

Murphy's Law

By Cookiesmom <kdmcelmore@aol.com>

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Summary: When you're a Boy Scout, no good deed goes unpunished.

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Note: This is in response to Queen of the Capes's challenge about wacky laws. It is a fanfic based on the characters in Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman, and the characters do not belong to me.

Clark was in a good mood as he walked into the Daily Planet that morning.

Yesterday had been one of his better days as Superman; he had heard a subway accident just as it was happening and had been able to divert one of the cars just in time to prevent any serious injuries. Then, because the accident had actually taken place on an elevated portion of the line, he had flown every one of the passengers from the damaged subway cars to safety. After that, he had moved the cars off the track and inspected the tracks to make sure they were undamaged, just in time to clear them for the evening rush hour.

It was a lot of work but he was proud of what he had done. In fact, he was feeling so good and so magnanimous that he passed up writing the story himself and gave an exclusive interview to his sometime partner Lois Lane. Her story about the accident and Jimmy Olsen's photographs of Superman flying the car's occupants to safety were both on the front page of this morning's Daily Planet. Lois could be a little temperamental, but she should be in a good mood this morning.

As he stepped off the elevator, he noticed that Lois was already at her desk, speaking on the phone. He walked over to his desk, stopping on the way to pour himself and Lois a cup of coffee each. As he set Lois's coffee on her desk, she put the line on hold and turned to him. "Clark, do you think you can reach Superman today?"

"Why, what's up?" he answered.

"That was the police chief's office. They'd like him to come to headquarters some time today. Something about yesterday's rescue."

"That was quick," thought Clark. They were undoubtedly going to give him some sort of award. In the eight months since his appearance as Superman, he'd already received four awards from the mayor. He'd have to watch out, or these awards were going to go to his head. "I can probably reach him by lunch time."

"Okay, I'll tell them to expect him," Lois replied.

At about 12:30 that afternoon, Superman landed at police headquarters and entered the door. Ignoring the curious looks from the people waiting in the lobby, he strode to the receptionist's desk and said, "I had a message that the chief was looking for me."

"Um, um, yes, Superman," babbled the awe-stricken receptionist. "The chief is out, but he asked me to have you see Captain Murphy in the Traffic Control Division. I'll buzz you through the door over there. Captain Murphy's office is right down the hall, the fourth door on the left. Please go right in. He's waiting for you."

Murphy looked up as Superman entered his office. "Superman! Thanks for coming by!"

Clark noted the copy of that day's Daily Planet lying on his desk. "Always glad to be of help," he responded. "What can I do for you?"

"Actually, it's a little awkward," Murphy responded. "We're asking for your cooperation because ... we have a warrant for your arrest."

"WHAT! Excuse me, what am I supposed to have done?" Clark was so astounded that he just stood there with his mouth open, in a very non-Superman-like pose.

"Operated a taxi service without a license," answered Murphy. "You may not be aware of it, but Metropolis has very strict requirements for anyone transporting people as part of their job. The only exceptions are municipal employees such as bus drivers and public safety personnel. Anyone else has to pass a test to prove their command of the English language, their knowledge of traffic laws, and their familiarity with the city's geography. Then they have to apply for a license and there are only a limited number of those available."

"But I'm not driving a taxi!" Clark almost shouted.

"The law doesn't specifically apply to taxis, it just states that the requirement must be met by anyone transporting people as part of their occupation. And you certainly transported about 150 people yesterday, and in this article you stated, 'It's just my job.'"

Clark couldn't help being curious. "Even though I don't charge anyone?" he queried.

"The law applies whether or not you charge. It was written to outlaw 'gypsy' unlicensed taxis that just claim to accept gifts or tips from their passengers."

"I think I need a lawyer," Clark mumbled. He was acting less and less like Superman as this situation became more and more like a nightmare.

"Well, you're certainly entitled to one," said Murphy. "In fact, if you're ready to cooperate and turn yourself in, I need to formally read you your rights."

"And if I'm not?" Clark replied.

