

# ANNOTATIONS BY: KEY EVENTS

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## BACKGROUND

The astronomer Carl Sagan once wrote, "Mars has become a kind of mythic arena onto which we have projected our earthly hopes and fears." People have always been fascinated by the possibility of alien life on Mars. In this story, author Ray Bradbury does away with hard science, choosing instead to explore the aura of mystery that has always surrounded the Red Planet.

- 1 **T**he rocket metal cooled in the meadow winds. Its lid gave a bulging *pop*. From its clock interior stepped a man, a woman, and three children. The other passengers whispered away across the Martian meadow, leaving the man alone among his family.
- 2 The man felt his hair flutter and the tissues of his body draw tight as if he were standing at the center of a vacuum. His wife, before him, seemed almost to whirl away in smoke. The children, small seeds, might at any instant be sown to all the Martian climes.
- 3 The children looked up at him, as people look to the sun to tell what time of their life it is. His face was cold.
- 4 "What's wrong?" asked his wife.
- 5 "Let's get back on the rocket."
- 6 "Go back to Earth?"
- 7 "Yes! Listen!"
- 8 The wind blew as if to flake away their identities. At any moment the Martian air might draw his soul from him, as marrow

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- The Bittering family arrives on Mars.
- Harry Bittering immediately feels uneasy and wants to return to Earth.
- The Martian environment feels eerie and threatening.



4:00

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- Harry expresses fear and a sense of not belonging.
- He checks his home obsessively, trying to feel normal.
- His son David wonders if Martians are still around, unseen.

comes from a white bone. He felt **submerged** in a chemical that could dissolve his intellect and burn away his past.

9 They looked at Martian hills that time had worn with a crushing pressure of years. They saw the old cities, lost in their meadows, lying like children's delicate bones among the blowing lakes of grass.

10 "Chin up, Harry," said his wife. "It's too late. We've come over sixty million miles."

11 The children with their yellow hair hollered at the deep dome of Martian sky. There was no answer but the racing hiss of wind through the stiff grass.

12 He picked up the luggage in his cold hands. "Here we go," he said—a man standing on the edge of a sea, ready to wade in and be drowned.

13 They walked into town.

14 Their name was Bittering. Harry and his wife Cora; Dan, Laura, and David. They built a small white cottage and ate good breakfasts there, but the fear was never gone. It lay with Mr. Bittering and Mrs. Bittering, a third unbidden partner at every midnight talk, at every dawn awakening.

15 "I feel like a salt crystal," he said, "in a mountain stream, being washed away. We don't belong here. We're Earth people. This is Mars. It was meant for Martians. For heaven's sake, Cora, let's buy tickets for home!"

16 But she only shook her head. "One day the atom bomb will fix Earth. Then we'll be safe here."

17 "Safe and insane!"

18 *Tick-tock, seven o'clock* sang the voice-clock; *time to get up*. And they did.

19 Something made him check everything each morning—warm hearth, potted blood-geraniums—precisely as if he expected something to be amiss. The morning paper was toast-warm from the 6 A.M. Earth rocket. He broke its seal and tilted it at his breakfast place. He forced himself to be convivial.<sup>1</sup>

20 "Colonial days all over again," he declared. "Why, in ten years there'll be a million Earthmen on Mars. Big cities, everything! They said we'd fail. Said the Martians would resent our invasion. But did we find any Martians? Not a living soul! Oh, we found their empty cities, but no one in them. Right?"

21 A river of wind submerged the house. When the windows ceased rattling Mr. Bittering swallowed and looked at the children.

22 "I don't know," said David. "Maybe there're Martians around we don't see. Sometimes nights I think I hear 'em. I hear the wind. The sand hits my window. I get scared. And I see those towns way

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- News arrives: Earth has been bombed; no rockets will come.
- The family realizes they are stranded on Mars.
- Harry is overwhelmed with fear and isolation.

up in the mountains where the Martians lived a long time ago. And I think I see things moving around those towns, Papa. And I wonder if those Martians *mind* us living here. I wonder if they won't do something to us for coming here."

23 "Nonsense!" Mr. Bittering looked out the windows. "We're clean, decent people." He looked at his children. "All dead cities have some kind of ghosts in them. Memories, I mean." He stared at the hills. "You see a staircase and you wonder what Martians looked like climbing it. You see Martian paintings and you wonder what the painter was like. You make a little ghost in your mind, a memory. It's quite natural. Imagination." He stopped. "You haven't been prowling up in those ruins, have you?"

