

Chapter 9

A guddle

“Baby Brother, *where are you?*” They had looked under all the furniture and Duff was getting a little anxious.

“Stay very quiet. I think I heard something,” said Beth. Then they all heard it. It was someone sobbing. Very quietly, but unmistakably sobbing.

It seemed to come from one of the leather armchairs, but Baby Brother was neither in it nor under it.

“Oh, it’s Begonia,” said Tosh. And then they could all see the small brown shape that was practically invisible against the brown leather of the chair.

“Oh, I’m so sorry! Excuse me! I didn’t mean to obtrude,” said the aged voice of Begonia the Brownie. “But it’s so sad, you see.”

“What do you mean?” said Duff. “Is this another of your silly jokes? What have you done with Baby Brother?”

“No, no,” (sob) “I didn’t do anything. I just saw it happen. I couldn’t stop it. I know I couldn’t. I’ve seen it happen before.”

“What? What happened?”

“Baby Brother rode his mammoth into the picture. Look, you can see!”

So they looked at the picture of the Island of the Bishbirds. And there, behind the large bishbird that was still looking straight at them, they saw Baby Brother and Woo-woo. Baby Brother had his little paw raised as though he were waving to them.

“That’s impossible!” said Duff. “Begonia, you’ve painted them onto the picture. You must have done. What have you done with Baby Brother?”

“No, he’s there on the island.” (sob) “Really. Excuse me! I’m sorry! I don’t mean to be disrespectful. But I’ve seen it happen before.” (sob) “Wee bears like Baby Brother don’t know that it can’t be done, and so it happens.”

“Piffle!” said Duff. “You’re pulling our paws.”

But Beth said, “No, I think I can see how it could happen. Begonia, what do you mean when you say it’s happened before?”

“Oh, long ago, many times. Lots of poor wee Grizzlies. One or two of the bears in every generation. They never come back.”

“Beth could do it,” said Tosh. “Beth has oodles of imagination. She could go there and get Baby Brother back.”

“OK, I’ll have a go,” said Beth.

“But you don’t know if you could get back again,” said Duff.

“No, but I’ve got to try. Mother told us to keep an eye on Baby Brother. She said we’ve got to be responsible for him. We can’t go home and tell her he’s lost forever on the Island of the Bishbirds.”

So Beth sat on the floor and fixed her eyes on the picture. The others stayed very quiet and looked all the time at Baby Brother in the picture.

It was a long time before Beth sighed and looked away from the picture. “I can’t do it,” she said. “I can imagine being there, but I can’t quite forget I’m here.”

“Pardon me saying so, but you’re too old, miss,” said the croaking voice of the brownie. “It’s only the wee bears that have ever done it.”

“Whatever shall we do?” said Duff. “We’ve been in some pretty weird guddles, but this is the worst.”

“Maybe we can think of something, but we need time,” said Tosh. “We mustn’t let Mother know about this yet. Why not tell her we’re staying on at Mrs Grizzly’s for a day or two?”

“I’ll do it,” said Begonia. “That is, if I may presume. I’ll go and tell Mother MacBear that you’re all staying on at Blair Bear for a wee while.”