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*Dramatic Publishing*

# RAY BRADBURY'S

# Fahrenheit 451



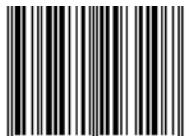
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

# Fahrenheit 451

***Drama. By Ray Bradbury***

***Cast: 17m., 7w.*** Fahrenheit 451 is the temperature at which paper ignites. With simple sets and uncomplicated staging, this powerful drama is about the inner struggle of Guy Montag, a fireman. Montag has worked as a civil servant for 10 years burning books, but lately he has become increasingly unsure about what he is doing and about his vegetable-like existence. It is not until he meets 16-year-old Clarisse, who is filled with strange ideas, that he is led into a dangerous and highly combustible situation. Now he must choose between continuing his nonexistent existence and risking everything for the right to think. *Simple sets.*

ISBN 13: 978-0-87129-310-7



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Fahrenheit 451

[www.DramaticPublishing.com](http://www.DramaticPublishing.com)

Code: F-35



printed on recycled paper

# Fahrenheit 451

by  
**RAY BRADBURY**



**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**

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(FAHRENHEIT 451)

ISBN 0-87129-310-2

# FAHRENHEIT 451

A Drama in Two Acts  
For Seven Men, Five Women,  
Assorted Book People and Voices\*

## CHARACTERS

MONTAG .....a fireman  
BLACK .....a fireman  
HOLDEN .....a fireman  
BEATTY .....fire chief  
CLARISSE .....a young girl  
FIRST PARAMEDIC  
SECOND PARAMEDIC  
MILDRED .....Montag's wife  
MRS. HUDSON .....an old woman  
FABER ..... Clarisse's grandfather  
ALICE ..... the Montags' neighbor  
HELEN .....Mildred's friend  
ARISTOTLE .....a book person  
TOLKEIN .....a young male book person  
BRONTE .....a book person named Kathy  
ROSTAND .....a book person  
DOSTOEVSKI .....a book person  
ST. EXUPEREY .....a boy book person  
TOLSTOY .....a book person  
WILDE .....a book person  
CARROLL .....a woman book person  
PLATO .....a book person  
MELVILLE .....a book person  
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.an old man book person

Voices - clock radio, disc, alarm, TV, phone,  
announcer, men, newscaster.

TIME: The future.

PLACE: A city.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING about *Fahrenheit 451*...

“An incredibly relevant and prophetic play adaptation of a classic novel. A challenging piece for any company.”

*David Longford, The Royal Company,  
Nottingham, England*

“Honors the book and the medium. Great for school groups.”

*Joe Angel Babb, The Alley Theatre,  
Houston, Texas*

“This is one of the great classical pieces of literature that is worth being on the stage till the end of theatrical time.”

*Hope deFrenes, Montgomery Theater,  
Souderton, Pa.*

“Our students, teachers and patrons were on the edge of their seats. This powerful play delivers a message that every community need to hear—it is dangerous when a society stops thinking and growing and, most importantly, reading. It was a challenge, but worth it!”

*Hillary Bower,  
Tri-School Theatre, Anaheim, Calif.*

“It was an excellent show. English classes read *Fahrenheit 451* at our school. We did a discussion group on the Internet and I contacted Ray Bradbury to tell him about our show and all the things we did. The students were most excited to hear from him.”

*Bob Howell, Illinois Valley Central High School,  
Chillicothe, Ill.*

## ACT ONE

SCENE: *Darkness. A great sound of fire and burning, the sounds of buildings falling into ruin. We hear sirens and bells and running feet, voices calling, and then at last just the quiet sound of burning itself, slowly fading during the next few minutes. A wind rises. A last building falls. The light rises, a flickering of flames that show us:*

*MONTAG standing, back to us, dressed in his black uniform, a portable brass torch in his left hand. He turns from the quiet sound of the lowering flames and thinks on it.*

MONTAG. *There is a thing about burning. It is so fine ... complete ... so beautiful. And then there is the power. To know that you own so much beauty, hand it out, as it were, give it a place to ... live. One moment, standing there, the great pumping kerosene hose in your hand and darkness. Then...the merest match, the smallest flint, and ... glory! Answers to everything. Solutions. Waste done away with. Problems solved. Worry eliminated. We were born of fire ... the sun. We go back to it for Ends. Between? There's me, the house I work in, the fire I live with, the great warm beauty I hand out to the world. Free! And everything answered... everything simple as ... smoke. (Holds out one of his gloves.) Kerosene. (Sniffs.) And isn't that a kind of...perfume?*

*(Bang! BLACK slides down a golden pole DL. Wham! He lands.)*



BLACK. Montag!

*(HOLDEN slides down and lands – wham!)*

HOLDEN. Montag. Cards?

CLOCK RADIO VOICE. The time is eight-oh-one.

