

# The Other Foot



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAY BRADBURY

A voracious reader, the young Ray Bradbury was hungry for fantastical books that would let him travel outside the confines of his small Illinois hometown. Bradbury began writing short stories in high school, after moving with his family to Los Angeles in 1934, and sold his first to a magazine called *Super Science Stories* in 1941. Bradbury's work initially appeared only in niche magazines specializing in fantasy and the supernatural. He quickly began to receive more mainstream attention, however, and in 1946 one of his stories was included in the annual publication *The Best American Short Stories*. The following year, his story "Homecoming," published in the widely-distributed magazine *Mademoiselle*, received the O. Henry Award. By the end of the 1940s, his work was appearing regularly in many of the most significant magazines in America. Nevertheless, editors of major American publishing houses showed little interest in Bradbury's work, preferring full-length novels. Bradbury struggled to land a contract until Doubleday publisher Walter Bradbury (no relation) suggested the author compile his many stories about Martians that had appeared in pulp magazines into a novel. This led to the publication of one of his most famous works, *The Martian Chronicles*, in 1950, as well as a contract for Bradbury's next book, *The Illustrated Man* (1951). The eleven novels that Bradbury published over the course of his career all grew out of his short stories. The eighteen stories that comprise *The Illustrated Man* clearly retain their individual identities, while in books such as [Fahrenheit 451](#) (1953), [Dandelion Wine](#) (1957), and [Something Wicked This Way Comes](#) (1962), Bradbury stitched his ideas together with strong narrative threads to craft volumes that read more like standard novels. Even so, Bradbury would never abandon the short story form; by the time of his death at the age of 91, he had published hundreds of such stories, many of which remain among the most beloved literary works of the twentieth century. His many honors included a National Medal of the Arts, a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation, an Oscar nomination, and an Emmy Award.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Bradbury's novels all grew out of his own short stories, and his oeuvre features a web of connecting ideas and recurrent themes. For instance, a 1950 story titled "The Illustrated Man" (a precursor to the novel of the same name that was published one year later) features a carnival worker whose tattoos tell the future. Magical tattoos are also a crucial part of Bradbury's novel [Something Wicked This Way Comes](#), which itself derives its

title from William Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#)—a play that Bradbury quotes in his story "The Exiles." The examination of book burning that provides the backbone of "The Exiles" would soon grow into the novel [Fahrenheit 451](#). Meanwhile, the many stories in *The Illustrated Man* that take place on Mars recall not only Bradbury's novel *The Martian Chronicles*, but also the dozens of stories, sprinkled throughout his many collections, that unfurl on the Red Planet. Beyond Bradbury's own work, "The Other Foot" is linked thematically to post-war books such as George Orwell's [Animal Farm](#) (1945) and [1984](#) (1949), both of which similarly grapple with existential threats to democracy and human kind.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Other Foot"
- **When Written:** 1947-1951
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles
- **When Published:** The individual stories were published between 1947 and 1951, in a variety of magazines; these were collected published as the novel *The Illustrated Man* in 1951.
- **Literary Period:** Post-war
- **Genre:** Science Fiction
- **Setting:** Mars
- **Climax:** When the white man's rocket lands on Mars
- **Antagonist:**
- **Point of View:** Third person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Recognition.** Ray Bradbury's first mainstream success was a short story published by the magazine *Mademoiselle* in 1947. The editor who accepted Bradbury's story was none other than Truman Capote, a then-unknown writer who would soon gain fame with his novels [In Cold Blood](#) and [Breakfast at Tiffany's](#).

**Hit Songs.** In 1972, Elton John and Bernie Taupin composed "Rocket Man," a song inspired by Bradbury's short story of the same name. The song would go on to become a major hit worldwide, and one of *Rolling Stone's* "greats songs of all time."



## PLOT SUMMARY

Hattie Johnson's children are buzzing with anticipation over the news: for the first time in twenty years, a white man is coming to Mars. The rocket is due to land later that day, and although her young boys are excited, Hattie has a feeling that

the white man's visit will stir up trouble. Her kids pester her to tell them what white people are like and why they don't live on Mars. Hattie explains that white people live on Earth, and that twenty years ago, the Martians did too. Eventually, the Martians "just up and walked away and came to Mars," but the white people stayed on Earth and entered into a terrible atomic war with one another. It wasn't until recently that the Earth people scrapped together enough metal to build a single rocket to reach Mars.

Telling her children to stay at the house, Hattie runs down the road and sees her neighbors, the Browns, piled into their family car. Mr. Brown says they're on the way to see the white man. Hattie tentatively asks the Browns if they're going to lynch the visitor, but the Browns laugh and assure her that they're going to shake his hand.

Willie, Hattie's husband, pulls up in his car and gruffly asks the Browns if they're going to see the white man "like a bunch of fools." He adds that he is on his way home to get his guns, and that they should consider doing the same. Willie then forces Hattie to get into the car with him, and the two speed home. Willie mutters about why the Earth people couldn't just stay on their own planet and "blow themselves up." Appalled, Hattie tells her husband that he doesn't sound very Christian. Willie asks Hattie if she remembers all of the terrible things the white people did to the Martians, and how Dr. Phillips and Mr. Burton hanged his father on Knockwood Hill and shot his mother. Now, with the arrival of the white man, "the shoe's on the other foot." Willie adds that, on Mars, white people will have discriminatory laws leveled against them, be forced to ride in the back of streetcars and sit in the back of theaters, and even get lynched.

The car pulls up in front of the Johnson household, and Willie dashes inside in search of guns and **rope**. Hattie reluctantly follows her husband into the house and watches him bustle around the attic, collecting his guns and muttering madly to himself. Hattie notices that his face looks twisted with bitterness and hatred. Barreling outside, Willie rounds up the children and tells them that he's locking them up—he doesn't want them to see or even talk about the white man.

On the way to watch the white man's arrival at the landing port, Hattie notices that other cars are filled with guns. She accuses her husband of provoking people in the community, and Willie proudly reveals that he stopped at every house earlier that day and told everyone to bring guns and ropes. Hattie asks her husband to think about what he's doing, but he snaps that all he's done for the past twenty years is think about white people and the cruelty and racism the Martians endured on Earth.

A dense crowd gathers at the landing port, and Willie passes out guns. When a trolley car pulls up, Willie climbs up into it, lugging a gallon of paint. He begins painting the seats, and the conductor quickly objects. However, when Willie steps back to reveal his handiwork, the conductor is pleased. The seat reads, "For Whites: Rear Section." Willie asks for volunteers in the

growing crowd to paint every streetcar in the city. Several people race off to begin their task. Willie also asks the crowd to rope off the back two rows in the movie theaters, and several volunteers are chosen. On a roll, Willie shouts that new laws need to be passed banning intermarriages. The town's mayor tries to get Willie off of his soapbox, saying Willie has formed a mob and is behaving no better than the white men he is shouting about. Unfazed, Willie responds, "This is the other shoe, Mayor, and the other foot." Willie yells to the crowd that they will elect a new mayor.

Clutching a noose in his hands, Willie asks the crowd if they're ready. Half of the crowd calls back enthusiastically, while the other half looks "like figures in a nightmare." The white man's rocket soars across the sky and begins its descent. When it lands, the crowd goes silent. The rocket's door slides open, and an old, tired-looking man steps out.

The old man doesn't introduce himself, saying it doesn't matter who he is. He tells the Martians that twenty years ago, when they left Earth, World War III broke out. Since then, most of the Earth has been destroyed by atomic bombs. Historic cities like Paris and London have been reduced to smithereens. Even small cities, like Greenwater, Alabama, have been annihilated. Hearing the name Greenwater, Willie's mouth drops open. The old man continues, explaining that cotton fields, cotton mills, and factories have all been destroyed. Everything is radioactive, including the livestock, food, and roads.

