

Mr Maguiver Receives A Letter That Isn't For Him And Discovers That One Of His Neighbours Is In Trouble

Chapter 1

In Which Mr Maguiver Received A Letter That Wasn't For Him And Discovered That One Of His Neighbours Was In Trouble

Mr Maguiver answered the front door to the postman in his paisley pyjamas, tartan dressing gown and purple slippers.

'I'm sorry about the apparel,' the postman said. 'It's Friday, so we're allowed to have an Undress-down Day. I hope you don't mind.'

'Not at all,' said Mr Maguiver. He made a vaguely signature-like squiggle on the screen that the postman held in his direction, and accepted the letter that followed it.

He glanced at the envelope. 'Hold on,' he said, as the postman turned to leave. 'This isn't addressed to me.'

The postman turned back. '105 Menshum Street,' he said. 'That's here, isn't it?'

'Well, yes,' Mr Maguiver said. 'But this is for a Mr Brankleshurmotshagen. That's not me.'

The postman scratched his head. 'Well,' he said. 'Can't help that, I'm afraid. Far as I'm concerned, it's this address, and you've signed for it. Rest is up to you, I'm afraid.'

He left, whistling. Mr Maguiver looked after him, then closed the door. Oh well – he'd just have to try sorting this out himself.

He sat down at his favourite table in his dining room, where he was indulging in his favourite breakfast: porridge, toast and marmalade, kippers, orange juice and fried acorns – he found that the porridge bound the rest together into a satisfyingly thick and creamy concoction, while the orange juice gave it a nicer colour – and gazed at the envelope while he ate.

Let me see, now, he thought. Mr Brankleshurmotshagen. I wonder who that could be?

Well, this was not going to be easy. Why, it could be any one of thousands of Brankleshurmotshagens in Menshum Street alone.

Hmm. There was Mr Brankleshurmotshagen the Baker, for example; who, it was widely known, sold black-market buns in the alleyway at the back of Brankleshurmotshagen's Cash-and-Carry Electrical Retailers on a Wednesday evening. Could it be him the letter was for?

Unlikely. Mr Brankleshurmotshagen the Baker had been in jail for three years, and was only let out one morning a month for conjugal visits with his wife, her sister, their fourteen cousins and the local women's choral society. Who would be writing to him?

Then there was Mr Brankleshurmotshagen the Spy. He was always receiving letters and packages, according to the postman; but most of those exploded shortly after they'd been delivered, and this letter – he held it to his ear to check – didn't appear to be ticking, so it was unlikely to be for him.

Then there was Mr Brankleshurmotshagen who spelled his name S-M-I-T-H, so, given the name on this letter was Brankleshurmotshagen spelled B-R-A-N-K-L-E-S-H-U-R-M-O-T-S-H-A-G-E-N, it was unlikely to be him.

Oh, this was going to be majorly difficult! He came to a decision. He had to start somewhere – so why not start with Mr Brankleshurmotshagen who lived in the upstairs flat?

He ascended the stairs, and knocked at Mr Brankleshurmotshagen who lived in the upstairs flat's door. After the sort of brief pause which usually indicates that a door is being walked to and is about to be opened, the door opened.

'Good morning,' Mr Maguiver said to the child of indeterminate sex who had answered the door. 'Could I speak to Mr Brankleshurmotshagen, please?'

'Nobody here of that name,' the child – who was probably around ten years of age, but might have been as much as ten-and-a-half – said, and closed the door.

Mr Maguiver stared at the door a second. Then he knocked again.

'Yes?' a woman of around five feet two inches in height and eight feet seven inches in width, and probably forty-ish years old said, when the door opened again.

'Good morning,' Mr Maguiver said. 'I was wondering if I could speak to Mr Brankleshurmotshagen, only your son or daughter said he didn't live here.'

'That's right,' the woman said. 'And I don't have a son or daughter or other indeterminate offspring, neither, so you must be mistaken. Good day.'

'One moment. Please,' Mr Maguiver said, as the door threatened to slam itself in his face again.

The door widened again. The woman peered out suspiciously at him. 'What?'

Mr Maguiver cleared his throat. 'You say that Mr Brankleshurmotshagen doesn't live here?'

