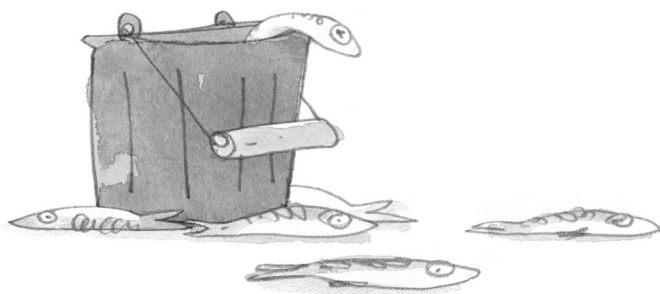


EINSTEIN the PENGUIN

• THE CASE of the FISHY DETECTIVE •

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To Patrick and Molly



CHAPTER ONE

Back to London

Imogen was walking home from school by herself. Normally she walked with Arthur, but Arthur had gone over to Theo's house, and normally they would get the bus, but today she had missed it – and anyway she was feeling brave.

I must look very grown up, she thought to herself, walking along a pavement without anyone else.

And, of course, she *was* very grown up when you thought about it. In three weeks' time she'd be eleven, and that was an impressive sort of age. Ten was double

figures too, but not in such a tidy way as eleven. Eleven did double figures properly.

Imogen imagined that once she was eleven she would look and feel quite different. She would be taller and cleverer, and adults would ask her opinion on things and take her responses seriously at last. Walking home alone was simply practice for what was to come.



It was early March, and none of the trees had bothered to grow any leaves yet, so that when the wind blew the branches looked like they were scratching the sky with their claws. But it was warm for March, and Imogen didn't mind the grey: grey was probably a sensible colour, the kind of colour she would appreciate once she was eleven.



She tucked her hands into her pockets and thought about the maths test that she had on Monday, and whether she was going to get an invite to Amy Diggory's birthday party. She didn't like the idea of not being invited, but she didn't much like the idea of going, either. It was all rather confusing to think about. And, while she'd done pretty well in her last maths test, this week Mr Smith had started putting letters into their sums, and Imogen wasn't sure whether she'd understood everything. She didn't see why numbers and letters couldn't be kept separately: when they sat next to each other like that everything went wobbly.

Still – those were problems for next week, thought Imogen, as she opened the garden gate and walked up the path towards her house. And right now it was Friday, which happened to be her favourite day of any day at all.

'It's Friday!' said Imogen, as she burst into the kitchen.

Mrs Stewart was just unpacking her work things, and Mr Stewart – who'd had the day off – was sitting with his feet up in front of the telly.

'So it is,' said Mr Stewart. 'Did they teach you that at school?'

'Can I borrow your laptop to check if the email's here?' Imogen dropped her school bag on to the floor and went to grab a biscuit from the biscuit tin.

'Just one!' said Mrs Stewart. 'And don't you want to wait until Arthur's home? He'll get upset if you open the email without him.'

'Oh,' said Imogen disappointedly. 'But what if it's important? What if Einstein's had some sort of accident, and we won't know about it because we haven't checked?'

'Those emails from Australia are the same every week,' said Mr Stewart. 'Einstein's eaten another fish and been swimming. I'm sure it can wait an hour until your brother's home.'

‘It might be different this time,’ said Imogen, though she didn’t really mind waiting – she just liked having the last word.

‘You mean he might have eaten a pilchard rather than an anchovy? Whatever will we do!’ said Mr Stewart, and Imogen bounded over to the sofa to thump him with a cushion, then ran upstairs to find a book.

‘Still reading about detectives?’ said Mrs Stewart when she returned a moment later.

