PART III
BURNING BRIGHT

LIGHTS flicked on and house-doors opened all down the street, to watch the carnival set up. Montag and Beatty stared, one with dry satisfaction, the other with disbelief, at the house before them, this main ring in which torches would be juggled and fire eaten.

"Well," said Beatty, "now you did it. Old Montag wanted to fly near the sun and now that he's burnt his damn wings, he wonders why. Didn't I hint enough when I sent the Hound around your place?"

Montag's face was entirely numb and featureless; he felt his head turn like a stone carving to the dark place next door, set in its bright borders of flowers.

Beatty snorted. "Oh, no! You weren't fooled by that little idiot's routine, now, were you? Flowers, butterflies, leaves, sunsets, oh, hell! It's all in her file. I'll be damned. I've hit the bulls-eye. Look at the sick look on your face. A few grass-blades and the quarters of the moon. What trash. What good did she ever do with all that?"

Montag sat on the cold fender of the Dragon, moving his head half an inch to the left, half an inch to the right, left, right, left right, left ....

"She saw everything. She didn't do anything to anyone. She just let them alone."

"Alone, hell! She chewed around you, didn't she? One of those damn do-gooders with their shocked, holier-than-thou silences, their one talent making others feel guilty. God damn, they rise like the midnight sun to sweat you in your bed!"

The front door opened; Mildred came down the steps, running, one suitcase held with a dreamlike clenching rigidity in her fist, as a beetle-taxi hissed to the curb.

"Mildred!"

She ran past with her body stiff, her face floured with powder, her mouth gone, without lipstick.

"Mildred, you didn't put in the alarm!"

She shoved the valise in the waiting beetle, climbed in, and sat mumbling, "Poor family, poor family, oh everything gone, everything, everything gone now ...."

Beatty grabbed Montag's shoulder as the beetle blasted away and hit seventy miles an hour, far down the street, gone.

There was a crash like the falling parts of a dream fashioned out of warped glass, mirrors, and crystal prisms. Montag drifted about as if still another incomprehensible storm had turned him, to see Stoneman and Black wielding axes, shattering window-panes to provide cross-ventilation.

The brush of a death's-head moth against a cold black screen. "Montag, this is Faber. Do you hear me? What is happening?"

"This is happening to me," said Montag.

"What a dreadful surprise," said Beatty. "For everyone nowadays knows, absolutely is certain, that nothing will ever happen to me. Others die, I go on. There are no consequences and no responsibilities. Except that there are. But let's not talk about them, eh? By the time the consequences catch up with you, it's too late, isn't it, Montag?"

"Montag, can you get away, run?" asked Faber. Montag walked but did not feel his feet touch the cement and then the night grasses. Beatty flicked his igniter nearby and the small orange flame drew his fascinated gaze.

"What is there about fire that's so lovely? No matter what age we are, what draws us to it?" Beatty blew out the flame and lit it again. "It's perpetual motion; the thing man wanted to invent but never did. Or almost perpetual motion. If you let it go on, it'd burn our lifetimes out. What is fire? It's a mystery. Scientists give us gobbledygook about friction and molecules. But they don't really know.
Its real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences. A problem gets too burdensome, then into the furnace with it. Now, Montag, you're a burden. And fire will lift you off my shoulders, clean, quick, sure; nothing to rot later. Antibiotic, aesthetic, practical."

Montag stood looking in now at this queer house, made strange by the hour of the night, by murmuring neighbor voices, by littered glass, and there on the floor, their covers torn off and spilled out like swan-feathers, the incredible books that looked so silly and really not worth bothering with, for these were nothing but black type and yellowed paper, and raveled binding.

Mildred, of course. She must have watched him hide the books in the garden and brought them back in. Mildred. Mildred.

"I want you to do this job all by your lonesome, Montag. Not with kerosene and a match, but piecework, with a flamethrower. Your house, your clean-up."

"Montag, can't you run, get away!"

"No!" cried Montag helplessly. "The Hound! Because of the Hound!"

Faber heard, and Beatty, thinking it was meant for him, heard. "Yes, the Hound's somewhere about the neighborhood, so don't try anything. Ready?"

"Ready." Montag snapped the safety-catch on the flamethrower.

"Fire!"

A great nuzzling gout of flame leapt out to lap at the books and knock them against the wall. He stepped into the bedroom and fired twice and the twin beds went up in a great simmering whisper, with more heat and passion and light than he would have supposed them to contain. He burnt the bedroom walls and the cosmetics chest because he wanted to change everything, the chairs, the tables, and in the dining-room the silverware and plastic dishes, everything that showed that he had lived here in this empty house with a strange woman who would forget him tomorrow, who had gone and quite forgotten him already, listening to her Seashell radio pour in on her and in on her as she rode across town, alone. And as before, it was good to burn, he felt himself gush out in the fire, snatch, rend, rip in half with flame, and put away the senseless problem. If there was no solution, well then now there was no problem, either. Fire was best for everything!

"The books, Montag!"

The books leapt and danced like roasted birds, their wings ablaze with red and yellow feathers.

And then he came to the parlor where the great idiot monsters lay asleep with their white thoughts and their snowy dreams. And he shot a bolt at each of the three blank walls and the vacuum hissed out at him. The emptiness made an even emptier whistle, a senseless scream. He tried to think about the vacuum upon which the nothingness had performed, but he could not. He held his breath so the vacuum could not get into his lungs. He cut off its terrible emptiness, drew back, and gave the entire room a gift of one huge bright yellow flower of burning. The fire-proof plastic sheath on everything was cut wide and the house began to shudder with flame.

"When you're quite finished," said Beatty behind him. "You're under arrest."

The house fell in red coals and black ash. It bedded itself down in sleepy pink-grey cinders and a smoke plume blew over it, rising and waving slowly back and forth in the sky. It was three-thirty in the morning. The crowd drew back into the houses; the great tents of the circus had slumped into charcoal and rubble and the show was well over.

Montag stood with the flame-thrower in his limp hands, great islands of perspiration drenching his armpits, his face smeared with soot. The other firemen waited behind him, in the darkness, their faces illuminated faintly by the smoldering foundation.

Montag started to speak twice and then finally managed to put his thought together.

"Was it my wife turned in the alarm?"

Beatty nodded. "But her friends turned in an alarm earlier, that I let ride. One way or
the other, you'd have got it. It was pretty silly, quoting poetry around free and easy like that. It was the act of a silly damn snob. Give a man a few lines of verse and he thinks he's the Lord of all Creation. You think you can walk on water with your books. Well, the world can get by just fine without them. Look where they got you, in slime up to your lip. If I stir the slime with my little finger, you'll drown!"

Montag could not move. A great earthquake had come with fire and leveled the house and Mildred was under there somewhere and his entire life under there and he could not move. The earthquake was still shaking and falling and shivering inside him and he stood there, his knees half-bent under the great load of tiredness and bewilderment and outrage, letting Beatty hit him without raising a hand.

"Montag, you idiot, Montag, you damn fool; why did you really do it?"

Montag did not hear, he was far away, he was running with his mind, he was gone, leaving this dead soot-covered body to sway in front of another raving fool.

"Montag, get out of there!" said Faber.

Montag listened.

Beatty struck him a blow on the head that sent him reeling back. The green bullet in which Faber's voice whispered and cried, fell to the sidewalk. Beatty snatched it up, grinning. He held it half in, half out of his ear.

Montag heard the distant voice calling, "Montag, you all right?"

Beatty switched the green bullet off and thrust it in his pocket. "Well--so there's more here than I thought. I saw you tilt your head, listening. First I thought you had a Seashell. But when you turned clever later, I wondered. We'll trace this and drop it on your friend."

"No!" said Montag.

He twitched the safety catch on the flame-thrower. Beatty glanced instantly at Montag's fingers and his eyes widened the faintest bit. Montag saw the surprise there and himself glanced to his hands to see what new thing they had done. Thinking back later he could never decide whether the hands or Beatty's reaction to the hands gave him the final push toward murder. The last rolling thunder of the avalanche stoned down about his ears, not touching him.

Beatty grinned his most charming grin. "Well, that's one way to get an audience. Hold a gun on a man and force him to listen to your speech. Speech away. What'll it be this time? Why don't you belch Shakespeare at me, you fumbling snob? 'There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats, for I am arm'd so strong in honesty that they pass by me as an idle wind, which I respect not!' How's that? Go ahead now, you second-hand litterateur, pull the trigger." He took one step toward Montag.

Montag only said, "We never burned right..."

"Hand it over, Guy," said Beatty with a fixed smile.

