

The Waders, Ray Bradbury

The Waders

THE FEET WAITED inside the door, burning in their leather boxes. The feet waited inside a thousand doors and the day burned green and yellow and blue, the day was a great circus banner.

The trees stamped their images fiercely upon clouds like summer snow. The sidewalks fried the ants and the grass quivered like a green ocean. And the feet waited, white with a winter of waiting, large and small feet, tender with six months of imprisonment, delicate and blunt feet, apprehensive and wiggling in warm darkness.

And far and away and above came the muted and then the whining arguments about the season of the year, the temperature, colds, winter hardly over, or spring hardly over, rather.

But this, said the whining voices, the insistent voices, was green summer, this was the day of the sun. And the feet worked their toes together and clenched the material of the socks in darkness, waiting.

There, just beyond the squeaking porch, the ferns were a green water sprinkled softly on the air.

There waited the great pool of grass with its tender heads of clover and its devil weed, with its old acorns hidden, with its ant civilizations. It was toward this grass country that the feet were slowly inching.

As the body of a boy on a sweltering July day yearns toward swimming holes, so the feet are drawn to oceans of oak-cooled grass and seas of minted clover and dew.

As the naked bodies of boys plunge like white stones and bobble like brown corks in the far country rivers, so the feet wish to plunge and swim in the summer lawns, refreshed.

Well, said a woman's voice, well. A screen door opened. All right, said the voice, all right, but if you catch your death of cold, don't come to me, sniffing.

Bang! Out the door! Over the rail! Watch the ferns! And into the lake of grass! Under the shady oaks! Off with the shoes, and now, running wet in the dew, running dry and cool under apple shade and oak shade and elm shade, a hot race over desert sidewalks, and the coolness of limes again on the far side, the touch of green ice and menthol, the feet burrowing like animals, feeling for old autumn's leaves buried deep, feeling for a year ago's burnt rose-petals, for anthills.

The pompous, nuzzling big white toe, jamming into cool dark earth, the little toes picking at milky-purple clover buds, and now, just standing, the hot feet drowning in cool tides of grass. Time enough later, to venture tenderly out on cinder drives and rocky paths where the enemy, the shattered bottles, brown and glittering white, lie waiting to test one's softened calluses. Time enough later for these marshmallow, winter-soft feet to slim themselves like Indian braves, paint themselves with colored dirts, bruise themselves with rocks and thorns.

Now, now, just the cool grass. The cool grass and a thousand other bare feet, running and running there.

The end