

"From its engaging drawings to its powerful message, Idiot Genius will leave readers musing about Willa Snap's adventures long after the winding story concludes." —D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review

IDIOT GENIUS

WILLA SNAP AND THE CLOCKWERK BOY



RICHARD DUE

Illustrations by Carolyn Arcabascio

PRAISE FOR RICHARD DUE'S
MOON REALM SERIES

Moonbeam Children's Book Awards
Gold Medal Winner

THE MOON COIN

Book One / A Moon Realm Novel

"The Moon Coin is a fine and adventurous read for young adults, highly recommended."

—Midwest Book Review

"The Moon Coin is a beautifully written fantasy novel, perfect for middle graders to pore over themselves or as a bedtime story for younger kids. The descriptions of everything, from Uncle Ebb's electronic fish-bird hybrids to the fanciful creatures Lily meets in the Moon Realm, are so rich that the action instantly comes alive for the reader. The story's tension builds slowly but the excitement is constant, with Lily asking the same questions puzzling the reader. *The Moon Coin* has all the elements of a great fantasy: a unique, complex world, a battle between good and evil, and creatures that are a mix of comical and terrifying."

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"So begins a beautifully descriptive, cleverly written, intricate story, full of adventure and captivating characters, who draw you into their very lives and worlds. The wider adult reading population will no doubt be entranced by the skill of the author, Richard Due. I just cannot believe that this maturity and skill with the written word comes from a debut author."

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—S. S. Tamberrino

“Due has just become one of my favorite authors. I love that his books are smartly written. So many YA and childrens books are just junk food for the brain. This book is complex, the characters have some depth, the scenarios faced by the characters are not simple. I read this to see if it was ok for the kids, and it turned out to be a great story, perfect for family reading or for older kids/teen (or even adults) to read on their own. It’s excellent fantasy that appeals to both genders.”

—CS (Amazon Review)

“This is the 2nd book in the best new series for young and old readers. Middle graders can read for themselves but younger children will enjoy being read to. The pictures are fabulous. There is a new adventure brewing all the time. You will love meeting the characters from the different moons of the moon realm.”

—Kindle Customer

WILLA SNAP AND THE CLOCKWERK BOY

Titles Available in the Moon Realm Series

The Moon Coin

(Part One: The Rinn of Barreth)

The Dragondain

(Part Two: The Rinn of Barreth)

Richard Due

WILLA SNAP AND THE CLOCKWERK BOY

An Idiot Genius Novel



Illustrated by
Carolyn Arcabascio



Gibbering Gnome Press
A Division of Ingenious Inventions Run Amok, Ink
Huntingtown



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Ingenious Inventions Run Amok, Ink
Huntingtown, Maryland

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's overwrought imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

WillaSnap.com

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To my mom,

*who showed me how to tilt my artwork on the
refrigerator at a jaunty angle . . . because,
you know, it just looks better that way.*

Vivian Rosslyne Due
“Viv”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In order to preserve our home's fragile sanity, we established a rule to end all rules: thou shalt have no more than one all-consuming mammoth writing project at a time. It's a good rule! It's an important rule! It's a rule we've thrown out the window of a speeding MiniDirigy.

I've decided to take the low road on this one. That's right, I'm blaming everyone but myself. First, I'd like to blame my lovely wife and editor, Liz, who, after I foolishly pitched her the idea of Idiot Genius, blurted, YOU HAVE TO WRITE THAT! Next, my alpha beta readers, Meredith and Clare Prouty-Due, for begging me to *write faster, Dad!* For the heinous crime of encouragement, I blame Emily Bakely (editor), who, after reading the beginning in a coffee shop, scooped up the rest of the MS, clutched it to her chest, and ran out the door with it. For their patient scrutiny, I blame my beta readers: Jessi Wood, Jared Jiacinto, Jimmy Humphries, Bridget Evans, and Sharon Grummer. I blame Carolyn Arcabascio, the illustrator of this work, for capturing my characters so beautifully—how dare she! I blame the people who contributed IG idioms and exclamations: Tricia Rightmire, Jessica Western, Lenny Lind, Christine E.P.V. Culver, Alyson Griesse, Georgi Ridgway, Danny Paul, William Wolfgang Allen, Sari Benmeir, Gerald Smith, John Verrico, Susan Hanson Turfle. And, lastly, the cherry on this ice cream sundae of blame, John Verrico and Yeşim Nuri Clark, for helping me with Nimet's Turkish.