And then he was a shrieking blaze, a jumping, sprawling, gibbering mannikin, no longer human or known, all writhing flame on the lawn as Montag shot one continuous pulse of liquid fire on him. There was a hiss like a great mouthful of spittle banging a redhot stove, a bubbling and frothing as if salt had been poured over a monstrous black snail to cause a terrible liquefaction and a boiling over of yellow foam. Montag shut his eyes, shouted, shouted, and fought to get his hands at his ears to clamp and to cut away the sound. Beatty flopped over and over and over, and at last twisted in on himself like a charred wax doll and lay silent.

The other two firemen did not move.

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Montag kept his sickness down long enough to aim the flame-thrower. "Turn around!"

They turned, their faces like blanched meat, streaming sweat; he beat their heads, knocking off their helmets and bringing them down on themselves. They fell and lay without moving.

The blowing of a single autumn leaf.

He turned and the Mechanical Hound was there.
It was half across the lawn, coming from the shadows, moving with such drifting ease that it was like a single solid cloud of black-grey smoke blown at him in silence.

It made a single last leap into the air, coming down at Montag from a good three feet over his head, its spidery legs reaching, the procaine needle snapping out its single angry tooth. Montag caught it with a bloom of fire, a single wondrous blossom that curled in petals of yellow and blue and orange about the metal dog, clad it in a new covering as it slammed into Montag and threw him ten feet back against the bole of a tree, taking the flame-gun with him. He felt it scrabble and seize his leg and stab the needle in for a moment before the fire snapped the Hound up in the air, burst its metal bones at the joints, and blew out its interior in the single flushing of red color like a skyrocket fastened to the street. Montag lay watching the dead-alive thing fiddle the air and die. Even now it seemed to want to get back at him and finish the injection which was now working through the flesh of his leg. He felt all of the mingled relief and horror at having pulled back only in time to have just his knee slammed by the fender of a car hurtling by at ninety miles an hour. He was afraid to get up, afraid he might not be able to gain his feet at all, with an anaesthetized leg. A numbness in a numbness hollowed into a numbness....

And now...?

The street empty, the house burnt like an ancient bit of stage-scenery, the other homes dark, the Hound here, Beatty there, the three other firemen another place, and the Salamander?... He gazed at the immense engine. That would have to go, too.

Well, he thought, let's see how badly off you are. On your feet now. Easy, easy . . . there.

He stood and he had only one leg. The other was like a chunk of burnt pine-log he was carrying along as a penance for some obscure sin. When he put his weight on it, a shower of silver needles gushed up the length of the calf and went off in the knee. He wept. Come on! Come on, you, you can't stay here!

A few house-lights were going on again down the street, whether from the incidents just passed, or because of the abnormal silence following the fight, Montag did not know. He hobbled around the ruins, seizing at his bad leg when it lagged, talking and whimpering and shouting directions at it and cursing it and pleading with it to work for him now when it was vital. He heard a number of people crying out in the darkness and shouting. He reached the back yard and the alley.

Beatty, he thought, you're not a problem now. You always said, don't face a problem, bum it. Well, now I've done both. Good-bye, Captain.

And he stumbled along the alley in the dark.

A shotgun blast went off in his leg every time he put it down and he thought, you're a fool, a damn fool, an awful fool, an idiot, an awful idiot, a damn idiot, and a fool, a damn fool; look at the mess and where's the mop, look at the mess, and what do you do? Pride, damn it, and temper, and you've junked it all, at the very start you vomit on everyone and on yourself. But everything at once, but everything one on top of another; Beatty, the women, Mildred, Clarisse, everything. No excuse, though, no excuse. A fool, a damn fool, go give yourself up!

No, we'll save what we can, we'll do what there is left to do. If we have to burn, let's take a few more with us. Here!

He remembered the books and turned back. Just on the off chance.

He found a few books where he had left them, near the garden fence. Mildred, God bless her, had missed a few. Four books still lay hidden where he had put them. Voices were wailing in the night and flashbeams swirled about. Other Salamanders were roaring their engines far away, and police sirens were cutting their way across town with their sirens.

Montag took the four remaining books and hopped, jolted, hopped his way down the alley and suddenly fell as if his head had been cut off and only his body lay there. Something inside had jerked him to a halt and flopped him down. He lay where he had fallen and sobbed, his legs folded,
his face pressed blindly to the gravel.

*Beatty wanted to die.*

In the middle of the crying Montag knew it for the truth. Beatty had wanted to die. He had just stood there, not really trying to save himself, just stood there, joking, needling, thought Montag, and the thought was enough to stifle his sobbing and let him pause for air. How strange, strange, to want to die so much that you let a man walk around armed and then instead of shutting up and staying alive, you go on yelling at people and making fun of them until you get them mad, and then....

At a distance, running feet.

Montag sat up. Let's get out of here. Come on, get up, get up, you just can't sit! But he was still crying and that had to be finished. It was going away now. He hadn't wanted to kill anyone, not even Beatty. His flesh gripped him and shrank as if it had been plunged in acid. He gagged. He saw Beatty, a torch, not moving, fluttering out on the grass. He bit at his knuckles. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, oh God, sorry ....

He tried to piece it all together, to go back to the normal pattern of life a few short days ago before the sieve and the sand, Denham's Dentifrice, moth-voices, fireflies, the alarms and excursions, too much for a few short days, too much, indeed, for a lifetime.

Feet ran in the far end of the alley.

"Get up!" he told himself. "Damn it, get up!" he said to the leg, and stood. The pains were spikes driven in the kneecap and then only darning needles and then only common, ordinary safety pins, and after he had dragged along fifty more hops and jumps, filling his hand with slivers from the board fence, the pricking was like someone blowing a spray of scalding water on that leg. And the leg was at last his own leg again. He had been afraid that running might break the loose ankle. Now, sucking all the night into his open mouth, and blowing it out pale, with all the blackness left heavily inside himself, he set out in a steady jogging pace. He carried the books in his hands.

He thought of Faber.

Faber was back there in the steaming lump of tar that had no name or identity now. He had burnt Faber, too. He felt so suddenly shocked by this that he felt Faber was really dead, baked like a roach in that small green capsule shoved and lost in the pocket of a man who was now nothing but a frame skeleton strung with asphalt tendons.

You must remember, burn them or they'll burn you, he thought. Right now it's as simple as that.

He searched his pockets, the money was there, and in his other pocket he found the usual Seashell upon which the city was talking to itself in the cold black morning.


He ran steadily for six blocks, in the alley, and then the alley opened out on to a wide empty thoroughfare ten lanes wide. It seemed like a boatless river frozen there in the raw light of the high white arc-lamps; you could drown trying to cross it, he felt; it was too wide, it was too open. It was a vast stage without scenery, inviting him to run across, easily seen in the blazing illumination, easily caught, easily shot down.

The Seashell hummed in his ear.

"... watch for a man running ... watch for the running man . . . watch for a man alone, on foot . . . watch..."

Montag pulled back into the shadows. Directly ahead lay a gas station, a great chunk of porcelain snow shining there, and two silver beetles pulling in to fill up. Now he must be clean and presentable if he wished, to walk, not run, stroll calmly across that wide boulevard. It would give him an extra margin of safety if he washed up and combed his hair before he went on his way to get *where . . . ?*
Yes, he thought, where am I running?

Nowhere. There was nowhere to go, no friend to turn to, really. Except Faber. And then he realized that he was indeed, running toward Faber's house, instinctively. But Faber couldn't hide him; it would be suicide even to try. But he knew that he would go to see Faber anyway, for a few short minutes. Faber's would be the place where he might refuel his fast draining belief in his own ability to survive. He just wanted to know that there was a man like Faber in the world. He wanted to see the man alive and not burned back there like a body shelled in another body. And some of the money must be left with Faber, of course, to be spent after Montag ran on his way. Perhaps he could make the open country and live on or near the rivers and near the highways, in the fields and hills.

A great whirling whisper made him look to the sky.

The police helicopters were rising so far away that it seemed someone had blown the grey head off a dry dandelion flower. Two dozen of them flurried, wavering, indecisive, three miles off, like butterflies puzzled by autumn, and then they were plummeting down to land, one by one, here, there, softly kneading the streets where, turned back to beetles, they shrieked along the boulevards or, as suddenly, leapt back into the sir, continuing their search.

And here was the gas station, its attendants busy now with customers. Approaching from the rear, Montag entered the men's washroom. Through the aluminum wall he heard a radio voice saying, "War has been declared." The gas was being pumped outside. The men in the beetles were talking and the attendants were talking about the engines, the gas, the money owed. Montag stood trying to make himself feel the shock of the quiet statement from the radio, but nothing would happen. The war would have to wait for him to come to it in his personal file, an hour, two hours from now.

He washed his hands and face and towed himself dry, making little sound. He came out of the washroom and shut the door carefully and walked into the darkness and at last stood again on the edge of the empty boulevard.

