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opening extract from

A Birthday Surprise

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published by

Puffin Books

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Prologue

'Yay! I did it! I delivered my first dream!' Splash exclaimed happily. Flapping his wings, the young magic puffin headed home to Silver Dream Cliffs.

Ahead of him, dozens of his friends flew in neat ranks as they also returned from their special nightly task of bringing good dreams to children

everywhere. Now Splash would be going with them every night too.

As the little puffin gave a joyful twitch of his stubby tail, a sprinkle of sea-blue glitter trailed out behind him. He was so busy thinking about telling his family the exciting news that he didn't realize he had fallen back from the others. With a flutter of his tiny wings, Splash flew harder to try to catch up.

Below him the sea was as clear as glass. Sand eels flashed enticingly

among the waves. At the sight of them, Splash's small tummy rumbled and his mouth watered. He was very hungry after his busy night.

There was a strict rule that all magic puffins must return to Silver Dream Cliffs and report safely to the leader before they were allowed to go fishing. But those wriggly, delicious-looking sand eels were so tempting.

Surely it could do no harm if he dived into the sea and scooped up just one tiny beakful? *I could be back with the*

flock before anyone even notices, Splash thought.

The temptation was too much. On impulse he dipped his wings and streaked downwards. The fresh smell of the sea surrounded Splash as he dived in. One, two, three delicious eels slipped down his throat before he quickly rose to the surface again.

But in that short time, the sky had grown much darker and the waves were being whipped into small peaks. There was a crash of thunder and

lightning zigzagged across the sky.

A strong *whoosh* of cold air swept the little puffin up from the sea. Splash tried to fly up to join his friends, but he felt himself being pulled away off course. His heart beat fast as he flapped desperately against the furious wind.

'*Help! Help!*' he called to the magic puffins far above him.

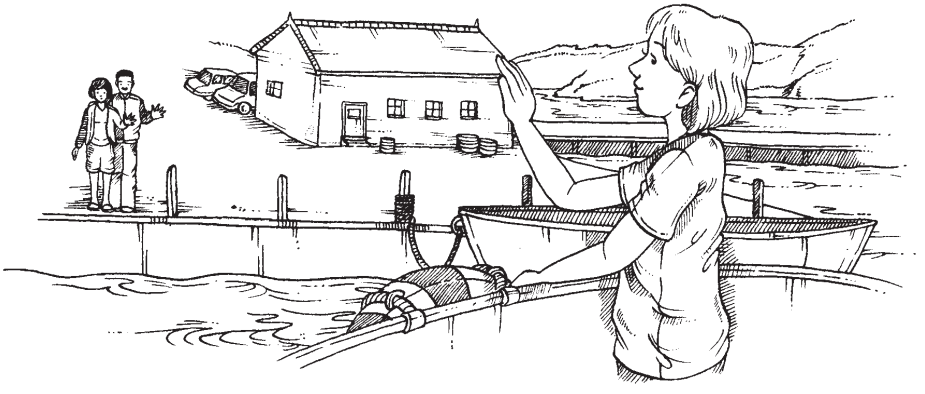
But Splash's little voice was lost in the might of the sudden storm. It was all he could do to stay in the air and not pitch helplessly into the crashing waves.

Suddenly, there was a bright flash of sea-blue light and the little puffin felt himself drifting downwards on a gentle wave of sparkly magic.

Chapter One

'Bye! Have a great time on the island!' Martina Judd's mum and dad called, waving from the quayside.

Martina waved back. 'See you later! Good luck in the golf tournament.' Kids weren't allowed to take part in the competition, so Martina was going to spend the day visiting her uncle and



cousin on nearby Bird Island. She hung on grimly to the wooden seat as her uncle steered the small boat out to sea.

Martina could taste salty spray on the breeze. She glanced nervously at the choppy waves that slopped against the side of the boat.

'I hope you've brought your sea

legs, love!' Uncle Andrew said good-naturedly, grinning.

'I think I must have left them at the hotel!' Martina replied with a wobbly smile. She was trying very hard not to think about how deep the sea must be now.

Her uncle turned back to the wheel and looked out of the cabin window. Suddenly, a *whoosh* of freezing water splashed into Martina's lap.

'Oh!' she gasped in shock.

From the other side of the boat

came peals of laughter. Martina glared at her cousin who sat opposite.

'You idiot, Gary. That's not funny. I'm soaked!'

'It's only a few drops! Don't be such a wimp!' Gary crowed, wiping his hands on his jeans. 'Your face looks green. You'd better not be sick because *I'm* not clearing it up!'

Martina swallowed hard, trying to ignore the fluttery feeling in her tummy. She wished she could think of a clever answer. She'd forgotten what a total pain

Gary was. He seemed to think he could order her about just because he was nearly three years older than her. At least this was only a short trip. She wouldn't have to put up with him for long.

Martina thought longingly of the holiday hotel room, with its big squishy sofa and huge TV. She had planned to spend the afternoon playing on her new computer console. But that was before Uncle Andrew phoned and invited her to help him and Gary in their week-long survey of bird numbers.

