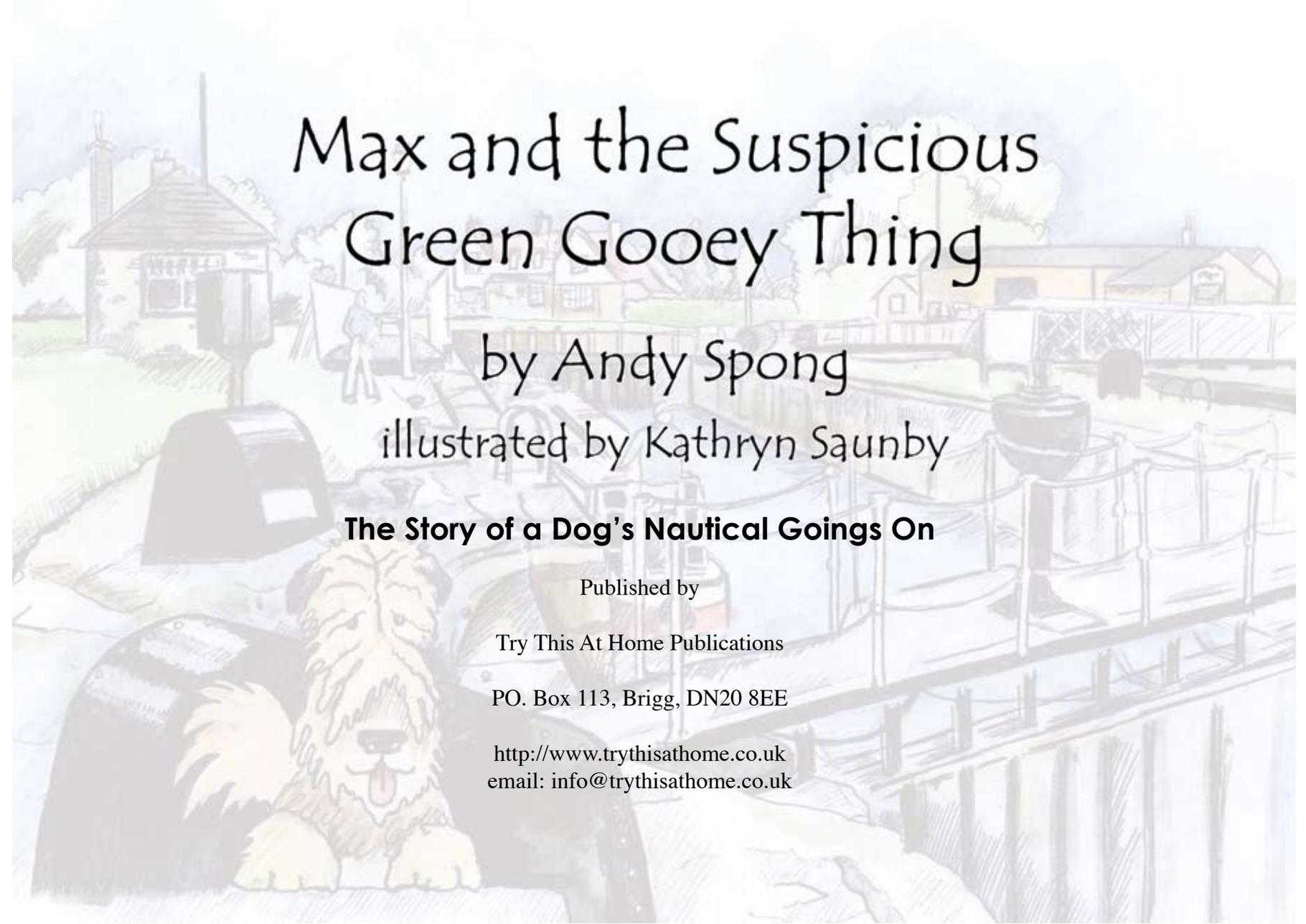


Max and the Suspicious Green Goopy Thing.



written by Andy Spong

illustrated by Kathryn Saunby

The background is a detailed illustration of a village scene. In the foreground, a large, shaggy dog with brown and black fur is looking towards the viewer. Behind it, a village street is visible with several houses, a church with a steeple, and a few people walking. The style is a soft, watercolor-like illustration with a slightly faded appearance.

