

The Puffin's Paper Crown



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On a rocky island in the wide blue sea, the seabirds were getting ready for the yearly festival. They hung seaweed streamers and set out shells in neat rows. Pip the puffin watched with her big dark eyes. She had a bright orange beak striped with yellow, and round orange feet. This year, the seabirds had chosen Pip to be the festival leader.



Pip was small and round, but she was cheerful and fair-minded. The other birds had made her a paper crown in gold and red. It was slightly crumpled and sat tilted on her head. "You will be a wonderful leader," said Uncle Bill the guillemot. He was tall and gentle, with a long pointed beak and a faded green scarf around his neck.



Uncle Bill had been festival leader for many years. "There is one important thing about leading," he told Pip. "A good leader makes sure everyone gets a turn." Pip nodded and looked at the paper crown. She wanted every seabird to be happy at the festival. The sun shone on the water, and the games were about to begin.



Gulla the seagull was in charge of the races. She had long grey wings and a yellow beak with a red spot. A blue ribbon was tied around one leg. "Line up for the flying race!" she called. The birds flapped their wings and zoomed around the cliffs. But Tiny the tern, a fluffy chick with a tiny black cap, could not keep up.



Tiny landed on a rock with a soft thump. Her big hopeful eyes looked sad. "I am too slow," she chirped. She wore a tiny shell necklace that Pip had given her for good luck. Pip saw that the race was too hard for the smallest birds. Some of them did not even want to try. This was not fair.



Next came the diving game. The birds had to dive deep and bring up a shiny pebble. Gulla dove first and came up with a beautiful pink pebble. But Tiny was afraid of the deep water. She shivered on the edge. "I cannot dive that far," she whispered. Pip saw that the games were made for the big, strong birds. The little ones felt left out.



Pip called all the seabirds together. "These games are too hard for some of us," she said. "Let us make them fair for everyone." Gulla crossed her wings. "But the games have always been this way," she said. "Why should we change them?" Pip looked at Tiny, who was hiding behind a rock. "Because every seabird deserves a turn," she said.



Uncle Bill nodded from his spot on the cliff. "Pip is right," he said gently. "A festival is for everyone, not just the fastest or the bravest." Gulla looked at Tiny and felt a little ashamed. She had not thought about the smaller birds. "I will help you test the new games," she said to Pip. "Show me what you have in mind."



Pip began to redesign the games. For the flying race, she marked a short course for the little birds and a longer one for the big birds. Everyone would race at the same time, but each bird had a fair path. "Now Tiny can fly too," Pip said. Tiny's eyes grew bright. She fluttered her soft grey wings and felt hopeful.



For the diving game, Pip made three levels. Deep divers could go far down. Others could dive just a little. And birds who did not want to dive could search for shells in the shallow water. "That sounds fun!" said Tiny. She waded into the water and found a tiny pink shell. She put it in her pocket, feeling proud.



The day of the festival arrived. Pip stood on a rock with her paper crown shining in the sun. "Welcome to the new games!" she called. The birds lined up for the races. Gulla waved her blue ribbon to start the race. Tiny flew the short course and finished with a happy chirp. All the birds cheered for each other.



In the diving game, every bird found something special. Some brought up shiny pebbles, some found shells, and some just splashed and laughed. Pip cheered for everyone. Her crown wobbled as she jumped up and down. "Well done, Tiny!" she called. Tiny beamed and held up her little shell. The festival felt warm and friendly.



Gulla came over to Pip. "I am sorry I was impatient before," she said. "You were right. The new games are much better." Pip smiled. "It was a team effort," she said. "You helped me test them." Uncle Bill watched from his cliff and nodded. "You see?" he said. "A good leader makes sure everyone gets a turn."



At the end of the day, the seabirds gathered for a feast of fish and seaweed. Pip took off her paper crown and held it up. "This crown is not just for me," she said. "It is for all of us, because we all made the festival fair." She placed the crown on a rock in the middle, and the birds cheered. The crown looked beautiful in the setting sun.



Tiny the tern came up to Pip. "Thank you for making the games fair," she said. "I was scared before, but now I know I can do it." Pip gave Tiny a gentle nudge. "You were brave to try," she said. "And you finished the race!" Tiny's shell necklace glinted in the light. She felt proud and happy.



As the stars came out, the seabirds sang a soft song together. Pip put her paper crown back on, tilted just right. She knew that being a leader meant caring for everyone. The festival had been the best ever, because every bird had a turn. Pip smiled, and her crown seemed to shine even brighter.