

## All About

# Who's That Knocking on Christmas Eve?



**Hi!**

I saw the Aurora Borealis one night many years ago. I awoke to hear cries of wonder from outside. People ran outside into the snow in their pj's to see an amazing sight. The sky was filled with a strange, flickering curtain of light. As the Aurora Borealis turned pale green and turquoise, it seemed to herald the mysterious presence of something magical.

My answer to, "What could that supernatural presence be?" is in my book, Who's That Knocking on Christmas Eve? Can you guess who it is?

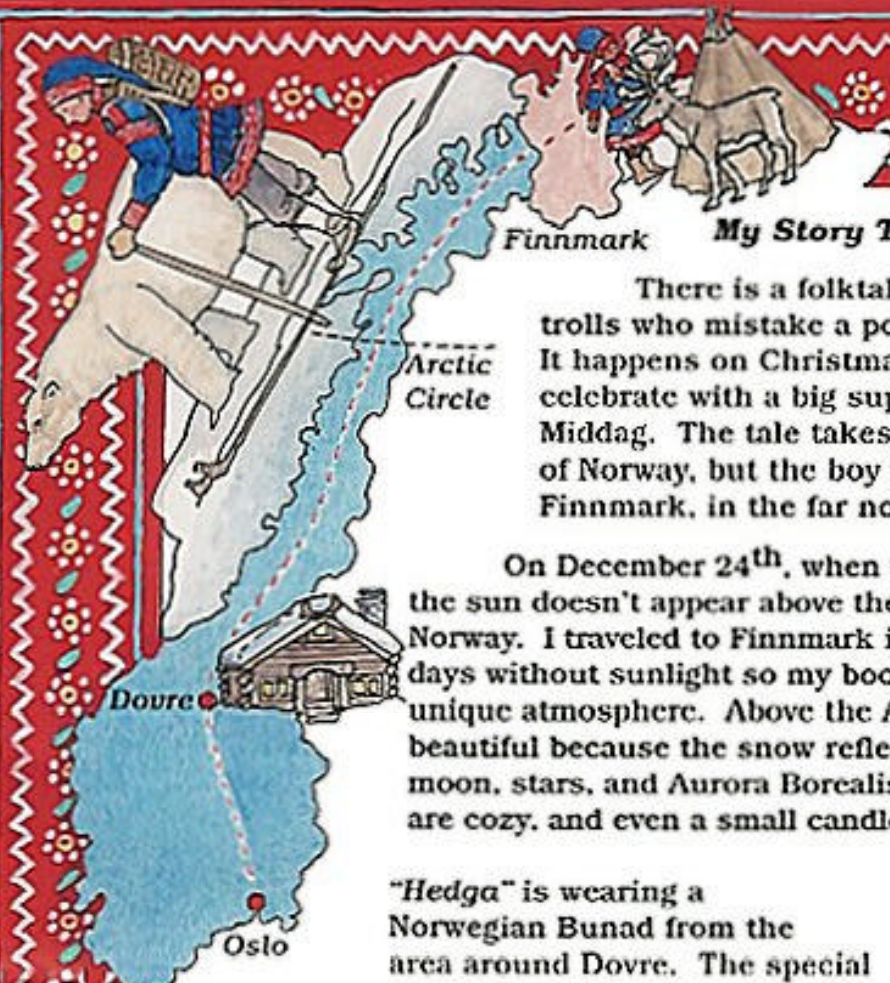
*Jan Brett*



The Aurora Borealis can be seen near the earth's North Pole, rarely further south. For example, I have seen it only one time, in New Hampshire. It occurs when the sun flares up and sends a jet of tiny particles off into space. This is called solar wind. These particles, which are so tiny you can't see them, hit the earth's atmosphere and cause a reaction that makes atoms and molecules in the air ionize. That is what we see glowing in the sky.

Some people claim that they can hear the Aurora Borealis crackling and swishing. Others say they can smell it. People say they've seen it touch the ground. Scientists believe these things aren't possible. One thing is for sure, the Aurora Borealis leaves humans awestruck with its majesty.





