



# The Pedestrian

Short Story by RAY BRADBURY

*“The lone car turned  
a corner quite  
suddenly and flashed  
a fierce white cone  
of light upon him.”*

## Connect to Your Life

**Walking Habits** In the story you are about to read, Leonard Mead is the pedestrian, out walking one night “for air, and to see, and just to walk.” As he walks he passes a number of homes, wondering what TV programs the people inside are watching. When you yourself take a walk, is it merely to get somewhere? Or do you ever walk just to “get away from it all”? Jot down a description of the kind of walking you do.

## Build Background

**It's a TV World** By the mid-1990s, 99 percent of households in the United States had a television, and 38 percent had more than one. There were 776 televisions for every 1,000 Americans, the world's highest ratio. It was determined that each American TV was on for an average of 51 to 52 hours per week, or more than 7 hours per day. Ray Bradbury anticipated such statistics as far back as 1951, when he wrote this story—except that he imagined that TV viewing would not reach such a high level until well into the 21st century!

## Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS DESCRIPTION** Bradbury brings “The Pedestrian” to life through **description**—writing that helps a reader picture the **scenes**, **events**, and **characters** in a story. Description often involves the use of precise language and the composing of vivid and original phrases. These are found in this sample passage:

*There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside.*

Think about the effects created by the descriptive details you encounter in the story.

**ACTIVE READING RECOGNIZING SENSORY DETAILS** **Sensory details** are references to sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. In appealing to the five senses, they help readers to more fully experience what is happening. Notice the senses Bradbury calls to mind in this passage from the story:

*During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, . . . as the scarab-beetles, a faint incense pattering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions.*

**READER'S NOTEBOOK** As you read this story, record some sensory details that help you experience Leonard Mead's night in the city. Here's an example:

Sensory Details	
Phrase or Sentence	Sense(s) Appealed to
“patterns of frosty air . . . like the smoke of a cigar”	sight

