

THERE'S
A SOCK
ON MY ANTLER



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Imagine, the biggest, darkest, scariest forest you've ever stood in, with tree's so tall and bushy that they block out all the light on the ground below, and where the animals creep around in the darkness, making strange noises.

Now, imagine the opposite of that.

One that isn't dark or scary, it's just lovely; a big friendly forest where the only strange noise you can hear is laughter.

That forest is Zen Forest, and its where Poppy and Zander live.

Poppy is a Polar Bear and Zander is a Gander, which is a male Goose.

Polar Bears and Ganders normally don't live in forests, but this is Zen, and things are different here.

“Does my bum look big in these knee pads?”

Poppy ignored Zander, not for the first time that morning, as she was busy trying to find her helmet. Zander, on the other hand, was busy mucking around as usual.

“As soon as I’ve found my helmet, I’m going skateboarding,” Poppy informed him, “whether you’re ready or not.”

“Safety helmet, now where did I see that?” Zander mumbled as he walked around Poppy’s cave, wearing her safety helmet on top of his.

“Give me that!” she grabbed the helmet and fastened it to her own giant head. “let’s go, I’ve been looking forward to skateboarding all week.”

Suddenly, Poppy’s cave door burst open and in ran Freddy the Fox, looking very anxious indeed.

“He’s locked the whole forest down!” he wheezed, “the whole place, nobody’s allowed to leave”

“Hang on,” said Zander, “what are you talking about Freddy? Who’s locked the forest down?”

Freddy helped himself to a glass of water and tried to compose himself.

“Big Andy. His orders. Nobody gets in or out.”

Poppy and Zander looked at each other with dread.

“Big Andy?” asked Poppy “But why has he locked us down?”

Freddy the Fox plopped himself into the armchair and sighed.

“Someone’s put a sock on his Antler, and now Big Andy is really mad.”

A short while later ...

Freddy led Poppy and Zander through the forest trees to the meadow, where all the animals had gathered.

There was a nervous tension in the air; lots of animals spoke in hushed voices so the Deer and Stag’s keeping guard around the meadow didn’t hear them. They were part of Big Andy’s herd; his hoof soldiers, and they did whatever the big boss told them. In the centre of the meadow, Big Andy - a 10ft tall Stag with muscles on his muscles started to address them.

“Most of you know by now, that this morning I awoke to find someone had disrespected me,” his voice was deep and menacing, “by placing this thing on my antler.” Big Andy pointed his hoof to a tiny red sock hanging from one of his Antler spikes, it hung down directly in front of his eyes and meant he could see red wherever he looked- not good for a Stag with anger issues.

“It’s only a sock”, shouted one heroically anonymous voice from the back.

“It’s not just a sock!” Big Andy snapped, “it’s a personal attack on me. This is how it starts ... with a sock.”

Poppy and Zander looked at each other a little confused.

“Tomorrow it could be someone’s pants,” continued Big Andy, “or a sleeping bag, or a fridge freezer.”

“Wow,” Zander whispered, “from a sock to a fridge freezer, that was quite a leap.”

“Excuse me Big Andy,” Poppy interrupted proceedings in her best calm voice, “but Zander and I are just going skateboarding; I need to practice my half pike.”

Zander stared down at his feet as all the eyes in the forest were drawn to the Gander and the Polar Bear wearing knee pads and helmets.

“You’re going nowhere dimples,” Big Andy informed Poppy, “until whoever did this has been caught and punished.”

“That’s no problem,” smiled Poppy, “Zander will find the culprit.”

The noise that escaped from Zander after Poppy’s promise could only be described as a nervous toot.

“What are you doing?” gasped Zander out the side of his beak.

Big Andy stomped towards them. The other animals beside Poppy and Zander moved further away, leaving them both to face the angry Stag coming their way.

“How’s he going to find the offender?” Big Andy was curious.

“He’s the best actor there is,” replied Poppy, pushing Zander in front of her like a proud parent “he’ll act like a Detective and get to the bottom of it.”

“I wouldn’t go that far-” Zander tried to back out, but Big Andy shouted over him.

“Done deal! - the man Goose is going to get to the bottom of it, until he does, nobody leaves.”

Zander swallowed hard. The sweat on his little Gander head started to roll down his face.

“Isn’t this exciting?” Poppy seemed oblivious to the danger she’d just put them in, “now Mr. Detective, let’s bust this case wide open.”

A short while later ...

Zander staggered aimlessly through the forest in disbelief at what had just happened. Poppy sloped behind him, wishing she hadn’t rushed in again without thinking things through.

“How on earth are we going to find the culprit?” Zander eventually broke the silence, “it could be anyone.”

“It’s obvious,” Poppy replied confidently, “we just find whoever is wearing one red sock.”

“That’s not a bad idea Poppy,” the idea took hold in Zander’s mind, “whoever is missing a sock must be the one who put it on Big Andy’s antler.”

Poppy seemed rather pleased with herself. She had come up with the idea and *she* wasn’t even a Detective, unlike Zander ... who also wasn’t a Detective.

As the day wore on, most of the forest inhabitants had allowed Zander to inspect their feet. All except Papa

Raccoon. He and his family were the biggest takers in the forest; regularly going out at night to rummage and grab whatever they could. Most often, they'd take something and have no idea what it was.

"Why do you want to see my feet?" asked Papa Raccoon, hiding them behind a boulder, "I'm not showing you anything until my lawyer gets here."

"You don't have a lawyer, you're a Raccoon," answered Zander.

"And you're not a Detective, you're a Gander!"

