

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



1. South Wind

The blizzard that had been brewing now blew full force. A stiff headwind whipped the sleigh side to side. Grey clouds darkened the sky. Both the stars above and the Christmas lights below vanished.

Anta clutched the reins tightly. The wind pulled back his black whiskers. His hat pointed straight behind him.

“Great bother, this, lads,” he called out. “South Wind is giving us a show.”

Carol pulled her stocking cap low over her ears. She said nothing. Her thoughts remained on the Naughty List and her Christmas Wish.

“Maybe Anta visited my grandma’s house by mistake,” she told herself. “I wasn’t that naughty this year. Was I? I didn’t mean to be. Maybe Santa will still come and read my note.”

The wind continued to play with the sleigh, batting it one way and the other. Anta pulled the reins and the sleigh dipped below a large cloud. He steered the yaks left to avoid another one. Up, down, right, and left the sleigh flew.

Carol felt every roller-coaster turn in her stomach. The sleigh rocked like a cradle, and she slid back and forth on the seat.

“Sorry,” she said when she bumped into Anta.

“Sorry again,” she said when she bumped into him a second time.

To make things worse, it started to snow. Instead of falling downward, the icy flakes blew straight into Anta’s and Carol’s faces. His black beard turned white. Her pigtails turned to icicles. Visibility was zero.

Before the sleigh, the yaks bravely forced their way through the flurry. Their shaggy wool was caked with snow. Ice coated their curved horns.

“Get on, Redback Yak! Get on, Orangeback Yak!” Anta shouted above the howl of the gale. “Keep going, lads! We need to take Carol home!”

But South Wind grew stronger, and the yaks grew weary. Their heads hung. Their shaggy backs sagged.

Anta pulled on the reins. "OK Whiteback Yak and Blackback Yak," he said. "You've had enough. We'll turn north again. We'll let South Wind take us where she will. We'll return Carol to Connecticut when the weather clears."

The sleigh whipped around. The wind pushed it northward at a remarkable rate.

"Oh! Oh!" Anta said. "I'm not sure where South Wind is taking us. But she's taking us there fast."

More dark clouds gathered around the sleigh. In all directions, the scene turned inky black.

Carol shivered. Beside her, Anta Claus appeared as a ghostly shadow. The yaks were monstrous, gray shapes.

The wind rushed around the sleigh. It whistled in the runners and whooshed through the reins. In all that noise, Carol thought she heard a voice. She listened hard. Yes, the wind was whispering to her.

"Carol Snow! Carol Snow! What do you know Carol Snow?" the voice said. *"Carol Snow! What do you know?"*

Carol sunk low in her seat.

"Carol Snow! Carol Snow!" the wind whispered. *"What do you know? What do you know?"*

Carol turned toward Anta. "The wind is talking to me," she said.

Anta nodded. "Not only do the Four Winds listen, but they also have voices," he said. "I've had many excellent conversations with the winds."

Something up ahead caught Carol's eye. Stretching across the sleigh's flight path was a translucent curtain of light. The curtain shimmered and rippled in shades of blue, red, yellow, and green.

"The northern lights, Anta!" Carol cried. "The aurora borealis!"

"We have the likes of those in the South, aurora australis, the southern lights," Anta said. "I often encounter both auroras on my rounds. Get ready now, Carol. You're in for a surprise."

As the sleigh approached the waving streamers of light, Carol's skin tingled. Buggy tickles ran up her arms and legs.

Carol giggled. "It feels as though my skin is covered with bubbles."

As she spoke, her long pigtails rose. Up, up they went until they stood on end.

“Look, Anta! Look at me!” she cried. “My hair’s gone wacky!”

Anta turned, grinning. Every hair on his head, beard included, stood straight up as well. Even the white ball on the tip of his hat pointed upward

The pair exploded with laughter.

As the northern lights drew closer, the entire sleigh became charged with electricity. The runners glowed. Snakes of current zipped down the reins in Anta’s hands. The backs of the colorful yaks crackled like sparklers on the Fourth of July.

Carol looked forward. The curtain of light was only a few yards away.

“Is this safe, Anta?” she asked. “Can we pass through the northern lights without getting zapped?”

“Have no fear,” Anta said. “Curtains up!”

As if on command, the curtain of light rose like a curtain on a stage. The sleigh sped safely underneath it

“It’s showtime!” Carol cried.

Beyond the northern lights, the stars returned. And what stars there were! So plentiful did they fill the sky that the Milky Way appeared as a creamy river. The constellations—Orion, the hunter; Taurus, the bull; and Cygnus, the swan—were no longer simple dot-to-dot patterns, but detailed golden pictures.

Carol pointed northward. “There’s the North Star,” she said. “If it were directly overhead, we’d be on the North Pole where Santa Claus lives.”

Anta nodded. “Santa is lucky to have a star to guide him home.”

Carol leaned over the side of the sleigh. Stretching from horizon to horizon was a dark forest.

“No towns, no roads, not a single light,” she said. “Just miles and miles of fir trees. Are we lost?”

“Oh! Oh! No!” Anta said. “The stars will tell us where we are.”

A short distance farther, the sleigh flew over a frozen lake, a small white oval in the dark ground.

“After the windstorm and snowstorm, you need a rest, lads,” Anta called to his yak team. He pulled on the reins. “Down we go to that lake. Once we land, we’ll see what the stars have to show us.”