

Tuppence for Christmas



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Free Online Books for 21st Century Kids

By Samantha & Diana Shaul

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Chapter 1

Our Christmas Tree



We stood at the edge of our ice floe to see the twinkling lights on our Christmas tree. The lights sparkled brightly against the white snow and gave our ice floe a warm orange glow. I snuggled between Mum and Dad as we gazed at the warm light; why, we were amazed.



We penguins live near the South Pole, you see, so warm lights are a treat for a penguin like me. Near the South Pole we live in the ice and the snow, so it was different to see that warm orange glow. The decorations looked just beautiful too, with baubles in red and green and blue.

Our tree was huge, fifteen feet tall,
and standing beside it made us feel small.
Dad said to me, "Tuppence, I'm glad to agree
that you were right about that big tree.



A small tree simply could not compare
to our tall tree that reaches up high in the air!"
Well, I'd always dreamed of a tall Christmas tree;
I could not have known what would happen to me.

It's not something a little chick could foresee,
that an ice floe could crack from the weight of a tree.

We slept that night under warm twinkly lights
and did not hear a sound or get a fright.

We were asleep when it happened, you see,
that our ice floe cracked from the weight of the tree.

Along the crack, ice just melted away,
warmed up by the lights, I guess you might say.



Well, that was how it happened to me:
I ended up on my own, a chick at sea.
I woke up just as the day was dawning,
and I will never forget that morning.

I was stranded alone on a small chunk of ice,
and the feeling I felt was not at all nice.



I looked all around and I could see
only miles and miles and miles of sea.

I couldn't see Mum and I couldn't see Dad,
and I began to panic and feel really sad.



For a while I just sat there and cried,

but then I thought, 'Do something!' and tried to paddle my ice chunk in one direction,



but all I could see was my own reflection in the waves crashing down all around me, a chick paddling her flippers crazily.

Chapter 2

Odd-looking Birds



I must have fallen asleep, I guess,
worn out from paddling and in need of rest.

"She's got the tiniest little wings:
they look more like flippers than anything."

"Yet she's got a beak like you and me;
a beak and feathers: a bird she must be."



I startled awake, and staring at me
were the two strangest penguins I ever did see.

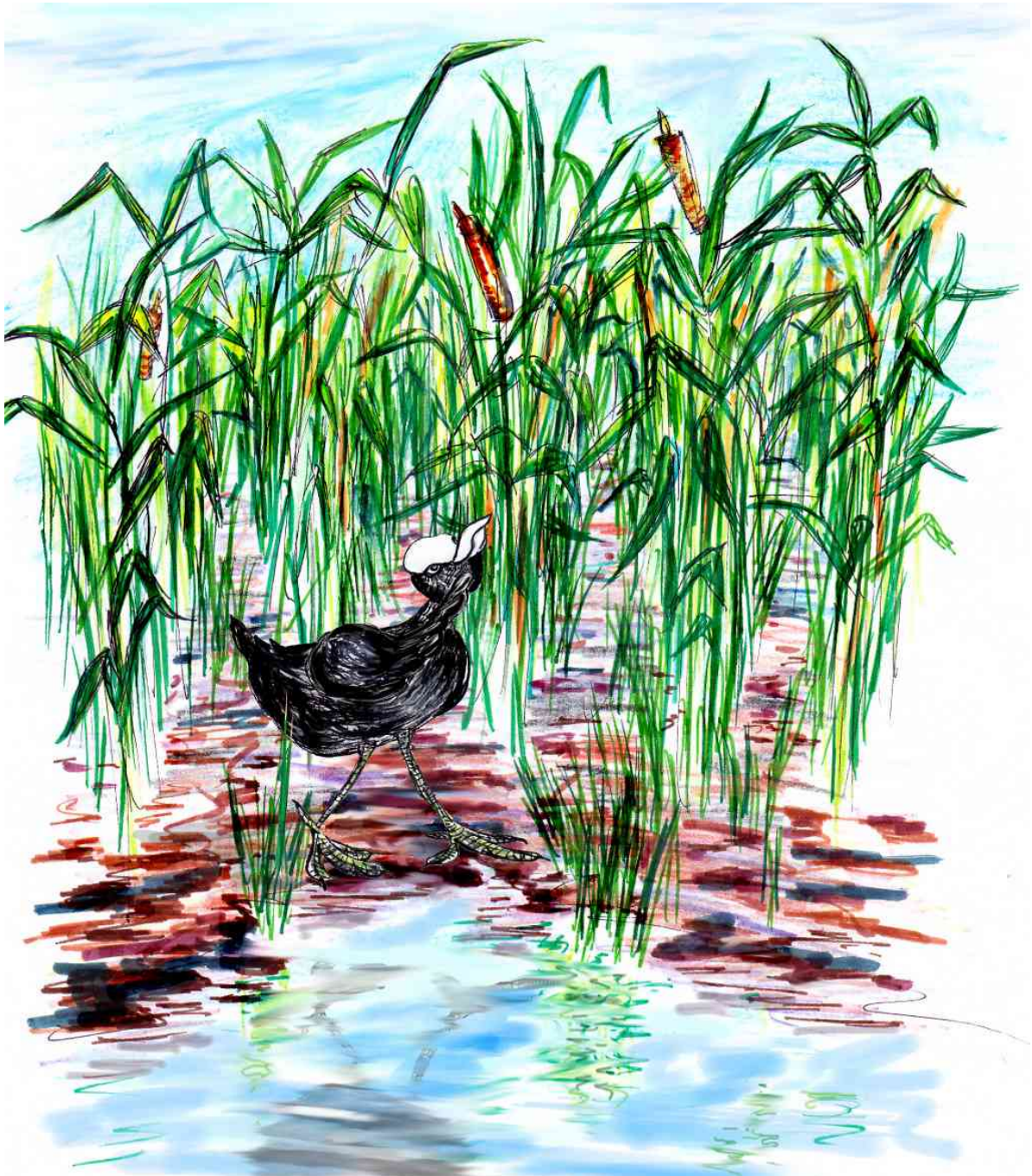
You have to believe I was still half asleep
when I said to them, "You have odd-looking feet."
They asked, "Who might you be? Where are you from?
We actually think you're the odd-looking one!"

