

The Glimpsing Book

Steve Loe

Royal Fineworks Press
UNIONVILLE, NEW YORK



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Royal Fireworks Press
P.O. Box 399
41 First Avenue
Unionville, NY 10988-0399
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website: rftp.com



ISBN: 978-0-88092-594-5

Publisher: Dr. T.M. Kemnitz
Editor: Jennifer Ault
Book and cover designer: Kerri Ann Ruhl
Cover photo: Ryan Mulholland

Printed and bound in Unionville, New York,
at the Royal Fireworks facility. 1au22

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Book One

How Beautifully
Things Crash Together

Prologue

Sebastian

Washington, D.C.

Impossible.

I, Sebastian Wey, simply can't accept impossible. Yet, as I studied the fifth photograph, the word *impossible* wedged itself painfully in my brain, like a piece of broccoli stuck between my teeth. I concentrated hard to yank it out. At the root of every situation, I assured myself, is a logical explanation.

Explain this photo to me then, Mr. Logical! That was the tiny voice of my imagination speaking from somewhere over my left shoulder. Sometimes my annoying imagination tries to put a chokehold on my reason and sends crazy thoughts racing off to fantastical places.

Closing my eyes tightly, I counted backwards from ten. That usually drives out any attempts by my imagination to take control. Lately, however, I've had to close my eyes tighter and count from twenty.

I discovered the fifth photograph in the Library of Congress while flipping through an academic journal printed in 1931. The caption below the photo read "Gandhi, April 1919." The black-

and-white image showed Gandhi, center, speaking to a small crowd of villagers in India. A boy, whom I guessed to be about thirteen years of age, stood off to the side of the crowd. He wore dirty, tattered clothing and stared in awe at the great civil rights leader. The boy hugged a book, as tattered and torn as he, to his chest. Although the title of the text was hidden from view, I could see a strange symbol on the binding. The symbol looked like a crude drawing of an anchor.

What's so impossible about such a photo?, you might ask.

Well, a few months ago, while helping my mother research for her next book, I found a 1955 picture of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. That photo shows Dr. King, center, speaking to a small crowd of people on a street corner. A boy about thirteen years of age stands off to the side of the crowd. He's wearing dirty, tattered clothing and staring in awe at the great civil rights leader. The boy hugs a book, as tattered and torn as he, to his chest. On the binding of the book is that same symbol—an anchor.

How could two photos from different time periods and a half a globe apart look so much alike?

Right. Like I said, impossible. Except I was seeing them with my own two eyes.

Henrietta and TP

Carver Middle School

Henrietta chose the library for her hiding place because she loved to read.

TP chose the library for his hiding place because he loved the artwork displayed on its back wall.

Both Henrietta and TP were excellent at hiding. So even though they shared the school library for nearly two hours that first night, neither knew the other was there. When it was time to go home, however, they bumped into each other, literally, in the empty darkness and just about gave each other a heart attack.

Henrietta wanted to scream but gulped it down instead. She stared at TP and thought she saw on his thin face a scream fighting to escape. But that was only for a second, and then the corners of his mouth shot down.

“What are you doing here?” TP’s voice was sharp, critical, like he owned the place, and Henrietta was trespassing.

Henrietta shook off her shock. “I could ask you the same thing.” She wrinkled her nose. A faint odor was coming from the boy. He was shorter than she and wore dark, oversized clothes that appeared not to have seen the inside of a washing machine in weeks. Greasy strands of hair hung over his eyes. He carried a large, ragged binder under one arm. “You’re not supposed to be in here at this time of the day,” she added.

“And you are?” TP realized that there would be no bullying this girl out of his hiding place, but he was determined not to give up his ground. “Why are you even here?”

“Why are you here?”

“I asked you first.”

Henrietta rolled her eyes. “So juvenile,” she sighed. “Because I like to read.”

TP stared at her, then scanned her from head to toe. She looked to be about his age, but she couldn't have appeared more different than he. She was wearing a crisp white shirt buttoned to her throat, a slim black skirt, and flat shoes. Her skin was brown and smooth. Her thick black hair had a perfect part right down the middle and hung smoothly down her back. "There are plenty of other places to read," he told her.

Henrietta shot back, "Nothing as good as a library. Why are you here?"

"Because I hate going home."

Henrietta could feel her face flush. TP's words rang with a bitter truth that she felt in her own chest. Against her will, her eyes filled with tears. She fought them back.

