

If It's Meant to Be

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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April 17th, Paris

Well, here we are. First wedding anniversary. (God, that's so weird to see written down.) In Paris, of course, the city that means so much to both of us. Let's just hope there are no hot stories while we're in town. Or any idiot tourists in danger on La Tour Eiffel.

*Got in late yesterday afternoon - would've been faster if we'd flown Kal Air instead of Air France, but oh well. There would be tongues wagging if someone saw Clark Kent's wife flying in **alone** with her famous ex, suitcases in hand. Got checked in, stowed our luggage, then had some wine and a light dinner in a little café and called it a night.*

Such a night, too. Good thing I slept well the night before. He somehow managed to neglect mentioning his plans to relive our wedding night (minus the harassment-by-cell-phone from my bridesmaids) the moment we got in the room. Not that I'm complaining in the least - I don't usually like surprises, but that fit nicely in with my plans...

Lois nibbled the end of her pen, gazing out the window at the courtyard below, where a young man was walking a black and white dog. She and Clark had taken a rental apartment for the twelve days of their anniversary trip; much more comfortable than a hotel, and more private when he needed to slip out for a while. Like now.

He had been gone when she woke up, the sheets still warm on his side. After a year, absences like that were still irksome - but it was part of living with him. Lois had spent six years without him in her life at all, and in that time had nearly managed to convince herself that she didn't need Kal-El. Of course, when he returned, she learned just how mistaken she had been. And now, she was willing to cope with his absences - however grudgingly - because both of them had acknowledged the fact that they couldn't live without one another.

Not to mention the kids. Lois smiled lazily. The twins had been so excited about their wedding - and they were excited again about this anniversary trip. Even after a year, Mommy

and Daddy being together was still utterly cool to Jason and Kala. *Just so long as Kala doesn't start singing 'Superman's my Daddy' in school, we'll be all right. But they've always understood the need for secrecy. We got very lucky that way.*

A breeze ruffled her hair, bringing the scent of fresh bread, coffee, and ... chocolate? Lois turned to see Clark grinning at her, his arms laden with coffee and pastry. "Smells delicious," Lois commented.

"Sweetened *café au lait* and *pain au chocolat, mademoiselle,*" Clark replied. "We're on vacation, why stick to bagels and newsroom coffee?"

"I don't think they'd let us drink Perry's coffee here," Lois muttered. "They like it strong, but not evil."

Clark chuckled as she tore open the wrapped parcels, nibbling through the pastry to get to the chocolate. "Leave a couple for me," he teased.

Lois arched an eyebrow and glared. "You shouldn't have handed them all to me if you didn't want me to have them. When I was living here I ate these every day." *And managed not to gain the approximate weight of a metro train.*

"Oh, that explains that picture of you," he joked back, snagging a pastry.

Lois rapped his nose with her knuckle. "No, *that* was *your* fault."

"*My* fault?" he shot back. "Who was off her birth control?"

"Hey! I forgot to bring it with me to Niagara!" Lois protested. "I sure didn't think I was going to need it spending the weekend with *Clark*. And I really wasn't going to ask you to run me by the apartment to pick up the pills on the way to the Fortress. Even if I *had* remembered." The look she shot him after that remark was almost fierce, ruined by the mischievous smile she couldn't contain.

Clark sipped his coffee and pulled Lois close, kissing her forehead. "Admit it, sweetheart. You just wanted to be..."

"If you say it, there won't be any more reenacting for you," she warned, glaring.

His cerulean eyes gleamed with humor. "Aw, Lois. You really hate it when I use slang, don't you?"

"No, I hate it when you make baby-mama jokes!" she growled, stealing his pastry. She held her ring up to his face as if it were truly the kryptonite that their coworkers suspected. "I'm gonna kill Jimmy."

He just laughed and kissed her again, stealing back his pastry in the process.

The Eiffel Tower. First stop for billions of McDonald's-eating tourists. And an elevator I refuse to get near ever again. What the hell was I thinking? Clark sensed Lois' tension and squeezed her fingers lightly. "It's all right, hon," he murmured. "If there's a big terrorist story today, I'll take it."

"Like hell," she shot back, but her nerves were soothed, and Lois chuckled as she realized how adroitly he'd manipulated her mood. "You're getting a little too good at this, Kent."

"Too good at what? Being your husband?" Even now, just the words made him grin like a kid.

"Being calculatingly competitive," she replied, but even then she couldn't help smiling at him.

