

# Sometimes

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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The old man had just gotten his first cup of joe when he heard the swinging doors of the City room open Monday morning, and the sight before him was enough to make him do a double take. The individual making her way across the still mostly-silent room was none other than Lois Lane. Perry had to take another sip before checking his watch and looking again. 7:25 in the morning - on a Monday - following a five-day break. He was immediately curious if the end of the world was nigh. Lois was an amazing reporter, his star for a reason, but never in the last eight years had she been in this early without staying over the night before. And *never* after a vacation. Perry watched her silently a moment longer, assessing her mood before blustering out in his usual bored tone, "So how was your vacation?"

And at that, he saw something he had also never seen: Lois *smiling* at this hour. As she went to get her cup of coffee from the maker, he was watching her with the expression of a man certain he was in the presence of an imposter. Something *pretty* damn weird was going on. "Vacation, my ass," Lois replied breezily, heading for his office. "You sent me on an *assignment* that kept me and Clark stuck away from home for Christmas."

"Just think of it as an all-expenses paid trip," Perry retorted, maintaining at least a three foot distance between them. Whatever it was that Lane had caught up in those damn mountains, he didn't want any of it. Still, he couldn't help a small smile when she dropped into the chair across from him.

"Yeah, right. Like you put us up in a chalet in the Alps." Those eyes rolled heavenward and now she looked and sounded a bit more like the Lois he knew, especially since he knew that she was rousing herself to gripe at him. "Well, Chief, your little 'vacation' sucked so much that I had to get myself a present while I was down there, just to make the whole trip worthwhile."

"Your credit card bills aren't my problem," the Editor-in-Chief said. "How about the *story*, Lane?"

"Oh yes, the story." Sighing, Lois whipped some sheets of paper from her purse and dropped them on his desk. "There you go, Perry. Typed, double-spaced, and proofread by Clark."

Perry read silently, nodding in some places. "How'd you get all this?"

"Flashed some leg at one of the employees," Lois said with a devilish grin, shrugging. "He's been working there practically since the invention of the wheel; about your age, Chief. Anyway, he doesn't like his bosses, *and* he's agreed to testify if we crack the story wide enough that law enforcement has to get involved."

"And the background info?"

"Clark and I spent a lovely winter day in Buncombe County's courthouse, which hasn't completely joined the computer age yet." Lois leaned back in her seat, an amused smile curving her lips as she thought back to the leisurely morning that had come *before* their little trip. There was more than one reason she'd remember how well the day after Christmas had gone.

"Good," Perry muttered, turning his attention back to the story in time to have missed her wicked grin altogether. "Pretty darned good indeed. And Kent even edited your typos, I see. That alone is almost worth the expense of sending you two down there for a week. *Almost.*"

"Oh, please," Lois sighed, that almost sinful smile evaporating as she narrowed her hazel eyes at her boss. "Perry, you're lucky the two of us didn't freeze to death since you didn't want us to stay in the actual resort hotel because they'd find us out." Her jaw tightened then, remembering just how sure she had been that she'd die the night of the snow storm. "Not only did you get a front-pager with my byline and Clark's on it, you also got a Superman interview on top of it! What *more* could you want?"

"Yeah, and *you* got an all-expenses paid trip with your own cabin, at holiday rates..." Perry's lecture continued, but Lois' train of thought had taken a forcible detour. It didn't matter, and to push their case any further could possibly bring up questions she didn't feel like answering. Besides, they had lived through it and came out of it with something more precious. And she hadn't even been at that cabin for the last two days of the trip. She and Clark had gone north, flown through the nighttime skies, to what seemed a palace made entirely of crystal, his impossibly beautiful Fortress of Solitude. *Shared solitude, now*, Lois thought resolutely, images of that long night clear in her mind as another smile teased her lips.

Winding down from his scolding tone, Perry glanced at Lois' hand and chuckled wryly. "By the way, Lane, you're home now - no reason to keep pretending. Give me back the ring. I paid for those out of pocket. Got the receipt somewhere..."

