

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



16. North Wind

North Wind blew. It pushed Anta's sleigh swiftly southward along the West Coast of the United States.

Carol pointed to the East. "Mt. Rainier!" she said.

She pointed to the ocean. "Look, Anta, a pod of gray whales. They're swimming south to the warmer waters of Mexico."

"Oh! Oh! The big fellows are spouting a Christmas greeting to us." Anta said. "I wish we had time to fly down and say hello, but we have no time to spare."

Carol slumped in her seat. She thought, *"Maybe now is a good time to ask Anta to take me to Tierra Del Fuego. Ever since the meeting with the polar bears he's been in good spirits."*

She scooped closer to Anta. "North Wind sure is moving the sleigh fast," she said. "Wouldn't it be helpful if the wind pushes you all the way through South America?"

"North Wind is not the best travel companion," Anta said. "He is the moodiest wind of all. He's gloomy and a bit of a blowhard."

"Oh," said Carol. "On Christmas Eve, it's better to have a flying partner who's cheerful and helpful."

"Once I finish my deliveries in California, I'll ask West Wind to carry us to the East Coast," said Anta. "Now there's a fine wind. She's warm and gentle and the fastest wind of all. West Wind will have you home in minutes."

Carol was about to say more when Anta pointed to a rooftop.

"Down we go, lads," he said. "Oh! Oh! Oregon."

When the sleigh landed, Anta checked his Naughty List. He grumbled and quickly rolled it up again. Without a word, he grabbed his sack from the back of the sleigh.

"What's wrong, Anta?" Carol asked. "Is there a problem with this delivery?"

“All my deliveries involve a problem,” Anta said. “This delivery is for a sneak.”

Carol sat up straight. “A sneak? What present does Tis and Twas pack for sneaks?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Anta said, and he stomped toward the chimney.

Carol stepped from the sleigh. She packed a snowball and fed it to Orangeback Yak. She looked around the rooftop.

“A sneak lives here?” she said. “I wonder how many sneaks are on the Naughty List,”

North Wind blew harder. A puff of powdery snow swept through the sleigh. Carol froze. She heard a voice again. But this voice she knew well.

“Carol! Carol, where are you?”

Her grandmother was calling to her.

“Carol! Come back. Why did you sneak out again? I can’t find you.”

Carol faced into the wind. “I’m here, Grandma,” she shouted. “I’m all right.”

“Carol! I’m worried about you. Where did you go?”

“I’m in California, Grandma. I’m safe and with a friend.”

Anta appeared on the chimney. He plodded up to the sleigh and tossed his sack in the back seat.

“I heard my grandma calling to me,” Carol said. “She knows I sneaked out of her house. She’s worried.”

“Oh! Oh!” said Anta, taking up the reins.

Carol shook her head. “This is not good. I didn’t mean to worry her.”

The sleigh continued southward. North Wind blew in gusts and spurts. The sleigh bucked and jerked.

“Yes, North Wind is not a good travel companion,” Anta said.

The yaks landed on a rooftop in northern California. Christmas lights twinkled on every house on the street but this one.

Anta checked his list.

“Another-first timer,” he said. “A girl named Pear; Twist lives here. I could use your help again.”

Carol looked surprised. “What for?” she asked. “Why is Pearl on the Naughty List?”

“Pearl is a dodger,” said Anta. “She dodges her homework at home and schoolwork at school. At home, she dodges her chores, and at school, she dodges her classroom jobs. She dodges rules both at home and school.”

Carol shrugged. "There must be a reason."

"Oh! Oh! That's what I hope you might find out," said Anta.

Carol climbed onto Anta's shoulders. Anta scrambled up the chimney and jumped in.

Carol's second chimney drop was much different from the first. She dropped at the same slow rate. But this time the chimney walls were gray. This time ghostly shadows floated around her. She recognized some of the dark silhouettes. There was her teacher at school. There was her grandmother. There was Jinx the Great Dane. This time she was eager for the trip down the chimney to end.

Anta landed in a small fireplace. He lifted Carol off his shoulders, and they stepped into a small room.

While Anta rummaged through his black sack, Carol inspected the room. Other than the lack of a Christmas tree, nothing was unusual. But the ballet shoes on the floor, the violin case on an armchair, the tutoring books on a shelf, and the gymnastics bag by the door caught her interest.

"Pearl is a busy girl," she whispered to Anta. "Ballet, violin, gymnastics, tutoring, and who knows what else?"

Anta held a bouquet of dried flowers. "Oh?" he said.

"I don't think Pearl dodges her chores and schoolwork on purpose," Carol said. "I think she's so busy she forgets to do them."

Anta dropped the dried flowers into Pearl's stocking.

"Oh! Oh!"

"But I think I can solve this problem," said Carol.

On a writing desk, she found some paper. Being good at origami, she folded one sheet into a fancy bracelet. On another piece she wrote a note:

*Pearl,
This is a magic Christmas bracelet.
Wear it at home and school.
It will help you remember things.
Try not to dodge your responsibilities,
and next year you'll be off the Naughty List.
Anta's Claus's helper,
Carol Snow*

Carol showed the note and bracelet to Anta. He scratched his whiskers and nodded.

"It takes a kid to know a kid," he said. "But if you put these in Pearl's stocking,

the Four Winds will blow them out.”

Carol picked up Pearl’s ballet slipper. She slipped the note and bracelet inside it. She left the slipper on the hearth.

“That should do it,” she said. “Pearl will find the note on Christmas morning after she empties her stocking.”

Silently, the pair rose up the chimney. Back in the sleigh, Anta said something that made Carol proud.

“Well done, helper. I believe next Christmas Eve the Naughty List will be a bit shorter.”