

I am a superhero.

Well, I say “superhero”, but that rather implies that I'm heroic – a good guy. Let's just say I have superpowers. I'm no villain; at least I don't think so – but the world disagrees. I swear I did my best to do the right thing, but it seems I'm Public Enemy #1.

This is my story. How I got here. How the world turned against me.

Five Years Ago

My name is Simon. I'm a normal guy – about as normal as it gets. Job, girlfriend, a decent flat, a small group of drinking buddies. I don't hate my job – I work in advertising, and it can be interesting – but I certainly don't love it, either. My girlfriend – Sarah – and I are getting married next year, and I'm supposed to be moving in with her any time now. As soon as I get round to it.

My flat's in a decent part of town; there's rarely any trouble here, but it's the sort of place where you never get to know your neighbours. There's a mad couple to the left – I think they're mentally ill or something – and a quiet older couple to the right. The folks to the right are fine – we nod and say hello when we take the trash out, and if I'm away they are happy to hold on to a package for me. The couple to the left? Not so much. They make strange screaming sounds at random times, their garden resembles a compost heap, and their fence fell down in last year's strong winds and they never bothered repairing it – which means I'm treated to the sight of the rubbish heap they call their garden every time I look out the window.

Today is Tuesday, and I'm a bit confused. I'm confused because I spilt a pan of boiling water on myself and didn't feel a thing. To be clear, this isn't a regular thing – usually when I hurt myself, I hurt myself. But today I didn't. Weird, eh?

That's not the only odd thing I've experienced recently. Last week, I swear I could hear the conversation of a couple of dog-walkers a few hundred yards away from me. I put it down to my imagination at the time, but now I'm not so sure. I can hear the mad couple next door – and when I say I can hear them, I mean I can hear them *breathing*.

Anyway. It's time for work, and I'm running as late as ever. The spilt water can wait – I grab my coat and head out the door, walking briskly down the street. It's summer, but I always take my coat just in case. You know what they say: better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it.

The office is quiet. At this time of year, plenty of people are on their holidays, and business is always slow. I don't mind; a bit of peace suits me. I busy myself in my latest project, carefully colouring in a bipedal mouse's ears with my... err... mouse. That's ironic, right? Like too many spoons or something. A couple of temp workers are screwing around by the photocopier – the boss isn't here, and they have no intention of doing any work. The cleaners are packing up their stuff, their shift finished for the day. One of them has dropped her purse, and I call out to her. She doesn't react; why would she? She's behind a brick wall, in another room.

Wait. She's behind a brick wall in another room. Only I can see her. This is getting freaky.

It's at this point that the flights of fancy start entering my mind. I've always been a comic-book fan. Of course I know this is all silly; there's a good explanation. There's a perfectly sensible reason why I could hear the people next door breathing, why boiling

water did not hurt me, and why I can see through a brick wall. A perfectly sensible reason, and when I figure out what it is, I'll let you know. In the meantime, we have these flights of fancy to address.

I go to lunch.

The first thing I do is head to the park nearby. I settle myself down on a bench, sandwich in hand, and gaze around. There's a small lake – pond – nearby, and a woman is entertaining a group of children. A dog runs frantically round them in circles, desperate for attention. On a bench further away I can see a young couple; they appear to be arguing from their body language. In the distance I hear the rumbling of a train, and in the sky I see the trails left by a jumbo jet.

I turn my attention to the young couple and concentrate, trying to hear what they're saying. It's tough over the din of those kids by the photocopier... those kids by the photocopier. Who I can still hear right now, despite being two streets away. Whoah.