The old man continues that there are only five hundred thousand people left on the entire planet. Calling the Earth people fools, he asks the Martians for permission to use their rockets, which have been sitting unused for twenty years, so that he can bring the Earth people to Mars. He reaffirms that Earth people have been stupid and evil, and adds that they will work for the Martians and endure whatever treatment they see fit.

When the old man finishes his speech, the crowd is silent. Many people watch Willie carefully to see how he will react. Watching her husband, Hattie thinks about how she wants to chip away at everyone's hate so that eventually, all hatred and racism will crumble. She realizes that if husband lets go of his bitterness, then maybe everyone else will too. Boldly stepping forward, she calls for the old man's attention, asking if he knows "Knockwood Hill in Greenwater, Alabama?" When the old man produces a map, Hattie asks about the big oak tree on the top of the hill. The old man says that the hill and the tree are both gone. Hattie asks if a certain Dr. Phillips and Mr. Burton are still alive, and the old man replies that they both died in the war and both of their houses burned down. He adds that there are no surviving houses or people in Greenwater.

Willie thinks about how there are no more "lynching trees," pubs, or plantation homes. There is nothing "left to hate," except for an "alien people" who will be forced to sit in the back of streetcars and theaters. Quickly, Willie tells the old man that

Earth people won't have to work for the Martians. Upon seeing Willie drop his noose, the other Martians swiftly unload their guns and race through town, tearing down all of the freshly painted signs and newly installed ropes.

On the way home, Hattie muses that everyone will finally have a fresh start. Willie tells her that in the past twenty years, the Earth people have endured the same feelings of pain, loneliness, and homelessness that the Martians experienced on Earth, meaning that now everyone is "on the same level." When Hattie and Willie get home, Hattie lets the children out of the house, and they excitedly ask their father if he saw the white man. Rubbing his temples with his fingers, Willie answers that he did: "Seems like for the first time today I really seen the white man—I really seen him clear."



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Willie Johnson** – Willie Johnson lives on Mars with his wife, Hattie, and their three children. Their community is populated entirely by black people who fled widespread racism and cruelty on Earth twenty years prior. Willie grew up in Greenwater, Alabama, where he witnessed the horrors of slavery and racism—his father was hanged and his mother was shot by white people. When Willie learns that the white man is coming to Mars, he sees it as a chance to exact revenge and subject white people to the same inhumane treatment that black people had to endure on Earth. For much of the story, Willie is gruff and cruel. At one point, his wife tells him that he doesn't "sound human," underscoring the inhumanity of wanting to reestablish prejudice in their small, peaceful town. A natural leader, Willie initially uses his power to perpetuate racism and form a mob that looks to him for direction. Ultimately, with Hattie's help, Willie is able to understand that the Earth people have suffered feelings of pain, isolation, and homelessness in the past twenty years similar to those feelings that black people felt when they were on Earth. He realizes that everyone is "even" and encourages his fellow Martians to tear down all of the segregationist signs that he had just instructed them to put up.

**Hattie Johnson** – In contrast to her husband Willie's thirst for vengeance, Hattie Johnson does not see the white man's arrival as an opportunity to exact revenge over the cruelty and racism that the Martians experienced on Earth. Empathetic and morally upright, Hattie is horrified to think that her children might have to witness the inhumanity and racism she experienced as a child in Greenwater, Alabama, even if now it is black people abusing white people out of revenge. For most of the story, Hattie is timid and scared of her husband. She fearfully goes along with his cruel plan to reinstate segregation and racism, though she cries silently as she helps. Seeing her

husband's influence over the crowd, Hattie knows that her husband is the "keystone"—if she can just dismantle his hatred, everyone else will follow suit. At the end of the story, Hattie acts with uncharacteristic boldness by being the first Martian to speak to the white man. She uses this conversation to show everyone—especially Willie—that everything on Earth has been destroyed, including physical remnants of racism such as lynching trees and plantation homes.

**The White Man** – The old white man, who is never named, steps out of the rocket to tell the Martians why the Earth people have come to Mars: a nuclear war has rendered Earth uninhabitable, and there are only five hundred thousand survivors on the entire planet. He humbly asks the Martians to allow the Earth people to come to Mars, asserting they will work for the Martians and endure whatever treatment the Martians see fit. Although many Martians initially planned to attack the white man and reinstate segregation and prejudice, the white man's humility and stories about how everything on Earth has been destroyed (and, with it, all physical traces of racism and slavery) change their minds. The Martians accept the white man's request for help and assert that all people—regardless of race—are now "on the same level."

**Hattie and Willie's Children** – Hattie and Willie's three young boys are excited about the white man's arrival. Yet, having been born on Mars (where there are only black people), the boys do not understand the deep-rooted racism that existed on Earth. Although the boys aren't allowed to go see the white man with the rest of the town, that doesn't curb their curiosity and they spend the entire day trying to understand what white people are like.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mr. Brown** – Hattie and Willie's kindly neighbor on Mars who takes his children to see the white man.

**The Mayor** – The mayor of Hattie and Willie's town on Mars. He opposes Willie's idea to create racial segregation laws that target white people and tells Willie that he's behaving no better than racist white men on Earth.

**Dr. Phillips** – A racist white man in Greenwater, Alabama, who hanged Willie's father and shot his mother with help from Mr. Burton.

**Mr. Burton** – A racist white man who, with help from Dr. Phillips, hanged Willie's father on Knockwood Hill and shot Willie's mother.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## REVENGE AND EMPATHY

Ray Bradbury's short story "The Other Foot" takes place on Mars, twenty years after all black people have fled the racism and cruelty of Earth to colonize the Red Planet. The impending arrival of a white man — the first white man to visit Mars since the black people colonized the planet — dredges up the Martians' deep-rooted feelings of bitterness towards a world that denied their humanity. Bradbury's story highlights the natural human impulse toward revenge while also presenting vengeance as both unproductive and unsatisfying. Because revenge simply perpetuates animosity and pain, "The Other Foot" ultimately suggests that true emotional healing can only happen when alleged enemies learn to see one another with empathy and understanding.

Bradbury's story centers primarily on Willie Johnson, a Martian who immediately races home to get his guns upon hearing of the white man's arrival. Though he doesn't know who the white man is or what he wants, Willie's first impulse is toward violence. What's more, he convinces the entire town to bring guns and **ropes** to greet the visitor. When Hattie, Willie's wife, urges her husband to stop and think for a moment, Willie responds by pointing out that he has stewed on racial relations for the past twenty years. "I was sixteen when I left Earth, and I was glad to leave," he says. "There wasn't anything there for me or you or anybody like us." With no sense of closure after leaving Earth, Willie's pain and spite has been bottled up for two decades and the white man's arrival triggers its release.

Bradbury presents Willie's desire for revenge as an understandable human impulse, but complicates matters by revealing how such feelings only perpetuate pain and strife for all involved. Getting increasingly worked up about the white man's arrival on Mars, Willie tells his wife, "the shoe's on the other foot now. We'll see who gets laws passed against him, who gets lynched, who rides the back of streetcars, who gets segregated in shows." Willie's plan for revenge means reinstating Jim Crow laws (the United States' strict racial segregation policies that were abolished in the 1950s), but altering them so that they exclude white, rather than black, people. Such a desire clearly eats away at Willie, however, whose face looks "stern and heavy and folded in upon the gnawing bitterness" as he scours his attic for guns. When Willie later proudly admits to forming a bloodthirsty mob to greet the white man, the mayor admonishes Willie that he is doing the "same thing" he always hated, and as such is "no better than some of those white men" he yells about. The mayor highlights how Willie isn't solving prejudice by turning his ire on white people; rather, he's perpetuating the same problems and attitudes that led to misery for people like him on Earth.

