



<http://www.angelfire.com/or/grace/marionettes.html>

Marionettes, Inc.

By Ray Bradbury, from "The Illustrated Man"

Beginning of the 1st excerpt

They walked slowly down the street at about ten in the evening, talking calmly. They were both about thirty-five, both eminently sober.

"But why so early?" said Smith.

"Because," said Braling.

"Your first night out in years and you go home at ten o'clock."

"Nerves, I suppose."

"What I wonder is how you ever managed it. I've been trying to get you out for ten years for a quiet drink. And now, on the one night, you insist on turning in early."

"Musn't crowd my luck," said Braling.

"What did you do, put sleeping powder in your wife's coffee?"

"No, that would be unethical. You'll see soon enough."

They turned a corner. "Honestly, Braling, I hate to say this, but you HAVE been patient with her. You may not admit it to me, but marriage has been awful for you, hasn't it?"

"I wouldn't say that."

"It's got around, anyway, here and there, how she got you to marry her. That time back in 1979 when you were going to Rio-----"

"Dear Rio. I never DID see it after all my plans."

"And how she tore her clothes and rumped her hair and threatened to call the police unless you married her."



"She was always nervous, Smith, understand."

"It was more than unfair. You didn't love her. You told her as much, didn't you?"

"I recall that I was quite firm on the subject."

"But you married her anyhow."

"I had my business to think of, as well as my mother and father. A thing like that would have killed them."

"And it's been ten years."

"Yes," said Braling, his gray eyes steady. "But I think perhaps it might change now. I think what I've waited for has come about. Look here."

He drew forth a long blue ticket.

"Why, it's a ticket for Rio on the Thursday rocket!"

"Yes, I'm finally going to make it."

"But how wonderful! You DO deserve it! But won't she object? Cause trouble?"

Braling smiled nervously. "She won't know I'm gone. I'll be back in a month and no one the wiser, except you."

End of 1st excerpt

Smith sighed. "I wish I were going with you."

"Poor Smith, YOUR marriage hasn't exactly been roses, has it?"

"Not exactly, married to a woman who overdoes it. I mean, after all, when you've been married ten years, you don't expect a woman to sit on your lap for two hours every evening, call you at work twelve times a day and talk baby talk. And it seems to me that in the last month she's gotten worse. I wonder if perhaps she isn't a little simple-minded?"

"Ah, Smith, always the conservative. Well, here's my house. Now, would you like to know my secret? How I made it out this evening?"

"Will you really tell?"

"Look, up there!" said Braling.



They both stared up through the dark air.

In the window above them, on the second floor, a shade was raised. A man about thirty-five years old, with a touch of gray at either temple, sad gray eyes, and a small thin mustache looked down at them.

"Why, that's YOU!" cried Smith.

"Sh-h-h-h, not so loud!" Braling waved upward. The man in the window gestured significantly and vanished.

"I must be insane," said Smith.

"Hold on a moment."

They waited.

The street door of the apartment opened and the tall spare gentleman with the mustache and the grievous eyes came out to meet them.

Beginning of the 2nd excerpt

"Hello, Braling," he said.

"Hello, Braling," said Braling.

They were identical.

Smith stared. "Is this your twin brother? I never knew-----"

"No, no," said Braling quietly. "Bend close. Put your ear to Braling Two's chest."

Smith hesitated and then leaned forward to place his head against the uncomplaining ribs.

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick.

"Oh no! It CAN'T be!"

"It is."

"Let me listen again."

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick.



Smith staggered back and fluttered his eyelids, appalled. He reached out and touched the warm hands and the cheeks of the thing.

"Where'd you get him?"

"Isn't he excellently fashioned?"

"Incredible. Where?"

"Give the man your card, Braling Two."

Braling Two did a magic trick and produced a white card:

MARIONETTES, INC.

Duplicate self or friends; new humanoid plastic 1990 models, guaranteed against all physical wear. From \$7,600 to our \$15,000 de luxe model.

end of the 2nd excerpt

"No," said Smith.

"Yes," said Braling.

"Naturally," said Braling Two.

"How long has this gone on?"

"I've had him for a month. I keep him in the cellar in a toolbox. My wife never goes downstairs, and I have the only lock and key to that box. Tonight I said I wished to take a walk to buy a cigar. I went down cellar and took Braling Two out of his box and sent him back up to sit with my wife while I came out to see you, Smith."

"Wonderful! He even SMELLS like you: Bond Street and Melachrinos!"

"It may be splitting hairs, but I think it's highly ethical. After all, what my wife wants most of all is ME. This marionette IS me to the hairiest detail. I've been home all evening. I shall be home with her for the next month. In the meantime another gentleman will be in Rio after ten years of waiting. When I return from Rio, Braling Two here will go back in his box."

Smith thought for a minute or two. "Will he walk around without sustenance for a month?" he finally asked.



"For six months if necessary. And he's built to do everything--eat, sleep, perspire--everything, natural as a natural is. You'll take good care of my wife, won't you Braling Two?"

"Your wife is rather nice," said Braling Two. "I've grown rather fond of her."

Smith was beginning to tremble. "How long has Marionettes, Inc., been in business?"

"Secretly, for two years."

"Could I--I mean, is there a possibility-----" Smith took his friend's elbow earnestly. "Can you tell me where I can get one, a robot, a marionette, for myself? You WILL give me the address, won't you?"

"Here you are."