They took the stairs at first, just as she had years ago, but now Clark's arm slid around Lois' waist, subtly supporting her to make the climb less arduous. Of course, they had to stop frequently so their progress wouldn't seem unusual, and Lois managed to put aside journalistic

acumen long enough to marvel at the delicate lace-like appearance of the ironwork.

Typical of Lois' temperament, if she *had* to scale the monument, she wanted to go up to the top first, then work her way down among the exhibits and shops. Since the stairs only went up to the second level, that goal demanded a trip in the elevator - the elevator which Lois had ridden *underneath* years ago. She shivered at the memory of watching the ironwork flow away from her, rising to a thousand feet above the ground, the entire tower feeling like it was shifting and swaying in the wind.

"Relax," Clark murmured. "It's a brand-new elevator, not the old hydraulic one."

Lois simply glared. "You're not helping," she muttered, but hesitated again as they approached the elevator.

"We don't have to if you don't want to." His eyes sought hers, and for a moment all Lois could see or think about were those amazing cerulean depths.

"I want to," Lois said resolutely. "I'm not gonna spend the rest of my life afraid of it."

Clark grinned. "That's my Lois," he said, curling his fingers into hers. Then he added in a whisper, "C'mon, love - Superman's girlfriend can't be afraid of *heights*."

"Maybe *she* wasn't, but what about his *wife*?" Lois muttered. However, his remark gave her the determination to stride confidently up to the elevator, and endure the long ride to the very top. She refused to let any nervousness show, even strolling to the railing when the other passengers hung back, and casually looking down.

Way, way down. A lot further than the *Daily Planet* roof, in fact. And unlike *that* near-fatal fall, she'd had quite a bit of time in which to contemplate this particular drop. Lois felt her stomach lurch slightly. *Me and my idiot bravado...*

Strong arms around her, Clark's hands on the railing next to hers, his warmth against her shoulder, his breath ruffling her hair. Lois leaned back against him, the cool breeze filling her lungs, and sighed. "You," Clark murmured, kissing her temple, "are incredibly," his lips touched her cheek, "unbelievably," now he kissed her neck below her ear, "brave," and then murmured against the back of her neck, "and also gorgeous."

"Mmmm," Lois purred, and managed to mutter, "flatterer." A moment later, when she could make a coherent sentence, she continued, "Good distraction, though."

Clark undid her concentration by softly nibbling the nape of her neck. Over the sound of her sudden gasp, he replied, "Darling, we're on vacation - for once you're not obligated to nearly get yourself killed for some of my time."

Remembering the look on his face when he'd rescued her at this very tower - that incredulous, exasperated expression as he'd brought the plummeting elevator to a halt, followed by the smile he couldn't help in her presence - Lois started to chuckle.

Nudging her, Clark asked, "Just what are you laughing at, *madame*?"

Lois tipped her head back onto his shoulder and looked up at him, eyes sparkling with mischief. "I believe this is your floor."

His rich laughter warmed her better than the wine they'd drunk last night.

While the two restaurants in the Eiffel Tower both looked amazing, Lois and Clark didn't have reservations. Even this early in the day, both were crowded, so after perusing the exhibits and learning that it took 50 tons of paint to coat the tower, the pair headed off into Montmartre for lunch. All of the cafés tempted Lois; rich scents filled the air, and Clark chuckled to see her tacking across the wind like a hound after one particularly savory aroma.

At least, he was amused until she finally tracked down the scent she was looking for. The

sign on the street said *Bisaha*, and the mélange of spices coming from the restaurant tantalized Lois. Clark's keener nose picked up the odor of tobacco. Nearly all French cafés sold cigarettes, but this establishment also carried cigars and something else... A young woman came out to the sidewalk tables carrying a glass and steel contraption, from which rose-scented smoke wafted, and Clark heard Lois murmur, "They have hookahs."

"Lois..." Clark looked at her meaningfully.

She crossed her arms. "It's not actually unhealthy. Well, not as unhealthy as cigarettes. Besides, you can check my lungs anytime. And we're on vacation - we're *supposed* to indulge our vices." Lois gave him a come-hither grin, making it very clear that she was thinking of other activities she found very hard to resist.

Clark found that look irresistible, and returned the smile. "If you insist ... just once this trip, though. I love you - I want you to stay fantastically healthy and live to be a hundred."

