

Through the Looking Glass

by Kala Lane Kent

© 11-May-08

Rating: T

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author. The author is in no way associated with the owners, creators, or producers of any media franchise. No copyright infringement is intended.

A tall, broad-shouldered man reached across the café table and took the hand of a petite black-haired woman. His cerulean eyes met her hazel ones, and they smiled at each other, their expressions radiant with adoration for each other. To all outward appearances, it was a normal lunchtime event, a tourist couple sharing appetizers and lingering looks.

From within the restaurant's private room, several keen gazes watched the scene outside through the smoked glass window. Of the eleven gathered there, all were curious, but some seemed more affected by the couple's romanticism while others were more wary. The most cautious of all sat at the head of the table, looking steadily through the darkened glass, his expression nearly a scowl. His eyes, so dark that the pupil was indistinguishable from the iris, followed every slightest move of the pair, every smallest gesture.

After a long, silent moment, in which the tourist couple laughed at some private joke before returning their attention to their meal, the dark-eyed man spoke a single word. "Report." But it was said in a form of Latin that few scholars would recognize.

The young blond man sitting across from him obediently slid a folder across the table. "Copies of their passports and visas," he said in French. "Mathieu and I did as much checking as we could, and everything looks genuine."

His dark-haired partner added, "We've had the boys tracking them, 'Sandre. It seems that sitting down to dinner *here* was just a fluke. They're doing all the usual tourist stuff: the tower, the museums, boating the Seine. Cyrille's right; they seem perfectly normal."

The dark-eyed man - known as Alessandro Sontheimer to those seated around him - nodded in acknowledgement as he glanced at the copies. "Lois Lane-Kent and Clark Kent," he said musingly, the names flavored by his French accent. "Reporters for the *Daily Planet*. Are they in pursuit of a story here?"

"Not that we could tell," Cyrille, the blond, answered him. "I checked their place - they're renting an apartment. They have a laptop computer, but nothing else that indicates an ongoing investigation. Inquiries to their newspaper got the answer that they're on vacation. This is their first anniversary, apparently."

"It appears to make sense," Alessandro said. "Maurice? Clio? Considering that they have chosen *your* place in which to dally, have you anything to add?"

"They haven't noticed anything strange about us," Clio replied, tucking a stray strand of flaxen hair behind her ear. "Nor Jessamine, nor Larrimore, nor Vachel, nor even Cyrille and his pack of theatre-obsessed hooligans. They sat right across from Maryse and Gavin and didn't seem to notice *them*, either."

Her husband Maurice added, "Clio and I have waited on them ourselves. I'd wager the deed to this restaurant that the pair of them are so consumed with each other that they wouldn't notice anything past their table."

"I'll tell you one thing," a soft voice spoke up. The youngest person at the table was Maryse, and she looked up through the fall of her dark brown hair to meet Alessandro's questioning expression. "He's not human."

This news was treated with less excitement than could have been expected. "*Certainement?*" Alessandro asked her.

Maryse tapped the side of her nose. "This nose doesn't lie, my lord. I have no idea what he is - never scented anything like it before - but he's *definitely* not human. Gavin agrees." From under the table came a single bark, in a very deep register. Maryse continued, "He got a closer sniff than I did, playing the friendly dog the second time they came here. They both thought he was cute; the man even petted him. The woman asked if he was some kind of malamute mix."

Polite chuckles greeted that statement, as Gavin poked his head up above the edge of the table and climbed onto the bench beside Maryse. Everyone *here* knew a wolf when they saw one. But Gavin's size - nearly two hundred pounds - and his affable doglike demeanor fooled most people, mainly because no one expected to encounter a fully-grown wolf in the middle of the city. Especially not a wolf that would prance right up to a stranger, wagging his tail and grinning, and flop over onto his back at their feet, practically demanding a tummy-rub.

"I happen to agree with Maryse's assessment. He doesn't smell human to me, either. I'd know more if I could bite him, but I don't think that would be prudent." That remark came from Alessandro's right, where a tall red-haired woman lounged. Her voice was a husky alto, the edges of her words roughened by a faint Russian accent.

"Thank you for exercising caution, Rachelle," Alessandro said. "For once."

She shrugged the implied rebuke off. "So he isn't human; who are *we* to discriminate?" More subdued laughter, and then the redhead added speculatively, "I wonder if she knows..."

On Alessandro's left sat a young-looking dark-haired woman, the same one who had happened to be in the café with Alessandro and Maryse and Gavin the first day these tourists arrived. She smiled knowingly, looking out the window at the rapt look on the female reporter's face. "Oh, she knows," she said assuredly. Her French was nearly perfect, but carried a slight American accent. "And I don't think she cares."

