The Puffin's Poetry Contest
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On a bright morning by the seaside, Puffin sat on a rock and watched the waves. She wore her small blue knitted scarf, which she saved for special days. Today was special because a poetry contest was coming to the shore. Puffin wanted to enter, but when she tried to write, no words came. She sighed and tucked her orange beak under her wing.

Puffin's best friend, Guillemot, stood tall and slim on a nearby rock. His sleek dark back shone in the sun, and his long pointed beak pointed toward the sea. 'What's wrong, Puffin?' he asked gently. 'I want to write a poem for the contest,' she said, 'but my words are all jumbled.' Guillemot smiled. 'Poems don't have to start with words,' he said. 'Sometimes they start with listening.'

Puffin wasn't sure about that. She looked at the other birds gathering for the contest. Seagulls practiced rhymes, and a sandpiper hummed a tune. Puffin felt small and round and very quiet. 'Everyone else has words,' she whispered. Guillemot stood beside her. 'Let's go down to the water,' he said. 'The ocean has plenty of words. We just have to find them.'

They walked to the edge of the water, where the waves rushed up the sand and pulled back again. 'Close your eyes,' said Guillemot. 'What do you hear?' Puffin listened. She heard the crash and hiss of waves, the distant cry of gulls, and the soft wind. 'It's just noise,' she said. 'No,' said Guillemot, 'it's a story. Listen again.'

Puffin listened harder. The waves sounded like slow, steady breathing. The gulls called out like singers in a choir. 'I hear something,' she said, opening her eyes. 'The waves are like a drum,' she said. 'And the gulls are like a song.' Guillemot nodded. 'Now you're making poetry,' he said. 'But I don't know how to put it together,' said Puffin.

Guillemot picked up a smooth pebble and drew lines in the sand. 'A poem is like a little boat,' he said. 'Each line carries you to the next.' Puffin looked at the lines and then at the sea. She said, 'The waves go up and down like a heartbeat.' Guillemot clapped his dark wings. 'That's a line!' he said. 'Keep going.'

Puffin took a deep breath. 'The gulls sing high above the sea,' she said. 'The wind whispers through the grass.' She paused. 'The ocean is a big blue drum.' Guillemot smiled. 'You have three lines already,' he said. 'Now we need a few more to make a poem.' Puffin felt a tiny spark of hope. Maybe she could do this after all.

They spent the whole afternoon by the water. Puffin watched the tide come in and go out. She saw a seal poke its head above the waves. 'The seal wears a bow tie of foam,' she said, giggling. Guillemot laughed too. 'That's playful,' he said. 'Poems can be playful.' Puffin added more lines about the salty air and the shells on the sand.

As the sun began to set, Puffin had a whole poem. It was short and simple, but it was hers. 'I'm still nervous,' she said. 'What if the judge doesn't like it?' Guillemot stood close. 'The judge is a seal who loves the sea,' he said. 'Just say your poem slowly and think of the waves.' Puffin nodded and held her poem close.

That night, Puffin practiced her poem in a quiet cove. She whispered the lines to the stars. The words felt like friends now. She wrapped her blue scarf around her neck and imagined standing before the crowd. Her heart beat fast, but she remembered Guillemot's words: 'Listen to the ocean inside you.' She fell asleep with the sound of waves in her ears.

On contest day, all the birds gathered on the beach. The judge, a large grey seal with a red bow tie, sat on a rock. One by one, the birds recited their poems. The seagulls' rhymes were clever, and the sandpiper's song was sweet. Puffin's turn came. Her orange beak trembled, and she almost turned away.

But then she saw Guillemot in the crowd, nodding his head. Puffin took a deep breath and began. 'The waves go up and down like a heartbeat,' she said. 'The gulls sing high above the sea. The wind whispers through the grass. The ocean is a big blue drum. The seal wears a bow tie of foam.' Her voice grew stronger with each line.

When she finished, the beach was quiet for a moment. Then the seal judge smiled, and his whiskers twitched. 'That poem made me feel the sea,' he said. The other birds clapped their wings and cheered. Puffin's cheeks turned pink under her white feathers. She had done it! She had shared her poem, and everyone had listened.

The seal judge announced the winners. Puffin didn't win first prize, but she won a special ribbon for 'Best Ocean Voice.' The seal said, 'Your poem reminded us that the sea has many sounds, and you listened well.' Puffin looked at Guillemot and smiled. She felt proud, not because she won, but because she had found her words.

After the contest, Puffin and Guillemot sat on their favorite rock and watched the sunset. 'You were right,' said Puffin. 'Poetry is everywhere if you listen.' Guillemot nodded. 'And you found your own way to make it,' he said. Puffin touched her blue scarf and knew she would never forget this day.

From then on, Puffin wrote poems about the sea whenever she could. She learned that creativity comes in many forms—sometimes in words, sometimes in sounds, and sometimes in the help of a good friend. And every time she heard the waves, she remembered the day she found her voice.