There it lay, a game for him to win, a vast bowling alley in the cool morning. The boulevard was as clean as the surface of an arena two minutes before the appearance of certain unnamed victims and certain unknown killers. The air over and above the vast concrete river trembled with the warmth of Montag's body alone; it was incredible how he felt his temperature could cause the whole immediate world to vibrate. He was a phosphorescent target; he knew it, he felt it. And now he must begin his little walk.

Three blocks away a few headlights glared. Montag drew a deep breath. His lungs were like burning brooms in his chest. His mouth was sucked dry from running. His throat tasted of bloody iron and there was rusted steel in his feet.

What about those lights there? Once you started walking you'd have to gauge how fast those beetles could make it down here. Well, how far was it to the other curb? It seemed like a hundred yards. Probably not a hundred, but figure for that anyway, figure that with him going very slowly, at a nice stroll, it might take as much as thirty seconds, forty seconds to walk all the way.

The beetles? Once started, they could leave three blocks behind them in about fifteen seconds. So, even if halfway across he started to run . . . ?

He put his right foot out and then his left foot and then his right. He walked on the empty avenue.

Even if the street were entirely empty, of course, you couldn't be sure of a safe crossing, for a car could appear suddenly over the rise four blocks further on and be on and past you before you had taken a dozen breaths.

He decided not to count his steps. He looked neither to left nor right. The light from the
overhead lamps seemed as bright and revealing as the midday sun and just as hot.

He listened to the sound of the car picking up speed two blocks away on his right. Its movable headlights jerked back and forth suddenly, and caught at Montag.

Keep going.

Montag faltered, got a grip on the books, and forced himself not to freeze. Instinctively he took a few quick, running steps then talked out loud to himself and pulled up to stroll again. He was now half across the street, but the roar from the beetle's engines whined higher as it put on speed.

The police, of course. They see me. But slow now; slow, quiet, don't turn, don't look, don't seem concerned. Walk, that's it, walls, walk.

The beetle was rushing. The beetle was roaring. The beetle raised its speed. The beetle was whining. The beetle was in high thunder. The beetle came skimming. The beetle came in a single whistling trajectory, fired from an invisible rifle. It was up to 120 m.p.h. It was up to 130 at least. Montag clamped his jaws. The heat of the racing headlights burnt his cheeks, it seemed, and jittered his eye-lids and flushed the sour sweat all over his body.

He began to shuffle idiotically and talk to himself and then he broke and just ran. He put out his legs as far as they would go and down and then far out again and down and back out and down and back. God! God! He dropped a book, broke pace, almost turned, changed his mind, plunged on, yelling in concrete emptiness, the beetle scuttling after its running food, two hundred, one hundred feet away, ninety, eighty, seventy, Montag gasping, flailing his hands, legs up down out, up down out, closer, closer, hooting, calling, his eyes burnt white now as his head jerked about to confront the flashing glare, now the beetle was swallowed in its own light, now it was nothing but a torch hurtling upon him; all sound, all blare. Now--almost on top of him!

He stumbled and fell.

I'm done! It's over!

But the falling made a difference. An instant before reaching him the wild beetle cut and swerved out. It was gone. Montag lay flat, his head down. Wisps of laughter trailed back to him with the blue exhaust from the beetle.

His right hand was extended above him, flat. Across the extreme tip of his middle finger, he saw now as he lifted that hand, a faint sixteenth of an inch of black tread where tire had touched in passing. He looked at that black line with disbelief, getting to his feet.

That wasn't the police, he thought.

He looked down the boulevard. It was clear now. A carful of children, all ages, God knew, from twelve to sixteen, out whistling, yelling, hurrahing, had seen a man, a very extraordinary sight, a man strolling, a rarity, and simply said, "Let's get him," not knowing he was the fugitive Mr. Montag, simply a number of children out for a long night of roaring five or six hundred miles in a few moonlit hours, their faces icy with wind, and coming home or not coming at dawn, alive or not alive, that made the adventure.

They would have killed me, thought Montag, swaying, the air still torn and stirring about him in dust, touching his bruised cheek. For no reason at all in the world they would have killed me.

He walked toward the far curb telling each foot to go and keep going. Somehow he had picked up the spilled books; he didn't remember bending or touching them. He kept moving them from hand to hand as if they were a poker hand he could not figure.

I wonder if they were the ones who killed Clarisse?

He stopped and his mind said it again, very loud.

I wonder if they were the ones who killed Clarisse!

He wanted to run after them yelling.

His eyes watered.

The thing that had saved him was falling flat. The driver of that car, seeing Montag down, instinctively considered the probability that running over a body at that speed might turn
the car upside down and spill them out. If Montag had remained an *upright* target. . . ?

Montag gasped.

Far down the boulevard, four blocks away, the beetle had slowed, spun about on two wheels, and was now racing back, slanting over on the wrong side of the street, picking up speed.

But Montag was gone, hidden in the safety of the dark alley for which he had set out on a long journey, an hour or was it a minute, ago? He stood shivering in the night, looking back out as the beetle ran by and skidded back to the center of the avenue, whirling laughter in the air all about it, gone.

Farther on, as Montag moved in darkness, he could see the helicopters falling, falling, like the first flakes of snow in the long winter to come....

The house was silent.
Montag approached from the rear, creeping through a thick night-moistened scent of daffodils and roses and wet grass. He touched the screen door in back, found it open, slipped in, moved across the porch, listening.

Mrs. Black, are you asleep in there? he thought. This isn't good, but your husband did it to others and never asked and never wondered and never worried. And now since you're a fireman's wife, it's your house and your turn, for all the houses your husband burned and the people he hurt without thinking. . .

The house did not reply.
He hid the books in the kitchen and moved from the house again to the alley and looked back and the house was still dark and quiet, sleeping.

On his way across town, with the helicopters fluttering like torn bits of paper in the sky, he phoned the alarm at a lonely phone booth outside a store that was closed for the night. Then he stood in the cold night air, waiting and at a distance he heard the fire sirens start up and run, and the Salamanders coming, coming to bum Mr. Black's house while he was away at work, to make his wife stand shivering in the morning air while the roof let go and dropped in upon the fire. But now, she was still asleep.

Good night, Mrs. Black, he thought.

"Faber!"
Another rap, a whisper, and a long waiting. Then, after a minute, a small light flickered inside Faber's small house. After another pause, the back door opened.

They stood looking at each other in the half-light, Faber and Montag, as if each did not believe in the other's existence. Then Faber moved and put out his hand and grabbed Montag and moved him in and sat him down and went back and stood in the door, listening. The sirens were wailing off in the morning distance. He came in and shut the door.

Montag said, "I've been a fool all down the line. I can't stay long. I'm on my way God knows where."

"At least you were a fool about the right things," said Faber. "I thought you were dead. The audio-capsule I gave you--"

"Burnt."

"I heard the Captain talking to you and suddenly there was nothing. I almost came out looking for you."

"The Captain's dead. He found the audio-capsule, he heard your voice, he was going to trace it. I killed him with the flamethrower."
Faber sat down and did not speak for a time.

"My God, how did this happen?" said Montag. "It was only the other night everything was fine and the next thing I know I'm drowning. How many times can a man go down and still be alive? I can't breathe. There's Beatty dead, and he was my friend once, and there's Millie gone, I thought she was my wife, but now I don't know. And the house all burnt. And my job gone and myself on the run, and I planted a book in a fireman's house on the way. Good Christ, the things I've done in a single week!"

"You did what you had to do. It was coming on for a long time."

"Yes, I believe that, if there's nothing else I believe. It saved itself up to happen. I could feel it for a long time, I was saving something up, I went around doing one thing and feeling another. God, it was all there. It's a wonder it didn't show on me, like fat. And now here I am, messing up your life. They might follow me here."

"I feel alive for the first time in years," said Faber. "I feel I'm doing what I should have done a lifetime ago. For a little while I'm not afraid. Maybe it's because I'm doing the right thing at last. Maybe it's because I've done a rash thing and don't want to look the coward to you. I suppose I'll have to do even more violent things, exposing myself so I won't fall down on the job and turn scared again. What are your plans?"

"To keep running."

"You know the war's on?"

"I heard."

"God, isn't it funny?" said the old man. "It seems so remote because we have our own troubles."

"I haven't had time to think." Montag drew out a hundred dollars. "I want this to stay with you, use it any way that'll help when I'm gone."

"But--"

"I might be dead by noon; use this."

