

# All's Fair in Love, War, & the Front Page

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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Lois headed down the hallway, making a face as she passed Kala's room. As her daughter's hearing grew more sensitive, she tended to play what she *wanted* to hear louder and louder to drown out everything else. At the moment, a heavy industrial beat backed a woman's clear soprano voice, one of the juxtapositions Kala seemed to really enjoy, and it was just low enough that Lois couldn't make out the words through the thickness of the wall. Telling her daughter that turning the volume up could damage her ears hadn't helped; Kala had just given her a *look* that Lois recognized all too well, and said, "Mom, I get the Canadian Weather Advisory channel. Partial deafness at this point would be a blessing."

Still, it wouldn't do to assume that she wasn't listening. In many ways, Kala took after her mother, little though she liked to admit it; putting one over on her was becoming increasingly difficult. Lois made sure her heels struck the hardwood floor sharply as she continued down the hall to her study. She closed the door, turned on the computer, and switched the radio on as well.

Three minutes later, the black-haired reporter crept back into the hall. Her feet, clad only in stockings now, made no sound as she eased the door open and shut again, holding the knob carefully to be certain it didn't make a telltale click. Then she snuck back up the hall, moving with exaggerated care and trying not to breathe too loudly.

Her destination was the linen closet. Lois eased that door open as well and slipped inside, leaving it cracked open behind her to admit some light - the switch might make a noise. They kept a small stepladder in here so that she could reach the winter quilts on the top shelf. *No one else in the family will need it*, Lois thought with a touch of resentment. *Jason I can understand, but Kala being exactly my height now - and liable to be taller in a few years - is just not fair.*

The petite woman climbed up onto the step and stretched as far as she could. There, just visible behind a stack of light summer linens, was a glimpse of red and white. By standing on the very tips of her toes and reaching until her tendons ached, Lois could just get hold of one corner of the gift-wrapped package.

*Gotcha*, she thought, grinning furiously, and began pulling it toward her.

Jason got home from chess club a little later than usual; he'd run into Elise on the way home and spent a heady fifteen minutes talking to her. He was smiling as he opened the front door, getting ready to call out a greeting to his mother and sister.

Kala was just inside it and snatched the door before he could close it, covering his mouth with a stern glare. Jason just raised his eyebrows as she eased the door shut and put a finger to her own lips. Then she beckoned him to follow her, and tiptoed up the hall to the linen closet.

It was open just a hair. A quick glance of his particular vision revealed Lois inside on the stepladder, reaching for the summer linens.

The same shelf where their father had hidden her Valentine's Day gift last night... Jason looked at his twin with wide eyes. Kala just grinned wickedly, her head cocked, and put her hand on the door. The black-haired boy watched through it as Lois hauled the box to her.

Just as she touched the wrapping paper to open it, Kala flung the door wide and yelled, "Mom!"

Lois almost dropped the box, almost fell off the ladder, almost swatted her daughter... "Kala! What do you think you're doing?" she snapped, trying desperately to regain her composure.

"What do you think *you're* doing, Mother?" Kala replied haughtily, crossing her arms and giving a very good imitation of Lois' most imperious look. "It certainly *looks* like you're trying to find out what Dad got you for Valentine's Day. And I know you wouldn't do anything like that; you're the woman who lectured us on how using x-ray vision on Christmas presents makes Santa take them back."

Jason had to suppress laughter; Kala had a point, and Lois obviously knew it.

The reporter looked at her children - her darling angels had grown up into the two most beautiful teenagers on the planet, and very little of that was motherly bias. Jason was nearly his father's height, and he had the same broad-shouldered, muscular figure. The same chiseled features as Kal-El, too, with those impossibly warm and loving eyes, blue as the summer sky. Lois did see herself in him as well, though; he had her crooked smile, and his hair had darkened to her color.

Kala, on the other hand, was a mix of both parents and a dash of something else as well. Hair so black it put Jason's to shame, hazel eyes tending toward amber and emerald tones, and a high-cheekboned classical elegance that might've come from Ella Lane - or Lara Lor-Van. She was gorgeous, and like her mother before her, she knew it. Lois couldn't help sighing with a little frustration at Kala; the girl was so damned self-possessed already, probably a result of the certain knowledge that if anyone harassed her, she could wipe the floor with them. *No, that one's nothing like me, nothing at all*, Lois mused.

