



A CHRISTMAS

LOVE STORY



S. Kirby

A CHRISTMAS LOVE STORY

or

THE PM SAGA, BOOK IV

*Yet one more Christmas Story*

by

Susan Kirby

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PM was in a funk. It began in June and grew progressively worse through July and August. She found herself sinking lower and lower, until by November she had gained 30 pounds and sat in her apartment for hours on end, counting the petals on the wallpaper and eating chocolate bonbons.

Recognizing the symptoms, having had them before,\* she made a joint appointment with her old child psychiatrist, Pimento Poppy, and her present analyst, Freudinella Jung.

"You see, Docs," she explained, "it's all so boring."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Pimento, jotting *ennui* in his spiral notebook.

PM settled back on the couch. "Except for one week out of the year, when I do my Christmas thing, it's the same old routine day in and day out. I wake up, practice my singing, practice my dancing, and then sit around with nothing to do. I live 364 days a year for the 365th (or the 6th, depending). At first the anticipation was rather exciting, but the newness has worn off. I mean, is this all life is?"

"P.I.L.," wrote Poppy. And Freudinella, looking over his shoulder, nodded.

"PM, you're suffering from the Purpose in Life Syndrome, also known as the Sisyphus Complex," interpreted Jung.

"What causes it?"

"Too much mother," answered Poppy.

"Too much father," contradicted Freudinella.



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\* PM's life history and her fantastic powers, as well as the biographies of other characters, are chronicled in three previous tales, available from the author.

"And sibling rivalry!" Pimento raised his voice, glowering at Jung. "Requiring behavior modification and bi-weekly sessions!"

"Nein, nein, mein Herr! Six-day-a-week extensive analysis," bellowed Jung, yanking Poppy's goatee.

PM tip-toed out and moped to her parents' home.

"Mom and Dad," she told Maraschino and Spruce, "I can't believe I was meant just to pull Santa's sleigh, year after year. But in Christmas Monsterland, there isn't any other job for a purple actress who sings and dances."

"What you need is a fellow and a family. Be like me," contributed PM's older sister Cerise, who was nursing one little Monster while diapering another. "Although I can't imagine any guy going for you, PM, you being lavender and all." (Cerise still resented PM's winning the sleigh-pulling contest, since she'd never got past the semi-finals.) "Besides, your kids would probably have orange polka-dots."

"Stop it, Cerise!" warned Spruce. "But she may be right, PM. You do have a good job and all, but maybe a little romance wouldn't hurt. Viridian, can't you get PM a date?"

Viridian scowled at his father, and went back to reassembling his calculator.

"Daddy!" harrumphed PM, "we've been through this before. All Viridian's friends are dull accountants!" Viridian threw the calculator at PM, missing her by inches.

Maraschino stood up. "Children! PM, I think maybe we aren't the ones to help on this. You have a very special job, very special talents, and you are becoming a Christmas tradition. Go talk to Mr. and Mrs. Claus--maybe they can help."

PM teletransported herself to the North Pole, greeting Clyde and Rudolph with hugs. "PM, this is an unexpected surprise!" smiled Santa and Mrs. Claus. They worked their way through the bustling toy factory to the kitchen. Mrs. Santa went back to a batch of marzipan while Santa stirred the fudge. "What brings you here in November?"

"Do you remember when you all had 'Apathia Sowhata'? I didn't get it at the time, but maybe I've got it now. It's

not that I don't care about Christmas. I *DO!* I *love* being lead sleigh puller, and helping deliver the presents. But I get so frustrated! You all have year-round duties-- preparing candy and toys, coordinating all your helpers. But I'm not good at anything but singing, dancing and acting, and I only do that one night a year. Christmas is still commercialized, people still fight and hurt one another. There's so much work to be done to bring more love into Christmas, and I don't think that I'm doing enough!"

"I understand," Santa sympathized.

"We still get discouraged," said Mrs. Claus. "Did you know that on some places on earth it's against the law to celebrate Christmas?"

"Maybe...*maybe*, PM, you *could* do more." Santa tugged at his beard and stared down into the fudge. "My helpers do a good job representing me on earth, but we *could* use a new ambassador."

"Oh, Santa!" cried PM.

"Honey," whispered Mrs. Santa. "It's so dangerous. SEGWAC, you know."

Santa stirred silently, thinking.

"Oh, please, Santa!" pleaded PM. "If there's anything I can do, let me!"

