

THE RAY
BRADBURY
CHRONICLES

4



The Authorized Adaptations

The Ray Bradbury Chronicles 4

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THE **RAY**
BRADBURY
CHRONICLES

VOLUME FOUR

THE RAY BRADBURY CHRONICLES

4

Night Meeting
By Daniel Torres

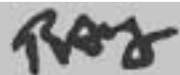
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Punishment Without Crime
By Ralph Reese

NIGHT MEETING

Adapted by Daniel Torres

NIGHT Meeting was another of those experiments where I simply sat down at my typewriter and said let's bring two characters together from different Time Streams and see what happens. So I sat and typed and let the Martian and the Earthman talk, each convinced that the other was in space in another year, each trying to describe to the other what architectures lay below and what festivities awaited. And both, finally, having to give in, relax, and accept the other person's version of Time and the Truth. I let the characters speak for themselves and their dream of reality. I never interfere with my story people. Their lives and thoughts must be acted out on the typewriter as I watch. This is where the fun happens. If I did not have fun letting my characters come alive, you the reader would not have the same fun and everything would be born lifeless. As a result it is one of my favorite stories. And it all happened because I built a road and let two fantastic vehicles move along the road for a night encounter. The road and the Martian and the Earthman were between my ears one moment and the next out in the open, onto paper, and through your eyes into your head.



Night Meeting



MARS, AUGUST, 2002



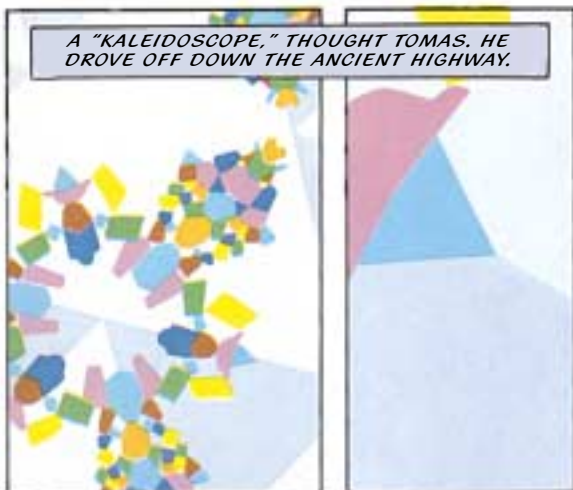
BEFORE GOING UP INTO
THE BLUE HILLS...



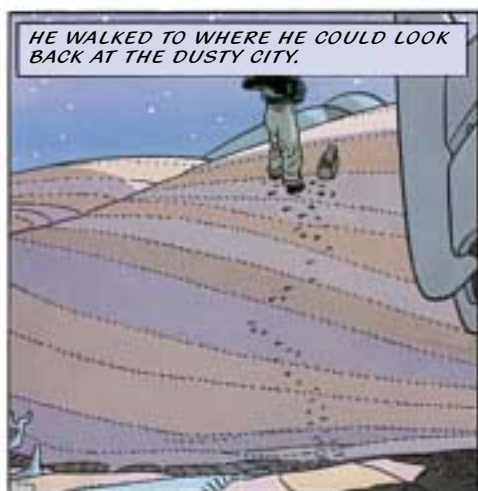
... TOMAS GOMEZ STOPPED FOR
GASOLINE AT THE LONELY STATION.















TOMAS FELT HIS HEAD TOUCHED,
BUT NO HAND HAD TOUCHED HIM.



THERE!
THAT'S
BETTER!

YOU
LEARNED MY
LANGUAGE SO
QUICK!



NOTHING
AT
ALL!



THIS IS CALLED
COFFEE. MAY I
OFFER YOU A
DRINK?

PLEASE.



THEIR HANDS MET
AND--LIKE MIST--
FELL THROUGH
EACH OTHER.



DID
YOU SEE WHAT
HAPPENED?

INDEED!