'That's right,' the woman snapped.

'May I ask what your name is?'

'Chiversomatsungen – if it's any of your business.'

'I see,' Mr Maguiver said. 'Might I ask how you spell that?'

'The usual way. A chiv, an er, a som, an at and two sungens.'

'Two sungens?'

'Yes – one's my brother, if it's all the same to you.'

'I see. Does your brother live with you?'

'Nobody lives with me. So if you're up to no good, be warned – we're all armed.'

'I see,' Mr Maguiver said again. 'And have you lived here long?' he added.

'As long as my teeth and twice as long as my nose,' the woman said. She made to close the door again.

'Ah – that long?' Mr Maguiver said. The door widened again, rapidly.

'What d'you mean by that?'

'Nothing at all,' Mr Maguiver said. 'It's just that I was wondering why there is a plaque on your door saying "Mr Brankleshurmotshagen Lives Here".'

The woman frowned, and peered at the area of the door Mr Maguiver was indicating.

'Woodworm,' she said.

'Woodworm?'

'That's right.' This time, she did slam the door.

Mr Maguiver contemplated the door, and the plaque it contained. Then, he knocked again.

'Hello?' This was a man of around six feet eight inches, with thick black curly hair, a thick black bushy beard and a long black leather suit.

'Do you live here?' Mr Maguiver asked.

'I do.'

'And is your name Brankleshurmotshagen?'

'No.'

'Have you lived here long?'

'I have.'

'And do you live on your own?'

'Yes.'

'Good morning,' said Mr Maguiver, and left.

Back in his dining room he contemplated the letter, a puzzled frown on his face. *Now, he thought, I've seen Mr Brankleshurmotshagen many times as we've passed each other in the hallway. He's a man of around seventy, small in all directions, balding and friendly. He is not:*

1) a child of around ten years of age; 2) a short, wide, snappy woman; or 3) a giant with more hair than a barber's shop. What can this mean?

The first thing it could mean was that the giant had visited two barber's shops. The second –

The second could, and most surely must, mean that Mr Brankleshurmotshagen was in terrible, terrible trouble!

Chapter 2

In Which Mr Maguiver Changes His Name To Maguire Because Then Microsoft Word Doesn't Put A Squiggly Red Line Underneath It Every Time He Writes It Down, And Finds Out Exactly What Terrible, Terrible Trouble His Neighbour Is In

The wall outside Mr Maguire's bedroom window is steep and smooth, and impossible to climb. Fortunately, Mr Maguire has recently had a new television aerial installed, and is therefore able to climb the co-axial cable that runs from this down to his sitting room, instead of having to go by way of the brickwork.

As he ascends, he congratulates himself on his foresight – and the fact that he can also now receive Radio 2 in High Definition, which was, he is sure he recollects accurately, his only childhood ambition.

Other thoughts that run through his mind are:

I am so glad that I invested in that correspondence course in mountaineering. Most useful;

I am so glad that I am not afraid of heights, so long as I don't look down, up, sideways, backwards, or at the wall in front of me;

and

I am so glad that I've changed from past tense to present, as at least I know that nothing bad has happened to me just yet.

With these thoughts to comfort him, Mr Maguire reaches his goal – the bedroom window (he supposes) of Mr Brankleshurmotshagen.

Unfortunately, the bedroom window (he supposes) of Mr Brankleshurmotshagen is firmly shut, and the curtains drawn across so Mr Maguire can't see in.

Mr Maguire hesitates, uncertain whether to knock on the pane and see whether he gets a response, or climb back down to his own bedroom window, knock on that, and see if he gets a response there.

Neither option seems that palatable to him. In the first instance, his knock may be answered by a child, a small woman or a giant, in which case he will need to hastily think up

an explanation as to why he is hanging around the outside of Mr Brankleshurmotshagen's bedroom (he supposes) window. And in the second instance, if he knocks at his own bedroom (he knows rather than supposes) window and discovers no-one at home, he will then be forced to take off into the town in the hope of running across himself at one of his favourite eateries or shopping places in order to obtain the key to get back into his flat.

