

## Part 2

### Summary

### Analysis & Themes

Montag and Mildred spend the afternoon flipping through books, reading passages, and trying to make sense of what they read. Mildred doesn't see the point of it. She would rather be in the parlor with her TV "family" and is also nervous about what Captain Beatty would do if he found the books. Montag is more worried about Mildred's depression, Clarisse's disappearance, and the bombers he hears flying overhead. He says that their country has started and won two atomic wars since 1990, yet no one talks about the rest of the world, which supposedly hates their country and is starving. He doesn't understand it, but he hopes the books might help.

Montag remembers a retired English professor he met in the park a year ago. The man, Faber, was fearful of Montag at first, but after Montag assured Faber that he was safe and the two of them talked for a while, Faber felt secure enough to recite poetry. The man made an impression on Montag—he was less interested in things than in the meaning of things. At the end of their talk, Faber gave Montag his phone number. Now Montag decides to call Faber for help. On the phone, Montag asks

how many copies exist of the Bible, Shakespeare, and Plato. Faber, frightened and thinking this is some sort of trick, says there are none and hangs up.

Montag shows Mildred the book he took from the old woman's house: it's a Bible, maybe the last Bible in existence. Mildred tells him to hand it in to Captain Beatty, but if it really is the last Bible Montag doesn't want to destroy it. He would rather hand in a substitute book. Montag then realizes that if Beatty knows that he took the Bible, by handing in the substitute Montag will make it clear that he has more than one book. He decides that he'll have to get a replica of the Bible made.

Mildred yells at Montag that he's ruining them. Soon, however, she calms down and tells him that her friends are coming over to watch a show called the White Clown. Montag, hoping to get through to her, asks her, Does the White Clown love her? Does her TV "family" love her? She says it's a silly question. He leaves, dejected, and heads for the subway to go to Faber's house.

On the subway, Montag feels numb. He remembers a time as a child at the beach when he tried, unsuccessfully, to fill a sieve with sand. Now he realizes he's holding the Bible open on his lap. If he can read the text in front of him and memorize it, he thinks that he can keep some of the sand in the sieve. He tries to read a passage but he's distracted by an advertisement for toothpaste. He stands up, screams for the advertisement to shut up, and waves the Bible, alarming the other passengers, before he gets off.

Faber is frightened when Montag shows up at his house, but is reassured when Montag shows him the Bible. Faber describes himself as a coward because he didn't speak up long ago when he saw the way society was changing. He then asks Montag to tell him why he's come.

Montag says that something is missing from people's lives, and books are the only things he knows for sure are missing. So, maybe books are the answer. Faber responds that it's not the books that are missing, it's what's in the books—and could also be on radio and television, but isn't.

Faber says three things are missing from people's lives. The first is quality information that has a detailed and "textured" understanding of life. As a parable, Faber mentions the story of Hercules and Antaeus, a giant wrestler who was invincible so long as he stood firmly on the earth, but whom Hercules defeated after lifting him off the ground. He agrees when Montag relays Mildred's contention that TV seems more real than books, but he responds that he prefers books because television is too fast and controlling—you can't stop watching or you will miss what's happening. With books, in contrast, you can put them down and consider them to digest what they say before reading on.

*In his confusion and despair, Montag places his hopes in books. But he has no practice reading or understanding complicated ideas or arguments, so understanding what he reads is a real struggle. Mildred tries to read along with Montag, but she's addicted to the easy familiar pleasure of watching TV, and is afraid of the authorities who enforce the ban on books.*

*Montag doesn't think he can get what he needs from books on his own, since he has no practice reading. Contrast the difficulty of reading and understanding books with the easiness of watching TV, which anyone can watch and understand immediately. But Faber,*

*conditioned by years of violently enforced censorship, is too fearful to offer help.*

*Like the old woman in the house, Montag is now willing to put himself in danger for the sake of preserving books. He has taken a stance against his society, though at this point he is not in outright rebellion, but he is trying to protect the Bible while also protecting himself.*

*Mildred can't maintain feelings of anger for any length of time—like everyone else, she's too busy being excited about the next TV show! Unlike Montag, who engaged with Clarisse's question about love, Mildred dismisses her question as silly to avoid thinking about it.*

*The sand falling through the sieve is a metaphor for knowledge in this society in general, and for Montag's effort to get and keep knowledge in particular. Montag no longer accepts the basic values of his society, and until he can find some other values to take their place, he is lost.*

*Faber believes in books and knowledge, but as of now does not have the courage to stand up for them. Unlike Mildred, who conforms because she is addicted to distraction, Faber conforms out of fear.*

*Faber's point here is that it's knowledge and deep thought that are important, not what contains the knowledge and thought.*

*Faber's mention of the parable of Hercules and Antaeus suggests that mass media has lost its connection to real life by leaving out thought and knowledge. In turn, it provides no strength to those who consume it. While Faber believes that any form of media can contain the type of information he prizes in books, he thinks that the effort required to read books makes them the best suited type of media for disseminating rich and complicated ideas.*

7.