Poppy decided it was time for a cool head before the heated argument got any worse.

"We're looking for someone missing a red sock," Poppy told Papa.

Papa Raccoon stepped from behind the stone, his feet were bare, much to Zander's disappointment.

"You mean, a sock like that one there?" Papa nodded up to the tree behind them where a little red sock was dangling from a branch.

"That's the other sock!" shouted Zander.

"It's been there all morning," replied Papa, "I just figured it was Bob's and he'd pick it up later."

"Bob? Who is Bob?" asked Poppy.

Papa Raccoon looked around the forest to make sure nobody was listening.

"If I tell you, you'll leave me alone?" asked Papa under his breath.

"Yes," they both replied.

“Bob is Barbary Bob. He’s a Barbary Macaque monkey, a good guy. But he has this thing for wearing lots and lots of clothes.”

“Where can we find this, Barbary Bob?” Zander asked, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

“He has a place, a treehouse, just near the old farmhouse ruins.”

“Let’s go Poppy,” Zander waddled quickly away, “we need to get to Bob’s place fast.”

As Poppy followed him, she noticed a small Otter down by the riverside making a raft.

“That’s odd,” thought Poppy, “I wonder where her family is?”

Deep in the forest, beside the ruins of a run-down old farmhouse, Poppy and Zander found Barbary Bob’s treehouse. It was lop-sided, with a grass roof and a door made of Bamboo poles.

“Bob,” Poppy yelled “can you come down here please?”

A small head appeared from behind the door and looked at them both curiously.

“Whaddaya want?” the monkey asked.

“I need some help with my investigation,” Zander replied, holding aloft his fake Policeman’s badge.

Barbary Bob stepped from behind the door. He was wearing 4 sweatshirts, 2 pairs of trousers and a pair of leg warmers. He climbed down the tree to the bottom.

“I should arrest you for crimes against fashion,” Zander told him.

“That’s a made-up charge from a phony Police Officer,” Bob replied.

Zander didn’t say anything, but he could tell Bob was a wily one.

“Have you lost a pair of red socks?” Poppy asked, much less combatively.

“Socks?” replied Bob, “Not just socks. I was swinging home last night and didn’t know my suitcase was open - I lost the lot. Socks, shirts, trousers, under crackers ... you name it.”

Poppy and Zander nodded to each other. Now things were becoming clear.

“One of your socks landed on Big Andy’s antler, and now he’s on the warpath Zander informed him. A look of terror crept across Bob’s face.

“Big Andy is looking for me?” he quivered, “I’m dead.”

Zander thought for a second before speaking.

“I think I can fix this but we’re going to need some help.”

“See Bob, Zander has a plan,” smiled Poppy, “everything is going to be alright on the fight.”

Bob took a deep gulp.

“On the *night* Poppy,” said Zander, “alright on the night”.

Later that day ...

Big Andy continued to stomp around the meadow in front of his hoof soldiers. He was waiting for Poppy and Zander to return with the culprit who stuck a sock on his antler.

“Big Andy!” shouted Zander from the hedgerow in front of the tree’s, he was wearing a white scientists coat, “come in here, I know who did it.”

Andy galloped towards Zander, the other Deer and Stags fell into line behind him. Just inside the tree line, Poppy felt the ground tremble as an army of hoof’s approached. Zander quickly flapped to her side and covered behind her enormous legs.

“Who was it then?” bellowed Andy, his giant antlers swung in the air as his head surveyed all around him.

“It wasn’t a someone,” replied Zander, “it was a something. It was a freak weather storm to be precise.”

Big Andy looked angry. “That’s ridiculous,” he replied.

“It’s called a Clothing Cyclone,” lied Zander, quite well it had to be said. “You get showered in socks, drenched in dresses ... basically covered in clothes. It’s a fashion flood.”

As Zander spoke, items of clothing fluttered all around Andy from the sky above. Shirts, trousers, jackets, jumpers, shoes.

A pair of yellow underpants snagged on Andy's antler and drooped over his nose - the mere sight of them freaked him out.

"It's happening again," shouted Andy, "take cover!"

Andy bounced between the tree's shaking his head furiously. Socks, pants, and all manner of garments were tossed into the air as he desperately tried to free himself from the downpour of clothes.

"Every stag for himself," roared Andy. It seemed a little strange to Poppy that a pair of yellow underpants had caused such a reaction.

As Andy raced through the trees towards the meadow, Poppy chased after him.

"Can we go skateboarding now?" she shouted.

"Yes," roared Big Andy, "the lockdown is lifted".

"Yaaay!" Poppy whooped with delight as all around her the clothes kept falling.

Zander looked up to the treetops. Barbary Bob and his friends were still dumping clothes out of bags.

"Job done lads," he laughed, "it's all over. Now let's get these clothes picked up."

As Bob and his friends climbed down to the forest floor, Poppy picked up Zander and sat him on her shoulder.

"I wasn't sure if that would work, but it did," she smiled.

"It was always going to work," replied Zander, "I told you - I'm a scientist."

That was the day a sock fell on Big Andy's antler.

And what a day it was.

Poppy learned to think first before jumping in and saying you can do something, or as Zander pointed out to her afterwards, volunteering others to do it.

Zander realised that acting tough to try and get what you want isn't the best way to do things. It's always better to talk things through, to be honest and open and to try and explain what you're thinking. It makes it easier for others to see things from your point of view.

And Big Andy taught them both, that no matter how big and scary your problem might be ... when you work together and combine your brains, there isn't a single problem you can't overcome.

That's what friendship is all about - caring, sharing and helping.



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