In the early morning, with the small sun lifting faintly among the folded hills, he would be up and finished with a smoky breakfast in a few minutes and, trodding out the fire ashes, be on his way with knapsacks, testing, digging, placing seed or sprout, tamping lightly, watering, going on, whistling, looking at the clear sky brightening toward a warm noon.

“You need the air,” he told his night fire. The fire was a ruddy, lively companion that snapped back at you, that slept close by with drowsy pink eyes warm through the chilly night. “We all need the air. It’s a thin air here on Mars. You get tired so soon. It’s like living in the Andes, in South America, high. You inhale and don’t get anything. It doesn’t satisfy.”

He felt his rib case. In thirty days, how it had grown. To take in more air, they would all have to build their lungs. Or plant more trees.

“That’s what I’m here for,” he said. The fire popped. “In school they told a story about Johnny Appleseed walking across America planting apple trees. Well, I’m doing more. I’m planting oaks, elms, and maples, every kind of tree, aspens and deciduous, chestnuts. Instead of making just fruit for the stomach, I’m making air for the lungs. When those trees grow up some year, think of the oxygen they’ll make!”

He remembered his arrival on Mars. Like a thousand others, he had gazed upon a still morning and thought, How do I fit here? What will I do? Is there a job for me?

Then he had fainted.

Someone pushed a vial of ammonia to his nose and, coughing, he came around.

“You’ll be all right,” said the doctor.

“What happened?”

“The air’s pretty thin. Some can’t take it. I think you’ll have to go back to Earth.”

“No!” He sat up and almost immediately felt his eyes darken and Mars revolve twice around under him. His nostrils dilated and he forced his lungs to drink in deep nothingness. “I’ll be all right. I’ve got to stay here!”

They let him lie gasping in horrid fishlike motions. And he
That had been thirty days ago, and he had never regained his

valour; the evening storms and snows and gales of fire over the

red rocks and shrubs, the black electric waves and rages of the

wind, had done it. But still he had never regained his

valour. And the red rocks and the shrubs, and the electric waves

and the wind, had done it. But still he had never regained his

valour.

"Well, then, let me do it,"—you're quitting—"it's

impossible. There won't be much sympathy to

resist quitting, you know."

He was the only one in the camp and in the

regions, but the others weren't far off, and the

tramp of his feet on the path in the early morning

was heard on every side, and the sound of his

whispering and the noise of his footsteps were

a warning to keep off the path. And the noise of

his footsteps was a warning to keep off the path.

And the noise of his footsteps was a warning to

keep off the path.
It rained steadily for two hours and then stopped. The stars came out, freshly washed and clearer than ever.

Changing into dry clothes from his cellophane pack, Mr. Benjamin Driscoll lay down and went happily to sleep.

The sun rose slowly among the hills. It broke out upon the land quietly and wakened Mr. Driscoll where he lay.

He waited a moment before arising. He had worked and waited a long hot month, and now, standing up, he turned at last and faced the direction from which he had come.

It was a green morning.

As far as he could see the trees were standing up against the sky. Not one tree, not two, not a dozen, but the thousands he had planted in seed and sprout. And not little trees, no, not saplings, not little tender shoots, but great trees, huge trees, trees as tall as ten men, green and green and huge and round and full, trees shimmering their metallic leaves, trees whispering, trees in a line over hills, lemon trees, lime trees, pomegranates, apple trees, peachees and elms and aspens, cherry, maple, ash, apple, orange, eucalyptus, stung by a tempestuous rain, nourished by alien and magical soil and, even as he watched, throwing out new branches, popping open new buds.

"Impossible!" cried Mr. Benjamin Driscoll.

But the valley and the morning were green.

And the air!

All about, like a moving current, a mountain river, came the new air, the oxygen blowing from the green trees. You could see it shimmer high in crystal billows. Oxygen, fresh, pure, green, cold oxygen. Turning the valley into a river delta. In a moment the town doors would open wide, people would run out through the new miracle of oxygen, sniffing, glistening in lungfuls of it, cheeks pinking with it, noses frozen with it, lungs revivified, hearts leaping, and worn bodies lifted into a dance.

Mr. Benjamin Driscoll took one long deep drink of green water and fainted.

Before he woke again five thousand new trees had climbed up into the yellow sun.

February 2002: The Locusts

The rockets set the bony meadows afire, turned rock to lava, turned wood to charcoal, transmuted water to steam, made sand and silica into green glass which lay like shattered mirrors reflecting the invasion, all about. The rockets came like drums, beating in the night. The rockets came like locusts, swarming and settling in blooms of rosy smoke. And from the rockets ran men with hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye, to bludgeon away all the strangeness, their mouths fringed with nails so they resembled steel-toothed carnivores, spitting them into their swift hands as theyammered up frame cottages and scuttled over roofs with shingles to blot out the eerie stars, and fit green shades to pull against the night. And when the carpenters had hurried on, the women came in with flowerpots and chintz and pans and set up the kitchen clamor to cover the silence that Mars made waiting outside the door and the shaded window.

In six months a dozen small towns had been laid down upon the naked planet, filled with sizzling neon tubes and yellow electric bulbs. In all, some ninety thousand people came to Mars, and more, on Earth, were packing their grips....