Ahead of them, the island was getting closer. It was a dark looming rock, ringed with towering cliffs and topped by an old lighthouse. Martina couldn't imagine how Uncle Andrew and Gary could bear to stay there. What a total waste of the summer half-term.

Martina sighed, looking glumly towards the small open-sided cabin where her cousin had gone to stand with his dad.

'Why did *she* have to come?' Gary's moody voice complained. He obviously thought he was out of earshot, but the

sea breeze carried his words clearly to Martina. 'She'll just be in the way. You know what girls are like about creepy-crawlies and stuff.'

'Now, Gary,' his dad replied calmly. 'I invited her, remember? It can't be much fun for Martina, having golf-mad parents and being dragged from hotel to hotel. I bet she has to spend lots of time by herself. I'm relying on you to make sure she has a good time with us. Right?'

'I s'pose,' Gary mumbled. He didn't sound convinced.

I don't mind being by myself. No one needs to feel sorry for me! Martina thought, a bit peeved. She liked being able to order stuff from room service and watch TV for hours on end. And it wasn't as if she was a baby – in two days' time, she'd be nine years old.

The boat was passing a steep cliff face and big clouds of seabirds circled overhead. Others were swooping down on to narrow ledges. Their loud cries were deafening.

Martina wrinkled her nose. '*Phew!* What's that terrible smell?'

'Seabird colonies all smell like that,' Gary informed her over his shoulder. 'It's a mixture of fish, bird poo and rotten eggs. Lovely!'

Uncle Andrew turned to grin at her. 'You'll get used to it. After a while you'll hardly notice.'

'Oh great! Death by pong!' Martina groaned.

Unexpectedly, Gary laughed.

Martina struggled to stop herself

smiling back. He looked much nicer when he was laughing, but she had to remember that he was still very annoying. She hoped that he might turn out to be friendlier once they were on the island.

Minutes later, they reached a small wooden landing stage. Uncle Andrew moored the boat and then Gary led the way up some stone steps.

Martina felt relieved as she reached firm ground at last. But as she looked round, her spirits sank into her trainers. The island was unbelievably bleak and

wild-looking. Scrubby grass, low bushes and wild flowers stretched in all directions. Here and there, bare rocks poked through the thin soil.

As they all headed towards the old lighthouse, a cold breeze stirred Martina's short fair hair. She shivered, wishing she'd worn jeans instead of shorts and a T-shirt. But it had been a bright summer afternoon when they left.

'Hurry up and follow me,' Gary ordered. 'See those dark clouds? There's going to be a heck of a storm.'

'Yeah, right!' Martina muttered grumpily as he broke into a jog. He was obviously teasing her again.

Uncle Andrew took her arm. 'I'm afraid Gary's right. Summer storms blow up out of nowhere along this coast. Come on, love, we need to get inside!'

A fat raindrop *plopped* on to Martina's head, followed by two more. She didn't need telling twice. Hunching her shoulders, she dashed towards the lighthouse. They barely reached the

shelter of the deep stone porch before a deafening crash of thunder rang out.

Martina hurried gratefully through the front door into a large bare room. There was a makeshift kitchen in one corner with a wooden table and chairs. Camp beds, a suitcase and a jumble of equipment were stacked against one wall.

Uncle Andrew produced towels from a backpack and then shrugged off his jacket before lighting a lamp and making them all hot chocolate. 'The storm will soon die down, but I reckon the sea

channel will be closed for a couple of days. You'll be having a longer stay with us than we'd planned, Martina.'

'Oh no!' Martina stopped drying her damp hair and looked at him in horror. 'I can't stay here!'

'Sorry it's not posh enough for you, Your Highness,' Gary muttered.

'It's not that.' Martina bit her lip. 'I'm going to miss my birthday. And Mum's promised me a party and a big cake!'

'Oh dear. I'd forgotten that. You're

nine the day after tomorrow, aren't you?' her uncle said sympathetically. 'I'm really sorry, love, but it can't be helped. No boats can travel to or from the island until we get the all-clear from the coastguard. I'll ring the coastguard, and then phone your mum and dad to let them know.'

Martina nodded silently as he went to get his mobile phone. This was going to be the worst birthday ever! To her horror, she felt tears pricking her eyes.

'You're not the only one who's fed

up,' Gary said crossly. 'What about me? I'm stuck with you!'

Martina gave him a hard look and only just managed to stop herself saying something very rude indeed. She'd totally had enough of Gary and his mean comments. Whipping round, she opened the front door and stomped outside into the deep stone porch.

'Grrr! Gary is *so* annoying!' she fumed, slamming the door. 'I wish he wasn't my cousin!'

She stared out at the curtain of rain

that hid the island from view. Thunder rumbled in the distance.

Suddenly, there was a flash of bright sea-blue light and a twinkling mist filled the porch. Martina noticed glittery drops forming and gleaming on her skin – she could have sworn they were blue and green in colour.

'Oh!' she screwed up her eyes, trying to see through the shimmer, and wondered what could be happening. As the mist cleared, something whizzed towards her on

a big *whoosh* of sparkly air and *plopped* at her feet.

Martina's eyes widened in surprise. Looking up at her was a small bedraggled puffin.

It gave a weak little gasp. 'Can you help me, please?'

