

THE MILLION YEAR PICNIC

SOMEHOW THE IDEA WAS BROUGHT UP BY MOM THAT PERHAPS THE WHOLE FAMILY WOULD ENJOY A FISHING TRIP. BUT THEY WEREN'T MOM'S WORDS; TIMOTHY KNEW THAT. THEY WERE DAD'S WORDS, AND MOM USED THEM FOR HIM, SOMEHOW. IMMEDIATELY, THERE WAS A TUMULT AND A SHOUTING, AND QUICK AS JETS, THE CAMP WAS TUCKED INTO CAPSULES AND CONTAINERS. MOM SLIPPED INTO TRAVELING JUMPERS AND BLOUSE, DAD STUFFED HIS PIPE... HIS EYES ON THE MARTIAN SKY, AND THE THREE BOYS PILED... YELLING... INTO THE MOTOR BOAT...

HURRAH! A PICNIC-FISHING-TRIP! CAREFUL, MIKE... ROBERT... G'MON, TIMMY...



SEVEN
AND
EIGHT

ADAPTED FROM A STORY BY
RAY BRADBURY

DAD PUSHED A STUD. THE MOTOR BOAT SENT A HUMMING SOUND UP INTO THE SKY. THE WATER SHOOK BACK AND THE BOAT NOSED AHEAD. TIMOTHY SAT BESIDE DAD, HIS SMALL FINGERS ON TOP OF DAD'S HAIRY ONES. DAD HAD A FUNNY LOOK IN HIS EYES AS THE BOAT WENT UP-CANAL... A LOOK THAT TIMOTHY COULDN'T FIGURE...

HOW FAR ARE WE GOING, DAD?

A MILLION YEARS.

GEE... YEAH...



MOTHER POINTED ONE SOFT LONG ARM...

LOOK, CHILDREN! THERE'S A DEAD CITY.

WOW!

GOLLY!



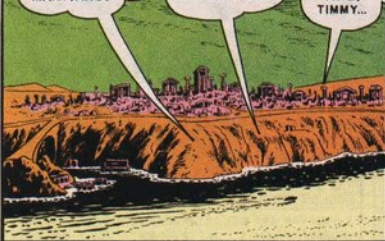
THE DEAD CITY LAY DEAD FOR THEM AND THEM ALONE, DROWNING IN THE HOT SILENCE OF THE MARTIAN SUMMER. AND DAD LOOKED AS IF HE WAS PLEASED THAT IT WAS DEAD...

THE CITY WAS A FUTILE SPREAD OF PINK ROCKS SLEEPING ON A RISE OF SAND, STRETCHING LAZY CRUMBLERD ARMS OUT THREE MILES, PETERING FINALLY INTO A DRIBBLE OF COLLAPSED PILLARS, A FEW TUMBLERD WHARVES, ONE LONELY SHRINE WITH IMAGES STOLEN FROM IT, AND THEN THE SWEEP OF SAND AGAIN. NOTHING ELSE FOR MILES...

I DON'T SEE ANY MARTIANS.

THERE *AREN'T* ANY MARTIANS.

BUT THERE *ARE*, TIMMY...



DAD STARED AFTER THE DISAPPEARING SPECK. LOOKING UP AT THE SKY, YOU COULDN'T SEE A TRACE OF THE WAR... COULDN'T SEE MEN FIGHTING AND SLAUGHTERING EACH OTHER LIKE HUNG PIG CARCASSES, GUSHING HOT, SALT BLOOD...

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT SO HARD, DAD?

I WAS LOOKING FOR *EARTHIAN LOGIC... COMMON SENSE... GOOD GOVERNMENT... PEACE... RESPONSIBILITY...*



MOTHER INTERRUPTED, POINTING. THERE ROSE A SOPRANO CLAMOR FROM ALL THREE BOYS AS THEY ROCKED THE BOAT, ARCHING THEIR TENDER NECKS TO SEE...



