

The Last 45 Minutes

Jim Elliff

He was lying down, gasping. It was his own bed and it was his time. Forty-five minutes from this moment he would die. Beside him sat his wife in the overstuffed leather chair that had been pulled close for the final event. She had been there all night. She sat on the edge as she patted his hand and tried to soothe him—disheveled, wide-eyed with simmering panic, twitching, pleading. It had been the hardest night of her life. The hospice workers were gone. She was alone with her husband of forty-three years. Now it was over—almost.



As his wife wiped his brow with the damp hand towel, he moaned in a horrible, eerie manner. It wasn't *him*; it wasn't *like* him. He had been a fighter all his life. She knew his determination. But there he was, a paper-like shell of the man who had built the company out of nothing and acquired leadership in almost every endeavor. He had presence in a room. He was a strong man—"a man's man," she would often say. The sound of those words seemed as trite as they actually are. "A man's man," she mused, repeating the words in a whisper several times.

Thirty minutes left.

"Book," he moaned, through cracked lips. Nothing seemed to lubricate his lips for long. She heard the word, but it made no sense.

He wasn't an angry man, but he was fixed on his purposes. The business was all-important, though he tried not to neglect his family. He was a churchman also, somewhat regular in attendance on Sunday mornings, giving to causes, involved, but not going overboard like some. He led there as he did in almost every sphere of life, giving his advice about so many things. They had a respectable life before people. They were *known* people.

He turned one way, then the next. Twelve minutes left.

"The book," he whispered.

She got up from the leather chair. It was too cool in the room. She went into the hall for just a moment to turn up the heat. Surely her husband would appreciate more heat. She walked quickly to the restroom and brushed her hair back. She threw up her arms and held them in the air for a moment, palms up, to stretch. She had been sitting in the same position for such a long time. But she must return. Wrapping a spare blanket around her, she sat again on her chair. "I'm back," she said, with a weak smile. He looked at her with searching eyes. He would not be able to see this face for much longer. He loved her.

Four minutes.

Three minutes.

"Read the book," he forced out of his mouth, though his lips would hardly close now. His breath did not smell good, but she could do nothing about that. She did not know that she had only three more minutes with him.

"What book?" she asked. "What book? I'll read it to you."

Two minutes. "What book do you want me to get?"

One minute.

"I want . . . I want . . . *Who Moved My Cheese?*"*

As she turned to find it on the bedside table, her husband slid into hell.

Important men with trivial lives go to hell.

**Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson is the bestselling book on adapting to change often used by the business world.

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