



The Meadow, Ray Bradbury

## The Meadow

A wall collapses, followed by another and another; with dull thunder, a city falls into ruin.

The night wind blows.

The world lies silent.

London was torn down during the day. Port Said was destroyed. The nails were pulled out of San Francisco. Glasgow is no more. They are gone, forever.

Boards clatter softly in the wind, sand whines and trickles in small storms upon the still air.

Along the road toward the colorless ruins comes the old night watchman to unlock the gate in the high barbed-wire fence and stand looking in.

There in the moonlight lie Alexandria and Moscow and New York. There in the moonlight lie Johannesburg and Dublin and Stockholm. And Clearwater, Kansas, and Provincetown, and Rio de Janeiro.

Just this afternoon the old man saw it happen, saw the car roaring outside the barbed-wire fence, saw the lean, sun-tanned men in that car, the men with their luxurious charcoal-flannel suits, and winking gold-mask cuff links, and their burning-gold wristwatches, and eye-blinding rings, lighting their cork-tipped cigarettes with engraved lighters. . . .

“There it is, gentlemen. What a mess. Look what the weather’s done to it.”

“Yes, sir, it’s bad, Mr. Douglas!”

“We just might save Paris.”

“Yes, sir!”

“But, hell! The rain’s warped it. That’s Hollywood for you! Tear it down! Clear it out! We can use that land. Send a wrecking crew in today!”  
“Yes, sir, Mr. Douglas!”

The car roaring off and gone away.

And now it is night. And the old night watchman stands inside the gate. He remembers what happened this same still afternoon when the wreckers came.

A hammering, ripping, clattering; a collapse and a roar. Dust and thunder, thunder and dust!

And the whole of the entire world shook loose its nails and lath and plaster and sill and celluloid window as town after town following town banged over flat and lay still.

A shuddering, a thunder fading away, and then, once more, only the quiet wind.

The night watchman now walks slowly forward along the empty streets.

And one moment he is in Baghdad, and beggars loll in wondrous filth, and women with clear sapphire eyes give veiled smiles from high thin windows.

The wind blows sand and confetti.

The women and beggars vanish.

And it is all strutworks again, it is all papier-mâché and oil-painted canvas and props lettered with the name of this studio, and there is nothing behind any of the building fronts but night and space and stars.

The old man pulls a hammer and a few long nails from his tool chest; he peers around in the junk until he finds a dozen good strong boards and some untorn canvas. And he takes the bright steel nails in his blunt fingers, and they are single-headed nails.

And he begins to put London back together again, hammering and hammering, board by board, wall by wall, window by window, hammering, hammering, louder, louder, steel on steel, steel in wood,

wood against sky, working the hours toward midnight, with no end to his striking and fixing and striking again.

“Hey there, you!”

The old man pauses.

“You, night watchman!”

Out of the shadows hurries a stranger in overalls, calling:

“Hey, what’s-your-name!”

The old man turns. “The name’s Smith.”

“Okay, Smith, what in hell’s the idea!”

The watchman eyes the stranger quietly. “Who are you?”

“Kelly, foreman of the wrecking gang.”

The old man nods. “Ah. The ones who tear everything down. You’ve done plenty today. Why aren’t you home bragging about it?”

Kelly hawks and spits. “There was some machinery over on the Singapore set I had to check.” He wipes his mouth. . . . “Now, Smith, what in Christ’s name you think you’re doing? Drop that hammer. You’re building it all up again! We tear it down and you put it up. You crazy?”

The old man nods. “Maybe I am. But somebody has to put it up again.” “Look, Smith. I do my work, you do yours, everyone’s happy. But I can’t have you messing, see? I’m turning you in to Mr. Douglas.”

The old man goes on with his hammering. “Call him up. Send him around. I want to talk to him. He’s the crazy one.”

Kelly laughs. “You kidding? Douglas don’t see nobody.” He jerks his hand, then bends to examine Smith’s newly finished work. “Hey, wait a minute! What kind of nails you using? Single-heads! Now, cut that! It’ll be hell to pay tomorrow, trying to pull ’em out!”

Smith turns his head and looks for a moment at the other man swaying there. “Well, it stands to reason you can’t put the world together with

double-headed nails. They're too easy to yank out. You got to use single-headed nails and hammer 'em way in. Like this!"

He gives a steel nail one tremendous blow that buries it completely in the wood.

