WILLIE BEA
and the Time the
MARTIANS LANDED

by VIRGINIA HAMILTON
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On the eve of Halloween in 1938, a radio play entitled *The War of the Worlds* announces that alien creatures have landed. Willie Bea and her family are among the thousands of people who believe the announcement.

Panic spreads quickly that October night. Willie Bea's town is abuzz with reports that Martians have landed at the Kelly Farm. Willie Bea's friend Toughy Clay even claims to have seen them!

Willie Bea doesn't exactly believe that Martians have landed – she thinks the aliens are from the planet Venus. The lines in Willie Bea's hand form a pattern called the "Star of Venus," and Willie Bea imagines that this is a sign that the visitors are from Venus – and that she can communicate with them.

Willie Bea convinces Toughy Clay to come with her and find the aliens. They set out on stilts, wearing capes of sheets over their Halloween costumes.
They strode the dark world, stilting. Willie Bea and Toughy Clay were out in the countryside. They were along roads, and through the fields whenever it was possible for them to get over fences.

The velveteen night and the distant, cold stars were what they could see traveling with them. They imagined they were alone on earth. Willie Bea could feel the loneliness in her heart and soul, and more than once she wished she was home.

Why'd I start this dumb, fool journey? she wondered.

They both imagined beings from another planet just out of sight in the dark.

Toughy Clay didn't dare turn around to check their backs, for fear he would see something beyond belief and fall. "You ever think what's gone happen if one of us fall off these dang stilts?" he whispered loudly to Willie Bea.
But she was thinking hard, and when she answered, it was not about one of them falling. “The evening star of Venus could be falling down on us this very minute,” she told him.

“You think so?” he said anxiously.

“Sure,” she said, “and maybe that Mars is falling down, too. They say it is red and mean, boy!”

Wonder what is really going on, she thought. And if the United States army can’t stop them space men, what will happen to us? And why come everything is so awful quiet all around?
She felt strange, as if they were being watched. She was about to warn Toughy and tell him to shut off the flashlight. The light bobbed along with them. It was a weak light, batteries wearing out. It barely lit the side of the road. But it was what they had and a comfort in the dark.

Suddenly, there was a burst of flames close to a fence in a field they were passing. The flames grew rapidly into a huge bonfire. The fire flowed up and licked a pile of brush and brambles, crackling and sizzling hotly.

A gun went off with a roar. It was such a shock, all that fire and then the shot.

"Am I hit?" Toughy cried. He lost his grip on the flashlight, but he kept his balance. "Oh, lordy, somebody shootin' at us!"
“Shhhh!” Willie Bea said. “Be quiet!”

The flashlight clattered and rolled on the road. It broke open and its light went out. They would have to leave it. There was no way to get down and then back on the stilts again.

“Halt! Who goes there!” a rasping voice yelled.

A man came toward them from the bonfire. He leaned on the fence and aimed his shotgun right at them.

“Oh-muh-god!” Toughy whimpered.

Willie Bea’s heart thudded and skipped. She lost her breath; got it back, ragged and gasping.

“It’s us. We’re only kids!” she managed to call out.

“Well, balls-a-fire! I almost ‘bout to give you some buck-shot,” said the man. “What chu kids doin’ out here?”

A woman who looked to be his wife came up beside him.

“An’ so tall—stilts!” she said.

“Don’ chu know they is Martians spreadin’ they sin all over this land?” said the farmer. “Get on in your home!”

He was a skinny farmer. There were some young kids about half Willie Bea’s age around the fire now. She didn’t recognize them or the farmer from this far side of town.

“We’re on our way now,” she hollered across. “But have you seen anything?”

“How can I see anythin’ when you make me light up muh far-er fer nothin’?” hollered the farmer. “Git on away from here ‘fore I git my dandurf up! Now git!”
Willie Bea and Toughy went, striding as fast as their legs and arms propelling the stilts would take them, their capes bouncing.

“Now!” hollered the farmer after them. His children and wife commenced shouting. “That’s the wrong way! You’re headin’ the direction of that Kelly farm. That’s where the Martians is...”

But Willie Bea and Toughy were gone. They were in the dark, invisible in the night.

Her hands and face were cold now.

So cold! she thought. Glad for the capes of sheets!

Out here where there were only cornfields, the cold seemed to sift down from the sky into the ground and come up again. Willie Bea longed to stop and just take stock of things. Her muscles were mighty sore, holding on so tightly to the stilts. Her fingers cramped her, and her legs were stiff and chilled. They were starting to ache.

“Maybe we oughtn’t to come out here,” she said softly. All was so still around them. “Toughy, maybe we ought to just go on back.”

