

A CHRISTMAS VISITOR



S. KIRBY



A CHRISTMAS VISITOR
or, *The PM Saga, Book 6:*
Ho! Ho! Ho! A UFO!

by
Susan Kirby

PM and Alabaster* weren't speaking. It was a week before Christmas, and all through Al's cave echoed the icicled sounds of silence.

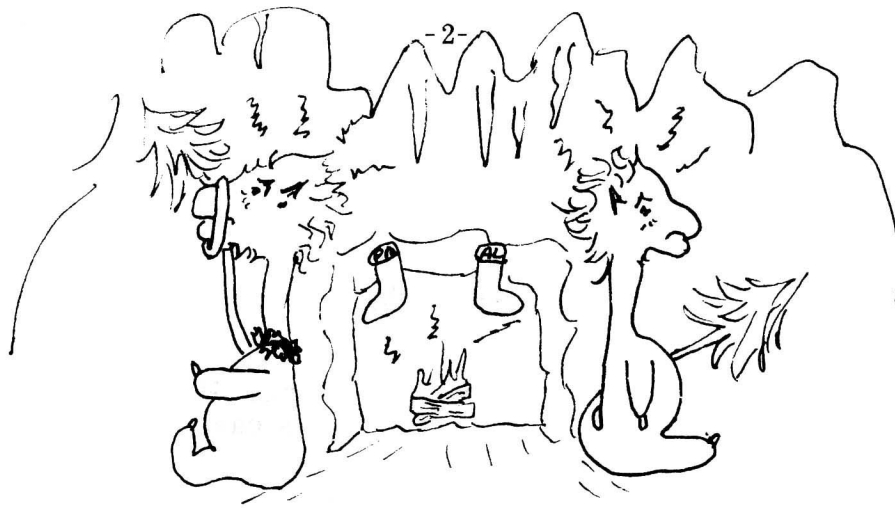
The large fir tree Spruce had brought to his daughter's suitor's abode stood in its stand, unadorned. Golden garlands lay folded in their boxes, and unpacked ornaments gathered dust in the corner of the cavern. On the left side of the fireplace, facing left, pouted PM. On the other side, facing right, sulked Alabaster. Even the roaring fire could not warm the chill between their backs.

There was a knock on the cave entrance, followed by, "Ouch, when *will* I learn to use that bell!" Peppermint Paunch entered the cave, licking his striped paw. "Hail, fellows, well met!" he greeted. No response. He made another attempt. "Great sleuth, how are you? My, cuz, it's sure grand to see you!" No response. Clyde Elf and Rudolph appeared at the entrance, and Paunch lumbered over to consult with them. "I think there may be something amiss here." The trio approached PM. "My goodness, Ms. Ambassador of Christmas cheer," Peppermint ventured, "we sure don't have too much ho-ho-hoing going, do we?"

"Ho-ho-ho humph," harrumphed PM, and muzzled her mouth with her tail.

**The life histories of PM (Purple Monster), Santa's lead sleighpuller, and Alabaster Eggshell, her beau, are documented in five previous volumes. To obtain copies, ask the author.*

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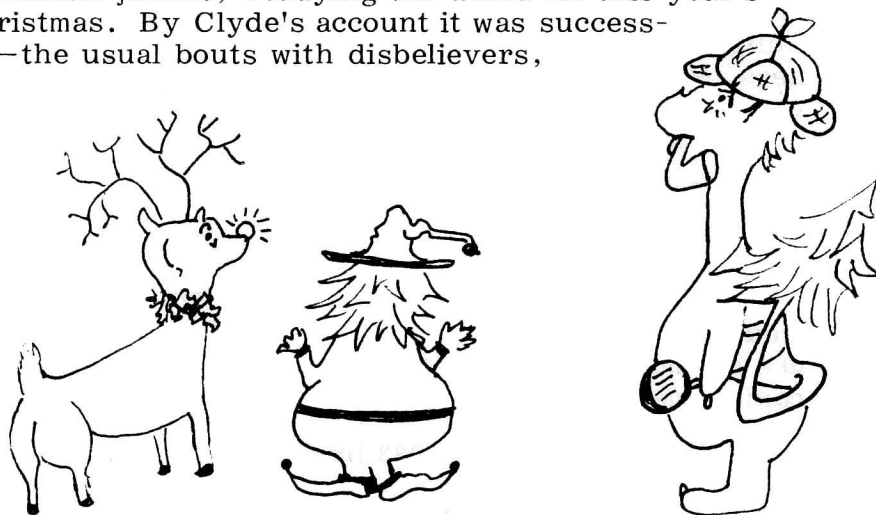


