

The Knitting Grannies phone a friend. Chapter 4

As Sylvia sipped her tea, Gertie gave her a detailed account of what had been happening with the other Grannies adding bits and bobs when she forgot something. All the while Sylvia's eyes darted continuously around the kitchen, like she was scanning the sea for a good surfing wave. One corner of the room seemed to attract her attention the most and I couldn't for the life of me see why. It was a dusty unused corner, with just a stack of shopping bags stored in its gloomy depths.

"Very interesting!" she said once the story had been told. "And you say you have had some incidents next door and your friend too?" she asked me. I told her that she was correct. "Hmm, well that's not the best situation but if I can get the ringleader I should be able to round the others up quickly....." she broke off and, not taking her eyes off that dark corner asked Gertie if she had the Marmite and ice cream tubs handy.

"If you do, could one of you get up slowly and fetch them, the rest of you just stay sitting where you are, and that goes for you Midnight and especially you Frankie, it's important.....stay!"

Bluebell got up and fetched the Marmite and the tub, returning and putting them on the table.

"Just keep chatting amongst yourselves and ignore me" Sylvia said removing the lid from the ice cream tub and dipping her fingers into the Marmite. She then smeared the Marmite on the sides of the tub and the lid and put a final blob right in the centre of the bottom.

"Gertie, hold the lid and when I give you the order, pop it on the tub with the Marmite side down.

Whatever you do, you MUST get it on first go, we only get one chance at this and then the game will be up and they will be impossible to catch, we will lose the element of surprise!"

As she was speaking, Sylvia had imperceptibly moved from her chair and crept across the room, her movements were soundless. When she was near the corner she froze for a moment with only her eyes moving backwards and forwards, searching, searching. She reminded me of a bird of prey. Have you ever seen them? They hover in the air in one place, searching far beneath them with their amazing eyesight for their prey. Once they lock on to it, they suddenly swoop down and bingo.....dinner is served! Well imagine Sylvia, standing stock still apart from her eyes moving and searching until they locked on to one point and she suddenly darted forward and swooped down, her hands closing around something invisible to us hidden amongst the shopping bags. She definitely had caught something for whatever it was, was now emitting very high-pitched squeals! Returning quickly to the table she plunged her hand into the tub and nodded at Gertie who came forward quickly with the lid pushing it on just at the moment when Sylvia removed her hand. Gertie gave the lid an extra push making sure it was on tight.

"Well spotted Stinky!" cheered Gertie. "It's OK Bella, don't worry, I am allowed to call her that, she doesn't mind!" Turning back to Sylvia, she continued "You certainly haven't lost your super sharp eyesight that's for sure!"

"It isn't quite what it used to be, I must admit, I do go for special training to keep it sharp but I find I have to rely on my ears as well these days. The perils of getting older! It also helps to know as much as you can about you're err.....enemy/prey/problem.....whatever you call it and over the years I have become quite an expert. Does anyone have a flannel I can wipe my fingers on? This Marmite is very sticky.....oh! Well cancel that, it seems that Frankie's tongue will do the job nicely!" Of course, attracted to the smell Frankie was busy licking her fingers clean.

"Thank you Frankie, that was very kind of you" she said addressing the dog. "But you must only eat Marmite when you have been told you can, that is very important for you to remember at the moment, do you understand, very important." Frankie looked up into Sylvia's eyes and it seemed as if a message passed from one to the other. He wagged his tail and she gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"What a clever dog" she whispered.

"What shall I do with this?" Gertie was still holding the ice cream tub.

"Pop it into the freezer, but mark it with a cross or something so you won't forget and take the lid off wondering what is inside!"

Bluebell gasped! "I don't know what you have in there, but it's alive, I heard it screaming and putting it in the freezer feels so cruel, it will die!"

"Gertie said you were the kind hearted one" Sylvia said smiling (actually Gertie had said she was the soft one!) "don't worry, it won't die, the cold in the freezer calms it and sends it to sleep until we can round up the others. I don't think it's going to be so easy to catch them all unless, as I said, I can find out who the ringleader is. Once we get them all, we can defrost them and get them back where they belong."

"How many do you think there are?" asked Gertie returning from the freezer where she had buried the tub right at the bottom where it was the iciest. (it now had a big black cross on the lid!)

Sylvia considered for a moment. "So far I have seen three of them. I don't think there are too many, maybe five or six, 10 at the most if we are unlucky so only a small infestation! They haven't had time to organise a mass invasion yet thanks to your quick-thinking Gertie. I feel that this is an opportunistic gang, probably hitched a ride on some poor unsuspecting soul visiting you."

"We aren't allowed visitors" said Bluebell. "We are all in lockdown because of this virus"

"The only visitor we have in the house is Frankie and his Mum from next door who help us with the knitting and our missions" added Petunia.

"Are you sure?" questioned Sylvia gently. "Think hard, I know you would never break the new rules but knowing you ladies, there are times when perhaps there has been other people here?"

The Grannies, thought.

"Mrs Bullock came at the start of the lockdown to help us knit"

"Where does she live, Devon, Cornwall, Norfolk?"

"No just down the road"

"Won't be her then, Anyone else?"

"Well she helped again a second time but only from her home" remembered Petunia, "so I guess that doesn't count either."

"Correct"

"There was the Giddy Aunt!" I ventured.

"Oh! has Gloria been here?" asked Sylvia excitedly. "How is she?"

"Yes, she came to help us teach Eunice Parker a lesson"

"Gracious is that old crone still up to her old tricks! What an exciting life you ladies lead! hmm, where had she come from? Abroad? Oh well then it won't be her"

"MARIGOLD!" the Grannies chorused together.

"Marigold came to help with the knitting as she is such a champion speed knitter"

"Ahhhhh! There you have it then! Where does she live?"

"Pebble Sands in Devon"

Oh, not Cornwall?"

"No"

Sylvia thought for a moment and then asked "are there any caves that she might have visited or any ruins?"

"Yes, there are caves and a ruined village just up the road, but I have just thought, we all visited Pebble Sands in a flash back the other day when we were remembering Black-Eyed Jack catnapping Midnight from Fishing Lane" said Gertie.

Petunia, who had been listening all the while, had gone pale. "Yes, and when we were on that flash back I visited the ruined village with the crew, do you remember I got them out of the bird bath with my sieve?"

"There we have it then! The point of contact!" cried Sylvia triumphantly.

Petunia went even paler than she had been and looked stricken! "But what? What was I in contact with? What have I allowed into this house? What is in the box in the freezer?"

To be continued.....