

Great Expectations: A Father's Day Tale

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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The alarm clock was set on the lowest volume, but it still woke Clark on the first ring. He reached out and turned it off before Lois even heard it, then lay in bed a moment longer, listening to the house.

If anyone had told me eight years that I'd be here right now, I wouldn't believe them... Lying beside Lois Lane, my wife and the love of my life, and listening to our twins asleep down the hall. Thinking about our one-year anniversary two months ago, and about everything we talked about in Paris. Wondering if we'll be able to have another child...

Lois murmured softly in her sleep, and he slid his arm around her waist again. She leaned back against him with a tiny satisfied sigh, and Clark chuckled as he kissed the top of her head. *Heck, eight years ago if you'd told me I'd be lying in bed with Lois Lane, **neither** of us wearing a stitch of clothing, I'd have fainted. And I would've **never** believed that she'd be wearing my ring so willingly ... so proudly, even.*

Although she had to keep her name ... I don't mind her office door reading 'Lois Lane-Kent'. It sounds pretty good, actually.

A morning like this took the sting out of the nightmare he'd had back when he and Lois hadn't gotten together again yet. No dream had ever been crueler than imagining that all of his problems were just a nightmare ... he could still remember how real it had felt, seeing Lois lying beside him much as she was now, only very obviously pregnant with the twins. The thought that he might not have missed everything ... that he might be able to be a father to Kala and Jason from the moment of their birth...

*I missed some things that I can never get back, he reflected soberly. Just then, Clark heard a soft whine from near the foot of the bed, and he smiled. *But I also have some things I never dreamed of, including kids sweet enough to give me a beagle for my anniversary.**

Bagel pawed the door of her crate lightly, whimpering, and Clark got up, pulling on his bathrobe. "Hush, Baby Bagel," he murmured to her as he opened the crate and carried her out

to the balcony.

It wasn't really fair to a young puppy to make her wait through the long elevator ride downstairs every time she needed to go out, so he and the twins had spent a Saturday building a large, low planter outside, which they covered with sod. Bagel had her own private lawn, twenty stories above street level. Clark looked away while she picked the perfect spot to water, and went back inside with her when she was done.

It was too early for her breakfast - dawn was just lightening the sky - so he patted the little dog on the head and went to get dressed for his morning rounds. As usual, Bagel made it interesting. She nipped at his cape, growled at the tights, and tried to run off with a boot.

Kal-El chuckled as he hopped on one foot to get his other boot back, then rumbled the pup's long ears one more time. "Be good," he whispered, and headed out the sliding glass door.

Bagel watched him go for a moment, her white-tipped tail wagging slower ... slower ... and then stopping. She pawed the glass, but no one came to let her out, and she whined softly.

The small tri-colored puppy wandered up the hall, head held low. She sniffed along the bottom of the twins' door, sneezing at the odor of the iguana. Whining softly and pawing the door gently didn't get a response, so Bagel sat there in the hallway disconsolately for several minutes.

Luckily, Bagel had other ways of amusing herself when she couldn't get into the twins' room. She trotted down the hallway, through the living room, and back to the master bedroom. Sure enough, Daddy had left the door partly open, and all Bagel had to do was put her head down and barge in. Success! Now all she had to do was get in the bed...

Unfortunately, Bagel was a very small puppy, and the bed was higher than she could easily jump. She got up on her hind feet and pawed at the covers, whimpering softly to attract Mommy's attention.

Lois groaned, curled on her side, and opened one eye slowly. The face that stared back at her was incredibly cute - Bagel had a tan head, with black on her ears and rimming her eyes like eyeliner, and a little white on her muzzle. Right now she was smiling - *smiling*, the damn dog knew she was cute! *Oh, for cryin' out loud, Bagel, it's not even daylight yet...* "Go back t' sleep, Yap," Lois muttered, and burrowed down in the covers.

Bagel chose to live up to her nickname, and yapped. She wasn't so easily dissuaded. Her little paws pulled on the sheet as she strove to drag herself up onto the bed, whining softly with effort.

"Oh, don't cry," Lois sighed with resignation, her hand stealing out to pet the puppy. It was like waking up for the twins' feedings all over again, this little puppy. Thank God she was adorable. Bagel's head was about the size and shape of an apple, and she *did* tend to yip. "Hush, Yappin' Applehead."

Of course, the petting and the pet name only excited her more. Bagel started to whimper with effort, pushing her head back against Lois' hand and scrabbling for a foothold. The more she struggled, and the more pathetic her cries became, the less Lois could resist her. At last she sighed and pulled the puppy up onto the bed, where Bagel repaid her kindness by frantically wagging her tail and licking Lois' face.

"Ugh, that'd be cuter if you had better breath," Lois muttered, hiding her head under the pillow. Bagel pawed at her shoulder and walked all over her a couple times before giving up.

Then the Beagle found a nice warm place to cuddle - right against Lois' belly. She had to curl herself into a tighter ball than usual, glaring reproachfully at Mommy's stomach, which took up more space these days.

Her goal accomplished, Bagel laid her head down with a sigh. Her chocolate-colored eyes slowly drifted closed, and moments later, the puppy was asleep again.

Home again, after a productive morning - several car wrecks, a construction accident, and a wildfire upstate, all easily dealt with. Kal-El flew back down to the balcony and headed inside. The apartment was quiet; Jason and Kala were still asleep, and by the sound of Lois' heartbeat, she'd woken a few minutes ago and was now drifting off again. *Hmm, let's see if I can't give you a reason to stay awake, beautiful*, he thought, smiling.

But the sight that met his eyes as he stepped into their bedroom made him chuckle ruefully. No fooling around this morning - the youngest 'child' had managed to climb in bed with Mommy. Again. *How do you manage that, Bagel, when she claims you're just a nuisance?*

The pup had opened her eyes when he opened the door, and now her white-tipped tail beat gently against the comforter. Kal-El moved to pat her head, whispering, "I know she loves you - but we'll keep her secret, okay?" He paused, though, and scrutinized the scene. Lois lying on her side with Bagel curled against her stomach - it wasn't exactly a new image, but something seemed new.