Smirking as she pulled herself from that pleasant reverie, Lois reached into her purse and took out the two plain gold bands she and Clark had worn while posing as Mr. and Mrs. Smith. *I wonder how long it'll take him...* "Here, Chief," she said impishly, handing them over. "Don't want you to be out the twenty-five dollars."

That earned her a scowl. Perry looked at the rings, then took a closer look at Lois' left hand. *Damn, he caught it faster than I'd thought he would.* The band on her ring finger there was platinum, he now saw. Giving her a dubious look, Perry pointed silently to what surely *looked* like a wedding ring.

Lois' lips curved up in a wicked grin as she idly toyed with the band around her ring finger. If he could see the look on his face! "Told you I brought back a souvenir."

"What, you bought yourself a *fake* wedding band?" Perry asked.

"No, my *husband* bought me a real one," Lois drawled, making her tone as flippant as

could be. With that, she rose from the chair and turned on her heel to walk out of his office.

"*Lane!*" Perry barked, starting after her. "Get back in here! Now what in the hell is the meaning of that? You got *married?* To *Kent?*"

The look on Lois' face was almost defiant, her chin high. She had known that this sort of thing would happen. She and Clark had even discussed this more than once and how she shouldn't get too defensive. *Easier said than done.* "Yeah, that pretty much sums it up."

For a long moment Perry simply stared at her, searching her expression. "You're serious," he stated at last.

Lois leaned back against the doorframe and returned his stare with her own as blank and factual. "Do you need me to show you the paperwork? Yes, we got married."

"No, I believe you now," Perry said slowly with an expression like shock. "But - *why?*"

Just that question was enough to crack her cool façade. "What do you mean, why? We got married, that's all," Lois snapped, turning on him.

He let out an explosive sigh. "Lois, you *hate* the whole idea of marriage. Everyone in this place has heard you bitch about it. And half of them probably think you hate *Kent*. I know better, but I know *you*, and I know you wouldn't be such a jackass to him if you didn't like the guy. But *marry* him?"

"Who said I hate Clark?" Lois asked indignantly, incredulous brows raised. That was enough to pin her ears back and make her feel more than a little guilty. "Where the hell did they get *that* crock? I'll show 'em a thing or two..."

"Break room gossip," Perry said dismissively, waving his hand. "Besides, if you spray a man with shaken-up soda his first day here, get him locked into the supply closet twice that same week, and pull the plug out of his typewriter next Monday, people are gonna reasonably assume you don't like him. *Anyway*, the point I'm trying to make here is, how the hell did Kent manage to marry the woman *Superman* can't land?"

"Sometimes things just happen, Chief." Lois knew that explanation wouldn't suffice even without Perry's disbelieving glare. She sighed heavily and dropped into the chair across from him. "Look. We were stuck alone in a cabin together, freezing to death. Situations like that, thinking you might not live to see morning, people say things they never would ... do things they never would, otherwise. And, well, let's just say it kind of ... opened my eyes."

Perry watched, fascinated, as Lois groped for the words to explain everything. She wasn't lying, he could always tell when she was, but whatever had happened in that cabin down in North Carolina had literally been beyond Lois' power to describe. He never would've thought he'd see this, but Lois was acting almost like a woman in love for the first time. *Which she probably is. I'd say second love, but the Pulitzer Prize doesn't really count. I'll be damned.*

She sighed again, running a hand through her hair, and managed to sum it all up.

"Sometimes you realize what you were looking everywhere for has been right beside you all along, okay?"

The editor-in-chief watched her steadily, and then a slow smile began to brighten his eyes. "Congratulations, Lois," Perry said warmly. "I'm proud of you, kid." Then he seemed to notice how affectionate his tone was, and barked, "That's all well and good, but you better not have put the ceremony on the company expense account."

"No, Chief," Lois sighed, eyes once again aimed toward the ceiling.

