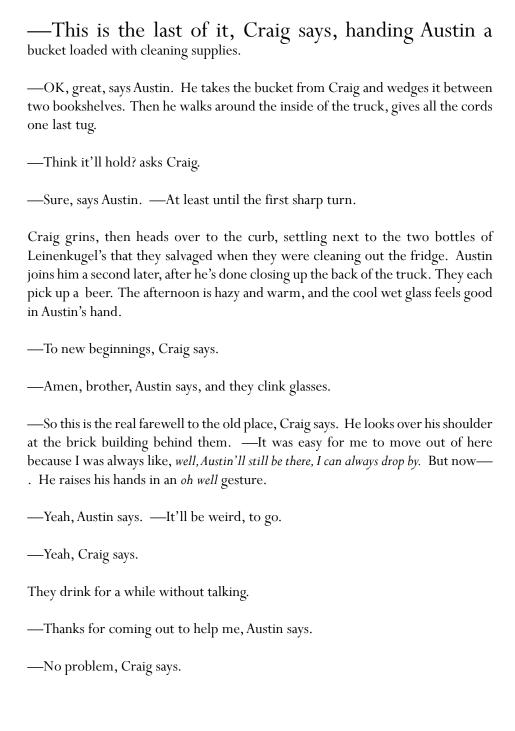
## **AUSTIN**

## **HOW WE LEARN**



—Will you tell Debra I said goodbye?
—Sure.
Austin finishes his beer and turns the empty bottle in his hands. —So what's it like, anyway?
—What's what like? Craig says, squinting at something across the street.
—Being married, Austin asks.
—Oh, Craig says. —It's cool. I mean, I don't know, with me and Debra, it's not that different from when we were going out. And so it's just—it's just like going out with any girl, sometimes it's great, sometimes it sucks.
—Do you ever worry about shit?
—Like what kind of shit?
—I don't know. Like whether you made the right decision or whatever?
—Nah, Craig says. —I mean, I guess, sometimes. There's always that uncertainty You can't <i>know</i> how it's going to turn out; you can't know <i>for sure</i> that you're not making a mistake. But when you're up there, saying <i>I do</i> , what you're basically saying is <i>that uncertainty doesn't matter to me</i> . Like that you're not worried <i>enough</i> about it to let it <i>stop</i> you from getting up there, in front of every fucking person and saying <i>this person and I, we're going to make it</i> .

Austin tries the thought out in his mind. Rose and I, we're going to make it.

—And maybe you're wrong, Craig says. —You know? Maybe you *are* making a mistake. But you know what? It doesn't fucking matter. If it turns out to be a mistake then it was a mistake. That's how we learn.

Craig drains the last of his beer. —OK, he says. He stands up and dusts off his butt. They say their goodbyes. They even hug.

And then Austin starts up the van and begins to rumble down the street. Six hours forty minutes to Minneapolis. He punches the radio on. It's Don Henley singing "Sunset Grill." Austin begins to sing along. He feels good. He feels like he is never going to die.