

# Snapshots: Light Up the Sky

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: K+

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On his way out of the office, Clark tuned in to Lois' heartbeat and focused on the sounds around it. First was Elinore Lane's voice, faintly echoing as if it were coming through a speaker - or a telephone receiver. "Just what is so important that you're missing the Fourth of July?"

"Momma, please," he heard Lois sigh. Her exasperated tone led him to imagine her rubbing her temples as she pressed the phone against her ear. Clark left the *Daily Planet* offices smiling slyly; he'd just wanted to check on Lois, but this little conversation was too good to ignore. Never mind that he was listening to it from twelve blocks away...

"Well, darling, I *miss* you. You've been working far too much lately. And you've never missed the family barbecue." Mrs. Lane sounded just like Ma, and Clark chuckled to himself.

"I'm not *missing* it; I'm just going to be late. I have an important interview. A *really* important interview." It was nearly impossible to miss the emphasis there, but Elinore Lane pressed on.

"I know you, Lois. If you say you're going to be late because of a story, you'll get wrapped up in it and the next time I see you it'll be on the front page. Really, I expect to see *Clark* here before you, and he's *never* on time."

Another gusty sigh. "Just be glad I invited Clark," Lois muttered, moving around the apartment. "Elliott was trying to finagle an invitation to the party. He should've *known* I'd never introduce him to you."

"I won't even comment on the fact that you dated a man you wouldn't bring home," Mrs. Lane retorted.

"Good," her daughter cut in, without admitting that the only men she'd ever brought home were the ones she'd dated solely to annoy her father. Clark had heard *that* little speech at the office a time or two - or two dozen. Her battles with her father had assumed legendary status among the Lanes.

"But I'm really disappointed that Elliot is still pestering you," Mrs. Lane continued. "You know, sweetheart, perhaps if you got involved with someone else he'd take the hint..."

That set Lois off like he knew it would. "Mother, I do *not* need some man to protect me." Clark had found a place to change and was currently hovering high above her apartment, waiting for the conversation to be done so he wouldn't interrupt. He winced at her sharp words, and the way she suddenly stalked out on the balcony, resentment in every stride. "I have told Dr. Elliot Marrin in no uncertain terms that we're *through*. I've blocked his number, cursed him out when he called at work, returned his gifts or given them away, and threatened to have him arrested for stalking me. I can't make it any more plain. He'll get the message

eventually."

He heard her mother sigh. "I'm sorry, Lois. I'm still your mother, and I'm still a little protective. Forgive an old woman?"

"You're hardly old," Lois protested. She sounded faintly puzzled, perhaps wondering how she'd gone from being angry with her mother to defensive of her. Kal-El smiled slightly. He could've told her that his superpowers were nothing compared to a mom's powers of manipulation.

"All right, sweetheart," the older woman chuckled. "Anyway, who are you interviewing?"

"Superman," Lois replied. "And he's going to be late in ... two and a half minutes." Her tone of voice was faintly annoyed, which Kal-El knew from experience meant she was trying to hide her affection.

"Oh, well in that case..." Mrs. Lane sounded amused at her daughter.

Superman chose that moment to float down to the balcony, precisely on time. "Ms. Lane?" he said quietly.

Lois whipped around, eyes wide. "I've gotta go," she said into the phone, her gaze never leaving him. "Love you, Momma." She hung up the phone and visibly rallied.

"Please give Mrs. Lane my regards," he told her.

Lois rolled her eyes slightly, looking a trifle embarrassed, and Kal-El managed not to grin impishly. If only she knew how often he called Ma...

"Anyway," Lois said, pulling a pen from behind her ear and a notepad off of the patio table. "I believe you came by to discuss your position on the military's recent requests of you?"

"I did," he told her, strolling forward. As always, the sight of her made his heart skip a beat. Lois dressed a little more casually for interviews these days, but she was no less stunning. "But first I'd like to apologize for keeping you from your family gathering."

"Oh, it's fine, my family's eating later," Lois said breezily, and he suppressed a smile.

He'd heard otherwise, but he allowed the falsehood for now. Especially since he had a wonderful way to tease her about her fondness for him. "Still, I'm certain you would rather be with your loved ones on the holiday," Kal-El replied, a gleam in his eye. "Unfortunately, I had other appointments this evening, and this was the only time I was able to schedule an interview. I do appreciate you taking the time."