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The Story of a Dog's Nautical Goings On

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The characters and situations in this book are entirely imaginary and bear no relation to any real person or actual happenings.

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Chapter 1: Max Arrives

Dave, the tall, stick like boatman with hair that resembled a hastily constructed sparrows nest, sat on the deck of the sailing barge “Hillsborough Owl” sipping his tea and gazing across the tow path to the fields beyond. There was a castle in the distance, its ruined outline silhouetted against the slight orange glow of an evening summer sky; insects hovered lazily in the air and cattle and sheep grazed contentedly in the lush green fields. Everything on the canal was at rest: the boats were all tied up for the evening and life was taking on the same gentle pace as the water that flowed beneath them. The only excitement, if you could call it that, was the occasional passing dog walker or fisherman; everything was at peace and all was right with the world. Dave put down his tea and reached for the packet of digestives. He teased one of the biscuits from its cellophane home and was just about to dunk it in his tea when he became aware of someone, or something, watching him intently.

Dave looked down to see a large brown and black woolly dog sitting at his feet. The dog was staring fixedly at the recently dunked digestive, his eyes following its every progress as he popped it into his mouth. Dave looked down again and he was certain the dog was wearing a disappointed expression. “Oh, you want one do you?” Dave enquired. The dog’s expression brightened and its great jaws widened into a definite grin. “Are you sure you are allowed this?” Dave looked questioningly at the dog and he was sure it nodded back to him. “OK then, here you go.” Dave prized another biscuit from the packet and tossed it in the woolly dog’s direction. The dog leapt into the air and caught the digestive skilfully in his teeth before flipping it into the air, catching it again and then crunching noisily before swallowing. “Wow, that was stylish!” commented Dave, taking a slurp of his tea.

“Max. Come here!” A very loud, but despairing voice cut through the perfect evening stillness. The dog and Dave jumped almost in unison.

“I think you are wanted, mate,” Dave commented, looking in the direction of the large woolly dog. Again the dog looked at Dave and seemed to shrug its shoulders before turning in the direction of the approaching loud voice and sitting down in the middle of the towpath.

“Come here you naughty dog!” An old lady was making her way as rapidly as her spindly legs would carry her towards the large woolly dog. In her hand she carried a lead and a great shiny choke chain. The dog sat where he was on the tow path and the old lady thrust the choke chain round his neck.

“It’s a good looking dog you have there,” commented Dave. “What sort is he?”

“He’s a very badly behaved Airedale,” the old lady replied with a slightly annoyed tone in her voice, before continuing, “He’s pulled me off my feet twice and if he does it again I’m giving him away!”

Dave thought for a moment and then replied, “If he’s a bit of a handful I would be more than happy to have him; he seems such a good natured animal.” The old lady grimaced and then, giving the woolly dog’s lead a tug, she continued on her way up the tow path towards the public footpath that led across the fields full of cows and sheep.

Peace and tranquillity returned to the canal bank once more and Dave was about to finish his tea and think about doing something useful when the sound of a terrible commotion floated across from the fields full of peaceful grazing cattle.

Dave looked across the little stone wall that divided the canal from the fields to see an old lady being dragged across the field by a large brown and black scruffy dog. The dog appeared to be in hot pursuit of something furry and edible that obviously had other ideas about being eaten on such a fine and pleasant evening. The mere fact that he was attached to a yelling old lady did not seem to be deterring the dog in the least and



he was making a good pace as the pair careered towards the hedge at the edge of the field. Dave hovered with indecision, wondering what sort of reaction he was going to encounter as he untangled an old lady and a high spirited dog from a thorn hedge. Then he put down his tea and set off in what could vaguely be described as hot pursuit of the source of the commotion.

Once Dave arrived at the point where old lady, dog and hedge had joined forces he had to desperately try and hold back a smile. Fortunately for the old lady, the small furry edible thing had decided to make good its escape by rapid evacuation into its burrow which was situated at the bottom of a sandy bank underneath an elder bush. The large woolly dog now had its head jammed well and truly into the hole and was snuffing loudly and burrowing with great gusto, sending showers of sand, earth and grass in the direction of the old lady who was still attached by the lead. This wouldn't have been quite so bad had not the course of pursuit of the furry edible thing involved traversing a number of very fresh sticky green cow pats.