"Fine, you two," Lois said haughtily. "It's a parent's privilege to make you do as I say, not as I do."

"Mother," they began in unison, but Lois just lifted that eyebrow, grateful she was still standing on the stepladder and could look down on them.

"Don't you two have homework? Kala, you need to be getting ready for work. Go on,

shoo."

Kala turned with a melodramatic sigh. "Fine, but you know you'll regret opening that present after you've done it."

"You let *me* worry about that, Kala Josephine," Lois grumbled back. *Who does she think she is, Jiminy Cricket in black lipstick?*

Jason followed his sister away, noticing a wicked smile on her face. And he thought he knew the reason for it. Once they were in the living room and out of their mother's hearing, he asked, "Kal, that didn't look like the box Dad brought in."

Her grin only became broader and more malicious. "That's because it isn't, genius."

He ignored the taunt. "What's in that one, then?"

"Something to convince Mom that opening gifts early is a bad idea," Kala replied, her eyes a gleam with mischief.

Jason rolled his eyes with a sigh. "Good Lord, what did you do now?"

Kala grinned again. She could hear her mother carefully slitting open the tape... "Oh, nothing," she told her brother breezily. "Say, how's that dinosaur of yours lately?"

"Huh? Gazeera's perfectly fine, it's not like you don't see him ... every day..." Realization dawned at that moment, and he whirled to bolt, yelling, "Mom! *Don't open it!*" Even with his speed, he would be too late, just as she'd planned. Kala closed her eyes to savor the sound of Lois opening the box ...

...and twelve pounds of angry iguana shot out right at Lois' face, hissing like a teakettle.

It took no super powers for the tenants two floors below to hear Lois' shriek.

Prancing back to her room with a smug grin, Kala listened to her mother's hysterics and her brother trying to rescue his pet. *Richard was right*, she thought with amusement, *she does sound just like a B-movie scream queen.*

By the time Valentine's Day actually occurred, two weeks after the Infamous Iguana-in-the-Box incident, Kala had been forgiven. Slightly.

Clark snuck into her room while she was at school, smiling at little at the memory of coming home to find Lois practically frothing at the mouth. He'd had to talk the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist out of calling her daughter's job and letting them know she couldn't come in because she was *grounded* for a year. After all, Gazeera hadn't hurt anyone, and Jason managed to get him away from Lois before *she* hurt *him*. Especially when Clark learned just how Lois had wound up with the lizard attached to her blouse.

*That's just like Lois, trying to find out what I got her. Good thing Kala was looking out for us.* He took the real present off the top shelf of Kala's closet, where Lois never, ever looked (one view of a black corset with red ribbons lacing up had been one look too many), and shook his head at some of the clothes there. *My God, my daughter dresses more like the Zod Squad than like anyone in this family. How much black can one person own? And isn't that **Lois'** red blouse? I'd better steal that back...*

On his way out, he left a small gift-wrapped package on Kala's desk. Nothing fancy, just a way to let Kala know that Daddy loved his little girl. *Say it with Godiva chocolates.* Then he headed to his son's room, dominated by Gazeera's huge, customized cage. The remaining wall surface was split between sci-fi movie posters and bookshelves. In that, at least, it was similar to Kala's, though she tended to go for horror movies and kept a variety of trinkets on her shelves along with the books.

Jason's wallet was on his dresser. He'd saved up for this date with Elise, wanting to make it something special, and Clark could understand that motivation very well. To that end, he

slipped two extra twenty-dollar bills into Jason's billfold. *The reward of fiscal responsibility*, he thought, smiling. *They're taking the subway, so with this he can spend a little more on dinner, maybe get her something nice on the spur of the moment.*

His fatherly duties done for the moment, Clark headed back to work. *Going home on your lunch break is so much easier with super-speed.*

The school had been running a Valentine's Day fundraiser for the past week. One dollar bought a small pack of candy and a heart-shaped note for the buyer to customize, and the Candy-Grams would be delivered after lunch on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Kala was sitting in her history class, eyes half closed because she'd speed-read the chapter, when the band kids who sponsored the fundraiser came in.

