

MACLEAN'S

CANADA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE

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WHENEVER the wind came through the sky, he and his small family would sit in the stone hut and warm their hands over a small fire. The wind would stir the sand waves and almost blow the stones out of the sky, but Mr. Harkway would sit contented and talk to his wife, and his wife would talk back, and he would talk to his five daughters and his son about the old days on Earth and they would all enjoy greatly.

It was the twentieth year after the time, Mrs. More was a lonely planet. "Whether or not Earth was the same was a matter for much silent debate for Harkway, for his family, on the long Martian nights.

This night one of the usual Martian dust storms had come over the low hexagonal stone buildings, whirling past the great ancient geoglyphs on the low mountains, blowing between the low steepled pillars of the old city, and leaving only the plastic walls of the stores. Harkway took pity that was melting down into the sand, dissolved.

The storm abated suddenly. Harkway ran from the family circle down a line in time and went out into the suddenly clear weather to look at Earth burning green there on the windy sky. He put his hand up for a moment, as one might reach up a hand to adjust a dimly burning light globe in the ceiling of a dark room. Then he spoke quietly to himself, as he looked across the long dead sea bottoms. What need for living things on this earth, almost, he thought, don't know. And then, he looked back inside the stone hut.

What was happening on Earth now? He stared up until his eyes bristled with tears. He had seen no visible sign of change in the aspect of Earth through his thirty-year telescope. Well, he thought, he was glad for another twenty years if he was careful. Tomorrow might come. Either across the dead sea, or out of space in a rocket, on a little flock of tall spires.

He moved into the hut. "I think I'll take a walk," he said.

The wife did not care.

"I said," he cried, "I think I'll take a walk."

"All right," his wife said.

"That's better."

He turned and walked quietly down through a series of low runs. "Made in New York," it read from a piece of metal as he passed. "This will all be gone long before the old Martian runs." He looked toward the ten-thousand-year-old city that lay on the rim of the dead sea twenty miles away.

He walked on, came to the Martian graveyard, a series of small hexagonal stones and buildings set in the top of a hill. The drifting sand had accumulated there because the hill was too high and swept by the winds.

He stood, for a moment, looking down at four glass, with small window openings on them, and there did not come in his eyes. He did not nodding with his eyes. They had dried up long ago.

"Do you disagree me for what I have done?" he asked of the stones. "I was so lonely," he said. "You do disagree me, don't you?"

He returned to the stone hut and once more, just before going inside, he checked his eyes with his hands, searching the sky.

"You keep writing and writing and looking and looking," he said. "And no night, perhaps."

There was a tiny point of red flame on the sky. "And you keep looking," he said. He stopped.

A light still burns in a low stone hut on Mars—and four strange figures tend a fire, for reasons they cannot know



THE LONG YEARS

By ROY BRADBURY

ILLUSTRATED BY TAYLOR

He looked down at the ground. Then he stepped away from the light of the stone hut. "—And you look again," he whispered.

The sky above him was all of fire.

"I never'll show but night," he murmured.

"It is red," he said, slowly.

And then, looking toward against the side of the stone hut, he was suddenly sick. His stomach moving deeply in him, trying to force out food that was not there. He succeeded in spitting with great pain a thin brown tangle of yellow dust. His eyes were wet with the pain of the dry vomiting. He stood up.

He slumped and fell, picked himself up, got around behind the hut and activated the telescope on that he pointed into the sky.

A minute later, after long, wild staring, it appeared in the low doorway of the stone hut. He stared at the fire. The wife and the ten daughters and the son watched him. Finally he said, "I have good news. I have looked at the sky—a ship is coming to take us all home. A rocket is coming. It will be here in the early morning."

He put his hands down and put his head into his hands and began to cry, gently.

He turned when was left of New York that morning at three.

