

Jason Kent and the Creature from the Deep

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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Midwinter in Metropolis was always a joy to behold: gray skies, freezing temperatures, snow that turned to muddy slush almost as soon as it fell. All of that, plus colds, surly tempers, and bored kids cooped up in the house just added to the joy. These things were enough to drive any sane person to the edge, especially if they were a mother. Even more especially if you were Lois Lane.

That said, there was exactly zero chance that she'd never admit to Clark that this vacation had been a *good* idea. Although dismal, dank weather seemed like nothing more than a bad dream at the moment, she wasn't generally the biggest fan of beaches, period. She was a winter baby to the hilt, far more comfortable in snow than in sun. But it would do for now. Lois lay on her stomach, feeling the sun's rays soaking into her back, hearing the steady soothing rumble of the waves punctuated by the cries of seabirds - and her twins, chasing each other up and down the beach.

Clark smoothed a hand down her back, eliciting a groaning sigh from his wife. Okay, fine, she *might* admit it. Taking a long weekend in the middle of January to go to the beach house on Paradise Island was exactly what she needed. On top of that, the feel of her husband's fingertips sliding down her spine - unimpeded by the bikini top, which she'd unlaced so as not to leave a tan line - made this idyll perfect.

Footsteps on sand, and then Richard called teasingly, "Get a spatula and flip her, Clark, I think she's toasted." Lois opened one eye behind the smoked lenses of her sunglasses to make sure the kids weren't in sight, then raised her middle finger at him. He just laughed, trotting down to the waves with his surfboard. "Come on in, Lois!" he called out. "You know you want to!"

She just rolled her eyes. Richard and Clark had both been trying to entice her into the water since they'd first gotten up this morning. Now it was a matter of principle to resist them both, even if a brief dip would've been refreshing. On the other hand, the prospect of watching Richard wipeout hilariously was enough to make Lois consider sitting up. "Clark, tie my top," she murmured.

"Now why would I do that, after I went to such trouble to convince you to come to the Bahamas instead of skiing?" His voice was low and amused.

"Because you're a superhero with a red bikini fetish," Lois muttered, glancing at him over her sunglasses.

His grin was absolutely irresistible. "Only on you."

"Yeah, you only mentioned it like sixteen times while trying to talk me into this." Lois

made a show of grousing, secretly reveling in the praise. Her mouth curved into a snarky little grin as she looked over her shoulder at him. "If your fans knew half the stuff you say..."

"Things like, 'It's a private beach, you can leave the top off?'" Clark asked in the most innocent tone he could manage, even as he was tying the back for her.

"Yes, things exactly like that, you perv." The long-suffering reporter turned her gaze back toward the shoreline, sighing and rolling her eyes at the cacophony there. "Y'know why I don't tan topless? Your answers just ran screaming past us."

Clark looked up, to where Kala had just raced by, wailing like a fire siren and leaving Jason in her dust. The boy was carrying something, but it wasn't a jellyfish and it wasn't a shark, so Clark ignored him for the moment. "Not like they haven't seen them before," he opined as Lois sat up. "You breastfed. I have the video."

The little waggle of his brows at that comment made Lois snort in amusement. "That was *how* many years ago? And you're just acting like this to freak me out and you know it." Crossing her arms over her chest, Lois just glared at him. "Yeah right. Fine, you wanna give Richard a free view, go ahead. It's just not gonna be mine on display."

"He's seen them, too," Clark pointed out. Lois knew perfectly well that he wasn't serious; he was arguing the point just for the sake of arguing, lazily teasing her about her legendary lack of modesty. "So has Lana, I'm sure. You did enough fittings for the wedding dress."

That brought on another snort of laughter. "If it comes to that, hero, *you've* seen them more than anyone else here," Lois told him, unable to fight off a grin of her own. "And you could be peeking right now, for all I know."

"I'd never do..." Clark's reply was cut off by Kala's scream. She'd been screaming for the last five minutes, but that had been her usual my-brother's-bothering-me scream. This was higher, louder, and sharper, and Lois and Clark both whirled toward it. On the deck of the beach house, Lana stood up, forsaking the shade of the awning that protected her fair complexion.

Kala was lying on the sand, clutching her foot and wailing, with Jason standing over her worriedly. "My God," Lois sighed, as her husband dashed down to his daughter at super-speed. He knelt beside her, Lois taking a few steps toward them, and then Clark gave Lois a thumb's-up to let her know everything was essentially okay.