Quite a few of her classmates got one, and some of the girls got more than one. But only Kala got *five* Candy-Grams, and the other girls glared.

Kala smiled like a queen receiving her due, and picked up the first one, sent anonymously. *Roses are red, Violets are blue*, it began, and she wrinkled her nose at the cliché, then burst out laughing at the conclusion. *Your weasel is stinky, And so are you!* "Jason, you nut," she muttered, setting it aside. He had no reason to complain about her ferret or her patchouli-rose perfume. Gazeera's cage had that weird reptile-house funk to it, controlled only by the Febreze that Mom demanded Jason keep in his room.

A couple Candy-Grams were from anonymous admirers, with verses ranging from sweet to soporific. The fourth one Kala picked up was something else entirely, and she read it with her eyebrows rising incredulously.

*Roses are red,  
Violets are blue.  
My boyfriend broke up with me  
Because of YOU!  
I hope you choke on this candy,  
You Goth vampire tramp!*

"And it doesn't rhyme, much less scan," Kala sighed. *I don't even know who this guy is she's talking about. Besides, I prefer the term 'gloom cookie,' and black lipstick does not a vampire make - alien, maybe. As for tramp, don't they all just wish. Oh, well, it's free candy.*

The final Candy-Gram was from her most recent ex-boyfriend, Sean, who hadn't quite gotten the hint yet. *Friday, Al's Pizza, 8 PM*, it read. Tempting - the upscale pizza parlor was one of Kala's favorite places to eat, but she was working that night. Besides, she prided herself on never waffling, and she'd been quite clear that things were over between them.

*I guess it's not Sean's fault that he can't measure up to my high standards*, Kala thought, idly popping Skittles. *They say that every girl wants to marry someone like her father. In that case, I'm doomed for spinsterhood. There's literally no one else on Earth like my Dad.*

*And that's the way I like it.* She returned the envious glances of a few classmates with an imperious attitude, but rolled her eyes and smiled at her friends.

Jason, meanwhile, was unable to concentrate on his trigonometry lesson. Elise sat three rows in front of him, and he was trying not to stare at her dark-blond curls as the band kids came in with Candy-Grams.

He'd had girlfriends before, in spite of being a self-described science nerd. The thing was, he was a *cute* science nerd; Kala liked to tell him so while pinching his cheeks and generally

mocking him. She also enjoyed harassing him about Elise, whose parents had named her after a Cure song.

She had turned Jason's world on edge; he found himself tongue-tied and grinning inanely in her presence. Fortunately, that seemed to amuse Elise; she was quite impressed by his parents, and tolerated his psycho sister. Then again, Kala didn't seem to be trying to run this one off quite as strenuously as she had the last couple of girls.

Elise was by far the most beautiful girl Jason had ever met. And she was *smart*, too; she'd been able to hold her own in an intense discussion of world politics with *Mom*. That was more than anyone else before her had accomplished; the other girls he'd introduced to his parents hadn't made that kind of impression on the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist.

*Mom's the acid test for any girl I want to date, Jason thought with a wry grin. And Kala's the endurance test. Dad's just so nice he's not intimidating - if only they knew who he is... Anyway, Elise wasn't scared of Mom or bothered by Kala, so she's basically perfect...*

*What the hell? Why is she getting **two** Candy-Grams? The whole school knows she's going out with **me**! What kind of loser sends a Candy-Gram to **my** girl?!*

Worse yet, Elise actually laughed at the first one she read. Jason's blood ran cold as she read the second. *Please, please let the first one be a joke from a friend... I hope she didn't laugh at what I wrote...*

As soon as the teacher turned his back, Elise flashed Jason a delighted smile over her shoulder. His relief was nearly palpable, and then she folded up the first Candy-Gram and tossed it to him.

He caught it just as the teacher turned around, and quickly hid it, putting on his patented innocent look. Only when the instructor was busy showing them a new way to memorize sines and cosines did he open and read it.