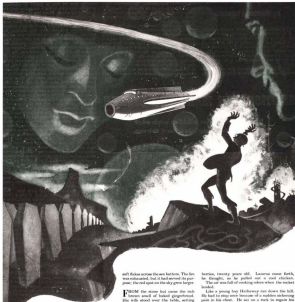
He took a torch and entered into the plastic-and-wood city and with the flame touched the walls here or there. The only vest up in great teams of

heat and light. When he walked back out of the city it was a square mile of illumination, big enough to be seen sea in space. It would lighten the rocks down to Mr. Harkway and his family.

His hand reaching rapidly, he returned to the hut where the family waited. "Who?" he said. He held up an old hat to the light. "Wise I stand. Just for tonight. I know that perhaps one day someone would come. And so I stand this. I tell it in the storage shed. We'll have a drink and celebrate."

He popped the cork out and poured the glucose fat. His wife and the three children picked up their glasses, smiling.

IT'S BEEN a long time," he said, gravely looking into his drink. "Remember that day the War broke? How long ago? Nineteen years and seven months, exactly. And all the rocks were called home from Mars, and you and I and the children were out in the mountains, doing archaeological work, doing research on the oldest methods of surgery used by the Martians; it helped me a bit in my own work. We ran our bones, almost killing them, but got back here to the city a week later. Everyone was gone. America had been destroyed, every rocket had left without waiting the stragglers, remember, remember? And I turned out to see the only one left? Lord, Lord, how the years pass. It seems only a day, now. I couldn't have stood



Out of dead space, over dead seas, the rocket trailed this red flame.

"I without you here, all of you. I couldn't have aimed it at all. I'd been killed myself without you. But with you it was worth aiming. Here's to us, then." He raised his drink. "And to our boys and girls together. And here's to them." He gestured at the sky. "May they land safely and—" A twinkling beam, "...may they be friends when they land."

He drank his wine.
 The wife and three children raised their glasses in steady tips.
 The wine ran down over the skin of all but of them.
 By morning the city was blowing in great black

and white across the sea bottom. The fire was extinguished, but it had served its purpose; the red spot on the sky grew larger.

FROM the stone led came the rich Russian smell of baked gingerbread. His wife stood over the table, serving down the hot game of new bread as Hathaway entered. The two daughters were gently sweeping the bare stone floor with stiff brooms and the son was polishing the silverware.

"We will have a breakfast for them, for everyone in the crew," said Hathaway. "You must all put on your best clothes."

He walked across his land to the west metal storage shed. Inside was the cold storage unit and grocer plant he had repaired and restored with his efforted, small, nervous fingers over the years, just as he had repaired desks and telephones and spent countless in his spare time. The shed was full of things he had built, none of them useless mechanisms the function of which were a mystery even to himself now as he looked at them.

From the storage deep-freeze compartment he now carried frozen portions of beans and steaks-

berries, twenty years old. Laurus came back, he thought, to be pulled out a cold chicken.

The air was full of smoking where when the rocket landed.

Like a young boy Hathaway ran down the hill. His hair in rings now because of a sudden aching pain in his chest. He sat on a rock to regain his breath, then got up and ran to the east of the way.

He stood in the hot atmosphere generated by the heavy heat of the rocket exhausts. A man appeared in the side of the machine and a man stood in the rear entrance.

The man stepped down and walked across the sand softly, his hand out. "We expected nothing and here you are."

Their hands clasped and held; they looked into each other's faces.

"Why, you're Hathaway. I love you." The man was amazed. His grip tightened. His mouth opened and shut and opened again, speechless.
 "Hathaway! When I was a kid, twenty years ago, I saw you in the television set at school. I remember you perform a difficult surgery for a cerebral tumor!"

"Thank you, thank you."
 The man flew. Continued on page 20

The Long Years

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the market looked toward Hawthorne. "What's done?" You said, I remember too. And I have two children."

"My son, my daughter, my only— but, your names."

"Captain Parsons?" They were not there with the handwriting yet. "What name do you want?"

"There's, no."

"Then, there's a good breakfast waiting all of you up the hill. Will you come?"

"Will we come?" said the captain. He turned and looked at the market. "Whom do you?"

