

Tomatoes and Stars: My Little Bradbury Moment

By Lev Neymotin
Plainview, NY

A few weeks ago, a friend gave me several tomato plants—barely alive. They were withered, weak, lying almost flat on the ground. Couldn't stand on their own. Honestly, they looked beyond help.

Still, I planted them. Gave them good fertilized soil, watered them, and left them alone. I didn't go back for a few days—not because I forgot, but because I was afraid. Afraid they'd be gone. Sometimes, it's easier not to look.

And then I remembered Bradbury's story—*The Appleseed*.

In it, there's this man—Johnny—traveling from planet to planet. The worlds he lands on are dead, airless. He wears an oxygen mask as he moves through the silence, planting trees that might—someday—create life where there was none. He doesn't stop. Doesn't look back. Because he can't bear to see a desert behind him. Can't bear the possibility that nothing is taking root. He just keeps going, planting and believing.

That story stayed with me. I read it a long time ago—but now, standing in front of those tomato plants, I realized I was living a version of it.

Eventually, I had to look. I walked out to the backyard, half-prepared for disappointment. But when I got there... the tomato plants were standing. Not tall, not strong yet—but standing on their own. The stems had straightened, the leaves had opened. Somehow, life had returned.



*Here's what I saw. My own little Bradbury Garden. No oxygen mask needed—
but the feeling? It was real. A breath of hope. A whisper that life had taken hold.
That maybe—just maybe—I had done something right.*

And in that moment, I thought again about Johnny.

At the end of Bradbury's story, Johnny finally does look back. And what he sees is not a desert, but trees—standing tall, pumping oxygen into the alien air. You can almost see the air change, shimmer, turn blue. And so, he takes off his mask. He breathes.

It's one of the most powerful endings I've ever read.

As I stood there, watching my tomatoes reach for the sun, I felt a small version of that same feeling. A kind of quiet joy. A breath of relief. As if something I'd almost given up on had whispered back, *I'm still here.*

I think many of us, in our own backyards, in quiet acts of care and hope, live out these small sci-fi stories. No rockets. Just roots. And still—they matter.