

## Chapter 12

### What a bish!

Not far from the Bar at the End of the World, Mungo and Grizzly found themselves becalmed. It was eerily still, and became still more eerie as a fog seemed to drift out of nowhere and enveloped the boat. Nothing was visible and all was silent.

Then they heard a noise they could not recognize. It was like the flapping of a sail in the wind, but, looking up, the bears saw three large birds approaching the boat. The sound was the flapping of their wings.

“Well, stone the bonxies!” said Mungo. “I never knew that bishbirds fly upside down.”

For there could be no doubt they were bishbirds. Their long legs and the resplendent colours of their feathers put that beyond question. They flew the way a bear might swim backstroke, with their beaks and their toes pointing upwards.

To see anything below them they had to twist their necks and look over their shoulders. And this is just what they did now, fixing their bright eyes on the bears in the boat.

They began to circle around the boat and were talking loudly to each other:

*First bishbird:* “Aha!”

*Second bishbird:* “Oho!”

*Third bishbird:* “What a bish!”

*First bishbird:* “What have we here?”

*Second bishbird:* “Can these be bears?”

*Third bishbird:* “Oh what a bish!”

*First bishbird:* “What brings bears here?”

*Second bishbird:* “Foolhardy bears!”

*Third bishbird:* “Imbecile bears!”

“Excuse me interrupting,” said Mungo, “but I can tell you why we’re here. My friend Grizzly here has long had a fervent ambition to see the Island of the Bishbirds.”

*First bishbird:* “Amb-bish-on, did you say?”

*Second bishbird:* “Am-bish-us is he?”

*Third bishbird:* “All in a bish is he?”

Mungo said, “The bishbirds are still remembered in the tales of Bearloch. We know of your brilliant colours and your dream of immortality. The Island of the Bishbirds seems to us a kind of paradise. It would be great honour to be allowed to see it.”

*First bishbird:* “Have you brought a gift?”

*Second bishbird:* “A present for the king of the bishbirds?”

*Third bishbird:* “The silly old bish.”

“Yes, yes,” said Mungo quickly. “Of course, we’ve brought a present.”

*First bishbird:* “You are in for a surprise.”

*Second bishbird:* “What a bish of a shock!”

*Third bishbird:* “For bears of little brain.”

Then they turned their beaks upwards again.

*First bishbird:* “Shall we bish?”

*Second bishbird:* “Let’s bish!”

*Third bishbird:* “Bish it is!”

They flew into the fog, where the bears could no longer see them, but shortly the boat began to move in the same direction.

“What was that about a present?” said Grizzly.

“Apparently we have to bring a present for the king of the bishbirds,” said Mungo.

“But we don’t have a present.”

“We could give him your bagpipes.”

Grizzly said “No” firmly. Grizzly was a bear of few words and when he said “No” like that he meant what other people would mean if they said, “No, no, no! No way! Absolutely not! Not on your nessie! Not in a thousand years! Over my dead body!” So Mungo did not press the point.

“There’s only one other thing we have that’s worth giving to anyone,” he said. “The book of cake recipes. Come to think of it, that’s very suitable. Bishbirds love cakes.”

Grizzly grunted.