

Read and annotate,
focusing on cause
& effect of
censorship.

Synopsis of *Fahrenheit 451*

Author: Ray Bradbury

Original Publication Date: 1953

Characters:

The protagonist and a fireman
The chief of Montag's department
Guy's wife
A former literature professor
The leaders of the hobos

Written in 1953, *Fahrenheit 451*—the temperature at which paper will burn—is a social satire or a book depicting a “negative utopia” or “dystopian” society in which book reading is illegal and an act of treason. The government, supported by the people, has banned books because they contain controversial and contradictory ideas. Book readers are considered to be dangerous criminals who can stir people up with their ideas. Firemen no longer put out fires but burn books and the homes of people who keep them. People watch wall televisions referred to as “televisors” constantly. They drive cars very fast. They do not think for themselves.

In this society, violence and suicide are common. The protagonist of the novel, Guy Montag, is a fireman who lives with his wife, Millie. Three entire walls in the “parlor” of their home, and the homes of most people they know, are devoted to wall-sized televisions (televisors). Millie's life revolves around watching “The Family,” a kind of television show with no plot and nameless characters such as “The Aunt.” She wants a fourth television wall so she can completely submerge herself in the life of “The Family.” In this society, people watch T.V. so much that they are numb to their own existence.

Montag begins to question the values of his society and his part in the mindless destruction of books as he spends some time with a teenager named Clarisse who lives in his neighborhood. Clarisse thinks and talks about things differently from anyone Montag knows. Clarisse is the only person Montag has met who is curious about the world around her, is interested in other people, and enjoys conversation and nature. Through his discussions with Clarisse, Montag begins to learn about himself. He thinks that his existence is “empty” and that he is unhappy. Clarisse tells Montag that his job “just doesn't seem right for you, somehow.” One day, Clarisse doesn't show up for their walk. Montag learns that Clarisse was killed by a speeding car.

Montag begins to further question the social values of his time after answering an “alarm” at work. He and the other fireman go to the house of an old woman where they find a large library of over 1,000 books. It is the job of the firemen to burn the books. The old woman refuses to leave her house when she is ordered to do so, telling Montag she wants to stay. He is very disturbed by her decision to burn with her books rather than leave with him. Montag wonders why books are illegal? What do they say? He secretly steals one of the old woman's books and hides it with a collection that he has been keeping in his home. He tries to talk with Millie about the old woman. Millie claims the woman must have been simple-minded, but Montag insists:

“You weren't there, you didn't see,” he said. “There must be something in books, things we can't imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house. There must be something there. You don't stay for nothing.” (page 51)

After meeting the old woman, he decides to stay home from work to read. Montag's wife refuses to read a book with him because she is afraid. Montag's boss, Captain Beatty, visits him and gives Montag his interpretation of how and why books became illegal to own or read.

After Captain Beatty leaves, Montag remembers that he met a man in the park two years earlier. The man, Professor Faber, was once a professor of literature. Montag visits Faber looking for some answers about what is so special about books. He wasn't satisfied by Captain Beatty's explanation of history. Faber is at first suspicious of Montag. Montag convinces Faber that he wants to learn how to understand the books and to think for himself. Faber tells Montag that people like himself were afraid to speak out against book burning when they still could have stopped it and therefore they share responsibility for the consequences. The two men decide they will secretly print books and plant them in the homes of firemen. Before he leaves, Faber gives Montag a radio device for his ear. The device allows Faber to talk to Montag and hear all Montag's conversations.

During this time, war is declared, but the people Montag knows seem unconcerned about the possibility that an atomic bomb might be used. To shock his wife's friends out of their stupor, Montag reads a stanza from the poem "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold. The women are upset that Montag reads to them and also because the world the poem describes is sad and imperfect. They accuse him of being crazy.

Montag returns to the firehouse just as an alarm is sounded. When they arrive at the alarm site, Montag discovers that the firemen have been sent to his own home. Montag is forced to burn down his own house because he has some books. Montag kills Captain Beatty when he fears that the Captain will hurt Faber. Montag thinks that Captain Beatty wanted to die. He runs to Faber's house to warn him of danger. A citywide search for him is underway. Faber tells Montag that there is a community of hobos who live near the river and that he will be safe in the hobo camps.

