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## RUN EAST: EMBELLISHMENT UNNECESSARY

*Lucas Marshall*

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*By moonlight on the side of the road, I squint in the darkness, catching litter's reflection in the dry grass. Plastic bottles, beer cans, napkins, and a ready-mix concrete bag begin to compile my cairn and I use a rock to scratch into the pavement. With my fingers still sore from Super Slab, I scar RUN EAST into the asphalt. That way, it will be known which way I went if I leave. I blow hot air into my hands as wind sneaks through my t-shirt and chalk powdered Dickies. I sit crossed legged on the pavement on an unmarked exit, stranded in the middle of nowhere Nebraska.*

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THE END to a stellar weekend of climbing in Colorado comes to a close with yet another 8 hour drive back to home in Omaha, Nebraska. These days the drive breezes by; four hours, refill and piss, 4 hours and there is the front range, climb, repeat in reverse. It is later than a usual Sunday drive home. Chris, Rusty and I decided it was worth the late return to get in some extra pitches before returning to Nebraska, and we were right, the weather was great and the climbing was totally so wet (Awesome). Fresh visions of the Yellow Spur, Genesis, Rosy Crucifixion, and C'est la Vie still dance in our heads. No epics, just good climbs and stories.

We are all pretty tired and we keep to ourselves as the sun disappears and the blur of traffic dances in the night. I snooze, text friends, and try to find comfortable positions to sleep that do not cause my sore legs to cramp up in the back seat of Chris's sedan. Chris is growing weary and Rusty offers his services to drive, Chris rubs his eyes and agrees to the switch. He exits I-80 on to an unmarked exit and parks the car. Rusty jumps out, as does Chris to let out a quick whiz and switch places. I

clean up the back seat so Chris can crash in the back seat but he is fine with sitting up front. Just as they are getting into the car, I open my door to take a quick leak myself and the door quietly shuts behind me. Standing by the back tire, I begin to do my business and the car shifts into first and hops forward a bit on its wheels, rolling slowly away from me. "Hah ha, funny guys," I think as I shake to the finish and put things away, the car accelerates across the intersection, shifts into second and begins to pick up more speed than I would think to stop 'the joke' and let us get on our way. I turn mid-zip up as the car begins to disappear down the entering ramp to the interstate. I don't even get a chance to run after them. My mind goes blank and my jaw drops. I begin to chuckle and a "What the fuck" slips from my lips. "No way!" I think. "No way! I can't believe this is happening. No way! Unbelievable!"

I can only bounce and giggle like a prissy school girl at this point, not even able to fathom what just happened. Here I am in the black, clad in blue pants, a tight blue T-shirt, blue wool socks and luckily my approach



kicks (not blue). I just got left behind! How the fuck did this happen? I bend over and tie my shoes in the dark and run across the bridge over the interstate to await the arrival of my 'friends' as they venture back west to get me. Minutes accumulate and I do jumping jacks to stay warm in the below freezing weather.

I know it will be a few minutes for them to find somewhere to turn around but too many minutes continue to accumulate, and with the 'jacks grown damn lame, I pace the bridge troubled by the thought of what to do now. Where the hell are they? Do I wait for them to come back? Is it a good idea to run down the interstate? Why can't I have a climbing trip that does not include some form of epic? Where the hell are they? I sure wish I was wearing underwear. (As it would turn out I was not even noticed missing from the car for almost an hour, yes, someone who was in the back seat in the SAME DAMN CAR). I decide that I cannot stay where I am or I will start to freeze. I decide that I should leave a marker and run to the next town to call for help. Unbelievable I think as I jog back across the bridge, cars driving by apathetically below.

**M**Y REFUSE cairn and I sit on the cold ground like a dead pile. How long have I been sitting here? Thirty minutes? Forty? Out of the corner of my eye, I catch a pair of large headlights approaching and I jump to my feet and wave the vehicle down. The tires of a U-Haul truck screech as the large truck and trailer come to a halt. I walk across the illuminated pavement as uncreepily as possible to the driver side door and peer into the vehicle.

