A Midsummer's Nightmare

by Kevin John Phillips

A Midsummer's Nightmare

The Players

Mister *Forty year old Dad, resisting the unbridled pleasure of being on vacation, of not having to make any decisions, yet haunted by the urge to make this the "Best Vacation Ever."*

Missus *Perpetual twenty-nine year old wife who struggles to understand how the country, yet alone the family income, can feed Mister and Brother in the same car for two days.*

Brother *Thirteen year old boy whose life revolves around peanut butter and jelly, if not jelly and peanut butter.*

Big Sis *Sixteen year old in a good mood this trip. Shhhhh!*

Lil' Sis *Recipient of Brother's torture.*

Prologue

The crystalline specs move through the hour glass, measuring your lives along with its cousins Front Lawn, Goofball Boss, and “PG-13 Doesn't Automatically Mean You Get To Go If You're Thirteen”. One day the calendar beckons you, "Come look," and you see vacation time beckons. Glorious anticipation dews the lip, disasters of the last vacation are fogged in "we can make the drive in ten and a *quarter* hours this time," while secret yearnings to really stop in Memphis and see Graceland and not just talk about it. All play it cool at first, however. . .

Act I - The Seedlings of a Plan

Scene One

(Open at the house, with the family sitting in the living room, negotiating details of the upcoming family vacation.)

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The Missus: "So, when should we leave? Should we leave after work on Saturday night, or should we wait until Sunday morning?"

Mister, Big Sis,
Lil' Sis, Dog,
Turtles, etc: "I dunno."

Brother: "But when will we eat? Are we gonna stop along the way and eat, or are we going to make sammy's? We could do both, you know; there's no law against it."

Scene Two

(Days later, Mister gets the adrenaline going, and begins devising THE PLAN!)

Mister: " . . . and then from 2:18 PM until 2:41 PM we'll drive to Steve's house. That time frame, by the way, allows twenty-five extra seconds in case we miss the green light on Twelfth Street. If we get off to a good start at Steve's, I believe we can visit everyone back home that we've ever known in our lifetime, and do it in five days."

Missus: "Okay, well, you make sure to keep us informed on how we're doing, will ya?"

Brother: "But if we do have to stop at the red light on Twelfth Street, is there a Dairy Queen, like, close to it?"

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Act II - On the Road Again

Scene One

(Having decided to leave "whenever," the family hits the road. This scene takes place somewhere in the vast wasteland between rest areas, gas stations, and restaurants. It occurs after three generations of travel.

(three generations = two hours by the clock. Bodies decompose and whither to dust in this timeframe...to Mister and Brother.)

Mister and
Brother: "FEED US! WOE IS ME!"

Missus: "Oh, just a little farther, scrounge around back there on the floor. There's bound to be some pretzel crumbs or something. Big babies."

Mister: "Oh no! Look at that plane crashing!"

As Brother looks out the back window, shouting, "Where? Where?" Mister leans over and begins feeling around under the seat.

Scene Two

(Somewhere amidst the God-given beauty of west Tennessee, whilst the joy of travel, the energy of Day Two, and the foolish giddy juices of reality-deceiving time away from work course through the veins.)

Missus: " . . . So, I was thinking, if we can swap a few things around, we can do Cancun in July, Hot Springs in August, and Thanksgiving in Tennessee."

Mister: "Yes! Yes! Let's do it all! Let's get a copy of Lewis and Clarke's itinerary, rough it like they did, but finish up at the Bayray Extraordinary Hotel."

Missus: (With tears of joy as she looks at the man that is the love of her life)"Yes, my darling, the Bayray it is."

Brother: "Buffet? Did someone say buffet? Is that where you get all-you-can-eat? I guess I could stand a snack."

Scene Three

(*The bloom is off the rose. Matter of fact, the rose petals are long gone. Truth be known, all the plants are torn out, the dirt is leveled, and the paradise of love is now a Wal-Mart.)*

Missus: "So, is *this* the datgum exit?"

Mister: "Grumphfr exit fregerrock." (This response means either yes, of course it is, I told you that ten miles ago, or, no it's not, I told you that ten miles ago, depending if it's the right exit or not.)

Brother: "Eggs? Did someone say eggs? I could go for some eggs. Is it okay to eat eggs in the afternoon? Do they charge extra?"

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Act III - Every storm starts with a drop of rain.

Scene One

(During a marathon, runners speak of hitting the wall. Somewhere in the last few miles of a race, when the body strains to its absolute limit and the brain is screaming for the runner to cut this nonsense out, the great runners are separated from the good ones.)

Big Sis and
Lil' Sis,
in a
sing-song voice: "Mom, Dad, Brother is . . ."

Mister and
Missus,
in unison.

In harmony: "Brother, don't touch them or the seat they occupy. Don't invade their airspace; don't pretend to invade their airspace. Don't look at them, or think about looking at them, and don't breathe the air within a foot of them. Girls, don't move a muscle for the remainder of the trip. Everyone, eyes forward, hands folded on lap."

Five minutes later. . .

Brother: "Can we eat now? Because I can't move or anything, all I have time to do is think about how hungry I am. Mom! Dad's got pretzel crumbs! That's not fair! We should all share the same food!"

Scene Three

(The windshield is full of bugs, the inside of the van is trashed, and the travelers are half asleep and half awake. The radio intermittently plays bars of "There Ain't Nothing Shakin' but the Leaves on the Tree," and static. The homestretch.)

The children: "Are we almost there?"

Either Mister
or Missus, in
rotating order: "Just a little while longer."

Big Sis: "But you've said that for the last three hours."

Mister
or Missus, in
a trance-like
voice: "Just a little while longer."

Act IV - The Arrival

Scene One

Aunts,
Uncles, etc: "Hey guys, glad to see you made it. My, my, look at how these kids have grown. How was the trip?"

Mister: "Oh, piece of cake. Traveling is nothing new for us. Been doing this for years. Why, Brother's first plane trip . . .."

Missus: "The kids are great, they're veterans. They know we run on a schedule, and they stick to it. It's like a sixth sense with them. When it's time to . . ."

Epilogue

And the vacation continues. Five or six days of running here and running there, trying to see friends too lazy...sorry...too busy to come see you at the house of the poor brother who put you up for the week. As nice as it is to see everyone, one thought keeps running through the mind as each tick of the clock takes another day off the calendar:

You have to drive back.