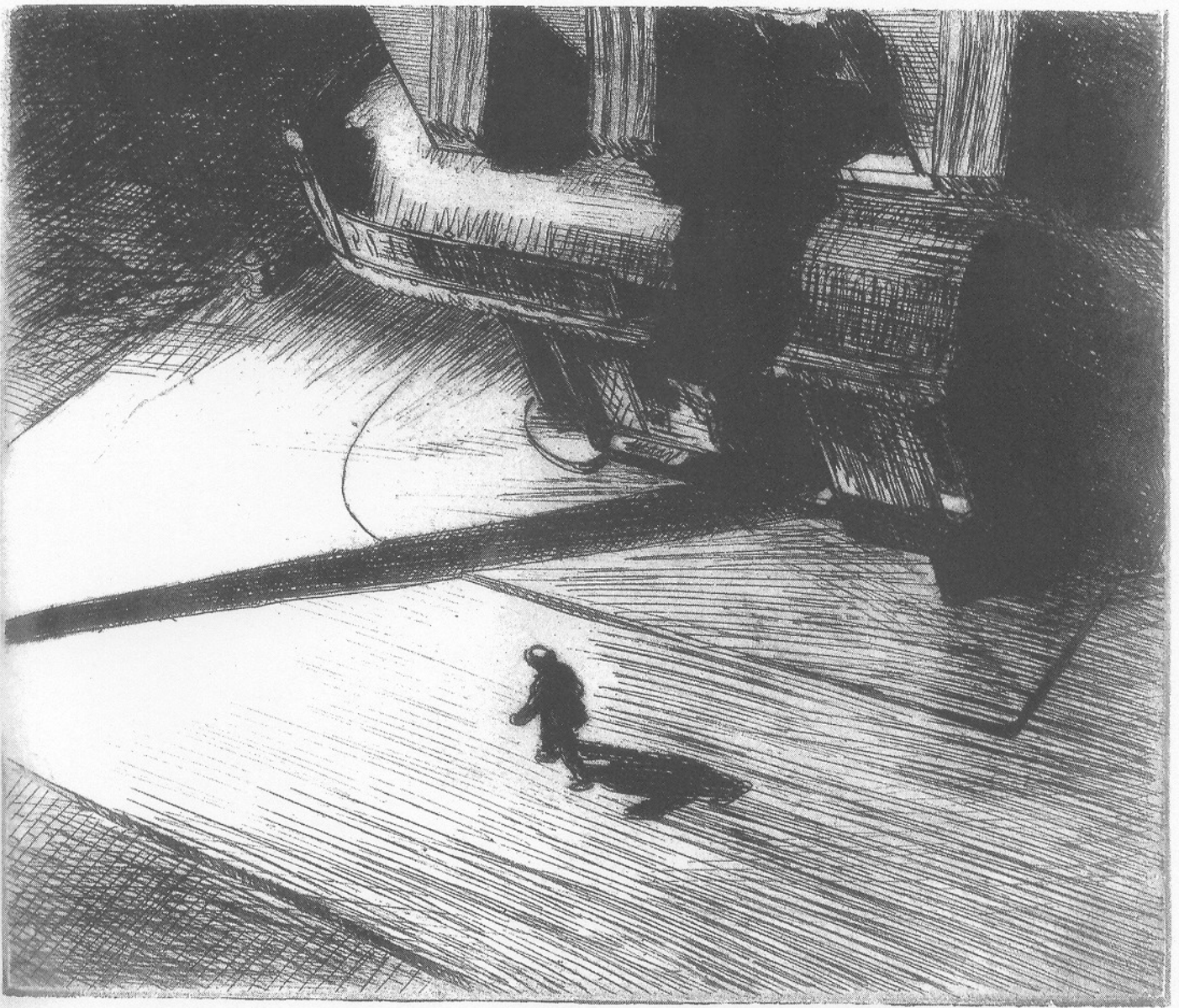
# The Pedestrian

Ray Bradbury

**To enter out** into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unlike walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomblike building was still open.

Mr. Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet



*Night Shadows* (1921), Edward Hopper. Etching, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ "  $\times$  8 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, F. M. Hall Collection (1951.H-333).

making no noise on the lumpy walk. For long ago he had wisely changed to sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent<sup>1</sup> squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure, himself, in the early November evening.

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, toward the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches

filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction, and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

"Hello, in there," he whispered to every house on every side as he moved. "What's up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see

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1. intermittent: appearing from time to time.

the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?"

The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in midcountry. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry river beds, the streets, for company.

"What is it now?" he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. "Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?"

Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moon-white house? He hesitated, but went on when nothing more happened. He stumbled over a particularly uneven section of sidewalk. The cement was vanishing under flowers and grass. In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not one in all that time.

**He** came to a cloverleaf intersection which stood silent where two main highways crossed the town.

During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, the gas stations open, a great insect rustling and a ceaseless jockeying for position as the scarab-beetles, a faint incense pattering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions. But now these highways, too, were like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance.

He turned back on a side street, circling around toward his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn toward it.

A metallic voice called to him:

"Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!"

He halted.

"Put up your hands!"

"But—" he said.

"Your hands up! Or we'll shoot!"

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left, wasn't that correct? Ever since a year ago, 2052, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

"Your name?" said the police car in a metallic whisper. He couldn't see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

"Leonard Mead," he said.

"Speak up!"

"Leonard Mead!"

"Business or profession?"

"I guess you'd call me a writer."

"No profession," said the police car, as if talking to itself. The light held him fixed, like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

"You might say that," said Mr. Mead. He hadn't written in years. Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the grey or multicolored lights touching their faces, but never really touching *them*.

"No profession," said the phonograph voice, hissing. "What are you doing out?"

"Walking," said Leonard Mead.