Clark gently lifted Kala, waving at Richard and Lana to let them know he was handling it. He carried his daughter past Lois, who could see a thin smear of blood on her foot; she'd scraped herself on a shell, most likely. Kala was pouting, crying a little, but not traumatized, and Lois lay back down on the lounge, groaning in disbelief to herself, "Last year she broke her arm; at least we got through Christmas this year. I swear she's as accident-prone as Clark..." That statement, of course, ignored the fact that *Clark's* accidents were mostly part of his disguise. *Lois* was the one who tended to get herself into life threatening situations.

The sun was warm, Clark and Lana would take care of Kala's little injury, Jason was safely padding around on the sand in line of sight, and Richard was goofing around on the board, indulging adolescent fantasies of a being a surf god. Lois let her eyes slip closed, knowing she couldn't actually doze off - she had to keep an eye on Jason, even if Richard was also watching him. It was so hot out; thank God for the SPF 70 sunscreen that Clark had rubbed thoroughly - very thoroughly - into her skin...

Ice-cold water dripped onto her belly, and Lois' eyes flew open while she let out a shocked gasp. In front of her was a vision out of nightmares - insectile legs ending in pincers, a long stiff tail, and a hard shell partly covered in spikes. It looked like a crab that had gotten in

the way of some mad scientist's experiment. "*What the f-freakin' hell?!*" she yelled.

The Creature from Planet X was then moved aside slightly, revealing her little boy's smiling face. "Mommy, lookit what I found!"

How had she not seen it coming? This was Jason and if there was some kind of odd animal to be found within a hundred miles of the boy, he *always* found it. "I know what *I* found. A frikkin' heart attack. Jeez, Jason, what *is* that thing?"

"I dunno!" he proclaimed, beaming. The thing he was holding on to was *alive* - it flicked its tail feebly and waved its pincer claws when Jason moved it. She could see every tooth in his head when he chirped happily, "Can I keep it?"

"No, Jacques Costeau, you can't," Lois said with feeling, still staring at her son's find in horror as she pulled her shades off. Just a typical day at the beach with the Lane-Kents - Kala hurts herself, and Jason finds some godforsaken beast from the deep and tries to make a pet out of it. "Where did you *find* that thing, anyway?"

"By the water." Jason was now gazing adoringly at his find. "Isn't it awesome? D'ya think it's a boy or a girl, Mommy?"

"I think it's an it - and *it's* going back in the water," his mother deadpanned, watch the creature in his arms warily.

Heaving a huge sigh, he looked up at her with his most pleading look, holding the scary crab-thing to his chest. "Awww, Mommy, *please?* I wanna keep it!"

"Jason, the Predator is going back in the water before it starts spitting acid at us," Lois said sternly.

Now it was the boy's turn to heave a heavy, disbelieving sigh. "Mommy, *aliens* spit acid, Predators have plasma guns."

Hearing that, one of Lois' dark brows rose. "Oh, is that so, Ridley Scott? And this is the part where you tell me your Daddy Richard did not let you watch those movies."

Realizing that he was trapped, Jason did the only thing he really could do in the situation. "Daddy Richard didn't let me watch those movies," Jason repeated back with absolute solemnity, as commanded.

Lois felt like beating her head against a wall; Richard had always been a little more indulgent about what he let the kids watch. As long as they understood that movies were make-believe, no one had any nightmares afterward, and he covered their eyes during the kissing parts, he figured it was okay. Lois had disagreed, but Richard bent her rules, and so far neither twin was mentally scarred by all the bad horror movies. What the heck, they were all on vacation anyway.

"All right, kiddo," Lois said, her voice firm. "Alien, Predator, or Creature from the Black Lagoon, we're not keeping it. Take that thing back down to the water and heave it in."

"But Mommy..."

"No buts," Lois stopped him, giving him the Mom Eye.

Jason pouted. "There might be sharks in the water."

"Daddy Richard's out there trying to surf," his mother pointed out, sitting up in her lounge chair. "If there are sharks, trust me when I say that they're too busy laughing at him to bother your crab thing."

"Come with me?" Jason pleaded, now giving her his best wide-eyed expression along with his pouting lower lip.

Swimming in the pool was one thing, but the ocean was full of sand and salt and shells and small fish ... and everything that lived in the ocean also used it for a toilet, something that

the twins had never quite seemed to understand. All in all, *not* Lois' idea of fun. "Sweetheart, I don't really want to go swimming," Lois said as gently as she could.