Faber nodded. "You'd better head for the river if you can, follow along it, and if you can hit the old railroad lines going out into the country, follow them. Even though practically everything's airborne these days and most of the tracks are abandoned, the rails are still there, rusting. I've heard there are still hobo camps all across the country, here and there; walking camps they call them, and if you keep walking far enough and keep an eye peeled, they say there's lots of old Harvard degrees on the tracks between here and Los Angeles. Most of them are wanted and hunted in the cities. They survive, I guess. There aren't many of them, and I guess the Government's never considered them a great enough danger to go in and track them down. You might hole up with them for a time and get in touch with me in St. Louis, I'm leaving on the five a.m. bus this morning, to see a retired printer there, I'm getting out into the open myself, at last. The money will be put to good use. Thanks and God bless you. Do you want to sleep a few minutes?"

"I'd better run."

"Let's check."

He took Montag quickly into the bedroom and lifted a picture frame aside, revealing a television screen the size of a postal card. "I always wanted something very small, something I could talk to, something I could blot out with the palm of my hand, if necessary, nothing that could shout me down, nothing monstrous big. So, you see." He snapped it on.

"Montag," the TV set said, and lit up. "M-O-N-T-A-G." The name was spelled out by the voice. "Guy Montag. Still running. Police helicopters are up. A new Mechanical Hound has been brought from another district--"

Montag and Faber looked at each other.

"-- Mechanical Hound never fails. Never since its first use in tracking quarry has this incredible invention made a mistake. Tonight, this network is proud to have the opportunity to follow
the Hound by camera helicopter as it starts on its way to the target--"
Faber poured two glasses of whisky. "We'll need these."
They drank.
"--nose so sensitive the Mechanical Hound can remember and identify ten thousand odor
indexes on ten thousand men without re-setting!"
Faber trembled the least bit and looked about at his house, at the walls, the door, the
doorknob, and the chair where Montag now sat. Montag saw the look. They both looked
quickly about the house and Montag felt his nostrils dilate and he knew that he was trying to
track himself and his nose was suddenly good enough to sense the path he had made in the air
of the room and the sweat of his hand hung from the doorknob, invisible, but as numerous as
the jewels of a small chandelier, he was everywhere, in and on and about everything, he was a
luminous cloud, a ghost that made breathing once more impossible. He saw Faber stop up his own
breath for fear of drawing that ghost into his own body, perhaps, being contaminated with the
phantom exhalations and odors of a running man.
"The Mechanical Hound is now landing by helicopter at the site of the Burning!"
And there on the small screen was the burnt house, and the crowd, and something with a
sheet over it and out of the sky, fluttering, came the helicopter like a grotesque flower.
So they must have their game out, thought Montag. The circus must go on, even with war
beginning within the hour....
He watched the scene, fascinated, not wanting to move. It seemed so remote and no part of
him; it was a play apart and separate, wondrous to watch, not without its strange pleasure. That's all
for me, you thought, that's all taking place just for me, by God.
If he wished, he could linger here, in comfort, and follow the entire hunt on through its swift
phases, down alleys across streets, over empty running avenues, crossing lots and playgrounds, with
pauses here or there for the necessary commercials, up other alleys to the burning house of Mr. and
Mrs. Black, and so on finally to this house with Faber and himself seated, drinking, while the Electric
Hound sniffed down the last trail, silent as a drift of death itself, skidded to a halt outside that
window there. Then, if he wished, Montag might rise, walk to the window, keep one eye on the TV
screen, open the window, lean out, look back, and see himself dramatized, described, made over,
standing there, limned in the bright small television screen from outside, a drama to be watched
objectively, knowing that in other parlors he was large as life, in full color, dimensionally perfect!
And if he kept his eye peeled quickly he would see himself, an instant before oblivion, being
punctured for the benefit of how many civilian parlor-sitters who had been wakened from sleep a few
minutes ago by the frantic sirening of their living-room walls to come watch the big game, the hunt,
the one-man carnival.
Would he have time for a speech? As the Hound seized him, in view of ten or twenty or
thirty million people, mightn't he sum up his entire life in the last week in one single phrase or a
word that would stay with them long after the. Hound had turned, clenching him in its metal-plier
jaws, and trotted off in darkness, while the camera remained stationary, watching the creature
dwindle in the distance--a splendid fade-out! What could he say in a single word, a few words, that
would sear all their faces and wake them up?
"There," whispered Faber.
Out of a helicopter glided something that was not machine, not animal, not dead, not alive,
glowing with a pale green luminosity. It stood near the smoking ruins of Montag's house and the men
brought his discarded flame-thrower to it and put it down under the muzzle of the Hound.
There was a whirring, clicking, humming.
Montag shook his head and got up and drank the rest of his drink. "It's time. I'm sorry about
this:"
them here--"

"Wait. There's no use your being discovered. When I leave, burn the spread of this bed, that I touched. Burn the chair in the living room, in your wall incinerator. Wipe down the furniture with alcohol, wipe the door-knobs. Burn the throw rug in the parlor. Turn the air-conditioning on full in all the rooms and spray with moth-spray if you have it. Then, turn on your lawn sprinklers as high as they'll go and hose off the sidewalks. With any luck at all, we can kill the trail in here, anyway."

Faber shook his hand. "I'll tend to it. Good luck. If we're both in good health, next week, the week after, get in touch. General Delivery, St. Louis. I'm sorry there's no way I can go with you this time, by ear-phone. That was good for both of us. But my equipment was limited. You see, I never thought I would use it. What a silly old man. No thought there. Stupid, stupid. So I haven't another green bullet, the right kind, to put in your head. Go now!"

"One last thing. Quick. A suitcase, get it, fill it with your dirtiest clothes, an old suit, the dirtier the better, a shirt, some old sneakers and socks . . . ."

Faber was gone and back in a minute. They sealed the cardboard valise with clear tape. "To keep the ancient odor of Mr. Faber in, of course," said Faber sweating at the job.

Montag doused the exterior of the valise with whisky. "I don't want that Hound picking up two odors at once. May I take this whisky. I'll need it later. Christ I hope this works!"

They shook hands again and, going out of the door, they glanced at the TV. The Hound was on its way, followed by hovering helicopter cameras, silently, silently, sniffing the great night wind. It was running down the first alley.

"Good-bye!"

And Montag was out the back door lightly, running with the half-empty valise. Behind him he heard the lawn-sprinkling system jump up, filling the dark air with rain that fell gently and then with a steady pour all about, washing on the sidewalks, and draining into the alley. He carried a few drops of this rain with him on his face. He thought he heard the old man call good-bye, but he wasn't certain.

He ran very fast away from the house, down toward the river.

*   *   *

Montag ran.

He could feel the Hound, like autumn, come cold and dry and swift, like a wind that didn't stir grass, that didn't jar windows or disturb leaf-shadows on the white sidewalks as it passed. The Hound did not touch the world. It carried its silence with it, so you could feel the silence building up a pressure behind you all across town. Montag felt the pressure rising, and ran.

He stopped for breath, on his way to the river, to peer through dimly lit windows of wakened houses, and saw the silhouettes of people inside watching their parlor walls and there on the walls the Mechanical Hound, a breath of neon vapor, spidered along, here and gone, here and gone! Now at Elm Terrace, Lincoln, Oak, Park, and up the alley toward Faber's house!

Go past, thought Montag, don't stop, go on, don't turn in!

On the parlor wall, Faber's house, with its sprinkler system pulsing in the night air.

The Hound paused, quivering.

No! Montag held to the window sill. This way! Here!

The procaine needle flicked out and in, out and in. A single clear drop of the stuff of dreams fell from the needle as it vanished in the Hound's muzzle.

Montag held his breath, like a doubled fist, in his chest.

The Mechanical Hound turned and plunged away from Faber's house down the alley again.

Montag snapped his gaze to the sky. The helicopters were closer, a great blowing of insects to a single light source.
With an effort, Montag reminded himself again that this was no fictional episode to be watched on his run to the river; it was in actuality his own chess-game he was witnessing, move by move.

He shouted to give himself the necessary push away from this last house window, and the fascinating séance going on in there! Hell! and he was away and gone! The alley, a street, the alley, a street, and the smell of the river. Leg out, leg down, leg out and down. Twenty million Montags running, soon, if the cameras caught him. Twenty million Montags running, running like an ancient flickery Keystone Comedy, cops, robbers, chasers and the chased, hunters and hunted, he had seen it a thousand times. Behind him now twenty million silently baying Hounds ricocheted across parlors, three-cushion shooting from right wall to center wall to left wall, gone, right wall, center wall, left wall, gone!

Montag jammed his Seashell to his ear.

"Police suggest entire population in the Elm Terrace area do as follows: Everyone in every house in every street open a front or rear door or look from the windows. The fugitive cannot escape if everyone in the next minute looks from his house. Ready!"

Of course! Why hadn't they done it before! Why, in all the years, hadn't this game been tried! Everyone up, everyone out! He couldn't be missed! The only man running alone in the night city, the only man proving his legs!

