

# Walking Distance

by Rod Serling, 1924-1975

Published: 1959  
in »The Twilight Zone«



His name was Martin Sloan and he was thirty-six years old. As he looked at his reflection in the dresser mirror, he felt that recurring surprise that the tall, attractive man staring back was he, and beyond that was the wonder that the image bore no real relationship to the man himself. There was Martin Sloan, a tall six-foot-two with a lean, suntanned face, a straight nose and a square jaw; just a few threads of gray on either temple, medium-set eyes—a good face, all in all. The inventory continued down the glass. Brooks Brothers suit that fitted with casual perfection, Hathaway shirt and silk tie, thin gold watch, and all of it so appropriate, so full of taste.

He continued to stare at himself and marveled at how a veneer could be spread over a man's frame to camouflage what was underneath. Because that's what he was looking at at this moment—camouflage. Hell, yes, he was Martin Sloan, an ad agency exec, with a fabulous bachelor apartment on Park overlooking Sixty-Third, and he drove a red Mercedes-Benz and he was an agile-minded, very creative, oh,

so subtly pushy kind of rising young man. He could order in French and call Jackie Gleason by his first name and feel the very odd warmth of status when the *maitre d'* at Sardi's East, or the Colony, or Danny's Hideway, called him by name, and smiled a quiet, respectful deference when he entered their places.

But the hell of it, the misery of it was that Martin Sloan had an incipient ulcer that at this moment began a slow, raking crawl over his insides. He knew panic a dozen times a day—that convulsive, breath-stopping, ice-cube feeling of doubt and indecision; of being second guessed, of being wrong; the effort to make his voice firm, his decisions sound irrevocable, when deep inside his gut—worse as each day passed—he felt a vague slipping away of all the props he conjured up and took on the stage with him when he faced the president of the agency, the clients, or the other account execs.

And that ulcer! That Goddamned ulcer. He felt it rise in him again and tensed himself like a man going into a cold shower. It burned across his stomach. After it subsided, he lit a cigarette and felt the wetness on his back as the hot June perspiration turned his Hathaway shirt into a clinging, itchy thing and made his palms sodden extensions of himself.

Martin Sloan went to the window to look out at New York. The lights were on along Park Avenue and he remembered the lights of his home town. He often thought about his home town lately. For the past several months he had been coming back to the apartment from the office to sit in the dark living room and drink long, solitary scotches; to think about himself as a boy, and where it had all begun—the chronology of the thirty-six-year-old man who had the world by the short hair, but at least three times a week felt like crying.

Sloan gazed down at the Park Avenue lights and thought about himself as a boy and the main street of his town and the drugstore that Mr. Wilson owned. Sporadic, unrelated remembrances, but part of a bittersweet pattern that made that room, the Scotch, the reflection in the mirror so unbearable. Again he felt that urge to cry and pushed it down deep inside of him along with the pain of the ulcer. A thought came to him. Get in the car and go. Get out of New York. Away from Madison Avenue. Away from the blathering, meaningless, mixed-metaphored jargon of his boss; the ratings and the “percentages-of-audience” and the cosmetic accounts and the three-million-dollar gross billings and that sick, ugly facade of good fellowship among strangers.

Some kind of ghostly billy club tapped at his ankles and told him it was later than he thought. He left his apartment, picked up his car, drove out on to Grand Central Parkway. Hunched over the wheel of his red Mercedes-Benz he asked himself very briefly just where the hell did he think he was going and he was undismayed by the fact that there wasn't an answer. He wanted to think, that was all. He wanted to remember. And when he turned off on the New York Thoroughway and headed upstate he had no further resolves. He just kept driving on into the night and was only dimly aware that old man Wilson's drugstore seemed strangely etched in his mind. It was this picture that sent his brain back on an errand to recapture memories of a time before. Memories of a place called Homewood, New York, a quiet, tree-filled little town of three thousand people. As he drove, he remembered what had been a minute fragment of his life, but God what a fragment! The wondrous time of growing up. Quiet streets on a summer night. The

joy of parks and playgrounds. The uninhibited freedom of a child. Memories ebbed back and forth across his mind and left him with a strange, indefinable hunger that subconsciously he realized was not just for a place but for a time. He wanted to be a boy again. That was what he wanted. He wanted to turn around in his life and go backwards. He wanted to run past the years to find the one in which he was eleven years old.

Martin Sloan, in a Brooks Brothers suit, driving a red sports car, headed out into the night and away from New York. He drove with an urgency and a purpose without really knowing his destination. This was no week-end drive. It was no momentary turning of his back to convention and habit. This was an exodus. This was flight. Somewhere at the end of a long, six-lane highway that stretched out across the rolling hills of upstate New York, Martin Sloan was looking for sanity.