Therefore, he decides on a third option, which is to take out one of Mr Brankleshurmotshagen the Baker's fresh-cream eclairs that he'd thoughtfully pocketed while still in the past tense, and smash Mr Brankleshurmotshagen his upstairs neighbour's bedroom (he still supposes) window.

Thankfully, because of his foresightedness in choice of ingress-aid, the noise he makes is more of a dull sludge than a resounding crash. Whoever the mysterious stranger or strangers who has or have invaded Mr Brankleshurmotshagen's flat is or are, he, she, it or they will probably not have heard. Cheered by this thought, Mr Maguire draws the curtains aside and enters.

Inside, the room proves to be (as he's supposed all along) Mr Brankleshurmotshagen's bedroom. It's empty except for a wardrobe, five chests of drawers, an occasional table, two frequent tables, one always-a-table, a washbasin and stand, nine bookcases containing exactly three thousand, two hundred and forty-six hardback (and approximately one paperback) novels, one single bed and a figure.

The figure is lying on the bed. It has a very un-Mr Brankleshurmotshagen bulk to it – Mr Maguire is jolted by this, and fears that it is maybe the small, wide woman taking a mid-morning nap. However, on further inspection (using a Junior Construct-it-yourself Telescope he builds from a kit he's slipped into his other pocket before undertaking his climb) he discovers the figure to actually be a small-in-all-directions man wrapped in a duvet and bound with thirteen miles of shipyard-strength rope.

Unfortunately, Mr Maguire cannot tell whether the small-in-all-directions man on the bed is Mr Brankleshurmotshagen. He decides he has to move closer.

He clambers over a chest of drawers, underneath the always-a-table, through the wardrobe (turning right at a lamppost in the snow that covers the floor inside), climbs six of the nine bookcases (stopping to read approximately none of the hardback novels), the washbasin and stand, and reaches the bed. Peering cautiously into the man's face, he cannot tell whether or not he is Mr Brankleshurmotshagen – unfortunately, the man has his eyes closed. Gently, Mr Maguire taps the man on the rope.

The man's eyes snap open. 'What?'

Mr Maguire looks into the eyes. The eyes are a faded grey, with black flecks. Mr Maguire still can't tell whether this is Mr Brankleshurmotshagen, or not as he's only ever seen Mr Brankleshurmotshagen wearing dark glasses and carrying a white stick.

He hesitates, then decides on a direct approach. 'Are you Mr Brankleshurmotshagen?' he hisses.

The Mr or non-Mr Brankleshurmotshagen glares. 'There's no need to whisper. I'm not deaf.'

'Oh. My apologies.' Mr Maguire raises his voice a notch or two. '*ARE YOU MR BRANKLESHURMOTSHAGEN!*'

The Mr or non-Mr Brankleshurmotshagen's glare turns to one of suspicion. 'Are you the police?'

Mr Maguire has never considered that he could be mistaken for a policeman. He removes his constable's helmet and scratches his head. 'No – I can't say that I am.'

'That's all right, then,' the Mr or non-Mr Brankleshurmotshagen says, relief in his voice. 'I haven't paid my electricity bill for five minutes, so you never know.'

'So,' Mr Maguire asks again, 'are you Mr Brankleshurmotshagen?'

'Of course I am! Who else would I be?'

Mr Maguire considers. 'Well,' he answers, 'you could be 1) a child, 2) a small, wide woman, or 3) a giant. As you just said, you never know.'

'Oh, them. No – I'm not them. And by the way, it's an A) a child, a B) a small, wide woman, or a C) a giant. They don't come in numbers, they come in capital letters.'

'I see,' Mr Maguire says. 'I appear to have a lot to learn.'

'Quite right.'

'So,' Mr Maguire continues, 'are you in trouble?'

'Not really,' Mr now-established-as-Brankleshurmotshagen replies.

'Oh. I merely ask because of your situation.'

Mr Brankleshurmotshagen frowns. 'My situation?'

'Indeed.' Mr Maguire coughs politely, and points to the duvet and the rope.

'A man can have a hobby, can't he?'

'Of course.' Mr Maguire pauses, then turns to go, considering that Mr Brankleshurmotshagen is obviously fine and, contrary to appearances, needs no assistance.

'Hang on!' Mr Brankleshurmotshagen snaps. 'Aren't you going to help me?'

