

## **Santa's Story**

Late one Christmas Eve, long long ago, I think it was back in the eighties, I was flying my heavily-laden sleigh from Lapland towards Britain when I found myself worrying about all the Christmas Eves that were yet to come.

The reason for me being worried was that as each year passes there are more and more of you children to be visited. Not only that, but I have to be sure that you are all behaving well enough to entitle you to a present, and keeping an eye on you all was taking up nearly all of my time throughout the year. The result was that I was having difficulties finding the time to buy the gifts from the shops. I was also having to update the database with all the new names and addresses, and when Christmas Eve came, I also had to feed and harness the reindeer, as well as load the sleigh. It was so much work that I didn't know if I was going to be able to continue in the years to come.

On this particular Christmas Eve, Rudolf was so excited that he started playing tricks on me and knocked my hat off when I was fixing the harness and, because I was already running behind on this year's schedule, I almost became cross - and, as you all know - Santa should never be cross. It was then that I realised that I was definitely going to need help in the future if all the presents were to be delivered on time - but the big problem was...where was I going to get good reliable help, especially on Christmas Eve?

So there I was, driving my sleigh and worrying about the future, not knowing that I was about to have an adventure that would change my Christmases forever.

That particular night it was absolutely freezing cold with no moon to light my way because a great booming wind had blown a blizzard in off the Atlantic Ocean. Snow, instead of being soft and flaky, stung my face like icy darts and seeing was almost impossible. These conditions make navigation extremely difficult but, when flying in this area during the winter it is not uncommon to catch up with flocks of geese flying south to escape the severe northern conditions, and Rudolph, who acts as my navigator, often speaks to them to make sure that we are heading in the right direction. On this occasion, I heard Rudolph talking to the leader of a skein of graylags who were heading for Vane Farm on the shore of Loch Leven near Kinross. The noise of the wind made it impossible to hear what was being said, but I soon realised that Rudolph was making a sweeping U turn back in the direction from which we had just come. Not only that, but we were also losing height. It was clear that Rudolph was going to make an unscheduled landing - in spite of the fact that we were already running very, very late!

When the sleigh came to a stop, I jumped out into the knee-deep snow and, struggling against the howling wind, I scrambled past the team of panting reindeer. As I drew level with Rudolph, I shouted in his ear. ‘Come on, Rudolph, you know that we are already seriously late, why have we landed? If we don’t get a move-on there will be some very disappointed boys and girls tomorrow morning.’

‘I know,’ said Rudolph, ‘but the geese told me about a small brown bird they had seen. It was very weak with cold and they were worried that it had fallen into a snowdrift someplace around here. If we don’t find it, it may never see Christmas morning.’

‘But what about the boys and girls and their presents?’ asked one of the other reindeer. ‘We don’t have time to waste.’

I gathered all the reindeer around so that they could hear me above the howling wind, and explained to them that to save the life of even one small bird was more important than the combined disappointment of all the boys and girls. ‘I know that some children will not understand and no doubt others will be angry with us,’ I said, ‘but I for one cannot bear to think of that little bird alone and cold in the snow. Let’s all look for it, and pray that by some miracle, we will find it alive and still have time to deliver the presents.’

For what seemed like an eternity, the reindeer and I searched through the snowdrifts looking for the little bird. There was no use in shouting since the noise of the wind would make it impossible for it to hear us, and we would certainly not be able to hear any feeble cry that a little frozen bird was likely to be able to make. As we searched, we became aware of a light appearing in the eastern sky – Christmas day was beginning to dawn and we were still many miles from making our first delivery. The situation was serious.

At last, one of the reindeer called out: ‘Here it is, - but we may be too late. He is frozen and quite stiff, and there is no sign of a heart beat.’

‘Bring him to me and I will try to revive him while we travel,’ I said. ‘Then get back into your harnesses and let’s fly like we’ve never flown before. It may be possible to deliver at least some of the presents before the children awake.’

I took the small stiff brown body and slipped him inside my glove to protect him from the cold. Next, I breathed gently into the glove directing my warm breath around his beak so that the heat could get down into his little body. After the ice on his feathers had melted, I transferred him from my glove into the inside pocket of my red fleecy jacket, where the heat from my body would keep the little fellow warm.

In the meantime, Rudolph and the other reindeer had made a tremendous effort to catch up on time. The wind had dropped, the snow had stopped falling and before it was properly daylight, we had managed to get to the northern shore of the Shetland isles – but

even so - I knew we were going to be too late. Without that miracle I had mentioned, there was no way we were going to be able to deliver the presents before the children were awakened on this Christmas morning.

Just then I felt a movement inside my jacket. I slid my hand into my pocket and gently scooped out the little brown bird that had caused us all the trouble. When I looked down at the small body with the black beady eyes and pointed beak, I knew that regardless of what was going to happen now, we had done the right thing in saving him. To see that little fellow so much recovered from his ordeal made the reindeer and I forget the problems that we now had to face. But how were we going to explain to all the children that there were no presents for them when they awoke?

It was then that I thought I saw a dark storm cloud appear unexpectedly out of nowhere. Then, to my amazement, I realised that it was a huge flock of tiny brown birds just like the one that I was holding in my hand. They flew up to the sleigh and started to pick up the presents off the sleigh and fly off with them. Some of the heavy parcels had as many as ten little birds all holding on to the string with their toes while they flapped their wings as hard as they could. At first I thought about how I could stop them, but somehow I knew that the presents weren't being stolen - they were being delivered, and at this rate all the boys and girls would have their presents waiting for them when they awoke. Our problem was solved. The miracle had happened. Christmas morning would not be a disappointment.

I looked down at the little bird that we had been able to save. He had fully recovered. Indeed, he looked the picture of health, for while he had been in my pocket some of the red colour off my wet jacket had left a mark on his front, so instead of being brown all over, he now had a glowing red breast. He jumped onto my finger, winked at me, and flew off with all the others.

This adventure of mine has had three lasting results; firstly, every year the same flock of birds meet me on Christmas morning and help to deliver your presents. Secondly, these little birds keep me informed throughout the year as to how well you children are all behaving. Thirdly, all the little birds that help me have a red patch on their chest. They are called Robins, and they are watching you - all year round.

Happy Christmas

By James Christie