Montag narrowly escapes the city. He joins the hobos who have been expecting him. They have been watching the manhunt on a portable T.V. The hobos are former intellectuals, scorned by the current society. The people who live in the hobo camps are preserving the great books in their memories by each memorizing a chapter of a book. Montag's job will be to remember the book of Ecclesiastes from the Bible. They watch as an atomic bomb is dropped on the city and completely destroys it. Montag and his companions move on to search for survivors outside of the cities and to transmit what they know to the world and to see it through its current "Dark Age."

FAHRENHEIT 451

by Ray Bradbury

This one, with gratitude, is for DON CONGDON.

FAHRENHEIT 451:

The temperature at which book-paper catches fire and burns

PART I: THE HEARTH AND THE SALAMANDER

IT WAS A PLEASURE TO BURN.

IT was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. With his symbolic helmet numbered 451 on his stolid head, and his eyes all orange flame with the thought of what came next, he flicked the igniter and the house jumped up in a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black. He strode in a swarm of fireflies. He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and lawn of the house. While the books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning.

Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame. He knew that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burntorked, in the mirror. Later, going to sleep, he would feel the fiery smile still gripped by his face muscles, in the dark. It never went away, that smile, it never ever went away, as long as he remembered.

Does Montag enjoy his job?

He hung up his black-beetle-colored helmet and shined it, he hung his flameproof jacket neatly; he showered luxuriously, and then, whistling, hands in pockets, walked across the upper floor of the fire station and fell down the hole. At the last moment, when disaster seemed positive, he pulled his hands from his pockets and broke his fall by grasping the golden pole. He slid to a squeaking halt, the heels one inch from the concrete floor downstairs.

He walked out of the fire station and along the midnight street toward the subway where the silent, air-propelled train slid soundlessly down its lubricated flue in the earth and let him out with a great puff of warm air and to the cream-tiled escalator rising to the suburb.

Whistling, he let the escalator waft him into the still night air. He walked toward the corner, thinking little at all about nothing in particular. Before he reached the corner, however, he slowed as if a wind had sprung up from nowhere, as if someone had called his name.

The last few nights he had had the most uncertain feelings about the sidewalk just around the corner here, moving in the starlight toward his house. He had felt that a moment before his making the turn, someone had been there. The air seemed charged with a special calm as if someone had waited there, quietly, and only a moment before he came, simply turned to a shadow and let him through. Perhaps his nose detected a faint perfume, perhaps the skin on the backs of his hands, on his face, felt the temperature rise at this one spot where a person's standing might raise the immediate atmosphere ten degrees for an instant. There was no understanding it. Each time he made the turn, he saw only the white, unused, buckling sidewalk, with perhaps, on one night, something vanishing swiftly across a lawn before he could focus his eyes or speak.

But now, tonight, he slowed almost to a stop. His inner mind, reaching out to turn the corner for him, had heard the faintest whisper. Breathing? Or was the atmosphere compressed merely by someone standing very quietly there, waiting?

The Mechanical Hound slept but did not sleep, lived but did not live in its gently humming, gently vibrating, softly illuminated kennel back in a dark corner of the firehouse. The dim light of one in the morning, the moonlight from the open sky framed through the great window, touched here and there on the brass and the copper and the steel of the faintly trembling beast. Light flickered on bits of ruby glass and on sensitive capillary hairs in the nylon-brushed nostrils of the creature that quivered gently, gently, gently, its eight legs spidered under it on rubberpadded paws.

Montag slid down the brass pole. He went out to look at the city and the clouds had cleared

The flutter of cards, motion of hands, of eyelids, the drone of the time-voice in the firehouse ceiling ". . . one thirty-five. Thursday morning, November 4th, . . . one thirty-six . . . one thirtyseven a.m. . . ." The tick of the playing-cards on the greasy table-top, all the sounds came to Montag, behind his closed eyes, behind the barrier he had momentarily erected. He could feel the firehouse full of glitter and shine and silence, of brass colours, the colours of coins, of gold, of silver: The unseen men across the table were sighing on their cards, waiting. ". . .one forty-five. . ." The voice-clock mourned out the cold hour of a cold morning of a still colder year.

"What's wrong, Montag?"

Montag opened his eyes.

A radio hummed somewhere. ". . . war may be declared any hour. This country stands ready to defend its--"

The firehouse trembled as a great flight of jet planes whistled a single note across the black morning sky.

Montag blinked. Beatty was looking at him as if he were a museum statue. At any moment, Beatty might rise and walk about him, touching, exploring his guilt and self-consciousness. Guilt? What guilt was that?

