

Emperor Of Mars

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Inspired by a true story

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Emperor of Mars

FADE IN:

EXT. PRAIRIES -- EVENING

The final light of day glows in warm orange across the flat prairies of Manitoba. A bright star shines down - Mars.

Title: October, 1957.

A VOICE speaks, with intermittent static from a radio speaker.

MON-KA (V.O.)

Greetings, people of Earth. I, Mon-Ka, Emperor of Mars, am once again making contact with your planet in the hope of initiating communications with you and your leaders.

TILTING DOWN TO A SMALL TOWN

At the town limit, a sign reads: *WELCOME TO EMPIRE - POP.468*. Two GRAIN ELEVATORS tower over the sleeping town, silent sentinels that stand alone against the horizon. Beyond the town, dark clouds loom over a flat-topped mountain several miles away. Distant thunder accompanies a flash of lightning.

MON-KA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Your leaders have been keeping my existence from you.

The CRESCENT CAFE is open. SAM WONG looks out the window and returns back to his well-worn chair behind the counter.

MON-KA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They have chosen to suppress this information, even as I have offered to tell them and you about the universe, so much for you to marvel at.

EXT. MATTHEW'S HOME - EVENING

Moving past a house towards the backyard where a garage has been converted to an odd-looking house by sealing the garage door shut.

INT. MATTHEW'S ROOM - NIGHT

A poster from DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL features prominently on the wall. There's also movie magazine PHOTOS pinned around it, Roy Rogers, Doris Day, James Dean.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MON-KA (V.O.)

But you must not believe your leaders.
I, the Emperor of Mars, will tell
you the secrets of our universe
exactly one week of your time from
today. I will speak over your radio
waves.

MATTHEW, aged 12, sits at a desk, silhouetted by a desk lamp.
The radio crackles with static for a beat, then -

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And that was the message left by Mon-
Ak, who calls himself the Emperor of
Mars. Government and military
officials dismiss the recording as a
hoax.

Matthew looks up at Michael Rennie on the movie poster, an
imposing figure standing in front of a flying saucer, with
his giant robot bodyguard behind him.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

However, several UFO sightings have
been reported over the skies of Los
Angeles as over other parts of the
western U.S. and Canada. Whether
Mon-Ka is real or a hoax remains a
mystery at this time. Locally, police
have reported nothing unusual and
anticipate the usual flying saucer
sightings that often accompany these
stories.

The static becomes heavier and the signal disappears.

MATTHEW (V.O.)

(an older voice)

That was the first time I heard about
the Emperor of Mars. Being twelve,
I didn't know what to think, part of
me was scared but another part seemed
to want to know more about him. I
didn't realize he would come to me
in a way that I never expected.

Matthew looks down at his scribbler, where he's written
Emperor of Mars - 1 week. He glances at a PHOTOGRAPH of a
young man. It's his father, killed in the war.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - EVENING

It's a small cottage near the elevators across the railroad
tracks. Beyond it is a wheat field, illuminated by a flash
of BALL LIGHTNING in blues and greens.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Johnson's DOG growls. Several other dogs join in the chorus from around town. A CRACK of thunder erupts.

NICODEMUS JOHNSON steps out. Somewhere in early middle age, he'd be called a young man by older people, and while he has a familiar look, there's a distance to him. You'd notice him on the street, but wouldn't really know why.

NICODEMUS

What is it, Dog?

Dog isn't about to let up. A flash of light from the field persuades Nicodemus to approach the field and stops. A soft glow dances madly with sparkles of static electricity.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Who are you?

Nicodemus waits but there is no answer. The light show ends.

EXT. MAIN STREET - MORNING

As sunlight brings a new day's warmth to the small community

INT. MATTHEW'S HOME - DAY

Matthew's mother, ELANA, 30's, Eastern European, pours milk into a bowl of oatmeal. Matthew looks at it reluctantly.

ELANA

Eat, you have school.

MATTHEW

No more rice krispies?

ELANA

Oatmeal.

MATTHEW

I hate oatmeal.

ELANA

Your father said food should always be eaten. We are lucky to have food when people in the old country have little.

Matthew looks towards the living room of the small house where his grandmother, BAPKA, kneels praying.

MATTHEW

Why does Bapka pray so much?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ELANA

She prays for your father, and many others. It wouldn't hurt you either.

MATTHEW

I don't know as many dead people.

ELANA

You will. Eat, I have to go to clean Dr. Collins house this morning. And go straight to school. And stay away from the elevators.

Matthew glances at his mother, dressed plainly, then at the movie magazine where HARRIET NELSON in designer clothes. Headline reads: *"What it's like to be Ricky Nelson's mom."*

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DAY

Matthew steps on a massive weigh scale intended for trucks unloading grain. The bars move slightly as Matthew steps onto the grid and looks down 20 feet. He turns to his best friend, JOEL BERNSTEIN. Joel is also 12, a little overweight.

JOEL

No way.

MATTHEW

Come on.

JOEL

We gotta go to school.

MATTHEW

Chicken.

Matthew walks further onto the grid. Joel reaches the edge of the grid, closes his eyes and steps onto it. It moves slightly. He steps back.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

You can do it, scaredy-cat.

JOEL

I don't want to do it.

Joel steps on the grid again. The grid shifts slightly.

NICODEMUS (O.S.)

What are you kids doing!

Joel runs for the outside. Matthew turns to see Nicodemus approaching. Nicodemus watches them run away.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

You can hurt yourself in here!

EXT. STREET - DAY

Matthew and Joel slow down, look back. They're safe.

JOEL

I thought he'd catch us.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus never tries.

JOEL

Yeah, well, one day he will. What are you gonna do after school?

MATTHEW

There's a new cowboy movie showing tonight.

JOEL

Naw... I don't wanna see a cowboy movie. Besides, we're getting a television.

MATTHEW

You are? When?

JOEL

Soon, my dad's gonna put it in the lobby so hotel guests can watch.

MATTHEW

What about us?

JOEL

We can watch it too. But I gotta be in bed by nine.

EXT. JENKINS HOUSE - DAY

A pleasant-looking two story house. It's home to Mrs. Jenkins. Also Miss Major, the new teacher, who rents the upstairs.

MISS MAJOR steps outside. She's the stuff of boyhood dreams, barely 21, pretty, with shining hair down to her shoulders and a smile that melts a young boy's heart. And old boys too.

She bundles her papers and starts to walk down the sidewalk. As she comes to Main Street she turns the corner and --

WALKS RIGHT INTO NICODEMUS

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Some papers fall as Nicodemus bends down to pick them up.

MISS MAJOR

Oh, I am so sorry, I wasn't...

NICODEMUS

My fault.

And with that, he walks past her.

MISS MAJOR

Um... thank you...

But he climbs into his old truck and drives off.

EXT. STREET NEAR SCHOOL -- DAY

Matthew and Joel walk as Nicodemus's truck passes them.

JOEL

Nicodemus is sure weird sometimes.

MATTHEW

He was in the war, like my dad.

JOEL

Paul said he was shot but he lived.
Didya know he used to live on Thunder
Hill?

MATTHEW

So what?

JOEL

You know what everyone says about
Thunder Hill.

MATTHEW

That it came up in the night all of
a sudden.

JOEL

Yeah, it's an Indian spiritual place.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus isn't any Indian ghost.
He just looks after the elevators.

A radio plays from a nearby house, reminding Matthew --

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

There's an Emperor of Mars coming to
earth, did you know?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

That's dopey.

MATTHEW

I heard it on the radio.

JOEL

Yeah, then why didn't my mom and dad tell me?

MATTHEW

Maybe they don't know.

JOEL

Yeah, sure. You're just makin' it up, like you always do.

MATTHEW

Am not.

JOEL

Like when you said Roy Rogers was going to come here. Or when you said Doris Day wrote to you. That was just a dopey picture her office sent you. She never even signed it, I bet.

MATTHEW

She did sign it.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - MORNING

Anderson hits the horn, waiting to enter the scale. No sign of Nicodemus. He looks at the field - his reaction is immediate.

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

Matthew runs to the school passing some FARM KIDS, early for school, playing in the yard.

INT. GRADE 6 ROOM - MORNING

Matthew bursts into the room, crashing into a desk. In front of the blackboard, Miss Major turns around.

MISS MAJOR

Matthew!

MATTHEW

I... I'm sorry I'm late, Miss Major.

MISS MAJOR

It's all right.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Matthew heads for the blackboards, where there's boxes of chalk and brushes. He begins to sort them.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

It's a beautiful morning, don't you think?

Matthew has eyes only for her...

MATTHEW

I guess.

He separates the unbroken pieces of chalk along the bottom of the blackboards, sneaking a look at her occasionally.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DAY

Anderson waits for his grain to be dumped. He looks out at the field as Nicodemus arrives and heads to the grid.

ANDERSON

What happened there?

Nicodemus doesn't bother to look as he works.

NICODEMUS

Don't know.

ANDERSON

Did you see it?

NICODEMUS

Yeah, I saw it.

ANDERSON

You tell anybody about it yet?

Nicodemus walks to the scale as Anderson remains curious.

INT. GRADE 6 ROOM - MORNING

The class sits quietly as GLORIA TAYLOR speaks. Gloria's twelve going on thirty, straight A's, shops in the city.

GLORIA

It is widely believed by political experts that, with the United States and the Soviet Union both voting against the invasion of Egypt by British, French and Israeli forces, the conflict will come to an end very soon.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Matthew and Joel exchange bored looks. Nearby, STEPHANIE SIMPSON, 11, sweet and pretty, passes a note which eventually finds Matthew.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

But, Egypt has called for all Moslem countries to fight the allied forces as a sacred duty and it is possible that the Soviets will intercede on behalf of the Egyptians. If this occurs, the Suez conflict could develop into a major war, much like Korea.

Matthew opens the note, "*See you after school?*" Matthew looks at Stephanie who waves. He just rolls his eyes.

MISS MAJOR

That was a very good report on the Suez conflict, Gloria. You've spent some time researching it.

GLORIA

Thank you, Miss Major. There's much more to discuss on the subject, I thought that my fellow classmates could offer their views.

The "fellow classmates" choke on this.

MISS MAJOR

That's a very good idea, Gloria, but perhaps next time. I think we should let some others offer a current event right now.

Gloria's miffed, but graciously concedes. All eyes turn away, hoping to avoid being called. Joel glimpses across the room at NANCY CARSEN, who smiles at him. Joel turns back quickly.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Paul.

PAUL, 12, a bleary-eyed kid in the corner shakes his head --

PAUL

Uh, I don't know, Miss Major, I forgot this is current event day.

MISS MAJOR

It seems you forgot last week also.

PAUL

I guess I forget a lot.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

The others giggle.

Matthew opens his scribbler to a page with only the heading, CURRENT EVENTS - nothing on the page. Fear strikes.

Miss Major continues searching, passing a smiling Stephanie (girls are always prepared) passing Joel and right to -

Matthew, avoiding her eyes -

MISS MAJOR

Matthew.

He glances at Joel - who flashes a "you're on your own" look.

MATTHEW

Miss Major?

MISS MAJOR

Give us your current event.

Matthew rises slowly as the class waits. Like the lions awaited the Christians.

MATTHEW

As my current event, I am going to report on...

Silence. Matthew is ready to die if he loses his teacher's favor. He looks down at the empty page - then notices something scribbled at the bottom - *Emperor of Mars*.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

That... That the Emperor of Mars is coming to Earth next week.

A beat. Silence. Joel shakes his head.

MISS MAJOR

The Emperor of Mars?

MATTHEW

Yes Miss Major. The Emperor of Mars is coming to Earth on... on October 31st and he's going to tell all the secrets of the universe to us.

This time the class laughs. Stephanie smiles, supportive.

Miss Major hides a smile, trying to look serious.

MISS MAJOR

That'll be enough, class.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

(to Matthew)

I'm not familiar with that story,
Matthew.

MATTHEW

I heard it on the radio. People
have been seeing flying saucers
everywhere.

Miss Major feels his desperation, decides to change direction.

MISS MAJOR

I think your assignment was a little
more down to earth.

MATTHEW

But it was on the radio.

Matthew looks for help, Joel lowers his head. Only Stephanie
nods at Matthew, understanding, loving.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

School's out, Matthew and Joel head home, walking their bikes.

JOEL

Boy, I don't believe you said that
Emperor of Mars stuff.

MATTHEW

It's true. He's gonna tell us the
secrets of the universe.

JOEL

Would you trust a Martian? I mean
if there were Martians, they'd
probably wanna vaporize us.

MATTHEW

He's different.

JOEL

Matthew... no Martians are gonna
come to Earth. Kids think you belong
in the nut house already, remember
that time you said there was a Cavalry
fort at the river, and we spent a
whole day looking for guns and
arrowheads. Then Miss Major said
there were never any forts around
here. Now Martians...

MATTHEW

It's true, Joel, it was on the radio.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Joel's exasperated.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)

Hi Matthew.

Stephanie appears.

JOEL

I gotta go home.

He walks off, leaving Matthew with Stephanie. Matthew walks, she catches up.

