

Happy Hour at Dulin's Bar

by Dandelio (AKA Librarian)

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Rating: K+

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September BlueTights Challenge - scuttlebutt:

1: a keg of water on board ship, around which sailors would gossip;

2: gossip, rumor, idle chatter

"Yo, Iris. Over here!"

Iris Britt looked around Dulin's bar to locate the speaker. She spotted him, Alex James, sitting at a table with one of the MPD old-timers, Joe Mooney. She tried to hide her nervousness as she made her way through the crowd of off-duty officers in off-the-rack suits, jeans, and sweaters. It was her first time at Dulin's, following her first day on patrol as a newly minted MPD officer and she was terrified that everyone would recognize her for what she was - a wet behind the ears rookie who didn't belong there.

Alex was grinning at her as she settled into the one open chair at his table.

"I hear you actually had some excitement today," Alex began.

"A shoplifter and a mugger," Iris said trying to sound more nonchalant than she felt. "No big deal."

"No big deal, she says," Alex scoffed. "Have you any idea how much I wish I'd been there. I mean, the Big Guy himself... What's he like? What did he say?"

Iris shrugged. She had no idea where to even begin. She had thought she'd outgrown her fan-girlishness - it had been years since she went ga-ga over a movie star or singer. But then, Superman wasn't a movie star or singer - he was Metropolis's own favorite son who could fly under his own power. Superman had the mugger in hand when Iris and her field training officer (FTO), Ray McGrew, rolled up in their panda car.

Iris had heard from Mooney and McGrew and the other old-timers about how courteous and considerate the Man of Steel was. They didn't mention that his pictures on TV and in the papers didn't do him justice - he was utterly gorgeous. Iris wasn't about to admit she had hardly heard a word he told her she was so taken with his appearance. Black hair, blue eyes, dimpled chin, a body to die for.

Luckily McGrew wasn't as awed as Iris was. He got Superman's statement, as well as the two elderly out-of-town victims, while Iris worked to close her mouth.

"He was nice," Iris managed to say. "But I don't think he likes the press much."

"What makes you say that?" Mooney asked.

"A couple guys showed up with cameras and started asking questions about those stories about him and Lois Lane that were going around a couple months ago," Iris said. "He wouldn't answer them. I mean, what business is it of theirs if he has a girlfriend or even a boyfriend?"

Mooney chuckled. "I doubt he has a boyfriend... but a girlfriend..." Mooney nodded knowingly. "I'm real sure there's a girlfriend out there."

"You really think so, sir?" Alex asked.

Mooney nodded and took a gulp of his beer. "He never lies, you know. But he isn't above avoiding telling the whole truth."

"Isn't that lying by omission?" Alex asked.

Mooney shook his head. "No, it's just keeping his private life private."

"But if he never talks about it, why do you think he has a girlfriend?" Iris asked.

The noise level in the bar was high and getting higher as more cops arrived. It had been a busy day in Metropolis and nearly everyone needed a little mood-brightening before heading home to wives, husbands, and families. Mooney chuckled and leaned forward conspiratorially. "You've read that first article Lane wrote about him, right?"

Iris nodded. She would never admit it to the other officers, but when she first moved to Metropolis for college she read everything she could about Metropolis's resident super-hero. She had practically memorized Lane's article '*I spent the Night with Superman*' and had spent more nights than she cared to recall watching the skies for some flash of the missing red and blue.

"Well, in that first article Lane wrote that he didn't have a girlfriend," Mooney continued.

"So?" Alex asked.

"So... after he came back he was asked if he had a girlfriend and he refused to answer the question."

"And that's your evidence?" Alex asked. "Not exactly enough to take to the DA."

"But he didn't deny having a girlfriend even when it might have saved him some grief a couple months ago," Mooney insisted.

"So, who do you think it is?" Iris asked.

"Well, early on a couple of us figured it was Lois Lane," Mooney drawled. "We figure they must have spent quite a bit of time together for her to get that much info out of him, and that article '*Why the World Doesn't Need Superman*' smacked an awful lot of the woman scorned."

"But isn't she married?" Alex asked. "I thought that was the cause of that whole mess a couple months ago - people thought he was making time with a married woman."

"Yeah, she's married and she has a kid," Mooney said. "But we also figured the timing was right for the kid to be his."

"Jeez, Mooney," Alex muttered. "You don't think that's why he disappeared, do you?"

Mooney shook his head. "Nah. I think if he knew she was pregnant, even if it wasn't his, he'd've never taken off." He lifted his glass and looked at it as if just now realizing it was empty. He waved at the bartender for another pitcher.

The waitress was wending her way across the crowded floor to their table with the pitcher of beer when the front door opened. Iris saw three people, two men in three piece suits and a woman wearing the distinctive uniform of the SCU - black t-shirt, black worsted pants and combat boots.