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A Note on the Text

When Willa Snap's first highly illegal memoir landed on my desk (I have since received two more), I must say I was intrigued—and after the first read, fearful for my life. Would proceeding with publication be wise? It was a fair question. But after a long talk with Nimet Simit, all my fears seemed to magically vanish.

As to the text, a little clarification is in order. First, I have no doubt Willa wrote her first drafts in the field, as events unfolded. However, it appears that while redrafting, she was unable to resist adding occasional asides that referenced later adventures. While these interjections at first seemed jarring, I have decided to leave them intact, as I believe the information they contain is as droll and unpredictable as Willa herself. Eğlenmek!

— E.A.P.

Somewhere South of the Flatiron
Building, Manhattan Island

“Genius is not measured by a number alone, but by the deeds and inventions it brings to our world. To possess the number alone, and to make inventions of wide-scale destruction, is not the hallmark of Genius—it is the hallmark of Idiot Genius. This is why we regard The One Who Got Away [Albert Einstein] as the patron saint of the Idiot Genius.”

—Bartholomew vos Savant, chancellor
of the Institute of Intellect, speaking
on the relevance of IQ as a number

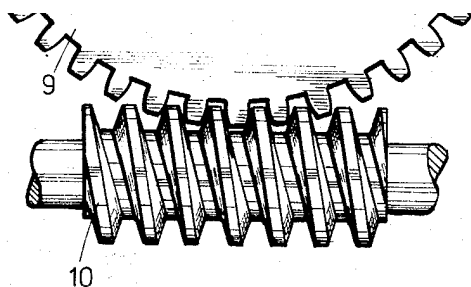
History is always older.

—Black Fez axiom





CHAPTER ONE



Cat's in the Bag

EVER wonder why some crazy scientist hasn't blown up the world? I used to wonder about it all the time. Actually, I was pretty sure my mom would be the one to do it.

But now I know better. It turns out there's a force working hard to keep the world from going KABLOOEY.

Who are these people? Wait for it:

Idiots. Yep, you heard me right.

How do I know? Well, apparently, I'm an Idiot. At least, according to the Geniuses I am. Confused? I'm not surprised. You're probably an Idiot too. Offended? You shouldn't be—I called you an Idiot, not an idiot. There's a difference, just as there's a difference between a Genius and a genius. Confused *and* offended? It gets worse. There's a third category: Idiot Genius. Those are the ones you really have to look out for. You see, Idiot Geniuses—for some unaccountable reason—are completely obsessed with “improving” the world. Maybe it's encoded in their DNA. I don't know. I didn't get those genes. I have Idiot genes, which means that for an equally unaccountable reason, I'm obsessed with sav-

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ing the world—usually from them.

I must warn you, my story isn't a pretty one: abductions, time-traveling dragons, the Order of the Black Fez, highly verbal cats, a secret invisible city, condescending robots (condescending means they talk to you like you're an Idiot; wait, is it condescending of me to explain what condescending means?), and that's just for starters.

But I digress. Digress, by the way, is a word I learned from my mother. You tend to grow a big vocabulary when someone in your family is a genius. If *your* vocabulary isn't up to speed and you're using an e-reader, feel free to look up *digress* using your built-in dictionary. However, if you're reading an ancient, smelly fire hazard of a book, then take a minute or two and go look it up in an ancient, smelly fire hazard of a dictionary, because I'm not going to waste my time explaining every single word I use just in case you don't know it. But I digress.