"As you did not, when you were mortal, *ma chere* Arianne," Alessandro said, giving her a warm smile.

Returning that smile, Ari reached out to squeeze his hand. Maybe that was why she had instantly felt protective of the pair. Then again, maybe it also had to do with the almost striking physical resemblance the man had to her father, Everett. The glasses, of course, skewed that but it was there just the same. "Which is why I want them safe all the more. You have to respect a love that strong."

Becoming more serious again, he turned to the two who had not yet spoken. "Neither my people nor the Lunae have had success in this venture. Have you met with any luck?"

The brunette of the pair shook her head slightly. "He's nothing I've ever encountered or heard of. I do know they're both utterly blind to magickal phenomena. Not only did they completely miss the fact that they walked into *this* restaurant on a day when the woman - and your daughter Breannan - were the only humans here, I gave them a little test yesterday. Sat in the corner and put shields and wards on everything, then took them off. I even poured power

into my personal shields, to the point where the oil lamp beside me flared, and they didn't notice a thing. So whatever he is and whatever they're doing here, it's nothing to do with us. If it was, they'd be spectacularly unprepared for dealing with us."

The black-haired girl beside her sat up. She had kept silent throughout the meeting, observing the others at the table as much as the couple outside, and anyone who saw the way she sat curled up in her chair would have assumed she was the lowest-ranking person at the table. But when she spoke, everyone else went silent and turned to her attentively.

"I wish I could touch him, but I don't dare," she said. "I'm inclined to agree with Suzanne - neither of them have any paranormal senses. That's not to say he doesn't have something else going on; I think I caught him reacting to something Suze said yesterday, but there's no normal way he could've heard her all the way across the courtyard."

"And not knowing what he can sense, for certain, it's better that you don't try clairvoyance on him," Arianne said, nodding in understanding. "Good call, Cara. Brilliant, as usual."

The two women shared a knowing smile before the witch shrugged. "I did notice one thing, though, and I can't decide if it worries me or reassures me. His aura ... yea gods, I can feel it in here. Rachele's got the strongest aura I've ever met, but his is several orders of magnitude above yours, Red. I have to shut down my Sight when I'm near him or he dazzles me worse than looking straight into the sun. Speaking of which, his aura is white with a hint of gold. Just like sunlight. There's some kind of tie there."

"I see why that would concern you, Carolina," Alexandre said thoughtfully. "We are all more comfortable in the night than in the day, to some degree. I would not wish him to declare us enemies. But you said it reassures you as well?"

"To an extent, yes," Carolina replied. "With an aura like that, in those colors, he's definitely one of the good guys. Nothing for us to worry about. Our only problem, as you said, is if he finds us and decides that we *aren't* the good guys."

The two witches, two werewolves, and seven vampires shared an ironic chuckle. Never mind that this particular group had worked diligently for the safety of *all* Paris' people, human and otherwise; never mind that their various races now enjoyed a rare peace, in this city only. Based on superficial description, they would *not* be perceived as being on the side of the Light.

"So what are we gonna do about them?" Cyrille asked.

Alexandre looked to Maryse. "What says your Queen, wolfling?"

"Leave them alone," she replied promptly. "They probably really *are* tourists. Unless they start threatening us, she sees no reason to bother with them. 'Don't trouble the bear as he attends to his fishing' and all that."

"An apt Lunaeon proverb," Alexandre replied with a nod. He nodded, turning back to the witches. "Carolina? You are our seer. Have you any intuition?"

"I don't foresee any harm coming to any of us from them," she told him. "But there's something else..." Carolina trailed off and looked at him expectantly.

"Perceptive as always," Alexandre said. "I have undertaken my own surveillance - and I was not alone. Someone else is watching them, and I dislike the look of these stalkers. I think they mean our tourists harm. I have no evidence of it, merely the feeling, but I trust it."

No one challenged his hunch. Being a predator himself, Alexandre was exquisitely attuned to others hunting his chosen quarry. The rest wouldn't argue with instincts honed by centuries.

"I think I know who you're talking about," Mathieu said, after a moment. "Four guys,

Americans. Pretty nondescript, except one of them has prison tattoos. They're staying right across the street from our couple, and there always seems to be one of them around. They're keeping *very* quiet otherwise."

"Yes, those are the ones who concern me," Alessandro said. "Well, my people? Have you any suggestions?"