Clyde cautiously crept to Alabaster. "Hey, Al, old buddy, what's happening? What's hot, what's not?"

"I'm hot, she's not," Al sputtered.

Rudolph's nose blinked as he looked from one Christmas Monster to the other, and back again. PM's fuchsia fur was as close to scarlet as it had been since she'd tried a henna rinse in high school. "At least they don't have laryngitis," Rudolph diagnosed.

Peppermint Paunch pondered the situation, his paws pressed to his protruding pouch. "Guess I've got to put on my Sherlock Holmes hat and solve the mystery. Let's put our facts together. PM, you've just returned from a diplomatic junket, readying the world for this year's Christmas. By Clyde's account it was successful—the usual bouts with disbelievers,



but you really sold Christmas. The people seem revved up."

"What a great trip!" exuded Clyde. "PM taught me how to play 'Ms. Pac Man' in Dallas. It was fun!"

"And she took me to see my sister Sarah in Siberia," Rudolph added, "so I know she even made a little progress in Russia!"

"And Al, you added a new career," continued Peppermint. "Your autobiography, *My Life in the Zoo: Five Years as an 'Alpaca?'* is on the best-seller list, soon to be a major motion picture. Monsterland Great Movies has signed the brilliant Bayberry Garnet to write the screenplay, and the fabulous Framboise Peridot will direct. Sir Laurel Olive just accepted the starring role, and they'll be shooting on location in the San Diego Zoo come February. They're even flying you in to consult. You should be thrilled!"

There was no word from either of the furry feuders.

"Do you think maybe they're jealous of one another--career conflict, you know?" suggested Rudolph.

Alabaster sniffed, "That's not the problem."

Clyde tried. "I bet PM and Al argued because the football strike's over and Al wants to watch Howard Cosell."

PM unwrapped her tail long enough to snarl, "That's not the problem."

"Hmm," hummed Peppermint, "maybe the problem is that there's *no* problem. By this time of year there's usually a catastrophe of some sort, and you're trying to make one up."

"Oh, there's a problem all right," unisoned the quarreling couple.

"So, I'm not such a great detective after all," said Paunch. "I give up."

"Me too," rendered Rudolph.

"Me three," Clyde chimed.

"That milkweed menace made a move on me," muttered the mauvette Monster.

"Pristine prune. She doesn't understand that after two years I have physical needs," argued Al.

"He could take up jogging," PM parried.

"I tried it—once. It's not the same."

"Aha! It's clear now—repressed desire!" declared Peppermint. "My my my, how conventional all you unconventional Christmas Monsters are."

"I don't understand," whispered Clyde.

Rudolph winked. "You're too young."

"Mr. Eggshell won't accept that my morals must be above reproach," PM said righteously. "You remember what happened last year."

Peppermint consulted the previous chronicle. "Yep—no pandering, prurience, licentiousness, lechery, or premarital snerkling. She's got you there, Alabaster."

"But it did say heavy kissing. I tried to rub noses with her and I was batted across the cave. I petted her paw and she punched me. I'm only allowed a kiss with benefit of mistletoe."

