

## I SPY

The new neighbours at number 11 were a relief to the whole road after the drug dealer was forced out. Betty's recordings of late night comings and goings and blurry timed photos gave the police the evidence they needed to make an arrest. After her retirement, as a forensic scientist, she filled her days with crosswords, playing Bridge and comprehensive neighbour watching. From her bay window, sitting just beyond sight of passers-by, she could watch the goings-on from numbers 5 to 13. The new occupants of number 11 had moved in a week ago, already introduced themselves to their nearby neighbours and arranged a drinks party for later this month. The man and a woman, in their 50s, both blond, were fortunately without children or dogs, so they weren't bringing new noise to the road. They looked like City workers and both left for work around 7:30 am presumably to ensure getting a seat on the Met to London.

Within a couple of weeks of their arrival, Betty noticed something strange. They were having milk delivered. No milk man had come down this road for nearly ten years. How had these new arrivals found a milkman happy to restart deliveries and why didn't they buy milk from the supermarket like everyone else?

Betty created a spreadsheet and checked in deliveries. Sometimes, there was more than milk delivered and orders were given by messages left in empty milk bottles on the porch. One morning, curious to see an actual message, Betty pretended to be bringing a mis-directed letter and checked the bottle before the milkman arrived.

Items were listed with a capital first letter. An acrostic, was Betty's first thought. This could be something secret, though not a very sophisticated approach. She annotated her spreadsheet using the first letters, for example M for milk, T for tea, E for eggs etc. Within a week, she thought she saw a pattern emerging from her chart. Could she have uncovered a spy network operating in plain sight? After the usefulness of her previous observations the police were prepared to investigate.

Betty was full of herself at Bridge. "You'll probably see me on TV tonight." She boasted to everyone she met. "I was the one who spotted the spies."

Dot, her partner, was about to get the full story, as soon bidding was over. "I knew there was something strange about the new couple. Their blonde hair, for instance, didn't look dyed so they were probably Russian, and who has milk delivered these days? I used AI to evaluate my spreadsheet data and it suggested there were probably messages being exchanged."

"You aren't creating a Spy version of The Thursday Murder Club are you?" Dot said.

Before Betty could continue, her phone rang, her Police contact. "Sorry, Betty. Not spies this time but you were right about secret messages. You've uncovered a love tryst between the milkman and the man at No. 11. I think you probably need to keep that to yourself."

Betty decided she wouldn't go to the newcomers' drinks party. She would probably say something inapposite. And she could stop the milk bottle observations now.