"I don't like this," Carolina said, before anyone else could respond. "You're right, the men you're talking about *are* trouble for those two out there. And I don't have to get a look at those watching to know who I'd side with if something happens."

"Me neither," Maryse seconded. "Gavin and I have more senses than just scent. These two are good people - no matter what *he* is, they're clearly in love with each other, and I think we've all agreed that they're just here on vacation. They've done nothing untoward since they arrived here. The other ones ... well, they're acting furtive, and you know what we think of that."

Alessandre smiled thinly. As he and his followers had learned, it was safe to approach a werewolf if you came to them open-handed and dealt with them fairly. But subterfuge roused their ire, and they tended to react with aggression. "I happen to agree with your assessment. So, for the moment, we will continue observation, shifting our focus to those who watch in secret. Report any anomalous behavior on the part of our vacationers, but we do not need to shadow them so closely."

"And if the people trailing them happen to try anything?" Rachelle asked.

All eyes turned to Alessandro. His own briefly shone a lambent gold, and his smile bared subtly-pointed canines. "I will not have visitors to my city harmed, not even by vermin that followed them here. Use your own discretion if a situation develops. If not, I have no wish to get involved. Unless..."

He paused in thought, and his grin became wicked. "Perhaps I should see if these men have the necessary documentation to visit our fair city. It would be such a pity if those papers were forged or missing entirely. Better still if the police discovered that fact, along with ... stolen property, perhaps. I think it can be arranged. And this ... Clark Kent need never suspect our involvement."

"The watchers will know something's up," Maurice warned.

"I don't think they get along too well," Cyrille opined. "If we do it just right, each one will think one of the others is the thief and just won't admit to it. They'll know if we take the paperwork, though."

"I am certain that questions can be raised about even genuine documents," Alessandro said. "Any problem with their papers, combined with an accusation of theft, will get them detained. Perhaps even deported. That would be the best possible outcome for all."

Murmurs of assent greeted that remark, particularly from Clio and Maurice. They had been dealing with Lois Lane-Kent and Clark Kent face-to-face, on an almost daily basis, and had grown rather fond of the pair. Alessandro read the relief in their faces, and nodded slightly to them. "Very well. It shall be done. My thanks to all of you, for your attendance and your aid in this matter."

When he rose from his seat, the rest did as well, and left the restaurant by several different directions, one of which was through the cellar and into the labyrinthine tunnels under the city. The four who could appreciate the cuisine - the witches and wolves - went out into the courtyard for lunch. Their appearance attracted no more than a glance from the tourist couple.

At least, it did until Gavin pranced up to them and rested his head familiarly in the woman's lap, wagging his entire body and giving her his best daffy doggy smile until she petted his ears. He licked her hands, and then did the same for the man across from her, his antics drawing amused laughter until Maryse came over and grabbed his collar. "Either he really likes you or you had the stuffed grape leaves," she said apologetically, as Gavin gazed up at her with his tongue hanging out - and without a shred of his keen intelligence evident.

Lois and Clark both laughed, the latter patting Gavin's shoulder affectionately as the big wolf allowed himself to be seemingly dragged away by his 'owner'.

As the tourist couple - *Clark and Lois, I mustn't forget their names*, he thought - walked down the street below him, Alessandro followed their every move with eyes that burned golden in the darkness. He had taken every precaution on this trip. For a vampire his age, walking silently was easier than remembering to make his footfalls heard, and neither breath nor heartbeat could give him away if the man's hearing was as good as Carolina suspected.

Of course, there was still the simple possibility of one of them glancing up at the rooftops and *seeing* him, but he had taken measures to prevent that. In all the years he'd prowled his city by night, only a handful of people had ever glimpsed him in his current form, and none of them had believed what their eyes showed them. Who would expect to see a black panther *here*, in the heart of Paris? His midnight coat camouflaged him from the casual glance, and anyone who did see him would dismiss the vision as a trick of the light.

Though these, perhaps, might not. He watched them carefully, pondering them. The woman, Lois, looked like a comely morsel, one he would have picked out as prey - until he got a close look at her confident stride, the determined set of her shoulders. No, this Lois Lane was no one's victim, and even the eldest vampire in the city would have turned aside and taken his hunting elsewhere. She was not someone to be trifled with.