The old lady, being attached to the fast moving dog by his lead, had proceeded to plough her way through the aforesaid cow pats and was now covered from head to foot in cows deposits. This had been added to with a layer of the mud, sand, grass and dead leaves which the large woolly dog was proceeding to excavate from the furry edible thing's burrow.

The old lady struggled to her feet, removed the lead from her wrist and handed the free end to Dave. "That's it!" The old lady spluttered through a mouthful of sand, leaves and cows' deposits, "I've had it with that dog. He's utterly uncontrollable! I'll bring his bed and bowl down tomorrow."

With that she turned on her heel and stormed back across the field leaving Dave holding the lead of a furiously burrowing dog. Dave shuffled in a bewildered Moose sort of fashion, pondering on his next move. This was the last thing he expected to happen and as the cognitive wheels of a boatman's mind generally run at the same

speed as the water they are travelling on; it was taking a while for things to catch up and fall into place. Another volley of leaves and sand from the burrowing dog, who was evidently enjoying himself, brought Dave to his senses.

“Max!” barked Dave in his best commanding voice, “Come on!” He jerked the lead attached to the burrowing dog, but this appeared to have very little effect as the dog was snuffling loudly and had jammed his head even further into the edible furry thing’s burrow. Dave tried again, this time giving the lead a really good sharp pull.

A yelp from the dog and a rapid retreat from the burrow signalled success. “Come on, you,” Dave announced in his best firm, no nonsense kind of voice. The dog looked up with a confused expression on his face. He seemed somewhat surprised that the old lady on the end of the lead had been replaced by someone else entirely and rather than there being a diminutive grey haired old lady, there was now a tall, stickish chap on the other end. Max was so surprised in fact that the thought of extracting the edible furry thing from its burrow, where it had very unsportingly retreated in his opinion, went totally out of his head.

“Come on!” Dave announced again, giving the lead a tug and pulling Max in the direction of the path that led back to the canal. Max looked up at Dave and decided that he’d better do as he was told. He had obviously disposed of the old lady in some unspeakable fashion and was about to start on him if he didn’t comply, so Max thought it better to cut his losses and follow this new holder of leads. Dave led Max back down to the canal tow path and then along to where the sailing barge was moored next to the bank.

“Welcome aboard, Max,” announced Dave, leading the way onto the deck of the barge. He looked round for a length of rope with which to attach Max’s collar to something secure. Events had definitely taken an unusual course this evening and Dave didn’t feel like further complicating matters by letting this wild

furry pleasure seeker loose on an unsuspecting world, particularly as it seemed he was now responsible for the exploits of this large woolly thing. Max watched as Dave busied himself finding a water bowl for the new arrival and then pondered on where this furry reprobate was going to sleep. Eventually he opted for an old wooden box that fitted nicely in the bow locker and, with the addition of a blanket that had seen better days, it looked quite a cosy home.

“Hmmm,” thought Max. “I better humour him. I think he wants me to sleep in there.” As Dave stepped back to admire Max’s new home, Max obligingly went and gave the box a preliminary sniff before climbing in and closing his eyes. “Well he seems to have made himself at home,” thought Dave. “We’ll just have to see what tomorrow brings.”



Chapter 2 Max and the Unfed Cat

Max, the large brown and black woolly dog and his owner Dave, a tall, stick like chap with hair the colour and style of a badly constructed straw sparrows nest, were sitting out on deck in the summer sunshine. It was a Saturday morning and the traffic over the old stone bridge that crossed the slowly winding river was starting to increase.

“Where on earth has Mick got to?” grumbled Dave, looking at his watch. “He said he would be here by nine o’clock and it’s a quarter to ten now.”

