

Chapter Four (more or less)

The floor that should not have been

YYY

The walk back to his apartment was considerably longer than Arthur normally took. He was forced to stop a number of times just to reflect on the day's events, and it occurred to him that the only word to describe them was fantastical. His Aunt would have been only mildly pleased with his choice. She would have favoured *incredible* instead.

As Arthur rounded the corner to his apartment block, he decided that he might try the glasses again. He waited until he was decently in the lobby and certain that he was alone before he tried them on again. Nothing looked different at first, but just as he was about to walk up the first flight of stairs, Arthur noticed that there seemed to be more than the usual number of mailboxes on the wall. The numerals on the boxes weren't Arabic, but a combination of letters and symbols that he couldn't make out. They clearly weren't Roman numerals, as Arthur was quite familiar with those, but they reminded him of something very ancient. It was a curious detail, but Arthur thought it could wait. He needed tea.

Arthur had moved into the building twelve years ago. He had wanted to rent an apartment on the fourth floor, but these were slightly more expensive than his budget would allow, so he had settled for the third floor. And for those twelve years, Arthur had walked up and down those thirty-nine steps each and every day, in precisely the same way. Today would be different.

As Arthur finished climbing what should have been the final few steps to his floor, he noticed something was amiss. The door did not look at all as it should. Despite being almost identical to his landing door in almost every way, there was one crucial difference. The number was wrong. In fact, it wasn't a number at all, but a curious symbol that Arthur could not seem to decipher, though he did have the niggling feeling that he had seen it before. It dawned on him that it looked very similar in nature to



the symbols on the mailboxes he has just passed in the lobby. It looked to be three "Y's" in sequence, with a bar across the top of them. He was certain that he had seen these before, but he just couldn't place where, no matter how much he squinted at them and tilted his head. Arthur had a habit of doing this when faced with a problem he couldn't solve. It was his theory that if he squinted his eyes and tilted his head at just the right angle, he would increase the probability of coming up with an answer. It seldom worked.

He paused in front of the door for what seemed like an eternity before screwing up his courage enough to open it. When he finally walked through the door and into the hall, he was met with disappointment. He had expected something grand, but instead, what he saw was a completely common hallway that looked almost exactly as his own, with the only marked difference being the various apartment doors. Each had symbols that seemed to match the mailboxes. Arthur stood there for a few moments to make absolutely certain he was alone, before he thought it was safe enough to explore his discovery.

Slowly, he stole down the hall, looking at every detail, trying to find something, anything that would give him an indication as to why this floor was in what seemed to be the wrong place. As Arthur was scanning the hall, what he feared most at that moment happened, a door at the far end of the hall, opened and a woman in her early forties walked out. At first, she didn't even notice Arthur as she walked by, but after she had passed him, she paused, turned around, and stared at Arthur with a curiously concerned look in her face. It was the same look his aunt had given him every time he surprised her by saying something accidentally witty.

Arthur ran through several options in his mind and settled on "hello".

The woman, looking rather flustered, looked around furtively and then simply ran off, leaving Arthur to add this encounter to the increasing longer list of things he could not figure out. He decided he would return to the stairwell and go up an additional flight.

When Arthur had ascended the next flight, things looked familiar once again. Here was the old, familiar door to his floor, albeit, in entirely the wrong place. Although it said third floor, it was clearly the fourth.

"This isn't right..." thought Arthur. Looking back, Arthur would realize that what passed through his mind at that precise moment was not very profound and certainly did not fit the magnitude of the moment, but that was the best he could muster given the day's events. It was at this moment that things had begun to really hit Arthur. An entire floor had appeared out of thin air between the second and third floors of his apartment building.

"That's impossible", thought Arthur. This observation was not much better than his earlier one. He clearly needed something stronger than tea to settle his nerves. Unfortunately, tea was all he had. Besides, it was too early in the day for anything stronger.

By the time Arthur reached the door to his own apartment, he had begun to feel a bit wobbly. He decided that tea would wait and headed to his armchair without even hanging up his coat. Rather, he just dropped it on the floor under the hook and sat down, utterly deflated. He had never, in the twelve years he had lived in this apartment, failed to hang his coat on the same hook and in the same manner, each and every day. Arthur was clearly not himself today.

Arthur reached his chair with the last of his resolve, and proceeded to melt into it. He had officially had enough. In an almost automatic movement, he then did something he had never done before. He removed his wristwatch and draped it over the left armrest. While this would seem a perfectly ordinary act for anyone else, it was completely out of character for Arthur. You see, Arthur was a man of fastidious routine and he always removed his watch while in his bedroom. That way he could place it in a jewelry tray on his dresser. This departure from routine would later prove to be very fortuitous, though Arthur did not know this at the time. As he shifted in his chair, the watch slipped between the armrest and the cushion, working its way deep into the chair.

