

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



7. Geese

A strong headwind blew, and Anta's eight yaks struggled southward.

Anta Claus clutched the reins tightly. "Great bother, this, lads," he said. "South Wind is throwing a temper tantrum tonight."

Beside Anta, Carol sat as still as a snowman. Her mind remained on the scroll beside her. If her name was there, she dreaded to think what she'd find in her stocking on Christmas morning.

From behind the sleigh came an unexpected sound.

Honk! Honk! Honk! Honk!

"Odd place for traffic," Carol said.

Honk! Honk!

Anta turned his head. "That's not traffic, Carol," he said. "Those are geese. Old friends of mine. Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Honk! Honk! Honk!

Soon a flock of six geese flew alongside Anta's sleigh. They flew in a V formation, fighting the wind. Their necks stretched forward. Their broad wings flapped in unison.

Honk! Honk!

Anta waved to the birds.

"Hello, honkers!" he called. "Good to see you again. Stop by for a chat. Rest your wings awhile."

The lead goose, the goose that flew at the point of the V, tucked in a wing. He turned toward the sleigh. The other geese followed. All six perched around the edge of the sleigh.

"Season's greeting to the entire flock," said Anta.

The lead goose's head bobbed up and down. "*Honk! Honk!* Thanks for the

break, Anta,” he said. “South wind is brutal tonight. I believe she’s turning into a blizzard. But we still have a long way to fly.”

Anta Claus nodded. “What parts of the Southern Hemisphere are you birds headed for?” he asked.

“Venezuela is where it’s happening these days,” the lead goose said. “That’s why we’re flying in a V-formation.”

“Of course, Brazil is fine in places,” said another bird. “So, you might find some flocks flying in a *B* formation.”

The six geese broke into goosey giggles. They nudged each other with their wings. “Good one! *Honk! Honk!*” they went. “Good one! *Honk!*”

“But Venezuela is just right for this flock, not too hot or too cold,” said a third goose. “If we traveled too far south, to the cold places we’d end up with goose pimples all winter.”

“And if we landed in the hot jungle, our goose would be cooked,” a fourth goose said.

The geese laughed some more. “*Honk! Honk!* Good one! Good one! *Honk! Honk!*”

“Oh! Oh! I’m headed for South America myself,” said Anta. “Plenty of naughty children on that continent.”

At the mention of South America, Carol perked up. “Tierra Del Fuego?” she said. “You’re going to Tierra Del Fuego?”

The lead goose stared at Carol and back at Anta. “You appeared to have picked up a passenger, Anta,” he said.

“A stowaway,” said Anta. “I’m taking her back to Connecticut.”

Carol waved. “I’m Carol Snow,” she said. “I’m here by accident. I was hoping to hitch a ride with Santa Claus.”

“*Honk! Honk!* Santa Claus?” said the lead goose. “Santa and his reindeer flew by us a short while ago.”

“He was as jolly as ever,” said another goose.

“He even gave us some gingerbread cookies,” said a fourth goose.

Anta Claus grumbled.

“Where was Santa going?” Carol asked. “Which way was he headed?”

“We didn’t ask, and we never follow Santa Claus,” said a goose on the back of the sleigh. “He’d lead us on a wild goose chase.”

Again, the geese giggled. “*Honk! Honk!* Good one! *Honk!*”

Carol couldn't help laughing herself.

"But, Anta, you're still our number one Claus," said the lead goose. "You've helped us a lot last Christmas Eve."

"He did?" said Carol. "What did Anta Claus do?"

"A boy in Canada was smashing our eggs," said the goose. "He ended up on the Naughty List. Problem solved."

"What did Anta leave in his stocking?" Carol asked.

"A large wooden zero," said the goose. "Also called a *goose egg*."

More giggles from the flock. "*Honk!* Good one! *Honk!*"

"Oh! Oh!" said Anta. "You can thank Tis and Twas for that one."

The goose closest to Carol tapped her on the shoulder with his bill. "There are many stories about how Anta Claus has helped children stop being naughty," she said.

"Like the time he left a white feather, a symbol of being a coward, for a girl who was shooting birds with her bb gun," said another goose.

"And one Christmas Eve, Anta left a large dust bunny for a boy who tossed rocks at ducks in a lake. *Honk! Honk!* Even the best baseball pitcher can't toss a ball of dust very far."

"Both children needed a simple reminder, a little nudge, that being naughty has no rewards," said another goose.

"And their names have never appeared on the Naughty List again," said the lead goose.

Carol was enjoying the bird's visit. She was sorry when the lead goose said, "Now we must be off, Anta. Keep up the good work."

With that, the six geese spread their wings and stretched their necks. One by one they dove off the sleigh. The flock formed a *V* and soared southward. By dawn, they would be in Venezuela.