Jason couldn't decide whether to be furious or amused. A very familiar handwriting read, *My brother has spent the last two hours trying to figure out what to write on your Candy-Gram, which basically guarantees it will suck. Please don't judge him by his lack of verbal skills; he's really a nice guy, if you speak Grunt. Anyway, here's some candy. Be nice to Jason no matter what garbage he spews onto your Candy-Gram. Anybody who can get along with Gazeera and my Mom - both fire-breathing creatures of operatic horror - is definitely worth bribing with chocolate.*

"Kala, I'm gonna strangle you," Jason whispered. She probably could hear him anyway.

When he managed to catch Elise's eyes, though, she held up the other Candy-Gram, grinned, and blew a kiss to him. That effectively turned his mood around, and he spent the rest of the class torn between elation and nervousness over their date that night.

Lois stashed the wrapped package in the *Daily Planet* darkroom, in Jimmy's filing cabinet. She couldn't help grinning to herself; after Kala thwarted her attempts to directly discover what Clark had gotten her, she got devious. A careful examination of his credit card records turned up a purchase from Custom Coffee Mugs, and the order number plus some smooth talking had led to the revelation that he'd bought one of their #1 mugs. The customer service rep wouldn't tell her what the customization had been, though.

Fine; two could play at this game. Lois had placed her own order, and she couldn't wait for the look on Clark's face when he opened it. *He'll see there's no keeping secrets from a determined reporter. A determined **two-time Pulitzer Prize winning reporter**, at that. Besides, it's good for a laugh.*

She was grinning devilishly as she sauntered back to her own desk. On it lay a white rose and a card. Lois smiled affectionately; every year, it was the same. The rose was white, and the card was unsigned. That didn't mean she didn't know who it was from, though. Clark probably knew, too, and since the sentiment was always affectionate and gentlemanly, neither of them had ever said anything about it.

Of course, as the afternoon wore on, more flowers arrived. Red carnations from her twins; potted verbenas from Perry and Loueen with the note, *Try not to kill these*. A couple of anonymous cards, one of which was explicit enough to make Lois sneeze coffee. *Apparently I still have it, whatever 'it' is. Whether I still want it is up for debate...*

*Speaking of 'it', here's something from Kent ... oh, dear God...* He'd gone over the top, as usual. Lois could only sigh heavily as the florist delivered a huge assortment of roses, with red tulips scattered throughout, two birds-of-paradise rising above the massed petals, and a veritable thicket of ivy beneath them.

"Someone did their research," the young man told her as the arrangement took over her desk. "One hundred and one roses mean absolute devotion. The tea roses here mean 'I still love you', the red ones are love and passion, the light pinks are perfect happiness, the lavender ones are 'love at first sight', and the coral ones mean, um, desire. The red tulips..." He blushed a little. "Anyway. Ivy is fidelity, and these birds of paradise I don't know about."

"That's okay, I get it," Lois muttered, blushing as well. Everyone in the office was staring now; only Clark would send a bouquet you needed a freakin' handcart to move. *Kent, I don't believe you. This is too damned sweet even for you; I think I need a shot of insulin. Or a couple two-by-fours to brace up my desk ... how am I supposed to work with this thing here?*

The man in question arrived shortly after his ostentatious bouquet. Lois just tried to glare at him, only half succeeding. Little as she wanted to admit it, overwhelming displays of affection *did* tend to have an effect on her.

Clark stopped by Lois' office on his way in, grinning. "Very cute, Kent," she told him, her acidic tone lightened by the genuine warmth in her smile.

"Glad you like them," he said, bending to kiss her cheek. "Dinner at six?"

"You think the kids will survive on their own?" she asked in reply.

"Honey, they'll be fine. They'll probably be only too happy to get a pair of fossils like us out of their hair for the evening." Clark smiled mischievously to let her know it was merely a joke.

"How much longer are you gonna be?" Jason asked with a gusty sigh.

"Add ten minutes every time you ask," Kala shot back, leaning toward the mirror. Liquid eyeliner was such a pain to apply, but you could do stuff with it that you couldn't with anything else...

"How come you have to put your freakin' panda makeup on in here, anyway? You've got a vanity - and never was a piece of furniture so aptly named."

Kala shot him the finger, irrespective of the door between them. He probably wasn't looking, but she might as well cover all bases. "Jerk. The lighting's better in here."

"Cause it's so dark in your little Goth cave..."

