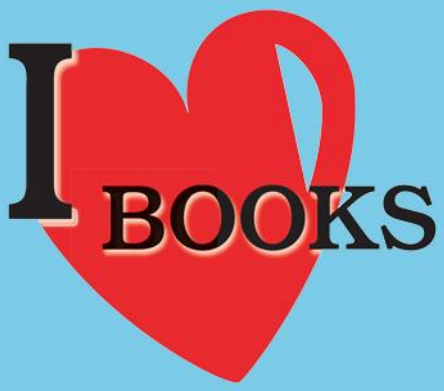


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Invisible Inc.

Written by

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Illustrated by

Jim Field

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To Ruben - go, Mango!
Steve Cole

For Tony
Jim Field

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Have you noticed

...how no one ever goes to the toilet in action stories?

Secret agents never arrive at a glamorous hotel busting for a wee.

Batman's never got diarrhoea when the bat signal goes up.

And in spooky tales no one ever gets so scared that they stop the action for a loo break. You'd think the characters would be wetting themselves throughout – but no!

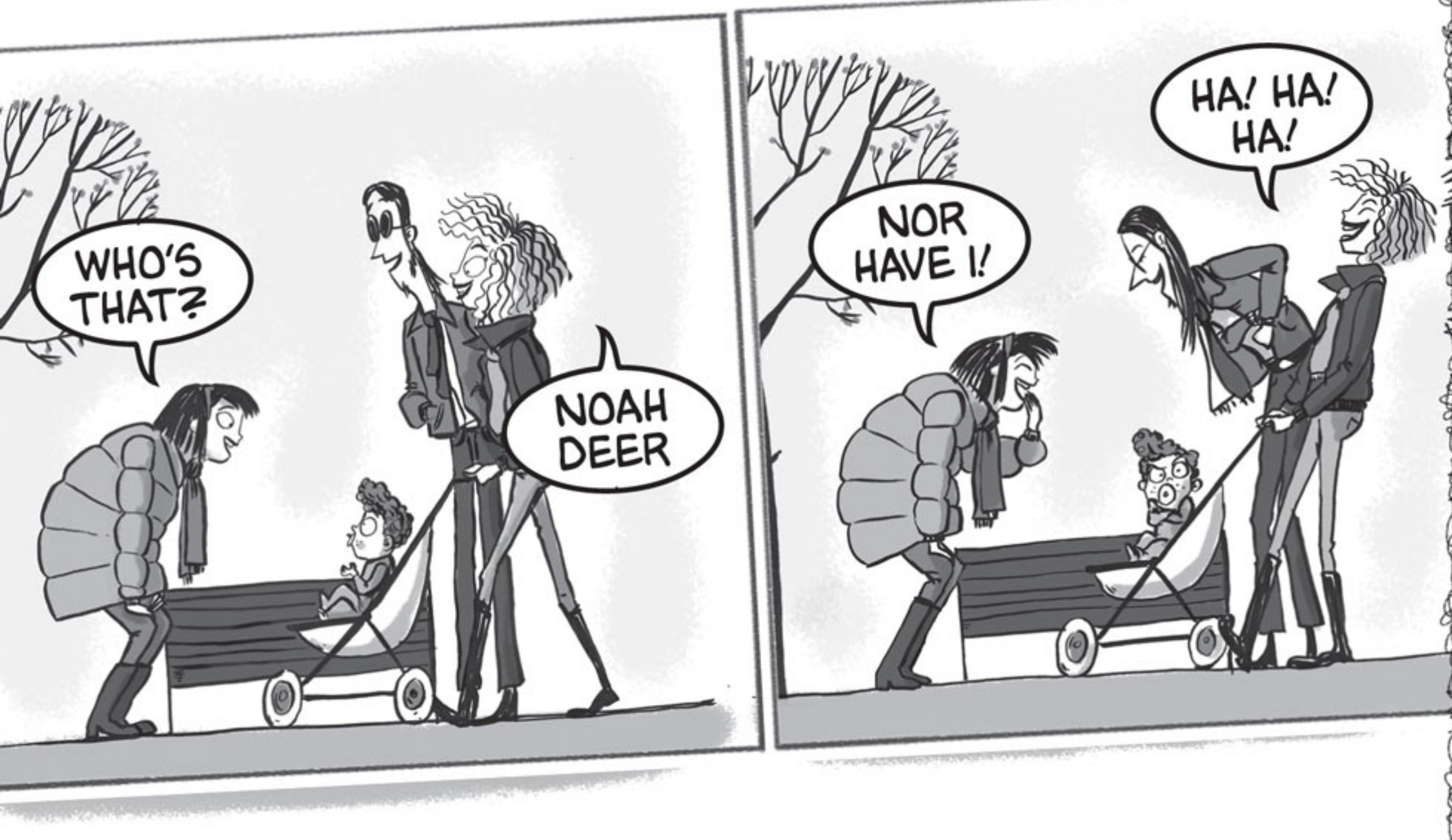
Why is that?

