

All Your Stories Magazine

Quick Reads Special

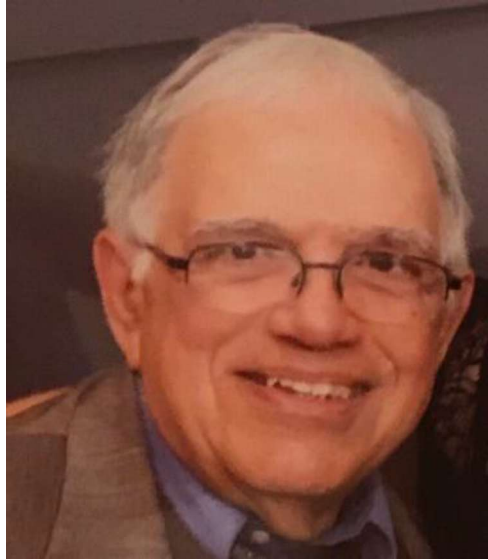
A selection of Short Fiction, Sudden Fiction,
Drabbles and Dribbles from individual
worldwide authors



Collated by Storm Grayson

Published by: The Writers Publishing Company

<https://allyourstoriesandpoems.com>



Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over one hundred and seventy of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in a wide range of anthologies and magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A first collection of his stories, “The Satchel and Other Terrors” is available on Amazon and other book outlets; additional anthologies of his work are scheduled for publication in 2025.

Flash Fiction

To Paul and Beth, my favorite puffin couple.

Puffins remind us that life is better when shared, even on the edge of a cliff.

Darlene Greene

A Tale of Two Puffins

This pair of Atlantic puffins were stocky, short-winged, and short-tailed birds, with black upper parts and white or brownish-grey underparts and contrasting orange-red feet. They met at sea, at a gathering of similar birds that took place near a North American offshore island. They were still uncoupled despite having already lived through one third of their anticipated life span; this was not unusual, since puffins can be rather solitary birds. But, as soon as they laid eyes on each other, they initiated a mating ritual in which they flew coquettishly around each other, in a dance that was accompanied by grunts that could perhaps be described as pig-like.

The most obvious sign of their availability for mating occurred then, through the transformation of their beaks. Their bill plates were shed, revealing striped, brightly colored bills that indicated that they were ready and willing to copulate. Reassured of the availability of a potential partner, the birds then flew landward and stationed themselves on a cliffside, chatting volubly in sharp contrast to their usual silent demeanor at sea. They joined, rubbing their bills together to greet each other and proclaim their new bond.

After they had coupled repeatedly, the male began building a nest to evidence his fidelity. The nesting was dug on soft soil, and the male labored to construct a deep, comfortable tunnel lined with grass, leaves, and feathers. Then the female deposited a single, creamy white egg in the depths of the nest, carefully guarded it, and saw the egg ultimately hatch, producing a male chick. A couple of years later, she was to lay a lilac-tinged egg that produced a female.

Prior to hatching, both parents had taken turns at incubating the egg. The incubating parent would use his or her wings to hold the egg against a brood chest patch that had developed following the mating process.

After hatching, both parents again took turns at feeding the chick several times a day, primarily with small fish. This process was facilitated by the fact that puffins can hold several (sometimes over a dozen) small fish at a time, crosswise in their bills, rather than regurgitating swallowed fish. This ability of puffins allows them to take longer foraging trips since they can come back with more food energy for their chicks than a bird that can only carry one fish at a time.

Raising puffin chicks is an intensive business, as the young birds take around forty days

Cont.

to leave their burrows. The male and female parents of our story collaborated on almost every aspect of raising each single chick, which enhanced the probability of the chick surviving to fledgling. For this couple, the two young chicks they raised fledged successfully. The chicks never knew hunger as they developed under the loving vigilance of their parents. They left the nest, flew off to sea, and remained away for several years before returning to land to lead adult lives, becoming exemplary members of the species.

After each breeding, the male and female puffins in our story returned to their respective routines. The colorful outer parts of their bills were shed, revealing smaller and duller true bills beneath. The puffins then went out to sea, far from coasts and sometimes extending south of their breeding range. They were solitary during migrations and temporarily separate from each other. Sometimes they headed for warmer waters, but most of the time remained reasonably close to their breeding grounds. The pair often followed similar migration routes – guaranteeing they would be available to each other when it was time for them to rejoin.

The pair had formed a strong bond despite being with each other for only part of the year, during the breeding season. The rest of the time they went out to sea by themselves, spending most of their time alone or in the company of other puffins that did not hold their romantic interest.

After each season, the puffin pair would reunite. As experienced household members, they would reestablish their bond while at sea, so they were ready to embrace each other as soon as they reached land. The male headed to the same burrow they had used multiple times and grunted to attract his mate while flicking his head back and forth. She responded to his summons eagerly.

The story of this puffin couple is still being written, and its end lies beyond the horizon. They have experienced good times together (many) and encountered spates of illness, discord, and discomfort (mercifully few) but, as they approach their sunset years, their love for each other remains strong and unwavering. Their intent is to stay together for their entire lifespan, which might amount to fifteen years or more.

The life of these two puffins constitutes a good example of how the myriad species inhabiting this earth should comport themselves during the time allotted to them by fate if they choose to be monogamous.