

The Knitting Grannies and the disappearing dog. Chapter 8

Dorothea looked into the kind face of Bluebell which seemed to give her a tiny bit of courage.

"I moved here a few years ago now to live with my sister Deborah. She used to live here with her husband but he died and she was lonely. I had nothing to keep me where I lived as I had just finally retired so it seemed like a good idea for both of us, and, at first it was, we rubbed along very well together. Debbie loved doing the garden and I the cooking and we spent some very happy days until Debbie became ill and, sadly very quickly passed away."

"Oh Dorothea, I am so sorry, " said Bluebell, " how old was Debbie?"

"She was 89, older than me, she was my big sister" replied Dorothea. "Once she had gone, I tried very hard to keep the garden nice like she did but I couldn't do it and gradually gave up trying. It was the same indoors, what was the point of cooking just for me? I became very sad and felt very lonely."

"Why didn't you make friends with the neighbours or find a club to go to, like a church group or Old peoples' group?" asked Gertie.

"I find it very difficult to make friends, I am very shy" replied Dorothea, " and Debbie was the same. I don't like groups, especially groups that remind me I am old, so I retreated into myself and got lonelier and sadder, and then the lockdown made things even worse. I did try to make myself go out for a walk once a day whatever the weather and mostly I managed to do that but I never talked to people, just walked. Until the day I first saw Frankie and his Mum. I kept seeing them and began to time my walks for when I knew they would be out. I don't know how to explain it, every time I saw the dog, it made me feel a little bubble of happiness inside and his Mum was so nice, she always smiled as she made room for me to pass by. That day I suddenly felt that I simply must stroke him, I was compelled, couldn't fight it, and Oh the feeling inside me, like loads of champagne bubbles fizzing and bursting and filling me with joy! His ears were soft as velvet, and his big brown eyes so calm and filled with love and I just wanted to be with him for ever, I knew he could make the loneliness go away. So, I checked his collar for his address and then went back home to work out what to do. Later that afternoon ... oh I am so ashamed! I went and took him from the garden. Opening the gate was a bit tricky but he was so keen to get the carrot it was easy to get him to follow me. I am so, so sorry!" She burst into a fresh bout of crying.

"Calm yourself Dorothea, have a sip or two of tea" encouraged Bluebell. "How did you get on with having Frankie here? Did it help?"

"It did but I didn't realise that he was so strong and walking him back with me he nearly pulled me over" the old lady continued. "Once we got home it was so lovely, he got up on the sofa with me and snuggled into me and I felt the warmth of his head on my lap, oh it was so lovely! And then he rolled over so he was laying on his back with his paws in the air and he made me laugh, and I realised I hadn't laughed for such a long time. But I started to feel guilty. I started to think about his Mum missing him and maybe he would be missing her and I knew what I had done was wrong but I didn't know how to make it right and was worried that I would be arrested."

"Stop right there" said Gertie "no one is getting arrested so put that thought right out of your mind. No harm has come to the dog and you know what you did was wrong so I am quite sure that you won't do anything like this again."

Dorothea shook her head "I won't, I promise!" she said.

"Well, let's draw two lines under the incident and think no more about it" continued Gertie. "However, we do need to think about you Dorothea and how to help you."

"Yes, your situation must not be allowed to continue, "put in Bluebell. " no one should get up each day feeling sad and lonely. You have us now dear, let us help you."

Dorothea looked uncertain, and then she said the saddest thing. "I don't know how to let people help me. " she said in a small voice. "I don't want pity or charity."

"And you won't get it from us!" declared Gertie.

Bluebell looked into the sad old lady's face. "Friends don't give pity or charity" she said quietly. "Friends are just that, friends, they share good times and bad, they do things for each just because that is what friends do"

Dorothea stared hard into the kind Grannies face and suddenly put her hands round her and gave her a hug, once again crying but this time happy tears.

Gertie assumed control once more. "Now it's getting late, there isn't much we can do tonight, so I suggest that you pack a bag Dorothea and come and stay with us, you can make a bubble with us. I think there are strong grounds for doing so and we won't be breaking any lockdown rules. Then, in the morning, we can make a plan and start sorting everything else out."

"Come along dear," encouraged Bluebell, "let's go and get you packed up. Bring enough clothes to last a good while, Petunia will you go around and make sure that everything is locked up securely?" With that she ushered Dorothea up the stairs.

The rest of us bustled about clearing the picnic away and washing the mugs and teacups. By the time Petunia had completed a security check, Frankie had his collar back on and was safely attached to his lead, the two of them reappeared and we all headed out of the door and hopefully away from the loneliness and sadness.