Perry nodded and then raised an eyebrow at her. "Does your favorite story know about this?"

"Yeah, I updated the Caped Wonder when he came and melted us all out of the snow

drifts. He's being a gentleman." Lois couldn't suppress a tiny grin, but Perry took it as meaning Superman hadn't taken the news *too* well for Lois' ego.

"Good. Now get out there and do some work for a change! What do I pay you for, to sit around runnin' your jaw? Scram!"

Gossip traveled through the *Daily Planet* newsroom at the speed of, "You didn't hear it from *me*, but..." Within two hours, whispers were rife with the rumor that Clark and Lois had gotten married. Half of them were watching Lois closely, still waiting for someone to announce that it was some kind of practical joke, waiting to see if Lois would have a complete meltdown when it got back to her. The rest wore thoughtful expressions. The fact that Clark loved Lois was no secret, and she had never discouraged him. Never encouraged him, either, but one look at Steve Lombard's hand in a cast proved what Lois could do if she didn't want a man chasing her. But, as yet, Kent hadn't appeared in the same room with her. Which only fed the flames.

The lady in question rolled her eyes as she strolled through on her way to the break room. The staff could deal with it ... although she'd very much like to at least *see* her husband today. Somehow he'd never been at his desk when she was at hers. Lois shook her head slightly, wondering how she had never noticed his frequent absences before. Then again, they had very rarely been apart in last few days and she was chagrined to realize that the separation was getting to her. *Get used to it, kid. You should have considered that before you said 'I do'*. As if summoned by her thoughts, she noticed Clark making his way out of the break room with a cup of coffee in hand just as she came in. He smiled to see her, that wonderful slow, knowing smile, and any dark thought fled. "Hi," Clark murmured, his voice warm. "Good to see you at last."

Despite the tight feeling in her chest, the dark-haired woman bowed to tradition, smirking at him. "Right. Like I've been anywhere but my desk since 7:30. I'm not the one who's been out of the office half the morning," Lois replied, taking the coffee from him like she would have any other morning.

"Um, Lois?" Clark said with his usual diffidence. "You do know that's *my* coffee, right?"

At that, she smiled wickedly and didn't even attempt to play it off as a misunderstanding. "Not anymore." Taking a sip, she gave a sigh of appreciation as the caffeine started to course through her veins. After a moment, she added with a sardonic arch of her brow, "You expect things to change just because I married you?"

Clark couldn't help chuckling; Lois had always freely stolen his food. But now that they were married, a few things *would* change... The moment the cup left her lips, Clark stole it back. And drained it.

The look of utter disbelief on her face was comical. Her hazel eyes going from him to the cup and back again, Lois glared up at him in shock. "What the hell? You took my coffee!"

"No, I didn't," Clark replied, grinning. "I took *my* coffee back." And when she continued to stare at him in utter astonishment, he added, "Some things *will* change because I married you. And letting you steal everything of mine without a word of protest is one of them."

You had to know Lois to understand just how much that statement irked her. One hand went to her hip and Clark could see that he had scored a direct hit with that little statement. "Is that so? That's funny, I don't remember that being on the list of things they made us repeat in our vows. What, you think just because you're sleeping with me you can suddenly change the rules? I don't think so!"

Rather than the offended reaction she had been expected, Clark let the grin become

wicked. "Lois, don't you remember? 'Love, honor, and *obey*'."

That really put her dander up. Dropping her head to glare up at him, she hissed under her breath, "My ass, *Kal-El*. I don't *obey* anyone, not even the *law*."

He couldn't help it anymore; Clark laughed at her savage glare, and kissed her forehead. "C'mere, love, let me make you a fresh cup of coffee," he relented.

Still glaring sulkily - little did she know that her furious pout looked adorable to him - Lois followed Clark back into the break room, arms still crossed in irritation. "I suppose," she stated with the over-blown dignity of a queen.