Max looked up at his owner in a patient yet despairing manner and raised an expressive eyebrow to show that he was indeed interested in what his owner had to say. “HmMMM,” pondered Max, “I don’t know what you are getting in such a tizwaz about. Mick’s always late when he’s not on his boat. You should know that by now. Suppose I better humour him or he’ll only start pacing up and down; it drives me mad when he does that.” Max got up padded over to where Dave was sitting and lay his great head on Dave’s lap, hoping that this would do the trick and stop his owner from working himself into a mood where any chance of a good walk along the river later would be out of the question.

Dave patted the great woolly head and smiled down at the dog. “At least you’re reliable, Max,” commented Dave. “I do wish he would be on time. I have things to do.” Max’s nose began to quiver; there was a slight breeze blowing along the river bank and it was carrying a faint but unmistakable aroma of diesel, damp sand and tug bilges.

Max began to wag his tail as the familiar figure of Mick the tug skipper hove into view.

“Now then, Mick. How are you?” announced Dave. “I’m all right, thanks, Dave,” replied Mick. “Shall we go and have a breakfast at Stavros’s Cafe then?” Dave slipped the lead over Max’s head and the three of them set off into town. Breakfast at Stavros’s was always something to look forward to: he believed in real breakfasts and used butcher Pete’s best sausages and bacon. It was only when they were sitting down outside at one of his tables and a formidable fry up was placed in front of Dave and Mick that the conversation turned to what had happened during the previous week.

“Where have you been all week then, Mick?” enquired Dave through a mouthful of sausage.

“Dredging at Monkston,” replied Mick. “There’s some really good clean sand up there. But I’ve been on my own this week so it has taken me a lot longer than usual.”

Mick was just on the verge of taking a large mouthful of fried egg and tomato when he became aware of a loud purring and gentle snoring coming from underneath the table. Stavros’s large ginger cat was curled up next to Max and the two of them were obviously very relaxed in each other’s company. Mick stopped chewing and let out a low moan, “Oh no. Oh dear, dear, dear,” exclaimed Mick.

“What ever’s the matter, Mick? You don’t sound very happy,” replied Dave.

“I’ve forgotten to feed Alan’s cat. I knew there was something I was meant to do but couldn’t for the life of me remember what it was,” wailed Mick.

“When did he ask you then, Mick?” replied Dave as he wrestled a reluctant piece of bacon and fried bread.

“Last Saturday,” moaned Mick, before continuing, “We better finish this up and get down to the moorings and see if Fluffy is still alive.”

There followed a period of silent munching; only the sound of knives and forks in action and the slurping of tea punctuated the stillness. Finally the fruits of Stavros's labours were devoured and Dave and Mick pushed back their chairs and stood up to leave.

"Come on, Max!" Dave gave Max's lead a tug and a sleepy woolly form uncoiled itself from underneath the table.

"See you again, Stav. Excellent breakfast. Thankyou," called Mick as he piled up the plates into some semblance of order. With that, Dave and Mick gave Stav a final wave and headed off back down to the river.

The trio headed back through the cobbled streets that were now beginning to fill with shoppers and past the large square with the big fountain, before making their way across the old bridge and down the stone steps to the small commercial wharf. "Mojo", the Sheffield sized barge, was moored on the outside of a motley collection of large and somewhat used tugs, dumb barges and floating cranes. Max sniffed the air; there was a strong smell of rotting dead thing coming from the general vicinity of "Mojo". Max had met Fluffy, the very unaptly named feline resident of Mojo, before, and he was not looking forward to a second meeting. Fluffy was a very large and very independent, jet black tomcat who regarded any visitor to "Mojo" as being in one of two categories: either a) generally unwelcome or b) possibly edible.

Max, not wishing to try his luck in category b, sat down firmly on the cobbles of the quayside and refused to move. Dave too had no wish to try carrying a large struggling, snapping dog across a selection of watery obstacles, so he fastened Max's lead to the end of a length of free mooring line and made Max lie down and await their return.

"After you, Mick," proffered Dave, stepping back to allow Mick to go first.

“Thanks!” replied Mick as he very reluctantly hauled himself up onto the first of the floating obstacles.

Mick and Dave made their way across the fore decks and gunnels of all the craft until they arrived at “Mojo”. The faint smell of rotting dead thing was now strong enough for Dave and Mick to detect and it grew stronger the nearer they came to the front cabin.

