

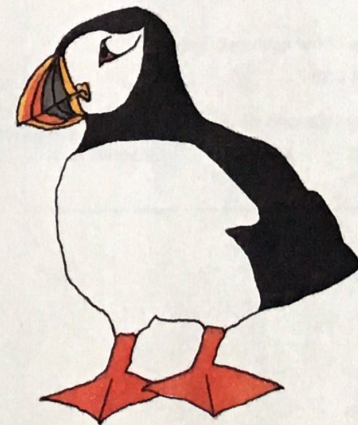
# On the Edge of the Eastern Ocean



Words and Pictures by Pam Hall



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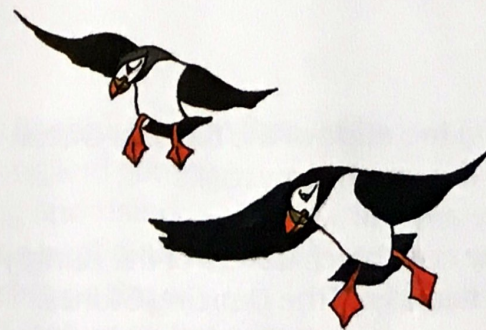
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*for Strat,  
the wind in my wings  
my second pair of eyes.*



Out on the edge of the Eastern Ocean  
where the green, grey rocks  
tumble and fall  
into the cold black waters of the hungry sea,  
lie the Islands of the Dancing Stones.

This is the land  
where the sun lifts the day  
out of the morning sea  
long before the rest of the world  
wakes to remember their dreams.

This is the land  
where the clouds roll out  
and the fog rolls in  
and the waves beat strong  
upon the rocky shores.

This is the land  
of the Great Birds.

The skies are filled  
with their dance  
and screaming song.

They float high upon the winds,  
soaring and gliding,  
diving and rising  
on the beat of their wings,  
dancing on the sky  
and feasting on the ocean.

This is the sky.  
This is the sea.  
This is the home  
of the Great Birds.

They come to earth  
in great colonies,  
covering the Islands  
with their clean, sleek forms.

They come to feed,  
to love and to nest,  
to bring their young into the world  
by the edge of the Eastern Ocean.



Among the Great Birds were many families.

There were the Gannets, white and sleek  
with slanting black masks  
and pale golden caps.

There were the Murres,  
black-faced and white-bellied,  
their beaks and feet as black as coal.



There were the black-legged Kittiwakes,  
the Terns, and the Guillemots.

There were the Gulls.  
Many families of Gulls  
would gather on these Islands,  
the speckled young, the grey-winged Herring Gull,  
the Great Blackbacks and all their kin.

And there were the Puffins, small and stout,  
white-faced and black-backed,  
with great round beaks of many colours.





Every year  
as the seasons changed  
the Great Birds would come  
in thousands,  
to nest on the Islands of the Dancing Stones  
and to feed on the Eastern Ocean.

For it was here  
that the young would be born into the world.  
It was here  
that they would grow strong  
and ready to join their Nations  
on the seaward journey of their lives.  
It was here  
that they would be fed on the silver fishes  
until their wings were strong enough  
to carry them over the water  
and through the winds.

They would rest here,  
tended by the elders,  
until they grew enough  
to hunt the fish themselves.

So it was  
on these rocky Islands,  
amidst the song and dance of the Great Birds,  
that a young Puffin was born into the world.

His earliest home was a burrow,  
safe from the large hunting Gulls  
who preyed on helpless new-born birds.

For he was small and soft,  
his downy body not yet covered with feathers,  
and his wings were small and weak.  
Only his mother's care  
and the silver fishes she brought  
would keep him alive.

With the food from her many-coloured beak  
and the warmth from her warm white belly,  
the little Puffin grew.





As he grew  
he learned to walk and wander  
and soon he left the burrow  
to play among the rocks and grasses.

He saw the Great Birds,  
their many Nations resting on the rocks.  
He saw the adults dancing on the wind  
and hunting on the sea.  
He saw the speckled young  
resting in their nests  
and calling to be fed.

And as he grew  
his back became black,  
his belly white,  
and his beak became yellow  
and he began to look  
like the other Puffins  
in his Nation.

He could not yet fly,  
but often flapped his growing wings,  
feeling them grow stronger  
as the time approached  
when he must use them.

And so he grew,  
waiting for the day his first flight would carry him  
over the waters  
through the skies  
above the rocky Islands.

He waited  
and fed  
and knew the Day of Flight  
would come.

