

Noodles & Albie



Eric Bennett

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LIZ BANNISH

SMALL BATCH BOOKS

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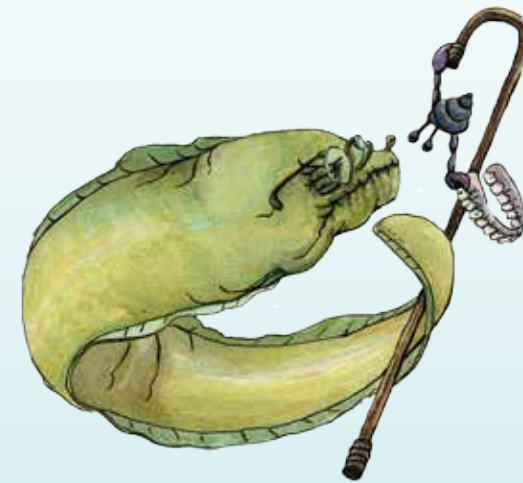
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SMALL
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*To Sophie and Rose,
who depended on me to make up stories on road trips,
and Ruby and Bernie,
who gave us reasons to make those trips. —E.B.*

To Momo and Jeanie —L.B.





After six long months of daylight, the sun was finally beginning to set on the Antarctic summer, and Noodles had not yet attempted his first swim. In fact, he hadn't even put one flipper in the water. Ever. During the last weeks of summer all the young penguins had already learned how to swim, all except Noodles, and his parents were getting worried.

“Noodles, tomorrow is the last day before the sun sets for winter. If you don't get your feathers wet, you'll never learn to swim,” his mom said.

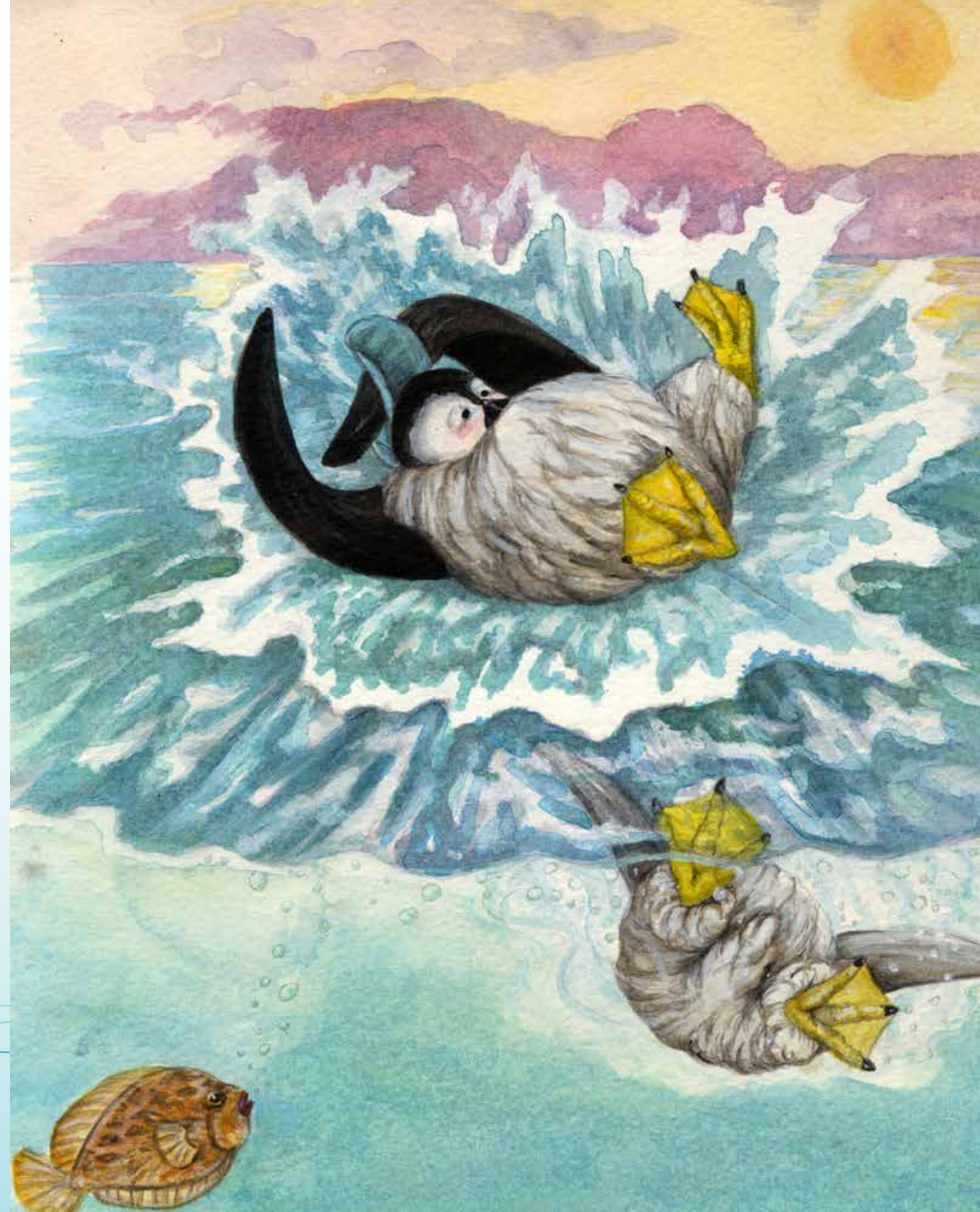
“When spring comes, the entire colony will go out to sea without you,” added his dad.