Even in the dim light, TP could see that she was battling her emotions. "You don't like going home either, do you?" he asked, his voice quieter.

Henrietta looked away from him.

"I also like the art," TP added.

Henrietta nodded.

TP shrugged sympathetically and looked around. "I guess this place is big enough for the two of us."

Chapter One

Sebastian

April 2021

Kolkata, India

Two photos worlds apart in both time and place, yet strikingly similar.

The 1919 Gandhi picture and the 1955 Dr. King photo shared the same positioning of people—the great civil rights leader in the center speaking to a small crowd, a young teenage boy off to the side, his face expressing awe for the historical figure. The book held by each boy appeared to be the same, although the title was covered by their arms as they hugged it tightly. The anchor-like symbol on the bindings was the common link.

When I showed my parents the fifth photo, I got two completely different responses.

My mom studied the picture like a scientist. “There has to be a rational explanation for this.”

Her response fired up my dad. “Are you kidding? Sebastian has scratched the surface of a historical mystery. Who knows how deep this might go!”

“Oh, settle down, dear,” Mom soothed. “I agree that the photos present quite a strange coincidence, but it’s a coincidence nonetheless.”

I jumped in. “Dad, Mom’s right. There has to be a logical explanation for these pictures.”

Dad turned to me. “Okay, Sebastian, that’s fine. So prove to me that these photos are a simple coincidence.”

My parents’ work takes us all over the world. Although that may sound adventurous and cool, I have to be honest: our lifestyle wears on a twelve-year-old. My mom and dad are nice, but they’re still my parents. A guy needs to hang out with kids his own age. Yes, I meet interesting people during our travels, and I still stay in contact with some of them, thanks to my trusty laptop and, when available, a good wireless connection. But sometimes I wonder what it would be like to be a normal kid: to get up in the same house every day, to walk to a bus stop and ride to school with friends. My mother makes sure that I get a good education. She homeschools me, but I tease her that it shouldn’t be called “homeschool” since we’re always traveling; I tell her it should be called “nomadic-school.” She rolls her eyes and replies, “Home is where the heart is.” I shoot back, “You stole that from a novel.”

Currently we’re in India. My mom is researching for her latest assignment—a book on President Obama’s historical elections and presidency. Mom’s a famous biographer who has written quite a few successful books. The critics say that her “tireless pursuit of the facts on any subject is what makes her one of the greatest nonfiction writers of our time.” Mom cross-references information so many times that experts from the Smithsonian will call her to ask if a fact is really a fact.

Why India, you might wonder, when my mom is writing about the historical presidency of the United States's first African-American president? When she was contracted for this assignment, her first thought was, *What would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., think about this moment in history?* So her initial draft began with a reflection on Dr. King and his nonviolent civil rights movement. That meant we had to travel to the South. My mom's "tireless pursuit of the facts" includes visiting the places her subject has lived and worked. She's not satisfied with just researching books, journals, and newspapers to get information for her writing. "Sebastian, personal experience of the setting and the realities of your topic can never be replaced by another author's point of view," she tells me.

It was during our time in the South that I was given the first Dr. King photograph. We met an elderly local librarian in Birmingham, Alabama, who owned a collection of Dr. King photos. She showed the collection to me and described the stories behind some of the pictures.

I spent nearly two hours listening to the librarian's stories of Dr. King and the civil rights movement. When she was done, the elderly woman smiled and said, "Young man, you've been very patient with this old lady while she babbled on and on. I want you to have something."

She handed me the 1955 photo of Dr. King speaking to the small crowd on the street corner, the young teen standing off to the side, tightly hugging the book with an anchor on its binding, gawking at Dr. King in awe.

How does all of that lead to India? As Mom "tirelessly pursued the facts" surrounding Dr. King's nonviolent civil rights

movement, Gandhi's name kept popping up in her readings, so she decided to include Gandhi's nonviolent civil rights movement in her book to highlight the global significance of President Obama's elections.

So here we are in India as Mom researches Gandhi. My dad couldn't be more excited. Remember, the 1919 Gandhi photograph is the *fifth* picture in my strange collection, and it shares those weird similarities with the *first* of the collection—the Dr. King image from 1955. I've discovered three other Dr. King photographs (from 1959, 1963, and 1968) showing that young teenager growing up into a man, each time clinging to that unknown book with an anchor on its binding. Dad's theory is that three more Gandhi photos exist that look a lot like the 1959, 1963, and 1968 King pictures.

