The Boy and the Little Puffin
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On a small island where the wind smelled of salt and seaweed, a boy named Leo lived in a blue house near the cliffs. He was eight years old, with warm light-brown skin, short curly black hair, and a scatter of freckles across his nose. Every morning he pulled on his mustard-yellow raincoat and red rubber boots, grabbed his canvas satchel, and ran outside to explore. He loved his island more than anything.

The island was famous for its puffins. Every spring, hundreds of little seabirds flew in from the sea to make their nests in the grassy burrows along the cliffs. They had black backs and white bellies, bright orange beaks, and funny orange feet. Leo thought they were the most wonderful birds in the world. He often sat quietly on the cliff top, watching them come and go.

One morning, Leo noticed something new. A young puffin stood near the path, small and round, about the size of a loaf of bread. It had soft grey-white cheeks and a tiny silver band on one ankle. The puffin tilted its head and looked at Leo with gentle dark eyes. Leo held his breath and did not move. "Hello, little one," he whispered. The puffin blinked and took a tiny step closer.

Leo slowly opened his satchel and took out his sketchbook. He drew the puffin's round body, its orange beak, and its bright webbed feet. The puffin seemed curious about the pencil. It waddled closer, then stopped and flapped its small wings. Leo laughed softly. "You're not shy at all, are you?" he said. The puffin gave a little puff of breath and settled down on the grass beside him.

Just then, Leo heard voices. A group of visitors was walking up the cliff path, talking loudly and pointing at the birds. One visitor had a light-blue sun hat and binoculars around her neck. She stepped off the path to get a closer look at the puffins. The little puffin beside Leo fluttered its wings and scurried back toward its burrow. Leo frowned. "They don't like loud noises," he thought.

Leo remembered what his mother had told him. She was tall and sturdy, with black hair in a loose bun and a calm smile. "Puffins are shy," she had said. "They need quiet and space to raise their chicks." Leo watched the visitors and felt worried. He wanted everyone to enjoy the puffins, but he also wanted the puffins to feel safe. There must be a way, he thought.

That evening, Leo told his mother about the visitors and the frightened puffin. She listened while she stirred soup at the stove, her teal apron tied neatly. "Maybe you can help them understand," she said. "You know a lot about puffins now. Why not share what you know?" Leo thought about his sketchbook full of drawings. A guide, he thought. I could make a guide for visitors!

The next day, Leo sat at the kitchen table with his pencils and paper. He drew the little puffin with its orange beak and silver leg band. He drew a visitor with a sun hat and binoculars, watching quietly from the path. He wrote simple words in big letters: "Watch quietly. Keep your distance. Never leave trash." His mother helped him test the rules on the island paths.

Leo walked to the cliff with his mother, carrying his guide. They met the visitor in the light-blue sun hat again. She was standing very still, looking through her binoculars. "Excuse me," Leo said politely. "Would you like to see my guide? It helps visitors enjoy the puffins without scaring them." The visitor lowered her binoculars and smiled. "I would love that," she said.

The visitor read Leo's guide carefully. She read about staying on the path, keeping voices low, and taking all trash home. She read about the little puffin with the silver band and how it needed a quiet place to rest. "I didn't know," she said. "I was so excited to see the birds that I forgot to be careful." She promised to follow the guide and tell her friends.

Leo felt a warm glow in his chest. He had an idea. He would make copies of his guide and put them at the island's welcome sign, the harbor, and the cliff path. His mother helped him print them, and together they hung them up with string and tape. The guide had cheerful drawings and bright colors. It showed everyone how to be a gentle friend to the puffins.

Soon, visitors began to read the guide. They walked quietly on the paths and kept their distance from the burrows. They picked up any litter they found and put it in their pockets. The visitor with the sun hat came back with a small green reusable water bottle and a big smile. "The puffins seem much calmer now," she said. Leo nodded happily.

The little puffin with the silver band returned to the path. It stood near Leo and puffed its chest. Leo sat very still and watched. The puffin waddled closer, then settled beside him again. "You're safe now," Leo whispered. The puffin blinked its gentle eyes. Leo knew that quiet watching and keeping distance made a big difference. The island was becoming a kinder place for seabirds.

By the end of the summer, the island was full of gentle friends. Visitors read Leo's guide and followed its simple rules. They watched the puffins from the path and smiled at their funny orange feet. The puffins raised their chicks in peace. Leo's mother was proud of him. "You made a real difference," she said. Leo hugged her and looked out at the sea.

Leo sat on the cliff with his sketchbook, drawing the little puffin one more time. The puffin stood beside him, round and happy, with its silver band shining in the sun. Leo added a new page to his guide. It said: "Thank you for being a gentle friend." He knew that visitors and wildlife could share the island if everyone cared. The puffins would always have a happy home.

And so the island stayed a happy home for seabirds and people alike. Leo's guide hung at the harbor, cheerful and bright, showing everyone how to enjoy the wildlife with care. The little puffin with the silver band still waddled along the path, trusting and playful. And Leo kept watching, sketching, and smiling, knowing that quiet care makes a big difference. The end.