"At the count of ten now! One! Two!"
He felt the city rise. Three.
He felt the city turn to its thousands of doors.
Faster! Leg up, leg down!
"Four!"
The people sleepwalking in their hallways.
"Five!"
He felt their hands on the doorknobs!
The smell of the river was cool and like a solid rain. His throat was burnt rust and his eyes were wept dry with running. He yelled as if this yell would jet him on, fling him the last hundred yards.

"Six, seven, eight!"
The doorknobs turned on five thousand doors. "Nine!"
He ran out away from the last row of houses, on a slope leading down to a solid moving blackness.
"Ten!"
The doors opened.
He imagined thousands on thousands of faces peering into yards, into alleys, and into the sky, faces hid by curtains, pale, night-frightened faces, like grey animals peering from electric caves, faces with grey colorless eyes, grey tongues and grey thoughts looking out through the numb flesh of the face.

But he was at the river.
He touched it, just to be sure it was real. He waded in and stripped in darkness to the skin, splashed his body, arms, legs, and head with raw liquor; drank it and sniffed some up his nose. Then he dressed in Faber's old clothes and shoes. He tossed his own clothing into the river and watched it swept away. Then, holding the suitcase, he walked out in the river until there was no bottom and he was swept away in the dark.

He was three hundred yards downstream when the Hound reached the river. Overhead the great racketing fans of the helicopters hovered. A storm of light fell upon the river and Montag dived
under the great illumination as if the sun had broken the clouds. He felt the river pull him further on its way, into darkness. Then the lights switched back to the land, the helicopters swerved over the city again, as if they had picked up another trail. They were gone. The Hound was gone. Now there was only the cold river and Montag floating in a sudden peacefulness, away from the city and the lights and the chase, away from everything.

He felt as if he had left a stage behind and many actors. He felt as if he had left the great séance and all the murmuring ghosts. He was moving from an unreality that was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new.

The black land slid by and he was going into the country among the hills: For the first time in a dozen years the stars were coming out above him, in great processions of wheeling fire. He saw a great juggernaut of stars form in the sky and threaten to roll over and crush him. He floated on his back when the valise filled and sank; the river was mild and leisurely, going away from the people who ate shadows for breakfast and steam for lunch and vapors for supper. The river was very real; it held him comfortably and gave him the time at last, the leisure, to consider this month, this year, and a lifetime of years. He listened to his heart slow. His thoughts stopped rushing with his blood.

He saw the moon low in the sky now. The moon there, and the light of the moon caused by what? By the sun, of course. And what lights the sun? Its own fire. And the sun goes on, day after day, burning and burning. The sun and time. The sun and time and burning. Burning. The river bobbed him along gently. Burning. The sun and every clock on the earth. It all came together and became a single thing in his mind. After a long time of floating on the land and a short time of floating in the river he knew why he must never burn again in his life.

The sun burned every day. It burned Time. The world rushed in a circle and turned on its axis and time was busy burning the years and the people anyway, without any help from him. So if he burnt things with the firemen, and the sun burnt Time, that meant that everything burned!

One of them had to stop burning. The sun wouldn't, certainly. So it looked as if it had to be Montag and the people he had worked with until a few short hours ago. Somewhere the saving and putting away had to begin again and someone had to do the saving and keeping, one way or another, in books, in records, in people's heads, any way at all so long as it was safe, free from moths, silver-fish, rust and dry-rot, and men with matches. The world was full of burning of all types and sizes. Now the guild of the asbestos-weaver must open shop very soon.

He felt his heel bump land, touch pebbles and rocks, scrape sand. The river had moved him toward shore.

He looked in at the great black creature without eyes or light, without shape, with only a size that went a thousand miles without wanting to stop, with its grass hills and forests that were waiting for him.

He hesitated to leave the comforting flow of the water. He expected the Hound there. Suddenly the trees might blow under a great wind of helicopters.

But there was only the normal autumn wind high up, going by like another river. Why wasn't the Hound running? Why had the search veered inland? Montag listened. Nothing. Nothing.

Millie, he thought. All this country here. Listen to it! Nothing and nothing. So much silence, Millie, I wonder how you'd take it? Would you shout Shut up, shut up! Millie, Millie. And he was sad.

Millie was not here and the Hound was not here, but the dry smell of hay blowing from some distant field put Montag on the land. He remembered a farm he had visited when he was very young, one of the rare times he had discovered that somewhere behind the seven veils of unreality, beyond the walls of parlors and beyond the tin moat of the city, cows chewed grass and pigs sat in
warm ponds at noon and dogs barked after white sheep on a hill.

Now, the dry smell of hay, the motion of the waters, made him think of sleeping in fresh hay in a lonely barn away from the loud highways, behind a quiet farmhouse, and under an ancient windmill that whirred like the sound of the passing years overhead. He lay in the high barn loft all night, listening to distant animals and insects and trees, the little motions and stirrings.

During the night, he thought, below the loft, he would hear a sound like feet moving, perhaps. He would tense and sit up. The sound would move away, He would lie back and look out of the loft window, very late in the night, and see the lights go out in the farmhouse itself, until a very young and beautiful woman would sit in an unlit window, braiding her hair. It would be hard to see her, but her face would be like the face of the girl so long ago in his past now, so very long ago, the girl who had known the weather and never been burned by the fire-flies, the girl who had known what dandelions meant rubbed off on your chin. Then, she would be gone from the warm window and appear again upstairs in her moon-whitened room. And then, to the sound of death, the sound of the jets cutting the sky into two black pieces beyond the horizon, he would lie in the loft, hidden and safe, watching those strange new stars over the rim of the earth, fleeing from the soft color of dawn.

In the morning he would not have needed sleep, for all the warm odors and sights of a complete country night would have rested and slept him while his eyes were wide and his mouth, when he thought to test it, was half a smile.

And there at the bottom of the hayloft stair, waiting for him, would be the incredible thing. He would step carefully down, in the pink light of early morning, so fully aware of the world that he would be afraid, and stand over the small miracle and at last bend to touch it.

A cool glass of fresh milk, and a few apples and pears laid at the foot of the steps.

This was all he wanted now. Some sign that the immense world would accept him and give him the long time needed to think all the things that must be thought.

A glass of milk, an apple, a pear.

He stepped from the river.

The land rushed at him, a tidal wave. He was crushed by darkness and the look of the country and the million odors on a wind that iced his body. He fell back under the breaking curve of darkness and sound and smell, his ears roaring. He whirled. The stars poured over his sight like flaming meteors. He wanted to plunge in the river again and let it idle him safely on down somewhere. This dark land rising was like that day in his childhood, swimming, when from nowhere the largest wave in the history of remembering slammed him down in salt mud and green darkness, water burning mouth and nose, retching his stomach, screaming! Too much water!

Too much land.

Out of the black wall before him, a whisper. A shape. In the shape, two eyes. The night looking at him. The forest, seeing him.

The Hound!

After all the running and rushing and sweating it out and half-drowning, to come this far, work this hard, and think yourself safe and sigh with relief and come out on the land at last only to find…

The Hound!

Montag gave one last agonized shout as if this were too much for any man.

The shape exploded away. The eyes vanished. The leaf piles flew up in a dry shower.

Montag was alone in the wilderness.

A deer. He smelled the heavy musk-like perfume mingled with blood and the gummed exhalation of the animal's breath, all cardamom and moss and ragweed odor in this huge night where the trees ran at him, pulled away, ran, pulled away, to the pulse of the heart behind his eyes.

There must have been a billion leaves on the land; he waded in them, a dry river smelling of hot cloves and warm dust. And the other smells! There was a smell like a cut potato from all the land,
raw and cold and white from having the moon on it most of the night. There was a smell like pickles from a bottle and a smell like parsley on the table at home. There was a faint yellow odor like mustard from a jar. There was a smell like carnations from the yard next door. He put down his hand and felt a weed rise up like a child brushing him. His fingers smelled of licorice.

He stood breathing, and the more he breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough here to fill him. There would always be more than enough.

He walked in the shallow tide of leaves, stumbling.
And in the middle of the strangeness, a familiarity.
His foot hit something that rang dully.
He moved his hand on the ground, a yard this way, a yard that.
The railroad track.
The track that came out of the city and rusted across the land, through forests and woods, deserted now, by the river.
Here was the path to wherever he was going. Here was the single familiar thing, the magic charm he might need a little while, to touch, to feel beneath his feet, as he moved on into the bramble bushes and the lakes of smelling and feeling and touching, among the whispers and the blowing down of leaves.
He walked on the track.
And he was surprised to learn how certain he suddenly was of a single fact he could not prove.

Once, long ago, Clarisse had walked here, where he was walking now.