STEPHANIE

Wanna come to my house?

MATTHEW

I can't.

STEPHANIE

Why not?

MATTHEW

'Cause I can't.

STEPHANIE

Then where are you going?

Matthew continues walking.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

I know. You're going to my dad's store to watch the TV, that's where all the men go and sit around and talk. Why can't I go, too?

MATTHEW

You're just a kid, that's why.

STEPHANIE

Matthew I'm eleven and you're twelve.

MATTHEW

That's what I mean, I'm older.

He walks away. Stephanie shakes her head.

STEPHANIE

Possession is nine-tenths of the law. And that TV is mine too.

EXT. SIMPSON'S HARDWARE - DAY

A stucco building on Main Street, windows full of hardwares and army surplus.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Two trucks and a war-era motorcycle outside.

INT. SIMPSON'S HARDWARE - DAY

Matthew - and Stephanie sit in front of a black and white CONSOLE TV. Matthew tries to ignore her. The store is filled with hardwares, building materials and army surplus, silk parachutes and a weather balloon hung from the ceiling.

Behind them, Simpson sits with three locals. He's a tall, overbearing man, ex-army, 40's, Stephanie's dad.

SIMPSON

So Anderson here says something landed on Nicodemus' field.

Anderson realizes his credibility is on the line here.

ANDERSON

Saw what I saw.

LORNE EVERETT, 18, jeans, leather jacket, sideburns perks up. He's the town's Brando look-alike.

LORNE

Didn't you hear about that Martian who's supposed to come to Earth. There's been a whole pile of flying saucer sightings.

Matthew perks up, his eyes wander towards the men.

SIMPSON

Only unidentified flying object round Empire is that motorcycle you run around on. And if you don't get a haircut soon, folks are gonna think you're from outer space.

The others chuckle over this, waiting for the next jab.

LORNE

Any Martians come around here and you'd probably skedaddle into that bomb shelter of yours.

SIMPSON

It's a root cellar, Lorne.

LORNE

Root cellars don't need three foot concrete walls. Wally Dan says you asked about his shelter. Either for Ruskies or spacemen, way I see it.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

SIMPSON

You oughtta not go talking about
what you don't know anything about.

The men shut up, Simpson's in a bad mood. Then he notices
the kids in front of the TV.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Hey, Stephanie, you get on home.

Stephanie looks at Matthew, who doesn't look back.

STEPHANIE

I'm not bothering anyone.

SIMPSON

Never mind. Go home. Now.

STEPHANIE

(to Matthew)

I gotta go now. See you at school,
Matthew.

She leaves. Matthew tries to be invisible.

SIMPSON

(to Matthew)

Don't you have something else to do
but sit an' watch my TV. It costs
money for electricity.

LORNE

Ain't gonna make you go broke, couple
of kids watchin' TV.

SIMPSON

Go home, boy.

Matthew leaves.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Sometimes I wonder what the hell I
was fighting for in the war. Come
home and there's more foreigners
here than over there.

LORNE

You sure get miserable, you know
that?

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

As Matthew walks, someone steps in front of him.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

TOMMY SIMPSON APPEARS

Stephanie's brother, 14, big for his age. A natural bully. Tommy smiles his wicked grin.

TOMMY

Where's that money you owe me, hunky?

MATTHEW

I... I don't owe you anything.

TOMMY

"I don't owe you anything." Is that right? Well, I say you owe me twenty-five cents each week. For protection.

MATTHEW

I don't have any money, Tommy.

Tommy grabs Matthew's hand and pulls his thumb backwards.

TOMMY

Guess I'm gonna have to persuade you.

Matthew grimaces, waiting for the pain.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Where's you fatso friend now, huh. See, you should never trust those Jews, they stick together, just like you hunkies. My dad says...

Tommy stops - his eyes look beyond Matthew -- someone is approaching, unseen by Matthew -- Tommy lets go and runs off.

Matthew turns slowly to face a tall shadow standing in sunlight - almost God-like. The figure moves - it's Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS

You okay?

Matthew wipes the tears -

MATTHEW

Yeah.

NICODEMUS

That boy is trouble.

Matthew isn't sure whether to be afraid or glad.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

Th...thanks.

Nicodemus starts to walk away --- Matthew gathers his courage --

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Mr. Nicodemus...

Nicodemus turns.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Did....

Words aren't forming. Matthew struggles --

NICODEMUS

Speak up boy.

MATTHEW

Did you see a flying saucer in your field today?

NICODEMUS

You boys keep away from the elevators, you could get hurt.

He turns and walks away. Beyond him the grain elevators tower over Main Street

EXT. CEMETERY - NEAR SUNSET

A woodframe Ukrainian CHURCH with a Byzantine-style, onion-shaped dome on top.

There are maybe fifty Ukrainian Catholic crosses in the small cemetery. One of them is for Matthew's father, Jacob. A Cross has a simple inscription, JACOB HUSAK and a cameo photograph of Jacob, youthful in a military uniform.

Bapka is on her knees, praying. Elana is cutting away weeds from the grave as Matthew helps. He glances at his Gene Autry wristwatch - nearly 8pm.

ELANA

You have somewhere else to be?

MATTHEW

The show.

ELANA

You always go to the show. You don't have to go tonight.

MATTHEW

But its a cowboy show.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ELANA

It costs money.

MATTHEW

I've got money from my birthday.

ELANA

When I was your age I didn't have
half the things you have now.

Matthew's heard it all before - he changes the subject.

MATTHEW

Did you hear about the flying saucer
that landed in Nicodemus's field.

(a beat)

Everybody was talking about it.
Even Mr. Simpson.

ELANA

Can't we visit your father without
silly stories?

Matthew backs off - at least the movie discussion has been
put on a back burner.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

As SPACE MEN chase a man and woman in glorious black and
white on a big screen. It's a cheap 50's serial.

Matthew and Joel gobble a box of popcorn. Not far behind
them is Stephanie, sitting with her mother, KATHERINE SIMPSON,
early thirties, classy-looking. Stephanie's watching Matthew.

ON THE SCREEN

*The evil spacemen corner the good guys into a cave, firing
RAYGUNS that rip the cave apart.*

Joel nudges Matthew. Matthew turns - Nicodemus is there, a
few rows behind, seemingly transfixed by the spacemen.

Joel makes a funny face - but Matthew watches Nicodemus.

The screen freezes as a title appears: *DON'T MISS THE NEXT
EPISODE OF DEATH RAY FROM MARS!! COMING NEXT WEEK TO THIS
THEATER.*

Matthew turns to see the screen, then back at Nicodemus.
He's gone.

JOEL

They'll get out.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

Maybe not.

JOEL

They always get out.

Joel notices Stephanie. He pokes Matthew.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Your girlfriend's here.

Matthew turns, Stephanie waves to him. Matthew lowers himself into the seat as THE BIG SCREEN Erupts in COLOR - SHANE, starring Alan Ladd. The two boys watch in silence. Matthew is in another world, absorbing every image.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

As the small crowd of townspeople filter out of the theater. Matthew and Joel pass by posters of upcoming features.

JOEL

I don't get it why Joey's mom wanted Shane to hang around all the time.

MATTHEW

'Cause he's a better gunfighter than her husband.

JOEL

I think she liked him.

MATTHEW

Shane doesn't care about moms.

He realizes Joel is looking behind him, and he turns slowly to see Stephanie standing behind him.

STEPHANIE

Hi Matthew, Hi Joel.

MATTHEW

Uh... hi Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

Did you see the previews of the new show with Natalie Wood?

JOEL

Yeah.

STEPHANIE

I think I look alot like her, don't you?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

I don't know. Uh, we gotta go
Stephanie, Bye.

They walk away as Stephanie's mother joins her.

MRS. SIMPSON

All right, Stephanie, let's go home.
You got to see your movie.

She notices Stephanie watching the boys leave.

STEPHANIE

Mom, why do boys act like they don't
even think you're alive?

MRS. SIMPSON

We let them get away with too much.

STEPHANIE

What do you mean?

MRS. SIMPSON

You'll understand when you're older.

STEPHANIE

How come everytime I ask you why,
you say I'll understand when I'm
older?

Mother and daughter walk off down the quiet street.

EXT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Miss Major, out for a walk on the empty main street, passes
by the cafe. She glances inside and decides to enter.

INT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Miss Major goes to Sam, asks for a coffee. As she waits she
turns to see who's there. A couple of teens, some farmers -
and Nicodemus, alone in a booth, with a coffee.

For a moment, she considers going. But --

SAM

Coffee?

He hands her coffee, she pays and changes her mind about
Nicodemus. She leaves.

Unseen by Miss Major, Nicodemus has noticed her.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF - NIGHT

Matthew and Joel look at a SEARS CATALOG, turned to the women's undergarment section. Lots of pretty girls with bras. They silently study each of them with a flashlight.

JOEL
(pointing)
Her or her.

MATTHEW
You gotta pick one.

JOEL
Her.

Matthew studies the girls with expertise --

MATTHEW
Her.

JOEL
You'd marry her?

MATTHEW
That's what I said.

JOEL
I think they all look the same.

MATTHEW
Joel, look at her... she's beautiful.

JOEL
Looks like Miss Major.

MATTHEW
Does not.

JOEL
Does too. She's too old for you to marry, anyway.

MATTHEW
When you get older, you catch up.

JOEL
Nancy Carsen is my age. She's not the prettiest girl in school, but she's always real nice to me and she's not too bad. 'Course you can never tell about those things because when people grow up they change. But I like her.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

You're supposed to love them.

JOEL

What's the difference?

MATTHEW

Love is a bigger deal. It kinda hits you, like one day you're walking along the street and you fall in love. I think it's sorta like getting punched.

JOEL

That's in the movies.

Matthew leans back and looks up at the sky. Joel joins him and they both gaze into the beginning of a starry night.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I'd like to marry Nancy. But I don't think I could. She's not Jewish.

MATTHEW

That doesn't matter. Old Mr. Kerpovitch married an Indian lady.

JOEL

It's different. You don't know what it's like to be Jewish.

MATTHEW

Sometimes I think everybody thinks that nobody knows what it's like to be them.

JOEL

Yeah. Maybe.

Matthew focuses on something far off. Joel notices him.

JOEL (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?

Matthew is looking at the grain elevators.

JOEL (CONT'D)

What is it?

MATTHEW

Let's go see what landed on Nicodemus's field.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

Oh no. I'm not going there. My parents will kill me.

MATTHEW

Okay, if you're scared, you don't have to go.

A dare - maybe a double dare. Joel's got few options.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT

Matthew looks around - only the yard light. Joel appears.

JOEL

Where's his dog?

MATTHEW

He'll be sleeping. He's old.

Matthew steps through the wire fence. Joel collects some courage, then follows. Both boys scramble towards the field. Joel glances back at Nicodemus's place.

JOEL

Let's leave.

MATTHEW

We're almost there.

JOEL

I don't care, let's leave.

Just then, a scuffle behind them - and a low growl.

JOEL (CONT'D)

It's him.

Matthew isn't exactly brave either. He tries to see in the dark when suddenly - The dog BARKS.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Run!

As the dog comes charging out of the field, both boys head for the railway tracks as -- A BRIGHT LIGHT shines on them. It's Nicodemus with a flashlight.

The boys freeze.

NICODEMUS

What are you boys doing here?

MATTHEW

Nothing... we... we're lost.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

You come here.

JOEL

Run Matthew... run!

Both boys split up and tear off into the darkness.

NICODEMUS

It's dangerous here at night. I
said keep away!

Nicodemus crosses to an old ROCKING CHAIR on the porch of his place. He sits down and picks up an old .303 ENFIELD army rifle and straddles it across his lap. Then he looks upwards - to the night sky.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Matthew stops, catches his breath. Joel stops.

JOEL

Come on, let's go home.

MATTHEW

Did you see, he was waiting for something.

JOEL

I don't know. Let's go, okay?

MATTHEW

There is something there, Joel.

JOEL

I'm going home.

Joel starts walking away as Matthew takes one last look at the tall elevator against the night sky.

INT. MATTHEW'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Matthew's hand turns the radio dial, finding a distant station playing rock and roll. The music carries us and we fade to -

EXT. MAIN STREET (DREAM) - DAY

As Sam Wong opens his cafe as he's done for twenty years. Suddenly a buzz alarms him and he looks around to see a brilliant white light blinding him. He steps backwards as an ALIEN life-form emerges. Pure evil, dripping green slime, blood-filled eyeballs, tentacles that ooze filth and destruction. And it's got TOMMY'S FACE.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Sam Wong is destroyed in a horrible way as Tommy the Alien envelopes him. Then -

MISS MAJOR

Standing in the street. Behind her, the town lies in waste, buildings burning, spaceships flying over it. Everything has a strange look to it, like a 50's movie with painted backdrops. Tommy the alien starts for her when:

MATTHEW APPEARS:

He fires his toy gun with shots that bounce off Tommy until he realizes that his gun only fires harmless CAPS.

Miss Major screams for help, but to little avail.

