

# THE COUPON

*It's a record.*

BY JUDY HELFRICH

I sat at Roy and Emmy's kitchen table, three cups of coffee between us, and mentally cursed my editor. *Alien sighting*. That's what he'd said with a twinkle in his eye. *That story's all yours, kid*.

"We was out for our morning constitutional," Roy said to me. "Just like every day since I got canned. They called it mandatory retirement, but we don't sugarcoat it, do we, Mother?"

"Only thing gets sugarcoated 'round here is cookies," Emmy said.

"Right," Roy said. "So there we was, down by the river, and damn if two of them Kardashians don't wander up."

I choked on my coffee. "Karda —? Wait. You must mean Cardassians: the aliens on *Star Trek*." It all made sense. "There's a convention in town."

"No, no, no." Roy waved his hand. "Them Kardashians. What's their names, Mother?"

"Pfft. Kit and Kaboodle, for all I know."

"But it wasn't really them," said Roy. "Them aliens been monitoring our TV and Twitters from another dimension — you believe that? And they figure these Kardashians is the leaders!"

Emmy giggled.

"So they took on their form." Roy guffawed. "They figured we'd be more likely to give 'em what they want!"

I blinked.

"What dimension was they from, Mother?"

"Eighth," said Emmy.

"You sure it wasn't ninth?"

"Eighth." She patted his knee.

"Anyhow, they says we can't see 'em in their real form, 'cause we can't see nothing in their dimension. They can see us, 'cause our dimension is inside theirs, get it?"

"Right..."

"You writing this down?"

I wrote: *Notify Roy and Emmy's son re: institutionalizing parents.*

"Don't you want to know what they wanted?" Roy turned to Emmy. "Some reporter. I gotta ask all the questions."

"Look, Roy," I said. "This is all very amusing, but —"

"Kitty litter!" Roy boomed.

"What?"

"Damn if they don't want the kitty litter!"

I forced a smile.

"They had a coupon," Emmy said.

"A coupon with a map showing 'em how to

get to Earth, advertising: 'Big sale on kitty litter.' 'Cept they didn't call it that. What'd they call it, Mother?"

"Silica. They got a short-age."

"Well me and Mother, we was just at the Walmart and we'd picked us up a couple boxes seein' as Mother here is crazy for that hairball she calls Hubert."

Said hairball slunk into the kitchen and sharpened his claws on my leg.

"And I'm thinkin', if I give them aliens both boxes, then I gotta go into town again, seein' as Hubert here goes through kitty litter like nobody's business."

Emmy put her hand over her mouth and tittered.

"So I made 'em an offer," Roy said. "Well, them aliens start singing to each other like they're Kenny and Dolly. Except they ain't just Kenny and Dolly; they're Kenny and Dolly and the whole damn orchestra, 'cause that's their language: music. Notes is their alphabet; that's what they said. Goddamn if it wasn't like being at the Grand Ol' Opry, but they was just havin' themselves a conversation!"

I rubbed my forehead.

"I talked 'em down to one box." He slapped his thigh. "You believe that?"

"Roy. Emmy. I think a couple of convention-goers were having you on."

"Nup," said Roy. "They was the real deal."

"I don't suppose you have proof?"

"Yep," said Roy. "We got the coupon."

I rubbed my eyes. This should be good.

"We didn't call the FBI because we know how they operate. We watched *The X-Files*. Trust no one, right, Mother?"

"But we trust you." She patted my hand. "Well, I remember when you was born. Your momma was worried about them ears of yours. But they don't stick out at all." She eyed me. "Hardly."

"See, the coupon's got music on it," said Roy. That's what brought them aliens here. They played that coupon and it sang in their

language: 'Come on down to Earth. Big sale on kitty litter.'"

"Silica," said Emmy.

"Right, silica. So

we gave 'em the kitty litter, and they gave us the coupon. Everybody's happy."

"It's real nice, that coupon," said Emmy.

"I got it right here." Roy reached back and pulled a cookie tin from the kitchen counter.

I half-expected a rubber snake to come flying out; my editor was obviously having a laugh at my expense.

Empty.

I stood up. "I really need to be going."

"Hang on. Where'd that coupon get off to, Emmy?"

Emmy toddled over to an ancient turntable and began flipping through records. "Maybe it's here. Let's see... Merle Haggard... Loretta Lynn..."

"We gave that coupon a spin. Long-hair stuff, mostly. Don't hold a candle to Willie Nelson."

"Wait," I said. "This coupon. It's a record?"

"Yep. A gold record."

"... Hank Williams... Johnny Cash..."

It couldn't be. "You mean it sold a lot of copies — it's not actually gold?"

"As gold as your cousin Billy's front tooth."

"... Charlie Pride... Patsy Cline. Here it is," Emmy said. "Smack dab between Waylon and Willie!"

My pen clattered to the floor as Emmy brandished a gold record emblazoned with symbols depicting the hydrogen atom, the location of our Sun and binary code. It was one of two golden records carried by the Voyager probes in 1977, last seen heading for interstellar space. I dropped into my chair.

"Want to hear it?" asked Emmy.

"I ain't partial to that long-hair stuff," said Roy. "Put Willie on."

"First contact," I breathed. "Humanity missed out on *first contact*."

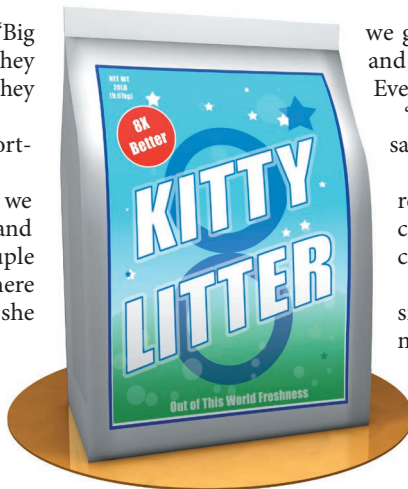
"Nup," Roy said. "They'll be back."

I stared at him.

"They got another coupon." ■

**Judy Helfrich** grew up on the Canadian prairie where long stretches of nothing persisted in at least four dimensions. She enjoys loading Linux on unsuspecting computers. More at [helfrich.ca](http://helfrich.ca).

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