

The Girl and the Puffin



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Mara lived on a small, windy island where the sea crashed against tall cliffs. She was nine years old, with wind-tangled black hair and a yellow raincoat that flapped like a flag. Every morning, she pulled on her red rubber boots and ran outside to check the sky. 'The puffins will come soon,' she whispered to the waves.



Mara's gran had lived on the island her whole life. She wore a thick green cardigan and carried a wicker basket filled with fresh bread. 'Look there, Mara,' Gran said, pointing to the sea. 'The first puffins are arriving!' Mara's dark eyes sparkled as she watched the little birds bob on the water. She grabbed her notebook and pencil from her satchel.



The puffins were black and white, with bright orange beaks and funny orange feet. They waddled up the cliffs like tiny clowns. Mara followed them quietly, keeping a safe distance. She drew each one in her notebook and wrote down everything she saw. 'They need peace and quiet to nest,' Gran explained. Mara nodded, already planning to learn more.



One puffin stood out from the rest. He had a numbered band on his right leg and a bold, comical way of tipping his head. Mara named him Pip. He wasn't afraid of her at all. 'Hello, Pip,' she said softly. He flapped his wings and gave a little grunt. Mara laughed. 'I think we're going to be friends.'



Every day, Mara visited the nesting cliffs. She watched the puffins dig burrows in the soft earth. She saw them carry grass and feathers to make cozy nests. 'They're getting ready for their eggs,' Gran said. Mara wrote it all down. 'Puffins need safe, quiet places to lay their eggs,' she wrote in her notebook. 'No loud noises. No running. No touching.'



One morning, a big boat arrived at the harbour. Visitors poured onto the island, excited to see the puffins. They ran along the cliffs, shouting and waving. The puffins flew away in a flurry of orange feet. Mara felt a knot in her tummy. 'They're scared,' she said. 'We have to help them.'



Mara ran to find Mr Tamsin, the harbourmaster. He wore a navy jacket with brass buttons and binoculars around his neck. 'The visitors don't know how to watch puffins without disturbing them,' Mara said. Mr Tamsin nodded. 'We need to teach them,' he said. 'Can you help?' Mara smiled. She had an idea.



That evening, Mara sat at the kitchen table with her notebook and colored pencils. Gran brought her a cup of cocoa. 'I'm making an island guide,' Mara said. 'It will tell everyone how to watch puffins without scaring them.' She drew pictures of Pip and wrote simple rules. 'Keep your voice low. Stay behind the rope fence. Never touch a nest.'



Gran read the guide and smiled. 'This is wonderful, Mara,' she said. 'You've listened and learned. Now others can learn too.' Mara drew a big picture of Pip on the cover with his orange beak and numbered band. She wrote in bold letters: 'Welcome to Puffin Island! Please help us keep our puffins safe.'



The next day, Mara showed the guide to Mr Tamsin. He read it carefully and nodded. 'This is just what we need,' he said. 'I'll print copies for every visitor.' He looked at Mara's drawing of Pip. 'That puffin looks like he's smiling.' Mara grinned. 'He is. He knows we're helping.'



Soon, visitors arrived with Mara's guide in their hands. They walked quietly and stayed behind the rope fence. They watched the puffins through binoculars and whispered to each other. 'Look at that one with the band!' a boy said. 'That's Pip,' Mara told him. 'He was the first puffin I met.' The boy smiled and kept his voice low.



Pip waddled close to Mara and tipped his head. She didn't touch him, but she sat very still. He seemed to say thank you. The other puffins returned to their nests, safe and calm. Mara felt proud. Her guide was working. 'Everyone can enjoy the birds,' she said, 'as long as we respect their homes.'



Weeks passed, and the puffins laid their eggs. Mara watched the parents take turns keeping the eggs warm. She drew pictures of the fluffy chicks when they hatched. 'They're so small,' she whispered. Gran nodded. 'And they need our protection,' she said. Mara added a new page to her guide: 'Please keep dogs on leashes and stay on the path.'



When summer ended, the puffins flew away to the sea. Mara waved goodbye to Pip. 'See you next spring,' she called. Mr Tamsin hung a sign at the harbour: 'Thank you for helping our puffins.' The visitors promised to return and follow the guide. Mara felt happy. Her island was a safe place for seabirds.



The next spring, the puffins returned. Pip landed on the cliff and waddled straight to Mara. He still wore his numbered band. Mara laughed with joy. 'You came back!' she said. Gran brought fresh bread, and Mr Tamsin printed new guides. Everyone cheered. The puffins nested safely, just as they always had.



Mara stood on the cliff with her notebook in hand. She looked at the puffins and smiled. 'Wildlife needs safe places to raise their young,' she said. 'And we can help by being kind and careful.' Gran put an arm around her. 'You've taught us all, Mara.' And the puffins called out, as if to say thank you.