It all began on a Thursday at precisely 8 a.m. I was standing in the family room of our lovely two-story house, directly across the street from Squirrel Brand Park in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The same family room that, in a few minutes, I would never ever, ever see again—ever.

Squirrel Brand Park is a small park, but I miss the little place every day. When I was six, my dad swore he saw a squirrel in the park hide a tiny pair of binoculars behind its back. Dad was *so* serious! After, we laughed and laughed and laughed. We are *not* laughing anymore.

Back to the story. My mother had kept me out of school that day so I could attend her big lecture at the Hall of Speculative Sci-

CAT'S IN THE BAG

ence at MIT. MIT is a university in Cambridge, across the Charles River from Boston. Every month they pick someone to give a talk on an invention that could change the world. That month, they'd chosen my mom.

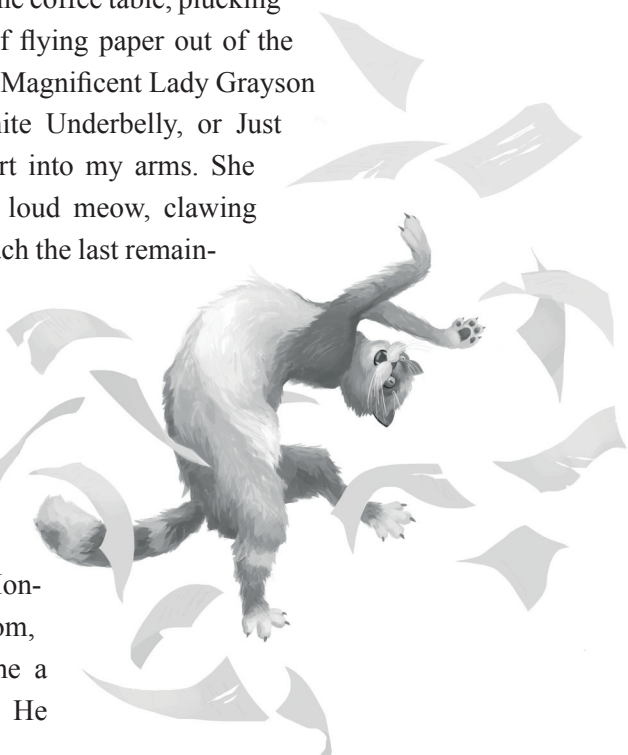
We were due at the hall in less than an hour, and my cat, the Magnificent Lady Grayson of the Silky White Underbelly, or Just Grayson for Short, was mixing up my mother's speaking notes by employing her claws to simulate a Cuisinart. Shredded papers were flying everywhere.

"Willamina Gilbert Snap! Get control of your cat!" screamed my mother.

I ran over to the coffee table, plucking bits and pieces of flying paper out of the air, and lifted the Magnificent Lady Grayson of the Silky White Underbelly, or Just Grayson for Short into my arms. She protested with a loud meow, clawing desperately to reach the last remaining unshredded note.

That's when

my father walked into the room. "Honey," he said to Mom, "can you give me a hand with this?" He



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was trying to tie his tie, which he should know better than to try and do by himself. If you haven't already guessed, he's an Idiot, too.

My dad's a fun dad. Kindly eyes, quick to smile, built like every guy you ever saw on a pre-steroids baseball card—how did all those guys hit so many home runs when they were so skinny? He doesn't talk down to me. He takes me out to ball games and museums and parks when Mom's busy in her laboratory all weekend, but he's not exactly what you'd call brilliant. Unless he's got a wrench in his hand and a bunch of pipes to play with, which is convenient since he's a plumber by trade. Not that he really has to work or anything, except when Mom loses one of her paychecks, which happens kind of often. She uses them as bookmarks, or writes grocery lists on them. Once, we found one in the freezer. It's like she doesn't understand how money works.

