The Illustrated Man
Ray Bradbury

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PROLOGUE: The Illustrated Man

IT was a warm afternoon in early September when I first met the Illustrated Man. Walking along an asphalt road, I was on the final leg of a two weeks’ walking tour of Wisconsin. Late in the afternoon I stopped, ate some pork, beans, and a doughnut, and was preparing to stretch out and read when the Illustrated Man walked over the hill and stood for a moment against the sky.

I didn’t know he was Illustrated then. I only knew that he was tall, once well muscled, but now, for some reason, going to fat. I recall that his arms were long, and the hands thick, but that his face was like a child’s, set upon a massive body.

He seemed only to sense my presence, for he didn’t look directly at me when he spoke his first words:

“Do you know where I can find a job?”

“I’m afraid not,” I said.
“I haven’t had a job that’s lasted in forty years,” he said.

Though it was a hot late afternoon, he wore his wool shirt buttoned tight about his neck. His sleeves were rolled and buttoned down over his thick wrists. Perspiration was streaming from his face, yet he made no move to open his shirt.

“Well,” he said at last, “this is as good a place as any to spend the night. Do you mind company?”

“I have some extra food you’d be welcome to,” I said.

He sat down heavily, grunting. “You’ll be sorry you asked me to stay,” he said. “Everyone always is. That’s why I’m walking. Here it is, early September, the cream of the Labor Day carnival season. I should be making money hand over fist at any small town side show celebration, but here I am with no prospects.”

He took off an immense shoe and peered at it closely. “I usually keep a job about ten days. Then something happens and they fire me. By now every carnival in America won’t touch me with a ten-foot pole.”

“What seems to be the trouble?” I asked.

For answer, he unbuttoned his tight collar, slowly. With his eyes shut, he put a slow hand to the task of unbuttoning his shirt all the way down. He slipped his fingers in to feel his chest.

“Funny,” he said, eyes still shut. “You can’t feel them but they’re there. I always hope that someday I’ll look and they’ll be gone. I walk in the sun for hours on the hottest days, baking, and hope that my sweat’ll wash them off, the sun’ll cook them off, but at sundown they’re still there.” He turned his head slightly toward me and exposed his chest. “Are they still there now?”

After a long while I exhaled. “Yes,” I said. “They’re still there.”

The Illustrations.

“Another reason I keep my collar buttoned up,” he said, opening his eyes, “is the children. They follow me along country roads. Everyone wants to see the pictures, and yet nobody wants to see them.”

He took his shirt off and wadded it in his hands. He was covered with Illustrations from the blue tattooed ring about his neck to his belt line.

“It keeps right on going,” he said, guessing my thought. “All of me is Illustrated. Look.” He opened his hand. On his palm was a rose, freshly cut, with drops of crystal water among the soft pink petals. I put my hand out to touch it, but it was only an Illustration.
As for the rest of him, I cannot say how I sat and stared, for he was a riot of rockets and fountains and people, in such intricate detail and color that you could hear the voices murmuring small and muted, from the crowds that inhabited his body. When his flesh twitched, the tiny mouths flickered, the tiny green-and-gold eyes winked, the tiny pink hands gestured. There were yellow meadows and blue rivers and mountains and stars and suns and planets spread in a Milky Way across his chest. The people themselves were in twenty or more odd groups upon his arms, shoulders, back, sides, and wrists, as well as on the flat of his stomach. You found them in forests of hair, lurking among a constellation of freckles, or peering from armpit caverns, diamond eyes aglitter. Each seemed intent upon his own activity; each was a separate gallery portrait.

“Why, they’re beautiful!” I said.

How can I explain about his Illustrations? If El Greco had painted miniatures in his prime, no bigger than your hand, infinitely detailed, with all his sulphurous color, elongation, and anatomy, perhaps he might have used this man’s body for his art. The colors burned in three dimensions. They were windows looking in upon fiery reality. Here, gathered on one wall, were all the finest scenes in the universe; the man was a walking treasure gallery. This wasn’t the work of a cheap carnival tattoo man with three colors and whisky on his breath. This was the accomplishment of a living genius, vibrant, clear, and beautiful.

“Oh yes,” said the Illustrated Man. “I’m so proud of my Illustrations that I’d like to burn them off. I’ve tried sandpaper, acid, a knife . . .”

The sun was setting. The moon was already up in the East.

“For, you see,” said the Illustrated Man, “these Illustrations predict the future.”

I said nothing.

“It’s all right in sunlight” he went on. “I could keep a carnival day job. But at night—the pictures move. The pictures change.”

I must have smiled. “How long have you been Illustrated?”

“In 1900, when I was twenty years old and working a carnival, I broke my leg. It laid me up; I had to do something to keep my hand in, so I decided to get tattooed.”

“But who tattooed you? What happened to the artist?”

“She went back to the future,” he said. “I mean it. She was an old woman in a little house in the middle of Wisconsin here somewhere not far from this place. A little old witch who looked a thousand years old one moment and twenty years old the next, but she said she could travel in time. I laughed. Now, I know better.”

“How did you happen to meet her?”
He told me. He had seen her painted sign by the road: SKIN ILLUSTRATION! Illustration instead of tattoo! Artistic! So he had sat all night while her magic needles stung him wasp stings and delicate bee stings. By morning he looked like a man who had fallen into a twenty-color print press and been squeezed out, all bright and picturesque.

“I’ve hunted every summer for fifty years,” he said, putting his hands out on the air. "When I find that witch I’m going to kill her.”

The sun was gone. Now the first stars were shining and the moon had brightened the fields of grass and wheat. Still the Illustrated Man’s pictures glowed like charcoals in the half light, like scattered rubies and emeralds, with Rouault colors and Picasso colors and the long, pressed-out El Greco bodies.

“So people fire me when my pictures move. They don’t like it when violent things happen in my Illustrations. Each Illustration is a little story. If you watch them, in a few minutes they tell you a tale. In three hours of looking you could see eighteen or twenty stories acted right on my body, you could hear voices and think thoughts. It’s all here, just waiting for you to look. But most of all, there’s a special spot on my body.” He bared his back. “See? There’s no special design on my right shoulder blade, just a jumble.”

“Yes.”

“When I’ve been around a person long enough, that spot clouds over and fills in. If I’m with a woman, her picture comes there on my back, in an hour, and shows her whole life—how she’ll live, how she’ll die, what she’ll look like when she’s sixty. And if it’s a man, an hour later his picture’s here on my back. It shows him falling off a cliff, or dying under a train. So I’m fired again.”

All the time he had been talking his hands had wandered over the Illustrations, as if to adjust their frames, to brush away dust—the motions of a connoisseur, an art patron. Now he lay back, long and full in the moonlight. It was a warm night. There was no breeze and the air was stifling. We both had our shirts off.

“And you’ve never found the old woman?”

“Never.”

“And you think she came from the future?”

“How else could she know these stories she painted on me?” He shut his eyes tiredly. His voice grew fainter. “Sometimes at night I can feel them, the pictures, like ants, crawling on my skin. Then I know they’re doing what they have to do. I never look at them any more. I just try to rest.
I don’t sleep much. Don’t you look at them either, I warn you. Turn the other way when you sleep.”

I lay back a few feet from him. He didn’t seem violent and the pictures were beautiful. Otherwise I might have been tempted to get out and away from such babbling. But the Illustrations . . . I let my eyes fill up on them. Any person would go a little mad with such things upon his body.

The night was serene. I could hear the Illustrated Man’s breathing in the moonlight. Crickets were stirring gently in the distant ravines. I lay with my body sidewise so I could watch the Illustrations. Perhaps half an hour passed. Whether the Illustrated Man slept I could not tell, but suddenly I heard him whisper, “They’re moving, aren’t they?”

I waited a minute.

Then I said, “Yes.”

The pictures were moving, each in its turn, each for a brief minute or two. There in the moonlight, with the tiny tinkling thoughts and the distant sea voices, it seemed, each little drama was enacted. Whether it took an hour or three hours for the dramas to finish, it would be hard to say. I only know that I lay fascinated and did not move while the stars wheeled in the sky.

Eighteen Illustrations, eighteen tales. I counted them one by one.

Primarily my eyes focused upon a scene, a large house with two people in it. I saw a flight of vultures on a blazing flesh sky, I saw yellow lions, and I heard voices.

The first Illustration quivered and came to life. . . .

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The Rocket Man

THE electrical fireflies were hovering above Mother’s dark hair to light her path. She stood in her bedroom door looking out at me as I passed in the silent hall. “You will help me keep him here this time, won’t you?” she asked.

“I guess so,” I said.

“Please.” The fireflies cast moving bits of light on her white face. “This time he mustn’t go away again.”

“All right,” I said, after standing there a moment. “But it won’t do any good; it’s no use.”