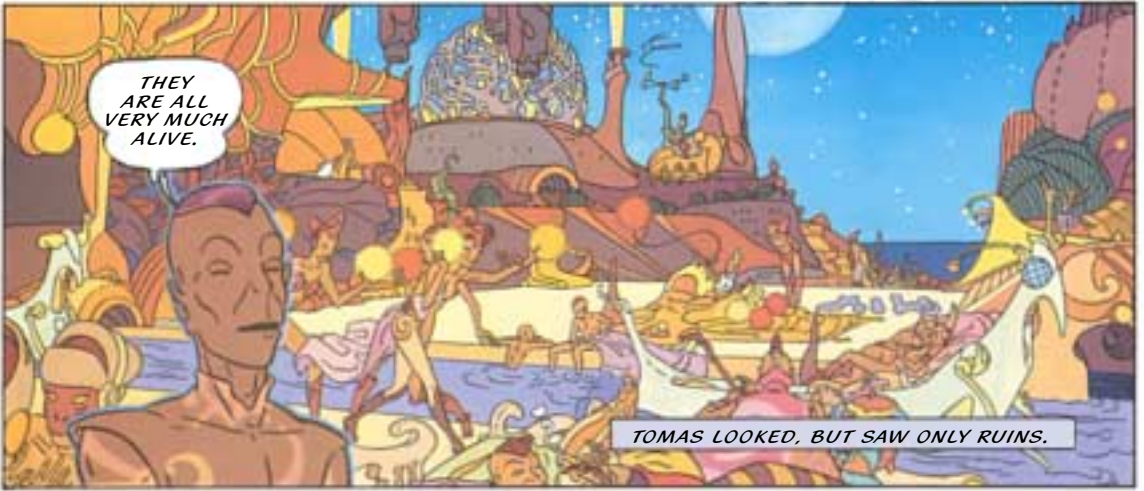
THE STARS! I
CAN SEE
THROUGH
YOU!



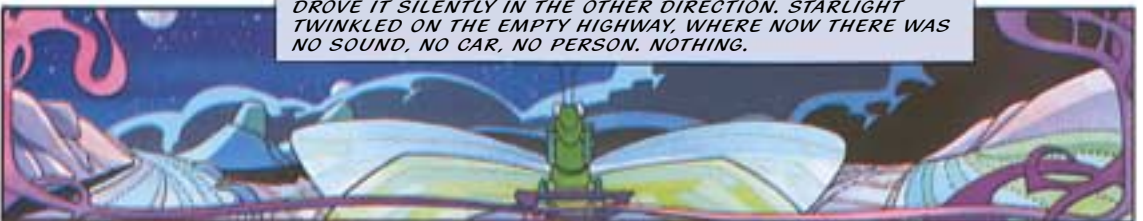
THE STARS WERE WHITE
AND SHARP BEYOND THE
FLESH OF THE MARTIAN.