He stopped at a motel near Binghamton, New York, slept a few hours, and was on his way again, and at nine in the morning pulled into a gas station off the State highway. He'd been going fast and the car squealed to a stop sending up clouds of dust. A little of the drive that sustained him in New York, a little of the impatience that pushed him through the days, clung to him now and he honked the horn persistently. The attendant, a nice-looking kid in dungarees, looked up from the tire he was repairing a few yards away, wiped his hands with a cloth and stood listening to Martin Sloan's horn.

„How about some service?“ Martin yelled.

„How about some quiet?“ the attendant answered him.

Martin bit his lower lip and turned away, gripping the steering wheel, studying the dashboard.

„I'm sorry,“ he said softly.

The attendant came toward him.

„Would you fill it up, please?“ Martin asked.

„Sure.“

„I said I was sorry,“ Martin said.

„I heard you,“ the attendant answered. „You take high-test in these things, don't you?“

Martin nodded, handed him the keys to the gas tank. The attendant went around to the rear of the car and unlocked the tank.

„How about an oil change and a lube job, too?“ Martin asked him.

„Sure,“ the attendant said. „It'll take about an hour.“

Martin said, „I've got plenty of time.“

He turned to look across the road at a sign which read, *Homewood, 1 ½ miles.*

„That's Homewood up ahead, isn't it?“ Martin asked.

The attendant said, „Yep.“

„I used to live there. Grew up there as a matter of fact. I haven't been back in eighteen... twenty years.“

He got out of the car, reached in his pocket for a cigarette and noticed that it was his last one. There was a cigarette machine in front of the station. Martin got a pack of cigarettes from it and came back, still talking. „Eighteen... twenty years. And then last night I—I just got in the car and drove. Reached a point where I,

well—I had to get out of New York. One more board meeting, phone call, report, problem—” He laughed and the laugh sounded hollow and tired.

„New York, is that where you’re from?” the attendant asked.

„That’s right. New York.”

„I see you guys all the time,” the attendant said. „Take a drive in the country—gotta go a hundred miles an hour. Stop for a red light, somebody beats you startin’ up when she turns green, then your day’s ruined. God, how do you guys keep at it?”

Martin turned away and fiddled with the side mirror on his car. „We just do,” he answered. „We just keep at it and then there comes a June night—when we suddenly take off.” He looked across the road again toward the sign. „A mile and a half,” he mused. „That’s walking distance.”

„For some people,” the attendant answered him.

Martin grinned. „But not for New York executives in red sports cars, huh?”

The attendant shrugged.

„I’ll come back for the car later on.” Martin grinned. „A mile and a half—that’s walking distance!”

He took off his coat and slung it over his shoulder and tramped down the road to Homewood, a little over a mile away—and twenty years later.

Martin entered the drugstore and stood motionless near the door in the dark coolness. It was exactly as he remembered it. A narrow, high-ceilinged room with an old-fashioned soda bar on one side, a counter on the other. A wooden stairway that led to a small office off a tiny balcony. This was where Mr. Wilson, the owner, used to take his catnaps, Martin remembered. A thin little man with thick glasses wiped soda glasses and smiled at Martin across the fountain.

„What’ll it be?” he asked.

Martin looked at the posters on the walls, the old-fashioned hanging lights, the two big electric fans that hung down from the ceiling. He went to the counter and sat down. The five big glass jars of penny candy were just as he remembered them.

„You still make great chocolate sodas?” he asked the man behind the soda bar. „Three scoops?”

The man’s smile looked a little strained. „How’s that?”

Martin’s laugh was apologetic. „I used to spend half my life in this drugstore,” he explained. „I grew up here. The one thing I always remember ordering—that was a chocolate ice cream soda with three scoops. And it was ten cents, too.”

The little man looked at him quizzically and Martin studied his face.

„You know,” Martin said, „you look familiar to me. Have I seen you before?”

The clerk shrugged and grinned. „I got that kind of a face.”

„It’s been a long time,” Martin said. „Eighteen... twenty years. That’s when I left—” Then he laughed at a collection of secret thoughts that crossed his mind. „I wish I had a buck,” he continued, “for every hour I spent at this fountain though. From grammar school right through third-year high.” He turned on the stool to look out at the bright, sunny street outside. „Town looks the same too.” He turned back to the little man. „You know it’s really amazing. After twenty years to look so exactly the same.”

The little man in glasses fixed his soda and then handed it to him.

„That'll be a dime.”

