

## **The Rocket, Part I**

by Ray Bradbury

**Bramante (sitting):** Well, well Bodoni.

**Bodoni:** Oh, it's you, Bramante!

**Bramante:** Do you come out every night, Bodoni?

**Bodoni:** Only for the air.

**Bramante:** So? I prefer the rockets myself. I was a boy when they started. Eighty years ago, and I've never been on one yet.

**Bodoni:** I will ride up in one someday.

**Bramante:** Fool! You'll never go. This is a rich man's world. When I was young they wrote in fiery letters: THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE! Science, Comfort, and New Things for All! Ha! Eighty years. The Future becomes Now! Do we fly rockets? No! We live in shacks like our ancestors before us.

**Bodoni:** Perhaps my *sons* –

**Bramante:** No, nor *their sons!* It's the rich who have dreams and rockets.

**Bodoni:** Old man, I've saved three thousand dollars. It took me six years to save it. For my business, to invest in machinery. But every night for a month now I've been awake. I hear the rockets. I think. And tonight I've made up my mind. One of us will fly to Mars!

**Bramante:** Idiot, How will you choose? Who will go? If you go, your wife will hate you, for you will be just a bit nearer God, in space. When you tell your amazing trip to her, over the years, won't bitterness gnaw at her?

**Bodoni:** No, no!

**Bramante:** Yes! And your children? Will their lives be filled with the memory of Papa, who flew to Mars while they stayed here? What a senseless task you will set your boys. They will think of the rocket all their lives. They will lie awake. They will be sick with wanting it. Just as you are sick now. They will want to die if they cannot go. Don't set that goal, I warn you. Let them be content with being poor. Turn their eyes down to their hands and to your junk yard, not up to the stars.

**Bodoni:** But—

**Bramante:** Suppose your wife went? How would you feel, knowing she had *seen* and you had not? She would become holy. You would think of throwing her in the river. No, Bodoni, buy a new wrecking machine, which you need, and pull your dreams apart with it, and smash them into pieces.

**Bodoni:** Good night.

**Bramante:** Sleep well.

## The Rocket: Bradbury Theater, Part 2

**Narrator:** When the toast jumped from its silver box, Bodoni almost screamed. The night had been sleepless. Among his nervous children, behind his mountainous wife, Bodoni had twisted and stared at nothing. Bramante was right. Better to invest the money. Why save it when only one of the family could ride the rocket, while the others remained to melt in frustration?

**Maria:** Fiorello, eat your toast.

**Bodoni:** My throat is shriveled.

**Paolo:** I saw the Venus rocket!

**Antonello:** It took off, *whoosh!*

**Bodoni:** Children! Listen, all of you. I have enough money to take one of us on the Mars rocket.

**Children:** Yay! Wow! I want to go!

**Bodoni:** You understand? Only *one* of us. Who?

**Children:** Me, me, me!

**Maria:** *pointing to Bodoni.* You

**Bodoni:** *pointing to Maria.* You

*Silence for a moment.*

**Paolo:** Let Lorenzo go—he's the oldest.

**Antonello:** Let Miriamne go—she's a girl!

**Maria:** Think what you would see. The meteors like fish. The universe. The Moon. Someone should go who could tell it well on returning. You have a way with words.

**Bodoni:** Nonsense, So have you. Here, the short straw wins. Choose

**Children:** *drawing straws.* Long straw, long straw, long straw

**Bodoni:** Now, Maria.

**Maria:** The short straw.

**Lorenzo:** Ah, Mama goes to Mars.

**Bodoni:** Congratulations. I will buy your ticket today.

**Maria:** What, Fiorello.

**Bodoni:** You can leave next week.

**Narrator:** She saw the sad eyes of her children upon her, with the smiles beneath their straight, large noses. She returned the straw slowly to her husband.

**Maria:** I cannot go to Mars.

**Bodoni:** But why not?

**Maria:** I will be busy with another child.

**Bodoni:** What!

**Maria:** It wouldn't do for me to travel in my condition.

**Bodoni:** Is this the truth?

**Maria:** Draw again, start over.

**Bodoni:** Why didn't you tell me before?

**Maria:** I didn't remember.

**Bodoni:** Maria, Maria. Draw again.

**Narrator:** Paolo immediately drew the short straw.

**Paolo:** I go to Mars! Thank you Father!

**Narrator:** The other children edged away. Paolo stopped smiling to examine his parents and his brothers and sisters.

**Antonello:** That's swell, Paolo.

**Paolo:** I *can* go, can't I? And you'll *like* me when I come back.

**Bodoni:** Of course.

**Narrator:** Paolo studied the precious broomstraw on his trembling hand and shook his head. He threw it away.

**Paolo:** I forgot. School starts. I can't go. Draw again.

**Narrator:** But none would draw. A full sadness lay on them.

**Lorenzo:** None of us will go

**Maria:** That's best.

**Bodoni:** Bramante was right.

**The Rocket, Part 3**  
**a short scene**

*Bodoni is working in his junk yard. A man enters and calls to him:*

**Mathews:** Hey, Bodoni, I got some metal for you!

**Bodoni:** What is it, Mr. Mathews?

**Mathews:** A rocket ship. What's wrong? Don't you want it?

**Bodoni:** Yes, yes!

**Mathews:** Of course, it's only a mockup. *You* know. When they plan a rocket they build a full-scale model first, of aluminum. You might make a small profit boiling her down. Let you have her for two thousand."