Glancing at her over his shoulder, Clark poured her a cup of coffee and sweetened it. "Oh, Lois. Stop."

"That's what you get for trying to thwart me. There's tradition to be upheld here, dammit, whether I know your deep, dark secrets or not. And that includes stealing that damn coffee." She was rapidly losing her irritation in the presence of more caffeine, but made her tone as aggravated as possible.

"Come on, every relationship needs a little give and take," Clark coaxed.

That earned him a semi-icy look as she glared at him from where she leaned against the counter. "We were fine while *I* was taking *your* coffee."

Handing her the mug, he stroked a tendril of raven hair out of her face. "I'll give you a cup of coffee; you'll take my breath away every time I look at you."

For an instant, Lois' eyes were startled when they met his. To his own wonder and amusement, she actually looked shy; she knew *exactly* who was flirting with her. The retort she had had on the tip of her tongue just crumbled. She'd learned the whole truth over the weekend, in bed in his Fortress, along with learning his given name. But she was still Lois Lane, the woman who couldn't be impressed by anyone, not even a superhero who had introduced himself by saving her life. She couldn't let herself get silly and romantic - not at *work* - so she took the coffee mug and turned away to hide her blush. "Knock it off, you," she murmured with false annoyance, looking away.

Unfortunately, turning her back just gave him a great opportunity to come up behind her and slide his arms around her waist. Lois couldn't help the way her eyes slid closed when he did, couldn't help the little shiver and the sigh that came to her lips. Only last night they had been... Kissing her shoulder, Clark whispered, "You are breathtakingly beautiful. You know that, right?"

Oh, the effect of those words. "And you're completely biased," she replied, leaning back to look up at him with a knowing grin. "Not that it's not *true*, mind you, but you're still biased."

He laughed, hugging her close and nuzzling her cheek. Then suddenly he backed away slightly, just as Lois was about to give up on being infuriated. She only had a moment to give him an unhappy frown before the reason for the sudden shyness made itself known.

"Hi guys," Jimmy called from the doorway as Clark pushed up his glasses. "So, you're getting coffee?"

"That's right, Jim." Lois hid her smile behind the cup. So someone wanted to ask about their trip... When was Jimmy going to learn that *everyone* could tell his forced nonchalance from a mile away? One day, they were going to have to teach the boy better or he'd never make it in the bullpen. She caught Clark's gaze and saw the gleam in his eyes as well.

The photographer, realizing that coffee in the break room was a dead end topic, tried something else. "Soooo, what did you guys think of North Carolina?"

"It was pretty cold," Clark said in his characteristic understatement.

"Snows too much for my taste," Lois added, just as drolly. It was almost painful, fighting the smile that wanted to bloom. *Oh my God, Jimmy, just spit it out before the two of us lose it laughing.*

"I heard a crazy rumor about you guys," Jimmy tried again in the same fishing-for-information tone. "Man, people will make up *anything*, right?"

*Come on, kid. Have we taught you nothing? You can do better than that, Jimmy.* "We haven't joined a cult or anything, if that's the current b.s. on the party-line," Lois drawled, arching an eyebrow.

And despite himself, Clark was enjoying himself just as much watching Jimmy try to get the information out of them. Following up on her tactics, he asked in his most curious tone, "What'd you hear, Jim?"

Falling for their act completely, the boy blanched a bit, deciding that maybe his information had been incorrect. "Well, you know, it's just wild gossip," Jimmy backpedaled quickly. "Probably isn't even close to true..."

*Now or never, Olsen. Do you have the guts?* "But we want to hear it anyway," Lois said, crossing her arms and looking at him steadily. "Just for laughs, if nothing else."

Looking from one to the other, Jimmy finally winced and came out with it. "Somebody was telling people you two got married..."

Lois and Clark just looked at each other for a moment, him wondering how to proceed, and her deliberately prolonging the photographer's anxiety. Jimmy quickly added, "I mean, they must've gotten mixed up over the fact that the Chief sent you two undercover *pretending* to be a married couple..."

