

Just a Little Help From...

By Dandello [momkat@dandello.net]

Rated PG

Submitted January 2010

Summary: A Christmas ornament prompts a discovery from Lois's past.

A/N: For the 2009 Holiday ficathon

For Bobbart

Lois eyed the Christmas tree critically. She didn't really want to admit it but Clark and his dad had managed to find the absolutely perfect tree for their first Christmas together as a family.

Currently Martha was puttering around in the kitchen while Clark and his dad did... well she wasn't sure what they were doing. They were supposed to be hanging lights on the outside of the house but Lois hadn't heard any sounds from outside for some time.

"We're back," Jonathan called out. He came in carrying a large box of Christmas ornaments.

Martha came out of the kitchen wiping her floury hands on a towel. "Oh Jonathan, I don't know why you even brought those. Lois doesn't want those old things on her tree," she said.

"Of course I would," Lois protested. "In fact, I'll go get my old ornaments down, too. It'll be fun."

Lois ran upstairs to the room they were using for storage, rummaged around and found the box of Christmas ornaments. It was a small box, but then her childhood ornaments had been lost years ago. All she had now was the ornament Superman gave her on his first Christmas in Metropolis and a few others she had collected over her years at the Planet. Her favorite was a black Madonna with child that she'd been given in the Congo six years before.

She grabbed her treasures and hurried downstairs with them.

Clark and his parents were sorting through their ornaments. Many of them were handmade, some obviously by Clark when he was a child - little green chenille wreaths with red ribbons, yarn-covered Styrofoam balls, a little felt Santa.

Martha was setting up a ceramic nativity scene that had seen better days, but instead of the standard stable with its animals, there was a Lincoln Log cabin with the animals on the outside looking in.

Lois gave Martha a quizzical look and the older woman chuckled. "When Clark was in kindergarten..."

"Mo-om!" Clark protested.

"Every family has its stories, Clark. Get used to it," Martha chided her son, laughing. She turned her attention back to her daughter-in-law. "As I was saying, when Clark was in kindergarten, he got so upset at the story about the inn-keeper putting a pregnant woman out in a drafty old barn in the middle of winter that he built them a proper house to stay in."

"Mom... I was five," Clark protested. "I didn't know that the winters in Bethlehem were a lot warmer than in Kansas. I also didn't know that the whole thing probably happened in late spring, assuming it happened that way at all."

"Still, it just goes to show that you had a good heart and a

need to help even then," Martha told him with a gentle smile.

"Things haven't changed all that much then, have they?" Lois asked, giving her husband a cheeky grin. She opened her box of ornaments and started pulling them out. First the glowing white crystal star, then the little black Madonna.

"Where did you get that?" Clark asked. There was a funny catch in his voice.

"When I was in the Congo in '92. Pointe-Noire," Lois said. "It was a gift."

Clark gave her a curious look and she realized she had never gone into details concerning the investigation that had led her to be in Africa on that Christmas Eve.

"I was working a story about some gun-runners that were based out of Metropolis. I traced them to Pointe-Noire," Lois said.

Clark was frowning. "The warehouse exploded, destroying the evidence," he said.

"Yeah," Lois said. "How did you...?"

Clark shrugged. "You said the Madonna was a gift. Do you know who gave it to you?"

Lois shook her head. "I never knew who it was... I had assumed at the time that Mister Wayne had sent it, and the evidence on the smugglers, to me but he told me later that he hadn't and he wouldn't tell me who did."

"Why don't you tell us about it," Martha suggested. There was little doubt in Lois's mind where Clark got his curiosity from.

Lois rolled her little Madonna over in her hands. It had been years since she'd thought much about what had happened there. She snuggled against Clark.

"Like I said, I was working on a story on arms smuggling..."

It had seemed so simple back in the Daily Planet's newsroom. Lois knew that Marj and Marvin Turner were the local contacts for a major international arms smuggling ring. A source within the organization had given her a reliable tip that a shipment was already headed for Pointe-Noire with a final destination in the war-torn areas farther inland.

Perry had groused at Lois when she told him she was following the trail to Africa, but he had authorized the trip after she promised to stay out of harm's way.

The heat had hit her like a shock wave when she stepped out of the airplane. Then she was picked up by someone claiming to be with the Congolese government and taken to a non-descript office near the middle of town.

After nearly a day of interrogation - they wanted the name of her source in the Turner organization and she wasn't about to give anyone that - she was released.