Guilty of what?

"Your play, Montag."

Montag looked at these men whose faces were sunburnt by a thousand real and ten thousand imaginary fires, whose work flushed their cheeks and fevered their eyes. These men who looked

steadily into their platinum igniter flames as they lit their eternally burning black pipes. They and their charcoal hair and soot-colored brows and bluish-ash-smearred cheeks where they had shaven close; but their heritage showed. Montag started up, his mouth opened. Had he ever seen a fireman that didn't have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue-steel shaved but unshaved look? These men were all mirror-images of himself! Were all firemen picked then for their looks as well as their proclivities? The color of cinders and ash about them, and the continual smell of burning from their pipes. Captain Beatty there, rising in thunderheads of tobacco smoke. Beatty opening a fresh tobacco packet, crumpling the cellophane into a sound of fire.

Why would they all look the same?

Montag looked at the cards in his own hands. "I-I've been thinking. About the fire last week. About the man whose library we fixed. What happened to him?"

"They took him screaming off to the asylum"

Explain Beatty's mindset.

"He. wasn't insane."

Beatty arranged his cards quietly. "Any man's insane who thinks he can fool the Government and us."

"I've tried to imagine," said Montag, "just how it would feel. I mean to have firemen burn our houses and our books."

"We haven't any books."

"But if we did have some."

"You got some?"

Beatty blinked slowly.

"No." Montag gazed beyond them to the wall with the typed lists of a million forbidden books. Their names leapt in fire, burning down the years under his axe and his hose which sprayed not water but kerosene. "No." But in his mind, a cool wind started up and blew out of the ventilator grille at home, softly, softly, chilling his face. And, again, he saw himself in a green park talking to an old man, a very old man, and the wind from the park was cold, too.

There's that ventilator again...what's in it

Montag hesitated, "Was-was it always like this? The firehouse, our work? I mean, well, once upon a time..."

"Once upon a time!" Beatty said. "What kind of talk is THAT?"

Fool, thought Montag to himself, you'll give it away. At the last fire, a book of fairy tales, he'd glanced at a single line. "I mean," he said, "in the old days, before homes were completely fireproofed " Suddenly it seemed a much younger voice was speaking for him. He opened his mouth and it was Clarisse McClellan saying, "Didn't firemen prevent fires rather than stoke them up and get them going?"

"That's rich!" Stoneman and Black drew forth their rulebooks, which also contained brief histories of the Firemen of America, and laid them out where Montag, though long familiar with them, might read:

Established, 1790, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies. First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin."

RULE 1. Answer the alarm swiftly.

2. Start the fire swiftly.

3. Burn everything.

4. Report back to firehouse immediately.

5. Stand alert for other alarms.

How was History altered?

Everyone watched Montag. He did not move.

The alarm sounded.

The bell in the ceiling kicked itself two hundred times. Suddenly there were four empty chairs. The cards fell in a flurry of snow. The brass pole shivered. The men were gone.

Montag sat in his chair. Below, the orange dragon coughed into life.
Montag slid down the pole like a man in a dream.
The Mechanical Hound leapt up in its kennel, its eyes all green flame.
"Montag, you forgot your helmet!"

He seized it off the wall behind him, ran, leapt, and they were off, the night wind hammering about their siren scream and their mighty metal thunder !

It was a flaking three-storey house in the ancient part of the city, a century old if it was a day, but like all houses it had been given a thin fireproof plastic sheath many years ago, and this preservative shell seemed to be the only thing holding it in the sky.

"Here we are !"

The engine slammed to a stop. Beatty, Stoneman, and Black ran up the sidewalk, suddenly odious and fat in the plump fireproof slickers. Montag followed.

They crashed the front door and grabbed at a woman, though she was not running, she was not trying to escape. She was only standing, weaving from side to side, her eyes fixed upon a nothingness in the wall as if they had struck her a terrible blow upon the head. Her tongue was moving in her mouth, and her eyes seemed to be trying to remember something, and then they remembered and her tongue moved again:

" 'Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.' "

"Enough of that!" said Beatty. "Where are they?"

He slapped her face with amazing objectivity and repeated the question. The old woman's eyes came to a focus upon Beatty. "You know where they are or you wouldn't be here," she said. Stoneman held out the telephone alarm card with the complaint signed in telephone duplicate on the back:

"Have reason to suspect attic; 11 No. Elm, City. --- E. B."