“Oh no,” moaned Mick shaking his head, “Please don’t let that be what I think it is.”

Very slowly and with even greater reluctance he put the key into the padlock that secured the cabin hatch and undid the padlock. Mick pulled back the hasp and slid the cabin hatch back. The stench of death was now overpowering and a few bluebottles buzzed noisily past as they headed for the daylight. “Oh well. Here goes,” said Mick in a resigned tone as he started to make his way down the ladder into the gloom of the front cabin. Mick’s head disappeared from view and there followed a loud crash, a yell of pain and then silence. Dave had been standing looking over the edge of “Mojo” into the slow moving brownish greenness of the river in a desperate attempt at trying to avoid getting personally involved in the possibly gooey side of things, however this unexpected turn of events now meant that he felt compelled to assist.

Dave made his way over to the open hatchway and peered down into the darkness before calling out, “You alright, Mick?”

The only response was a low moan from the depths below . Reluctantly Dave swung himself down the ladder. As he got nearer the bottom he could make out the prostrate form of Mick lying face up on the cabin floor. The air down below was absolutely horrific, so thick you could have cut it with a knife: a mixture of rotting fish, meat and feathers. Mick appeared to be lying in the remains of several rotting and dismembered seagull and pigeon carcasses which were strewn across the floor. Dave reached the bottom and swung to one



side to avoid standing on Mick who was slowly starting to come round. “Give us a hand up will you, and pull those curtains so we’ve got some light,” slurred Mick, as Dave helped him to his feet.

“What happened, Mick?” enquired Dave.

“I skidded on one of those rotting seagulls and smacked my head on the ladder as I went down,” grunted Mick, rubbing the back of his head and dislodging a seagull’s wing from one of the benches so he could sit down. Dave meanwhile was pulling open the curtains and light was gradually illuminating the sheer scale of chaos and carnage that littered the cabin.

Fluffy had clearly been doing a very successful bit of self catering in the absence of any food from Mick, but rather than consuming his take-away out on deck, Fluffy had felt it much more appropriate to dine in the comfort of the captain’s cabin via one of the open portholes.

“Well at least Fluffy hasn’t starved to death, Mick,” chuckled Dave.

“Although I doubt Alan is going to be very happy with the state of his bed when he gets back,” commented Dave nodding in the direction of a particularly green and maggoty dismembered seagull’s rib cage that was lying on the pillow of the captain’s bunk.

Mick looked up from where he was sitting and groaned. “I think you could be right there, Dave,” Mick replied. “It’s going to take hours to clean this lot up, talking of which I still haven’t seen the cat.” It was at this point that a large black furry head with two great glaring green eyes stuck itself through the porthole and fixed Mick with an unblinking stare.

“Morning, Fluffy,” commented Mick, “I see you’re looking well fed.” The cat continued to glare, and Dave could just about make out the swishing of a long black tail which was never a good sign where Fluffy was concerned as it generally signalled displeasure with a capital D.

“I’d better be off, Mick,” announced Dave as he made his way to the cabin ladder; “I can’t leave Max tied up for too long.”

Dave hauled himself up the ladder into the fresh air and daylight. “See you later, Mick,” called Dave.

“Aye. See you later, Dave,” came a resigned voice from below.

Dave made his way back across the various crafts to Max who had very much taken things in his stride and stretched himself out in the sun, head between his paws. Dave bent down and patted Max on the head before untying the mooring line that held his lead, “Well, Max,” exclaimed Dave. “I can honestly say that after seeing the inside of that cabin, I am well and truly a dog person. I swear I will never complain about a muddy paw print ever again.” Max looked up at his owner and stretched himself, raised an expressive eyebrow to show his interest and grinned.



Chapter 3: Max and the suspicious green gooey thing.