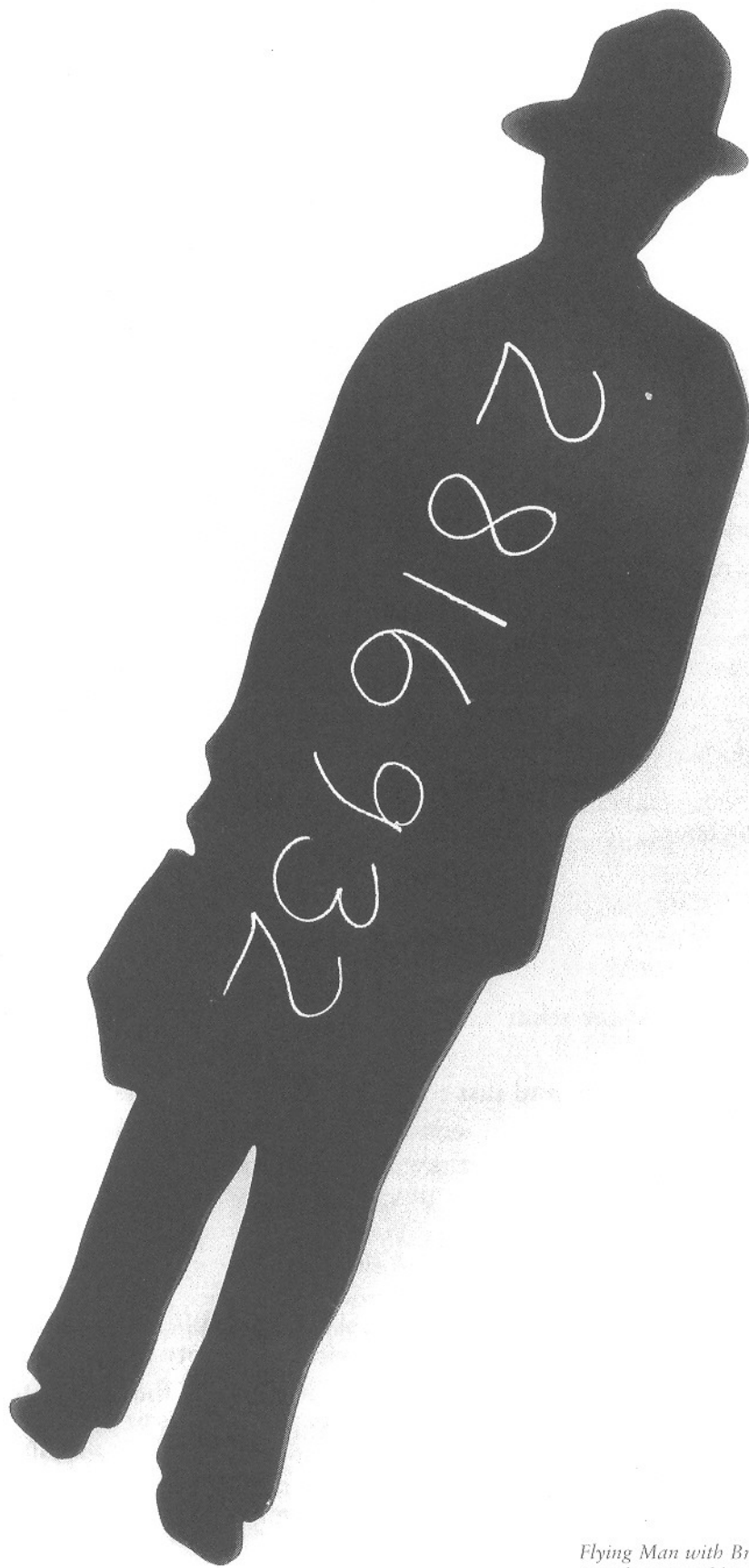
"Walking!"

"Just walking," he said simply, but his face felt cold.

"Walking, just walking, walking?"

"Yes, sir."