"Twenty minutes now, Jason. Keep it up, you may *never* get to go on that hot date."

"Forget this," Jason grumbled, and twisted the door open anyway. "You better have clothes on, Kal."

"Everything but a shirt," she breezily replied, and had the satisfaction of seeing his eyes

wince shut. "Relax, retardo. It's a corset."

Jason peeked, then scowled. "Mom's gonna kill you for leaving the house like that."

"Mom's not here to see it, now is she?" Kala replied. "Besides, unlike *you*, some of us *work* for a living. I'm wearing a blouse over it."

"Surprised they let you wear that much makeup at Bed Bath & Beyond," Jason muttered, combing back his hair anxiously. That one curl in the front just wouldn't behave...

Kala decided to help him by reaching out and twisting the little lock of hair around her finger. "Knock it off!" he snapped, jerking his head away and almost yanking the hair out by the roots. "It's never gonna lay flat if you do that!"

"That's why I sneak in your room every night and twiddle that one curl," Kala teased, looking speculatively at five tubes of lipstick. Black Cherry, Black Rose, or Black Plum? Or just to be different, the Delirium, maybe the Asphyxiation?

"Why do you have five black lipsticks?" Jason asked, splashing on cologne.

"They're not all *black*. One's true black, one's more really dark red, one's kind of blue-black... Jason, you nerd! You're using Dad's gag-gift cologne!"

"So what?" he retorted defensively. "It's really nice and women love it."

"It's freakin' CK One, Mom bought it for a *joke*... You might as well wear Old Spice and be even *more* of a cliché." She rolled hazel eyes at him before choosing the iridescent purple lipstick. "Boys. You're all so lame."

"I don't see why you're getting all dressed up to go to work," Jason replied haughtily, changing the subject. "Not like your customers want Elvira ringing up their linens."

His sister shot him an icy glare so reminiscent of their mother that both of them, seeing it in the mirror, started laughing. "Anyway, brother mine, I'm not dressing up for work. I'm going out to the club afterward."

"Does Mom know?" Jason paused in the middle of straightening his collar, eyebrows rising.

"Dad said I could," Kala replied, pouting at the mirror for effect. Perfect. "I have a curfew, and he *can* check up on me. Besides, you get to go to dinner and a movie, why do you care?"

"I don't believe Dad let you go clubbing," Jason said, trying for his father's stern tone. "Practically everyone there's going to be older than you..."

"As if I can't handle them," she sighed. "Sebast's gonna meet me there, and you know I'm safe with *him*." Kala drew back from the mirror, examining her appearance critically and finally nodding in satisfaction. Then she turned to Jason with a worldly look, and added, "Listen, I saw Dad's *real* present. Make sure you don't come home 'til curfew, and whatever you do, *don't* listen this direction."

"What do you ... oh." For a moment, the fact that they were twins was particularly apparent, as both teens wore identical looks of nausea.

Clark left the office at five, and was home five minutes later, finding a note from the twins on the counter. Kala had mentioned in writing that she knew about the curfew, which meant she'd probably keep it. Jason thanked him for the extra money and said he might try to go for a carriage ride around Centennial Park, if it wasn't too crowded and Elise liked the idea.

He hurried around the apartment, neatening things up, setting out candles, and tossing a few handfuls of red rose petals onto the bed. Bagel followed him curiously, snatching up a fallen rose petal and spitting it out with a disgusted expression. Dinner, in the form of

vermicelli and his own secret recipe pasta sauce, would be ready within moments of Lois' arrival - heat vision was an ever-present aid to the busy cook.

A small bottle of Chambord, some expensive cocoa powder, and other dessert ingredients stood on the counter beside the mixer. Clark grinned as he eyed the preparations for dessert - triple chocolate soufflé with a touch of raspberry liqueur. Soufflé, in all its forms from appetizer to dessert, had become something of an ongoing theme in the Kent house.

Then he settled down to wait for Lois to get home.

And wait.

And wait.

At five forty-five, he started to get a little impatient, so he dashed down to the florist and brought back another bag of rose petals, making a path from the door to the bedroom. *Have to remember to pick those up later, or the kids will never let us hear the end of it*, he thought, chuckling as Bagel tried another petal and found it equally unappetizing.

