*Fahrenheit 451* Part III: Burning Bright

**CLOSE READ PRACTICE**

Pages 113-117

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 bullseye. 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 dream-like 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 gobbledegook 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 neighbour 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 ravelled 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 neighbourhood, 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 parlour 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."

**CLOSE READ QUESTIONS**

**DIRECTIONS🡪** Read each question carefully. Select the best answer. Then, in a few words, explain why you selected your answer. In other words, tell me why your answer is the best choice compared to the others.

1. In the **second paragraph** (Line 9) beginning with, "Well," said Beatty, "now you did it…”, Beatty uses which of the following **literary devices** in his conversation?
2. Allegory
3. Symbol
4. Allusion
5. Metaphor
6. Mildred’s words, “”’Poor family’” (Line 30) most likely refer to:
7. The end of her marriage to Montag
8. Her TV relatives
9. Clarisse’s grieving parent
10. The “family” of firemen
11. In the paragraph beginning, “’What a dreadful surprise,’” (Line 37) Beatty’s **tone** towards Montag could be best described as:
12. doubtful
13. astonished
14. condescending
15. affectionate
16. Montag is most likely surprised that the **twin beds** burn with “heat and passion” (Line 72) because:
17. The furniture was supposed to be virtually fireproof
18. He had only fired at the beds twice
19. Small beds would be expected to burn up almost instantly
20. His relationship with Mildred was cold and distant
21. The characterization of Mildred as a “strange woman who would forget him tomorrow” (Line 75) most likely represents the thoughts of which character?
22. Montag
23. The Narrator
24. Beatty
25. Mildred
26. The paragraph beginning with “And then he came…” (Line 79) contains all of the following **EXCEPT**:
27. Alliteration
28. Simile
29. Metaphor
30. Personification