

## Chapter 14

### Surprise!

*First bishbird:* “We have still to show you your surprise.”

*Second bishbird:* “Brainless bears!”

*Third bishbird:* “What a bish of a shock awaits you!”

*First bishbird:* “Ho!”

*Second bishbird:* “Ho!”

*Third bishbird:* “Ho!”

The bears were left by their bishbird guides at a tall door in a wall. This was the way they must go in order to present themselves to the king of the bishbirds.

Beyond the door they found more steps. They were tempted to stop to rest, but Mungo said, “The king of the bishbirds is expecting us.” As they climbed they saw that they were on a hillock that rose above the multi-coloured light that covered the rest of the plateau. It seemed to be the highest part of the island.

The flight of steps took them through an orchard. Bushes and trees brimmed with ripe fruit, and they were tempted to stop and eat. But Mungo said, “The king of the bishbirds is expecting us.”

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The king of the bishbirds sat on a throne on the very top of the hill. By peering through the trees Mungo and Grizzly were able to see him before he saw them. They gasped.

“Well, stone the bishbirds!” said Mungo.

“How can the king of the bishbirds be a bear?” said Grizzly. “The bishbirds seem to have nothing but contempt for bears.”

But Mungo was looking closely at Grizzly and then at the king, with utter amazement in his eyes.

“Grizzly,” he said. “Not only is the king of the bishbirds a bear. He is the spitting image of you.”

Timidly the two bears stepped out into the open space below the throne. They supposed they ought to bow and did so. But the king was already getting down from his throne. He seemed excessively excited.

“Bears from Bearloch! Bears from Bearloch! The bishbirds told me you were coming. But I can’t really believe it. And if I’m not mistaken you” (he looked closely at Grizzly) “are a Grizzly from Blair Bear. I thought I’d never see a grownup bear again.”

“Your majesty,” said Mungo, “we have come all the way from Bearloch because my friend here has always longed to see the Island of the Bishbirds. But we never imagined we would meet a bear here.”

“Exactly,” said the king. “But sit down. We have a lot to talk about.”

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The king explained how, long ago, when the bishbirds left Bearloch in search of a home in the Far West, he had begged them to allow him to go with them.

“I was enthralled by the idea of a land where the sun never sets. Everyone else in Bearloch thought they were well rid of the bishbirds, and said I was crazy. And so I was. The dream of the bishbirds had taken me over.

“To everyone’s surprise the bishbirds agreed to take me with them. Sometimes I rode on a bishbird’s tummy. Sometimes they carried me in a basket.”

“And they made you their *king*?” Mungo could still not understand this.

“Oh, I’m a king in nothing but name. It’s a joke to them. They’re always mocking me and sniggering about what a bish of brainless bear I am. The throne is a joke. The crown is a joke.

“I’m no king. I’m a pastry-cook. For endless circles of time I have been making cakes for the bishbirds, just as the people of Bearloch did when the bishbirds ruled the loch.”

“Well, in that case, I suppose we brought you the right present,” said Mungo, handing over the cake recipe book. The king received it glumly.

In an effort to cheer him up, Mungo said, “I suppose you get to eat a lot of cakes yourself then?”

“Me – eat cakes? Of course not. That’s the privilege of the bishbirds. They won’t let me eat cake. I live on porridge. Nothing else. Porridge for breakfast,

porridge for elevenses, porridge for lunch, porridge for tea, porridge for supper. If it weren't for the fact that I can put honey on the porridge I think I'd stop eating."

"So you're not happy?" said Mungo.

"There's one thing that gives me pleasure and keeps me going, though it's sad in a way. Let me show you."