Half an hour later, cold, and moving carefully on the tracks, fully aware of his entire body, his face, his mouth, his eyes stuffed with blackness, his ears stuffed with sound, his legs prickled with burrs and nettles, he saw the fire ahead.

The fire was gone, then back again, like a winking eye. He stopped, afraid he might blow the fire out with a single breath. It took the better part of fifteen minutes before he drew very close indeed to it, and then he stood looking at it from cover. That small motion, the white and red color, a strange fire because it meant a different thing to him.

It was not burning; it was warming!
He saw many hands held to its warmth, hands without arms, hidden in darkness. Above the hands, motionless faces that were only moved and tossed and flickered with firelight. He hadn't known fire could look this way. He had never thought in his life that it could give as well as take. Even its smell was different.

How long he stood he did not know, but there was a foolish and yet delicious sense of knowing himself as an animal come from the forest, drawn by the fire. He was a thing of brush and liquid eye, of fur and muzzle and hoof, he was a thing of horn and blood that would smell like autumn if you bled it out on the ground. He stood a long long time, listening to the warm crackle of the flames.

There was a silence gathered all about that fire and the silence was in the men's faces, and time was there, time enough to sit by this rusting track under the trees, and look at the world and turn it over with the eyes, as if it were held to the center of the bonfire, a piece of steel these men were all shaping. It was not only the fire that was different. It was the silence. Montag moved toward this special silence that was concerned with all of the world.

And then the voices began and they were talking, and he could hear nothing of what the voices said, but the sound rose and fell quietly and the voices were turning the world over and
looking at it; the voices knew the land and the trees and the city which lay down the track by the river. The voices talked of everything, there was nothing they could not talk about, he knew from the very cadence and motion and continual stir of curiosity and wonder in them.

And then one of the men looked up and saw him, for the first or perhaps the seventh time, and a voice called to Montag:

"All right, you can come out now!"
Montag stepped back into the shadows.
"It's all right," the voice said. "You're welcome here."
Montag walked slowly toward the fire and the five old men sitting there dressed in dark blue denim pants and jackets and dark blue suits. He did not know what to say to them.

"Sit down," said the man who seemed to be the leader of the small group. "Have some coffee?"

He watched the dark steaming mixture pour into a collapsible tin cup, which was handed him straight off. He sipped it gingerly and felt them looking at him with curiosity. His lips were scalded, but that was good. The faces around him were bearded, but the beards were clean, neat, and their hands were clean. They had stood up as if to welcome a guest, and now they sat down again. Montag sipped. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks very much."

"You're welcome, Montag. My name's Granger." He held out a small bottle of colorless fluid. "Drink this, too. It'll change the chemical index of your perspiration. Half an hour from now you'll smell like two other people. With the Hound after you, the best thing is bottoms up."
Montag drank the bitter fluid.
"You'll stink like a bobcat, but that's all right," said Granger.
"You know my name," said Montag.

Granger nodded to a portable battery TV set by the fire. "We've watched the chase. Figured you'd wind up south along the river. When we heard you plunging around out in the forest like a drunken elk, we didn't hide as we usually do. We figured you were in the river, when the helicopter cameras swung back in over the city. Something funny there. The chase is still running. The other way, though."
"The other way?"
"Let's have a look."
Granger snapped the portable viewer on. The picture was a nightmare, condensed, easily passed from hand to hand, in the forest, all whirring color and flight. A voice cried:

"The chase continues north in the city! Police helicopters are converging on Avenue 87 and Elm Grove Park!"

Granger nodded. "They're faking. You threw them off at the river. They can't admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long. The show's got to have a snap ending, quick! If they started searching the whole damn river it might take all night. So they're sniffing for a scape-goat to end things with a bang. Watch. They'll catch Montag in the next five minutes!"
"But how--"
"Watch."
The camera, hovering in the belly of a helicopter, now swung down at an empty street.

"See that?" whispered Granger. "It'll be you; right up at the end of that street is our victim. See how our camera is coming in? Building the scene. Suspense. Long shot. Right now, some poor fellow is out for a walk. A rarity. An odd one. Don't think the police don't know the habits of queer ducks like that, men who walk mornings for the hell of it, or for reasons of insomnia. Anyway, the police have had him charted for months, years. Never know when that sort of information might be handy. And today, it turns out, it's very usable indeed. It saves face. Oh, God, look there!"
The men at the fire bent forward. On the screen, a man turned a corner. The Mechanical Hound rushed forward into the viewer, suddenly. The helicopter light shot down a dozen brilliant pillars that built a cage all about the man.

A voice cried, "There's Montag! The search is done."

The innocent man stood bewildered, a cigarette burning in his hand. He stared at the Hound, not knowing what it was. He probably never knew. He glanced up at the sky and the wailing sirens. The cameras rushed down. The Hound leapt up into the air with a rhythm and a sense of timing that was incredibly beautiful. Its needle shot out. It was suspended for a moment in their gaze, as if to give the vast audience time to appreciate everything, the raw look of the victim's face, the empty street, the steel animal a bullet nosing the target.

"Montag, don't move!" said a voice from the sky.

The camera fell upon the victim, even as did the Hound. Both reached him simultaneously. The victim was seized by Hound and camera in a great spidering, clenching grip. He screamed. He screamed! He screamed!

Blackout.
Silence.
Darkness.

Montag cried out in the silence and turned away.
Silence.

And then, after a time of the men sitting around the fire, their faces expressionless, an announcer on the dark screen said, "The search is over, Montag is dead; a crime against society has been avenged."

"We now take you to the Sky Room of the Hotel Lux for a half-hour of Just-Before-Dawn, a program of."

Granger turned it off.

"They didn't show the man's face in focus. Did you notice? Even your best friends couldn't tell if it was you. They scrambled it just enough to let the imagination take over. Hell," he whispered. "Hell."

Montag said nothing but now, looking back, sat with his eyes fixed to the blank screen, trembling.

Granger touched Montag's arm. "Welcome back from the dead." Montag nodded. Granger went on. "You might as well know all of us, now. This is Fred Clement, former occupant of the Thomas Hardy chair at Cambridge in the years before it became an Atomic Engineering School. This other is Dr. Simmons from U.C.L.A., a specialist in Ortega y Gasset; Professor West here did quite a bit for ethics, an ancient study now, for Columbia University quite some years ago. Reverend Padover here gave a few lectures thirty years ago and lost his flock between one Sunday and the next for his views. He's been bumping with us some time now. Myself: I wrote a book called The Fingers in the Glove; the Proper Relationship between the Individual and Society, and here I am! Welcome, Montag!"

"I don't belong with you," said Montag, at last, slowly. "I've been an idiot all the way."

"We're used to that. We all made the right kind of mistakes, or we wouldn't be here. When we were separate individuals, all we had was rage. I struck a fireman when he came to burn my library years ago. I've been running ever since. You want to join us, Montag?"

"Yes."

"What have you to offer?"

"Nothing. I thought I had part of the Book of Ecclesiastes and maybe a little of Revelation, but I haven't even that now."

"The Book of Ecclesiastes would be fine. Where was it?"
"Here," Montag touched his head.  
"Ah," Granger smiled and nodded.  
"What's wrong? Isn't that all right?" said Montag.  
"Better than all right; perfect!" Granger turned to the Reverend.  "Do we have a Book of Ecclesiastes?"

"One. A man named Harris of Youngstown."

"Montag." Granger took Montag's shoulder firmly.  "Walk carefully. Guard your health. If anything should happen to Harris, you are the Book of Ecclesiastes. See how important you've become in the last minute!"

"But I've forgotten!"

"No, nothing's ever lost. We have ways to shake down your clinkers for you."

"But I've tried to remember!"

"Don't try. It'll come when we need it. All of us have photographic memories, but spend a lifetime learning how to block off the things that are really in there. Simmons here has worked on it for twenty years and now we've got the method down to where we can recall anything that's been read once. Would you like, some day, Montag, to read Plato's Republic?"

"Of course!"

"I am Plato's Republic. Like to read Marcus Aurelius? Mr. Simmons is Marcus."

"How do you do?" said Mr. Simmons.

"Hello," said Montag.

"I want you to meet Jonathan Swift, the author of that evil political book, Gulliver's Travels! And this other fellow is Charles Darwin, and-this one is Schopenhauer, and this one is Einstein, and this one here at my elbow is Mr. Albert Schweitzer, a very kind philosopher indeed. Here we all are, Montag. Aristophanes and Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama Buddha and Confucius and Thomas Love Peacock and Thomas Jefferson and Mr. Lincoln, if you please. We are also Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

Everyone laughed quietly.

"It can't be," said Montag.