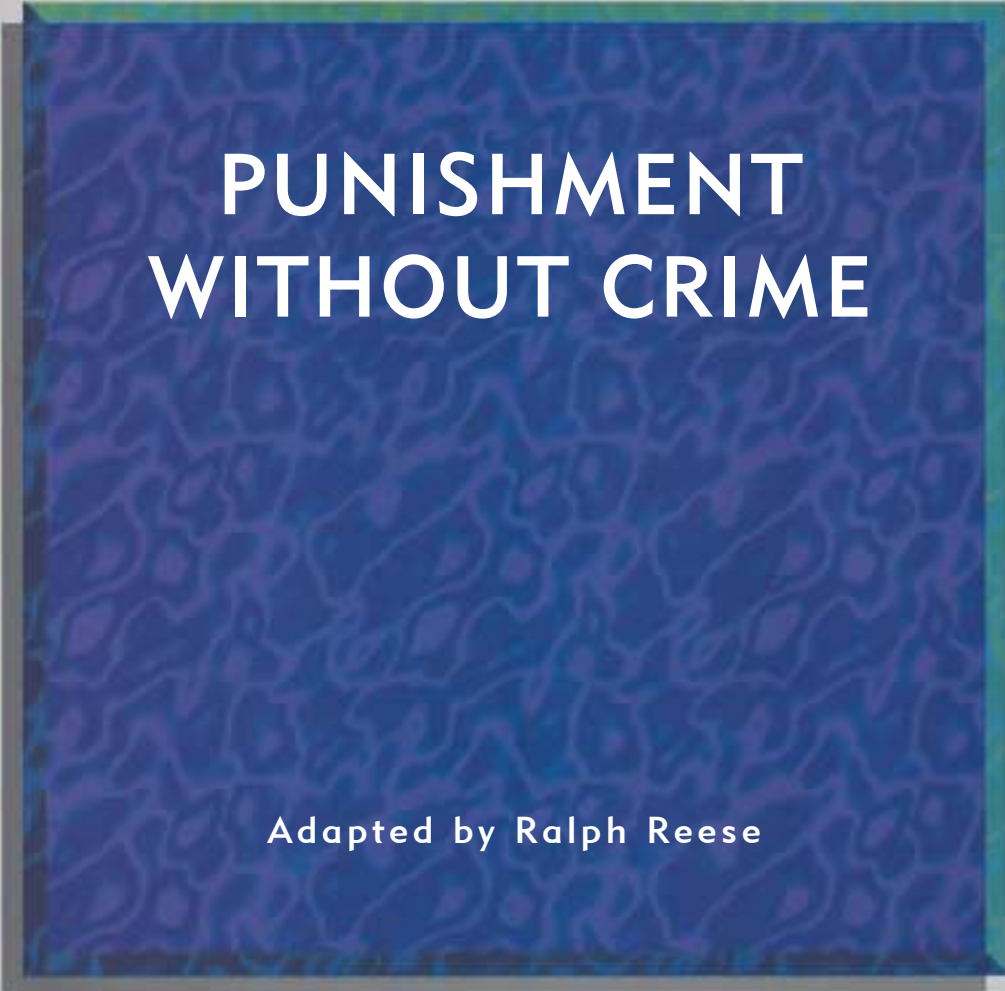










The image shows a book cover with a dark blue background featuring a complex, organic, marbled pattern in shades of blue and purple. The title 'PUNISHMENT WITHOUT CRIME' is printed in large, white, sans-serif capital letters, centered in the upper half. Below the title, the text 'Adapted by Ralph Reese' is printed in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, also centered. The book is shown at a slight angle, with a greyish-blue background visible behind it.

PUNISHMENT WITHOUT CRIME

Adapted by Ralph Reese

Over the years, as we began to imagine robots of every size and shape, including humanoid, I could not help wondering what would happen when more and more of these electric machines took over the tasks of real men and women. Could or could not a computer, or any of its mechanical cousins, do good or evil, directly or indirectly? And what of the people who ran these machines? How do we look at them and accuse them of good or bad behavior? Out of such meandering thought, I conjured up PUNISHMENT WITHOUT CRIME, thinking: if it is murder to kill a live human, what sort of sin is it if you slay a duplicate of that human? Is it the equivalent, in many ways, of making a wax effigy of your enemy and sticking sharp needles in it to assassinate that person long-distance, by suggestion? If you refuse and outlaw witchcraft, what do you do with the super witchcraft of the robot designed to resemble a former associate, lover or spouse, and "killed" at the moment of technological birth? The answer could move in many directions. The idea in my story PUNISHMENT WITHOUT CRIME could be duplicated by other writers with different goals and happier or unhappier endings. When you finish with my tale, write your own version of this strange sad encounter.

RAY



THREE MINUTES TO TWELVE...
THREE SHORT MINUTES IN THE LIFE
OF GEORGE HILL. BUT THEY ARE THE
MOST IMPORTANT THREE MINUTES HE
WILL EVER SPEND. THEY ARE THE
LAST THREE MINUTES OF HIS LIFE.
THREE MINUTES TO THINK...