• • •

My parents and I spent our entire first month in Kolkata practically living in the National Library of India. Many of the library's staff ended up knowing us by name. The National Library is the permanent repository of all documents published in India. It's a huge, beautiful place that's been around forever and contains a large collection of rare documents.

During that first month, Mom was successful at gathering volumes of information for her book, but I didn't find any more pictures. I poured over pages of journals, newspapers, and other publications spanning years but found nothing. Dad and I even spent two full days exploring the National Museum in New Delhi, but we came up with nothing there either.

At last my mom had enough of the National Library and began exploring the real India on foot. Dad and I decided to do the same. Maybe the people of Kolkata would hold clues to the mystery of the April 1919 photo.

A week went by, and I asked so many people about the photo that I lost count. No one had any information. Finally one person directed us to an elderly gentleman from the town of Chauri Chaura, Uttar Pradesh. “Bashir,” he said. “You must visit Bashir. He is the source for all things Gandhi not in museums or books.”

So Dad and I boarded the train for Chauri Chaura.

Bashir was a small man in his early seventies with a seemingly permanent smile. He explained to us that he was the caretaker of his family’s small private library of Indian history, which had been passed down for four generations. When I showed him the 1919 photo, his eyes lit up. “Come in, come in! We must talk,” he said excitedly.

Dad and I followed him to a back room, which had been converted to a library packed with books.

“May I see the picture again, please?” he asked.

I handed him the photo. Bashir lost his permanent smile as he studied the picture. After a long moment, he pulled out a magnifying glass for a closer inspection. Then, suddenly, his smile returned, doubled in size. “It is Gupil!” he laughed. “I am almost certain of it. Gupil!”

“Who’s Gupil?” My heart began to race.

“Too long. Many, many years,” Bashir chuckled. “Before I was born.”

Afraid that this was too good to be true, I asked, “What makes you think this is...um...uh...Graypal.”

“Gupil. I know because of the book. That strange book!” Bashir held the magnifying glass over the photo once more. “The anchor on the book’s binding. I remember that symbol.”

“Do you remember the title of the book?”

“No, I cannot recall that. But I do remember my father telling me that at some point in Gupil’s life, he would not be seen without it.”

Bashir handed me back the picture and turned to a wall filled with shelves of books. His bony finger moved over the binding of each text as he scanned the titles.

“Aha!” He slid a book off one of the shelves and opened it. It was a small, homemade photo album. He placed the album on a nearby desk and waved for us to join him. He flipped through several pages of photos before stopping on one with “February 1922” typed across the top of it. Several old pictures filled the page, which was protected by a plastic cover. Bashir once again used his bony finger to skim over the pictures. He pointed to the photo he was searching for.

My dad and I were too shocked to speak for a moment.

“Astonishing!” Dad gasped at last. “It’s the same as the second Dr. King photo!”

“Dr. King photo?” Bashir asked.

I studied the picture. In it, a young man stood next to Gandhi. They were standing before a crowd of people. The young man’s expression was one of caution and worry as he peered out at the

crowd. Wrapped in the young man's arms, hugged tightly to his chest, was a book.

The picture was inexplicably similar to the second Dr. King photo. My imagination began buzzing. I closed my eyes tightly and counted backwards from twenty, searching desperately for a logical explanation to the pictures.

I laid the April 1919 photo next to the February 1922 photo. Three years had passed. The book in the 1922 photo appeared newer, cleaner, as did the young man. We could see that it was the same person, yet I had to determine for myself if he was clinging to the same book.

"May I borrow your magnifying glass?" I asked.

Bashir handed it to me.

I held the thick lens over the 1922 Gupil photo, aiming specifically for the book's binding.

"You see the anchor?" Dad's voice trembled slightly.

"Yes."

"Unbelievable. Simply unbelievable." Dad ran his hands through his thinning hair and turned to Bashir. "Do you have any more pictures of Gupil?"

"No," Bashir replied. "Of that I am certain. Gupil was arrested when Gandhi was arrested in March 1922. Both were accused of sedition and sentenced to six years in prison for the violence that occurred here in Chauri Chaura. Terrible, terrible times."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Gandhi's non-cooperation movement was spreading rapidly, but things turned for the worse when a police station in Chauri

Chaura was set on fire by angry citizens opposing British rule. Twenty-three police officers were killed.” Bashir sighed. “Oh, how this upset Gandhi. As you know, Gandhi’s campaign of mass civil disobedience was rooted in nonviolence.”