Matthew doesn't know what to do. SUDDENLY a WIND comes up. Even blowing back Tommy the Alien. Matthew turns in the direction of the wind where:

NICODEMUS STANDS,

With a strange glow around his head. Nicodemus walks towards Matthew, who shrinks back, afraid. Backing into the arms of Tommy the Alien. Matthew kicks and screams, reaching for Nicodemus's hand.

CUT TO:

INT. MATTHEW'S ROOM - NIGHT

He whirls around his bed, tangled in the sheets. A light goes on and a figure grabs him. Matthew tries to fight back as the strong arms subdue him and he awakes -

ELANA

Matthew. Matthew!...

Matthew calms down, realizes it was a dream.

ELANA (CONT'D)

What was it?

MATTHEW

The Martians.

ELANA

There's no Martians here. Just us.
Now go to sleep. You have school tomorrow.

Matthew leans back, a little calmer. Elana strokes his hair and kisses him on the forehead.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ELANA (CONT'D)

Sleep, Matthew.

BAPKA

(in Ukrainian)

Leave him alone, Elana, he's no baby.

Elana smiles at Matthew and leaves. The light goes out. Matthew is left in the darkness. Somewhere in the distance, thunder cracks.

EXT. NICODEMUS' PLACE - NIGHT

The distant thunder awakes Nicodemus on the porch. He looks towards Thunder Hill as LIGHTNING illuminates it. Dog growls.

NICODEMUS

Easy, Dog... it's all right.
Nothing's going to happen. Not yet.
You'll know when.

Dog settles down, calmer. But Nicodemus grips his rifle.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Joel is waiting near the gate as Matthew approaches.

JOEL

Did you hear?

MATTHEW

What?

JOEL

Dolores Anderson.

MATTHEW

What about her?

JOEL

Her mom saw a flying saucer.

MATTHEW

Don't kid me today, okay?

JOEL

I'm not kidding.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - LATER

DOLORES ANDERSON, ten years old, pigtails, tells her story. She's the daughter of Anderson, the man who saw something in Nicodemus's field. Dolores knows how to hold an audience.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

DOLORES
So after my dad and I left to go to
school, mom was alone..

FLASHBACK
TO:

ANDERSON'S WIFE

In the kitchen washing dishes.

DOLORES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*And so she was finishing the breakfast
dishes and heard a strange sound,
like a whine.*

OUTSIDE ABOVE THE HOUSE

Something is hurling down at blazing light speed.

DOLORES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*She looked out the window but couldn't
see anything. With nobody home but
her, she was a little scared.*

BACK TO SCENE

Everyone listens intently. Especially Matthew.

DOLORES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That's when it happened.

FLASHBACK
TO:

ANDERSON'S WIFE

*Looking around her to see where the sound is coming from.
Suddenly the CEILING EXPLODES with the force of something
crashing through the roof, the rafters and the ceiling. It
CONTINUES CRASHING thru the floor.*

Then it's over. Silence. Mrs. Anderson is frozen.

DOLORES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*So she stands there for a second and
then slowly walks over to the hole
in the floor.*

BACK TO SCENE

MATTHEW
What happened?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

DOLORES

I'm coming to that Matthew.
 (a pause for effect)
 So then she noticed a funny smell
 and smoke coming from the floor.

FLASHBACK
 TO:

ANDERSON'S WIFE

Walks slowly to the hole in the floor. She leans over and looks down to the basement where - a ROUND ROCK, the size of a cannonball, glows red.

DOLORES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was a round ball with red light coming from it and was foaming and had a horrible smell.

BACK TO SCENE

A cute seven-year-old GIRL is enthralled.

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL

An then what happened?

FLASHBACK
 TO:

ANDERSON'S WIFE

SCREAMS as loud as she can and runs out the door. The camera remains to look down at the METEORITE again.

DOLORES

She went to call my dad.

Oohs and ahhs from the crowd. Matthew shrugs.

MATTHEW

What do you mean it had a red light?

DOLORES

It was alive, she said it was alive.

JOEL

That's a dopey story, Dolores.

DOLORES

No it's not. I heard my mom say it to my dad last night when they thought I was in bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

She was just dreaming it.

DOLORES

You can say what you want. I don't care. It's true and I know it.

MATTHEW

How do you know it's true?

DOLORES

Because I saw a whole bunch of grown-ups at Nicodemus's this morning and they were walking through his field.

JOEL

So?

DOLORES

So you know what happened there, don't you?

JOEL

He didn't see nothing.

DOLORES

A flying saucer landed there. My dad said so.

Matthew looks towards the grain elevators as the bell rings and kids head for the doors. He's not following them.

JOEL

Matthew. Where're you going?

But Matthew's not answering as he runs down the street.

JOEL (CONT'D)

You're gonna be late. You're gonna get in trouble, big trouble.

Matthew's already half way down the street.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - DAY

Matthew looks for any sign of Nicodemus. Dog approaches, Matthew stiffens, scared. Dog growls then comes up and sniffs Matthew.

MATTHEW

What's out there, boy, huh, what's there?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

As if to answer, the dog stares out in the field. Matthew follows his look where Nicodemus moves in the waist-high wheat.

Matthew doesn't know what to do. He looks up at a ladder leaning against Nicodemus's house.

AT THE LADDER

The aging ladder creaks under his weight as he climbs to the roof. He steps softly on the angled old roof and walks to the top. He nears the peak and slowly rises to look over the other side. There he sees --

THE FIELD

Perfectly normal except for one perfectly round CIRCLE, cut into the wheat. It's about thirty feet in diameter and looks like a coffee cup ring on a table, except on a huge scale and burned and charred at the edges.

Matthew can't believe it.

NICODEMUS

You! Boy! Get down!

Matthew snaps back, sees Nicodemus coming towards him.

MATTHEW

Oh damn.

He takes a step down as a sickening CRACK rips through the air. Wood splinters and breaks under him as he FALLS through the roof. His world turns to stars, sunglare and blackness.

INT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - LATER

Matthew regains consciousness. Lying on his back, he looks up and remembers where he is.

NICODEMUS (O.S.)

You okay?

Nicodemus stands over him. Matthew has a few scratches, a couple of bruises and aches. But nothing seems really wrong.

MATTHEW

I think so.

NICODEMUS

Well, you made one big hole in my roof.

MATTHEW

I'm sorry, sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

Sorry won't fix it. House is way too old anyways. Didn't help for you to go climbing where you shouldn't. You oughtta know better.

Matthew gets up slowly as Nicodemus helps him stand upright.

MATTHEW

I... I'm sorry.

NICODEMUS

You should be, I have to repair that now.

MATTHEW

What made the circles?

NICODEMUS

You best go now.

MATTHEW

It was a flying saucer, wasn't it?

He looks at Matthew - almost like he's hiding something.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Are they going to come back?

NICODEMUS

Nothing was here.

MATTHEW

I just want to see. I won't ask about it anymore. Just let me see what's there.

Nicodemus realizes Matthew won't let up.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

You gotta. I'm gonna come back again if you don't let me, I'm gonna come back again and again.

Nicodemus studies the boy -

EXT. NICODEMUS'S FIELD - DAY

Standing in the middle of the big circle, Matthew looks around. He's in awe. Up close, the circles are more impressive.

MATTHEW

What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

They said it was the wind, or
electricity spinning around.. or
cows walking in a circle.

Matthew touches the burned wheat.

MATTHEW

What do you think?

Nicodemus is thinking but he isn't ready to talk about it.

NICODEMUS

I think you should be at school.

Matthew suddenly remembers and looks at his watch.

MATTHEW

School.

NICODEMUS

School.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Matthew runs to the school door but finds it locked. Paul,
from class, bounces a ball off the wall.

PAUL

It's closed. Had a flood in the
basement.

(beat)

Miss Major was asking where you were,
Matthew. You're in trouble.

EXT. JENKINS HOUSE - DAY

Matthew walks towards the door. You get the feeling he's
going to his own execution. When he reaches the door he
thinks it over - then knocks. After a beat, the door opens.

MRS. JENKINS appears.

INT. MISS MAJOR'S FLAT - DAY

The place is small but cheerful, a sofa at one end, a kitchen
table and chairs and a bookshelf. Towards one side a smaller
room that serves as the bedroom.

Miss Major's hanging up a print of a French impressionist,
Cezanne's *The Card Players*. Mrs. Jenkins appears at the
door, with Matthew behind her.

MRS. JENKINS

Miss Major. You have a visitor.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

She's in jeans and sweatshirt and her hair is tied back in a ponytail. He's never seen her like this - normal-looking.

MISS MAJOR
Matthew. This is a surprise.

MATTHEW
I... I'm sorry I wasn't at school today, Miss Major.

She looks at him, standing bravely in front of her, afraid.

MISS MAJOR
You can help me with this thing.

Mrs. Jenkins leaves, and Matthew slowly steps inside.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)
There's some tacks in the drawer.

He looks at her as he walks towards the drawer.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)
Mrs. Jenkins said she doesn't mind putting a few tacks into these old walls, especially for something so pretty, don't you think?

Matthew opens the top drawer revealing underwear, folded neatly.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)
Did you find them?

Matthew gingerly gropes around for the tacks. An odd place for them but - who knows.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, on top. Second drawer.

Matthew closes the first drawer and looks on top. There's a little jar of tacks, nails, etc.

MATTHEW
I got them.

He brings some tacks to her.

MISS MAJOR
You can pin the corners.

Matthew has to go under her arms to reach the other corners. Brushing against her just enough to feel the touch.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

It's a French impressionist painting.
Well, not really a painting but a
print of it. Someday I'll go to
Paris to see the real one.

Matthew puts the final pin in.

MATTHEW

I saw a movie about Paris once.

MISS MAJOR

After I graduated from Teacher's
College I was supposed to go., but
things didn't allow it, I'm sorry to
say.

MATTHEW

Why are you sorry?

MISS MAJOR

It's a figure of speech, Matthew, I
meant it would have been my only big
adventure, but it didn't happen, you
know, smalltown girl, small town
life.

MATTHEW

I don't know anybody who went to
France.

MISS MAJOR

Well, it's very real. Maybe you'll
have your chance to see it someday.

MATTHEW

Maybe you'll go someday. It's not
as far away as the Mars.

Miss Major smiles, turns to something a little more serious.

MISS MAJOR

Where were you today, Matthew?

The moment of truth:

MATTHEW

Well, Nicodemus, uh, Mr. Johnson, he
kinda watches the grain elevators.
He's got this wheat field right behind
them and...

His name brings a reaction from Miss Major as she conceals
any interest --

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Something was there. It left big circles right in his field and there were marks like from a huge flying saucer.

(beat)

Really.

MISS MAJOR

Matthew, I think there's a lot of things we don't know about, but I don't think there's Martians hanging around Empire... or anywhere else.

(beat)

You missed some assignments. I can give them to you now.

MATTHEW

I'll do them. Honest.

MISS MAJOR

You're my responsibility during the school day Matthew. I didn't know where you were and I was concerned about you. I had to call your mother.

(beat)

This flying saucer thing, well, you'd do better to think about real things, like school.

(beat)

And you shouldn't be bothering Mr. Johnson.

Properly punished, Matthew shrugs. It was painless.

MATTHEW

Yes, Miss Major.

For a brief second a few strands of hair fall in her face and she wipes them back with her hand. Matthew glories in this personal moment with her.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

A quiet week night. Several cars parked along the street, mostly in front of the cafe and hotel.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Matthew makes his way up the stairs to the second floor hallway. To one side, the hotel rooms, to the other a living space made from several of the rooms. Matthew passes the living room where MRS. BERNSTEIN reads a book.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

Is Joel here?

MRS. BERNSTEIN

Joel is with his father on the roof.
(off his look)
Go, have a look.

Matthew's already on his way.

MRS. BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Be careful of the ladder, Matthew!

A slamming door tells her he never heard the words.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - EVENING

Matthew climbs the metal ladder up to the flat roof.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF - EVENING

Up here, the sky is still a warm orange. Matthew spots MR. BERNSTEIN and Joel as they grapple with a metal TV ANTENNA.

JOEL

Matthew. Come here, quick.

Matthew joins them as they attempt to raise the antenna.

JOEL (CONT'D)

The TV came this afternoon. Right
from the catalogue.

Mr. Bernstein tries to balance the antenna. He's mid-forties, glasses, a soft-spoken man.

BERNSTEIN

As long as you're here, Matthew, you
can help us.

MATTHEW

Sure. Is it gonna be on soon?

JOEL

We have to connect the antenna first.
That's how it works. The TV's an
RCA Victor and it cost three hundred
and nine dollars.

They hold the antenna up as Bernstein bolts in the base.

MATTHEW

Can I stay to watch it?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

BERNSTEIN

Oh, I suppose you can. But only until nine. You can watch Phil Silvers and Wyatt Earp.

Mr. Bernstein finishes the bolts. They all stand back and he pushes it several times. It seems to be solid.

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Now, you boys can go downstairs and get ready to turn it on.

Joel and Matthew start to run back to the fire escape.

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

BOYS! Walk, please. Don't run. I don't want anyone falling off the roof.