“Please, Noodles,” his mom pleaded, “you must learn how to swim. It's what all penguins do!”

With a nervous smile, Noodles gave in. “I will, Mom. I promise, Dad. Tomorrow I will swim!”

The following morning, Noodles' friends stopped by his igloo to see if he'd go swimming with them. To their surprise, he accepted the invitation. So off they waddled toward the sea. But the closer they got to the water, the more anxious Noodles became. It was no accident that he found himself last in line for the morning dive. As he peeked out over the edge of the ice, a late-arriving penguin came sliding down the hill and knocked Noodles beak over flipper into the ocean!

"Help! Help! I can't swim!" Noodles shouted, and in a way it was true. But, being a penguin, of course he would learn. All he had to do was try. "Hey, wait a minute," he said to no one in particular. "I can swim. This is easy! I'm swimming! I'm swimming!" he called to his friends, but there was no one around to hear him. In his excitement, Noodles had drifted away from the other penguins. He could not see the shoreline either. It wasn't long before Noodles realized he was lost.



“I wonder where everyone is. Well, I guess they can’t be too far,” Noodles thought, as he began to explore the incredible undersea world around him. But as morning turned to afternoon, Noodles began to worry. “There are only a couple of hours of daylight left, and I don’t know where I am or which way is home.”





“Excuse me, sir,” Noodles asked an elderly eel. “Do you know how to get to the penguin colony from here?”

“Penguin colony, you say? I think I was there a long time ago. Or am I thinking of that seal colony? It’s all very confusing,” said the old eel.

Noodles swam on. Soon he encountered some interesting sea creatures who he thought might know which direction to point him in. “Excuse me, but would any of you know which way the penguin colony is?” Noodles asked.

“Hmm, can’t say that I do,” yawned a sleepy squid.

“How the heck should I know?” shouted a cranky crab.
“I haven’t moved from this spot in years!”

“Oh, it’s definitely this way! Or is it that way? Or maybe it’s . . . over there?” stammered a confused starfish, eventually tying herself in a knot. Noodles just shook his head and swam on, hoping against hope to find someone who could help him before night set in.

In the undersea twilight, Noodles had just about given up. “I’ll never see my home or my parents again,” he whimpered.





“Hey, little penguin. Why so sad?” a voice called out. As Noodles looked around through the shadows a small fish swam toward him. “Are you lost?” asked the fish.

“I am,” said Noodles. “This is my first day in the ocean and I got separated from my friends and now I’m . . . I’m . . .”

“Lost,” the fish said, finishing the penguin’s sentence.

“I don’t know how to get back to my colony, and I’m afraid if I don’t get back before dark, I’ll never . . . Hey, fish, do you know where the penguin colony is?”

“Penguin colony? Piece of cake!” replied the little fish. “I know this part of the sea like the back of my fin, but you’re right, we better get going before it gets dark or we’ll never find it.”



“Wow! Thanks! My name’s Noodles, what’s yours?”

“I’m Albie,” she said, with a smile. “Now follow me, Noodles!” and off they went. Noodles stuck close to Albie, and as they swam, the new friends talked and laughed, sharing stories. “It must be fun to waddle and belly-slide on ice,” said Albie.

“It must be so cool to live in the ocean,” replied Noodles. “I never dreamed it could be so beautiful.”

On and on they swam, racing the undersea shadows that grew longer by the minute. Just as the sun was about to set, they spotted the icy shores of Antarctica in the distance! However, their joy didn’t last long. Noodles and Albie spotted something else. Right behind them was a hungry leopard seal. Penguins are a leopard seal’s favorite snack. “Hurry, Noodles!” shouted Albie, as the pair made a mad dash for the shore.



Meanwhile on shore, all the young penguins had returned from their swim—except one. Noodles’ parents had just about given up hope as they sadly watched the last sunset of the season, while scanning the vast Southern Ocean for a sign of their boy.



