

***Probability Zero Presents***

**Mrs. McGinty  
and the Missing Link.**  
A Mrs. McGinty Mystery

Alberia is a vaguely pointless country.

It lies between oil rich Qatan to the north and Perilia with its gold mines to the south. Although it has an area of approximately France, it has a population roughly equivalent of the crowd at an MK Dons football match. The nomadic tribesmen that live between Alberia's oases got the short end of the stick when the boundaries were drawn up between the three countries. Its population had been divided between Qatan and Perilia, some moving to the oil in the north, others to the gold in the south.

Many years later, Alberia had fallen under the beady eye of the Hayes Corporation.

They had realised that it was difficult for the people of land locked Perilia to get their gold to the ports of Qatan. They had also realised that if there was a transport infrastructure in Perilia linking the oases, then there were thousands of acres of real estate that could be bought for a couple of beads and the occasional Exocet missile.

They had decided to build a railway line between Qatan and Perilia. The raw materials were readily available and there was an enthusiastic indigenous work force. Once the railway was in, they intended to use it to bring in materials and build airstrips in the desert.

Hayes had organised work teams in Qatan and Perilia. National pride had been intense and both sides had set off determined to have built more of the line before the two ends met.

Qatan was well ahead in the race before disaster struck. A surveyor had come from the Hayes Corporation and found that the Qatan crews had drifted approximately three hundred miles off course.

The Qatani were livid. They claimed that the Hayes Corporation had given them the wrong information. They said Hayes were working with the Perilians.

It was at this point that Hayes had called in Colonel Ephraim Pikeaway.

Pikey had got straight to the bottom of the matter. It had turned out there was no conspiracy, just an over enthusiastic engineer who, in his haste to get the job done, had misread his satellite location device.

Secretly, the Hayes Corporation were quite pleased with this outcome. They had been worried that if one of the countries had won, the other would not have allowed the track to be finished.

But now they could call it a draw. The Qatani had built more track, but the Perilians had got further into Alberia. Honour was satisfied.

The Hayes Corporation decided to hold a joining ceremony.

Sleepers were made out of compacted sand (there was a lot of it in the desert) and the tracks were extruded hot (to allow for expansion) from the back of a

machine. The rails were then joined to the sleepers by what were effectively nails. The nails came in two sizes, Brads and Tacks.

Brads were the longer nails used to secure the track. Tacks were smaller and used to secure the brads.

To finish the line, Hayes had made a Golden Tack. The President of Perilia and the King of Qatan had agreed to both place hands on the sledge hammer that would be used to drive in the final tack. The tack itself would be made of twenty-four carat gold.

Hayes had three tacks made. One was to be driven into the sleeper during the ceremony and the other two were to be given to the relevant countries.

The ceremony itself went without a hitch, both the king and the president playing their parts perfectly. The problem came when it was time to present the ceremonial tacks.

One of them was missing.

This caused a major problem. It would have been easier if both had been stolen, neither country would have been given a tack. But now there was a single tack, so which country was to get it?

It was at this point that Pikey called me and my aunt in.

We landed in Qatan and Pikey had arranged a special railcar that could get us to Al Huduh, the town where the ceremony had been held.

My aunt moaned all the way there.

"It's too bloody hot," she said, despite the air conditioning. "I'm sweating like a rhino with hives. I'm not a sweaty old slag, I'm a slapper in aqueous suspension."

She broke wind and the air conditioning groaned.

"I makes your knickers stick to your bum," she added unhelpfully and began to firtle around her nether regions.

By the time we reached Al Huduh she had managed to compose herself properly and was every inch the English Gentlewoman. She had re-arranged her underwear and was carrying herself erect. She carried a small parasol and when the door opened she waited for Colonel Pikeaway to take her hand and help her from the carriage.

"There's been a development," said the Colonel eagerly. "We've tracked the robbers down to the Street of a Thousand Thieves."

"That was imaginative," said my aunt

"It's not called the Street of a Thousand Thieves for nothing. When got there, we followed them into an alley way. We knew it was a dead end and so we let them go in.

"There were three shops on the alley way."

"There was Abdul A Aneedul's, a small scale electronics specialist. You know the sort of thing, cheap mp3 players, CD's, knocked off SatNavs."

"There was Byron B Blannibos' which is a carpet shop."

"Isn't that a bit stereotypical"

"Who's telling this story? I'll tell you something though, he's got some lovely rugs. I've bought a couple to take back to Mrs. Pikeaway.

"The last shop was owned by Cyrus C. Cantano. It's a...er...private...shop."

“Did you buy Mrs. Pikeaway anything from there?”

“I was tempted to buy something, but not for Mrs. Pikeaway.”

“So you’ve been into all the shops?”

“Yes, but only for a quick look round. We’re outside our jurisdiction and we don’t have the right to search all of them. We will be allowed to search one shop and only one. So here’s my question, which shop do you think they would pick?”

*The Challenge.*

*So where has the ceremonial nail been hidden?*

*Was it Abdul A Aneedul’s small scale electronics shop*

*Was it Byron B Blannibos’ carpet shop.”*

*Or was it Cyrus C. Cantano’s private shop.”*

*“Did you buy Mrs. Pikeaway anything from there?”*

*To answer the question, you must decide which shop would you put the golden tack in if you wanted it to be hardest to find.*

*The solution may be found below.*

## The Solution

“Let’s look at this logically,” said my aunt. “The thieves would put their booty in the place that it would be hardest to find.”

“Yes,” I said.

“No doubt about it, then. The stolen nail is in the electronics shop, owned by Abdul A Aneedul.”

“Why?”

“What’s harder to find than a Hayes’ Tack in Aneedul’s?”

We all groaned.