

Impressions

by htbthomas

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Rating: M

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Clark

Sprays of flowers tied in careful patterns, connected by white ribbon and greenery... Gleaming wooden pews, reflected in the polished floor... Late afternoon light filtering through the stained glass windows... Candle flames springing up one by one...

Clark drew in a deep breath and let it out in satisfaction, as he paused in the doorway of the sanctuary. He would never hear the end of it from Lois, he thought with a smile, but having a traditional church wedding ceremony in front of family and friends meant more to him than he could ever express.

Oh, he would never trade the impromptu wedding at the Fortress that he and Lois had a year before, but he had been waiting for this day - the day when he could openly declare his love for Lois and proudly be known as Lois Lane's husband. For some reason, it took seeing the fully-decked-out sanctuary to make him fully conscious of that fact.

Lois had just barely gone along with this plan - she had often suggested a trip to the courthouse - but her mother's shocked reaction was enough to make even the great Lois Lane pause. Ella Lane had been preparing for a wedding since Lois' engagement to Richard, and when that engagement had ended so suddenly... No way in hell would she be denied the second time around. And as for Clark's mother, Martha, even though she knew that he and Lois were already married... he suspected that going through with this ceremony was the only reason his ears hadn't been soundly boxed for leaving her out of the first one.

As the wedding plans got more and more chaotic, Lois would often turn her plaintive eyes on him, as if to say, "*Save me, Superman!*" It wasn't difficult for him to shrug helplessly and squeeze her hand with compassion, and let the craziness go on. It was worth it, even after each flash of fire in her eyes.

He shook himself from his reverie and walked purposefully toward the front of the church. The minister was flipping through his notes and the florist was putting some finishing touches on the floral arrangements. But the one person he was looking for - his best man - was nowhere to be seen. He stepped behind the minister, clearing his throat gently. "Excuse me, have you seen my best man? He's about this tall..." He indicated a height at his shoulder. "With reddish brown hair, boyish-looking..."

Before the man had time to even look puzzled, Clark heard a breathless shout behind him. "Clark! Clark... Oh, my gosh, I'm so sorry... there was a terrible traffic jam downtown... a big office building on fire..." Jimmy jogged up beside him, huffing, beads of sweat breaking out around his brow, bowtie askew.

"Oh?" he asked Jimmy, eyes wide. Of course, he'd just been there and back, after a brief argument with himself about whether he should go. He did not want anything to disrupt this special day, not with only an hour to go, but he was sure Lois would have his head if he ever purposely ignored a plea for help.

"Yeah, a big one - and I missed out on the photos, too, being stuck in my car..." He trailed off, grimacing at the way that sounded.

Clark placed a reassuring hand on Jimmy's shoulder. "Well, you made it, that's the important thing."

"Yeah..." Jimmy opened his mouth as if to continue, and then began to pat the pockets of his tuxedo - gently at first, then with increasing alarm. "Oh, no, if it fell out in the cab...!"

With a sinking feeling, Clark asked, "What's the problem, Jim?"

"You're not going to believe it, but I can't find the rings..."

Clark quickly X-rayed Jimmy's tux and found a pair of rings in the inner breast pocket.

He was sure Jimmy had checked there already - something wasn't right... Come to think of it, Jimmy's heart rate hadn't even jumped...

"Uh, Jim, have you double-checked every pocket...?" he asked innocently, as the young photographer frantically emptied his outer pockets. "Even the inside ones? These tuxedos sure have a ton of places to hide things."

Jimmy stilled and placed his hand below his lapel, a mischievous grin stealing across his features. "Oh, *there* they are..." He suddenly burst out laughing. "I'm sorry, Clark, I couldn't help messing with you a little." He pulled the rings out, wrapped in a white handkerchief, and clapped Clark on the shoulder. "How could I possibly do that to you guys? I mean, I'm the *best man* at the wedding of the century!" he beamed proudly.

"I, uh, I *knew* you were the right man for the job," Clark agreed.

Jimmy smiled and re-pocketed the rings. "Is Jason with his mom?"

"No." Clark nodded toward the door to the church annex. "He's with Richard."

Jimmy's eyebrows rose as if to say, *Richard's here?* But instead, he said "I'll go make sure the ringbearer gets these, then. Give him a few pointers..." He gave Clark a short wave and walked toward the annex doors.

As the door opened, Clark saw Lois' head poke into the doorway. She was still not in her wedding dress and looking frazzled. "Clark!" she called in an exaggerated whisper, which surprised him since she should have known that the barest murmur would reach his ears.

He tried to respond with a goofy wave, but Jimmy practically tackled her backward. "What are you *doing*, Ms. Lane?!" Lois struggled against him futilely. "You know it's bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding!"