When Kal-El saw what the difference was, he felt a chill race up his spine. *Bagel's curled up tighter than she usually is - she's got less room between Lois and the edge of the bed. And she isn't any bigger; the vet said she won't grow much more. Lois, though...*

He looked very closely. *Her stomach is definitely bigger - just a tiny bit. But still ... we've been trying... Could she be...?* He was tempted to use x-ray vision, but that just seemed like too much of an invasion of privacy. Lois hadn't mentioned the possibility to him, after all.

She might not know ... or she might not be sure. Either way, I won't ruin the surprise. Kal-El bent over Lois, softly kissing her forehead and smiling at her wordless murmur. "Sleep in, beloved. I'll play ringmaster to the circus this morning."

Quickly changing back into normal clothes, he went to wake the twins. Clark knocked on their door before opening it, a courtesy he and Lois had always shown them, but the sound didn't wake the slumbering pair.

Sometime during the night, Kala had left her bed and crawled in with Jason. Clark frowned slightly; she only did that when she had a particularly nasty nightmare. *There are times when I really wish Lois **had** shot Luthor. All morals aside, the twins shouldn't have gone through all that.*

They had all survived, and they were even thriving, but every once in a while the past came back to haunt them. The twins especially, and it broke Clark's heart that they sought comfort from each other most of the time these days, instead of from him or Lois. *They were on their own for most of that*, he told himself. *They saw me hurt and Lois trapped. It only makes sense they'd lean on each other. Besides, anything **else** that scares them, they run right to us. It's only those old nightmares that drive them into each other's beds.*

Damn Luthor. Damn him to Hell, and I won't even apologize for thinking it.

"Hey, kids," Clark called softly, forcing his mind away from the troubled past. "Jason, Kala, time to get up."

"Fi' mo' min'ts..." Jason muttered, his usual request. He sounded just like Lois asking for five more minutes after he tried to wake her, except that Lois would try to swat him if he shook her shoulder gently. Jason just groaned loudly and burrowed deeper into the pillows.

Clark ruffled Kala's hair - all of her that was visible. She was often the livelier one first thing in the morning. "C'mon, sweetie, wake up."

"Wha' time izzit?" she asked, turning toward him just enough for him to see her hazel eyes peeking out from under the sheet.

"Fifteen minutes until your cartoons come on," he replied.

"Cartoons?"

"It's Saturday, baby."

Kala blinked at him for a long moment while that computed, and then suddenly her eyes became bright and aware. The covers shot back and she bolted across the bed - Jason yelling as she stepped on him - racing down the hallway in her pajamas. "C'mon, slowpoke!" she called to her brother.

"Brush your teeth first!" Clark called after her. Bagel heard the noise and came scampering up the hall to the bathroom, where Kala had skidded to a halt and turned in. She was now washing up as if she were trying for a sixteen-second NASCAR pit stop. *So much for letting Lois sleep in*, Clark thought ruefully as the puppy started barking at the electric toothbrush.

Jason crawled out of bed, his hair sticking straight up, and peered up at Clark. "Can Gazeera have breakfast with me?"

Clark smoothed his hair and kissed his forehead. "No, son," he answered, for at least the hundredth time.

"Please?"

"No, Jason. He can watch cartoons with you after you eat. C'mon, I'll fix your oatmeal."

"Kay." The little boy yawned as he headed for the bathroom, and yelped as Kala knocked into him running out again. "Ow! Kala! Daddy, Kala hit me!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Kids, your mother's asleep!" Clark said sharply.

"Too late," came the weary groan from the hall. "Kala, no running in the house."

"Yes, Mommy," her daughter said contritely, stretching her arms up for a hug. As Lois knelt and gathered both twins to her, she glanced at Clark, raising one eyebrow.

He nodded; he'd seen how fast Kala ran. As well as her uncanny hearing, she seemed to be developing his speed. *Have to take her somewhere like Kansas where she can learn to control it*, Clark thought, remembering his own youth. Kala needed the wide-open spaces; people would notice if she crashed through a wall or a roof here in the city.

Kala hurried to the kitchen - not quite running, but very close - to make breakfast. Jason toddled into the bathroom, still sleepy. That left Lois standing in the hall, in her robe, with her hair mussed and her eyes still half-shut. Clark chuckled as he kissed her cheek. "Good morning, gorgeous."

"Bull," she retorted. "I look like a reject from *Night of the Living Dead*. How dare you be awake and groomed this early?" Lois tried to sound fierce, but she knew the answer to her peevish query, and loved him for his devotion to duty.

"I can function without caffeine," he replied, kissing her again before heading into the kitchen to start the coffee.

"Life without caffeine?" Lois muttered, following him. "You *must* be from another planet."

What would a Saturday be without a trip to the park? Clark tossed the baseball up into the

air and caught it, grinning at Jason. The little boy held out his catcher's mitt - his favorite birthday present, after Gazeera - and smiled determinedly. "C'mon, Daddy!"

As always, Clark's heart seized for a moment. *He called me Daddy ... I wonder if he'll ever know how much that means to me.* "All right, son - here it comes." He tossed the ball at Jason, who caught it easily and fired it back. With every throw, they stepped back slightly, increasing the distance between them.

Lois watched the scene with an indulgent eye from the nearby playground, where she relaxed on a bench, Bagel snoozing beside her. The pup had been running around like a maniac as she always did for the first fifteen minutes of any park trip, and was now utterly exhausted and sleeping deeply - for the next ten minutes or so. Then the cycle would repeat itself.

Petting the sleeping dog's side, Lois turned to look at her daughter. Kala didn't want to play catch today; she was making another attempt at scaling the jungle gym. "Need some help?" Lois asked, seeing her hesitate at the point where the bars began to curve inward.

"Nope," Kala said firmly, and resumed climbing. Lois smiled fondly at her; she understood the desire to never back down, never give up.

Clark winked at Jason, then threw the ball up in the air to simulate a pop fly. Jason scrambled to get under it, holding both hands above his head as he'd been taught. The baseball thwacked into the glove, and Clark cheered, "Way to go!"