Martin started to fish in his pocket, then stopped abruptly. „A dime?” he asked incredulously. He held up the giant, richly dark glass. „Three scoops?”

The soda jerk laughed. „That's the way we make 'em.”

Martin laughed again. „You're going to lose your shirt. Nobody sells sodas for a dime anymore.”

There was a moment's silence then the little man asked, „They don't? Where you from?”

Martin started to spoon down some of the chocolate ice cream. „New York,” he said between gulps. „Hey, you make a great soda!”

The little man leaned on the counter with his elbows. „Taste okay?” he asked.

„Wonderful.” He finished the ice cream and slurped up the last of the soda water. He grinned. „Like I never left home. That was great.” He turned to scan the room. „Funny,” he said, „how many memories you connect with a place. I always thought if I ever came back here, it'd all be changed.”

The store looked back at him. The counters and shelves and posters and lights. The electric fans. They looked back at him like old friends. „It's just as if—” Martin said thoughtfully, „—as if I'd left yesterday.” He got off the stool and stood twirling it. „Just as if I'd been away overnight.” He smiled at the soda jerk. „I'd almost expect Mr. Wilson to be sitting up there in the office and sleeping away his afternoons just the way he always did before he died.”

He didn't see the soda jerk start at this.

„That's one of the images I have,” he continued. „Old Man Wilson sleeping in his big comfortable chair in his office up there. Old Man Wilson—may his soul rest in peace”

He reached in his pocket, took out a dollar bill and put it on the counter. The soda jerk stared at it, surprised. „That's a buck!”

Martin smiled at him, tapped the glass with a finger. „That—” he looked around the room—„and all of this, they're worth it.”

He went back out into the hot summer. The soda jerk leaned on the counter, wondering about Martin, then lifted up the top of the chocolate syrup container and peered inside. He replaced it, came around from behind the counter, climbed the stairs, and tapped gently on a door. A muffled, sleepy voice responded.

„Yes?”

The soda jerk opened the door a few inches. „Mr. Wilson,” he said to the white-haired old man, sitting in the heavy leather chair, one eye open, „We need more chocolate syrup.”

The old man winked, nodded and closed his eyes again. „I'll order some this afternoon.”

In a moment he was fast asleep again. The soda jerk went back to the counter. He took Martin Sloan's glass and started to wash it. Funny guy, he thought. Lose your shirt if you sell three scoops for a dime. He chuckled as he was drying the glass. Nobody sold three scoops for a dime any more. Then he shrugged and put the glass away. You met all kinds. You sure met all kinds. But this guy, this one was odd. This one had a look on his face. How would you describe the look? He was so... so happy. Just being in the dingy old drugstore, he looked happy. A

woman came in with a prescription and the soda jerk didn't think of Martin Sloan any more that day.

Martin walked down Oak Street—the street he'd grown up on. It stretched out ahead of him flanked by big, full-leafed maple trees that cast sharp black shadows against the brilliant whiteness of the sunshine. Big, two-story Victorian houses set back behind long, green lawns were old friends to him. He rattled off names of their owners as he walked slowly down the sidewalk. Vanburen. Wilcox. Abernathy. He looked across the street. Over there, Dr. Bradbury, Mulrooney, Grey. He stopped and leaned against a tree. The street was exactly as he remembered it. He felt the bittersweet pang of nostalgia. He remembered the games he'd played with the kids on this street. The newspapers he'd delivered. The small-boy accidents on roller skates and bicycles. And the people. The faces and names that fused in his mind now. His house was on the corner and for some reason he wanted to save this for last. He could see it ahead of him. Big, white, with a semi-circular porch running around it. Cupolas. An iron jockey in front. God, the things you remembered. The things you tucked away in an old mental trunk and forgot. Then you opened the trunk and there they were.

„Hi,” a little boy's voice said.

Martin Sloan looked down to see a four-year-old with syrup on his face, shooting marbles. „Hi,” Martin answered and sat down on the curb beside him. „You pretty good?” He pointed toward the boy's marbles.

„At aggies?” the little boy said. „I'm not so bad.”

Martin picked up one of the marbles and looked through it. „I used to shoot marbles, too. We gave them special names. The steel kind, the ball bearings we took off old streetcars, we called them steelies. And the ones we could see through—we called them clearies. Still call them names like that?”

„Sure,” said the little boy.

Martin pointed across the street toward a telephone pole marked up by a thousand jackknives. „That's where we used to play hide-and-peek,” he said to the boy. He grinned. „Draw a circle around the old man's back and who's to punch it.” He laughed aloud as the thought warmed and delighted him. „Right on this street, every night in the summer we used to play that. And I used to live in that corner house down there,” he pointed. „The big, white one.”