They moved out of sight and just before the door slammed behind them, Clark heard a distinct tenor *yelp*.

Chuckling, Clark turned to walk in the opposite direction, toward the waiting room for the groomsmen. He didn't even pause at Lois' furious muttering on the other side of the door. "*If you know what's good for you, you'll come see me before the processional, Super-groom...*"

The door opened again behind him, and Clark fully expected to hear Lois' pelting footsteps. But instead, he heard a voice he hadn't heard in far too long...

"Clark?"

Lana

He turned to her, surprise written on his face. She wondered briefly - *has he forgotten me after all this time?* But her fears were laid to rest when he smiled at her. Clark Kent was still as good-looking as she remembered, maybe even more so. He looked dashing in his black tux, which did nothing to hide his masculine strength.

"Lana? I knew you were coming, but I didn't think I'd see you until later."

Lana Lang returned his smile. "I saw you, so I thought I'd say hi."

The two old friends embraced. "It so good to see you, Lana. How've you been?"

"Doing well. I saw Martha, but didn't get a chance to talk to her. And it's a shame I haven't met Lois yet - I hope I'll get the chance."

She watched Clark's expression melt the moment she mentioned his bride. He was, without a doubt, a man in love. "Don't worry. I'll make sure I introduce you."

Lana smiled back at him. "You do that." Though they had never been anything but friends, there was a time, long ago that she wished those blue eyes would have focused on her. Thankfully, she had gotten over that.

"Did you bring anyone with you?" Clark asked.

"No." As she said this, suddenly she wished she had. She knew Pete had been invited too...

"I'm surprised. I was almost sure you'd have brought Brad."

Brad? Now why would he think-? Then Lana remembered. "No, Brad isn't with me. We broke up long ago." Lana decided not to mention that she had broken up with Brad once Clark had gone off to Metropolis.

"I thought..."

Lana understood why Clark was hesitant to finish what he was going to say. So she said it for him. "That I'd marry Brad after high school?" It was true that everyone thought she and Brad were going to be together forever. But after what Clark had shared with her that fateful day...

"Yes. So you're not seeing anyone right now?"

His question was innocent enough, but it upset her a little. *Does he think that just because he's happily in love with the woman he's marrying that everyone needs to be?* But Lana did not verbalize her feelings. This was after all Clark's day. His and Lois'. Romantically, she had put Clark Kent behind her a long time ago.

She smiled instead - though it was a bit forced. She had a feeling that what she said next was going to surprise him. "Oh, I've been seeing Pete," she shrugged, "but it's nothing serious."

"Pete? As in Pete Ross?" His expression alone almost made Lana start laughing. She was sure that not much surprised Clark Kent.

"The one and the same." She couldn't help but smile.

"How long have you been dating?" Clark's expression was inquisitive. "I haven't kept in touch with Pete like I should have."

"It's only been a few dates, maybe a month. Like I said, it's not serious."

"Maybe something will come of it. Pete's a great guy. And you're my friend, Lana - I hope you find someone," he said with a smile of his own.

"Thanks, Clark." Lana's attention was suddenly drawn below his broad grin. "Your collar is twisted."

Clark abruptly tried to fix his collar, which only made it worse.

"Let me." Lana smoothed out the collar, adding in the smallest of whispers, "There. No

blue is showing."

Clark stilled, eyes widening just a fraction.

"Did you think I'd forgotten?" Her voice was still soft. "Martha told everyone that you were gone for five years - to Peru. I talked to her one day, since I hadn't heard anything about Superman. I was worried, and I had a feeling that you wouldn't keep something like that a secret from her."

Lana had stunned him into silence.

"Krypton," Clark answered once he was finally able to speak. Softly he added, "That's where I was. I wanted to see if there was anyone left."

"Was it there?"

"No." Clark's eyes were calm, but there was a marked, poignant sadness in his voice.

To be the last one... Lana regretted even bringing it up. "I'm so sorry."

"I'm all right. I do have a few reminders of home here on Earth. But I'll have to tell you about it some other time. I need to finish getting ready for the ceremony. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Of course." Lana watched him move quickly, but at human speed, toward the waiting room.

Her mind wandered to that fateful day, a time when she wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life. It had been just an ordinary day, or so it seemed. It had been shortly after Clark's father had passed away. Clark had come over to talk, telling her that she was one of his closest friends, besides Pete, of course. And he had wanted to tell her something important...

"What?" she asked.

Clark rubbed the back of his neck, like he was nervous.

Is he going to tell me that he cares for me as more than a friend? Lana's heart had started to beat faster.

"Maybe it would be better if I showed you." He took both of her hands into his.

She was so intent on his blue eyes that she didn't realize that they were floating until Clark looked down. No, it was more like hovering, a few inches from the ground.

Lana let out a small shriek of surprise.