"All right," he finally answered. "But it won't be easy. The Society for the Elimination of Good Will and Christmas has been getting stronger. You'll be a very visible target."

"PM, take Peppermint Paunch and Clyde Elf with you," suggested Mrs. Santa. "You'll need allies."

\* \* \*

On Thanksgiving Eve, PM, Clyde Elf and Peppermint Paunch gathered at the North Pole.

"Remember, PM," Santa warned, "it's very different down there. Your powers will be much weaker. You'll only have the strength to teletransport the group down there and back. Clyde and Paunch must be with you for the return trip or they'll be left behind."



Mrs. Claus kissed them all. "This will be a very short trip. Since the U.S. is the most tolerant right now of things Christmas, we're sending you there this year. But the bad news is that because of America's tolerance, SEGWAC's world headquarters are located there. I've booked you into the Thanksgiving Day Parade tomorrow morning in New York. Then you'll have a series of interviews and guest appearances across the country. We've applied for you to speak to the U.N., but they won't recognize the Ambassador from the North Pole."

PM set her coordinates for Central Park West. Waving goodbye to the worried Santa and Mrs. Claus, she teletransported the trio to New York.

Just as they arrived there was an explosion. Bits of rubber flew all over the West '80s. PM, Paunch and Clyde groped their way through the streets, searching for Joe, the Macy's Santa. Joe told them the Snoopy balloon had just been blown up.

"Oh dear," said PM, beginning to get nervous.

"I'm glad you're here," said Joe, shaking her paw. "This city's a jungle, but New Yorkers pull together for holidays. You're not as well-known as Snoopy,

but I'm sure you'll be recognized from last year's news conference. Welcome!"

Peppermint Paunch winked at PM, who was fading from deep violet to lilac. "I'm not ready for this!" she whispered to Clyde.

The Thanksgiving Parade was a success. PM sang "We Wish You A Merry Christmas," and tapped along with the Rockettes in front of the NBC cameras. Peppermint Paunch was enjoying giving autographs until he realized the children thought he was Big Bird. Clyde got stepped on three times and had to take a hot bath when he got back to the hotel.

The next day she was interviewed by *The New York Times*, which ran her story under the headline, "NORTH POLE VISITOR TOURS NEW YORK ON GOOD WILL MISSION: Mauvette Minister to Promote Christmas." She was also interviewed by Tom Snide on the 'Tomorrow Show':

"You're not real, now are you? Har, har!"

"I'm very real," smiled PM. "And so is Christmas. That's why I'm here, because we want people to believe in us, so they can believe in their dreams."

"But aren't love and kindness old-fashioned? Yuck, yuck!"

"Oh no! Nothing is old-fashioned that still works!"

"Well, it's a delight to have you here, PM--I can call you PM, can't I? Well, tell Santa I want a new contract for Christmas. Har, har. Isn't she a delight, ladies and gentlemen, huh? huh?"

PM began to get discouraged when, walking through a department store on Fifth Avenue, she noticed that some new toys--the "Iago Doll," "Brutus Doll," "Lucrezia Borgia Doll," and the "Grab It Now Game," all manufactured by SEGWAC, Inc.--were selling swiftly. Peppermint Paunch made her even more nervous when he told her that two shady characters had been shadowing them ever since they left Rockefeller Center.

\* \* \*

PM toured the Midwest, the South, and returned to the East Coast. She was scheduled to be in LA on December 23rd, and on the 22nd flew out of JFK to LAX. The in-flight movie was "SEGWAC presents: WE'RE BETTER THAN THEM!" (PM didn't rent a headset).

Once in LA, PM noticed that not being purple in that city would be unusual. While Paunch and Clyde threaded their way through the rollerskaters to find a taxi to take them to the Burbank Hilton, PM sat down to rest (she'd been dieting since receiving her assignment, and tended to get rather dizzy). Suddenly an ebony-clad man and woman slithered up behind PM and threw a sack over her. As she struggled to escape she was pierced by a needle and blacked out.