Kelly works his hands on his hips. "I'll give you one more chance. Quit putting things back together and I'll play ball with you."

"Young man," says the night watchman, and keeps on hammering while he talks, and thinks about it, and talks some more, "I was here long before you were born. I was here when all this was only a meadow. And there was a wind set the meadow running in waves. For more than thirty years I watched it grow, until it was all of the world together. I lived here with it. I lived nice. This is the real world to me now.

That world out there, beyond the fence, is where I spend time sleeping. I got a little room on a little street, and I see headlines and read about wars and strange, bad people. But here? Here I have the whole world together and it's all peace. I been walking through the cities of this world since 1920.

Any night I feel like it, I have a one-o'clock snack at a bar on the Champs Élysées! I can get me some fine amontillado sherry at a sidewalk café in Madrid, if I want. Or else me and the stone gargoyles, high up there—you see them, on top Notre Dame?—we can turn over great state matters and reach big political decisions!"

"Yeah, Pop, sure." Kelly waves impatiently.

"And now you come and kick it down and leave only that world out there which hasn't learned the first thing about peace that I know from seeing this land here inside the barbed wire. And so you come and rip it up and there's no peace anymore, anywhere. You and your wreckers so proud of your wrecking. Pulling down towns and cities and whole lands!"

"A guy's got to live," says Kelly. "I got a wife and kids."

“That’s what they all say. They got wives and kids. And they go on, pulling apart, tearing down, killing. They had orders! Somebody told them. They had to do it!”

“Shut up and gimme that hammer!”

“Don’t come any closer!”

“Why, you crazy old—”

“This hammer’s good for more than nails!” The old man whistles the hammer through the air; the wrecker jumps back.

“Hell,” says Kelly, “you’re insane! I’m putting a call through to the main studio; we’ll get some cops here quick. My God, one minute you’re building things up and talking crazy, but how do I know two minutes from now you won’t run wild and start pouring kerosene and lighting matches!”

“I wouldn’t harm the smallest piece of kindling in this place, and you know it,” says the old man.

“Might burn the whole goddam place down, hell,” says Kelly. “Listen, old man, you just wait right there!”

The wrecker spins about and runs off into the villages and the ruined cities and the sleeping two-dimensional towns of this night world, and after his footsteps fade there is a music that the wind plays on the long silver barbed wires of the fence, and the old man hammering and hammering and selecting long boards and rearing walls until a time finally comes when his mouth is gasping, his heart is exploding; the hammer drops from his open fingers, steel nails tinkle like coins on the pavement, and the old man cries out to himself alone:

“It’s no use, no use. I can’t put it all back up before they come. I need so very much help I don’t know what to do.”

The old man leaves his hammer lying on the road and begins to walk with no direction, with no purpose, it seems, save that he is thinking to

make one last round and take one last look at everything and say good-bye to whatever there is or was in this world to say good-bye to.

And so he walks with the shadows all around and the shadows all through this land where time has grown late indeed, and the shadows are of all kinds and types and sizes, shadows of buildings, and shadows of people.

And he doesn't look straight at them, no, because if he looked at them straight, they would all blow away. No, he just walks, down the middle of Piccadilly Circus . . . the echo of his steps . . . or the Rue de la Paix . . . the sound of him clearing his throat . . . or Fifth Avenue... and he doesn't look right or left. And all around him, in dark doorways and empty windows, are his many friends, his good friends, his very good friends.

Far away there are the hiss and steam and soft whispering of a caffè espresso machine, all silver and chrome, and soft Italian singing . . . the flutter of hands in darkness over the open mouths of balalaikas, the rustle of palm trees, a touching of drums with the chimes chiming and small bells belling, and a sound of summer apples dropped in soft night grass which are not apples at all but the motion of women's bared feet slowly dancing a circle to the chimes' faint chiming and the belling of the tiny golden bells.

There is the munch of maize kernels crushed on black volcanic stone, the sizzle of tortillas drowned in hot fat, the whisk of charcoals tossing up a thousand fireflies of spark at the blowing of a mouth and the wave of a papaya frond; everywhere faces and forms, everywhere stirs and gestures and ghost fires which float the magical torch-colored faces of Spanish gypsies in air as on a fiery water, the mouths crying out the songs that tell of the oddness and the strangeness and the sadness of living. Everywhere shadows and people, everywhere people and shadows and singing to music.