24 "No, Papa." David looked at his shoes.

25 "See that you stay away from them. Pass the jam."

26 "Just the same," said little David, "I bet something happens."

27 Something happened that afternoon.

28 Laura stumbled through the settlement, crying. She dashed blindly onto the porch.

29 "Mother, Father—the war, Earth!" she sobbed. "A radio flash just came. Atom bombs hit New York! All the space rockets blown up. No more rockets to Mars, ever!"

30 "Oh, Harry!" The mother held onto her husband and daughter.

31 "Are you sure, Laura?" asked the father quietly.

32 Laura wept. "We're stranded on Mars, forever and ever!"

33 For a long time there was only the sound of the wind in the late afternoon.

34 Alone, thought Bittering. Only a thousand of us here. No way back. No way. No way. Sweat poured from his face and his hands and his body; he was drenched in the hotness of his fear. He wanted to strike Laura, cry, "No, you're lying! The rockets will come back!" Instead, he stroked Laura's head against him and said, "The rockets will get through someday."

35 "Father, what will we do?"

36 "Go about our business, of course. Raise crops and children.

Wait. Keep things going until the war ends and the rockets come again."

37 The two boys stepped out onto the porch.

38 "Children," he said, sitting there, looking beyond them, "I've something to tell you."

39 "We know," they said.

40 In the following days, Bittering wandered often through the garden to stand alone in his fear. As long as the rockets had spun a silver web across space, he had been able to accept Mars. For he had always told himself: Tomorrow, if I want, I can buy a ticket and go back to Earth.

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- Harry tries to distract himself with gardening.
- He reflects on Martian history and the renaming of places.
- He notices strange changes in the peach blossoms.

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41 But now: The web gone, the rockets lying in jigsaw heaps  
of molten girder and unsnaked wire. Earth people left to the  
strangeness of Mars, the cinnamon dusts and wine airs, to be  
baked like gingerbread shapes in Martian summers, put into  
harvested storage by Martian winters. What would happen to  
him, the others? This was the moment Mars had waited for. Now  
it would eat them.

42 He got down on his knees in the flower bed, a spade in his  
nervous hands. Work, he thought, work and forget.

43 He glanced up from the garden to the Martian mountains. He  
thought of the proud old Martian names that had once been on  
those peaks. Earthmen, dropping from the sky, had gazed upon  
hills, rivers, Martian seats left nameless in spite of names. Once  
Martians had built cities, named cities; climbed mountains, named  
mountains; sailed seas, named seas. Mountains melted, seas  
drained, cities tumbled. In spite of this, the Earthmen had felt a  
silent guilt at putting new names to these ancient hills and valleys.

44 Nevertheless, man lives by symbol and label. The names were  
given.

45 Mr. Bittering felt very alone in his garden under the Martian  
sun, anachronism<sup>2</sup> bent here, planting Earth flowers in a wild soil.

46 Think. Keep thinking. Different things. Keep your mind free of  
Earth, the atom war, the lost rockets.

47 He perspired. He glanced about. No one watching. He removed  
his tie. Pretty bold, he thought. First your coat off, now your tie.  
He hung it neatly on a peach tree he had imported as a sapling  
from Massachusetts.

48 He returned to his philosophy of names and mountains. The  
Earthmen had changed names. Now there were Hormel Valleys,  
Roosevelt Seas, Ford Hills, Vanderbilt Plateaus, Rockefeller  
Rivers,<sup>3</sup> on Mars. It wasn't right. The American settlers had shown  
wisdom, using old Indian prairie names: Wisconsin, Minnesota,  
Idaho, Ohio, Utah, Milwaukee, Waukegan, Osseo. The old names,  
the old meanings.

49 Staring at the mountains wildly, he thought: Are you up there?  
All the dead ones, you Martians? Well, here we are, alone, cut off!  
Come down, move us out! We're helpless!

50 The wind blew a shower of peach blossoms.

51 He put out his sun-browned hand and gave a small cry. He  
touched the blossoms and picked them up. He turned them, he  
touched them again and again. Then he shouted for his wife.

52 "Cora!"