TO FEEL...

TO REMEMBER...



PUNISHMENT WITHOUT CRIME

Adapted by Ralph Reese

TIME TO THINK BACK...BACK TO THAT DAY
SEVERAL MONTHS AGO...BACK TO THE
STRANGE DARK MAN IN HIS SHADOWY
OFFICE...



NAME AND
ADDRESS?

GEORGE HILL.
ELEVEN SOUTH
SAINT JAMES,
GLENVIEW.

THE MAN WROTE THIS DOWN EMOTIONLESSLY.

YOUR WIFE'S
NAME?

KATHERINE.



HAVE YOU A
DIMENSIONAL PHOTO
OF HER? A TAPE
RECORDING OF HER
VOICE? AH, I SEE YOU
DO. NOW...

AN HOUR LATER, GEORGE HILL WAS PERSPIRING.
THE DARK MAN AROSE AND SCOWLED.

THAT'S ALL. YOU
STILL WANT TO GO
THROUGH WITH IT?

YES.

SIGN HERE.

HE SIGNED.

YOU KNOW THIS
IS ILLEGAL?

YES.

THE MAN SMILED FAINTLY...

IT'LL TAKE **NINE HOURS** TO PREPARE
THE MARIONETTE OF YOUR WIFE.
SLEEP AWHILE... IT'LL HELP YOUR
NERVES. THE THIRD MIRROR ROOM
ON YOUR LEFT IS UNOCCUPIED.

...AND THAT
WE'RE IN NO WAY
LIABLE FOR WHAT
HAPPENS TO YOU
AS A RESULT OF
THIS REQUEST?

YES, YES...
FOR GOD'S
SAKE! LET'S
GET ON
WITH IT!



GEORGE MOVED NUMBLY, SLOWLY TO THE MIRROR ROOM. HE LAY ON THE BLUE VELVET COT, HIS BODY PRESSURE CAUSING THE MIRRORS IN THE CEILING TO WHIRL. A SOFT VOICE SANG...



HE MURMURED SOFTLY...

KATHERINE...I DIDN'T WANT TO COME HERE... YOU MADE ME DO IT... I DON'T WANT TO... KILL...YOU...

THE MIRRORS GLITTERED AS THEY ROTATED HYPNOTICALLY...HE SLEPT.

HE DREAMED HE WAS FORTY-ONE AGAIN. HE AND KATIE ON A GREEN HILL SOMEWHERE WITH A PICNIC LUNCH, THEIR HELICOPTER BESIDE THEM. THE WIND BLEW KATIE'S HAIR GOLDEN STRANDS AND SHE WAS LAUGHING...



THEY KISSED AND HELD HANDS, NOT EATING. THEY READ POEMS. IT SEEMED THEY WERE ALWAYS READING POEMS...

OTHER SCENES...HE AND KATIE FLYING OVER GREECE AND ITALY AND SWITZERLAND, IN THAT LONG, CLEAR AUTUMN. FLYING AND NEVER STOPPING!



AND THEN -- THE NIGHTMARE. KATIE AND LEOPARD PHELPS. GEORGE CRIED OUT IN HIS SLEEP. WHY? WHY HAD IT HAPPENED? WAS IT THE DIFFERENCE IN AGE? GEORGE TOUCHING FIFTY, KATIE SO YOUNG, SO VERY YOUNG...



THE SCENE WAS UNFORGETTABLY VIVID...PHELPS AND KATHERINE IN THE GREEN PARK. GEORGE HIMSELF APPEARING ON THE PATH ONLY IN TIME TO SEE THEM KISSING...



THE RAGE... THE STRUGGLE...THE ATTEMPT TO KILL LEONARD PHELPS...MORE DAYS, MORE NIGHTMARES...



GEORGE HILL AWOKE, WEEPING.



MR. HILL, WE'RE
READY FOR YOU
NOW.

