

The Jigsaw

Herbert Smith rose at 6.30 as always and following his usual routine which over the years had become so much ingrained in his DNA that even he couldn't change it, went directly into his shower room to attend to his morning ablutions and then into his dressing room, he put on a clean white shirt which his wife had laid out for him the previous evening and dressed. He then made his way slowly down the huge oak staircase and wondered yet again why he and his wife still needed to live in such a large house, after all they were now both in their eighties and the last of their staff, Maisie the cook, was 'let go' a long time ago.

Herbert was a retired banker, wealthy by even footballer standards, but now tired, the energy had left his body years previously and with it had gone the enthusiasm for doing anything other than reading the financial times and keeping an eye on the stock market. He had bought this rather large country house in Hertfordshire at the start of the 70's when prices were low but now it was a burden. The children had all left home and neither of his two sons nor his daughter had any interest in the building.

He eventually reached the ground floor and paused momentarily composing himself and then made his way to the morning room and across to the windows to pull back the curtains. He then turned to go through to the kitchen but something in the corner of his eye wasn't quite right. He turned his head and could see the glass doors to the display cabinets were open. Confused he quickly hobbled over to the cabinets. These cabinets were his pride and joy, he had designed the units himself and had watched every step of their construction in case of error and they now housed his collection of antique silver, vestas, card cases, flasks, anything that he thought worthy of owning, now, they were empty.

Incredulous of what had happened he stood motionless, mouth open until his wife's voice brought him back to life, "what's the matter" she cried out "you look as though you've seen a ghost".

"A ghost" he cried "I wish I had seen a ghost, we've been robbed, somebody's stolen the silver, all of it, call the police Joyce, now, quickly"

Sometime later a car pulled into the drive and stopped outside the front door, two policemen got out, one plain clothed and the other a uniformed officer, and walked to the door where Herbert was waiting. They introduced themselves and were quickly ushered into the morning room by Herbert where he introduced them to his wife.

When Herbert had finished explaining what had happened the plain clothes officer, a Chief Inspector Britton, instructed the other officer to have a look around to try and find out how the thieves had got into the building, he then turned to Herbert and enquired, "tell me Mr Smith do you have a list of everything that was in the cabinet?"

"Yes of course I do" responded Herbert with some surprise, "I need it for the insurance, I've also got photographs and up to date valuations" he added with a sense of pride as he walked over to his desk where he kept his papers and then handed them to inspector Britton who thanked him as he gave a cursory glance at what he'd been given.

Inspector Britton then walked closer to the cabinets and inspected the doors and the shelves inside, turning again to Herbert he said don't let anybody touch anything in this

room until forensics have been here, they'll probably want to look for fingerprints. Have you any idea who might have taken them?"

Shaking his head Herbert replied "No, very few people knew they were there, we try to keep our business private"

Britton then decided to look over the rest of the room, firstly at the windows which opened onto the front driveway and then those to the back of the house. As he crossed the room he noticed a partly finished jigsaw puzzle on the table "Is this you doing the jigsaw Mr Smith or your wife?"

"Oh no, that's my wife," replied Herbert "she sits for hours with them, we buy them at the local charity shop then when she finishes them we take them back so they can sell them again."

"That's a good idea, every little helps they say". The picture was of a 'Constable like' country scene and the inspector looked for the lid, "that's funny" he said "there's no lid, I was interested to see what the finished picture looked like, did it have a lid Mr Smith?"

"Yes of course" replied Herbert "I remember because I only bought it a couple of days ago, do you think the robber may have used it to carry off some of my silver". Britton just nodded and continued looking around the room

At that point the other officer returned to the morning room "Inspector" he said "I think he got in through a first floor window at the back of the house sir, there's even a ladder on the ground near there, I've asked Mrs Smith not to touch anything sir"

"Well done Charlie" then turning once again to Herbert the Inspector continued "we're about finished here for now Mr Smith, I'll get the forensic boys here asap and I'll ask them to check upstairs and at the back as well if that's ok with you"

"That's quite alright Inspector, oh, can I offer you some tea before you go, I'm sorry I should have offered earlier but this has quite upset me, It's taken years to collect all those pieces, I'm certain that some pieces are 'one-offs' and are irreplaceable, I'm really upset you know"

"That's alright Mr Smith, don't you worry about us, you just make sure you and Mrs Smith are ok." And with that the two officers made their way towards the front door "I'll be in touch Mr Smith, I'll phone you to let you know when 'soco' will be here and also if we need to pop back at any time"

Herbert forced a smile, nodded and responded "thank you very much Inspector, You've both been very Kind, Thank you"

Over the next couple of weeks the Smith residence was visited by the 'scene of crimes officer' twice, the second time to take the finger prints of Mr Smith and his wife in order to eliminate them from their enquiries and once more by Inspector Britton but they were no closer to finding the culprit. Despite all their efforts they were unable to trace any finger prints found on the ladder and the cabinet doors and outside there wasn't even one footprint to be seen.