It would mark the beginning of his learning  
as was the custom of the Puffin Nation.  
For the Day of Flight  
would earn him his name  
and the coloured stripes for his yellow beak  
and he would take his place  
among his Nation  
as an adult,  
full-grown and ready to share  
the secrets of the sea.

And with his name  
the Elders would pass on to him  
the mysteries of the moving winds and waters,  
the skills of the fish-hunter,  
and the knowledge of the Nation.



And so it happened  
that he had never flown  
the day the Great Black-backed Gull  
came screaming from the sky.

The Gull was large and strong,  
wings stretched and beating the air,  
his shadow passing over the rocks  
like a vast black cloud.

The Black-back was the enemy  
of all the Puffins,  
preying on the young  
for his food.





His cries struck fear and panic  
throughout the Nation.

He attacked quickly,  
shooting from the sky  
like a deadly spear.  
And as he neared the ground  
even the Elders of the Puffins  
were struck with terror,  
for they saw that he was Goth,  
the leader of the Black-backs,  
the mightiest of their enemy,  
known to them as  
Goth, the Puffin-Killer.

And so they fled,  
to the air  
and to the waves.

There was much confusion.

Mothers tried to hurry their young to safety,  
to the sea  
or into burrows.  
But some were lost,  
and some were left,  
deserted in the noise.

The young Puffin who had never flown  
was left alone,  
his mother lost in the fear of the Nation.  
He was afraid  
and knew his only safety  
was in the sea.

And as the shadow of the Gull  
passed above him,  
he flew in fear and panic  
to the water.





And meeting the cold waves  
with his warm white belly,  
he swam and swam,  
too frightened to look  
where he was going  
until the cries of his Nation  
were far behind him.

Finally,  
his fear began to fade.  
He found the silence all around him.

Only the slow lapping of the waves  
and the quiet whistle of the sea wind  
could be heard.

He slowed his swimming  
and turned  
to look for his family and friends  
but found he was alone.

There was no land to be seen,  
no other birds speckled the sky.  
Only the blue-black water  
of the great sea  
stretched out around him.

He knew then  
that he was alone.  
He knew that he was too young  
to know the secrets  
of the sea and skies  
that would have brought  
an adult Puffin home.

He knew that he was lost.

And so began his search for home.  
He began to swim  
and as he swam he cried,  
and called  
and cried  
until all his tears  
were lost in the sea.

He swam and swam  
until black night came down  
to turn the sea to darkness.

And finally he slept,  
a tiny young Puffin  
adrift on the Eastern Ocean.



Many days and nights passed,  
and because he was hungry  
the little Puffin learned to fish,  
to dive beneath the waves,  
and snatch the silver fishes in his beak.



Because he grew tired  
he learned to float  
and bob with the currents of the sea,  
letting them carry him where they would.

He did not know how far they took him  
or where,  
but he knew he must be many miles from  
the rocky Islands that were his home.

He did not know that his beak  
was bright and striped with colours  
and that he had come of age.

Then there came a day  
when the sun lifted out of the sea  
to shine on the grey-green rocks  
of an island bigger than any  
the Puffin had ever seen.

He knew it was not home  
but he was tired  
and lonely  
and hoped that here  
he might find some Nation of birds  
who could guide him home.

And so he came ashore.



He walked among the rocks  
and searched the tufted grassy banks  
for nests  
or other signs of life.  
He found only the silent wind,  
the empty rocks,  
and the echo of his own small voice  
lost in the pounding waves.

He slept then,  
sad, hope gone,  
resting before returning to the sea  
and search for home.

When he woke, it was night  
and the moon shone down with cold white light  
and showed him he was not alone.

All around him stood great shadowed birds,  
tall and ghostly strange,  
with long hooked beaks and feet of purple,  
like none of the Great Birds  
he had ever seen before.

He was struck with fear  
and could not move or speak  
for the moon shone through their eyes.

They stood straight  
and loomed above him,  
stately and mysterious  
in the light of the moon.

And when the Leader spoke  
his voice was deep and rumbling  
and seemed to come from other worlds.

"Who are you, Puffin?  
What brings you to this sacred place?"

The Puffin shivered,  
and fearful not to answer, said,  
"I have no name.  
I have been lost upon the sea  
and even now  
I cannot find my home  
or tell you where it is."



The Great Black Bird turned then,  
and spoke to his companions  
in words and sounds  
unknown to the small Puffin.



The Puffin waited.  
The moon was high and white  
against the night.





The Great Black Bird  
turned to him once more and spoke,  
"You are far from home,  
Little Traveller,  
and young to find your way.