No idea.

Or to put it in a picture:



That's me. Noah Deer. Sounds like 'No Idea' – get it? My parents' attempt at a brilliant joke. Perfect for so many occasions, such as:



Ahh, how Mum and Dad must have laughed about my name, before they grew to hate each other and break up when I was small!

Anyway, I always thought that if I ever wrote an action story, I would keep it real and mention how many times the hero went to the toilet when it wasn't necessary to the plot (or to set up a comedy death).

Then one day my life became an action story.

And it's been tough. In all kinds of ways. Although, weirdly, remembering when I went to the toilet wasn't one of them – as you'll find out.

Can't wait, eh?

Come on, turn the page already!

CHAPTER ONE

Haunted by a Tin of Beans

I was just washing my hands after my morning wake-up wee (see? Nothing glossed over) when I heard something downstairs.

It sounded like someone was throwing stuff around the living room.

"Mum?" I called. She was the only one in – it was just me and her living in that creepy old house – but I didn't expect her to answer. Mum kind of lives in her lab in the basement. She doesn't hear a thing down there with her music on.



Mum is an inventor and, when she gets on the scent of a discovery, that's it. She seems to forget I'm even here – just leaves a supply of baked beans on the kitchen worktop so I can feed myself while she's working.

Anyway, I could still hear weird stuff downstairs. Glass breaking. Things banging against the wall.

We've got burglars! I thought. *Or . . . more likely . . .*

Ghosts!

I was glad that I'd just emptied my bladder.

It may sound crazy, but, since we'd moved into our latest house at the start of the summer holidays, I had the weirdest feeling that I was being watched. The fact that our new house was an old, dark, creepy Victorian lodge – in the overgrown grounds of an old, even darker and creepier abandoned stately home – made things worse, as you can imagine. I was just glad the place had a toilet upstairs and downstairs, so a 'wee of fear' was always an option.

But yes. Invisible things, watching me. That was the feeling I got from this place.

I crept slowly down the stairs, hoping I'd meet Mum on her way up from her lab to investigate who – or what –

was wrecking the living room. But, as I peeped through the open doorway, I realised that would be difficult.

Because Mum was wrecking the living room.

"Yeahhhhh!" Dressed in her usual skinny blue jeans and white leather lab coat, she was dancing about with a bulging bin bag over her shoulder. There was rubbish all over the floor, and she wasn't stopping there: "Taste my slop, sofa cushions!" She reached into the bag, pulled out a half-empty Pot Noodle and chucked it onto the sofa. "Oh, okay, armchair, you wanna piece of this action?"

I wish I could say I was shocked and dismayed by my mother's behaviour but, to be honest, she's often like this. She calls it 'not pandering to society's expectations of a woman in her forties'. I call it 'totally embarrassing'.

I watched her empty a tin of paint over the log basket. "Ha, now how about you, TV?"

"STEP AWAY FROM THE TELEVISION!"

I threw myself in front of it. With Mum working late every night, the telly was all I had for company; I wasn't about to let it get coated in something gunky. "Mum, please, calm down. I know you've been working hard—"

"Hard?" she cried. "You have no idea!"

"No, YOU have Noah Deer," I corrected her (punning cunningly). "I'm your son, remember? You have a son, Mum, and you're freaking him out."

"Don't be afraid, darling. I have to make the mess so that I can get rid of it!" She grinned at me, brown eyes wide and staring. "And I will, just you wait. **I'm going to get rid of ALL the rubbish!"**

Sometimes I have to remind myself who's the parent and who's the child. "Mum," I said patiently, "throwing it round the house is not getting rid of it. Now why don't I get you some water?"

"Water's no good!" Mum cried. "Get me something that will stain!"

"What?"

"Bring some red wine!"

"Mum, maybe you've had too much red wine already?"

"I haven't touched a drop!" Mum was skipping round the room, dancing with her smelly bin bag. "But if this thing works, I'm going to crack open the champagne!"

Man, she'd really flipped this time. Since the TV no longer seemed in imminent danger, I figured it was best to

fetch that glass of water after all and hope it might calm Mum down a little.

So I headed through the draughty hall towards the kitchen. How I hated that old, cold kitchen with its freezing slate floor and big, black-leaded oven thing and the wooden worktops crowded with bean tins and . . .

I froze.

Stared.

Felt hairs stand up on the back of my neck and chills prickle my spine.

On the worktop, before my startled eyes, a tin of beans was shaking in a sinister fashion.

Suddenly it floated into the air and bobbed towards me . . .