Mr Maguire turns back. 'So you are in trouble?'

'I didn't say that! I just said I need help, that's all!'

Mr Maguire ponders this. 'Very well,' he says. 'What do you need me to do?'

'Release me from these bonds, for a start.'

'Certainly,' Mr Maguire reaches downwards to begin to try to untie the rope.

'Hold on a sec,' Mr Brankleshurmotshagen says. 'I need to check that the A, B and C aren't going to catch us.'

Quicker than Mr Maguire could believe for a probably-a-septuagenarian, Mr Brankleshurmotshagen leaps off the bed, shrugs off the rope and the duvet, and disappears through the door into another part of his flat. There is a pause of around ten seconds, then the A) boy of around ten walks in.

'Hey, what are you doing!' the A) boy of around ten yells. *'I'm going to get help!'*

He runs out of the door. There is a pause of around another ten seconds, then Mr Brankleshurmotshagen walks back into the room, shrugs back on the rope and the duvet, and lays back down on the bed.

'That's torn it,' he says. 'He'll go and get one of the others. You'd better hide.'

With that, he re-leaps off the bed, re-shrugs off the rope and the duvet, and re-disappears through the door.

Mr Maguire casts around in a panic. With so few choices of hiding place, he makes his way hastily behind three of the hardback novels on two of the bookcases. From there, he is in a perfect position to see the B) small, wide woman rush into the room, a broom in hand held in a threatening position.

'Hmm,' the B) small, wide woman says, having scanned the room with both eyes closed. 'That's funny. Youngster definitely said...'

She leaves. After another pause of around ten seconds (possibly ten-and-a-half, this time), Mr Brankleshurmotshagen re-re-enters, re-re-dons the rope and the duvet, and re-re-reclines himself. Mr Maguire creeps down from the bookcase and stalks to the bed, glancing at the door nervously.

'I think you got away with that,' Mr Brankleshurmotshagen says. 'Though you won't be so lucky if the C walks in.'

'Oh dear,' Mr Maguire says. 'I think perhaps I'd better...'

'Quick!' Mr Brankleshurmotshagen interrupts. 'I can hear him coming!'

Mr Maguire rushes back to his novels, while Mr Brankleshurmotshagen re-re-leaps, re-re-shrugs off, and re-re-disappears. In ten seconds flat (definitely no more) the C) giant stalks in, glaring. He carries not a broom, not a shotgun, and not an A or a B, but C) himself, very, very hugely and menacingly.

'I know you're in here,' he growls. 'I can smell you.'

Mr Maguire gingerly sniffs his armpits. He knows the situation is stressful, but his nose reassures him that his underarm deodorant is still holding.

He braces himself to be discovered. And is astonished to see that, instead of prowling around the room checking behind various articles of furniture and exactly three thousand, two hundred and forty-six hardback (and approximately one paperback) novels, including the three that he himself is hiding behind, the C stalks back out of the room, still muttering imprecations.

After the now-accustomed delay, Mr Brankleshurmotshagen re-re-re's. Mr Maguire creeps back over to him. 'Listen,' he says, 'this situation is too rich for my blood. I think that I need to contact the authorities.'

'Good idea. Better scarper before they come back.'

Mr Maguire softly retraces his steps back to the window and, by dint of reversing his upward climb to Mr Brankleshurmotshagen's bedroom (as it turned out), climbs back up to his flat in the downward direction.

Back there, he writes to British Telecommunications plc to have a telephone installed, and then, once the engineer who comes to do that has finished, contacts the police.

Chapter 3

In Which Mr Maguire Will Slip Into The Future Tense And Decide That He Won't Like His New Name After All, So Will Change It Back To Maguiver, Only Spelt Capital-M-A-C-Capital-G-Y-V-E-R, Which Will Ensure He Still Won't Get A Squiggly Red Line Underneath It, Then The Police Will Raid Mr Brankleshurmotshagen's Flat And Arrest His Captors, And Mr MacGyver Will, For Reasons He Won't Be Able To Fathom, Never See Mr Brankleshurmotshagen Again

(All as the chapter title will say, as the chapter title will say all that will need to be said.)

Chapter 4

In Which The End Switches Back Into The Present Tense and Happens

The End