

## The Knitting Grannies and the cloud of doldrums

### Chapter 5

"Catchy title Gertie!" beamed Bluebell, "Tell us more!"

"The challenge will be to complete a round trip of Tithepit Shaw Lane hill, that is to walk down it until reaching the post box at the bottom and then back up it, returning to the starting point at the old Infant school site at the top. A target of 50 round trips a day I think is a reasonable one, with donations invited via a 'just giving' page. I am sure the children will be supporting their favourite staff member and I am also sure there will be a bit of competition between them to maybe do more than 50 trips a day if they are able. Money raised to go to the NHS of course."

"Petunia, your first job will be to set up the just giving page and to sort out social media coverage, get publicity rolling. We have to wait for the school to agree first and you dear, need to phone the headteacher and put the idea to her. I'll talk to her as well. I don't anticipate any problems as they are very community caring. Nothing can be done before we secure their agreement so let's do this now!"

Gertie was proved right, on finishing a telephone call with Mrs. Mace, the headteacher, we had her 100% agreement and she even volunteered to be the first member of the school to take on the challenge, assuring us that she would be ready and waiting at 9.00am the following morning, trainers on and raring to go! She was also organising support for the walker of the day with water and food to sustain them, a first aid pack with blister sticks and plasters and of course, the all important access to the toilet!

Whilst Gertie and myself had been busy on the phone, Midnight and Frankie had disappeared into the evening gloom eager to make a start on contacting the pets in the area and passing on their instructions.

Petunia had raced up to the computer room and with publicity as her goal, her fingers were flying over the keyboard as she sorted donation pages, social media reveals and emails to national news broadcast teams and newspapers. Every angle it seemed she had covered. Once all the pages had gone live and the emails had been sent, there was no turning back!

Bluebell had been designated to locate and collect the required boxes of special wool. From past experience with the boxes I remembered that this can be a trickier operation than it sounds as they do have a habit of moving around and are difficult to find. Then, when they are discovered, they dart away from a reaching hand and the chase is back on! However, they are no match for a determined Bluebell and she emerged clutching the boxes plus the Giant Knitting needle (or Queen Pin her official title, or Queenie as they affectionately call her!) and laid it all on the table. As soon as she heard that the school were on board with Gertie's plan she ordered me to sit down and grab some knitting needles and placed a silvery ball of shimmering wool and a pattern (of sorts!) in my lap.

"It's years since I had to knit one of these" she said "it's quite easy though, no fancy stitches, just knit and purl, and you will find the knitting will organise itself as you go along. Just get started and knit as fast as you can, remember we have the hearts waiting after this and they are a little more fiddly. Gertie is just checking that everything else is in place and Petunia will join us just as soon as she has finished on the computer. I hope Midnight and Frankie come home soon as we really do need Midnights knitting skills as well. Are you sure Frankie can't knit dear?"

"Positive!" I laughed.

As the evening progressed all that could be heard was the clackety clack of the knitting needles as a steady stream of silvery knitting slid from them to pool on the floor at our feet. As Bluebell came to the end of her pattern, (my goodness she is a knitting whirlwind!) she cast off her final stitch with a flourish and looked around at the rest of us.

"There, done it!" she exclaimed "Oh the memories of the last time we knitted these! That nice Mr. Churchill was very impressed, wasn't he?"

"If you've finished you can go and put the kettle on Bluebell instead of wittering on!" grumped Gertie. "my throat is parched and a late night snack might not be amiss either." Looking at the clock she saw that in fact it was nearer an early morning snack as it was 4.30am!

"Very well dear, coming right up!" twittered Bluebell happily and disappeared off into the kitchen. Frankie, who had returned with Midnight a couple of hours ago and had been lulled to sleep by the rhythmic clacking of the knitting needles, woke up and on hearing the word "snack" slunk out of the room like a dark shadow, ever hopeful! Midnight threw him a dirty look and continued knitting.

It wasn't long before the other two Grannies had completed their balloons and I had gratefully handed my own over to Petunia who offered to finish it for me. I am so much slower than they are! Once all four balloons (oops I mean 5, I forgot Midnights!) were completed, tea had been drunk and hot buttered toast devoured, Gertie declared that it was time for the Queen Pin and that it would be prudent to return to the garden for this bit!

With the knitting on the ground by our feet, we gathered into a circle and held hands (and paws) whilst Gertie grasped the Queen Pin in her free hand.

"We solemnly promise that we have done our best,  
we have knitted all night and now we must rest,  
To the edges of the cloud these must go,  
Silver balloons all in a row."

As her words faded into the morning air, the Queen pin, gave a jerk and with sparks flying it pushed its sharp tip into the bundle of knitting and like a fork entering a bowl of spaghetti, began to twirl and swirl furiously. In a moment it seemed as if the knitting had come alive as rising from the ground a row of silvery forms floated swiftly into the air. As they rose higher they separated and began to spread out around the edges of the cloud and remember, it was a rather large cloud and yet there seemed to be enough of the balloons to disappear to the distant edges. On and on they went until the cloud was surrounded by an outline of silvery sentinels. As I watched fingers of doughy cloud tried to insinuate themselves between two balloons only to find itself being squeezed back as the balloons suddenly inflated like a puffer fish and closed the gap!

"Good work all, very good work, that is that part of the plan completed. The cloud is contained, the pets are primed ready for action. Now for the next part of the plan. Petunia and Bluebell and Midnight, you stay here and start knitting the hearts....."

"MEOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOW!" cried Midnight plaintively.

"I know you don't like knitting Midnight, but this is an emergency. Bella dear, give Midnight a big bowl of sardines before he starts. No Frankie, not you, you can have some when we come back because you, me and you dear have an appointment with Mrs. Mace!"

To be continued.....