Smith took the card and turned it round and round. "Thank you," he said. "You don't know what this means. Just a little respite. A night or so, once a month even. My wife loves me so much she can't bear to have me gone an hour. I love her dearly, you know, but remember the old poem: 'Love will fly if held too lightly, love will die if held too tightly.' I just want her to relax her grip a little bit."

"You're lucky, at least, that your wife loves you. Hate's my problem. Not so easy."

"Oh, Nettie loves me madly. It will be my task to make her love me comfortably."

"Good luck to you, Smith. Do drop around while I'm in Rio. It will seem strange, if you suddenly stop calling by, to my wife. You're to treat Braling Two, here, just like me."

"Right! Good-bye. And thank you."

Smith went smiling down the street. Braling and Braling Two turned and walked into the apartment hall.

On the crosstown bus Smith whistled softly, turning the white card in his fingers:

Clients must be pledged to secrecy, for while an act is pending in Congress to legalize Marionettes, Inc., it is still a felony, if caught, to use one.

"Well," said Smith.



Clients must have a mold made of their body and a color index check of their eyes, lips, hair, skin, etc. Clients must expect to wait two months until their model is finished.

Not so long, thought Smith. Two months from now my ribs will have a chance to mend from the crushing they've taken. Two months from now my hand will heal from being so constantly held. Two months from now my bruised underlip will begin to reshape itself. I don't mean to sound ungrateful.... He flipped the card over.

Marionettes, Inc., is two years old and has a fine record of satisfied customers behind it. Our motto is "No Strings Attached." Address: 43 South Wesley Drive.

The bus pulled to his stop; he alighted and while humming up the stairs he thought, Nettie and I have fifteen thousand in our joint bank account. I'll just slip eight thousand out as a business venture, you might say. The marionette will probably pay back my money, with interest, in many ways. Nettie needn't know. He unlocked the door and in a minute was in the bedroom. There lay Nettie, pale, huge, and piously asleep.

"Dear Nettie." He was almost overwhelmed with remorse at her innocent face there in the semidarkness. "If you were awake you would smother me with kisses and coo in my ear. Really, you make me feel like a criminal. You have been such a good, loving wife. Sometimes it is impossible for me to believe you married me instead of that Bud Chapman you once liked. It seems that in the last month you have loved me more wildly than ever before."

Tears came to his eyes. Suddenly he wished to kiss her, confess his love, tear up the car, forget the whole business. But as he moved to do this, his hand ached and his ribs cracked and groaned. He stopped, with a pained look in his eyes, and turned away. He moved out into the hall and through the dark rooms. Humming, he opened the kidney desk in the library and filched the bankbook. "Just take eight thousand dollars is all," he said. "No more than that." He stopped. "Wait a minute."

He rechecked the bankbook frantically. "Hold on here!" he cried. "Ten thousand dollars is missing!" He leaped up. "There's only five thousand left! What's she done? What's Nettie done with it? More hats, more clothes, more perfume! Or, wait--I know! She bought that little house on the Hudson she's been talking about for months, without so much as a by your leave!"



He stormed into the bedrom, righteous and indignant. What did she mean, taking their money like this? He bent over her. "Nettie!" he shouted. "Nettie, wake up!"

She did not stir. "What've you done with my money!" he bellowed.

She stirred fitfully. The light from the street flushed over her beautiful cheeks.

There was something about her. His heart throbbed violently. His tongue dried. He shivered. His knees suddenly turned to water. He collapsed. "Nettie, Nettie!" he cried. "What've you done with my money!"

And then, the horrid thought. And then the terror and the loneliness engulfed him. And then the fever and the disillusionment. For, withouth desiring to do so, he bent forward and yet forward again until his fevered eaar was resting firmly irrevocably upon her round pinnk bosom. "Nettie!" he cried.

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick.

As Smith walked away down the avenue in the night, Braling and Braling Two turned in at the door to the apartment. "I'm glad he'll be happy too," said Braling.

"Yes," said Braling Two abstractedly.

Beginning of the 3rd excerpt

"Well. It's the cellar box for you, B-Two." Braling guided the other creature's elbow down the stairs to the cellar.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," said Braling Two, as they reached the concrete floor and walked across it. "The cellar. I don't like it. I don't like that toolbox."

"I'll try and fix up something more comfortable."

"Marionettes are made to move, not lie still. How would you like to lie in a box most of the time?"

"Well---"

"You wouldn't like it at all. I keep running. There's no way to shut me off. I'm perfectly alive and I have feelings."



"It'll only be a few days now. I'll be off to Rio and you won't have to stay in the box. You can live upstairs."

Braling Two gestured irritably. "And when you come back from having a good time, back in the box I go."

Braling said, "They didn't tell me at the marionette shop that I'd get a difficult specimen."

"There's a lot they don't know about us," said Braling Two. "We're pretty new. And we're sensitive. I hate the idea of you going off and laughing and lying in the sun in Rio while we're stuck here in the cold."

"But I've wanted that trip my whole life," said Braling quietly.

He squinted his eyes and could see the sea and the mountains and the yellow sand. The sound of the waves was good to his inward mind. The sun was fine on his bared shoulders. The wine was most excellent.

"I'LL never get to go to Rio," said the other man. "Have you ever thought of that?"

"No, I--"

"And another thing. Your wife."

"What about her?" asked Braling, beginning to edge toward the door.

"I've grown quite fond of her."

"I'm glad you're enjoying your employment." Braling licked his lips nervously.

"I'm afraid you don't understand. I think---I'm in love with her."

Braling took another step and froze. "You're what?"

