

Boys' Night Out: Lights and Sirens

by Dandelio (AKA Librarian)

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Rating: K+

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Author's Notes: Written for the 12daysofClois prompt: #02/Basement Set in the Shadows Universe, some months after **Crystal Dreams**.

"Are you sure you don't want me along?" Clark Kent asked his wife of almost-but-not-quite one year.

"It's a baby shower, Clark," Lois Lane responded. "I can just see you trying to make yourself invisible in a room full of cackling hens. I just wish I could make *myself* invisible so I could get out of the whole thing."

"Then why didn't you tell Alice you didn't want a shower?" Clark asked.

Lois raised one perfectly sculpted eyebrow at him. "Tell Alice White *not* to throw a party?"

"I guess you're right," Clark conceded. Perry White's wife had a well deserved reputation when it came to throwing parties - small dinner get-togethers to meet her husband's employees, large soirees designed to impress Metropolis's *hoi oligoi*, and of course baby and bridal showers for Planet staff. Once invited to one of Alice's parties the only way out was via a death certificate - something Clark had learned to his chagrin when he first joined the Daily Planet staff nearly eleven years before.

"At least she won't be trying to get you married off," Clark added, recalling Alice's attempts to introduce him to 'nice' girls despite his attempts to dissuade her.

"Thank God for small favors," Lois agreed. "So, what are you and Jason planning to do this evening while I'm being tortured by the boss's wife?"

"Nothing much," Clark said. "Catch a movie, do some shopping..."

Lois nodded knowingly. Their first anniversary was Monday and Jason's seventh birthday was at the end of the month. "Don't go overboard at the toy store, okay? He's already spoiled rotten."

"Am not," Jason Kent protested with a pout, looking up from his drawing station at his father's desk.

"Are too," Lois shot back, ruffling her son's hair.

"I'm not rotten," Jason told her solemnly. "I don't stink. Rotten stuff stinks."

"He's right, you know," Clark stated with equal solemnity. "Rotten stuff stinks. I suspect it's nature's way of telling humans that some things are better left alone."

"Then why do they age meat?" Lois asked sweetly as she shut down her work computer and collected her cell phone.

"Another good reason to be a vegetarian," Clark stated in reply.

Lois chuckled. "Just stay out of trouble, okay? And if..." She made a sideways 'flying'

motion with her hand to indicate Superman. "...drop him off at Jimmy's."

"Jimmy has a date tonight," Clark reminded her. "Besides, what sort of trouble could we possibly get into?"

"You want a list? If there are flashing lights and sirens, you'll be right there."

Clark had to admit that Lois had a point. Jason's presence made Clark's duties as Superman more complex - Jason's safety came before anything else. Luckily no one had picked up on the fact that Superman was occasionally a little slow getting to rescues since his recovery from the injuries he sustained dealing with the monstrosity of New Krypton. And those few who knew that Superman had normal job and family obligations were wise enough, and courteous enough, not to mention anything about it to him.

But having Jason with him did make disappearing at a moment's notice a little more difficult.

"So, what movie do you want to see?" Clark asked.

Jason shrugged then his expression brightened. "Maybe we can go shopping for the baby."

"If we get any more stuff for the baby, we won't have any room in the house *for* the baby."

"But that's all 'useful' stuff," Jason complained. "What about fun stuff?"

"Jason, it'll be a little while before the baby's old enough to appreciate 'fun' stuff," Clark reminded his son. It wasn't the first time they'd had this conversation and Clark doubted it would be the last before the baby came. "Remember Joey's baby brother?" Clark added.

Jason nodded. "He wasn't much fun at first and now he's just annoying."

Clark chuckled. "Well, the same thing is going to happen with your baby brother or sister."

Their walk had brought them to Schott's Toy Emporium, one of Metropolis's landmark stores not far from the Daily Planet. Jason ran to the baby toy section and started inspecting the variety of rattles and stuffed toys. After several long moments, Jason selected a small brown bear and a teething ring shaped like Superman's symbol. Clark noted Jason's longing look at the fire engine that came complete with lights and sounds.