A SILVER RING-FISH FLOATED BY THEM, UNDULATING, AND CLOSING LIKE AN IRIS, INSTANTLY, AROUND FOOD PARTICLES TO ASSIMILATE THEM...

JUST LIKE WAR...



JUST THEN, A ROCKET WENT UP... LIKE A STONE THROWN ACROSS A BLUE POND, HITTING WITH A SCAR OF FLAME, FALLING DEEP, DEEPER, AND VANISHING...

DAD! LOOK!

ISN'T THAT THE EARTH ROCKET, DADDY?

YES, SON...



DAD GOT A SCARED LOOK IN HIS EYES WHEN HE SAW THE ROCKET. HE GRITTED HIS TEETH, ADDING SPEED TO THE BOAT. THAT WAS THE *LAST EARTH ROCKET...*

HUH? ALL UP THERE?

NO. I DIDN'T FIND IT. IT'S NOT THERE ANY MORE. MAYBE IT'LL NEVER BE THERE AGAIN. MAYBE WE FOOLED OURSELVES THAT IT WAS EVER THERE...

SEE THE FISH!



DAD LOOKED AT IT, HIS VOICE WAS DEEP AND QUIET...

WAR SWIMS ALONG, SEES FOOD, CONTRACTS. A MOMENT LATER... EARTH IS GONE...



THEY SAT STILL AND FELT THE CANAL WATER RUSH COOL UNDER THEM, SWIFT AND GLASSY. ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CANAL THEY SAW THE GREAT OXYGEN VINES AND BUSHES SOWN BY FAR-SEEING EARTH SCIENTISTS FIFTY YEARS BEFORE AND ONLY NOW PROFUSE ENOUGH... ACTIVE ENOUGH... TO GIVE MARS A THIN ATMOSPHERIC SHELL...

WHEN DO WE SEE THE MARTIANS, DADDY?

QUITE SOON, PERHAPS... MAYBE THIS AFTERNOON... MAYBE TONIGHT.



DON'T MISLEAD THE CHILD, WILLIAM. THE MARTIANS ARE A DEAD RACE. HOW CAN YOU...?

OH, NO, THEY'RE NOT. I'LL SHOW YOU SOME MARTIANS, ALL RIGHT.



TIMOTHY SCOWLED AT THAT, BUT SAID NOTHING. THERE WAS NO FATHOMING THE ALIEN THOUGHT PATTERNS OF GROWNUPS. BUT TEN YEAR OLD MICHAEL, WHO WAS DECORATED CONSPICUOUSLY WITH THE MEDALS OF MENDELIAN SKIN-COLORATION... FRECKLES... PURSUED THE SUBJECT...

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE, DADDY? THE MARTIANS?

YOU'LL KNOW THEM WHEN YOU SEE THEM.



TIMOTHY WONDERED. THEY WERE GOING FAR ON THIS OUTING... TO FISH. BUT THERE WAS A GUN IN THE BOAT. AND THIS WAS A VACATION. BUT WHY ALL THE FOOD... MORE THAN ENOUGH TO LAST THEM YEARS AND YEARS? A VACATION. BUT JUST BEHIND THE VEIL OF THE VACATION WAS NOT A SOFT FACE OF LAUGHTER, BUT SOMETHING HARD AND BONY AND PERHAPS TERRIFYING. TIMOTHY COULD NOT LIFT THE VEIL AND THE OTHER TWO BOYS WERE BUSY BEING TEN YEARS OLD AND EIGHT YEARS OLD, RESPECTIVELY... ROBERT GLARING...

NO MARTIANS YET! NUTS!



DAD HAD BROUGHT AN ATOMIC RADIO ALONG. IT FUNCTIONED ON AN OLD PRINCIPLE: YOU HELD IT AGAINST THE BONES NEAR YOUR EAR, AND IT VIBRATED... SINGING OR TALKING TO YOU. DAD LISTENED TO IT NOW...