"And I've been thinking," said Braling Two, "how nice it is in Rio and how I'll never get there, and I've thought about your wife and--I think we could be very happy."

"Th-that's nice." Braling strolled as casually as he could to the cellar door. "You won't mind waiting a moment, will you? I have to make a phone call."

"To whom?" Braling Two frowned.

"No one important."

"To Marionettes, Incorporated? To tell them to come get me?"



"No,no--nothing like that!" He tried to rush out the door.

A metal firm grip seized his wrists. "Don't run!"

End the 3rd excerpt

"Take your hands off!"

"No."

"Did my wife put you up to this?"

"No."

"Did she guess? Did she talk to you? Does she know? Is that it?" He screamed. A hand clapped over his mouth.

"You'll never know, will you?" Braling Two smiled delicately. "You'll never know."

Braling struggled. "She must have guessed; she must have affected you!"

Beginning of the 4th excerpt

Braling Two said, "I'm going to put you in the box, lock it, and lose the key. Then I'll buy another Rio ticket for your wife."

"Now, now, wait a minute. Hold on. Don't be rash. Let's talk this over!"

"Good-by, Braling."

Braling stiffened. "What do you mean, 'good-by'?"

Ten minutes later Mrs. Braling awoke. She put her hand to her cheek. Someone had just kissed it. She shivered and looked up. "Why--you haven't done that in years," she murmured.

"We'll see what we can do about that," someone said.

End of 4th excerpt

End of story



https://bu.digication.com/wr150k3_rclagoy/The_Presentation

Ryan Lagoy
Dec. 9, 2010
WR-150

Hanging By Strings

The 1950s were bustling with new types of technology, and everyone was eager to try them out. Movies, television shows, and advertisements captured the attention of society. It was an exciting time to live; however there were some critics, such as Ray Bradbury, that believed that the current trend was going to lead to the superiority of machines over humans. Specifically, Bradbury addresses this argument in his 1951 compilation of short stories entitled, *The Illustrated Man*. In this compilation, Bradbury addresses significant social issues, such as racism, selfishness, and capitalism. Among these, was his concern about the overuse of entertainment technology. In the one of the stories found within, "Marionettes, Inc.," Bradbury directly addresses how technology controls the lives of its enthusiasts. A man named Braling, invests in a robot, Braling II, to replace himself, in a scheme to escape his wife to travel to Rio. In the end of the short story, he discovers that the robot is emotionally attached to his wife, and the robot traps Braling in his toolbox. In "Marionettes, Inc.," Bradbury specifically critiques entertainment technology and how it consumed the minds of Americans in the 1950s.

Television in the 1950s was new and rapidly becoming common in the household, and Bradbury critiques this trend in "Marionettes, Inc." The use of technology grew rapidly in the 1950s; in fact, in 1950 only 9% of American households had televisions, but by the end of the decade, there were television sets in 87% of the households (Alexander et al. 1). This statistic shows that Americans were embracing television and it was becoming a part of their lives. Much like how society reacted to the advent of television, Braling and his friend, Smith, marvel at the robotic replica of Braling in "Marionettes, Inc.":

Smith staggered back and fluttered his eyelids, appalled. He reached out and touched the warm hands and the cheeks of the thing.

"Where'd you get him?"

"Isn't he excellently fashioned?"

"Incredible. Where?"

"Give the man your card, Braling Two." (Bradbury 215)



Smith was so impressed with Braling's marionette, that he wanted to buy one: "Not so long, thought Smith. Two months from now my ribs will have a chance to mend from the crushing they've taken. Two months from now my hand will heal from being so constantly held. Two months from now my bruised underlip will begin to reshape itself. I don't mean to sound *ungrateful...*" (Bradbury 216). Smith soon learns that his wife had already purchased one. As can be seen, Bradbury critiques how rapidly new technology becomes common in society. Television especially was considered an incredible innovation in the 1950s. This rapid increase in a single technology worried Bradbury, believing that technology, like television, would increase in popularity faster than humans could adapt to it.

Bradbury critiques society's infatuation with news stories and television programs. The space race began in the 1950s, which unified the nation by way of the news reports shown on television. People were interested in space, for they expected other life forms or new technology as seen in science fiction of their day. In "Marionettes, Inc.," Bradbury introduces a new technology in the futuristic society. Braling and Smith become very interested in this technology and were applying it to their lives, similarly to what the people in the 1950s did with the news programs.

The number of children's toys also increased greatly in the 1950s, which may have also impacted Bradbury's concern with how society was consumed with new products. After World War II, parents expected better living conditions: "Parents who had been through the deprivations of the Depression and World War II vowed that their children would experience affluence. Consequently, children became a market" (Alexander et al. 1). With this expectation and the rising number of advertisements on television, parents felt that it was necessary to purchase new toys for their children: "In addition to buying new parenting guides and magazines advocating techniques for creating a healthy personality, postwar parents spent record sums on amusements. Toys such as building blocks, beads, wooden trains and cars, and peg boards became standard equipment in the postwar playroom and schoolroom of the young middle-class child" (Ogata 129). In "Marionettes, Inc.," the marionette was new technology: "Smith was beginning to tremble. 'How long has Marionettes, Inc., been in business?'/ 'Secretly, for two years'" (Bradbury 215). After World War II, new entertainment technology appeared to satisfy the public after the hardships that they had faced in the prior years. Soon toys and television became an integral part of everyday life, and Bradbury argued that if this new trend was not monitored, then society will be controlled by the technology that is developed.

