

Chapter 8

Something happens

Next morning the haar still hung thickly over Bearloch, and Grampa MacBear could see not a single island from his window. For all he knew, twenty new islands could have arrived in the night or they could all have played musical chairs all night and ended up in completely new positions.

He had the rather thrilling impression that almost anything could have happened while the loch was so thoroughly hidden from view. Indeed, anything might still happen, and Grampa climbed the pole down to breakfast with a growing sense of anticipation. "Ho! ho!" he said to himself. "Something's afoot."

After breakfast, and once they had made sure that the Rumbling Roller got his daily spoonful of jam, the bearns (all except Baby Brother) went out to play. They were going to be intrepid explorers lost in the fog. They hadn't told the grown-ups about seeing the horse in the haar. Duff was a little cautious, Beth a little fearful about it, while Tosh thought it would be exciting to find out if it really was a kelpie.

A little later the front door bell rang.

"Mrs Grizzly!" said Mother MacBear when she opened the door. "Whatever's the matter?"

Grizzelda was looking even more flustered than usual and much as though she hadn't slept.

"Mrs MacBear. Daughter. Awfully. Trouble you. Nowhere to turn. Kidnapped."

"Oh dear!" said Mother MacBear. But she was no longer alarmed. That was all it was! "Are the children playing their kidnapping game again? They've probably put her in the woodshed."

Grizzelda's brow became deeply furrowed. "Your bearns? Did *this*?" She thrust a piece of paper into Mother MacBear's paw.

Mother MacBear read: "Don't worry about your daughter. We shall not hurt her." That was all it said. The handwriting was very neat, not at all like that of any of the MacBear bearns.

Mother MacBear said slowly and seriously, "I do not think this is from the bearns. Mrs Grizzly, my dear, I think you should come in and we shall have some peppermint tea with honey and think about this."

Mother MacBear's kitchen felt safe and friendly, and Grizzelda calmed down a little while she watched Mother MacBear preparing some tea. As well as the

peppermint tea, Mother MacBear found some buttercream and honey cakes that she knew were irresistible even to very agitated Grizzlies.

Gradually Grizzelda told her story. The previous afternoon she had walked home through the haar. She was not at first worried that Grizzlette was not at home. She had taught her to be independent. It was only later that Grizzelda found the note that had been pushed under one of the back doors.

She had been quite unable to think what to do. There was no point in wandering around in the fog. She had no idea who could have taken Grizzlette or where they might be. To talk to the local policeman she would have to walk to the village in the fog, and she could not see that he would be able to do anything that night. In any case, her opinion of him was not high.

She spent a sleepless night. This morning she knew she must talk to someone about it, but Grizzelda had no friends. She thought of the MacBears because they were the sort of people one could confide in even if one wasn't particularly friendly with them.

"Well," said Mother MacBear, "at least you can be sure Grizzlette has come to no harm. The note says so."

"Why take her? Must think I'm rich," said Grizzelda between sobs. "Not a penny left. Broke."

This was a surprise to Mother MacBear, who like everyone else thought Grizzelda had pots of money. But she kept her surprise to herself.

"You don't know they're going to ask for a ransom," she said. But Mother MacBear could not think of any other reason why Grizzlette should have been kidnapped.

At that moment the bearns burst into the room.

"Wow," said Tosh, gasping for breath, "that was scary! There was this gigantic python, right. Big as a tree. It swallowed me whole, but I tickled its throat till it had to sneeze and choke, and it spewed me out. It was right behind us up to the porch. I guess..."

"Tosh, darling," said Mother MacBear, "this isn't a good time for your stories. Something really serious has happened. Grizzlette..."

And so the bearns were told the news. Tosh found the words "Serve her right" coming to mind, but he knew this was unkind and dismissed the thought. His second thought, which he did voice, was: "The horse!"

Duff and Beth had thought of this too. "The horse must have taken her down to the bottom of the loch and eaten her," said Duff.

"What horse?" said Mother MacBear, and they had to explain. Grampa reminded them that they didn't really know it was a kelpie.

"But in any case," said Mother MacBear, "no kelpie could have written that note." They all had to agree with this and felt a little relieved. But they had no other ideas.

"We must tell PC Bobby about this," said Mother MacBear. "He will know what to do."

Grizzelda was not so sure he would, but she was persuaded to stay on at the Den and to try to get some sleep. Beth took her up to the guest room in the tower, along with a cup of Mother MacBear's special camomile tea with honey.

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Grampa MacBear was feeling a little guilty. He had so much wanted something to happen and this morning he had really thought something was going to happen. But what had happened was this. As Wompy had said, when something happens it isn't always good. He decided to go and talk to Wompy.

First he had to find the village policeman, who could be anywhere. But luckily he met PC Bobby MacBadger passing the Den on one of his regular patrols. Grampa sent him hurrying up to the house.

Soon Grampa was sitting in one of the extremely comfy armchairs in Wompy's library. They were talking about what could have happened to Grizzlette and why anyone should have wanted to kidnap her.

Grampa was not surprised when Wompy said, "There is a story I could tell you."

The story went like this:

Once upon a time in Bearloch there was a family of bears with a bonny wee bearn - just like Baby Brother. One day the wee bearn disappeared, and in its place they found a piece of faery gold. So they knew the faeries had taken him.

In those days faeries had a bad reputation with other creatures, who thought they stole children because they envied other creatures the happiness their children brought them. This might be true. After all, faeries live for hundreds and thousands of years and don't have many children of their own.

But this family of bears loved their wee bearn so much they weren't going to be bought off with faery gold and they weren't going to let their fear of the faeries stop them getting him back. So they searched the mountains, day after day, until they found him. They found him in a little cave with just one faery, who obviously doted on him.

She was a sad and lonely faery. She had got left behind when the rest of her clan had sailed off across the ocean to look for new lands. She wasn't jealous or malicious. She just loved the wee bearn and she needed someone to love.

So the wee bearn's mother and father and the lonely faery realised they all loved the wee bearn and they didn't have to fight over him. The bears took their bearn back home, but the faery came to visit whenever she wished, and when baby bear got older he would go to visit her. She was his faery godmother.

The bears were even happier than they were before and the faery was also happy now. So they all lived happily ever after.

The story cheered Grampa up enormously. He wasn't at all sure if he believed it, any more than he usually did with Wompy's stories. But it cheered him up anyway.