"I'm Tuppence, and I have been out at sea.
Where am I now? Can you please tell me?"



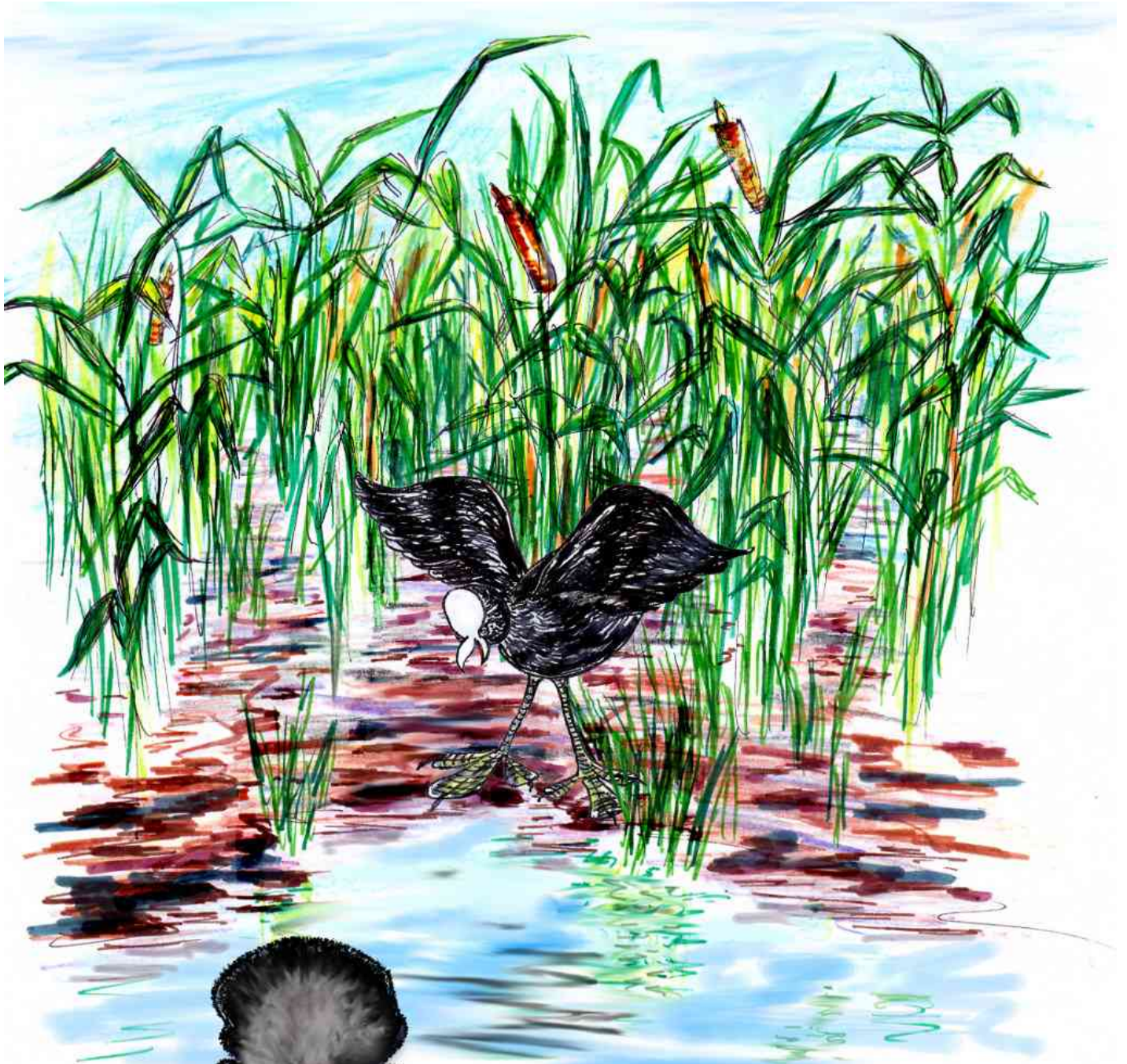
I have to get home for Christmas, you know,
but I'm not sure exactly which way to go.
My family lives near the South Pole, you see,
but our ice floe cracked on account of a tree."

"The South Pole? Hmm... I don't know.
Isn't that a place with a lot of snow?"



"Do you know if it's far from here?
I really do hope that it is near.
I'm only a little chick, you know,
and I don't know quite how far I could go."

"I think the South Pole is far away.
To get there by sea would take many a day.
You might get there faster if you could fly.
Perhaps you ought to give that a try.



You do have very odd-looking wings.
Tuppence, can you fly with those things?"

"Fly? Well, I cannot be sure.
I have never actually flown before.
None of the penguins I know can fly,
but I'm certainly going to give it a try.



Do you think you could teach me how?
I really do need to learn right now!"

"We'd like to help; we really would,
but I'm not quite sure if we actually could.
Are you a penguin? Is that what you said?
Penguins can't fly, or so I have read.



If you are a penguin and penguins can't fly,
then it won't matter how hard you try.
If you are not meant to fly up in the air,
the greatest effort won't get you there."

"Of course I'm a penguin. What else could I be?
What are you, if you're not penguins like me?"



