

Chapter Three

Things are most certainly all wrong now

(A very short Chapter)

Once Arthur caught his breath and the dizziness started to pass, he felt a little more like himself again. This feeling lasted only a moment before the gravity of his recent discovery hit him. He bolted out of his apartment and ran down the stairs to the street. He was still wearing the glasses, so this is why this time, it was not the normal three flights he had always taken, but four. As he finished the first flight of stairs and rounded the landing, he realized that there was, for no apparent reason and having no logical explanation, now an additional floor just below his own. He noticed the extra floor only because the number on it was unusual and not an Arabic numeral. Rather, it looked vaguely familiar, even comforting, reminding Arthur of something he had seen somewhere before. Arthur had only a moment during which to process this as his momentum carried him down to the lobby.

Reaching the lobby of his building, Arthur burst through the doors to the street and to his chagrin (another of his aunt's words that seemed to fit the occasion) nothing looked amiss. Or more exactly, everything looked normal, if one could overlook the extra building across the street. People were walking down the street just as they always had, wearing the same clothes they normally did. There was simply no indication that anyone was the least bit affected by Arthur's world falling apart around him. The only thing that was remotely different was that every once in a while, someone would either enter or emerge from the building that shouldn't be there, each of them wearing the same set of glasses more or less.

There was one peculiarity that Arthur noticed, or more specifically two. The first was that the people wearing the mysterious glasses seemed to be conscious of not being noticed by those without them. It appeared to Arthur that they were taking some great pains to enter and exit the building in a way as to remain unobserved. As Arthur watched a middle-aged man approach the building that shouldn't be there, he slowed, looked at his watch and then quickly slipped through the door at an

opportune moment. Similarly, a woman leaving the building glanced around in an effort to time her exit perfectly. At a loss for words, Arthur just stood there, statuesque, transfixed to the sidewalk. It was at this moment that a middle-aged man wearing a business suit exited the building and noticed Arthur staring at him. Rather than alarm, Arthur was met with a cordial smile and friendly nod. Arthur nodded back.

The next thing that Arthur noticed was significantly more difficult to explain. Actually, it seemed impossible and Arthur would not have believed it had he not seen it with his own eyes. The people, the ordinary, everyday ones, were walking past the building without even noticing its existence. "Odd", thought Arthur. With this less than profound observation, he did the only thing he could think of. He removed that glasses just as a woman with a stroller passed the midway point, roughly even with the entrance to the building that shouldn't be there. As soon as he did this, she appeared right where she should have been if the previous building had not existed, without breaking a stride. The building just seemed to vanish and all was as it should be. "How could someone be in two places at once?" thought Arthur.

Completely perplexed, Arthur decided to return to the scene of the original shooting, the lobby of the building he worked in. Still wearing the glasses, he ran as fast as he could, covering the twenty-seven- and one-half blocks in record time, that is record time for a man who never ran. Had Arthur walked that distance as he normally did and counting the steps as was his habit, he would have noticed that rather than the usual 2000 steps from his building's entrance to the lobby doors of the Diamond Tower, there were an additional 387 steps. These extra steps were due to the extra buildings that Arthur passed on his normal route, buildings that had no business being there.

Once he reached his office building, he just stood outside the doors, afraid to go in. Had his aunt been present, she would have insisted that Arthur was filled with trepidation, but since she was not there, he felt that afraid was a perfectly acceptable word. After some deliberation, he screwed up about as much courage as a man like Arthur could muster, lifted his head and strolled through the doors, desperately trying to act as naturally as he could. As he passed through the doors, he heard his aunt's voice resonate in his mind. Every time he was cautious or apprehensive, she would tell him to "screw his courage to the sticking place", shake her head and tut when he failed to appreciate the literary reference. All of Arthur's effort was for naught, since, as usual, he made absolutely no impression on anyone.

What Arthur found upon entering the building, or more precisely, failed to find, astounded him. Although it had been only a few hours since Arthur had been in the lobby, there was absolutely no indication that anything out of the ordinary had transpired there. There was no broken glass, chipped paint, or even bullet holes anywhere. There was nothing to mark the absolute mayhem that had taken place earlier. Now, the sight of someone scouring the lobby of an office building might be something that would conceivably draw the attention of others, but as it has been stated before, Arthur's ability to make no impression on anyone was simply unparalleled. So he was able to glide about the lobby unnoticed.

"How is this possible?" Arthur considered as he glanced around. Business was going on as it always did. There were people in the lobby as there was on the morning of the shooting, but no one seemed to be the slightest bit concerned that a man had died at his feet amid a hail of bullets.

As Arthur was starting to doubt his own sanity, he noticed something. At first, it was a reflexive act, touching the jamb of a doorway, but he lightly brushed the tip of his finger along it and then looked at his hand. On the tip of his middle finger, clearly visible, was wet paint. It was then that Arthur started to look at the lobby more closely. He had missed it earlier, but it all looked fresh. Not freshly cleaned, as one would expect, but fresh, as if it had just been redone.

"How is this possible?" thought Arthur. Although it was not an original question, as Arthur had been repeating it all morning, it did bear repeating given everything that he had endured.

This revelation gave Arthur a new sense of purpose. Invigorated, he started to look for other details. A lamp shade had been replaced, looking just a little fresher than the others in the room. A number plate by the door had been repaired, slightly newer, as it was just a little less tarnished than the others. Although identical to the previous things, these were clearly not the originals. It was then that Arthur noticed an error, a small something that had been overlooked. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw some plaster dust lying on the floor.

The white dust was directly below a hall table that had been placed in the lobby to give it a feeling of fanciness. Arthur knew this wasn't the right word and his great Aunt would have been quite disappointed in him using it, but he wasn't in the mood to quibble about vocabulary right now. He had a mystery to solve.

Getting on his knees, he looked under the hall table and discovered a single bullet hole. "Ha!" thought Arthur, "They missed something!"

Using a pen he had in his pocket, Arthur dug the bullet out and cradled it in his handkerchief. Here was actual, physical proof that something extraordinary had happened this morning. At least, Arthur considered, it was a tangible indication that he had not gone completely batty after all.

Arthur rolled the bullet between his thumb and index finger, desperately trying to come up with something, anything more distinguishing than it being a bullet. Had Arthur been more "outdoorsy", he might have speculated on the caliber of bullet or its type, but being more bookish, he knew almost nothing about guns, other than the thought of them made him overly nervous.

Actually, bookish was not nearly the right word to describe Arthur. Even though his aunt insisted on his reading classic literature, he gravitated towards non-fiction, namely books about science and history. Although his aunt did get him to read the works of Joyce and Faulkner, she was only able to do so by striking a bargain with Arthur. For every book he read, he was taken on an outing of his choice. These would consist of things like factories, building sites, and the occasional amusement park. Despite it being completely out of character, Arthur did love rollercoasters. As he began to take full advantage of this bargain, his aunt was forced to renegotiate their arrangement, upping the number of required books from one per outing to five and then ten. His aunt never did come to enjoy rollercoasters though.

Having explored the lobby as fully as he could and finding only a single anomaly, there was nothing more Arthur could think of doing, so he decided to do the only sensible thing that came to his mind. He went home for tea.