"Well, if I didn't, somebody at the *Star* would, and I don't trust half of them to get their own byline right, much less a story," Lois muttered. "So, let's start with the basics. What did the military actually ask of you, and why'd you say no?"

"I didn't say no to *all* of it," Kal-El said, pulling out her chair before taking the seat across from her. "I have no problems defending American soil from attack, and I enjoy speaking to the troops - I want them to know they have my support. What I refused was any involvement in acts of aggression on foreign soil."

"In other words, you won't fight our battles for us," Lois said, nodding slightly as she wrote it down. Then those lovely eyes glanced up and pierced him again. "Why not?"

"I don't feel it's fair," Kal-El answered simply. He always felt slightly off balance at times like this; Lois was doing her journalistic best to discover any shred of untruth in his story, and he was trying not to get distracted by her beauty, by the thousand little quirks he loved.

One of which was that keen mind, and willingness to question *anyone*. "So? Truth, justice, and the *American* way, right? Seems like you ought to be out there fighting to put democratic elections into every regime and a McDonalds on every corner." Lois leaned back in her chair, studying him, and Kal-El knew she was noting his body language as much as his words.

"I won't support American hostility toward any sovereign nation," he said. "Conquest is *not* part of the American way."

"Oh, conquest isn't?" Lois asked, deceptively gentle. "What about when we conquered this whole damn country and killed off the Indians to do it?"

"I've always found the settlers' treatment of the natives to be a regrettable example of culture clash, not something to admire and uphold," Kal-El replied. "As do you, if I recall correctly. Besides, the freedom we enjoy in America cannot help but eventually conquer the world - without bloodshed. If you believe what our Declaration of Independence says, that all men - and women, Ms. Lane - are created equal, and are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then you realize that all human beings everywhere will strive for those goals. It may take time, a great deal of time, but the natural state of humanity is freedom. If I, with all my powers, were to fly to another country and simply impose American democracy on them, my interference would be resented, and the progress of freedom would be impeded."

Lois' serious façade broke then, an amused smile curving her lips. "Okay, all right, touché," she chuckled. "After a speech like that, I feel like I should be begging your pardon and buying you a drink or something." The reporter was too disciplined to actually wince, but he saw the slight narrowing of her eyes as she realized how that remark could be taken. *It seems we've made double-entendres a habit.*

Kal-El smiled at her. "Forgive me if I tend to wax poetic about this country, Ms. Lane. I may not have been born here, but I do feel a deep loyalty to my adopted home's ideals."

"So you consider yourself a patriot?"

Kal-El knew a loaded question when he heard one. "I think history determines who was truly a patriot," he replied, evading it neatly. "Patriotism is something people like to declare and argue about in the present, but only hindsight shows it with utter clarity. I will say, however, that I love my country. But then, I am in a unique position to appreciate all of this planet's wonders."

Lois caught the evasion and smirked. Tilting her head to gaze at him with what looked like pride, she shook her head. "You're getting pretty good at this, hero." The teasing in her tone was clear.

"I had an excellent teacher," he said, succeeding in making her blush slightly, her eyes immediately going down to her notepad. Every time he could make her go red, he wondered just how many others had managed that. It was probably very few.

The interview continued much in the same vein, verbal fencing intermingling with the occasional flirtation. Kal-El knew perfectly well that Lois agreed with most of his views on the topic, but she was willing to play devil's advocate to get the story. They became caught up in the interplay, Lois alternately challenging him outright and trying to lure him into contradicting himself, and Kal-El slyly taunting her right back. Time seemed to fly, and when Lois' inexhaustible curiosity finally permitted her a break to consider how to test him further, it was full dark.

Craning her head back to examine the sky, it was apparent that she had lost track of time when she murmured softly, "Almost time for the fireworks..."

"And I've kept you too late to find a good spot to view them," Kal-El said, sounding regretful and not even slightly like he'd *planned* this.

Her momentary disappointment vanished at the sound of his voice. "Nah, I can see them from here," Lois replied with a shrug, smiling for his benefit. But he knew from her conversations with Clark how much Lois loved the show, the bright thunder in the night sky. It

was one of the few things Lois really let herself look forward to during the summer, and he wasn't about to be the reason she missed it.

"Not as well as you'd like," he told her. "I've also kept you from your family. To be honest, I suspected this might happen - a reporter such as yourself rarely lets go of a story until you have all the information."