„The Sloan house?” the little boy asked.

Martin's eyes grew a little wider. „That's right. You still call it that?”

„Still call it what?”

„The Sloan house. My name's Sloan. I'm Martin Sloan. What's your name?”

He held out his hand but the boy backed away, frowning at him. „You're not Marty Sloan,” the boy said accusingly. „I know Martin Sloan and you're not him.”

Martin laughed. „I'm not, huh? Well, let's see what the driver's license says.”

He reached into his breast pocket for his wallet. When he looked up the little boy was running down the street and then across a lawn to the house opposite his. Martin got slowly to his feet and began to walk again. It was the first slow walk, Martin reflected, that he'd taken in a long, long time. The houses and lawns went by and he drank them all in. He wanted this slow. He wanted to relish it all. In the distance he could hear children's laughter and the tinkle of an ice-cream

wagon bell. It all fitted, sight and sound and mood. He got a tight feeling in his throat.

He didn't know how long he had walked but later he found himself in the park. Like the drugstore, like the houses, like the sounds—nothing had changed. There was the pavilion with the big, round, band-concert stand. There was the merry-go-round, loaded with kids, the brassy, discordant calliope music still chasing it round and round. There were the same wooden horses, the same brass rings, the same ice-cream stands, cotton candy vendors. And always the children. Short pants and Mickey Mouse shirts. Lollipops and ice-cream cones and laughter and giggling. The language of the young. The music—the symphony of summer. The sounds swirled around him. Calliope, laughter, children. Again the tight feeling in his throat. Bittersweet again. All of it he had left so far behind and now he was so close to it.

A pretty young woman walked by him, wheeling a baby carriage. She stopped, caught by something she saw in Martin Sloan's face, as he watched the merry-go-round. She'd never seen a look quite like that before. It made her smile at him, and he smiled back.

„Wonderful place, isn't it?” he said.

„The park? It certainly is.”

Martin nodded toward the merry-go-round. „That's a part of summer, isn't it? The music from the merry-go-round. The calliope.”

The pretty woman laughed. „And the cotton candy and the ice cream and the band concert.”

There was no smile on Martin's face now. It had been replaced by an intensity, a yearning. „There isn't anything quite as good ever,” he said softly. „Not quite as good as summer and being a kid.”

The woman stared at him. What was there about this man? „Are you from around here?” she asked.

Martin said, „A long time ago. I lived just a couple of blocks from here. I remember that bandstand. God, I should. I used to sneak away at night, lie over there on the grass staring up at the stars, listening to the music.” His voice took on an excitement now. „I played ball on that field over there,” he continued. „Third base. And I grew up with that merry-go-round.” He pointed to the concert pavilion. „I carved my name on that post over there one summer. I was eleven years old and I carved my name right on—” He stopped abruptly and stared.

There was a small boy sitting on the railing of the pavilion carving something on the post with a jackknife. Martin Sloan walked slowly toward him. He felt a sensation he had never felt before. It was cold and heat and excitement. It was shock and surprise and a mystery he couldn't fathom. He looked up at the small boy and saw his own face of twenty-five years ago. He was looking at himself. He stood shaking his head from side to side, squinting up against the sun and then he saw what the boy was carving on the post. It was a kid's printed scrawl, the letters uneven. It read, „Martin Sloan.” Martin caught his breath and pointed at the boy who was suddenly aware of him.

„Martin Sloan! *You're Martin Sloan.*”

The boy slid down from the railing. He looked frightened. „Yes, sir, but I didn't mean nothing, honest. Lots of kids carve their names here. Honest. I'm not the first one—”

Martin took a step closer to the boy. „You're Martin Sloan. Of course you're Martin Sloan, that's who you are. That's the way I looked.”

He was unaware that his voice had suddenly become loud and of course he couldn't know how intense his face looked. The boy backed off and then scurried down the steps.

„Martin!” Sloan's voice followed him. „Martin, please come back. Please, Martin.”

He started to chase him and the boy disappeared in the multi-colored crowd of shorts and Mickey Mouse shirts and mothers' cotton dresses.

„Please, Martin,” Sloan called again, trying to find him. „Please—don't be frightened. I don't want to hurt you. I just wanted to—I just wanted to ask you some questions.

„I just wanted to tell you,” Martin continued gently, now more to himself, „I just wanted to tell you what is going to happen.”

He turned to see the pretty woman beside him again. He closed his eyes and ran a hand over his face, confused, bewildered.

