

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING



Holly Webb
Interiors illustrated by John Meiring

LITTLE TIGER
LONDON





Alice peered out of the car window. She really wanted to ask her mum if they were nearly at the campsite, but Hattie had been doing that since they left home. If she did it too, it would make her sound the same age.

Hattie was only six, and Alice was nine, and those three years made a *lot* of difference, Alice reckoned. Before, when it was just her and Mum, she'd been treated almost like a grown-up. Like they were sisters, instead of mother and daughter. Movie nights together, with popcorn and silly green face packs. Going

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

out to get coffee for Mum and a smoothie for Alice on Saturday mornings. She'd loved it.

Now Tim and Hattie were in the picture, she wasn't sure they really understood that. It was just one of the many things she didn't like about having a stepdad and a stepsister.

Everything had changed, and it seemed to have happened so fast. She'd liked Tim when he and Mum first started dating. He was kind, and quite funny, even if Alice didn't understand most of his jokes. But that didn't mean she wanted him around all the time. And she definitely hadn't signed up for a little sister, and a wedding, and a new house.

Alice missed their old flat, just because it was home, even if she did like the new house and the garden. At least she hadn't had to move schools. She'd been really worried about that,

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

but Mum had pointed out that Alice only had two more years of primary school, and then she and Hattie would be at different schools again anyway.

It was still strange, though. There were four people in the house most of the time, and Alice was used to it just being her and Mum. She missed the quiet. It felt so weird having two loud and bouncy extra humans in her space. Mum didn't seem to mind, which made sense. After all, she was in love with Tim (and that was even more weird, but never mind...) But it made Alice feel lonely; that she was the only one who wanted the house to be peaceful, just sometimes.

Maybe she and Mum could do something together on one of the days of this holiday? Something just for them, without Hattie and

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

Tim? Something that made Alice feel grown up and special again?

Alice sighed. She had a feeling that if she asked Mum about it, Mum would say that the holiday was all about being together as a new family. It was a time for bonding – Mum kept talking about bonding.

Alice had hoped they'd at least go somewhere hot, with a pool. She and Mum had gone to Spain the year before, and it had been brilliant. She'd argued as hard as she could for going back there – or maybe Italy! But no one else in her new family seemed keen.

Instead, Tim had suggested they go to Yorkshire. He was a birdwatcher, and he knew loads about them. He knew all the different kinds that came to the bird table in the back garden, and he could recognize any birdsong

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

Alice heard in the trees behind the garden, or in the park. He even knew what sort of thing the bird was saying.

“Oh, that’s a robin, Alice. Sounds nice, doesn’t it? But they’re stroppy old things, robins. That one’s probably telling us, *Get out of my garden! It’s mine! Don’t you dare land in this tree!*”

So, for their holiday, he’d found a campsite close to a beach for sunbathing and swimming, and a little village – but more importantly, the most amazing cliffs, where every ledge and crevice was covered in seabirds. And not just any old seabirds: the cliffs were packed with puffins. The beginning of the summer holidays just happened to coincide with the very end of their nesting season, so the young puffins would be coming out of the nests and flying away.

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

Tim was desperate to see the puffins and their chicks. He'd been doing lots of research ready for the trip, finding out all about them. He'd described them to Alice and Hattie and Mum; their gorgeous colourful stripey beaks and waddling walk. Apparently, puffins were called the clowns of the sea, because they were so cute and funny to watch. If you saw a group of them together – and it sounded like they were going to – they were called a circus of puffins.

Tim had even signed up for a special study that was using citizen scientists (that meant everyday people who wanted to get involved) to take photos of puffins carrying food in their beaks. It was to help the professional scientists work out what sort of fish the puffins were eating. They wanted to see if the puffins were eating different things now that the sea was

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

getting warmer because of climate change. Tim was so excited to be a part of it, and he wanted Alice and Hattie to take photos too.

Tim was sure it was going to be the perfect holiday.

Alice wasn't convinced.



Alice blinked and shook herself as the car swung gently round a corner. She'd half fallen asleep, leaning against the window. Hattie was bouncing excitedly next to her, and squeaking, "Alice! Alice! I saw a sign!"

Alice gazed at her sleepily. "Sign?" she murmured.

"A sign for the campsite! Puffin Cliffs Camping! It had a puffin on it. It said two miles."



“Oh!” Alice sat up straighter. “So, we actually are nearly there?”

Tim glanced over his shoulder at her. “Yup! Very close now. Ten minutes, I should think.”

“You were asleep!” Hattie announced loudly. “Alice was asleep. I wasn’t! I’ve been awake the whole time.”

Alice felt herself turning pink. After everything she’d been saying to herself about

THE LITTLEST PUFFLING

being grown up compared to Hattie, she was the one who had fallen asleep in the car like a baby.

Tim snorted. "I know that, Hattie. You haven't stopped talking long enough to go to sleep. I think it was very sensible of Alice to have a nap; she'll be bright and ready to go as soon as we get to the campsite."

"So will I!" Hattie protested.

Alice pulled a face out of the window, where nobody could see her.

"Oh, I just caught a glimpse of the sea!" Alice's mum said, peering through the windscreen. "Did you see it, girls? That little flash of blue. Oh, it looks wonderful. I can't wait to get to the beach."

"And the cliffs," Tim murmured. "The campsite is right next to them. It's going to be amazing."