

Excerpt from
Branta and the Golden Stone

Walter Wangerin Jr.

On the second day of the storm it snowed. The lake stayed black; but the ground grew thick with drifts, and the geese were swallowed altogether.

"Where are you?" Branta called. She buttoned the white scarf above her ears and ran out into the blizzard. "Are you dead?" She stumbled toward the boulder, which was now sunken in snow. "Please, please," she cried, "don't die!"

Branta reached into the snowdrift and touched warm feathers. Immediately, eight geese burst up in a shower of snow and began to race away from her. Branta chased them.

"Wait," she called. "I want to help you!"

But they were afraid of her! They were as scared of Branta as they were of the storm. When she ran at the gander, he opened his wings to fly from her; but the wind slapped him backward, and he rolled like a snowball along the ground. She tried to grab him. "Come with me," she begged. "You'll die out here."

But it was no good. The gander stuck his face in the wind and with a desperate beating of his wings moved farther and farther away. So did they all. Branta had visions of eight geese frozen in the cold, their black eyes closed or clouded. Yet whenever she drew near to them, they ran faster and farther away.

So then, thought Branta, maybe I could scare them into the cottage! She began to wave her arms and to scream louder than the wind. "Go! Go! Go!" she screamed—and for a little while the plan worked. The geese ran in front of her. She aimed them toward the door of her cottage, the warmth of the fire —

But at the last instant they split and raced around the cottage, farther and farther away.

"Oh, you stupid geese!" Branta wept. She stopped and leaned against the cottage wall. "You have to come inside. The cold is going to kill you, don't you know?" What could she possibly do to save them?

"*Gaba-gaba-gaba!*" said the gander. And then, no matter how tired his family was, no matter how windy the world or how cold, they gathered all around him. "*Gaba-gaba-gaba,*" he said—and suddenly Branta knew exactly what she would do.

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