53 She appeared at a window. He ran to her.





54 "Cora, these blossoms!"  
55 She handled them.  
56 "Do you see? They're different. They've changed! They're not  
peach blossoms any more!"  
57 "Look all right to me," she said.  
58 "They're not. They're wrong! I can't tell how. An extra petal,  
a leaf, something, the color, the smell!"  
59 The children ran out in time to see their father hurrying  
about the garden, pulling up radishes, onions, and carrots from  
their beds.  
60 "Cora, come look!"  
61 They handled the onions, the radishes, the carrots among them.  
62 "Do they look like carrots?"  
63 "Yes . . . no." She hesitated. "I don't know."  
64 "They're changed."  
65 "Perhaps."  
66 "You know they have! Onions but not onions, carrots but not  
carrots. Taste: the same but different. Smell: not like it used to be."  
He felt his heart pounding, and he was afraid. He dug his fingers  
into the earth. "Cora, what's happening? What is it? We've got to  
get away from this." He ran across the garden. Each tree felt his  
touch. "The roses. The roses. They're turning green!"  
67 And they stood looking at the green roses.  
68 And two days later Dan came running. "Come see the cow.  
I was milking her and I saw it. Come on!"  
69 They stood in the shed and looked at their one cow.  
70 It was growing a third horn.

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- Harry discovers that the plants and animals are changing.
- The cow grows a third horn.
- He fears the Martian environment is altering everything.

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- Harry expresses fear about the food - they might change them if they eat it.
- Harry urges the townspeople to help him build a rocket.
- They laugh and dismiss his concerns.
- He notices physical changes in others—yellow eyes, altered features.

71 And the lawn in front of their house very quietly and slowly  
was coloring itself like spring violets. Seed from Earth but  
growing up a soft purple.

72 "We must get away," said Bittering. "We'll eat this stuff and  
then we'll change—who knows to what? I can't let it happen.  
There's only one thing to do. Burn this food!"

73 "It's not poisoned."

74 "But it is. Subtly, very subtly. A little bit. A very little bit. We  
mustn't touch it."

75 He looked with dismay at their house. "Even the house. The  
wind's done something to it. The air's burned it. The fog at night.  
The boards, all warped out of shape. It's not an Earthman's house  
any more."

76 "Oh, your imagination!"

77 He put on his coat and tie. "I'm going into town. We've got to  
do something now. I'll be back."

78 "Wait, Harry!" his wife cried.

79 But he was gone.

80 In town, on the shadowy step of the grocery store, the men sat  
with their hands on their knees, conversing with great leisure  
and ease.

81 Mr. Bittering wanted to fire a pistol in the air.

82 What are you doing, you fools! he thought. Sitting here! You've  
heard the news—we're stranded on this planet. Well, move! Aren't  
you frightened? Aren't you afraid? What are you going to do?

83 "Hello, Harry," said everyone.

84 "Look," he said to them. "You did hear the news, the other day,  
didn't you?"

85 They nodded and laughed. "Sure. Sure, Harry."

86 "What are you going to do about it?"

87 "Do, Harry, do? What *can* we do?"

88 "Build a rocket, that's what!"

89 "A rocket, Harry? To go back to all that trouble? Oh, Harry!"

90 "But you *must* want to go back. Have you noticed the peach  
blossoms, the onions, the grass?"

91 "Why, yes, Harry, seems we did," said one of the men.

92 "Doesn't it scare you?"

93 "Can't recall that it did much, Harry."

94 "Idiots!"

95 "Now, Harry."

96 Bittering wanted to cry. "You've got to work with me. If we  
stay here, we'll all change. The air. Don't you smell it? Something  
in the air. A Martian virus, maybe; some seed, or a pollen. Listen  
to me!"

97 They stared at him.



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- Harry begins building a rocket alone.
- Townspeople mock him for building a rocket.
- Harry sees that his eyes are turning yellow.
- He refuses to eat Martian-grown food.
- His wife doubts the rocket will succeed.

