

(The MEN scramble to helmet themselves. BLACK and HOLDEN run out. BEATTY looks at MONTAG who has not moved. BEATTY hands him his helmet.) With all haste, Montag.

VOICE. 134 Rockwell Drive. With all haste.

MONTAG. That voice, too...

BEATTY. Dead! But the facts it gives are alive, out there! Let's go give them (Exhales smoke.) a gift! (BEATTY strides out. MONTAG, after a beat, follows. Quick BLACKOUT.)

VOICE (fading). With all haste...haste... (Great thunders of fire engines, bells, sounds of burning. Far away, a bell clangs four or five times. A siren wails then fades. Silence. After a few beats: a loud crack of thunder, a heavy fall of rain. Slow rise of pinspot light.)

(We see CLARISSE, head back, mouth half-open, eyes half-shut, hands out at her sides, feeling an invisible rain touch at her face. Behind her we see faint images of falling rain and hear the sound of a fading storm.)

(Enter MONTAG who, if he notices at all, gives CLARISSE the merest glance and hurries on. She stops him by taking a deep breath and speaking, almost to herself, eyes still closed.)

CLARISSE. I know who you are. Even with my eyes shut, I know. (MONTAG turns. CLARISSE takes a big snuff of air, exhales.) Kerosene. That means you're--

MONTAG. Guy Montag!

CLARISSE. ...the Fireman. The Man who starts fires and burns books.

MONTAG. Guy Montag.

CLARISSE. I'm sorry. Of course! (She goes back to what she was doing...holding her head back, enjoying the rain...her mouth open, eyes shut. MONTAG watches her curiously.)

MONTAG. Don't they have water at your house?

CLARISSE. Ever tried it?

MONTAG (snorting). Why should I?

CLARISSE. Because it tastes better! Trust me.

Come on. (Tilts her head back.)

MONTAG. I feel silly.

CLARISSE. If you never feel silly, then you'll never feel great.

MONTAG. Why am I standing here?

CLARISSE. Because you know I'm right. Come on! (Now MONTAG gives it a tentative try and shakes his head. She glances over quickly, then returns to her drinking posture.) You're afraid of drowning!

MONTAG. Dammit, no! (He puts his head back more firmly. Pleased, CLARISSE opens her eyes to watch him.)

CLARISSE. Isn't that great?

MONTAG (slowly putting his head down and looking at her). It's water.

CLARISSE. No, no! It tastes just exactly like... like...

MONTAG. ...wine?

CLARISSE (laughing, stops, turns). Hey, yes! Next good storm, can I come to your house and ask if you can come out to play?

MONTAG. My wife would...

CLARISSE. No. (A beat.) She never does anything.

MONTAG (stopping and staring at her). You've been watching me...

CLARISSE (going blithely on, ignoring this). What a shame. She never comes out by day.

MONTAG. And you shouldn't be out here by night.

Look that way. And that. The sidewalks.
 CLARISSE. Yes, empty. No one uses them anymore.
 Is it against the law...?

MONTAG. Not quite...

CLARISSE. Anyway, I'm not alone. You've been walking home from work for a week now.

MONTAG (*startled*). Have I?

CLARISSE. Hadn't you noticed?

MONTAG. I... Come along. You'll catch your death of cold. (*He walks her. They circle the stage.*)

CLARISSE. No, nothing that simple. I've been thinking...I'll just disappear some day and never come back.

MONTAG. Why do you say that?

CLARISSE. I talk too much. My uncle, C.R. Faber, you ever hear of him, the philosopher?, says I should shut up. I make people nervous.

MONTAG. You make me *very* nervous.

CLARISSE. You see? (*Walks for a beat.*) How long have you been a Fireman?

MONTAG (*pacing her*). Ten years.

CLARISSE. Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?

MONTAG (*snorting*). That's against the law!

CLARISSE. Yes, but *do* you?

MONTAG. Don't you know the rules? Monday burn Millay. Tuesday Tolstoy. Wednesday Walt Whitman. Thursday Thoreau. Friday Faulkner. Burn them to ashes, then burn the ashes.

CLARISSE. You sound awfully pleased about it.

MONTAG. It's a job.

CLARISSE (*searching his face*). I can see that. (*A beat.*) Is it true that long ago firemen once put fires out instead of going places to *start* them?

MONTAG. No.