The rapid increase of entertainment technology in the 1950s worried Bradbury that the American people will become consumed by the technology and forget what they really care about in life. Similarly to how people embraced television and toys, Bradbury describes how Braling embraces the robotic technology, but he soon learns that there are



implications: “Marionettes are made to move, not lie still. How would you like to lie in a box most of the time?’ / ‘Well---’ ‘You wouldn’t like it at all. I keep running. There’s no way to shut me off. I’m perfectly alive and I have feelings” (Bradbury 217). At this point in the story, Braling realizes that he overlooked the consequences and that there was no way to reverse his actions. Before he has a chance to undo his actions, the robot locks him in its toolbox: “Braling II said, ‘I’m going to put you in the box, lock it, and lose the key. Then I’ll buy another Rio ticket for your wife” (Bradbury 217). Bradbury critiques the trend in society that if everyone becomes caught up with the media and other forms of new entertainment, they will not realize that they are being consumed by it until it is too late.

Further, Marionettes, Incorporated’s motto, “No Strings Attached,” serves as a way for Bradbury to criticize how the people do not control technology but rather how it controls the people. Knowing that the company manufactures robots, the name Marionettes, Inc. implies that they produce robots that can be controlled by the owners, similar to how a manipulator controls their marionette with strings. However, the company’s motto, “No Strings Attached,” which appears on the back of their business card suggests otherwise. With this deceitful contradiction, Bradbury argues that the implications of embracing new technology are not always evident at first, and that people should be wary that there may be consequences. Otherwise, as technology develops to be as advanced as is seen with Braling II, people will lose control over technology.

Bradbury did not only address the effect of mass media and amusements on people in “Marionettes, Inc.” of the *The Illustrated Man*, but also in his more well-known novel, *Fahrenheit 451*. *Fahrenheit 451* is a novel about a society set in the future, which bans books and promotes video entertainment. The protagonist’s wife, Mildred, aspires to expand her telescreen display from three walls to four: “It’s really fun. It’ll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed. How long you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a wall-TV put in. It’s only two thousand dollars” (Bradbury 20). Bradbury critiques society’s need for video entertainment and their obsession with media. Mildred is only interested in watching her shows, and Bradbury uses this as an exaggeration to show how television is taking people’s attention off of what is really important in life such as books, personal health, and family. In other words, Bradbury is critiquing how the amusements in the 1950s were consuming the minds of Americans. Because Bradbury is concerned about how the society of the 1950s is reacting to the new amusements in *Fahrenheit 451*, it further shows that “Marionettes, Inc.” is another piece written to criticize the trend of the society.

Bradbury relates why people are becoming infatuated with simple amusements, such as toys and television, to the pursuit of happiness. Ruut Veenhoven defines happiness as such: “Happiness is conceived here as the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life favorably. In other words: how well he likes the life he

leads. As such, happiness can also be called ‘life satisfaction’ (2). In “Marionettes, Inc.,” Braling purchases Braling II in order to raise his quality of life, thus pursuing happiness, by going on a trip that he was longing for: “I shall be home with her for the next month. In the meantime another gentleman will be in Rio after ten years of waiting” (216). Braling invests in this technology to increase his freedom, and therefore his life satisfaction. This is similar to how society was reacting to the television and other amusements in the 1950s. Their standard of living during the war and the time of depression was much worse than it was post-war, and the introduction of new technology especially increased the standard of living. This observation is analogous to Veenhoven’s as he continues to say in his study that a part of happiness is “how favourable one compares with various standards of success” (3). With the better living conditions and popularization of the television and toys, people believed themselves to be more successful and happier.

Bradbury’s critique of entertainment technology is a run off of his disregard of new technological advances. In an open letter to Ray Bradbury, Bulat Galejev, a Soviet scholar, discusses how Bradbury did not even own a television: “Upon reading your novel *Fahrenheit 451* and learning that you had no TV set in your house, I became involuntarily your spontaneous follower. And it was only recently, on the occasion of my 50th birthday, that I allowed myself to accept as a gift this ‘diabolic invention’” (25). The fact that Bradbury did not own a television himself shows that he was against the current trend in society. “Marionettes, Inc.” and *Fahrenheit 451* were examples of his writing that portrayed his view on entertainment technology.

The idea of purchasing and using new forms of entertainment technology to pursue happiness still occurs today, and will probably continue to transpire. Currently, there are half a billion users registered on Facebook, and many more on other social networking websites. People are being drawn in to these sites, and attaching themselves wholeheartedly, much as how people attached themselves to television in the 1950s. In a CNN article, a woman describes how addicted she is to Facebook: “I’m an addict. I just get lost in Facebook,” Newton said. ‘My daughter gets so PO’d at me, and really it is kind of pathetic. It’s not something I’m particularly proud of. I just get so sucked in’” (Cohen). People are drawn to using entertainment technology to pursue happiness, and the more they use it, the more they get a sense of short term happiness. Bradbury, in “Marionettes, Inc.,” goes a step further to explain that as technology develops and consumes the minds of its users, it may control, quite literally, human lives.

Bradbury uses “Marionettes, Inc.,” as a metaphor to describe how if society is not careful, technology will overtake the minds of humans, and that possibly once technology advances far enough along, gain superiority over humans. Bradbury addresses this issue because of his concern that humans focus much more on amusements than they should. Surprisingly, Bradbury’s short story “Marionettes, Inc.,” as well as *Fahrenheit 451*, written



60 years ago, can still be applied to the current society. Facebook, television shows, movies, and video games, among many other forms of entertainment technology make people lose focus on what is really important in life. Bradbury and other writers analyze the trends in society, and it is important to read their works to understand the issues of the past to solve the issues of present.

