

# Snapshots: In the Light of Day

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: K+

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"Elliott, for the love of God, *please* tell me this isn't another pathetic attempt to get me back," Lois snarled into the phone, glaring at her desk. Amazing how such a small delivery could make her feel positively irate. The plain white package sitting on it looked so innocent, but she had a sneaking suspicion of what was inside. "It's not going to work this time. Just let it go, Elliot. It's over."

His voice on the phone was the same as always, low and soothing, the cadence of his speech slow, perhaps even a trifle lazy. A voice you could curl up in and let it carry you away. "Did you open it, Lois?"

"No," she snapped, her crossed arms tightening as he made her feel like an idiot. Which was doing him no favors at the moment. "Elliot, I swear to you, if this is what I think it is..."

"Why do you let yourself get so angry before you even know what's in the box?" he asked gently. "Lois, that's very counter-productive behavior. It might not even be from me."

"Of course it's from you, no one else sends me unmarked packages at work," she replied, shoving a stray wave behind her ear as she glared at the offending object. The calmer he sounded, the more annoyed she got. Something, unfortunately, he was well aware of. "Besides, you knew what I was talking about the moment I called."

"It *is* from me," Elliot said. "Open it before your hostility gets the better of you."

Lois gritted her teeth and tore the white satin bow off savagely, not caring if Elliott heard her destroy the box. She also didn't see Clark Kent look up, completely missing the concerned and compassionate look he gave her.

Inside the small white box was a small dish of tiramisu. Lois felt her mouth start to water; done well, it was one of her favorite desserts. And Elliott never did anything that wasn't done well...

"It's delicious," that low voice murmured in her ear. "Made with real mascarpone. The

recipe's from Treviso."

"Elliott, you shouldn't have," Lois said, sincerely. She could practically taste the espresso... "We broke up a month ago."

"Darling, we've broken up at least three times a year," he laughed. "You can really taste the freshness of the cream - and just a hint of the marsala. *Good* marsala, at that. I happen to have a bottle on hand. It would go very well with the tiramisu..."

"Elliott, *no*," Lois said. It was starting to annoy her how well this man knew her. *Never again will I date a shrink of any sort whatsoever*, she thought angrily. Of course, she'd had the same thought on at least a monthly basis for the past two years.

"Lois," he murmured. "It's truly excellent tiramisu. It would taste even better on your lips."

"We're through, and that's final." The raven-haired reporter made her voice as cold as she could. Elliott was manipulating her, tempting her, and she hated it.

He chuckled again, and there was a note of indolent amusement in his voice that brought their long evenings in bed back to her mind. "My, you sound so convincing," Elliott said. "I almost believe you this time. But where in this city would you find a man who could be a more perfect match for you? I know you've looked."

"Yes, well, I've quit looking *in* the city and started looking *above* it," Lois snapped. Instantly she regretted the remark; it made it sound like the only way she could do better than Elliott was to snare a superhero.

"Him again?" Elliott scoffed. "Please, Lois. One of the things I like best about you is your absolute refusal to run along with the crowd. This whole Superman fetish is so unlike you - and so very like every stereotypical single female in Metropolis. 'He's a hero, he must be perfect.' You're too intelligent to follow the masses - they would willingly worship him on their collective knees."

"You don't know him like I know him," she started to argue, and Elliott cut her off.

"I'm sure every woman he's ever rescued feels some kind of special connection," he said, his tone growing pedantic. "The way he looked at them, the way he spoke to them, must hold some kind of deeper meaning. After all, this godlike being - this flying man..."

"Shut up about flying and Freud," Lois growled, and for once Elliott actually did. Lois dropped the telephone receiver onto her desk loudly, and called across the room, "Hey, Loueen!"

"What?" Perry's secretary called back.

"Want some dessert?"

"Is it poisoned?"

"I doubt it, I didn't cook it," Lois replied, and tossed the box onto the desk across from hers. "Live it up, hon. Compliments of Elliott."

"Now there's a man who knows his restaurants," Loueen said with a grin, picking up the box in a hurry. "Smells yummy. I take it you're breaking up with him again?"

"For the last time," Lois said, picking up her phone again. "Well, Elliott?"

"You're rather charming when you act out," he told her. "I have more tiramisu. You're still welcome to come by after work."

"You arrogant..." Lois took a deep breath. He'd been known to analyze her use of profanity. "Goodbye, Elliott. We're through." She slammed the phone down, and *then* swore repeatedly.

