

That day, Owala daydreamed on her nest. She was thinking about having three chicks and wondering how she would carry three baby loons on her back. Maybe Yudel would take one and she would look after the other two. They could feed them that way too.

She could hear the fledging siskins above her in the pine tree. Their mother was telling them the smoothest way to take off into the air. Owala had seen one of the fledglings swoop clumsily, then tumble and right itself. She thought it might splat on the ground near her. There were six chicks up there, all getting ready for flight. Owala thought about the number of ducklings one duck mother had to look after. Here she was wrought up about three loon chicks when she had Yudel to help her.

“Has your mate seen the human children?” Owala called up to the mother siskin.

“They walked near. Looked at Yudel. Looked and left. Watch my first, my first hatched.”

Owala turned her head to admire a skinny brown-tufted bird chick fall out of the nest. It twirled its wings and sailed desperately.

“My that’s good,” Owala said. “Practice makes perfect.”

“So it does, doesn’t it?” chirped the mother siskin.

“The human children looked and left?” Owala asked again.

“Of course they did, didn’t they?”

“I still can’t believe what I heard,” Owala said. “They left fat tasty minnows near the gull’s nest. Of course, they weren’t fresh.”

“Gulls eat before they look. They don’t care.”

Human children were a frightening and curious subject on the island lately. There were reports of them walking. They were here last year, frightening Chipchap because they tempted him with peanuts. Owala wondered why they were leaving the gulls minnows. The gulls would eat them up without suspecting anything. They were proud that the humans left them alone and let them eat their food.

Spotted Croak was affronted. Being the oldest about, he had heard horrors about human children. They caught relatives of his that were never seen again. They poured salt on edible leeches. They started fires on the island and acted as if it were theirs.

Chipchap ran about the island, telling how the human children came for an hour, fished and walked, got in their boat and went away. They were like the humans his relatives had told about on the other side of the ice. Sometimes they left food and

although they seemed so happy to see a chipmunk, he had heard of traps. But he said that if they planned to harm Owala's eggs, they would come much closer. They would scare her off her nest.

There were cries above Owala. She looked up to see the father siskin flying in with a worm trailing from its mouth.

A moment later, he called, "Listen, listen. I have seen a terrible sight, a sight you must hear about. No worry, my flying chicks. Worry belongs to Owala. Gulls in a panic, panic of the worst kind."

Owala froze on her nest. It must be the human children! They had fooled the gulls with their minnows.

"The armored devil, the old one, the feared," the father bird exclaimed.