"Then you're not the defender of law and order that you've presented yourself to be," growled Murphy. "It's not really that bad. The charge is just a misdemeanor. You will have to go through booking, but the court is just across the street and the judge is there until 4pm, so as soon as your lawyer gets here we can have an arraignment and a bail hearing. You might not even have to spend any real time in jail. And I shouldn't tell you this," he added, "but ask your lawyer whether you might qualify for our first offender program. If you complete the conditions set by the judge, the arrest and conviction will be removed from your record."

"May I make a phone call first?" Clark asked. "Or am I limited to one phone call, like they say in the TV shows?" He was wondering how he was possibly going to find a lawyer, but, more importantly, how he was going to explain his absence to Perry. He had supposedly just left the office to get lunch at the deli on the corner.

"Well, you're not in custody yet, so you can call your lawyer or whoever from the pay phone in the lobby."

"But that costs money, doesn't it? I'm sorry, but I don't normally carry any change."

"I guess you don't have any pockets in that thing, do you?" Murphy almost grinned. "I guess I can make an exception, since it's you, Superman. I can let you use the phone in our booking area."

Three hours later, Superman was released from custody. It wasn't as bad as he thought it would be; during the booking interview, he had stuck to his Superman persona, and when he could not report any assets or source of income, he was told he qualified for a court-appointed attorney. He hadn't had much of a

chance to speak with Constance Hunter, but she had helped him to enter a plea of “not guilty” and had persuaded the judge that, since he had already turned himself in once, he could be released on his own recognizance, without posting bail. It was close, because he could not prove any ties to Metropolis, but luckily the judge was a Superman fan, who had presided over the trials of some of the criminals he had captured and turned in.

He had a meeting with Constance scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, to give her a chance to go over the charges and the case law. Now the only thing he had to do was write up the story, because Superman’s arrest was page-one news. Perry was waiting for an exclusive. This was going to be one of the hardest stories he had ever written, and he had to keep reminding himself to stick to the facts. Opinions about the stupidity of the law enforcement process belonged on the editorial page, and it was up to Perry to write that.

The next day, Constance smiled as he entered her office. “I have good news,” she stated as soon as he took a seat. “Since you’re a first offender, we may be able to get you into a diversion program. All you will have to do will be to take the taxi driver tests, pass them, and then apply for a license, and we may be able to get by without any conviction going onto your record. It’ll still be up to the judge as to whether they’ll allow you into the program, but we can argue that there was no intent to break the law. However, you will have to promise not to transport anyone until you get the license. The only other problem may be meeting one of the requirements for the license — can you prove that you are a legal resident of this country?”

Clark sighed. “I’ll find a way.”

It took a week-long campaign of Daily Planet editorials, but the senior Senator from New Troy was persuaded to introduce a private bill into Congress declaring Superman a U.S. citizen. It helped that the Planet had supported him in his last campaign. The bill passed quickly after the White House staff placed calls to all 100 Senators and 435 members of the House. The next week, Superman took and passed all three qualification tests for his transportation license, and Perry pulled more strings to get City Hall to expedite issuing the license. In the interim, Superman had been responding to emergencies, but he was careful to have the police or fire department transport anyone who could not take care of themselves.

Now he breathed a sigh of relief — things could return to normal! There was only one thing left to do. In order to place the first call to Perry in privacy, he had borrowed fifty cents from Captain Murphy to use the pay phone, and Superman always repaid his debts. This time he had to take a deep breath before walking through the door of Police Headquarters, but he reminded himself that he was in the clear — he had nothing to worry about. He tried to leave the envelope with the money in it with the receptionist, but she insisted that Captain Murphy was in and would be glad to see him, so she buzzed him through the door. Murphy looked up as he entered, and Clark handed him the envelope, explaining that it was to repay the money he had borrowed.

“Thanks,” Murphy responded.

“No, thank you,” Clark answered. “I know you were just doing your job, and I respect that. But I’m glad this is all behind me.”

“I’m glad too,” Murphy stated. “But there’s just one more thing ...”

Clark felt his throat tighten. He knew this was a bad idea! “What?” he asked.

“Superman, did anyone ever mention to you that we have designated flight corridors and no-fly zones in Metropolis? We’re very strict about enforcing them, both for safety and for noise control. And it looks like you flew within 500 feet of a hospital

yesterday, which is definitely a violation of the ordinance ... ”

THE END