

Death in the Family

It was in a spit of green grass by a south-facing fence. You could hear the sound of a shovel's blade penetrating several inches past the roots and into the dark dirt that lay beyond. The speckled sneaker of a young man kicked the blade in deeper with more of the same soft sound that preceded it. This noise was nearly exactly the same each and every time it occurred. It was the sound of uncountable grains of sand grinding upon the spade and halting its progress.

“Do you really think so?” Tyler said. His voice was crisp, and there were beads of water forming on the fabrics of his hoodie and jeans. The air felt heavy with dew, and the sun itself seemed to just barely peak through the trees and spy the two brothers digging a hole. Not a very big hole. No more than a foot and half deep.

“Yeah, just think about it,” Anthony answered. At seventeen, he was two years his brother's elder, and he never seemed to forget it. Anthony didn't carry his books in a book bag when he walked around his high school campus. He carried everything in one highly negligible looking three ringed binder. Despite this fact, he still managed to get straight As. “There are so many stars out there, literally billions, that if even one millionth of them had planets in the hospitable zone, then there would be more than one thousand hospitable planets. Once you consider how old the universe is, it's practically guaranteed that one of them supports life.”

“One of them other than us you mean.” Every sentence the brothers spoke was punctuated with regular pauses that occurred after three or so words, which were produced by the timely swings of their spades.

“Well, yeah, obviously. If you think about it, we developed pretty late in the game...”

Tyler tossed his shovelful off into a small pile and leaned against the wooden handle. He liked the smell of the dirt and feel of the shovel in his hand. It was solid, something concrete and

easily understood. It would give him blisters in due time, but that was okay. “It just seems... If there were aliens out there, we would have seen them already.”

“Exactly. That’s just the thing, that’s the Fermi Paradox. You see, there are three types of civilizations. Type One, which uses all of the resources of their planet. Type Two, which utilizes all of the energy of their sun. And Type Three, which seeks to colonize as many different planets as possible. The fact that we haven’t had any undeniable encounters with extraterrestrials is disconcerting... It could mean one of two things. It could mean that there are aliens out there and they are waiting. Waiting for us to mature... Or waiting to destroy us. Or, it could mean that we are the first civilization to reach this point and not get wiped out. Either way, we have to keep expanding. We have to become that Type Three civilization, for the good of mankind... For the good of the universe really.”

Tyler said nothing in response and joined in the work again. For a few minutes everything was just grunting and shoveling. The smells of breakfast wafted over the backyard from the house and filled his nostrils. Coffee and French toast, eggs and potatoes, and then they were done. The completed hole was still not very big, probably about four feet deep and not too much wider. The brothers walked a few paces to the East where a black and shaggy dog lay on a soft white blanket, the kind of fabric that seems to repel water. It was strange to Tyler. Anthony was the one that found her, lying on the kitchen floor, not moving. The same kitchen where his parents now cooked. He wondered, was the floor still warm where she had been laying? Could they even tell, or did they have slippers on their feet?

They took this blanket by the corners and carried it over to the grave, then lowered it in. She wasn’t as heavy as they thought she’d be, and when they tossed the dirt in, it looked pathetic. The brown soil mingled with the black coat and the body absorbed all of the shock from the

impact. It made no attempt to better itself, to get up and shake the dirt off like they half expected.

After they patted down the fresh mound of dirt, they turned their backs on the grave and headed for the house. Tyler thought about how in a hundred years if someone dug in that spot, they'd just find a bunch of fur, bones, and blanket. As they walked, he heard a mourning dove coo and looked over his shoulder to find it. "Just think," his brother was saying. "If we could become the first Type Three civilization... It would be.... amazing." Tyler gave up looking for the mourning dove and followed his brother inside. Anthony never even looked.