How could she argue with that? Lois slipped her arm through his as they walked up to the maitre-d', a handsome dark-skinned man whose faint accent revealed itself as he showed them to an open table in the courtyard. Lois preferred to sit outdoors in Paris and watch the people walking by.

The French attitude toward sidewalk dining delighted her; just the absolutely civilized way everyone behaved, no boorish arguments to ruin the appetite. And that meant *everyone*. Two tables away from hers, a young woman sat nibbling stuffed grape leaves and occasionally holding one under the table for her gigantic dog, some kind of malamute mix. It looked like a wolf crossed with a teddy bear, and even so it ate delicately, never dropping a crumb. The girl who had been carrying the hookah stopped to top up the porcelain bowl beside the dog with mineral water.

The best thing about traveling is seeing how other people live, seeing what their definition of normal is. A dog at a restaurant? Americans would be scornful. A dog at a restaurant, wearing no leash - they'd fine the owner and take the dog to the pound. Here even the dogs are gracious.

And the woman who arrived to take their order was graciousness personified, a blonde who resembled a young Catherine Deneuve. As Lois inquired about the wine selection and the hookahs, she smiled and asked, "American?"

"Yes," Lois said, a little chagrined.

"Your accent is *très excellente, madame*, but I have an ear for the American voice. Please, go on with your order."

Clio, as she introduced herself, seemed quite pleased that they both ordered in French. She made them feel as if they were guests at her home, not customers in a restaurant, and by the time Lois and Clark decided what to sample, they had both privately decided this was their favorite place to eat. All before the first appetizer had been served. *Too bad I didn't live in Montmartre when I was in Paris before*, Lois thought, listening to soft Moroccan music playing inside the restaurant.

As soon as their order arrived, Lois knew why Clio had an ear for the American voice. Their waiter Larrimore was originally from New Orleans, and he pointed out the young woman they'd seen earlier as his sister. "Really, madame and monsieur, this is something of a family establishment. All of the employees are like the owners' children," he said charmingly, and left them in peace to enjoy the wine and the food.

"So what else do you want to do today?" Clark asked, taking a bite of his maftool and savoring the shredded chicken over couscous as he listened to his wife's reply.

Lois had a bite of her chicken and date tagine and made appreciative noises over the flavor. So few restaurants these days actually used the preserved lemons that gave the meat such a unique flavor. "Mmmm... Well, it's going to take us a couple of days to go through the Louvre. We could start today, or just get tickets for tomorrow so we don't have to stand in line quite as long in the morning."

"Sounds good to me, either way," Clark said. "If we get tickets for tomorrow, though, what do you want to do tonight? You've lived here, I haven't, so I'm trusting you to know everything."

"Don't I always?" Lois teased. "Actually, Clark, I didn't do the tourist thing when I was here. I was too busy hunting for *you* the first few months, and then I was too pregnant to want to do much sightseeing, and after that I had the twins. So this is new to me, too."

A dark-haired little girl racing past their table forestalled Clark's affectionate reply. In spite of knowing that the twins were in Kansas, Lois and Clark both turned to follow the child's progress - she had the same curly raven hair as Kala, was nearly the same age even...

Everyone else in the restaurant seemed bemused by the darting child, but her destination was soon clear. A young woman - almost too young to be the girl's mother, but "Maman!" was what the little one called her - had just come in and was talking to the maitre-d'.

"Breannan!" the young mother scolded, unable to keep a fond tone out of her voice. "Did we not teach you not to run in restaurants?"

Lois blinked; the woman spoke English, with a hint of the American south in her accent. But the child replied in perfect French, "*Je suis desolée, maman,*" and then continued in accented English, "You were taking too long talking to M'sieur Deschain."

"Oh, well, *pardonnez-moi* for keeping you waiting, little duchess." The young woman rolled her eyes, still chuckling, as she carried the girl back to the table from which she had evidently run.

Lois, amused by the similarity to herself and Kala, couldn't help watching them. The man who stood to hold out a chair for the mother was probably old enough to be her father, but it was the little girl he spoke to like a daughter. "Breannan, *ma fille, mon petit ange*, patience is a virtue."

"This coming from you?" her mother muttered.

Lois sighed; much as she loved a vacation without the twins...

Clark's hand was suddenly on hers, his fingers curling protectively into her palm. "You miss our little troublemakers, don't you?"

"Yeah, I do," she replied. "But I do love being able to be with you without any sudden interruptions - other than major natural disasters."