How dare you say that penguins can't fly!
Of course I can learn, if I really try!"

"Allow me to introduce us to you:
I am Pete, and this is Sue.
I didn't mean to put you down,
so don't get angry, and please do not frown.
We're coots, and we don't fly very much;
we're not even keen on flying as such.



Flying is just a way to get from A to B,
and to most birds it comes quite naturally.
I had read that penguins can't fly at all,
but if you want to try, then that is your call.
I just didn't want you to waste your time;
if you think you can learn to fly, then that's fine."

I turned around and paddled away.
I was determined to learn to fly that day.



I would show those coots what I could achieve.
In myself Mum and Dad had taught me to believe.
That's why I thought I just needed to try.
It was why I was sure I could learn to fly.

Chapter 3

Trying to Fly



I stood all alone, flapping my wings,
but I did not accomplish anything.



My feet remained firmly on the ground.
That I couldn't fly seemed to be what I'd found.
I'd given it my all, flapped as hard as I could,
but I didn't take off in the way a bird should.

It was then that two birds shot out from the reeds.
They were Pete and Sue, running at speed.



On the water, it seemed, they could run,
and running on water looked like fun.



Then they took off up into the sky.
So that was how the coots could fly!

I decided that to take off I would need
a long runway to work up some speed.
I went as far back from the shore as I dared,
and I started to run to the water from there.
Wings flapping, I ran as fast as I could,
but I still didn't fly in the way a bird should.



Over the water my feet did not skim;
I suppose I am lucky that I can swim.
You see, into the water I fell, head first.
At flying, it seemed that I was the worst.
I began to think that coot was right,
that penguins are just not meant for flight.
Our bodies are big, and our wings are small.
Well, no wonder penguins can't fly at all!

Just then I heard a soft voice say,
"Tuppence, you haven't flown away."

I turned round to see the coot named Sue,
and she said, "Little Tuppence, how are you?"
I didn't want to admit that Pete had been right,
that penguins are just not meant for flight,
but on the bank of the river I felt all alone,
and all I wanted to do was go home.



I told Sue that I could not fly,
and I felt so sad that I started to cry.
"I thought that Pete might have been right.
Looking at you, you're not made for flight.
Don't cry, dear Tuppence, for you're not alone.
I believe I can help you to find your way home.

Come with me, and I'll see what I can do.
I think I have something that may help you."
I followed Sue to her floating nest,
and you won't believe what happened next.



Sue called out to me, "I've found it! It's here,
though to read it, I'll need my glasses, my dear."

On the paper that Sue held out to me
was a picture of our penguin colony.
In the picture were my cousin Tom,
Mum and Dad, and Uncle John.
I said, "That's a picture of our colony.
In the bottom right, that's my family.
That is just where I need to go!
Does it say how to get there? Do you know?"



I could not read the words on the page.
Well, it's not surprising, on account of my age.
I'm only a little chick, you see,
and reading is hard for a chick like me.

"Now, where are my glasses? Oh, let me see.
Tuppence, can you help find them for me?"



We searched the nest and hunted around,
but the glasses were nowhere to be found.
"They must have fallen out of my nest,
so my news for you is not the best.

Tuppence, please do not cry or weep,
but the water here is very deep.

I can dive to a depth of two metres or so,
but the water here is much deeper, you know.

If my glasses fell down to the river bed,
that's where they'll remain," sadly, Sue said.



Quickly I dived out of the nest,
for at diving penguins are the very best.
Penguins might not be made for flight,
but for diving we are made quite all right.

Chapter 4

Diving for Glasses



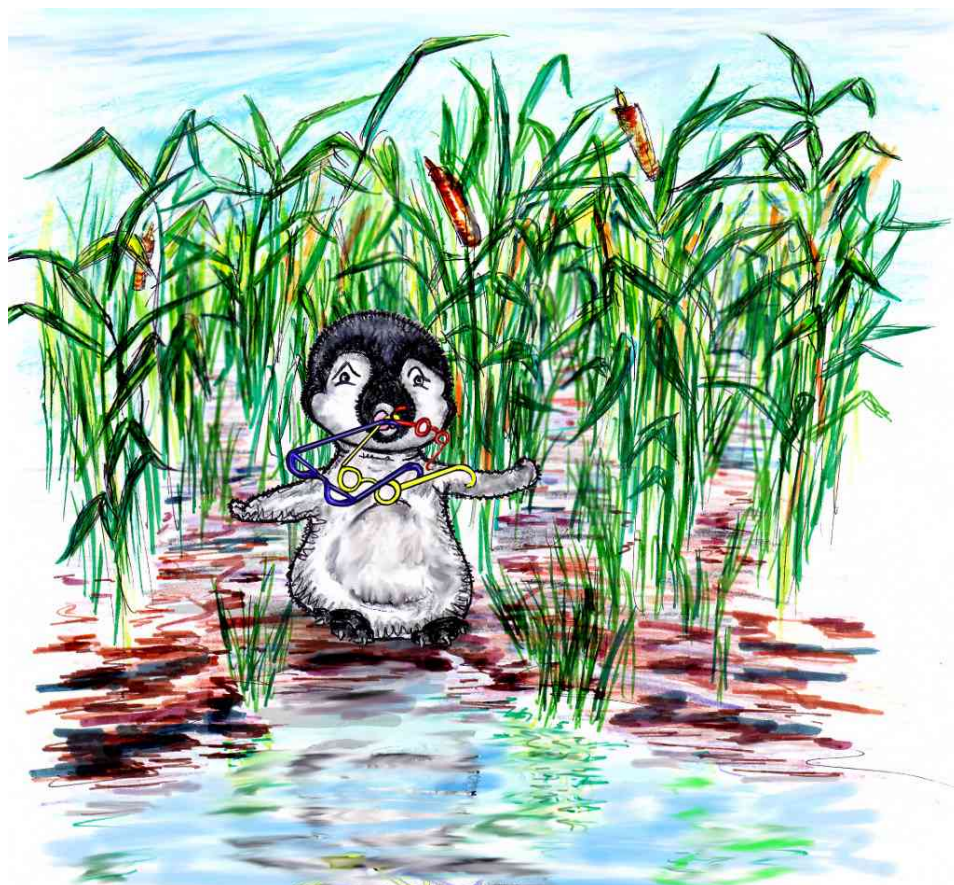
I dived down to the river bed.
The water was deep, as Sue had said,



but diving was not a problem for me,
and swimming, well, that comes naturally.