Max Airedale, the large, scruffy, brown and black woolly dog lay with his head between his paws on the deck of the little wooden fishing boat “Minni”. His owner, Dave, and Big Rab, the fishing boat captain, sat on the cabin roof drinking tea and gazing across what had once been the peaceful, slow moving river and was now a wide expanse of anything but slow moving water. The river was in flood; whole trees with enormous trunks would occasionally shoot past, carried downstream by the torrent. Max was not over keen on water at the best of times and today he was even more apprehensive than usual. Max had a feeling that things were not going to go smoothly and as he gazed under the gunnels, watching the rapids and racing whirlpools, that feeling was getting worse. Max’s large wet black nose twitched and quivered; his only consolation was the odd aroma of some gently rotting farm animal that had strayed too close to the swollen river.

“Bit of a flow on, Rab!” exclaimed Dave.

“Too right,” replied Rab. “I’d better check my lines. I don’t want to be going out there unexpectedly.” Rab gestured towards the centre of the torrent where another large tree was racing past horizontally. Rab put down his tea and sauntered round to the bow of the boat. Max watched Rab’s progress as he slowly and methodically began checking each of the mooring lines and springers that kept “Minni” tight onto the pontoon. Suddenly Rab stopped and peered intently over the side of the boat, to where the hull and the pontoon met. Max pondered for a moment and then thought “Hmmmmm. Such strange behaviour warrants a closer look.”

Max got up and wandered over to where Big Rab was standing and stuck his large wet nose over the gunnels; his eyes followed Rab’s gaze to where a large, suspicious-looking, green, gooey object was wedged between the boat and the pontoon.

“Here, Dave! Come and have a look at this,” said Rab in a hesitant voice. “Looks like the flood has brought us something unpleasant.”

Dave got up and came over to where Rab and Max were looking. He too peered into the water to where the half floating, half submerged, suspicious, green, gooey object lay between the boat’s hull and the pontoon. Max’s large, wet, black nose quivered. “Hmmm,” Max thought, “lovely. A definite aroma of decay and stagnation. That thing’s been at the bottom of the river for some time!”

Dave glanced in Max’s direction just in time. Max was eyeing the half submerged misshapen green gooey thing with longing in his eyes and pondering on whether he could drag it out and have a good roll in its sticky contents. “Oh no you don’t!” Dave exclaimed, grabbing Max’s collar with a free hand. “I’ll tie him up for a minute while you get a boat hook.” Dave kept hold of Max’s collar as he reached for a short length of rope and tied Max to a cleat on the wheelhouse so that he was out of the way of any lifting that had to be done.

Rab had now located a boat hook and was prodding gently at the green gooey thing. “It’s stuck fast whatever it is, Dave!” exclaimed Big Rab. “Here, give us a hand, will you?”

Dave and Big Rab gripped the long handle of the boat hook and pulled. The green gooey thing was indeed stuck fast, but as Big Rab and Dave heaved, the thing rose slowly in the water. Rab and Dave both stopped pulling.

“Ohh, Noooooo!” Dave looked down in horror as the collar of a jacket and then what appeared to be the back of a green algae covered human torso, rose above the surface of the swirling water. Big Rab and Dave glanced at each other and grimaced like a pair of horrified camels sucking lemons. “Ohhhh, Noooooo!” Dave wailed again.

“What are you going to do about it, Rab?” Dave enquired hesitantly.

Rab looked back at him in a despairing sort of way and exclaimed, “What do you mean by: what are YOU going to do about it? I don’t like the sound of YOU - after all, YOU helped pull it up!”

Dave shuffled uncomfortably and then replied, “You’ve got to feel sorry for whoever it is, but I think we better leave it there, Rab. It looks a bit..” Dave fought for words before continuing, “It looks a bit..” Dave’s face wrinkled into an expression that would not have looked out of place on a church gargoyle before spluttering, “It looks a bit... fragile.”

“I like that idea, Dave,” replied Rab, looking relieved. “Let’s ease it back in the water - we don’t want to pop it!” Max watched as Rab and Dave gently eased their grip on the boat hook and let the mis-shapen green gooey thing slide back into the water. The lifting of the green gooey thing had caused a host of new foul-smelling nauseous odours to waft their way upwards towards Max’s large quivering wet black nose.

Max breathed deeply; this was heaven. “Mmmmmm,” thought Max. “Rotting eel carcasses, putrid decaying fish and stagnant river mud with a hint of old plastic. There’s something not quite right about this, but I can’t put my paw on it.”

