

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 as 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, pi

cking 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! Then, in mid-air, all vanishes! Whirl man
's mind around about so fast under the
pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcaste
rs, that the centrifuge flings off all
unnecessary, time-wasting thought!"
Mildred smoothed the bedclothes. Montag felt his he
art jump and jump again as she patted his
pillow. Right now she was pulling at his shoulder t
o try to get him to move so she could take the
pillow out and fix it nicely and put it back. And p
erhaps cry out and stare or simply reach down
her hand and say, "What's this?" and hold up the hi
dden book with touching innocence.
"School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosoph
ies, histories, languages dropped, English and
spelling gradually neglected, finally almost comple
tely ignored. Life is immediate, the job
counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why lea
rn 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 ju
st that much time to think while dressing at.
dawn, a philosophical hour, and thus a melancholy h
our."
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 passionat
ely.
Beatty opened his eyes wide.
Mildred's hand had frozen behind the pillow. Her fi
ngers 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 colours 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 parlour "aunts" began to laugh at the parlour "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 minor minorities with their navels to be
kept clean. Authors, full of evil thoughts, lock
up your typewriters. They did. Magazines became a n
ice blend of vanilla tapioca. Books, so the
damned snobbish critics said, were dishwater. No wo
nder books stopped selling, the critics said.
But the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning ha
ppily, let the comic?books survive. And the
three?dimensional sex?magazines, of course. There y
ou have it, Montag. It didn't come from the
Government down. There was no dictum, no declaratio
n, no censorship, to start with, no!
Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressur
e carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks
to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are a
llowed to read comics, the good old
confessions, or trade?journals."

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

"Ah." Beatty leaned forward in the faint mist of sm
oke from his pipe. "What more easily
explained and natural? With school turning out more
runners, jumpers, racers, tinkers,
grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead o
f examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative
creators, the word 'intellectual,' of course, becam
e the swear word it deserved to be. You always
dread the unfamiliar. Surely you remember the boy i
n your own school class who was
exceptionally 'bright,' did most of the reciting an
d 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 ma
n the image of every other; then all are
happy, for there are no mountains to make them cove
r, to judge themselves against. So! A book
is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Ta
ke 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 parlour 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 and, 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.

"Coloured 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? Bum 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 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 the m. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean."

The fireworks died in the parlour behind Mildred. S he 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 d id she happen?"

Beatty smiled. "Here or there, that's bound to occu r. 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 kinde rgarten 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 m ixed record; anti?social. The girl? She was a time bomb. The family had been feeding her subcon scious, 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 yo u 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 wo od. If you don't want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don't want a man unhappy pol itically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, gi ve him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the Government is inefficient, top ?heavy, 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 c apitals or how much corn Iowa grew last

year. Cram them full of non-combustible 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, motor-cycle 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."