Even while he spent an idyllic Saturday afternoon playing with his son, Clark's mind was distracted. Lois had already purchased his Father's Day gift, and she had been making a big deal out of it - *without* giving him a single clue as to what it was. *I wonder what my favorite sneaky, snarky reporter has planned this time. Knowing Lois, it has to be something sarcastic - like the Superdad bathrobe she helped the twins pick out. Or the nice, normal-looking tie - micro-printed with the word 'dork' over every square inch. Of course, only I can see it without a magnifying glass.*

Father's Day being tomorrow, Lois has probably planned some kind of joke around fatherhood. Or... He glanced over at her thoughtfully. *Lois is usually a little more active than this - she's been taking it easy for a while. I wonder if she really could be...* Clark's contemplation led him to forget about the ball, and Jason laughed hysterically when it bounced off his father's head. Clark had to chuckle, too, as he retrieved it for another toss, not seeing the speculative look Lois gave him.

It was hard to even think it, as if pondering the topic too closely would jinx their chances. He and Lois both wanted another child so much...

*That might be what the big surprise Father's Day present is, Clark suddenly thought. Oh, my God. If it is ... if **she** is ... what better gift could she possibly give me?*

When he glanced back at Lois, she was looking away, but he recognized the secretive little smile curving her lips.

Most Saturday evenings belonged to the grandmothers, and this week was Ella's turn. Clark took them across town, while Lois savored a few moments alone. Once upon a time, she had spent most of her waking hours alone - chasing stories by herself, taking wild risks. Then Perry had saddled her with a partner, but she still managed to ditch Clark every now and then - *usually right before I ran into Superman. Damn, I was blind.* Then there were the twins, whom she wouldn't have traded for the world, but her fiery independent spirit began to be banked. And Richard completed the domestic picture.

She'd been all set to become a tame, pretty wife and mother, the headstrong journalist

fading away, when all of a sudden her world turned upside down all over again. Now she had that sense of wonder and adventure back in her life, along with the joy of motherhood. The comforts of hearth and home, and the excitement of her career. Kal-El was even wise enough to know that Lois sometimes simply needed time for herself, and to give it to her before she asked.

Time for herself included a long shower, at the moment. Ah, bliss - twenty minutes without a child yelling for her attention, or a beagle sitting outside the bathroom door barking indignantly at being ignored. Strange how Kal-El could take care of the entire planet, and couldn't shut the damn dog up for five minutes. Lois smiled affectionately at the thought of him helpless before the onslaught of yapping.

Lois turned her face up to the hot spray, letting the water sluice away her shampoo. She didn't even hear the door open, or the shower curtain slide back. Her first indication she wasn't alone was Kal-El's strong, warm arms sliding around her waist, and Lois gasped in surprise. "I *told* you to stop sneaking up on me!" she grumbled, turning with a fierce glare.

But as usual, her fury was weakened by the sight him gloriously nude and dripping water. "I wasn't sneaking up on you, Lois," he chuckled. "You just weren't paying attention." Kal-El pulled her closer again, and Lois couldn't stop herself from sighing. The warmth of his body against hers was just too delightful. And his hands sliding over her wet skin...

"Mmmm, you're home early," Lois purred, letting her head drop back against his shoulder. He stroked her belly lightly, both of them thinking the same thing at that moment and neither one knowing it. *What if...?* But then Kal-El's hands came back up, cupping her breasts, and he kissed her neck... "What're you doing?" Lois asked lazily, reaching over her shoulder to slide her hand into his now-soaked hair.

"You need me to spell it out?" he asked huskily, hands gently kneading her breasts, the tips of his fingers brushing her nipples.

Lois gasped, arching her back, then chuckled. "I *know*, but somehow I ... oh, *God*, that's ... somehow I think you have... Mmmm ... an ulterior motive."

"Why would you think that?" Kal-El whispered, his breath tickling her ear. Gradually, his right hand began to slip lower, down her soap-slick belly. And yes, the curve of her stomach did seem a little more pronounced.

He couldn't see the knowing little smile that graced Lois' features as his hand hesitated there, didn't know how much she was savoring the idea of telling him she might actually be... Lois purred, "Because I know you, Kal-El. And you... *ohh...*" She sighed as his hand slid still lower, down the curve of her hip. The skin there was so very sensitive, and he knew it so very well. "You never tease like this ... unless you want something..."

"Oh, I want something," Kal-El whispered, nuzzling her neck.

"I'll just bet you do," Lois murmured, rocking her hips against him. She had the satisfaction of hearing him gasp, just before he slid his hand lower still and startled a gasp out of her as well.

"But not just that," he amended, making Lois whimper softly. "There's something I want to know."

"Mmmm?" Lois wasn't exactly capable of articulate speech.

"Something *you've* been teasing me about for a while now." His voice grew deeper as Lois leaned against him, her breath quickening, her body starting to move in time with his caresses.

"What?" she whispered, her eyes closing.

His voice was still lower, that rich timbre that always sent shivers down her spine, when he said, "Tell me what you got me for Father's Day."

Lois's eyes snapped open again. "*What? No fair-*" But then he mouthed the back of her neck, and she moaned, arching against his touch.

Kal-El laughed softly at her, the wicked laugh only she knew, and Lois had a moment to think she'd taught him too well. "All's fair in love, war, and the front page. *You* told me that, Lois. So, will you tell me? Or will I have to stop what I'm doing?"

"Oh, you *evil...*" Lois hissed. *Very cute, Kal-El. Very cute. But two can play at this game, and I intend to win.* Lois took a step forward out of his embrace, half-turning toward him with a wounded look. But that was merely a cover for what she meant to do. At her height, she could get completely out of the spray by staying close to the wall. "I'm not telling ... so you'll have to stop. Let me help you..." And she reached behind her, twisting the hot water knob abruptly off.

The water temperature suddenly dropped from steaming to ice cold, and Kal-El gasped in shock. Lois dove out, not even bothering to grab a towel - he'd be only too happy to drag her under the cold shower with him. Now all she had to do was make it out the door...

Lois laughed out loud as she grabbed the doorjamb, sliding a little on the tile. She'd almost made it when she heard the shower curtain slide back rapidly, and a whooshing sound...