Instead of revenge, the story suggests that to combat vengeful impulses people must view others with empathy. During Willie's angry rant prior to the white man's arrival, Hattie tells her husband that he doesn't "sound human." In his rage, Willie has become cold, heartless, and unempathetic toward people who are different from him; his desire for vengeance has stripped him of man's more noble qualities. However, after actually meeting the white man and internalizing Earth's near-complete destruction, Willie realizes that those who oppressed him have finally experienced genuine horror themselves—and, as such, must better grasp the cruelty and horror to which they subjected people who look like Willie. Indeed, Willie's vengeful impulses melt away once he is able to empathize with the white man over their shared experiences. Willie's ultimate embrace of the visitor reflects the story's belief that shared trauma can create understanding, and that understanding is the only path toward peace.



## THE INHUMANITY OF RACISM

"The Other Foot," which draws its dramatic tension from the impending arrival of a white man to an entirely-black community on Mars, was published in 1951, thirteen years before racial segregation laws were abolished throughout the United States. Bradbury repeatedly evokes the realities of racism on Earth throughout the story, referencing both the historical scars of slavery and contemporary lawful discrimination against black people. By setting his story on another planet, Bradbury is also able to create a sense of defamiliarization—to make racism appear at once foreign, strange, and deeply illogical. Above all, "The Other Foot" presents racism as a learned, rather than innate, human behavior.

Despite the anxiety the white man's arrival kicks up for adult Martians who remember their time on Earth, Hattie and Willie's children are excited and curious about the man's arrival. Having never seen a white person before, they have no preconceptions of what he will be like and try to make sense of white skin by comparing it to milk, flowers, and chalk. There is no sense that the children think the white man is inferior or superior to them—he is simply different and interesting. Willie, meanwhile, nearly shatters this innocent understanding of race by declaring to his sons, "You ain't seeing no white man, you ain't talking about them, you ain't doing nothing." In this moment, Willie attempts to pass on his hatred onto his children, reflecting the notion that prejudice is a learned behavior.

Willie then goes so far as to attempt to recreate the racism he experienced on Earth by inverting Jim Crow laws to target white, rather than black, people. Willie's blinding, dangerous fury underscores the inherent cruelty of such racist policies and their ability to erode any communal sense of peace. Hattie's horror at Willie's actions and declamation that he

doesn't "sound human" further casts such prejudicial legislation as utterly inhumane. Given that Jim Crow practices were still legal at the time of Bradbury's writing, Hattie's horror can be read as a direct condemnation of contemporary societal racism in the United States.

Of course, if racism is a learned behavior, it follows that it can be *unlearned*. The Earth people, the story suggests, have done just that; their suffering throughout World War III has forced them to reconsider previous prejudices, apologize for their foolishness, and beg for help from those they once treated as inferior. Hattie, too, recognizes the manmade nature of racism and hatred, and, as such, their ability to be dismantled piece by piece like any other structure. In the silence following the white man's plea, she thinks about the fact that, though her husband riled the crowd with talk of about prejudice and payback, these attitudes can be undone: "She wanted to get at the hate of them all," Bradbury writes, "to pry at it and work at it until she found a little chink, and then pull out a pebble or a stone or a brick and then a part of the wall, and, once started, the whole edifice might roar down and be done away with." Hattie likens the crowd's anger to an unstable wall that will tumble into a heap of rubble when its load-bearing element is removed, creating a domino effect of empathy, mercy, and forgiveness.

The key to this, Hattie soon realizes, is her husband, who, after meeting the white man and listening to his stories, also comes around to the idea that racism can be unlearned. "I knew then that now the white man's as lonely as we've always been," he tells Hattie. "Now everything's even. We can start all over again, on the same level." Willie's words again reflect the notion of racism as an unnatural behavior, one that is not innate to the Earth people now seeking refuge on Mars. By starting with a clean slate—that is, one without the chosen, learned racism that tore apart life on Earth—the Martians and Earth people can finally build a peaceful, harmonious world.



### HUMILITY AND FORGIVENESS

Intimately connected to the story's themes of racism and vengeance is the power of humility, as both Willie and the white man must overcome their personal pride in the name of peace and survival. Beyond an admission of wrongdoing, the story depicts humility as evidence of taking responsibility for one's actions and a vital precursor to forgiveness and healing.

"The Other Foot" presents Earth on the verge of total destruction after nearly two decades of atomic war. With only 500,000 people left on the planet and all cities reduced to rubble, the white man has arrived on Mars to ask for the Martian's help in getting the surviving Earth people off the planet. His plea is immediately characterized by humility as he refuses to name himself, asserting that his specific identity does not matter. He goes on to unflinchingly admit that the Earth people—himself included—have been foolish and evil in their

treatment of black people in the past. Humbly, he tells the Martians, "We've been stupid. Before God we admit our stupidity and our evilness. All the Chinese and the Indians and the Russians and the British and the Americans. We're asking to be taken in." Continuing his plea, the white man says that the Earth people are ready and willing to work for the Martians, even if doing so means partaking in demeaning or subservient behavior. He says, "We deserve anything you want to do to us [...] we'll work for you and do the things you did for us—clean your houses, cook your meals, [and] shine your shoes."

The Earth people's willingness to endure the same treatment they subjected the Martians to for centuries shows an acceptance of responsibility for their past actions, as well as an acknowledgment of the immense pain they put the Martians through. The white man goes so far as to admit that the Earth people's actions have affected innumerable people over hundreds of years, saying, "[we'll] humble ourselves in the sight of God for the things we have done over the centuries to ourselves, to others, and to you." The angry Martian mob quiets at the man's words, its thirst for vengeance tempered by such honesty and self-recrimination. This reflects the power of humility to combat rage and violence.

Like the white man, Willie ultimately sets aside his pride and admits his own mistakes as a means to build a more peaceful world. On the way home from meeting the white man, Willie tells Hattie that "what happens next is up to all of us. The time for being fools is over. We got to be something else except fools." Willie does not try to abdicate responsibility for trying to reestablish racial segregation and spark hatred in people's hearts. Rather, by using the word "we," he directly *takes* responsibility for both himself and his community. His use of the word "fools" further echoes the white man's earlier language, illustrating the similarity of realizations on both sides and suggesting the power of humility to inspire meaningful reflection in all who witness it.

Indeed, Hattie recognizes that Willie's ability to set aside his pride and accept the white man means that there will be a "new start for everyone." Willie agrees, saying, "now the white man's as lonely as we've always been. He's got no home now, just like we didn't have one for so long." Humility has allowed both parties to look past their anger and instead toward their shared experiences. With the white man's admission of guilt, Willie realizes that he doesn't need to exact revenge or assert his own authority. Humility grants him the space to accept that the Martians and the Earth people have both suffered greatly over the years and can now welcome a new era of forgiveness.



### THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE GROUP

Beyond delving into racism and revenge, "The Other Foot" also explores the tensions that exist between individuals and groups. Throughout the story Willie holds immense sway over his fellow Martians, who

are quick to give in to a mob mentality at the expense of independent thought. Willie proves influential enough to stoke vengefulness, racism, and cruelty in the hearts of his followers, whom Bradbury repeatedly presents as a single entity. Hattie, meanwhile, proves pivotal in undoing Willie's work and getting her husband—and the whole community—to think clearly and humanely again. Through Hattie's actions and Willie's eventual change of heart, the story highlights the immense power individuals can have on their community—for better and for worse.

For most of the story, Willie actively influences other Martians to adopt his own feelings of hatred and his desire for vengeance. On the way to the white man's landing point, he gruffly admits to his wife that he stopped by every house in the city and urged residents to fetch their guns and **ropes** to "be ready" for the arrival. He barks orders at others, clearly enjoying the sense of power that comes with being able to control a crowd. When the town mayor objects to his actions, for example, Willie is not cowed, retorting that they can simply elect a new mayor.