"Well, he won't be doing *that* anymore," Lois snarked, raising her left hand. The platinum band gleamed in the light. After a moment, she couldn't hide her grin any longer as she glanced up at her partner.

"No need to pretend," Clark finished, showing the match to hers on his left hand as well. The matching rings made their statement for them, but Jimmy could only stare for several minutes.

The disbelief in his expression was clear to both of them. Sure, *Lois* might do something like this as a joke, but Clark? He'd be too embarrassed, and even if he did go along with it, he wouldn't be so casual about the implications. So it had to be true... "For real?" Jimmy managed to squeak out. "You two really got married?"

"Seemed like a good idea at the time," Lois said, completely deadpan.

Jimmy couldn't stop staring at them both, wide-eyed, as Clark grinned at him. "Yes, Jim, we're serious," the older man said at last. "We really did get married. 'Til death do us part."

The comment reminded her of what started this in the first place. Still a little irked, Lois growled under her breath, "You keep stealing my coffee, it *will* be 'til death do us part." The look of her face wasn't exactly a cease-fire.

"It was *my* coffee, Lois, stealing it from me didn't make it yours."

That exchange seemed to convince Jimmy where nothing else could. Beaming, he threw his arms around both of them like a proud father. "Congratulations!"

Lois was startled into laughter before she hugged him back, glaring at Clark for the comment about the coffee. The next thing they knew, Jimmy had run out into the hallway and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Lois and Clark got married!"

"Oh, *shit*," Lois chuckled, one hand on her hip as she rolled her eyes to Clark. "Well, there goes any possibility of keeping any of *my* credibility. *Wonderful*. You know what this

means, right?" As if in answer, they heard Jimmy proclaim their marriage to the City room.

"We don't have to send out announcements?" he ventured, pulling her back to him to give her another quick hug.

They could hear Jimmy yelling the news into the International department next as Lois muttered, "No, it means Steve Lombard's gonna come park his fat ass on my desk and try to feel me up in front of you."

"Don't worry, Lois," Clark said, grinning. "I'd never let some misguided notion of chivalry keep you from your fun. If Steve provokes you, he's on his own. Just try not to break any of his bones this time, okay? You're developing a reputation..."

"Okay, *that's* why I married you," Lois replied as leaned up to kiss him. "Well, that and certain skills..." she added after a moment of consideration, her grin wicked.

"Hush," he whispered, a memory flashing to his mind. Their arrival at the Fortress seemed to have almost stunned Lois silent. Moments passed as she took in her surroundings, awed by the majesty of the place, as she stepped just a little away from him. Her hazel eyes seemed to take in everything, her gaze slipping from one thing to another as if to memorize it. Finally she'd look over at him, seen him standing only a couple of steps away in the suit. Still without a sound, Lois looked down at the ring on her hand, closed the distance ... and practically *attacked* him, her mouth hungry on his. They'd been lucky to make it to the bed at all.

"*Lois and Clark got married!*" Jimmy yelled down the elevator shaft, and Lois dropped her head against Clark's chest with a groan, laughing in disbelief.

Clark nuzzled her hair, breathing in the scent of her, and closed his eyes for another moment of pure blissful memory. Two days they had spent at the Fortress, during which he hadn't quite gotten around to telling Jor-El he had a daughter-in-law, although Lois had been positively gleeful and absolutely fascinated to learn so much about the history of Krypton, leading to the usual million questions. It also didn't detract from the experience that she had been curled around him at the time. That made his grin just a little wide. Then home last night - a brief moment of awkwardness when they'd suddenly realized that 'home' meant two different apartments. Both had been stunned that they hadn't even stopped to consider that. So much needed to be discussed, so many compromises would have to be made; Christmas in North Carolina had been such a whirlwind of romance that neither of them had stopped to think about their *real* lives back home.