She went away, and the fireflies, on their electric circuits, fluttered after her like an errant constellation, showing her how to walk in darkness. I heard her say, faintly, “We’ve got to try, anyway.”

Other fireflies followed me to my room. When the weight of my body cut a circuit in the bed, the fireflies winked out. It was midnight, and my mother and I waited, our rooms separated by darkness, in bed. The bed began to rock me and sing to me. I touched a switch; the singing and rocking stopped. I didn’t want to sleep. I didn’t want to sleep at all.

This night was no different from a thousand others in our time. We would wake nights and feel the cool air turn hot, feel the fire in the wind, or see the walls burned a bright color for an instant, and then we knew his rocket was over our house—his rocket, and the oak trees swaying from the concussion. And I would lie there, eyes wide, panting, and mother in her room. Her voice would come to me over the interroom radio:

“Did you feel it?”

And I would answer, “That was him, all right.”

That was my father’s ship passing over our town, a small town where space rockets never came, and we would lie awake for the next two hours, thinking, “Now Dad’s landed in Springfield, now he’s on the tarmac, now he’s signing the papers, now he’s in the helicopter, now he’s over the river, now the hills, now he’s settling the helicopter in at the little airport at Green Village here. . . . And the night would be half over when, in our separate cool beds, Mother and I would be listening, listening. “Now he’s walking down Bell Street. He always walks . . . never takes a cab . . . now across the park, now turning the corner of Oakhurst and now . . .

I lifted my head from my pillow. Far down the street, coming closer and closer, smartly, quickly, briskly—footsteps. Now turning in at our house, up the porch steps. And we were both smiling in the cool darkness, Mom and I, when we heard the front door open in recognition, speak a quiet word of welcome, and shut downstairs. . . .
Three hours later I turned the brass knob to their room quietly, holding my breath, balancing in a darkness as big as the space between the planets, my hand out to reach the small black case at the foot of my parents’ sleeping bed. Taking it, I ran silently to my room, thinking, He won’t tell me, he doesn’t want me to know.

And from the opened case spilled his black uniform, like a black nebula, stars glittering here or there, distantly, in the material. I kneaded the dark stuff in my warm hands; I smelled the planet Mars, an iron smell, and the planet Venus, a green ivy smell, and the planet Mercury, a scent of sulphur and fire; and I could smell the milky moon and the hardness of stars. I pushed the uniform into a centrifuge machine I’d built in my ninth-grade shop that year, set it whirling. Soon a fine powder precipitated into a retort. This I slid under a microscope. And while my parents slept unaware, and while our house was asleep, all the automatic bakers and servers and robot cleaners in an electric slumber, I stared down upon brilliant motes of meteor dust, comet tail, and loam from far Jupiter glistening like worlds themselves which drew me down the tube a billion miles into space, at terrific accelerations.

At dawn, exhausted with my journey and fearful of discovery, I returned the boxed uniform to their sleeping room.

Then I slept, only to waken at the sound of the horn of the dry-cleaning car which stopped in the yard below. They took the black uniform box with them. It’s good I didn’t wait, I thought. For the uniform would be back in an hour, clean of all its destiny and travel.

I slept again, with the little vial of magical dust in my pajama pocket, over my beating heart.

When I came downstairs, there was Dad at the breakfast table, biting into his toast. “Sleep good, Doug?” he said, as if he had been here all the time, and hadn’t been gone for three months.

“All right,” I said.

“Toast?”

He pressed a button and the breakfast table made me four pieces, golden brown.

I remember my father that afternoon, digging and digging in the garden, like an animal after something, it seemed. There he was with his long dark arms moving swiftly, planting, tamping, fixing, cutting, pruning, his dark face always down to the soil, his eyes always down to what he was doing, never up to the sky, never looking at me, or Mother, even, unless we knelt with him to feel the earth soak up through the overalls at our knees, to put our hands into the black dirt and not look at the bright, crazy sky. Then he would glance to either side, to Mother or me, and give us a gentle wink, and go on, bent down, face down, the sky staring at his back.
That night we sat on the mechanical porch swing which swung us and blew a wind upon us and sang to us. It was summer and moonlight and we had lemonade to drink, and we held the cold glasses in our hands, and Dad read the stereo-newspapers inserted into the special hat you put on your head and which turned the microscopic page in front of the magnifying lens if you blinked three times in succession. Dad smoked cigarettes and told me about how it was when he was a boy in the year 1997. After a while he said, as he had always said, “Why aren’t you out playing kick-the-can, Doug?”

I didn’t say anything, but Mom said, “He does, on nights when you’re not here.”

Dad looked at me and then, for the first time that day, at the sky. Mother always watched him when he glanced at the stars. The first day and night when he got home he wouldn’t look at the sky much. I thought about him gardening and gardening so furiously, his face almost driven into the earth. But the second night he looked at the stars a little more. Mother wasn’t afraid of the sky in the day so much, but it was the night stars that she wanted to turn off, and sometimes I could almost see her reaching for a switch in her mind, but never finding it. And by the third night maybe Dad’d be out here on the porch until ‘way after we were all ready for bed, and then I’d hear Mom call him in, almost like she called me from the street at times. And then I would hear Dad fitting the electric-eye door lock in place, with a sigh. And the next morning at breakfast I’d glance down and see his little black case near his feet as he buttered his toast and Mother slept late.

“Well, be seeing you, Doug,” he’d say, and we’d shake hands.

“In about three months?”

“Right.”

And he’d walk away down the street, not taking a helicopter or beetle or bus, just walking with his uniform hidden in his small underarm case; he didn’t want anyone to think he was vain about being a Rocket Man.

Mother would come out to eat breakfast, one piece of dry toast, about an hour later.

But now it was tonight, the first night, the good night, and he wasn’t looking at the stars much at all.

“Let’s go to the television carnival,” I said.

“Fine,” said Dad.

Mother smiled at me.

And we rushed off to town in a helicopter and took Dad through a thousand exhibits, to keep his face and head down with us and not looking anywhere else. And as we laughed at the funny things and looked serious at the serious ones, I thought, My father goes to Saturn and Neptune
and Pluto, but he never brings me presents. Other boys whose fathers go into space bring back bits of ore from Callisto and hunks of black meteor or blue sand. But I have to get my own collection, trading from other boys, the Martian rocks and Mercurian sands which filled my room, but about which Dad would never comment.

On occasion, I remembered, he brought something for Mother. He planted some Martian sunflowers once in our yard, but after he was gone a month and the sunflowers grew large, Mom ran out one day and cut them all down.

Without thinking, as we paused at one of the three-dimensional exhibits, I asked Dad the question I always asked:

“What’s it like, out in space?”

Mother shot me a frightened glance. It was too late.

Dad stood there for a full half minute trying to find an answer, then he shrugged.

“It’s the best thing in a lifetime of best things.” Then he caught himself. “Oh, it’s really nothing at all. Routine. You wouldn’t like it.” He looked at me, apprehensively.

“But you always go back.”

“Habit.”

“Where’re you going next?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I’ll think it over.”

He always thought it over. In those days rocket pilots were rare and he could pick and choose, work when he liked. On the third night of his homecoming you could see him picking and choosing among the stars.

“Come on,” said Mother, “let’s go home.”

It was still early when we got home. I wanted Dad to put on his uniform. I shouldn’t have asked—it always made Mother unhappy—but I could not help myself. I kept at him, though he had always refused. I had never seen him in it, and at last he said, “Oh, all right.”

We waited in the parlor while he went upstairs in the air flue. Mother looked at me dully, as if she couldn’t believe that her own son could do this to her. I glanced away. “I’m sorry,” I said.

“You’re not helping at all,” she said. “At all.”

There was a whisper in the air flue a moment later.
“Here I am,” said Dad quietly.

We looked at him in his uniform.

It was glossy black with silver buttons and silver rims to the heels of the black boots, and it looked as if someone had cut the arms and legs and body from a dark nebula, with little faint stars glowing through it. It fit as close as a glove fits to a slender long hand, and it smelled like cool air and metal and space. It smelled of fire and time.

Father stood, smiling awkwardly, in the center of the room.

“Turn around,” said Mother.

Her eyes were remote, looking at him.

When he was gone, she never talked of him. She never said anything about anything but the weather or the condition of my neck and the need of a washcloth for it, or the fact that she didn’t sleep nights. Once she said the light was too strong at night.

“But there’s no moon this week,” I said.

“There’s starlight,” she said.

I went to the store and bought her some darker, greener shades. As I lay in bed at night, I could hear her pull them down tight to the bottom of the windows. It made a long rustling noise.

Once I tried to mow the lawn.

“No.” Mom stood in the door. “Put the mower away.”

So the grass went three months at a time without cutting. Dad cut it when he came home.

She wouldn’t let me do anything else either, like repairing the electrical breakfast maker or the mechanical book reader. She saved everything up, as if for Christmas. And then I would see Dad hammering or tinkering, and always smiling at his work, and Mother smiling over him, happy.

