

## The Knitting Grannies phone a friend Chapter 5

"Tommy Knockers!" announced Sylvia. "You have an infestation of Tommy Knockers, albeit a small infestation thank goodness!"

"Sounds like something straight out of Harry Potter!" exclaimed Bluebell. "I've heard of them before, but I thought it was a fairy story, folk tales, that sort of thing. I didn't realise they really existed!"

"There aren't as many as there used to be it's true" went on Sylvia "They used to live in the old tin mines in Cornwall and in those days, there were thousands of them! Ideal conditions for them."

"Didn't they used to cause accidents in the mine?" asked Bluebell.

"No, not at all, in fact the opposite is true. When they knew there would be a cave in or other such disaster to put the miners in danger they used to make loud knocking noises to warn them and give them time to get out. You were a foolish miner indeed if you didn't respect and listen out for the Tommy Knockers! Of course, they liked to make mischief as well, little things like hiding their tools when the men weren't looking or stealing their food. If you knew what was good for you and you were a miner back in those days, you would make sure you dropped a crust of pastry and maybe a little bit of filling too from your pasty for the little chaps. They had their good side but they do, as you realise now, like to make mischief especially when they are bored!"

"So how come you know all about this?" asked Petunia intrigued.

"My family have, what shall I call it, connections to the Elfish people. Way back in my family tree it is said that one of my ancestors was an Elf and somehow or other got mixed up with humans and so the Elf traits were blended down through the years until it came to me." She pointed to her ears. "I also have exceptional eyesight and hearing and can speak some Elvish too."

"How remarkable!" said Petunia impressed!

"Fascinating!" joined in Bluebell.

"So, when I left school, I went to university and studied "little people" I suppose you would call it. Gnomes, Pixies, Elves and Tommy Knockers and all manner of mixtures in other countries too. After university I moved to Cornwall where the old magic is said to be the strongest and got a job at the Museum of Folklore and continued my research. By this time, I concentrated on Tommy Knockers being that they are linked with the old industry of the county."

"Wow! " said Bluebell. "So that is how you saw that one in the corner?"

"Yes. I know a Tommy Knocker from your everyday Cornish Pixie!" laughed Sylvia.

"So, what do our uninvited house guests actually look like Stinky?" asked Gertie

"They are about 60cms tall with very wrinkly skin and very white whiskers. Their arms are very long as are their fingers, ideal for moving and stealing things, they can hide in a dark corner or crevice when in the mines and reach out a long way with their arms and fingers to move things! (bit like Mr Tickle the Mr Man, but I think his arms are longer than theirs!) The way to tell the difference between them and a Cornish Pixie is that they dress in miners' clothes, drab trousers and shirts, very dirty and of course there is their heads. They are too big for their tiny bodies so they look as if they are balancing a pumpkin on a stick!"

"Oh, they don't sound attractive at all!" shivered Bluebell

"No, but it's what is inside that is important. Yes, as we have said they are mischievous but they also like to be useful and help humans, like they did in the mines. Since all the mines closed of course, they haven't had any way of helping and so they are turning more and more to mischief!"

"So where do they live now the mines are closed?" asked Petunia.

"They can still live in the mines, but there are no humans there to share food with, so a lot of them moved into caves in the cliffs from where they can raid the seabird's nests for eggs or go down to the rocks by the sea edge and dabble about in the pools for limpets which they pull off the rocks. A lot of them have lost their lives this way though, been washed away by the sea."

"Oh dear" cried kind-hearted Bluebell.

"Yes, it's sad, they seem to have lost their purpose in life and so filled that hole with mischief!"

Everyone was silent for a moment, going over what they had just heard and thinking about what had happened since Sylvia had arrived.

"What was the Marmite all about?" asked Petunia.

"Funnily enough, they absolutely hate everything about Marmite from the colour to the smell to the taste! They won't go near the stuff! Once you put them in a box with marmite smeared on the sides of it they won't try to climb out, they just sit at the bottom."

"Why an ice cream box? Surely that can't be big enough for them?"

"Whilst they hate marmite, they love ice cream, especially Cornish ice cream! They also love clotted cream by the way! They love sitting in empty ice cream boxes because their sharp noses can still smell the stuff and it makes them happy! They aren't greedy like Gnomes and as for not being big enough, well they are extremely bendy, they can pull up those long arms and squash their heads!"

"Remarkable little chaps!" said Bluebell now fully entranced!

"So, Gertie, how did you work out we might have Tommy Knockers?" asked Petunia turning to the Green haired Granny

"I used to go and stay with Stinky when we were younger and I learned about her Elvish ancestor and then, when she moved to Cornwall, I stayed with her again for two or three months and helped her do some of her research. Those were happy days!"

"One last question, well two really, firstly if they can be good, why are we so keen to get rid of them and secondly what do we do now?" Petunia said.

"They do have a good side as I said, but over the years since the mines closed, the mischievous side has had time to come to the fore and they are absolute pests with their tricks. They really don't know when to stop! That is why I told Gertie not to reveal the....."

"Box depository" supplied Gertie.

"Ah yes thank you dear. Many years ago, I had a call from Clover Peacemaker, a Granny who lives on the Isles of Scilly, she had a terrible problem with them. They had gotten into her depository and it was totally unusable. You know the boxes move around at the best of times, but these little chaps had them spinning and twirling until the boxes got so dizzy they spilt their contents all over the floor and Clover couldn't work out what went where! The boxes refused to go back on the shelves and each and every one of them denied her access to itself. Completely locked themselves up forever! I caught the culprits and once I had gone, Clover had to call in the installers to remove the unstable boxes and completely refit her depository."

"Oh my!" Cried Bluebell. "How terrible!"

"Yes, we don't want that happening here! Took the best part of a year to get it all in workable order and in all that time she couldn't knit a thing!" said Sylvia.

"So, now we know all that and before Bella starts wanting to adopt the poor creatures.....how don't deny it Bella, I can see it in your eyes, you are too soft, .....as Petunia said, what do we do now?"

*To be continued.....*