Then one afternoon as inspector Britton sat in his office going over the file for the umpteenth time his telephone rang. "Britton" he said into the mouth piece and as he listened to the voice on the other end he slowly rose to his feet, "yes sir, thank you, I appreciate that, can you just give me your address, I'll 'come straight over, give me twenty minutes". He still had the receiver in his hand as he shouted "Charlie, get your coat on, we're going to see a man about some silver" With that the two of them ran out the front door of the station into their car with the uniformed officer almost falling out again as Britton sped off.

"Where we going Guv" asked Charlie.

"We're going to see an old friend, dare I say, of mine who I had the pleasure of putting away some years ago," replied Britton " anyway, he did his time and he's now got a pawn brokers business down the high street, I find it useful to keep in with these fellers, if you know what I mean"

"Afternoon Mr Britton" said the shop owner as the two police entered the pawn brokers "I thought I'd call you as I've had this guy in this morning. I've bought a couple of bits off him in the past, a ring here, a watch there, you know 'ow it is Mr Britton, Well he comes in this morning with all this silver, good stuff most of it. He 'ad no idea what it was worth, all he knew was it was silver and it was all 'all marked, I'll go and get."

While he was at the back of the shop Britton removed the photograph that Herbert had given him from his pocket and the two officers then checked each item against the photographs and they discovered that they matched exactly. Then the Inspector realised that the silver was sitting in an open box, which on closer examination proved to be the lid of a jigsaw Puzzle and the picture look very similar to Mrs Smith's jigsaw.

"Well Michael you've done well here" Britton said to the pawn broker "but I'll have to take all these and the box with me, it's evidence you know"

"Yer ok Mr Britton but 'ow about what I paid for 'em, I'm out of pocket 'ere".

"Don't worry Michael, there's probably a reward out for these and if we get the guy who pinched them I'll see you get something".

"Well in that case Mr Britton, I'd better give you the address he gave me"

"You've got his address Michael, why didn't you say before!"

"Well you never asked Mr Britton but I don't pay out that sort of money without an address, It against the law "

“Yer yer, come on then, be quick, give us the address”, taking the address in one hand the Inspector motioned to his colleague to pick up the box and they left the shop to get in the car.

Inspector Britton phoned the police station from the car while Charlie drove, and told them to send men to the address he’d been given, to pick up the suspect and to arrange for a warrant to search the building at the same time.

Back at the station the two officers handed the box to forensics for examination while they waited to question the suspect.

Luckily he was at home, his line of business usually meant he worked at night, and being a mere petty burglar, he put up no resistance so was quickly handcuffed and put in the back of the car.

Within half an hour the suspected thief was sitting in an interview room facing Chief Inspector Britton and Constable Charlie Waters.

“Well” said the inspector “Little Billy Wiggins if I’m not mistaken, this is a big step up market for you isn’t it Billy”

“No Mr Britton, you’ve got it all wrong. You see I found ‘em. Last night I ‘eard a noise out in the garden but I didn’t go out just in case, you know. Well this morning I went out to see what it was and I found this carrier bag by the bins and that stuff was in it, then I took it straight to the pawn shop to flog it, see”

“Ok Billy, but where’s the carrier bag then?” asked Charlie.

“Well it was wet so I put ‘em in the box to take ‘em down the shop and I threw the bag”

“Where did you get the box then Billy”

Oh I ‘ad it at ‘ome with a jigsaw I did Mr Britton, Honestly”

Charlie continued, “Do you still have the jigsaw Billy”

“No” he said “there were loads of bits missing so I threw it away, dun’no why I didn’t throw the lid as well, I must have forgotten”

There was a knock on the door and a women wearing a white laboratory coat opened the door, “Inspector” she said “ May I have a word” The inspector rose from his chair and went to the door and the lady whispered, “we’re found a couple of prints on the box that could be Mrs Smiths’ but we also found this, a piece of a jigsaw caught in the folds of the cardboard, It could be from Mrs Smiths’ jigsaw”.

Britton took the piece and thanked the officer and turning to the suspect said, “Billy, we’ve got to pop out for a while don’t go anywhere, we’ll see you in a bit. Charlie, Lets go”.

As Herbert opened his front door he smiled at the two police officers and said, "Oh, Chief Inspector and constable, how nice to see you, do come in, Joyce is in the morning room and she'll be so pleased to see you"

In the morning room Mrs Smith was indeed pleased to see them and offered them tea, which they declined, then begged them to be seated.

"Well," started off Britton " we have good news, we've found most of your silver, we can't give it back to you yet but at least you know it's safe with us" Herbert immediately rose to his feet and with the legs of a man twenty years his junior, raced across the room to shake hands and thank both the officers.

Mrs Smith was also overcome with joy " Inspector, Charlie, how can we ever thank you, you've done wonderfully I thought we'd lost the silver for ever," after a short pause she continued " I'm just sitting here finishing this confounded jigsaw, after all that, can you believe it, there is one single piece missing".

"I think I may be able to help you with that also Mrs Smith", and with that he got up from the comfort of the chesterfield, walking over to the table where Mrs smith was sitting and placed the piece of jigsaw in the one gap remaining in the picture.