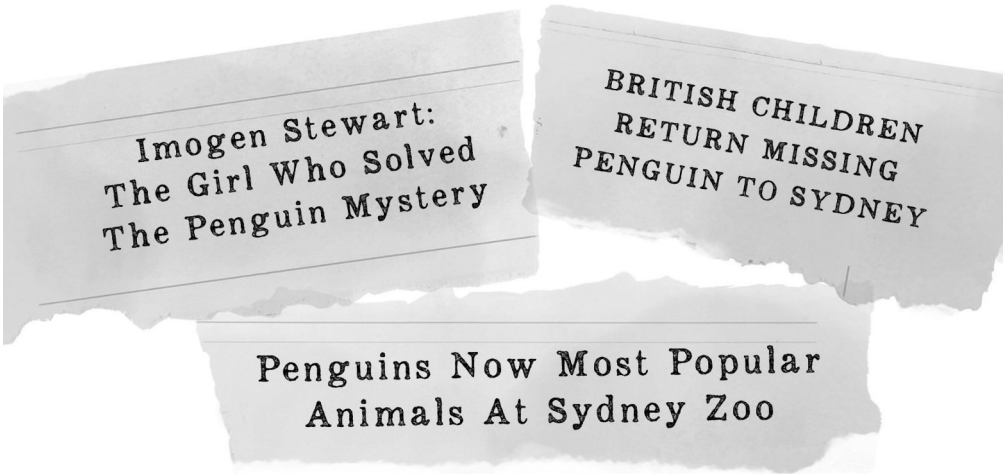
Imogen flopped down on to the sofa and sighed. ‘No,’ she said. ‘Detectives are a bit babyish, I think.’

‘Surely not!’ said Mrs Stewart, aghast. ‘You can’t mean that.’

Imogen made a sort of mumbling noise and buried her face in her book. She didn’t mean it – not really. She’d loved being a detective, and for months she’d carried her notebook with her at all times, keeping a constant eye out for things that might

need investigating. But the truth was that ever since Einstein had left there hadn't been any more mysteries. Or there had – but they weren't the proper kind of mystery, the kind with heroes and villains. There were only boring mysteries: things like how to say 'hello' in French, and why Arthur never wiped his toothpaste up off the basin.

All Imogen had now to remind herself that she'd ever been a detective before were the newspaper clippings Mrs Stewart had insisted on pinning to the fridge:



**Imogen Stewart:
The Girl Who Solved
The Penguin Mystery**

**BRITISH CHILDREN
RETURN MISSING
PENGUIN TO SYDNEY**

**Penguins Now Most Popular
Animals At Sydney Zoo**

They were very good newspaper clippings, to be fair, and Imogen still felt a surge of pride whenever she looked at them. But it had been a whole year now – *more* than a year, in fact. It was only sensible to assume her detective days were behind her.

When Theo's mum dropped Arthur off outside the house, he was so eager to run up the path that he almost forgot to say goodbye. But he stopped himself.

‘Thank you for having me!’ he blurted. ‘And I’ll see you on Monday, Theo.’

‘Are you in a rush?’ Theo’s mother asked.

‘Oh, no,’ said Arthur, going a little pink. ‘But Fridays are when Ted emails us. He’s the zookeeper from Sydney.’

‘Ah, of course,’ she said, raising her eyebrows a little. ‘Silly me – how could I forget?’

Theo’s mum had never actually met Einstein, and she still looked bemused whenever he was

mentioned, like she didn't quite believe any of it had really happened.

'Don't worry, Mum. You'll meet Einstein next time he comes to visit,' said Theo.

'Oh, he's coming back, is he?'

'No . . . I don't know,' Arthur admitted. 'I hope so.'

'Well, tell your parents I said hello,' said Theo's mum. She'd become distracted by Theo's little sister, Sophia, who had started crying in the back seat.

Arthur waved one last time before hurrying up the garden path towards the front door.

'Imogen!' cried Arthur, as he crashed into the house and threw his school bag down on top of a pile of old trainers. 'It's Friday!'

'So it is!' called Mr Stewart. 'Did they teach you that at school?'

'That wasn't funny the first time, Dad,' said Imogen. 'Can we use the laptop now? Please?'

'Yes, yes, I demand that you use the laptop!' said

Mr Stewart. ‘Why haven’t you used it already? This week might be the week that everything changes!’

‘You’re *still* not *funny*!’ said Imogen, but she was already halfway up the stairs.

Dear Imogen and Arthur,

Thank you so much for your email last week! I passed everything you said on to Einstein, and he gave a very big squawk when he heard how well Arthur had done in his maths test.