Eight-oh-one. Eight-oh-one. *(BLACK and HOLDEN move swiftly to a card table. BLACK riffles the cards.)*

BLACK. Join us? We need a fourth. *(But MONTAG is intrigued with the clock radio voice.)*

HOLDEN *(briskly)*. Montag?

MONTAG. Huh?

BLACK *(sitting)*. Yes or no?

MONTAG. I'll be damned.

HOLDEN *(swiftly)*. You are already. Are you in or out?

BLACK *(quickly, almost staccato)*. What the hell are you doing?

MONTAG. Listening.

HOLDEN *(quickly)*. To what?

MONTAG. That voice...

HOLDEN *(very fast)*. Forgot how to tell time?

MONTAG. No, of course not.

BLACK *(exasperated)*. He's hearing voices!

MONTAG *(listening)*. It's not...alive.

HOLDEN. What?

BLACK *(out of patience)*. Alive? Montag, it's a tape. Just a tape.

MONTAG. Yes, but whoever made the tape might have died thirty years ago, for all we know.

*(BEATTY has been coming down pole during above).*

BEATTY. Time for cards? Montag, sit. Holden... deal.

HOLDEN. Yes, sir. All ready.

MONTAG. Funny, I never really noticed those voices...thought about it all these years...

BLACK (*shutting his eyes*). Christ...! (*Turning for help*). Captain...?!

BEATTY. Montag, sit down. You're making the men nervous.

MONTAG. All the things we don't notice. Know about but *don't* know.

BEATTY (*rising, coming to MONTAG*). Example? (*MONTAG tries to think of one, but can't.*) You see. Run out of gas, already. Montag, there's nothing, mind you, nothing worth knowing. Baseball rules, scorecards, of course. Nothing.

MONTAG. Right.

BEATTY. Once you accumulate knowledge, it's very much like owning twelve beds. You can only sleep in one at a time. The rest are superfluous. There's only one truth worth knowing. (*Lights his cigarette lighter.*)

MONTAG. Fire.

BEATTY (*lighting his pipe*). And smoke and ashes. Answers to everything. Problems solved, worry eliminated. Right, Montag? Right?

MONTAG. Right.

HOLDEN. How about our game? (*The Alarm Bell goes off. A warning siren shrieks. The MEN leap up. BLACK swiftly touches a voice-disc suspended to one side. At his touch it lights itself and a VOICE cries:*)

VOICE. Alarm. Four-bell alarm. Emergency search, Engine Co. 7. Suspect: Roger W. Davenport. Address: 134 Rockwell Drive. City. With all haste!

BEATTY (*still seated, drily*). On the double, men.

*(The MEN scramble to helmet themselves. BLACK and HOLDEN run out. BEATTY looks at MONTAG who has not moved. BEATTY hands him his helmet.)* With all haste, Montag.

VOICE. 134 Rockwell Drive. With all haste.

MONTAG. *That voice, too...*

BEATTY. Dead! But the facts it gives are alive, out there! Let's go give them *(Exhales smoke.)* a gift! *(BEATTY strides out. MONTAG, after a beat, follows. Quick BLACKOUT.)*

VOICE *(fading)*. With all haste...haste... *(Great thunders of fire engines, bells, sounds of burning. Far away, a bell clangs four or five times. A siren wails then fades. Silence. After a few beats: a loud crack of thunder, a heavy fall of rain. Slow rise of pinspot light.)*

*(We see CLARISSE, head back, mouth half-open, eyes half-shut, hands out at her sides, feeling an invisible rain touch at her face. Behind her we see faint images of falling rain and hear the sound of a fading storm.)*

*(Enter MONTAG who, if he notices at all, gives CLARISSE the merest glance and hurries on. She stops him by taking a deep breath and speaking, almost to herself, eyes still closed.)*

CLARISSE. I know who you are. Even with my eyes shut, I know. *(MONTAG turns. CLARISSE takes a big snuff of air, exhales.)* Kerosene. That means you're--

MONTAG. Guy Montag!

CLARISSE. ...the Fireman. The Man who starts fires and burns books.

MONTAG. Guy Montag.

CLARISSE. I'm sorry. Of course! (*She goes back to what she was doing...holding her head back, enjoying the rain...her mouth open, eyes shut. MONTAG watches her curiously.*)

MONTAG. Don't they have water at your house?

CLARISSE. Ever tried it?

MONTAG (*snorting*). Why should I?

CLARISSE. Because it tastes better! Trust me. Come on. (*Tilts her head back.*)

MONTAG. I feel silly.

CLARISSE. If you never feel silly, then you'll never feel great.

MONTAG. Why am I standing here?

CLARISSE. Because you know I'm right. Come on! (*Now MONTAG gives it a tentative try and shakes his head. She glances over quickly, then returns to her drinking posture.*) You're afraid of drowning!