He awoke the next morning as the sun crept into the window. It was the warmth of the rays hitting Arthur's eyelids that did it. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair for a few moments before he realized that he had not actually gone to bed last night. In fact, he had not stirred from the moment he collapsed into it and this was confirmed by the crick in his neck.

Checking the clock, Arthur realized that he had just enough time to get cleaned up and get to work if he did without breakfast. Having taken yesterday off sick, he wasn't going to risk another. It did occur to Arthur, if only for a moment, that there was a very good chance that no one would notice if he did skip work for a second day, but this thought only briefly flitted through his mind before it was gone.

Although Arthur was willing to forgo breakfast, he was not willing to forgo a cup of tea.

Sadly, Arthur did not have the time to make a proper cup of tea this morning, so he did the unthinkable and tossed a single tea bag in his cup and covered it with boiling water. He even forgot to remove the bag before adding the milk, and completely forgot the sugar. After a few mouthfuls, he put on his coat and hat and raced out the door.

Chapter Four
(the proper one)
Arthur's last day at the office

When Arthur arrived at the entrance of his building, he just stood there on the sidewalk, staring vacantly at the doors. He desperately tried to muster up enough courage to walk in. Before he had left for work this morning, Arthur had decided to forgo wearing the spectacles, so as to make his walk to work as normal as possible. Had he done so, he might have noticed the extra steps mentioned earlier. Heaven only knew what he might see and the last thing he needed was to be even more flustered. He had placed the spectacles in their case and carefully tucked them in his briefcase, wrapping them up in a white handkerchief for added safety.

With an air of determination and a spirit of resolve, Arthur walked through the door and took the elevator to his floor. Though, if you had watched Arthur walk into the building and onto the elevator, you would not have noticed anything out of the ordinary, if you had noticed anything at all about him. He looked like he did every day, though maybe with a slight sense of anticipation, as if something were about to happen.

When he arrived at his floor, Arthur did what he did every day. He walked past the receptionist, who failed to notice him as she always failed to notice him, and went to his work area. As he passed, Arthur was reminded about his previous day's encounter with Mrs. Underhill outside his apartment building. "She had noticed me," wondered Arthur aloud. He chalked up this discrepancy to his having altered his normal routine in such a dramatic fashion, and so the thought left him.

Now it is at this point that we should address what Arthur did at the *Fienstien, Mulleur & Fibble Clock and Watch Co.*. Despite Arthur's last name being on the company's letterhead, he was in no way involved in anything even remotely important with its operation. The actual running of the company was left to the partners who took over after his grandfather. As you might remember, Arthur's grandfather had started the company a good many years earlier. He had been trained as a clockmaker in Europe, and when he emigrated to America, it just made sense to continue in the trade. He had been so skilled

at his craft that a co-worker had remarked that he should start his own company. And so, the very next day, he did.

The Fibble Clock and Watch Company, as it was known in the beginning, grew over the years, proving to be quite successful. Arthur's grandfather looked for an opportunity to grow the enterprise, and so, he took on partners, Fienstien and Mulleur. Not much was known about the partners but they seemed to show up at the most opportune time and the company took off, becoming quite a concern, not only on the east coast, but internationally. The addition of partners afforded Arthur's grandfather more time to work on what he called "special projects", though no one really knew what those were.

It was not too long after the addition of the partners that Arthur's grandfather disappeared. It was rumoured that he just stood up from his desk, walked out the door, and was never seen from again, though no one was able to confirm this exactly. When the police had investigated, they had been unable to turn up even the slightest shred of evidence. The elevator had not been called to the floor. Mr. Thomas, the concierge, had not seen anything suspicious. Even the doorman had failed to see him exit the building. Thus it remained an unsolved case, filed away in a dusty cabinet in a long forgotten corner in the basement of the local precinct.

Even though Arthur carried the Fibble name, and so might be expected to have inherited at least a minor interest in his Grandfather's company, this was not the case. No one could adequately explain to Arthur why exactly this wasn't the case, but shortly before he started at the company, a team of lawyers had done their very best to do just that. The explanation was convoluted and obtuse (another word his Aunt had taught him) and very complicated, and it did very little to clear things up in his mind.

If he had not been given a clear explanation, he had at least been given a job and a very important looking desk in a not very important section of the company offices. The placement of the desk seemed like an afterthought, it being far too large for the area it occupied. In fact, it was so large that Arthur had wondered how they might have gotten it in there. This puzzled him for some time, but he finally decided that it must have been disassembled and then reassembled in the room. This hypothesis satisfied him, and he thought no more on the matter.