"It is," replied Granger, smiling.  "We're book-burners, too. We read the books and burnt them, afraid they'd be found. Micro-filming didn't pay off; we were always travelling, we didn't want to bury the film and come back later. Always the chance of discovery. Better to keep it in the old heads, where no one can see it or suspect it. We are all bits and pieces of history and literature and international law, Byron, Tom Paine, Machiavelli, or Christ, it's here. And the hour is late. And the war's begun. And we are out here, and the city is there, all wrapped up in its own coat of a thousand colors. What do you think, Montag?"

"I think I was blind trying to do things my way, planting books in firemen's houses and sending in alarms."

"You did what you had to do. Carried out on a national scale, it might have worked beautifully. But our way is simpler and, we think, better. All we want to do is keep the knowledge we think we will need, intact and safe. We're not out to incite or anger anyone yet. For if we are destroyed, the knowledge is dead, perhaps for good. We are model citizens, in our own special way; we walk the old tracks, we lie in the hills at night, and the city people let us be. We're stopped and searched occasionally, but there's nothing on our persons to incriminate us. The organization is flexible, very loose, and fragmentary. Some of us have had plastic surgery on our faces and fingerprints. Right now we have a horrible job; we're waiting for the war to begin and, as quickly, end. It's not pleasant, but then we're not in control, we're the odd minority crying in the wilderness. When the war's over, perhaps we can be of some use in the world."

"Do you really think they'll listen then?"

"If not, we'll just have to wait. We'll pass the books on to our children, by word of mouth,
and let our children wait, in turn, on the other people. A lot will be lost that way, of course. But you can't make people listen. They have to come round in their own time, wondering what happened and why the world blew up under them. It can't last."

"How many of you are there?"

"Thousands on the roads, the abandoned railtracks, tonight, bums on the outside, libraries inside. It wasn't planned, at first. Each man had a book he wanted to remember, and did. Then, over a period of twenty years or so, we met each other, travelling, and got the loose network together and set out a plan. The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves was that we were not important, we mustn't be pedants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world. We're nothing more than dust-jackets for books, of no significance otherwise. Some of us live in small towns. Chapter One of Thoreau's Walden in Green River, Chapter Two in Willow Farm, Maine. Why, there's one town in Maryland, only twenty-seven people, no bomb'll ever touch that town, is the complete essays of a man named Bertrand Russell. Pick up that town, almost, and flip the pages, so many pages to a person. And when the war's over, some day, some year, the books can be written again, the people will be called in, one by one, to recite what they know and we'll set it up in type until another Dark Age, when we might have to do the whole damn thing over again. But that's the wonderful thing about man; he never gets so discouraged or disgusted that he gives up doing it all over again, because he knows very well it is important and worth the doing."

"What do we do tonight?" asked Montag.

"Wait," said Granger. "And move downstream a little way, just in case."

He began throwing dust and dirt on the fire.

The other men helped, and Montag helped, and there, in the wilderness, the men all moved their hands, putting out the fire together.

They stood by the river in the starlight.

Montag saw the luminous dial of his waterproof. Five. Five o'clock in the morning. Another year ticked by in a single hour, and dawn waiting beyond the far bank of the river.

"Why do you trust me?" said Montag.

A man moved in the darkness.

"The look of you's enough. You haven't seen yourself in a mirror lately. Beyond that, the city has never cared so much about us to bother with an elaborate chase like this to find us. A few crackpots with verses in their heads can't touch them, and they know it and we know it; everyone knows it. So long as the vast population doesn't wander about quoting the Magna Charta and the Constitution, it's all right. The firemen were enough to check that, now and then. No, the cities don't bother us. And you look like hell."

They moved along the bank of the river, going south. Montag tried to see the men's faces, the old faces he remembered from the firelight, lined and tired. He was looking for a brightness, a resolve, a triumph over tomorrow that hardly seemed to be there. Perhaps he had expected their faces to burn and glitter with the knowledge they carried, to glow as lanterns glow, with the light in them. But all the light had come from the camp fire, and these men had seemed no different from any others who had run a long race, searched a long search, seen good things destroyed, and now, very late, were gathering to wait for the end of the party and the blowing out of the lamps. They weren't at all certain that the things they carried in their heads might make every future dawn glow with a purer light, they were sure of nothing save that the books were on file behind their quiet eyes, the books were waiting, with their pages uncut, for the customers who might come by in later years, some with clean and some with dirty fingers.

Montag squinted from one face to another as they walked.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," someone said. Why is Montag somewhat disappointed?
And they all laughed quietly, moving downstream.

There was a shriek and the jets from the city were gone overhead long before the men looked up. Montag stared back at the city, far down the river, only a faint glow now.

"My wife's back there."

"I'm sorry to hear that. The cities won't do well in the next few days," said Granger.

"It's strange, I don't miss her, it's strange I don't feel much of anything," said Montag. "Even if she dies, I realized a moment ago, I don't think I'll feel sad. It isn't right. Something must be wrong with me."

"Listen," said Granger, taking his arm, and walking with him, holding aside the bushes to let him pass. "When I was a boy my grandfather died, and he was a sculptor. He was also a very kind man who had a lot of love to give the world, and he helped clean up the slum in our town; and he made toys for us and he did a million things in his lifetime; he was always busy with his hands. And when he died, I suddenly realized I wasn't crying for him at all, but for the things he did. I cried because he would never do them again, he would never carve another piece of wood or help us raise doves and pigeons in the back yard or play the violin the way he did, or tell us jokes the way he did. He was part of us and when he died, all the actions stopped dead and there was no one to do them just the way he did. He was individual. He was an important man. I've never gotten over his death. Often I think, what wonderful carvings never came to birth because he died. How many jokes are missing from the world, and how many homing pigeons untouched by his hands. He shaped the world. He did things to the world. The world was bankrupted of ten million fine actions the night he passed on."


"What?"

"My wife, my wife. Poor Millie, poor Millie. I can't remember anything. I think of her hands but I don't see them doing anything at all. They just hang there at her sides or they lie there on her lap or there's a cigarette in them, but that's all."

Montag turned and glanced back.

What did you give to the city, Montag?

Ashes.

What did the others give to each other?

Nothingness.

Granger stood looking back with Montag. "Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there. It doesn't matter what you do, he said, so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away. The difference between the man who just cuts lawns and a real gardener is in the touching, he said. The lawn cutter might just as well not have been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime."

Granger moved his hand. "My grandfather showed me some V-2 rocket films once, fifty years ago. Have you ever seen the atom-bomb mushroom from two hundred miles up? It's a pinprick, it's nothing. With the wilderness all around it.

"My grandfather ran off the V-2 rocket film a dozen times and then hoped that some day our cities would open up and let the green and the land and the wilderness in more, to remind people that we're allotted a little space on earth and that we survive in that wilderness that can take back what it has given, as easily as blowing its breath on us or sending the sea to tell us we are not so big. When we forget how close the wilderness is in the night, my grandpa said, some day it will come in and get
us, for we will have forgotten how terrible and real it can be. You see?" Granger turned to Montag. "Grandfather's been dead for all these years, but if you lifted my skull, by God, in the convolutions of my brain you'd find the big ridges of his thumbprint. He touched me. As I said earlier, he was a sculptor. 'I hate a Roman named Status Quo!' he said to me. 'Stuff your eyes with wonder,' he said, 'live as if you'd drop dead in ten seconds. See the world. It's more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories. Ask no guarantees, ask for no security, there never was such an animal. And if there were, it would be related to the great sloth which hangs upside down in a tree all day every day, sleeping its life away. To hell with that,' he said, 'shake the tree and knock the great sloth down on his ass.'"

"Look!" cried Montag.

And the war began and ended in that instant.

Later, the men around Montag could not say if they had really seen anything. Perhaps the merest flourish of light and motion in the sky. Perhaps the bombs were there, and the jets, ten miles, five miles, one mile up, for the merest instant, like grain thrown over the heavens by a great sowing hand, and the bombs drifting with dreadful swiftness, yet sudden slowness, down upon the morning city they had left behind. The bombardment was to all intents and purposes finished, once the jets had sighted their target, alerted their bombardiers at five thousand miles an hour; as quick as the whisper of a scythe the war was finished. Once the bomb-release was yanked it was over. Now, a full three seconds, all of the time in history, before the bombs struck, the enemy ships themselves were gone half around the visible world, like bullets in which a savage islander might not believe because they were invisible; yet the heart is suddenly shattered, the body falls in separate motions and the blood is astonished to be freed on the air; the brain squanders its few precious memories and, puzzled, dies.

This was not to be believed. It was merely a gesture. Montag saw the flirt of a great metal fist over the far city and he knew the scream of the jets that would follow, would say, after the deed, disintegrate, leave no stone on another, perish. Die.