No, she never talked of him when he was gone. And as for Dad, he never did anything to make a contact across the millions of miles. He said once, “If I called you, I’d want to be with you. I wouldn’t be happy.”

Once Dad said to me, “Your mother treats me, sometimes, as if I weren’t here—as if I were invisible.”

I had seen her do it. She would look just beyond him, over his shoulder, at his chin or hands, but never into his eyes. If she did look at his eyes, her eyes were covered with a film, like an animal
going to sleep. She said yes at the right times, and smiled, but always a half second later than expected.

“I’m not there for her,” said Dad.

But other days she would be there and he would be there for her, and they would hold hands and walk around the block, or take rides, with Mom’s hair flying like a girl’s behind her, and she would cut off all the mechanical devices in the kitchen and bake him incredible cakes and pies and cookies, looking deep into his face, her smile a real smile. But at the end of such days when he was there to her, she would always cry. And Dad would stand helpless, gazing about the room as if to find the answer, but never finding it.

Dad turned slowly, in his uniform, for us to see.

“Turn around again,” said Mom.

The next morning Dad came rushing into the house with handfuls of tickets. Pink rocket tickets for California, blue tickets for Mexico.

“Come on!” he said. “We’ll buy disposable clothes and burn them when they’re soiled. Look, we take the noon rocket to L.A., the two-o’clock helicopter to Santa Barbara, the nine-o’clock plane to Ensenada, sleep overnight!”

And we went to California and up and down the Pacific Coast for a day and a half, settling at last on the sands of Malibu to cook wiener’s at night. Dad was always listening or singing or watching things on all sides of him, holding onto things as if the world were a centrifuge going so swiftly that he might be flung off away from us at any instant.

The last afternoon at Malibu Mom was up in the hotel room. Dad lay on the sand beside me for a long time in the hot sun. “Ah,” he sighed, “this is it.” His eyes were gently closed; he lay on his back, drinking the sun. “You miss this,” he said.

He meant “on the rocket,” of course. But he never said “the rocket” or mentioned the rocket and all the things you couldn’t have on the rocket. You couldn’t have a salt wind on the rocket or a blue sky or a yellow sun or Mom’s cooking. You couldn’t talk to your fourteen-year-old boy on a rocket.

“Let’s hear it,” he said at last.

And I knew that now we would talk, as we had always talked, for three hours straight. All afternoon we would murmur back and forth in the lazy sun about my school grades, how high I could jump, how fast I could swim.
Dad nodded each time I spoke and smiled and slapped my chest lightly in approval. We talked. We did not talk of rockets or space, but we talked of Mexico, where we had driven once in an ancient car, and of the butterflies we had caught in the rain forests of green warm Mexico at noon, seeing the hundred butterflies sucked to our radiator, dying there, beating their blue and crimson wings, twitching, beautiful, and sad. We talked of such Things instead of the things I wanted to talk about. And he listened to me. That was the thing he did, as if he was trying to fill himself up with all the sounds he could hear. He listened to the wind and the falling ocean and my voice, always with a rapt attention, a concentration that almost excluded physical bodies themselves and kept only the sounds. He shut his eyes to listen. I would see him listening to the lawn mower as he cut the grass by hand instead of using the remote-control device, and I would see him smelling the cut grass as it sprayed up at him behind the mower in a green fount.

“Doug,” he said, about five in the afternoon, as we were picking up our towels and heading back along the beach near the surf, “I want you to promise me something.”

“What?”

“Don’t ever be a Rocket Man.”

I stopped.

“I mean it,” he said. “Because when you’re out there you want to be here, and when you’re here you want to be out there. Don’t start that. Don’t let it get hold of you.”

“But—”

“You don’t know what it is. Every time I’m out there I think, If I ever get back to Earth I’ll stay there; I’ll never go out again. But I go out, and I guess I’ll always go out.”

“I’ve thought about being a Rocket Man for a long time,” I said,

He didn’t hear me. “I try to stay here. Last Saturday when I got home I started trying so damned hard to stay here.”

I remembered him in the garden, sweating, and all the traveling and doing and listening, and I knew that he did this to convince himself that the sea and the towns and the land and his family were the only real things and the good things. But I knew where he would be tonight: looking at the jewelry in Orion from our front porch.

“Promise me you won’t be like me,” he said.

I hesitated awhile. “Okay,” I said.

He shook my hand. “Good boy,” he said.
The dinner was fine that night. Mom had run about the kitchen with handfuls of cinnamon and dough and pots and pans tinkling, and now a great turkey fumed on the table, with dressing, cranberry sauce, peas, and pumpkin pie.

“In the middle of August?” said Dad, amazed.

“You won’t be here for Thanksgiving.”

“So I won’t.”

He sniffed it. He lifted each lid from each tureen and let the flavor steam over his sunburned face. He said “Ah” to each. He looked at the room and his hands. He gazed at the pictures on the wall, the chairs, the table, me, and Mom. He cleared his throat. I saw him make up his mind.

“Lilly?”

“Yes?” Mom looked across her table which she had set like a wonderful silver trap, a miraculous gravy pit into which, like a struggling beast of the past caught in a tar pool, her husband might at last be caught and held, gazing out through a jail of wishbones, safe forever. Her eyes sparkled.

“Lilly,” said Dad.

Go on, I thought crazily. Say it, quick; say you’ll stay home this time, for good, and never go away; say it!

Just then a passing helicopter jarred the room and the windowpane shook with a crystal sound. Dad glanced at the window.

The blue stars of evening were there, and the red planet Mars was rising in the East.

Dad looked at Mars a full minute. Then he put his hand out blindly toward me. “May I have some peas,” he said.

“Excuse me,” said Mother. “I’m going to get some bread.”

She rushed out into the kitchen.

“But there’s bread on the table,” I said.

Dad didn’t look at me as he began his meal.

I couldn’t sleep that night. I came downstairs at one in the morning and the moonlight was like ice on all the housetops, and dew glittered in a snow field on our grass. I stood in the doorway in my pajamas, feeling the warm night wind, and then I knew that Dad was sitting in the
mechanical porch swing, gliding gently. I could see his profile tilted back, and he was watching the stars wheel over the sky. His eyes were like gray crystal there, the moon in each one.

I went out and sat beside him.

We glided awhile in the swing.

At last I said, “How many ways are there to die in space?”

“A million.”

“Name some.”

“The meteors hit you. The air goes out of your rocket. Or comets take you along with them. Concussion. Strangulation. Explosion. Centrifugal force. Too much acceleration. Too little. The heat, the cold, the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, the asteroids, the planetoids, radiation . . .”

“And do they bury you?”

“They never find you.”

“Where do you go?”

“A billion miles away. Traveling graves, they call them. You become a meteor or a planetoid traveling forever through space.”

I said nothing.

“One thing,” he said later, “it’s quick in space. Death. It’s over like that. You don’t linger. Most of the time you don’t even know it. You’re dead and that’s it.”

We went up to bed.

It was morning.

Standing in the doorway, Dad listened to the yellow canary singing in its golden cage.

“Well, I’ve decided,” he said. “Next time I come home, I’m home to stay.”

“Dad!” I said.

“Tell your mother that when she gets up,” he said.
“You mean it!”

He nodded gravely. “See you in about three months.”

And there he went off down the street, carrying his uniform in its secret box, whistling and looking at the tall green trees and picking chinaberrys off the chinaberry bush as he brushed by, tossing them ahead of him as he walked away into the bright shade of early morning. . . .

I asked Mother about a few things that morning after Father had been gone a number of hours. “Dad said that sometimes you don’t act as if you hear or see him,” I said.

And then she explained everything to me quietly.

“When he went off into space ten years ago, I said to myself, ‘He’s dead.’ Or as good as dead. So think of him dead. And when he comes back, three or four times a year, it’s not him at all, it’s only a pleasant little memory or a dream. And if a memory stops or a dream stops, it can’t hurt half as much. So most of the time I think of him dead——”

“But other times——”

“Other times I can’t help myself. I bake pies and treat him as if he were alive, and then it hurts. No, it’s better to think he hasn’t been here for ten years and I’ll never see him again. It doesn’t hurt as much.”

“Didn’t he say next time he’d settle down.”

She shook her head slowly. “No, he’s dead. I’m very sure of that.”

“He’ll come alive again, then,” I said.

“Ten years ago,” said Mother, “I thought, What if he dies on Venus? Then we’ll never be able to see Venus again. What if he dies on Mars? We’ll never be able to look at Mars again, all red in the sky, without wanting to go in and lock the door. Or what if he died on Jupiter or Saturn or Neptune? On those nights when those planets were high in the sky, we wouldn’t want to have anything to do with the stars.”

“I guess not,” I said.

The message came the next day.

