

## Prime Suspect

(The East End – early 1960s)

They called me Victor - after the Queen, who'd died in the January.

When my old man passed away, I took over the business, 'Wood's Locksmiths - est. 1823'. It had been in the family for generations and was part of the neighbourhood, or what was left of it after Adolf's lot had had their way.

I remember, it was October, late in the afternoon, when 'George' (I called him this, after he of Dock Green fame) popped in at the end of his day on the beat. He came in, the bell above the door giving a warning tinkle. His bicycle was propped against the shop window.

'George! Come on in. Cuppa?'

'As long as it's warm and wet,' he said, sat down and took off his helmet.

I returned, poured the tea, and George added a splash of milk and his customary three sugars. We chatted for a few minutes, then I ventured: 'Nasty business down at Churchill Mansions. How many break-ins is it now? Three, four?'

'Three flats in as many weeks, Victor. Your dad would be turning in his grave.'

'Certainly would. Did you know he was part of the committee they formed when they built the Mansions?'

'I didn't,' George said with a sad shake of his head, 'but it doesn't surprise me. He was a diamond like you, Victor, he'd do anything for the local community.'

'So...any closer to finding the culprit?'

He sat, took a slow sip, then leaned in confidentially.

'Well, Victor,' - he was whispering - 'he seems to have a method. His break-ins follow a pattern: number 3 was on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month; number 7 on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 13 on the 17<sup>th</sup>, and so on.'

I shook my head at him and shrugged.

'They're *prime* numbers, Victor! Prime numbers! He's obviously a man hooked on numbers and he's following a sequence.'

'I'm sorry, I never was much good at maths, but what you say sounds very interesting. Who would ever have thought?'

'Oh, yes!' he said, warming to his theme, 'they often like to tease us, to see if we twig what's going on.'

'So...?'

'So, Victor,' he sighed heavily, patience running out, 'so, we know what he's planning next - number 19 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>! And that's tomorrow!'

'Well, I never. Blimey, you're a genius, PC Smith, a veritable genius. Another cuppa?'

'No,' he said standing and pulling his chin-strap into place. 'Got to get down to the station so we can get things ready for tomorrow night. So, *Evening All*,' he said with a wink. I waited until he and his bike had wobbled their way out of sight. The street-lights were just coming on.

I rinsed the cups in the sink and went to the backroom and opened up the key safe. My flashlight picked out a small pile of rings, watches, and bracelets that winked at me through the gloom.

'Now then, where's the key to number 1?' I breathed softly.

'It's about to get dark.'

500 words