

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



20. Christmas Morning

Carol awoke. She looked around the room. What a surprise! She lay in her own bed in her own bedroom in her own house in Princeton, New Jersey. She threw aside her comforter and leaped out of bed. Christmas morning! What boy or girl doesn't leap out of bed on Christmas morning?

But how did she get here? She remembered the red sleigh on the roof. She remembered strong arms carrying her down the chimney. And she remembered a face with twinkling eyes and a snowy beard. Did Santa Claus bring her home?

A voice came from downstairs. "Carol, are you up, yet?"

"Merry Christmas," said someone else. "Come on down."

How could it be? Could her mother and father be downstairs? She ran to the top of the stairs. Yes, her parents stood in the hallway. They smiled up at her with open arms. She bounded down the steps. Soon she was smothered with hugs and kisses.

"You're here?" Carol said. "You're not in Tierra Del Fuego. You're home."

"Yes, we came home to be with our daughter on Christmas," said her father.

"What we did was wrong, Carol," said her mother. "We split up our family at Christmastime."

"A wind storm blew away all traces of our fossil dig," her father said. "It was as though the wind was telling us something. It was telling us we should be with Carol."

"We took a plane straight to New York to be here early this morning," said her mother. "With a strong tailwind, our plane made the flight in record time."

"Now come and see the living room," said her father.

Together Carol and her parents walked into the next room. In a corner stood a tall Christmas tree decorated with Carol's favorite ornaments. On the top sat an

angel and underneath stood piles of wrapped packages. Carol's stocking hung from the fireplace mantle bulging with goodies. The raptor skeleton wore tinsel and its bone blinked with Christmas lights.

"It's just like in a dream I had," Carol said.

Carol's grandmother sat in an armchair. "Santa Claus was here," she said.

Carol laughed. "Yes, I know."

She hugged her grandmother.

"Grandma, I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry for sneaking out last night. I'm sorry to have worried you. I'm sorry for all the sneaking around I've done at your house."

"All forgiven," her grandmother said. "I'm just glad your parents found you safe in this house."

Carol's mother held out a red glass ball. "We saved one ornament for you to put on the tree," she said.

Carol grinned. She took the red CAROL ornament and hung it near the middle of the tree. The silver glitter sparkled in the blinking tree lights.

"Now let's open presents," said Carol's father.

Carol's father was the present presenter. Before handing out each gift he read aloud the label on it. Carol received packages from her parents and her grandmother. She opened the presents marked FROM SANTA with extra curiosity.

At length, Carol's father grabbed the final package under the tree. He studied the label and looked puzzled.

"To Carol. From Anta," he read. "Someone left off the S."

"No, Anta is correct," Carol said. "Anta Claus of Antarctica."

Carol clawed open the package. Inside she found a new pair of running sneakers. They were in her favorite color and style.

Under the shoes was a note. She read it to herself.

Carol,
Thank you for being my Christmas Eve helper. I know your name won't be on the Naughty
List next year, but next Christmas Eve let's do another round of the U. S. together. Oh! Oh! OK?
Your friend,
Anta

Carol beamed. "OK!" she said.

Later, she would tell her parents and grandmother more about Anta Claus and his eight yaks who deliver appropriate presents to naughty children on Christmas Eve. She would tell them her name was on the Naughty List, but it would never appear there again.

At school, Carol would also spread the word about Anta Claus. Of course, some of her schoolmates knew his name already. But Anta Claus of Antarctica wouldn't remain unknown to the others for long.

For now, Carol wished to enjoy this Christmas morning with her parents and grandmother. There was still her Christmas stocking to unload.