„I don't know,” he said vaguely. “I really don't know.” He opened his eyes and dropped his hand. „If it's a dream—I suppose I'll wake up!”

He was conscious of the laughter once more, the calliope music, the voices of the children. „I don't want it to be a dream,” he said. „Oh, God, I don't want it to be a dream.”

When he looked at the young woman there were tears in his eyes. „I don't want time to pass, do you understand? I want it to be the way it is now.”

The young woman didn't understand what there was about this man that made her feel such pity. She wanted to comfort him, but did not know how. She watched him turn and walk out of the park, and she wondered about him all the rest of the day, this strange man with the intense look, who stood in the middle of the park, in love with it.

Martin knew where to go now. It was all he knew. Except that something odd was happening to him. Something unreal. He was not frightened. Merely disquieted. He went back to Oak Street and stood in front of his house. Again he felt memories sweep over him. He went up the front walk, up the steps and rang the bell. He was trembling and did not know why. He heard footsteps approaching, the door opened and a man looked at him through the screen.

„Yes?” the man inquired.

Martin Sloan didn't answer. For a moment he couldn't speak. Eighteen years ago he'd attended his father's funeral on a rainy, cold, wind-swept March afternoon and now he was looking into his father's face on the other side of a screen door. The square jaw, the deep-set blue eyes, the wonderfully etched lines that gave him a look of both humor and wisdom. His father's face. A face he loved. And it was looking at him through the screen.

„Yes?” His father stopped smiling and the voice became edged with impatience. „Whom did you want to see?”

Martin's voice was a whisper. „Dad! Dad!”



From inside the house he heard his mother's voice. His mother was dead fourteen years, but there was her voice. „Who is it, Robert?” his mother asked.

„Mom?” Martin's voice shook. „Is that Mom?”

Robert Sloan's eyes narrowed and his lips compressed. „Who are you?” he asked. „What do you want here!”

Mrs. Sloan arrived at her husband's elbow, took one look at her husband's face and then stared out at Martin.

„Why are you both here?” Martin asked. „How can you be here?”

Questioning and concerned, Mrs. Sloan looked from Martin to her husband. „Who is it?” she asked. „What do you want, young man?”

Martin shook his head in disbelief, feeling every part of him yearn toward the man and woman who stood before him. He wanted to touch them, feel them, embrace them.

„Mom,” he said finally. „Don't you know me? It's Martin. Mom. It's Martin!”

The woman's eyes grew wide. „Martin?” She turned to her husband, whispering, „He's a lunatic or something.”

Robert Sloan started to close the door. Martin tried the handle. It was locked.

„Please, Dad, wait a minute. You mustn't be frightened of me. My God, how can you be frightened of me?” He pointed to himself as if he represented all the logic in the world. „I'm Martin,” he repeated. „Don't you understand? I'm Martin. I grew up here.”

He saw the coldness on both faces, the fear, the rejection. He was like a little boy now, He was like a little boy who had been lost and then come home and been stopped at the front door.

„I'm your son,” he said. „Don't you recognize me? Mom? Dad? Please—look at me.”

The door slammed shut in his face and it was several minutes before he could walk down the steps. Then he paused to look back at the house. Questions assaulted him, questions without form. Questions that made no sense. What in God's name was happening here? Where was he? When was he? Trees and houses converged on him and he felt the street coming up at him. Oh God, he didn't want to leave. He had to see his parents again. He had to talk to them.

The sound of a car horn intruded upon him. In the next yard, there was a kid who seemed familiar. He was standing beside a roadster with a rumble seat.

„Hi,” the boy shouted at him.

„Hi!” Martin answered. He went toward the car.

„Nice, huh?” the boy asked. „First one of its kind in town. My dad just bought it for me.”

„What?” Martin asked.

„New car,” the boy's smile was persistent. „First one of its kind. Beauty, huh?”

Martin looked from the front bumper to the rear light. „Got a rumble seat,” he said softly.

The boy tilted his head questioningly. „Sure, it's got a rumble seat. It's a roadster.”

„I haven't seen a rumble seat in twenty years.”

There was a silence and the boy's face tried to recapture the enthusiasm of a moment before. „Where you been, mister? Siberia?”

Martin Sloan didn't answer him. He just stared at the roadster. First one of its kind in town, the boy had said. First one. Brand new. A 1934 automobile and it was brand new.

It was night when Martin Sloan returned to Oak Street and stood in front of his house looking at the incredibly warm lights that shone from within. The crickets were a million tambourines that came out of the darkness. There was a scent of hyacinth in the air. There was a quiet rustle of leaf-laden trees that screened out the moon and made odd shadows on cooling sidewalks. There was a feeling of summer, so well-remembered.

