

Chapter 13 The Accident

The two lords had no choice but to leave the king and Captain Roach in their little clearing in the fog and proceed onto the marsh. Spittleworth took the lead, feeling his way with his feet for the firmest bits of ground. Flapoon followed close behind, still holding tightly to the hem of Spittleworth's coat and sinking deeply with every footstep because he was so heavy. The fog was clammy on their skin and rendered them almost completely blind. In spite of Spittleworth's best efforts, the two lords' boots were soon full to the brim with fetid water.

'That blasted nincompoop!' muttered Spittleworth as they squelched along. 'That blithering buffoon! This is all his fault, the mouse-brained moron!'

'I'll serve him right if that sword's lost for good,' said Flapoon, now nearly waist-deep in marsh.

'We'd better hope it isn't, or we'll be here all night,' said Spittleworth. 'Oh, curse this fog!'

They struggled onwards. The mist would thin for a few steps, then close again. Boulders loomed suddenly out of nowhere like ghostly elephants, and the rustling reeds sounded just like snakes. Though Spittleworth and Flapoon knew perfectly well that there was no such thing as an Ickabog, their insides didn't seem quite so sure.

'Let go of me!' Spittleworth growled at Flapoon, whose constant tugging was making him think of monstrous claws or jaws fastened on the back of his coat.

Flapoon let go, but he too had been infected by a nonsensical fear, so he loosened his blunderbuss from its holster and held it ready.

'What's that?' he whispered to Spittleworth, as an odd noise reached them out of the darkness ahead.

Both lords froze, the better to listen.

A low growling and scrabbling was coming out of the fog. It conjured an awful vision in both men's minds, of a monster feasting on the body of one of the Royal Guard.

'Who's there?' Spittleworth called, in a high-pitched voice.

Somewhere in the distance, Major Beamish shouted back:

'Is that you, Lord Spittleworth?'

'Yes,' shouted Spittleworth. 'We can hear something strange, Beamish! Can you?'

It seemed to the two lords that the odd growling and scrabbling grew louder.

Then the fog shifted. A monstrous black silhouette with gleaming white eyes was revealed right in front of them, and it emitted a long yowl.

With a deafening, crashing boom that seemed to shake the marsh, Flapoon let off his blunderbuss. The startled cries of their fellow men echoed across the hidden landscape, and then, as though Flapoon's shot had frightened it, the fog parted like curtains before the two lords, giving them a clear view of what lay ahead.

The moon slid out from behind a cloud at that moment and they saw a vast granite boulder with a mass of thorny branches at its base. Tangled up in these brambles was a terrified, skinny dog, whimpering and scrabbling to free itself, its eyes flashing in the reflected moonlight.

A little beyond the giant boulder, face down in the bog, lay Major Beamish.

'What's going on?' shouted several voices out of the fog. 'Who fired?'

Neither Spittleworth nor Flapoon answered. Spittleworth waded as quickly as he could towards Major Beamish. A swift examination was enough: the major was stone-dead, shot through the heart by Flapoon in the dark.

'My God, my God, what shall we do?' bleated Flapoon, arriving at Spittleworth's side.

'Quiet!' whispered Spittleworth.

He was thinking harder and faster than he'd thought in the whole of his crafty, conniving life. His eyes moved slowly from Flapoon and the gun, to the shepherd's trapped dog, to the king's boots and jewelled sword, which he now noticed, half-buried in the bog just a few feet away from the giant boulder.

Spittleworth waded through the marsh to pick up the king's sword and used it to slash apart the brambles imprisoning the dog. Then, giving the poor animal a hearty kick, he sent it yelping away into the fog.

'Listen carefully,' murmured Spittleworth, returning to Flapoon, but before he could explain his plan, another large figure emerged from the fog: Captain Roach.

'The king sent me,' panted the captain. 'He's terrified. What happ—'

Then Roach saw Major Beamish lying dead on the ground.

Spittleworth realised immediately that Roach must be let in on the plan and that, in fact, he'd be very useful.

'Say nothing, Roach,' said Spittleworth, 'while I tell you what has happened.'

'The Ickabog has killed our brave Major Beamish. In view of this tragic death, we shall need a new major, and of course, that will be you, Roach, for you're second-in-command. I shall recommend a large pay rise for you, because you were so valiant - listen closely, Roach - so very valiant in chasing after the dreadful Ickabog, as it ran away into the fog. You see, the Ickabog was devouring the poor major's body when Lord Flapoon and I came upon it. Frightened by Lord Flapoon's blunderbuss, which he sensibly discharged into the air, the monster dropped Beamish's body and fled. You bravely gave chase, trying to recover the king's sword, which was half-buried in the monster's thick hide - but you weren't able to recover it, Roach. So sad for the poor king. I believe the priceless sword was his grandfather's, but I suppose it's now lost forever in the Ickabog's lair.'

So saying, Spittleworth pressed the sword into Roach's large hands. The newly promoted major looked down at its jewelled hilt, and a cruel and crafty smile to match Spittleworth's own spread over his face.

'Yes, a great pity that I wasn't able to recover the sword, my lord,' he said, sliding it out of sight beneath his tunic. 'Now, let's wrap up the poor Major's body, because it would be dreadful for the other men to see the marks of the monster's fangs upon him.'

'How sensitive of you, Major Roach,' said Lord Spittleworth, and the two men swiftly took off their cloaks and wrapped up the body while Flapoon watched, heartily relieved that nobody need know he'd accidentally killed Beamish.

'Could you remind me what the Ickabog looked like, Lord Spittleworth?' asked Roach, when Major Beamish's body was well hidden. 'For the three of us saw it together and will, of course, have received identical impressions.'

'Very true,' said Lord Spittleworth. 'Well, according to the king, the beast is as tall as two horses, with eyes like lamps.'

'In fact,' said Flapoon, pointing, 'it looks a lot like this large boulder, with a dog's eyes gleaming at the base.'

'Tall as two horses, with eyes like lamps,' repeated Roach. 'Very well, my lords. If you'll assist me to put Beamish over my shoulder, I'll carry him to the king and we can explain how the major met his death.'

Wednesday 1st July 2020

Task 1

This exciting chapter gives us snippets of what the infamous Ikabog may look like. Sketch what you imagine the Ikabog to look like based on these extracts.

