Fahrenheit 451 Condensed – originally by Ray Bradbury

**Part I**

It was a pleasure to burn.

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

**Part II**

“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 radio, magazines, books levelled down to a sort of pandering 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 Wikipedia entry.”

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

**Part III**

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

“Well, then, what if a fireman accidentally, really not intending anything, takes a book home with him?” Montag asked.

Montag twitched. The open door looked at him with its great vacant eye.

“A natural error. Curiosity alone,” said Beatty. “We don’t get overanxious or mad. We let the fireman keep the book twenty-four hours. If he hasn’t burned it by then, we simply come burn it for him.”

**Part IV**

A great stream of fire 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. 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!” screamed Beatty.

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