This week Einstein has done a lot of swimming and has shown a preference for pilchards over anchovies. Here’s a picture of him hanging out on a rock with his new friend Steve. They’d just made up after a brief incident this morning when Einstein stole Steve’s fish at feeding time. I think he mostly did it because some tourists were watching. Einstein always wants to be in front of a camera . . .!

Best,

Ted

Mr Stewart had been right: it was pretty much the same as normal. But sometimes, Imogen told herself, normal was nice. It was nice knowing that Einstein was safe, and happy, and making friends with other penguins. Nine-year-old Imogen might have felt selfishly about it, and hoped for another adventure, but this Imogen – who was, after all, not so far off eleven – knew that as long as Einstein was safe everything was really all right. She smiled at the photo and started to turn away from the computer.

‘Imogen, wait!’ said Arthur.

‘What?’

‘He just sent us another message! He wants to do a video call!’

Imogen spun round. Video calls to Sydney only happened very occasionally.

Just then the desktop started to ring, and Ted’s profile picture appeared above the keyboard in front of them.

Imogen rushed to click ACCEPT and the picture expanded to fill the whole screen – only now Ted’s face was moving too.

‘Hi!’ Ted waved, peering into the webcam.

He looked blurry at first, but eventually crackled into real time. He appeared to be in an office – the same one he’d been in last time they had spoken, in fact. Imogen couldn’t remember when that was. Three weeks ago? Four?

‘Can you hear me?’ said Ted.

‘What did he say?’ whispered Arthur.

‘Yes, we can hear you!’ said Imogen. ‘Can you see us?’

‘Our camera’s turned off,’ said Arthur, and he elbowed Imogen out of the way to change the setting.

‘Ah, there you are!’ said Ted. ‘How’s it going?’

‘Good,’ said Imogen, resting her head awkwardly on her elbow. She always felt oddly shy in video calls, which was unlike her. Seeing her own miniature face in the corner made her self-conscious.

‘Well, it’s very late here, but I’m on the night shift so I thought I might as well let Einstein say hello.’

Arthur barged his way on to the edge of the desk chair in order to see better. Imogen was hogging it again. ‘Where is he?’ he asked.

‘Shh,’ whispered Imogen. ‘Ted’s *getting* him.’

They watched Ted lean down and scoop something up off the floor, and a few seconds later Einstein appeared, his feet paddling in mid-air as if he hadn’t quite noticed where he was yet. Ted placed him down on the desk in front of the computer.

‘Look who’s here, Einstein!’ said Ted.

Einstein glanced up at the screen and squawked excitedly.

‘Hi, Einstein!’ said Imogen.

He stretched his flippers back into the air and bounced up and down on his little feet.

‘We miss you!’ said Arthur. ‘When are you coming back to London?’

Einstein squawked again and shrugged his flippers, then made several frantic attempts to peck the screen.

‘He misses you too,’ said Ted. ‘Perhaps you kids could visit Sydney sometime.’

‘Maybe,’ said Imogen uncertainly. ‘But we couldn’t come alone. Mum and Dad would have to save up for it and take time off work and everything – and we don’t know when that would be.’

‘Yeah, it’s a long way,’ Ted agreed.

‘We want to, though,’ she added.

‘You’ll still let us know if Einstein ever comes to England, won’t you?’ asked Arthur.

‘Arthur, there’s no one else I would dream of telling first.’

Arthur smiled and sat back in the chair. He liked Ted. Ted always said the right thing.

‘Well, I’m afraid I’m going to have to pack up in a minute, but let’s talk again soon.’ Ted ruffled Einstein’s feathers and handed him a snack.

‘Okay. See you soon, Einstein,’ said Imogen. She brushed her finger against the screen, as if she was stroking Einstein’s feathers too.

‘Bye, Einstein!’ said Arthur.

Einstein squawked so enthusiastically that he dropped the snack he was eating, then hurried to pick it up again and tripped over the keyboard. The picture turned the colour of feathers as Einstein came crashing towards the screen.



Imogen and Arthur heard him squawk once more before he pushed himself up with his flippers and accidentally ended the call with the edge of his beak.