

# ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



## 11. East Wind

As Anta finished his story, Carol took her last sip of cocoa.

“And Anta Claus and Santa Claus have been sharing Christmas Eve delivery duties ever since,” she said. “Oh! Oh! Oh! and Ho! Ho! Ho!”

The snowy owls perched on the sleigh glided away. The forest animals stood. Silently, the ring broke apart. The moose, deer, elk, beavers, wolves, and wildcats drifted across the moon-bright lake. Beyond the lakeshore, they disappeared into the dark forest.

Anta looked toward Carol. “You’ve heard my story,” he said. “Now tell me yours.”

“I’m ten years old,” Carol said. “Not much of a story to tell.”

“Oh! Oh! All children have stories,” said Anta. “And they are usually more interesting than the ones grown-ups tell.”

Carol slurped the marshmallows at the bottom of her mug. “My real home is in Princeton, New Jersey,” she said. “My parents are professors at Princeton University. They teach about dinosaurs. I love my house. It’s full of books and dinosaur bones. There’s even a raptor skeleton standing in my living room.”

“Splendid!” said Anta.

“I like Christmastime in Princeton the best,” Carol went on. “We cut down our own tree and decorate it with ornaments we’ve collected on trips around the world. My favorite ornament is a red glass bulb from Japan. My name is written on it in silver glitter.”

“Oh! Oh!”

“But this year...” Carol said. She lowered her voice. “This year Christmas is different.”

Anta slid the thermos and cocoa mugs under the seat. “Time to go,” he said.

“We have a delivery schedule to keep. But first, we must return you to Connecticut.”

Back to her grandmother’s house was the last place Carol wanted to go. She liked Anta. Despite his odd job, he seemed honest and trustworthy. Maybe, if she were good, she could a hitch ride with him to Tierra Del Fuego at the tip of South America. After all, Anta was stopping there anyway on his way back to Antarctica.

“Do you have many deliveries in the United States?” she asked.

Anta nodded “From Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon. From Long Beach, New Jersey to Long Beach, California,” he said. “There are naughty children across the country.”

Carol took a deep breath. “I have an idea,” she said. “Since you have all those deliveries to make, and since you’re on a tight schedule, why don’t I come along with you and be your helper. Like Tis and Twas. I could find presents in your sack and feed the yaks snowballs. You can take me back to Connecticut after your presents are delivered in the United States.”

The yaks turned their heads. An easterly gust of wind swept through the sleigh.

Anta winked at the yaks. “A helper? Interesting idea,” he said. “Perhaps I could use some assistance.”

East Wind blew harder.

“OK, Carol, you are now my official temporary helper.”

“Hurrah!” Carol said. Her voice echoed across the lake. “Look out naughty children! Here comes Anta Claus!”

Anta grumbled. He cracked his whip in the air. “Get on, lads!” he cried. “Across America we go. Oh! Oh! Oh!”

The eight yaks raced for the star-spangled sky. East Wind pushed the sleigh swiftly westward.

“It’s always good to have East Wind at my back,” said Anta.

“Tell me about East Wind,” said Carol. “What is this wind like?”

“East Wind is a happy and fun wind to be around,” said Anta. “He’s dependable and will always take you where you want to go.”

The carpet of moonlit forest below turned into a sheet of black. A map of the US ran through Carol’s head.

“We’re passing over one of the Great Lakes,” she said. “Probably Lake Erie.”

A ribbon of lights appeared on the horizon. Soon the sleigh was flying over a large city.

“Oh! Oh! Ohio!” Anta shouted.

He pulled on the reins and aimed the sleigh at a cluster of twinkling Christmas lights. It landed on a large flat roof.

At once, Carol hopped from the sleigh. She grabbed the black sack from the back seat. It was heavier than she expected. Lifting it with both arms, she helped Anta sling it over his shoulder.

“Anta’s helper at your service, sir,” she said with a quick salute.

“Wait here, Carol,” Anta said. “This won’t take long. The lad who lives here, James Tag, is a scribbler. All year, James scribbled in his picture books and on his bedroom walls. Tis and Twas usually pack just the right gift to teach scribblers a lesson.”

As Anta trudged to a nearby chimney, Carol packed snowballs for the yaks. East Wind blew stronger and Carol zipped up her parka. As before, she heard whispers in the wind.