"Sorry, I know that was sudden." Clark smiled apologetically as he returned them to the ground.

She was in shock, but managed to say, "How did-?"

Clark had explained to her that he been found by Jonathan and Martha Kent when he was just a baby. They had found him in a spacecraft, the product of an advanced technology, far beyond Earth's. But he knew little, if anything, about where he had come from.

He had admitted to her that once he started to exhibit his powers, he had just wanted to fit in. He did not want to be seen as an alien.

"Why did you tell me all this?" Lana had wanted to know, still stunned by Clark's news.

Lana looked again at Clark's figure, as it disappeared through the doorway at the front of the sanctuary, his answer from all those years ago still ringing in her ears. *"Because you're my best friend."*

Lois

"Mooooom..." Lois whined, weakening her next argument. "I'm not a child anymore. I should be able to see my hu-groom... whenever I want!" She barely stopped herself from stamping her foot in irritation.

"Lois Joanne Lane," Ella began in a tone that brooked no argument, "You only have one wedding day - why wreck it unnecessarily? And with *your* history..." Her mother pierced her with a long, flat stare. After a contest of wills, Lois consciously dampened the fire in her eyes. After all, this was the woman who managed to raise the fiercely independent Lois Lane... Lois supposed she could back down... this once.

"Fine, Mom," she conceded. "But I think you're exaggerating about my *history*..." At her mother's sharp look, she shot back, "Do you *see* any helicopters... airplanes... *space shuttles* around here?"

She allowed herself to be led to the bride's room, where her sister Lucy, already decked out in her matron of honor dress, was removing the plastic from the wedding gown. Looking at the dress gave her a jolt of unreasoning fear. *Get a hold of yourself, Lane! You've been married to Clark for a whole frickin' year! A small voice added, and you know it's been the best year of your entire life to boot...* She grimaced internally at the different voices arguing back and forth inside her head. Why was making the marriage official making her so irritable?

It's not like anything will really change - except that everyone would think that intrepid reporter Lois Lane had been tamed - Well, who cares what anyone thinks! I can love whoever the hell I want!

But as Lucy held out the dress for Lois to step into, to begin the arduous process of transforming herself into a bride, she caught herself wishing yet again that Clark hadn't been so damn proper about this whole traditional wedding. He was getting *way* too much enjoyment out of her discomfiture. And all she wanted to do was wipe that amusement off his face with a kiss that would turn the Man of Steel into the Man of Magma...

Lois sighed, removing her blouse - *I wish Clark were doing this instead*, she thought morosely - and then her skirt, hose and heels. She became uncharacteristically silent as the dress was zipped, buttoned, and fluffed, her mother and sister clucking with matronly glee. In the three-way mirror before her, Lois slowly underwent a not-so-subtle metamorphosis from the ideal career woman into a vision of feminine innocence. *And I'm anything but that...* But that was the inexplicable magic of a wedding, the promise of a new beginning, a fresh start on the road of life, that dispelled the angst tugging at her soul. And even her hard-bitten heart was beginning to soften at the sight of the woman in the mirror.

"Lois... you look..." Lucy sighed with satisfaction, "like a *bride*."

"I agree." Ella nodded in approval.

Lois' look of uncertainty from earlier gradually turned into a smile. "I suppose I do."

Ella fluffed out the veil in a wispy halo around Lois' face. "Would you like a few minutes alone?" she asked softly.

Lois' eyes jerked up sharply, locking with her mother's. Ella must have decided she was no longer a flight risk. Ella nodded, eyes warm with motherly affection, and she stepped back. "C'mon, Lucy. Let's go see what those kids of yours have gotten themselves into." They left quietly, the door clicking shut behind them.

For several long minutes, Lois regarded her reflection. "Well, here we are, Lois. About to marry the man of your dreams." The blushing bride stared back at her silently. "So what's the problem? Why does something seem to be missing?"

She stood up suddenly, and slowly made her way toward the only window in the small room. The sheer curtains obstructed the view of the people outside, but she could easily see the guests steadily drifting into the church. There were more people arriving than she would have dreamed would turn up. A lot of them were guests from Clark's side of the family - the Kents were well-liked back in Smallville - but a good number were also people from the journalism community, people that Lois or Clark had gotten to know over the last few years. She felt touched that so many wanted to wish them well. *Or they came out of some sort of morbid fascination...* she thought, lips quirking in amusement.

The door quietly opened behind her, and she sighed. She guessed Ella or Lucy were here to tell her to prepare... maybe the florist was here to deliver her bouquet...

A large, warm hand settled on her shoulder, and warm breath tickled her ear. "Lois."

She whirled in Clark's arms, all nervousness and irritation suddenly washed away.

"Clark," she said with relief and pulled his dark head down for a kiss.