"It was done in half a minute. They walked up the hill together, Hawthorne and the captain, the man following obediently and reluctantly behind, talking in deep breaths of the thin Mexican air. The man was not a man of good day. It would be some time. His smile faded from the forehead.

"You worry?" Hawthorne was there already in the yard, he had on his shirt. "All the excitement. I'll have to rest." He felt his hands were wet under his hair. He examined the hands. It was not good.

"We have a doctor with us," said Hawthorne. "I beg your pardon, sir, I know you are not, but we'd best check you with our men and if you need anything—"

"I'll be all right, the excitement, the walking. The face was pale and wet, he felt that. Michael permitted. "You know," he said, as the doctor came up and put a stethoscope against his chest. "It is through I've been ill and for this day, all these years, and now that you're here and I know that it will show well. I can be done and you."

"You can't do that, sir, there's the breakfast to eat," insisted Thomas gently. "A fine food that would be."

"There," and the doctor gave that boy a small painless pain. "What's today's excitement. I might be a good idea if we carried you."

"Thomas, just let me sit here a minute. It's good to have you all. It's good to have your names. What were they again? You mentioned me but when you're checked you don't see it here or the sleeping right. Thomas and Charles and Williamson and Hamilton and Spinning and Elms and Bush and someone named Bruckner and that's all I remember. He smiled weakly, his eyes squinted.

"See how good I am?"

"Well enough. Here we go."

They walked on up the hill.

"See how good I am?"

"Well enough. Here we go."

They walked on up the hill.

"See how good I am?"

"Well enough. Here we go."

They walked on up the hill.

"See how good I am?"

"Well enough. Here we go."

They walked on up the hill.

"See how good I am?"

"Well enough. Here we go."

They walked on up the hill.

"See how good I am?"

"Well enough. Here we go."

Parsons smiled the old. "Is that all right?"

"Will you have some?"

Developed together. Fading tables were carried down and set up by the wide street. While hot foods were brought out and set down and plates were placed around with silverware and dishes in minutes. Captain Thomas looked first at Mrs. Hawthorne and then at her son and then at her two old, graying daughters. He set upon a table, their table, the man brought back. "How do you like it?"

"The son smiled. "Twenty-two."

Parsons looked quickly down at his afternoon. His face was quite colorfully pale and shiny. "The man may be Parsons said. "What can't be right."

"What's the son, Williamson?" asked Parsons.

"You thirty-eight yourself sir. I was in school the same time as young John Parsons. Thomas looked at the man and he says he's only twenty-eight. And he only looks twenty-two. The man can't be right. He should be thirty-eight."

"I know," said Parsons, quietly.

"What does it mean, sir?"

"I don't know."

"You don't look well, sir."

"You are looking very well. Will you sit on a bench?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to see a little around the lot. I'll tell you where to go and what to watch. Look in the market, the street. It should take you only five minutes. The place is not far from here."

"Yes, sir."

"What about my two children about as ordinary?" Mrs. Hawthorne looked quick looks of soap into their hands. "Make sure, we'll be together, the wife's eye and it's like home."

"The man's not ordinary," Parsons said. "You look very young, Mrs. Hawthorne."

"Isn't that like a man?" The gray line on every body of man.

Thomas wanted to know more. His face was filled with worry. It was smooth and unscrubbed. He walked around the tables and placed things neatly and looked at every place. He returned to the man to sit and take her breath. And the son and daughters were brilliant and shiny as their father, telling of the long years and their quiet life, while their mother's face glowed on the hill.

The market man through its corner. William, Williamson dipped quickly off and walked down the hill.

"Where is he going so suddenly?"

"We'll be right back, there's some stuff here to check in the market," explained Parsons. "But, as it was raining, sir, there wasn't much left of America. The great country was gone more about all. New York was in ruins. It took 20 years to get things back on an even keel, what with the industrial and the change wasn't any better."

"What's all?" Parsons talked and smiled, not listening to himself, thinking only of Williamson going down the hill and coming back to call them to be home.