Finmark

### *My Story Takes Place in Norway.*

There is a folktale told in Norway about trolls who mistake a polar bear for a huge cat. It happens on Christmas Eve, when Norwegians celebrate with a big supper called Jule aften Middag. The tale takes place in Dovre, a part of Norway, but the boy in the story is from Finnmark, in the far north of Norway.

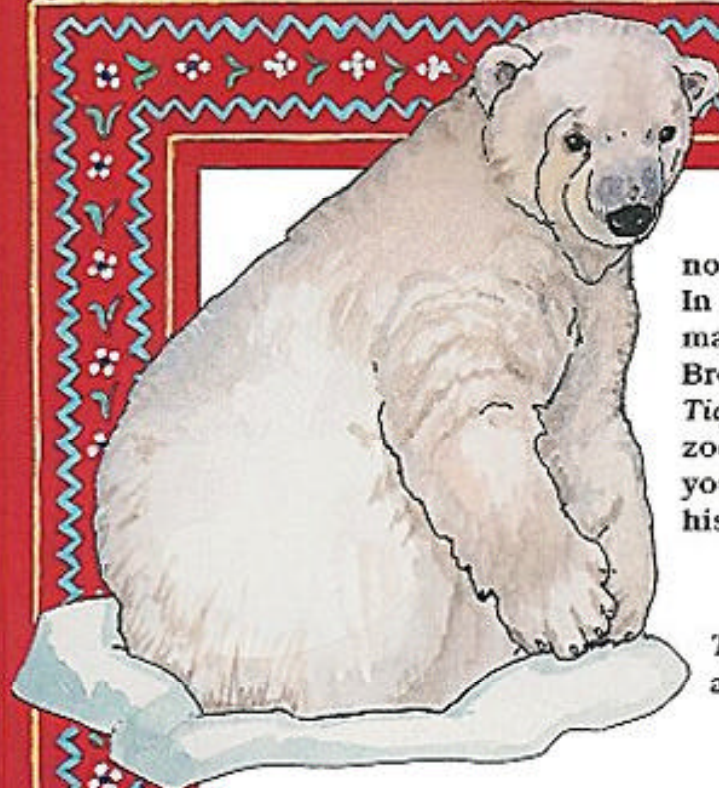
On December 24<sup>th</sup>, when this story takes place, the sun doesn't appear above the horizon in northern Norway. I traveled to Finnmark in winter to experience days without sunlight so my book would reflect the unique atmosphere. Above the Arctic Circle it is strangely beautiful because the snow reflects the light from the moon, stars, and Aurora Borealis. The houses and huts are cozy, and even a small candle can be seen from afar.

"Hedga" is wearing a Norwegian Bunad from the area around Dovre. The special candle is called a Three King's Candle, traditional at Christmas.



"Hedgie's" jacket is called a Kofla, and is worn by the Sami. He's eating a heart-shaped waffle served with jam and sour cream.





Polar bears are fierce predators, not friendly pets like in this folktale. In order to capture the beauty of this magnificent creature, I went to the Brookfield Zoo outside of Chicago to see *Tiquak*, a polar bear brought up at the zoo. If you go to the Brookfield Zoo, you can see *Tiquak*, all grown up, and his little brother *Kinapak*.

*Tiquak*  
as a cub

The trolls in my story are wearing clothes similar to ones worn by people in an old painting. At the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo, I learned it was painted in 1699. A farmer and his family are depicted wearing clothes in a style from the 1500s because fashion did not change much in rural areas. The men wore pantaloons and ruffles around their necks.

I imagined that trolls, who live under the mountains and rarely come out, would wear old-fashioned clothes.



The boy from Finnmark is one of the Sami people. There are about 45,000 Sami who live above the Arctic Circle in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

They are closely tied with reindeer who provide them with food, milk, fur for blankets, hides for clothes and transportation. The reindeer can live in harsh conditions because they eat lichen, a pale green crusty plant that survives under the snow. The Sami's clothes are unique and beautiful.

