

Chapter 11

Grog

The notice said: THE BAR AT THE END OF THE WORLD.

It stood on a small rocky island, where a very large white ship was moored. A path led to a circular building which was the only building on the island.

After the hurricane and the iceberg, this island looked very attractive to two weary, hungry and thirsty bears.

“This is not the Island of the Bishbirds,” said Mungo.

“Obviously not.”

“But it will do very well for tonight.”

Grizzly grunted, which is as much as he usually did when agreeing.

As they moored beside the big ship, they saw that it was called *The Monster Hunter*.

“Well, it’s obviously not a small hunter,” said Mungo. “A monster of a ship if ever I saw one.”

They were just disembarking when Grizzly remembered his bagpipes and went back for them. He didn’t want any monster hunters getting hold of them.

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The room was full of big polar bears. They all wore stripy jumpers and woolly hats of various colours. They all had mugs of drink and were talking and laughing rumbustiously. Some were playing table football and others were playing darts. The dart board was a picture of a sea monster.

One of the bears shouted, “Hey! Condoleezza! More grog over here!”

A very attractive black bear behind the bar was evidently Condoleezza, because she replied, “Just as soon as I can, guys. There are two bears just come in that look like they could use a drink.”

They sure could.

“What do you have?” asked Mungo cautiously. Who knows what they might drink at the end of the world?

“Grog,” said Condoleezza.

“Just grog?”

“We got huckleberry grog and blueberry grog and pineapple grog and raspberry grog ...”

“Raspberry for me then, please,” said Mungo.

“Pineapple,” said Grizzly.

They also ordered blueberry pancakes with maple syrup. (There was no honey, but Condoleezza said maple syrup was what all the bears around there loved.)

Then one of the polar bears shouted, “Let’s give these bears a shanty, shipmates!” So they did:

We are the bears from the frozen Arctic

Heave, ho! haul away Joe!

We love grog and rum and garlic

Down, clown, blow the bear down!

We are the bears on the briny oceans

All together, stormy weather!

Hard as nails and tough as Trojans

Down, clown, blow the bear down!

All day long we hunt the monsters

Heave, ho! haul away Joe!

Outsize clams and noxious lobsters

Down, clown, blow the bear down!

All night long we're hale and hearty

Nog, nog, jolly jolly grog!

We have a whopping whale of a party

Down, clown, blow the bear down!

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Mungo and Grizzly got talking to some of the polar bears.

“If this is the bar at the end of the world, what is there beyond it?” Mungo asked.

“We don’t talk about it,” said a polar bear in a green woolly hat.

“It’s best not talked about,” said another in a yellow hat. “This is as far as we go. There are monsters enough in the Northern Ocean for us.”

We’ve had enough of ocean,” said Mungo.

“Actually, we’re looking for the Island of the Bishbirds,” said Grizzly. It was the first thing he’d said since “Pineapple!”

“The Island of the Bishbirds!” said the yellow-hatted bear. “Do you hear that, shipmates? They’re looking for the Island of the Bishbirds.”

“No one finds the Island of the Bishbirds,” said a bear in a pink and brown striped hat. “It finds them.”

“It’ll be looking out for you,” said the bear in the green hat.

“Have any of you been there?” said Mungo.

“Everybody knows someone whose second cousin has been there, but nobody’s been there themselves,” said the yellow-hatted bear.

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There were more shanties. In return, Grizzly played the pipes, and the polar bears seemed to enjoy that hugely.

At last Mungo and Grizzly could keep awake no longer and said goodnight.

“Are you sure you can’t just point us in the right direction for the Island of the Bishbirds?” said Mungo.

To his surprise several of the bears chanted in chorus: “Second to the left and straight on till evening.”

It was not until Mungo and Grizzly had slept long and late that they thought about it and each said to the other, “Second *what* to the left?” By then *The Monster Hunter* with all its polar bears had gone.

“Maybe,” said Mungo, “there isn’t really an Island of the Bishbirds at all.”

Grizzly said nothing.

Mungo added: “I am reminded of the old saying: ‘The path that never ends goes nowhere.’”