His lips opened above hers, and she drank in his unearthly sweetness. Now this... *this* was the reason they were submitting to this insanity. Not that she needed any legal approval to ravish her husband...

He pulled away a touch of regret in his eyes, and murmured, "You needed to see me?"

"Yes," Lois breathed. She slipped her hands around his waist and pulled his hips right against hers. He stirred in response and she grinned lustily. "I needed *this*." She punctuated the word with a tiny thrust.

Clark groaned, eyes fluttering closed for a moment. Then he hungrily devoured her with kisses, causing her to gasp with pleasure. Her hands traveled to his belt buckle, fingers yanking forcefully to free him from his tuxedo pants.

"Wait... we *can't* d-" he protested, just as her hand snaked below his boxers. He drew in a shuddering breath and tried to continue speaking through her ministrations. "Lois, the ceremony is going to start in twenty minutes..."

"So?" she answered, chuckling. "They can't start without us, right?" Her hands began to stroke rhythmically, breaking down his defenses the best way she knew how.

"Your mother, your sister - they could come back any minute..." He bit down hard on his lip to stop another groan from escaping.

Her other hand reached around to squeeze one firm buttock. "But you'll hear them coming, won't you? Or we could always l-"

She didn't finish her thought, because she suddenly found herself pressed into the cushions of the settee, voluminous skirt up around her waist. *Super-speed is useful in more ways than one*, she thought idly as his hand smoothed its way up her inner thigh.

He growled with pleasure at finding gartered hose and a tiny pair of bikini briefs. It was short work to shimmy them down her legs, and she didn't waste any time yanking his pants and boxers down. She sighed with satisfaction as he entered her, her breaths coming faster and faster with each thrust.

Yes... her internal voice pleaded, all ability to speak gone with the urgent need exploding within her. *This makes everything right... so right...*

They were so caught up in each other that neither could have stopped when the door to the bride's room creaked open. In fact, neither even noticed they were not alone until they heard the startled gasp.

Jason

"Oh, Mr. White, it's good to see you."

Jason looked up to see Jimmy enter the room where he was waiting with his daddy Richard. He was happy to see another familiar face. He knew that his parents were getting ready for the wedding.

"Jimmy, Clark was just looking for you-" Daddy started.

"I just saw him..." He pulled on his bowtie, making it more crooked than it had been when he first entered the room. "Sorry I'm late... There was a huge fire in an office building on my way here. Really messed up traffic for miles."

Jason's ears perked up at this. *Did Superman go and help?* He had not seen his dad in a while and wondered if he was nearby.

Jimmy did not continue on, though. "Jason." He pulled the rings from his pocket and bent down. "Here you go, kiddo. Make sure you don't lose these," he said as he placed them on the pillow.

"I won't," Jason promised, knowing how important these rings were to his parents. For the past year they had not worn them a lot - they could not.

Jason still remembered that first wedding where he had held the rings. The same rings that were resting on the fancy pillow in his arms. He thought he understood why his parents needed to get married again, for friends and family, and he felt a happy little fluttering in his stomach. No more hiding - everyone could know that his mom and dad were married!

"Well, Jason, we'd best go into the room to wait until they start." Jimmy started to head to the waiting room for the groomsmen.

"Ah, Jimmy... you might want to fix your tie before the ceremony starts," Daddy pointed out.

"Thanks, Mr. White, I knew that," Jimmy laughed, embarrassed. "I was going to fix it while we wait."

Richard nodded, and added; "I'll see you at the reception, Sport." Then he turned and went to take his seat in the pews.

As they headed to the room reserved for the groomsmen, Jason passed the door to the sanctuary and saw Dad walking away from a red-haired lady. He was heading for the annex.

He watched Jimmy fidget with his bowtie a little while, and then Jason started shifting impatiently from one foot to the other. But it was hard, since he was trying to be careful and not let the rings fall to the floor.

"Where's Clark? The wedding's going to start soon..." Jimmy spoke quietly, almost under his breath.

Jason heard it, though. So he figured he could ask Jimmy something instead. "What happened with the fire? Did Superman come?"

Jimmy smiled - he knew how much Jason loved to talk about Superman. "Yeah. He put the big fire out with his breath. He made sure that everyone was okay, too. Wish I got some pictures, though..." Jimmy said the last part more to himself.

"Is it time yet?" Jason asked. The one thing he hated about this was wearing this suit. Give him regular clothes any day.

"Almost, but we really can't start without Clark. But we'd better go see if your mom and aunt are ready."

They left the room. Jason saw his aunt Lucy and cousin Susie - in her pink flower girl dress, *Yuck* - in the back of the church. When they reached them, Jimmy asked worriedly,

"Have you-?"

But he didn't get to finish his question because Jason spotted his father coming to them. He could see Dad's face was a little red.