**Bodoni:** I haven't the money.

**Mathews:** Sorry. Thought I'd help you. Last time we talked you said how everyone outbid you on junk. Thought I'd slip this to you on the q.t. Well—

**Bodoni:** I need new equipment I saved money for that.

**Mathews:** I understand.

**Bodoni:** If I bought your rocket, I wouldn't even be able to melt it down. My aluminum furnace broke down last week—

**Mathews:** Sure.

**Bodoni:** I couldn't possibly use the rocket if I bought it from you.

**Mathews:** I know

**Bodoni:** But I am a great fool. I will take my money from the bank and give it to you.

**Mathews:** But is you can't melt the rocket down—

**Bodoni:** Deliver it.

**Mathews:** All right, if you say so. Tonight?

**Bodoni:** Tonight would be fine. Yes, I would like to have a rocket ship tonight.

## The Rocket, Part 4

**Narrator:** He sat for half an hour considering the rocket and the house lights, and his eyes narrowed and grew wide. He stepped down from the wrecking machine and began to walk, and as he walked he began to laugh, and when he reached the back door of his house he took a deep breath and called:

**Bodoni:** Maria, Maria, start packing. We're going to Mars!

**Maria:** I can't *believe* it! What have you done? Taken our money for this? It will never fly.

**Bodoni:** It will fly.

**Maria:** Rocket ships cost millions. Have you millions?

**Bodoni:** It will fly. Now go to the house all of you. I have phone calls to make, work to do. Tomorrow we leave! Tell no one, understand? It is a secret.

**Maria:** You have ruined us. Our money used for this—this thing. When it should have been spent on equipment.

**Bodoni:** You will see. God help me.

**Narrator:** Through the midnight hours trucks arrived, packages were delivered, and Bodoni, smiling, exhausted his bank account. With blowtorch and metal stripping he assaulted the rocket, added, took away, worked fiery magics and secret insults upon it. He bolted nine ancient automobile motors into the rocket's empty engine room. At dawn he entered the kitchen:

**Bodoni:** Maria, I'm ready for breakfast. We're ready! Come on!

**Maria:** I've locked the children in the closet.

**Bodoni:** What do you mean?

**Maria:** You'll be killed in that rocket. What kind of rocket can you buy for two thousand dollars? A bad one!

**Bodoni:** Listen to me, Maria.

**Maria:** It will blow up. Anyway, you are no pilot.

**Bodoni:** Nevertheless. I can fly *this* ship. I have fixed it.

**Maria:** You have gone mad.

**Bodoni:** Where is the key to the closet?

**Maria:** I have it here.

**Bodoni:** *Putting out his hand.* Give it to me.

**Maria:** You will kill them.

**Bodoni:** No, no.

**Maria:** Yes, you will. I *feel* it.

**Bodoni:** You won't come along?

**Maria:** I'll stay here.

**Bodoni:** You will understand; you will see then. *He unlocks the closet.* Come, children. Follow your father.



## **The Rocket, Part 5**

**Bodoni:** Children, we will be gone a week. You must come back to school, and I to my business. Listen. This rocket is very old and will fly only *one* more journey. It will not fly again. This will be one trip of your life. Keep your eyes wide.

**Children:** Yes, Papa.

**Bodoni:** Listen, keep your ears clean. Smell the smells of a rocket. *Feel. Remember.* So when you return you will talk of it all the rest of your lives.

**Children:** Yes, Papa.

**Bodoni:** Ready?

**Children:** Ready!

**Bodoni:** Take-off!

**Narrator:** He jerked ten switches. The rocket thundered and leaped. The children danced in their hammock screaming.

**Child:** Here comes the Moon!

**Narrator:** The moon dreamed by. Meteors broke into fireworks. Time flowed away in a serpentine of gas. The children shouted. Released from their hammocks hours later, they peered from the ports.

**Child:** There's Earth!

**Child:** There's Mars!

**Narrator:** The rocket dropped pink petals of fire while the hour dials spun; the child eyes dropped shut. At last they hung like drunken moths in their cocoon hammocks.

**Bodoni:** Good.

**Narrator:** He pressed a button. The airlock door swung wide. He stepped out. Into space? Into inky tides of meteor and gaseous torch? Into swift mileages and infinite dimensions? No. Bodoni smiled. All about the quivering rocket lay the junk yard. Resting, unchanged, there stood the padlocked junkyard gate, the little silent house by the river, the kitchen window lighted, and the river going down to the same sea. And in the center of the junk yard, manufacturing a magic dream, lay the quivering purring rocket.

**Bodoni:** Oh, let nothing happen to the illusion in the next six days. Let all of space come and go, and red Mars come up under our ship, and the moons of Mars, and let there be no flaws in the color film. Let there be three dimensions; let nothing go wrong with the hidden mirrors and screens that mold the fine illusion. Let time pass without crisis.

**Children:** Papa!

**Narrator:** Bodoni looked and saw red Mars and it was good and there was no flaw in it and he was very happy. At sunset on the seventh day the rocket stopped shuddering.

**Bodoni:** We are home.

**Maria:** I have ham and eggs for all of you.

**Child:** Mama, Mama, you should have come, to see it, to see Mars, Mama, and meteors, and everything!

**Maria:** Yes, she said

**Child:** We want to thank you, Papa.

**Bodoni:** It was nothing.

**Child:** We will remember it for always, Papa. We will never forget.

**Narrator:** Very late in the night Bodoni opened his eyes. He sensed that his wife was lying beside him, watching him. She kissed his cheeks and his forehead.

**Bodoni:** What's this?

**Maria:** You're the best father in the world.

**Bodoni:** Why?

**Maria:** Now I see. I understand. Is it a very lovely journey?

**Bodoni:** Yes

**Maria:** Perhaps, perhaps some night, you might take me on just a little trip, do you think?

**Bodoni:** Just a little one, perhaps.

**Maria:** Thank you, Good night.

**Bodoni:** Good night.