Martin Sloan had walked a lot of pavements and thought a lot of thoughts. He knew now with a clear and precise clarity that he was back twenty years in time. He had somehow, inexplicably, breached an unbreachable dimension. He was no longer disturbed nor apprehensive. He had a purpose now and a resolve. He wanted to put in a claim to the past. He went toward the front steps and his foot hit something soft. It was a baseball glove. He picked it up, slipped it on his hand, pounded the pocket as he had years ago. Then he discovered a bicycle propped up in the middle of the yard. He rang the bell on the handlebar and felt a hand enclose his and muffle the ring. He looked up to see Robert Sloan beside him.

„Back again, huh?” his father said.

„I had to come back, Pop. This is my house.” He held up the glove in his hand. „This is mine, too. You bought it for me on my eleventh birthday.”

His father's eyes narrowed.

„You gave me a baseball, too,” Martin continued. „It had Lou Gehrig's autograph on it.”

His father stared at him for a long, reflective moment. „Who are you?” he asked softly. „What do you want here?” He struck a match, lit his pipe, then held the match out while he studied Martin's face in the brief flame.

„I just want to rest,” Martin said. „I just want to stop running for a while. I belong here. Don't you understand, Pop? I belong here.”

Robert Sloan's face softened. He was a kind man and a sensitive one. And wasn't there something about this stranger which gave him an odd feeling? Something about him that—that looked familiar?

„Look, son,” he said. „You're probably sick. You've got delusions or something, maybe. I don't want to hurt you and I don't want you to get in any trouble either. But you'd better get out of here or there will be trouble.”

There was the sound of the screen door behind him opening and Mrs. Sloan came out.

„Who are you talking to, Rob—” she began to call. She stopped abruptly when she saw Martin.

He ran over to the porch and up the steps to grab her. „Mom,” he shouted at her. „Look at me! Look into my face. You can tell, can't you?”

Mrs. Sloan looked frightened and tried to back away.

„Mom! *Look at me.* Please! Who am I? Tell me who I am.”

„You're a stranger,” Mrs. Sloan said. „I've never seen you before. Robert, tell him to go away.”

Martin grabbed her again and turned her around to face him.

„You’ve got a son named Martin, haven’t you? He goes to Emerson Public School. The month of August he spends at his aunt’s farm near Buffalo, and a couple of summers you’ve gone up to Saratoga Lake and rented a cottage there. And once I had a sister and she died when she was a year old.”

Mrs. Sloan stared at him wide-eyed. „Where’s Martin now? she said to her husband.

Again Martin tightened his grip on her shoulders. „*I’m Martin,*” he shouted. „I’m your son! You’ve got to believe me. I’m your son Martin.” He released her and reached into his coat pocket to pull out his wallet. He began to tear out cards. „See? See? All my cards are in here. All my identification. Read them. Go ahead, read them.”

He tried to force the wallet on her and his mother, desperate and frightened, lashed out and slapped him across the face. It was an instinctive action, done with all her strength. Martin stood stock still, the wallet slipping out of his fingers to fall to the ground, his head shaking from side to side as if a terrible mistake had been made and he was amazed that the woman couldn’t perceive it. From the distance came the sound of the calliope. Martin turned to listen. He walked down the steps past his father to the front walk. He stood there for a moment listening to the calliope again. Then he began to run down the middle of the street toward the sound of the music.

„Martin,” he shouted, as he raced toward the park. „Martin! Martin! Martin, I’ve got to talk to you!”

The park was lit up with lanterns and street lights and colored electric signs on the stands. A moving path of light from the merry-go-round went round and round and played on Martin’s face as he looked wildly around to find an eleven-year-old boy in a night filled with them. Then suddenly he saw him. He was riding the merry-go-round.

Martin raced over to it, grabbed a post as it whirled past and catapulted himself on to the moving platform. He started a running, stumbling journey through a maze of bobbing horses and a hundred little faces that moved up and down.

„Martin,” he shouted, colliding with a horse. „Martin, please, I have to talk to you!”

The little boy heard his name, looked over his shoulder, saw the man with the disheveled hair and perspiring face coming toward him. He climbed off the horse, threw his box of popcorn away and started to run, threading his way expertly among the rising and dipping horses.

„Martin!” Sloan’s voice called after him.

He was getting closer. He was only ten or fifteen feet away now, but the boy continued to run from him.