"There you are!" Jimmy said. Then he smirked. "I almost thought you got cold feet and made a break for it."

"Hardly," he assured Jimmy, but he still seemed flushed. Then Dad put a hand on his head. "Are you ready to do this, Jason?"

Jason nodded.

"Just take your time going down the aisle, just like we did in practice."

"Okay."

"Make sure you don't drop the rings."

Jason looked up at his aunt with some surprise. Susie giggled.

"Lucy," Dad's voice was kind, but he added in a bit of his Superman tone. "He'll do fine."

Jason's aunt simply said, "Of course he will."

"We need to get up front," Jimmy said to Dad, and the two of them left.

Time felt like it was slowing down. Jason started to get uncomfortable, which got him looking around at the backs of people's heads in the pews. But he stopped looking when his eyes caught his father's up front.

Dad was up front, Jimmy at his side. Dad smiled at him. But no, he realized, he was looking past him, and there was that expression on his face, Jason was sure of it. The one he held for Mommy alone.

Jason turned around and saw Susie. He made a face. *Why would he look at her?*

But then he saw Mommy, behind Aunt Lucy. She was in an all-white dress; looking just like that princess she had once told him about.

But he could not dwell on the fairy tale now... the music was starting.

Martha

"You may kiss the bride."

Clark leaned forward to capture Lois' lips, but before he could, Lois grabbed him around the waist and pulled him into a passionate embrace. The bride's antics triggered an avalanche of laughter. A flurry of loud applause broke out, especially among the *Planet* crowd.

Then not to be outdone, Clark tipped Lois backward, intensifying the kiss. A few in the assembled crowd added some whoops and cheers, particularly Jimmy, who hooted in open laughter, a broad smile on his freckled face.

Martha simply smiled. Her dear boy, the one who had often worried that he would be alone for all his days, was finally able to share his life with someone. And not just anyone: the mother of his child, his partner in work and life... and keeper of the many secrets of his complicated existence. Of course, she knew they'd been married a year, but it was not until this moment that it finally seemed real.

Standing beside her, Ben squeezed her hand in his weathered palm. He knew how important this ceremony was for her, how much she had worried about her son. And he had taken the revelation of Clark's other identity surprisingly well - a widening of the eyes, a huff of astonishment - but she had been absolutely sure they could trust him, and Clark had accepted her assessment without hesitation.

Martha squeezed her husband's hand back, briefly looking into his eyes for a knowing moment before turning back to the "newlyweds," who had finally broken their kiss and turned to face the crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you, Mr. Clark Kent and Mrs. Lois Lane-Kent!"

Her traditionalist heart beat a little faster at hearing the Kent addition to Lois' name. Right until the last, Lois had insisted that there would be no name change...

Martha watched her son and his wife glide down the aisle on a wave of well-wishes. They would have to double back for some professional photographs, but it wouldn't take long. It was hard enough getting Lois to agree to a traditional wedding - Ella had called to complain several times over the last few months - forget spending an hour taking a million photographs of the wedding party from every angle. She'd be lucky to get a few.

Martha's lips twisted into a wry smile as people began to break up and head toward the reception hall. Lois Lane... or Lane-Kent now... was such an odd mix of personality traits. She was tough, no-nonsense, sarcastic, independent, difficult to please... but she was also fiercely loyal, a tender mother and full of passion. Clark adored her, worshipped the ground on which her high heels trod.

Martha laughed quietly. Clark never did anything the easy way... he could have had someone like Lana - sweet, easygoing, eager to please. But over the last year, Martha had slowly come around to the realization that Clark needed someone like Lois.

Twenty minutes later, the wedding party had entered the reception hall. Martha's eyes scanned for Ben and found him chatting with Smallville folk. He acknowledged her and returned to his discussion without breaking cadence. She walked idly through the room, noticing groups of guests clustered with the odd individual here or there. Suddenly, she realized just who was standing alone...

To one side of the group of *Planet* employees stood Richard White, just on the fringe of conversation. But it was easy to tell from this distance that his heart was not really in it. *The poor man...* she thought consolingly. *What bravery it took for him to be here, even after Jason's request.* Martha knew that even though Lois and Clark were making every effort to

keep him involved in Jason's life, it was almost superheroic that Richard had mustered the courage to attend this stark testament to his and Lois' dead relationship.

Through their mutual connection to Jason, Martha had gotten to know Richard over the past year. She admired his love and devotion to Jason and his ability to keep *The Secret* without bitterness. He was a fine young man, and though not right for Lois, would make some young woman a wonderful husband.

She began to make her way toward Richard, to try to encourage him in some small way, when Clark came around from the back to touch him on the arm. They stepped away from the others and began to speak earnestly. Well, she supposed she could speak to him later. Her eyes drifted to the other lone individual...

