The Girl and the Puffin
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Mara lived on a small, windy island where the sea crashed against the rocks and the wind never stopped blowing. Every summer, puffins flew in from the ocean to nest on the cliffs. Mara loved watching the funny birds with their bright orange beaks and waddling walks. She wore her mustard-yellow raincoat and red pom-pom hat every day, even when the sun shone.

Mara's grandfather, Grandpa Finn, was a retired fisherman. He had a thick white beard and round glasses that hung on a string around his neck. He knew everything about the island. 'The puffins come back to the same burrow every year,' he told Mara. 'They're like old friends returning home.' Mara listened carefully and wrote in her notebook with a pencil from her satchel.

One morning, Mara saw a puffin with a silver band on its leg. It stood right on the path in front of her, tilting its head. 'Hello, Pip,' she said, and the puffin didn't fly away. Pip was bold and curious, and he became Mara's favourite. She watched him carry fish in his orange beak to his burrow. 'You're a good parent,' she whispered.

But one day, Mara noticed something troubling. Some visitors were getting too close to the puffins, trying to take photos. The birds flapped their wings and looked worried. Mara frowned. 'They need space,' she said to Grandpa Finn. 'How can we help people understand?' Grandpa Finn smiled gently. 'You're a curious girl, Mara. Why don't you find out?'

Mara decided to learn everything she could about puffin conservation. She read books from the island library and asked Grandpa Finn endless questions. She took notes in her notebook, drawing little pictures of puffins and their burrows. She learned that puffins need quiet cliffs to nest and clean beaches to find food. 'I can help,' she thought, 'if I know the rules.'

Mara spent days observing Pip and the other puffins. She learned that they get scared when people come too close or make loud noises. She learned that litter on the beach can hurt them. She wrote down everything in her notebook. 'Puffins are wild creatures,' she wrote. 'They need our care.' Her red pom-pom hat bobbed as she worked.

Mara asked Grandpa Finn about the old days. 'When I was a boy, there were more puffins,' he said. 'But people didn't always know how to protect them.' He told her about keeping beaches clean and not disturbing nests. Mara wrote it all down. 'I want to make a guide,' she said. 'A guide for visitors.' Grandpa Finn's crinkly eyes sparkled. 'That's a wonderful idea.'

Mara worked hard on her guide. She drew pictures of puffins with their orange beaks and wrote simple rules: 'Watch from a distance. Stay on the path. Take your litter home.' She coloured the pages with bright pencils. She added a drawing of Pip with his silver leg band. 'Pip is my helper,' she told Grandpa Finn. 'He shows people how to watch politely.'

Mara printed her guide and put copies in the island shop and the café. Visitors picked them up and read them. 'Look at this!' said a woman. 'It says we should keep our voices low near the puffins.' Mara watched as people began to follow her rules. They stayed back and watched quietly. The puffins seemed calmer. Pip waddled right past a group of visitors, and they smiled.

More and more visitors used Mara's guide. They picked up litter on the beach and stayed on the paths. The puffins nested peacefully. Mara felt proud. 'You've made a real difference,' said Grandpa Finn. 'Young people can protect nature, you know.' Mara grinned, showing the little gap between her front teeth. 'I know,' she said. 'And I'm going to keep learning.'

One day, a family asked Mara to show them how to watch puffins. She led them along the cliff path, pointing out Pip and his burrow. 'Stay here,' she said softly. 'You can see him without getting too close.' The family watched with wide eyes as Pip carried fish to his baby. 'This is the best day ever!' said a little boy. Mara felt warm inside.

Mara's guide became famous on the island. The local school asked her to talk about puffin conservation. She stood in front of the class, wearing her red hat, and told them everything she had learned. 'Puffins are our neighbours,' she said. 'We need to take care of them.' The children clapped. Some of them wanted to make their own guides for other birds.

At the end of summer, the puffins gathered on the cliffs, ready to fly out to sea. Pip stood near Mara's path one last time. He tilted his head as if to say goodbye. 'See you next year, Pip,' Mara whispered. 'I'll keep the beach clean for you.' The puffins took off, their wings beating against the wind. Mara waved until they were tiny dots.

Mara sat with Grandpa Finn, watching the empty cliffs. 'The island feels quiet now,' she said. 'But they'll be back,' said Grandpa Finn. 'And your guide will help more people protect them.' Mara nodded. She opened her notebook and started drawing a puffin for next summer's guide. 'I have more ideas,' she said. 'We can always do better.'

Word spread about Mara's guide. Other islands asked for copies. Mara's drawings of Pip and the puffins made people smile. 'You've shown that small actions matter,' said Grandpa Finn. Mara looked out at the sea. She knew that when the puffins returned, the island would be ready. 'Coastal habitats need protection,' she said. 'And everyone can help.'

When the puffins flew back the next summer, they found clean beaches and quiet cliffs. Pip landed right in front of Mara, his orange beak shining. 'Welcome home!' she laughed. Visitors came with her guide in their hands, watching respectfully. Mara knew that she had made a difference. 'Nature is precious,' she said to Grandpa Finn. 'And we can all be its guides.'