In the moments before the white man's rocket touches down on Mars, Willie hands out guns to a crowd described as full of people "so close together it looked like one dark body with a thousand arms reaching out to take the weapons." This description underscores the notion of the mob as a single entity antithetical to diverse or independent thought. Many people feel unwillingly roped into the action, but the pressure to follow the group proves too strong to defy. When Willie calls out to the crowd to ask if they're ready for the white man's arrival, half of the crowd yells "Ready!" while the "other half murmured and moved like figures in a nightmare in which they wished no participation." Many Martians are clearly reticent to partake in violence, but the herd mentality that Willie has created has pressured everyone to conform to one person's will—in this case, Willie's. When someone yells that the rocket is approaching, "Like marionette heads on a single string, the heads of the crowd turned upward." This language again underscores the notion of the crowd as a puppet controlled by an outside string rather than its own convictions.

After the white man lands and asks humbly for the Martians' help, the crowd again turns to Willie for instructions: "Willie Johnson held the rope in his hands. Those around him watched to see what he might do," Bradbury writes. Instead of thinking about the white man's words for themselves, people look to Willie to tell them how to feel and react, once again highlighting the power that individuals can hold over their community and the danger of suppressing independent thought.

In contrast, Hattie is able to use her empathy and sensitivity to encourage the community to think clearly again. In the tense silence following the white man's request, Hattie realizes that her husband's influence over the mob means that he is the only one who can dismantle it. However, instead of simply waiting

for her husband to react, Hattie takes action: "She stepped forward. She didn't even know the first words to say. The crowd stared at her back; she felt them staring." Hattie skillfully directs the conversation in ways that helps Willie see that physical remnants of racism were destroyed in the war. The second Willie realizes this and drops the noose from his hands, the crowd takes its cue: people "ran through the streets of their town and tore down the new signs so quickly made, and painted out the fresh yellow signs on streetcars, and they cut down the ropes in the theater balconies and unloaded their guns and stacked their ropes away." By quickly tearing down the newly installed artifacts of racial discrimination, the Martians seem to realize that they were swept up in Willie's wave of hatred and were not thinking for themselves.

Bradbury's story ultimately cautions against giving in to mob mentality at the expense of independent critical thought. Written in the midst of a deeply segregated America, "The Other Foot" encourages readers to be bold and stand up for integrity and acceptance just like Hattie does—even if doing so means confronting loved ones (like Willie) or stating an unpopular opinion. More specifically, it suggests the extraordinary power of individuals to fight the mob mentality of racism in their own communities.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### THE ROPE

The rope that Willie Johnson ties into a noose in preparation for the white man's arrival symbolizes Willie's vengeful desire for authority and control over the white man. Tied as a noose, the rope is a racially-charged symbol that points to a long, dark history of racism in America. Willie's own father was hung by racist white men in the American South, so by greeting this white visitor with a rope—noose already tied—Willie makes his vengeful intentions clear. Prior to the white man's arrival, Willie visits every house in town and tells the residents to bring guns and rope so that the visitor will have a proper "welcoming committee." In this way, the rope is an assertion of authority and power meant to immediately show the white man that he is unwanted on Mars and will be subjected to the same inhumane treatment that the Martians received on Earth. In a show of power and aggression, Willie holds a noose for the entirety of the white man's speech. Because Willie is the unofficial leader of the gathered mob, everyone watches him during and after the speech to gauge his reaction. Upon this realization of the suffering endured by Earth people during their atomic war, he drops the rope from his hands, signaling to the crowd that they must not attack the

white man and spurring others to rush to remove all of their newly-installed artifacts of segregation. For Willie, dropping the rope represents letting go of his bitter longing for revenge and allows a new era of peace and acceptance to unfold.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Illustrated Man* published in 2012.

### The Other Foot Quotes

Well, the white people live on Earth, which is where we all come from, twenty years ago. We just up and walked away and came to Mars and set down and built towns and here we are. Now we're Martians instead of Earth people. And no white men've come up here in all that time. That's the story.

**Related Characters:** Hattie Johnson (speaker), The White Man, Hattie and Willie's Children

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 41

#### Explanation and Analysis

In the beginning of the story, Hattie's three young sons are excited about the white man's arrival on Mars since they've never seen a white person before. In this passage, Hattie answers her boys' questions about what white people are like and why they don't live on Mars. She sums up the entire process of moving from Earth to Mars—which was likely lengthy and complicated—in a highly-simplified sentence. This suggests that Hattie aims to shield her children from the brutality of the racism that their mother escaped by coming to Mars. This moment also reflects the story's eventual assertion of racism as a learned behavior—and, it follows, something Hattie's sons know nothing about.

“You ain't going to lynch him?”  
“Lynch him?” Everyone laughed. Mr. Brown slapped his knee. “Why, bless you, child, no! We're going to shake his hand. Ain't we, everyone?”

**Related Characters:** Mr. Brown, Hattie Johnson (speaker), The White Man

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 42

#### Explanation and Analysis

After telling her sons to stay at home, Hattie runs down the road to the neighboring Browns' house to see how they are preparing for the white man's arrival. Hattie's fear of a potential lynching in this moment gives context for her earlier anxieties while she discussing the white man with her children: she's worried that the Martians will kill the man as payback for the abuse that the Martians suffered on Earth at the hands of white people. Although Mr. Brown's hearty laughter suggests he wouldn't dream of doing anything of the sort, it becomes clear as the story unfolds that Mr. Brown is an exception. Most of the other Martians feel bitter and vengeful toward the white man, especially upon being spurred forward in their hatred by Hattie's husband Willie. The fact that Willie will go on to hold a rope tied into a noose for the entirety of the white man's speech shows that Hattie's concern about lynching is, in fact, warranted.

“I'm not feeling Christian [...] I'm just feeling mean. After all them years of doing what they did to our folks—my mom and dad, and your mom and dad—You remember? You remember how they hung my father on Knockwood Hill and shot my mother? You remember? Or you got a memory that's short like the others?”

**Related Characters:** Willie Johnson (speaker), The White Man, Hattie Johnson

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 43



#### Explanation and Analysis

While driving away from the Browns' home, Hattie deems Willie's desire for vengeance against the visiting white man un-Christian. Willie responds by telling Hattie that his anger stems from the memory of what white people did to his family. Throughout the story, Willie never talks about how white men have abused him but rather focuses on the way that such men treated his parents. When he accuses his wife of having “a memory that's short like the others,” Willie suggests that many Martians have suppressed their memories of what life was like on Earth. Willie's tightly-held memories of pain and sorrow catalyze his violent hysteria

leading up to the white man's arrival. This suggests the lasting legacy of racist trauma and sets the stage for the power of the later reveal that many physical remnants of racism have been destroyed—allowing Willie to finally move on.

“Well [...] the shoe's on the other foot now. We'll see who gets laws passed against him, who gets lynched, who rides the back of streetcars, who gets segregated in shows. We'll just wait and see.”

**Related Characters:** Willie Johnson (speaker), The White Man, Hattie Johnson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 43

### Explanation and Analysis

Still driving home together from the Browns', Willie continues to espouse his hatred for white people. He tells his wife that on Mars, white people will be treated the way that black people were treated on Earth. Willie is alluding to the Jim Crow laws that upheld racial segregation in America from 1877 to 1964. “The Open Foot” was published in 1951, over a decade before such laws were abolished. In this passage, Willie explains that he wants to establish such segregationist laws on Mars but twist them so that they discriminate against white people as a means to exact revenge. He phrases this as “the shoe [being] on the other foot,” which is an idiom that means a situation has been reversed. Since the story itself is called “The Other Foot,” it's clear that such revenge and reversal of circumstances is a key theme that resonates throughout the text.