The messenger gave it to me and I read it standing on the porch. The sun was setting. Mom stood in the screen door behind me, watching me fold the message and put it in my pocket.
“Mom,” I said.

“Don’t tell me anything I don’t already know,” she said.

She didn’t cry.

Well, it wasn’t Mars, and it wasn’t Venus, and it wasn’t Jupiter or Saturn that killed him. We wouldn’t have to think of him every time Jupiter or Saturn or Mars lit up the evening sky.

This was different.

His ship had fallen into the sun.

And the sun was big and fiery and merciless, and it was always in the sky and you couldn’t get away from it.

So for a long time after my father died my mother slept through the days and wouldn’t go out. We had breakfast at midnight and lunch at three in the morning, and dinner at the cold dim hour of 6 A.M. We went to all-night shows and went to bed at sunrise.

And, for a long while, the only days we ever went out to walk were the days when it was raining and there was no sun.
The Fox and the Forest

THERE WERE fireworks the very first night, things that you should be afraid of perhaps, for they might remind you of other more horrible things, but these were beautiful, rockets that ascended into the ancient soft air of Mexico and shook the stars apart in blue and white fragments. Everything was good and sweet, the air was that blend of the dead and the living, of the rains and the dusts, of the incense from the church, and the brass smell of the tubas on the bandstand which pulsed out vast rhythms of “La Paloma.” The church doors were thrown wide and it seemed as if a giant yellow constellation had fallen from the October sky and lay breathing fire upon the church walls; a million candles sent their color and fumes about. Newer and better fireworks scurried like tight-rope walking comets across the cool-filed square, banged against adobe café walls, then rushed on hot wires to bash the high church tower, in which boys’ naked feet alone could be seen kicking and re-kicking, clanging and tilting and re-tilting the monster bells into monstrous music. A flaming bull blundered about the plaza chasing laughing men and screaming children.

“The year is 1938,” said William Travis, standing by his wife on the edge of the yelling crowd, smiling. “A good year.”

The bull rushed upon them. Ducking, the couple ran, with fire balls pelting them, past the music and riot, the church, the band, under the stars, clutching each other, laughing. The bull passed, carried lightly on the shoulders of a charging Mexican, a framework of bamboo and sulphurous gunpowder.

“I’ve never enjoyed myself so much in my life.” Susan Travis had stopped for her breath.

“It’s amazing,” said William.

“It will go on, won’t it?”

“All night.”

“No, I mean our trip.”

He frowned and patted his breast pocket. “I’ve enough traveler’s checks for a lifetime. Enjoy yourself. Forget it. They’ll never find us.”

“Never?”

“Never.”

Now someone was setting off giant crackers, hurling them from the great bell-tolling tower of the church in a sputter of smoke, while the crowd below fell back under the threat and the crackers exploded in wonderful concussions among their dancing feet and flailing bodies. A
wondrous smell of frying tortillas hung all about, and in the cafés men sat at tables looking out, mugs of beer in their brown hands.

The bull was dead. The fire was out of the bamboo tubes and he was expended. The laborer lifted the framework from his shoulders. Little boys clustered to touch the magnificent papier-mâché head, the real horns.

“Let’s examine the bull,” said William.

As they walked past the café entrance Susan saw the man looking out at them, a white man in a salt-white suit, with a blue tie and blue shirt, and a thin, sunburned face. His hair was blond and straight and his eyes were blue, and he watched them as they walked.

She would never have noticed him if it had not been for the bottles at his immaculate elbow; a fat bottle of crème de menthe, a clear bottle of vermouth, a flagon of cognac, and seven other bottles of assorted liqueurs, and, at his finger tips, ten small half-filled glasses from which, without taking his eyes off the street, he sipped, occasionally squinting, pressing his thin mouth shut upon the savor. In his free hand a thin Havana cigar smoked, and on a chair stood twenty cartons of Turkish cigarettes, six boxes of cigars, and some packaged colognes.

“Bill——” whispered Susan.

“Take it easy,” he said. “He’s nobody.”

“I saw him in the plaza this morning.”

“Don’t look back, keep walking. Examine the papier-mâché bull here. That’s it, ask questions.”

“Do you think he’s from the Searchers?”

“They couldn’t follow us!”

“They might!”

“What a nice bull,” said William to the man who owned it.

“He couldn’t have followed us back through two hundred years, could he?”

“Watch yourself, for God’s sake,” said William.

She swayed. He crushed her elbow tightly, steering her away.

“Don’t faint.” He smiled, to make it look good. “You’ll be all right. Let’s go right in that café, drink in front of him, so if he is what we think he is, he won’t suspect.”

“No, I couldn’t.”
“We’ve got to. Come on now. And so I said to David, that’s ridiculous!” This last in a loud voice as they went up the café steps.

We are here, thought Susan. Who are we? Where are we going? What do we fear? Start at the beginning, she told herself, holding to her sanity, as she felt the adobe floor underfoot.

My name is Ann Kristen; my husband’s name is Roger. We were born in the year 2155 A.D. And we lived in a world that was evil. A world that was like a great black ship pulling away from the shore of sanity and civilization, roaring its black horn in the night, taking two billion people with it, whether they wanted to go or not, to death, to fall over the edge of the earth and the sea into radioactive flame and madness.

They walked into the café. The man was staring at them.

A phone rang.

The phone startled Susan. She remembered a phone ringing two hundred years in the future, on that blue April morning in 2155, and herself answering it:

“Ann, this is Rene! Have you heard? I mean about Travel in Time, Incorporated? Trips to Rome in 21 B.C., trips to Napoleon’s Waterloo—any time, any place!”

“Rene, you’re joking.”

“No. Clinton Smith left this morning for Philadelphia in 1776. Travel in Time, Inc., arranges everything. Costs money. But, think—to actually see the burning of Rome, Kubla Khan, Moses and the Red Sea! You’ve probably got an ad in your tube mail now.

She had opened the suction mail tube and there was the metal foil advertisement:

ROME AND THE BORGIAS!
THE WRIGHT BROTHERS AT KITTY HAWK!
Travel in Time, Inc., can costume you, put you in a crowd during the assassination of Lincoln or Caesar! We guarantee to teach you any language you need to move freely in any civilization, in any year, without friction. Latin, Greek, ancient American colloquial. Take your vacation in Time as well as Place!

Rene’s voice was buzzing on the phone. “Tom and I leave for 1492 tomorrow. They’re arranging for Tom to sail with Columbus. Isn’t it amazing!”
“Yes,” murmured Ann, stunned. “What does the Government say about this Time Machine company?”

“Oh, the police have an eye on it. Afraid people might evade the draft, run off and hide in the Past. Everyone has to leave a security bond behind, his house and belongings, to guarantee return. After all, the war’s on.”

“Yes, the war,” murmured Ann. “The war.”

Standing there, holding the phone, she had thought, Here is the chance my husband and I have talked and prayed over for so many years. We don’t like this world of 2155. We want to run away from his work at the bomb factory, I from my position with disease-culture units. Perhaps there is a chance for us to escape, to run for centuries into a wild country of years where they will never find and bring us back to burn our books, censor our thoughts, scald our minds with fear, march us, scream at us with radios . . .

They were in Mexico in the year 1938.

She looked at the stained café wall.

Good workers for the Future State were allowed vacations into the Past to escape fatigue. And so she and her husband had moved back into 1938, a room in New York City, and enjoyed the theaters and the Statue of Liberty which still stood green in the harbor. And on the third day they had changed their clothes, their names, and had flown off to hide in Mexico!

“It must be him,” whispered Susan, looking at the stranger seated at the table. “Those cigarettes, the cigars, the liquor. They give him away. Remember our first night in the Past?”

A month ago, their first night in New York, before their flight, drinking all the strange drinks, savoring and buying odd foods, perfumes, cigarettes of ten dozen rare brands, for they were rare in the Future, where war was everything. So they had made fools of themselves, rushing in and out of stores, salons, tobacconists, going up to their room to get wonderfully ill.

And now here was this stranger doing likewise, doing a thing that only a man from the Future would do who had been starved for liquors and cigarettes for many years.

Susan and William sat and ordered a drink.

The stranger was examining their clothes, their hair, their jewelry—the way they walked and sat.

“Sit easily,” said William under his breath. “Look as if you’ve worn this clothing style all your life.”

“We should never have tried to escape.”
“My God!” said William, “he’s coming over. Let me do the talking.”

The stranger bowed before them. There was the faintest tap of heels knocking together. Susan stiffened. That military sound!—unmistakable as that certain ugly rap on your door at midnight.

“Mr. Roger Kristen,” said the stranger, “you did not pull up your pant legs when you sat down.”

William froze. He looked at his hands lying on either leg, innocently. Susan’s heart was beating swiftly.

“You’ve got the wrong person,” said William quickly. “My name’s not Krisler.”

“Kristen,” corrected the stranger.

“I’m William Travis,” said William. “And I don’t see what my pant legs have to do with you!”