You will stay with us  
until your wings and age  
will take you home alone.  
We would not see you lost,  
so you must stay."

Even then  
the little Puffin felt no comfort,  
for these Great Ones frightened him,  
and so he spoke again.

"It is true that I am small and young,  
and cannot easily find my way alone.  
It is true that I must grow and learn  
before I go again to meet the sea  
and find my Nation.

But I must know who you are  
and where I am,  
and if you can help me find my home."

The Great One spoke.  
His voice was deep and awesome,  
but there was kindness  
in his eerie, empty eyes.

"You are in a sacred place,  
Little One,  
for here you are on the Vanished Isle of Funk.  
I am Linnaeus  
and we are the Dead,  
the Lost and the Memory  
of the Great Auks.  
We are the Dead, gone from the eyes of the world  
and only here, to the Great Birds and their Nations  
do we show ourselves.

To the rest of the world  
we are but an old memory,  
Ghosts from another time,  
Shadows of a Lost Nation."

The little Puffin shook with fear,  
knowing then  
that he had asked for help from Death itself.  
Yet there was nowhere else to go  
and these Great Ones  
did not seem unkind or evil.



And so he asked,  
"How was it that your Nation came to Death?"

"We are the Dead, the Great Auk Nation,  
lost to the world through murder.



Many years ago, Men came, strange creatures  
from the sea.  
They came in floating wooden shells  
to the Isle of Funk.

They found our Nation strong and fat  
with many young.  
They came, these Men, to take our eggs,  
to eat our flesh,  
to fill their pillows with our feathers.  
They came  
and left our bones  
lying in the sun.

So now we are gone,  
not one has life  
to feel the winds or waves against our bellies.  
Our ghosts wander here, among these rocks  
on this Vanished Isle that was our home.  
When winter falls our spirits rise  
and fly the winds and distant seas  
to watch the Great Bird Nations meet and grow  
and bring their young into the world."

The little Puffin lost his fear  
and asked,  
"Why did you not flee,  
and fly  
to sea and sky,  
to save yourselves  
long time ago?"



Linnaeus stood tall and black  
against the sky.  
He spoke with sadness in his eyes,  
remembering perhaps the Days of Death  
so many years ago.

"We did not fly.  
We could not fly.  
Our wings were small and weak  
from many generations of living on the sea.

Before Men came, our enemies were few.  
We had no need of flight,  
and so had lost it.  
But now,  
in death,  
we fly the oceans of the earth  
and dance the winds  
as we never did in life.

We have become the Watchers,  
unseen, unheard,  
but always there,  
watching and guarding  
the Nations that remain.

There is much that you must learn,  
Little One,  
and you will stay with us  
until your knowledge will take you home."

The Puffin looked up at the moon.  
The stars were growing dim  
and morning soon would ride across the sky.

He looked at Linnaeus,  
black and tall and older than time.

He looked at the others,  
the Watchers,  
standing still and silent  
by their Leader.

"I will stay", he said.

And so he stayed,  
for days and nights and nights and days  
until he lost all count.  
The Watchers became his teachers  
and it was not long  
before he lost his loneliness for home.



For since their death  
Great Auks had travelled the wide seas  
and scattered islands of the earth.  
They knew their mysteries,  
their many Nations,  
and they knew too,  
the ways of Men,  
and their dangerous, deathly gifts.



They told him many tales  
and taught him many things.

He learned the languages and customs  
of many Nations.

He learned the secrets of the tides,  
the ocean pathways of the fishes,  
and the roads of flight across the skies  
that guided the Great Birds  
over many miles of sea.

He learned of other Birds,  
their histories and customs.  
He learned of his own Nation  
and of cousins, like himself,  
but with crowns of golden feathers on their heads.  
He learned of other oceans  
and of birds who could not swim  
but lived on land instead.

And as he learned,  
his skill as a hunter of fishes  
grew sharp and quick.  
He mastered the art of charting the skies  
and mapping the night stars.



As his skills grew greater,  
his hunger for knowledge increased,  
and he would ask Linnaeus  
for tales and stories  
of the other Nations of Great Birds.

He listened,  
and learned,  
and grew.

And so it was from Linnaeus  
that he heard of the Great Waved Albatross,  
who flew the oceans  
for months on end,  
never touching land,  
and of the Dance of Love  
that was their custom.



He learned of their home,  
the magic islands  
called Galapagos,  
where lived Great Birds  
that could be seen at no place else  
across the earth.

He dreamed of travelling there  
to meet the Frigate Bird,  
with its bright red pouch beneath its chin.