The second missing thing in people's lives is leisure time. Leisure time doesn't mean hours spent speeding in cars or sitting in front of four-wall TV shows. Instead, it means the leisure of silence and having the space in one's life to examine and digest one's reading and experience.

*There is plenty of leisure time in the society of Fahrenheit 451, but it is consumed by noise, images, speed, and explosions. No one really processes what they see or hear or feel.*

8.

Faber's third requirement is the freedom for people to act based on what they learn when they have access to both quality information and the peace of mind to think it through.

*This is a reminder that the threat of physical violence hovers over people like Faber and now Montag.*

Montag wants to do something, but Faber is reluctant to act. Faber does hypothetically suggest a scheme of printing books and planting them in the firehouses to discredit the firemen. Montag jumps at the idea, but as a bomber flies overhead, Faber says that the firemen are actually just a symptom because the populace doesn't want to read anyway. Faber says that they'd be better off just waiting for the coming war to destroy the current civilization.

*The weight of seeing his civilization decay and of his feelings of cowardice have left Faber almost unwilling to act. He can't face risking anything for what seems like a losing cause. Nevertheless, Montag's appearance at his home gives him a tiny spark of hope.*

Unwilling not to act, Montag rips a page out of the Bible, then another, until Faber's agrees to help. Faber promises to get in touch with an old friend of his who owns a printing press. He also agrees to help Montag deal with Captain Beatty and give Beatty a substitute book instead of the Bible. Faber gives Montag a tiny two-way radio transmitter he's built that can fit in someone's ear. The device will allow Faber to hear whatever Montag hears and to talk Montag through difficult situations.

*Montag is worried that Captain Beatty will talk him out of the resolve he now feels. The Captain has a way with words, but so does Faber, and with Faber's help, Montag may learn and grow stronger. Faber and Beatty are set up as opposites.*

As Montag takes the subway home, Faber reads to him from the Bible while pleasant announcements that the country has mobilized for war play over the radio.

*The contrast between Montag and Faber's reading of the Bible and the casual broadcasts about the war big shows the superficiality of this society.*

9/3

At home, Mildred's friends Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles arrive to watch the White Clown. Faber, through Montag's earpiece, tells him not to do anything and to be patient, but Montag pulls the plug on the TV show and tries to talk with them. The women have no concern about the coming war—Mrs. Phelps says that if her husband, who's serving in the Army, is killed then she'll just marry again. Their apathy, disconnection from their families, and their decision to vote for President Noble because he looked nice while the opposition candidate was fat, enrages Montag, who leaves the room.

*Mildred and her friends (and by extension all the people of this society) also seem utterly superficial. They don't care about the war, have no connections to their family, don't care about raising the next generation, and their opinions about politics are shallow and uninformed. They don't seem to have any real interests besides entertainment.*

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Moments later, Montag returns with a book of poetry. Although Faber, through the radio earpiece, begs him not to, Montag reads a poem—"Dover Beach," by Matthew Arnold. When he finishes, Mrs. Phelps is crying, while Mrs. Bowles denounces poetry in general and Montag for making them endure the messiness of poetry. At Faber's urging, Montag drops the book in the incinerator. He gives Mrs. Bowles an earful before she leaves, listing all the sad things that have happened in her life that she refuses to think about. The friends depart, Mildred rushes into the bedroom and takes sleeping pills. Faber calls Montag a fool through the earpiece. Montag finally removes it from his ear and shoves it in his pocket.

*The women can't handle hearing the poetry. One reacts with anger and denial, another is reduced to sobs. The suggestion is that the poem contains the kind of reality that these women—like most people in this society—hide from themselves with television, radio, and fast cars. When they are exposed to it, they must also face their own hidden despair.*

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Montag searches the house for his books. He finds them where Mildred has put them behind the refrigerator, and discovers that she has burned several of them already. He hides the rest in the backyard. He leaves for work, feeling guilty that he has upset the women, and wonders if they are right to care only about immediate pleasures. Faber, talking to Montag through the reinstated earpiece, tells him that fun is fine if there is peace, but that now the world is on the brink of war.

*Montag has made his choice to protect the books above all else, but he has still not completely made his break from his job. At this point he is also not entirely convinced that the pursuit of instant gratification is hollow.*

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At the firehouse, Montag hands over a book to Beatty, who welcomes him back to work and tosses the book in the wastebasket without reading the title. While the firemen play cards, Beatty recites contradictory passages from books by famous authors in an attempt to convince Montag that books are useless and untrustworthy. An alarm comes in and the firemen head out into the night. Beatty drives at breakneck speed to their destination. It is Montag's house.

*Beatty's intimate knowledge of literature is impressive for someone whose job is to burn books. In fact, it's difficult to believe that Beatty, who has committed so many passages to memory, truly thinks the books those passages come from have no value and should be destroyed. Perhaps Beatty is himself conflicted about his job as a fireman...*