Grayson plunged her claws deep into my shoulders. The resulting bolts of pain loosened my grip. Out she flew from my arms. In a single bound she crossed the room and plastered her face against the front window, paws spread-eagled on the glass.

"What's the matter with you—"

She glanced over her shoulder at me, a look of horror on her fluffy face. That's when the doorbell rang.

"I'll get it," said my mother, finishing up my father's tie.

As my mother made her way to the door, I watched Grayson's eyes dart back and forth between whoever was outside and Mom. The cat sprang into action, racing up the back of a chair and leaping into the air. (This wasn't the first time I'd witnessed this kind of behavior. The Magnificent Lady Grayson of the Silky White Underbelly, or Just Grayson for Short arrived on our doorstep us-

CAT'S IN THE BAG

ing much the same maneuver, only she was swinging off a nearby tree branch the day she tumbled into our home. If you told me she was a runaway from a flying trapeze circus family, I would say to you: ya think?) Lucky for Mom, I anticipated this, catching Grayson and balling her up in a jacket before she could land on my mom's head. I dropped to the floor, tied the arms in a knot and—voilà!—instant bagged cat.

My mom looks like one of those movie stars from way back. Today, for example, she'd styled her blonde hair in a sleek updo and was wearing a white swing skirt with a wide red belt and a short red bolero jacket covered with big white polka dots. It's the kind of outfit that makes strangers stare and mumble. So whenever she answers the door and I want to know what's what, I stand right next to her. It's the only way to get the firsthand scoop.

"Good morning," said a woman wearing a black fez emblazoned with a big red *G*. "My name is Heather Peaceout, and I'm with the I.O.I. Would you be Dr. Audrey Snap?" This lady was *not* mumbling.

Except for the bright red tassel attached to the top of her fez, she was dressed all in black. Black clothes, black fingernail polish, black sunglasses. She wore no makeup that I could detect, a plus in my book. If she hadn't been standing so close to my mother, I would have said she looked pretty.

"Can I help you?" Mom asked.

"Are you Dr. Audrey Snap, inventor of the pac-a-purse?" persisted Heather.

"Yes, that's me. Say, that's an unusual style of fez you're wearing, isn't it?" Grayson began struggling inside the jacket like she was warming up for an Olympic gymnastics routine. "You say

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you're with the eye-oh-eye?"

"Yes, the Institute of Intellect. It's a private concern."

Grayson growled loudly. Heather, suddenly alert, dipped her chin and peered over her sunglasses at the growling jacket in my arms. Her eyes were sky blue, and unruly tufts of blonde hair rimmed her fez. I looked down at the squirming bundle and made a *this couldn't be helped* face. Heather gave me a wink and pushed her sunglasses back into place. All business, she tapped her wrist, and a computer thingy strapped to her forearm appeared out of thin air.

"Totally bean!" I whispered. Mom and I say that when we see something unthinkable amazing.

Reading from her computer thingy, she asked, "Are you still planning to give your talk today at 9 a.m. in the Hall of Speculative Science at MIT?"

"Are you with the press?" asked Mom coyly.

"No. I'm with the Institute of Intellect. Don't you . . . remember?"

Mom flinched and touched her hand to her forehead, the way she does when one of her headaches is coming on. "I'm afraid I really don't have the time—"

"One quick question," said Heather. "Then I'll be out of your hair forever." This is standard Black Fez procedure, designed to plant an image in your brain of them walking away. This dramatically reduces the chances of you instead imagining something unpleasant, like being tasered, or hit with a tranquilizer dart, or rolled up in the rug you're standing on and carried off. "Is it true that the principal technology behind your device can be easily scaled up?"

Mom brightened at the mention of her invention. "Why, yes.

CAT'S IN THE BAG

That's the beauty of it, you see. Because my discovery uses a heretofore little-understood quirk of quantum mechanics—"

Heather held up her hand. "One more question. Could it be used on something as large as a city?"

