

# CRISIS AT THE NORTH POLE



or

## Yet Another Christmas Story

by

Susan Kirby



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Something strange was happening at the North Pole. All week long PM\* had been telephoning to make arrangements for her annual role as lead sleigh puller, and all she reached was the taped message: "This is the North Pole. We're unable to take your call right now, but if you'll leave your name and number, we'll get back to you as soon as possible" (chorus of "Jingle Bells," then "beep").

But none of her calls was returned. And when PM arrived Christmas Eve, she found an eerie sight: Packages, toys and games in various states of completion. Cookies baked and sitting on the stove. Candy canes hung from wires around the kitchen. Sleigh bells polished and in readiness. But not a creature was stirring -- not Santa, not Mrs. Santa, not reindeer, not elves, not even a mouse. The place was deserted. Definitely, something very strange ...

PM searched the cottage. As she went out the back door she saw a scrawled note tacked to the screen: "Gone to our island in Bermuda Triangle. Needed a rest. Back January 10th or thereabouts. See ya!"

PM couldn't believe it, yet there it was in Santa's own handwriting. He was finking out on Christmas! She thought last year's bout of "apathia sowhata" had been cured. But this was worse -- total neglect!

There was only one thing to do. PM called her mother, Marachino Monster. Marachino calmed PM somewhat, saying that there had to be some explanation. Perhaps

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\* For those encountering PM (short for Purple Christmas Monster) for the first time, the author commends you to two previous reports -- "A Christmas Fable -- Or A Star Is Born" (1976) and "Another Christmas Story" (1978) -- both available upon request.

something had happened to Santa. An all-out effort should certainly be made to find him. She offered to call cousin Peppermint Paunch, a graduate of Red Green's Detective School, and send him up to the Pole. PM swallowed her pride (she was still smarting from when Paunch had called her the Galloping Grape back in high school); indeed, she agreed to forgive him forever if he pulled them out of this mess.

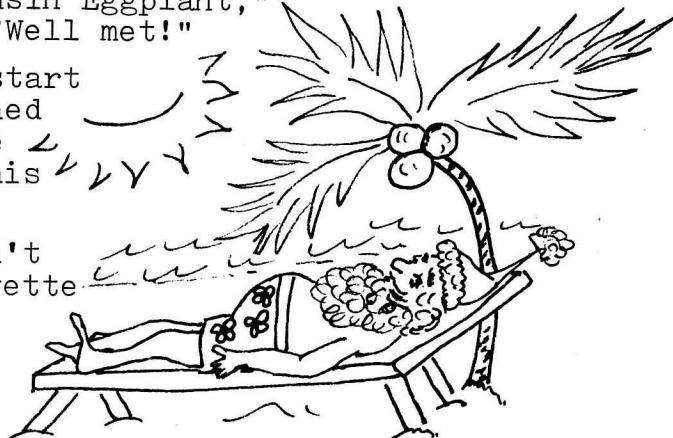
PM hung up and wandered about, finishing a toy here and tying a bow there. As she waited for Paunch a terrible thought came to her: "Oh dear, I hope the press doesn't get wind of this. There'll be widespread panic!" But when she switched on the TV, she saw it was already too late. Walter Crewcut was delivering a diatribe on world irresponsibility and cited Santa as an example. There was a picture of Santa on a lush island, reportedly taken by an anonymous paparazzo. Crewcut held up headlines from the papers: the Post: "Santa Suns, Kids Cry!" -- the Daily News: "No Christmas This Year!" -- the Voice: "Santa Bellies Up and Drops Out" -- and from The Times, in the bottom right-hand corner: "Unconfirmed Report States Mr. Claus Has Cancelled Christmas." All papers carried the photo, and the National Enquirer reported an exclusive interview with Santa and his mistress.

PM was in hysterics when Paunch arrived.

"Ah, cousin Eggplant," he greeted. "Well met!"

"Don't start on me, you lined loxodont!" she shrieked. "This is serious!"

"Oh, don't worry, my mauvette munchkin," he consoled, and



started sleuthing. PM paced the room, mumbling "Someone has to stand up for Santa!" After the fifth trip across the floor she decided to call a press conference, and began dialing the media.

Meanwhile, Paunch had been discovering things: A videotape of last year's Christmas flight was on the Betamax. The calendar was X'd out through December 25th. On the roof, etched in footprints in the snow, were the letters S-E-G-W-A-C. Santa's suit was hanging in the stable with a note, dated the 23rd, from the cleaners: "We've returned the suit -- it didn't need cleaning, since we just cleaned it two days ago. Why'd ya send it back before Christmas?" PM and Paunch began to smell evil in the air.

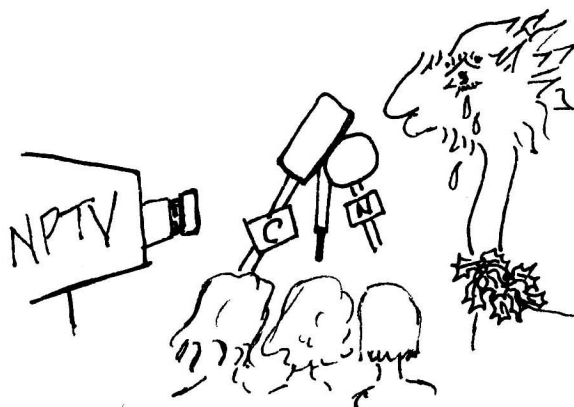
Camerapeople soon arrived. The world's press and broadcasters were hooked in by satellite. PM spoke extemporaneously.