They begin to walk. Behind them, the prairie sky is ablaze with evening color but they're totally oblivious to it.

JOEL

Miss Major called your mom. Did you get the strap?

MATTHEW

No.

JOEL

What are you going to tell Miss Major tomorrow?

MATTHEW

I talked to her already.

JOEL

Where'd you see her?

MATTHEW

At her place.

JOEL

Her place?

MATTHEW

Yeah, I helped her put up some pictures.

JOEL

Wow! I never went to see a teacher at their place. What's it look like?

MATTHEW

Like anyplace. She's been to France.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

Does this mean you don't have to do homework anymore?

MATTHEW

Don't be dumb. We're just friends, is all.

They reach the fire escape.

JOEL

Wow. A TV set and a guy who's friends with a teacher. What a day.

Joel climbs down the fire escape. Matthew pauses for a moment and looks around. Not far away, he can see a light in Miss Major's room. Then he turns to -

NICODEMUS'S PLACE

Beyond the buildings, there's still enough daylight to see the field. Matthew climbs down.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S FIELD -- NIGHT

Nicodemus walks through the crop circle and stops. Dog is nearby. Stars are coming out above as night falls. Nicodemus scans the vastness of space until -

Dog growls. Nicodemus looks around - no sign of anybody or anything. The growl turns to a whine... as he pushes into Nicodemus for safety.

NICODEMUS

I swear you're the scarest dog I ever saw...

Then - a crackling sound. Followed by electrical static. Nicodemus looks towards the elevator where power lines begin to buzz and impulses of static electricity spark off the lines.

Lines of static ARC from the wires to the top of the elevator.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

I've seen this, Dog. I've seen this before...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

As a snowy television screen is turned on to the opening theme of WYATT EARP. The picture is snowy, but watchable.

Matthew and Joel have staked their territory for viewing. Behind them, a small audience has gathered.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Mr. and Mrs. Bernstein, MISS EVANS, 60's, MR. JESSUP, and REVEREND PHILLIPS.

JESSUP

The picture is very good, isn't it.

MRS. BERNSTEIN

It's an RCA Victor.

MISS EVANS

It's almost as clear as my brother-in-law's set. He's got a Motorola.

Matthew and Joel are lost in the magic of the images being flashed in front of them in spite of the poor quality.

REVEREND

It's just a little snowy.

JESSUP

Maybe the antenna needs an adjustment.

BERNSTEIN

I'll do it tomorrow.

REVEREND

That should fix it.

MISS EVANS

My brother-in-law had a little trouble at first, too.

Just then, the door swings open and Nicodemus enters the lobby. He looks like a man on a mission.

NICODEMUS

I need to find Simpson. I need supplies. He's not at his store or house.

Nicodemus stands in front of the TV.

REVEREND

Really, Mr. Johnson, we're watching television.

Nicodemus turns to look at the television but it doesn't interest him.

BERNSTEIN

He's not here, Mr. Johnson. He might have gone to Swan River, he has a sister there. What's the problem?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

You don't understand, I need supplies.
There's no time to waste.

BERNSTEIN

Surely it can wait until tomorrow.
Sit down, watch our television.

NICODEMUS

There's no time!

They sit quietly, looking at him, reacting uncomfortably.

JESSUP

What about them crop circles out
there, Nicodemus, you make 'em?

Nicodemus dismisses Jessup with a look. But he begins to realize he's too loud, and they already think he's crazy. He sees Matthew looking at him, almost embarrassed.

NICODEMUS

I... I apologize, it's... I need to
find Mr. Simpson... I apologize for
intruding upon all of you.

Nicodemus gives Matthew an acknowledgment before he turns and walks out. When he's gone there's silence for a beat --

MISS EVANS

It's terrible, that man should be
ashamed to behave like that.

BERNSTEIN

He's a little confused, Mrs. Wilson,
it happens.

JESSUP

What about them other flying saucer
sightings goin' on all around the
country. Saw it in the paper
yesterday. They don't print lies in
the paper.

REVEREND

If God had made beings on other
planets, he would have revealed it
to us in the Bible. And last time I
looked, there was nothing in it about
spacemen.

MISS EVANS

He's an odd man no matter what you
think. Says he was in the war.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS EVANS (CONT'D)

He just shows up, says he lived on Thunder Hill, but folks left there long before the war. He's not one of us, either, I never see him in church.

BERNSTEIN

God is many things to many people. Mr. Johnson is a lonely man. Maybe he needs our understanding.

JESSUP

Coulda been the war, I know some others who were never the same after combat.

BERNSTEIN

Please, let's watch some more television. Phil Silvers is coming after this.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Nicodemus looks through the window of Simpson's store. Finally he gives up and turns to look at the elevators. They're dark and ominous. Silent sentinels waiting. Nicodemus starts to walk down the lonely street by himself.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - MORNING

As bells ring, signaling another day at school.

INT. GRADE 6 ROOM - MORNING

Stephanie passes around small envelopes to everyone in Class, ending at Matthew's desk. She takes her place.

Matthew reluctantly opens the envelope. It's an invitation to her Halloween party on October 31st from two to four pm. Written on his invitation - "*Looking forward to your presence*", *Love, Stephanie*", with a few X's and O's for good measure.

MISS MAJOR

Now that you've all the opportunity to read your notes, I want to say that I think it's a lovely and considerate invitation on the part of Stephanie and her mother and I've received permission from the principal for all of us to attend during school hours.

The class likes this idea. Very much.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Thank you for very much for the invitation, Stephanie, and I'm pleased to be included in your affair. Class, please show your appreciation.

CLASS

(in broken unison)

Thank you, Stephanie.

Stephanie beams.

STEPHANIE

We'll be having finger sandwiches and Freshie and chocolate cake, Miss Major. My mom and I are making everything.

Some of the boys put their hands in their mouth to gag.

MISS MAJOR

We're all looking forward to it. And I've got a special little project for the class that I think you'll enjoy.

Groans from the Class - assignment? But it's a party.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

I'm sure all of you remember Matthew's current event a few days ago. Well, it seems everyone's got an idea about this Emperor of Mars thing. So I thought...

Matthew perks up.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Each of you can show us what you think the Emperor of Mars looks like. You can draw a picture of him.

A buzz of excitement runs through the kids. Matthew reacts with some coolness. Gloria puts her hand up.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Gloria.

GLORIA

Miss Major. Exactly how should he look?

MISS MAJOR

Use your imagination.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

That's what this is about, we'll all see what our imaginations can come up with.

PAUL

How about if they look like Gloria?

The guys guffaw and Gloria gives Paul a look that's made of pure ice - and certain death after school.

MISS MAJOR

All right, that's enough. The best drawing will appear in the newspaper, along with a five dollar prize.

The stakes have been raised. Now it's competition. Matthew is silent throughout. He's not sure about this.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Matthew. We're expecting something really special from you, after all, it's your story.

Matthew tries to offer a smile, but it's pretty thin.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Matthew and Joel walk along the street.

JOEL

Boy, everybody's talking about the Man from Mars now. Wonder if he's gonna bring kids?

MATTHEW

It's not funny, Joel.

JOEL

Why not? He's sorta like relatives from out of town. Just further away.

Matthew isn't laughing.

MATTHEW

Joel, he's coming to tell us secrets of the universe.

JOEL

Yeah, like what?

MATTHEW

Like what happens to us.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

What's that supposed t' mean?

MATTHEW

Like after we die.

That stops Joel in his tracks. He looks at Matthew.

JOEL

You think some dumb spacemen who isn't even real, is gonna tell you about dying?

MATTHEW

He is real. Nicodemus knows something about it too. It's got to do with the circles in his field.

JOEL

You're as dopey as Nicodemus.

The tensions rise, both boys step back.

MATTHEW

Am not!

JOEL

Are too.

MATTHEW

He's not dumb. He's a soldier and he was in the war, and he's my friend.

JOEL

You know what they say, he came back from fighting the war and that made him kinda dopey. Like you.

Joel circles his finger around his head.

MATTHEW

What do you know, you're a fatso.

That hits home. Joel takes a POKE at Matthew.

JOEL

You're a dumb hunky.

A few swings go nowhere as both boys jostle each other. Finally Matthew connects - Joel steps back, feels his jaw.

MATTHEW

I'm not a dumb hunky!

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

You're just trying to make Nicodemus
your dad because your dad never came
back.

Matthew can't find words. Joel, realizing he's gone too
far, figures the best thing is to leave. Now. He runs away.

MATTHEW

I'm not making anybody my dad!

Matthew feels angry - but that turns to a bad feeling quickly
as he notices Nicodemus's old truck, parked at Simpson's
store.

EXT. SIMPSON'S HARDWARE - DAY

Matthew runs to the store and looks inside. Through the
window he sees Simpson talking to Nicodemus at the counter.

INT. SIMPSON'S HARDWARE - DAY

Simpson hands over a long roll of electrical wiring. The
store regulars watch quietly as Matthew enters, unseen.

SIMPSON

Repairing the elevators, huh.

Nicodemus doesn't answer as he counts out his money - to the
dime. Simpson glances down at the money - then at Nicodemus.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

I say, you rewiring something?

Nicodemus pushes the money to Simpson.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Somethin' to do with them crop
circles, maybe?

Nicodemus checks the wiring.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

We got electrical code restrictions
here, you just make sure you don't
violate them, understand?

Nicodemus lifts the wiring and leaves, passing by Matthew on
the way out, glancing sideways at him before he leaves.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

Hey, kid.

Matthew turns:

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

What's your friend there up to?

MATTHEW

Don't know.

SIMPSON

You don't, huh, well, you tell him
I'm keeping my eye on him.

Matthew, a little afraid of Simpson, nods nervously and leaves.

EXT. SIMPSON'S HARDWARE - DAY

Matthew steps out just in time to see Nicodemus drive off towards the elevators. He leaps on his bike and races off.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S FIELD - DAY

Nicodemus drops the load of electrical wiring near the crop circle. He notices Matthew arriving on his bike.

Matthew sits down on the grass, watching Nicodemus hammer stakes into the wheat field in a line leading to the elevator.

Everytime he looks up, Matthew is sitting closer. Nicodemus doesn't bother chasing him this time.

INT. MATTHEW'S PLACE - NIGHT

Matthew's finishing dinner. He has a book near his plate, reading and eating quickly. Elana notices.

ELANA

Matthew, can't you just eat? And slowly?

Matthew looks up, realizes they're watching him.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus is building something on his field.

ELANA

Whatever it is, it's his business.

MATTHEW

Do you remember the ghost town on Thunder Hill. Did you ever see it?

Elana takes a beat - a memory --

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ELANA

I was there once. With your father.
It was when... when we were both
sixteen. He wanted to explore it, I
was scared but he wasn't.

(beat)

There wasn't much there.

MATTHEW

Everyone says the town came out of
the ground like magic and that the
people who lived there were spirits
and when it was time, they went back
under the earth.

ELANA

The people left, that's all.

MATTHEW

He doesn't have any family or
anything. I think sometimes he just
wants someone to talk to.

ELANA

Mr. Johnson had a hard life, I think.
Not like your movie shows.

MATTHEW

In school they tell us we can become
anything, doctors, lawyers, famous
actors.

ELANA

That's not for ordinary people.

MATTHEW

Why are we ordinary? Was dad
ordinary?

(beat)

Why did he go to war?

ELANA

He said it was the right thing.

MATTHEW

I don't remember him much.

ELANA

He was like you, he liked the movie
shows. Once he took me, but it was
foolishness, people pretending to be
other people. I didn't like the
movies.

A memory comes back and she drifts away --

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ELANA (CONT'D)

He liked them, though.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - DUSK

Matthew's hand knocks on the door. There's a pause, he knocks again. The door opens and Nicodemus peers out, suspicious.

Matthew stands there holding something in wax paper.

MATTHEW

I brought you some cake.

Nicodemus is surprised - not sure what to do next.

NICODEMUS

I don't want any.

MATTHEW

It's good, my mom made it, it was for me, I thought you'd want some.

NICODEMUS

Why do you bother me, boy? I got work to do.

MATTHEW

Because I believe you. I want to see him as much as you do.

NICODEMUS

Who?

MATTHEW

The Emperor of Mars.

Nicodemus studies the boy - realizes he's not leaving.

EXT. EMPIRE - DUSK

Looking down from the elevators. The sun is blood red, the sky a pillow of deep purples and blues.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S FIELD - EVENING

Nicodemus uses a scythe to cut a path through the wheat field guided by the wooden stakes that lead towards the elevators. Matthew stacks the cut wheat as he goes.

Nicodemus stops and pours a cup of coffee from a thermos, looks at Matthew, hands him the cup and takes another cup.

They eat the cake. Two working men taking a break.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

The way you're going, you're not gonna have much of a field left.

NICODEMUS

Nobody's gonna miss a few bushels of wheat. It's late, you go home now.

MATTHEW

I can stay.

NICODEMUS

It's dark, your mother will be worried.

MATTHEW

I'll be back. Tomorrow?

A beat --

NICODEMUS

Tomorrow then.