Inside sits Judy and her two sons. As her story goes, Judy is moving from Sydney to Lincoln that night and had earlier kicked her husband out of the U-Haul and had gotten off at this exit to turn around and to retrieve him from where she dumped him. I told her my story and she asked me How much had we guys been drinkin', what kinda of drugs had I taken that night, what did I do to piss them off, and if I wanted a dirty, stained blanket that was sitting at her feet to keep me warm. I refused the blanket and defended my climbing buddy's for some damn reason. "Well at least when I threw my husband out, I gave him his coat." Judy said. Unfortunately, I had not been treated with such a kind gesture. I asked to borrow her phone and as I flipped it open to

see an image of Judy and two kids (But not the kids in the truck. Apparently she has 6 total. I guess these are just the ones she wanted to bring that night?) My mind draws blank to not only Chris's number, but anyone who could possibly help me get ahold of Chris. I remember my brother's digits and I call him. Judy yells at her kids and rambles on about a large cut on her finger from inside the cab. After I tell my brother about my situation, I lose track of the number of times he says, "Are you serious?" I tell him to give some people some calls to try and find Chris's number. I give my own phone, which is sitting casually in the back seat of the car that I am supposed to be in, a call and leave a message. "Um yeah, this is Lucas, I usually answer this phone, but I am currently standing where I was abandoned beside the road and can't get to the phone right now. Call this number back if you want to retrieve your Lucas. Thanks!" *Unbelievable!*

"Well, do you want me to stop at this exit again after I go get my husband and then I can give you a ride if you still need me to?" Asks Judy while exhaling a cloud of Camel smoke. The idea of waiting here, and involving a husband sounds like a stupidly bad idea and I convince Judy to take me to the next exit whose lights illuminate the horizon. I hop in the truck and share a seat with her two blond haired boys. I give them high fives and remind myself to wash my hands when I get a chance. The ride is short and warm and I greatly thank Judy for her hospitality but decide to at least wait 'til tomorrow to give her a call and thank her. No need to involve myself in her life any more tonight. She has got a cold husband (That she refers to as "Dickhead" to her kids) and a half dozen rug rats to deal with. I run over to the Petro's at the York exit and look around inside for someone to yet again tell my story to. I shake my head, dig my hands into my pockets and push the door open with my hip. *Unbelievable.*

**I** FIND one of the store attendants and give her my spiel and again get the response of "What kind of drugs we been taking tonight?" As she directs me into the arcade where her son has her cell phone. Her son Andy takes a break from the arcade game and tells me I need to find new friends after I tell him my situation and lets me use the phone. I call and give my brother an update on my



location. I wander around the gas station checking out sterling and turquoise belt buckles when I come across a pay-by-the-minute internet kiosk. Luckily I have my wallet and I go and get 20 bucks from the ATM, I get charged \$3.95 for the withdrawal and decide to include that in Chris and Rusty's asshole tax that I plan on taking in compensation for their warmhearted friendship. I get online and pull Chris's number off his e-mail signature (Oh did I mention that Chris is a civil engineer and Rusty is a college professor? Normally these types of people are thorough and intelligent.) and give him a call. I can't think of anything better to say, "Yeah Hi, umm... this is Lucas."

After his laughing stops, I tell him where I am and that I will be patiently awaiting his arrival. I drink shitty truck stop coffee and look at shitty truck stop merchandise as I wait. I jingle a rock in my pocket, the same one I used to inscribe "RUN EAST," and I search for a keepsake for my friends to pass the time. I come across some Nebraska post cards, and some cheap sun glasses, and a toy truck with the tag line (I shit you not!) "Watch me drive away, then turn around and come right back." Though the trucks are tempting I cheaply opt for the post cards and pay for them, slipping them into the back pocket of my Dickies. I look at my sunburnt face in the reflection sunglasses and reminisce about the day's givings. *Unbelievable.*

CHRIS AND RUSTY eventually pull up to the Petro's pump, needing gas again due to the extended adventure. I step outside and just stare at them. Both practically fall to the ground laughing hysterically, and I can't help but join with a sheepish smile. I yell, "I have feelings you know!" into the windy night. Chris can't stop grinning as he wipes tears from his eyes and fills up on gas. I casually slip into the back seat and let out a sigh as I pop a chocolate Cadbury egg into my mouth. It's candy shell collapses under the force of my teeth. I whisper "unbelievable" from my chocolate-infused breath.

While driving back, we decide the situation was a "perfect storm." Somehow all the god damn stars were aligned and the car doors were shut at just the right time and everyone was just a little bit too tired to pay attention to details. Good thing no one suffered

too much for it all! I add in that this is definitely the worse instance of getting caught with my wiener hanging out that I can remember. I pull my laptop out as I sit in the back seat where I belong. I push the power button to begin to record the night's adventure. "Unbelievable" crosses my chapped lips as the screen illuminates my face. Chris leans back and apologizes again as a laughing Rusty tries not to swerve off the road. Chris asks me if I am going to use some creative embellishment on the evening's story. I respond, "You know Chris, I don't think that any is necessary in this instance." More laughing ensues. I am left to write as probability and chance swirl in and out of conversation in the front seat. I chalk up yet another epic climbing trip, *unbelievable.*

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