"*HOLY ... CRAP!*" Lois screamed as his freezing breath struck her bare, wet skin. She followed that with less savory profanity. "Kal-El, I will *kill* you for that!"

She had actually started to turn around, intending to somehow make good on the threat, when he stepped out of the shower, glaring at her. "I'll get *you* for that, Lois," he muttered threateningly, and Lois realized he could use the super-breath again - and it would be even less pleasant against the front of her body.

Discretion is the better part of valor - an uncommon thought for Lois, but a wise one at the moment. She backed away nervously, suddenly reminded that he was nearly a foot taller than she was ... almost a hundred pounds heavier, too, all of it muscle. And he was glowering at her as if he was actually angry, and intending to do something completely wicked in revenge.

And then she hit the wall behind her, no room to run. "Um ... I was just kidding ... good joke, huh?" Lois tried to grin up at him, but she was already wincing in anticipation of payback.

She'd crossed her arms over her chest to defend herself, and Kal-El took hold of her wrists, pinning her hands above her head. Lois closed her eyes, just knowing he was going to do something terrible. *I should've remembered that damn Arctic-fresh breath before I turned the cold water on him. Oh, hell. This is gonna...*

But it wasn't frigid air that struck her damp skin. Instead Lois felt sudden warmth clothing her, and her eyes shot open in time to catch the gleam of red in his. *Talk about your heated stares,* she thought, and then Kal-El was kissing her, skin against skin and nothing *cold* about either of them. His warm hands slid down her sides, catching her thighs and lifting her to his height.

Lois moaned against his lips, and Kal-El chuckled, completely forgetting about what he wanted to ask her...

...for the moment.

Later the same evening, Kal-El walked out onto the balcony wearing only a pair of jeans.

Lois was blissfully asleep in bed, and he glanced through the wall at her with a complicated smile: part adoration, part satisfaction, and part curiosity.

The Adirondack recliner he'd had shipped from Smallville rested on the balcony now, with a decent view of the stars. Clark sat down in it and put his feet up, reflecting again on how oddly comfortable it was.

His thoughts didn't stay so mundane for long. The same question returned to haunt his mind. *Is she or isn't she? Lois doesn't want to tell me yet, and I'm not going to sneak around with x-ray vision to find out. That just seems rude. But still...*

Okay, the options. What if she isn't? I mean, we've only been trying for two months. I know people who've tried for years before finally succeeding. Just because we managed it in one night the first time is no reason to assume we'd be lucky again so soon. If Lois isn't pregnant, nothing really changes. We have the twins, and we keep trying - which, frankly, is no hardship.

Unless... What if we can't? What if we only got the twins because of something relating to me losing my powers? That would mean we could never have another child, since I can't risk giving up my powers again. Look what happened last time. If that's the case, I could never be there for the birth, the first few years - never hear the first word, never witness the first steps...

No way to know, yet, so no point in worrying about it yet, he told himself firmly. The sky was unusually clear tonight, so Kal-El watched the stars above, drowsing slightly as he contemplated the other option.

If she is ... our lives will get a lot more complicated. The twins plus a new baby? We'll need every ounce of my speed to keep up with them. True, we have a pretty good support network, and at least money isn't a problem for the department heads of a newspaper the size of the Planet, but it's still a big adjustment.

The sliding glass door behind him opened, and Lois padded out onto the balcony. She was wearing the red bathrobe he adored, the one with black lace trimming the sleeves, and he smiled knowingly at her.

"Stupid double standard," Lois growled affectionately as she bent to kiss him. "You can sit out here flashing your chest to the whole world..."

"You'd start a stampede if you did that, Lois," he whispered. "And I'm a little too tired to fight off your hordes of admirers."

"My hordes of admirers? When every paper in this city was stashing a good-looking female reporter on the roof almost two years ago? Right, Kal-El. I'm not taking any chances." With that Lois, slid into his lap, leaning back against his chest. The chair was very sturdily constructed, and held both of them easily.

He chuckled at her, kissing her hair. "There's only one good-looking female reporter to whom I give the exclusives, Lois." Kal-El slipped his arm around her waist as Lois made herself comfortable, the top of her head nestled under his chin and the rest of her body draped across him.

"Yeah, I know," she muttered, her tone deadpan, "I've got two of your 'exclusives' staying at my mom's place tonight."

"Hmm," he mused, enjoying her closeness. "Speaking of exclusives ... if we do have another news flash in the family tree, what do you think of Jonathan for a name?"

"I'm partial to Michael," Lois replied, "but they sound good together. Jonathan Michael Lane..."

"Kent."

"Lane-Kent."

"Kent," he insisted, eyes bright with mischief.

"I'm a hyphenate, so are the possible future kids," Lois replied.

"Jason took my name..."

"With Lane as his middle," Lois said firmly, "and Kala hyphenated. I'm not giving up my name."

"Thought you didn't like your dad." The statement was neutral, Kal-El stroking her arm thoughtfully.

"No, but I like my mom. Lucy bellied up to patriarchal tradition; someone has to maintain the Lane legacy of stubbornness."

"Oh, well, you and Kala have that taken care of for decades to come," Kal-El teased, kissing her ear.

"I'll tell your daughter you said that," Lois threatened lazily.

"She'll take it as a compliment," he replied. "Jonathan Michael Lane-Kent it is, then. He'd better inherit our love of writing with a name that long."

"How do you know it's going to be a boy?" Lois challenged him, catching his hand in hers and kissing the back of it. "Could be a girl. Michaela is a gorgeous name, but I'm not hanging Jeanne on any child of mine."

"Mmmm," Kal-El murmured, turning his hand over and stroking her chin lightly. "There's always Lara, but that leaves my mom out."

"Honey, I love your mother, but I'm not naming a girl Martha in this era. Besides, didn't you tell me you're named for her somehow?"

"Her maiden name was Clark," he confirmed.

"Explains the dorkiness, since it was a surname ... ah! Stop it!" Lois tried to get up suddenly as he tickled her.

"As if Lois was the world's most avant-garde name for a girl," Kal-El teased. "You did just fine with a classic, even if it did have an effect on your personality."