98 "Sam," he said to one of them.  
 99 "Yes, Harry?"  
 100 "Will you help me build a rocket?"  
 101 "Harry, I got a whole load of metal and some blueprints. You  
 want to work in my metal shop on a rocket, you're welcome. I'll  
 sell you that metal for five hundred dollars. You should be able to  
 construct a right pretty rocket, if you work alone, in about thirty  
 years."  
 102 Everyone laughed.  
 103 "Don't laugh."  
 104 Sam looked at him with quiet good humor.  
 105 "Sam," Bittering said. "Your eyes—" *"Your eyes—"*  
 106 "What about them, Harry?"  
 107 "Didn't they used to be gray?"  
 108 "Well now, I don't remember."  
 109 "They were, weren't they?"  
 110 "Why do you ask, Harry?"  
 111 "Because now they're kind of yellow-colored."  
 112 "Is that so, Harry?" Sam said, casually.  
 113 "And you're taller and thinner—" *"And you're taller and thinner—"*  
 114 "You might be right, Harry."  
 115 "Sam, you shouldn't have yellow eyes."  
 116 "Harry, what color eyes have *you* got?" Sam said.  
 117 "My eyes? They're blue, of course."  
 118 "Here you are, Harry." Sam handed him a pocket mirror. "Take  
 a look at yourself."  
 119 Mr. Bittering hesitated, and then raised the mirror to his face.  
 120 There were little, very dim flecks of new gold captured in the  
 blue of his eyes.  
 121 "Now look what you've done," said Sam a moment later.  
 "You've broken my mirror."  
 122 Harry Bittering moved into the metal shop and began to build  
 the rocket. Men stood in the open door and talked and joked  
 without raising their voices. Once in a while they gave him a hand  
 on lifting something. But mostly they just idled and watched him  
 with their yellowing eyes.  
 123 "It's supptime, Harry," they said.  
 124 His wife appeared with his supper in a wicker basket.  
 125 "I won't touch it," he said. "I'll eat only food from our  
 Deepfreeze. Food that came from Earth. Nothing from our  
 garden."  
 126 His wife stood watching him. "You can't build a rocket."  
 127 "I worked in a shop once, when I was twenty. I know metal.  
 Once I get it started, the others will help," he said, not looking at  
 her, laying out the blueprints.



## Page 134

- Harry begins speaking Martian words unconsciously.
- He grows weaker and thinner.
- His wife runs out of Earth food and he reluctantly eats Martian food.

128 "Harry, Harry," she said, helplessly.  
 129 "We've got to get away, Cora. We've got to!"

130 The nights were full of wind that blew down the empty  
 moonlit sea meadows past the little white chess cities lying for  
 their twelve-thousandth year in the shallows. In the Earthmen's  
 settlement, the Bittering house shook with a feeling of change.

131 Lying abed, Mr. Bittering felt his bones shifted, shaped, melted  
 like gold. His wife, lying beside him, was dark from many sunny  
 afternoons. Dark she was, and golden-eyed, burnt almost black by  
 the sun, sleeping, and the children metallic in their beds, and the  
 wind roaring **forlorn** and changing through the old peach trees,  
 the violet grass, shaking out green rose petals.

132 The fear would not be stopped. It had his throat and heart.  
 It dripped in a wetness of the arm and the temple and the  
 trembling palm.

133 A green star rose in the east.  
 134 A strange word emerged from Mr. Bittering's lips.  
 135 "*lorrt. lorrt.*" He repeated it.  
 136 It was a Martian word. He knew no Martian.  
 137 In the middle of the night he arose and dialed a call through to  
 Simpson, the archaeologist.

138 "Simpson, what does the word *lorrt* mean?"  
 139 "Why that's the old Martian word for our planet Earth. Why?"  
 140 "No special reason."  
 141 The telephone slipped from his hand.  
 142 "Hello, hello, hello, hello," it kept saying while he sat gazing  
 out at the green star. "Bittering? Harry, are you there?"

143 The days were full of metal sound. He laid the frame of the  
 rocket with the reluctant help of three indifferent men. He grew  
 very tired in an hour or so and had to sit down.

144 "The altitude," laughed a man.  
 145 "Are you *eating*, Harry?" asked another.  
 146 "I'm eating," he said, angrily.  
 147 "From your Deepfreeze?"  
 148 "Yes!"  
 149 "You're getting thinner, Harry."  
 150 "I'm not."  
 151 "And taller."  
 152 "Liar!"

153 His wife took him aside a few days later. "Harry, I've used up  
 all the food in the Deepfreeze. There's nothing left. I'll have to  
 make sandwiches using food grown on Mars."  
 154 He sat down heavily.  
 155 "You must eat," she said. "You're weak."  
 156 "Yes," he said.