Lupe Leocadio, head of the Special Crimes Unit, grinned at Mooney. "Hanging out with the rookies again, Mooney?"

Mooney grinned back at her. "Somebody's got to keep an eye on them," he said. "Word is that you had some excitement this afternoon."

Leocadio shrugged. "Let's just say that Robo-cop won't be working in Metropolis anytime

soon if the mayor has anything to say about it."

"I'm sure it *sounded* like a good idea," the younger and taller of the suits said.

Leocadio glowered good naturedly at him. "Cops need hearts that pump blood, not whatever that *thing* had running through its veins."

"Some sort of oxygenated coolant," the man said. "STAR Labs said it might take a while for a complete analysis of whatever it was. They suspect it wasn't based on Earth tech."

Iris couldn't place the tall stoop-shouldered man with glasses but she did recognize the other, older, man from when he lectured at the police academy- Inspector William Henderson of Special Investigations. He and Leocadio were two of the most high-powered people in the MPD.

Leocadio's glower deepened. "You mean to say somebody else got hold of the info Luthor stole from Superman and is using it to make killer robots?"

The man shook his head. "Superman was able to recover the stolen data crystals not long after Luthor's death and we all know how unlikely it is that Luthor shared his information with anyone."

"So, alien tech, but not from Superman?" Leocadio insisted.

The tall man shrugged. "One alien implies more than one alien."

"Madre de Dios, Kent," Leocadio growled. "You mean there might be more of that sh*t out there?"

Henderson shook his head and pushed Leocadio ahead of him toward the back of the room. The tall man followed them through the crowd. Iris watched as other officers greeted the trio, clapping Kent on the back as he passed. "I hear the wife's expecting," someone said. Iris didn't catch Kent's response but she would have sworn he was blushing at the attention.

"Henderson and Leocadio I know," Alex said. "But I've never met the guy in the glasses. Can't be SCU - none of them wear glasses. One of Henderson's?"

Mooney didn't answer.

"He knows a lot about Superman," Iris observed. "One of Chen's sniffers over in Organized Crime?"

Mooney shook his head.

"Come on, Mooney," Iris urged. "What's the scuttlebutt on this guy? He's obviously got an in with the big guns. I mean, how are mere rookies supposed to know what the big guns look like when we run into them if you don't point them out?"

Mooney's response was interrupted by a commotion at the front door. A stylishly dressed woman with dark hair and hazel eyes walked in. The men closest to the door high-fived her as she passed them.

"How's the Big Guy doin'?" someone asked.

"If you're referring to Superman, he was doing fine when I saw him last," she responded.

"From what I hear, that robot or whatever it was nearly had him," someone else said.

"Did you really think a mere cyborg was going to keep Superman down?" she asked back.

There were mumbles of agreement as the woman looked around for someone. "Has my husband shown up?" she asked. "Six-four, two hundred pounds, black hair, glasses, bad posture?"

"In the back with Bill and Lupe," one of the older men said, jerking his head towards the back of the room. "Oh, and I hear congratulations are in order."

"Thanks, Cabrera," the woman said as she headed toward the back.

"Okay, she's Kent's wife, right?" Alex asked Iris and Mooney.

"Mooney, you mean you haven't introduced the rookies to the woman who took out Lex Luthor?" Cabrera asked.

Iris felt her jaw drop. "That's Lois Lane?"

Cabrera grinned at her. "Got it in one."

"But she's a..." Alex began.

"Her scores at the shooting range are probably better than yours," a dark-skinned woman at Cabrera's table said with a grin. "Hell, I didn't believe it when I first heard it," she continued. "I still have a hard time believing it. All those staters out at Manahasset and it takes a civilian to take out the shooter."

"If that was Lois Lane, then that Kent guy is..." Iris said, thinking out loud, "Clark Kent, the guy who blew the whistle on that lunatic government agency that was trying to kill Superman last year? Wait... they're married?"

"Eloped to Reno during the Church trial," the woman said. "It was about time, too, if you ask me. They're good people despite their choice of professions. They've got a cute kid, too."

"Who is no doubt terrorizing his baby-sitter," Lois Lane said, coming up behind her. Kent was trailing behind her, a bemused look on his face.

"You can always ask one of us," Cabrera said.

Lane rolled her eyes. "That's what he does in a pinch," she said, jerking her thumb at her husband.

"It was only a couple times," Kent protested mildly.

"Uh huh. And that's why the 97th Precinct has so many of his toys?"

"Actually, most of them are at Sergeant O'Malley's house. He has five kids of his own you know, and his wife really likes Jason..."

"Uh huh... and which one of them taught our son to play blackjack?"

Iris didn't hear Kent's response as the couple disappeared out the front door.

Mooney was laughing and shaking his head.

"What's so funny?" Alex asked.

"Just another Friday night at Dulin's," Mooney managed to say. "So, Cabrera, what was going on with that bozo with the knife..."