*Flying Man with Briefcase No. 2816932 (1983), Jonathan Borofsky. Painted Gatorfoam, 94½" × 24½" × 1". Copyright © 1983 Jonathan Borofsky/Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, California.*

“Walking where? For what?”

“Walking for air. Walking to see.”

“Your address!”

“Eleven South Saint James Street.”

“And there is air in your house, you have an air conditioner, Mr. Mead?”

“Yes.”

“And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?”

“No.”

“No?” There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

“Are you married, Mr. Mead?”

“No.”

“Not married,” said the police voice behind the fiery beam. The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were gray and silent.

“Nobody wanted me,” said Leonard Mead with a smile.

“Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to!”

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

“Just walking, Mr. Mead?”

“Yes.”

“But you haven’t explained for what purpose.”

“I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk.”

“Have you done this often?”

“Every night for years.”

The police car sat in the center of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

“Well, Mr. Mead,” it said.

“Is that all?” he asked politely.

“Yes,” said the voice. “Here.” There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide. “Get in.”

“Wait a minute, I haven’t done anything!”

“Get in.”

“I protest!”

“Mr. Mead.”

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all.

“Get in.”

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic;<sup>2</sup> it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

“Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi,” said the iron voice. “But—”

“Where are you taking me?”

The car hesitated, or rather gave a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dripping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes. “To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies.”<sup>3</sup>

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud.

The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead.

They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

“That’s my house,” said Leonard Mead.

No one answered him.

The car moved down the empty river-bed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty sidewalks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night. ❖

**“Just walking, Mr. Mead?”**

2. antiseptic: a substance used to kill germs.

3. Regressive Tendencies: habits of acting in ways that belong to a more primitive stage of development.

## Connect to the Literature

### 1. What Do You Think?

Do you think Leonard Mead will ever again walk his city's streets? Explain.

### Comprehension Check

- What interrupts Leonard's walk one November night?
- What makes him appear suspicious to the police?
- Where is he taken at the end of the story?

## Think Critically

2. **ACTIVE READING** **RECOGNIZING SENSORY DETAILS** Review the examples of sensory details that you recorded in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. Which passage do you think best conveys Leonard Mead's separation from others?

3. What are your impressions of Leonard's world of 2053?

THINK ABOUT

- what Leonard hasn't seen in ten years of nightly walks
- what passes for "normal" night behavior in the city
- the condition of the city's sidewalks

4. Of Leonard's several responses to the police car, which do you think gets him into the most trouble? Why?

5. Would you call Leonard a rebel? Why or why not?

6. What kind of statement about TV do you think Bradbury tries to make?

## Extend Interpretations

7. **Critic's Corner** According to Bradbury's biographer David Mogan, "The Pedestrian" is science fiction that comments on present-day irritations with society and technology by portraying a future in which the problems are exaggerated. On the basis of the selections you've read in this Author Study, what would you say are some of Bradbury's specific concerns about the modern world? Defend your views with evidence from the selections.

8. **Connect to Life** Bradbury's science fiction stories have been termed "warning fictions." Which of the three stories in this Author Study do you feel holds the most powerful warning for readers of your generation? Explain the reasons for your choice.

## Literary Analysis

**DESCRIPTION** **Description** is the process by which a writer creates a word picture of a scene, event, or character. Good descriptive writing appeals to the senses, helping the reader to see, hear, smell, taste, or feel the subject being described. It relies on vivid and precise language.

In the following passage, Bradbury reveals the impersonal, insensitive way that Leonard Mead is being observed:

*And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows.*

**Paired Activity** With a partner, choose three or four more examples of description that you found particularly well crafted. Discuss how each example contributes to the mood of the story.

**REVIEW** **CHARACTER** The individuals who participate in the action of a literary work are called **characters**. The most important characters are main characters, and the less prominent ones are minor characters. "The Pedestrian" has an unusual cast of characters. Briefly review the story. How much do you feel you know about the story's main character? Explain. The robot voices in the police car can be considered minor characters. What human traits do you feel they imitate, if any?