A quick trip to Clark's apartment to snatch up clothes and essentials had solved the problem for the moment. He hadn't wanted to be away from Lois, not even for one night. It still amazed him how lucky he was to have found someone like her. Not just the looks and the attitude and the crazy cock-eyed brilliance, though he loved all of that. But where else on Earth would Clark have found a woman who both completely understood, and completely accepted, the fact the he *wasn't* from this galaxy? It had never fazed her in the slightest. Even during that first interview, when he'd told her he was from another planet, Lois' only concern had been how to spell it.

*Every other woman I've ever met as Superman has either assumed that because I look human, I must **be** human, or been entirely too interested in the fact that I'm Kryptonian, or even been a little bit afraid of me. They ignore it or obsess over it, but no one has ever simply taken it in stride like Lois,* he thought, hugging her a little more tightly. *She's the only person in my life who sees all of who I am, and loves me.*

She nuzzled against his throat, giving a small sigh of contentment. "What's on your mind, hero?"

"I'm a very lucky man," Clark replied honestly, nose buried in her hair.

Tilting her head back to look up at him, his wife positively beamed up at him. "Damn right you are," Lois told him, witty banter as wickedly sharp as ever.

Before either of them could say anything else, though, they heard Perry bellow. "Mrs. Kent!"

"Oh, to hell with you, Chief!" Lois yelled right back, knowing full-well he knew they were in here and both on lunch. "I hyphenated! It's Lane-Kent, I'm not gonna give up my name!"

"Whatever you call yourself, your mother's on the phone!"

Lois sighed, rolling her eyes. "Oh, God, now I'm gonna catch it. I never called her back when we got home yesterday like I said. And I know she's irate because I missed the weekend. Missing Christmas entirely is something I'm never going to live down and I'm all too aware of it. Though why she's calling me at work to chew me out..."

The reporter trailed off as she remembered how Jimmy had done his town crier impression and spread the news gleefully just moments ago. He'd even gone to International ... where Ron Troupe worked. Her eyes widened as the ramifications to this ran through her mind as if it were a slideshow. Ron, her brother-in-law, who upon hearing that Lois had gotten married, might have called up his wife to scold her for not telling him earlier. Only Lucy wouldn't have known a thing about it, because Lois hadn't broken the news to her family yet, wanting to sit down with them to explain ... and if Lucy hadn't known about the marriage, she would've called Momma...

"Oh, *shit!*" Lois was off and running.

Clark listened after her, worried, but the moment Ella Lane started speaking he winced. *Lois didn't remember to tell her, and I didn't remember to nudge her about it. That's what we get for being off in our own little fog. Oh, boy.* Just then he heard Lois say half-angrily, "Look, Mother, I'm at *work*. Yes, Momma. I'll come over for dinner and a lecture, all right? Is that atonement enough? What? Yes, I'll bring Clark, but only if you promise not to bite his head off..." He winced again and headed back to his desk, carefully *not* eavesdropping on the rest of the conversation. *Sometimes I think I'm more intimidated by Mrs. Lane than anyone else on earth, even Luthor...*

Lois pulled her car door shut, buckled her seatbelt, and let her head thump against the headrest with an aggravated groan. "*God,*" she sighed, staring at the ceiling. "I swear, my mom... I'm sorry, Clark." Those hazel eyes rolled to meet his gaze, and Clark couldn't help smiling at her.

"It's all right, Lois," he said, buckling his own seat belt. "She has a right to be worried about you. She's a mom, it's what they do. Even *my* mom worries."

The notion of some sweet little old lady having vapors over her invulnerable super-powered son sent Lois into a fit of giggles. That was exactly what she needed after spending an hour being grilled by her mother. Ella had been extremely displeased to learn of her headstrong daughter's latest exploits, but after that grueling interview, Mrs. Lane seemed satisfied - and actually *happy* for them, which Clark hadn't expected. They hadn't been able to explain exactly how everything had happened, not without letting her in on the secret of his identity, but much to Clark's surprise Ella had given him a warm hug and welcomed him to the family.