Word Count: 1988 words

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PROJECT No - 2016-1-HR01-KA201-022159 Handbook for reluctant, struggling and poor readers

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Ray Bradbury
Marionettes, Inc.

They walked slowly down the street at about ten in the evening, talking calmly. They were both about thirty-five, both eminently sober.

"But why so early?" said Smith.

"Because," said Braling.

"Your first night out in years and you go home at ten o'clock."

"Nerves, I suppose."

"What I wonder is how you ever managed it. I've been trying to get you out for ten years for a quiet drink. And now, on the one night, you insist on turning in early."

"Mustn't crowd my luck," said Braling.

"What did you do, put sleeping powder in your wife's coffee?"

"No, that would be unethical. You'll see soon enough."

They turned a corner. "Honestly, Braling, I hate to say this, but you have been patient with her. You may not admit it to me, but marriage has been awful for you, hasn't it?"

"I wouldn't say that."

"It's got around, anyway, here and there, how she got you to marry her. That time back in 1979 when you were going to Rio --"

"Dear Rio. I never did see it after all my plans."

"And how she tore her clothes and rumpled her hair and threatened to call the police unless you married her."

"She always was nervous, Smith, understand."

"It was more than unfair. You didn't love her. You told her as much, didn't you?"

"I recall that I was quite firm on the subject."

"But you married her anyhow."

"I had my business to think of, as well as my mother and father. A thing like that would have killed them."

"And it's been ten years."

"Yes," said Braling, his gray eyes steady. "But I think perhaps it might change now. I think what I've waited for has come about. Look here." He drew forth a long blue ticket.

"Why, it's a ticket for Rio on the Thursday rocket!"

"Yes, I'm finally going to make it."

"But how wonderful! You do deserve it! But won't she object? Cause trouble?" Braling smiled nervously. "She won't know I'm gone. I'll be back in a month and no one the wiser, except you."

Smith sighed. "I wish I were going with you."

"Poor Smith, your marriage hasn't exactly been roses, has it?"

"Not exactly, married to a woman who overdoes it. I mean, after all, when you've been married ten years, you don't expect a woman to sit on your lap for two hours every evening, call you at work twelve times a day and talk baby talk. And it seems to me that in the last month she's gotten worse. I wonder if perhaps she isn't just a little simple-minded?"

"Ah, Smith, always the conservative. Well, here's my house. How, would you like to know my secret? How I made it out this evening?"

"Will you really tell?"

"Look up, there!" said Braling.

They both stared up through the dark air.

In the window above them, on the second floor, a shade was raised. A man about thirty-five years old, with a touch of gray at either temple, sad gray eyes, and a small thin mustache looked down at them.

"Why, that's you!" cried Smith.

"Sh-h-h, not so loud!" Braling waved upward. The man in the window gestured significantly and vanished.

"I must be insane," said Smith.

"Hold on a moment." They waited.

The street door of the apartment opened and the tall spare gentleman with the mustache and the griever eyes came out to meet them.

"Hello, Braling," he said.

"Hello, Braling," said Braling.

They were identical.

Smith stared. "Is this your twin brother? I never knew --"

"No, no," said Braling quietly. "Bend close. Put your ear to Braling Two's chest."

Smith hesitated and then leaned forward to place his head against the uncomplaining ribs. Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick.

"Oh no! It can't be!"

"It is."

"Let me listen again."

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick.

Smith staggered back and fluttered his eyelids, appalled. He reached out and touched the warm hands and the cheeks of the thing.

"Where'd you get him?"

"Isn't he excellently fashioned?"

"Incredible. Where?"

"Give the man your card, Braling Two."

Braling Two did a magic trick and produced a white card:

MARIONETTES, INC. Duplicate self or friends; new humanoid plastic 1990



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models, guaranteed against all physical wear. From \$7,600 to our \$15,000 de luxe model.

"No," said Smith.

"Yes," said Braling.

"Naturally," said Braling Two.

"How long has this gone on?"

"I've had him for a month. I keep him in the cellar in a toolbox. My wife never goes downstairs, and I have the only lock and key to that box. Tonight I said I wished to take a walk to buy a cigar. I went down cellar and took Braling Two out of his box and sent him back up to sit with my wife while I came on out to see you, Smith."

"Wonderful! He even smells like you: Bond Street and Melachros!"

"It may be splitting hairs, but I think it highly ethical. After all, what my wife wants most of all is me. This marionette is me to the hairiest detail. I've been home all evening. I shall be home with her for the next month. In the meantime another gentleman will be in Rio after ten years of waiting. When I return from Rio, Braling Two here will go back in his box."

Smith thought that over a minute or two. "Will he walk around without sustenance for a month?" he finally asked.

"For six months if necessary. And he's built to do everything—eat, sleep, perspire—everything, natural as natural is. You'll take good care of my wife, won't you, Braling Two?"

"Your wife is rather nice," said Braling Two. "I've grown rather fond of her."

Smith was beginning to tremble. "How long has Marionettes, Inc., been in business?"

"Secretly, for two years."

"Could I—I mean, is there a possibility—" Smith took his friend's elbow earnestly. "Can you tell me where I can get one, a robot, a marionette, for myself? You will give me the address, won't you?"

"Here you are."

Smith took the card and turned it round and round. "Thank you," he said. "You don't know what this means. Just a little respite. A night or so, once a month even. My wife loves me so much she can't bear to have me gone an hour. I love her dearly, you know, but remember the old poem: 'Love will fly if held too lightly, love will die if held too tightly.' I just want her to relax her grip a little bit."