"Ohh-kay," the little boy sighed heavily, and trudged toward the water. Lois felt a pang, seeing his slumped shoulders. In spite of the fact that she'd resisted Clark and Richard when *they* attempted to get her in the water, she got up and went to her son. What was a little sand in her bikini compared to her son's smile? As for the rest, a good long bath in antibacterial soap should do the trick.

"All right, you win," she murmured, rumpling his hair as she came up behind him. "I'll help with the release part of catch-and-release weird animals found on the beach."

"Yay!" Jason cried, throwing his arms around her waist - and forgetting he was holding the crab-thing. Lois yelped when its claws scabbled against her side, and Jason giggled. "I think it likes you, Mommy."

"Yeah, uh-huh. Let your little buddy there know that the feeling's not mutual. C'mon, sweetheart. His mom's probably wondering what he's doing out so late in the day."

They headed down to the water, the reporter wincing as she walked over the shell-strewn high tide line. Jason splashed into the clear blue water without the slightest reservation, lifting his feet high and spraying saltwater everywhere with each stride. Much to her own amusement, Lois had to quicken her stride to keep pace with him.

He seemed determined to wade halfway back to the Florida coast, so she stopped him when he was waist-deep. "This is deep enough, Jason," she called as she caught the back of his trunks. "It's got plenty of room to swim, kiddo. Time to let him go."

Jason sighed, and patted the crab. "Go and swim and get real big and don't meet any sharks," he said solemnly, then kissed its shell, to Lois' disgust. "I'll miss you."

Gently placing the creature into the next wave, Jason watched through the water as it swam away. Once it was out of sight, he turned to his mother and sighed sadly. Knowing that look, as if he had lost his best friend, Lois smiled warmly and hugged him. Her sweet boy had never met an animal he didn't like - well, except Sylvia White's damn terriers. Over the course of the last year or two, he'd brought home all sorts of strange 'pets', from Fred the Frog at his grandmother's that first visit to a host of garden lizards from Aunt Lucy's to the occasional insect that lighted down on their terrace. Just a few weeks ago, he'd found a wren that had stunned itself against the apartment's French doors, and had carefully brought it to Lois. The tiny bird survived to be released the following day, and Lois had shaken her head in amazement. Her son broke a lot of toys, but he'd never handled a living creature with anything other than infinite care.

"Can we have an aquarium?" Jason asked, leaning against Lois. He knew his soulful blue eyes didn't work with *every* request, but tried using them to persuade her anyway.

And now the inevitable, as always. "Jason, I don't think we have room. Gazeera's cage takes up half a wall in your bedroom."

"I have space; Kala's sleepin' in her room now," Jason said all too brightly. "And Captain Jack's in *her* room. We could get little fish, like the pretty ones we saw on the boat."

Lois was afraid to ask which boat he was talking about - she remembered the glass-bottomed gallery aboard Luthor's yacht too well. And remembered what had happened there. *He doesn't know what he did to Brutus*, she reminded herself, kissing the top of her son's head and tabling the discussion with, "I'll think about it." *For all his strength, he's so gentle. He takes such good care of Gazeera, much as I want to see the frikkin' dinosaur dead. My sweet little boy...*

In her musings, she didn't notice Jason's attention suddenly shift, and didn't see him smile at someone behind her. The next thing Lois knew, Clark caught her up around the waist and started dragging her further into the waves. "C'mon, son, help me out here," he teased. "Your mom needs a swim, I think."

"I do not, you creep!" Lois yelled, struggling.

Jason laughed, splashing them both indiscriminately and yelling, "Creep~~tonian~~, Mommy!" He didn't follow them too far, knowing enough to stay in shallower water, but Richard had come in to help, and Lois soon found herself dumped in well over her head.

Thankfully, she could swim. Lois surfaced and lashed at the water, sending a spray into Richard's and Clark's faces. "You jackasses!" she hissed in playful aggravation, all too aware of Jason's closeness. "Are you *trying* to drown me?!"

"Nah, he'd rescue you," Richard laughed, splashing her back. "Glad to see *someone* convinced you to get in the water."

"That would be *Jason*," Lois snapped, finding a spot where she could touch bottom and shaking the saltwater out of her hair. "Not either of *you* jerks."

"Well, the Kent men are pretty well known for powers of persuasion," Clark said, evading the next curtain of water Lois flung at him. On the deck, Kala and Lana laughed at the four of them, and closer by, Jason looked up at Lois with bright blue eyes.