“Suppose I better call Newbold Lock and tell them what we’ve found,” announced Rab in a resigned voice as he turned to put the boat hook back in its rack, before disappearing into the little wheelhouse. Max watched as Rab unclipped the microphone from its holder and pressed the transmit button. “Newbold Lock. Newbold Lock. This is fishing boat Minni. Over.”

The VHF crackled and then a voice came over the speaker. “Minni. Minni. This is Newbold Lock. Go ahead.”

Rab pressed the transmit button again, “Good Morning, sir. I appear to have what looks like a human body stuck between my boat and the pontoon. Can you send someone out? Over.”

The speaker crackled again. “Thank you for that, Captain. I’ll see if I can get the Police out to you. Out.”

Rab pressed the button again. “Thank you, Newbold Lock. I’ll wait here till they arrive. Out.” Rab hung the microphone in its clip and squeezed his way back out of the wheelhouse.

“Did you hear all that, Dave?” enquired Rab settling himself back down on the cabin roof.

“Yeah. Great,” sighed Dave. “I suppose it’s my turn to put the kettle on?”

“Best idea you have had all day!” replied Rab.

Max eyed Dave as he lifted up the cabin hatch and disappeared down into the little galley before returning some time later with two steaming mugs and a packet of biscuits.

“Oh I see you’ve helped yourself to MY biscuits,” grumbled Rab when he caught sight of the packet. “They won’t last five minutes if the law turn up,” moaned Rab.

Max had also caught sight of the biscuits and his rope was just long enough to allow him to lay his great head on Rab’s knee and look up at him with his big sad brown eyes. Rab looked down at Max and smiled. “You are as much of a scrounging git as your master,” Rab laughed. “But you do it with a lot more style than him!” exclaimed Rab as he reached for the biscuit packet and dropped a digestive into the gaping jaws below. Max crunched contentedly before collapsing in a heap at Rab’s feet.

“Aye up, Rab. Law’s here. They must have heard the news that you actually bought biscuits worth eating for once!” laughed Dave. Rab looked up to see a police van bouncing along the track that led down to the moorings. “Huh. Typical. They didn’t come that fast when I had my outboard stolen,” grunted Rab, shaking his head.

The van drew up alongside the gangplank and two large policeman levered themselves out. “Good morning, gentlemen,” boomed the older of the two policemen, “I hear you have discovered human remains. Is that correct?”

“Aye. It’s down there,” Rab gestured towards the green gooey thing. “You can borrow my boat hook if you like,” continued Rab generously.

The two policemen advanced down the gangplank and peered into the water. “HmMMM. It doesn’t look very fresh, does it,” the elder policeman announced. “Think we will need the divers for this one. We don’t want it coming apart on us, do we?”

Rab rolled his eyes. “I suppose you would like a cup of tea while you are waiting?” Rab enquired.”

“That’s very kind of you to offer, sir. Milk and two sugars for me, please. Just milk for the lad here. Oh and those biscuits look very nice. I’ll go and give the divers a call.” The older policeman turned and went back up the gangplank towards the van.

Dave started to chuckle. “Go and make yourself useful, Dave, and get the kettle on!” scowled Rab. Dave opened the cabin hatch and, still chortling to himself, disappeared down into the galley. Max’s ears had twitched at the mention of biscuits and he sat upright in a hopeful manner before making his way over to the handrail.



“Good looking dog you have there, sir. Is he friendly?” announced the younger policeman, coming over to give Max a pat on his large woolly head.

“He is if you’ve brought biscuits with you,” grumbled Rab. Dave had now returned with steaming mugs and the older policeman was making his way back down the gangplank. “The divers are on their way,” he announced before enquiring, “Is that my tea?”

“Here you go,” replied Dave, passing the mugs across to the policemen. “Can I tempt you to a biscuit?” Dave grinned at Rab and offered the packet over to them.

“Thank you very much, sir, that’s very kind of you.” The two policemen sipped their tea and munched Rab’s biscuits, while pondering on their next move and handing a much reduced packet of biscuits back. Rab stared at the packet with a resigned expression and rolled his eyes.