Willie plunged out of the house. “You children come inside, I'm locking you up. You ain't seeing no white man, you ain't talking about them, you ain't doing nothing.”

**Related Characters:** Willie Johnson (speaker), The White Man, Hattie and Willie's Children

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 45

### Explanation and Analysis

While getting his guns from his house to prepare for the

white man's arrival, Willie decides to also lock his sons away. Up until this point, the three boys had been playing in the yard and talking excitedly about the white man, trying to imagine what white skin looks like—comparing it to milk, chalk, and flowers. Their musings revealed their innocence and the fact that they didn't seem to have any concept of racial tension or to be aware of Earth's history of racism and slavery. When Willie “plunge[s]” out of the house and furiously commands his children not to see or even talk about the white man, however, he introduces his boys to the concept of racial prejudice. Willie's sharp words imply to the boys that the white man—and white men in general—should be avoided and hated. It is situations like this that have the power to influence children's worldviews in deeply negative ways, and Willie's comments further reflect the story's theme of racism as a learned behavior.

All along the road people were looking up in the sky, or climbing in their cars, or riding in cars, and guns were sticking up out of some cars like telescopes sighting all the evils of a world coming to an end.

**Related Characters:** Hattie Johnson, Willie Johnson, The White Man

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 45

### Explanation and Analysis

While accompanying Willie to the white man's landing spot, Hattie notices that other people have also brought guns. The comparison between these guns and telescopes pointing toward a doomed world could be read as a reflection of the fact that Hattie's community is safely on Mars while on Earth people are engaged in a massive atomic war. However, the passage could also be read as suggesting that Mars is now succumbing to some of the same evils that destroyed the Earth. Many Martians have been swept up in a wave of hatred and prejudice and given into Willie's emotionally-charged call for racial segregation targeting white people. As Willie and the other Martians realize later in the story, however, this makes them no better than the white men on Earth. This passage thus further suggests that if the Martians follow through with Willie's plans, Mars will also be “a world coming to an end.”



☞ The people were so close together it looked like one dark body with a thousand arms reaching out to take the weapons.

**Related Characters:** The White Man, Willie Johnson

**Related Themes:**   


**Page Number:** 46

### Explanation and Analysis

Upon reaching the landing port for the white man's rocket, Willie begins passing out guns to the growing crowd, the sheer size of which underscores how monumental the white man's visit is; it seems that everyone in the Martian community is present. More importantly, by describing the crowd as "one dark body" Bradbury suggests it is no longer made up of individual people with independent thoughts; rather, it has adopted a mob mentality and bends to Willie's will. In this passage, no one stops to consider if violence is the right way to deal with the white man's arrival. Instead, the people form a single unit bent on destruction.

☞ "We've been stupid. Before God we admit our stupidity and our evilness. All the Chinese and the Indians and the Russians and the British and the Americans. We're asking to be taken in [...] We deserve anything you want to do to us, but don't shut us out."

**Related Characters:** The White Man (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

After landing on Mars, the white man tells the crowd of Martians about World War III and the extent of Earth's destruction. After asking for the Martian's help in getting survivors to Mars, the white man then apologizes for the way the Martians—that is, black people—were treated on Earth. He humbles himself completely, declaring that he—and the rest of the Earth people—are unworthy of forgiveness for their "stupidity" and "evilness." When the white man says, "We deserve anything you want to do to us," he anticipates the Martians' desire to initiate reverse Jim Crow laws discriminating against white people. This reveals that the white man believes the Martians' anger to be justified, since they endured centuries of abuse on Earth. Ultimately, the white man's humility and ability to admit his

mistakes plays a major role in Willie's decision to abandon his vengeful plan and admit his own foolishness.

☞ She wanted to get at the hate of them all, to pry at it and work at it until she found a little chink, and then pull out a pebble or a stone or a brick and then a part of the wall, and once started, the whole edifice might roar down and be done away with. It was teetering now. But which was the keystone, and how to get at it? How to touch them and get a thing started in all of them to make a ruin of their hate?

**Related Characters:** Willie Johnson, Hattie Johnson

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis

There is a tense silence after the white man finishes his speech, in which Hattie can feel that the crowd is still hateful and wanting revenge for the centuries of cruelty the Martians were subjected to on Earth. Hattie's thoughts about how to dismantle hatred and racism are based on the premise that neither are natural but rather are manmade constructions, and as such can be toppled like any other structure. She likens the crowd's anger to an unstable wall that will tumble into a heap of rubble when its load-bearing element (its "keystone") is removed. Like this wall, the crowd's hatred is unstable and "teetering," balancing on one pivotal stone. Hattie wants to find and remove this stone—soon revealed to be Willie—and in doing so start a domino effect of empathy, mercy, and forgiveness.

☞ "The Lord's let us come through, a few here and a few there. And what happens next is up to all of us. The time for being fools is over. We got to be something else except fools. [...] now the white man's as lonely as we've always been. He's got no home now, just like we didn't have one for so long. Now everything's even. We can start all over again, on the same level."

**Related Characters:** Willie Johnson (speaker), The White Man, Hattie Johnson

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 56

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Willie and Hattie are driving home from meeting the white man. Willie's attitude about the man (and white men in general) has shifted dramatically, and he no longer is itching for violence and revenge. Willie mirrors the white man's humility when he says, "The time for being fools is over." This implies that Willie realizes that the community has been too quick to seek vengeance. He also recognizes

his responsibility as an individual, as he affirms, "what happens next is up to all of us." It seems that Willie understands that he can use his influence in the community to welcome a new age of compassion, understanding, and equality rather than be the driving force behind the Martians' hatred and prejudice.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## THE OTHER FOOT

Shocking news sweeps across the town, causing “the dark people” stare at the sky in anticipation. The news reaches towns thousands of miles away, and everyone “lift[s] their dark hands over their upturned white eyes” to block the harsh sunlight as they scan the skies.

Hattie Johnson’s children have heard the news as well. Hattie’s “three little Negro boys” jump up and down in the yard in anticipation, worried that their mother will “miss it.” Hattie asks her boys where they caught wind of this rumor, and they answer that they heard about it at the Jones’s house. Excitedly, one of the boys tells his mother, “They say a rocket’s coming, first one in twenty years, with a white man in it!” The other boy asks what a white man is, claiming he has never seen one before. Hattie tells her son that he will find out.

The children beg Hattie to tell them stories about white men. Frowning, Hattie says that “it’s been a long time. I was a little girl, you see. That was back in 1965.” Unsatisfied with this answer, the boys continue to beg Hattie to tell them about white men.

Hattie looks up at the “blue clear Martian sky” painted with “thin white Martian clouds.” On the horizon, the “Martian hills” look like they’re baking in the harsh sun. After a long pause, she tells her boys that white people have white hands. Her boys are incredulous. When she tells them that white people also have white arms and white faces, her boys holler in disbelief. The smallest boy throws dust on his face and asks, “White like this, Mom?” Solemnly, Hattie tells him that white people’s faces are even whiter.