"That would be Mrs. Blake, my neighbour;" said the woman, reading the initials.

"All right, men, let's get 'em!"

Next thing they were up in musty blackness, swinging silver hatchets at doors that were, after all, unlocked, tumbling through like boys all rollick and shout. "Hey! " A fountain of books sprang down upon Montag as he climbed shuddering up the sheer stair-well. How inconvenient! Always before it had been like snuffing a candle. The police went first and adhesive-taped the victim's mouth and bandaged him off into their glittering beetle cars, so when you arrived you found an empty house. You weren't hurting anyone, you were hurting only things! And since things really couldn't be hurt, since things felt nothing, and things don't scream or whimper, as this woman might begin to scream and cry out, there was nothing to tease your conscience later. You were simply cleaning up. Janitorial work, essentially. Everything to its proper place. Quick with the kerosene! Who's got a match!

But now, tonight, someone had slipped. This woman was spoiling the ritual. The men were making too much noise, laughing, joking to cover her terrible accusing silence below. She made the empty rooms roar with accusation and shake down a fine dust of guilt that was sucked in their nostrils as they plunged about. It was neither cricket nor correct. Montag felt an immense irritation. She shouldn't be here, on top of everything!

Books bombarded his shoulders, his arms, his upturned face A book alighted, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering. In the dim, wavering light, a page hung open and it was like a snowy feather, the words delicately painted thereon. In all the rush and fervor, Montag had only an instant to read a line, but it blazed in his mind for the next minute as if stamped there with fiery steel. "Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine." He dropped the book. Immediately, another fell into his arms.

*Look up
quote said by
woman-
what's it's
history?*

*Why was
this call
bothering
Montag so
much?*

"Montag, up here! "

Montag's hand closed like a mouth, crushed the book with wild devotion, with an insanity of mindlessness to his chest. The men above were hurling shovelfuls of magazines into the dusty air. They fell like slaughtered birds and the woman stood below, like a small girl, among the bodies.

Montag had done nothing. His hand had done it all, his hand, with a brain of its own, with a conscience and a curiosity in each trembling finger, had turned thief. Now, it plunged the book back under his arm, pressed it tight to sweating armpit, rushed out empty, with a magician's flourish! Look here! Innocent! Look!

*What did
he do?*

He gazed, shaken, at that white hand. He held it way out, as if he were far-sighted. He held it close, as if he were blind.

"Montag! "

He jerked about.

"Don't stand there, idiot!"

The books lay like great mounds of fishes left to dry. The men danced and slipped and fell over them. Titles glittered their golden eyes, falling, gone.

"Kerosene!"

They pumped the cold fluid from the numbered 451 tanks strapped to their shoulders. They coated each book, they pumped rooms full of it.

They hurried downstairs, Montag staggered after them in the kerosene fumes.

"Come on, woman!"

The woman knelt among the books, touching the drenched leather and cardboard, reading the gilt titles with her fingers while her eyes accused Montag.

"You can't ever have my books," she said.

"You know the law," said Beatty. "Where's your common sense? None of those books agree with each other. You've been locked up here for years with a regular damned Tower of Babel. Snap out of it! The people in those books never lived. Come on now! "

She shook her head.

"The whole house is going up;" said Beatty,

The men walked clumsily to the door. They glanced back at Montag, who stood near the woman.

"You're not leaving her here?" he protested.

"She won't come."

"Force her, then!"

Beatty raised his hand in which was concealed the igniter. "We're due back at the house. Besides, these fanatics always try suicide; the pattern's familiar."

Montag placed his hand on the woman's elbow. "You can come with me."

"No," she said. "Thank you, anyway."

"I'm counting to ten," said Beatty. "One. Two."

"Please," said Montag.

"Go on," said the woman.

"Three. Four."

"Here." Montag pulled at the woman.

The woman replied quietly, "I want to stay here"

"Five. Six."

"You can stop counting," she said. She opened the fingers of one hand slightly and in the palm of the hand was a single slender object.

An ordinary kitchen match.

The sight of it rushed the men out and down away from the house. Captain Beatty, keeping his dignity, backed slowly through the front door, his pink face burnt and shiny from a thousand fires

and night excitements. God, thought Montag, how true! Always at night the alarm comes. Never by day! Is it because the fire is prettier by night? More spectacle, a better show? The pink face of Beatty now showed the faintest panic in the door. The woman's hand twitched on the single matchstick. The fumes of kerosene bloomed up about her. Montag felt the hidden book pound like a heart against his chest.