"I am a Christmas role model," PM objected loudly. "It's difficult for me, too. But how can I have an erotic life with the glittering Monster of my dreams if I'm single? It just isn't done!"

"Well, then," yelled Al, "don't you think we'd better get married?"

"Is that a proposal! ?!" shouted PM.

"Yes!" screamed Al.

"I accept!!!" PM thundered.

The cave fell silent once again, as PM and Alabaster slowly turned to one another. Finally Clyde spoke: "Golly, ain't love grand?"

PM and Alabaster nuzzled necks. "I'm sorry, sugar lump," cooed PM.

"Me too, lilac lollypop," Al amorized.

"Yuch," contributed Clyde.

Peppermint Paunch hugged the pair. "So, gang, set the date. Why not Christmas Day, when you get back from your ride? No, wait—that's when the North Pole crowd goes to the Bermuda Triangle for vacation."

"I know," Rudolph suggested, "why not right before the sleigh ride? Santa can marry you, you can ride together, and when it's over we'll drop you off for your honeymoon."

PM and Alabaster consulted. "Sounds good to me."
"Me too."

(Can you believe it? Already the story's got a happy ending, with no major calamity and no mention of Santa Claus or SEGWAC. No big EVENT. You feel cheated? Never fear—a crisisless Christmas makes for happy holidays but lousy literature. Nope, folks, there's more.)

PM and Al were getting all lovey and gooey-eyed, nauseating Clyde and embarrassing Paunch and Rudolph. "Excuse me, cuz," interjected Peppermint. "Don't you think we'd better tell Mr. and Mrs. C. the good news?"

PM unwound her tail from Al's and nodded, saying, "Oh yes, but I must call my mother first!" After the call (in which Maraschino cried her eyes out and Spruce promised to contact a friend at *The Times* to insert an announcement), the five joined paws, hooves, and hands and whisked away, via PM's teletransportation, to the North Pole.

They found Mrs. Claus—just returned from a crash course at Silicon Valley College—busy in the workshop, supervising the construction of video games and home computers. "My goodness me, welcome!" she cried, removing her white smock and hugging her friends. "Santa's boogieing to some New Wave in the kitchen, making sure the cookies don't scorch. C'mon!"

"I love Rock and Roll, rumtumptum," Santa was singing when the group walked in, "I



think I'll dye my beard blue, tralalalala lalå la la." He shook jellylike as he flipped the sweets onto the cooling rack. "Who have we here? You're early!"

(I know, I know. Still no big event. But we did get Santa and Mrs. Claus in, didn't we? Trust me—here it comes!) Just as the gang began to pour out the news of the upcoming nuptials, a UFO crashed through the roof of the kitchen, barely missed the stove, crushed a crate of cranberries, bumped into a batch of bon bons, pummeled packages of popcorn, and rolled to a stop in front of the wide-eyed Christmas crew.

"My goodness, it's E.T.!" cried Clyde, joyously searching his pockets for Reeses Pieces.

"It certainly looks like an I.T. to me," agreed Rudolph, shining his nose so bright on the gilded craft.

"An 'et it'?" queried Mrs. Claus of her husband.

"No dear," Santa chuckled. "E-T I-T."

Peppermint interpreted: "An extra-terrestrial intergalactic traveler."

Several lights blinked on and off on the ship, and a ramp began to lower. Seven pairs of eyes stared as a stranger descended.

"Do you want to phone home?" Clyde finally spoke.

"There's no home to call," said the visitor in hushed tones. *(Remember, at the North Pole there's no language gap.)*

"What happened to your planet?" asked Alabaster.

"We blew ourselves up. We kept fighting wars and building new weapons. Fighting more wars and using those new weapons. Until the wars were so frequent and the weapons so powerful that there was one more battle and one more button pushed than our fragile sphere could tolerate."

"How did you escape the destruction?" Santa inquired softly.