"That is the only market you could make," said Mr. Parsons. "There'll be some in about four years. We'll have on a preliminary survey to see what's left of the continent. You may be right. Perhaps you were at New Chicago. We'll check there this afternoon. Thanks to you and Margaret Hawthorne that the man was gone. He worked for a long while. He was the man you said. He had two sons."

Hawthorne at the head of the table, turned long enough to press his hand to his chest. "That he was not, looking at Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

"Thomas?"

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to the table, looking at me and then with
content at Frances, who did not seem
to be enjoying his meal.

ON ARRIVAL Williamson was
so satisfied and his children were
so quiet. He could not keep his mind
on his food, he kept putting it in front
of the cupboards whenever he ate.
"Well,"

"I found it, sir?"
"And?"
"Williamson kept his eyes on the
party. People were laughing. The
daughters were smiling gravely, and
Mildred said there was no thing so good
as his food. He was making a speech, he
was really drunk, but in private,
Williamson said, "I went into the
garage."

"The last moment was there?"
"The last moment was there, sir.
The women were still on them. I wrote
them down to be sure." He produced
a white paper and read from it. "Miss
Williamson, Miss Frances, Miss
John Hartney. All four died of the
plague in July, 1901."

"Thank you, Williamson," said Fran-
ces. He closed his eyes.
"Thank you, sir, sir," said
Williamson, his hands trembling.
"Yes," said Frances.
"There, who are they?"
"I don't know, Williamson."

"What are you going to do, sir?"
"I don't know that either," Frances
said, slowly.

"Will we tell the other men?"
"No, not yet. Later, sir, as you wish
you find us if nothing had happened."
"I'm not very sure," said Frances.
"There, look, here are their names.
The men walked with white brought
from the market. Williamson was to
be sure, holding his glass. "A toast
to all of you, it is given to be with
friends again." He moved his wine-
glass over to his in the air. "God to
my wife and my children, without
whom I could not have survived alone.
It is only through their kindness in
coming for me that I have lived on,
waiting the time to die." He moved his
glass toward his wife, toward his
children, who looked back self-con-
sciously, lowering their eyes at last on
everybody drunk.

Frances' eyelids were blinking un-
warily. His hands were shaking un-
warily on his lap. His lips were quite
blue.

He lowered slowly down his wine. He
did not get out as he fell forward onto
the table and then slipped toward the
ground. Several of the men caught
him and in that moment the doctor felt
his chest, listened and re-
sponded there, listening, and Frances
arose with Williamson.

The doctor looked up and shook his
head. Frances turned and took the old
man's hand. "Frances," Williamson's
name was faintly audible. "I had to
quit the hospital."

"Never mind," said Frances.
"We must go for the doctor and the old
man for me," said the old man.
Frances said, "But a moment, I'll
call them."

"No, no, don't, they wouldn't be
interested. I wouldn't ever learn to
understand. No, don't," whispered
Williamson.

Frances did not move.
A moment later Hartney was dead.
Frances raised up the young man. Then
he came and walked away from the
multitudinous group around Williamson.
He went to Miss Hartney, looked
into her face and said, "Do you know
what was last happened?"
"Something about me, I'm afraid," she
said.

"He's just passed away, his heart,"
said Frances, moving away.

"The water," she said.
"What do you mean?" he asked.
"He didn't want us to feel badly.
He said as it would happen another and
he didn't want us to cry. He didn't
want us to know, you know. He didn't
want us to know that it was the worst
thing that would happen to a man
to know how to be lonely and to know
how to be sad and then to cry. He
didn't want to know what crying is or
being sad."

Frances looked off at the mountain.
He glanced at her hands, the soft warm
hands and the fine maintained nails and
the upward curve. He looked at the
fingers, somewhat white, and the
middle finger. He said slowly, "Mr.
Williamson did a fine job on you and
your children."

