

Chapter 15

The second cake

The king took Mungo and Grizzly through some bushes to a grassy spot, where dozens of small bears were playing. There was a pleasant din of childish chatter and laughter.

“These,” said the king, “are the lost bearns. The bishbirds call them the bish babies, but I call them the lost bearns.”

“How did they get here?” asked Grizzly.

“They are all Grizzly children, and they all got here by crawling or toddling through the picture of the island in your study at Blair Bear. The bishbirds put it there when they left Bearloch. They said it would replace me in the family. In fact, it’s been a magnet for wee Grizzlies for centuries.

“Of course, once they get here they never grow up, just as I will never grow old. They are always happy, and when I’m with them I can be happy too.”

“The lost wee bearns of Bearloch,” murmured Grizzly.

“We can change all this,” said Mungo. “We can take you all back to Bearloch in our boat.”

“No, it’s not possible. You see, the only way for anyone to leave the island is in the vessel they came in. Sometimes people do get here by boat: sailors lost at sea, reindeer and kangaroos looking for adventure. Once an owl and a pussycat arrived in a beautiful pea-green boat. The bishbirds let people like that onto the island because they amuse them. They can have a good laugh, and then send them packing in the boats they came in.

“But the lost bearns didn’t come in a boat or in anything at all. That’s why they can never leave.

“Oh, come to think of it, it isn’t quite true that they’re all Grizzly children. One wee bearn arrived just the other day. I don’t think he’s a Grizzly. He doesn’t look like one. See, over there!”

The king pointed to a small bear who was sitting on a woolly mammoth and seemed to be talking to it.

‘I think,’ said Mungo to the king, ‘you should make us a cake. Our mouths have been watering for months from reading these recipes. We missed my beloved wife’s wondersome Midsummer cake back in Bearloch. I reckon we’re due for a cake, and if you’ve been baking cakes for centuries you’ll have got pretty good at it. You can make us a cake such as can only be eaten here, on the Island of the Bishbirds.’

‘But I can’t,’ said the king. ‘You’re not bishbirds. It’s not allowed.’

‘Piffle!’ said Mungo.

‘No Grizzly can be bound by a silly rule like that,’ said Grizzly. ‘We Grizzlies do as we please.’

‘Do we?’ said the king.

‘Aye, of course, you do,’ said Mungo. ‘If you don’t bake us a cake you will no longer be able to hold your head up and call yourself a Grizzly.’

It took a little longer to persuade him, but in the end the king of the bishbirds agreed for the very first time to break the rules of the island.

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The cake was amazing. It was shaped like the island. The icing was all the colours of the bishbirds. On top there were bears made of marzipan and marshmallow. They were playing chocolate bagpipes and climbing trees made of crystallized seaweed. There was not a bishbird in sight.

The king of the bishbirds wheeled the cake on a trolley. While Mungo and Grizzly admired it, he kept looking around nervously.

Then Mungo grabbed the trolley out of his paws and began to wheel it away.

‘Where are you going?’ cried the king.

‘You’ll see,’ said Mungo.

He wheeled the trolley through the bushes to the lawn where the lost bears were playing. They all gathered round to admire the cake.

‘Now,’ said Mungo, ‘this is a treat for all bears on the island.’ And he began cutting slices and handing them out to the bears. The king was horrified and would have stopped him, but Grizzly held him back.

When all the lost bearns were happily munching, and Mungo and Grizzly themselves were tucking into big slices of cake, Mungo said: “No bishbird can deprive a bear of a bear’s right to eat cake.”

Grizzly grunted his agreement. But then he said, “Absolutely.” On Grizzly’s lips the force of this word was earth-shattering.

“You are free to eat cake!” Mungo proclaimed, and, offering a slice of cake to the king, said to him too: “You are free to eat cake!”

“Go on,” said Grizzly. “Be a Grizzly. No Grizzly is intimidated by bishbirds.”

Then all the bearns who were old enough to talk started shouting, “We are bears! We are Grizzlies! We are free to eat cake!” Those too young to talk burbled and chortled happily.

Emboldened by all this, the king began to nibble nervously at his slice. Everyone cheered.

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When all the cake was eaten, Grizzly played *The Lost Wee Bearn of Bearloch* on the bagpipes, and there was lots of singing and dancing. Mungo made up a little song and Grizzly set it to music:

Free to eat cake

Free to eat cake

Bishbirds be bished!

We are free to eat cake.

Amid the singing and dancing, Mungo noticed that one of the lost bearns had come up to him and was looking at him closely. It was the bearn who had the woolly mammoth on wheels.

After a while he said, “Dadda!”

Baby Brother had not seen his father since he was six months old, but somehow he knew him. Father MacBear had not seen his son since Baby Brother was six months old, but somehow he recognized him. He was very happy and utterly bewildered at the same time.