Why at night?

"Go on," said the woman, and Montag felt himself back away and away out of the door, after Beatty, down the steps, across the lawn, where the path of kerosene lay like the track of some evil snail.

On the front porch where she had come to weigh them quietly with her eyes, her quietness a condemnation, the woman stood motionless.

Beatty flicked his fingers to spark the kerosene.

He was too late. Montag gasped.

The woman on the porch reached out with contempt for them all, and struck the kitchen match against the railing.

People ran out of houses all down the street.

What did the woman do and why?

They said nothing on their way back to the firehouse. Nobody looked at anyone else. Montag sat in the front seat with Beatty and Black. They did not even smoke their pipes. They sat there looking out of the front of the great salamander as they turned a corner and went silently on.

"Master Ridley," said Montag at last.

"What?" said Beatty.

"She said, 'Master Ridley.' She said some crazy thing when we came in the door. 'Play the man,' she said, 'Master Ridley.' Something, something, something."

"'We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out,'" said Beatty. Stoneman glanced over at the Captain, as did Montag, startled.

Beatty rubbed his chin. "A man named Latimer said that to a man named Nicholas Ridley, as they were being burnt alive at Oxford, for heresy, on October 16, 1555."

Montag and Stoneman went back to looking at the street as it moved under the engine wheels.

"I'm full of bits and pieces," said Beatty. "Most fire captains have to be. Sometimes I surprise myself. WATCH it, Stoneman!"

Stoneman braked the truck.

"Damn!" said Beatty. "You've gone right by the corner where we turn for the firehouse."

Curious? Why would Beatty know all this?

"Who is it?"

"Who would it be?" said Montag, leaning back against the closed door in the dark.

His wife said, at last, "Well, put on the light."

"I don't want the light."

"Come to bed."

He heard her roll impatiently; the bedsprings squealed.

"Are you drunk?" she said.

So it was the hand that started it all. He felt one hand and then the other work his coat free and let it slump to the floor. He held his pants out into an abyss and let them fall into darkness. His hands had been infected, and soon it would be his arms. He could feel the poison working up his wrists and into his elbows and his shoulders, and then the jump-over from shoulder-blade to shoulder-blade like a spark leaping a gap. His hands were ravenous. And his eyes were beginning to feel hunger, as if they must look at something, anything, everything.

moved and went out of the room and Captain Beatty strolled in, his hands in his pockets.

"Shut the 'relatives' up," said Beatty, looking around at everything except Montag and his wife.

This time, Mildred ran. The yammering voices stopped yelling in the parlor.

Captain Beatty sat down in the most comfortable chair with a peaceful look on his ruddy face. He took time to prepare and light his brass pipe and puff out a great smoke cloud. "Just thought I'd come by and see how the sick man is."

"How'd you guess?"

Beatty smiled his smile which showed the candy pinkness of his gums and the tiny candy whiteness of his teeth. "I've seen it all. You were going to call for a night off."

Montag sat in bed.

"Well," said Beatty, "take the night off!" He examined his eternal matchbox, the lid of which said GUARANTEED: ONE MILLION LIGHTS IN THIS IGNITER, and began to strike the chemical match abstractedly, blow out, strike, blow out, strike, speak a few words, blow out. He looked at the flame. He blew, he looked at the smoke. "When will you be well?"

"Tomorrow. The next day maybe. First of the week."

Beatty puffed his pipe. "Every fireman, sooner or later, hits this. They only need understanding, to know how the wheels run. Need to know the history of our profession. They don't feed it to rookies like they used to. Damn shame." Puff. "Only fire chiefs remember it now." Puff. "I'll let you in on it."

Mildred fidgeted.

Beatty took a full minute to settle himself in and think back for what he wanted to say.

"When did it all start, you ask, this job of ours, how did it come about, where, when? Well, I'd say it really got started around about a thing called the Civil War. Even though our rule-book claims it was founded earlier. The fact is we didn't get along well until photography came into its own. Then--motion pictures in the early twentieth century. Radio. Television. Things began to have mass."

Montag sat in bed, not moving.

"And because they had mass, they became simpler," said Beatty. "Once, books appealed to a few people, here, there, everywhere. They could afford to be different. The world was roomy. But then the world got full of eyes and elbows and mouths. Double, triple, quadruple population. Films and radios, magazines, books levelled down to a sort of paste pudding norm, do you follow me?"

