

RAY BRADBURY STORIES VOLUME 2

Also By Ray Bradbury

Ahmed and the Oblivion Machines
The Anthem Sprinters
Bradbury Speaks
Bradbury Stories
The Cat's Pajamas
Dandelion Wine
Dark Carnival
The Day it Rained Forever
Death is a Lonely Business
Driving Blind
Fahrenheit 451
Farewell Summer
From The Dust Returned
The Golden Apples of the Sun
A Graveyard for Lunatics
Green Shadows, White Whale
The Halloween Tree
I Sing the Body Electric!
The Illustrated Man
Lets All Kill Constance
Long After Midnight
The Machineries of Joy
The Martian Chronicles
A Medicine for Melancholy
Moby Dick (screenplay)
Now and Forever
The October Country
One More for the Road
Quicker Than the Eye
R is for Rocket
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S is for Space
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Something Wicked This Way Comes
A Sound of Thunder
The Toynbee Convector
When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed
Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run Round in Robot Town
The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit
Yestermorrow
Zen in the Art of Writing

Ray Bradbury Stories
Volume 2

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WITH LOVE TO MY THREE SAMUELS:

Number One, in the past,
SAMUEL HINKSTON BRADBURY, my grandfather.

Number Two, in the present,
SAMUEL HANDLEMAN, my grandson.

Number Three, in the future,
SAM WELLER, who is writing my life.

Introduction

It is hard for me to believe that in one lifetime I have written so many stories.

But on the other hand I often wonder what other writers do with their time.

Writing, for me, is akin to breathing. It is not something I plan or schedule; it's something I just *do*. All the stories collected in this book seized on me at the strangest hours, compelling me to head for my typewriter and put them down on paper before they went away.

A good example of this is 'Banshee.' When I was working for John Huston in Ireland on the screenplay of *Moby Dick*, we spent many late evenings, sitting around the fire, drinking Irish whiskey, which I did not much care for, but only drank because he loved it. And sometimes Huston would pause in the middle of drinking and talking and close his eyes to listen to the wind wailing outside the house. Then his eyes would snap open and he would point a finger at me and cry that the banshees were out in the Irish weather and maybe I should go outdoors and see if it was true and bring them in.

He did this so often to scare me that it lodged in my mind and when I got home to America I finally wrote a story in response to his antics.

'The Toynbee Convector' was born because of my reaction to the bombardment of despair we so frequently find in our newspaper headlines and television reportage, and the feeling of imminent doom in a society that has triumphed over circumstances again and again, but fails to look back and realize where it has come from, and what it has achieved.

One day, overcome with this feeling, I had to do something about it and so created a character to speak my thoughts.

'The Laurel and Hardy Love Affair' comes from a lifetime of the affection I have for this wonderful team.

When I arrived in Ireland many years ago I opened the *Irish Times* and discovered therein a small ad, which read:

**TODAY
ONE TIME ONLY!
A BENEFIT FOR THE IRISH ORPHANS
LAUREL & HARDY
IN PERSON!**

I ran down to the theater and was fortunate enough to purchase the last available ticket, front row center! The curtain went up and those dear men performed the most wonderful scenes from their greatest films. I sat there in joy and amazement, with tears rolling down my cheeks.

When I got home I looked back on all this and remembered an occasion when a friend of mine took me to the stairs up which Laurel and Hardy had carried the piano box, only to be chased down the hill by it. My story had to follow.

‘The Pedestrian’ was a precursor to *Fahrenheit 451*. I had dinner with a friend fifty-five years ago and after dining we decided to take a walk along Wilshire Boulevard. Within minutes we were stopped by a police car. The policeman asked us what we were doing. I replied, ‘Putting one foot in front of the other,’ which was the wrong answer. The policeman looked at me suspiciously because, after all, the sidewalks were empty: nobody in the whole city of Los Angeles was using them as a walkway.

I went home, sorely irritated at being stopped for simply walking – a natural, human activity – and wrote a story about a pedestrian in the future who is arrested and executed for doing just that.

A few months later I took that pedestrian for a walk in the night, had him turn a corner and meet a young girl named Clarisse McClellan. Nine days later, *Fahrenheit 451* was born as a short novella called ‘The Firemen.’

‘The Garbage Collector’ was inspired by my reaction to a newspaper item that appeared in the Los Angeles newspapers in early 1952, when the mayor announced that if an atomic bomb fell on Los Angeles, the resulting bodies would be picked up by garbage collectors. I was so inflamed by this remark that I sat down and wrote the story, fueled by my outrage.