My mother placed a finger next to the adorable dimple on her chin and thought for a moment. "Well, I suppose . . . but all I want to use it for is a purse! You see, I'm always leaving something at home that I wish I hadn't." Heather examined her fingernails and waited for my mother to stop talking. "And so one day I thought if only I could store everything I wanted in my purse, then I'd always have it. Get it?" Mom was excited. Geniuses always get excited when they're explaining how something they invented will change the world for the better.

Heather looked bored. "I see. One final question. If this new technology of yours were used on say, oh, Washington, D.C., what would happen to the city during the time that it was . . . in the purse?"

My mother gave Heather a funny look. "That's crazy! Who would want to carry around an entire city in her purse!"

Heather looked at me to see if Mom might be kidding. I sighed and shook my head.

"Please, ma'am, what would happen to the city?"

"Well, it would exist inside the purse, of course." Heather clearly wanted more. You see, the problem is that geniuses—both capital G and small g—either think you understand everything they've said as perfectly as they do, or that you're as dumb as dirt. It's one of their biggest flaws. "In a perfect state of stasis until it was taken out again," added my mother, now getting a little annoyed.

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“I see. One final, final question. And *please*, I beg of you, think *very* carefully before you answer. All right?”

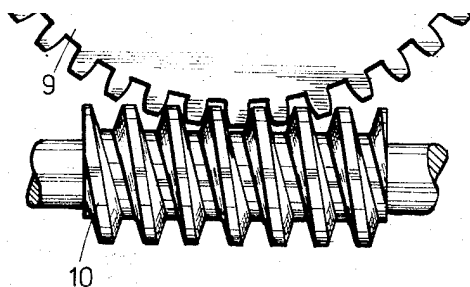
“O-kaaaay.” My mother was now using the voice she reserves for kindergarteners and puppies.

“Do you see *any* problems with that?”

I knew what Heather wanted to hear. Dad, listening from the living room, knew what Heather wanted to hear. Heck, from the gyrations going on inside my coat, you’d think even Grayson knew what Heather wanted to hear.

I often wonder, if Mom had had an “aha!” moment that day, would that have called off the abduction? Lucky for me, she snorted out a laugh and said, “Do you mean like . . . would fewer bad laws be passed?”

CHAPTER TWO



Abduction!

MOM closed the door. The Magnificent Lady Grayson of the Silky White Underbelly, or Just Grayson for Short went limp inside my jacket.

“Fez is kind of a funny word, isn’t it?” I asked.

“It’s a type of hat.”

“I know, but where does it come from?” My mom’s an instant-on dictionary. Watch and learn.

“Well,” she began. “Let’s see. One day in 980 CE, in a brilliant piece of marketing, a clever haberdasher decided to hawk his new hat to a bunch of students. Not only did it turn out to be a flashy fashion statement, but it was also instantly associated with braininess. Before you could say Judah ben David Hayyuj, the entire north coast of Africa was wearing them.”

“Let me guess, the hatmaker’s name was Fez?”

“Noooo,” she said, as if what I’d said would have actually been funny if only I had more brainpower than a canary. “But the city he lived in was.”

“There’s a city named after a hat?”

CHAPTER TWO

My mom laughed. “I can see how you might think that, but no. The city of Fez was doing plenty well all on its own long before the hat came along.”

“What do you think that big red G stood for?”

“That I don’t know. But I do know that, traditionally, a woman’s fez is smaller than the one she was wearing. And they’re usually colored a shade of red made from a particular berry that, for a very long time, Fez held a monopoly on.”

“More great marketing!” Geniuses love it when you pipe up and show that you’ve been paying attention.

“Yes! But all that changed after synthetic aniline dyes were invented in the nineteenth century.” Sadly, geniuses never know when to stop explaining stuff. “The shade of red made from that berry represents the supreme height of practical wisdom. Isn’t that fascinating?”

“Erm, not so much.”