HIS FACE LOOKED LIKE ONE OF THOSE FALLEN MARTIAN CITIES, CAVED IN, SUCKED DRY, ALMOST DEAD. HE GAVE IT TO MOM TO LISTEN. HER LIPS DROPPED OPEN...

WHAT'S WRONG DAD? MOM?



TIMOTHY LOOKED AT THEM BOTH, QUESTIONINGLY. DAD BLINKED WET EYES...

IT'S ALL OVER. THE RADIO JUST WENT OFF THE ATOMIC BEAM. EVERY STATION ON EARTH IS GONE. THE AIR IS COMPLETELY SILENT. IT WILL PROBABLY REMAIN SILENT.



FOR... FOR
HOW LONG,
DAD?

MAYBE... MAYBE
YOUR GREAT-
GRANDCHILDREN
WILL HEAR IT AGAIN.



DAD JUST SAT THERE, AND THE
KIDS WERE CAUGHT IN THE CENTER
OF HIS AWE AND ACCEPTANCE.
FINALLY, HE SAID...

MIKE! PICK A CITY.
PICK ANY ONE OF THE
CITIES WE PASS BY.

OKAY,
DAD.
BUT...
WHICH
ONE?



PICK THE ONE YOU
LIKE THE MOST.
YOU, TOO, ROBERT...
AND TIMOTHY. PICK
THE CITY YOU
LIKE THE MOST.

I WANT A
CITY WITH
MARTIANS
IN IT.

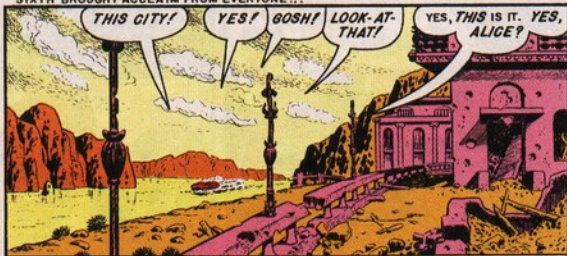


YOU'LL HAVE THAT,
I PROMISE YOU.



DAD'S LIPS WERE FOR
THE KIDS, BUT HIS EYES
WERE FOR MOM...

THEY PASSED SIX CITIES IN TWENTY MINUTES. MIKE LIKED THE FIRST, BUT THIS WAS
VETOED BECAUSE EVERYONE DOUBTED QUICK, FIRST JUDGEMENTS. THE SECOND CITY
NOBODY LIKED. TIM LIKED THE THIRD. THE FOURTH AND FIFTH WERE TOO SMALL. THE
SIXTH BROUGHT ACCLAIM FROM EVERYONE...



THIS CITY!

YES!

GOSH!

LOOK-AT-
THAT!

YES, THIS IS IT. YES,
ALICE?

MOM NODDED SWIFTLY, HER FACE AN EXACT REPLICA OF DAD'S EXPRESSION...

STEERING THE BOAT TO A LANDING
FLAT, DAD JUMPED OUT...

HERE WE ARE,
KIDS! THIS IS
OURS. THIS IS
WHERE WE
LIVE FROM
NOW ON!

FROM NOW
ON, DAD?
BUT WHAT
ABOUT THE
EARTH
ROCKET?
WHAT ABOUT
GOING HOME?



DAD PLACED THE ATOMIC RADIO TO
MICHAEL'S BLONDE PEAR-SHAPED
SKULL...

HERE, MIKE!
LISTEN!

I... I... DON'T
HEAR ANYTHING!
NOTHING!



DAD NODDED...

THAT'S RIGHT, MIKE! NOTHING!
NOTHING AT ALL ANY MORE. NO
MORE HOME, NO MORE ROCKET,
NO MORE EARTH!



MICHAEL CONSIDERED THE LETHAL REVELATION AND BEGAN TO SOB LITTLE DRY SOBS, UNBORN AS YET BY TEARS...

