

THE LITTLE PENGUIN

There was a little penguin who lived far away in a severe land filled with ice and snow. Because it was a very cold and windy place, his mother and all the family flock had taken refuge in a small but sufficiently sheltered bay. As a matter of fact this was the choicest spot along the entire coast not only for survival, but for a full and satisfying way of life.

Great hills surrounded the bay and gave it more the appearance of a fortress than anything else, keeping out harmful creatures as well as the freezing winds and heavy snow that fell on the other sides. And because the bay seemed as if it were scooped at an angle with the coastline, a creature could easily forget about the huge sea that poured its water into the silver, glistening bay. There was freedom to laugh and play with little or no fear of any dangers or predators. The fish proved to be a rich abundance of a food supply.

This environment remained so, happily, because like anything that runs well, certain rules and boundaries of behavior were set up by the flock and were dutifully kept. The little penguin knew these well and had been taught them by his father and had watched them all practice these rules faithfully, especially his older relatives. Above all, one rule was deeply impressed on him and in him and was called the "Family Rule". With his young mind he thought about it often. This main rule was that no bird was to pass over the natural boundaries set by the surrounding mountains and hills. If anyone was to come from the outside into the flock, that bird was welcome to become one of them. But none of the native flock was to go beyond the set boundaries.

Occasionally the little penguin had heard the stories - vague, hushed stories of the few who had wandered to the other side. Each of them talked of the lure and pull of the great waters that were beyond the sheltered bay. Also, they spoke about how much most of their efforts and desires were to travel across the sea in search of all kinds of adventures. The cost was great and it took much courage and daring. But, oh the excitement of it all, to the little penguin in his mind, seemed worth it! Anyone who chose to seek this new life had to go at the cost of never returning to their safe home grounds. And their way of leaving was equally exciting- they used the ice masses that broke off the nearby glacier as tiny island floats. Yes- it was at a high cost to venture off!

But the tales of so many expectations were drawing as a powerful lure, setting aside all doubts about any sacrifice. Once the little penguin had even overheard an older bird tell the story of how he had even climbed aboard an ice island to begin his own adventure. He told about a desire in each flock, and an inward craving born in each, a destined journey each would need to make one day. In spite of the smirks and giggles of those listening, the little penguin drank in each word as being completely sincere, serious beyond doubt.

Yet, this type of thinking was not for the bay flock to dwell on at all. The older ones would try to answer all the questions about the Great Sea and what the seekers were after; but, none would say any good about it or give any encouragement regarding it. The pictures they painted were always disappointing with fear waiting like a morning fog outside the sheltered, secure bay. This totally puzzled the little penguin. At times a

different thought would come into his young mind that none of those who spoke so confidently had ever been across the sea. How could they really know? How could they!

After some time with much thought, pondering what his own mother had taught him and the older males had shown him, the little penguin decided he had more than enough courage to find out the truth of these things for himself. He had the right to know. So, getting up very early one morning, he set off for the distant hills and the sea beyond with its great store of treasure and certain good adventure. Although the climb was long and difficult hopping from rock to rock, searching the ledges and trails for a path, the flipper feet carried him along steadily. In fact instead of getting very tired at all, the little penguin felt a new kind of strength stir inside of him surging and propelling him onward in his quest until finally he stood at the very crest of the high hill.

"How small the bay looks from up here," he thought. "And how small the flock and its little world!" Then his eyes caught sight of the sea. Something amazing welled up within him and he knew that his destiny was to truly seek this higher purpose for his life across the sea. He could even faintly see a strip of coastline that seemed alive with movement. Small dots were moving from there off to the distant horizon.

Quickly now he made his journey to the staging area down below. He saw many others like himself who had the same look in their eyes. After some waiting and jostling he hopped aboard his own little ice island and began his very own adventure moving out into the majestic Sea. As he watched the shoreline slip away and carried beyond the point of no return, the little penguin began to think of how he wasn't a little penguin anymore. He had suddenly grown up inside, almost miraculously in such a short time.

By now the shoreline faded into a dimness, then disappeared. His gaze was fixed anxiously toward the new distant horizon. He now settled in for his certain fate. Eating some of the fish he had brought along could hardly satisfy the real hunger inside him.

Days came and went as the little ice islands carried in the currents toward the uncertain destination. Little happened during the string of sunrises and sunsets. But the little penguin did begin to notice something a bit peculiar. It was his large ice chunk. Slowly, ever so slowly it was becoming smaller! It was melting. And no land was yet in sight.

"Certainly," he thought, "the land must be near because the water was warming". But more days came and went without any land. The ice islands grew smaller and smaller.

By now the waves began to wash over some of the other ice chunks and had forced a few frightened birds into the sea. The little penguin watched at a distance and felt very frightened for them. To make matters worse, schools of predator fish were now also in the area and seemed to trail the floats. They quickly went after those who fell in the water. So not only was his small island melting away into nothing, but vicious fish were waiting to devour him the moment he left the island safety. The ice islands that led to freedom and good adventure had become only cruel prisons. And the Sea had turned on them drawing away from the safe, secure bay to eventual destruction. The hopes and dreams of new adventures were only lies!