Lana Lang stood near some of the other people who had flown in from Smallville to attend Clark's wedding. But she seemed distracted as well, eyes drifting around the room aimlessly, lost in thought. The last time they'd spoken was... she guessed it was Lana's RSVP to the wedding, but before that? It must have been a few years after Clark had left for Krypton.

Martha gave herself a firm nod and walked over to where Lana was standing. "Lana, dear... so glad you could make it."

Lana looked toward her, a fond smile breaking over her features. "I was glad to come, Martha." She leaned close and gave Martha a small peck on the cheek. "Clark seems really happy. Lois seems..." A faint flush rose to her cheeks, and she suddenly looked down at her sandals. "...to be very much in love with him, too."

"Oh, yes, they've been nearly inseparable this last year," Martha agreed. For some reason, that made Lana's face redden even further.

"Really?" she said, not meeting Martha's eyes.

It was time for a change of subject. "So... are you seeing anyone, Lana?" Martha hadn't really kept up on the local gossip, but she thought she would have heard if Lana was involved with anyone from home.

"Me? No, not really... a few dates here and there. But nothing serious."

Martha patted her arm encouragingly. "Well, don't you worry. If an old gal like me can find love again, then I'm sure it'll find you soon." Martha wanted to dig a little deeper into that topic, but the younger woman was starting to look uncomfortable. Martha noticed a break in the line at the buffet table, and began to steer her in that direction. "I'm feeling a little peckish. Would you like to join me?"

"Sure," Lana agreed, seeming relieved.

They filled their plates in comparative silence, Martha taking the opposite side of the buffet table from Lana. And that was when she noticed Richard, Clark no longer beside him, making his way to the table himself. He glanced in her direction at the same time, it seemed, and he paused, gazing at the back of Lana's head for a moment too long. Then he shook himself slightly and continued toward the line.

Like a bolt from the blue, Martha was suddenly struck with an intriguing thought. *Richard, looking so lonely... and Lana, unattached...?* She fought to keep a secretive smile from showing on her face.

Martha and Lana seated themselves at an empty table near the end of the serving line... "Richard? Richard, dear, do you already have a table?" Martha called. He looked over at Martha, somewhat surprised. Before he could react, she added, "Come join us here." She beckoned over to him with one hand.

Richard smiled and began to walk toward them. Martha silently praised heaven that her

grandmotherly wiles were so effective.

Richard took a seat on the other side of Martha, giving Lana a nod of greeting. Lana nodded back, and stretched her hand across the table toward him. "Hi, I'm Lana Lang," she introduced herself with easy grace. "An old friend of Clark's from Smallville."

"Richard White," he returned, a touch of amusement in his voice. At the name, both sets of eyes sparkled suddenly.

"So you're-"

"You must be-"

Lana cut off, laughing lightly at the awkwardness of speaking at the same time. Richard chuckled and tried again. "I've heard about you from Clark. One of his *best* friends, right?"

A blush had turned her face crimson, but even Martha saw how pretty her skin looked against her yellow sundress. She was sure Richard was noticing.

"And you're Jason's father, right?" Lana asked in return.

Richard nodded without hesitation. "I guess we're not *total* strangers, then," he said amiably.

"I guess not..."

They quickly fell into comfortable conversation, each asking about what the other did for a living. Martha was content to simply nibble at her food and nod sagely here and there. Better to let the kids talk without interference. Soon Lana was launching into a story about Clark from their high school days. "...and there was Clark, acting like he hadn't *meant* to trip Brad..." Lana trailed off, paling slightly.

Both Martha and Richard turned to see the bride and groom approaching them. Before she could be puzzled about Lana's odd reaction, Clark had taken Lana's hand. "Lana, I wanted to properly introduce you to my wife, Lois."

Lois held out a satin-gloved hand to Lana, and shook it. "Hi, Lana, it's nice to meet you." Lois' expression seemed a little off-kilter, almost embarrassed, yet proud.

Her son grimaced, shaking his head. "I'm sorry about what happened earlier - you shouldn't have had to see that."

"It's-I'm-I should have-" Lana shook her head, not finishing her jumbled train of thought. "I'm glad to finally meet you."

"I'm glad, too... and sorry... can we start over?" Lois cocked her head to the side and grinned impishly.

"Of course! I'm very happy for you..."

Both Richard and Martha watched the conversation like the parody of a tennis match, perplexed at whatever had the three of them so embarrassed. Well, as embarrassed as Lois could get, that is. Martha opened her mouth to ask, "What are-?"

The music from the loudspeakers suddenly shifted into a slow romantic song, and the DJ's smooth voice interrupted her. "Would our bride and groom start us off with the first dance?"

As encouraging cheers sounded from around the room, Clark groaned. "Oh, I'd forgotten all about this..."