There were lots and lots of things down there,
amongst them some glasses - more than one pair.

In my little beak, I could fit just three,
so I brought three pairs to the surface with me.



"I was not sure which ones you would wear:
these red ones, those blue ones or the yellow pair,"
I said to Sue, hoping desperately
that hers were a pair that I'd brought back with me.

"Tuppence, what a talented chick you are.
You have found my glasses. You are a star!
I wonder who owns these other pairs.
Let's ask my friend Kirk, who's perching there."

Kirk examined the glasses carefully.
"I'm as sure as a pigeon can possibly be -
which is very sure, actually -
that the blue ones belong to Professor Lee.



He feeds me each and every day.
I know where to find him. Come this way."

When he got back his glasses, Professor Lee said that he was very grateful to me. A fifty pound note from his wallet he drew, and handing it to me he said, "Thank you."



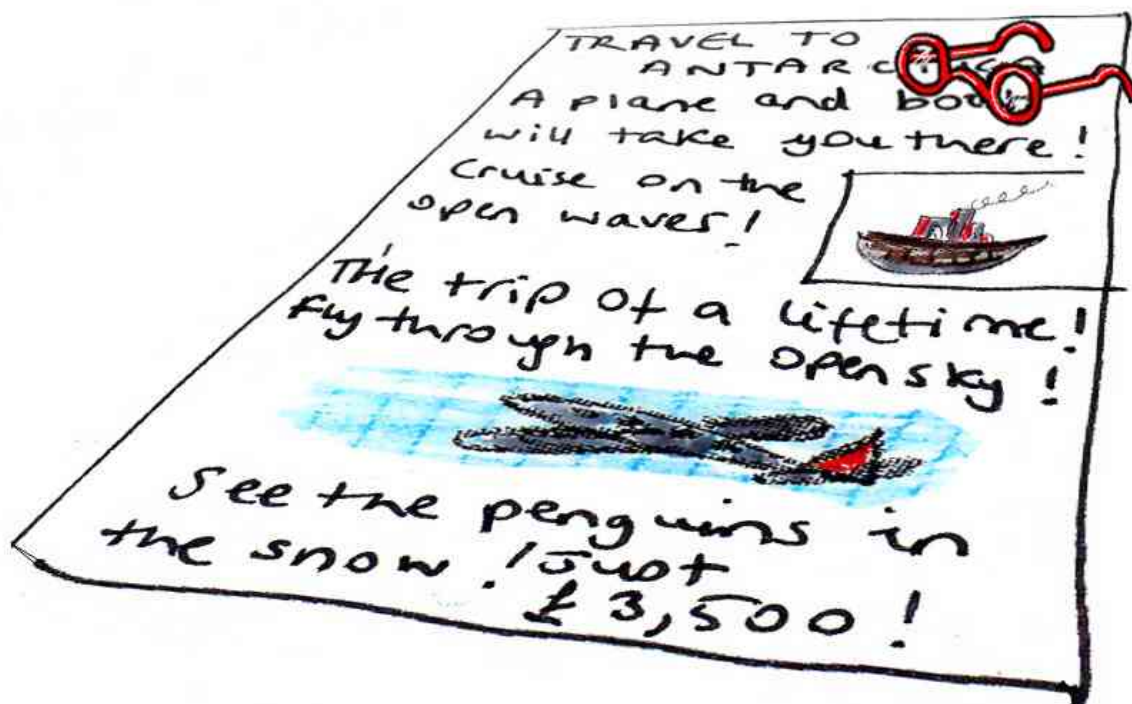
Without my glasses, I could not see.
Will you accept this reward from me?"

I'd never had so much money before,
so I asked Sue what I should use it for.
She said to me, "Tuppence, I have an idea.
What you should do is really quite clear.
Whilst you were out and about with Kirk,
I sat down and did some work.



I read the words on that page that I showed you before,
and you'll need that money and quite a lot more.

To South America, you can fly in a plane.
Do that, and you'll be almost home again.
From there, a boat you'll need to take,
but a lot of money you'll need to make
to afford to travel by boat and by plane.
Tuppence, you need to go diving again.



If you can find things that people have lost,
the rewards you get might cover the cost
of the tickets that you'll need to obtain
to travel on the boat and the plane.
You might get home for Christmas that way.
You must go diving again right away!"

Chapter 5

Some Help from New Friends



I really had no time to waste,
so into the river I dived in haste.
In my beak I grasped whatever I could,
and I carried more than a penguin should.