And wait some more.

At six-fifteen, he decided to go looking for her. *If she's let a story sweep her away...*

"What about the concert, Mrs. Kent?" the wet-behind-the-ears copyboy asked, and Lois gritted her teeth.

"Run it just above the fold," she replied, glaring at three potential layouts on her desk. *Stupid free surprise Valentine's Day concerts*, Lois thought. *Why the hell did Chris Daughtry decide to play Metropolis today of all days, when for once my kids are out of the house? And an hour before the presses roll on the evening edition, too.*

"And the proposal?" That was Gil, too smart to call her Kent, Lane, or anything else at the moment.

Lois sighed heavily. *The mayor's son just had to propose to the British Ambassador's niece, too. In the middle of a Valentine's Day parade. Why do they have those, anyway? What's the point?* "Put the ensuing fiasco top, the proposal that started it sidebar. I know what Raines is gonna lead. Frikkin' gossip rag. And where the hell are those pictures?"

"Right here, Chief," Jimmy said, grinning.

Lois shot him an evil glare as he slapped the stack of prints down on her desk, but there was no way she could turn viciously on that handsome freckled face. Instead, she just chose four pictures and pointed at the door with another malicious look.

"Yes, sir," the staff photographer joked, and hustled out before Lois could throw something at him.

"Don't even start, Olsen, considering my husband's waiting for me at home," she called after him, then dropped her voice to a mutter. "I shoulda been out of here an hour ago. Damn Perry and his heart and all his excuses why *I* had to stay and cover this nonsense..."

Just then, the City editor noticed Gil and the copyboy still hanging around. "Well? Run this down to the print and tell them they get overtime. Now shoo, I was supposed to be having a romantic dinner, not bloody *working*."

The two had barely left when Lois heard a polite cough from somewhere in the office. "Mad Dog Lane strikes again?" Clark said softly.

"You have no idea," she grouched. "The mayor's idiot son proposed to British semi-royalty in the middle of the frikkin' parade, and she was so surprised she dropped her Corgi's leash. The dog jumped off the float and tried to chase the parade horses - this's a little dog we're talking about here, Bagel's size - and the stupid animals actually *ran* from it."

Clark hadn't been listening; there were no sirens. "No one was hurt?"

"Nah, the two lovebirds fell off the float and had a couple bruises and sprains. The horses decided that a parking garage looked enough like their stable, and they ran in there instead of into the crowd. The only casualty was someone's Miata, and we've got great pics of the dog and pony show."

"So that's what's keeping you at work," he murmured, easing an arm around her shoulders. The other hand was held behind his back.

"No, no, it gets better. You know those free surprise concerts MTV is running? Well, there's a thousand screaming fangirls in Centennial Square right now. It's Chris Daughtry, he'll be lucky if he isn't eaten alive."

"And here's you stuck holding down the fort. Poor baby," Clark whispered, kissing her hair and ignoring the automatic retching noise she made at being called 'baby'. "Well, I brought you something to make you feel better."

"What is it, a fifth of Stolichnaya? Oh, no, a Taser for the next time Perry pulls this crap on me."

Clark just chuckled and held out the coffee mug, filled to the brim with something far better than the black brew from the breakroom.

"He brings me coffee. My husband, the hero," Lois said, but she was smiling. "Any Irish whiskey in it?"

"No, silly," Clark replied. "Look at it."

Lois took a sip and held up the mug. On one side, '#1' was prominently marked. She chuckled, not even bothering to demure. Clark just gently turned the cup around so she could see the customization on the other side.

Three words, each with a box to the left, and all three boxes were checked in red. 'Reporter, Mother, Wife.' "Nice to know I'm tops in all categories," Lois teased, smiling crookedly. He did have quite a way with gifts, even the slightly corny gifts. "Yours is in the darkroom, in Jimmy's file."

Clark disappeared while she sipped more coffee. This had to be Starbucks' brew, but they normally wouldn't pour it in your mug. Well, Clark was persuasive, after all. He'd gotten *her*.

He returned with the gift-wrapped package and proceeded to unwrap it carefully, Lois biting her lip the whole time. When the packing material fell away, he couldn't stop himself from bursting out laughing.

