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## Chapter 16 Bert Says Goodbye

Spittleworth noticed a commotion beside the palace walls and strained to see what was going on. When he spotted the woman on the ground, and heard the cries of shock and pity, he suddenly realised that he'd left a loose end that might yet trip him up: the widow! As he rode past the little knot of people in the crowd who were fanning Mrs Beamish's face, Spittleworth knew that his longed-for bath must be postponed, and his crafty brain began to race again.

Once the king's party was safely in the courtyard, and servants had hurried to assist Fred from his horse, Spittleworth pulled Major Roach aside.

'The widow, Beamish's widow!' he muttered. 'Why didn't you send her word about his death?'

'It never occurred to me, my lord,' said Roach truthfully. He'd been too busy thinking about the jewelled sword all the way home: how best to sell it, and whether it would be better to break it up into pieces so that nobody recognised it.

'Curse you, Roach, must I think of everything?' snarled Spittleworth. 'Go now, take Beamish's body out of those filthy cloaks, cover it with a Cornucopian flag, and lay him out in the Blue Parlour. Put guards on the door and then bring Mrs Beamish to me in the Throne Room.'

'Also, give the order that these soldiers must not go home or talk to their families until I've spoken to them. It's essential that we all tell the same story! Now hurry, fool, hurry - Beamish's widow could ruin everything!'

Spittleworth pushed his way past soldiers and stable boys to where Flapoon was being lifted off his horse.

'Keep the king away from the Throne Room and the Blue Parlour,' Spittleworth whispered in Flapoon's ear. 'Encourage him to go to bed!'

Flapoon nodded and Spittleworth hurried away through the dimly lit palace corridors, casting off his dusty riding coat as he went, and bellowing at the servants to fetch him fresh clothes.

Once in the deserted Throne Room, Spittleworth pulled on his clean jacket, and ordered a maid to light a single lamp and bring him a glass of wine. Then he waited. At last, there came a knock on the door.

'Enter!' shouted Spittleworth, and in came Major Roach, accompanied by a white-faced Mrs Beamish, and young Bert.

'My dear Mrs Beamish... my very dear Mrs Beamish,' said Spittleworth, striding towards her and clasping her free hand. 'The king has asked me to tell you how deeply sorry he is. I add my own condolences. What a tragedy... what an awful tragedy.'

'W-why did nobody send word?' sobbed Mrs Beamish. 'W-why did we have to find out by seeing his poor - his poor body?'

She swayed a little, and Roach hurried to fetch a small golden chair. The maid, who was called Hetty, arrived with wine for Spittleworth, and while she was pouring it, Spittleworth said:

'Dear lady, we did in fact send word. We sent a messenger - didn't we, Roach?'

'That's right,' said Roach. 'We sent a young lad called...'

But here, Roach got stuck. He was a man of very little imagination.

'Nobby,' said Spittleworth, saying the first name that came into his head. 'Little Nobby... Buttons,' he added, because the flickering lamplight had just illuminated one of Roach's golden buttons. 'Yes, little Nobby Buttons volunteered, and off he galloped. What could have become of him? Roach,' said Spittleworth, 'we must send out a search party, at once, to see whether any trace of Nobby Buttons can be found.'

'At once, my lord,' said Roach, bowing deeply, and he left.

'How... how did my husband die?' whispered Mrs Beamish.

'Well, madam,' said Spittleworth, speaking carefully, for he knew that the story he told now would become the official version, and that he'd have to stick by it, forevermore. 'As you may have heard, we journeyed to the Marshlands, because we'd received word that the Ickabog had carried off a dog. Shortly after our arrival, I regret to say that our entire party was attacked by the monster.

'It lunged for the king first, but he fought most bravely, sinking his sword into the monster's neck. To the tough-skinned Ickabog, however, 'twas but a wasp sting. Enraged, it sought further victims, and though Major Beamish put up a most heroic struggle, I regret to say that he laid down his life for the king.

'Then Lord Flapoon had the excellent notion of firing his blunderbuss, which scared the Ickabog away. We brought poor Beamish out of the marsh, asked for a volunteer to take news of his death to his family. Dear little Nobby Buttons said he'd do it, and he leapt up onto his horse, and until we reached Chouxville, I never doubted that he'd arrived and given you warning of this dreadful tragedy.'

'Can I - can I see my husband?' wept Mrs Beamish.

'Of course, of course,' said Spittleworth. 'He's in the Blue Parlour.'

He led Mrs Beamish and Bert, who was still clutching his mother's hand, to the doors of the parlour, where he paused.

'I regret,' he said, 'that we cannot remove the flag covering him. His injuries would be far too distressing for you to see... the fang and claw marks, you know...'

Mrs Beamish swayed yet again and Bert grabbed hold of her, to keep her upright. Now Lord Flapoon walked up to the group, holding a tray of pies.

'King's in bed,' he said thickly to Spittleworth. 'Oh, hello,' he added, looking at Mrs Beamish, who was one of the few servants whose name he knew, because she baked the pastries. 'Sorry about the major,' said Flapoon, spraying Mrs Beamish and Bert with crumbs of pie crust. 'Always liked him.'

He walked away, leaving Spittleworth to open the door of the Blue Parlour to let Mrs Beamish and Bert inside. There lay the body of Major Beamish, concealed beneath the Cornucopian flag.

'Can't I at least kiss him one last time?' sobbed Mrs Beamish.

'Quite impossible, I'm afraid,' said Spittleworth. 'His face is half gone.'

'His hand, Mother,' said Bert, speaking for the first time. 'I'm sure his hand will be all right.'

And before Spittleworth could stop the boy, Bert reached beneath the flag for his father's hand, which was quite unmarked.

Mrs Beamish knelt down and kissed the hand over and over again, until it shone with tears as though made of porcelain. Then Bert helped her to her feet and the two of them left the Blue Parlour without another word.

## Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020 Y4 English Home Learning

In this chapter, the new Major realises that they haven't told Major Beamish's poor wife about the death of her husband. Now that he has died, she is called a widow.

*'The widow, Beamish's widow!' he muttered. 'Why didn't you send her word about his death?'*

Your task today - To write a letter from the new Major to Major Beamish's wife to break the bad news to her and explain how her husband came to his fateful death (the fictional story obviously, not the truth!)

Remember our work on letter writing -

Address and date in the right corner

Open with a formal greeting (Dear Mrs Beamish, )

Explain your reason for writing in your opening sentences

In the main paragraph, explain the events.

In the final paragraph express your sincere condolences

Finish by signing off (Yours sincerely...)