The voyager continued. "I was an astronaut, circling our world, tuning in on enemy communications. The force of the first nuclear explosion ripped through the atmos-

phere and hurled me out of orbit. I listened as frequency after frequency went dead after bomb after bomb exploded. I was far out in space when I saw my planet disintegrate." She started to weep. *(At least this author thinks the visitor is a she. It's so hard to tell with E.T.s.)*

PM put her paw on the nomad's shoulder. "What's your name?" she asked tenderly.

"It was Sentries. But I've changed it to Relicta."

"How did you find our planet?"

"When I entered your solar system I took readings as I zoomed through. Your orb was the first that indicated an environment I might survive in. I've been circling around and around for months now, searching for an opening in your atmosphere. Today I found one, and landed here."

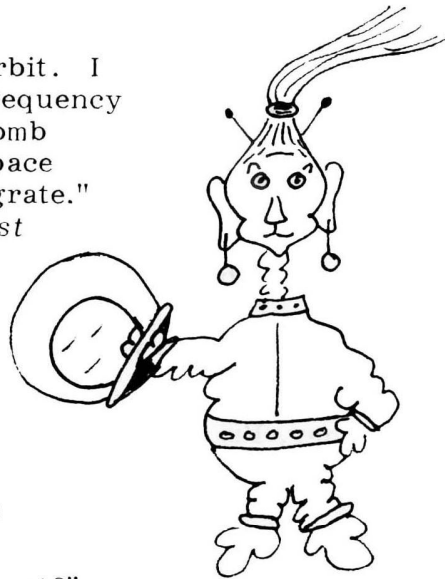
Mrs. Santa took over. "Relicta, you are welcome here. This is Santa—my husband—and PM, Alabaster, Peppermint, Rudolph and Clyde. Are you hungry?" As she offered a cookie to the guest the room grew dark, as if a huge cloud were passing over. Clyde hurried to the window.

"Ho Santa, look, look!" he cried, pointing. The group rushed to the window, then scurried outdoors.

Doming the North Pole was a sizzling blue glow which crackled and popped fiercely.

"What is it?" asked Rudolph, his nose short-circuited with fear.

Before anyone could speculate, they heard a voice over the CB in Santa's sleigh. The group listened in stony horror as they heard the deep rumble. "This is SEGWAC. Santa, you've made your last trip. We have placed a force field over the North Pole. You cannot get out. You got away last year, but we will triumph now."



Enjoy your Christmas—no one else will!" There was an evil laugh, then the CB went dead.

"It's a bluff," snorted Peppermint Paunch.

A reindeer ran up to Santa. "Santa, Santa!" danced Prancer excitedly. "Dasher bashed his head on the strange light—I think one of his antler's broken."

"I'd better see to him," said Santa with a frown, and hurried off with Rudolph and Prancer.

Alabaster spoke to Mrs. Claus. "While he looks after Dasher, I'm going to borrow some of your chemistry sets, computers, and other equipment and see what SEGWAC's come up with. Maybe we can break through. I'll need your help, Peppermint."

Clyde and Mrs. Claus stared at the dome. "I hope Al's Ph.D.s in Chemistry and Physics are enough to get us out of this mess," mused Mrs. Santa.

PM apologized to the visitor. "I'm sorry, Relicta, but it looks like we have an emergency."

"I figured that much. What's SEGWAC?"

"The Society for the Elimination of Good Will and Christmas," explained PM. "Sort of a terrorist group."

"What's Christmas?"



Mrs. Santa gasped. "You don't know about Christmas?!? It's a very special time on earth—we're part of it. In fact, it's our only reason for existence."

"Oh, I see," commented the traveler, although of course she didn't.

"Let's go inside and I'll explain," said PM.

Once back in the kitchen, Relicta excused herself. "I'd better check my ship." PM and Mrs. Claus watched out the window as Alabaster, Santa and the others returned.

"Dasher's alright, we splinted his antler," puffed Santa. "What did you find out, Al?"