Just that very trite thing—the wind?

No. The people are all here. They have been here for many years. And tomorrow?

The old man stops, presses his hands to his chest.

They will not be here anymore.

A horn blows!

Outside the barbed-wire gate—the enemy! Outside the gate a small black police car and a large black limousine from the studio itself, three miles away.

The horn blares!

The old man seizes the rungs of a ladder and climbs, the sound of the horn pushing him higher and higher. The gate crashes wide; the enemy roars in.

“There he goes!”

The glaring lights of the police shine in upon the cities of the meadow; the lights reveal the stark canvas set-pieces of Manhattan, Chicago, and Chungking! The light glitters on the imitation stone towers of Notre Dame Cathedral, fixes on a tiny figure balancing on the catwalks of Notre Dame, climbing and climbing up where the night and the stars are turning slowly by.

“There he is, Mr. Douglas, at the top!”

“Good God. It’s getting so a man can’t spend an evening at a quiet party without—”

“He’s striking a match! Call the fire department!”

On top of Notre Dame, the night watchman, looking down, shielding the match from the softly blowing wind, sees the police, the workmen, and the producer in a dark suit, a big man, gazing up at him. Then the night watchman slowly turns the match, cupping it, applies it to the tip of his cigar. He lights the cigar in slow puffs.

He calls: “Is Mr. Douglas down there?”

A voice calls back: “What do you want with me?”



The old man smiles. "Come up, alone! Bring a gun if you want! I just want a little talk!"

The voices echo in the vast churchyard:

"Don't do it, Mr. Douglas!"

"Give me your gun. Let's get this over with so I can get back to the party. Keep me covered, I'll play it safe. I don't want these sets burned. There's two million dollars in lumber alone here. Ready? I'm on my way."

The producer climbs high on the night ladders, up through the half shell of Notre Dame to where the old man leans against a plaster gargoyle, quietly smoking a cigar. The producer stops, gun pointed, half through an open trapdoor.

"All right, Smith. Stay where you are."

Smith removes the cigar from his mouth quietly. "Don't you be afraid of me. I'm all right."

"I wouldn't bet money on that."

"Mr. Douglas," says the night watchman, "did you ever read that story about the man who traveled to the future and found everyone there insane? Everyone. But since they were all insane they didn't know they were insane.

They all acted alike and so they thought themselves normal. And since our hero was the only sane one among them, he was abnormal; therefore, he was the insane one. To them, at least. Yes, Mr. Douglas, insanity is relative. It depends on who has who locked in what cage."

The producer swears under his breath. "I didn't climb up here to talk all night. What do you want?"

"I want to talk with the Creator. That's you, Mr. Douglas. You created all this. You came here one day and struck the earth with a magical checkbook and cried, 'Let there be Paris!' And there was Paris: streets, bistros, flowers, wine, outdoor bookshops and all.

And you clapped your hands again: ‘Let there be Constantinople!’ And there it was! You clapped your hands a thousand times, and each time made something new, and now you think just by clapping your hands one last time you can drop it all down in ruins. But, Mr. Douglas, it’s not as easy as that!”

“I own fifty-one percent of the stock in this studio!”

“But did the studio ever belong to you, really? Did you ever think to drive here late some night and climb up on this cathedral and see what a wonderful world you created? Did you ever wonder if it might not be a good idea for you to sit up here with me and my friends and have a cup of amontillado sherry with us?”

All right—so the amontillado smells and looks and tastes like coffee. Imagination, Mr. Creator, imagination. But no, you never came around, you never climbed up, you never looked or listened or cared. There was always a party somewhere else. And now, very late, without asking us, you want to destroy it all. You may own fifty-one percent of the studio stock, but you don’t own them.”

“Them!” cries the producer. “What’s all this business about ‘them’?”

“It’s hard to put in words. The people who live here.” The night watchman moves his hand in the empty air toward the half-cities and the night. “So many films were made here in all the long years. Extras moved in the streets in costumes, they talked a thousand tongues, they smoked cigarettes and meerschaums and Persian hookahs, even.

Dancing girls danced. They glittered, oh, how they glittered! Women with veils smiled down from high balconies. Soldiers marched. Children played. Knights in silver armor fought. There were orange-tea shops. People sipped tea in them and dropped their h’s Gongs were beaten. Viking ships sailed the inland seas.”

