

Up on the Husetop

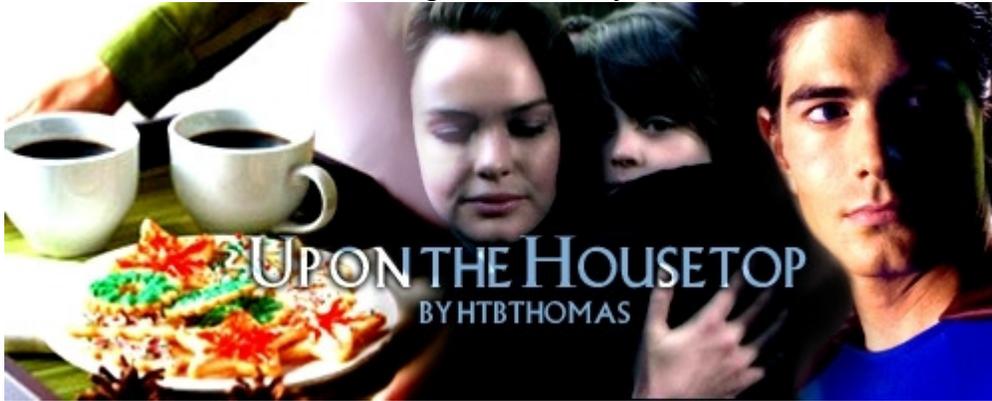
by htbthomas

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Rating: K

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Author's Note: Thanks to lastwordslinger for the story banner!



Snow was lightly falling outside, Christmas lights glowing from the eaves and doorway. Inside, the scent of a fresh Scotch pine and warm cookies added to the festive atmosphere. A few presents were under the tree - a few for each of the family members, Lois, Jason and Clark... although the gifts from Lois to Clark were wrapped securely with lead foil-lined paper. The rest of the presents from 'Santa' were hidden well from curious little eyes - after all, what if x-ray vision turned out to be Jason's surprise Christmas gift this season? No, to be safe, not even Lois knew where they were.

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Now, at precisely 9:45pm (she had been obsessively checking the time for hours) on Christmas Eve, Lois and Jason were cuddled up on the sofa. The flickering light which drew their attention was not the multi-colored array of lights on the tree, or the flames of a scented candle or a roaring fire... but instead the television, which showed the images of a volcanic disaster in the Philippines.

Clark had been there since the middle of dinner, he had arrived in time to stop the worst of the damage, but he had stayed to help with repair, to help people find shelter, or to look for lost family members. And as strong and as fast as he was, he was one lone man waiting for enough relief aid to arrive to take over. And because it was Christmas Eve, response time was delayed longer than usual.

Lois had tried to tempt Jason with some of the other holiday classics: *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, even *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (which he'd always thought was hilarious), but he refused. His eyes were glued to CNN, watching his father zip and out of the coverage.

"Jace," she tried again.

"Mm," he answered, eyes beginning to droop.

"I know he looks really busy, but I'm *sure* he'll be back in time for Christmas morning." She was not sure in the slightest, but she needed the reassurance as much as her son.

"I know, Mommy... but I wanna stay up just in case..."

She simply nodded into his hair, giving him a kiss on the top of his head. He snuggled in tighter to her, and she wrapped an arm around him to hold him close.

As she watched the devastating images on the screen, she found her thoughts drifting to last Christmas. Clark had really gone out of his way to try to make it a Christmas like no other. This Christmas, however, Lois had insisted that they do the normal family Christmas at their own house. It was time to start a few traditions of their own. They would visit Smallville and her parents' house in the next few days, but there was something special about having Christmas Eve at home together.

Clark had promised that he would try to spend every moment of this holiday with Lois and Jason. But when he stiffened suddenly at dinner, she knew that wasn't to be. The look on his face earlier when he realized he *had* to leave? It was still burned into her brain.

As she came back to reality, she realized that Jason's breathing had become very even, and looked down to see his eyes closed in slumber. She smiled slightly and shifted him onto one of the throw pillows, pulling one of Martha's hand-knitted afghans over his shoulders. He murmured softly and turned over, burying his face in the sofa cushions.

Lois went to the coffee pot and poured herself a fresh cup of coffee. Maybe it would help keep her up, but after the week they'd had - holiday preparations on top of work on top of piano recitals... it would probably take a shot of triple espresso to keep her from joining Jason under that afghan. She never wished Starbucks delivered more than she did right then.

Taking a sip, she sat beside Jason's bundled form on the couch and flipped through the channels. Many stations were playing holiday specials, but a few had news of the Philippine disaster. It was mostly the same images - there weren't many news crews on the scene. She began to flip to another program when an image caught her eye.