"Jason, I'm not sure your mother would approve," Clark said. The sound effects would certainly not be welcome after a long night in the office or with the baby. But it was *so* tempting.

Then he heard real sirens - a warehouse fire near Hobs Bay. He was familiar with the building. Superman had put out a minor fire there more than a year before and knew that even though the fire suppression system had been improved, the building still housed an extremely dangerous mix of solvents and chemicals.

"Dad?" Jason's voice intruded.

Clark blinked, reminding himself where he was. He turned to the waiting cashier. "Um... I forgot... We'll be back." With that he picked Jason up and hurried out of the store.

The fire was now a multiple alarm situation and Superman's services were needed if lives were not to be lost.

The fire was as bad as Clark had feared and with the speed the fire was progressing there wasn't a nearby rooftop that was safe to leave Jason. There also wasn't time to fly Jason to Smallville to his grandmother's.

He surveyed the situation. The fire was worse than he had thought - the building was fully engaged. Battalion Chief Yobachi Obote was in command of the forces trying to get a handle on the blaze - both Clark and Superman knew him. He was a good fire commander but he was also fighting a losing battle with this blaze.

Gawkers lined the sidewalk across the street and several police officers were trying to keep the crowd at a safe distance.

A white minivan in MFD livery was parked behind one of the fire engines. The insignia indicated it belonged to the battalion chief. Two boys a little older than Jason were sitting inside watching the fire. It seemed safe enough and he knew that although it was officially frowned on, firefighters were sometimes in the same pinch he was right now. The battalion chief's vehicle made for a reasonably safe place to drop their kids off.

"Jason, I want you to go and wait with those boys, okay?"

Jason obediently headed for the van as Clark Kent ran off and Superman made his appearance.

The baby shower was as horrifically boring as Lois had feared. Between her sister Lucy, her mother, and Clark's mother, every piece of furniture, every possible baby supply, had already been laid in. Clark's mom hadn't known about Jason until he was five and she was making up for lost time with her second grandchild - she'd practically bought out *Babies 'R Us*.

A baby shower held in the 'rumpus room'/basement of the Whites' house was superfluous. Not to mention that, although the room was no doubt charming, it was still a basement and the dark paneling and low ceilings made it positively claustrophobic. Lois would have preferred a party at Dooley's or even that little deli Clark and Jason liked but Alice had insisted.

The baby felt like he/she was tap dancing on Lois's bladder as she made yet another trip to the tiny downstairs half-bath. Lois didn't remember having so much trouble when she was pregnant with Jason but that was seven years before. She was seven years younger then.

There was a knock on the narrow door and Perry's gruff voice said, "Lois, there's a multiple alarm fire down by Hobs Bay. Superman is in attendance. It looks bad."

"Did Clark drop Jason off?" Lois asked, grabbing her cell phone to check for messages. To an outsider, Lois's question may have sounded like a change in subject but Perry White was one of the two other people at the Daily Planet who knew that Clark Kent, mind-mannered reporter, had a second job as a red caped super hero.

"No, but I figure you might like an excuse to escape the dungeon," Perry said with a dry chuckle. "I'll make your apologies to Alice. I'll tell her... You've been working on a story about the MFD..."

Jason watched the action from the van windows. He'd seen fires on the news, had watched Superman in action as well. But this was the first time the boy had been so close to a major fire. He was sure his mom wouldn't approve but then he and his dad did a number of things he was sure his mother wouldn't approve of if she knew - having chili at a place called Moe's down by the docks, or hanging out with Officer Mooney as he walked his beat, or having coffee and donuts with the guys at the fire station closest to their house.