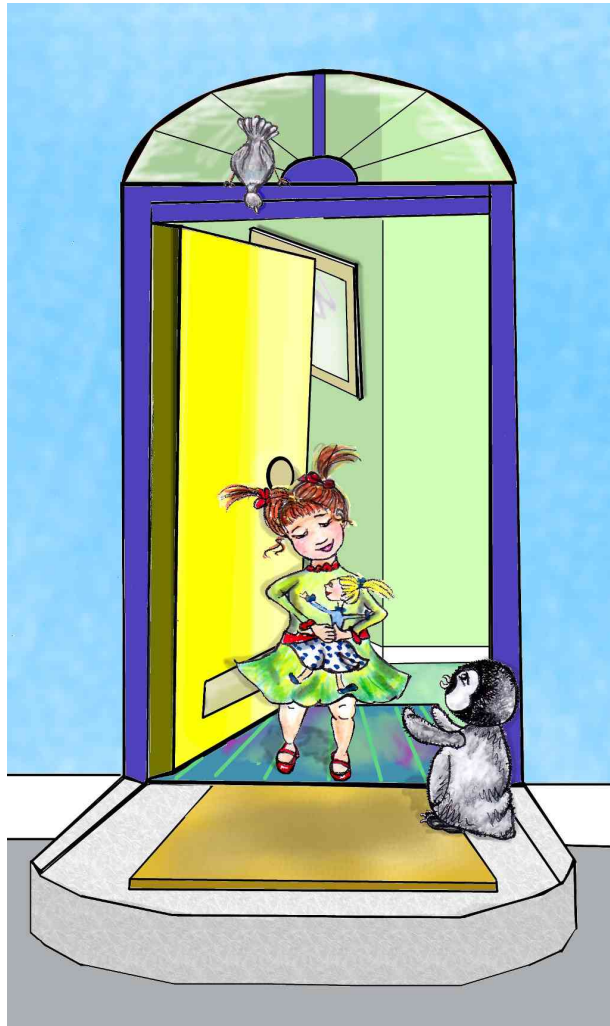
I found a doll and a key chain,
a diamond ring and a walking cane.

I needed to find out who owned those things,
so I asked Kirk, who said, flapping his wings,



"The doll, now, that's an easy one.
It belongs to a girl named Maddie Dunn.
She lives in a house near this very park.
I can take you there before it gets dark."

"That is my doll, Stephanie!
Thank you for bringing her back to me.
I thought that she was lost forever,
that I would not get her back ever.
I don't know how I can thank you.
Is there anything I could possibly do?"



I did not want to ask for a reward,
but my tickets home I could not afford,
so I told Maddie of my far away home
and how I'd been swept out to sea on my own.
I told her about the boat and the plane
and how I might get home again.

She said, "Oh, Tuppence, you're not alone.
I would like to help you get back home.
In this piggy bank I keep all my money;
to count it you'll need to break open its tummy."



I hope that with this money you may
get home in time for Christmas Day!"

On my way back to the river's edge,
I saw two pigeons who perched on a hedge.
They were Kirk's best friends, Tom and Drew,
and I could hardly believe what they'd managed to do.

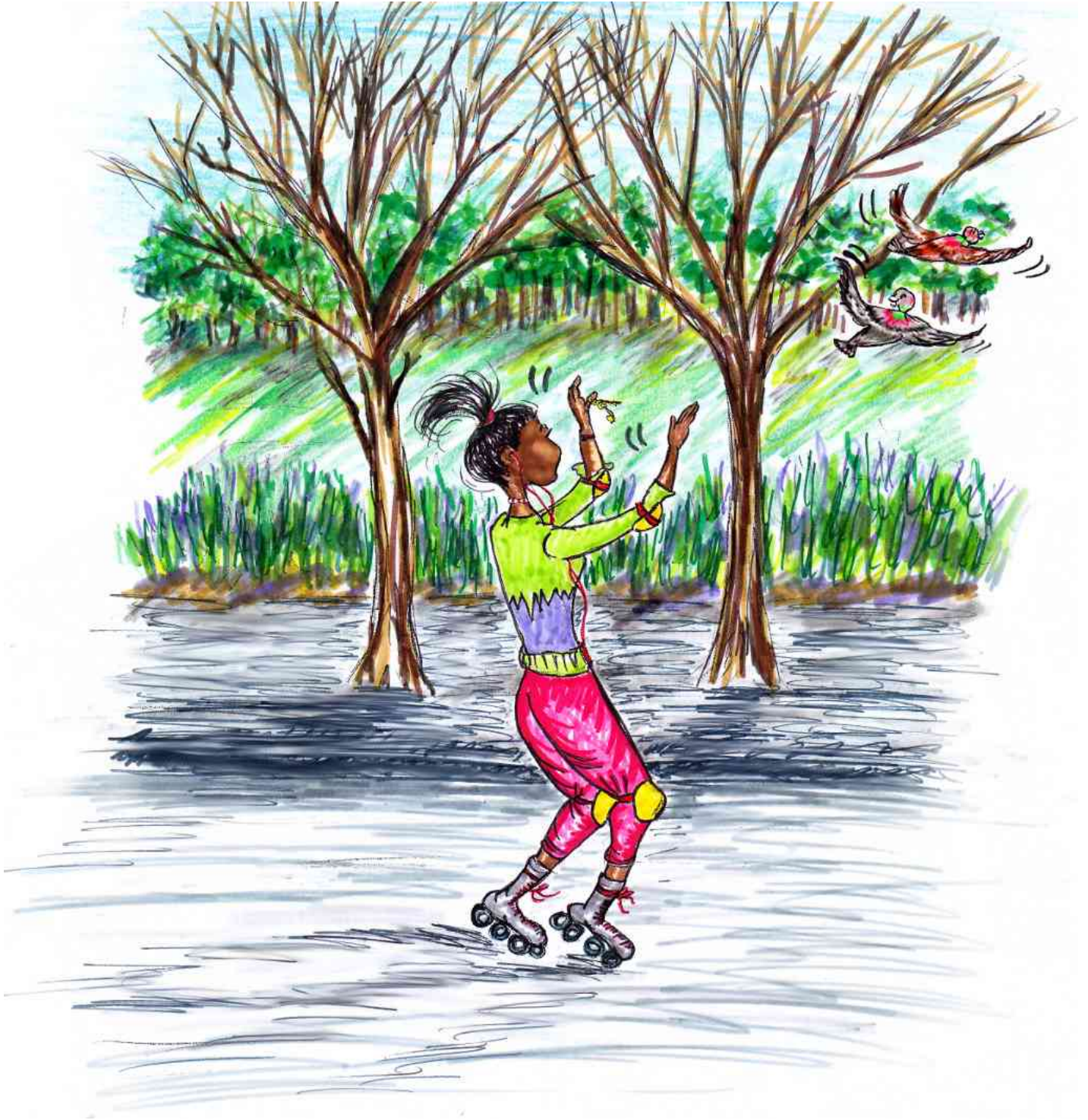


Those pigeons had travelled all around
and returned to people things that I'd found.

