

A TIME FOR DREAMS

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At 7:05 Mr. Bertrand Huttin's double-bell alarm clock went off as it had for the past ten years and probably always would. It interrupted and totally obliterated a dream he felt he had had before, and he promptly buried his head in the pillow in an effort to recall it. He gave up after a couple minutes, however, as his wife shook him urgently awake. He stumbled into the washroom, while his wife went to wake up their two children with the imperious cry, "Come on. You're going to be late."

Meanwhile, he began his morning ritual. Actually he took great pride in its organization for it was worked out through experience to do as much as possible in the smallest amount of time. First, it was into the shower to wake himself up as well as to freshen him for the day. Then, he lathered his face and, while the lather was softening up the whiskers, he proceeded to brush his teeth. Then off with the facial hair, on with the Aqua Velva, and into the bedroom to begin dressing. Here, too, he had everything worked out. Underwear went on first (any order), then the shirt, so he could pull his pants on over it without tucking it in, then he fastened his belt and tied his tie at the same time he slipped into his shoes. He then filled his pockets with assorted necessities—comb, handkerchief, wallet, etc.—grabbed his coat, went down the stairs, threw the coat over a chair, and glanced up at the kitchen clock. It read 7:23.

"Best yet," Mr. Huttin muttered to himself. He glanced at the table and saw his bacon and eggs breakfast all set up. He smiled in satisfaction and gave his wife a kiss, for no other reason but that he had done the same thing for ten years past, as she rushed upstairs to rejuvenate the children's attempts to cope with their morning exertions.

7:26—Mrs. Huttin was back, with the children this time. Casting anxious glances at the clock, she sat the kids down to breakfast and asked: "Who goes early today?"

"I do," 10 year-old Marty answered, thinking of orchestra practice.

"Okay, let's see," Mrs. Huttin figured mentally for a moment, "Today is Friday so Mrs. Russell drives. She always comes early so you hurry up."

By now Mr. Huttin was finished and collecting his coat, briefcase, hat, and anything else he might conceivably need. "Hurry up," he called to his wife, "The new train schedule is in effect. We have to be there by 7:35."

"Coming," she replied. "Kathy, you make your own lunch. I should be back in time to take you to school."

"Bye, kids," Mr. Huttin said over his shoulder as he went out the door.

"Bye, Daddy," returned Kathy like she always did.

"Bye, Dad," came Marty a second later, and that tradition was complete.

Outside, they got into the car, and Mr. Huttin urgently glanced at his watch and then matched it with the car clock. He swore; partly because the time pieces were two minutes apart and he didn't know which to trust, and partly because the car was resisting his wife's efforts to start it more than was usual.

However, start it finally did and Mr. Huttin was relieved to note that they still had, at worst, six minutes to make a five minute trip. He now turned to his wife and went through everything he wanted to be sure she had done by the time he got home. "Okay, Kate, you go first to the post office and make sure they stop our mail. Then make sure the car is gassed up. You can wait to pack until the kids get home; they can help you. Don't forget I'll be on the 4:40 train tonight. Let's see. Oh, did you remember to leave a note for the milkman?"

"Yeah, I put it out."

"Good. That's it then," he finished softly. "You know it's going to be great. There'll be no rushin' around. Nothing that has to be done every minute."

Mrs. Huttin glanced at him doubtfully, and he could see her thoughts mirrored his own. But before he could say anything, they had pulled into the station and at a glance he could see the train was already there. "Damn," he muttered, "New schedule and the thing is a minute early." Turning, he kissed his wife good-bye and was out of the car at a run.

Mr. Huttin's outstretched hand just caught the closing doors and swung himself into the train. He had no trouble finding a seat, since his station was almost at the end of the line, but that bit of good fortune was compensated by the fact that he had a 40 minute trip ahead of him. What was worse, he had made this trip five days a week for sixteen years and knew every single house and tree along the route so that it was actually depressing to look out the window. However, today he stared out the window, though he was not earnestly scanning the scenery as any casual onlooker might suppose, because he was so deeply immersed in thought that he wasn't seeing anything.

An accountant making \$18,000 a year could afford a reasonable home, a car, and even a couple of kids but not much else. Above all else Mr. Huttin had always wanted a place to get away to, but not just on a vacation. It had to be a place he could call home. And it was in this, his sixteenth year at Belson's Accountants, that he had finally bought that place, out of the city, which he could truly call a second home. How he had managed to buy it was only one-half the miracle, finding the place was the other. Some company had developed another one of those choice lots of homesites. Of course, Mr. Huttin had never intended to buy. Merely, he had gone to look and feed his lifelong yearning. When the salesman had begun to drag him around from one site to another, Mr. Huttin had deftly fed him all the perfect points he had ever dreamed of. And while the salesman continued his surely hopeless task, Mr. Huttin had enjoyed the near heavenly scenery, taken deep breaths of the fresh air in the hopes of preserving at least the memory when he returned to the city; and he had basked in the total carelessness that was the country. Finally, he had looked at his watch and seen that it was time to go and had raised his head to tell the salesman, and then every last wisp of air had been driven from his lungs.