Dad tapped on the 1922 picture. “Gandhi conveying his disappointment of the Chauri Chaura incident?”

Bashir nodded.

I studied the 1922 photo again. “What happened to Gupil?”

Bashir shook his head. “I do not know. Gandhi was released two years later for appendicitis surgery. I do not know if Gupil served all six years or not. My father once told me he had heard Gupil’s name come back up in the early 1930s attached to Gandhi’s movement again.”

I looked at my dad. He was rubbing the stubble on his pointed chin. Bashir carefully peeled back the plastic film in the photo album. He removed the 1922 Gupil photo and handed it to me.

“You need this more than I do, young man.”

“Oh, I can’t—”

“You can, and you must. I see it in your eyes. You will not rest until you understand the mystery of this book.”

Chapter Two

Henrietta and TP

September 2021

Carver Middle School

TP didn't think that Henrietta would be back the next afternoon, but he quickly found her hiding place upon his arrival at the library. She was sitting on the floor with her knees folded up to her chest, her body stuffed into a nook created by the sharp turns of the outside walls. It was a pretty good hiding place, away from the circulation desk and all the traffic. TP had used it himself a couple of times while the librarians were locking up and saying goodbye, but he'd realized that the spot had its weaknesses when it came to the security cameras.

Henrietta had her nose in a book and didn't sense his approach.

"So you're not going away, are you?" TP asked.

Henrietta jumped. "Don't do that! You scared me to death!"

"If you're staying, then you're going to do this right."

Henrietta sneered at him. "What? You think I can't hide as well as you?"

“Nope. I found you in less than a minute. It’s not a bad spot—if you want the cameras to catch you.” He pointed up to a small tinted dome poking through the ceiling tiles.

Henrietta glanced up.

“TP Burton.” TP stuck out his hand.

Henrietta wrinkled her nose and offered her name but not her hand. “Henrietta Harper.”

“Henrietta? That name’s more old-fashioned than your clothes.”

“You smell,” Henrietta shot back.

“Thanks.”

“That wasn’t a compliment.”

TP smiled wider. “It was to me.”

“Henrietta was my grandmother’s name,” Henrietta told him. She looked down at her shiny shoes and stated the next fact more to herself than to TP. “My mother loved that name.”

“Loved? She doesn’t love it anymore?”

“My mother died last year.”

Their conversation got stuck in a silent, awkward moment, but TP pulled them from the stickiness. “Follow me,” he told Henrietta.

He turned and walked toward the back corner of the library. Henrietta didn’t move. She didn’t want to follow TP anywhere, but her curiosity got the better of her when she noticed that he had moved to the outside of the central stacks of books and was walking slower, hugging the far wall.

As if he knew what she was thinking, TP called back to her, “You have to stay away from the cameras.” He pointed up to the ceiling.

Henrietta looked up and saw another small tinted dome peering down at them.

“Is someone watching us right now?” she asked.

“Nope,” TP replied. “Campus police don’t look at the tape until something happens. But they can go back and review whatever the camera captures.”

“How do you know that?”

TP smiled. “I asked one of the officers. Told him I wanted to be a cop someday. After that, there was no stopping him. I know the hours he works and what halls he patrols at what time of day. We’re safe in here unless someone comes in one night and steals a bunch of books.”

“Like that’s going to happen,” said Henrietta.

“I don’t want to take any chances.”

TP led Henrietta to the back corner of the library where the last stack of fiction was housed. It was a small area surrounded by three walls.

Henrietta looked around. “Great,” she said sarcastically. “If someone does come in, we’re trapped. No way to escape.” She rolled her eyes at TP.

“Yes, there is,” he told her. He pointed to a door in the corner with big red letters on it that spelled “FIRE EXIT ONLY. ALARM WILL SOUND.”

Henrietta rolled her eyes again. “Can’t you read? Open that door, and the whole world will know someone’s here. Then they *will* check the cameras.”

TP shook his head and smiled sadly at Henrietta’s novice hiding abilities. He marched over to the door and grabbed the bar.

“No!” Henrietta yelled.

TP pushed the door open.