"Miss Long," Marchand said. He smirked at her assumed name as he handed her back her travel bag and identification. "It would be best if you went back to Metropolis on the first plane out of here. I cannot guarantee your safety and this is not the safest place for a white woman alone."

"I can take care of myself," Lois assured him.

"I wish you would reconsider telling us who your contact is."

"Not happening. I'm a journalist and I protect my sources." She was tired of repeating herself. Besides, he had never given her an actual name, only a code name - Black Pimpernel.

Marchand shrugged. "I hope your contact understands that. It would be regrettable if he thought you'd turned on him."

Despite the oppressive heat, Lois felt a shiver run down her back. She had a suspicion Marchand knew who her contact was but was simply looking for her to confirm it. She promised herself to get in touch with her contact and warn him about what was happening - assuming she could get into contact with him. He had warned her not to try to contact him while she was in Pointe-Noire. She figured that this was an emergency and he

would forgive her for not following his instructions.

She went to the nearest post office and used a pay phone to try to leave him a message at his number in Metropolis. The number had been disconnected. Lois tried to quell the bad feeling she felt in the pit of her stomach. The number in Metropolis was the only link she had to her source unless he managed to contact her. And after what Marchand had said, it was likely she would never hear from her nameless contact again.

She was feeling more cheerful by the time she reached her hotel. There was nothing nefarious about the phone being disconnected. Her contact was just being cautious and would contact her when he was able to. Perry and the U.S. consul knew where she was. She couldn't just disappear. People would look for her.

She checked into her room and debated with herself as to whether or not she should interrupt Perry's holiday with a call. She decided to call him when she had something more. Marchand's threats proved she was on the right track and that made her feel better. She knew she was going to get what she needed for her story.

She was feeling more cheerful until she headed for the hotel bar for something to eat and spotted Marvin Turner seated at a table with Marchand and a man she recognized from his photos on the society page - Bruce Wayne.

A dark haired man was seated at the bar sipping a beer and watching Wayne and the others. His face was shadowed. All she could really tell was that he was Caucasian and wore glasses. She guessed he was an American, but he could have been Italian or German or English. He could have been anything or anyone, but from the way he was watching the table, she'd be willing to bet a week's wages that he was a cop or some sort of security man. The real question was: who was he working for?

Lois waited out of sight until the meeting broke up. Marchand left first, making a show of checking to see if anyone had noticed him. Then Turner and Wayne left together. The watcher stayed at the bar, probably to see if anyone was following them. For a moment Lois thought he'd spotted her, but he didn't move from his seat.

Lois hurried around the building to catch up with Turner and Wayne. Night had fallen, making it hard to keep sight of the two men as they walked. Then Lois realized where they were headed - the docks. Turner's warehouse was near the docks.

Lois maintained a discrete distance from the two men, wishing she could get closer to hear what they were saying. It was hard to tell, but it seemed like Turner was nervous - he kept looking around as though he expected to see someone following them.

Wayne moved as if he had every right to be there and didn't care if he was seen with a notorious gun runner.

The warehouse had only one light on the outside and that was above what looked like an office door. Turner unlocked it and both men disappeared inside. Ten minutes later the door opened and they reappeared. Again Lois wished she could get close enough to hear their conversation, but from Turner's expression she could tell he wasn't pleased with whatever Wayne was saying. After a few moments of listening to Wayne, Turner's expression cleared and the men shook hands.

Turner and Wayne started back toward the city. Then Wayne stopped, apparently urging Turner to go on. Wayne watched Turner go then scanned the area around the warehouse entrance. For a moment Lois thought he'd caught sight of her in the darkness, but then he seemed to mentally shrug and went inside the building again.

Twenty minutes went by, then thirty. Finally Wayne came out, locking the door behind him. Lois watched as he strode away, following the path Turner took toward town.

Lois waited and when she was sure that neither Turner nor

Wayne was going to come back, she scurried to the warehouse door. As she suspected, the door really was locked, but the lock was a cheap one. She had it open in no time.

Once inside she turned on her flashlight and swung it around. The office was small and seemed unused - the desk was bare and the file drawers were empty. The pinup calendar on the wall was yellowed and several years old.

She opened the inner door into the warehouse proper. There were piles of stacked crates all marked 'farm equipment - ACAG.' The lid had been pried off of one crate and Lois peered inside. Hidden amongst innocuous machine parts were other things. She was reasonably certain that Congolese farmers had little need for machine guns and land mines.

Lois berated herself for not bringing along a better camera. The one she had was no good in dim light.

There was a faint pop somewhere and the scent of sulfur. Then there was the heart-stopping roar of an explosion.