The producer lifts himself up through the trapdoor and sits on the plankings, the gun cradled more easily in his hand. He seems to be

looking at the old man first with one eye, then the other, listening to him with one ear, then the other, shaking his head a little to himself.

The night watchman continues:

“And somehow, after the extras and the men with the cameras and microphones and all the equipment walked away and the gates were shut and they drove off in big cars, somehow something of all those thousands of different people remained. The things they had been, or pretended to be, stayed on.

The foreign languages, the costumes, the things they did, the things they thought about, their religions and their music, all those little things and big things stayed on. The sights of far places. The smells. The salt wind. The sea. It’s all here tonight if you listen.”

The producer listens and the old man listens in the drafty strutworks of the cathedral, with the moonlight blinding the eyes of the plaster gargoyles and the wind making the false stone mouths to whisper, and the sound of a thousand lands within a land below blowing and dusting and leaning in that wind, a thousand yellow minarets and milk-white towers and green avenues yet untouched among the hundred new ruins, and all of it murmuring its wires and lathings like a great steel-and-wooden harp touched in the night, and the wind bringing that self-made sound high up here in the sky to these two men who stand listening and apart.

The producer laughs shortly and shakes his head.

“You heard,” says the night watchman. “You did hear, didn’t you? I see it in your face.”

Douglas shoves the gun in his coat pocket. “Anything you listen for you can hear. I made the mistake of listening. You should have been a writer. You could throw six of my best ones out of work. Well, what about it—are you ready to come down out of here now?”

“You sound almost polite,” says the night watchman.

“Don’t know why I should. You ruined a good evening for me.”

“Did I? It hasn’t been that bad, has it? A bit different, I should say. Stimulating, maybe.”

Douglas laughs quietly. “You’re not dangerous at all. You just need company. It’s your job and everything going to hell and you’re lonely. I can’t quite figure you, though.”

“Don’t tell me I’ve got you thinking?” asks the old man.

Douglas snorts. “After you’ve lived in Hollywood long enough, you meet all kinds. Besides, I’ve never been up here before. It’s a real view, like you say. But I’ll be damned if I can figure why you should worry about all this junk. What’s it to you?”

The night watchman gets down on one knee and taps one hand into the palm of the other, illustrating his points. “Look. As I said before, you came here years ago, clapped your hands, and three hundred cities jumped up!

Then you added a half-thousand other nations, and states and peoples and religions and political setups inside the barbed-wire fence. And there was trouble! Oh, nothing you could see. It was all in the wind and the spaces between. But it was the same kind of trouble the world out there beyond the fence has—squabbles and riots and invisible wars. But at last the trouble died out. You want to know why?”

“If I didn’t, I wouldn’t be sitting up here freezing.”

A little night music, please, thinks the old man, and moves his hand on the air like someone playing the proper and beautiful music to background all that he has to tell. . . .

“Because you got Boston joined to Trinidad,” he says softly, “part of Trinidad poking out of Lisbon, part of Lisbon leaning on Alexandria, Alexandria tacked onto Shanghai, and a lot of little pegs and nails between, like Chattanooga, Oshkosh, Oslo, Sweet Water, Soissons, Beirut, Bombay, and Port Arthur. You shoot a man in New York and he stumbles forward and drops dead in Athens. You take a political bribe in Chicago and somebody in London goes to jail.

You hang a Negro man in Alabama and the people of Hungary have to bury him. The dead Jews of Poland clutter the streets of Sydney, Portland, and Tokyo. You push a knife into a man's stomach in Berlin and it comes out the back of a farmer in Memphis. It's all so close, so very close.

That's why we have peace here. We're all so crowded there has got to be peace, or nothing would be left! One fire would destroy all of us, no matter who started it, for what reason. So all of the people, the memories, whatever you want to call them, that are here, have settled down, and this is their world, a good world, a fine world."

The old man stops and licks his lips slowly and takes a breath. "And tomorrow," he says, "you're going to stomp it down."

The old man crouches there a moment longer, then gets to his feet and gazes out at the cities and the thousand shadows in those cities. The great plaster cathedral whines and sways in the night air, back and forth, rocking on the summer tides.

"Well," says Douglas at last, "shall—shall we go down now?" Smith nods. "I've had my say."

Douglas vanishes, and the watchman listens to the younger man going down and down through the ladders and catwalks of the night. Then, after a reasonable hesitation, the old man takes hold of the ladder, breathes something to himself, and begins the long descent in shadow.