The man beside her, even less so. Though he carried himself with a slightly apologetic air, he didn't behave like prey - the meek demeanor he affected seemed more like an attempt to make himself less imposing than a true reflection of Clark Kent's psyche. When he believed himself unobserved, his shoulders went back, his head came up, and his stride lengthened. *My height, and a trifle heavier*, Alessandro thought, watching him walk with his arm around his wife's waist. *And no more wary in the night of a strange city than I would be. Hmm. No, not human, and not something that expects harm to come to him from any quarter. Not even the wolves are so fearless...*

His quarry crossed a narrow side street, and Alessandro waited for them to get ahead before taking a few loping strides to the edge and leaping across. He landed silently on the opposite roof, claws digging into the worn masonry as he caught his balance. A piece of brick no bigger than one of his teeth dislodged from the very edge and fell; he felt it slipping out from beneath his paw. That was the only thing he could *not* control in a stalk like this - the age and sometimes disrepair of the buildings he hunted across.

Before the brick ever struck the street below he had flung himself halfway across the rooftop, flattening down beside the slightly raised edge. Closing his eyes to hide their reflection and folding his ears flat against his skull, he made his profile no more than a lumpy dark shape, barely differentiated from the roof-edge itself.

The steady footfalls below him stopped with the sound of that tiny sliver of masonry hitting the cobbles. Alessandro waited, listening intently, inwardly cursing the unpredictable footing. Following the pair from the Louvre had taken him out of his usual haunts, and he

didn't know the high roads as well here. In le Marais where he lived, every rooftop trail was as familiar to him as the halls of his house, and he knew exactly where to land safely and soundlessly.

The silence below went on rather longer than he expected, and then the woman spoke. "What is it?" she murmured, her voice coming clearly to Alessandre three stories above.

His reply was very soft, and Alessandre had to cock his ears forward to catch it. "Two blocks up, there's a man in the alley. Armed. Acting very nervous. And there's a young woman walking by herself, coming toward us - she'll pass right by him."

Ignoring the rest of their whispered conversation, Alessandre slunk to the edge of this roof and lifted his head, scenting the wind. Sure enough, he smelled the peculiar mix of anxiety and anger and determination that so often scented a desperate pickpocket, along with the faint tang of gun oil. *Merde. I do not need this interruption. Damned thieves, marring my hunting. And thrice-damned woman, to walk alone in the night - there are far worse than I prowling these streets.*

He could also smell the woman, perfect prey, and he could not allow her to be harmed, even if she was a fool to wander alone. Muscles bunched under velvet fur, preparing to fling him off this roof and across to the next.

Before he could do so, Alessandre heard a sudden gust of wind. That was out of place - the air had been still moments ago. He paused, all senses on the alert...

Of course he knew that bright blue shape, crimson cape trailing behind. Everyone recognized it, just as they would recognize the red and gold S-shield emblazoned on his chest. Alessandre sat back on his haunches, nonplussed, as Superman flew down to confront the pickpocket. Now *that* was a *deux et machina* if ever one existed...

And then it dawned on him. Alessandre dared to rear up, paws on the parapet, and look down at Lois Lane. She was Superman's chronicler, his research told him, still covering the stories even after her rather public breakup with the hero. That breakup had been right before her marriage to Clark Kent, who was now nowhere in sight...

Alessandre had the good sense to lie down out of sight, curling his panther body into a tight ball with only the tip of his tail moving. *It explains everything. Maryse could not identify his scent - he is not of this world. Carolina said his aura was like sunlight - he draws his power from the sun. And I believe it has been said that Superman has no grasp of magick.*

His tail lashed. *Thank the gods Rachelle did not try to bite him! She would have broken her fangs, not to mention what his blood might do to one of us. I prefer not to imagine it. And thank Them that he did not see me. No, this is no business of ours, that the Man of Tomorrow chooses to vacation in our city. He is welcome here, so far as I am concerned, and I believe the others would wholeheartedly agree.*

After a brief check to make certain neither of them were watching him - Clark Kent had returned to his wife, the entire episode taking mere moments - Alessandre rose and loped off toward their apartment. It was time to make certain that they were safe from whoever their mysterious stalkers were. *To Hades with subtlety*, Alessandre thought as he dropped to street level and raced along from one patch of shadow to the next. *I will destroy their documents and tip the police myself. If they know they were interfered with, then they will know that he has an ally in this city.*

He had his own reasons for making this his business. While time, not an exploding planet, had set him adrift from the world he'd been born into, Alessandre felt a certain kinship with the Last Son of Krypton. They were both the last of their people, and both had successfully

adapted to the world they found themselves in. And both felt a certain protectiveness toward their people. *Of course, I also cannot fault his taste in women.*

As he slipped up to the building across the street from the apartment the Kents were renting, Alexandre tilted his whiskers in an unmistakable grin. *Arianne will be delighted. She has always been such a fan ... but she will be furious that I did not stop him to ask for his autograph!*