As the newscaster talked about Superman's heroic efforts in the clean-up effort, the cameraman was able to catch him as he paused on the top of a pile of rubble. He stood still as a statue - perhaps listening for any potential aftershocks, or the signs of a building collapse - facing toward the east. His look of complete attention was mixed with an indefinable sadness. She knew exactly how he felt. He had to be there, to help as many as possible. But he wished he were with his family. His family wished the same. And that was the price they would pay over and over again.

Lois' heart swelled, and she whispered softly, "You do what you need to do. I love you... and I'll wait as long as it takes."

At that moment, he looked up into the camera and gave a small, warm smile. He lightly touched his fingertips to his lips... And then he was off in a blur of color, zooming to lift the roof of a large structure nearby.

Lois closed her eyes and mimicked his gesture, imagining she were looking him in the eyes the way he had known to do into the camera. Her hand fell to her side, and she sat, lost in thought for a few moments...

She awoke with a start. The news program was over and an infomercial was blaring in its place. Jason had turned over and had his head against her hip, heating her like a hot-water bottle. Lois groaned as she stretched. It was time to go to bed - no sense in waiting on the

couch. Clark would be home whenever he was home.

She turned off the television and gently shook her son. "Hey, munchkin, let's get into bed, all right? Daddy's not home yet. You can curl up with me if you want."

He half-opened his eyes - he was probably noticing that the lights were still off, and there were no presents under the tree. "No Santa yet either?" he murmured sleepily.

"No, not yet. He can't come when you're downstairs, anyway."

"Oh..." He looked around the table and frowned. "Where are the cookies?"

"I'll set them out after I put you in bed." She threaded an arm under his and pulled him to a standing position.

He fought her groggily, starting to move toward the kitchen. "No." His voice creaked out. "If we don't put them out, he might not leave any presents..."

Lois shook her head but acquiesced. The two of them stumbled toward the kitchen and back out again with the prepared plate of decorated sugar cookies, Martha's afghan dragging along behind them. Lois placed the cookies on the coffee table, beside a glass of milk and gestured to the display. "Are we good to go?"

He simply nodded and started toward the stairs.

Once he was settled in bed beside her, Lois set the alarm on her nightstand for 4:00am. If Clark had not returned by then, she would have to try to find the presents somehow. And manage to get them under the tree before Jason heard her rustling around downstairs. *Well*, she thought tiredly, *I'll probably think of some excuse to explain why I'm doing it instead of Santa...* Her eyes drifted closed.

A *thump* from the roof above and Lois' eyes sprang open. Jason already was sitting straight up in bed. "What was that?"

"Um, I don't know... a tree branch, maybe?"

Jason dismissed that explanation out of hand. "Do you think it's Santa? Is he here?" He slid out of bed and raced for the hallway.

"Hold it!" Lois stopped him in his tracks. "If you interrupt him, he might get scared off... what if he isn't done?" She hoped that if it was Clark down there, this little delay would give him time to get finished. He did have the advantage of super-speed.

Jason thought about that for a moment, and then his shoulders slumped. "But I want to say hi..."

Lois grinned. "What if I go and check? I don't think he'd mind. Parents are different," she improvised.

His lips pursed, then he nodded. "Okay."

"Don't come down until I tell you, all right?" After a confirming nod from Jason, she slid into her slippers and carefully tiptoed down the stairs. It was still completely dark, and without even the Christmas lights on, it was hard to tell if the noise had been Clark or not. She squinted into the living room, trying to decide if it had really been a branch knocking against the side of the house after all...

Silence.

Suddenly, all the lights in the room seemed to come on at once, nearly blinding her. "Ack!" She threw up an arm over her eyes until her eyes adjusted.

Clark stood there beside the Christmas tree, still in his Superman costume. All of the presents were stacked below, a perfect picture of a young boy's dream. He had a star-shaped cookie in one hand, a bite out of the side - Clark swallowed and smiled at her, almost as brightly as the twinkling lights of the tree behind him.

She came to him eagerly and wrapped her arms around him. They stood that way for a timeless instant, and then Clark murmured into her hair, "No place like home for the holidays..."

Lois pulled away with a grin. "I swear, you and songs this year..." She never finished the thought, pulling his head down for a kiss. She drank him in, still smelling of sulphur and ash - but it might as well have been cinnamon and pine. This was the way she wanted to spend every Christmas, held in his embrace.

Suddenly, Clark began to hum a tune, his lips still moving across hers. Lois' brows drew together - *not another song...?* And then she chuckled, realizing that he was humming, "I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus."

They both turned and looked up to see Jason at the top of the stairs. "Daddy, you're back!" He bounded down, as happy to see Clark as Lois had been. "You made it back just in time!"

Lois expected him to exclaim about the presents now glittering beneath the tree, but instead Jason's smile faded, and he frowned with disapproval. "Hey, Daddy," he scolded his father. Lois followed his eyes to the iced star in Clark's hand. "Those cookies were for Santa!"