*The story begins with an element of confusion, as it’s unclear who “the dark people are” and what they’re looking for in the sky. The repetition of the word “dark,” however, foreshadows the important role race will play in the story.*



*This moment clarifies that this particular community is comprised of black people who have been isolated from white people for a long time; Hattie’s children have never even seen a white person. The detail about the rocket is also the first suggestion that Hattie’s community possibly lives on a different planet. Note that Bradbury’s use of the word “Negro” was generally accepted at the time he was writing, though such language would be seen as offensive today.*



*It becomes clearer that this world is comprised of black people, but that its settlers are young enough to have once lived among mixed races. Because “The Other Foot” was published in 1951, Bradbury was imagining a not-so-distant future;*



*Here, the story clarifies that Hattie and her community live on Mars. Hattie’s young boys have no concept of racial tension and appear utterly aware of the long, grim history of racism on Earth. Instead, they show a childlike curiosity and wonder at the notion of having skin so different from their own. This hints at the way that racism is a learned behavior, as the boys don’t intrinsically believe that the white man is inferior or superior to them because of his skin color—rather, he is simply different.*



Hattie stares at the sky with worry. She tells the boys to go inside, but they object, claiming that they simply have to watch what is going on. The boys ask if anything will “happen,” and Hattie is unsure but says that she feels like something might. The boys say they just want to see the spaceship and see the white man. They ask again what the white man is like, and Hattie answers, “I don’t know, I just don’t know.”

Hattie tells her boys that white people live on Earth, which is where “we all come from.” Twenty years ago, she explains, people like them walked away from Earth and settled on Mars. As such, now they are “Martians instead of Earth people.” During those twenty years, no white men have come to Mars.

Excitedly, the boys ask why the white men didn’t come up to Mars, too. Hattie answers that right after “we” got to Mars, the people on Earth engaged in a huge atomic war and forgot about those who had already left. After several years of a terrible atomic war, the people on Earth were left without any rockets. It took them until the present moment to be able to build one. Looking at her children “numbly,” Hattie tells the boys to stay at the house. Reluctantly they agree, and Hattie hurries down the road.

Approaching the Browns’ house, Hattie sees the family piled into the car. The Brown children greet Hattie and eagerly tell her that they’re going to see the white man. Mr. Brown adds that his children “never saw one, and I almost forgot.” Cautiously, Hattie asks Mr. Brown what he’s “going to do” with the white man. The Browns assure her that they’re just going to look at him. Hattie is surprised and says that she “thought there might be trouble.” When she asks the Browns if they’re planning to lynch the white man, Mr. Brown hollers with laughter, shouting, “Why, bless you, child, no! We’re going to shake his hand. Ain’t we, everyone?”

Hattie notices her husband Willie driving by and shouts for him. Angrily, he asks why she’s in this part of town and not at home with the kids. Willie glares at the Browns and asks them if they’re going to see the white man “like a bunch of fools.” Mr. Brown smiles and affirms that they are planning to do just that. Willie gruffly tells them to bring their guns, as he’s on his way home to grab his own.

*Hattie is clearly concerned about the white man’s arrival but doesn’t voice her worries to her boys, highlighting both her protective nature and her sons’ youthful innocence. Hattie’s uncertainty about how the day will unfold suggests that she fears the Martians will react violently to the white man’s arrival, possibly exacting revenge for centuries of bitter abuse and prejudice on Earth.*



*Hattie oversimplifies the interplanetary migration from Earth to Mars for her children, telling her boys that all black people “just up and walked away and came to mars”—as if doing so were as easy as moving to another town. Hattie also glosses over the Martians’ reason for leaving Earth: racism. These details make clear that Hattie is attempting to shield her children from the brutality of the racism that their mother escaped.*



*Hattie is hesitant to talk to her boys about race but seems to have no issue talking to them about atomic war and death, suggesting that she’s not trying to protect them from all pain but rather from the specific evil of racism. The detail about the shortage of rockets on Earth further reveals the extent of the war and destruction it caused.*



*Mr. Brown’s comment about almost forgetting what a white man is like underscores the Martians’ isolation from Earth. Meanwhile, Hattie’s question regarding whether the Martians will lynch the white man clarifies her earlier anxiety while talking to her children; she is worried that the Martians will react vengefully and violently to the white man’s visit. Mr. Brown’s surprise and cheerfulness suggests that Hattie’s concerns may be overblown.*



*Willie is immediately established as being domineering and abrasive. His impulse to go home and get his guns is a sharp contrast from Mr. Brown’s warm, cheerful affirmation that he just wants to shake the white man’s hand.*



Willie demands that Hattie get in his car and glares at her until she complies. As Willie races down the road, Hattie asks him to slow down. Driving even faster, Willie answers, “Not so fast, huh? We’ll see about that.” Willie asks why Earth people think they have the right to come to Mars, and why they didn’t “blow themselves up on that old world and let us be.” Hattie cautions her husband, pointing out that it’s not very Christian to talk like that. Sharply, Willie tells his wife that he’s “not feeling Christian.” He’s “just feeling mean.”

Willie asks Hattie if she remembers “what they did to our folks,” and how white people hung his father on Knockwood Hill and shot his mother. He asks if she’s “got a memory that’s short like the others,” but Hattie asserts that she remembers. Continuing his rant, Willie asks if Hattie remembers Dr. Phillips and Mr. Burton, white men who lived in big houses and were responsible for hanging Willie’s father. Wildly, Willie claims that “the shoe’s on the other foot now,” continuing, “We’ll see who gets laws passed against him, who gets lynched, who rides the back of streetcars, who gets segregated in shows.”

Hattie tells her husband that he’s “talking trouble,” but Willie dismisses her. He says that for years people have idly wondered what would happen if a white man came to Mars and now that the day has come they “can’t run away.” When Hattie asks if Willie is going to let the white people live on Mars, Willie says yes but his smile is cruel and his eyes are filled with anger. He claims that the white people can certainly come to Mars and work—that is, if they live in “the slums, and shine our shoes for us, and mop up our trash, and sit in the last row in the balcony.” Willie asserts this is a simple request, and adds that “once a week we hang one of two of them.”

Hattie disapprovingly tells Willie that he doesn’t “sound human,” but he tells her to “get used to it.” Pulling up to their house, Willie commands her to find his guns and some rope so that they can “do this right.” Hattie doesn’t move. Crying, “Oh, Willie,” she sits in the car while her husband dashes wildly into the house.

Eventually, Hattie reluctantly goes into the house as well. Peering up into the dark attic, she can’t see Willie at all—she can only hear his swearing and see the “brutal metal” of the guns “glittering in the black attic.” When Willie climbs down from the attic, he’s coated in dust, and his face is “stern and heavy and folded in upon the gnawing bitterness there.” Hattie watches her husband muttering to himself, repeating the phrase “leave us alone” and madly flapping his arms. When Hattie tries to get Willie’s attention, he looks at her cruelly, and she feels as though she can sense the “pressure” of his hatred.

*Willie asserts his power and dominance over his wife by forcing her to get into the car and driving faster when she asks him to slow down. He ignores the fact that she’s clearly uncomfortable, which hints at his inability to empathize with other people and put aside his own pride. His comment about the Earth people “blow[ing] themselves up” further reflects how anger has made him unfeeling and inhumane.*



*Willie suggests that other Martians have been too quick to let go of their painful memories of racism and bitterness toward white people. Willie shows that he has good reason to still be angry: his own parents were murdered by racist white men. His comment about how “the shoe’s on the other foot now” echoes the story’s theme of revenge: Willie wants to reverse the Jim Crow laws—racial segregation laws in America that were still in effect at the time of Bradbury’s writing—so that they discriminate against white people rather than black people.*



*Willie’s actions reflect the exact “trouble” Hattie expressed concern about earlier in the story. This moment foreshadows Willie’s role in stirring up animosity and vengefulness among the Martian community. Willie’s idea for Jim Crow laws that target white people reflect the terrible and inhumane treatment black people were subjected to on Earth.*



*By telling her husband that he doesn’t “sound human,” Hattie points out how Willie’s desire for revenge has robbed him of his humanity. Once again, however, Willie coldly ignores his wife’s concerns, reflecting the tunnel vision created by anger.*



*Willie’s rage continues to control his behavior and rob him of both empathy and rationality. His muttering and uncontrollable movements suggest that he is on the brink of hysteria, while his twisted facial expression reveal that his bitterness and hatred is hurting not only those around him, but also himself.*



In the yard, Hattie's boys chatter about the white man, saying that he is white like milk, chalk, and flowers. Willie "shove[s]" his children inside, telling them they won't see and can't talk about the white man. Before getting back into the car, Willie fetches paint, a stencil, and a **rope**, which he quickly ties into a noose.

