

Chapter 4

Haiku

Grampa MacBear wrote a lot of notices about 'the great Bearloch haiku contest' and the bearns stuck them on trees and put them through doors. Soon everyone was talking about it.

"What *exactly* is a haiku?," Desdemona the station-mistress asked Mrs Mairi MacSheep when they met in the street. "I'm wondering whether I have the right wool for it."

"I was thinking more along the lines of baking powder and icing sugar," said Mrs MacSheep.

But it quickly became known what haiku are, and people started carrying little notebooks with them wherever they went.

Grampa took it very seriously. From now on, whenever he stepped outside the house after breakfast and Mother MacBear said, "Are you going for a walk, Father?" Grampa would say:

"Not just a walk, my dear. A *haiku* walk. I am in search of that special moment that will inspire the finest haiku in Bearloch."

Among the bearns, it was Beth who really took to this new game. Tosh soon got bored with it. Duff tried his hand whenever he remembered to, but it was Beth who accompanied Grampa on some of his haiku walks, as well as taking some of her own.

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"This is my best haiku so far," said Grampa to Wompy one afternoon when Wompy had called at the Den for a cup of tea and a chat. "You must tell me what you think:

When I looked out of my window this morning
the sky was blue and the ocean was blue and the loch was blue
and nothing at all was happening and so I was blue too."

Wompy's big ears flopped and he looked down at his cup of tea.

"Well?" said Grampa. "Tell me what's wrong with it, then."

"It's more than seventeen syllables," said Wompy, stirring his tea.

Grampa started to count the syllables. "Is it all right apart from being too long?" he asked.

"No," said Wompy gloomily. He was concerned that Grampa would soon be getting grumpy again.

"I don't think you've really understood what haiku are. I can't explain better than I have already. I'll lend you a book of haiku and you can learn by reading them."

"That sounds jiggeringly hard work. You said it was easy as porridge."

"But why are you writing haiku when you and I are going to be the judges of the contest? You can't take part in the contest and also judge it."

"But I want to win the contest, drat it!" said Grampa, sitting up in his chair and looking very determined. "I am going to write the best haiku in Bearloch. It's not going to be any fun if I can't do anything until everyone else has written their haiku."

"Well, then you can't be a judge. Why don't you wait and see whether you come up with a good haiku. If you do, you can enter the contest and leave the judging to me. If you don't, you can be a judge."

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"Jiggering jellyfish!" said Grampa to the bears at supper that evening. "It's no use. A good haiku just happens to you. So Wompy says. But they don't happen to me."

Beth saw at once that someone needed to be helpful. "Why don't you run through all the poems you know?" she suggested. "They might inspire you. I know a really good poem. I found it in one of Wompy's books:

There was a young bear of Bearloch
who always wore only one sock.
When they asked, "Where's the other?,"
he said, "On my mother,
for there's only one pair in Bearloch."

That's by a poet called Edward Bear."

"I think you must mean Edward *Lear*, darling," said Mother MacBear.

"Oh, I thought he was a bear." Beth was disappointed, mainly for Grampa's sake. Knowing that other bears are poets might have helped him.

"So what's a *lear*?" she asked.

"It's what's left when a Cheshire cat vanishes," was Tosh's contribution.

"That's right. Shakespeare wrote a play about one," said Grampa. He was proud of knowing this, and it cheered him up immediately.

"How odd that one of those should write a poem!" thought Beth. But she kept the thought to herself for fear of appearing stupid.

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That night Beth had a dream.

In the dream she was Waverley Bear, who had come back to Bearloch to enter the haiku contest. She had composed many quite brilliant haiku, but decided to give the very best one to Grampa so that he could win the contest.

The trouble was she couldn't remember it. She was about to recite it to Grampa and she remembered the first two words: "Shimmering yellow." But, try as she might, she couldn't remember any more. She thought the haiku may have been about Cheshire cats. Or was it bishbirds? Or washing up? Or Baby Brother's breakfast? She couldn't remember.

Now lots of people were gathering around her, all of them furious because she couldn't remember the haiku. Grampa and Father MacBear and Duff and Tosh and Wompy and Mairi MacSheep and Dougie MacDog and the whole of the Bearloch basketball team were all shouting at her to remember the haiku.

"We'll have to shake it out of her," said Wompy. "Astute bear, my paw!"

Several people grabbed hold of her, turned her upside down and shook her. "I know," she cried out in Waverley Bear's squeaky voice. "It's about a pepperpot."

"No, it isn't," they said. And she heard them all laughing at her.

Then she was being tossed around like a ball by the basketball team. They kept shouting, "Haiku, haiku!" and every time they said it they tossed her higher.

Now she was being whacked into the air with glof clubs. Oddly, it didn't hurt, but it was very scary being tossed so high in the air. As she flew up and down she could see right over the loch and all the islands seemed to be moving around, very rapidly. Altogether it made her feel rather sick.

Then she saw the horse. It was standing just outside the crowd of people, staring up at her.

Suddenly she felt like a very astute bear again. On her next ascent into the air she kicked and swam in the air until she was heading down, not into the crowd this time, but towards the horse. "Take me away!" she cried.

She landed on its back, and off it galloped. She found it had a rope of seaweed round its neck that she could hold onto.

Behind her someone shouted, "What an astute bear!" But then she heard Tosh saying, "Not so astute really. It'll take her down to its lair at the bottom of the loch and eat her. Tomorrow we shall find just her spectacles floating on the loch."

As the horse approached the loch Beth woke up.