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## THE ILLUSTRATED MAN

THE GRAND MASTER EDITIONS



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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 Veldt*

“George, I wish you’d look at the nursery.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, then.”

“I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it.”

“What would a psychologist want with a nursery?”

“You know very well what he’d want.” His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.

“It’s just that the nursery is different now than it was.”

“All right, let’s have a look.”

They walked down the hall of their soundproofed HappyLife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them. Their approach sensitized a switch somewhere and the nursery light flicked on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off as they left them behind, with a soft automaticity.

“Well,” said George Hadley.

They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house. “But nothing’s too good for our children,” George had said.

The nursery was silent. It was empty as a jungle glade at hot high noon. The walls were blank and two dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls began to purr and recede into crystalline distance, it seemed, and presently an African veldt appeared, in three

dimensions, on all sides, in color reproduced to the final pebble and bit of straw. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun.

George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.

“Let’s get out of this sun,” he said. “This is a little too real. But I don’t see anything wrong.”

“Wait a moment, you’ll see,” said his wife.

Now the hidden odorophonics were beginning to blow a wind of odor at the two people in the middle of the baked veldtland. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on grassy sod, the papery rustling of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. The shadow flickered on George Hadley’s upturned, sweating face.

“Filthy creatures,” he heard his wife say.

“The vultures.”

“You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they’re on their way to the water hole. They’ve just been eating,” said Lydia. “I don’t know what.”

“Some animal.” George Hadley put his hand up to shield off the burning light from his squinted eyes. “A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe.”

“Are you sure?” His wife sounded peculiarly tense.

“No, it’s a little late to be sure,” he said, amused. “Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what’s left.”

“Did you hear that scream?” she asked.

“No.”

“About a minute ago?”

“Sorry, no.”

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with admiration for