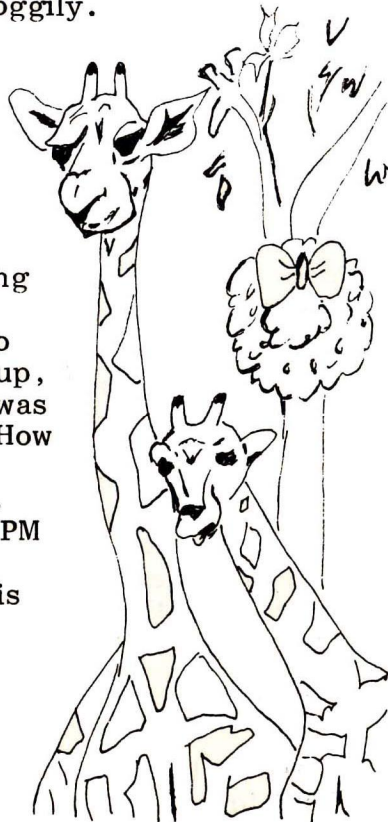
PM awoke in the back of a black limousine with dark tinted windows, traveling down a highway. "Where are you taking me?" she asked groggily.

"Where no one will ever find you," the female gloated, and the man in the front seat laughed ominously. PM passed out again.

When she regained consciousness she was on a hard rock, and something was licking her face. She sat up slowly. "Where am I?" "The San Diego Zoo, where else?" PM looked up, and up again. Looking down was a giraffe, over 18 feet tall! "How did I...?" "You were dumped off here after the park closed. Would you like some leaves?" PM grimaced, rubbing her eyes. She was beginning to think this was all a bad dream.

"She doesn't look like a giraffe to me," said an older tenant, chewing his cud and taking a long swallow.

"I'm not," replied PM.





"Well," said the tall giraffe. "You're welcome to stay here tonight anyway, but tomorrow you'd better go to your own turf."

"I really doubt if there are any others here like me," said PM. She realized the giraffes couldn't see very well in the dark, and doubted they'd believe she was a Christmas Monster. She was prepared for their shock when they circled her the next morning.

"I've never seen anything like her before."

"I have. There's another one here--but it's certainly not purple!"

"Another one?!" Pm was astonished.

"Yeah, 'bout five years ago one showed up, much like you did. The zoo officials had a fit. Couldn't figure out where it came from. Couldn't figure out what it was. First they put it with the dromedaries, but those humpbacks wouldn't have a thing to do with it. Then they threw it in with the buffalos--same thing. Tried to put it with us, but it just sat under a tree and sulked. Nearly starved to death. Couldn't reach the leaves." PM shuddered, wondering what would be her fate. "Where is it now?" she asked hesitantly.

"Somewhere down there." One of the giraffes nodded. "That way. Near the lacunas, next to the guanacos. I think they decided it was a llama. If you stretch your neck, you can see it."

PM leaned as far over as she could, and caught sight of an empty enclosure. On the railing in front was a sign which read "ALPACA?" Then as she looked, the handsomest Christmas Monster she'd ever seen came out of the rocky cave. Not only the handsomest, but bright white, with green eyes, and a silver mane that danced with the sunlight! "But it can't be a Christmas Monster," she thought to herself. "They're only red and gr..."

"Help me," she shouted to the giraffes. "I've got to get over there!"

"Well, although we're not in cages, it is rather difficult to get out of here. Something about protecting us from the masses."

PM devised a plan. If one of the giraffes would pull down a branch, lift her on it, and let go, she would be catapulted over the trough. As they prepared the branch, PM prayed that she'd lost enough weight and that her ballet classes had prepared her for this kind of grand jeté. As they let go of the branch she sang out, "Gravity be good to me," and flew over the barriers. Landing in a perfect plié she did a few entrechats, a pirouette for good measure, and ran to the Christmas Monster. He was stepping into a pond as she approached the rail, muttering to himself, "Alpaca! Do I look like a darn alpaca?" She whistled at him. "What on earth are you?" he exclaimed, gaping at her.

"What do you think?" she retorted. "A Christmas Monster, like you."

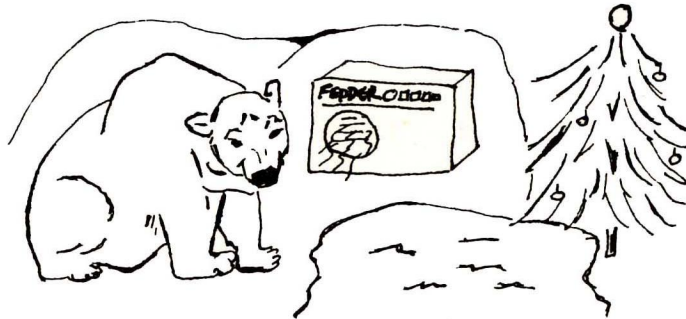
"Well, I'm glad somebody here finally figured that out. But you can't be a Christmas Monster, they're green and r..."