“Sorry.” The stranger pulled up a chair. “Let us say I thought I knew you because you did not pull your trousers up. Everyone does. If they don’t, the trousers bag quickly. I am a long way from home, Mr.—Travis, and in need of company. My name is Simms.”

“Mr. Simms, we appreciate your loneliness, but we’re tired. We’re leaving for Acapulco tomorrow.”

“A charming spot. I was just there, looking for some friends of mine. They are somewhere. I shall find them yet. Oh, is the lady a bit sick?”

“Good night, Mr. Simms.”

They started out the door, William holding Susan’s arm firmly. They did not look back when Mr. Simms called, “Oh, just one other thing.” He paused and then slowly spoke the words:

“2155 AD.”

Susan shut her eyes and felt the earth falter under her. She kept going, into the fiery plaza, seeing nothing.

They locked the door of their hotel room. And then she was crying and they were standing in the dark, and the room tilted under them. Far away firecrackers exploded, and there was laughter in the plaza.

“What a damned, loud nerve,” said William. “Him sitting there, looking us up and down like animals, smoking his damn cigarettes, drinking his drinks. I should have killed him then!” His voice was nearly hysterical. “He even had the nerve to use his real name to us. The Chief of the
Searchers. And the thing about my pant legs. My God, I should have pulled them up when I sat. It’s an automatic gesture of this day and age. When I didn’t do it, it set me off from the others; it made him think, Here’s a man who never wore pants, a man used to breech uniforms and future styles. I could kill myself for giving us away!”

“No, no, it was my walk—these high heels—that did it. Our haircuts—so new, so fresh. Everything about us odd and uneasy.”

He turned on the light. “He’s still testing us. He’s not positive of us—not completely. We can’t run out on him, then. We can’t make him certain. We’ll go to Acapulco leisurely.”

“Maybe he is sure of us, but is just playing.”

“I wouldn’t put it past him. He’s got all the time in the world. He can daily here if he wants, and bring us back to the Future sixty seconds after we left it. He might keep us wondering for days, laughing at us.”

Susan sat on the bed, wiping the tears from her face, smelling the old smell of charcoal and incense.

“They won’t make a scene, will they?”

“They won’t dare. They’ll have to get us alone to put us in that Time Machine and send us back.”

“There’s a solution then,” she said. “We’ll never be alone; we’ll always be in crowds. We’ll make a million friends, visit markets, sleep in the Official Palaces in each town, pay the Chief of Police to guard us until we find a way to kill Simms and escape, disguise ourselves in new clothes, perhaps as Mexicans.”

Footsteps sounded outside their locked door.

They turned out the light and undressed in silence. The footsteps went away. A door closed.

Susan stood by the window looking down at the plaza in the darkness. “So that building there is a church?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve often wondered what a church looked like. It’s been so long since anyone saw one. Can we visit it tomorrow?”

“Of course. Come to bed.”

They lay in the dark room.
Half an hour later their phone rang. She lifted the receiver.

“Hello?”

“The rabbits may hide in the forest,” said a voice, “but a fox can always find them.”

She replaced the receiver and lay back straight and cold in the bed.

Outside, in the year 1938, a man played three tunes upon a guitar, one following another.

During the night she put her hand out and almost touched the year 2155. She felt her fingers slide over cool spaces of time, as over a corrugated surface, and she heard the insistent thump of marching feet, a million bands playing a million military tunes, and she saw the fifty thousand rows of disease cultures in their aseptic glass tubes, her hand reaching out to them at her work in that huge factory in the Future; the tubes of leprosy, bubonic, typhoid, tuberculosis, and then the great explosion. She saw her hand burned to a wrinkled plum, felt it recoil from a concussion so immense that the world was lifted and let fall and all the buildings broke and people hemorrhaged and lay silent. Great volcanoes, machines, winds, avalanches slid down to silence and she awoke, sobbing, in the bed, in Mexico, many years away.

In the early morning, drugged with the single hour’s sleep they had finally been able to obtain, they awoke to the sound of loud automobiles in the street. Susan peered down from the iron balcony at a small crowd of eight people only now emerging, chattering, yelling, from trucks and cars with red lettering on them. A crowd of Mexicans had followed the trucks.

“Qué pasa?” Susan called to a little boy.

The boy replied.

Susan turned back to her husband. “An American motion-picture company, here on location.”

“Sounds interesting.” William was in the shower. “Let’s watch them. I don’t think we’d better leave today. We’ll try to lull Simms. Watch the films being made. They say the primitive film making was something. Get our minds off ourselves.”

Ourselves, thought Susan. For a moment, in the bright sun, she had forgotten that somewhere in the hotel, waiting, was a man smoking a thousand cigarettes, it seemed. She saw the eight loud happy Americans below and wanted to call to them: “Save me, hide me, help me! Color my hair, my eyes; clothe me in strange clothes. I need your help. I’m from the year 2155!”

But the words stayed in her throat. The functionaries of Travel in Time, Inc., were not foolish. In your brain, before you left on your trip, they placed a psychological bloc. You could tell no one
your true time or birthplace, nor could you reveal any of the Future to those in the Past. The Past and the Future must be protected from each other. Only with this psychological bloc were people allowed to travel unguarded through the ages. The Future must be protected from any change brought about by her people traveling in the Past. Even if she wanted to with all her heart, she could not tell any of those happy people below in the plaza who she was, or what her predicament had become.

“What about breakfast?” said William.

Breakfast was being served in the immense dining room. Ham and eggs for everyone. The place was full of tourists. The film people entered, all eight of them—six men and two women, giggling, shoving chairs about. And Susan sat near them, feeling the warmth and protection they offered, even when Mr. Simms came down the lobby stairs, smoking his Turkish cigarette with great intensity. He nodded at them from a distance, and Susan nodded back, smiling, because he couldn’t do anything to them here, in front of eight film people and twenty other tourists.

“Those actors,” said William. “Perhaps I could hire two of them, say it was a joke, dress them in our clothes, have them drive off in our car when Simms is in such a spot where he can’t see their faces. If two people pretending to be us could lure him off for a few hours, we might make it to Mexico City. It’d take him years to find us there!”

“Hey!”

A fat man, with liquor on his breath, leaned on their table. “American tourists!” he cried. “I’m so sick of seeing Mexicans, I could kiss you!” He shook their hands. “Come on, eat with us. Misery loves company. I’m Misery, this is Miss Gloom, and Mr. and Mrs. Do-We-Hate-Mexico! We all hate it. But we’re here for some preliminary shots for a damn film. The rest of the crew arrives tomorrow. My name’s Joe Melton. I’m a director. And if this ain’t a hell of a country! Funerals in the streets, people dying. Come on, move over. Join the party; cheer us up!”

Susan and William were both laughing.

“Am I funny?” Mr. Melton asked the immediate world.

“Wonderful!” Susan moved over.

Mr. Simms was glaring across the dining room at them. She made a face at him.

Mr. Simms advanced among the tables.

“Mr. and Mrs. Travis,” he called. “I thought we were breakfasting together, alone.”

“Sorry,” said William.
“Sit down, pal,” said Mr. Melton. “Any friend of theirs is a pal of mine.”

Mr. Simms sat. The film people talked loudly, and while they talked, Mr. Simms said quietly, “I hope you slept well.”

“Did you?”

“I’m not used to spring mattresses,” replied Mr. Simms wryly. “But there are compensations. I stayed up half the night trying new cigarettes and foods. Odd, fascinating. A whole new spectrum of sensation, these ancient vices.”

“We don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Susan.

“Always the play acting.” Simms laughed. “It’s no use. Nor is this stratagem of crowds. I’ll get you alone soon enough. I’m immensely patient.”

“Say,” Mr. Melton broke in, his face flushed, “is this guy giving you any trouble?”

“It’s all right.”

“Say the word and I’ll give him the bum’s rush.”

Melton turned back to yell at his associates. In the laughter, Mr. Simms went on: “Let us come to the point. It took me a month of tracing you through towns and cities to find you, and all of yesterday to be sure of you. If you come with me quietly, I might be able to get you off with no punishment, if you agree to go back to work on the hydrogen-plus bomb.”

“Science this guy talks at breakfast!” observed Mr. Melton, half listening.

Simms went on, imperturbably. “Think it over. You can’t escape. If you kill me, others will follow you.”

“We don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Stop it!” cried Simms irritably. “Use your intelligence! You know we can’t let you get away with this escape. Other people in the year 2155 might get the same idea and do what you’ve done. We need people.”

“To fight your wars,” said William at last.

“Bill!”

“It’s all right, Susan. We’ll talk on his terms now. We can’t escape.”

“Excellent,” said Simms. “Really, you’ve both been incredibly romantic, running away from your responsibilities.”
“Running away from horror.”

“Nonsense. Only a war.”

