

The Venusian Invasion

By Mary Carriker

Joey Bannock walked slowly out of the school building to join the other children on the playground. He saw his older brother Frank grin at him and beckon him onto the play area. He quickened his pace, hoping that today would be different.

“Hey Joey!” Frank called as soon as he reached the group of schoolchildren. “We’re going to play capture the flag. Wanna play?”

Joey’s solemn face brightened as he answered, “Sure I do!” But just then a bird flew overhead, twittering and chirping. One of the bigger boys narrowed his eyes at Joey. “What’s that birdie saying, Joey? Is it asking why a weirdo thinks he can play with normal kids?”

Frank walked over to the bully and grabbed his shirt collar. “Stop it, Cole, do you hear?” he said loudly.

“Whatcha gonna do to me?” asked Cole saucily. “It’s not like the teachers are on your side.”

Frank’s face reddened. He knew that Cole would never get punished for being mean to Joey. “I don’t care what the teachers do to me, because I’m going to defend my brother!” He shouted. Just then one of the teachers pulled Cole and Frank apart. “Let us be peaceful towards each other,” she told them in a monotonous, unfeeling voice. Frank turned to comfort his little brother, who he knew would be upset. But Joey was gone.

Joey sat in the woods with his back to a pine tree. He truly meant to go back to school once recess was over. He just felt as though he could *not stand* another minute on the playground with his taunting schoolmates. Why was it that in all his eight years no one had loved him except for his family? Was it *that* weird to be able to understand animal speech? A little rabbit crept out of the brush and looked at Joey sympathetically. “I wonder what has happened to this forlorn human being?” he said to another rabbit. Joey allowed a smile to flit about his face. How fun it was to be able to hear the reactions animals had! Suddenly, a squawking bird rushed out from a bush. His wings beat the air, and he seemed in great distress. “The Venusians are coming!” he squawked at the top of his voice. “They are going to invade Earth! Beware! Beware!”

Joey scrambled to his feet and tried to make sense of what he had just heard. What was the bird saying? *Venusians*? Who were Venusians? The word sounded like *Venetians*. But why would people from Venice be invading America? Suddenly cold sweat beaded his forehead. Now he remembered. They had learned

about Venusians—those from Venus—in Science class. Joey began to run toward school faster than he had ever run before.

Joey reached school just as the bell sounded for the end of recess. “Miss McKinley!” he cried breathlessly, “I just learned from a bird that the Venusians plan to invade Earth!”

All the children turned and stared at Joey. He felt like he wanted to sink into the ground. “It’s true,” he whispered.

Miss McKinley eyed Joey critically for a full minute. Then she turned away. “Order the school buses to be in operation at once,” she told her assistant. “School is over for the day.”

The bewildered children knew not whether to rejoice because school had been let out early or to mourn because their planet was about to be invaded. Soundlessly Frank, Joey, and their sisters Florence, Judith, Jemima, and Paula boarded one of the buses. It was not until they reached their home that Frank finally said what he and his sisters had been thinking. “What in the world, Joey?”

“You mean, ‘what *beyond* the world,’ Frank,” his brother replied with a wry smile. I was just sitting in the woods, and this bird came out and squawked about an invasion.”

“And you’re sure you didn’t hear it wrong? because”—Frank did not finish his sentence. For just as he was opening the front door of their house the sky became crowded with weird-looking spaceships and Venusians began parachuting down to the ground.

The children tumbled into the house and screamed, “The Venusians are invading us!” Mrs. Bannock stared at them speechlessly. Then, suddenly, she screamed. The doorway was crowded with Venusians. Phosphorus, the Bannock family’s dog, yelled a challenge to the invaders.

One of the Venusians advanced into the house, but another pulled him back and slammed the door, saying “Didn’t you hear the dog, Dolan? Let him charge first; then we can enter.” Just then, Phosphorus crashed into the door and fell in a heap. The Venusians reopened the door and advanced into the house. Joey ran to the dog and began to sob. “He says his leg is broken!” he screamed. “*Why did you do this to us?*” Suddenly the room became still. Joey looked around and saw Dolan. They stared at each other. “You should be on our side of the room,” said Dolan quietly. A wicked smile crossed Joey’s face. Now he could repay everyone at school for everything they did to him . . . but no! Remorse filled his heart. Swallowing hard, he pulled himself up straight.

“Don’t hurt the Earthlings,” he said in a clear voice. “They are my friends.”