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Chapter 17 **Goodfellow Makes a Stand**

Having watched the Beamishes out of sight, Spittleworth hurried off to the Guard's Room, where he found Roach keeping watch over the rest of the Royal Guard. The walls of the room were hung with swords and a portrait of King Fred, whose eyes seemed to watch everything that was happening.

'They're growing restless, my lord,' muttered Roach. 'They want to go home to their families and get to bed.'

'And so they shall, once we've had a little chat,' said Spittleworth, moving to face the weary and travel-stained soldiers.

'Has anyone got any questions about what happened back in the Marshlands?' he asked the men.

The soldiers looked at each other. Some of them stole furtive glances at Roach, who'd retreated against the wall, and was polishing a rifle. Then Captain Goodfellow raised his hand, along with two other soldiers.

'Why was Beamish's body wrapped up before any of us could look at it?' asked Captain Goodfellow.

'I want to know where that bullet went, that we heard being fired,' said the second soldier.

'How come only four people saw this monster, if it's so huge?' asked the third, to general nods and muttered agreement.

'All excellent questions,' replied Spittleworth smoothly. 'Let me explain.'

And he repeated the story of the attack that he'd told Mrs Beamish.

The soldiers who'd asked questions remained unsatisfied.

'I still reckon it's funny that a huge monster was out there and none of us saw it,' said the third.

'If Beamish was half-eaten, why wasn't there more blood?' asked the second.

'And who, in the name of all that's Holy,' said Captain Goodfellow, 'is Nobby Buttons?'

'How d'you know about Nobby Buttons?' blurted Spittleworth, without thinking.

'On my way here from the stables, I bumped into one of the maids, Hetty,' said Goodfellow. 'She served you your wine, my lord. According to her, you've just been telling Beamish's poor wife about a member of the Royal Guard called Nobby Buttons. According to you, Nobby Buttons was sent with a message to Beamish's wife, telling her he'd been killed.'

'But I don't remember a Nobby Buttons. I've never met anyone called Nobby Buttons. So I ask you, my lord, how can that be? How can a man ride with us, and camp with us, and take orders from Your Lordship right in front of us, without any of us ever clapping eyes on him?'

Spittleworth's first thought was that he'd have to do something about that eavesdropping maid. Luckily, Goodfellow had given him her name. Then he said in a dangerous voice:

'What gives you the right to speak for everybody, Captain Goodfellow? Perhaps some of these men have better memories than you do. Perhaps they remember poor Nobby Buttons

clearly. Dear little Nobby, in whose memory the king will add a fat bag of gold to everybody's pay this week. Proud, brave Nobby, whose sacrifice – for I fear the monster has eaten him, as well as Beamish – will mean a pay rise for all his comrades-in-arms. Noble Nobby Buttons, whose closest friends are surely marked for speedy promotion.'

Another silence followed Spittleworth's words, and this silence had a cold, heavy quality. Now the whole Royal Guard understood the choice facing them. They weighed in their minds the huge influence Spittleworth was known to have over the king, and the fact that Major Roach was now caressing the barrel of his rifle in a menacing manner, and they remembered the sudden death of their former leader, Major Beamish. They also considered the promise of more gold, and speedy promotion, if they agreed to believe in the Ickabog, and in Private Nobby Buttons.

Goodfellow stood up so suddenly that his chair clattered to the floor.

'There never was a Nobby Buttons, and I'm damned if there's an Ickabog, and I won't be party to a lie!'

The other two men who'd asked questions stood up as well, but the rest of the Royal Guard remained seated, silent, and watchful.

'Very well,' said Spittleworth. 'You three are under arrest for the filthy crime of treason. As I'm sure your comrades remember, you ran away when the Ickabog appeared. You forgot your duty to protect the king and thought only of saving your own cowardly hides! The penalty is death by firing squad.'

He chose eight soldiers to take the three men away, and even though the three honest soldiers struggled very hard, they were outnumbered and overwhelmed, and in no time at all they'd been dragged out of the Guard's Room.

'Very good,' said Spittleworth to the few soldiers remaining. 'Very good indeed. There will be pay rises all round, and I shall remember your names when it comes to promotions. Now, don't forget to tell your families exactly what happened in the Marshlands. It might bode ill for your wives, your parents and your children if they're heard to question the existence of the Ickabog, or of Nobby Buttons.

'You may now return home.'

Tuesday 7th July 2020 Find evidence within the chapter to complete the tables

Doubts, questions and challenges made about Spittleworth's story	Ways in which Spittleworth covered the truth