“You know, honey,” said Dad, scratching his head. “That woman did kind of have a point.”

“How’s that, dear?”

“Well, the whole bit about what could happen if you applied your invention to something as large as a city. I mean, call me crazy, but I think a lot of people would probably get a little antsy about being tossed in stasis for a week. Don’t you think?”

Mom dismissed Dad’s concerns with a wave of her hand. “Don’t be silly. That woman was being kooky.”

“But Mom,” I said, jumping in, “don’t you think placing millions of people’s lives on hold could be confusing? Yay, it’s Tuesday! Whoa! Now it’s Thursday! Hey, where did Wednesday go?”

“But that would never happen!” she insisted. “It’s for a purse.”

ABDUCTION!

I looked at Dad. “She’s not getting it. Why isn’t she getting it?”

“Hey, guys! Lighten up, will ya?” said Mom. “Who’s the genius in the family?”

“You are,” Dad and I said dejectedly. Geniuses have been using this technique on Idiots for centuries, and with good reason—it’s devastatingly effective.

Before we left for the lecture, I placed the jacket containing the Magnificent Lady Grayson of the Silky White Underbelly, or Just Grayson for Short on the living room floor, loosened the arms a bit, and ran for it. The instant I was out of the house, my dad slammed the door shut and peeked through a little porthole of a window high up on the door.

“Did she get out?” I asked.

Dad frowned. “Are you sure she was still in the jacket?”

“Positive. Can I see?”

Dad lifted me up. Sure enough, there was the empty jacket, but no sign of Grayson. Then, all of a sudden, I heard a gallop, followed by silence. A second later, Grayson’s face appeared plastered to the other side of the little window. As she slowly sank from view, she let out a long, plaintive meow. Her claws sounded like nails on a chalkboard.

“Ooh! Looks like I’m going to be painting this weekend!” I said.

Dad rearranged some of his tools and plumbing supplies so I could sit in the back of his work van. Just as we were pulling out of the driveway, I heard a loud thump on the roof but didn’t think anything of it. Later, I would learn that Grayson had run upstairs

CHAPTER TWO

to Mom's laboratory, hurled a glass beaker through a window, and then launched herself into the big maple tree out front. From there, she leapt for it, attaching herself to the big snapping fingers on the van's roof. (Get it? *Snap!* Snapping fingers? Our last name is Snap? Try and keep up.)

We didn't discover Grayson until after we'd parked near MIT. Dad gave her a poke. She was like a frozen furry statue. "Should we leave her up there?"

He wasn't serious . . . I'm pretty sure.

"Um, can you get her down?" I asked.

He pried her from the giant thumb while I dumped out one of his tool bags and held it open.

"If you don't want to lose her, I suggest you don't open that bag again until we're back home," he cautioned.

But we weren't ever going home, and that's how Grayson ended up being with us the day we were abducted.

The Hall of Speculative Science was smaller than I'd imagined. It consisted of a podium and about thirty folding chairs. A crisp-looking woman sat my father and me in the wings behind a little curtain, like she didn't want us to be seen or heard. Dad pulled a book out of his pocket. He's a voracious reader: mysteries, historical fiction, memoirs, fantasy, plays, science fiction, you name it.

Right at nine o'clock, Mom started her presentation to a full house. I'd seen her rehearse it a bunch of times. It was full of boring scientific jargon that I couldn't pretend to understand. After what felt like an hour—okay, maybe it was only five minutes—I peeked out into the audience for the thousandth time and noticed a man in black sunglasses, dressed all in black, and wearing, you

ABDUCTION!

guessed it, a black fez with a big red *G* emblazoned on its front. I tried to get my dad's attention, but he was too into his book. The next time I looked, there were five more black fezzes, all in the front row. As an experiment, I looked away really, really quickly, then looked back. There was another one! I looked away and then back three times fast. *Fip-fip-fip!* Now there were ten black fezzes in the audience. The most disturbing part, though, was that I couldn't figure out how the normal people were disappearing.