"Or purple, or white!" PM interrupted. "What's your name?"

"Alabaster Eggshell." He finished washing his face. "Yours?--Not that I care."

"PM. You're not very friendly, are you?"

"Look, lady, I've been cooped up here ever since I was spirited from Monsterland five years ago. I've lost my sense of humor. After going from genus to genus, they finally decided I was some kind of South American mountain goat, and put me here. I wish they'd thought I was a polar bear. At least I'd get air-conditioning."



"Alabaster--Al?--how would you like to be home, in Monsterland, for Christmas?"

"You sound like a Bing Crosby record." He cracked the smallest of grins.

"Force of habit," she smiled. The two laughed. "I think I can get you out of here. Santa sent me down here as his ambassador. I've got the ability to make people understand me. I'll find a zoo official and see what I can do."

"It won't be as easy as you think. SEGWAC has spies here. Not the officials, but some of the grounds-people. Watch yourself."

PM carefully wended her way past the lions, tigers, the alligators and chimpanzees. When she reached the koala bears she saw a man with ZOOKEEPER lettered on his hat. He was talking to a raven-garbed grounds-keeper. The groundskeeper saw her and yelled, "The alpaca's escaped! Catch it!"

"My goodness me, it's purple!" said the Zookeeper unimaginatively. "What happen to it?"

"Some kid probably threw grapejuice on it," the groundskeeper smirked. PM recognized the evil laugh--it was the kidnapper!

PM cautiously approached the pair. "Mr. Zookeeper, there's been a mistake!"

"It can talk!" the Zookeeper shrieked, once again expressing the obvious.

"Ventriloquism," growled the groundskeeper.

"No! Listen to me!" cried PM. "I'm a Christmas Monster, and you've got another one with the llamas. I was kidnapped. I've got to get to LA as soon as possible!"

The villain sneered. "It's a joke. A fake. Don't be a sucker."

"Oh, I don't know what's going on. I'm so confused," moaned the Zookeeper.

The zoo had opened, and people poured in.

"Ask them!" PM pointed. "They'll know me!"

Crowds gathered around PM. A little boy and girl ran to her and tugged her tail. "It's PM!" "It's PM! It's the Christmas Monster!"

"Ouch! Yes, it's me!" PM turned to plead with the Zookeeper. "Please, let my friend out. We have to finish our work here and get back to the North Pole." As she spoke she saw the kidnapper join five other black-clad SEGWAC members. "Stop them!" PM yelled, but they raced away through the lemur cages.

"I'll get your friend," said the Zookeeper.

He brought Alabaster to join PM in the Children's Zoo, where she was telling the story of how Santa had made her a star. Alabaster looked at her strangely throughout the tale, nodding as she explained how difficult it had been to be mauve until Santa discovered her.

As PM and Al exited the park, the band of SEGWACs surrounded them, brandishing knives and clubs. PM contemplated teletransporting Al and herself back to the North Pole immediately, but knew she couldn't leave Clyde and Peppermint Paunch behind. As she looked around for someplace to hide, she heard sirens blaring. The attackers dispersed as the police cars roared in. PM did a tour en l'air when she saw--in the midst of San Diego blue--Peppermint Paunch and Clyde! She hugged them both, then stared.

Clyde touched his Mickey Mouse Club hat. "We had a tip they'd taken you to Disneyland."

Peppermint Paunch adjusted his Donald Duck T-shirt over his belly. "We got lost in Space Mountain and Clyde fell into the Blue Bayou at the Pirates of the Caribbean. But as a result of my sleuthing training at Red Green's Detective School, I was able to track you here. I missed you, your Heliotrope Highness!"

"Missed you too, you striated Sherlock! But we've got to rush or we'll miss the 'Tonight Show' taping."

With a police escort they headed up the San Diego Freeway, toward Burbank. On the way, Alabaster recited his story.

"As PM can attest, growing up any color but red or green was difficult. My parents kept me hidden away, and I spent a very lonely childhood. The other children called me 'Albino Egghead' and even 'Snow White!'"

"Oh, dear," empathized PM.