HILL AROSE, CLUMSILY, HE
SAW HIMSELF IN THE HIGH
AND NOW-SILENT MIRRORS...



HE LOOKED EVERY ONE OF
HIS YEARS. A LITTLE TOO
MUCH STOMACH...A LITTLE
TOO MUCH CHIN...HE EYED
HIMSELF WITH LOATHING.
IT HAD BEEN A WRETCHED
ERROR.



THIS IS KATIE'S
ROOM!

WE TRY TO HAVE
EVERYTHING
PERFECT.

GEORGE HILL DREW
FORTH A CHECK FOR
TEN THOUSAND
DOLLARS. THE MAN
TOOK IT AND
DEPARTED. A LOT OF
MONEY, BUT THEN
RICH MEN COULD
AFFORD THE LUXURY
OF CATHARTIC
MURDER. THE VIOLENT
UNVIOLENCE...THE
DEATH WITHOUT DEATH.
THE ROOM WAS QUIET
AS HE SAT, FEELING
THE GUN IN HIS
POCKET, WAITING....



HELLO,
GEORGE.

HE WHIRLED AROUND...



KATIE...

SHE STOOD IN THE DOORWAY BEHIND HIM.
HER HAIR WAS BRIGHT AROUND HER
THROAT AND HER EYES WERE BLUE AND
CLEAR. HE DID NOT SPEAK FOR A LONG
WHILE...

HE PUT OUT HIS HANDS LIKE A SLEEPWALKER, WALKING FORWARD AS IF UNDER
A DEEP PRESSURE OF WATER. HE WALKED AROUND AND AROUND HER, TOUCHING
HER...



YOU'RE
BEAUTIFUL.

HOW ELSE
COULD I BE?



LET ME LOOK
AT YOU.

HAVEN'T YOU SEEN
ENOUGH OF ME IN ALL
THESE YEARS?

NEVER
ENOUGH.

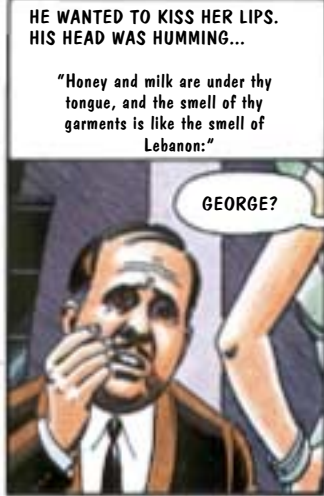
HIS EYES WERE FILLED WITH TEARS.

GEORGE SAT DOWN WEAKLY...



HE REMEMBERED AGAIN THE WORDS THEY HAD READ SO OFTEN IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS:

"Behold thou art fair;
my love;
Behold thou art fair:
Thou hast dove's eyes
within thy locks...
Thy lips are like a thread
of scarlet,
And thy speech is
comely...
Thy two breasts are
like two young roes
That are twins,
That feed among the
lilies...
There is no spot in thee."



SHE WASN'T SMILING...

WHY DID YOU COME TO SEE ME?
WASN'T IT ABOUT LEONARD?
YOU KNOW I LOVE HIM,
DON'T YOU?

STOP
IT!

HE PUTS HIS HANDS TO HIS EARS.

YOU KNOW, I SPEND ALL OF MY TIME
WITH HIM NOW. REMEMBER THE PICNIC
GREEN ON MOUNT VERDE WHERE YOU
AND I USED TO GO? WE WERE THERE
LAST WEEK. WE FLEW TO ATHENS A
MONTH AGO, WITH A CASE OF
CHAMPAGNE.

SHE KEPT AT HIM...

YOU'RE NOT GUILTY... YOU'RE NOT HER!
YOU HAVEN'T DONE WHAT SHE 'S DONE...
SHE'S GUILTY, NOT YOU!

HE GRABBED HER AND SHOOK...