WAIT A MINUTE, SON. I'M GIVING YOU A WHOLE LOT MORE IN EXCHANGE!

WHAT?

DAD WAVED HIS ARM TOWARD THE FIFTY OR SIXTY STRUCTURES STILL STANDING IN THE DEAD CITY THEY'D CHOSEN...

I'M GIVING YOU THIS CITY, MIKE. IT'S YOURS. FOR YOU... AND ROBERT... AND TIMOTHY... ALL THREE OF YOU... TO OWN FOR YOURSELVES...

OURS? ALL OURS? DID YOU HEAR THAT, GUYS? ALL FOR US! ALL OF THAT!

THEY HURRIED INTO THE GREAT PINK-STONED CITY, WHISPERING AMONG THEMSELVES, BECAUSE DEAD CITIES HAVE A WAY OF MAKING YOU WANT TO WHISPER...

RALPH EDWARDS WILL BE COMING HERE TOO... WITH HIS WIFE... AND FOUR DAUGHTERS...

FOUR DAUGHTERS! GIRLS! GAHH!

THEY STOOD THERE, KING OF THE HILL, TOP OF THE HEAP, RULER OF ALL THEY SURVEYED, UNIMPEACHABLE MON-ARCHS AND PRESIDENTS...

IS THIS REALLY OURS, DAD?

THE WHOLE PLANET BELONGS TO US, KIDS. THE WHOLE DARN PLANET.

THEY STOOD THERE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANT TO OWN A WORLD, AND HOW BIG A WORLD REALLY WAS...

NIGHT CAME QUICKLY IN THE THIN ATMOSPHERE. DAD WENT DOWN TO THE BOAT AND CAME WALKING BACK CARRYING PILES OF PAPERS IN HIS BIG HANDS...

HE LAID THE PAPERS IN A CLUTTER IN AN OLD COURTYARD AND SET THEM AFIRE. TO KEEP WARM, THEY CROUCHED AROUND THEM AND LAUGHED AND TIMOTHY SAW THE LETTERS LEAP LIKE FRIGHTENED ANIMALS WHEN THE FLAMES TOUCHED AND ENGULFED THEM...

GOVERNMENT BONDS. POLITICAL MAPS. RELIGIOUS QUARRELS. SCIENCES, PREJUDICES, STOCKS. BONDS, WAR REPORTS. DAD SAT THERE AND FED THEM TO THE FIRE.

I'M BURNING A WAY OF LIFE JUST LIKE THE WAY OF LIFE IS BEING BURNED CLEAN BACK ON EARTH RIGHT NOW...

FORGIVE ME IF I TALK LIKE A **POLITICIAN**. I AM, AFTER ALL, A **FORMER GOVERNOR** OF A STATE. I WAS **HONEST** AND THEY **HATED** ME FOR IT. LIFE ON EARTH NEVER SEEMED TO **ORIENT** ITSELF. **SCIENCE** GOT TOO FAR AHEAD TOO QUICKLY, AND THE PEOPLE GOT LOST IN A **SCIENTIFIC WILDERNESS**... LIKE **CHILDREN**, MAKING OVER **PRETTY THINGS**... PUTTING EMPHASIS ON THE **WRONG** THINGS; ON **MACHINES** INSTEAD OF THE THOUGHT OF HOW TO **RUN** THE MACHINES.



WARS GOT WORSE AND **KILLED** THEM. THAT'S WHAT THE **SILENT RADIO** MEANS. THAT'S WHAT WE RAN AWAY FROM. I **KNEW** THE WAR WAS **COMING**. I HOPED IT WOULDN'T BE THIS **BAD**. BUT NOW, **EARTH IS GONE**. **INTERPLANETARY TRAVEL** WON'T BE **BACK** FOR ANOTHER **TWO HUNDRED YEARS**... MAYBE **LONGER**... MAYBE **NEVER**.



