



Nights of the Pufflings

by Bruce McMillan

Every year, black and white birds with orange bills visit the Icelandic island of Heimaey. These birds are called puffins. They are known as “clowns of the sea” because of their bright bills and clumsy movements. Puffins are awkward fliers during takeoffs and landings because they have chunky bodies and short wings.

Halla lives on the island of Heimaey. She searches the sky every day. As she watches from high on a cliff overlooking the sea, she spots her first puffin of the season.

She whispers to herself “Lundi,” which means “puffin” in Icelandic.

Soon the sky is speckled with them—puffins, puffins everywhere. They are returning from their winter at sea, returning to Halla’s island and the nearby uninhabited islands to lay eggs and raise puffin chicks. These “clowns of the sea” return to the same burrows year after year. It’s the only time they come ashore.





Halla and her friends climb over the cliffs to watch the birds. They see pairs tap-tap-tap their beaks together. Each pair they see will soon tend an egg deep inside the cliffs. When the puffin eggs have hatched, the parents will bring fish home to feed their chicks.

Each chick will grow into a young puffling. The nights of the pufflings will come when each puffling takes its first flight. Although the nights of the pufflings are still long weeks away, Halla thinks about getting some cardboard boxes ready.

All summer long the adult puffins fish and tend to their chicks. By August, flowers blanket the burrows. With the flowers in full bloom, Halla knows that the wait for the nights of the pufflings is over.

The hidden chicks have grown into young pufflings. Now it's time for Halla and her friends to get out their boxes and torches for the nights of the pufflings. Starting tonight, and for the next two weeks, the pufflings will be leaving for their winter at sea.

In the darkness of the night, the pufflings leave their burrows for their first flight. It's a short, wing-flapping trip from the high cliffs. Most of the birds splash-land safely in the sea below. But some get confused by the village lights – perhaps they think the lights are moonbeams reflecting on the water. Hundreds of the pufflings crash-land in the village every night. Unable to take off from the flat ground, they run around and try to hide.

Halla and her friends will spend each night searching for stranded pufflings that haven't made it to the water. But the village cats and dogs will be searching, too. Even if the cats and dogs don't get them, the pufflings might get run over by cars or trucks. The children must find the stray pufflings first. By ten o'clock the streets of Heimaey are alive with roaming children.

Halla and her friends race to rescue the pufflings. Armed with torches, they wander through the village, searching dark places. Halla spots a puffling. She races after it, grabs it, and puts it safely in a cardboard box.



For two weeks all the children of Heimaey sleep late in the day so they can stay out at night. They rescue thousands of pufflings.

Every night Halla and her friends take the rescued pufflings home. The next day, with the boxes full of pufflings, Halla and her friends go down to the beach.

It's time to set the pufflings free. Halla releases one first. She holds it up so that it will get used to flapping its wings. Then, holding the puffling snugly in her hands, she swings it up in the air and launches it out over the water beyond the surf. The puffling flutters just a short distance before splash-landing safely.

Day after day Halla's pufflings paddle away, until the nights of the pufflings are over for the year. As she watches the last of the pufflings and adult puffins leave for their winter at sea, Halla bids them farewell until next spring. She wishes them a safe journey as she calls out, "Goodbye, goodbye."



Stop

End of Part 2.

Now go to your question booklet.