LOOK, ISN'T THERE SOME WAY, CAN'T I-
PAY MORE MONEY? TAKE YOU AWAY
WITH ME? WE'LL GO TO PARIS OR
STOCKHOLM OR WHEREVER YOU LIKE!

THE MARIONETTES ONLY RENT,
THEY NEVER SELL. IT WAS TRIED,
LONG AGO. IT LEADS TO INSANITY.
EVEN THIS MUCH IS ILLEGAL...

ON THE CONTRARY...I AM HER! I CAN
ACT ONLY AS SHE ACTS. I DID ALL
THOSE THINGS...I MADE LOVE TO HIM...

ALL I WANT IS TO LIVE WITH YOU,
KATIE!

ENOUGH OF THIS-I WARNED YOU, WE
MUSTN'T SPEAK OF THESE THINGS.
YOU'LL FEEL FRUSTRATED WHEN YOU
LEAVE. YOU PAID YOUR MONEY, NOW DO
WHAT YOU CAME TO DO.

ONE PART OF YOU
DOES YOU'RE WALLING
IT IN, TRYING NOT
TO LET IT OUT!

THAT CAN NEVER BE,
BECAUSE I AM KATIE. ANYWAY,
MARIONETTES CAN'T LEAVE
THE PREMISES...WE MIGHT BE
DISCOVERED OR DISSECTED.

BUT
I DON'T
WAN'T TO
KILL YOU!

I'M AN OLD
FOOL. I SHOULD
NEVER HAVE COME.



I'M GOING TO SEE LEONARD TONIGHT.

DON'T TALK.



HE TOOK THE GUN FROM HIS POCKET...

WE'RE FLYING TO PARIS IN THE MORNING...

YOU HEARD WHAT I SAID.

SHE LAUGHED AND CARESSSED HIS CHIN...

...AND THEN ON TO STOCKHOLM, MY LITTLE FAT MAN!



SOMETHING BEGIN TO STIR IN HIM...THE HIDDEN REVULSION AND HATRED IN HIM WERE SENDING OUT THEIR FIRST FAINT PULSES. SHE FELT THEM, SOMEHOW, IN HER LOVELY CLOCKWORK HEAD, AND FANNED THE FLAMES...



PLUMP ODD LITTLE MAN, WHO ONCE WAS SO FAIR...

DON'T!



HE RAISED THE GUN BLINDLY...

OLD WHILE I AM ONLY THIRTY ONE. AH, GEORGE, YOU WERE BLIND, WORKING ALL THOSE YEARS FOR ME... DON'T YOU THINK. LEONARD IS LOVELY?

KATIE...

SHE RECITED SOFTLY...

"His head is as the most fine gold...
His locks are bushy, and black as a raven...
His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl..."

HOW COULD SHE SPEAK THOSE WORDS?! THEY WERE IN HIS MIND... HOW COULD SHE REMEMBER THEM...?

KATIE, DON'T MAKE ME DO THIS!

"His cheeks are as a bed of spices...
His belly is as bright ivory, overlaid with sapphires...
His legs are as pillars of marble..."



KATIE, DON'T!





SHE FELL.

FOUR MORE TIMES HE PUMPED BULLETS INTO HER BODY...



SHE LAY SHUDDERING, SOME INSANELY WARPED MECHANISM CAUSING HER TO REPEAT AGAIN AND AGAIN...

AS THE GUN SLIPPED FROM HIS NERVELESS FINGERS, GEORGE HILL FAINTED.



HE AWAKENED TO A COOL CLOTH ON HIS BROW...



GEORGE LOOKED DOWN AT HIS HANDS. THE LAST THING HE REMEMBERED AFTER HE FELL WAS THE BLOOD... HER BLOOD...POURING OVER THEM. NOW THEY WERE CLEAN...

I'VE GOT TO LEAVE.

IF YOU FEEL CAPABLE.



I'LL GO TO PARIS NOW, START OVER, I'M NOT TO TRY TO SEE KATIE AGAIN, AM I?

