

There was once an old woman who was a bit crabby and getting older every day. She lived in a little house with her cat and her dog and out the back there was a grape vine growing. All summer luscious bunches of shiny purple black grapes had dangled from between the green leaves on the grape vine and the old woman had gathered them and harvested them and turned them into wine, and vinegar and raisins (she had a solar dryer) and she even made grape jelly which was delicious on a piece of fresh bread.

The old woman was not only getting older but she was also losing her memory. Sometimes she could not find her slippers and could not remember where she had put them. Sometimes she went for a walk and couldn't quite remember how to get home and had to ask a friendly passerby, and sometimes she even forgot to put her glasses on!

Summer passed and the grapes were all gone. The green leaves turned yellow, then orange and finally red.. and many of them fell off onto the ground. The grape vine was bare but it was still enjoyed by some creatures who lived with the old woman. Greysmoke, the old woman's cat, liked to shimmy up the trunk of the grape vine so that she could get onto the corrugated iron roof, because there was a little sheltered place behind a brick wall where she could curl up on the sun warmed iron and be warm and as snug as a bug in a rug!

On this particular chilly winter's day, the old woman was outside in her warm coat and looking at her garden when she noticed the bare grapevine and she put her head on one side and said:

*There are no more luscious grapes on this grapevine for me to pick
There's no doubt about it: this grapevine is definitely most incredibly sick.
I will get my axe and chop it down. I will buy a new one.*

But Greysmoke was snoozing on the roof and she heard what the old woman had said and she scooted down as quickly as she could. She rubbed herself against the old woman's legs and wound her warm body in and out and around her legs and when the old woman bent down to stroke her, Greysmoke stood on her back legs and nudged the old woman's face with the top of her soft furry head. And then the old woman sat down, and Greysmoke jumped onto her lap and curled up, putting her paws around her nose, and her tail around her paws and purred.... Prrrr,, prrrr, prrrr...just like a perfect little tractor! And the old woman stroked her and forgot all about chopping down the grape vine!

It was a few weeks later when it was not quite so cold that the old woman was outside throwing a stick for her puppy, Digalot. Now Digalot was a very new puppy because the old woman used to have a big old dog called Suzy. Suzy was a golden Labrador who had been the old woman's friend for almost 18 years, but Suzy had gotten older and she ate less, and played less, and ran less and eventually, during the time when the grapes were dangling from the grapevine, Suzy had curled up in her basket one night and died. The old woman was very sad and buried Suzy in the garden but eventually she got a new puppy, Digalot. Digalot was small and black and white and he was called Digalot because he did dig a lot! One winter's day he dug up some daffodil bulbs! They looked a lot like onions and because the old woman had forgotten that she had planted daffodils, she looked at the bulbs which were starting to grow roots and threw them into the compost bin!

Digalot was young and he loved to explore and run and chase things. He was a bit naughty: he often did not come when he was called and he did not sit when he was told to sit and he did not come to heel when he was told to come to heel. This was because he was a puppy and he was still learning. Now when she was throwing a stick for Digalot to chase she happened to look at the grapevine and she saw the few remaining red leaves on it and she said:

The leaves on this grape vine are shrivelled, brittle and red.

There's no doubt about it: This grape vine is most certainly dead.

I will get my axe and chop it down. I will buy a new one.

When Digalot heard her say that, his ears pricked up and he thought, 'No, no, no. That's not a good idea!' The reason why Digalot did not want the grapevine chopped down was because just behind the base of the trunk of the vine was his favourite place to hide when Greysmoke was teasing him and it was also his favourite place for hiding his bones and other things like the old woman's slippers! (which is why she lost them...not because she was losing her memory, but because cheeky Digalot had run off with them!) So when Digalot heard the old woman talking about the axe, he barked and ran to the garden gate and jumped clean over it and ran away, because he knew the old woman would come after him. And she did, calling and whistling and slapping her thigh, but Digalot did not even turn his head but just kept running. The old woman spent all afternoon looking for him, and calling him, and asking her neighbours and by the time Digalot came home, nonchalantly asking for his dinner, the old woman had forgotten all about chopping down the grapevine!

And so the weeks passed and the weather was slowly getting warmer. Greysmoke spent more time on the warm tin roof, and the daffodil bulb in the compost heap was sprouting leaves and buds, and the old woman was outside because it was a lovely fresh sort of day. She was putting on her shoes to go for a walk, when she noticed the grapevine and said:

The bark is dry and wrinkly and a pale shade of grey.

There's no doubt about it: this grapevine's life force has just withered away.

I will get my axe and chop it down. I will buy a new one.

Now, Greysmoke and Digalot were not the only animals in the old woman's garden who liked the grapevine. There was an entire colony of ants living under the bark and in the cracks between the branches and it was their home, so when they heard the old woman say that about the axe, the grandfather of the tribe called the youngest and bravest and swiftest of all the young ants and said, "Right, it's time. All your work of training now has to go into action. You, you, and you... off you go and do what you have been taught to do! but be careful!!" and down the grapevine trunk the three little ants scurried and across the grass and straight up the old woman's trouser legs. Now when you bite human beings, the first thing the humans tend to do is to slap their legs so it was a very dangerous mission because that is what they did.. first they tickled, then they nibbled and then they bit...and sure enough, the old woman slapped her trouser legs, but the ants were fast and ran around to the back of her leg and as soon as they could they ran back out and back up the grapevine! And the old woman was rubbing and itching and she went inside to change her trousers and forgot all about chopping down the grapevine.

Two weeks passed and the old woman had been looking at the wonderful daffodil in her compost bin and wondering where it had come from but now she was having a cup of tea and reading a

book. She leaned back in her chair, enjoying the sun's warmth and happened to notice something green in the grapevine. She squinted over her glasses and wondered what it was... was it a sweetie wrapper carried up there by those pesky ants? Was it some sort of goody bag belonging to Greysmoke? Or was it something that Digalot had managed to kick up there from his vigorous digging? She got up to take a look and put her hand on her heart in her surprise! "Well, bless my soul!" she said, "Goodness gracious me!" and "Well, I never!", because there, amongst the shrivelled red leaves was a great big fat green bud, with leaves unfurling in the sunshine, and in the middle there was even a tiny weeny bunch of little green grapes! "To think I was going to chop it down!" and then she suddenly remembered, and hit her hand against her head, "Oh that's what I forgot!! the Seasons! After summer comes autumn and after autumn comes winter and after winter comes spring and after spring comes summer! I forgot! "And so it was. And that autumn, there were more grapes than ever and they were luscious and big and juicy because even the grapevine was happy to have escaped the axe! And it was all thanks to Greysmoke, Digalot and some brave little ants!