THE WAY OF LIFE PROVED ITSELF **WRONG**, AND IT **STRANGL**EDED ITSELF WITH ITS **OWN HANDS**. YOU'RE **YOUNG**. I'LL TELL YOU THIS **AGAIN**... **EVERY DAY**... UNTIL IT **SINKS IN**.



DAD PAUSED TO FEED MORE PAPERS TO THE FIRE...

NOW WE ARE **ALONE**... WE AND A **HANDFUL** OF **OTHERS** WHO ARE TO MEET US IN A FEW DAYS. ENOUGH TO **START OVER**. ENOUGH TO **BEGIN**. ENOUGH TO TURN THEIR **BACKS** ON **CHAOS** AND **STRIKE OUT** ON A **NEW LINE!**



THE FIRE LEAPED UP TO EMPHASIZE HIS TALKING. HE WAS FULL OF THAT FIRE, AND THEN ALL OF THE PAPERS WERE GONE EXCEPT **ONE**. THAT WAS A **SYMBOL**, TOO. ALL OF THE LAWS AND BELIEFS OF EARTH WERE BURNT INTO SMALL HOT ASHES...



TIMOTHY LOOKED AT THE LAST THING DAD TOSSED INTO THE FIRE. IT WAS A **MAP OF THE UNITED STATES**...



IT WRINKLED AND DISTORTED ITSELF HOTLY AND WAS GONE LIKE A WARM **BLACK BUTTERFLY**...

TIMOTHY HAD TO TURN HIS HEAD AWAY AND SWALLOW, HARD. DAD GOT UP...

COME **ALONG** ALL OF YOU. **HERE**, ALICE, **COME ALONG**. NOW, I'M GOING TO **SHOW YOU THE MARTIANS!**



ROBERT WAS CRYING LOUDLY, AND DAD PICKED HIM UP AND CARRIED HIM, AND THEY WALKED DOWN THROUGH THE RUINS TO THE CANAL...



... THE CANAL, WHERE TOMORROW OR THE NEXT DAY THE BOYS' FUTURE WIVES WOULD COME UP IN A BOAT... SMALL LAUGHING GIRLS NOW, WITH THEIR FATHER AND MOTHER...

THE NIGHT CAME DOWN AROUND THEM AND THERE WERE STARS. BUT TIMOTHY COULDN'T FIND EARTH. IT HAD *ALREADY SET*...



THAT WAS SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT. *IT HAD ALREADY SET!*

A COOL NIGHT WIND BLEW AROUND THEM...AND AS THEY WALKED, DAD SAID...

YOUR MOTHER AND I WILL TEACH YOU. PERHAPS WE'LL FAIL. I THINK NOT. WE'VE HAD EXPERIENCE. WE'VE SEEN, WE *PLANNED* THIS TRIP *YEARS* AGO, EVEN *BEFORE* YOU WERE *BORN*. EVEN IF THERE *HADN'T* BEEN A WAR, WE'D HAVE *COME* TO *MARS* TO *LIVE* AND FORM OUR *OWN* STANDARD OF LIVING. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ANOTHER *HUNDRED YEARS* BEFORE MARS WOULD HAVE BEEN *POISONED* BY EARTH CIVILIZATION. NOW, OF COURSE...



THEY REACHED THE CANAL. IT WAS LONG AND STRAIGHT AND COOL AND WET AND REFLECTIVE IN THE NIGHT...

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE A MARTIAN, DAD. WHERE ARE THEY? YOU PROMISED...

THERE THEY ARE, MICHAEL...



DAD POINTED STRAIGHT DOWN. THE MARTIANS WERE *THERE*, ALL RIGHT. IT SENT A *THRILL* CHASING THROUGH TIMOTHY...



THE MARTIANS WERE *THERE*...IN THE CANAL...REFLECTED IN THE WATER. TIMOTHY AND MICHAEL AND ROBERT AND MOM AND DAD. THE MARTIANS STARED BACK AT THEM FOR A LONG, LONG SILENT TIME FROM THE RIPPLING WATER...