157 He took a sandwich, opened it, looked at it, and began to nibble  
at it.

158 "And take the rest of the day off," she said. "It's hot. The  
children want to swim in the **canals** and hike. Please come along."

159 "I can't waste time. This is a crisis!"

160 "Just for an hour," she urged. "A swim'll do you good."

161 He rose, sweating. "All right, all right. Leave me alone.  
I'll come."

162 "Good for you, Harry."

163 The sun was hot, the day quiet. There was only an **immense**  
staring burn upon the land. They moved along the canal, the  
father, the mother, the racing children in their swimsuits. They  
stopped and ate meat sandwiches. He saw their skin baking  
brown. And he saw the yellow eyes of his wife and his children,  
their eyes that were never yellow before. A few tremblings shook  
him, but were carried off in waves of pleasant heat as he lay in the  
sun. He was too tired to be afraid.

164 "Cora, how long have your eyes been yellow?"

165 She was bewildered. "Always, I guess."

166 "They didn't change from brown in the last three months?"

167 She bit her lips. "No. Why do you ask?"

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- Harry joins his family for a swim in the canals.
- He notices their yellow eyes and darkened skin.
- He begins to accept the changes.

168 “Never mind.”  
 169 They sat there.  
 170 “The children’s eyes,” he said. “They’re yellow, too.”  
 171 “Sometimes growing children’s eyes change color.”  
 172 “Maybe *we’re* children, too. At least to Mars. That’s a thought.”  
 He laughed. “Think I’ll swim.”  
 173 They leaped into the canal water, and he let himself sink down  
 and down to the bottom like a golden statue and lie there in green  
 silence. All was water-quiet and deep, all was peace. He felt the  
 steady, slow current drift him easily.  
 174 If I lie here long enough, he thought, the water will work  
 and eat away my flesh until the bones show like coral. Just my  
 skeleton left. And then the water can build on that skeleton—  
 green things, deep water things, red things, yellow things.  
 Change. Change. Slow, deep, silent change. And isn’t that what it  
 is up *there*?  
 175 He saw the sky submerged above him, the sun made Martian  
 by **atmosphere** and time and space.  
 176 Up there, a big river, he thought, a Martian river; all of us lying  
 deep in it, in our pebble houses, in our sunken boulder houses,  
 like crayfish hidden, and the water washing away our old bodies  
 and lengthening the bones and—  
 177 He let himself drift up through the soft light.  
 178 Dan sat on the edge of the canal, regarding his father seriously.  
 179 “*Utha*,” he said.  
 180 “What?” asked his father.  
 181 The boy smiled. “You know. *Utha*’s the Martian word for  
 ‘father.’”  
 182 “Where did you learn it?”  
 183 “I don’t know. Around. *Utha*!”  
 184 “What do you want?”  
 185 The boy hesitated. “I—I want to change my name.”  
 186 “Change it?”  
 187 “Yes.”  
 188 His mother swam over. “What’s wrong with Dan for a name?”  
 189 Dan fidgeted. “The other day you called Dan, Dan, Dan. I didn’t  
 even hear. I said to myself, That’s not my name. I’ve a new name I  
 want to use.”  
 190 Mr. Bittering held to the side of the canal, his body cold and his  
 heart pounding slowly. “What is this new name?”  
 191 “Linnl. Isn’t that a good name? Can I use it? Can’t I, please?”  
 192 Mr. Bittering put his hand to his head. He thought of the silly  
 rocket, himself working alone, himself alone even among his  
 family, so alone.  
 193 He heard his wife say, “Why not?”  
 194 He heard himself say, “Yes, you can use it.”

## Page 136

- Harry’s son asks to change his name to a Martian one.
- The family explores Martian villas and enjoys the landscape.
- Harry begins to lose interest in the rocket.





## Page 137

- The townspeople move to the villas.
- Everyone adopts Martian names and customs.
- Harry agrees to postpone rocket work until autumn.