It happened suddenly. Martin came within an arm’s length of the boy and reached out to grab him. The boy looked over his shoulder and, unseeing, stepped over the edge of the platform and fell head-long into whirling, multicolored space. His leg caught on a protruding piece of metal that extended from under the platform, and for a shrieking, agonizing moment he was dragged along with the merry-go-round. The boy screamed just once before the attendant, his face a pale mask, reached for the clutch and pulled it back. No one noticed then or remembered later that two screams joined the calliope music as it died away in a

dissonant, premature finale. Two screams. One from an eleven-year-old boy, descending through a nightmare, before he blacked out. One from Martin Sloan who felt a piercing agony shoot through his right leg. He clutched at it, almost falling. There were shouts now from mothers and children as they raced toward the little boy lying a few feet from the merry-go-round, face down in the dirt. They collected around him. An attendant pushed his way through and knelt by the boy. He gently lifted him in his arms and a little girl's high-pitched voice rose over the crowd.

„Look at his leg. Look at his leg.”

Martin Sloan, aged eleven, was carried out of the park, his right leg bleeding and mutilated. Martin tried to reach him but already they had carried him off. There was a silence and then a murmur of voices. People began to drift out of the area to their homes. Concession stands closed up. Lights went off. Within a moment Martin found himself alone. He leaned his head against one of the guard poles of the merry-go-round and closed his eyes.

„I only wanted to tell you,” he whispered. „I only wanted to tell you that this was the wonderful time for you. Don't let any of it go by without enjoying it. There won't be any more merry-go-rounds. No more cotton candy. No more band concerts. I only wanted to tell you, Martin, that this is the wonderful time. Now! Here! That's all. That's all I wanted to tell you.”

He felt a sadness well up inside of him. „God help me, Martin, that's all I wanted to tell you!”

He went over to the edge of the platform and sat down. Wooden horses stared lifelessly at him. Shuttered concession stands surveyed him blindly. The summer night hung all around him and let him alone. He didn't know how long he had sat there when he heard footsteps. He looked up to see his father walk across the merry-go-round platform to reach his side. Robert Sloan looked down at him and held out a wallet in his hand. Martin's wallet.

„I thought you'd want to know,” Robert said. „The boy will be all right. He may limp some, the doctor told us, but he'll be all right.”

Martin nodded. „I thank God for that.”

„You dropped this by the house,” Robert said, handing him the wallet. „I looked inside.”

„And?”

„It told quite a few things about you,” Robert said earnestly. „The driver's license, cards, the money in it.” He paused for a moment. “It seems that you are Martin Sloan. You're thirty-six years old. You have an apartment in New York.” Then, with a question in his voice—„it says your license expires in 1960. That's twenty-five years from now. The dates on the bills—the money, those dates haven't arrived yet, either.”

Martin looked straight in his father's face. „You know now then, don't you?” he asked.

Robert nodded. „Yes, I know. I know who you are and I know you've come a long way from here. A long way and—a long time. I don't know why or how. Do you?”

Martin shook his head.

„But you know other things, don't you, Martin? Things that will happen.”

„Yes, I do.”

„You also know when your mother and I—when we’ll—”

Martin whispered, „Yes, I know that, too.”

Robert took the pipe out of his mouth and studied Martin for a long moment. „Well, don’t tell me. I’d appreciate not knowing. That’s a part of the mystery we live with. I think it should always be a mystery.” There was a moment’s pause. „Martin?”

„Yes, Dad.”

Robert put his hand on Martin’s shoulder. „You have to leave here. There’s no room for you. And there’s no place. Do you understand?”

Martin nodded and said softly, „I see that now. But I *don’t* understand. Why not?”

Robert smiled. „I guess because we only get one chance. Maybe there’s only one summer to a customer.” Now his voice was deep and rich with compassion. „The little boy... the one I know, the one who belongs here. This is his summer, Martin. Just as it was yours one time.” He shook his head. „Don’t make him share it.”

Martin rose and looked off toward the darkened park.

„Is it so bad—where you’re from?” Robert asked him.

„I thought so,” Martin answered. „I’ve been living at a dead run, Dad. I’ve been weak and I made believe I was strong. I’ve been scared to death—but I’ve been playing a strong man. And suddenly it all caught up with me. And I felt so tired, Pop. I felt so damned tired, running for so long. Then—one day I knew I had to come back. I had to come back and get on a merry-go-round and listen to a band concert and eat cotton candy. I had to stop and breathe and close my eyes and smell and listen.”

„I guess we all want that,” Robert said gently. „But, Martin, when you go back, maybe you’ll find that there are merry-go-rounds and band concerts where you are and summer nights, too. Maybe you haven’t looked in the right place. You’ve been looking behind you, Martin. Try looking ahead.”

