

The Girl and the Puffin



Çınar BİBER

The Girl and the Puffin

Çınar BİBER



Sophie stood on the deck of a small ferry, the wind tugging at her two short braids. Her mustard-yellow raincoat flapped, and her red rubber boots squeaked on the wet boards. She held her child-sized binoculars tight. 'Puffins live here,' she whispered, her hazel eyes wide. The island ahead was wild and green, with cliffs like giant steps.



Sophie jumped onto the island dock, her green backpack bouncing. A tall ranger in an olive-green uniform waited with a clipboard. 'Welcome! I'm Ranger Mae,' she said, her round face smiling. Sophie showed her binoculars. 'I want to photograph puffins,' she said, her gap-toothed grin showing. Ranger Mae nodded. 'Then you've come to the right place.'



Ranger Mae led Sophie along a path with little wooden posts. 'These marked paths keep us safe and keep the birds safe too,' she explained. Sophie looked at the cliffs, where tiny black and white shapes fluttered. 'Puffins!' she gasped. Her binoculars swung as she pointed. 'They're so funny,' she giggled. 'They look like little clowns with orange beaks.'



Sophie stepped off the path to get a closer look. Suddenly, Ranger Mae's warm voice called, 'Hold on, Sophie!' Sophie froze. 'Puffins make their homes in burrows under the grass,' Ranger Mae said gently. 'We must stay on the marked paths so we don't step on them.' Sophie looked down and saw a small hole hidden in the grass. 'Oh!' she said. 'I didn't know.'



Ranger Mae knelt beside Sophie. 'Puffins need quiet, safe homes,' she said. 'If we get too close, they get scared and might leave their eggs.' Sophie bit her lip. 'I don't want to scare them,' she said. 'I just want a photo.' Ranger Mae smiled. 'You can take photos from far away with your binoculars. That's the kindest way.'



Sophie nodded and stepped back onto the marked path. She raised her binoculars and watched. A puffin with a bright orange beak waddled out of its burrow. It looked around, then flapped its wings. Sophie laughed softly. 'It's so comical!' she whispered. She stood very still, her red boots planted on the path, and watched the busy little seabird.



All afternoon, Sophie watched from a distance. She saw puffins carrying fish in their striped beaks. She saw them splash into the sea. She saw two puffins bump beaks like friends. 'They're wonderful,' she said. Ranger Mae stood nearby, her clipboard under her arm. 'You're a patient observer,' she said. 'That's what seabird conservation needs.'



Sophie lifted her binoculars and held her breath. A puffin stood on a rock, its orange feet glowing in the sun. Click! She took a photo with her small camera. Then another puffin flew in, and another. Click! Click! 'I got them!' Sophie cheered. Her braids bounced. 'I can't wait to show my class,' she said. 'They'll love these funny little birds.'



The sun began to set, painting the sky pink. Sophie yawned. 'Time to head back,' Ranger Mae said. 'But first, let's check the burrows from the path.' They walked quietly, and Sophie saw puffins returning to their homes. 'Goodnight, puffins,' she whispered. 'I'll see you tomorrow.' Her heart felt full and happy.



On the last day, Sophie took one more photo. A puffin stood at the edge of the cliff, its white face bright. Click! 'That's the best one,' she said. Ranger Mae gave her a badge. 'You're an official puffin protector,' she said. Sophie beamed. 'I'll tell everyone to stay on the paths,' she promised. 'And to watch from far away.'



Back home, Sophie printed her photos. She glued them onto a big board for a school exhibition about seabird conservation. She wrote: 'Puffins need quiet, safe homes. Stay on marked paths.' Her teacher hung the board in the hall. Sophie's gap-toothed smile was the widest in school. 'My photos will help the puffins,' she said.



At the exhibition, Sophie stood by her board. 'Why didn't you just walk up to them?' asked a boy. Sophie shook her head. 'Puffins get scared if we get too close,' she said. 'They might leave their burrows. So I used my binoculars and stayed on the marked paths.' The boy nodded. 'That makes sense,' he said.



Sophie showed her favourite photo: a puffin with a beak full of fish. 'Look at its orange feet,' she said. 'Puffins are funny and shy.' Her classmates crowded around. 'I want to see puffins too!' said a girl. Sophie smiled. 'Just remember to watch from a distance,' she said. 'That's the kindest way to help them.'



That evening, Sophie looked at her photos again. She thought of the puffins on their wild island. She thought of Ranger Mae's warm voice. 'Responsible curiosity protects wildlife,' she said softly. She put the photos in a special album. On the cover, she drew a puffin with a bright orange beak. 'My puffin summer,' she wrote.



Sophie's teacher invited Ranger Mae to visit the school. Ranger Mae wore her khaki hat and brought a puffin puppet. 'Sophie's photos show how to be a friend to seabirds,' she said. Sophie stood beside her, proud. 'I learned that watching from a distance is the kindest way,' Sophie told the class. Everyone clapped.



Sophie still keeps her binoculars by her bed. Sometimes she looks at her puffin photos and smiles. She knows that somewhere on a wild island, the funny little seabirds are safe in their burrows. And she knows that she helped, just by staying on the marked paths and watching from far away. That was the best summer holiday ever.