KATIE IS DEAD.



GOD, THE BLOOD... IT WAS REAL!

WE ARE PROUD OF THAT TOUCH.

HE WENT DOWN THE ELEVATOR TO THE STREET, IT WAS RAINING, AND HE WANTED TO WALK FOR HOURS. THE ANGER AND DESTRUCTION WERE PURGED AWAY. THE MEMORY WAS SO TERRIBLE HE WOULD NEVER WANT TO KILL AGAIN. SHE WAS DEAD NOW. THE RAIN FELL COOL ON HIS FACE.



THE MARIONETTES' FUNCTION WAS TO PREVENT ACTUAL CRIME. IF YOU NEEDED TO KILL, TORTURE, OR HIT SOMEONE, YOU TOOK IT OUT ON ONE OF THEM. HE COULDN'T GO BACK TO ME APARTMENT NOW...SHE MIGHT BE THERE. HE WANTED TO THINK OF HER AS DEAD...



A MANACLE WAS SLIPPED OVER HIS WRIST...

YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

BUT...



YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME!

FOR MURDER... YES WE CAN!



A CLAP OF THUNDER SPLIT THE MURKY SKY...

IT WAS EIGHT-FIFTEEN AT NIGHT. IT HAD BEEN RAINING NOW FOR TEN DAYS, STREAMING DOWN THE GREY PRISON WALLS OUTSIDE. A DOOR CLANGED BEHIND HIM AND GEORGE DID NOT MOVE, BUT STOOD THERE AT THE WINDOW, STARING...



HIS LAWYER LOOKED UP AT HIM FROM HIS SEAT BY THE DOOR...

IT'S ALL OVER...YOU'LL BE EXECUTED TONIGHT AT TWELVE.

BUT, SHE WASN'T REAL! I DIDN'T KILL HER!



IT'S THE LAW, ANYHOW. YOU REMEMBER. THE OTHERS ARE SENTENCED, TOO. THE PRESIDENT OF MARIONETTES, INC. WILL DIE AT TWELVE THIRTY. HIS THREE ASSISTANTS WILL GO AT ONE.

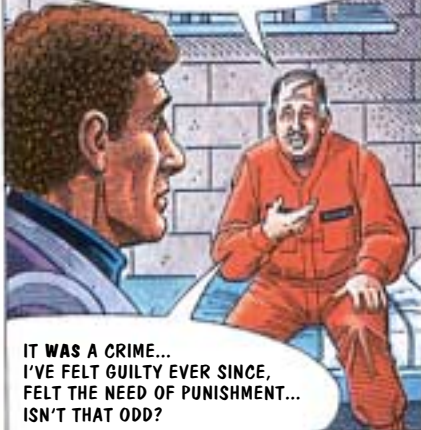
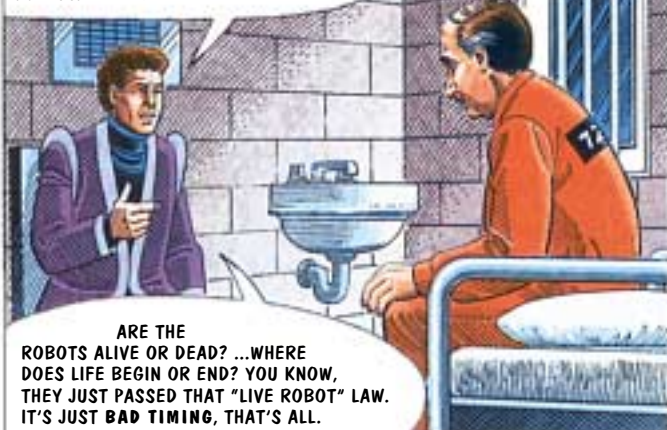
THANKS...YOU DID ALL YOU COULD. I GUESS IT WAS MURDER, IMAGE OR NOT, THE IDEA WAS THERE, THE PLAN WAS THERE...IT LACKED ONLY THE REAL KATIE HERSELF.