Henrietta covered her ears, waiting for the loud, obnoxious beeps to cut into the silence. But nothing happened.

She lowered her hands. “Why isn’t the alarm going off?” she asked.

TP smiled. “I disconnected the wiring. This is how I leave every night. Follow me. I’ll show you.”

Henrietta followed TP out the door and down a bare, concrete stairwell that led to the bottom floor. They popped out into the custodian’s area.

“The janitor will see us,” Henrietta rasped.

“Nope. He’s cleaning the third floor right now.”

“How do you know?”

“Walked up to him first week of school and told him I wanted to be a custodian one day. After that, there was no stopping him. His shift begins at 3:00 p.m. and ends at 11:00 p.m. First hour he cleans the third floor, and the next hour he cleans the second. After a break, he cleans the library—around 5:15. That’s why we have to leave by five every night.”

Henrietta couldn't help but be impressed with TP's thoroughness and cunning, but she wasn't ready to let him know that just yet.

"So we leave through that door over there?" She pointed across the dock.

"If you like being on camera." TP pointed to his left at a side door hidden behind some crates. "Leave by this door. No cameras. For us, it's exit only, though. There's an electronic keypad on the outside."

"What's the matter? Haven't broken the code yet?"

"Working on it."

TP headed back up to the library, and Henrietta followed. TP plopped down on the floor in a corner behind the last stack of fiction. He pulled out a large drawing pad from his worn-out bag and began sketching.

Henrietta opened her bookbag and found the novel she was reading. It was the last book in a series by her favorite author, Lynden McCurry. She was purposely going slowly through this novel because Mrs. McCurry had announced that her writing career was over when she was elected a congresswoman the previous fall. That news had been upsetting to Henrietta. The McCurry fantasy series had gotten her through some difficult times, especially when her mother had been sick.

Two old, oversized stuffed chairs sat against the opposite wall. As Henrietta eased into one, a plume of dust rose and shrouded her in a cloud the color of low-fat milk. She coughed and waved her hand in front of her face.

TP grinned without looking up. “I don’t think the custodian has touched this area in fifteen years. Another reason I like it back here.”

Henrietta scanned the cramped area. TP was right. Dust covered everything. The paint on the walls was chipping, and cobwebs hung in the corners. She got up for a closer inspection of the books on the last stack of shelving. They were ancient, with hard, dried bindings cracking down the middle. She read a few of the spines and realized that there was no order to their arrangement, either by author’s name or by title.

“That stack has to be the books that have been here for a century, and no one wants to read them anymore,” TP remarked.

“Why don’t they get rid of them, then?”

“Mrs. Langley is a packrat. She is the older of the two librarians.”

“I know who she is.”

“Do you know she’s about to have a nervous breakdown?”

“What? Sweet old Mrs. Langley?” Henrietta wouldn’t have guessed that. Mrs. Langley was always smiling and asking students if they needed help. Although Carver Middle School had tons of students, Mrs. Langley tried to get to know all of her regular library customers, and she had a knack for picking out stories she knew that those students would love—as if she knew the exact dimensions of everyone’s imagination. Henrietta could attest to that. Mrs. Langley had suggested a few novels—other than her favorite McCurry ones—that Henrietta had thoroughly enjoyed. Plus, everyone got a free bookmark from Mrs. Langley.

Mrs. Langley was far nicer than Ms. Grinder, who was thin and stiff, with a hard, shiny face that looked plastic. Ms. Grinder would only help you if you were getting information for a research paper or a project for one of your classes. She wouldn't touch the fiction section at all. In fact, Ms. Grinder was most proud of the brand new computers she had purchased with a grant she had written. When a student or class came to the library to do research, Ms. Grinder directed them to the computers first. Books as resources were the last place to look for the best information, according to Ms. Grinder. She was purely business.

TP pointed down the row of stacks. "Do you realize that there used to be two more full shelves of fiction?"

Henrietta moved cautiously along the far wall. After passing seven stacks, she stopped and examined the floor. She had never noticed the imprints before. The library was carpeted, and there, between the circulation desk and the first stack of fiction, were two deep imprints that matched the dimensions of the other shelving. TP was right. At one point, two of the large shelving units had been removed.

Henrietta came back to their dingy corner hideout. "What happened?"

TP shrugged. "Not sure. But tomorrow I think I'll tell Mrs. Langley that one day I would like to be a librarian."