Matthew beams. He walks to his bike and climbs on -

MATTHEW

There's more cake.

Nicodemus smiles as Matthew turns and rides away. When he's gone, Nicodemus's smile fades as he looks at his handiwork.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

THE BAD SEED playing tonight. A handwritten label on the poster reads ADULT! Matthew looks at it then walks around the side.

At the rear EXIT door, Matthew sits down and listens to the movie inside. He closes his eyes, imagining the movie.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING (LATER)

As several patrons file out - the show's over.

Then she appears. Miss Major. She doesn't see him as she exits and heads down the street alone. Matthew waits till she's out of sight, then he gets his bike and follows.

EXT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Matthew comes around the corner - the street is empty. But there are a few trucks at the cafe and the neon sign is on.

INT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Sam brings Miss Major a coffee. She looks over to see Nicodemus at the same booth again. This time, she decides -- and walks over to him --

MISS MAJOR

Mr. Johnson.

Nicodemus looks up.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

I'm Miss Major, I'm Matthew's teacher. I was wondering if I could talk to you for a minute.

Nicodemus studies her - she could be an angel if this wasn't Empire.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Matthew says he's been at your place. He's got this silly idea about the Emperor of Mars and...

NICODEMUS

Why are you asking me about the boy?

MISS MAJOR

I... uh, well, he seems to be strongly influenced by you, his father was killed in the war.

NICODEMUS

Alot of men were killed in the war.

MISS MAJOR

Nobody seems to agree on you, Mr. Johnson. Some say you lived in that town on Thunder Hill, others say you never lived here.

NICODEMUS

Most people don't know much about you, either.

There is definitely something between them, even Sam notices.

MISS MAJOR

I'm from Wadena, one hundred and six miles south of Empire. I guess we're both strangers here. Guess that's why I came over. Even small towns can be hard to get into, at first.

EXT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Matthew looks through the window, first seeing Nicodemus, then Miss Major. She seems not a teacher now, but something else - a woman. He doesn't like it.

INT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

MISS MAJOR

Can I ask you something?

NICODEMUS

What?

MISS MAJOR

Did you make it to Paris, I mean, did you see it?

NICODEMUS

I saw Paris towards the end.

MISS MAJOR

What was it like?

NICODEMUS

Old. People on the streets and at cafes, museums, big churches.

MISS MAJOR

Not like here, I guess.

NICODEMUS

Home is home.

MISS MAJOR

It must have been beautiful.

A beat as he remembers --

NICODEMUS

It was. Like nowhere else on earth.

EXT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Matthew feels hurt, takes one last look, then rides away. He stops for a moment, then rides off towards the elevators.

INT. CRESCENT CAFE - NIGHT

Nicodemus finishes his coffee. There's an awkward moment.

NICODEMUS/MISS MAJOR

I...

The moment is broken -

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

I have to go.

MISS MAJOR

Maybe we can... have a coffee again
sometime? Two strangers?

NICODEMUS

That would be okay.

He's as awkward as she is, and turns to leave, knocking into the hat rack, deftly correcting himself.

EXT. ELEVATORS - NIGHT

Matthew rides quietly, his heart broken. He passes by Nicodemus's house and hears something. He stops. A groan comes from the shadows.

Matthew turns slowly, not sure of what to do. A SILVER SHAPE floats toward him. Maybe a bed sheet on a clothesline --

A SILVER FIGURE

With silvery arms that spark at the ends -move slowly towards him. ANOTHER SILVER FIGURE comes towards him also.

Matthew trembles, but something stronger keeps him here.

MATTHEW

He... hello.

They don't answer.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I'm Matthew, uh, welcome to Earth...
uh, sir...

The silver figures swoop past him, knocking him down.

ALIEN FIGURE

(through a tin can)

Where's my money, Earth child?

There's something vaguely familiar about the echo-like voice.

ALIEN FIGURE (CONT'D)

Give me my money or you will be
blasted into space!

The speaking alien's hand sparks sputter out and a spent SPARKLER falls as Matthew realizes what's happening.

MATTHEW

Tommy.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

The two aliens laugh hysterically as the second one grabs Matthew and lifts him to his feet, holding him tightly.

ALIEN

Earth child, give us money!

Matthew struggles to get out of the second alien's grip, pulling off some of his "skin" - tin foil.

MATTHEW

LET ME GO!

TOMMY

What are you gonna do, baby? Cry!

Matthew suddenly plows his fist into Tommy, catching him by surprise and knocking him down. Matthew realizes he's dead for sure. He tries to run but, like a bad dream, he can't seem to get moving.

Just as Tommy and his pal are about to pounce on Matthew --

NICODEMUS (O.S.)

What's going on here!

Tommy and his pal freeze, turning to see Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Don't you two have better things to do than scare kids younger than you.

The two bullies run off into the dark.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

MATTHEW

Yeah. Thanks.
(embarrassed)
Again.

NICODEMUS

I swear you and that Tommy seem to be mortal enemies.

Matthew wipes a tear from his eye, tries to hide it.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

It's okay. Tears are okay. I've seen brave soldiers cry where I was.

Matthew smiles a little --

MATTHEW

I could use a coffee.

INT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT

Basic necessities. A table, two chairs and wood stove. There's a recycled trunk, a rocking chair, a desk that keeps the elevator records. A bookcase with a dozen books including *1984*, *War of the Worlds*, a few other classics. Matthew looks at two framed PHOTOGRAPHS on the trunk. One has a younger Nicodemus with several men, all in WW11 uniforms. Another is of a beautiful young woman, standing in front of a cafe called THUNDER HILL CAFE.

Nicodemus has two cups of coffee. Hands one to Matthew

NICODEMUS

Watch it, it's hot.

MATTHEW

I really thought they were real spacemen. I can't believe it, I fell for it, like a grade One. Everybody's gonna know tomorrow.

NICODEMUS

Worse things can happen to a man than getting laughed at.

Matthew glances at the photographs.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Me on the left there. Andy and Homer and Jackie.

Matthew looks at the woman. Nicodemus's expression changes.

MATTHEW

Who's she?

NICODEMUS

That's my Mary.

MATTHEW

Is she dead?

NICODEMUS

You don't waste much time, do you, boy?

MATTHEW

Whattya mean?

NICODEMUS

Some things, you should work up to, don't just ask them out right.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

Why not?

NICODEMUS

Because you don't.

MATTHEW

My dad died, everyone in town knows that. I don't mind.

Nicodemus moves away from the photographs.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Do you pray alot?

NICODEMUS

Boy, you ask a lot of questions.

MATTHEW

My name's Matthew. Just asked because my bapka prays all the time, mom says the older you are the more people you got to pray for.

(a beat)

So?

NICODEMUS

So what!

MATTHEW

Do you pray alot?

NICODEMUS

Praying's for those who choose to believe praying helps. Some folks figure other things help.

MATTHEW

Like what?

NICODEMUS

Don't you learn anything at school?

MATTHEW

Not about praying.

NICODEMUS

Boy, drink your coffee.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT

Nicodemus watches as Matthew gets his bike.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

I sure liked working with you. I
can come again, tomorrow...

NICODEMUS

You ask your momma...
(beat)

An' if you're gonna hang around, you
call me Nicodemus. Mr. Johnson makes
me feel old.

Matthew gets on his bike on rides home. Nicodemus watches
till Matthew disappears. Then he looks back at the field.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - MORNING

The alien foil is wrapped around a dummy hanging from a tree.
A sign around it's neck reads: "MATTHEW." Matthew passes by
it as a handful of kids whisper as they watch him go by.

Joel stands near the door.

JOEL

Tommy told everybody. Did you really
think it was spacemen? Well, didya?

MATTHEW

I got work to do.

INT. GRADE 6 ROOM - MORNING

Matthew walks in looking like he doesn't have a friend in
the world. Miss Major sees him - she's heard about it too.

MISS MAJOR

Good morning, Matthew.

He looks at her, not forgetting her betrayal last night.

MATTHEW

(cold)
Good morning.

Matthew begins taking the brushes and chalk out.

MISS MAJOR

Matthew.

She approaches with a book. French impressionist painters.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

I thought you might like to read
this. It's not as boring as it looks.
There's lots of pictures.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

Yeah, sure...

He sets it down and returns to his job, turning his back to her. She notices, but unsure what it's about.

INT. GRADE 6 ROOM - LATER

The class sits, hands in position.

MISS MAJOR

Before we begin our classes, I want to talk to you about something.

Matthew looks up at her. Stephanie smiles.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

There's a mean story going around about last night. It was a very cruel joke that could have been intended for any one of us. How would you have reacted? I know I would have probably been scared out of my wits. It's not a very nice thing to do to anybody, is it?

Some mumbles from the class. Matthew looks sick.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Think about it before you laugh at anybody else. It could have been you... or maybe an elderly person. Would you want that? Of course not. I don't want to see anybody laughing about it.

CLASS

Yes, Miss Major.

MISS MAJOR

Good. Now, Matthew and Joel. I want both of you to go outside and take that awful thing down from the tree and throw it in the garbage.

He and Joel get up and walk out. Once they're gone -

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Remember, class, what happened to Matthew could have happened to anyone.

A boy giggles, but Stephanie glares at him, raising her fist. He stifles the laugh.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - SAME TIME

Joel and Matthew gather the foil and bunch it up, carrying it to the garbage can.

JOEL

I'm sorry about calling you a hunky.
And what I said about your dad.

MATTHEW

I'm sorry 'bout calling you fatso.

JOEL

One of these days, Tommy's gonna get his. And I hope I see it.

MATTHEW

Yeah. Me too.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S FIELD - AFTERNOON

The path Nicodemus cut now leads through the wheat from the circle to the elevator. Nicodemus has begun building a wooden foundation in the middle of the circle. Matthew hands him nails.

MATTHEW

Do you think he was here before?

NICODEMUS

Who?

MATTHEW

The Emperor of Mars.

NICODEMUS

I don't know.

MATTHEW

Why are you building this?

NICODEMUS

Because I have to.

MATTHEW

Why?

NICODEMUS

Because I do.

MATTHEW

Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

Some things have no reason, they just have to be done. Like washing dishes, or pressing shirts.

MATTHEW

I betcha you think he's coming here.

NICODEMUS

You don't know nothing.

MATTHEW

Dolores Anderson's mother saw a flying saucer.

NICODEMUS

She saw a rock, a meteorite. They fall all the time.

MATTHEW

Well, you don't see circles like this all the time.

A stand-off.

NICODEMUS

You come to talk or you come to help?

MATTHEW

Help.

NICODEMUS

Then get me some of those ten-penny nails over there.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Matthew rides along the street when another bike comes alongside. Music drifts from the bike and he turns to see Stephanie who has a TRANSISTOR RADIO tied onto her handlebars.

STEPHANIE

Hi, Matthew.

Matthew goes faster. She keeps up.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

I got a transistor radio. See, it plays anywhere.

MATTHEW

I gotta go now, Stephanie.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

STEPHANIE

I can ride with you... besides I
wanna tell you I think my brother
did a rotten thing to you last night.

MATTHEW

Why don't you go home?

STEPHANIE

It's a free country.

(a beat)

You're not being nice. Didn't your
mother tell you you're supposed to
be nice to girls.

(beat)

Anyways, I just wanted to remind you
about my party.

MATTHEW

I can't come.

STEPHANIE

You have to come. It's going to be
a perfect party and... and...

MATTHEW

And what!

STEPHANIE

We're going to have music and we can
dance.

DANCE! The word that strikes terror into any self-respecting
boy of twelve. Matthew rolls into racing speed.

MATTHEW

Bye, Stephanie!

She tries to keep up but falls behind and gives up.

EXT. EMPIRE OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Matthew finally stops, realizes he's on the edge of town.
He catches his breath, then looks off towards Thunder Hill
about four miles away.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

The mountain has a dark cloud over it and there's the sound
of distant thunder. Matthew starts to pedal towards it. He
speeds along a dirt road through wheat fields.

EXT. THUNDER HILL - DAY

At the foot of the mountain, an old signpost is rotted and leaning to one side reads: *Thunder Hill*. Matthew looks up at a winding road leading to the top.

EXT. THUNDER HILL - TOP - DAY

Matthew comes over the rim, looking down onto the prairie below. The road ends in front of him where the remains of a few buildings still stand.

A roar of thunder echoes from above.

EXT. THUNDER HILL TOWNSITE - DAY

What's left are a few buildings, weathered by years of wind, hot summers and cold winters.

Matthew walks around a house.

INT. THUNDER HILL HOUSE - DAY

The place is empty, wallpaper is torn and mice run along the walls. There's an old newspaper pasted onto the wall, covering a crack - a faded headline reads: *Local Boys off to Europe*.

Matthew studies the photo - there he sees the same picture of Nicodemus and the other soldiers.

EXT. THUNDER HILL -- DAY

Matthew walks outside, the wind whispers through the willow trees. The leaves, turning to yellow and red with the fall cold, seem to be speaking.

He turns, thinking he's heard a sound. But there's nothing.

