

## Brief Interlude at the Bookstore

Or

## Apropos of Nothing Much

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*Barnes & Noble* was crowded and noisy, but its *Starbuck's* concession wasn't. I had come in for coffee but that wasn't soon to be. I had unwisely stopped for a moment to look over titles on the 'Just Arrived' book table, and that's when a dozen or so out-of-control and deafeningly-noisy children, accompanied by two or three distraught-looking mothers, managed to sneak in and overwhelm the lone barista. The first three in line had no clue what they wanted and, like so many headlight-struck deer, gazed vacantly at the menu board behind the counter.

I headed back to the books to await the thinning of the herd.

Among the selection was an interesting autobiography by an unabashed atheist. I leafed through it, noting group photographs of the author and other like-minded souls, all posing in various street scenes and grinning like there was no tomorrow. I pondered briefly how it must sound to people when they heard the word "atheist" spoken. "I'm an atheist." Probably pretty shocking to some, especially if blurted out unexpectedly. You need to ease into such things. Maybe it would sound more acceptable if it were pronounced "I'm an a-theist," putting a slight pause between the "a" and the "theist." More scholarly?

I succumbed, though, to buying a short-story collection by lawyer John Grisham and a book titled *Collision Course*, a novel of survival. That's me. A survivalist. I don't go around publicly proclaiming my predilections.

Back to the coffee bar where I was behind only one adult who didn't know what she wanted but was finally cajoled into something she probably didn't want anyway.

The barista smiled at me familiarly and said, "Arthur, isn't it?" I belatedly recognized her from one previous encounter. *I wonder how, or why, she recognizes me.* "Yup – that's me. How are you, you happy, overworked lady?"

I asked for a medium coffee, three-quarters full, with the rest milk. I paid for it and my two books and sat as far away as possible from the noisy youngsters, now filling themselves with sticky drinks. This placed me squarely opposite two giggling teenage girls, facing each other and noisily interlacing comments about whatever it is young girls talk about.

I surreptitiously turned up my hearing aids. Pretty neat things, these cutting-edge electronics. Crisp and clear with computerized, automatically-directional sound pickup.

*Giggle. Smirk. ...couldn't stand the teacher... O my god, did you see the guy looking at us... I couldn't believe Jan told him what I said... where did you guys go last night...*

My gaze and attention wandered along various posters on the walls, each portraying famous authors and their works. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. William Faulkner's *To Have and Have Not*. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. I wondered if my giggling duo might ever read such works.

Picking up one of my books, I was again reminded why I liked John Grisham's writing style. Taut and not overly garnished with adjectives. He gives the reader wiggle room to flesh out the written word into his own, personal theater of the mind. Just enough description to put the reader into the scene but not make him an unwilling participant of the action.

Coffee finished, I stood up and walked past the coffee counter toward the door. My hearing aids were still sonically sharpened and I heard the barista say, "Have a nice day, Arthur." I looked up; she smiled at me; I winked at her, and continued out the door.

*What's with her? She's not even a quarter my age; she remembered my name; she fixed my coffee ahead of another customer, and she took time to smile at me. Guess it pays to be polite and friendly with sales people.*

I got in my car and headed home, thinking that maybe this is what Tanya St. Clair tried to drum into her class about taking notes, remembering things: sounds, sights, smells, colors... well, let's give it a try. Although I didn't have a notebook to write down my impressions, I'll just show her that I'm not, by golly, endlessly fixated on the Arctic and Eskimos.

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Tanya:

John Grisham's dedication in the above book reads:

"When *A Time to Kill* was published twenty years ago, I soon learned the painful lesson that selling books was far more difficult than writing them. I bought a thousand copies and had trouble giving them away. I hauled them in the trunk of my car and peddled them at libraries, garden clubs, grocery stores, coffee shops, and a handful of bookstores. Often, I was assisted by my dear friend..."

I think the above quote, given to your classes, could be a two-edged sword. One side to encourage budding authors to persevere, practice, re-write, trim, revisit what they have written... and the other side to weed out the dilatants.