Back on the road, Hattie tells Willie to "slow up," but he refuses, insisting it is time to hurry. The road is lined with other people getting into cars and staring up at the sky. In many of the cars, guns "stick up [...] like telescopes sighting all the evils of a world coming to an end." Noticing the guns, Hattie blames her husband for "talking." He says that he went to every house and told people to bring guns, paint, and **rope**, and to "be ready." Gleefully, he says, "And here we all are, the welcoming committee, to give them a key to the city."

As Willie navigates the throng of cars, Hattie feels anxiety and fear churning through her. People from other cars tote their **ropes** and guns, yelling, "Hey, Willie, look!" When the car comes to a halt in a field, Willie kicks the door open and begins unloading his weapons. Hattie tries to get Willie to stop and think about what he is doing, but he claims that he's spent the last twenty years thinking. He says that when he left Earth at sixteen, he was happy to leave, because "there wasn't anything there for me or you or anybody like us." He says that they've had peace on Mars, which allowed them to draw "a solid breath" for the first time.

A crowd surrounds Willie and asks what to do. Willie begins passing out weapons, and the crowd is so dense that it looks "like one dark body with a thousand arms reaching out to take the weapons." Everyone chants Willie's name. Hattie, however, stands silently next to her husband and cries. Willie commands her to bring him a gallon of paint, and she complies.

A trolley car pulls up. Fastened to its front is a freshly-painted sign reading, "To the White Man's Landing." Crowds of people pour out of the trolley car, including women carrying picnic baskets and men wearing straw hats. Climbing into the empty trolley, Willie begins to paint. The conductor objects, but when he sees that Willie has painted "For Whites: Rear Section," the conductor smiles and says, "That suits me just fine, sir."

*By tying the rope into a noose, Willie gestures to the United States' history of racism and cruelty toward black people. Lynching was often a public act used to threaten and spread fear among black people, and the noose itself became a symbol of white supremacy groups. Just as Willie wants to establish Jim Crow laws that target white people, Willie puts the "shoe on the other foot" by bringing a noose to meet the white man.*



*Once again, Hattie asks Willie to slow down, and he does the opposite to assert his dominance and power. This passage also reveals Willie's influence in the community at large. While people like the Browns resisted Willie's violent call to action, many others were apparently swept up in Willie's hatred and hysteria. Willie sarcastically compares the Martians armed with guns and ropes to a "welcoming committee," implying that the white man's welcome will be anything but warm and generous.*



*Willie underscores the ways in which black people on Earth were made to feel unwelcome and alienated in society, a fact that catalyzed their desire to move to Mars. On Mars, the Martians finally were able to find peace and a sense of communal belonging, which the white man's arrival may threaten.*



*Willie quickly becomes the unofficial leader of the crowd, showing how one individual has the power to influence the masses. By describing the crowd as "one dark body," Bradbury suggests it is no longer made up of individual people with independent thoughts; rather, the crowd has adopted a mob mentality and bends to Willie's will.*



*While some people bring guns for the white man's arrival, others bring picnic baskets. This contrast echoes the disparity between Mr. Brown's hearty laughter at the thought of lynching the white visitor and Willie's insistence that he bring a rope with the noose already tied. Clearly, not everyone is as revenge-minded as Willie.*



Returning to the growing crowd, Willie climbs onto packing boxes and asks for volunteers to paint streetcars and rope off theater seats (“the last two rows for whites”). Several people run off toward the town to complete their assigned tasks. Willie then calls for a new law to be passed banning intermarriages between races and commands the shoeshine boys to quit their jobs. Willie says that the town needs a minimum wage law, too—ten cents an hour for white people.

*The packing boxes serve as Willie’s soapbox, further portraying him as a leader. Once again, by calling for Jim Crow laws that discriminate against white people, Willie consequently shows the inhumane treatment black people were subjected to on Earth. This likely touches an emotional nerve among his audience, spurring them to give in to mob mentality and go along with Willie’s emotionally charged plans.*



Hurrying toward Willie, the town’s mayor demands he climb down off of the boxes and asserts that Willie is forming a mob. Willie simply replies, “That’s the idea.” The mayor tells Willie that he’s “no better than some of those white men you yell about.” Willie objects, claiming, “This is the other shoe, Mayor, and the other foot.” When the mayor threatens Willie, Willie calls for an election to get a new mayor.

*For the second time, Willie gestures to the story’s title. From his perspective, revenge against white people is completely warranted because it is merely a reflection of what white people did to black people on Earth. The mayor suggests that cruelty is never warranted, but is powerless against Willie—further emphasizing the latter’s influence in the community.*



Willie looks toward the town, where people are hanging freshly-painted signs reading, “Limited Clientele: Right to serve customer revokable [sic] at any time.” The “chuckling men” bustle through town, roping off theater seats and painting streetcar seats white. Meanwhile, their wives stand on the curb silently and their children are “hid[den] away from this awful time.”

*The fact that men are swept up in Willie’s call for a violent, authoritative stand while the women remain helplessly on the sidelines (just like Hattie did earlier) reflects the gendered expectations of masculinity and femininity of Bradbury’s era. The women are reticent to participate, suggesting they have more empathy than their husbands and don’t want other people to face the same racism, cruelty, and pain that the Martians experienced on Earth.*



Holding the **rope** tied into a noose, Willie addresses the crowd and asks if they’re ready. Half of the crowd eagerly calls back, “Ready!” The other half whispers “like figures in a nightmare in which they wished no participation.”

*The crowd contains people who “wished no participation,” but those people are unable to break away from the mob and act independently, emphasizing the danger of mob mentality and the overwhelming pressure to fit in with a group.*



A young boy shouts that the rocket ship is approaching, and “like marionette heads on a single string, the heads of the crowd turn upward.” As the rocket swoops down to Mars, the crowd gasps. Suddenly, the rocket’s large door slides open, and a tired-looking old white man steps out. The crowd begins to murmur, “A white man, a white man, a white man...”

*Earlier, the crowd was compared to a single body with thousands of arms, and now it is like a “single string” with many “marionette heads.” The puppeteer is Willie, who can manipulate the crowd however he wishes.*



The white man is tall and frail. His eyes are “colorless, almost white and sightless with things he had seen in the passing years.” He extends a shaky hand in greeting and “half smile[s]” but then quickly puts his hand down. The crowd is motionless. Looking into the crowd, the white man “did not see the guns and the **ropes**.”

Addressing the crowd, the old man says that he will not offer his name, as it doesn't really matter who he is. He says that twenty years ago (which feels “more like twenty centuries” ago), when the Martians left Earth, war broke out. He calls the war “The Third One,” and says that it went on until last year. All of the major cities are gone, including New York, Paris, London, and Shanghai. Even small cities have been demolished—including Greenwater, Alabama. Upon hearing this, Willie's jaw drops.

The old man continues, saying that the cotton fields have all burned, the cotton mills have been bombed, and the factories are radioactive. Everything is radioactive in fact—even roads and food. He lists more towns that have been destroyed, and people in the crowd whisper in shock when they hear that their hometowns have been demolished. A wave of nostalgia overtakes the crowd as they think of the places that were once so familiar to them having been reduced to rubble.

The white man tells the crowd that “we destroyed everything and ruined everything, like the fools that we were and the fools that we are.” Millions of people are dead, and now there are only five hundred thousand people left on Earth. The destruction is so severe, that they could only find enough metal to make this one rocket so that they could come to Mars to find help.