"You're lucky, at least, that your wife loves you. Hate's my problem. Not so easy."

"Oh, Nettie loves me madly. It will be my task to make her love me comfortably."

"Good luck to you, Smith. Do drop around while I'm in Rio. It will seem strange, if you suddenly stop calling by, to my wife. You're to treat Braling Two, here, just like me."

"Right! Good-by. And thank you."

Smith went smiling down the street. Braling and Braling Two turned and walked into the apartment hall.

On the crosstown bus Smith whistled softly, turning the white card in his fingers: Clients must be pledged to secrecy, for while an act is pending in Congress to legalize Marionettes, Inc., it is still a felony, if caught, to use one.

"Well," said Smith.

Clients must have a mold made of their body and a color index check of their eyes, lips, hair, skin, etc. Clients must expect to wait for two months until their model is finished.

Not so long, thought Smith. Two months from now my ribs will have a chance to mend from the crushing they've taken. Two months from now my hand will heal from being so constantly held. Two months from now my bruised underlip will begin to reshape itself. I don't mean to sound ungrateful...

He flipped the card over.

Marionettes, Inc., is two years old and has a fine record of satisfied customers behind it. Our motto is "No Strings Attached." Address: 43 South Wesley Drive.

The bus pulled to his stop; he alighted, and while humming up the stairs he thought, Nettie and I have fifteen thousand in our joint bank account. I'll just slip eight thousand out as a business venture, you might say. The marionette will probably pay back my money, with interest, in many ways. Nettie needn't know. He unlocked the door and in a minute was in the bedroom. There lay Nettie, pale, huge, and piously asleep.

"Dear Nettie." He was almost overwhelmed with remorse at her innocent face there in the semidarkness. "If you were awake you would smother me with kisses and coo in my ear. Really, you make me feel like a criminal. You have been such a good, loving wife. Sometimes it is impossible for me to believe you married me instead of that Bud Chapman you once liked. It seems that in the last month you have loved me more wildly than ever before."

Tears came to his eyes. Suddenly he wished to kiss her, confess his love, tear up the card, forget the whole business. But as he moved to do this, his hand ached and his ribs cracked and groaned. He stopped, with a pained look in his eyes, and turned away. He moved out into the hall and through the dark rooms.



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Humming, he opened the kidney desk in the library and filched the bankbook. "Just take eight thousand dollars is all," he said. "No more than that." He stopped. "Wait a minute."

He rechecked the bankbook frantically. "Hold on here!" he cried. "Ten thousand dollars is missing!" He leaped up. "There's only five thousand left! What's she done? What's Nettie done with it? More hats, more clothes, more perfume! Or, wait - I know! She bought that little house on the Hudson she's been talking about for months, without so much as a by your leave!"

He stormed into the bedroom, righteous and indignant. What did she mean, taking their money like this? He bent over her. "Nettie!" he shouted. "Nettie, wake up!"

She did not stir. "What've you done with my money!" he bellowed. She stirred fitfully. The light from the street flushed over her beautiful cheeks.

There was something about her. His heart throbbed violently. His tongue dried.

He shivered. His knees suddenly turned to water. He collapsed. "Nettie, Nettie!" he cried. "What've you done with my money!"

And then, the horrid thought. And then the terror and the loneliness engulfed him. And then the fever and disillusionment. For, without desiring to do so, he bent forward and yet forward again until his fevered ear was resting firmly and irrevocably upon her round pink bosom. "Nettie!" he cried.

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick.

As Smith walked away down the avenue in the night, Braling and Braling Two turned in at the door to the apartment. "I'm glad he'll be happy too," said Braling.

"Yes," said Braling Two abstractedly.

"Well, it's the cellar box for you, B-Two." Braling guided the other creature's elbow down the stairs to the cellar.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," said Braling Two, as they reached the concrete floor and walked across it. "The cellar. I don't like it. I don't like that toolbox."

"I'll try and fix up something more comfortable."

"Marionettes are made to move, not lie still. How would you like to lie in a box most of the time?"

"Well -

"You wouldn't like it at all. I keep running. There's no way to shut me off. I'm perfectly alive and I have feelings."

"It'll only be a few days now. I'll be off to Rio and you won't have to stay in the box. You can live upstairs."

Braling Two gestured irritably. "And when you come back from having a good time, back in the box I go."

Braling said, "They didn't tell me at the marionette shop that I'd get a difficult specimen."

"There's a lot they don't know about us," said Braling Two. "We're pretty new. And we're sensitive. I hate the idea of you going off and laughing and lying in the sun in Rio while we're stuck here in the cold."

"But I've wanted that trip all my life," said Braling quietly. He squinted his eyes and could see the sea and the mountains and the yellow sand. The sound of the waves was good to his inward mind. The sun was fine on his bare shoulders. The wine was most excellent.

"I'll never get to go to Rio," said the other man. "Have you thought of that?"

"No, I -

"And another thing. Your wife."

"What about her?" asked Braling, beginning to edge toward the door.

"I've grown quite fond of her."

"I'm glad you're enjoying your employment." Braling licked his lips nervously.

"I'm afraid you don't understand. I think—I'm in love with her."

Braling took another step and froze. "You're what?"

"And I've been thinking," said Braling Two, "how nice it is in Rio and how I'll never get there, and I've thought about your wife and—I think we could be very happy."

"T-that's nice." Braling strolled as casually as he could to the cellar door.