"Only certain stories," Lois said softly, half under her breath, and he allowed himself a small smile. Lois saw him react to hearing her, her own expression going horrified and embarrassed, and dropped her head into her hands with a self-deprecating chuckle. "Yeah. Ummm ... obviously I haven't eaten since lunch. Never mind me, it's been a long day."

And that gave him the perfect opening for what he'd planned. "I'd be happy to escort you to your family's dinner, Ms. Lane, if you'd do me the honor of watching the fireworks with me."

"What?" Those hazel eyes met his with a look of unbridled surprise at the invitation, then Lois seemed to get a hold of herself and abruptly changed direction. "You mean you actually watch the New Troy fireworks?"

"Actually, Ms. Lane, I usually watch all of them. I fly high enough to see all the ones in the greater Metropolis area, anyway. But we'll stay a little lower tonight, and watch the New Troy show. Here, you'll need this." With that he handed her the earplugs he'd been carrying ever since he left the *Daily Planet*, and rose to take her hand as she stood up. "It gets rather loud up there."

Kal-El couldn't help smiling at her expression as he took her elbow gently and slid an arm around her waist. While Lois was still putting the earplugs with bemusement, he took off, lifting them both high above the city. From here, most of the fireworks displays would be visible - and they were just as spectacular when seen from above.

This high up, the oppressive heat of the city gave way to a cooler breeze, and he watched Lois lift her face to it gratefully. The earplugs forestalled conversation, but that was just as well, since the first firework exploded only moments later. The closeness of it startled her for a moment, but it took only seconds for her to burst out laughing at her own reaction. Kal-El held her close against his side, watching Lois' face as the show continued. Viewed from above, the fireworks show was spectacular, but nowhere near as fascinating as her rapt expression.

Kal-El had thought the noise and the colorful explosions might startle Lois further. Any normal person would probably be afraid, watching fireworks explode seemingly just beneath their feet. But not Lois. She was enthralled, grinning, as wide-eyed as a child at her first Fourth of July picnic, and the nearness of some of the bursting rockets only caused another round of excited laughter.

How could he *not* love her? Was any other woman on the face of the earth this bold? After only a few flights with him with no repeats of his loss of grip, Lois had become perfectly comfortable thousands of feet in the air, supported only by his arms. The yawning space beneath her, gravity's greedy clutch, was of no concern. And now, fireworks soaring up to burst below them, she didn't spare a moment to worry what would happen if the explosions came too near. Lois automatically assumed he would keep her safe; he liked to think that she trusted him as she trusted very few men. He knew how self-reliant she was, how rarely she put her safety in someone else's hands. Kal-El smiled, thinking that it was an honor to have her trust.

A very large rocket burst directly below them, scattering red, white, and blue sparks. Lois startled slightly against his chest, her hand tightening on his arm, before turning to him with

wonder in her eyes. "Oh my God, this is incredible!" she exclaimed before looking away again.

*No more amazing than you*, he thought, but only smiled. She wouldn't be able to hear him through the earplugs, and it was sort of a corny line anyway. More Clark Kent than Superman, and if only she knew the truth...

Kal-El quickly curtailed that thought. It was too dangerous for her. He'd been telling himself that since their first real date, right after that interview. The secret had risen to his lips, standing there in her living room, and he had very nearly let it slip. Only the cold little warning in the back of his mind - *if she knows she'll never be safe; you must never put one of them above the rest* - stopped him. And in moments like this, when it was tempting to just *tell* her, he reminded himself of one more thing: if he told Lois how he had deceived her, she would never trust him again.

But even if she could never be his, he could have moments like this with her. Kal-El smiled wistfully, wishing this wasn't just another stolen instant, wishing he could be with her always...

The fireworks show was nearing its end. There was a pause of several heartbeats, then the whistling scream of several rockets being fired at once. The air thundered around them, Lois still laughing and ducking her face against his chest at the sheer percussive force of the multiple explosions. Brilliant bursts of red, white, blue, silver, and gold light dazzled their eyes, and for a moment they were both blinded and deafened by the spectacle.

All too soon, the climax of the show was over, the air full of smoke and longing. Lois sighed with what sounded like happiness, leaning a little more against his shoulder, and he was keenly reminded of that moment a few months ago, when only an arbitrary raindrop had robbed him of the chance to kiss her. Kal-El leaned just slightly toward her, taking in the fragrance of her hair, the warmth of her nestled against him, her very presence there with him, and smiled in pure contentment.

