

## Counting and Other Quirks

That morning I was in a hurry so I had to walk in the road because the blasted council had put new slabs on the pavement. You see, I have to avoid stepping on the cracks and it does take me a bit longer to walk anywhere.

I needed to get the Tube and I was already cutting it fine. I had to go back home three times to check on things I was worried about. I couldn't remember whether I'd set the alarm system. Then, the second time, I was sure I'd left the iron on and I couldn't risk burning the house down. Finally, I was convinced I'd not locked the front door.

I was annoyed because I'd really got my act together and left plenty of time for all the things I needed to do. I'd washed my hands ten times and checked that all the items in the food cupboards were in their proper colour-coded sections. I'd hoovered upstairs and downstairs twice using my new powerful Dyson. I lost a bit of time when I realised the blue tie I'd chosen because it was a Tuesday had a faint black stripe and I had to search for a plain replacement.

When the Tube pulled in I made sure I got on through the middle door of the fourth carriage. When I've boarded an odd numbered carriage the day has always gone disastrously wrong for me. As usual I put my own sanitised dust sheet on the seat before settling down. I have a phobia about germs and always wear a proper surgical mask.

Counting the number of passengers in my carriage cheered me up. There were twenty. Even better, there were ten men and ten women.

When I disembarked at Marylebone, I was relieved to see there were four stationary trains. I stayed back until the ticket barriers were clear. I don't like being jostled and it's unhygienic when people get too close to you. I counted the uniformed station staff I passed on my way out and was pleased to register another even number, six. I thought things were looking up.

I'd given myself thirty minutes for the short walk to Harley Street because I knew that I'd have to take it slowly to negotiate all the lines. Even with my eyes constantly scanning the pavement I did manage to count the number of passing buses. Again the omens were good. I saw eight.

I arrived in Harley Street without incident and found Dr Dennis Blake's brass plaque outside number sixty. I was relieved when I saw there were only two of

us in the ground floor waiting room. After exactly six minutes, another good sign, I was told to go to Dr Blake's consulting room on the second floor.

I counted the steps as I headed up the staircase. Damn it! There were thirty-nine, a horrible odd number. I just knew that the psychiatrist wouldn't be able to help with my Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

The Thirty-nine Steps by John Buchan

500 Words