'#2', his cup read on one side. And on the other, 'Gotcha!'

"You cheated," Clark said, mock-sternly. "That's not nice, Lois."

"No, but it *was* fun," she retorted, and tipped the mug up to get the last swallow of coffee. That was when she saw the writing on the bottom of inside of the cup: '#1 Lover, too' in small print.

The janitor outside the department heard her laugh out loud, half choked by the coffee she suddenly couldn't swallow. Clark had to gently thump her on the back, and Lois whirled to punch him in the arm, glancing around to be sure they were alone before whispering, "Kal-El, that was *not* fair! Geez!"

"All's fair in love and war," he replied. "And the front page."

"Amen," she muttered, setting the cup aside. "In the last ten years, we've had all three, haven't we?"

The department was very quiet. "I prefer love, actually," Clark murmured, and kissed her brow. Lois pulled back a little, but found herself leaning against the corner support. At least

there was no one to witness them ... unless someone happened to be looking in the huge windows to either side of her. But on the sixtieth floor, the only man who could was right in front of her. Gradually kissing down her cheek, to her neck...

Lois grinned lazily. "Kal-El?"

"Hmm?"

"That was just a joke present, you know." She ran her nails over his perfect chest, knowing he could feel it even through the thin shirt and the uniform beneath that.

"Mm-hmm. You buy a lot of those," he murmured, nuzzling into her hair. He had her basically pinned against the wall now, his breath tickled her ear.

"I did get you a real present this time..." Lois' voice trailed off, distracted.

"Mm?" He wasn't exactly into coherent thought at the moment, either.

"Have a look." Her tone breathy, wicked.

He leaned back, keeping her trapped in the circle of his arms, and glanced through the perfectly respectable royal blue suit. What he saw beneath it made him grin that slow, sexy smile that never failed to weaken her knees and jump-start her heart.

"I have a little surprise waiting for you at home, too," Kal-El said huskily, his eyes alight.

"Mm, really?"

Before the double entendres could begin in earnest, Jimmy stuck his head in the door. "Hey, Ms. Lane, you want the concert pic centered or... Oh, hi, Clark."

Both editors swiveled their heads to look at him, seeing the sarcastic grin on his face. *There goes our biggest fan, and the guy who was rooting for us to get together even before Niagara*, they both thought. *Also the person who **always** manages to ruin a moment for us.*

"Center the bloody thing and put it to bed," Lois replied. "Whatever. I'm going home with my husband, and I suggest that everyone else do the same. Not my home or my husband, though."

Jimmy smiled even wider, saluted her, and disappeared.

Clark turned to her in honest surprise. "Wait a minute, Lois Lane-Kent leaving in the midst of a story? *That's* a sign that the end is nigh."

She rolled her eyes and traced his jaw with a fingertip. "What was it you said, Kent? 'All's fair in love, war, and the front page'? Please. It's a pair of puff-pieces. Get me out of here while the kids are still occupied."

"With pleasure, ma'am," he replied, sweeping her up into his arms and carrying her, laughing, out of the office. Jimmy, Gil, and the janitor, the only people to witness the spectacle, were too surprised by the fact that she hadn't throttled him for picking her up to notice that they went up in the elevator instead of down.

Ten minutes until 10 PM, the Lane-Kent twins met in the apartment building lobby. Kala was wearing someone else's jacket and carrying her high-heeled boots in one hand, looking totally exhausted but pleased. Jason drifted in as if on a cloud, his eyes glazed and a tiny spot of lipstick on his cheek.

For a moment they just looked at each other, then Kala started humming under her breath as she reached up and rubbed the mark away. "Have a good time, Jason?" she asked softly.

Jason blushed and swatted her hand. Noticing her smeared makeup, he added, "Not as good as you, looks like."

"Oh, please. Dancing all night will do this to you," Kala replied nonchalantly, and headed for the elevators. "Well, Dopey, I take it you finally managed to kiss Elise - without vaporizing

yourself?"

He blushed a little, muttering, "Shut up."

Kala waited until they were actually in the elevator to ask, "So did you do more than kiss?"

The blush crept up to Jason's ears. "None of your business."