There it was! He had stood staring, oblivious to everything, for a ridiculously long time, for it is not every man that confronts his dream in reality. The lot was a gently sloping field set amidst woods on all sides that would forever guard his privacy. At the bottom of the hill was a great arm of the even greater lake, which was out of sight and with it the hubbub of humanity. Across the arm of water was a more steeply rising wooded hill, a bulwark against everything not meant to be seen in such a setting as this. And in the distance, rising against the forever ocean blue sky was a larger hill wearing a beautifully rounded grass knoll as a crown. At this point in the evening, the sun formed a great red jewel as it

sat in place above the crown.

He had bought it right then and there, not giving even a passing thought as to how he could afford it. It was just one of those rare moments when a man knows exactly what he wants and nothing else matters.

A hiss of brakes, a glance at his watch, and Mr. Huttin was up walking down the aisle. He walked briskly through the crowded station, indifferently squeezing through the crowds with the minimum amount of contact that comes with long practice. Then, he was on a bus and had arrived at his destination five blocks and five minutes later. Passing through the tall crystal doors, he said good morning to the doorman and stopped a moment wondering at the sudden silence. The din of the city's traffic never seemed loud when one was in it, for the mind tends to tune down such obtrusive noises. However, once out of it, the difference can be heard, though even this was relative since Mr. Huttin's ears were accustomed to the level of clattering produced by a battery of typewriters.

He reached his desk, finally, and checking his watch noted that the new train schedule got him into his office five minutes early. He leaned back easily in his chair and allowed his mind to wander, and it floated to the inevitable.

Tonight they would leave. It would be the first time they had actually stayed in their new second home. Building it, or rather finding the money for building it, had been another of those impossible feats that determined men can always arrange. The house was still small according to the plans, although Mr. Huttin had insisted on waiting till it was finished before seeing it. And that would be tonight.

"Come on, Huttin," a voice, soon identified as that of one of the vice-presidents, intoned, "8:30; time to get to work."

Every morning the exact same words, Mr. Huttin thought. "But my house doesn't have any clocks," he said aloud. For this he had insisted. The only clocks he would follow when in his second home would be the rise of the sun in the morning, and it taking its place on the crown of the hill at night.

And now he began to hate the clocks.

All his life, it seemed, he had done everything "on schedule." Always a glance at a wall clock, a check of the wristwatch, but tonight he would know what it is to be free of that man-made abstraction of time.

He got to work sluggishly, for all time now had slowed to a near halt just to taunt him. He checked his watch every five minutes only to see that a mere four minutes had passed. Remembering that time is, after all, only in the mind, he purposely drove it from his thoughts so as to allow it to pass normally again. When he finally checked, he virtually hissed at his desk clock. He checked it, shook it; it *had* to be running slow. He prayed for interruptions to take his mind off the time. He paced. He went for a drink. He went to the washroom. He went for another drink. And at last time surrendered.

He was on the train home! He kept thinking of that. His wife and kids would be at the station, the car packed, and they'd be on their way. However, now it was the train's turn, and it moved magnificently slowly. The people getting off at each station seemed to pause purposely just to add another minute to the trip. But the train, too, lost in the end as it pulled into the station with a mournful squeal of brakes.

Mr. Huttin ran to his car to beat the rush. He got in, absentmindedly kissed everyone hello, and urged: "Go. Go."

The trip up was a heart-racing dream. He scarcely paid any attention to what went on. He stared out the window half the time and sat with eyes closed the rest and never noticed the difference. He kept picturing the noisy, smog-filled city, running forever on its repeating timetable, receding into the distance behind him. He had hardly ever left that world of masonry and people before and just to be out was like fresh air to a suffocating man. He caught himself looking at the car clock and vowed that while they were in the country, he'd never check it again. And his watch? Well, that could be locked in a dresser drawer and never seen again. In the mornings he would sleep 'till it pleased him to get up. They would eat when they were hungry, go to bed when they were tired, do everything on their own time.

Now, he noticed, it was getting hilly. Ohhh, I hope we get there before dark, he thought. It became a passion now. His heart beat in his ears. Hurry, he thought, hurry; before it's dark. A familiar landmark. Another. The next hill must be . . .

They were there.

His racing heart held a moment. His heavy breathing suspended itself in mid-breath. He had arrived in time. The crown of the hill wore its

jewel in a display which turned a ruby to sand. The sun was a deep red fireball casting pieces of itself in all directions, those shining beams reflecting from every cloud and particle of dust. Nothing could compare. . .

Mr. Huttin's heart froze. There was a sound far off. "Could it be?" he muttered. It grew louder and he lashed at it with every atom of his brain. "No—No—," he cried in animal desperation, for the half-heard tolling was very clear now, and it was all the more terrible for its casual familiarity. It was the insistent ringing of his double-bell alarm clock.

Mr. Huttin opened his eyes and was hit by the blinding flash of the sun coming through his window. He quickly turned off the alarm and buried his face in his pillow in an attempt to recall his dream; a strange dream he felt he had had before but could never remember. A moment later, however, he gave up as his wife shook him awake cautioning him not to be late. He then wearily stumbled into the washroom and began a ritual, which he was really very proud of for it did the most possible activities in the least amount of time. . .