This time a man’s voice said, “*Carol Snow! Carol Snow!*”

Carol stood up straight. “What? What do you want?”

“*Carol Snow! Carol Snow!*” the wind whispered. “*Which way will you go? Which way will you go, Carol Snow?*”

The yaks snorted.

Carol turned into the wind. “I don’t understand?” she called. “What are you asking me? What do you want?”

She eyed the scroll on the front seat of the sleigh.

“I’m trying to be good,” she said. “I’m helping Anta. I don’t want to be on your Naughty List.”

Anta returned to the sleigh, chuckling to himself. Carol helped him remove his sack and dropped it in the back seat. Together, they climbed into the front.

“Yes, the trolls packed James, the scribbler, a gift he deserves,” Anta said, laughing some more. “A giant rubber eraser! Oh! Oh!”

“East Wind was talking to me,” Carol said. “He asked me more odd questions.”

Anta gripped the reins and nodded. “The Four Winds are full of mystery,” he said. “At times they baffle me completely.”

From Ohio, Anta flew south to Alabama, north to Michigan, south to Mississippi, and back north to Wisconsin. In this zigzagging manner, the sleigh made its way across the country. At each stop, Carol helped Anta Claus load the sack onto his shoulder and cared for the yaks.

Above Louisiana, Carol pointed to a wide ribbon of water. "The Mississippi River," she said. "One Mississippi...two Mississippi...three Mississippi. And now we're in Minnesota."

On a rooftop in Iowa, while Anta was checking his list, Carol sneaked a peek inside the black sack. She held it open with both hands and ducked in her head. It smelled of onions and stinky feet. Instead of finding a pile of packages, however, she spied long tidy rows of wooden shelves. Boxes, bags, jars, and cages containing Anta's gifts filled the shelves. Each shelf bore a label telling what group of naughty children the gifts were for.

"Cheaters," Carol read off one label. "Screamers, Stealers, and Spitters," she read off some others. She leaned farther into the bag. The shelves continued on and on. But for the stink, she would have crawled right inside. "Bullies, Blabbermouths, Back-talkers, and Biters," she read.

Anta's voice startled her, and she straightened. Anta was staring at her with a raised eyebrow.

"While you were nosing around in my sack, did you happen to spy a gift for Adam Sulky, the lad who lives in this house," he said. "Adam is on the Naughty list for being a crab. All year long he pouted, whined, and complained."

"Adam Sulky? Yes, I did," said Carol. "His gift is on the shelf labeled *Grouches*. Adam gets a bag of crabapples."

"Oh! Oh!" Anta said. Then he shouldered the black sack and stomped to the chimney.

"Goodness," Carol said, watching him leave. "I never knew there were so many ways children can be naughty."

The sleigh continued across the country. The yaks flew south to Texas and back north to South Dakota. Carol had never worked harder.

On a rooftop in Wyoming, she said, "Flying through the time zones adds extra hours to your night. Doesn't it, Anta?"

"Yes, Christmas Eve is extra-long for the yaks and me," said Anta. "It's now midnight, and I've repeated this hour three times already."

In Montana, something curious happened. After Anta dropped down the chimney, Carol spotted hoof prints on the snowy rooftop. Behind the prints ran parallel tracks like the ones Anta's sleigh runners left after he landed.

"Hoof prints and sleigh tracks," Carol said. "That can mean only one thing. Santa Claus has been here. So why did Anta also come to this house?"

Anta returned to his sleigh looking puzzled. He checked his list and shook his head.

“What’s the problem?” Carol asked. “Did you deliver your gift?”

“Not a problem, really,” Anta said. “A girl named Tonya Tough lives in this house. Tonya was on the Naughty list because she got into many fights this year.”

Carol eyed the hoof prints in the snow. “What happened down there?”

“When I landed in the fireplace I found presents under a decorated Christmas tree,” Anta said. “And Tonya’s stocking was filled with toys and candy.”

Carol’s eyes brightened. “That means Santa was really here!” she said. “That means Tonya’s name switched to the Nice List. And it switched this Christmas Eve.”

Anta checked his list again. “Yes, Tonya Tough’s name is gone. Good for her.”

“How did it happen?” Carol asked. “What did Tonya do?”

Anta scratched his black whiskers. “I never know how naughty children switch lists,” he said. “But Tonya found a way. As I said, the Four Winds are full of mystery.”