Then he sees a foundation of a building. Matthew follows the outline of the building as grasshoppers jump out of his way.

Finally he spots a board and turns it over slowly. It's the cafe sign - *THUNDER HILL CAFE* - seen in Nicodemus's photograph.

He finds an old coffee cup and dirt-stained glass. Then something else catches his eye --

CROP CIRCLES, three of them in tall prairie grass.

MATTHEW

You were here, weren't you?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Just then a CRACK of thunder makes Matthew jump. He looks up at the darkening sky where a BOLT of LIGHTNING sears into the earth less than fifty feet away. Smoke drifts up from the seared earth.

Matthew jumps on his bike and rides off down the empty street. The wind raises DUST DEVILS that seem to chase him out. Whatever was here doesn't want any visitors.

INT. MATTHEW'S HOME - DINNERTIME

Matthew wolfs down the rest of his food as Elana watches.

ELANA

Matthew, what are you doing?

MATTHEW

I gotta go help Nicodemus.

ELANA

What are you doing there all the time?

MATTHEW

Building.

ELANA

Does he pay you?

MATTHEW

Uh, yeah.

ELANA

I don't see any money.

MATTHEW

Uh, when it's done. He'll pay me when it's done. I gotta go.

ELANA

Matthew...

He's out the door.

EXT. MAIN STREET - EARLY EVENING

Matthew's on his bike, headed for Nicodemus's place. As he heads up Main Street, he passes the hotel.

Joel is on his bike and catches up.

JOEL

What's Nicodemus building?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

Nothing.

JOEL

Come on, you know.

MATTHEW

It's secret.

JOEL

I heard someone say it's a landing platform for flying saucers.

MATTHEW

Maybe.

JOEL

Can I see?

MATTHEW

Maybe, later.

JOEL

Stop, okay?

Matthew stops his bike.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I can't stay out after dark on a school night.

MATTHEW

Scared?

JOEL

(maybe...)

No... My parents won't let me.
They found a new way to punish me.
No TV. Boy, just when I thought TV
was a good thing, too.

Matthew scans the horizon, looks up to the emerging stars above him. Joel follows Matthew's gaze upwards.

JOEL (CONT'D)

It's gonna be dark soon, I can't stay long.

MATTHEW

Nobody really knows what's out there.
Not even the smartest guys on Earth.
I read that some of those stars are
millions of miles away, further than
we can imagine.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

The boys are silhouetted against the darkening sky.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

The only thing they can see are canals
on Mars. Man-made rivers. Nobody
knows who made them.

JOEL

Somebody must know. There's always
somebody who knows everything.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - DAY

There's a partially finished platform in the circle.
Nicodemus is placing construction firepots in the path leading
to the elevators. There are wires leading to the top of the
elevator to an old TV antenna on top with Christmas lights
strung on.

Matthew and Joel approach just as a bolt of LIGHTNING sears
through the air, hitting the antenna. The static electricity
flows through the wires.

JOEL

Matthew, look!

BLUE STATIC ELECTRICITY

Sparks and jumps along the wires, dropping down on Nicodemus's
home. Flames begin to appear on the roof.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Nicodemus's place is on fire!

Nicodemus sees the fire -- sees the boys...

NICODEMUS

Matthew, go get the fire department.

Matthew and Joel stand there - frozen.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Matthew! GO!

They both turn around on their bikes and head back down the
street. Both boys race for all they're worth.

Nicodemus heads for a fire extinguisher.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DUSK

Matthew's easily outpacing the heavier Joel as they roar
down the empty main street, turning into --

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

THE FIRE HALL

Matthew leaps off his bike and runs to the door. He tries the handle, it's locked. Then he bangs on the door.

Joel arrives and both boys frantically try to get inside. Then Matthew sees something --

A FIRE ALARM

On a POST near the fire station. There's no time to waste. Matthew smashes the glass, the emergency RING WAILS.

The boys take time to catch their breath as rain begins to fall. Men begin to appear, running to the fire hall.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT

The final smoldering glows of a fire are quickly drowned as a firehose sprays the building. The rain has stopped.

NEAR THE FIRE TRUCK

Simpson's there, and Lorne and Anderson as well as the town clerk and the Reverend. Nicodemus sits on the steps leading up to the platform. Matthew and Joel are nearby.

SIMPSON

When the hell you gonna learn to protect these buildings. If that fire hit the elevators... this whole town could blow sky high. Just what the hell are you building, there, Nicodemus?

Nicodemus looks at them as Simpson looks at the wiring and firepots.

SIMPSON (CONT'D)

If I didn't know any better...

LORNE

What?

Joel gets on his bike.

JOEL

I gotta go.

He leaves and Matthew edges closer to the men.

SIMPSON

In the war, we used to make temporary airfields for small planes to land. We'd set patterns just like that.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ANDERSON

You saying he's making an airplane
landing strip.

SIMPSON

It's too short.

LORNE

Maybe it's for flying saucers.

Nobody's laughing as Reverend steps up.

REVEREND

Those circles are the work of a
greater power than we know.

SIMPSON

Now don't go putting the fear of God
into everyone, Reverend.

REVEREND

What do you expect... all this flying
saucer talk. It's blasphemy, that's
what it is.

LORNE

What is this Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS

Nothing.

REVEREND

The Lord does not tolerate false
gods before him.

SIMPSON

Don't know about that, but you'd
better not let the grain agent see
them wires up on the elevator. Take
'em down.

The men return to the fire truck and drive off. Nicodemus
sits quietly as Matthew walks up to him.

MATTHEW

Could use some coffee...

INT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT

As Matthew lifts a tin coffee cup to his mouth and sips the
bitter coffee. Nicodemus watches him, amused.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus, what's it mean, your name?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

It comes from the Bible. Nicodemus was one of Jesus's disciples... he was an educated man and knew many languages, they say. He translated God's words so people of many kinds could read them.

(a beat)

My grandmother named me that.

MATTHEW

Was she in Thunder Hill?

NICODEMUS

What do you know about Thunder Hill?

MATTHEW

I went there. I found the sign from the cafe. What was it like there?

Nicodemus weighs over something in his mind --

NICODEMUS

It was a fine town in it's time. We had farms, stores, even the cafe. If a fellow wanted an ice-cream cone, he'd go right down to the cafe and have it, without no problems.

MATTHEW

Why would you have problems getting ice cream?

NICODEMUS

We were a little different from most folks.

MATTHEW

How?

NICODEMUS

Different.

MATTHEW

I saw a newspaper there, it had pictures of them. They were going to war.

Nicodemus looks over at the photographs.

NICODEMUS

One day an army recruiter came to town and told us about this war across the ocean and that we had to fight

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

for freedom. Most all the eligible men joined up and went off, me included.

(a beat)

Trouble is, most of them was killed in places you probably never heard of. The ones that survived, some ended up in the cities and some, like me, in veteran hospitals.

MATTHEW

What happened to the town?

NICODEMUS

Without the men to work the fields and the businesses, it started dying. Some of the women did a damn good job of it, but eventually, the town just plain lost it's will to live. The ones that were left, the women an' children and old ones, they moved to other places.

Nicodemus looks at the picture of Mary.

MATTHEW

Where'd she go?

Nicodemus takes a long time, then:

NICODEMUS

Far away. Too far. Best be you go on home now, Matthew, your mama's gonna be worried about you.

Matthew senses it's time to leave. He puts his cup on the counter, glancing at Nicodemus.

MATTHEW

Did you know my dad?

NICODEMUS

No.

Nicodemus gets up and walks to the kitchen. Matthew leaves.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

A few cars, a few people walking - what seems like a normal day. A car radio plays Gogi Grant's *WAYWARD WIND* as we move into the grocery store.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- DAY

A newspaper headline reads *UFO OVER LOS ANGELES* and another, *SAUCER SEEN IN CALGARY* on a magazine rack as Matthew passes someone carrying bags of groceries out.

Matthew goes to a food shelf and reaches for the last can of soup. Most of the shelf is bare as he sees Simpson carry out two armfuls of groceries. The GROCER and the CASHIER watch and whisper something to each other.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

A BOY wearing a SPACE HELMET chases a girl with his ROCKET BLASTER water pistol until two bigger GIRLS surprise him with their own ROCKET BLASTERS. He runs for cover.

Matthew watches them run down the street. He walks past a building where a HUGE POSTER reads *MARTIAN HOP* featuring *THE 5 MARTIANS* - pasted over the previous band name.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - DAY

Nicodemus is finishing work on the platform as someone approaches. He rises to greet Miss Major.

MISS MAJOR

I came to see what the fuss is.

NICODEMUS

Come to see the crazy man in town?

MISS MAJOR

Well, you sure did stir up the town. You and Matthew. Talk is going on about Martians all over the Swan Valley.

She looks at the construction --

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Do you really think something is going to happen here?

NICODEMUS

Not up to me.

MISS MAJOR

I don't think any spacemen are coming here, to this field or this town.

NICODEMUS

Probably not. You ever read George Orwell? When is two plus two not four?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Miss Major remembers --

MISS MAJOR

When you don't want it to be.
Nineteen eighty-four, right?

NICODEMUS

When this is over...

A beat - neither says anything.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Would you have a coffee with the
crazy man again?

MISS MAJOR

It's not catchy, is it?

NICODEMUS

No.

MISS MAJOR

I have homework to correct. Assuming
the world will be safe tomorrow.

She turns and walks away. He watches her go.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF - EVENING

MAGIC HOUR. Matthew and Joel are on the rooftop. Matthew
lowers his binoculars as Joel loads his BB gun. Matthew's
gun stands at the ready.

MATTHEW

Nothing unusual.

JOEL

My dad said he might take mom and me
up to the lake tomorrow.

MATTHEW

He can't. Tomorrow is when it's
gonna happen.

JOEL

It's my mom. She's scared about
everything.

MATTHEW

It's safer here with everybody.

JOEL

What makes you think the Emperor guy
is gonna come here? It's not like
we're important or anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

If he's gonna come, he's gonna come here.

A beat.

JOEL

Maybe he'll know about your dad?

MATTHEW

You think so?

JOEL

I don't know, if heaven's out there somewhere, and the Emperor is from Mars, well, that's kind of our there too, so maybe he's been there.

In the stillness of dusk, for a moment, anything is possible.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Whattya think they'll have to eat at Stephanie's party? God, I hope they don't have that meat spread stuff that we had at Gloria's party in fourth grade.

Beneath them, the town looks very quiet and small under the vast expanse of outer space.

EXT. EMPIRE - MORNING

The SUN rises as a bright yellow and orange ball of fire that seems to pour over the land. This is the big day.

INT. MATTHEW'S ROOM - MORNING

Matthew wakes up with a start. He leaps out of bed.

EXT. MATTHEW'S HOUSE - MORNING

Matthew stands in his pajamas out in his yard. Around him, the world seems normal.

EXT. SIMPSON HOUSE - DAY

An ALIEN FACE leaps into frame, a girl shrieks as a boy in Alien costume chases her. They pass the Martian drawing contest entries, all pasted onto cards and exhibited like they were in an art gallery. It's Stephanie's party.

Matthew and Joel make their way to a TABLE prepared with food and drink for the kids. Green and red FINGER SANDWICHES. Joel reluctantly tastes one.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

Yep. Meat spread.

He takes out the mouthful, looks for somewhere to put it without being noticed, finally stuffs it into his pocket.

STEPHANIE

Hi Joel, Hi, Matthew.

Stephanie's looking great - Space Alien meets Princess.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

Do you like how I look?

MATTHEW

Okay, I guess.

STEPHANIE

Have you seen my drawing?

She takes both of them by the arm and brings them over to her drawing - a flying saucer with cute aliens.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

Do you like it?

MATTHEW

It's okay.

Matthew sees Miss Major talking with Mrs. Simpson. Joel sneaks away.

STEPHANIE

Where's your picture?

MATTHEW

Don't have one.

STEPHANIE

Why not?

MATTHEW

I don't know what he looks like.

Matthew notices Mr. Simpson, carrying boxes around the back looking around somewhat suspiciously.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Where's your dad going?

STEPHANIE

Oh, he's just putting stuff into the room in the cellar. Have you had any of the punch? I made it.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

She drags him back to the table, but Matthew also notices Anderson, the Reverend and Lorne who ask Mrs. Simpson something and she points them around the back of the house.

GLORIA
Stephanie, this is simply a divine party.

STEPHANIE
Thank you, Gloria.

Matthew sees his chance and leaves.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
Matthew...

BEHIND THE HOUSE

The three men wait as Simpson steps out, sees them with a look like he's been caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

ANDERSON
Afternoon, Bill.

SIMPSON
What's up?

ANDERSON
You stayin' around the house today?

SIMPSON
Got things to do.

ANDERSON
You know, I never seen that bomb shelter of yours.

SIMPSON
Got no bomb shelter, told ya that.

The three men exchange looks, nobody believes it.

ANDERSON
We figure we got a right to see it.
See if it conforms to zoning laws.

SIMPSON
I'm on the goddam town committee also, Andy. In case you forgot. And like I said, there isn't anything there.