Just then, a split second ahead of the leopard seal's jaws, Noodles burst through the water with enough speed to carry him clear over his parents' heads and beak-first into a snow bank. Some penguins say they actually saw Noodles fly that day, if only for a moment.

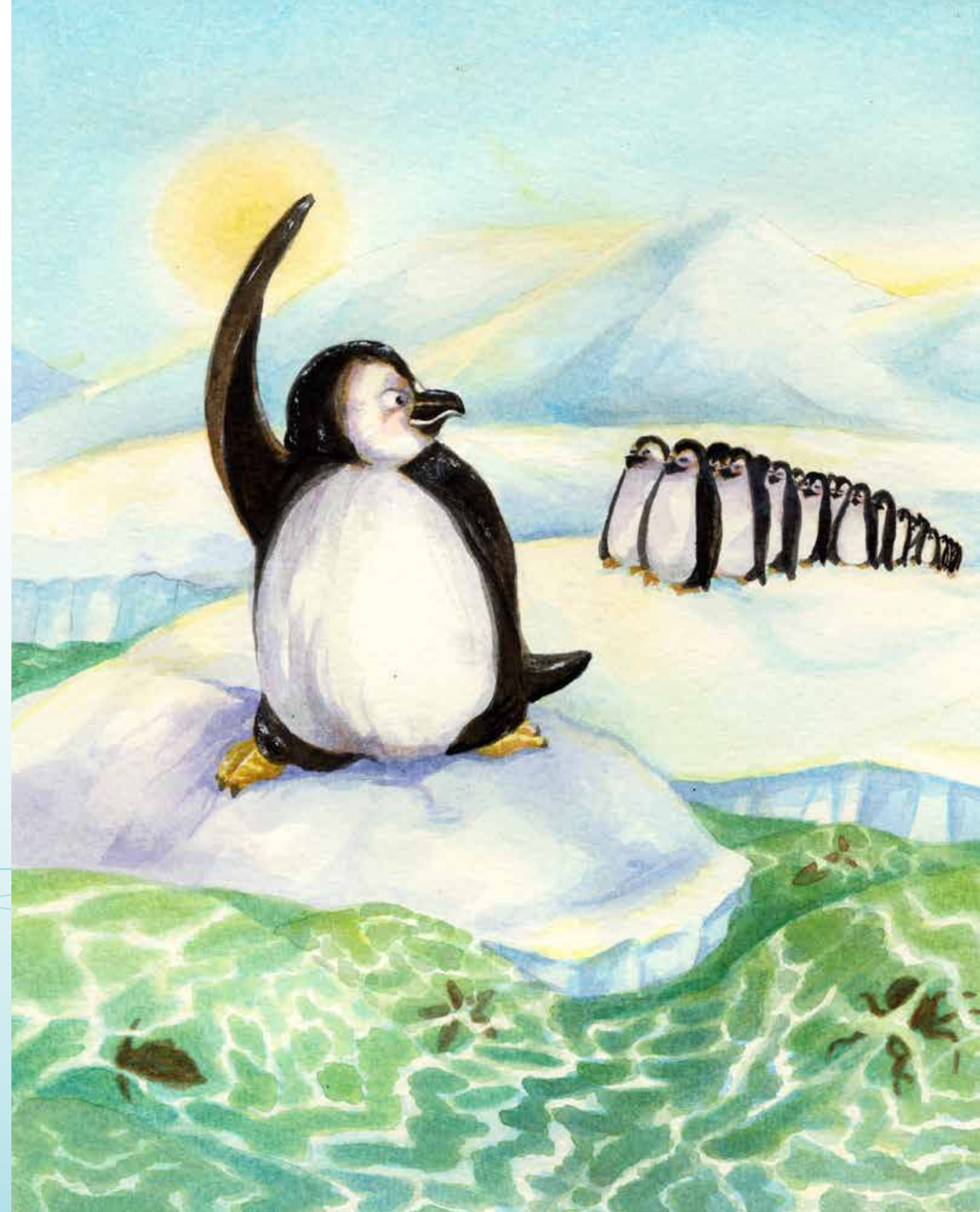
Overjoyed, his parents carried him home to celebrate, but all he could think about was Albie. "I wonder if she's all right. I wonder if I'll ever see her again. I wonder where Albie is right now."



Back under the water, Albie hid deep in the shadows until she was sure the leopard seal had gone. It was almost completely dark, and Albie needed to head home. As she began to swim, she noticed something strange floating just above her head. It was Noodles' baseball hat. "It must have come off when he jumped out of the water," Albie thought, as she put it on with a smile. "I'll keep this for Noodles until I see him again. If I see him again," she sighed. Albie flicked her colorful tail and started her journey home.



