

The Winter Geese *by Helen Gowan*

“What is this?” She asked the question of the larger goose squatting beside her in the cold fresh white feathers that had fallen during the night. “Snow,” was the reply. “It’s winter. Haven’t you seen it before? There is snow every winter.”

“But how do you eat? The feathers cover up the grass.”

“You are a baby. It’s not feathers. It’s snow. You have to find a place where the snow has melted. Usually you can find a place around a tree, or on the edge of a sidewalk after they push the snow away. Look, follow me. I’ll show you where to find some grass.”

She tried to follow in the footsteps of the larger goose, but after the first step, she could not stretch her legs enough to match the footprints in front of her, and she marked out a trail of her own. Soon the feather bed of snow was marked with the footprints of dozens of other geese, all merging at a grassy place on the east side of a pine tree. Larger and smaller, they all craned their necks to peck-peck at the seeds which lay under stiff grass. A few of the larger drakes raised their heads and examined their surroundings, looking for danger, the dog who roamed the lakeside by day, the coyotes that came at night, and the great winged creature who soared both night and day, and regarded the flock of geese from her nest in the poplar tree. As long as the air was calm, the flock went on finding seeds and fresh grass to fill their insatiable maws, but when a bit of wind blew snow down from the tree above them, they split into small groups, some scooting along until they gathered the speed to fly. Some found resting places in sunny spots, shaking themselves to fluff out their feathers, nestling into the snow, tucking their heads in against their breasts, pulling their claws in close to their bodies.

“Is it over?” the small goose asked.

“Over?” the larger goose replied. “It’s winter. Of course it’s not over.”

“I see other geese flying up in the sky. Where are they going?”

“South where it never snows, where there is always warm weather.”

“Why don’t we go with them? I don’t like this snow.”

“Some of the geese don’t come back,” she warned. The larger goose was silent after that, until the small goose thought she must have fallen asleep. Finally the larger goose spoke again. “Why should we fly away? We have everything we need right here. We’re safe. We have food to eat. You’ll get used to the snow. Go to sleep.”