There was a silence. Martin turned to look at his father. He felt a love, an acme of tenderness, a link, deeper than flesh that ties men to men.

„Maybe, Dad,” he said. „Maybe. Good-by, Dad.”

Robert walked several feet away, stopped, remained there for a moment, his back to Martin, then he turned toward him again. „Good-by—son,” he said.

An instant later he was gone. Behind Martin the merry-go-round began to move. The lights were off, there was no noise, only the shadowy figures of the horses going round and round. Martin stepped on it as it turned, a quiet herd of wooden steeds with painted eyes that went around in the night. It went a full circle and then began to slow down. There was no one on it. Martin Sloan was gone.

Martin Sloan went into the drugstore. It was the one he remembered as a boy, but aside from the general shape of the room and the stairway leading to an office off a small balcony, it bore no resemblance to the place he remembered. It was light and cheerful with strips of fluorescent lights, a blaring, garish juke box, a fancy soda bar full of shining chrome. There were a lot of high school kids there dancing to the juke box, poring over the teen mags in the corner near the front window. It was air conditioned and very cool. Martin walked through the smoke of cigarettes, the blaring rock ‘n’ roll, the laughing voices of the kids, his eyes looking

around trying to find any single thing that had familiarity. A young soda jerk behind the counter smiled at him.

„Hi,” he said. „Something for you?”

Martin sat down on one of the chrome and leather stools.

„Maybe a chocolate soda, huh?” he said to the kid behind the fountain. „Three dips?”

„Three dips?” the soda jerk repeated. „Sure, I can make one with three dips for you. It’ll be extra. Thirty-five cents. Okay?”

Martin smiled a little sadly. „Thirty-five cents, huh?” His eyes scanned the room again. „How about old Mr. Wilson,” he asked. “Used to own this place.”

„Oh, he died,” the soda jerk said. „A long time ago. Maybe fifteen, twenty years. What kind of ice cream you want? Chocolate? Vanilla?”

Martin wasn’t listening to him.

„Vanilla?” the soda jerk repeated.

„I’ve changed my mind,” Martin said. „I guess I’ll pass on the soda.”

He started to get off the stool and half stumbled as his stiff right leg was thrust out momentarily in an awkward position. „These stools weren’t built for bum legs,” he said with a rueful grin.

The soda jerk looked concerned. „Guess not. Get that in the war?”

„What?”

„Your leg. Did you get that in the war?”

„No,” said Martin thoughtfully. „As a matter of fact I got it falling off a merry-go-round when I was a kid. Freak thing.”

The soda jerk snapped his fingers. „The merry-go-round! Hey, I remember the merry-go-round. They tore it down a few years ago. Condemned it.” Then he smiled sympathetically. „Little late I guess, huh?”

„How’s that?” Martin asked.

„A little late for you, I mean.”

Martin took a long look around the drugstore. „Very late,” he said softly. „Very late for me.”

He went out into the hot summer day again. The hot summer day that appeared on the calendar as June 26, 1959. He walked down the main street and out of the town, back toward the gas station, where he’d left his car for a lube job and oil change so long ago. He walked slowly, his right leg dragging slightly along the dusty shoulder of the highway.

At the gas station he paid the attendant, got into his car, turned it around and started back toward New York City. Only once did he glance over his shoulder at a sign which read, “Homewood, 1 ½ miles.” The sign was wrong. He knew that much. Homewood was farther away than that. It was much farther.

The tall man in the Brooks Brothers suit, driving a red Mercedes-Benz, gripped the wheel thoughtfully as he headed south toward New York. He didn’t know exactly what would face him at the other end of the journey. All he knew was that he’d discovered something. Homewood. Homewood, New York. It wasn’t walking distance.

LONG ANGLE SHOT

Looking down as the car slowly starts onto the highway. Over the disappearing car we hear the Narrator's Voice.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

Martin Sloan, age thirty-six. Vice-president in charge of media. Successful in most things, but not in the one effort that all men try at some time in their lives—trying to go home again.

(a pause)

And also like all men perhaps there'll be an occasion, maybe a summer night sometime, when he'll look up from what he's doing and listen to the distant music of a calliope—and hear the voices and the laughter of the people and the places of his past. And perhaps across his mind there'll flit a little errant wish—that a man might not have to become old, never outgrow the parks and the merry-go-rounds of his youth.

(a pause)

And he'll smile then too because he'll know it is just an errant wish. Some wisp of memory not too important really. Some laughing ghosts that cross a man's mind... that are a part of The Twilight Zone.

Now the CAMERA PANS down the road to the sign that reads "Homewood, 1 ½ miles."

FADE TO BLACK