“Looks like we’ve got company!” exclaimed Rab, nodding in the direction of the gate. Another van was bouncing its way along the track to the moorings.

“Ah. That’ll be the divers,” the elder policeman said. The new van drew up behind his colleagues and two more large, wide policemen extracted themselves from its interior. The two new arrivals sauntered down the gangplank and greeted their colleagues, before they too peered down into the water to inspect the green gooey thing.

“You lads better get your gear on then!” the elder policeman exclaimed. “I suspect it might break up if you’re too rough with it!”

The two new arrivals glanced sideways at each other and then back at the green gooey thing. “After you, Sergeant!” exclaimed one of the new arrivals turning to his colleague.

“Oh no! After you, PC Johnson,” retorted his companion “I wouldn’t like you to miss this valuable experience. It will be good for your career development. Go and get your gear on!”

PC Johnson looked forlornly at his colleagues and then trudged up the gangplank towards the back of his van.

“While your colleague is getting ready, shall I get the kettle on again?” enquired Dave. “Thank you, sir,” replied the older policeman, “that would be very welcome.” Dave went back down the hatch and shortly returned with yet more steaming mugs.

“Biscuits, gentlemen?” Dave enquired, grabbing the packet from the cabin roof before Rab had a chance to move.

“Very kind of you, sir, I’m sure,” replied the older policeman. “It makes a pleasant change for us servants of the public to be made so welcome”.

Rab glanced at Dave and rolled his eyes. “Aye, and you can notice it’s my biscuits he’s making you welcome with and all. You wouldn’t be made so welcome if it was Dave’s biscuits you were eating!”

Dave looked back at Rab and grinned, “I’m just showing your appreciation for their hard work, Rab,” he replied laughing. Max had fallen asleep on deck, but now he raised his head as the sound of clanking air cylinders and an overwhelming smell of rubber and dead fish made its way down the gangplank. PC Johnson was now clad in his full regalia.

“What would you like me to do then, sergeant?” PC Johnson enquired.

The sergeant looked at him and replied, “You get into the water, PC Johnson. We will let the boat out a bit and you can try and gently coax the remains nearer the bank, while these two lads assist you in its retrieval.”

The small party of policemen then put down their tea mugs and got into position while PC Johnson eased himself off the pontoon into the river. “OK, lads. After three,” commanded the sergeant. A great deal of grunting and puffing went on as the ropes holding “Minni” to the pontoon were slackened and PC Johnson took a firm hold of the green gooey thing. “One. Two. Three,” commanded the sergeant. PC Johnson grimaced and pulled the green gooey thing towards the bank and his waiting colleagues. “OK. After three let’s try and lift it gently onto the bank,” the sergeant called again. The policemen all manoeuvred themselves into position and prepared for the lift.

“Ready, lads! One. Two. Three!” commanded the sergeant again. The policemen looked reluctantly from one to another and heaved. The green gooey thing rose from the water and the expressions on the policemen’s faces changed rapidly from reluctance to shock and surprise.

“It’s stiff as a board, Sergeant. I wasn’t expecting that!” exclaimed PC Johnson.

“That’s because it’s a shop dummy, you stupid boy!” retorted the Sergeant.

“Is this your idea of a joke, gentlemen?” the sergeant roared, turning towards Dave and Rab who were standing on the deck of “Minni”, their mouths gaping open like a couple of bewildered cod who had just found themselves on the deck of a trawler.

“Get that wretched thing in the back of the van, Johnson, before it confuses some other half wit!” Rab and Dave were now sitting on the cabin top, desperately trying to stifle their laughter as they watched a dejected group of policemen gathering together all their belongings and making their way forlornly back to their respective vans.

Rab then picked up the rather empty looking biscuit packet, shook his head and extracted the last biscuit before tossing it in Max's direction. Max jumped, caught the biscuit in his great jaws before flipping it in mid air, catching it again and giving it a quick crunch before swallowing.

"Hmmm," thought Max. "Dinner and a show. I wasn't expecting that, but I knew there was something not quite right about that green gooey thing."

Rab grinned and turned to Dave and commented, "Like I said before. That dog might come here and eat all my biscuits, but at least he does it with a lot more style than his owner!"