The studio police and the few workers and some minor executives all drive away. Only one large dark car waits outside the barbed-wire gate as the two men stand talking in the cities of the meadow.

"What are you going to do now?" asks Smith.

"Go back to my party, I suppose," says the producer.

"Will it be fun?"

"Yes." The producer hesitates. "Sure, it'll be fun!" He glances at the night watchman's right hand. "Don't tell me you've found that hammer

Kelly told me you were using? You going to start building again? You don't give up, do you?"

"Would you, if you were the last builder and everybody else was a wrecker?"

Douglas starts to walk with the old man. "Well, maybe I'll see you again, Smith."

"No," says Smith, "I won't be here. This all won't be here. If you come back again, it'll be too late."

Douglas stops. "Hell, hell! What do you want me to do?"

"A simple thing. Leave all this standing. Leave these cities up."

"I can't do that! Damn it. Business reasons. It has to go."

"A man with a real nose for business and some imagination could think up a profitable reason for it to stay," says Smith.

"My car's waiting! How do I get out of here?"

The producer strikes off over a patch of rubble, cuts through half of a tumbled ruin, kicking boards aside, leaning for a moment on plaster façades and strutworks. Dust rains from the sky.

"Watch out!"

The producer stumbles in a thunder of dust and avalanching brick; he gropes, he topples, he is seized upon by the old man and yanked forward.

"Jump!"

They jump, and half the building slides to ruin, crashes into hills and mountains of old paper and lathing. A great bloom of dust strikes out upon the air.

"You all right?"

"Yes. Thanks. Thanks." The producer looks at the fallen building. The dust clears. "You probably saved my life."

"Hardly that. Most of those are papier-mâché bricks. You might have been cut and bruised a little."

“Nevertheless, thanks. What building was that that fell?”

“Norman village tower, built in 1925. Don’t get near the rest of it; it might go down.”

“I’ll be careful.” The producer moves carefully in to stand by the set-piece. “Why—I could push this whole damn building over with one hand.” He demonstrates; the building leans and quivers and groans. The producer steps quickly back. “I could knock it down in a second.” “But you wouldn’t want to do that,” says the watchman.

“Oh, wouldn’t I? What’s one French house more or less, this late in the day?”

The old man takes his arm. “Walk around here to the other side of the house.”

They walk to the other side.

“Read that sign,” says Smith.

The producer flicks his cigarette lighter, holds the fire up to help him squint, and reads:

“‘THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK MELLIN TOWN.’” He pauses. “‘ILLINOIS,’” he says, very slowly.

The building stands there in the sharp light of the stars and the bland light of the moon.

“On one side”—Douglas balances his hands like a scales—“a French tower. On the other side—” He walks seven steps to the right, seven steps to the left, peering. “‘THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK.’ Bank. Tower. Tower. Bank. Well, I’ll be damned.”

Smith smiles and says, “Still want to push the French tower down, Mr. Douglas?”

“Wait a minute, wait a minute, hold on, hold on,” says Douglas, and suddenly begins to see the buildings that stand before him. He turns in a slow circle; his eyes move up and down and across and over; his eyes

flick here, flick there, see this, see that, examine, file, put away, and re-examine. He begins to walk in silence.

They move in the cities of the meadow, over grasses and wild flowers, up to and into and through ruins and half-ruins and up to and into and through complete avenues and villages and towns.

They begin a recital which goes on and on as they walk, Douglas asking, the night watchman answering, Douglas asking, the night watchman answering.

“What’s this over here?”

“A Buddhist temple.”

“And on the other side of it?”

“The log cabin where Lincoln was born.”

“And here?”

“St. Patrick’s church, New York.”

“And on the reverse?”

“A Russian Orthodox church in Rostov!”

“What’s this?”

“The door of a castle on the Rhine!”

“And inside?”

“A Kansas City soda fountain!”

“And here? And here? And over there? And what’s that?” asks Douglas.

“What’s this! What about that one! And over there?”

It seems as if they are running and rushing and yelling all through the cities, here, there, everywhere, up, down, in, out, climbing, descending, poking, stirring, opening-shutting doors.

“And this, and this, and this, and this?”

The night watchman tells all there is to tell.

Their shadows run ahead in narrow alleys, and avenues as broad as rivers made of stone and sand.