They'd returned the cane to Mrs Chalk,
who had been finding it hard to walk.



The key chain belonged to a girl named Lane,
who lost her keys again and again.



This was the very first time that
she'd lost her keys and got them back.

The yellow glasses... well, it's long story,
but they'd been returned to a boy called Cory.



Tom said, "We've returned everything
except for this lovely diamond ring.
We've never seen this ring before.
We've thought and thought, and we are sure.



We pigeons remember all that we see,
and if we'd seen that ring, well, believe me,
we would recall the person who wore
a ring so lovely - of that we are sure."

Before I could think to say anything,
Drew pulled some money from under his wing.
He said to me, "Tuppence, we told your story
to Mrs Chalk and to Lane and to Cory.



They felt that the very least they could do
was give us some money to pass on to you
to buy tickets for the boat and plane
so that you might get back home again.
We very much hope that you may
get home in time for Christmas Day."

I thanked Tom and I thanked Drew,
but there was one thing left for me to do.
I slipped the ring on to my beak,
and its owner I set out to seek.



Chapter 6

An Engagement



Under the stars in the night sky,
I stood by the river and started to cry.



I had asked all the other birds in the park -
even the ducks - before it fell dark,
but they said they had not seen the ring before
and that they were sorry they couldn't help more.

Even worse, no one had a clue
what in the world I could possibly do
to find the owner of the ring,
although I would try most anything.



I really did not know where to start,
and a feeling of sadness filled my heart.

I decided to try and get some rest,
but just as I set off towards Sue's nest,



I saw a young man in the moonlight,
and his sobs told me that all was not right.

I patted his leg and said, "Are you okay?
It seems as if things are not going your way."

He said, "Little penguin, you have no idea.
I've lost something quite precious, I fear.
I'd bought a ring for my girlfriend, you see,
and I'd planned to ask her to marry me,
but I lost the ring somewhere in this park,
and I can't find it now, out here in the dark."



Out of my pocket the ring must have slipped:
look at the lining, at how it has ripped.

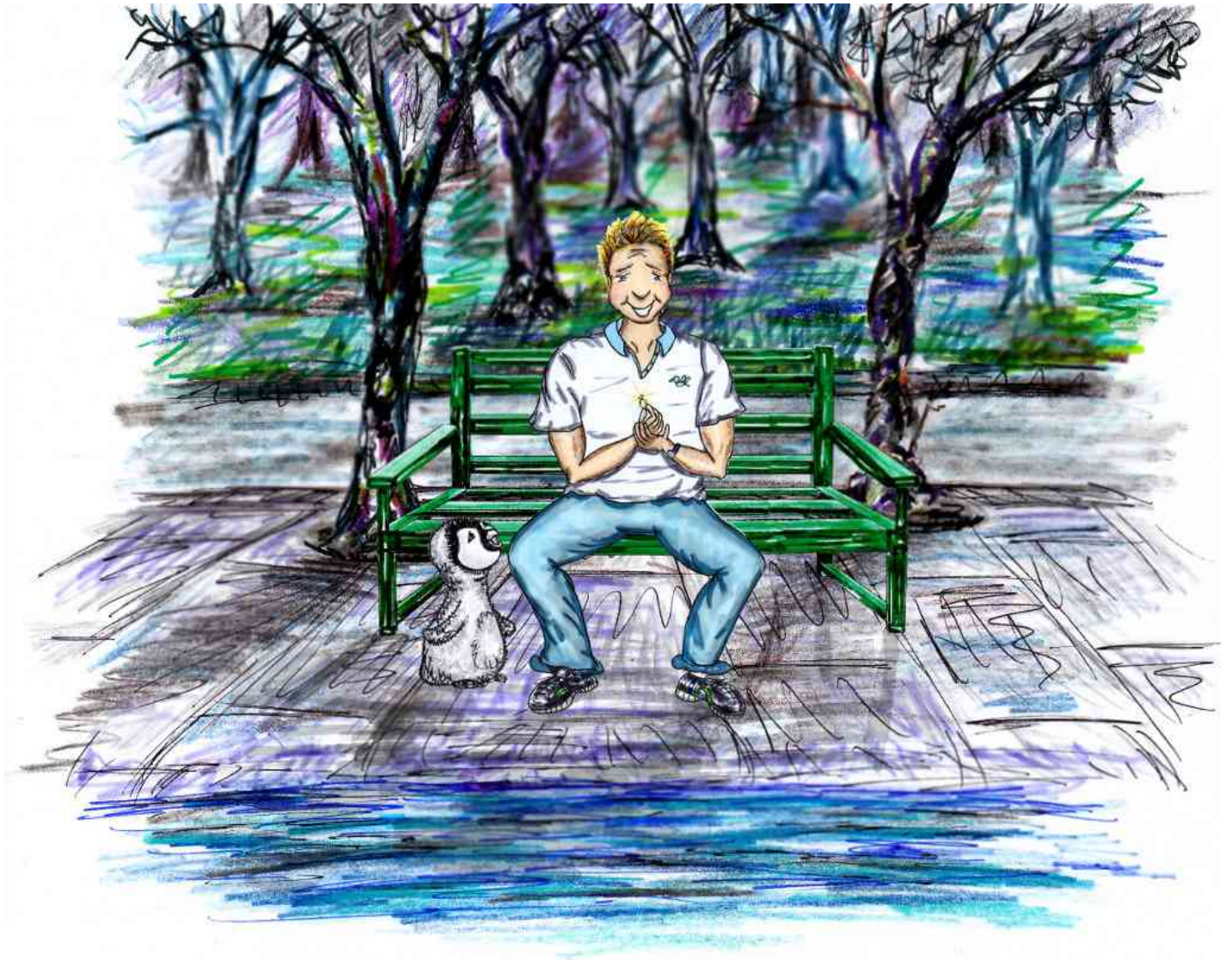
I jog along the river bank each day,
but I've looked along here, all the way.
Perhaps the ring rolled down the bank;
perhaps it rolled into the river and sank."