Toughy strode ahead of her. They had slowed somewhat, for thick trees along the road blocked out the bonfire light behind them. They crossed onto a narrower gravel strip with fields on either side. Gravel was tricky beneath their stilts. Willie Bea saw that there was no fence on either side of the gravel road.

“This is a private road,” Toughy told her.

“Whose private?” she asked him.

“It’s the Kelly private,” Toughy said. “Cuts right through the corn, and they own it. Can say who walk and stride on it, too.”
Toughy had never been on the Kelly road before. But he recognized it from the years of stories he had heard about the farm.

"Are we that close? Keep your voice down," she whispered.

"Look there," Toughy said. He stood, shifting back and forth to keep his balance.

Willie Bea shifted, too. But she was better at balancing than Toughy was. Just arm pressure and flexing leg muscles was all that was necessary. And once in a while moving the stilts an inch or two. "Look at what?" she said.

"There. Come over here," Toughy said.

She came up beside him. And what she saw made her feel like someone had shut down all her tiredness. Had turned off the cold of her hands and face. She didn't realize she was shivering, but the cold had got way under the hobo costume she had made.

They were on the private Kelly road and it had risen over a hillock. At first Willie Bea looked down at the reach of land.

"Is it the ice-skating lake?" she asked in the softest voice. Who could tell anything in this deep night?

"Uh-uh," Toughy said. "I hear the lake is on the other side of the house. Here is only the fields on each side of the private road."

"Well, I'm glad of that," Willie Bea said.

She thought to look up, gazing across and beyond the black land-reach to where there had to be some sort of hill. Over there, situated high and handsome, was the biggest house Willie Bea had ever seen. It was enormous. And it was lit up like a carnival, like a birthday cake.

"Havin' a Halloween ball?" she asked in awe.

She thought she heard strains of music coming from the mansion.

"Think they just own a lot of light," Toughy said. "Think they must be listenin' to their Victrola phonograph."

They don't even know the Venus ones are here! Willie Bea thought.
“Did you hear that?” she said. “Did you hear them laughing over there, them Kellys?” she asked Toughy. Her voice was dreamy and faraway.

“No,” he said. “They don’t act like they care about Martians, though.”

“Not Martians,” Willie Bea said. “They are from Venus.”

“That’s what you said before. But how you know that?” he asked her.

“Aunt Leah read my palm and she found in it the Star of Venus. Aunt Leah says it is a sign of great good luck.”

“You sure?” Toughy asked. But he knew anything Leah Wing told was true. Everyone knew that Leah Wing was the best fortune lady ever did live among the people. And rich, like the Kellys.

“So you lookin’ for the Venus ones. So, see what they have to say to you?” Toughy asked.

Willie Bea nodded in the dark. “I don’t know what-all will happen,” she said in a misty voice. She never took her eyes from that Kelly mansion of enchantment. “But maybe it will stop the attack from them. Maybe if they see there’s somebody here that has the Star of Venus . . .” Her voice seemed to drift off on the air.

“I don’t know,” Toughy murmured. He imagined it could be true. In the deep dark of Halloween night, the Kelly farm was a magic kingdom. Invading men from Venus were boldacious monsters, close about. Watch out! Anything could be true.

“Where’d you see the monster?” Willie Bea asked. “Was it over there? You can see some big, dark trees by the light from those windows.”
Toughy shifted uneasily on his stilts. He cleared his throat, about to tell his lie again, when Willie Bea said, "Come on! We'll follow the road closer."

It was deep, dark going, and their stilts made grating sounds on the gravel. When they were down there, it didn't feel or look much different than on the rise. It was cold. The cornfields looked full of tall rows of dark.

"There's no lake that I can tell," Willie Bea said.
"I told you. Say the lake is on the other side of the house," Toughy said.
"Well, you don't have to yell," Willie Bea told him.
"I'm not yelling!" he yelled back.

They were both yelling. Noise, a deep rumbling, was coming out of the ground. Willie Bea couldn't hear herself breathe, or think.

"What's that?" she hollered at Toughy.
"Don't know. Can't tell where it is or what it is!" he hollered.

It was getting closer. Willie Bea thought she saw something. Like the blackest night moving.

"You see that?" she thought she yelled. Her mouth moved, but she couldn't hear what came out. "Toughy!" she screamed.
"Willie Bea!" he was screaming back. "Willie Bea!"

Now they could guess what the noise was. The great black dark that moved was one of the monsters. It was a rolling, ear-splitting, outlandish alien. And huge.

The thing must have turned a corner in front of them from behind the house, somehow. It had turned toward them and they saw its evil eye.

An awful, white, wicked, round eye. It could have been its heat ray, but it didn't hurt them. It was just blinding.
"Wait! I got the Star!" cried Willie Bea.