Lois found herself outside the building, watching as flames reached for the sky. She had no idea how she'd gotten out. She didn't remember running and except for the wild beating of her heart, she didn't feel as though she had run out of the building - she was gasping from shock, not exertion.

In the fire light she thought she saw a man watching the flames. Then he was gone and she wondered if she imagined him. There were sirens in the distance and Lois hurried away. It wouldn't look good for her to be found near the warehouse, especially after Marchand's warning.

This had turned out to be one hell of a Christmas Eve. At least she was alive, but without the warehouse and its contents - or at least photos - her story was dead. She'd come all this way, missed Christmas with her sister, for nothing.

She took a round about way back to her hotel. She needed to sort her thoughts and get some sleep before calling Perry to let him know what had happened.

The night manager called out to her when he caught sight of her. She had hoped to sneak in unobserved.

"A gentleman left a package for you," he said, grinning at her.

"What did he look like?" she asked.

"White man, dark hair, glasses," the night manager told her.

The Watcher, maybe. At least it wasn't Turner.

"He asked me to wish you a Merry Christmas and he hoped his gift would make it that much merrier," the manager added.

Puzzled, Lois took the package up to her third floor room. She set the package on the rickety desk and checked out her room. Nothing appeared to have been touched. None of her little traps had been sprung. The one oddity was that the French doors to the small balcony were open and she was certain she had left them closed. She checked the balcony. No one could have climbed up to it without being seen and it was too rickety to allow someone to jump to it from above or from one of the other rooms.

Puzzled, Lois went back to the mysterious package and carefully opened it even though she knew that if it was booby-trapped, all the care in the world wouldn't keep it from going off.

Inside was a wooden Christmas ornament wrapped in tissue. Beneath it were papers and photographs - Turner with Marchand, Turner and his wife standing with men in para-military uniforms. The papers included copies of transcripts of telephone calls, telephone records, affidavits, bank records, even tax records. Lois recognized many of the names in the documents. Most of them were people she and the MPD suspected of being involved with the Turners. The others were people she hadn't realized might be involved.

There was a piece of folded paper tucked in the side of the box. Lois unfolded it. It was a note written in clear simple script wishing her a Merry Christmas and a safe trip home. It was

signed 'Black Pimpernel'.

Lois sighed. "You know, I should have died in the warehouse. I'm pretty sure the other Clark's Lois didn't make it out."

"Maybe you had more help than you knew," Clark said thoughtfully.

She looked at her husband. "You were the watcher at the bar, weren't you?"

He nodded.

"You were the Black Pimpernel?"

"That was Bruce, mostly."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Lois asked.

Clark looked embarrassed. "I wasn't even supposed to be at the warehouse that night. And I never told Bruce about you being there. And then, you were checked into the hotel under the name of Laura Long and I hadn't gotten that good of a look at you. Bruce didn't tell me your real name. So when I got to Metropolis and finally met you, it never occurred to me that you were also the woman at Pointe-Noire."

"You were the one who sent me the ornament and the documents," Lois said, wonderingly.

Clark nodded. "Bruce did mention that you worked for a paper in Metropolis and with the warehouse gone you'd have trouble proving your allegations. He also indicated that helping you prove them might not be a bad thing."

"Why didn't you write the story yourself?" Lois asked.

Clark grinned. "I wasn't working for the Daily Planet."

"I won a Kerth for that story, you know," Lois said. "I'm not about to share it with you."

"It was a Christmas present, Lois," Clark said. "I don't expect you to share it."

"Uh huh... and Bruce Wayne was the Black Pimpernel?" Lois scooted closer to her husband.

"Yes." He kissed her delicately.

She straightened up. "You were at the warehouse that night. You were there when it exploded."

"I got you out just in time."

"And that's why the other Lois didn't make it. Her Clark wasn't there to save her," Lois said. "Oh, Clark... she died because he wasn't there."

"Somehow I think Mister Wells has that well in hand." He moved in to kiss her again.

There was the sound of throat clearing. "I'd tell you to go get a hotel room, but this is your house."

THE END

Screen Name: bobbart

Three things I want in my fic:

1. Lois and Clark together at the end with smoochies 1a.

Together throughout with early smoochies is fine by me but not required. :-)

2. A revelation to someone (doesn't have to be Lois)

3. Something funny (if possible - humor is SO hard)

Preferred season(s)/holiday [if applicable]: Christmas (but other holidays are okay)

Three things I do not want in my fic:

1. Lois getting hurt or killed.

2. High-level angst.

3. Songfic.