But this was different. This was right in front of him. The fire was loud, roaring like an angry animal and it almost seemed like the fire wanted to reach out and grab the firemen and Superman. He hadn't realized how loud fire was. They didn't show that on TV. Nor did the TV show how a fire smelled - this one had a bad chemical smell in the heavy smoke. The strobing

lights from the fire trucks cast eerie shadows on the buildings and onlookers.

More sirens wailed as additional fire equipment arrived. This wasn't like TV. This was real and scary and Jason was loving every minute of it.

"Hey, what unit is your dad with?" one of the boys, Joey, asked, interrupting Jason's study of the newest arrivals.

"That one," Jason answered, pointing to where Superman was standing with Chief Obote. The truck nearest them was marked 'Rescue One'.

"A rescue man?" the other boy, Mark, asked. He sounded impressed.

Jason nodded. It wasn't a lie - Superman was the ultimate 'rescue man', but it wasn't the whole truth either.

The real team from Rescue One disappeared into the building.

Superman was in the air again, then he too disappeared into the fire. On the ground, people in protective garments held canvas hoses, pouring water on the flames. People on high ladders were handling more hoses, pouring on more water. The fire hissed and screamed at them.

Jason searched the fire for signs of Superman. He had been inside for what seemed a long time.

Then the building exploded and seemed to fall in on itself.

"They're dead," Joey announced flatly. "Superman didn't get them out."

"Maybe it got Superman, too," Mark suggested. "I don't see him. Your dad's dead, you know."

Jason felt tears welling up. Superman was okay. He *had* to be okay.

"You're lying," Jason sputtered. "My daddy's okay."

"Look kid, nobody got out of there alive," Joey insisted.

"My daddy's okay," Jason repeated more softly. "You'll see. Superman's okay and he saved 'em."

"No, he didn't," Joey said.

With tears in his eyes, Jason opened the door of the van and started running toward the rubble.

Joey was wrong.

He had to be.

The building was a fire-fighter's nightmare. First the chemicals, many of which he was sure were not documented, and then the basement had been subdivided into little cubicles which made it into a veritable maze. There was evidence the cubicles weren't just offices but sleeping areas as well. Luckily, Superman saw no signs that anyone had been down in the basement when the fire started. But there was a building owner out there who would be facing some severe fines for allowing the creation a possible death trap in the basement of the building.

Superman turned his attention back to the fire itself, cooling it with super-breath as he tried to keep the flames away from the hose men who were trying to get a handle on the inferno. Neither he nor they were having much luck. Super-speed wasn't a lot of help in situations like this - speed created unpredictable air currents that could exacerbate matters.

Then he heard the crack of timbers and flooring as they gave way beneath the men. He scooped them up and flew them out of the building, depositing them beside an aid car before going back into the building to make sure there was no one else inside. With the main floor

collapsing into the basement, it wouldn't be long before the entire building came down.

Fire fighters on the roof - at least the roof was holding so far. It was a long ways down to the basement which was filling with water.

Canisters of chemicals bobbed in the rising mess of water and debris.

He could hear more wood cracking, even above the roar of the fire. The roof was going. He sped to grab the men still on the roof, taking them to safety as the building collapsed in on itself. One wall remained standing. The rest was a pile of rubble with flames flickering in it like a giant campfire burning down.

At least the fire-fighters were safe.

"Hey kid!" Superman heard one of the boys in the van yell. He stopped in midair and surveyed the area around the van. Jason was nowhere to be seen.

What's going on down there? Superman wondered. Then it occurred to him that the aid car was out of sight of the van. Jason must have gotten worried and panicked and gone looking for him. He extended his hearing to find his son.

There. In the rubble.

"Superman..." a small voice was calling. "Superman..."

Jason didn't seem troubled by the heat and Superman wondered whether or not his son's invulnerability had kicked in. Jason's invulnerability was spotty and right now was neither the time nor place to test it. Superman started to carefully move toward Jason in the rubble. It was slow going - he didn't want to dislodge any of the debris for fear it might come down on Jason.