MONTAG. Dammit, no! (*He puts his head back more firmly. Pleased, CLARISSE opens her eyes to watch him.*)

CLARISSE. Isn't that great?

MONTAG (*slowly putting his head down and looking at her*). It's water.

CLARISSE. No, no! It tastes just exactly like... like...

MONTAG. ...wine?

CLARISSE (*laughing, stops, turns*). Hey, yes! Next good storm, can I come to your house and ask if you can come out to play?

MONTAG. My wife would...

CLARISSE. No. (*A beat.*) She never does anything.

MONTAG (*stopping and staring at her*). You've been watching me...

CLARISSE (*going blithely on, ignoring this*). What a shame. She never comes out by day.

MONTAG. And you shouldn't be out here by night.

Look that way. And that. The sidewalks.

CLARISSE. Yes, empty. No one uses them anymore.

Is it against the law...?

MONTAG. Not quite...

CLARISSE. Anyway, I'm not alone. You've been walking home from work for a week now.

MONTAG (*startled*). *Have I?*

CLARISSE. Hadn't you noticed?

MONTAG. I... Come along. You'll catch your death of cold. (*He walks her. They circle the stage.*)

CLARISSE. No, nothing that simple. I've been thinking...I'll just disappear some day and never come back.

MONTAG. Why do you say that?

CLARISSE. I talk too much. My uncle, C.R. Faber, you ever hear of him, the philosopher?, says I should shut up. I make people nervous.

MONTAG. You make me *very* nervous.

CLARISSE. You see? (*Walks for a beat.*) How long have you been a Fireman?

MONTAG ( *pacing her*). Ten years.

CLARISSE. Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?

MONTAG (*snorting*). That's against the law!

CLARISSE. Yes, but *do* you?

MONTAG. Don't you know the rules? Monday burn Millay. Tuesday Tolstoy. Wednesday Walt Whitman. Thursday Thoreau. Friday Faulkner. Burn them to ashes, then burn the ashes.

CLARISSE. You sound awfully pleased about it.

MONTAG. It's a job.

CLARISSE (*searching his face*). I can see that. (*A beat.*) Is it true that long ago firemen once put fires *out* instead of going places to *start* them?

MONTAG. No.

CLARISSE. But once upon a time, houses did burn, didn't they? They weren't fireproof, like today?

MONTAG. That was long ago.

CLARISSE. There are a few of those houses left.

MONTAG (*irritated with her*). A few, yes, yes.

CLARISSE. Our house is one of them. If it caught fire, would you come over and save me and put it out?

MONTAG. I...

CLARISSE. *Would you?*

MONTAG (*laughing*). I don't know. I never thought.

CLARISSE. Well, here's my place. Remember it, just in case. (*MONTAG laughs.*) Why are you laughing?

MONTAG. Because...you keep changing the subject. (*We hear some jet-air cars roaring by. CLARISSE turns, stares off, watches them rush by.*)

CLARISSE. Why *not*? I wonder if those drivers know what grass is? A green blur. Flowers. A pink blur. Houses are white blurs. Brown blurs are cows. I often think that if fast cars had been invented in 1820, Impressionism would have arrived forty years earlier on, don't you think?

MONTAG. Er...I...

CLARISSE. But you *must*! You're missing all the fun! Did you know that once billboards on the highways were only twenty-five feet wide, but with jet-cars rushing faster they had to build our modern ones, stretch them out, make them one hundred feet across so you could see them?

MONTAG. I know.

CLARISSE. You say "I know" when you mean "oh, shut up."

MONTAG. No, no, you are a most peculiar beast, but I like you. (*Turns, blinks. A beat.*) My God. Your house!

CLARISSE. What?

MONTAG. All the lights are on. All, all of them!  
Blazing.

CLARISSE. Yes, that's because we don't have any television walls in our house. Just us, lights on, my uncle, my father, my grandfather, and me. Talking, talking.

MONTAG. Talking? Talking about what?

CLARISSE. You. (*She runs.*)

MONTAG. Wait!

CLARISSE (*coming back*). Yes?

MONTAG (*eyes shut, shaking his head*). Nothing.

CLARISSE (*a beat*). One last question...

MONTAG. Yes?

CLARISSE. Are you happy?

MONTAG. Happy...?