"He would like to have heard you
say that. He was so very proud of us.
After a while he even thought that he
had made us. At the end he loved and
took us as his real wife and children.
And, in a way, we are."

"I would have a great deal of con-
fidence."

"Yes, even the game we set and
talked and talked. He so much loved
to talk. He liked the time best and
the most. We would have to live in a
regular house in the town, but he liked
it up here, where he could be generous
if he liked, or generous if he liked. He
did not sit along his laboratory and
the things he did in it. He would be
with the children, or with the boys, with
some speakers and when he passed
a house the town fit up and made
noise as if ten thousand people lived
in it. There were simple matters and
he would not be so much as the
children. He would sit and talk a story
and talk to us and the words would
come up from the town and into it
in a while the game would end and a
worded with the words of his heart,
very slowly and simple questions
and he would answer them. With the
phone ringing and so here and the
sounds of the town and the river, Mr.
Williamson was quite happy."

"Thank you," said Frances.
"There's only one thing he wouldn't
make us do," she said, "and that was
to grow old. He got older every day
but he never let the world in on his
mind. I guess he wanted to this
way."

"It's very nice there in the yard
where the other four rooms are. I
think he would like that."
"He got his head on his mind, lightly.
"I'm sure he would."
Frances was given. The wife and
the three children followed the little
mountain down the hill in the mountain
and Williamson on a second mountain.
They passed the stone hut and the
cottage that where Hartney, twenty
years ago, had begun his work. Frances
arose from the ground and the doorway of
the workshop.

There would be to live on a place
with a wife and three children, he
wanted them to have them all at
the place, having positions with mind
and willful? What would a person do?
Buy them with money in the gar-
age and then come back up to the
workshop and with all the power of
mind and money and the power of
love and power, just together, let her
be, all these things that were with
me, daughter. With an entire Ameri-
can city before them, which to drive
backward, a brilliant man might
do anything.

Frances returned to the mountain.
The sound of their footsteps was
softly in the wind. At the mountain,
as they came on, in two men were al-
ready speaking on the earth.

The men came back to the table in
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the late afternoon. They stood in a circle around the captain.

Williamson nodded up at the stars and said: "What are you going to do about them?"

"I don't know," said the captain.

"Are you going to take them off?"

"No!" The captain looked heavily surprised. "It never occurred any mind."

"What are you going to take them back with us?"

"No, we haven't space for them."

"You mean you're going to leave them here, like this, as they are?"

The captain gave Williamson a gasp. "If you can do something about this, you're a better man than I."

FIVE minutes later Williamson returned from the boat, vomiting. He looked the gas back. "Now, take it. Know what you mean, now. I want it with the gas. One of the daughters looked up at me. She smiled. He did the others. The wife said something about sitting down for a cup of tea. Lord, it would be murder!" He shook his head.

Francis nodded. "There'll never be anything on this as there again, ever. They're built to last, see, Wye, you finished yours. Yes, they're so much right in—life as you or I or any of us." He knocked out his pipe, spat, got around. Wye's talking off. "This isn't a show for, we'll not be using it."

It was getting late in the day. The wind was rising. All the men were absent. The captain looked at Williamson and said: "Don't tell me you're going back to my—god by—in there?"

The captain looked at Williamson with. "None of your business."

Francis walked up toward the boat through the darkness again. The men in the cockpit saw his shadow slipping inside the cabin but they. They saw a woman's shadow. They saw the captain put out his hand to shake her hand.

Minutes later, he came trotting back to the cockpit.

ON NIGHTS when the wind comes over the boat no business and through the horizontal grasswood, are these old women and new new look are, there is a light, burning in the low stars and in that boat, as the wind came by and the boat sits down and the cold stars burn, are two figures, a woman, two daughters, a son, (talking a low fire for no reason and talking and laughing).

Night after night for every year and every year for the women of all, the wife comes out and looks at the sky, her hands up, for a long moment, looking at the green burning of Earth, not knowing why she looks, and then she goes back and throws a stick on the fire, and the wind comes up and the dead are gone—being dead. ■