*One thing Elliott did get right about me*, Lois thought, flipping through her notes on the

latest scandal in the mayor's office. *I do tend to use my aggression constructively. Let's grill some politicians...*

Clark felt like a bit of a jerk for being glad about it, but Lois had dumped Elliott at least twice since he'd met her. Obviously the man wasn't right for her, even if she did keep going back to him...

He watched surreptitiously as Lois attacked the story she was working on, going after her sources ruthlessly. Seeing her furious - and channeling that wrath into something productive, if uncomfortable for Metropolis' elected officials - always made Clark smile. She was never as completely, fiercely *alive* as when she was angry. And after everything that had happened in California a few months ago, Clark had a very definite interest in keeping Lois alive.

Of course, when she was hot on the trail of a scandal, Lois tended to forget things like food and sleep. On his lunch break, Clark stopped by a great little Chinese restaurant - which happened to be in Atlanta - and brought back an order of General Tso's with white rice. He made sure to bang into her desk with his knee and nearly drop the takeout box onto Lois' notes.

"*Clark!*" Lois ducked from the impending cascade of spicy Chinese food, the exasperation in her tone very clear. "What on earth...? Ooh, that smells good."

"I, um, brought you some General Tso's," Clark told her with his typical goofy smile. "I figured you were working hard and you hardly ever take a lunch break..."

Lois was already opening the box and ripping the chopsticks out of their holder. She finally glanced up at Clark, the beginning of a smile on her face, and then the phone rang. The raven-haired reporter seemed to completely forget Clark's existence as she snatched up the receiver and said, "Lois Lane, *Daily Planet*."

Trying to keep up the sheepish smile, Clark set the cup of soda on her desk, gestured to it, and got a quick thumb's-up in reply. He backed away from her desk with an awkward little wave, remembering to trip over Gil's outstretched leg. As he stumbled past Gil, he saw Lois' shoulders shake with suppressed laughter; at least she was that kind, that she didn't openly laugh at him. Much.

Making it back to his own desk without further mishap, Clark typed up his own story while watching Lois simultaneously listen to her contact, take notes, and wolf down chicken so spicy it made most men sweat. After the first few mouthfuls of rice, she switched from using the chopsticks as intended to using only one and spearing each piece of chicken. For some reason that made Gil wince - maybe he didn't like seeing Lois stab things. Although he seemed to have no problem watching her nibble the chicken off the end of the chopstick.

Clark involved himself in his work, still keeping part of his attention on Lois as he always did. The story he was working on involved certain shady business deals in the construction industry. Where Lois would have attacked her sources, using everything from intimidation to a judicious flash of leg to get the information she needed, Clark was patient, polite, and honest. Yet he still managed to scoop her on occasion when they battled over a story, and that constantly perplexed Lois. He'd ever heard her mutter to Loueen about it, some remark along the lines of "How the heck can the *definition* of milquetoast manage to wring info out of people who won't even talk to *me*?!"

He grinned slightly at the thought, double-checking his quotations. It was the very same patience and politeness which drove Lois berserk that did the trick. Sources who would've fought with Lois' confrontational style found nothing to argue against dealing with Clark. He could generally tell when people lied to him, and on those occasions he would simply look at

them with a slightly disappointed frown, and ask the question again. Most people found his brand of sincerity contagious, and wound up freely telling him things they'd never admit to under torture.

*Which is why we make such a good team*, Clark thought. Perry had sent the two of them on a couple of stories. Their contrasting styles were complimentary, and both reporters were competitive enough to bring out the best in each other.

While Clark was reflecting on the look of surprise on Lois' face when he'd actually dared to argue with her over a story - and worse, fail to be swayed by an arch look - he was peripherally aware of her. Lois had finished most of the chicken, and was absently licking the spicy sauce off the end of her chopstick. That made Bill Freizon turn purple, and poor Jimmy Olsen dropped an armload of files with a loud crash.

"Damn, Lois," Gil groused at her, helping a red-faced Jimmy gather up his stuff while he muttered ineffectually about a snag in the carpet. "How the hell can you *eat* that stuff? It's hotter than jalapeno peppers, and you're treating it like candy!"

"Well, maybe I'm just hotter than it is," Lois said brightly, trying for an innocent smile and failing. After a moment she gave a teasing grin and winked before getting back to work, leaving Freizon shaking his head slowly and Clark chuckling to himself. Lois did love to harass the men around the office - Elliott was right about that much. She'd never let the fact of being a woman hold her back in her career, but she would also never let them treat her as just one of the guys.