Lois swatted his hands away. "Oh? How do you figure?"

"Lois is a German name that means 'famous warrior', which is terribly appropriate for you," he told her. "You're famous, and you've been fighting all your life - you clobbered that guy in the diner all those years ago. My very own Valkyrie."

"Oh, knock it off," Lois grumbled, but she couldn't hide the pleased smile from him. "And my mother already has a grandchild named after her, thanks to Lucy. I swear she's having a kid for each living member of both families..."

"Lucy's a good mom, though," Kal-El said. "Both of you are - obviously a tribute to your mother."

"Flatterer," Lois said idly.

"No, I'm quite sincere," he replied, running his fingers through her hair. Lois sighed with pleasure, relaxing against him even more.

They lay like that for quite some time, Kal-El watching the sky above and toying with Lois' hair. An atmosphere of perfect peace and contentment descended upon them, and it finally seemed the right time to ask her the question that had occupied his thoughts for days. "Hey, Lois," Kal-El whispered, nuzzling the top of her head as he wondered how to phrase it.

His only reply was a sleepy, inarticulate murmur. Kal-El could only chuckle at himself when he realized that Lois had been asleep for several minutes; he'd heard her heartbeat slow

to its current rhythm, but hadn't thought about what it meant. *I suppose it'll have to stay a mystery - which is how she wants it to be.*

Kissing her forehead, he gently gathered her up and carried her back to bed.

The next morning was Father's Day. Lois saw to it that Kal-El received an early gift on waking up, one that made him a little late for his morning rounds but was deeply appreciated. Lois got up, too, and by the time he returned from circumnavigating the globe the coffee was ready, and breakfast was cooking.

He came up behind her as she flipped pancakes, slid his arms around her waist, and kissed her neck. Her cooking was a surprise, and on any other day he would've teased her about it, but not this one. "Good morning, beautiful."

"Yes, it was," Lois purred, leaning against him. The smell of food made her a little queasy; the shrimp scampi they'd had for dinner last night must've been disagreeing with her. She nibbled toast while Kal-El indulged in a proper Kansas farmer's breakfast, teasing him gently about his invulnerable arteries.

"So what's the plan for today?" he asked at last.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," Lois said archly. "First things first - since this is Father's Day, you probably ought to go get the kids. The twins *and* the four-footed brat."

"Putting me to work on Father's Day," Kal-El teased back. "Shame on you, Lois."

"You're lucky you're not in the office, Kent," she replied, eyes agleam. "Besides, I need you out of the house for a little while. There's still some things I have to get ready."

"Procrastinator. Any hints?"

"No," Lois said. "You'll be surprised. Now scram, I have to wrap your gift. And I promised Jason and Kala they could help me bake your cake."

"Oh dear," he teased. "Just don't let them repeat the Christmas cookies from two years ago, okay? I love you - I'll be back soon." Laughing, he kissed her once - twice - three times before she swatted him away. Once he was out of the house for sure, Lois grinned slyly and hurried to get wrapping paper, scissors, and tape.

The gift had already been wrapped once, but Kal-El was one of those annoying people who liked to open their gifts gently, unlike Lois and the twins, who tore wrapping paper gleefully in pursuit of presents. She intended to tease him a bit this time, using several different papers to wrap the gift multiple times.

She also had a phone call to make, relentlessly efficient even on the weekend. Lois slipped her cell phone's headset on and hit speed dial as she started to add the next layer of wrapping paper.

"What's on fire?" Perry's gruff voice answered.

"Nothing, old man," Lois replied, grinning.

"Then why the heck are you calling me? The weekend staff put a misspelling in 42-point type again?"

"Nope," Lois chuckled. "Just wanted to wish you a happy Father's Day."

That actually startled Perry into a few moments of silence, and Lois could just see his expression - the typical scowl warring with a pleased smile. At last, he managed to say, "Lois, I know your mother's awfully fond of me, but I swear I never took advantage of that."

"Because the general had a very well-maintained gun collection," Lois retorted. "Don't try to make yourself sound all noble, Mr. White."

He guffawed. "Lois, if I was afraid of General Lane, I'd never have let you move into my house all those years ago."

"Oh, please," Lois muttered. "Anyway, how's Bryan?"

"Loud, demanding, completely overbearing," Perry said, a hint of pride in his tone. "Kinda reminds me of you, Lois."

"Perry!" she laughed. With their relationship firmly back in the arena of affectionate sarcasm, Lois and Perry bantered on for a few more minutes. She finally hung up with a warning not to let his wife spoil him too much.

Kal-El's gift was irregularly shaped, and wrapping it many times over required more of Lois' attention than she originally suspected it would. He and the twins would be back very soon, so she hurried to finish, ignoring the faint pain in her stomach at first. *I will never eat shrimp scampi again...*

Then, suddenly, a savage cramp struck. Lois dropped the scissors, gasping in pain and disbelief. *No, it can't be*, she thought wildly, pressing both hands low on her abdomen.

The pain snarled through her belly again defiantly. After having experienced these cramps just about every month since she turned twelve - with the exception of the last two and the eleven months she carried the twins - Lois knew exactly what it was. But it couldn't be. She was pregnant... Wasn't she? *No, no, dammit! I knew it! I am!*

Biting her lip against the pain, Lois hurried to the bathroom. She'd bought a pregnancy test when she first began to suspect, but ultimately talked herself out of using it. It seemed like knowing for sure would somehow jinx their good luck. They had talked before of the possibly that the twins had been a miracle, one they might never be able to duplicate. *No, this isn't right. Not now. Not like this.* Fighting back furious tears, she forced herself to open the box even as her stomach churned, her hands shaking despite their sudden numbness. *Please, just let it be the damned shrimp or something...*

Running up the hallway, Daddy's keys in hand, Jason was laughing with excitement when he made it to the door to their apartment first. He had kept Mommy's secret since last night when they had packed for Nana's. She hadn't been planning to tell them if she had gotten the gift they had discussed or not, but he had pouted, begged and begged, and then promised not to tell Kala and her big mouth, until she had had to laugh and whispered it into his ear. His eyes had widened in wonder as he stared up at his mother in awe. *Oh, wow! That's so cool!*

Now he couldn't wait to see his father's face when he saw what Mommy had done. Once they had first gotten on the elevator with Bagel's kennel and all of her other stuff, Kala had argued that she wanted to carry the puppy's toy bag. Nevermind that she still had to carry her own backpack; it was because Daddy was carrying Bagel. Daddy had just looked curiously at both of them and agreed. Okay, fine. If Kala wanted to be a showoff, he'd let her do it because *he* knew what Daddy's present was. Kala had beamed at him in triumph; her brother just grinned.