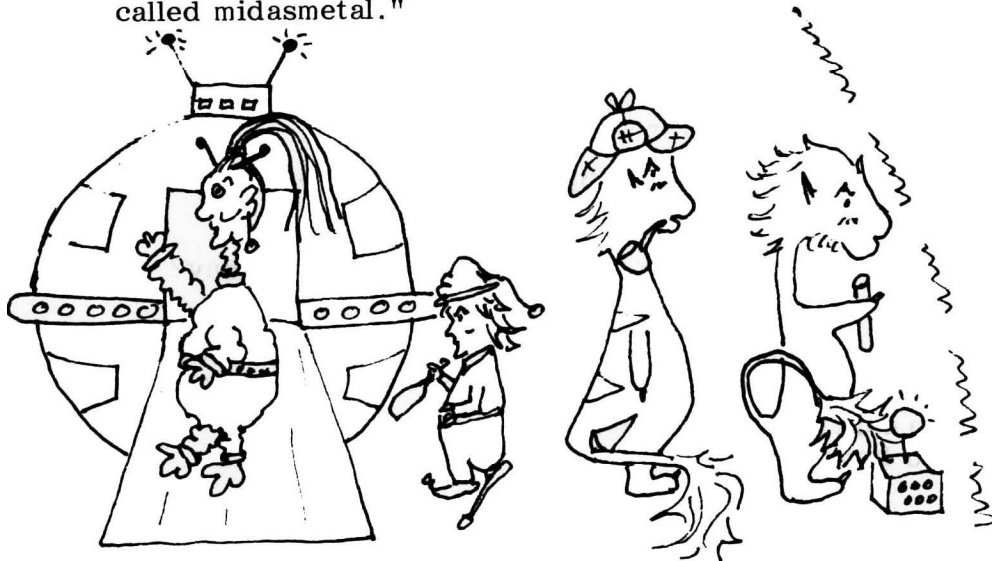
"It's an almost impermeable force field," reported Al dejectedly. "It is especially designed to prevent the passage of you, your sleigh, reindeers and Christmas Monsters."

"What about elves?" volunteered Clyde bravely.

"Sorry, Clyde, you can't get through either."

PM looked at Alabaster. "Would it be possible for me to teletransport through?"

"Possible," sighed Al, "but it's also possible that your molecules would be split up in passing through, and you wouldn't be able to reassemble. It seems that the only substance that they haven't controlled for is an alloy called midasmetal."



"And the molecular structure of myself." The group turned to Relicta, who was exiting her spacecraft.

"How do you know that?" asked Al.

"While you used your equipment, I used mine. I can pass through safely, and so can my ship—it's made of midasmetal."

"Then you could save Christmas for us!" Santa beamed, grasping the visitor's shoulders.

"I could save myself, you mean," Relicta corrected. "I'm splitting this planet right now."

"Please don't," Peppermint pleaded. "We need help, really!"

"While I was orbiting your sphere I tuned in on some of those television satellites I nearly collided with, and I heard that you're sitting on a powder keg like the one I just escaped from. Maybe you're a few years behind, but the outcome will be the same. I thought I'd come down anyway to check it out. Now that I'm here, I think I'd better find another galaxy." She turned to go.

"I guess I'll have to try to teletransport myself," determined PM. "It's our only hope, if Santa is to take his ride. If I make it through, I'll get to Christmas Monsterland and see what we can do to locate the source of the force field."

"You'll never find it. It's controlled from one of the satellites I passed in space. My readings told me that." The visitor had stopped halfway up the ramp. "You mean you would be willing to risk your life for this...this Christmas, whatever it is?"

"Yes," PM nodded vigorously. "I would have to."

"We would all have to try," said Santa.

"But why? What's so special about this holiday? Why are those people worth saving?"

"It's a long story," said Santa. "Relicta, we have a few days before Christmas. Stay until then—maybe we can convince you to help us. To understand Christmas, you have to understand earth's history."