Lucy had come over as well, and she'd been delighted to see Clark. "Sometimes the good guy *does* get the girl!" she'd crowed, provoking retching noises from her sister.

"What's so funny?" he heard Lois ask, bringing his attention back to the present - Clark had been chuckling at the memory of Lucy's remark as Lois drove back to her apartment.

"Your sister," he replied, shaking his head. "I think she's been secretly hoping we'd get together."

"Secretly, hell," Lois snorted. "I've been hearing about it for the last six months. That's what I get for bringing you to dinner with her and Ron." In spite of her peevish tone, the grin she shot him was dazzling. "The only reason she never set me up with you was because it'd be cheating on Superman ... little does she know..."

Their laughter filled the car over that, both of them sharing a smile when Clark leaned in for a quick kiss at a stop sign. They were quiet for a moment, linking hands, before Lois commented offhandedly, "I only hope your family accepts me as easily..."

He winced a little. Jor-El would have to be told, but Clark wasn't relishing the task. In his father's mind there was a clear distinction between Kryptonians and humans, a sharply-drawn line that Clark himself rarely acknowledged. By marrying Lois, he hadn't just crossed that line; he had erased it, and he had the feeling Jor-El would not be pleased.

However, Clark had another parent far more amenable to the idea of love and marriage. "We really should go see Ma," he told Lois as he squeezed her hand. "I mean, it's not like she's going to hear it through the rumor mill the way your mom did, but we shouldn't wait to tell her. It's good news."

"I suppose we can call when we get home," Lois suggested distractedly, her mind on the traffic.

"I'd really rather tell her in person," Clark replied.

"Fine, so I guess we'll head out to Kansas this weekend?"

"Actually, I'd rather go tonight." When Lois just turned to look at him, Clark gave her that brilliant smile, the one that made his eyes light up. "It's not as if we have to buy plane tickets, Lois."

"Huh?" Hazel eyes blinked at him in confusion, then Lois laughed at herself. "*Oh*. Right. That's true."

That was how, an hour later, Lois found herself standing on the front porch of a Kansas farmhouse, her stomach churning with anxiety. They hadn't called ahead - dropping in unannounced was the norm for Clark's visits home.

He glanced at her as he raised his hand to the doorbell, and his expression softened. "C'mon, Lois, there's nothing to be afraid of," Clark said.

"Yeah, right," Lois muttered, pressing closer against him. She was still trying to adjust to the fact that they had flown what Clark estimated to be around twelve hundred miles in only fifteen minutes. And, on top of that, that she was going to have to face the most feared breed of creature in America, the mother-in-law, with almost no warning and wind-blown hair. "Maybe I should wait somewhere else while you explain...?"

Clark couldn't help the grin he turned on her, hopelessly amused at her skittishness. "No, but I'll stand in front of you, if you want. I promise not to tell anyone Lois Lane actually hid behind her husband ... from a sweet little silver-haired Midwestern lady."

"Shut up, you." Lois elbowed him, but nevertheless took him up on the offer. He was nearly a foot taller than her, and much broader, so it was possible for her to literally hide behind him and brace herself as he rang the doorbell.

Martha Kent answered in moments, opening the door with a delighted, "Clark! So good to

see you, sweetheart!"

"Sorry I'm late, Ma," Clark said with genuine regret, stepping forward to hug his mother. Lois had to move quickly to stay out of sight. "Things have been pretty busy since Christmas."

"I'll just bet," she replied with a chuckle. "What with that blizzard and all."

"I did get you a present, though," Clark continued. With that he stepped aside, and Lois had no time to attempt another dodge. All she could do was glare at him, wide-eyed.

Martha did a slight double-take at the sight of the girl, and then she smiled merrily. "Lois Lane! So good to meet you at last."

Even as Martha held out her hand to Lois, and Lois started to shake it, looking overwhelmed, Clark added, "Actually, Ma, it's Lois *Lane-Kent* now."