"I think so."

Beatty peered at the smoke pattern he had put out on the air. "Picture it. Nineteenth-century man with his horses, dogs, carts, slow motion. Then, in the twentieth century, speed up your camera. Books cut shorter. Condensations, Digests. Tabloids. Everything boils down to the gag, the snap ending."

"Snap ending." Mildred nodded.

"Classics cut to fit fifteen-minute radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve-line dictionary resume. I exaggerate, of course. The dictionaries were for reference. But many were those whose sole knowledge of Hamlet (you know the title certainly, Montag; it is probably only a faint rumour of a title to you, Mrs. Montag) whose sole knowledge, as I say, of Hamlet was a one-page digest in a book that claimed: 'now at least you can read all the classics; keep up with your neighbours.' Do you see? Out of the nursery into the college and back to the nursery; there's your intellectual pattern for the past five centuries or more."

Mildred arose and began to move around the room, picking things up and putting them down. Beatty ignored her and continued:

"Speed up the film, Montag, quick. *Click, Pic, Look, Eye, Now, Flick, Here, There, Swift, Pace, Up, Down, In, Out, Why, How, Who, What, Where, Eh? Uh! Bang! Smack! Wallop, Bing, Bong, Boom!* Digest-digests, digest-digest-digests. Politics? One column, two sentences, a headline!

According
to Beatty
why did
things
change?

Then, in mid-air, all vanishes! Whirl man's mind around about so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters, that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!"

Mildred smoothed the bedclothes. Montag felt his heart jump and jump again as she patted his pillow. Right now she was pulling at his shoulder to try to get him to move so she could take the pillow out and fix it nicely and put it back. And perhaps cry out and stare or simply reach down her hand and say, "What's this?" and hold up the hidden book with touching innocence.

"School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?"

"Let me fix your pillow," said Mildred.

"No!" whispered Montag,

"The zipper displaces the button and a man lacks just that much time to think while dressing at dawn, a philosophical hour, and thus a melancholy hour."

Mildred said, "Here."

"Get away," said Montag.

"Life becomes one big pratfall, Montag; everything bang; boff, and wow!"

"Wow," said Mildred, yanking at the pillow.

"For God's sake, let me be!" cried Montag passionately.

Beatty opened his eyes wide.

Mildred's hand had frozen behind the pillow. Her fingers were tracing the book's outline and as the shape became familiar her face looked surprised and then stunned. Her mouth opened to ask a question . . .

"Empty the theatres save for clowns and furnish the rooms with glass walls and pretty colors running up and down the walls like confetti or blood or sherry or sauterne. You like baseball, don't you, Montag?"

"Baseball's a fine game."

Now Beatty was almost invisible, a voice somewhere behind a screen of smoke

"What's this?" asked Mildred, almost with delight. Montag heaved back against her arms.

"What's this here?"

"Sit down!" Montag shouted. She jumped away, her hands empty. "We're talking ! "

Beatty went on as if nothing had happened. "You like bowling, don't you, Montag?"

"Bowling, yes."

"And golf?"

"Golf is a fine game."

"Basketball?"

"A fine game."

"Billiards, pool? Football?"

"Fine games, all of them."

"More sports for everyone, group spirit, fun, and you don't have to think, eh? Organize and organize and superorganize super-super sports. More cartoons in books. More pictures. The mind drinks less and less. Impatience. Highways full of crowds going somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, nowhere. The gasoline refugee. Towns turn into motels, people in nomadic surges from place to place, following the moon tides, living tonight in the room where you slept this noon and I the night before."

Mildred went out of the room and slammed the door. The parlor "aunts" began to laugh at the parlor "uncles.",

"Now let's take up the minorities in our civilization, shall we? Bigger the population, the

more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the dog lovers, the cat lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. The people in this book, this play, this TV serial are not meant to represent any actual painters, cartographers, mechanics anywhere. The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that! All the minor minorities with their navels to be kept clean. Authors, full of evil thoughts, lock up your typewriters. They did. Magazines became a nice blend of vanilla tapioca. Books, so the damned snobbish critics said, were dishwater. No wonder books stopped selling, the critics said. But the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning happily, let the comic books survive. And the three dimensional sex magazines, of course. There you have it, Montag. It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, or trade journals."

Why was it easy to change?

"Yes, but what about the firemen, then?" asked Montag.