Matthew hides behind the corner of the house, listening when a HAND touches him from behind.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS MAJOR

Matthew. You haven't said a word to me the whole afternoon.

Matthew wants to hear what the men are talking about - but Miss Major is here. Even if she did break his heart.

MATTHEW

Uh, I...

She takes his hand and leads him back to the party.

MISS MAJOR

Come with me, I have a special job for you.

Miss Major leads Matthew to the alien pictures. They pass Joel who winks and Stephanie who looks incredibly jealous.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

(to the class)

Well, this is certainly turning out to be a wonderful party, isn't it, class?

CLASS

(in broken unison)

Yes, Miss Major.

MISS MAJOR

I think we have to express our thanks to Stephanie and her mother, Mrs. Simpson, for the nice food and everything else.

CLASS

(awkwardly)

Thank you Mrs. Simpson and Stephanie.

Miss Major brings Matthew closer to her, brushing against her side. She's *almost* forgiven.

MISS MAJOR

And, I thought we should all thank Matthew for bringing the Martian story to our attention. It certainly has become a big event around town.

RAISED VOICES suddenly interrupt and everyone turns towards the house to see Simpson and the three men walk into view.

SIMPSON

Goddam it, Andy, nobody tells me what I can or can't do. You understand?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Silence among the kids. Dolores looks worried -

ANDERSON

You can't keep that place a secret anymore. We all got a right to know.

SIMPSON

You got no right to be on my property!

ANDERSON

This ain't the army, Bill, you can't go around ordering me like I was some buck private. We're gonna vote on this... this thing.

SIMPSON

You're not gonna do anything, you son-of-a-bitch!

ANDERSON

You got a goddam bomb shelter there and you've been stocking up food like a packrat. We got a right to know about it.

Simpson shoves Anderson, it turns into a shoving match as the kids watch.

Stephanie's embarrassed as her mother tries to calm Simpson. He pushes her away as Anderson shoves him, Simpson swings a fist, connecting hard in Anderson's face.

DOLORES

Daddy!

Anderson falls on the ground and gets up slowly as the other men and Mrs. Simpson try to keep Simpson from going at him.

ANDERSON

That's it, Bill. That's it!

MRS. SIMPSON

All of you. The children...

The men realize the kids are watching. Dolores comes to her father. Simpson stomps off. Stephanie runs to the house, crying.

JOEL

Wow, I never saw a grownup hit anyone in real life. It's not like the movies, is it?

The kids break up slowly and head towards home.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL (CONT'D)

Guess this means we won't get any
cake.

Off Matthew's look.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Matthew rides on Main Street, stores closed. He sees only
Sam at his usual spot in the cafe as he rides past.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Clock reads 6:01. Matthew watches it like a hawk, then looks
at his mother. His plate has been emptied in record time.

MATTHEW

Mom... I'm finished. Can I go?

ELANA

Matthew, you eat too fast.

MATTHEW

It's tonight. I gotta go see.

ELANA

There's nothing to see. You can
stay home for one night.

MATTHEW

But..

ELANA

You can stay home tonight!

MATTHEW

It's not fair. I gotta be at
Nicodemus's tonight. I gotta be
there, mom. Please.

ELANA

Go to your room and study for school.

Shattered - and frustrated. He looks at her angrily.

MATTHEW

I hate you. I wish I was with dad!

He runs to his room, slamming the door. Elana looks over at
Bapka, who returns the look with her resigned expression.

INT. MATTHEW'S ROOM - DUSK

He lies on his bed. After a moment, he knows he can't stay
there and he goes to his closet and pulls out his BB GUN.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Also finds a fresh paper tube of BB's.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - DUSK

The trunk sits in front of the two chairs and rocking chair now on the platform. Matthew carries his BB gun as he approaches. The photograph of Mary rests on the table.

NICODEMUS (O.S.)

Come for the show?

MATTHEW

I came to see the Emperor of Mars.

NICODEMUS

There's no Emperor of Mars. There isn't anything on Mars.

MATTHEW

Then why did you build this?

NICODEMUS

Because something inside of me has been telling me to build it, since that storm. Can't explain it, just know I got to do it. Like the ducks that fly south, you know?

MATTHEW

That's what makes me want to be here too. Like the ducks.

Near the elevator a TRUCK stops, the two people inside watch in silence.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATORS - DUSK - LATER

A CAR drives up and two YOUNG MEN get out and lean against the fender, watching. Nearby two KIDS sit on the grass.

Matthew helps Nicodemus with the firepots.

EXT. SIMPSON'S HOUSE - DUSK

Simpson looks outside the window, then turns back inside.

INT. SIMPSON'S HOUSE - DUSK

We hear a radio that crackles with music from a distant station - Patti Page's "You Belong to Me".

Stephanie, Tommy and Mrs. Simpson eat silently in the dining room. Simpson sits down, a real RIFLE leans against the wall behind him. Nervous looks all around.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - DUSK

The outside lights go on, lighting up the poster for BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL - a war picture. No customers tonight.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DUSK

The TV is on, but the lobby is empty. Bernstein comes in and turns it off. He glances at his wife, who looks worried. Bernstein embraces her as they look out the window.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATORS - DUSK

Nicodemus lights the firepots one by one. Matthew stands by an extension cord. When Nicodemus finishes, he signals to Matthew. Matthew plugs the extension cord into an outlet.

The Christmas lights high up on the elevator twinkle on in blues, reds and greens, visible for several miles.

Below the elevator, more locals show up.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF - DUSK

Joel sees the lights on the elevator.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE -- DUSK

Sam Wong sells paper cups of coffee, donuts and sandwiches. Two enterprising TEN-YEAR OLDS sell KOOL-AID. Crowd has grown to around thirty people. Almost a festive mood.

Joel appears with his BB gun in hand.

JOEL

We didn't go. I sneaked out. Dad's gonna kill me if he finds out...

MATTHEW

You can join us.

They all take chairs on the platform, Nicodemus on the rocker.

JOEL

What are we doing?

MATTHEW

Waiting.

JOEL

Oh. Yeah.

Joel cocks his BB gun and lays it on his lap.

Miss Major appears in the crowd, noticing the three of them.

INT. SIMPSON'S HOUSE - EVENING

As the black and white TV features a news announcer.

TV NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 President Eisenhower today faces the
 prospect of an increasingly unfriendly
 Congress in the aftermath of his
 sweeping re-election victory.
 Although Eisenhower defeated Adlai
 Stevenson, his Republican party took
 a political defeat when Democrats
 won margins in both houses of
 Congress.

Stephanie and her mother sit quietly s Simpson watches TV.
 Stephanie looks out the window as twilight nears. Tommy
 sneaks a look from the hallway, then leaves unseen.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - EVENING

A radio from a TRUCK offers a different newscast,

RADIO ANNOUNCER (OS)
 Weather for the midwest remains cool
 with a low tonight of 49 degrees.
 Tomorrow, sunny with highs near 65
 and lows near 45. Next news watch
 on the hour at nine o'clock.

Music fills the air, There are at least 70 people now, some
 CHILDREN run around. Miss Major finds it fascinating.
 Suddenly, a VOICE SHOUTS!

FARMER
 Up there! Look! Up there!

People suddenly scan the near dark sky.

2ND VOICE
 Over there! In the west!!

The sky is nearly black as a light twinkles over the horizon.

3RD VOICE
 It's a star. That's all.

FARMER
 It ain't no star. Look how bright
 it is.

2ND VOICE
 It's an airplane.

The Reverend steps into view, shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

FARMER

Ain't nobody got an airplane 'round here.

Joel pulls out his father's binoculars and hands the binoculars to Matthew who looks at the night sky.

The bright light seems to be unusually large - but it's not acting very different either. It just sits there.

JOEL

Is it him?

MATTHEW

I don't think so.

NICODEMUS

It's only Venus, always the first star to come out every night.

REVEREND (O.S.)

What is the matter with all of you!

All attention turns to the Reverend. Even Miss Major.

REVEREND (CONT'D)

Do you not fear God!! Do you not see the evil in what you do? Listen to the words of God.

(lifts a Bible)

And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

(a beat)

There are no Martians, no aliens, only God. And if anything comes tonight it will be Him. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever."

The crowd is silent until --

WOMAN

Look at the light!

All eyes turn to the light in the sky. Now that it's darker, it twinkles, and another has joined it. And another.

JOEL

It's stars. That's all. Just stars.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

They all look up as night brings it's shower of distant stars appearing one after another.

INT. MATTHEW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Elana looks down at the empty bed. Bapka is at the door.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT

People have lit kerosene lamps, flashlights, even truck headlights as Matthew carries coffee.

MISS MAJOR

Matthew.

He notices her but keeps on walking. She catches up.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

There certainly is a crowd, isn't there.

MATTHEW

They've come to see the Emperor.

MISS MAJOR

Matthew, sometimes people believe what they want to even when it isn't true.

MATTHEW

Like you being mushy with Nicodemus?

His look says it all. She never even thought of this --

MISS MAJOR

I know you like me, Matthew. I like you too. But that was different. I think you understand that.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus is my friend.

MISS MAJOR

He still is. Nothing's changed. We're both your friends.

MATTHEW

Do you love him?

MISS MAJOR

He's been places, I like talking to him, that's all.

MATTHEW

He knows the Emperor is coming.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MISS MAJOR

I know this is important to you.
But... sometimes people think there's
answers in the unknown, Matthew.
Sometimes when they can't figure
life out, they look to something
that they can't explain. It makes
them feel better.

(a beat)

Don't be disappointed if your Emperor
doesn't show up. You've got a
lifetime ahead of you.

That leaves Matthew one question --

MATTHEW

Then you still like me?

MISS MAJOR

Of course I like you. I care a lot
about you, Matthew, I think you're
going to do something important with
your life.

MATTHEW

I gotta go.

She leans forward and kisses him lightly on the forehead.

MISS MAJOR

You're a very special boy, Matthew.

Matthew's shaken, she just kissed him. Not a real movie
kiss, but it was a kiss. His first ever. He turns and runs.

AT THE PLATFORM

Anderson, his wife and Dolores show up.

ANDERSON

Nicodemus... since my missus here
saw somethin' too, I figure we oughtta
be here with ya.

Nicodemus nods and they climb to the platform and sit.

EXT. NICODEMUS'S PLACE - NIGHT (LATER)

People point out stars and others watch silently while still
others argue with their neighbors.

Matthew and Joel hold onto their BB guns, standing guard by
Nicodemus. Joel's love, Nancy Carsen, stands near the
platform, looking up at Joel with big, sparkling eyes. Joel
has noticed her, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

FARMER

Listen! Everyone listen, the news!

The crowd silences itself as he turns the radio up.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And finally, Radio stations in the west who waited for the Martian broadcast set for tonight have reported no contact with the alleged Emperor of Mars, now well past his scheduled time of appearance. The Mars hoax originated in California when a group of outer space enthusiasts produced a tape recording which played a message from Mon-Ka, the Emperor of Mars, set to appear tonight.

(a beat)

While a number of UFO reports have been made, officials are reminding people of the panic surrounding the War of the Worlds broadcast of 1939. Next news at midnight.

As people absorb the message, a DJ comes on.

DJ (O.S.)

Well, you heard it. No Martians tonight. So right now I'd like to dedicate this song to the Emperor of Mars, wherever he is.

The radio plays THE GREAT PRETENDER by THE PLATTERS. Nobody says anything as the music drifts across the yard. They seem to be still waiting for something. But nothing comes.

Matthew doesn't believe it. The townspeople are beginning to leave, mostly in silence.

JOEL (O.S.)

Matthew.

Matthew turns around - Joel's with Nancy.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Me'n Nancy are going to my place to watch TV.

MATTHEW

He's gonna come. All that meant was that he isn't coming anywhere else. He's coming here.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

JOEL

Yeah, maybe. But I wanna watch TV.
So does Nancy.

Joel shrugs.

MATTHEW

Then go ahead. I don't care.

JOEL

Matthew.

Matthew's disappointment is all too obvious. Joel and Nancy start to leave.

MATTHEW

The Emperor is gonna come and nobody
but me is gonna see him.

The Anderson family leave, passing Nicodemus who just stares. Matthew is quiet - this is big. End of the world big.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

He is coming, I know he is, and so
do you, Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS

Maybe not.

MATTHEW

He's supposed to come. He said he
would. He's supposed to be here!!
Goddam it.

Matthew flings his chair off the platform. Nicodemus grabs Matthew by the arm. Matthew swings at him, harmless enough, but the intent is real. Nicodemus holds onto him to protect the boy from falling.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Let me go! Let me go!! You don't
care, you made me believe, you said
he was coming..

NICODEMUS

Matthew, you listen to me. I didn't
tell you nothing about the Emperor
of Mars. Nothing. You come around,
wanna help me do this and that. I
said okay. Fact is, I liked the
company. But your daddy isn't coming
back, he's never coming back. And
you got to take that for a fact.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm sorry, boy, I'm truly sorry for you, if there was anything I could do, I would. But you got your mom and your grandma and your life is with them. You gotta just accept that.