‘By the Numbers!’ has its roots in reality. At one time, many years ago, I went, on occasional afternoons, to swim at the Ambassador Hotel pool with friends. The man in charge of that pool was a strict disciplinarian and used to stand his young son by the edge of the pool and give him all sorts of rigid instructions about life. Watching this ongoing lecture, day after day, I could not help but think that at some future time the son would react violently. Brooding at this seemingly unavoidable scenario, I sat down and wrote the story.

‘Lafayette, Farewell’ is based on a real and tragic tale told to me by a cinematographer who lived next door to Maggie and me for many years. Occasionally he came over to my house to visit with me and have a glass

of wine. He told me how, way back in time, during the last months of World War I in 1918, he had been a member of the Lafayette Escadrille. As we talked, tears streamed down his face as he remembered shooting down German bi-planes; the faces of the doomed, handsome young men still haunted him after all those years. I could do nothing but offer my services as a storywriter to try to help him in the middle of his haunting.

At home, later that night, I wrote a letter to a friend of mine in Paris and said I had the most wonderful experience that afternoon of hearing the crowds of Mexico City over the telephone. As I wrote the letter to my friend it turned into a short story about an old man who listens to far places with long distance calls.

‘The Sound of Summer Running’ began with a bang. I was on a bus crossing Westwood Village when a young boy jumped on the bus, jammed his money in the box, ran down the aisle, and threw himself into a seat across from me. I looked at him with great admiration thinking, my god, if I had that much energy I could write a short story every day, three poems each night, and a novel by the end of the month. I looked down at his feet and saw there the reason for his vitality: a pair of wonderful bright new tennis shoes. And I suddenly remembered those special days of my growing up years – the beginning of every summer – when my father would take me down to the shoe store and buy me a new pair of tennis shoes, which gave me back the energy of the world. I could hardly wait to get home to sit down and write a story about a boy whose main desire is to own a pair of tennis shoes so he can run through summer.

‘The Great Collision of Monday Last’ was caused by my picking up a copy of the *Irish Times* in Dublin and reading the terrible fact that during the year 1953, 375 bike riders had been killed in Ireland. I thought, how amazing. We rarely read anything like that at home; it was always people dying in car accidents. Investigating further I discovered the reason. There were tens of thousands of bicycles all over Ireland; people going 40 or 50 miles an hour and colliding head on, so that when their heads struck, they sustained serious skull injuries. I thought: Nobody in the world knows this! Maybe I should write a short story about it. Which is what I did.

‘The Drummer Boy of Shiloh’ had its genesis in an obituary in the *Los Angeles Times* concerning a bit player in motion pictures named Olin Howland. I’d seen him in scores of films over the years and now I was reading his death notice, which mentioned the fact that his grandfather had been the drummer boy at Shiloh. Those words were so magical, so evocative, so sad, that I was shocked into going immediately to my typewriter and putting those words down. This short story followed within the next hour.

‘Darling Adolf’ was caused very simply. Crossing a Universal Studios lot one afternoon I encountered a movie extra dressed in a Nazi uniform and wearing a Hitler mustache. I wondered what might happen to him

wandering around the studio or out in the street, what kind of reaction there might be to a person who resembles Hitler. The story was written that night.

I've never been in charge of my stories, they've always been in charge of me. As each new one has called to me, ordering me to give it voice and form and life, I've followed the advice I've shared with other writers over the years: Jump off the cliff and build your wings on the way down.

Over a period of more than sixty years I've jumped off many cliffs and struggled wildly on my typewriter to finish a story so as to make a soft landing. And, during the last few years I've looked back at the time when I was a teenager standing on a street corner, selling newspapers, and writing every day, not realizing how terrible my efforts were. Why did I do it, why did I keep jumping off those cliffs?

The answer is an immense cliché: Love.

I was so busy rushing headlong into the future, loving libraries and books and authors with all my heart and soul, was so consumed with becoming myself that I simply didn't notice that I was short, homely, and untalented. Perhaps, in some corner of my mind, I did know. But I persisted – the need to write, to create, coursed like blood through my body, and still does.

I always dreamed of someday going into a library and looking up and seeing a book of mine leaning against the shoulder of L. Frank Baum or Edgar Rice Burroughs, and down below my other heroes, Edgar Allan Poe, H. G. Wells, and Jules Verne. My wild love for them and their worlds, and for others like Somerset Maugham and John Steinbeck kept me so invigorated with passion that I could not see that I was the Hunchback of Notre Dame in their grand company.

But as the years passed I slipped my skins, one by one, and finally became a short story writer, an essayist, a poet, and a playwright. It took all those years to leave my other selves behind, but love was the thing that called me on.

Within this collection you will find representative tales from the many years of my long career. For all those years and for that great love that has kept me going, I am deeply grateful. My eyes fill with tears as I review the table of contents of this volume – all my dear, dear friends – the monsters and angels of my imagination.

Here they all are. A grand collection. I hope you will agree.

Ray Bradbury

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