

The Knitting Grannies and the Pirate ship in the birdbath**Episode 4**

Everyone snapped into action! Gertie disappeared into the hall to call Keeper Bill, Petunia popped upstairs to fire up the computer in the little study on the landing and Bluebell nipped next door to let Marigold know the situation and deliver Gertie's message. Marigold however, wouldn't wait half an hour and insisted on accompanying Bluebell back there and then. She could see that the blue haired Granny was all of a fluster and didn't want to leave her on her own. On their way to the back door, she inspected the Pirate ship in the birdbath and once inside, Bluebell showed her Midnight's hat and the badly written note. Marigold had a grim look on her face as she studied the note. She loved little Midnight, he was such a little character with that jaunty little hat perched on his head, ears in those cute little ear pockets!

They heard Gertie finishing her telephone call to Keeper Bill and she came back to the kitchen with a determined air.

"Bluebell, pop the kettle on, coffee this time I think! Ah Marigold, you're here already!"

"Hello Gertie my lovely, yes, Bluebell has been telling me all about it, so I am up to speed and have seen the evidence as well. I thought it best to pop back with Bluebell." She indicated with her head at Bluebell and gave Gertie a knowing look. Gertie looked at Bluebell and nodded silently back at Marigold. At that moment Petunia returned joining the others around the kitchen table and taking the mug of coffee that Bluebell was holding out for her.

"Thank you dear, well that was a pretty fruitless search. I couldn't find out much I am afraid. The only Pirate ship with a name similar was "The Salty Sea Dog" no mention of a yappy dog at all."

"I've been luckier" said Gertie, once Petunia had finished. "Keeper Bill was a mine of information and what you have found out Petunia matches! The Salty Sea Dog was a notorious Pirate ship around these parts, ambushing ships, stealing their cargo, making crews walk the plank and terrorising the village. When they needed more crew, they used to prowl the streets and kidnap fishermen and young boys! They made their base in the ruins of the old village apparently. Well it seems that there was then a falling out between the Captain, Stinky Stan and the first mate, a man called Jack who, so it is told, was a most unpleasant and unsavoury character. He used to wear a black eye patch even though he could see perfectly well. Thought it made him look scarier! He had a phobia of parrots, couldn't stand them anywhere near him which is unfortunate for a pirate! Anyhow, he had this little sausage dog (it had been a pet on a ship they plundered and Jack took a fancy to it) who was just as unpleasant its master, would yap at the crew, bite their ankles and pee on their scrubbed decks! One day, so the tale goes, the dog pee'd on Stinky Stan's leg and that was the final straw! He demanded the dog be thrown overboard! Jack refused and there was a big fight between the two of them. Jack finally won when Stinky Stan slipped on a puddle of wee and knocked himself out when he fell. On finally coming around, he found himself bound up with rope and was made to walk the plank! Jack declared himself the new captain and in honour of the fact that the dog had helped him win the fight, he ordered the ship's name to be changed to "The Yappy Dog!" Jack himself then adopted the name "Black Eyed Jack" and he wanted to be meaner and nastier than Stinky Stan. He terrorised the bay until the day he, his entire crew and the ship suddenly disappeared and haven't been seen since. Keeper Bill said it was thought they floundered on the Blackstone Reef, the other side of the lighthouse. Whatever happened, no trace of them has ever been found.

"Until a perfect model of it turns up in your bird bath!" remarked Marigold.

"Exactly! What are the chances of that? And I bet, if we had a picture of the ship it would be absolutely identical in every detail".

"But where does all this leave us?" twittered Bluebell, it's nearly lunch time and we still don't know where Midnight is, let alone how to rescue him!"

"Oh, I think we do know where he is," said Gertie kindly. "What we don't know is how or why or, how we are going to rescue him. Be patient a little longer Bella, we just need one more piece of information." Turning to Petunia, she said "Can you pop back on your computer (really we need to update ourselves ladies, and get a laptop it would be so much easier!) and find out all you can about Black-Eyed Jack. We sort of know what he was like as a person but we don't know what he looks like and we need to find his weak spot. We know he doesn't like parrots so that is helpful. To sum up so far ladies, somehow, if I am not mistaken, Midnight is on the Yappy dog and Black-Eyed Jack is the catnapper!"

Bluebell gasped and started to quietly sob, Marigold put her arm around her. Petunia jumped to her feet and ran back upstairs to the computer and Gertie remained at the table, brain whizzing, forming a plan. She fingered a small piece of metal in her pocket.

It wasn't long before they heard footsteps running lightly down the stairs and Petunia burst back into the kitchen holding a photo! "Ladies, meet our catnapper! This, is Black Eyed Jack!

Bluebell gave a faint cry and promptly fainted!

To be continued.....