“What are you guys talking about?” asked Mr. Melton.

Susan wanted to tell him. But you could only speak in generalities. The psychological bloc in your mind allowed that. Generalities, such as Simms and William were now discussing.

“Only the war,” said William. “Half the world dead of leprosy bombs!”

“Nevertheless,” Simms pointed out, “the inhabitants of the Future resent you two hiding on a tropical isle, as it were, while they drop off the cliff into hell. Death loves death, not life. Dying people love to know that others die with them. It is a comfort to learn you are not alone in the kiln, in the grave. I am the guardian of their collective resentment against you two.”

“Look at the guardian of resentments!” said Mr. Melton to his companions.

“The longer you keep me waiting, the harder it will go for you. We need you on the bomb project, Mr. Travis. Return now—no torture. Later, we’ll force you to work, and after you’ve finished the bomb, we’ll try a number of complicated new devices on you, sir.”

“I’ve a proposition,” said William. “I’ll come back with you if my wife stays here alive, safe, away from that war.”

Mr. Simms considered it. “All right. Meet me in the plaza in ten minutes. Pick me up in your car. Drive me to a deserted country spot. I’ll have the Travel Machine pick us up there.”

“Bill!” Susan held his arm tightly.

“Don’t argue.” He looked over at her. “It’s settled.” To Simms: “One thing. Last night you could have gotten in our room and kidnaped us. Why didn’t you?”

“Shall we say that I was enjoying myself?” replied Mr. Simms languidly, sucking his new cigar. “I hate giving up this wonderful atmosphere, this sun, this vacation. I regret leaving behind the wine and the cigarettes. Oh, how I regret it. The plaza then, in ten minutes. Your wife will be protected and may stay here as long as she wishes. Say your good-bys.”

Mr. Simms arose and walked out.

“There goes Mr. Big Talk!” yelled Mr. Melton at the departing gentleman. He turned and looked at Susan. “Hey. Someone’s crying. Breakfast’s no time for people to cry. Now is it?”
At nine-fifteen Susan stood on the balcony of their room, gazing down at the plaza. Mr. Simms was seated there, his neat legs crossed, on a delicate bronze bench. Biting the tip from a cigar, he lit it tenderly.

Susan heard the throb of a motor, and far up the street, out of a garage and down the cobbled hill, slowly, came William in his car.

The car picked up speed. Thirty, now forty, now fifty miles an hour. Chickens scattered before it.

Mr. Simms took off his white panama hat and mopped his pink forehead, put his hat back on, and then saw the car.

It was rushing sixty miles an hour, straight on for the plaza.

“William!” screamed Susan.

The car hit the low plaza curb, thundering; it jumped up, sped across the tiles toward the green bench where Mr. Simms now dropped his cigar, shrieked, flailed his hands, and was hit by the car. His body flew up and up in the air, and down and down, crazily, into the street.

On the far side of the plaza, one front wheel broken, the car stopped. People were running.

Susan went in and closed the balcony doors.

They came down the Official Palace steps together, arm in arm, their faces pale, at twelve noon.

“Adiós, señor,” said the mayor behind them. “Señora.”

They stood in the plaza where the crowd was pointing at the blood.

“Will they want to see you again?” asked Susan.

“No, we went over and over it. It was an accident. I lost control of the car. I wept for them. God knows I had to get my relief out somewhere. I felt like weeping. I hated to kill him. I’ve never wanted to do anything like that in my life.”

“They won’t prosecute you?”

“They talked about it, but no. I talked faster. They believe me. It was an accident. It’s over.”

“Where will we go? Mexico City? Uruapan?”

“The car’s in the repair shop. It’ll be ready at four this afternoon. Then we’ll get the hell out.”
“Will we be followed? Was Simms working alone?”

“I don’t know. We’ll have a little head start on them, I think.”

The film people were coming out of the hotel as they approached. Mr. Melton hurried up, scowling. “Hey I heard what happened. Too bad. Everything okay now? Want to get your minds off it? We’re doing some preliminary shots up the street. You want to watch, you’re welcome. Come on, do you good.”

They went.

They stood on the cobbled street while the film camera was being set up. Susan looked at the road leading down and away, and the highway going to Acapulco and the sea, past pyramids and ruins and little adobe towns with yellow walls, blue walls, purple walls and flaming bougainvillaea, and she thought, We shall take the roads, travel in clusters and crowds, in markets, in lobbies, bribe police to sleep near, keep double locks, but always the crowds, never alone again, always afraid the next person who passes may be another Simms. Never knowing if we’ve tricked and lost the Searchers. And always up ahead, in the Future, they’ll wait for us to be brought back, waiting with their bombs to burn us and disease to rot us, and their police to tell us to roll over, turn around, jump through the hoop! And so we’ll keep running through the forest, and we’ll never ever stop or sleep well again in our lives.

A crowd gathered to watch the film being made. And Susan watched the crowd and the streets.

“Seen anyone suspicious?”

“No. What time is it?”

“Three o’clock. The car should be almost ready.”

The test film was finished at three forty-five. They all walked down to the hotel, talking. William paused at the garage. “The car’ll be ready at six,” he said, coming out, worried.

“But no later than that?”

“It’ll be ready, don’t worry.

In the hotel lobby they looked around for other men traveling alone, men who resembled Mr. Simms, men with new haircuts and too much cigarette smoke and cologne smell about them, but the lobby was empty. Going up the stairs, Mr. Melton said, “Well, it’s been a long hard day. Who’d like to put a header on it? You folks? Martini? Beer?”

“Maybe one.”

The whole crowd pushed into Mr. Melton’s room and the drinking began.
“Watch the time,” said William.

Time, thought Susan. If only they had time. All she wanted was to sit in the plaza all of a long bright day in October, with not a worry or a thought, with the sun on her face and arms, her eyes closed, smiling at the warmth, and never move. Just sleep in the Mexican sun, and sleep warmly and easily and slowly and happily for many, many days... .

Mr. Melton opened the champagne.

“To a very beautiful lady, lovely enough for films,” be said, toasting Susan. “I might even give you a test.”

She laughed.

“I mean it,” said Melton. “You’re very nice. I could make you a movie star.”

“And take me to Hollywood?” cried Susan.

“Get the hell out of Mexico, sure!”

Susan glanced at William and he lifted an eyebrow and nodded. It would be a change of scene, clothing, locale, name, perhaps; and they would be traveling with eight other people, a good shield against any interference from the Future.

“It sounds wonderful,” said Susan.

She was feeling the champagne now. The afternoon was slipping by; the party was whirling about her. She felt safe and good and alive and truly happy for the first time in many years.

“What kind of film would my wife be good for?” asked William, refilling his glass.

Melton appraised Susan. The party stopped laughing and listened.

“Well, I’d like to do a story of suspense,” said Melton. “A story of a man and wife, like yourselves.”

“Go on.”

“Sort of a war story, maybe,” said the director, examining the color of his drink against the sunlight.

Susan and William waited.

“A story about a man and wife who live in a little house on a little street in the year 2155, maybe,” said Melton. “This is ad lib, understand. But this man and wife are faced with a terrible war, super-plus hydrogen bombs, censorship, death in that year, and—here’s the gimmick—they
escape into the Past, followed by a man who they think is evil, but who is only trying to show them what their duty is.”

William dropped his glass to the floor.

Mr. Melton continued: “And this couple take refuge with a group of film people whom they learn to trust. Safety in numbers, they say to themselves.”

Susan felt herself slip down into a chair. Everyone was watching the director. He took a little sip of wine. “Ah, that’s a fine wine. Well, this man and woman, it seems, don’t realize how important they are to the Future. The man, especially, is the keystone to a new bomb metal. So the Searchers, let’s call them, spare no trouble or expense to find, capture, and take home the man and wife, once they get them totally alone, in a hotel room, where no one can see. Strategy. The Searchers work alone, or in groups of eight. One trick or another will do it. Don’t you think it would make a wonderful film, Susan? Don’t you, Bill?” He finished his drink.

Susan sat with her eyes straight ahead of her.

“Have a drink?” said Mr. Melton.

William’s gun was out and fired three times, and one of the men fell, and the others ran forward. Susan screamed. A hand was clamped to her mouth. Now the gun was on the floor and William was struggling, held.

Mr. Melton said, “Please,” standing there where he had stood, blood showing on his fingers. “Let’s not make matters worse.”

Someone pounded on the hall door.

“Let me in!”

“The manager,” said Mr. Melton dryly. He jerked his head. “Everyone, let’s move!”

“Let me in! I’ll call the police!”

Susan and William looked at each other quickly, and then at the door.

“The manager wishes to come in,” said Mr. Melton. Quick!”

A camera was carried forward. From it shot a blue light which encompassed the room instantly. It widened out and the people of the party vanished, one by one.

“Quickly!”

