

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



18. Santa Claus

The Anta's sleigh flew over the silvery desert. The warmer air made Carol sleepier. She yawned and snuggled close to Anta. Her eyelids slid closed. But they shot back open when the air filled with the jingling of bells.

"Oh, those bells!" Anta cried. "Those jingling jangling bells!"

Carol looked over and saw something she had only seen in books and videos. Flying alongside Anta's black sleigh was Santa Claus in his shiny red sleigh pulled by the eight reindeer.

Santa appeared as Carol expected. The white beard. The red suit. The round belly. The pointy red hat with the white ball on the tip. There they were!

Santa waved to Anta with a red mitten. "Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas, Anta," he called out. "How about another race? Hawaii and back. This time no help from the Four Winds. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

"Sorry, Santa, I'm running behind tonight," Anta said.

"Yes, the Four Winds mentioned the Naughty List is long this year," Santa said. "Sad."

Anta pointed to a wispy cloud near the horizon. "We need to talk, Santa," he said. "Can we meet on that cloud?"

Moments later, Anta's sleigh and Santa's sleigh were parked on top of the silky cloud. The eight reindeer looked toward the eight yaks and raised their noses. Far below, a coyote howled.

Carol had no idea what kept the sleighs from falling through the cloud. But they remained standing there as if on solid ground. She tried not to appear too excited being this close to Santa Claus. Anta's feelings would be hurt. But when Santa winked at her, she couldn't help letting out a small peep.

"Ho! Ho! There's your new helper, Anta," Santa said.

Anta smiled at Carol. "This is Carol Snow from Connecticut and Princeton, New Jersey," he said.

Carol pulled her pink nightie over her knees. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Claus," she said.

Santa's eyes twinkled with moonlight. "The Four Winds have told me much about you this evening, Carol Snow," he said. "You've helped some children on the Naughty List."

Carol sat up straight in her seat. "A few," she said.

"Ho! Ho! And I also heard you wrote a Christmas carol."

Carol glanced at Anta. "The yaks helped," she said.

Anta gestured to the far side of the cloud. "Can we get out of our sleighs and talk, Santa?" he said. He looked down at Carol. "In private."

"Certainly," Santa said.

As if walking on air, the two Clauses strolled across the wispy cloud. On the far side, they stopped and faced each other.

Carol strained to overhear the conversation. But the wind drowned out everything they said. Only an occasional *Oh! Oh! Oh!* and *Ho! Ho! Ho!* reached her ears. At times, the pair looked over at her and laughed some more.



"Great bother, this," she said.

To the east, the horizon turned pink. Christmas morning was moments away.

Carol lay down on the front seat of the sleigh. She pulled the yak wool blanket over her. What a night it had been. She thought about meeting Anta, the blizzard, Anta's story on the lake, the journey across the US, the trips down the chimneys, the polar bears, and her tumble from the sleigh. It all seemed like a fuzzy dream.

The warm breeze blew. How sleepy it made her. As the voices of the two Claus's droned on in the distance, Carol closed her eyes. She heard music. The yaks were humming her a Christmas lullaby. Soon she was sound asleep.