As soon as the elevator door dinged at their floor, Jason reached up for his father's keys and announced that he'd open the door for them. Although he got a rather amused look, the keys were handed off to a suddenly-sprinting Jason. Theirs was the only set of rooms on this floor, so it was absolutely safe for him to run full-tilt with his prize.

He only had to play with the key for a moment and then he was in the door. Looking around as he came right into the living room, he immediately searched for his mother. "Mommy!" he called out, eyes darting around for her immediately, moving quickly toward the kitchen. The glass doors to their balcony were shut and the curtains drawn, so she couldn't be there. "Mommy, we're home! Daddy and Kala are bringin' Bagel! Didja finish wrappin' the present?"

But his mother wasn't there, either. He could just see the roll of wrapping paper sitting on top of the counter and a package, as well. That had to be Daddy's Father's Day gift. But then, where was Mommy? And why didn't she come out when he called her or at least say 'Hello'? "Mommy? Where are you? Daddy and Kala are almost here."

Turning around, he saw that the door to his parents' bedroom was open. And he thought he could hear noises from inside. Puzzled, Jason started in that direction, worried since he had seen the present just sitting out and his fear just growing as he inched into the bedroom. "Mommy?" he whispered in the doorway before going inside.

Lois was sitting on the bed, rubbing her eyes as she looked up at him. Her face was red, and she was sniffing the same way he did when he didn't want anyone to know he'd been crying. Forgetting about his sister and father for the moment, Jason hurried to his mother's side and just hugged her.

Lois wrapped her arms around her son and hugged him back, stifling another sob. For a long moment they just held each other like that, comfort given and received unquestioningly. Then Lois kissed Jason on the temple and drew back slightly, trying to look composed.

His next words shattered her fragile poise. "No baby, huh?"

Lois' jaw dropped. She spluttered, "Whuh? How ... how on earth...?"

Those blue eyes were solemn as they met her shocked hazel ones. "You said you were gonna try to get us a little brother or sister. Remember? When you 'n' Daddy came back from Paris?"

"Yes, but ... how did you know I thought I was pregnant?" Lois still couldn't wrap her mind around it. She'd guarded the secret so closely.

"You've been goin' around smilin' like Kala when she knows what you 'n' Daddy got me for Christmas," Jason told her. "And you pat your tummy a lot."

"Oh, Jason." His perceptiveness astounded his mother - she hadn't realized that her behavior was so noticeable, but for him to have picked up on her secret hope from just those few indicators amazed her. Lois could think of no other response but to hug him again, and Jason's arms wrapped protectively around her neck.

They both heard Clark and Kala come in the front door, Bagel already whining. Father and daughter headed out to the balcony so Bagel could make sure her very own patch of grass hadn't been moved or marked by some other twentieth-story living canine. Lois sighed and let go, smiling a bit more naturally now. "I love you, baby."

"I love you too, Mommy," Jason said. "It's okay if I can't have a little brother. Can I have a bearded dragon instead?"

Lois broke into startled laughter. "No more lizards! Gazeera's enough for one house. Gazeera's enough for one *city*!"

Bagel, coming back into the house, heard her voice and dashed toward her, yelping and whining. Lois had no time to brace herself against the Amazing Train-Wreck Beagle, who hit her legs at full speed and started trying to clamber up into her lap.

"Hi, Bagel! Hello, Bagel, hello - *AUGH!*" Lois had leaned forward to pet the pup, and Bagel leaped upward just as she said hello. Bagel was trying to lick her face, but because she was speaking, Lois got licked in the mouth with puppy breath - not an experience for the faint of heart.

Clark and Kala arrived at the bedroom as Lois pushed the pup back down on the floor, still complaining vociferously. "Oh, yuck! Disgusting! I'm getting up, that was so gross..."

In spite of her half-amused grumbling and her laughter a moment ago, father and daughter

both saw her reddened eyes and were concerned. "Honey, are you all right?" Clark asked her.

"Mommy, you okay?" Kala inquired at the same moment.

"I'm fine, I just got French-kissed by a dog," Lois said. "Gah! I need Listerine... Shoo, you guys."

They let her pass, Bagel leaping joyfully at her all the way. Clark's brow knit thoughtfully as he watched her go, but Kala was wise enough to turn her speculative gaze on her brother.

"Jason?" she asked over the sound of Lois gargling in the next room.

"No baby," he told her, his lip pouting slightly.

Kala mirrored his expression, groaning "Awwww," and Clark whipped around to stare at them. *What the heck? She told the twins and not me?*

"No lizard, either," Jason continued mournfully.

"Jason, we don't need another stupid lizard!" Kala grouched. "I wanna *meerkat*."

"You an' your weasels," Jason complained.

"They're not weasels!"

"Are so!"

"Are not!"

Clark knew them well enough to intervene before the argument could really get started. Even if he was still trying to get a grip on the sudden revelation that Lois wasn't pregnant - but apparently she'd thought she was - he had to cope with the children he already had before letting himself think overmuch about the one he might have had but didn't yet. "C'mon, you guys, enough," he said. "Don't you want to call Daddy Richard and tell him Happy Father's Day? You can use the speakerphone in my office."

"Yeah!" they chorused, racing pell-mell to Clark's study.

He trailed them, quickly dialing the long distance number amid escalating impatience. As it rang, he said, "Kids, don't say anything about ... you know, your mom." They nodded rapidly, too eager to speak with Richard to worry overmuch about keeping secrets.

"Hello?" Richard's voice sounded slightly harried.

"Hi Daddy Richard! Happy Father's Day!" both twins yelled into the speakerphone, and were rewarded with a laugh.