"Ladies, gentlemen, children. I'm a newcomer to the Christmas tradition, but I've been around Santa long enough to know that he lives for Christmas. I can't explain what's happened, but I assure you there must be some reason for Santa's disappearance."

"Ms. Monster, have you seen the picture?"

"Yes, I have. Still -- I can't help feeling that there is something undiscovered. We're working right now to find what it is. But this talk of 'no Christmas' is nonsense! Santa was never Christmas -- he just helped out a bit. Does everyone expect only to get on Christmas? Christmas is giving. So even if Santa isn't on the job on the 24th, Christmas will still come tomorrow. In a world with so much, you don't need Santa to give you more. Why not share what you have? Buy just one more present for a little child, give one more dollar to charity, spend one more hour helping someone, sing one more carol."





"Are you saying that we don't need Santa?" a correspondent demanded.

PM began to cry. "Yes, we need Santa," she sobbed. "But there are forces we don't know about, and perhaps cannot comprehend, which have tried to make Santa the symbol of Christmas and are now destroying his image. But discrediting a symbol of Christmas won't discredit the spirit of Christmas ... That's all, no more questions."

"'Twas beautiful, my lilting lilac," solaced Paunch after the reporters left. PM turned on the television to get the reaction. There were still diehards calling for Santa's lynching. But the TV showed pictures of people reaching out to one another, sharing their little or their plenty -- more Christmas lights were lit, more hymns hummed, more hands held, and more prayers prayed.

PM perked up a bit, but her thoughts were still on Santa. Suddenly she heard a moaning from the direction of the wine cellar. Paunch warily unlocked the door, and out stumbled Clyde Elf, his eyes blinking in the light.

"It was terruble!" he stammered. "Terrububble! These masked people came in las' week and tied up ev'ryone. I hid inna cella, mussa bin locked in -- only wine to eat'r drink." He shook himself, then hiccupped, "Where's Santa?"



"Aha!" cried Paunch, who had just finished analyzing the contents of the eggnog bowl. "I suspect ... a plot! There are traces of a hallucinogenic drug in here. I'm beginning to piece it all together."

"Clyde, do you know where Santa might be?" begged PM. "He left this note."

Clyde uncrossed his eyes with great difficulty and read the writing. "Yeah, I been there ... but they always go the day after Christmas. Why're they there now?"

"I'll explain later -- if I can. But get down there now and bring him back -- fast! Bring them all back!"

Clyde wobbled off in search of the Christmas crew. Paunch began to explain to PM:

"I see it all now, my furry fuchsia friend. The 'SEGWAC' should have clued me. I've heard of them before -- the Society for the Elimination of Good Will and Christmas. They're the group that causes discord and creates terror around the world. It's falling in place -- they must've fed all the reindeer, elves, and Mr. and Mrs. Claus this drug, and then had the holiday helpers watch last year's tape. With a little brainwashing, our friends were convinced that they had already done Christmas -- which explains the calendar,



why the suit was re-sent to the cleaners, and why Santa left the note."

"But the picture? How did SEGWAC get that?"

"They must've followed Santa down there, or maybe they found a vacation shot from last year. From what I know of the Triangle, nobody flying overhead could spot the island, and there is probably no communication, so Santa doesn't even know what's going on. It's all so evil, it's unthinkable."

"Well, we'll get Santa back, but how will we ever convince him what happened?"

"I'm preparing an antidote, my amaranth antelope. We'll have them ready for the ride in no time!"

The screech of sled blades pierced the evening stillness, followed by a loud rumbling as Clyde staggered in, tugging Santa, Mrs. Claus, and the rest of the Christmas party.

"What's this all about, PM?" roared Santa. "I was just beginning to tan."

"Yes," echoed Mrs. Santa. "Here I thought we had the perfect spot, where no one could find us, and Clyde parachutes in to bring us back, blathering about work to be done. We're tired! Christmas was rough this year -- as bad as last!"

The reindeer and elves chorused their agreement. Even while the tirade escalated, Paunch began administering the antidote. PM then explained to the very confused Christmas group what had happened, and played back the tape of the news conference. They watched reports of the continuing swelling of world-wide good will as they completed last-minute preparations.

"Should I tell the people you're back?" inquired PM.



"No, I'll surprise them," smiled the sunburnt old man. "SEGWAC is still out there, probably furious that their little plot backfired. If they know I've returned, they might cause more trouble. I'll make my ride tonight and add to the festivities -- there's never too much joy! Let's get going!"

Then he leaned over to PM and whispered, "Thanks, little starlet." "I'll get my bells on," sang PM. Waving at Paunch she grinned, "Merry Christmas, Cuz!" She threw him a kiss and ran off to get ready.

"It's magic time!" laughed St. Nick, and shaking jellylike he pulled his red suit over his Bermuda shorts.