"What?" Lois teased. "Are you afraid you'll step on my foot?"

"No... you do that more often than I do..." he shot right back, grinning.

Lois laughed openly, "Then come on, farm boy. Sweep me off my feet. It shouldn't be too hard." And with a spirited tug, Lois pulled him out onto the dance floor.

Lana and Richard were eyeing each other warily, but whether it was due to both Lois and Clark's winking references to the groom's super-life right in front of them, or just the sudden

silence at their departure, Martha wasn't sure.

She suddenly realized that everyone at the table was 'in the know' - but Lana and Richard probably didn't realize that. Another thing these two had in common - the only two people outside the family entrusted with this knowledge. *Time to leave them alone.*

Martha stood, gathering her things. "Well, I'll leave you two to get better acquainted. I think I see Ben trying to catch my eye. He may not look it, but he does a mean foxtrot." She waved toward Ben, nodding toward the front, where several couples had begun to drift onto the dance floor.

As she walked away from them, no longer hiding her satisfied grin, she heard Richard ask Lana, "Would you like to dance?"

Richard

Richard stood next to Guy Lombard, listening with only half an ear to the man's bragging about his latest article as his eyes wandered the reception hall. The dance floor was already full - with children that is. Some of the older ones were trying to do some dance moves, while the younger kids were running to and fro. Jason was in the latter group, and it appeared that he was playing tag with some of his cousins.

Richard smiled briefly, watching Jason's antics as he ran after Susie, who was trying not to get tagged by him. Thankfully Jason had learned to control his super-speed - he wondered how soon it might be before he could *fly*...But Richard knew Lois and Clark would cross that bridge when the time came.

Out of the corner of his eye, Richard caught sight of a woman with red hair, the same woman he had spied sitting on the groom's side during the ceremony. He hadn't even seen her face yet, but he had not seen many redheads here - it must be her. Her remarkably vivid red, flowing hair would have already made her stand out in any crowd, but her simple yellow sundress made her stunning.

Just as he had been briefly in the chapel, he was suddenly assaulted with the memory of a dream that had been occurring nearly on a nightly basis for the past few weeks. In the dream, he really wasn't sure where he was, but it didn't matter. He saw a woman with long red hair, too far away to see her face clearly. In hindsight, everything but the woman had been hazy with red.

Why was he having this dream about a woman he was sure he'd never seen nor met? More importantly, why had the dream come to his mind now? Was it because of the woman he-

He felt a hand on his arm, snapping him out of his reverie.

"You look a million miles away. Are you all right?" Clark asked as he stepped back.

"Just thinking. And am I okay? I'm well, even considering today."

Clark looked a bit pained. "Richard, I'm sure today wasn't easy..."

"Don't." Richard's tone was a bit sharper than he meant it to be. But not to seem like an ass, he added, "I know you mean well - let's just leave it at that."

This past year had not been easy and Richard was finally getting past it after a long and sometimes bitter struggle. But on this, Clark's and Lois' wedding day, it seemed to be harder. He knew that some of their co-workers were surprised that he was even here. He couldn't even imagine what today would have been like had his and Clark's places been reversed.

It had taken him a while, but Richard eventually understood that he and Lois were never meant to be. As he and everyone else had watched the newlyweds leave the church, he felt certain that even if Clark had never come back, Lois' heart would always belong to him.

"I can't express my gratitude enough that you were there for Lois and Jason. You were there when I wasn't." Clark's voice deepened at the words.

Should mind reading be added to his list of superpowers? Richard wondered dryly.

Clark does not need to say that at all, but that's the kind of guy he is.

"I'm hardly a hero, all I did was love them." His voice was quiet, but he knew Clark could hear him even if he whispered them. He also knew very well that Clark loved Lois and Jason with his entire strength and his *being*.

"You're a hero in your own right, Richard. You may not wear a cape, but you sacrificed so much to make two people's lives brighter. That's what a hero is in my book." Clark smiled.

Richard managed an honest and genuine smile in return.

"Now if you don't mind, I need to find my wayward bride." Clark patted Richard's arm lightly before moving away again.

"Sure." Richard scanned the reception room for someone he could talk to, someone other than Lombard, at least. He really didn't want to be alone with his thoughts anymore. Before he could spot anyone, his stomach growled. He hadn't eaten today - something he was going to rectify now. His step caught as he saw the mysterious redhead serving herself only a few places ahead in line.

"Would you like to dance?" As soon as the words were out of Richard's mouth he had no idea why he was asking. Since the moment that Martha had beckoned to him to sit with her - and with Lana - Richard had been in sort of a daze. Images of the red-haired woman in the dream were fuzzing across his vision. He was reacting to her so strongly just because of a silly dream... *That's crazy, isn't it?*

Maybe that wasn't it at all. Maybe it was only because he could tell how uncomfortable Lana had been in Clark and Lois' presence. He just wanted to get her mind off of whatever was making her uneasy.