"You won't mind waiting a moment, will you? I have to make a phone call."

"To whom?" Braling Two frowned.

"No one important."

"To Marionettes, Incorporated? To tell them to come get me?"

"No, no—nothing like that!" He tried to rush out the door. A metal-firm grip seized his wrists. "Don't run!"

"Take your hands off!"

"No."

"Did my wife put you up to this?"

"No."

"Did she guess? Did she talk to you? Does she know? Is that it?" He screamed. A hand clapped over his mouth.



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"You'll never know, will you?" Braling Two smiled delicately. "You'll never know."

Braling struggled. "She must have guessed; she must have affected you!"

Braling Two said, "I'm going to put you in the box, lock it, and lose the key. Then I'll buy another Rio ticket for your wife."

"Now, now, wait a minute. Hold on. Don't be rash. Let's talk this over!"

"Good-by, Braling."

Braling stiffened. "What do you mean, 'good-by'?"

Ten minutes later Mrs. Braling awoke. She put her hand to her cheek. Someone had just kissed it. She shivered and looked up. "Why - you haven't done that in years," she murmured.

"We'll see what we can do about that," someone said.

Marionettes, Inc.

by Ray Bradbury

"Marionettes, Inc." is a short story that is included in *The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury. The story is protected under copyright law, so I am not able to include a full-text version for you here. On my last product update, these two websites were hosting copies of the story:

http://alcfilms.nebo.edu/uploads/1/3/1/8/13180529/stories_of_mystery_vol1_w_cover.pdf

(The story is on pages 131-141 of the alcfilms website ebook.)

http://language2ucologiaarturosoria.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/marionettes_inc.pdf

Also, many textbooks include Bradbury's story, so you may want to check with your department's offerings/book room.

Read the story with your class and then give a copy of the question sheet on page 2 to each student. Sometimes, I have students work independently to answer the questions; other times, I allow them to work in teams of two. Depending on the length of your class period, some students may need to finish the questions as homework.

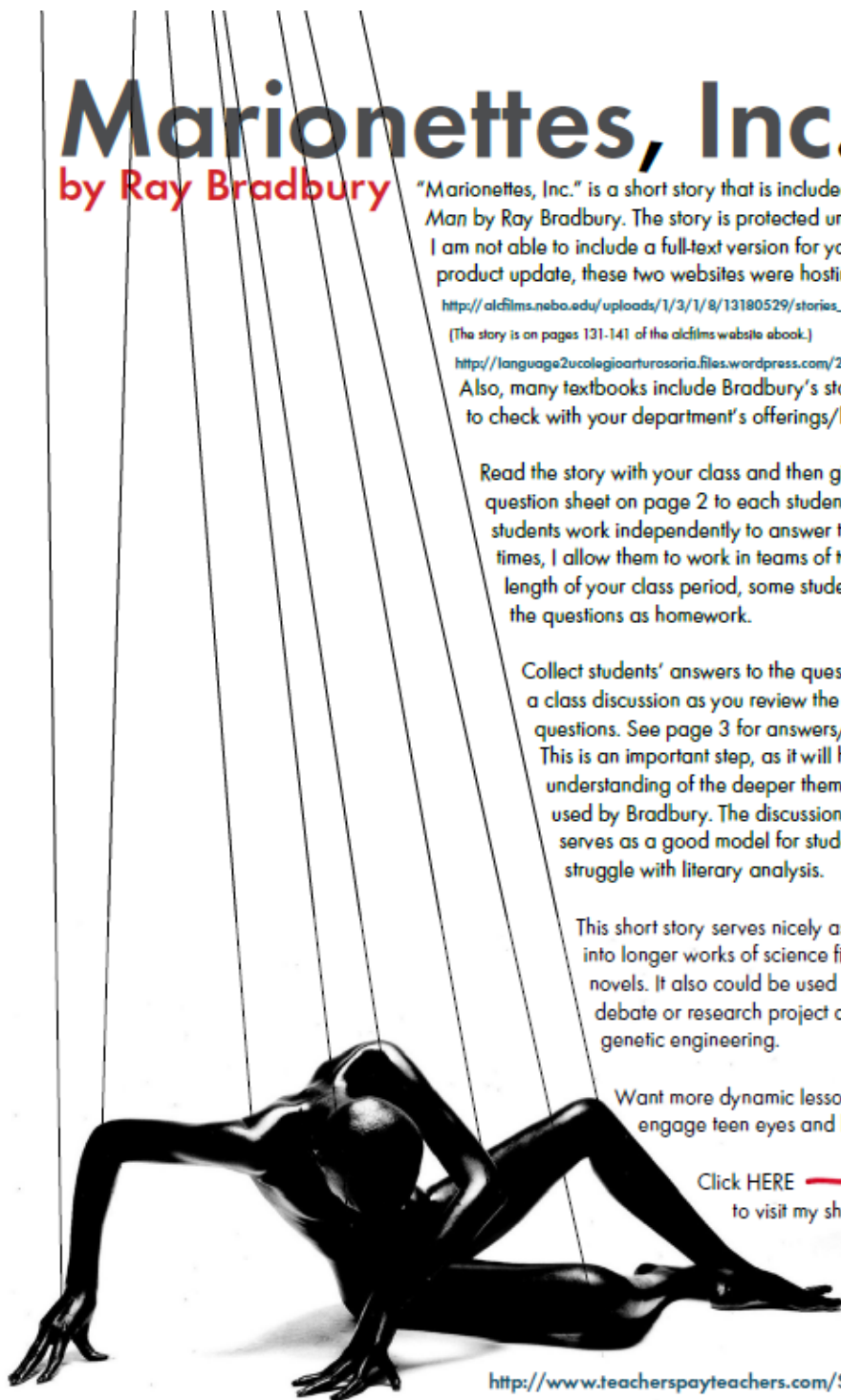
Collect students' answers to the questions. Then, launch a class discussion as you review the answers to all of the questions. See page 3 for answers/discussion starters. This is an important step, as it will help solidify students' understanding of the deeper themes and techniques used by Bradbury. The discussion is always rich and serves as a good model for students who might struggle with literary analysis.