"Hi, you two!" he replied warmly. "How have you been?"

"Great!" Jason said eagerly. "We just got back from Nana's house."

"Bagel learned to howl," Kala added. "She doesn't like the neighbor's yappy dog."

"Good heavens," Richard chuckled. "Sounds like fun."

"What about you, Richard?" Clark asked. "Got your hands full over there?"

"God, yeah," he replied with a laugh. "Nowhere near as bad as you, though. Nice work yesterday morning."

"Thanks," Clark replied. "Listen, I'm gonna leave the munchkins to you. I need to talk to their mom... But, um, is three o'clock next Saturday good for you?"

"Yeah, we're pretty much keeping the schedule free. You want the twins back Sunday after dinner? Say about seven?"

"Sure," Clark told him. "We've been letting them stay up until ten on Saturday nights, *if* they're really good, because it's vacation."

"Oh, you guys are *spoiled*," Richard chuckled, teasing the twins.

"Nuh-uh! You let us stay up an' watch *Godzilla vs. Mothra* that time!" Jason replied quickly.

Clark laughed too. "You're busted, Richard. I'm going to leave before they sully your

image any more."

"Take care," Richard told him, and both men knew he meant both *take care of yourself* and *take care of them*. Lois, Jason, and Kala were still very much a part of Richard's life, and his heart.

Lois was still in the upstairs bathroom when he went looking for her, washing away the evidence of recent tears. Her reddened eyes and down-turned mouth still gave her real feelings away. Kal-El turned her to face him gently, drawing her into the circle of his arms. She leaned her head on his shoulder, unable to voice her need of him.

Fortunately, he knew. This woman, whose father had taught her never to show weakness, bared her vulnerability to him. It was a sacred trust, and he gave her his strength, his warmth, and his palpable love as well as his silent understanding. Lois wrapped herself up in his arms until her shoulders stopped shaking with sobs she wouldn't voice.

When she began to relax, he whispered softly, "Lois?"

"I'm not pregnant," she said in a tiny voice. "I never was. I thought ... I hoped... I didn't know for sure, but I really thought I was, Kal-El. I was going to tell you today..." Then her voice hitched slightly, and he kissed her forehead and held her tightly.

"Lois, Lois, my Lois," he murmured softly, swaying with her. "I love you, Lois."

"I'm sorry..."

"Don't be," he told her, leaning back to tilt her chin up. Looking into those tear-stained hazel eyes, Kal-El continued seriously, "Lois, you've already given me three miracles I never thought I'd have."

"Three?" she questioned.

"Jason, Kala ... and you."

Lois blinked back tears again, hugging him as hard as she could. She who made her living with words had none to express how much she loved him at that moment. His arms enfolded her gently, and he pressed a kiss to her cheek.

After another silence, Lois said tentatively, "We can always try again..."

"We can," Kal-El replied. "But Lois ... the twins were conceived after I lost my powers. What if something about the powers is keeping us from getting pregnant?"

"You're not going through that again," she said flatly, scowling. "There's no telling what a second exposure would do to you."

"Lois, that would mean we might *never* have another child," he told her gently.

She stroked his cheek, her expression fraught between devastation and determination.

"No," Lois said, cupping his face. "I won't risk you. Unless... Kal-El, I know how much you want another chance..."

"I'd love to have another baby with you," he replied. "God, Lois, I'd love that so much. But look at what you went through with Jason and Kala. Having them was so hard. They were so fragile - they still are, even if they're coming into some of my powers. Maybe ... maybe it just wasn't meant to be."

Hating herself for doing it, Lois started to sob again. "But ... but I wanted ... we both wanted... It's not *fair!*"

"Hush, Lois," he soothed, rocking her gently in his arms. "Shh, Lois, my love. We're already so blessed - we have each other, we have Kala and Jason. Not many parents get kids that awesome, you know?"

Lois sniffled, cuddling against his chest. "But you wanted..."

"I wanted you to be my wife, and I got you in spite of all the odds. Then I lost you and got

you back, in spite of both of us having to nearly die to be together again," Kal-El told her. "I wanted to have children with you - I wanted that so much, and I never thought it would happen. Even when I was looking right into my own son's eyes, I never dreamed I could be so lucky."

He ran his fingers through her hair, making her look up at him again, and kissed her swollen eyelids. "Every good thing I've done, every life I've saved, every injustice I've righted ... none of that makes me worthy of this, Lois. No one ever could be. I'm from a whole different *galaxy*. I never had any right to expect we'd be able to have a family. Jason and Kala are *miracles*, Lois. They're the best Father's Day gift you could ever give me. And if we never have any more children, they're enough. They're more than enough, love."

Lois nodded, not trusting herself to speak, and kissed him gently. They stood there merely holding each other for a long moment, wrapped up in each other and at last satisfied with their lot in life.

Something slapped gently against Kal-El's calf, and something else pressed against Lois' knee. They looked down to see Bagel standing there, nuzzling Lois tenderly while her tail beat a slow rhythm. Her dark eyes looked so mournful as she peered up at them, evidently having sensed their mood, that even Lois smiled.

"Besides, we have a baby beagle," she said, chuckling tiredly. Bagel took that as a sign that they wanted her to rear up on her hind feet and paw at their legs, and Lois and Kal-El petted her fondly.

"I'd better go check on the twins," he said at last. "I left them talking to Richard, and he's got a lot to do."

"How are they taking it?" Lois asked. "They both want siblings..."

"They're okay," Kal-El reassured her. "Besides, they have Bryan and Kristen."

"True," Lois sighed. "C'mon, let's go parent the kids we have."

Baking the cake went smoothly, thanks to pre-packaged cake mix and enthusiastic assistance from the twins. Jason and Kala had picked white cake with French vanilla frosting, exalting in the fact that they'd finally grown out of their allergies. Clark was banished from the kitchen for once, settled in the living room with his feet up on the ottoman and a root beer beside him.

Once they had it made, they left the finished cake on the dining room table and filed into the living room with their presents. Clark sat up, grinning, as the twins handed him their card.

