

The Not-So-Great Escape

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Rated PG for mention of nudity

Summary: For a change, Lois is not the one fleeing. This story is part of a series, but you don't need to read the other stories to understand this one. This story takes place after "The Diagnosis" and before "Echolalia."

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Disclaimer: Lois and Clark belong to Warner Brothers and DC Comics. I am just borrowing them for some not-for-profit fun. All other characters are my own creations.

"All right, kiddo, time to take off your swim trunks."

As Lois unhooked the combination lock, opened the locker door, and retrieved her younger son's towel and clothing, she kept up a steady stream of speech.

"We had fun in the pool today, didn't we? What should we tell your brother and Dad about it? You did a lot of splashing, didn't you?" Lois thought that there really wasn't much exciting to tell Clark and Jerome about their afternoon at the pool.

"Here. Feel how soft the towel is? Let me dry you with it." After Todd was dry, Lois started to dress him.

"I wonder how Jerome and your Dad are enjoying their movie? I guess we'll find out when we meet them for ice cream in an hour. Do you think Jerome will like the new bike we bought him for his birthday? It's hard to believe he's seven already. It seems like just yesterday when he was your age."

Although she had already had plenty of practice with one-sided conversations, she still found it hard sometimes to come up with things to say. It had been so much easier having them with her children when they were cute babies who made good eye contact and who didn't understand her speech. But now Todd seldom looked at her, and she often had no idea how much her three-year-old son was actually understanding. She knew he got a lot more out of conversation than the casual observer would realize, but even she had no clue how much more. But she wanted to provide him as language-rich an environment as possible, so she just kept on talking.

"Which would you like to put on next — your shirt or your pants?"

Todd reached for the article of clothing in her left hand.

"OK. Shirt it is, then. Hold up your arms, please, so I can put it on you.

"So, we'll head to the Dairy Freeze when we leave here, and after that, we'll go home and give Jerome his presents. Which one do you think he'll like best?"

As always when she asked Todd a question, she paused to give him an opportunity to answer. He had never done so yet, but maybe he would one of these days. She then continued to speak to him while she finished getting him dressed.

"All right, kiddo. Now it's my turn. Please sit on the bench while I take off my bathing suit." Todd sat down and began kicking his legs. A few seconds later, her suit on the floor, she turned her attention to the locker as she retrieved her street clothes. When she turned back, the bench was empty.

She belatedly realized that she had only asked Todd to stay seated while she took her suit off. He did precisely as she had requested. She should have remembered the tendency for people on the autism spectrum to interpret language literally; in his mind, he had followed the directions appropriately.

Lois's eyes darted frantically until she spied her son about ten feet away from her and rapidly increasing the distance. She chased after him, not sparing the time to grab a towel.

"Todd! Stop! Come back here!" She knew he heard and understood her, but Todd kept right on going. He could be so infuriating at times!

They raced past a row of lockers. She was narrowing the gap, but he moved so fast! She was only about four feet away from him when he turned the corner and shot out of the locker room through the doorless entryway and into the gym's general (and *CO-ED*) lobby area.

As she steeled herself to go after him, her mind was already composing "The National Whisper's" next front page headline and first sentence:

"Daily Planet Reporter a Streaker"

"Lois Lane moves from writing exposés to exposing herself."

Fortunately, Todd chose that moment to plunk himself down on the floor. Unfortunately, he was about 25 feet out of arm's reach, and he continued to ignore her commands.

A few men and women were strolling through the lobby. Lois pressed her body against the wall and stuck her head out into the common area.

Lois — the same Lois who could stay calm during her frequent jaws-of-death dangles — was flustered. (Amazing how becoming a mother changes one.) She didn't dare let Todd out of her sight long enough to retrieve her towel, nor could she go out to get him in her current *au naturel* state.

Instead, she did the only other thing she could think to do: She threw herself on the mercy of the passersby. She called out, "My son has autism and I'm naked!" (She thought, a bit hysterically, about what a perfect headline *that* would make for The Dirt Digger.) "Could someone please bring him to me?"

A small, middle-aged woman took pity on her. She grasped Todd's hand and guided him into the women's changing room.

Lois gushed her relief. "Thank you! Thank you so much! I had no idea what I would have done if you hadn't helped."

The woman smiled. "Not a problem. Would you like to me to hold his hand while you get dressed?"

"Oh, would you, please?"

The two women walked to Lois's locker.

"I had only turned away from him for a few seconds. He's so fast! It's getting harder and harder for me to take him swimming by myself. But he just loves to swim, and it's one of the few things he does that is like other kids. Well, he doesn't really swim yet, he just splashes around. But he does have fun."

While Lois was babbling and getting dressed, she was also observing the woman. Todd had taken an obvious shine to her and was rapidly and repeatedly patting one of her hands with his free hand. Most people would find such behavior annoying, or at least off-putting, but the woman was taking it in stride and was smiling at Todd.

"Say, you really have a way with him. Do you have a child with autism yourself?"

"No, I work at the MSCA; I teach kids who are on the autism spectrum."

Lois had travelled through time and to alternate dimensions. She had met clones and been cloned herself. She was married to a flying man from another planet, for goodness sake. So why, she wondered, did such a little coincidence surprise her so much?

As she continued to get dressed and talk with her benefactor, she knew one thing for sure: She would, after all, have something interesting to relate to Clark and Jerome at the ice cream parlor.

THE END