"Ah." Beatty leaned forward in the faint mist of smoke from his pipe. "What more easily explained and natural? With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word 'intellectual,' of course, became the swear word it deserved to be. You always dread the unfamiliar. Surely you remember the boy in your own school class who was exceptionally 'bright,' did most of the reciting and answering while the others sat like so many leaden idols, hating him. And wasn't it this bright boy you selected for beatings and tortures after hours? Of course it was. We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well read man? Me? I won't stomach them for a minute. And so when houses were finally fireproofed completely, all over the world (you were correct in your assumption the other night) there was no longer need of firemen for the old purposes. They were given the new job, as custodians of our peace of mind, the focus of our understandable and rightful dread of being inferior; official censors, judges, and executors. That's you, Montag, and that's me."

The door to the parlor opened and Mildred stood there looking in at them, looking at Beatty and then at Montag. Behind her the walls of the room were flooded with green and yellow and orange fireworks sizzling and bursting to some music composed almost completely of trap-drums, tom-toms, and cymbals. Her mouth moved and she was saying something but the sound covered it.

Beatty knocked his pipe into the palm of his pink hand, studied the ashes as if they were a symbol to be diagnosed and searched for meaning.

"You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred. Ask yourself, What do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn't that right? Haven't you heard it all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these."

"Yes." Montag could lip-read what Mildred was saying in the doorway. He tried not to look at her mouth, because then Beatty might turn and read what was there, too.

"Colored people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag. Take your fight outside. Better yet, into the incinerator. Funerals are unhappy and pagan? Eliminate them, too. Five minutes after a person is dead he's on his way to the Big Flue, the Incinerators serviced

What is the purpose of this society?

by helicopters all over the country. Ten minutes after death a man's a speck of black dust. Let's not quibble over individuals with memoriams. Forget them. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean."

The fireworks died in the parlor behind Mildred. She had stopped talking at the same time; a miraculous coincidence. Montag held his breath.

"There was a girl next door," he said, slowly. "She's gone now, I think, dead. I can't even remember her face. But she was different. How--how did she happen?"

Beatty smiled. "Here or there, that's bound to occur. Clarisse McClellan? We've a record on her family. We've watched them carefully. Heredity and environment are funny things. You can't rid yourselves of all the odd ducks in just a few years. The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That's why we've lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we're almost snatching them from the cradle. We had some false alarms on the McClellans, when they lived in Chicago. Never found a book. Uncle had a mixed record; antisocial. The girl? She was a time bomb. The family had been feeding her subconscious, I'm sure, from what I saw of her school record. She didn't want to know how a thing was done, but why. That can be embarrassing. You ask why to a lot of things and you wind up very unhappy indeed, if you keep at it. The poor girl's better off dead."

"Yes, dead."

"Luckily, queer ones like her don't happen, often. We know how to nip most of them in the bud, early. You can't build a house without nails and wood. If you don't want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the Government is inefficient, topheavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it. Peace, Montag. Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy. Any man who can take a TV wall apart and put it back together again, and most men can nowadays, is happier than any man who tries to slide-rule, measure, and equate the universe, which just won't be measured or equated without making man feel bestial and lonely. I know, I've tried it; to hell with it. So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your dare-devils, jet cars, motorcycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex. If the drama is bad, if the film says nothing, if the play is hollow, sting me with the theremin, loudly. I'll think I'm responding to the play, when it's only a tactile reaction to vibration. But I don't care. I just like solid entertainment."

Beatty got up. "I must be going. Lecture's over. I hope I've clarified things. The important thing for you to remember, Montag, is we're the Happiness Boys, the Dixie Duo, you and I and the others. We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought. We have our fingers in the dyke. Hold steady. Don't let the torrent of melancholy and drear philosophy drown our world. We depend on you. I don't think you realize how important you are, to our happy world as it stands now."

Beatty shook Montag's limp hand. Montag still sat, as if the house were collapsing about him and he could not move, in the bed. Mildred had vanished from the door.

"One last thing," said Beatty. "At least once in his career, every fireman gets an itch. What do the books say, he wonders. Oh, to scratch that itch, eh? Well, Montag, take my word for it, I've had to read a few in my time, to know what I was about, and the books say nothing! Nothing you can teach or believe. They're about non-existent people, figments of imagination, if they're fiction. And if they're non-fiction, it's worse, one professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet. All of them running about, putting out the stars and extinguishing the sun."

According to Beatty, why were books eventually banned?