Richard glanced again over at Lois and Clark dancing. Or maybe it was that he just wanted to dance with someone, and Lana was available. After all other couples were taking the dance floor...

Lana smiled up at him. "I'd like that."

He led her by the hand onto the dance floor, as the refrain of a popular slow love song began to play. There was a brief moment of awkwardness as they started to dance, but it passed as soon as it came. Lana felt good, felt right, in his arms.

When the next song shifted into a fast tempo, they remained on the floor, keeping up the small talk. Richard felt his spirits lifting the longer he danced. He grinned at the sight of Jason dancing animatedly with Susie - he must have decided she wasn't so 'icky' after all.

After the third dance they made their way back to the table, a little winded. But Lana seemed to be enjoying his company, and to be honest, he was definitely enjoying hers.

Neither of them spoke for a few minutes. They watched as another slow number came on, but neither made a move to return to the dance floor.

Richard glanced at the woman next to him out of the corner of his eye. She was Clark's friend - but she seemed to be so different from Lois in many ways. Of course, he couldn't know for sure, but Lana Lang seemed like a caring person, and anyone would be honored to call her friend.

"Lois is feisty isn't she?" Lana's question seemed to come out of the blue.

"Oh, yes... she is that!" Richard chuckled at that, her blunt question not fazing him.

"And Clark needs someone to keep him down to earth too."

Richard stared at her. Lana had said these words softly, more to herself than to him. He began to correct her - it was Lois who needed to be kept down to earth, and Clark was good at that. Unless.... Lana had meant that in a different way...

That's ridiculous! But the way she reacted at the table... does she suspect his other identity? Richard saw Lana glancing over to where Lois and Clark were dancing. "True, but I think Clark will have a hard time keeping *Lois* earthbound," he responded carefully. When she didn't reply, he took a relieved breath. *Maybe she doesn't know...* Richard tried to change the subject.

"If you don't mind me being a bit nosy, what in the world was Lois talking about earlier?"

Lana's cheeks turned pink, but she softened before his baffled expression.

"I ran into Clark before the wedding," she started to explain. "After talking to him, I thought that I might pop in and introduce myself to Lois, but while I was debating that with myself, the minister stopped me. He asked me to go into the bride's room to let Lois know that the ceremony was in 'ten more minutes.' I thought with that excuse we could have a quick introduction. When I got there... she... and Clark were..."

Lana was blushing profusely, and she hadn't been able to keep eye contact with him as she spoke. Richard was suddenly very uncomfortable for her - he could easily understand what she *was not* saying.

"It was just really bad timing for you..." Richard took her hand and held it until Lana looked up at him. "And Lois and Clark are sorry too, they said as much a few minutes ago." He gave it a reassuring squeeze before letting it go.

The sudden squealing of the microphone turned both of their heads toward the stage. "Can I have everyone's attention, please? In another few minutes, the bride will toss the bouquet," announced the DJ.

Many of the single female co-workers Richard knew went excitedly to the front of the dance floor to where Lois was standing. And there were also a few women that he didn't know making their way toward the others.

He noticed that Lana hadn't moved to go with the other women. "Aren't you going up?" As he said that, he hoped he hadn't asked anything out of line. *Not everyone wants to marry... and it's just a silly tradition... She seems the type who would though... but why am I assuming anything about a woman I just met!*

"Actually I-"

Whatever Lana was about to say, it was cut off as Martha appeared almost out of nowhere. "Lana, dear, you must go up there!"

Lana looked like she wanted to protest, but at Martha's gentle tugging, she shrugged cheerfully and joined the other women just in time.

Richard glanced at Martha and was slightly surprised to see she was looking back at him, a humorous sparkle in her eyes and a grin on her wrinkled face. *Why is that?*

He looked back just as Lois threw her bouquet. It sailed through the air, women stretching and leaping to grab it, but it landed almost without effort in the hands of...

Lana.

Martha's triumphant smile told Richard exactly what Clark's mother was up to. He grimaced. He was sure Martha had good intentions, but he hardly needed a matchmaker. He didn't even know if he was ready for another relationship.

Lana glanced back at him, looking astonished. She smiled at him and lifted the bouquet with a gesture of *Well, what do you know?*

Maybe he *was* ready, maybe not. Perhaps a nice girl from Smallville was what he needed. It had worked for Lois, hadn't it...? Only time would tell. If it was meant to be, it would be.

But right here, right now, all Richard could do was smile back at Lana in return.

THE END

End Notes: Extra thanks to kalalanekent and anissa7118, without whom the possibility of Richana would never have crossed our minds... :)