They make a great talking circle; they hurry all around and back to where they started.



They are quiet again. The old man is quiet from having said what there was to say, and the producer is quiet from listening and remembering and fitting it all together in his mind. He stands, absentmindedly fumbling for his cigarette case. It takes him a full minute to open it, examining every action, thinking about it, and to offer the case to the watchman.

"Thanks."

They light up thoughtfully. They puff on their cigarettes and watch the smoke blow away.

Douglas says, "Where's that damned hammer of yours?"

"Here," says Smith.

"You got your nails with you?"

"Yes, sir."

Douglas takes a deep drag on his cigarette and exhales. "Okay, Smith, get to work."

"What?"

"You heard me. Nail what you can back up, on your own time. Most of the stuff that's already torn down is a complete loss. But any bits and pieces that fit and will look decent, put 'em together. Thank God there's a lot still standing. It took me a long time to get it through my head.

A man with a nose for business and some imagination, you said. That is the world, you said. I should have seen it years ago. Here it all is inside the fence, and me too blind to see what could be done with it. The World Federation in my own back yard and me kicking it over. So help me God, we need more crazy people and night watchmen."

"You know," says the night watchman, "I'm getting old and I'm getting strange. You wouldn't be fooling an old and strange man, would you?"

"I'll make no promises I can't keep," says the producer. "I'll only promise to try. There's a good chance we can go ahead. It would make

a beautiful film, there's no doubt of that. We could make it all here, inside the fence, photograph it ten ways from Christmas.

There's no doubt about a story, either. You provided it. It's yours. It wouldn't be hard to put some writers to work on it. Good writers. Perhaps only a short subject, twenty minutes, but we could show all the cities and countries here, leaning on and holding each other up.

I like the idea. I like it very much, believe me. We could show a film like that to anyone anywhere in the world and they'd like it. They couldn't pass it up, it would be too important."

"It's good to hear you talk this way."

"I hope I keep on talking this way," says the producer. "I can't be trusted. I don't trust myself. Hell, I get excited, up one day, down the next. Maybe you'll have to hit me on the head with that hammer to keep me going."

"I'd be pleased," says Smith.

"And if we do the film," says the younger man, "I suppose you could help. You know the sets, probably better than anyone. Any suggestions you might want to make, we'd be glad to have. Then, after we do the film, I suppose you won't mind letting us tear the rest of the world down, right?"

"I'd give my permission," says the watchman.

"Well, I'll call off the hounds for a few days and see what happens. Send out a camera crew tomorrow to see what we can line up for shots. Send out some writers. Maybe you can all gab. Hell, hell. We'll work it out." Douglas turns toward the gate. "In the meantime, use your hammer all you want. I'll be seeing you. My God, I'm freezing!"

They hurry toward the gate. On the way, the old man finds his lunch box where he abandoned it some hours ago. He picks it up, takes out the thermos, and shakes it. "How about a drink before you go?"

“What’ve you got? Some of that amontillado you were yelling about?”

“1876.”

“Let’s have some of that, sure.”

The thermos is opened and the liquid poured steaming from it into the cup.

“There you are,” says the old man.

“Thanks. Here’s to you.” The producer drinks. “That’s good. Ah, that’s damned good!”

“It might taste like coffee, but I tell you it’s the finest amontillado ever put under a cork.”

“You can say that again.”

The two of them stand among the cities of the world in the moonlight, drinking the hot drink, and the old man remembers something:

“There’s an old song fits here, a drinking song, I think, a song that all of us who live inside the fence sing, when we’re of a mind, when I listen right, and the wind’s just right in the telephone wires. It goes like this:

“We all go the same way home,

All the same collection, in the same direction,

All go the same way home.

So there’s no need to part at all,

And we’ll all cling together like the ivy on the old garden wall...”

They finish drinking the coffee in the middle of Port-au-Prince.

“Hey!” says the producer suddenly. “Take it easy with that cigarette!

You want to burn down the whole darn world?”

They both look at the cigarette and smile.

“I’ll be careful,” says Smith.

“So long,” says the producer. “I’m really late for that party.”

“So long, Mr. Douglas.”

The gate hasp clicks open and shut, the footsteps die away, the limousine starts up and drives off in the moonlight, leaving behind the

cities of the world and an old man standing in the middle of these cities  
of the world raising his hand to wave.  
“So long,” says the night watchman.  
And then there is only the wind.

The End