His sister folded her arms and arched an eyebrow. "Excuse me? Didn't we swear - *pinky swear*, even - when we were six that we'd never keep secrets from each other again? If we'd shared information back then things would've been a lot different."

Jason tried to return her glare. "C'mon, Kal, that was different. Who Dad really is - and the fact that he's our Dad - was really important."

"Are you saying Elise isn't important?" She asked the treacherous question in a honeyed voice.

"Yeah, she's important, but not to you," Jason retorted.

"She's my twin brother's girlfriend, of course she's important to me. No secrets, Jason."

Knowing she'd never give up, he had to look away to answer. "No, Kal, all we did was kiss. There, happy?"

"Yeah," Kala said, leaning against the back wall of the elevator. Then with a wicked grin, she added, "Glad to know there's some things I've done that you haven't."

"**What?!**" Jason whirled to face her. "Kala Josephine Lane, what the hell have you been up to?"

"Whoa, down boy. Being born a minute and a half ahead of me doesn't give you the right to play Protective Older Brother," she laughed, raising both hands as if to say 'don't shoot me'. "Chill, I was just kidding. Like I'd let one of these idiots touch me; please." The haughty tone and the exasperated roll of her eyes were perfect imitations of Lois.

Jason eyed her sternly as the elevator continued its slow rise. "You're sure about that? No secrets, remember."

"Jason, please. I'm half alien and half Lois Lane's daughter. Some of them are nice, but no Earthling is good enough for me."

Her brother stepped back. "Hello, Jor-El's granddaughter!"

"Hey, the Giant Floating Head has nothing to do with this," she shot back.

"Then don't be a speciesist like him."

They were still quarreling benignly as they reached the penthouse apartment. Opening the door, the twins halted, staring at the trail of rose petals, and then shared a disgusted look.

"Such a couple of romantics," Kala sighed, and headed for the kitchen. Bagel trotted out of the hallway, looking at them mournfully, and Jason picked her up.

Jason followed Kala for no real reason, watching idly and ruffling Bagel's ears as his sister made herself a plate of leftover pasta and popped it in the microwave. "Lovely," he commented, "they left the kitchen a mess."

Kala grinned and winked at him. "We'd better leave it for them to clean up," she said soberly, mischief dancing in her hazel eyes. "Otherwise they'll never learn better."

Jason had to laugh at her mimicry of their parents. "Good one, Kal. Hey, why is Mom's robe hanging on the chair there?"

Kala glanced at it speculatively, then replied, "Better not to ask. You want some pasta?"

"Nah, I'm stuffed," he said as she took the first bite.

Kala gave Bagel a tiny piece of pasta and patted the Beagle's head affectionately, cooing, "Poor little baby, Mom and Dad kicked you out, didn't they?" Then the twins ambled into the

living room, but the scene that met their eyes brought them to a standstill.

Kala's eyebrows rose as she surveyed the clothing strewn from the balcony door to the hallway. "So glad I was dancing by the speakers," was all she said.

"Geez," Jason muttered, rolling his eyes. Then he felt a draft, and crossed the living room to close the sliding glass door. "Good Lord, they left the door open! That's ... that's *gross*."

His sister was trying to be a bit more mature. "It *is* Valentine's Day, Jason, and we weren't exactly hatched from an egg, you know." She passed him heading for her room, and a moment later exclaimed in surprise at finding her father's uniform shirt in the hallway. "You guys!"

Jason wasn't far behind her, and he collapsed into laughter as she pounded on their parents' bedroom door. "You'd better clean up this house, you two, or you're grounded for a week!" Kala yelled, barely stifling her own laughter as she hurried to her room.

"Good night, Mom," Jason said as he passed the door, knowing they had to both be awake with all that noise. "Good night, Dad."

His room was across from Kala's, and she paused in her doorway long enough to mutter, "From the looks of the place, it certainly was."

"Kala! You pervert!" Jason yelled at her, but she'd already shut her bedroom door.

In the darkened bedroom, Lois opened her eyes lazily, too thoroughly satisfied to be annoyed at the twins. Kal-El lay beside her, chuckling softly as he listened to their kids, and when he saw her awake he ran his fingers lightly through her hair. "Happy Valentine's Day, Lois," he whispered.

"Oh, it was," she replied with a purr, and snuggled close to him.