CLARISSE. Sorry...Good night. (*Runs. MONTAG stands musing.*)

MONTAG. (*shaking his head*) ...happy? (*Quick BLACKOUT as cars rush by, a siren rises and fades.*)

*(After a beat, night sounds of a mechanical house. Vague television voices as MONTAG enters, touches the air in front of his house. A pale illumination pulses to let him in. He steps forward, looks around, sees MILDRED's pale form laid out on a sofa like a marble tableau in a tomb.)*

MONTAG. Mildred? I'm home. (*Silence from the carved figure on the couch. MONTAG goes to turn off the murmuring television set. The patterned lights that have played over MILDRED's sleeping shape, flick out.*) Mildred? Millie?... You won't sleep later, if you sleep now. It's only eight o'clock... (*He goes to bend over her, looks, searches her ears, takes out*

*the small ear-radios she has in both ears, glances at them, hears the small insect sounds of music from both, places them on the sofa. Musing*). Millie...when did we meet? I was trying to remember. (*Sits by her.*) Do you know? Millie? (*A beat.*) Mildred...? (*He takes her hands, finds a small plastic vial closed in them, casually lifts it, stares.*) Empty! My God, Mildred! Millie! (*BLACKOUT. Arriving motors. Running footsteps.*) This way. Quick. Here! Here! This way!

(*Enter TWO PARAMEDICS carrying illuminated devices.*)

FIRST PARAMEDIC. Mr. Montag?

SECOND PARAMEDIC. Your wife? (*MONTAG gestures.*

*The PARAMEDICS bustle around MILDRED.*)

FIRST PARAMEDIC. Now you just go outside and wait, sir. Fix your wife in a jiffy.

SECOND PARAMEDIC. Good pump-out. Clean the blood stream, the stomach, the whole works. Out you go... (*MONTAG backs off DR, to stand in darkness, waiting, turned away, stunned, as the PARAMEDICS work.*)

FIRST PARAMEDIC. Let's have that over here, Stan. Here goes... That's it. What's the blood pressure? All right...not bad... (*The PARAMEDICS' VOICES fade to a murmur. A VOICE CLOCK whispers.*)

CLOCK. ...one fifteen...one fifteen...one fifteen...

(*From the shadows, CLARISSE appears quietly to stand behind MONTAG, saying nothing.*)

BOTH PARAMEDICS. ...now bring that stuff... that's



it...on the double now...at's a boy... here goes...that's a good lady...easy now... soon be over...over...

CLOCK. ...one twenty-one...one twenty-two...

FIRST PARAMEDIC (*approaching MONTAG*). Done! All done! Fit as a fiddle! (*CLARISSE wordlessly melts back into darkness.*)

SECOND PARAMEDIC (*approaching also*). Okay by morning, that's what she'll be. Well, we'll be off. Sign this, sir.

MONTAG. What?

SECOND PARAMEDIC. This, just sign this, that's it. You can go in now. Let her sleep. Give her breakfast in bed, eh? That's the ticket. So long. So long. (*PARAMEDICS exit. We hear the ambulance drive off, fading. MONTAG looks toward CLARISSE's house, then goes back into his own place.*)

(*Lights rise on MILDRED, lying almost as we saw her before, but position reversed and stripped down now and in her nightclothes. The television sound is on again, faintly playing--far GHOST VOICES talking. The illumination filters over MILDRED.*)

MONTAG (*after a beat*). Mildred. (*No response.*)

Mildred? (*He stands there by her quiet body, reaches down, takes her hand, holds it. A beat, then, echoing from memory, we hear CLARISSE's VOICE.*)

CLARISSE'S VOICE. One last question...are you happy? (*MONTAG sways, eyes shut, holding fast to MILDRED's hand. CLARISSE'S VOICE fading.*) ...are you happy? (*Quick fade to BLACK. VOICE CLOCKS sing in the darkness.*)

CLOCKS. Three...three...three o'clock...four ...five

...six o'clock. Seven, seven, eight o'clock!  
Nine, nine...breakfast time!

*(Alarms go off. Lights up. Enter MILDRED in full-bustle, dishing out food, breakfast for herself and MONTAG.)*

MILDRED. You said it! Breakfast! My God, I'm ravenous! Come on, Montag, hit the floor! What's wrong with you?!

*(MONTAG has entered, looking somewhat the worse for wear.)*

MILDRED. Here it is, come feed your face. *(She moves to turn on the TV wall which is, of course, out in the audience. As she watches it, she stares at the audience from where the TV shadow-lights emanate.)*

MONTAG. Mildred!

MILDRED. How come I'm so *hungry*? Starved!

MONTAG. Don't you remember...

MILDRED *(handing him a plate)*. What? Eat, eat. My show's on in *(Checks watch.)* two minutes!

MONTAG. Show?

MILDRED. The Mildred Show. I'm the star. You know, the Family Play. Today it's *me*; I'm so excited! They called last night. "Mildred," they said, "the Mildred Drama." God, isn't that *great*?

MONTAG *(picking at his food)*. Mildred, Mildred, there are ten thousand Mildreds in the city. They call them all!

MILDRED. That's not true! *(A beat.)* Well, some maybe.

MONTAG. They put on a different play each day, Mildred. One day they talk to Mary, the next