He longed to see the Blue-Footed Boobies  
and their white-masked brothers  
who were cousins to the Gannets  
he had seen on the Islands of his birth.





One day he went to find Linnaeus,  
asking for another tale.

The sun was high.  
The sea was rolling gently  
out to meet the sky.  
He found Linnaeus on the shore  
looking with his empty eyes  
across the endless waters.

That Great Black Auk looked sadly down  
and spoke,  
"Come, Little One,  
the time has come for you to hear  
much more than tales of other places."

His voice was grave and bitter.  
The Puffin followed,  
wondering what could be so wrong or sad  
on a day so beautiful and fine.

Far down the beach  
the Great Birds stopped,  
the little Puffin and the Ghostly Auk,  
standing side by side  
in the morning sun.

At their feet  
lay Death.

Upon the silent shore lay  
a poor dead Gull,  
his feathers glued together  
with a black and shiny ooze.  
His proud neck was twisted  
around his shoulders,  
as if he looked to the water  
as he died.





His wings and back  
were slick and black  
with strange and glistening death.

His eyes were closed.

"It is Death you see,"  
Linnaeus said,  
"and it is time  
you learned this tale,  
time you learned the dangers  
that lie across the waters  
for you and all the Nations.

The Gull has died  
from Men's Black Death.  
It takes the flight and breath  
from any bird it touches.

It is the juice from Men's floating shells  
and when it spills,  
it floats,  
a shining, scented Death.  
And if it touches you  
when you should land upon the sea,  
it will hold you and leave you  
to wash up on some strange shore,  
never to meet the skies again.

But even if you touch it not  
it will kill the silver fishes that are your food,  
and starve you into death.  
Beware, and always fly above it.  
Many do not know its danger  
and many die."

Linnaeus stopped.  
His eyes were grave and sad.  
The little Puffin could not speak  
and both walked silently  
down the rocky shore.  
They left the Gull  
for the winds and tides.

All that day and through the night  
the little Puffin thought and thought  
about the Gull.  
He thought of the sadness  
in Linnaeus' eyes,  
of the sorrow in his voice,  
and of the words of Death  
that he had spoken.

He thought of home  
and of his Nation,  
and of the Great Birds nesting  
on the Island rocks,  
and feared for them.  
He thought of Men.



He knew that it was time  
for him to leave the Watchers  
and seek his home.

And so he came to Linnaeus  
and said,  
"I have thought of the Gull  
and of your words  
and know that it is time  
for me to leave  
your Vanished Isle of Funk.  
For I must seek my home and Nation  
and return to the Islands of my birth."

