

“Unka-Bunka,” Maude said, her blue webbed feet tapping in the sand.

“Tick Tick,” Lou replied, his pointy beak pecking at Maude's back, hoping for blood.

“Bunka-Ugh-A-Lunka,” Maude said, tolerating her vampire finch pal, who, after his metallic snack, perched on Maude.

*Whoosh. Whoosh.*

Maude flapped her wings, taking flight, her torpedo-shaped body skimmed the Pacific, hunting sardines.

Ocean winds increased. Maude flapped harder, realizing Lou had hitched a ride when a black feather stuck to her beak.

“Oonka-Dang-It-A-Kabunka,” Maude honked, diving to shake the vampiric pest.

“Click Click,” Lou chirped as the duo flew into a storm.

*Whoosh. Whoosh.*

Maude's five-foot wingspan struggled. The birds tumbled until they crash-landed.

Dazed, Maude and Lou struggled to focus, the air cold against their plumage.

“Tick Tick,” Lou said, hopping onto Maude's head.

“Unka-No-A-Idea-Lunka,” Maude replied.

Snow-dusted fir trees lined the limestone cliffs. Icebergs floated on still water. Maude dipped her blue foot.

“Lunka-Brrr-Oonka,” she said, chattering.

*ROAR!*

A brown, furry creature crawled from a cave, stood, and scratched its back. Its pale muzzle was wide and showed sharp teeth.

“Click Click,” Lou said, flying toward the cave bear.

“Oonka-No-Noonka!” Maude pleaded.

Lou ignored her, landing on the bear’s back and rooting through its fur. Maude watched Lou hold on as the bear thrashed, and for a moment, she was glad. She never liked Lou. But the sweet scent of wildflowers changed her heart. If they were home in the Galápagos, Maude would have dive-bombed that bear to save Lou. Here, she was unsure.

Pacing, she found a large hollow bone. It was heavy, but Maude pushed her beak inside. Her webbed feet stumbled on slimy gravel. Growls echoed through the ravine. Her neck bobbed as she launched the bone, shouting, “BUNKA-GA-TAKE-A-THAT-A!”

The bone missed the bear and landed on a slate slab. It bounced, startling the bear. A low hum vibrated from the stone and traveled across the lake, hitting the cliffs. The bear relaxed, letting Lou fly to Maude.

“Tick Tick,” Lou said, glad to feel Maude's feathers.

“Lunka-What-A-The-Hecka,” Maude replied, pecking the rock.

*Oooooooooomm.*

The sound came again.

“Click Click,” Lou said, pecking the slate, recreating the hum.

Maude hopped on, her blue webbed feet tapping.

*Ooom... Ooom... Ooom...*

The gorge filled with sound as the pair discovered a percussive delight. Shadows formed as the sun set and the bear retreated. The slate cooled under the tropical birds’ feet.

*Ooom... Ooom...*

The sound got softer. Further away.

“Tick...”

*Ooom...*

“Click...”

*Ooom..*

Maude felt a pinch on her back. Not a finch beak... smaller. Sharper. Salty air floated on the wind.

*Ooom...*

*Whoosh...*

*Ooom...*

*Whoosh...*

The humming blended with a whooshing sound and became waves.

“Click Click.”

Maude’s eyes opened, sea foam gathering around her blue webbed feet. A sand crab scurried down her legs. Lou's beady eyes peered into her soul.

“Unka-Bunka.” Maude stretched. “Must-A-Been-An-Unka-Dream-A-Lunka.”

Lou pushed past Maude's feathers for a sip of blood as they traveled down the beach, Maude tripping over a large hollow bone.