CLARISSE. But once upon a time, houses did burn, didn't they? They weren't fireproof, like today?

MONTAG. That was long ago.

CLARISSE. There are a few of those houses left.

MONTAG (*irritated with her*). A few, yes, yes.

CLARISSE. Our house is one of them. If it caught fire, would you come over and save me and put it out?

MONTAG. I...

CLARISSE. *Would* you?

MONTAG (*laughing*). I don't know. I never thought.

CLARISSE. Well, here's my place. Remember it, just in case. (*MONTAG laughs.*) Why are you laughing?

MONTAG. Because...you keep changing the subject. (*We hear some jet-air cars roaring by. CLARISSE turns, stares off, watches them rush by.*)

CLARISSE. Why *not*? I wonder if those drivers know what grass is? A green blur. Flowers. A pink blur. Houses are white blurs. Brown blurs are cows. I often think that if fast cars had been invented in 1820, Impressionism would have arrived forty years earlier on, don't you think?

MONTAG. Er...I...

CLARISSE. But you *must*! You're missing all the fun! Did you know that once billboards on the highways were only twenty-five feet wide, but with jet-cars rushing faster they had to build our modern ones, stretch them out, make them one hundred feet across so you could see them?

MONTAG. I know.

CLARISSE. You say "I know" when you mean "oh, shut up."

MONTAG. No, no, you are a most peculiar beast, but I like you. (*Turns, blinks. A beat.*) My God. Your house!

CLARISSE. What?

MONTAG. All the lights are on. All, all of them!
Blazing.

CLARISSE. Yes, that's because we don't have any television walls in our house. Just us, lights on, my uncle, my father, my grandfather, and me. Talking, talking.

MONTAG. Talking? Talking about what?

CLARISSE. You. (She runs.)

MONTAG. Wait!

CLARISSE (coming back). Yes?

MONTAG (eyes shut, shaking his head). Nothing.

CLARISSE (a beat). One last question...

MONTAG. Yes?

CLARISSE. Are you happy?

MONTAG. Happy...?

CLARISSE. Sorry...Good night. (Runs. MONTAG stands musing.)

MONTAG. (shaking his head) ...happy? (Quick BLACKOUT as cars rush by, a siren rises and fades.)

(After a beat, night sounds of a mechanical house. Vague television voices as MONTAG enters, touches the air in front of his house. A pale illumination pulses to let him in. He steps forward, looks around, sees MILDRED's pale form laid out on a sofa like a marble tableau in a tomb.)

MONTAG. Mildred? I'm home. (Silence from the carved figure on the couch. MONTAG goes to turn off the murmuring television set. The patterned lights that have played over MILDRED's sleeping shape, flick out.) Mildred? Millie?... You won't sleep later, if you sleep now. It's only eight o'clock... (He goes to bend over her, looks, searches her ears, takes out

the small ear-radios she has in both ears, glances at them, hears the small insect sounds of music from both, places them on the sofa. Musing). Millie...when did we meet? I was trying to remember. (Sits by her.) Do you know? Millie? (A beat.) Mildred...? (He takes her hands, finds a small plastic vial closed in them, casually lifts it, stares.) Empty! My God, Mildred! Millie! (BLACKOUT. Arriving motors. Running footsteps.) This way. Quick. Here! Here! This way!

(Enter TWO PARAMEDICS carrying illuminated devices.)

FIRST PARAMEDIC. Mr. Montag?

SECOND PARAMEDIC. Your wife? (MONTAG gestures. The PARAMEDICS bustle around MILDRED.)

FIRST PARAMEDIC. Now you just go outside and wait, sir. Fix your wife in a jiffy.

SECOND PARAMEDIC. Good pump-out. Clean the blood stream, the stomach, the whole works. Out you go... (MONTAG backs off DR, to stand in darkness, waiting, turned away, stunned, as the PARAMEDICS work.)

FIRST PARAMEDIC. Let's have that over here, Stan. Here goes... That's it. What's the blood pressure? All right...not bad... (The PARAMEDICS' VOICES fade to a murmur. A VOICE CLOCK whispers.)

CLOCK. ...one fifteen...one fifteen...one fifteen...

(From the shadows, CLARISSE appears quietly to stand behind MONTAG, saying nothing.)

BOTH PARAMEDICS. ...now bring that stuff... that's