The moment couldn't last. A tendril of smoke from the expended fireworks drifted up to them, and Lois started to cough. Kal-El quickly took her out of range, asking, "Are you all right, Ms. Lane?"

She coughed a couple of times before she caught her breath. The fact that she was still smoking certainly wasn't doing her any favors, he thought ruefully. But now wasn't the time to twit her for it. Especially since he knew that she had had only one cigarette that day, knowing about their appointment. "Sure," she finally managed, taking a deep breath of clearer air. "Just the smoke, I think. Thanks for the gorgeous light-show. You didn't have to."

"You're welcome," he said gently, and took them soaring over the river toward Elinore Lane's house. "I am sorry if I've made you late."

"It's fine, I told you," Lois said softly, unable to conceal the dreamy, almost reflective tone in her voice. Flying always appeared to do that to her. "This isn't the first time an interview has run overtime. I knew we were going to meet tonight. Besides, Momma always holds something for after the fireworks..."

"Very considerate of her," Kal-El murmured. He hovered over the house briefly, then quickly dropped down between the trees in the side yard. "Well, here we are, Ms. Lane."

With solid ground under her feet again, Lois had regained some of her composure. His arm was still around her waist when she looked up at him, another timeless moment in which they both felt the magnetic pull between them, and then Lois was the one to step back slightly. She moved as though to start away, maybe call a greeting over her shoulder. But Lois stopped mid-movement and turned back to him. Smiling a smile both impish and wry, she teased, "So,

tell me, Superman. If we keep meeting like this, when are you going to start calling me by my first name?"

"I don't know, Ms. Lane," he replied, still smiling warmly.

Even in the darkness of the yard, he could see those hazel eyes dance with amusement.

"Ah. Well, good night, then."

"Good night," he answered, and took off, leaving her looking up after him.

Lois turned to walk into the house, and he heard her sigh heavily. With something that sounded like longing. "Geez, I'm such an idiot," he thought he heard her mutter. That was enough to make Kal-El smile again, but he was already preoccupied with finding a place to change so he could arrive as Clark.

Several minutes later, he could hear Elinore was still affectionately berating her daughter's lateness as Clark knocked on the front door. Lucy opened it, and beamed joyfully at him. "Clark!" the blonde exclaimed, and hugged him. "Where on earth have you *been*? We've been waiting for *ages*. And Lois was late, too. I swear that Perry White works you guys too hard."

"Sorry, when the fireworks started the traffic pretty much stopped dead," he told Lucy, following her through the house. "Thank goodness the cab driver was nice enough not to keep the meter running while we were in traffic that whole time." As he came into the living room, Lois caught his eye and grinned at him from the comfort of the armchair she had staked out, the broad unguarded smile she only showed after a flight.

"I wish you could be on time just once, Lois. Just one holiday." The Lane matriarch continued to admonish her eldest as she came back in from the kitchen.

"Momma, please," Lois groaned, but still gave her mother an exasperated yet loving smile. "It's one of the hazards of having a world-renowned journalist for a daughter." Then that left brow of hers rose with devilry. "The trade-off is that every one of your friends knows who I am. And I know you just love that." Her mother only shook her head and tugged at a strand of Lois' black hair affectionately.

"Well, Clark, lucky for you we saved some supper," Mrs. Lane turned to acknowledge him, only gently scolding as Little Sam and Nora came out with plates for he and Lois. "It seems Lois only beat you here by the barest margin. Maybe *you* should get Superman to fly you to your appointments, too."

Clark was too busy making his apologies to notice the way that Lois' forehead wrinkled in concentration after that comment, the way sudden interest blazed in those eyes. And even if he had, he wouldn't have connected it with his one mistake of the evening. He'd flown her directly here to her mother's house - without once asking for directions, or even an address.

He did, however, catch the gloating smile on Lois' face when he turned back to her. She had slunk down in the chair, her expression almost cat-like with cleverness. He knew by now how to tell that she had a bee in her bonnet, which was exactly what that look in her eyes screamed. "Well, you're looking awfully pleased with yourself, Lois," he said. "Your interview went okay?"

Lois crossed her arms with an air of triumph. "Mm-hmm," she purred, and the dreamy grin became a wicked one. Oh, that look always meant trouble... "I just realized a certain exclusive's been paying a little more attention than I thought. Kinda unexpected, but awfully sweet of him to bring me here, wasn't it?"

Clark swallowed nervously, wondering just what was going on in that brilliant mind.