By the time Mom finished her presentation and everyone in the room stood up to clap, they were *all* wearing black fezzes, most with red tassels, but a few with black.

Walking back to the car, Mom couldn't stop talking. "I think they liked it!"

"Um, Mom? Did you notice anything strange about the audience?"

"Strange? Not that I remember. But I really think they liked it!"

"You were great, honey," said Dad, reading and walking at the same time.

Then an odd thing happened.

"Hey," I said. "Isn't that Heather?" Dad's tool bag growled.

The light changed and we started walking toward each other.

It was Heather all right. I looked around. Somehow, we were the only people on the street.

"Maybe she wants to interview you again," said Dad hopefully.

But she didn't. As we met, she raised her arm and threw something to the ground. There was a flash, followed by a weird, low-frequency noise. A shimmering bubble seemed to grow around us,

CHAPTER TWO

first ten feet around, then twenty, then thirty. Then a whole lot of things happened at once. A few feet to our right, a strange-looking bus appeared out of thin air. Big purple letters scrolled across a screen on its side: “E-X-P-R-E-S-S T-R-A-N-S-P-O-R-T-A—” Its doors flew open, and people in black fezzes poured out and surrounded us. One of them, looking at his wrist, announced, “Let’s move it, people. Fifty-five seconds to temporal harmony!”

In a bored monotone, Heather announced, “Do *not* attempt to leave the time-bubble. If you attempt to leave the bubble, terrible things will happen to you. Remain calm. You’ve done nothing wrong.” *Done nothing wrong?* The Black Fez tell lies like this *all* the time. “We’re simply relocating you under the Revised Planet Safety Act of 1926. Do not panic. Please enter the transport peacefully. I repeat, don’t panic.”

“Forty-five seconds,” called out the timekeeper.

My Idiot father threw his hands in the air. “I always knew something like this would happen!”

Mom rested her hands on her hips and gave him her best *Oh, really!* look.

“Oh, come on, Dad!” I said. “You did *not* see this one coming!”

Mom pointed at me. “From the mouths of babes,” she said.

“Snaps!” said Heather, snapping out of the monotone. “I’m not joking around here! Please enter the transport—”

“Thirty seconds!”

“I most certainly *did* see this coming!” said my dad hysterically. “Since before we were married! I would say ‘Just promise me you aren’t going to blow up the world one day by accident. Can you *just* promise me that?’”

ABDUCTION!

The Black Fez got all extra agitated. A particularly twitchy-looking one pointed at Mom and started shouting. “Code Tesla! Code Tesla!”

Heather made a growling noise. “Bhattarai, Castillo, get Little Boy Blue here into the transport. And make sure no satellite strike-forces are being called down on this location, will you?”

“Twenty seconds!” called the timekeeper.

“Last warning, Snaps!” shouted Heather.

I looked at Mom incredulously. “Hey, I wasn’t trying to defend you! I was pointing out how incredibly unlikely it was that Dad could have possibly seen this *exact* thing coming! I mean, people running around in black fezzes, an invisible bus—what are the odds!”

Mom opened her purse and pulled out a box of tissues. “I hate it when you two gang up on me.”

The world outside the bubble wobbled.

“We’re losing bubble integrity!” someone shouted.

“Ten seconds!”

“All right, round ’em up,” ordered Heather.

“Aw, honey!” said Dad, taking Mom in his arms. “I’m so sorry.”

“Me too,” I added, joining the group hug.

The Black Fez converged on us all at once, whisking us into the transport and down a wide aisle between facing seats. Doors slammed shut. Outside, in the window of the beloved Cambridge cafe $E = \text{More Caffeine}^2$, our reflection wavered and vanished. It was like we’d gone invisible or something.

“5 . . 4 . . 3 . . 2 . .” counted the timekeeper.

The bubble outside started collapsing.

“Henderson!” Heather yelled to the driver. “Punch it!”