I said, "I am Tuppence. How do you do?
I think I have something belonging to you.



I found a ring in the river today.
I'd like to return it to you, if I may."

As soon as the young man saw what I had,
he started smiling and stopped being sad.



He said, "Tuppence, you found it! You found my ring!
How can I thank you? I'd do anything."

What is the matter? You look so sad!
Perhaps I should find your mum and dad."
I could not bear to think about Mum and Dad:
I missed them so much that it made me feel sad.
I almost cried as I tried to explain
that to get home I'd need a boat and a plane.
I told the young man about my home
and about being stranded at sea on my own.



It was then that I learned an amazing thing.
He was a pilot, that young man with the ring.
He said, "Little Tuppence, I want to help you,
but first you really must stop feeling blue.

My name is Will, and I can fly a plane,
so I can take you almost home again.
First, though, I have to go and see Rose,
the girl to whom I want to propose."



When we got to her house, Rose opened the door,
and Will knelt down, one knee on the floor.
He said to Rose, "Will you marry me?
I know I could make you very happy."
Rose said, "I would love to marry you.
There's nothing at all that I'd rather do."
On to her finger, Will slipped the ring,
and it was just the loveliest thing.

After they kissed, Will said that he had to introduce Rose to me. He told her about how he'd lost the ring and how I'd found it and everything.



He told her what had happened to me, all about how I'd been lost at sea, and Rose could not help but agree that Will was the person to help me.

Chapter 7

Tuppence Goes a Long Way



It was exciting to fly with Will on the plane.
I liked flying so much, I might try it again.



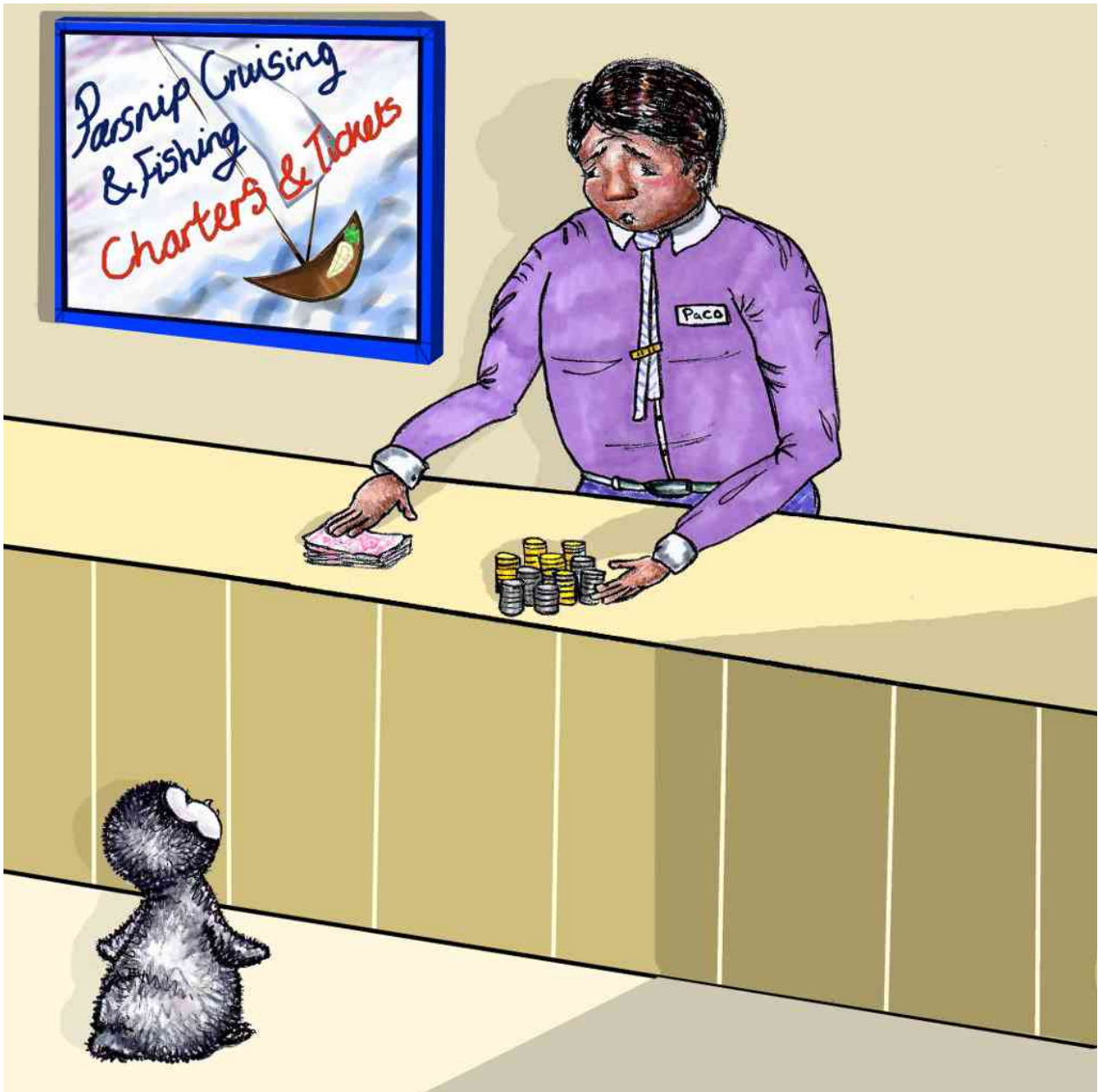
When we landed, Will said goodbye,
and it was then that I decided to try
to buy a ticket for a boat headed home,
so I went to the ticket desk all alone.