IT'S A MATTER OF TIMING, TOO... TEN YEARS AGO OR TEN YEARS FROM NOW, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN DEATH. THEY NEEDED AN OBJECT LESSON... A WHIPPING BOY.



THE USE OF MARIONETTES HAS GROWN SO MUCH IN THE LAST YEAR IT'S FANTASTIC. THE PUBLIC MUST BE SCARED OUT OF IT, AND SCARED **BADLY**...

YOU KNOW, THE GOVERNMENT'S RIGHT...I SEE THAT NOW. THEY CAN'T LET MURDER BE LEGAL, EVEN IF IT'S DONE WITH **ROBOTS**.



ARE THE ROBOTS ALIVE OR DEAD? ...WHERE DOES LIFE BEGIN OR END? YOU KNOW, THEY JUST PASSED THAT "LIVE ROBOT" LAW. IT'S JUST **BAD TIMING**, THAT'S ALL.

IT WAS A CRIME... I'VE FELT GUILTY EVER SINCE, FELT THE NEED OF PUNISHMENT... ISN'T THAT ODD?



THE DOOR SHUT. GEORGE STARED OUT AT THE RAIN, HIS HANDS TWISTING TOGETHER. SUDDENLY, A RED LIGHT BURNED IN THE WALL...A VOICE CAME OVER THE INTERCOM...



GEORGE GRIPPED THE BARS...



THE RED LIGHT WINKED OFF...LIGHTNING FLASHED IN THE SKY AND LIT HIS FACE. HE PRESSED HIS BURNING FOREHEAD TO THE COLD BARS, STARING, WAITING...



AFTER A LONG TIME. A DOOR OPENED SOMEWHERE BELOW. HE SAW TWO CAPED FIGURES EMERGE FROM THE PRISON, CROSSING THE COURTYARD...

UNDER AN ARC LIGHT, THEY PAUSED BRIEFLY AND ONE OF THEM GLANCED UP...



IT WAS KATIE, AND BESIDE HER LEONARD PHELPS.

VAINLY, HE SHOUTED THROUGH THE BARRED AND SEALED WINDOW...



HER FACE TURNED AWAY THE MAN TOOK HER ARM AND THEY HURRIED THROUGH THE BLACK RAIN INTO A LOW CAR...



HE HEARD THE ENGINE START

HE WRENCHED AT THE BARS, BEATING AT THE CONCRETE LEDGE WITH HIS FISTS...



THE GUARDS CAME RUNNING...

THE CAR DROVE AWAY, WITH LEONARD AND KATIE INSIDE IT. AWAY TO PARIS AND LONDON AND VENICE IN THE SPRING, STOCKHOLM IN THE SUMMER AND VIENNA IN THE FALL...

SHE'S NOT DEAD! I SAW HER! NOW YOU CAN LET ME OUT! I DIDN'T MURDER ANYONE...IT'S ALL A MISTAKE! I SAW HER!

WE SAW HER TOO, SIR...WE WENT THROUGH ALL THAT AT THE TRIAL!

KATIE, COME BACK! YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME!



BEHIND HIM, THE GUARDS MOVED TO TAKE HOLD OF HIM AS HIS SCREAMS ECHOED IN THE CONCRETE CELL...

Ralph Reese is a veteran illustrator and comics artist. He began as an assistant to the legendary Wally Wood. Later, he became a regular contributor to "National Lampoon", drawing the continuing strips "One Year Affair" and "Two Year Affair". In 1977 he illustrated one of the first graphic novels, "The Son of Sherlock Holmes". More recently, Ralph was the illustrator of the continuing daily comic strip "Flash Gordon" for King Features.

Daniel Torres was born in Valencia, Spain, where he began his career as an illustrator. He is the creator of the comic characters Roco Vargas as well as an illustrator for *Esquire*, *Playboy*, *Premiere* and *Sports Illustrated*.

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