The great black dark came straight for them. And another huge blackness came on behind it. Giants as tall as houses, tall as trees, on the move.
Another one came after the second. Two of them marching, rolling behind the first. They spread out to the left of the first one. Their blinding eyes outlined the first one. Illuminated it for Willie Bea to see plainly that it was a deadly, monstrous alien.

"It's true! It's an invasion!" Toughy was yelling. "Run. Run, Willie Bea!"

Willie Bea couldn't hear him. She couldn't move. She was transfixed by the monsters. The first one's neck wasn't in the center of its body, where it should have been. It was on the right side of it! The long neck was like a wide stovepipe jutting out of its side. Its head that fitted on its neck was all V-shaped.

Suddenly, it seemed that the first monster spoke to her. She was staring into its awful eye, into its noise. The darkness moving one by one was overpowering.

All went quiet inside Willie Bea. She no longer heard the monster's roaring noise. Its sound of voice was right with her,
like it was all around in her head. It seemed to be right by her, right in her ear.

“Huh?” Willie Bea said, staring wildly into the evil eye.

“Willie Bea, I come here, too. I got here late. I was looking for you. Heard you shouting.” Spoken loud and as clear as a bell in her ear.

The white eyes of the monsters coming on held her hypnotized. She thought she told them, “Look. I hold the Star of Venus in my palm. Turn off your rays. Don’t fight. We only want to be friends!” She held up her palm for them to see.

“Willie Bea, we’d better get back. You coming back with me?”

The first monster was now to the left side of the road. Its head on the side, on its long neck, was coming right at her.

“Oh, no, I can’t go back to Venus with you!” she told it.

“You’re just scared and tired. Follow me close behind.”

The second monster was passing along beside the gravel road. Willie Bea looked up at its head.

“No! Get away!” she hollered.

Then she was backing away from the third monster. She thought its light was bearing down. “You leave me be!” She flailed her arms backward and one stilt leg slipped in the gravel. She twisted, trying to untangle herself from the foot wedges. She was falling. Something grabbed at her. She saw the last monster’s head turn in her direction. Its light was full on her. It was coming for her.

Willie Bea, falling. And something, someone had hold of her, was falling with her. She hit the ground, falling hard on part of someone. Something struck her a glancing blow on the forehead.

All went dark for Willie Bea. The dark filled with glowing comets and stars. Great planets of Venus and Mars. All such colors of worlds, pumpkin yellow and orange in a Halloween universe.
Willie Bea opened her eyes on an alien standing over her. She thought she saw its V-shaped mouth: “Willie Bea! Are you hurt?”

“No. I won’t go back with you, either,” she told it. “I like my own world.”

“You hit your head. It knocked you silly,” the alien said. Willie Bea’s head started hurting. Suddenly, she felt cold all over. Her legs were aching. Her hand with its Star felt numb as she came to.

She saw a great light. It was upon her and the someone who stood over her.

“Where . . . ?” was all she could think to say.

She heard fast footfalls on the gravel. She lifted her head and was blinded by the white monster-light. The monster made its roaring sound, but it wasn’t moving now.

“What happened?” it hollered, sounding frightened. “What are you kids doing where we are harvesting? Did we hit someone? . . . Oh, little child!”

Willie Bea saw a man in the light. He knelt beside her. “Did the combines scare you, child? We might’ve run you over!”

Willie Bea was damp and clammy from the gathering cold and mist. Tired and confused, she closed her eyes. Her insides flopped and the inky night of a dizzying universe returned.

Where a giant black cat sat on a pumpkin world. Where aliens were Kelly kings. They took away the Star in her palm. Willie Bea was so small, so unimportant. They made her polish their V-shaped crowns of gold.
MEET VIRGINIA HAMILTON

When Virginia Hamilton was a child, she loved to listen to the stories her relatives told when they got together. Some of these stories told of family history. Others were wonderful tales of mystery and magic. The stories grew and changed with each telling and were passed along from one generation to the next.

Virginia Hamilton believes the rich family storytelling in her childhood shapes her writing. "I am a teller of tales," she explains, "in part, because of the informal way I learned from Mother and her relatives...."

Hamilton often roots her books in a real event from history. She creates characters and details to make the story come alive for readers today. *Willie Bea and the Time the Martians Landed*, for example, shows how a small-town Ohio girl with an active imagination responds to an actual 1938 radio broadcast that frightened many people.

Like Willie Bea, the young Virginia Hamilton was a bright, imaginative girl from a close-knit Ohio family. Today, Hamilton is the widely praised author of many books for young readers as well as a collector of folk tales, myths, and legends.