

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



6. Talk

Anta Claus stared at the girl standing in his sleigh. The bottom of her pink nightie hung below a blue down parka. Long brown pigtails drooped from beneath a knitted stocking hat. She wore white mittens and red snow boots.

“You’re not Santa Claus,” she said again. “Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, or Saint Nick. You’re not any of those guys, are you?”

Anta waved his mittened hands. “I am certainly not.”

“Then who are you?”

“I’m Anta Claus of Antarctica,” Anta said.

The girl made a face. “*Anta* Claus?” she said, stressing the first syllable. “I’ve never heard of you.”

“And it’s a good thing you haven’t, young lady,” Anta said.

Anta was so flustered by the appearance of a girl in his sleigh it took him a moment to ask, “Who are *you*? What are you doing here?”

“I’m Carol Snow,” the girl said. “I was hoping to hitch a ride with Santa.”

Anta paused to think. “*Carol Snow? This is the sneaky girl I visited back in Connecticut.*”

“How did you manage to sneak out of your house without anyone noticing?” he asked.

Carol tightened her coat around her neck. “I’m staying at my grandmother’s house for now,” she said. “She never notices anything I do. My Mom and Dad are in Tierra Del Fuego digging up dinosaur bones.”

A blast of wind struck the sleigh. As it rocked back and forth, Anta turned toward the yaks to gain control.

“Steady now, lads,” he said. “Our next stop is coming up.” He turned back toward the girl. “Sit down, Carol. The wind is acting tricky tonight.”

Carol sat on the wooden seat. She studied the black sack next to her. She opened the top to peek inside. A strong whiff of rotten fish greeted her.

“Phew!” she said, wrinkling her nose. “What’s in there?”

Before Anta could answer, Carol climbed over the back of the front seat. She sat next to him and looked over the side of the sleigh. Colorful Christmas lights twinkling on the ground met the stars twinkling in the sky.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” she said. “The earth is all lit up for Christmas. Where are your yaks taking us, Anta?”

“After my next delivery in Maine, we’re taking you straight back to your grandmother’s house in Connecticut.”

Carol’s eyes brightened. “Delivery?” she said. “You mean you deliver presents to boys and girls as Santa does?”

Anta Claus scratched his black whiskers. “Not exactly,” he said. “Santa and I both have Christmas Lists. But they are different.”

“Oh,” said Carol.

She spotted the scroll on the seat beside her. She turned and studied the black sack on the back seat. “I heard you mention something about a Naughty List.”

“That’s right. The other Mr. Claus delivers presents to children on the Nice List. I deliver different kinds of gifts, appropriate ones, to boys and girls on the Naughty List. Both Santa and I receive our lists on Christmas Eve.”

Carol thought about the rotten fish odor she sniffed in the black sack. She thought about seeing Anta climb out of her grandmother’s chimney. Why was he there?

“From who?” Carol asked. “Who sends the lists to you and Santa?”

“The Four Winds—North Wind, South Wind, East Wind, and West Wind,” Anta explained. “On Christmas Eve the winds deliver the Nice List to the North Pole where Santa lives and the Naughty List to the South Pole where I live.”

“Oh,” Carol said again.

“Before the start of my around-the-world journey tonight, I studied the Naughty List so my two troll helpers, Tis and Twas, knew what to pack.”

Carol was silent a moment before asking, “How does a girl or boy get on your list, the naughty one?”

“The Four Winds decide,” said Anta. “All year long they blow through houses and backyards. They blow into classrooms and across playgrounds. They listen to every boy and girl in the world. It’s the winds who judge which list children go on.”

“Oh,” said Carol one more time.

“Oh! Oh!” Anta said. He pointed to the ground. “There’s the next roof, lads.”

He pulled the reins. Carol’s stomach dropped as the eight yaks took the sleigh downward. They made another perfect landing on the slanted roof of a brown wooden house.

Anta unrolled his list. He studied it and grumbled.

“Wait here, Carol,” he said. “If you want, you can make some snowballs for the yaks to munch on. Snowballs are their favorite treat.”

Anta grabbed his black sack from the back seat. He tramped to the nearby chimney and soon was gone.

Carol remained in the sleigh. She eyed the rolled-up list on the seat beside her. The paper was old with browned edges. The top part stuck out, and she read the word NAUGHTY.

“How I would like to sneak a peek at that list,” she said. “If my name is there, Santa will fly right past my grandma’s house tonight. My Christmas wish won’t happen.”

Her hand inched toward the scroll. As her fingers touched the paper, a stiff breeze blew and she stopped. She took a deep breath and climbed out of the sleigh.

“Who wants a snowball?” she asked the yaks.

Carols bent over and packed two snowballs. She held them on her palms for Yellowback Yak and Orangeback Yak to lick with their long narrow tongues. Then they chomped into the balls as a horse would an apple.

“Careful, don’t eat the snow too fast,” Carol said. “You don’t want a brain freeze.”

Carol hopped foot to foot to keep warm. She packed two more snowballs and held them out for Redback Yak and Purpleback Yak to lick. Again, her eyes landed on the scroll on the front seat.

“If my name is on that list, it’s because I’ve been a sneak,” she said. “And if I sneak a peek at the list that would make me more of a sneak.”

The next two snowballs went to Blueback Yak and Greenback Yak.

Carol felt the wind on her face. “I wonder how naughty kids need to be before the Four Winds puts them on the Naughty List,” she said. “I wonder if there’s a way to get off Anta’s list and onto Santa’s.”

As she fed snowballs to Whiteback Yak and Blackback Yak, she saw Anta Claus climbing down from the chimney.

Grumbling, Anta plodded to the sleigh. Both he and Carol climbed into the front seat. Anta cast a glance at the scroll and another at the girl.

“Back to Connecticut we go, lads,” he called to the yaks. “But this detour must be quick. We have a tight schedule to keep. Oh! Oh! Ohhh!”