"We love you, Daddy, for all that you do," he read aloud, and Lois was a little surprised to hear his voice choke slightly. It was their second Father's Day together, but apparently the novelty hadn't worn off. Opening the card, he smiled and read, "But we love you most of all just for being you." Below that Jason and Kala had both printed their names and a huge number of X's and O's to represent hugs and kisses ... someone had even added Bagel's name to the card. "Thanks, you guys," he said, and both twins leaped into his lap for hugs.

"Presents!" Kala demanded.

"Okay, okay," Clark laughed. "Let's see ... I think I'll open this little one first." Jason, whose gift he'd picked, bounced up and down excitedly as his father undid the wrapping. A slim black wallet lay within, and before Clark could admire it more than a second, Jason reached out to turn it over.

"It already has your initials, Daddy! See?" Clark looked at the distinctive CK, and cut a glance at Lois. She was leaning against the wall, biting her knuckle and trying not to laugh. *Yet another Calvin Klein joke...*

"Thank you, son. It's really neat to have a monogrammed wallet." Clark ignored Lois' snort of laughter as he hugged and kissed Jason.

"Mine next!" Kala said, pushing her package into his hands. Unwrapping it, Clark found a maroon silk tie with narrow blue and white stripes. "It kinda matches your Superman suit, Daddy."

"Very nice," Clark agreed. "Thank you, baby girl." Kala grinned smugly as he hugged and kissed her.

Lois had gotten him a card that merely read, "To my husband on Father's Day... You're a dream come true." Clark had to bite his lip and smile at her, their conversation a few hours ago making the sentiment seem all the more true.

The last gift was now the size of toaster, and Clark started unwrapping it only to uncover ... more wrapping paper. He chuckled at the joke and started on the next layer, which revealed yet another layer. Lois was chuckling again, and he gave her a baleful look. "Lois, is there actually a gift, or is this just layers upon layers of paper and the gift is supposed to be 'perseverance' or something?"

She grinned, and the twins giggled. "It's a gift!" Jason said excitedly, and Kala scowled at him. Clark sighed and resumed unwrapping.

Ten minutes later he uncovered the treasure... "A pack of *socks*?" he said incredulously.

"Hey, everybody needs socks," Lois said nonchalantly, then scowled. "Oh, crap. Look, the plastic is slit right there at the top." Jason started snickering again, trying to hide it behind his hand while Kala stared at him confusedly. Their mother continued, "Count them, make sure they're all in there."

"Lois, you probably just cut it when you were wrapping it nine hundred times," Clark replied.

"Check," she urged. "People steal stuff like that all the time."

Sighing a trifle testily, Clark started taking the socks out of the package. *This is the kind of gift she hates to get ... I can buy my own socks. Geez.* Suddenly, he felt something in the package that wasn't cloth. Stiff paper of some kind... "What's this?"

Lois just grinned at him as he pulled it out, and the faintly annoyed expression on his face vanished into wide-eyed wonder. "Monarchs versus Royals tickets? Holy ... wow, Lois! The Sovereigns Series has been sold out for *weeks*! How'd you get these?"

"Never you mind," she said. "Just make sure you take these two little baseball fans, because I'm not going. Oh, and peanuts and Cracker Jack aren't included. Happy Father's Day, honey."

"I love you, Lois," he replied tenderly. "I love you, too, kids."

"Love you, Daddy!" they chorused. "Time for cake!"

Unbeknownst to all of them, Bagel had gotten bored during the unwrapping of Lois' gift. She wandered away, her nose to the ground, tracking Jason's scent backwards from the living room. Even at her tender age, the puppy was capable of following a fresh, easy trail like that.

It led her to the dining room table, where more tantalizing scents assaulted her sensitive nose. Something on the table smelled utterly delectable...

Bagel tried to stand on her hind feet, but couldn't see above the table's edge. Not even jumping got her high enough to look. Whimpering softly with frustration, she circled under the table, peering up.

An idea suddenly struck her. Bagel tried clambering into one of the dining room chairs, which happened not to be completely pushed in. A month ago she wouldn't have been able to

reach its seat, either, but she was growing rapidly. Front paws splayed on its surface, she heaved her body up, kicking with her back legs for more propulsion.

Her hind claws just barely caught at the edge of the seat, scrabbling for a hold. Bagel was sliding on the smooth wood, and she flung her head back straining for purchase. The table edge was there, and though she thumped it, her fur and puppy fat protected her.

Now she could brace the back of her neck against the table and push down with her front feet, the rear ones still striving to get up on the chair. It wasn't too unlike the way she'd clambered into bed with Mommy yesterday morning, and in a few seconds Bagel had gained the seat of the chair. From that height she could easily see the yummy-smelling thing on the table...

Clark kissed Lois on the cheek as they walked back into the dining room, his arm around her shoulders squeezing her affectionately. "You silly..." he began, and then both adults froze in shock at the sight that greeted them.

The twins peered around them, frowning with curiosity, and then their eyes widened in surprise. "Our cake!" Kala cried.

Bagel looked up, her white-tipped tail lashing. Only she seemed to have gotten a lot whiter in the last few minutes, especially around the head and front legs. Yapping excitedly, she ran across the table and jumped straight at Clark's chest while covered in icing and bits of cake...

"My *God*, why can't this family ever have a *normal* holiday?" Lois groaned.

Authors' Notes: At the end of the fic. But special thanks to **Connie**, who gave us awesome chai latte while we worked on this in her café, and to **Abby** once again, who stayed up at an obscene hour doing creative consultancy work when she had to be at church the next morning. Also, the kids' greeting card came from www.americangreetings.com. Lois' card is our invention.

Additional Author's Note: No, they will not be having any more children. With as rare and special as their family is, and everything they've had to go through to be together, we felt that giving them any more children wouldn't serve the story. It works in other people's stories, though, and kudos to them. Also, no, we're not going to tell you who Bryan and Kristin are. You'll find that out by the end of *Little Secrets*. Lastly, you may all blame the baseball references in this fic on **Abby**, who's doing her best to make Anissa a ravening Kansas City Royals fan. Clark's team is the Metropolis Monarchs, and no, I won't say who wins the Sovereigns Series.