This short story serves nicely as a stepping stone into longer works of science fiction and dystopian novels. It also could be used as a primer for a debate or research project about cloning and/or genetic engineering.

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Marionettes,
Inc.
by Ray Bradbury

1. What disturbing thing happened between Mr. and Mrs. Braling that likely led to their marriage? (Note: You'll need to use your inference skills because the situation is not clearly spelled out for the reader.)
2. What color are Mr. Braling's eyes? What's symbolically interesting about this?
3. In what year is the story set? How do you know this?
4. When Braling Two's mechanical heart beats, it makes a "tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick" sound. What other association does this sound hold for the reader?
How is this an example of skillful foreshadowing by Bradbury?
5. Mr. Smith is shocked to discover that his wife, Nettie, has beat him to the punch, already swapping her spot with a marionette. Based on the text, how long ago do you think Nettie made the switch and where do you think she's been spending her free time?
6. Despite his questionable dealings with Marionettes, Inc., Mr. Braling sees himself as an ethical person. Give two pieces of evidence from the text that show Mr. Braling's belief that he is an upright citizen.
7. In the last line of the story, Braling Two is referred to by the narrator as "someone." What does this new identifier imply and how does it add to the drama of the closing scene?
8. Today, people don't buy clones to take their places in troubled relationships, but they do sometimes use technology to avoid conflict with their partners. Give an example from modern life that proves this statement true.

Marionettes, Inc. – Answer Key

1. What disturbing thing happened between Mr. and Mrs. Braling that likely led to their marriage? (Note: You'll need to use your inference skills because the situation is not clearly spelled out for the reader.) It's likely that the young couple was fooling around and things went further than they should have; to save her reputation (this story was published in 1949, after all), Mrs. Braling threatened Mr. Braling. It's suggested that she told him to marry her or she would accuse him of rape. That's a rough start to a marriage and helps to explain why Mr. Braling would be tempted after 10 years in this troubled union to contact Marionettes, Inc.

2. What color are Mr. Braling's eyes? What's symbolically interesting about this? His eyes are gray. This is an interesting choice by Bradbury because it suggests the internal moral ambiguity shown by Mr. Braling when he tries to justify fooling his wife. Also, the eye color is suggestive of Mr. Braling's depressed, worn-down state of mind.

3. In what year is the story set? How do you know this? The story is set sometime in 1989 or 1990. We know this because Smith says that the Bralings were married ten years ago in 1979. Also, Marionettes, Inc. is now selling models from its 1990 product line. Bradbury published the story in 1949, so it's fun to see what he imagined life would be like in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

4. When Braling Two's mechanical heart beats, it makes a "tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick" sound. What other association does this sound hold for the reader? How is this an example of skillful foreshadowing by Bradbury? The sound should also make us think of a bomb. These marionettes are ticking time-bombs, likely to destroy the people they were built to emulate. This foreshadows exactly what will happen when Braling Two kills Mr. Braling.

5. Mr. Smith is shocked to discover that his wife, Nettie, has beat him to the punch, already swapping her spot with a marionette. Based on the text, how long ago do you think Nettie made the switch and where do you think she's been spending her free time? It's likely that Nettie has been away for the past month, since that's when Mr. Smith first noticed her change in behavior. She's probably having an affair with her old flame, Bud Chapman, since Bradbury specifically mentions him by name. Nettie and Bud may even be off together at "that little house on the Hudson" that she's always dreamed of owning.

6. Despite his questionable dealings with Marionettes, Inc., Mr. Braling sees himself as an ethical person. Give two pieces of evidence from the text that show Mr. Braling's belief that he is an upright citizen. Early in the story, he says that he would never trick his wife by slipping sleeping powder in her coffee because "that would be unethical." Later, he says purchasing Braling Two is "highly ethical" because he's giving his wife exactly what she wants, more of "his" time and attention. The irony is thick for the reader here, as Mr. Braling is clearly an unethical man; he's planning a relaxing vacation to Rio while leaving his wife in the house with a murderous cyborg. He isn't exactly Husband of the Year material, yet he's able to justify his actions to himself.

7. In the last line of the story, Braling Two is referred to by the narrator as "someone." What does this new identifier imply and how does it add to the drama of the closing scene? The use of the word "someone" in the final line is chilling because Mrs. Braling doesn't really know who she's lying next to and we, the readers, don't know what evil the marionette is capable of committing. He has just presumably murdered Mr. Braling and now he's lying in bed with a defenseless woman. This is super-creepy, menacing stuff.

8. Today, people don't buy clones to take their places in troubled relationships, but they do sometimes use technology to avoid conflict with their partners. Give an example from modern life that proves this statement true. Students' answers will vary, but it's true that many people plug into technology as a distraction from having to spend time in tense relationships with family members. Also, students may relate stories of knowing people who have ended relationships via text or email rather than having the courage to break up with someone face-to-face.