195 "Yaaa!" screamed the boy. "I'm Linnl, Linnl!"  
196 Racing down the meadowlands, he danced and shouted.  
197 Mr. Bittering looked at his wife. "Why did we do that?"  
198 "I don't know," she said. "It just seemed like a good idea."  
199 They walked into the hills. They strolled on old mosaic paths,  
beside still pumping fountains. The paths were covered with  
a thin film of cool water all summer long. You kept your bare feet  
cool all the day, splashing as in a creek, wading.  
200 They came to a small deserted Martian villa with a good view of  
the valley. It was on top of a hill. Blue marble halls, large murals,  
a swimming pool. It was refreshing in this hot summertime. The  
Martians hadn't believed in large cities.  
201 "How nice," said Mrs. Bittering, "if we could move up here to  
this villa for the summer."  
202 "Come on," he said. "We're going back to town. There's work to  
be done on the rocket."  
203 But as he worked that night, the thought of the cool blue marble  
villa entered his mind. As the hours passed, the rocket seemed less  
important.  
204 In the flow of days and weeks, the rocket receded and  
dwindled. The old fever was gone. It frightened him to think he  
had let it slip this way. But somehow the heat, the air, the working  
conditions—  
205 He heard the men murmuring on the porch of his metal shop.  
206 "Everyone's going. You heard?"  
207 "All going. That's right."  
208 Bittering came out. "Going where?" He saw a couple of trucks,  
loaded with children and furniture, drive down the dusty street.  
209 "Up to the villas," said the man.  
210 "Yeah, Harry. I'm going. So is Sam. Aren't you Sam?"  
211 "That's right, Harry. What about you?"  
212 "I've got work to do here."  
213 "Work! You can finish that rocket in the autumn, when it's  
cooler."  
214 He took a breath. "I got the frame all set up."  
215 "In the autumn is better." Their voices were lazy in the heat.  
216 "Got to work," he said.  
217 "Autumn," they reasoned. And they sounded so sensible, so  
right.  
218 "Autumn would be best," he thought. "Plenty of time, then."  
219 No! cried part of himself, deep down, put away, locked tight,  
suffocating. No! No!  
220 "In the autumn," he said.  
221 "Come on, Harry," they all said.  
222 "Yes," he said, feeling his flesh melt in the hot liquid air. "Yes, in  
the autumn. I'll begin work again then."

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- The Bitterings abandon their Earth-style home.
- They fully embrace Martian life.
- They no longer feel connected to Earth.

223 "I got a villa near the Tirra Canal," said someone.  
 224 "You mean the Roosevelt Canal, don't you?"  
 225 "Tirra. The old Martian name."  
 226 "But on the map—"  
 227 "Forget the map. It's Tirra now. Now I found a place in the  
 Pillan Mountains—"  
 228 "You mean the Rockefeller Range," said Bittering.  
 229 "I mean the Pillan Mountains," said Sam.  
 230 "Yes," said Bittering, buried in the hot, swarming air. "The  
 Pillan Mountains."  
 231 Everyone worked at loading the truck in the hot, still afternoon  
 of the next day.  
 232 Laura, Dan, and David carried packages. Or, as they preferred  
 to be known, Ttil, Linnl, and Werr carried packages.  
 233 The furniture was abandoned in the little white cottage.  
 234 "It looked just fine in Boston," said the mother. "And here in the  
 cottage. But up at the villa? No. We'll get it when we come back in  
 the autumn."  
 235 Bittering himself was quiet.  
 236 "I've some ideas on furniture for the villa," he said after a time.  
 "Big, lazy furniture."  
 237 "What about your encyclopedia? You're taking it along,  
 surely?"  
 238 Mr. Bittering glanced away. "I'll come and get it next week."  
 239 They turned to their daughter. "What about your New York  
 dresses?"  
 240 The bewildered girl stared. "Why, I don't want them any more."  
 241 They shut off the gas, the water, they locked the doors and  
 walked away. Father peered into the truck.  
 242 "Gosh, we're not taking much," he said. "Considering all we  
 brought to Mars, this is only a handful!"  
 243 He started the truck.  
 244 Looking at the small white cottage for a long moment, he was  
 filled with a desire to rush to it, touch it, say good-bye to it, for he  
 felt as if he were going away on a long journey, leaving something  
 to which he could never quite return, never understand again.  
 245 Just then Sam and his family drove by in another truck.  
 246 "Hi, Bittering! Here we go!"  
 247 The truck swung down the ancient highway out of town. There  
 were sixty others traveling in the same direction. The town filled  
 with a silent, heavy dust from their passage. The canal waters lay  
 blue in the sun, and a quiet wind moved in the strange trees.  
 248 "Good-bye, town!" said Mr. Bittering.  
 249 "Good-bye, good-bye," said the family, waving to it.  
 250 They did not look back again.

