

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING



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Interiors illustrated by John Meiring

LITTLE TIGER
LONDON

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They were lying on their fronts on the thin, wiry grass along the top of the cliff, watching puffins waddling about only a few metres away. Alice could see why they were called the clowns of the sea – they moved in such a funny way, and their brightly coloured beaks were like clown make-up. They were strutting between clumps of pink flowers that Mum had said were called sea thrift. She wanted to grow it in their new garden.



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“Burrows – like rabbits?” Alice murmured.

“Yes!” Isla smiled at her. “And actually, the puffins sometimes reuse old rabbit burrows. It’s easier than digging their own. Although they’re brilliant diggers too. They’ve got very sharp claws, and they dig with their feet *and* their beaks.”

Alice nodded. It was so nice having someone answer just her. It felt like no one had listened to her at all that morning.

“You’re just in time to see the puffins – a lot of the chicks have fledged already. That means they’ve grown their adult feathers and headed off out to sea,” Isla explained. “But there are a few left. Oh, look.” She lowered her voice. “See this puffin flying in now? It’s got a mouthful of fish – sand eels, I reckon. I think this it’s a male – it’s very hard to tell,

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but they're a bit bigger than the females.
He's probably on his way to feed his chick.
If we're very lucky..."

Tim was holding his breath, Alice noticed. He wasn't breathing, he was so excited. She was a little bit too. As the adult puffin landed with a bump, a little dark grey fluffy head popped up, almost in the middle of a clump of pink thrift flowers. That must be the entrance to the burrow.

"Oh, it doesn't have a stripey beak," Alice said, surprised. The baby puffin had a black back and a white tummy like all the others, but its beak was dark instead of blue-black and orange and red.

"Only the adults have them," Isla explained. "And not all the time. Just in the spring and summer. See the puffling's head is all fluffy?"

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It's still growing its adult feathers, but it won't be long till this one's off out to sea too."

"What did you call it?" Alice asked curiously.
"A puffling?"

Isla laughed. "Yes, that's the proper name for a baby puffin. I love it."

Alice smiled at her. "Me too. Puffling.
It's such a cute word."

