

## Poke A What?

Vicki Stevens

‘There’s something outside,’ said Ethel, peering through the kitchen window.

Thelma blew the steam from her cup of tea, and lifted the remote to lessen the volume of the TV, annoyed that Master Chef was being interrupted once again by her sister’s ponderings. ‘What’s that?’

‘I said, there’s something outside, in the backyard.’

Thelma took a hesitant slurp of her hot beverage, ‘How do you know?’

‘The security light came on.’

‘Its probably just possums. Or that cat from next door, Tiddles.’

‘Fiddles.’

‘What?’

Ethel rolled her eyes and dropped the curtain. ‘I said . . . the . . . mangy . . . cat’s . . . called . . . Fiddles.’

Thelma let out a groan. ‘No need to talk to me like I’m an idiot, I’m just a little hard of hearing that’s all.’

Ethel pulled a face. ‘I’m going to check.’

‘Take a broom to scare it off,’ said Thelma, struggling with finding the button to increase the volume again, and then realising she was holding the remote upside down.

‘I’ll take something a sight better than a broom,’ growled Ethel stomping into the dining room and heading for the tall display cabinet filled with inherited china and glassware that they both hated, but couldn’t bare to part with all the same.

Thelma watched with concern as Ethel stood on the tips of her toes in her fluffy slippers to reach high, the flap of loose skin on her scrawny arm jiggling like a bowl of wrinkled custard.

‘God, no!’ cried Thelma as Ethel extricated their dear old Dad’s shotgun from the blanket of dust on top of the cabinet. ‘You can’t use that!’

‘Why not?’ Ethel slung it over her arm and cracked it open, finding that it was still loaded with pellets. ‘Dad sure won’t mind. He’s probably giving me a nod and a *‘give ‘em hell girly’* through the bars of the Pearly Gates.’

‘Oh Ethel, you can’t kill a poor possum . . . or sweet little Piddles, its too cruel. Use the broom.’

Thelma wrestled her large self from the recliner and shuffled into the kitchen, grabbing the broom from its resting place near the fridge. But Ethel had already swung open the back door and was rushing out onto the landing. Thelma followed as quickly as her swollen ankles would allow.

The security light came on at their appearance, and a shadow moved in the left corner of the yard, then disappeared behind a row of hibiscus.

‘I’ll get you, you feral critter,’ snarled Ethel, creeping past the clothesline decorated with oversized underwear ready for the early morning sunshine, the shotgun gripped tightly in her skeletal fingers.

'Be careful,' warned Thelma, side-stepping a gnarly toad . . . or two . . . or three.

As they neared the flowering bushes, the light went out. Ethel continued stalking her prey by moonlight, with Thelma, clinging to her back like a lumpy trench coat.

A rustle in the foliage.

Ethel raised the gun to her shoulder and fingered the trigger in readiness. Thelma's breath was ragged in her ears.

Then a flash of light, and a cry.

'Please, don't!' screamed a voice . . . a human voice.

The two elderly sisters' eyes widened as a man appeared, his form illuminated by the light of the small thing in his hand. It was a phone—one of those iPhone thingies.

Thelma leapt back and Ethel lowered the gun, slightly. 'What the bloody hell are you doing in our yard? We've got nothing worth robbing out here . . . or inside,' she said as a quick afterthought.

'I'm not a robber,' the young man whimpered, slipping back the hood of his sweatshirt and revealing a face twitching at the corners of a thin-lipped mouth. 'I'm playing Pokeman Go.'

'What?' asked Ethel.

'I think he said, he's wants to poke some mangoes,' answered Thelma, covering her chest with the broom.

'We don't have any mango trees,' said Ethel, confused. 'Just some limes and a passionfruit vine.'

'No,' the man shook his head, 'It's a game. You have a Venusaur in your yard. I need to catch it.'

Ethel laughed. 'We don't have any of them, young fella. Haven't you heard, they're extinct.'

He frowned. 'I found some Weedles, but I don't need them.'

'Oh yes, we have plenty of those, even some Bindis.'

'Never heard of it. How about a Weezing, or a Koffing?'

Ethel chuckled and pointed at her sister. 'Yep, she could help you there.'

'How about a Krabby?'

Thelma pointed hard at Ethel, who scowled back.

The man smiled and stepped forward, 'I just got a Rhyhorn, but could really do with a Lickitung . . . or a Pickachu?'

Ethel swiftly raised the gun, 'Hey, I don't like the sound of that young man. I'd have you know we may be a couple of old spinsters, but we have morals. And anyway, you certainly wouldn't want to peek at anything under our nighties. Now bugger off, before I give you a butt full of lead and you're only left with a Wigglytuff to show for your efforts.'

It didn't take long for the man to hurriedly scramble over the back fence and disappear into the night.

'What's a Wigglytuff,' asked Thelma, as they walked back towards the house.

'I don't really know,' giggled Ethel, 'but the kid next door didn't sound too happy about finding out that's all he had the other day. Poor sod.'