Willie tenses and his fingers tighten around his **rope**. The old man repeats, “We've been fools.” He says that none of the cities can be saved, as everything will be radioactive for at least the next century. He points out that the Martians have lots of rockets, which they used to get to Mars twenty years prior. He asks for permission to use the rockets to bring the survivors from Earth to Mars.

*Surprisingly, the Martians greet the old man with tension and silence rather than immediate chaos and violence. This reflects the fact that the white man appears weary and drained—and, as such, lacks a threatening presence.*



*By refusing to give his name, the old man humbles himself and reduces his personal importance. He swiftly moves on to describing the disastrous effects of World War III. Willie's reaction to hearing the name Greenwater, Alabama suggests that Greenwater was his hometown on Earth.*



*The old man specifically says that the cotton fields and cotton mills have been destroyed—artifacts of slavery in the American South. This is the first indication that certain aspects of racism and prejudice were destroyed in the war.*



*By calling the Earth people fools (himself included), the white man shows humility and willingness to set aside his pride. The white man doesn't make excuses or justifications for the Earth people's behavior. Assuming “The Other Foot” is set around 1985, there would have been about five billion people on Earth during that time—Earth's population being reduced to five hundred thousand reflects a planet on the verge of total destruction.*



*Here, the old man finally reveals the purpose of his visit to Mars: to ask the Martians for help by letting the Earth people borrow their rockets and come live on Mars. Willie's fingers tightening on the rope show that his aggression is flaring up. Perhaps he thinks the Earth people shouldn't ask for or expect help from the Martians after the way that the Martians were treated for so long.*





The old man says that Earth people have been “stupid,” and they admit their evilness “before God.” On behalf of the Americans, the British, the Russians, the Indians, and the Chinese, he asks the Martians to take the Earth people in. He knows that there’s room for everyone on Mars, and he’s seen from above that the soil is fertile. He asserts that it is up to the Martians, though. If they want, he will get back into his rocket ship and never come back. On the other hand, if the Martians allow the Earth people to come live with them, the white man says Earth people will do all the things they once forced black people to do.

The silence of the crowd feels “like a pressure of a distant storm.” Many people watch Willie, who is still holding the **rope**. Hattie holds her husband’s arm and waits. She wants to extract the hate from everyone in the crowd, “to pry at it and work at it until she found a little chink, and then pull out a pebble or a stone or a brick” so that “the whole edifice might roar down and be done away with.” She knows that the crowd’s hatred is “teetering,” but she can’t figure out what is the “keystone” that will make everyone abandon their hate for good.

Suddenly, Hattie realizes that Willie is the “keystone,” and “if he could be pried loose,” then maybe everyone’s hatred will fall away, too. Stepping forward from the silent crowd, Hattie asks the old man about Knockwood Hill in Greenwater, Alabama. Someone in the rocket ship hands the old man a map. Hattie asks if the big oak on the top of the hill is still there, and the old man says both the tree and the hill are gone. He holds out a photograph, which Willie gruffly asks to see.

With her heart pounding, Hattie asks the old man if Dr. Phillips and his son are still alive. A machine clicks within the rocket, and the old man confirms that Dr. Phillips and his son both died in the war. Their house also burned down, just like all the other houses. When Hattie asks about the other big tree on Knockwood Hill, the old man affirms that all of the trees were destroyed. Willie speaks up, asking, “That tree went, you’re sure?” When the man confirms, Willie’s body loosens.

Willie asks about Mr. Burton and his house, and the old man says that no people or homes are left in Greenwater. Willie then asks about his mother’s washing shack—where she was shot—and the old man says that the shack is gone, too. He passes out pictures to the crowd: “The pictures were there to be held and looked at and thought about.” The entire rocket is full of pictures to answer questions about any place on Earth.

*Although most of the story has centered on the tension between white people and black people, it’s clear that white people aren’t the only race left on Earth. Once again, the old man humbles himself before the Martians, as he recognizes that the Earth people are undeserving of help. The white man is unaware of the Martians’ plan to establish reverse Jim Crow laws, and yet he seems to suggest the very same thing. This further reflects his humility and belief that Earth people are deserving of the same treatment they subjected the Martians to.*



*People look to Willie for cues about how to react to the white man’s speech, again underscoring Willie’s influence over the crowd and the way that mob mentality impairs independent thought. Meanwhile, Hattie reveals a way in which racism and prejudice can be dismantled.*



*Hattie wisely decides to focus her efforts on dismantling her husband’s hatred rather than trying to go up against the entire crowd. When she asks the old man about Knockwood Hill—which Willie earlier said is the place where his father was hanged by two racist white men—Hattie attempts to show Willie that the Earth’s mass destruction means that many painful remnants of slavery and racism have also been destroyed.*



*Hattie taps into Willie’s painful memory of his father’s hanging in order to show Willie that the hill, lynching tree, and man responsible for the murder have all been destroyed. Since Willie’s vengefulness is largely fueled by what happened to his parents, Hattie attempts to show Willie that in many ways, justice has already been served for wicked, racist men.*



*Now Willie takes over asking questions, revealing that Hattie’s plan is beginning to work. He asks about his mother—the other half of the driving force behind his long-held animosity toward white people—and learns that reminders of her death are gone, too.*



With the **rope** still in his hands, Willie thinks about the Earth that he knew, “the green Earth and the green town where he was born and raised.” He thinks about how everything has been destroyed, and “all of the supposed or certain evil scattered with it.” He thinks about “all of the hard men gone,” as well as the soda fountains, cows, roads, plantation homes, bars, and “lynching trees.” All of this is “gone and never coming back.” The entire civilization has been “ripped into confetti and strewn at their feet,” and now there is “nothing of it left to hate.” He thinks the only thing left to hate is a group of alien people “who might shine his shoes and ride in the back of trolleys or sit far up in midnight theaters...”

Willie loosens his fingers, and the **rope** drops to the ground. He tells the white man that Earth people won't have to work for Martians. With these words, the Martians run through the town, tearing down their newly installed signs and cutting down the ropes in the theaters.

In the car on the way home, Hattie affirms that this will be “A new start for everyone.” After a while, Willie answers that God allowed them to come to Mars, and that “what happens next is up to all of us. The time for being fools is over.” He explains that when the white man was addressing the crowd, Willie realized that white people have now experienced the loneliness and homelessness that the Martians used to feel on Earth. Because of that, everyone is now equal and “on the same level.”

At home, Willie sits in the car while Hattie lets the boys out of the house. The children run out to their father asking if he saw the white man, and Willie responds, “Yes sir [...] Seems like for the first time today I really seen the white man—I really seen him clear.”

*Physical artifacts of racism—“lynching trees,” bars populated by racist white men, plantation homes—played a large part in Willie’s long-held anger and bitterness toward the past. Now that those artifacts are gone, there is “nothing of it left to hate.” Here, Willie realizes that his reverse Jim Crow laws would actually perpetuate painful memories of racism and create even more pain for everyone, Martians and Earthlings alike.*



*Willie drops the rope to the ground, consequently letting go of his pride and his desire for power, authority, and revenge. He refuses to perpetuate a system based on prejudice. Hattie has successfully “ried” the hatred out of Willie, and since he is the unofficial leader of the crowd, his reaction has a domino effect.*



*Just as the white man used the word “fools” to refer to himself and his fellow Earth people, Willie also calls himself and his community “fools.” In this way, Willie takes responsibility for emboldening the crowd towards vengeance. Willie is also able to find common ground with the Earth people and empathize with their experience of loneliness and homelessness in the wake of World War III.*



*When Willie says that saw the white man clearly, he means that he was finally able to empathize and find common ground with a people he had hated for so long.*





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