Before Clark could let himself get too amused by Lois, Perry's office door opened. "Kent!" he bellowed. "Are you done with the contract fiasco yet? Good God, *I* could've typed it three times by now. If you didn't spend your lunch break feeding every reporter on this crew who's too lazy to bring their own lunch..."

"Here, Chief," Clark said, pulling the paper out of his typewriter. "Is there anything else...?"

"Of course there is," Perry grumbled. "C'mere, I've got an assignment for you, kid..."

With one last glance at Lois, who was now having an animated conversation with whoever had picked up on the other end of the extension, Clark followed the editor. He'd see Lois again before the end of the day - one way or another, he always did.

Lois joined the five o'clock rush for the elevators, still shuffling notes. By judicious use of the infamous Lane elbow, she managed to squeeze into a car before most of her fellow City Beat reporters even reached the bank of elevators.

Most, but not all. Loueen had left a few minutes ahead of Lois, and they wound up standing next to each other as the elevator doors closed. "Well, this is a surprise," Loueen said. "What are you doing leaving at five, Lois? Someone give you an IV of normality? If you stay past four, you usually don't leave 'til six or seven."

"Very funny, Loueen," Lois replied, grinning. "I'd normally leave early to go interview a source, but I don't want to catch this guy in his office. I'd rather surprise him at this apartment I'm not supposed to know he has."

"Sounds like fun," Loueen said. "You always get the best stories, Lois."

"Because I fight for them," the dark-haired reporter replied. "And I never let any of the old boys' network beat me."

"True, you do have a way with men," Loueen snickered. "I find it highly amusing that Elliott sent you a pricey dessert, which you fed to your sole rival for the title of Official Office Hot Chick-"

"You don't count, you're a secretary," Lois interjected.

"-while Clark brings you General Tso's chicken, and you eat it happily," Loueen finished. "So what gives?"

"It should be obvious," Lois told her. "Clark is nice guy, and I can trust him."

At the back of the elevator, a man holding a *Daily Planet* newspaper in front of his face began to smile. He happened to be the only reporter who always left precisely at five o'clock, always managing to have everything done by then in spite of his numerous breaks. The same man was also the only person who could possibly have made it from his desk to the elevators before Lois did, *without* elbowing anyone in the ribs.

"Yeah, he is that," Loueen said. "No one in this place is as trustworthy as Clark. But what about Elliott? I know he's not on the same order of niceness as Kent..."

"Elliott isn't a nice guy," Lois chuckled. "Not by a long shot."

"So why are you still seeing him?"

"I'm not. I dumped him." Lois glared at Loueen in annoyance.

"And this time you mean it, right?" The secretary rolled her eyes. "You know I only set you up with him as a joke, right? Nobody else could stand his arrogant self-centered conversation past the soup course. *You* went and hooked up with him for two years."

"Loueen, c'mon," Lois said. "It's not like we moved in together or anything. We probably saw each other maybe two weekends a month."

"Of which you spent both days at his house," Loueen shot back.

Lois glanced at the press of people in the elevator to either side of her. Most of them were paying attention to their newspapers or their own conversations. "Would you shut up, Loueen?" she growled.

"Cool it, Lane," the secretary replied, grinning. "People would be more impressed with that glower if you didn't spend three quarters of your life ticked off. *Anyway*, I still wonder what you see in Elliott."

"*Saw*," Lois corrected. "What I *saw* in Elliott. Past tense. I've moved on to bigger and better things."

"Bigger and better things that wear capes," Loueen teased, and got a frosty look. "Oh, stop it, Lois."

Choosing to ignore the implication - talking about Superman for more than ten minutes could still make her blush - Lois said, "Fine. You want to know what I saw in Elliott? He's blindingly intelligent, he wasn't intimidated by me, and he's dynamite in bed. There, happy now? The day-to-day stuff he just didn't get."

"Not a mental image I needed," Loueen muttered, rubbing her temples. "Hey, Lois, I thought you didn't *want* someone day-to-day, all that mushy love stuff. I thought you said you just wanted someone who would be there when you needed them, and leave you alone when you didn't."