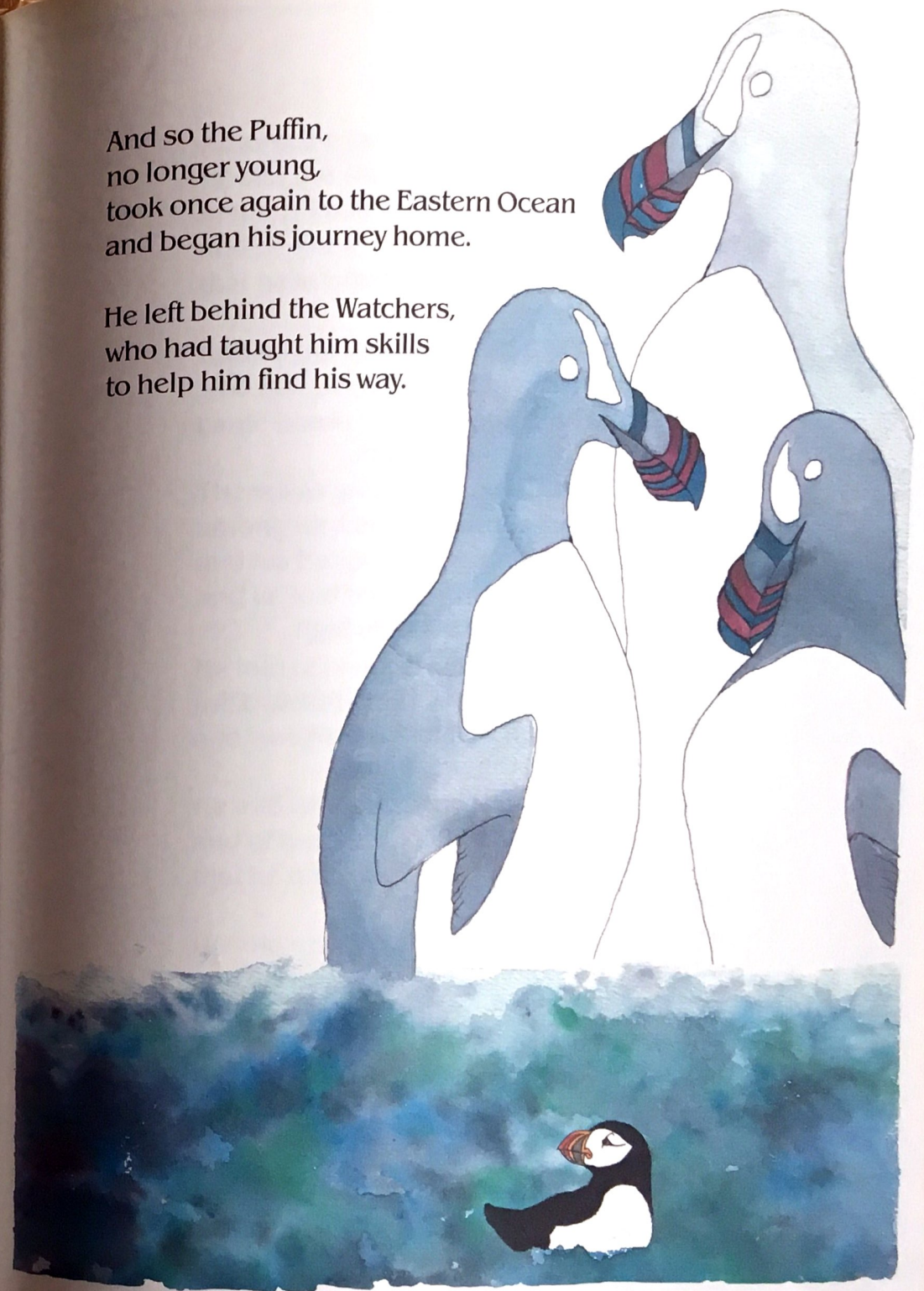
"Yes," Linnaeus said,  
"it is time and you must go,  
and bring your knowledge  
to your Nation.

Take your place among them  
and be named.  
You must bring your warning  
of the dangers  
that prey upon the Great Birds  
so they may know  
and they too may beware.

Yes, it is time.  
You are ready  
and must go."

And so the Puffin,  
no longer young,  
took once again to the Eastern Ocean  
and began his journey home.

He left behind the Watchers,  
who had taught him skills  
to help him find his way.





And when he turned,  
far out to sea,  
to look again on the Isle of Funk  
that had been home,  
he saw only the shimmering sun  
on endless water.

The Isle had vanished  
and the Watchers with it.  
Yet, he knew they were with him,  
unseen, unheard,  
sailing the skies above him  
and guiding his way.

One morning as the sun broke high  
out of the sparkling sea,  
three rocky islands rose above the waters.  
They were covered with movement,  
and the voices of the Great Birds  
came to him over the sea.

Above the rocks  
the sky was filled  
with Gannets and Gulls,  
with Murres and Kittiwakes,  
and the sea was speckled  
with swimming birds  
fishing for their young.

Among the swimmers  
he saw the coloured beaks  
of many Puffins  
and he knew  
that he was home.

And so the little Puffin  
who had been lost  
came home.

There was great celebration  
among his family  
and his Nation,  
and he told his story many times.

He told of Linnaeus,  
the Leader of the Great Auk Ghosts  
and Watchers.

He told of the Vanished Isle of Funk  
and of the tales of other Birds  
that he had heard.

He told of the Gull  
and of Men's Black Death  
and the danger to the Nations.

He told it many times  
and many came to listen.



The Elders of all the Great Bird Nations  
came and listened.



They thanked him  
for his knowledge  
and for his warning  
of the dangers.

The Elders of the Puffin Nation met,  
to find him his name  
which he had earned  
through flight  
and through his travels.

They met for many days and nights  
and searched for a name  
that would befit  
this Puffin  
who had journeyed so far alone  
and seen and learned so much.

At last they called him to their meeting,  
and gave to him his name  
that is known today  
in songs and tales  
throughout the Puffin Nation.

For he became a great traveller  
who journeyed far and wide  
across the oceans  
and islands of the world.



And so the tales are told  
and songs are sung  
of Geb, the Windwalker,  
the Puffin  
who was lost,  
who met the Watchers,  
and who sailed alone  
across the Eastern Ocean,  
to find his home  
on the grey rocky shores  
of the Islands of the Dancing Stones.







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