To the clerk I handed all of my money;
I even broke into the piggy bank's tummy,



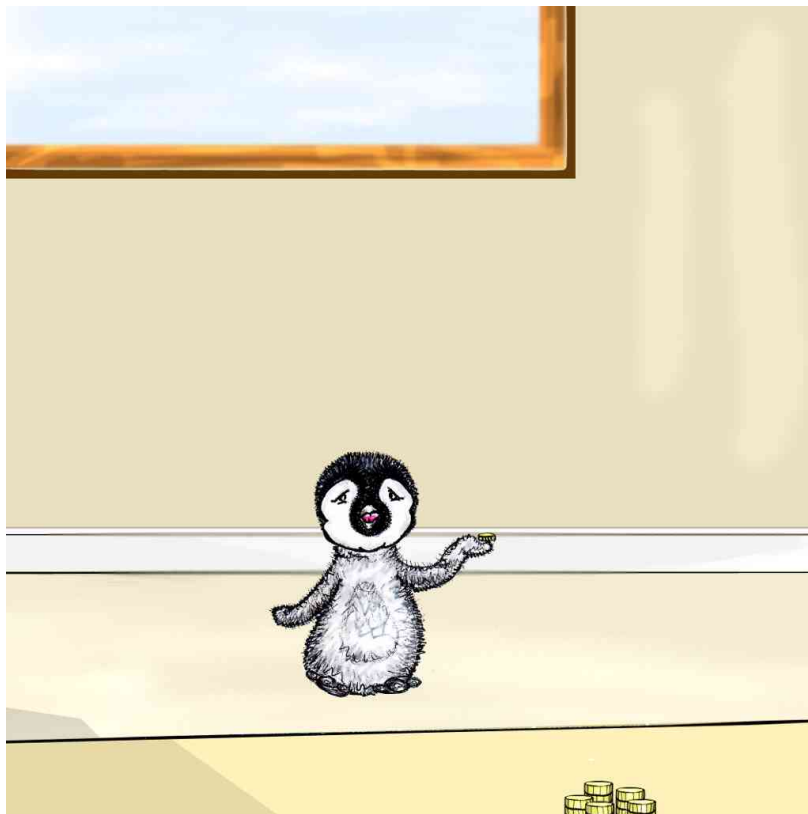
but when the clerk counted all that I had,
he gave me some news that was very bad.

He told me that he was sorry to say I was two pence short of the price one must pay for a ticket to the South Pole (one way) and that I'd be going nowhere today.



"Two pence?" I asked him. "That's not very much." He said, "Tuppence, that's all; not much, as such, but to get on that boat, you must pay your fare. If you don't pay your fare, you're going nowhere."

I asked him, "Tuppence? Is that what you said?"
He screwed up his eyes, and his face went all red.
"Tuppence or two pence - they're one and the same!
Do you understand, or must I explain?"
"Oh yes," I said, "I know they're the same,
for Tuppence is my very own name."



It was then I remembered what Mum had once said,
one day as she helped me get ready for bed.
She said, "Under your wing, two pence I shall tuck.
That will be your tuppence for luck."
A two-pence piece, and it was mine,
and it had been with me all the time!
I handed it over and said, "Will this do?"
The clerk said, "Here's a ticket for you."

I boarded the boat right away,
and I arrived home that very day.



I ran over the ice to our colony,
where Mum and Dad were waiting for me.



They said, "Where have you been? Are you okay?
We thought that you had just floated away!
We woke up and you were no longer there,
and we felt a sadness we just could not bear.
We swam and we dived and we looked around,
but you were nowhere to be found."



I told them about being stranded at sea
and about how hard it had been for me.
I told them all about Pete and Sue,
and Kirk, and also Tom and Drew.
I told them all about Maddie Dunn
and how flying with Will had been fun.
I told them about Professor Lee
and everyone else who'd been kind to me.

I ended by saying that I was so sorry to have been the cause of all of their worry, and that I hoped Mum wouldn't be sad that my lucky tuppence I no longer had, as that lucky tuppence I'd needed to pay the last two pence of my boat fare (one way).



Mum said, "Well, if that tuppence was lucky for you, then it did the job it was there to do. It helped you get home; that's lucky, you see, and it's certainly all that matters to me." "Now we can have a great Christmas," said Dad. "Our Tuppence is home, and we are so glad!"

Well, Christmas was fun in our colony,
and I celebrated with my family.



I sent presents to all of my friends far away,
who'd helped me get home for Christmas Day.

On Christmas night, from under her wing,
Mum pulled out a little something.



Under my wing, two pence she did tuck:
a special Christmas tuppence for luck.
She said, "Tuppence can go a very long way.
Two pence helped my Tuppence get home for today."



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