"I picked up some of it from the satellites—pretty bleak. But I'll stay and listen to your arguments. Tell me everything—good and bad. Then I'll decide. But first, do you have any hamburgers? I heard them advertised while I was in space—I want one made *my way*."

While Clyde prepared the meal, Alabaster began to describe the scientific and mystical theories of creation. Each resident of the North Pole and Christmas Monsterland then sat with the I.T. for the next few days, telling about the religions and philosophies, the wars and disasters, the art forms and cultures. By Christmas Eve morning they had given the extra-terrestrial a condensed picture of the world as they knew it.

"Well, that's it," Mrs. Claus concluded. "Do you have any more questions?"

"Given what you've told me, it's no real sales pitch for those people. They sound much like mine. This planet has the same uncanny ability of turning inconceivable horrors into conceivable ones. The annihilation some of the religions declare is only possible by God's will is now made probable by Man's. The potential for self-destruction is incredible!"

"But there are people working to lessen that potential," said PM. "I marched with over half a million of them in New York this year. Maybe they don't have a pat answer, but they are calling attention to the problem."

"Look, all it takes is one of your crazy terrorist groups to get a weapon, or one of your politicians to overreact. I've seen it first-hand, remember. The only thing different about your world from mine is this... Christmas. And from what you told me, it only has meaning for a certain religion."

"Oh no," cried Clyde. "That's not true. Oh tell her, Santa, please!"

"Christmas is not just for one religion, Relicta. It's for everyone. It's a spirit, a season when people are reminded of love, of sharing, of peace," explained Santa.



"I'll forego discussing Lebanon, Central America, Russia, Afghanistan, the bombings in Paris, etc., for the moment," continued Relicta. "Take the United States—that country, which bills itself as the upholder of freedom, of equality, of—if you will—Christianity, those people don't practice what the man they worship preached. Americans have a system of what they call justice, the essence of which is to put more and more of their population in barred storage, because they don't know how to deal with man's inhumanity to man. Goodwill towards men! Bah! not to mention towards women! That country refuses to grant equal status to over half its population! Art, culture? Fooey! They either starve their artists or make them trivialize their work to the lowest common denominator to make a living. And this year the citizens dedicated a monument to a war that seems to me to have been better forgotten."

"No," interrupted Paunch. "That memorial is for the men who fought and died in that war. It's a monument for reflection, not justification."

"Maybe, but it took them this long to separate the morality of that war from the ones who fought it, and the veterans are still having problems. The U.S. is, by its elected officials, cutting off programs which were designed to help those in need, and in their place appropriating money for more weapons. So many in that country are hungry, and their neighbors seem unwilling to share what they have with those that have less—'not out of *my* pocket,' they say. And what's most absurd to me is that these pious, self-righteous people talk about the *deserving* poor! I think their President said those who are poor 'through no fault of their own.' At a time of skyrocketing unemployment, when so many can only look forward to a holiday season of scarcity, of dehumanizing 'charity' in its worst definition, they are faced daily with a barrage of television, radio, catalog, newspaper and magazine advertisements trumpeting the joys of giving expensive gifts—video games, furs, jewels. Bah! You want me to save Christmas for those hypocrites?" Relicta rolled her eyes.

"Yes," said PM, "because not *all* of them are hypocrites. And because so many people *are* suffering."

Maybe we didn't explain Christmas well enough. The meaning of Christmas is that God believed humankind is worth saving, so much so that He sent the dearest person to Him—His Son—to help people learn how to live. He wanted the world to see by example that love was possible, that peace was possible, that sharing was possible. Christmas represents hope—the human *potential* and *capacity* for good. Christmas is universal in that message. Perhaps in viewing the world as a whole, you see only the hopelessness. But we see the hearts of individuals—those that when they hear of someone in need, give without thought of what they're giving up. Those artists that create beauty because they have to, because they believe they have been given a talent, not because they expect to get rich. Those who extend their hand to help someone else, not asking if that person is 'deserving' of that hand. Those that struggle to survive so that their children may survive. Those who seek peace by trying to live without hatred or greed."