Dorothea stayed with the Grannies for a couple of months in the end, and in that time was transformed! Gone was the pale unhealthy unkempt look, gone was the air of sadness. Dorothea bloomed. She allowed Petunia to cut and style her hair (hairdressers being closed in the lockdown) and smartened up her appearance, even putting a little bit of makeup on! She had a twinkle in her eye and a smile permanently on her face. With Bluebell's nourishing cooking she filled out, losing the gaunt dips and furrows that weight loss had produced. Frankie visited her every day for some playtime in the garden and Midnight snuggled on her lap in the evenings when she sat knitting with the other Grannies. She wasn't as good a knitter as them but enjoyed making cardigans and woolly hats. Meanwhile the Grannies got on with finishing their dog shaped draught excluder and I must say they excelled themselves! The finished article looked exactly like Frankie lying down with his head on his front paws! The magical thing was, that if you cuddled it, you could feel a heartbeat inside! Dorothea loved it and it was decided that, the Grannies would give her the pattern (and supply the special wool!) and she would make some more and put them by, for anyone else that they discovered who was lonely and in need of some comfort. In fact, she also suggested that Bluebell made a pattern for a cat with a hidden heartbeat! (Of course, to be modelled by Midnight - minus the hat!)

Whilst Dorothea continued to improve every day under Bluebell's kind ministrations, Gertie had swung into action and arranged an army of volunteers to cut back the garden at Dorothea's house and remove the rampant hedge. No more hiding away! At the same time, Petunia gathered up some willing helpers from amongst Dorothea's neighbours, who, once they had heard her story were only too keen to help, and they all swept through the house, painting, decorating and polishing. Everything was bright, sparkling and smelling of beeswax polish. Store cupboards were replenished and everything stood waiting for Dorothea to return. As a final thought, Petunia contacted Hamsey Green School and they organised the children in making colourful cards to welcome Dorothea home! Many of the kind-hearted children wrote story books for her and drew pictures and Mrs. Mace sent a lovely letter telling her that, once the pandemic was over, she would be very welcome to visit the school and enjoy one of the many assemblies or plays that the children put on, or maybe Dorothea would perhaps like to come in and listen to the children read? (subject to all the checks required so that the children were kept safe) Dorothea was delighted!

However, the house could sparkle as much as it wanted, the garden could be as tidy as tidy could be, but it didn't change the fact that Dorothea was lonely, and if that couldn't be changed, then things would slip back to how they had been. The Grannies knew that, of course, they would keep visiting her and make sure she came to them at every week for the day and that her neighbours would all pop in frequently, one of them had promised to keep helping with the garden. At first Dorothea saw this as charity, but when he explained that he had no garden of his own (his wife had paved it over!) and missed gardening, she was happy with the arrangement. But what the little old lady needed was a purpose, something to give her energy and the will to get up and face each day with a smile.

Strangely, it was Dorothea herself who supplied the answer! Sitting having tea one afternoon, the usual squabble began between Gertie and Bluebell about Jammie Dodgers with Bluebell refusing to allow the greedy Granny any more with fear of running out! It was then that their house guest let slip that she had worked all her life as a biscuit maker!! What's more, knew how to make Gertie's favourite biscuit! Gertie wouldn't believe it until she saw it (and tasted it) and so Dorothea, confident in her ability, took up the challenge and rustled up a batch of perfect Jammie Dodgers! Gertie took her first bite and was immediately in seventh heaven! They were delicious! Over the next few days, they explored what other biscuits Dorothea could make and, as she happily turned out batch after batch of the most amazing varieties, Bluebell had an idea. She got together with the other Grannies and they put the plan in action. "Dorothea's delicious delights" was born! Homemade biscuits delivery service! Petunia made her a web page whilst Gertie and Bluebell together with Dorothea made sure that her kitchen was all set up for her to produce her biscuits (in line with all the normal health and hygiene rules of course!). Word soon spread, and with every bit of praise her confidence grew, her happiness with it. She had a purpose

again, she felt useful. People popped by and, even though they could only talk to her from the doorstep she knew that, once the lockdown was over, she would have many a cup of tea and chat indoors with friends!

Until then, at the end of each day, she retired to her sitting room with a cup of tea and snuggled happily into the knitted Frankie, comforted to feel his knitted heart beating. She would then stroke the warm furry body of the black and white cat that was curled up on her lap. No, not a knitted one, a real live old timer that she had found in a rescue centre on Petunia's suggestion. She blessed the day that she had met the three funny Grannies with their wacky hair colours. She blessed Frankie dog, and vowed to make sure that she would find other lonely people and help them, just like she had been helped.

The End.