Outside the window, in the instant before she vanished, Susan saw the green land and the purple and yellow and blue and crimson walls and the cobbles flowing down like a river, a man upon a
burro riding into the warm hills, a boy drinking Orange Crush, she could feel the sweet liquid in her throat a man standing under a cool plaza tree with a guitar, she could feel her hand upon the strings, and, far away, the sea, the blue and tender sea, she could feel it roll her over and take her in.

And then she was gone. Her husband was gone.

The door burst wide open. The manager and his staff rushed in.

The room was empty.

“But they were just here! I saw them come in, and now—gone!” cried the manager. “The windows are covered with iron grating. They couldn’t get out that way!”

In the late afternoon the priest was summoned and they opened the room again and aired it out, and had him sprinkle holy water through each corner and give it his blessing.

“What shall we do with these?” asked the charwoman.

She pointed to the closet, where there were 67 bottles of chartreuse, cognac, crème de cacao, absinthe, vermouth, tequila, 106 cartons of Turkish cigarettes, and 198 yellow boxes of fifty-cent pure Havana-filler cigars. . . .
The Rocket

MANY nights Fiorello Bodoni would awaken to hear the rockets sighing in the dark sky. He would tiptoe from bed, certain that his kind wife was dreaming, to let himself out into the night air. For a few moments he would be free of the smells of old food in the small house by the river. For a silent moment he would let his heart soar alone into space, following the rockets.

Now, this very night, he stood half naked in the darkness, watching the fire fountains murmuring in the air. The rockets on their long wild way to Mars and Saturn and Venus!

“Well, well, Bodoni.”

Bodoni started.

On a milk crate, by the silent river, sat an old man who also watched the rockets through the midnight hush.

“Oh, it’s you, Bramante!”

“Do you come out every night, Bodoni?”

“Only for the air.”

“So? I prefer the rockets myself,” said old Bramante. “I was a boy when they started. Eighty years ago, and I’ve never been on one yet.”

“I will ride up in one someday,” said Bodoni.

“Fool!” cried Bramante. “You’ll never go. This is a rich man’s world.” He shook his gray head, remembering. “When I was young they wrote it in fiery letters: THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE! Science, Comfort, and New Things for All! Ha! Eighty years. The Future becomes Now! Do we fly rockets? No! We live in shacks like our ancestors before us.”

“Perhaps my sons——” said Bodoni.

“No, nor their sons!” the old man shouted. “It’s the rich who have dreams and rockets!”

Bodoni hesitated. “Old man, I’ve saved three thousand dollars. It took me six years to save it. For my business, to invest in machinery. But every night for a month now I’ve been awake, I hear the rockets. I think. And tonight I’ve made up my mind. One of us will fly to Mars!” His eyes were shining and dark.

“Idiot,” snapped Bramante. “How will you choose? Who will go? If you go, your wife will hate you, for you will be just a bit nearer God, in space. When you tell your amazing trip to her, over the years, won’t bitterness gnaw at her?”
“No, no!”

“Yes! And your children? Will their lives be filled with the memory of Papa, who flew to Mars while they stayed here? What a senseless task you will set your boys. They will think of the rocket all their lives. They will lie awake. They will be sick with wanting it. Just as you are sick now. They will want to die if they cannot go. Don’t set that goal, I warn you. Let them be content with being poor. Turn their eyes down to their hands and to your junk yard, not up to the stars.”

“But—”

“Suppose your wife went? How would you feel, knowing she had seen and you had not? She would become holy. You would think of throwing her in the river. No, Bodoni, buy a new wrecking machine, which you need, and pull your dreams apart with it, and smash them to pieces.”

The old man subsided, gazing at the river in which, drowned, images of rockets burned down the sky.

“Good night,” said Bodoni.

“Sleep well,” said the other.

When the toast jumped from its silver box, Bodoni almost screamed. The night had been sleepless. Among his nervous children, beside his mountainous wife, Bodoni had twisted and stared at nothing. Bramante was right. Better to invest the money. Why save it when only one of the family could ride the rocket, while the others remained to melt in frustration?

“Fiorello, eat your toast,” said his wife, Maria.

“My throat is shriveled,” said Bodoni.

The children rushed in, the three boys fighting over a toy rocket, the two girls carrying dolls which duplicated the inhabitants of Mars, Venus, and Neptune, green mannequins with three yellow eyes and twelve fingers.

“I saw the Venus rocket!” cried Paolo.

“It took off, whoosh!” hissed Antonello.

“Children!” shouted Bodoni, hands to his ears. They stared at him. He seldom shouted. Bodoni arose. “Listen, all of you,” he said. “I have enough money to take one of us on the Mars rocket.”

Everyone yelled.
“You understand?” he asked. “Only one of us. Who?”

“Me, me, me!” cried the children.

“You,” said Maria.

“You,” said Bodoni to her. They all fell silent.

The children reconsidered. “Let Lorenzo go—he’s oldest.”

“Let Miriamne go—she’s a girl!”

“Think what you would see,” said Bodoni’s wife to him. But her eyes were strange. Her voice shook. “The meteors, like fish. The universe. The Moon. Someone should go who could tell it well on returning. You have a way with words.”

“Nonsense. So have you,” he objected.

Everyone trembled.

“Here,” said Bodoni unhappily. From a broom he broke straws of various lengths. “The short straw wins.” He held out his tight fist. “Choose.”

Solemnly each took his turn.

“Long straw.”

“Long straw.”

Another.

“Long straw.”

The children finished. The room was quiet.


She drew.

“The short straw,” she said.

“Ah,” sighed Lorenzo, half happy, half sad. “Mama goes to Mars.”

Bodoni tried to smile. “Congratulations. I will buy your ticket today.”
“Wait, Fiorello—”

“You can leave next week,” he murmured.

She saw the sad eyes of her children upon her, with the smiles beneath their straight, large noses. She returned the straw slowly to her husband. “I cannot go to Mars.”

“But why not?”

“I will be busy with another child.”

“What!”

She would not look at him. “It wouldn’t do for me to travel in my condition.”

He took her elbow. “Is this the truth?”

“Draw again. Start over.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?” he said incredulously.

“I didn’t remember.”

“Maria, Maria,” he whispered, patting her face. He turned to the children. “Draw again.”

Paolo immediately drew the short straw.

“I go to Mars!” He danced wildly. “Thank you, Father!”

The other children edged away. “That’s swell, Paolo.”

Paolo stopped smiling to examine his parents and his brothers and sisters. “I can go, can’t I?” he asked uncertainly.

“Yes.”

“And you’ll like me when I come back?”

“Of course.”

Paolo studied the precious broomstraw on his trembling hand and shook his head. He threw it away. “I forgot. School starts. I can’t go. Draw again.

But none would draw. A full sadness lay on them.

“None of us will go,” said Lorenzo.
“That’s best,” said Maria.

“Bramante was right,” said Bodoni.

With his breakfast curdled within him, Fiorello Bodoni worked in his junk yard, ripping metal, melting it, pouring out usable ingots. His equipment flaked apart; competition had kept him on the insane edge of poverty for twenty years. It was a very bad morning.

In the afternoon a man entered the junk yard and called up to Bodoni on his wrecking machine. “Hey, Bodoni, I got some metal for you!”

“What is it, Mr. Mathews?” asked Bodoni, listlessly.

“A rocket ship. What’s wrong? Don’t you want it?”

“Yes, yes!” He seized the man’s arm, and stopped, bewildered.

“Of course,” said Mathews, “it’s only a mockup. You know. When they plan a rocket they build a full-scale model first, of aluminum. You might make a small profit boiling her down. Let you have her for two thousand——”

Bodoni dropped his hand. “I haven’t the money.”

“Sorry. Thought I’d help you. Last time we talked you said how everyone outbid you on junk. Thought I’d slip this to you on the q.t. Well——”

“I need new equipment. I saved money for that.”

“I understand.”

“If I bought your rocket, I wouldn’t even be able to melt it down. My aluminum furnace broke down last week——”

“Sure.”

“I couldn’t possibly use the rocket if I bought it from you.”

“I know.”

Bodoni blinked and shut his eyes. He opened them and looked at Mr. Mathews. “But I am a great fool. I will take my money from the bank and give it to you.”

“But if you can’t melt the rocket down——”
“Deliver it,” said Bodoni.

“All right, if you say so. Tonight?”

“Tonight,” said Bodoni, “would be fine. Yes, I would like to have a rocket ship tonight.”

There was a moon. The rocket was white and big in the junk yard. It held the whiteness of the moon and the blueness of the stars. Bodoni looked at it and loved all of it. He wanted to pet it and lie against it, pressing it with his cheek, telling it all the secret wants of his heart.

He stared up at it. “You are all mine,” he said. “Even if you never move or spit fire, and just sit there and rust for fifty years, you are mine.”

