

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

Ray Bradbury, 1950



November 2005: THE OFF SEASON

Sam Parkhill motioned with the broom, sweeping away the blue Martian sand.

"Here we are," he said. "Yes, sir, look at that!" He pointed. "Look at that sign. SAM'S HOT DOGS! Ain't that beautiful, Elma?"

"Sure, Sam," said his wife.

"Boy, what a change for me. If the boys from the Fourth Expedition could see me now. Am I glad to be in business myself while all the rest of them guys're off soldiering around still. We'll make thousands, Elma, thousands."

His wife looked at him for a long time, not speaking. "Whatever happened to Captain Wilder?" she asked finally. "That captain that killed that guy who thought he was going to kill off every other Earth Man, what was his name?"

"Spender, that nut. He was too damn particular. Oh, Captain Wilder? He's off on a rocket to Jupiter, I hear. They kicked him upstairs. I think he was a little batty about Mars too. Touchy, you know. He'll be back down from Jupiter and Pluto in about twenty years if he's lucky. That's what he gets for shooting off his mouth. And while he's freezing to death, look at me, look at this place!"

This was a crossroads where two dead highways came and went in darkness. Here Sam Parkhill had flung up this riveted aluminum structure, garish with white light, trembling with jukebox melody.

He stooped to fix a border of broken glass he had placed on the footpath. He had broken the glass from some old Martian buildings in the hills. "Best hot dogs on two worlds! First man on Mars with a hot-dog stand! The best onions and chili and mustard! You can't say I'm not alert. Here's the main highways, over there is the dead city and the mineral deposits. Those trucks

from Earth Settlement 101 will have to pass here twenty-four hours a day! Do I know my locations, or don't I?"

His wife looked at her fingernails.

"You think those ten thousand new-type work rockets will come through to Mars?" she said at last.

"In a month," he said loudly. "Why you look so funny?"

"I don't trust those Earth people," she said. "I'll believe it when I see them ten thousand rockets arrive with the one hundred thousand Mexicans and Chinese on them."