

Chapter 7

Dreaming of cakes

"I wish I could meet the Tiddlywinks-playing walruses," said Beth between mouthfuls of porridge. "It's not fair that Father's having all these adventures, and we never got the chance to go with him."

"I want to see the sea monsters," said Tosh. "Especially the lobster-like ones with five massive eyes on stalks."

"There are horrible ones that look like haddock and gape," said Beth. "I had a dream about them." Dreams had a good deal of reality for Beth.

"I think I'll learn the bagpipes so that I can charm them," said Tosh. "I'll get Mr Grizzly to teach me when he gets home."

Mother MacBear and Grizzelda (who had stayed the night) exchanged rather glum looks. They wouldn't say it to the bears, but they didn't rate their husbands' chances of ever getting home.

Tosh had another idea: "I think we should go and look for them."

"Another of your birdbrained notions, Tosh," said Duff. "They could be anywhere in the Northern Ocean and there isn't even a map."

"Serendipity!" cried Tosh triumphantly. "Mr Wompy said it. Like meeting your twin sister halfway up Everest. Happens all the time. Probably we'll find them just about to be eaten by some vile creature and we'll be just in time to save them."

Then Wompy himself arrived and Mother MacBear ushered them all into the parlour to read the rest of Father MacBear's letter:

Out here in the middle of the ocean I often think of you, my dear and wondersome family. On cold and desolate days, as most of our days are, I think of you safe and warm and snug in the Den. I think of my comfortable armchair with the rose pattern and the fancy antimacassar and the wee footstool. And the table lamp with the pink fringe. I imagine you all sitting around me in the parlour. And I think of my beloved wife's cooking. Honey and blackberry muffins. Blaeberry and honey tarts.

How I long for honey! The supply we brought with us ran out long ago. I may have told you that already. But sometimes it seems the greatest hardship of this long adventure.

At other times I remember the balmy days of summer in Bearloch. The hammock in the garden. The giant sunflowers. The bears playing frisbee. Grampa snoring gently in his deckchair. My beloved wife dead-heading the roses. Such sweet memorabilia!

When we were with the walruses Grizzly won a prize in one of their Tiddlywinks tournaments. The walruses give as prizes just anything they happen to have picked up during their travels in the summer. Usually things they have no use for themselves. This one was a big book of cake recipes.

Since we have little else to read, we often read it. Sometimes we read it aloud to each other. It's really just a way of torturing ourselves. Here on the boat it's as much as we can do to boil fish. Making cakes is an impossible dream.

Sometimes I really do dream about cakes from the book - profiteroles or treacle gingerbread or sticky toffee pudding or banoffee tart or Bear Forest gateau with honey. Always the same thing happens. I have filled a plate and I'm just about to tuck in when I wake up. I try to get back to sleep, but even if I do it's no use. Some horrible sea creature will have eaten all the cake in the meantime.

I am reminded of the old saying: 'A dreaming bear is a hungry bear.'

"It must be awful for Father," Duff broke in. "How can a bear live without anything sweet to eat?"