Lois turned a pleading look on him as the older woman froze, giving her son a stern look. Clark just shrugged sheepishly at both of them. "It all happened pretty fast," he admitted. "I know what they say about marrying in haste, but Ma, I love her."

"Well, I know that," Martha replied, turning to catch Lois' gaze and starting to smile again. "Lord knows you've talked about the young lady enough for me to figure it out. And since you're married, and you're here and I don't exactly see a rental car..."

"She knows," Clark said simply, sliding his arm around Lois' shoulder.

"It was kind of an accident that I found out," Lois said hurriedly, still not sure what kind of an impression she was making. This was never really a situation she had found herself in, meeting her significant others' parents, let alone figuring out a mother-in-law. No wonder Lucy was always a basket case on holidays.

Although Mrs. Kent didn't look half as scary as Mrs. Troupe sounded. Martha crossed her arms then and looked from one to the other. "Well, Clark Joseph Kent, I swear I haven't seen you look so hangdog since the time you accidentally knocked a hole in the barn roof. Did you think I'd be upset with you?" She laughed at both of their expressions. "I'll admit to being quite a bit *surprised*, but hardly angry! This is *good* news, children, and I'm sure there's a reason why it all happened so fast."

Lois and Clark shared another dubious look, in which they both decided silently to edit their Christmas in the Carolinas just a bit more. Meanwhile, Martha stepped back, holding the door open. "Come on inside, you're just in time for dinner. Lois, you and I can get a little better acquainted over a meal. Although after reading all of your articles, I feel as if I know you already."

"*All* of them?" Lois was clearly surprised, her expression amazed.

The older woman laughed. "Well, dear, my son looked up the *Daily Planet* archives all the way back to your very first published article, when you were still an intern..."

"Ma!" Clark yelped. "Don't tell her that! You're making me sound like some kind of creep."

But Lois couldn't help but laugh as Martha continued to tease her son as much as inform her, "I heard so much about you, and the articles were lying around, so I did a little research of my own. Now come in before the neighbors see me making you stand on the porch like you're not family or something."

With that she stepped away from the door, and Lois looked up at Clark wonderingly, seeing him blush. He'd been *that* crazy over her? The man who could literally have his pick of women on this planet, the World's Defender, had gone into the archives and read her old articles like any teenager with a crush? "Sorry," he mumbled. "I know that's such a weird thing to do, but I wanted to know everything about you..."

Before he could finish the sentence, Lois rose up on tiptoe and kissed him quickly. "I love you," she whispered, mirth dancing in her eyes. "Even though I secretly suspect your mother's going to get us inside and then grill us worse than my mom did. She *can't* be that happy to have a stranger show up married to her boy..."

"Nah," Clark said, hugging her against his side. "She's serious; if she wasn't happy for us, believe me, we'd know. Besides, I know Ma - she's just delighted to have a daughter-in-law and someone to share the secret with."

Lois shrugged, still a bit nervous over her mother-in-law, but willing for once to be optimistic. "I guess sometimes things just work out better than you ever expected them to," she mused, then cut Clark a sharp glance. "Especially if a certain someone stops mentioning the damn hyphenated name."

Laughing, Clark took her hand and led her into the house.

*Feeling alive all over again,  
As deep as the sky, under my skin  
Like being in love, she says  
For the first time  
Maybe I'm wrong,  
But I'm feeling right where I belong  
With you tonight  
Like being in love  
To feel for the first time*

*The world that I see inside you  
Waiting to come to life  
Waking me up to dreaming  
Reality in your eyes*

*Looking at you,  
Holding my breath,  
For once in my life  
I'm scared to death,  
I'm taking a chance,  
Letting you inside.*

*I'm feeling alive all over again  
As deep as the sky that's under my skin  
Like being in love, she says, for the first time  
Maybe I'm wrong, I'm feeling right  
Where I belong with you tonight  
Like being in love to feel for the first time.*

~ Lifehouse, *First Time*