Montag held the bombs in the sky for a single moment, with his mind and his hands reaching helplessly up at them. "Run!" he cried to Faber. To Clarisse, "Run!" To Mildred, "Get out, get out of there! " But Clarisse, he remembered, was dead. And Faber was out; there in the deep valleys of the country somewhere the five a.m. bus was on its way from one desolation to another. Though the desolation had not yet arrived, was still in the air, it was certain as man could make it. Before the bus had run another fifty yards on the highway, its destination would be meaningless, and its point of departure changed from metropolis to junkyard.

And Mildred . . .

Get out, run!

He saw her in her hotel room somewhere now in the half-second remaining with the bombs a yard, a foot, an inch from her building. He saw her leaning toward the great shimmering walls of color and motion where the family talked and talked and talked to her, where the family prattled and chatted and said her name and smiled at her and said nothing of the bomb that was an inch, now a half-inch, now a quarter-inch from the top of the hotel. Leaning into the wall as if all of the hunger of looking would find the secret of her sleepless unease there. Mildred, leaning anxiously, nervously, as if to plunge, drop, fall into that swarming immensity of color to drown in its bright happiness.

The first bomb struck.

"Mildred!"

Perhaps, who would ever know? Perhaps the great broadcasting stations with their beams of color and light and talk and chatter went first into oblivion.

Montag, falling flat, going down, saw or felt, or imagined he saw or felt the walls go dark in Millie's face, heard her screaming, because in the millionth part of time left, she saw her own face
reflected there, in a mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it was such a wildly empty face, all by itself in the room, touching nothing, starved and eating of itself, that at last she recognized it as her own and looked quickly up at the ceiling as it and the entire structure of the hotel blasted down upon her, carrying her with a million pounds of brick, metal, plaster, and wood, to meet other people in the hives below, all on their quick way down to the cellar where the explosion rid itself of them in its own unreasonable way.


The concussion knocked the air across and down the river, turned the men over like dominoes in a line, blew the water in lifting sprays, and blew the dust and made the trees above them mourn with a great wind passing away south. Montag crushed himself down, squeezing himself small, eyes tight. He blinked once. And in that instant saw the city, instead of the bombs, in the air. They had displaced each other. For another of those impossible instants the city stood, rebuilt and unrecognizable, taller than it had ever hoped or strived to be, taller than man had built it, erected at last in gouts of shattered concrete and sparkles of torn metal into a mural hung like a reversed avalanche, a million colors, a million oddities, a door where a window should be, a top for a bottom, a side for a back, and then the city rolled over and fell down dead.

The sound of its death came after.

Montag, lying there, eyes gritted shut with dust, a fine wet cement of dust in his now shut mouth, gasping and crying, now thought again, I remember, I remember, I remember something else. What is it? Yes, yes, part of the Ecclesiastes and Revelation. Part of that book, part of it, quick now, quick, before it gets away, before the shock wears off, before the wind dies. Book of Ecclesiastes. Here. He said it over to himself silently, lying flat to the trembling earth, he said the words of it many times and they were perfect without trying and there was no Denham's Dentifrice anywhere, it was just the Preacher by himself, standing there in his mind, looking at him ....

"There," said a voice.

The men lay gasping like fish laid out on the grass. They held to the earth as children hold to familiar things, no matter how cold or dead, no matter what has happened or will happen, their fingers were clawed into the dirt, and they were all shouting to keep their eardrums from bursting, to keep their sanity from bursting, mouths open, Montag shouting with them, a protest against the wind that ripped their faces and tore at their lips, making their noses bleed.

Montag watched the great dust settle and the great silence move down upon their world. And lying there it seemed that he saw every single grain of dust and every blade of grass and that he heard every cry and shout and whisper going up in the world now. Silence fell down in the sifting dust, and all the leisure they might need to look around, to gather the reality of this day into their senses.

Montag looked at the river. We'll go on the river. He looked at the old railroad tracks. Or we'll go that way. Or we'll walk on the highways now, and we'll have time to put things into ourselves. And some day, after it sets in us a long time, it'll come out of our hands and our mouths. And a lot of it will be wrong, but just enough of it will be right. We'll just start walking today and see the world and the way the world walks around and talks, the way it really looks. I want to see everything now. And while none of it will be me when it goes in, after a while it'll all gather together inside and it'll be me. Look at the world out there, my God, my God, look at it out there, outside me, out there beyond my face and the only way to really touch it is to put it where it's finally me, where it's in the blood, where it pumps around a thousand times ten thousand a day. I get hold of it so it'll never run off. I'll hold on to the world tight some day. I've got one finger on it now; that's a beginning.
The wind died. 
The other men lay a while, on the dawn edge of sleep, not yet ready to rise up and begin the
day's obligations, its fires and foods, its thousand details of putting foot after foot and hand after
hand. They lay blinking their dusty eyelids. You could hear them breathing fast, then slower, then slow-

Montag sat up.
He did not move any further, however. The other men did likewise. The sun was touching the
black horizon with a faint red tip. The air was cold and smelled of a coming rain.
Silently, Granger arose, felt his arms, and legs, swearing, swearing incessantly under his
breath, tears dripping from his face. He shuffled down to the river to look upstream.
"It's flat," he said, a long time later. "City looks like a heap of baking-powder. It's gone." And
a long time after that. "I wonder how many knew it was coming? I wonder how many were surprised?"

And across the world, thought Montag, how many other cities dead? And here in our country,
how many? A hundred, a thousand?
Someone struck a match and touched it to a piece of dry paper taken from their pocket, and
shoved this under a bit of grass and leaves, and after a while added tiny twigs which were wet and
sputtered but finally caught, and the fire grew larger in the early morning as the sun came up and the
men slowly turned from looking up river and were drawn to the fire, awkwardly, with nothing to say,
and the sun colored the backs of their necks as they bent down.
Granger unfolded an oilskin with some bacon in it. "We'll have a bite. Then we'll turn around
and walk upstream. They'll be needing us up that way."
Someone produced a small frying-pan and the bacon went into it and the frying-pan was set
on the fire. After a moment the bacon began to flutter and dance in the pan and the sputter of it filled
the morning air with its aroma. The men watched this ritual silently.
Granger looked into the fire. "Phoenix."
"What?"
"There was a silly damn bird called a Phoenix back before Christ: every few hundred years
he built a pyre and burned himself up. He must have been first cousin to Man. But every time he
burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again. And it looks like
we're doing the same thing, over and over, but we've got one damn thing the Phoenix never had.
We know the damn silly thing we just did. We know all the damn silly things we've done for a
thousand years, and as long as we know that and always have it around where we can see it, some
day we'll stop making the goddam funeral pyres and jumping into the middle of them. We pick up
a few more people that remember, every generation."
He took the pan off the fire and let the bacon cool and they ate it, slowly, thoughtfully.
"Now, let's get on upstream," said Granger. "And hold on to one thought: You're not
important. You're not anything. Some day the load we're carrying with us may help someone. But
even when we had the books on hand, a long time ago, we didn't use what we got out of them. We
went right on insulting the dead. We went right on spitting in the graves of all the poor ones who
died before us. We're going to meet a lot of lonely people in the next week and the next month
and the next year. And when they ask us what we're doing, you can say, We're remembering.
That's where we'll win out in the long run. And some day we'll remember so much that we'll
build the biggest goddam steam-shovel in history and dig the biggest grave of all time and shove
war in and cover it up. Come on now, we're going to go build a mirror-factory first and put out
nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them."
They finished eating and put out the fire. The day was brightening all about them as if a
pink lamp had been given more wick. In the trees, the birds that had flown away now came back and
settled down.

What's the point of the story of the Phoenix?

Why mirrors to look at... what's the point of the metaphor?
Montag began walking and after a moment found that the others had fallen in behind him, going north. He was surprised, and moved aside to let Granger pass, but Granger looked at him and nodded him on. Montag went ahead. He looked at the river and the sky and the rusting track going back down to where the farms lay, where the barns stood full of hay, where a lot of people had walked by in the night on their way from the city. Later, in a month or six months, and certainly not more than a year, he would walk along here again, alone, and keep right on going until he caught up with the people.

But now there was a long morning's walk until noon, and if the men were silent it was because there was everything to think about and much to remember. Perhaps later in the morning, when the sun was up and had warmed them, they would begin to talk, or just say the things they remembered, to be sure they were there, to be absolutely certain that things were safe in them. Montag felt the slow stir of words, the slow simmer. And when it came to his turn, what could he say, what could he offer on a day like this, to make the trip a little easier? To everything there is a season. Yes. A time to break down, and a time to build up. Yes. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. Yes, all that. But what else. What else? Something, something . . .

And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Yes, thought Montag, that's the one I'll save for noon. For noon...

When we reach the city.

THE END