*Crap.* Lois saw Loueen's eyebrows rising with the speculation that everyone's favorite cynic might have a romantic side. She had to cut that off fast. "Oh, *please*. I'm not saying I want roses and chocolate and all that other crap. It's just... This is *ridiculous*. See, this is why I don't talk about Elliott. Freakin' Kinky Briefcase ruins every damn conversation..."

Loueen whooped with laughter while the people from Accounting edged away from Lois. "Holy shit, Lois," the secretary finally managed to wheeze. "Oh, man. I so don't want to know."

Lois elbowed her again, viciously. "*Shut up.* Loueen, don't make me hit the emergency

stop button and throw you out of here. There's people from our department in this elevator!"

The man in the back had stopped smiling some time ago. Lois had never claimed to be a saint. But did he *have* to hear her say such things?

"Okay, okay, I quit," Loueen said, still chuckling. "But I'll still bet you twenty bucks you go back to Elliott again. You always do."

"Not this time," Lois said firmly. "If I let him talk me into coming back - that's his whole problem, he never got the 'leave me alone when I don't need him' part - if I get back with him again, I'll transfer to Features."

Silence. "Whoa," Loueen said quietly. "You *are* serious."

"As a heart attack," Lois replied.

Behind them, Clark started smiling again.

The *Daily Planet* staff filed out through the main lobby, the revolving doors turning steadily. Clark was right behind Lois as she left, and got her attention simply by getting caught in the revolving door. Again.

Lois was walking smoothly, one hand on the door in front of her, confident in the expectation that it would keep turning. When Clark swung his briefcase a little too far forward and jammed the doors, she came to a jarring halt. The raven-haired reporter whirled, ready to curse out the fool who had forgotten how to operate a simple revolving door, and saw Clark. Sighing and growling his name in aggravation, she helped him out. "For the love of God, Clark, you've worked here a year and you're *still* getting stuck in revolving doors? Keep this up and Perry will start making you parachute down from the roof."

"Sorry," Clark said, grinning sheepishly. "I, um, guess I'd better not try the parachuting. Me and heights..."

"You're six-foot-something, how the heck can you be afraid of heights?" Lois rolled her eyes. "Yeah, well, be glad you never had to free-fall from up there. Not fun. Although it did net me a good story." Her lips curved in a quick smile that said far more about the story than she would've imagined ... especially to the man who had made his debut in the world by saving her from that fall.

Clark chuckled nervously and pushed up his glasses. "Only Lois Lane could turn a near death experience into the story of her career."

Lois started to grin. "That's why I'm the star reporter, although I'll have you know Superman was *not* my first front-pager. People in this city knew who I was *before* he turned up."

"Yes, but everyone knows you're his, um, chronicler now," Clark replied, remembering to hesitate in his speech, even if the placement was awkward.

Lois arched an eyebrow at him. "I've never heard that said."

"I have," he replied, not mentioning that *he* had said it. "As far as everyone in the city's concerned, Lois Lane's the authority on Superman. You, um, you get every exclusive, you got that interview..."

"Okay, maybe he likes talking to me. Superman's lucky to get so much of my time," she teased.

"Yeah," Clark said with a barely-audible sigh. "Lucky."

Lois had been scanning the street for a cab, but she turned and smiled fondly at him. "Clark. Superman's a great guy - a guaranteed front-page headline - but he doesn't bring me lunch when I'm too wrapped up in a story to remember to eat."

"Gee, Lois," Clark began, blushing with both pleasure and surprise. "I just ... you know ...

I never ... wow..."

Lois grabbed his tie and tugged on it, silencing him. She caught his chin, made him look squarely at her, and smiled again, that beautiful, sincere smile that he adored. "Thank you, Clark," Lois said. "You really are a sweetheart."

"You're welcome," he beamed. And then Lois leaned up to hug him, pressing her cheek against his for a moment.

Spending most of his time in Metropolis, Clark rarely had a use for his keen sense of smell. Most of what he picked up was exhaust fumes. But at that moment, his heightened senses were a blessing. He caught the fragrance of Lois' perfume, her sandalwood shampoo, and under them both, a hint of the clean, warm scent of her skin. It was enough to make his heart soar.

Then Lois drew away, still smiling. "Take care, Kent," she said. "I'll see you tomorrow. I've got a story to chase."

Clark watched her with a wistful expression and Lois turned and caught a cab. Just as she disappeared from sight, a thought occurred to him. *I'll probably see her later tonight then, in uniform.* The dreamy smile gradually became a sly grin, and Clark headed home with an extra spring in his step.