The rocket smelled of time and distance. It was like walking into a clock. It was finished with Swiss delicacy. One might wear it on one’s watch fob. “I might even sleep here tonight,” Bodoni whispered excitedly.

He sat in the pilot’s seat.

He touched a lever.

He hummed in his shut mouth, his eyes closed.

The humming grew louder, louder, higher, higher, wilder, stranger, more exhilarating, trembling in him and leaning him forward and pulling him and the ship in a roaring silence and in a kind of metal screaming, while his fists flew over the controls, and his shut eyes quivered, and the sound grew and grew until it was a fire, a strength, a lifting and a pushing of power that threatened to tear him in half. He gasped. He hummed again and again, and did not stop, for it could not be stopped, it could only go on, his eyes tighter, his heart furious. “Taking off!” he screamed. The jolting concussion! The thunder! “The Moon!” he cried, eyes blind, tight. “The meteors!” The silent rush in volcanic light. “Mars. Oh, God, Mars! Mars!”

He fell back, exhausted and panting. His shaking hands came loose of the controls and his head tilted back wildly. He sat for a long time, breathing out and in, his heart slowing.

Slowly, slowly, he opened his eyes.

The junk yard was still there.

He sat motionless. He looked at the heaped piles of metal for a minute, his eyes never leaving them. Then, leaping up, he kicked the levers. “Take off, damn you!”

The ship was silent.
“I’ll show you!” he cried.

Out in the night air, stumbling, he started the fierce motor of his terrible wrecking machine and advanced upon the rocket. He maneuvered the massive weights into the moonlit sky. He readied his trembling hands to plunge the weights, to smash, to rip apart this insolently false dream, this silly thing for which he had paid his money, which would not move, which would not do his bidding. “I’ll teach you!” he shouted.

But his hand stayed.

The silver rocket lay in the light of the moon. And beyond the rocket stood the yellow lights of his home, a block away, burning warmly. He heard the family radio playing some distant music. He sat for half an hour considering the rocket and the house lights, and his eyes narrowed and grew wide. He stepped down from the wrecking machine and began to walk, and as he walked he began to laugh, and when he reached the back door of his house he took a deep breath and called, “Maria, Maria, start packing. We’re going to Mars!”

“Oh!”

“Ah!”

“I can’t believe it!”

“You will, you will.”

The children balanced in the windy yard, under the glowing rocket, not touching it yet. They started to cry.

Maria looked at her husband. “What have you done?” she said. “Taken our money for this? It will never fly.”

“It will fly,” he said, looking at it.

“Rocket ships cost millions. Have you millions?”

“It will fly,” he repeated steadily. “Now, go to the house, all of you. I have phone calls to make, work to do. Tomorrow we leave! Tell no one, understand? It is a secret.”

The children edged off from the rocket, stumbling. He saw their small, feverish faces in the house windows, far away.

Maria had not moved. “You have ruined us,” she said. “Our money used for this—this thing. When it should have been spent on equipment.”
“You will see,” he said.

Without a word she turned away.

“God help me,” he whispered, and started to work.

Through the midnight hours trucks arrived, packages were delivered, and Bodoni, smiling, exhausted his bank account. With blowtorch and metal stripping he assaulted the rocket, added, took away, worked fiery magics and secret insults upon it. He bolted nine ancient automobile motors into the rocket’s empty engine room. Then he welded the engine room shut, so none could see his hidden labor.

At dawn he entered the kitchen. “Maria,” he said, “I’m ready for breakfast.”

She would not speak to him.

At sunset he called to the children. “We’re ready! Come on!” The house was silent.

“I’ve locked them in the closet,” said Maria.

“What do you mean?” he demanded.

“You’ll be killed in that rocket,” she said. “What kind of rocket can you buy for two thousand dollars? A bad one!”

“Listen to me, Maria.”

“It will blow up. Anyway, you are no pilot.”

“Nevertheless, I can fly this ship. I have fixed it.”

“You have gone mad,” she said.

“Where is the key to the closet?”

“I have it here.”

He put out his hand. “Give it to me.”

She handed it to him. “You will kill them.”
“No, no.”

“Yes, you will. I feel it.”

He stood before her. “You won’t come along?”

“I’ll stay here,” she said.

“You will understand; you will see then,” he said, and smiled. He unlocked the closet. “Come, children. Follow your father.”

“Good-by, good-by, Mama!”

She stayed in the kitchen window, looking out at them, very straight and silent.

At the door of the rocket the father said, “Children, we will be gone a week. You must come back to school, and I to my business.” He took each of their hands in turn. “Listen. This rocket is very old and will fly only one more journey. It will not fly again. This will be the one trip of your life. Keep your eyes wide.”

“Yes, Papa.”

“Listen, keep your ears clean. Smell the smells of a rocket. Feel. Remember. So when you return you will talk of it all the rest of your lives.”

“Yes, Papa.”

The ship was quiet as a stopped clock. The airlock hissed shut behind them. He strapped them all, like tiny mummies, into rubber hammocks. “Ready?” he called.

“Ready!” all replied.

“Take-off!” He jerked ten switches. The rocket thundered and leaped. The children danced in their hammocks, screaming.

“Here comes the Moon!”

The moon dreamed by. Meteors broke into fireworks. Time flowed away in a serpentine of gas. The children shouted. Released from their hammocks, hours later, they peered from the ports. “There’s Earth!” “There’s Mars!”

The rocket dropped pink petals of fire while the hour dials spun; the child eyes dropped shut. At last they hung like drunken moths in their cocoon hammocks.

“Good,” whispered Bodoni, alone.
He tiptoed from the control room to stand for a long moment, fearful, at the airlock door.

He pressed a button. The airlock door swung wide. He stepped out. Into space? Into inky tides of meteor and gaseous torch? Into swift mileages and infinite dimensions?

No. Bodoni smiled.

All about the quivering rocket lay the junk yard.

Rusting, unchanged, there stood the padlocked junk-yard gate, the little silent house by the river, the kitchen window lighted, and the river going down to the same sea. And in the center of the junk yard, manufacturing a magic dream, lay the quivering, purring rocket. Shaking and roaring, bouncing the netted children like flies in a web.

Maria stood in the kitchen window.

He waved to her and smiled.

He could not see if she waved or not. A small wave, perhaps. A small smile.

The sun was rising.

Bodoni withdrew hastily into the rocket. Silence. All still slept. He breathed easily. Tying himself into a hammock, he closed his eyes. To himself he prayed, Oh, let nothing happen to the illusion in the next six days. Let all of space come and go, and red Mars come up under our ship, and the moons of Mars, and let there be no flaws in the color film. Let there be three dimensions; let nothing go wrong with the hidden mirrors and screens that mold the fine illusion. Let time pass without crisis.

He awoke.

Red Mars floated near the rocket.

“Papa!” The children thrashed to be free.

Bodoni looked and saw red Mars and it was good and there was no flaw in it and he was very happy.

At sunset on the seventh day the rocket stopped shuddering.

“We are home,” said Bodoni.

They walked across the junk yard from the open door of the rocket, their blood singing, their faces glowing.
“I have ham and eggs for all of you,” said Maria, at the kitchen door.

“Mama, Mama, you should have come, to see it, to see Mars, Mama, and meteors, and everything!”

“Yes,” she said.

At bedtime the children gathered before Bodoni. “We want to thank you, Papa.”

“It was nothing.”

“We will remember it for always, Papa. We will never forget.”

Very late in the night Bodoni opened his eyes. He sensed that his wife was lying beside him, watching him. She did not move for a very long time, and then suddenly she kissed his cheeks and his forehead. “What’s this?” he cried.

“You’re the best father in the world,” she whispered.

“Why?”

“Now I see,” she said. “I understand.”

She lay back and closed her eyes, holding his hand. “Is it a very lovely journey?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Perhaps,” she said, “perhaps, some night, you might take me on just a little trip, do you think?”

“Just a little one, perhaps,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said. “Good night.”

“Good night,” said Fiorello Bodoni.
Epilogue

IT WAS almost midnight. The moon was high in the sky now. The Illustrated Man lay motionless. I had seen what there was to see. The stories were told; they were over and done.

There remained only that empty space upon the Illustrated Man’s back, that area of jumbled colors and shapes.

Now, as I watched, the vague patch began to assemble itself, in slow dissolvings from one shape to another and still another. And at last a face formed itself there, a face that gazed out at me from the colored flesh, a face with a familiar nose and mouth, familiar eyes.

It was very hazy. I saw only enough of the Illustration to make me leap up. I stood therein the moonlight, afraid that the wind or the stars might move and wake the monstrous gallery at my feet. But he slept on, quietly.

The picture on his back showed the Illustrated Man himself, with his fingers about my neck, choking me to death. I didn’t wait for it to become clear and sharp and a definite picture.

I ran down the road in the moonlight. I didn’t look back. A small town lay ahead, dark and asleep. I knew that, long before morning, I would reach the town. . . .

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