

# ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



## 17. Overboard

Over California, Anta Claus checked his Naughty List again. Carol's name remained at the bottom.

"Time is running out, lads," he called to the yaks.

Carol lay asleep on the seat beside Anta. He pulled a yak-wool blanket from under the seat and covered her.

"There's only an hour before the first light of Christmas Day," he said. "After that, it will be too late for Carol to switch lists."

The yaks nodded their horned heads.

"Carol has been good all night" Anta went on. "If I take her back to Connecticut she will find no gifts from Santa. Only the old sneaker I left her. I wish I knew how to help. What does she need to do to get off the Naughty List?"

North Wind gave Anta no answer. The wind continued to gust, making steering the sleigh difficult.

Anta heard a voice beside him.

"Look, the Goldengate Bridge."

Carol was awake and leaning over the side of the sleigh. She rubbed her eyes with her knuckles and yawned.

"But the bridge isn't golden," she said. "It's red."

"Oh! Oh! San Francisco," said Anta.

"I've been to this city before," Carol said. "My parents gave a dinosaur lecture at the university. But I never had a view like this."

Anta made many deliveries throughout the Bay Area. He left a pair of false teeth for a boy who bit his classmates. A girl who plays video games after bedtime received a package of dead batteries.

"In big cities and small towns, there are naughty children everywhere," Anta

said.

Soon the sleigh was soaring south again. As it flew over the moonlit ocean, Carol spied something peculiar. Three tall ships with billowing green and red sails were sailing toward shore. Colorful Christmas lights lined their tall masts. Their decks shone golden like glow sticks. But not a single sailor appeared on any of them.

“What are they, Anta?” Carol asked. “What are those ships?”

“Oh! Oh! The three Christmas ships,” Anta said. “On Christmas Eve the Four Winds blow them from one coastline to the other. When the ships reach shore, it marks the start of Christmas morning.”

“The Christmas ships are not far from the California coastline,” said Carol. “Christmas morning must be close.”

Carol leaned farther out of the sleigh. As if in a trance, she watched the phantom ships. Inch by inch they lured her farther over the rim.

“Careful, Carol,” Anta called. “North Wind is still huffing and puffing.”

Then it happened. Another blast of wind struck the sleigh. The sleigh rocked and Carol’s feet left the floor. For one breathless second, she teetered on the top edge. Her arms thrashed wildly. The sleigh rocked again and over she went.

“Yikes!” she cried.

The yaks awaited no orders. Like stones, they dropped toward the ocean. Anta watched in horror as the small figure tumbled head over heels toward the dark water.

Without a second to spare, the sleigh drew alongside Carol.

“Yikes!” she shouted.

“Don’t fear!” Anta called out. “I’ll grab you!”

“Yikes!”

In one swift motion, Anta reached out, grabbed Carol by the leg, and hauled her into the sleigh.

Inches above the foamy ocean breakers, the yaks pulled out of their dive. With sopping bellies, they rose toward the moon.

Carol lay crumpled on the floor of the sleigh. “I...I think I’m going to be sick,” she said.

“No problem, that,” Anta said.

Carol sniffled. “No problem? Yes, I am a problem,” she said. “I’ve been a problem this whole trip. I’ve been a problem this whole year.”

Anta Claus said nothing.

“I’ve been a sneak,” Carol went on. “I’ve been a sneak at my grandmother’s

house and a sneak at school. I even sneaked out tonight and hid in your sleigh. Now my grandma is worried. I've been a problem to everyone."

Still Anta remained silent. His eyes stayed fixed on the backs of his colorful yaks.

Carol looked at the scroll on the seat beside her.

"My name is on the Naughty List, isn't it?" she said. "That's why you were on my grandmother's roof in the first place. You delivered one of your bad presents."

Carol wiped away some tears. "But I'm sorry, Anta. I'm sorry for being a sneak and lying to you. I didn't come with you tonight to be your helper. I wanted you to take me to Tierra Del Fuego."

She sobbed some more.

"I'll also say sorry to my grandmother, parents, and teacher," she said. "I've caused them all to worry. I'll never be sneaky again."

Anta grabbed the Naughty List. He looked at it, pretending to check his next delivery. Instead, he looked for Carol's name. It was still there, although fainter.

"You know, Anta, I now know children have a choice whether to be naughty or nice," said Carol went. "That's why your job is important. On Christmas Eve you remind children it's wiser to be nice. One naughty kid can ruin the whole game. I know I'm on the Naughty List this year. But I'll never be on it again. I promise."

Once more Anta checked his list. Carol's name was fainter still. He watched the printing fade until it was almost invisible. Then the name was gone.

The yaks snorted. A gentle breeze blew from the north, south, east, and west.

"Good for you, Carol," Anta told himself. "Good for you."