

Chapter 8

The picture

After lunch Grizzelda and the four bearns set out for Blair Bear. Reluctantly she had agreed to show them the picture of the Island of the Bishbirds. She was rather afraid of the picture that taken her husband away from her. "Weird," was the only thing she would say about it.

Baby Brother knew nothing about this, but he tagged along, pulling Woo-woo behind him. He prattled a lot to Woo-woo, much of the time not in proper words. Baby Brother was always wanting to say more than he knew the words for yet. But he was sure that Woo-woo knew what he was burbling about. And he was probably right.

Grizzelda led the way through the great hall of Blair Bear and up the great oak staircase to the first floor, where corridors led off in all directions. It was a house one could easily get lost in.

A particularly dark corridor led to Grizzly's study. It was an oak panelled room with leather armchairs and dusty bookcases.

"Gloomy, isn't it?" said Duff.

But Baby Brother seemed delighted by it. Chattering happily to Woo-woo he disappeared behind the big mahogany desk.

All the others looked at the picture that hung on the wall above the desk. And the picture looked at them.

So it seemed because the large figure of a bishbird stood in the foreground looking straight ahead as though on the lookout for anyone who entered the room. It was unmistakably a bishbird. The brilliant colours of its feathers shone. It was beautiful but also, in the way of bishbirds, gawky. It stood on only one of its long legs, while the other was bent and sticking out behind it.

"See," said Grizzelda. "Weird."

"What does it want?" said Beth. "What's it on the lookout for?"

"Cakes, probably," said Tosh. "Bishbirds always want cakes."

"But look at the island," said Duff. "It's the island that's weird."

The bishbird was standing at the end of a rocky spit of land that jutted out from the island that filled the rest of the picture.

The island had very high black cliffs. They rose out of a swirling sea as black as the cliffs. Only the white crests of the wild waves that lashed the promontory broke up the darkness below.

But above the cliffs a multi-coloured glow lit up the sky. There was nothing to be seen above the cliffs except this strange light. It seemed to rise from the island.

"I don't think I want to go there," said Beth. "It's not exactly scary, but it's weird. As you said, Mrs Grizzly."

"Grizzly used to sit looking at it," said Grizzelda. "Hours, sometimes. Couldn't think what he saw in it."

"Maybe it's the bishbirds that glow," said Duff.

"Or maybe they have really ginormous cakes with lots and lots of candles," said Tosh.

"If Father and Mr Grizzly find it, they won't want to stay, will they?" said Beth. "It doesn't look like a place anyone would want to stay."

"Not unless the cakes are really, incredibly superlicious," said Tosh.

"Well, talking of cakes," said Grizzelda. "Downstairs. Made the other day. One each and some to take home."

The bears felt at once that they'd seen enough of the picture.

"Come along, Baby," said Duff. "We're going down for some cakes."

He walked over to where Baby Brother was playing some mysterious game with Woo-woo behind the desk.

"Come on."

"No," said Baby Brother, quietly but firmly at first. Then loudly as Duff pulled at his hand.

"Woo-woo likes it," he said.

"Oh, leave him," said Beth. "He can stay here while we have our cakes. He won't come to any harm here."

"He's started making sentences," said Duff. "Only short ones, but sentences."

Grizzelda, who rarely felt the need of a full sentence herself, led the way downstairs to the big kitchen where treacle tarts with honey, and raspberry and seaweed muffins were waiting for them. Grizzelda was not, of course, such a good cook as Mother MacBear, but she was a dab paw at muffins.

Three cakes later the bearns returned to Grizzly's study to fetch Baby Brother.