During the long, dark winter, Noodles studied hard, learning the ways of an adult penguin. He quickly grew, trading in his gray feathers for a handsome black and white coat. Through it all, he never forgot about Albie. Spring could not arrive soon enough, so he could set off to find his friend. Finally, the sun began to rise over the eastern icebergs, and with it the penguin colony began to march toward the sea, this time led by Noodles.





In the water, Noodles tried his best to retrace the path he and Albie had taken months before. But he quickly realized that the ocean is a very big place to find one little fish. After hours of searching, an exhausted Noodles sat down on a rock and sighed, “What was I thinking? I’ll never see Albie again.”

As Noodles sat remembering his friend, he heard a voice behind him that not only sounded familiar, it also sounded as sad as his. Turning around, Noodles spotted a colorful fish who just happened to be wearing his baseball hat. His baseball hat!

“Albie? Is that really you?” Noodles asked.

“Noodles? I can’t believe it! And look at you in your penguin tuxedo!” said Albie.

After a couple seconds of silence, they both shouted at the same time, “I can’t believe I found you!” The rest of the day the two friends played, laughed, and talked as if a day hadn’t passed since the last time they were together. When it came time for both of them to head home, Noodles said, “See you here tomorrow, Albie. Same time?”

“Absolutely!” she replied, as she playfully smushed his baseball hat back on his head. “And the day after that?” Albie giggled.

“And the day after that,” Noodles answered back with a grin.

“And the day after that!” they both shouted together, laughing.

And that’s just what they did.



Noodles & Albie Q & A

(ASKED BY KIDS. ANSWERED BY ALBIE.)



Ivy—What kind of penguin is Noodles?

Albie—Noodles is an Emperor Penguin. Emperors are the largest of all eighteen different penguin species. They can grow as tall as 48 inches (four feet) and weigh as much as 100 pounds.

Dominic—Do penguins live at the South Pole?

Albie—No, although the South Pole is in Antarctica (home to many penguins like Noodles), the South Pole itself is much too far from the ocean for penguins to live there. In fact, only two types of penguins live in Antarctica, Emperors and Adélies, and their colonies are all near the ocean, which is where they get their food. Emperors are the only penguins that live in Antarctica all year round.

Mallary—Noodles is underwater a lot. How long can penguins hold their breath and how deep can they dive?

Albie—Emperor Penguins can hold their breath for twenty minutes and can dive as deep as 1,800 feet (the length of six football fields).

Briana—How long do Emperor Penguins live?

Albie—In the wild they can live as long as fifteen to twenty years. In an aquarium or zoo, where there isn't the daily threat of predators and there are veterinarians and medicines to take care of them, Emperor Penguins can live a lot longer—up to thirty years!

Rose—Why does Noodles start off gray and end up black and white?

Albie—Emperor Penguin chicks are born with a thick downy coat of gray feathers to help keep them warm in Antarctica, the coldest place on Earth. It takes about six months before the penguin chick molts (changes feathers) and becomes a black and white adult-looking penguin.

Dakota—How come penguins waddle?

Albie—Emperor Penguin bodies are designed for great speed and agility in the water, where they hunt for food and avoid predators. They have no land-based predators, so on land they are a little awkward waddling on their short legs or sliding on their bellies.

August—How fast can a penguin swim?

Albie—Penguins are built for swimming. They have powerful flippers and short legs and their bodies are streamlined for speed in the water (they use their feet to steer). Emperors can swim at 10 to 15 mph, and even faster when propelling themselves out of the water as Noodles did to escape the leopard seal.

Sophie—Why are penguins black and white?

Albie—Their colors camouflage them from predators (like the leopard seal) in the water. When a penguin is swimming, the black of his back blends in with the dark sea floor, in case a predator is above. And if a predator is below, the white of his belly blends with the light on the water's surface.

Greta—Are there penguins at the North Pole?

Albie—No, in fact, there are no penguins in the wild north of the Equator.

Milo—What do Penguins eat?

Albie—Penguins love to eat krill, which is a kind of shrimp, and all sorts of small fish. But don't worry—Noodles would never eat Albie.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A native of New York City, Eric Bennett's passion for penguins began as a kid. After graduating Queens College he opened the world's first all-penguin shop at South Street Seaport. In time, Bennett began offering his retail rookery online by launching PenguinGiftShop.com.

Over the years Bennett would entertain his daughters, Sophie and Rose, with tall tales, and the "Penguin & Fish" story was one of them. Bennett showed the story to his artist friend Liz Bannish and the rest, as they say, is Noodles and Albie history. Eric presently lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, with his daughters and a few hundred penguins. This is his first book.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Liz Bannish was raised in landlocked West Springfield, Massachusetts. She received her BFA from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and currently lives in Northampton. Bannish spends her time making art, exploring strange new worlds, and thinking about her favorite sea creatures. This is her first book. (See more of Bannish's work at lizbannish.com.)

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(JENNIFERBROY.COM)