## Page 139

- A rescue rocket arrives from Earth five years later.
- The Earth settlement is empty and abandoned.
- The rescuers find “Martians” living peacefully in the hills.

251 Summer burned the canals dry. Summer moved like flame upon  
the meadows. In the empty Earth settlement, the painted houses  
flaked and peeled. Rubber tires upon which children had swung  
in back yards hung suspended like stopped clock pendulums in  
the blazing air.

252 At the metal shop, the rocket frame began to rust.

253 In the quiet autumn Mr. Bittering stood, very dark now, very  
golden-eyed, upon the slope above his villa, looking at the valley.

254 “It’s time to go back,” said Cora.

255 “Yes, but we’re not going,” he said quietly. “There’s nothing  
there any more.”

256 “Your books,” she said. “Your fine clothes.

257 “Your *Illes* and your fine *ior uele rre*,” she said.

258 “The town’s empty. No one’s going back,” he said. “There’s no  
reason to, none at all.”

259 The daughter wove tapestries and the sons played songs on  
ancient flutes and pipes, their laughter echoing in the marble villa.

260 Mr. Bittering gazed at the Earth settlement far away in the low  
valley. “Such odd, such ridiculous houses the Earth people built.”

261 “They didn’t know any better,” his wife mused. “Such ugly  
people. I’m glad they’ve gone.”

262 They both looked at each other, startled by all they had just  
finished saying. They laughed.

263 “Where did they go?” he wondered. He glanced at his wife. She  
was golden and slender as his daughter. She looked at him, and he  
seemed almost as young as their eldest son.

264 “I don’t know,” she said.

265 “We’ll go back to town maybe next year, or the year after, or the  
year after that,” he said, calmly. “Now—I’m warm. How about  
taking a swim?”

266 They turned their backs to the valley. Arm in arm they walked  
silently down a path of clear-running spring water.

\* \* \*

267 Five years later a rocket fell out of the sky. It lay steaming in the  
valley. Men leaped out of it, shouting.

268 “We won the war on Earth! We’re here to rescue you! Hey!”

269 But the American-built town of cottages, peach trees, and  
theaters was silent. They found a flimsy rocket frame rusting in an  
empty shop.

270 The rocket men searched the hills. The captain established  
headquarters in an abandoned bar. His lieutenant came back to  
report.

271 “The town’s empty, but we found native life in the hills, sir.  
Dark people. Yellow eyes. Martians. Very friendly. We talked a bit,

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- The rescuers assume the original settlers died from a plague.
- They plan to rename Martian landmarks with Earth names.
- The transformation of the settlers into Martians remains a mystery.

not much. They learn English fast. I'm sure our relations will be most friendly with them, sir."

272 "Dark, eh?" mused the captain. "How many?"

273 "Six, eight hundred, I'd say, living in those marble ruins in the hills, sir. Tall, healthy. Beautiful women."

274 "Did they tell you what became of the men and women who built this Earth settlement, Lieutenant?"

275 "They hadn't the foggiest notion of what happened to this town or its people."

276 "Strange. You think those Martians killed them?"

277 "They look surprisingly peaceful. Chances are a plague did this town in, sir."

278 "Perhaps. I suppose this is one of those mysteries we'll never solve. One of those mysteries you read about."

279 The captain looked at the room, the dusty windows, the blue mountains rising beyond, the canals moving in the light, and he heard the soft wind in the air. He shivered. Then, recovering, he tapped a large fresh map he had thumbtacked to the top of an empty table.

280 "Lots to be done, Lieutenant." His voice droned on and quietly on as the sun sank behind the blue hills. "New settlements. Mining sites, minerals to be looked for. Bacteriological specimens taken. The work, all the work. And the old records were lost. We'll have a job of remapping to do, renaming the mountains and rivers and such. Calls for a little imagination.

281 "What do you think of naming those mountains the Lincoln Mountains, this canal the Washington Canal, those hills—we can name those hills for you, Lieutenant. Diplomacy. And you, for a favor, might name a town for me. Polishing the apple. And why not make this the Einstein Valley, and farther over . . . are you *listening*, Lieutenant?"

282 The lieutenant snapped his gaze from the blue color and the quiet mist of the hills far beyond the town.

283 "What? Oh, *yes*, sir!"