MATTHEW

But I miss him.

NICODEMUS

Everyone misses someone who left them. It ain't special to you. And I ain't gonna tell you you shouldn't miss him, because that's your daddy. But you can find a place to put him where he'll always be.

MATTHEW

Where?

NICODEMUS

(points to his heart)

Right here, in that very part of you that gives life. You remember him here every day of your living life.

MATTHEW

I don't get it.

NICODEMUS

You will. Look at you, good-looking man. One of these days, some pretty girl's gonna catch you and first thing you get to be a daddy of your own. That's the way this life works.

Matthew eyes glisten. He runs off, leaving Nicodemus. Miss Major is there now.

MISS MAJOR

He's a boy, without a dad, did you have to be so hard on him?

NICODEMUS

Truth is hard sometimes. Better he knows now.

MISS MAJOR

All of this, about space beings, why did you start this?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

NICODEMUS

I didn't start it.

MISS MAJOR

Then who are you waiting for?

She sees the photograph on the table.

MISS MAJOR (CONT'D)

Nicodemus, did you believe someone was coming from out there?

(beat)

Was it the war, did it change you that much?

NICODEMUS

I'm not crazy, even though everyone in town thinks I am.

MISS MAJOR

I don't think you're crazy.

A beat - they know the loneliness each other feels. But before that changes --

MRS. ANDERSON (O.S.)

Look! There!

Matthew turns first, he sees Mrs. Anderson pointing up in the sky. He looks at Nicodemus.

ANDERSON

There!!

IN THE NIGHT SKY

A silvery, translucent form appears above the elevator. Some people gasp and some run away while others jump in their trucks and lock the doors. The Reverend stands his ground.

Elana shows up, moving through the crowd, looking for Matthew. Joel is there, so is Nancy.

JOEL

Oh boy.

He cocks his BB gun and goes running back to Matthew.

ABOVE THE CROWD

The object is at least twenty feet long, moving closer to the elevator.

MATTHEW

It's headed for the elevator.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ANDERSON

Crazy thing's gonna hit it!

THE OBJECT bumps softly into the top of the elevator. Some of the "skin" rips and sails downwards. A thought strikes Matthew - something odd - and familiar.

MATTHEW

Tommy.

HIGH ABOVE THE CROWD

IT'S TOMMY - in a makeshift basket tied to the weather balloon. He's trying to steer away from the elevator. But the balloon collides, hitting the Christmas lights. Sparks fly. The helium inside the balloon catches fire. Flame spills.

FARMER

They're shooting at us! They're trying to kill us!!

The crowd begins to step back, afraid. Elana spots Matthew catching up to Nicodemus and she heads towards him.

MATTHEW

It's Tommy Simpson, he's up there.

NICODEMUS

Crazy damn fool.

Nicodemus breaks into a run to the elevator and goes inside.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus!

JOEL

That fire's gonna spread to the wheat.
The whole elevator's gonna go up.

MATTHEW

I gotta get him back.

JOEL

You can't go, Matthew, you're a kid.

MATTHEW

I gotta.

He runs after Nicodemus as Joel holds back..

JOEL

Matthew!

Elana reaches Joel just as Miss Major does.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

ELANA

Matthew!

Suddenly, screams from the crowd as -

TOMMY LEAPS

High above them, he barely catches onto the ladder on the side of the elevator. The fire has spread to the elevator, burning into the wood siding.

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - GROUND - NIGHT

Nicodemus rips a fire extinguisher off the wall and heads for the electric elevator platform. He climbs in and pulls the lever and the platform slowly rises upwards.

Matthew enters, sees the platform rising.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus! It's on fire!

His words go unheard. Matthew reaches the stairs and begins running up the huge labyrinth of wood frames and iron gears trying to catch the elevator.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - GROUND - NIGHT

As the fire spreads across the top of the elevator.

ANDERSON

It's not a spaceship. It's a fire!
With all that grain inside, that
place will go up like an Atomic Bomb.

LORNE

We gotta get the fire engine before
it blows.

Lorne and Anderson run to Anderson's truck and screech off towards the fire hall.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR ROOF - NIGHT

As Tommy climbs back from the fire that's racing madly up the roof towards him. He climbs onto a walkway.

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR ROOF - NIGHT

Nicodemus jumps off the elevator and runs for the door leading to the outside platform. It's locked and he puts down the fire extinguisher.

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR STAIRWAY - NIGHT

As Matthew uses every ounce of his strength to race upwards.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR ROOF - NIGHT

Tommy tries to put out some fires as they spread. Nicodemus kicks open the door and spots him.

TOMMY

Nicodemus...

NICODEMUS

You crazy kid. What the hell you done here!!

TOMMY

It was just a joke...

An EXPLOSION rocks the building as fire has entered into the storage area, connecting with the deadly gases inside.

INT. SIMPSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Everybody inside hears the blast. Simpson runs to the door and looks outside. FROM HIS POV, the top of the elevator looks like a Roman Candle, fire and sparks blasting upwards.

SIMPSON

Oh God.

MRS. SIMPSON

Bill.

SIMPSON

Stay here.

He runs down the steps towards the street. Stephanie joins her mother as the fire burns across town.

STEPHANIE

Matthew is there!

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR GROUND - NIGHT

From here, it's almost like fireworks as fire shoots out from either side of the elevator. People panic.

Joel's near the bottom of the building, pulled away by Miss Major. She also pulls back Elana, nearly hysterical.

ELANA

Matthew, please, help him!

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - TOP FLOOR - NIGHT

As a wood beam crashes across the doorway, blocking Nicodemus and Tommy. They're both trapped above the fireline.

Matthew appears at the head of the stairway, on the other side of the fire. He tries to see through.

NICODEMUS

Matthew!

Matthew sees him through the fire.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

Get outta here. Go back down.

Matthew spots the fire extinguisher. He runs for it.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

No, get going. Leave! Get outta here, goddam it!

Matthew picks up the extinguisher and triggers a blast of retardant at the fire. It puts out enough for Nicodemus to push Tommy through.

NICODEMUS (CONT'D)

You crazy kid, why don't you listen to me?

MATTHEW

I came to get you, you're my friend.

Another blast rocks the building. Tommy panics and tries to run but Nicodemus grabs him. Behind them, the elevator platform suffers a crushing blow rendering it unusable.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

The stairway, Nicodemus!!

Nicodemus holds onto Tommy and pushes Matthew along.

EXT. FIREHALL - NIGHT

As the second explosion throws a fireball well over the top of the elevator. Simpson starts the fire engine with Anderson and several others hanging on as the engine drives out.

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - STAIRS - NIGHT

Tommy's pushed down the stairs as fire licks at them. Matthew's leading with Nicodemus at the rear. Matthew stops.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus!

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Ahead, fire blocks off escape. Nicodemus tries to figure out what to do. Suddenly Tommy bolts and runs.

NICODEMUS

Tommy!

Tommy's cut off by fire as the floor breaks and he falls, smashing his head against a grain conveyor.

Nicodemus arrives and lifts the unconscious Tommy.

MATTHEW

Nicodemus!!

Nicodemus looks to see the stairway shaft below them entirely engulfed in fire. The stairway below Matthew gives way and Matthew grabs onto a beam, swinging over the fire below him.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Nicodemus, help me!! Please!!

Nicodemus holds Tommy, looks helpless as fire surrounds them.

NICODEMUS

(shouting, looking up)

Help me! Help me now!

Matthew manages to pull himself up, his vision is blurred and off-kilter as he sees:

NICODEMUS

Blurred, MOVING towards him, Tommy in his arms. He moves with a STRANGE GRACE that defies the urgency of the situation. And there's a cool light from above that ENGULFS the two.

Matthew wipes his eyes as smoke clouds his vision. Suddenly he feels himself BEING LIFTED. He looks down, the blurred floor IS MOVING AWAY from him.

Matthew looks up, a faint, blurred image of Nicodemus before him. But now there's a brilliant GLOW around him and Tommy.

Underneath Matthew, the floor gives way and crashes down.

Matthew is SUSPENDED IN AIR!!

And he's FLOATING into a tunnel of invisible air that keeps the flame outside. Nicodemus and Tommy are in the tunnel also as Matthew looks down. He's suspended over the fire below him.

Matthew looks back at Nicodemus. But his vision is still blurred, interrupted by short flashes of black. Slowly, Nicodemus disappears from his sight.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

FROM BLACKNESS

Matthew sees he's floating down the magical tunnel, past the fire. Then, darkness again.

Then another FLASH of light. Matthew sees the ground below him, coming closer. He shouts, thinking he's falling. Then he loses consciousness.

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Sounds come back, shouts and sounds of breaking wood and explosions. Then an IMAGE - someone looking down at him - IT'S NICODEMUS. Around him, the sky is lit by the fire. Nicodemus smiles at him. Then darkness.

NICODEMUS (O.S.)

They're here, Matthew, my people,
they come for me. Mary's here... I
gotta go home. I'll see you again,
I will. Goodbye.

The voice echoes in the darkness and fades to silence. Then light - and another face, Elana. Beside her, a smiling Miss Major. Then, darkness.

DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. MATTHEW'S HOUSE - DAY

Matthew awakes looking into the blinding light of sun streaming through his window. Then Elana leans over him, smiling.

He looks around, realizing where he is. There's home-made get well cards from his class and a card with a Monet painting on it. Matthew reaches for the Monet - it's from Miss Major.

Inside, handwritten, "*to the bravest person I've ever known. Get better soon, Love, Jenny Major*"

MATTHEW

Jenny...

He holds the card close to him.

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DUSK (THE DAY AFTER)

The elevator is a total loss. Smoking, charred ruins. Miss Major walks around the house, stops and looks at the charred elevator rooftop.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

Slowly, she turns and walks away.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Miss Major became different afterwards, she stayed for a few more years then left Empire. Long after I moved away from town, I got a postcard from Paris, it was from Miss Major. All she said was "you were right, it wasn't as far away as Mars after all". She signed it "love, Jenny".

DISSOLVE
TO:

NICODEMUS'S PLATFORM

Where Matthew stands alone on the platform. Some of it has been stripped away. The crop circle remains.

MATTHEW (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I guess I can't explain what really happened that night. Tommy doesn't remember anything at all. After that, though, he became a nicer kid and years after I met him at a Midas Muffler shop and learned he became a teacher.

He turns towards Nicodemus's house. It looks abandoned.

MATTHEW (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Nobody saw Nicodemus again. Some of the people say he died in the fire but I know he didn't. I saw him, he was going home. The doctor said I was probably hallucinating because of the smoke and everything. But I remember how we got out, all three of us. And I know I wasn't seeing things. Because here I am.

INT. NICODEMUS' PLACE - NIGHT

Nobody lives here anymore. The photos are gone.

EXT. NICODEMUS' PLACE - NIGHT

Matthew walks out, looks up at the night sky.

MATTHEW

Come back Nicodemus.

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

He waits for an answer. But the dark sky offers little.
Then, a sparkle. Venus - first star of the night.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)

Hi, Matthew.

Matthew turns.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

Everybody knows about you. You were
very brave.

MATTHEW

Yeah.

STEPHANIE

It's real sad about Nicodemus.

Matthew walks to the road, she follows alongside, as usual.

MATTHEW

He's not dead.

Stephanie smiles, then Matthew turns and walks away from
her. But this time she's had enough of chasing him.

STEPHANIE

Matthew, I liked you since the first
grade and you like me. I'm not gonna
chase you anymore.

She starts to walk away herself. Matthew watches her for a
beat - then:

MATTHEW

Stephanie.

She keeps walking. He runs after her.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Stephanie.

She turns as Matthew catches up.

STEPHANIE

I mean it this time, Tommy Young
asked me to the movies twice already.

MATTHEW

I was thinking... maybe we could go
to the movie. I mean, if Tommy isn't
taking you.

STEPHANIE

Me and you?

(CONTINUED)

CONT'D:

MATTHEW

It's the Natalie Wood movie tonight.
You kinda look like her.

STEPHANIE

It's adult.

MATTHEW

Maybe with all the excitement, nobody
will notice two kids.

Stephanie smiles. Satisfied.

STEPHANIE

I'll buy popcorn... if we share.

Matthew ponders this.

MATTHEW

Okay.

They both start walking. She reaches for his hand and, after
a few tries, he takes it.

MATTHEW (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I never did get some of the answers
I wanted. But maybe nobody does.
Maybe, like the circles in the
field... things just happen.

The CAMERA pans back to Nicodemus's landing pad.

MATTHEW (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I guess Miss Major was right about
something. There was a whole future
for me to face beginning tomorrow.
By the sixties, Life Magazine said
we'd be in space and I wanted to see
that.

(a beat)

But whatever else I expected, I kinda
hoped I'd see Nicodemus again someday
before I got old and died. Somehow,
I think he was about as close to the
Emperor of Mars that I could hope
for. And if he couldn't come to me,
then maybe I might come to him.

The small town of Empire sets in for another quiet and
peaceful night. Above, stars twinkle in the endless darkness
of space and the red planet - MARS shines as bright as any
of them.

Fade to black