"Hmmm. Well, maybe...but I have my doubts."

"But," said Alabaster, with his lawyer's knack for argument, "you admit the possibility that those people exist."

Relicta hesitated. "I guess."

Mrs. Santa touched the visitor's hand. "Then you have hope. If we can ride tonight, and deliver what presents we can to those we can, we will remind people of what Christmas means. If we don't ride, we won't destroy Christmas—because [*as the reader may remember from previous stories*] we *aren't* Christmas, were never meant to be. But our absence will mean a little less hope for children everywhere. And, after all, the children are the hope of the world."

"Please help us," whispered Clyde, wiping a tear from his eye.

The Christmas crew looked expectantly at Relicta.

"All right. I'll blast off, knock out SEGWAC's satellite, then I'm getting out of this world."

Santa stroked his beard. "I hope you know how grateful we are. Say, maybe you could postpone your



trip a while. You don't have any particular destination in mind, and you might enjoy coming on the ride with us tonight—see it from our view, and see it from the tiny tots' view as they open the presents. What do you say?"

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to come back for a while. My travels *have* left me rather exhausted. I do need a rest."

"Sure," chirped Clyde. "And after the ride we all go on vacation and get a sun tan!"

"I'll think about it. But right now I'd better take off." She climbed back into the ship and slowly maneuvered it through the hole in the roof. Once clear, with a burst of orange flame she blasted into the sky. As she passed through the blue force field she left a streak of white, like a falling star in reverse.

Santa and the gang began packing the sleigh. Rudolph drew Alabaster aside. "Dasher's still dizzy. Would you mind taking his place tonight?"

"Not at all," replied Al. "I was going to go anyway, remember?"

"That's right!" cried Santa, joining them. "I've got a wedding to perform. I almost forgot!"

"I didn't," purred PM. "I just wanted our wedding to be a celebration."



The electric blue dome suddenly disappeared, leaving only puffs of dark smoke to obscure the bright stars.

Alabaster gripped PM's grape paw tightly as they gazed at the sky. "I don't know what I would have done if you'd tried to teletransport through that field and not succeeded," he said.

"I know what I'd have done," replied PM with false gaiety. "I'd have given new meaning to the phrase, 'trying to get my act together.'"

Alabaster was still shaking his head when the space craft returned, this time barely missing the Christmas tree. Relicta joined the reindeer, Christmas Monsters, elves and Clauses at the sleigh, where PM and Alabaster (already in place at the front) were saying "I do."

"I guess the only thing for me to add is, I now pronounce you Monster and Monster," declared Santa, as Clyde lifted his champagne glass and hiccupped "hooray!"

Relicta climbed in and perched on the top of Santa's sack. Mrs. Santa took her place next to her husband. "Let's get this show on the road!" Santa ordered, and Peppermint Paunch, Clyde and the other elves, and a dazed Dasher threw rice as the sleigh pulled away to follow the shining star that beaconed another Christmas.

By the time the last gifts were delivered, Relicta was laughing almost as jollily as St. Nick. "Maybe I'll hang around the North Pole for a while," she said once flight-borne again.

"We're so glad," said Alabaster, turning back to smile at the sparkling eyes of the I.T.

"One more stop," Santa nudged Mrs. Claus, who now held the reins.

"No need to remind me, dear," chided Mrs. C., as she guided the sleigh and then pulled to a stop. PM and Alabaster removed their harnesses.

"Relicta, come visit us in Monsterland," waved PM. "Merry Christmas to all!" was heard as the sleigh drove out of sight. And PM and Alabaster began their honeymoon in the cloud castle at the end of a rainbow.

* * *



*May this Christmas bring you the
hope of love and peace . . .*