"So I read a lot, and by the time I was 21 I had received five Ph.D.'s--in Psychology, Sociology, Chemistry, Physics and English Literature--plus an M.A. in Philosophy, and one in History. Sort of a walking testament to interdisciplinary education. I had no friends, no social life. I learned everything from books. I became a troglodyte, living in a cave near Monsterland U., venturing only to classes and to my theses typist. One day while I was studying, two humans appeared. They seemed nice to me. They said they wanted to take me to a place where I'd be in the majority. I thought it was a great idea, until they explained that I would have to tell the world how bad Christmas Monsterland was, how Santa was a fraud. I was to develop a drug that would make everyone hate one another. I refused--after all, feeling sorry for myself was one thing; but I really didn't like loathing, and I certainly didn't wish the way I felt on anyone else. I was bitter, but not that bitter. Besides, Santa's OK. I rather like the old guy. So the two grabbed me, and you know the rest."

\* \* \*



After reaching the NBC studios, PM finished her makeup and joined the Christmas trio in the Green Room. They watched in horror a promo commercial for "SEGWAC presents 'THE J.R. EWING CHRISTMAS SPECIAL.'"

PM finished her segment. As the group exited the set, they heard Johnny say, "Our next guest you all know--Joan Emery, from the San Diego Zoo. What's this funny looking animal, Joan?" "This is a native of the Andes, the alpaca..." Al winced, as PM tele-transported the quartet back to the North Pole.

The holiday crew was working when the four arrived, preparing for the next evening's trip. Santa and Mrs. Claus greeted them with relief, and PM introduced Alabaster. Since the group was exhausted, Santa sent them to bed, promising to record the 'Tonight Show' segment on the Betamax.

The next day Santa replayed the tape as they wrapped last-minute presents. PM watched as her segment came on. Johnny introduced her as the Ambassador from the North Pole. "We have people here promoting movies, plays, TV specials, and books. I think this is the first time we've had anyone promote Christmas. Right, Ed?"

"Right, Johnny!"

"So, do you have toys to promote, or what?"

"Johnny, I'm not here to sell anything, but to give something. To give hope for a world of peace and friendship."

Santa beamed at PM. The tape continued: "As you know, last year an attempt was made to make Santa look bad. It was plotted by a group that tries to discredit good deeds, making them look like selfish or underhanded acts. The Society endeavors to camouflage their own evil in the guise of purity, nationalism, or morality. But SEGWAC really wants to dictate the 'right' way to live--and to reap profits from their activities. Often people hear only their words and fail to assess their motives. I'm here tonight to ask that Christmas be restored to a time of love, a time of tolerance. SEGWAC may preach morality or justice,

but it really promotes prejudice, violence, censorship, ostracism and war. Hatred and Christmas are not synonymous. The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of love--it claims no single race, no one nationality, no one political or social ideology."

Alabaster pulled PM away from the Betamax. "I'm not very good at this," he mumbled. "But...er...I think I like you." PM batted her eyes. "I think I might like you too," she answered. Alabaster kissed her lightly. PM's toenails throbbed, her tail twitched, and she swooned.

Santa and Mrs. Claus watched the two, blinking tearily at each other, and turned their attention once again to the TV. On tape, PM was continuing: "Christmas is very simple--caring for one another. Any message of giving is Christmas. Any message of hate or violence is not. Two years ago we at the North Pole were reminded by the being who started this whole tradition that Christmas is the miracle of loving and giving that overcomes merchandising and the media. It can also overcome SEGWAC. But we must be willing to reassume responsibility for our actions, and not blame what we don't like on others, or expect others to cure our problems. We must insist on peace and understanding. If we relinquish our power to love and care for one another, SEGWAC will be victorious."

Meanwhile, PM was ignoring her televised self. Alabaster sheepishly took PM's paw. "I'd, uh...uh, like to see you again, um, after you make your trip tonight."

PM gazed at him, and nodded, trying to think of a way to explain to her parents that she had met this guy in the San Diego Zoo. It would be a very interesting New Year, indeed.

The tape was concluding. The video PM was saying, "I look forward to another ride with Santa this year, and another chance to wish you all a very Merry Christmas!"

Santa turned off the set, and donned his red suit. Mrs. Santa stuffed a few last-minute stockings

into the sleigh as Alabaster and Peppermint Paunch helped strap Rudolph and the other reindeer and Christmas Monsters into their places. Clyde and Santa hopped in the sleigh, as PM took her place at the front. PM was heard to sing as they rode out of sight, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas Monster." It was her best performance ever!

*A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS*

*AND ALL GOOD WISHES*

*FOR THE NEW YEAR ! ! !*