"Jason," Superman called sharply. "Come out of there now!"

"They said you were dead," Jason said. Superman could hear the tears in his voice.

"I'm fine and so are all the fire-fighters," Superman assured him. "So let's get out of here before you get hurt and we're both in trouble."

He watched Jason turn and start toward him. Then what remained of the floor beneath the boy gave way and with a squeak, Jason dropped into the slimy mess of water in the basement.

"Jason!"

Lois made it from Park Ridge to Hobs Bay in record time. She had just gotten to the scene when she saw the building collapse. Superman was nowhere to be seen but she had no doubt he was around, somewhere. She didn't see any sign of her son but assumed Clark had put him somewhere safe. *She hoped.*

A boy she didn't recognize was shouting something she couldn't quite make out.

Then Superman dropped out of the sky and disappeared into the rubble.

With a sense of foreboding, Lois approached Chief Obote.

"Jason!" Superman called again.

"Oops," Jason called back. Superman could see the boy was unharmed and treading water. Jason's clothes were covered with oily chemical residue. *We're going to have to burn them,* Superman thought to himself.

Superman wove through the debris until he could reach Jason. Again, super-speed would have created dangerous air currents so he had to move at human normal. At least he had the ability to float through the debris - his weight wouldn't cause a collapse.

"Jason, what did you think you were doing, coming in here?" Superman asked as they made their way out of the rubble.

"Looking for you," Jason responded, still teary eyed. "Joey said you were dead. That

everybody was dead."

"You shouldn't believe everything people tell you, okay?" Superman said.

"But I didn't see you," Jason explained. Tears made clean paths down his cheeks.

"But that doesn't mean you can ignore m... *your father's* instructions to stay put," Superman reminded him gently. There were people running toward them including, to Superman's chagrin, Lois Lane.

"Do you mind telling me what the hell's going on here?" Jason's mother demanded.

"We... uh... Dad..." Jason sputtered.

"You and your father saw the lights and sirens and you just couldn't resist," Lois stated.

Jason ducked his head and Superman gave his shoulder a gentle squeeze.

"It was a little more complicated than that," Superman said.

Lois nodded. She tipped her head toward the smoldering rubble. "How bad was it?"

"Bad. Luckily there were no deaths or serious injuries," Superman said. He paused and added softly, "You'll want to get him out of these clothes as soon as you can."

"Yes, of course," Lois agreed. She sounded unusually amiable. Clark had expected her to rip him a new one over putting Jason in danger, no matter if she was yelling at Superman or if there were witnesses.

Lois took Jason's hand and started toward her car. "Haven't we told you not to go running toward fires and things like that?" Superman heard her saying as they walked away. "You could have gotten badly hurt."

"But Mommy..." Jason protested.

"Just wait till your father gets home..." Lois's voice came floating back to Superman.

"But Mommy..."

"In the car young man."

Superman watched as Lois buckled their son into the back seat of the car.

Then she opened the driver's door. "And don't think you're off the hook, buster," she said to the air, as if knowing he was listening. Of course she knew he was listening. She knew he knew how upset she was likely to be with him for letting Jason get so close to a major fire, lights and sirens notwithstanding.

But then, Jason was the son of a superhero as well as two award winning journalists. Overwhelming curiosity and a total lack of fear were two traits that were part of his heritage. It was a good thing that he was almost invulnerable as well, considering how he took after his parents. But invulnerable or not, Jason was going to be grounded for at least a week for disobeying orders and running into a burning building.

Superman took a moment to check the fallen building. The fire department was taking care of the mess. With a wave to Chief Obote, he took off into the sky.

Schott's was just getting ready to close their doors when Clark Kent hurried in. "I said I'd be back," he said, handing the cashier his credit card to pay for the little bear and the teething ring. Then he went and grabbed the toy fire truck as well.

Lois was right - the lights and sirens were irresistible.