

## Chapter 6

### Islands

Baby Brother slept all through the reading, which was just as well because the description of the sea monsters would have been too scary for him. But had he been awake, he might have noticed Woo-woo's eyes light up at that point. Of course, no one else noticed.

"That picture," Grizzelda was saying to Grampa MacBear. "Never liked it myself. Gloomy."

"I'd really like to see it," said Tosh. "Could we come over and see it, Mrs Grizzly?"

Grizzelda hadn't time to reply, for Mother MacBear had resumed reading Father MacBear's letter.

I haven't told you yet about the renaming of the boat. I didn't much want to rename it. The boat's been in our family for so long. It feels like she's one of the family. It was like giving Duff or Beth or Tosh a new name. But you just can't go on an epic voyage to unknown lands across the ocean in a boat with a name like Daisy.

It wasn't easy thinking of a new name. I remember a book Wompy has about people sailing into the far west. Rather like us. I think it was called *The Voyage of the Prawn Shredder*. Or was it the *Yawn Spreader*? Something like that. Anyhow it didn't seem a very suitable name.

In the end we renominated Daisy *The Wonder of the West*. Of course, we had to break a bottle of whisky across her bows. I now wish we'd kept the whisky, but it had to be done. No MacBear has ever named a boat without whisky.

At that time we also decided that, there being only two of us, I would have to be the Captain and Grizzly the Crew. (It's my boat, after all.) So he calls me "Skipper" and I call him "You there!"

But you will be wondering how we have survived in our small fishing boat on the open ocean for so long. We eat mainly fish, of course.

Sadly the stock of honey we brought with us was used up all too quickly. Rationing honey just goes against a bear's grain. We couldn't do it.

We stock up with fresh water whenever we come across an island, which is quite often. The birds are the key to finding islands. You can see the birds that nest there long before you can see the island itself.

Sometimes we stay a while on an inviting island. It makes a change after the monotony of the sea and the hard work that sailing is even when we just go with the currents. On one island we spent all of the dark months of winter when there is very little light at all in the northern areas where we found ourselves.

This was Tiddlywinks Island. Its only inhabitants are walruses, who travel about the ocean and the islands the rest of the year but spend the depressing winter months on the island. They play Tiddlywinks all winter! They are fanatical about Tiddlywinks and diabolically expert. They run a great tournament that keeps them amused all through the dark months.

When we first arrived they invited us for a game of Tiddlywinks or two, and then Grizzly introduced them to Sudoku. They soon became almost as keen on Sudoku as they are on Tiddlywinks. They were so delighted to learn about Sudoku that they pressed us to spend the winter with them.

For someone less than fanatical about Tiddlywinks and Sudoku - like me - it got a bit tedious. But at least we had shelter and food and company for the winter. As the old adage has it, "Be grateful for what you receive even from a walrus."

At this point Mother MacBear stopped reading.

"Well," she said, "we're all getting very tired. I think we should go to bed now and read the rest after breakfast tomorrow."

Tosh was the only one who protested, wanting to go on with it through the rest of the night.

Mother MacBear put the letter back in its bottle, and placed the bottle on the mantelpiece beside the beautiful china bishbird that had been a wedding present from

Great-grandmother. This, as Tosh knew, was as good as saying to Tosh: "You are not - absolutely not - to sneak a read before the rest of us are ready."

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In the night Beth had a dream.

She was in a boat called *The Yawn Spreader*. As the crew were all fast asleep she had to steer.

They came to an island where there were lots of animals crowded around the harbour where she meant to put in. But as the boat approached they all started shouting things like

"Boring! Boring!"

"This is really tedious!"

"You are *so* boring!"

"Must you be so dull?"

"Go away! We want to have fun!"

Beth was feeling really hurt by all this hostility. But as soon as she was clear of the island, she realised that sea monsters were gathering all around the boat. They looked like gigantic haddock. Their mouths were wide open.

Beth knew she ought to play bagpipes to them. She searched frantically all over the boat but couldn't find any. She was sure there were some there, and knew her life depended on finding them. But they were nowhere to be found.

Then she heard the weird noises the haddock were making. They were yawning.

Soon Beth herself was also yawning uncontrollably. She was just about to fall asleep when she woke up.