The desk was sort of squished into what seemed to have been at one time, a storage room, (though squished was a word of which aunt Marrion would disapproved). The room was just large enough for there to be just enough space on one side of the desk for Arthur to walk around to get to the chair. But only if he turned sideways and sort shuffled along. The only other furnishings in the room were a single oak office chair awkwardly sitting in one corner across from his desk, while the other corner held a plain coat stand made from the same wood.

The Desk was Spartan except for a few items, a green leather desk pad, pen holder, in and out boxes, and a green banker's lamp. There wasn't a phone or intercom since Arthur had no need to contact anyone. The walls were barren, apart from a company calendar hanging to the right of Arthur's desk. Every January, the old calendar was replaced by a new one, though not by Arthur.

For the past Twelve years, Arthur showed up at his building five day a week, took the elevator to the 14th floor, walked unnoticed to his work area, and signed papers. He wasn't exactly sure why he signed the papers, but he was told that it was critical that he did.

"The signing of these papers is vital to the continued operation of the company," a very stern looking man had remarked on his very first day, though truth be told, the papers were just a formality used to keep Arthur distracted and occupied. Whether he signed them or not was largely immaterial to the functioning of *The Feinstein, Mueller & Fibble Clock and Watch Company*.

So, every day, papers would arrive in the box with the brass plate titled *In Box*, which sat on the right-hand side of his desk. The papers would each have a small piece of coloured tape indicating where he should sign, and Arthur signed them dutifully, though he did not use his full legal name for fear someone would figure out the secret of his initials. Once signed, Arthur would place the papers in the box with the brass plate labeled, *Out Box* and they would be taken away by the appropriate people at the appropriate time, usually long after Arthur had left for home.

If you have not guessed by now, Arthur was a tremendously unimaginative fellow. It's not that he was incapable of wonder, it was just that he never really had much need of it, beyond wondering what word he should use in any given situation. This was, of course, a result of his Great aunt's tutelage. He remembered what she used to say every time Arthur disappointed her with his particular choice of words.

"Remember Arthur, there is a universe of difference between the right word, and almost the right word. Shakespeare did not write great plays filled with almost the right words!"

And so, Arthur wondered about words. There was another thing that Arthur wondered about, however. Upon his arrival at his work area, he noticed that there were not papers stacked in the *In Box* waiting to be signed. He expected that since he had taken the previous day off, his work might have piled up, but that was not the case. His desk was clean and organized.

"Hmmm," thought Arthur. "Someone must have filled in for me."

So, Arthur took his usual place behind his desk and waited for the first papers to arrive.

If Arthur was not accustomed to wondering about things, he was about to get very used to it. At about mid-morning, it occurred to him that he still had the spectacles safely tucked away in his briefcase, though his aunt preferred calling it an attaché case as it made the case seem more important. This was one instance where Arthur differed from his aunt and refused to call it anything other than a briefcase.

Arthur waited a considerable time, hoping papers would arrive so he could begin signing them, but they never did. While he considered this, he instinctively glanced at his wrist to check the time and noticed that he was not wearing his watch. The absence of his wristwatch made him feel suddenly naked and vulnerable, as if he was incomplete in some way. Rubbing his left wrist with his thumb, he decided to stretch his legs and move about a little. Since his office was so small, he ventured out into the lobby, but not before ensuring that the glasses were safely in his pocket.

The lobby, being like any other lobby, was not very busy and Arthur estimated that it must be not later than half eleven. Occasionally, a ding could be heard as an elevator door opened and the occupants exited. This was punctuated by the periodic click of heels or dress shoes from down the hall. Other than that, there was little activity this morning.

As Arthur aimlessly wandered about the lobby, he put his hands in his pockets and immediately felt the glasses wrapped in a handkerchief. Since no-one was around, he decided to put them on.

Now, it should be noted that Arthur didn't really expect to see anything amiss when he placed the glasses on, as he had worked on this floor for almost fifteen years, and so he was rather ill-prepared for what came next. Carefully, Arthur pulled the case out of his pocket and unrolled the handkerchief. He opened the case, took the opportunity to clean the lenses with the handkerchief and while still looking down, placed them on the bridge of his nose. When he raised his head, he had an inkling that things were about to change.

It was then that Arthur saw the extra elevator door, sitting directly in between the two doors on the right. It was a door almost exactly like the other doors, only it differed in two ways. Firstly, it had the same curious markings above the buttons, markings he had seen earlier on the door in his building, on the floor that shouldn't have been there. Secondly, it had not been there before. The only way one could describe it is as if someone have cut the wall and opened it up, leaving a space for a fourth door. It was simply not supposed to be there. Arthur just stood there, perplexed, searching for a word that would somehow capture this situation. None came to him.