He chuckled. "True. I loathe leaving them, though - I already missed so much..."

She bit her lip. He'd just given her the perfect opening, but was this the best time to reveal the little secret she'd been keeping for the past three weeks? "I know... Listen, what would you think about ... you know, if we could ... maybe not missing out?"

For a moment, Clark just looked perplexed. "Lois, what are you talking about?"

"You know," she sidled around the topic, "maybe ... being there for everything ... next time..."

Understanding dawned, and Clark leaned forward, resting his chin on his palm for a moment. "Lois, if I was half as devious as you, I would pretend ignorance until I forced you to admit you want another baby."

"Hey, *you're* the one constantly sighing over the fact that you couldn't be with me when I

was pregnant with Jason and Kala. Not that it was any kind of picnic." Lois was trying desperately to sound casual, but Clark saw through her as usual.

"It's all right, Lois. You don't sound like a silly romantic. Just like a woman madly in love who wants to grant her husband's most impossible dream." He squeezed her fingers gently. "I'd love to have another child ... but you had that surgery..."

Lois wouldn't meet his eyes, and then blurted out, "I wasn't really in Charlotte."

Clark cocked his head. Three weeks ago she'd been in the North Carolina capital on business, supposedly... "Then where were you?"

Still staring at her wineglass instead of his face, Lois replied very softly, "There's this clinic up in Raleigh... They do microsurgery. Two hours, you go home the next day..."

His hand slowly withdrew from hers, and Lois looked up. The expression on his face chilled her: shock, indignation, even a little anger... "You had the tubal ligation reversed without even telling me?"

"I'm telling you now..."

"Lois..." Clark looked away, looked anywhere but at her. Keeping his voice very low, his tone very controlled, he continued, "You should've talked to me about this. It's *surgery*, Lois - I don't care how safe it is, there's *always* a risk."

"You just would've been a basket case like you're being now. Which the twins would have noticed," Lois pointed out quietly. "Besides, I'm *fine*. I was fine *the same day*. And it was *supposed* to be a surprise."

"Yeah, it was that," Clark replied a little too swiftly, his eyes hard when they swung back to her. "Nothing like the surprise I would've gotten if something happened to you. Lois, I love you - didn't you think I should know about this first?"

"I didn't want you to worry, Clark. Which you would have done. Which is made even more obvious by the way you're acting right now." She hadn't wanted to upset him, but found she couldn't even look him in the eye. All she had honestly thought of was the look on his face when she told him that they could have another child together, to see his face light up with amazement. *Oh, he's amazed, that's for sure... Lois, you're an idiot. That's what you get for acting like a stupid lovesick moron. Wishing and having are two different things. Haven't you learned that by now?* Looking away, she closed her eyes with a sigh.

Clark was still glaring at her; she could feel his gaze even through her closed lids. He kept his voice low, but the intensity of his tone wasn't lost on her. "Lois, why did you hide it? Why did you *lie* about it? What could possibly go through that brilliant mind of yours to make doing this secretly seem like a *good* idea?"

Lois flinched a little, her jaw tightening; she didn't want him to see how much that hurt, but he saw through her more clearly than anyone else ever could. Meeting his eyes again, she whispered softly, "Happy anniversary, Kal-El."

And in spite of his anger - which was only fear for her safety, after all - Kal-El saw what she meant. This was to be her anniversary gift to him, and what could be more priceless, more treasured, than a child? Lois' intentions were excellent, as usual - unfortunately, she thought nothing of having that surgery. It was *her* body, after all, and she was merely reversing a decision she'd made years ago while he was gone. The risk was negligible to her; her driving was more dangerous.

He could see her reasoning as clearly as the wounded look in her hazel eyes. And he knew she was accustomed to making her own decisions, never seeking support from anyone. This wasn't the first time in their marriage that she had gone ahead and done something he

would have preferred to be consulted on.

Sighing in frustration, Clark took her hand again. "Lois. I'm honored that you want to have my child - this time *knowing* what's going on. And it's a very sweet thought to surprise me with this on our anniversary. But you can't just go making major decisions and having surgery like this..."

Saying *you can't* was a mistake, he realized, as the fire leaped up in those hazel eyes he loved so much. "It's *my* body, Kal-El, don't you dare tell me what I can and cannot do."

He squeezed her fingers lightly and softened his voice even more. "It's your body and your decision, Lois - but it's not *just* yours anymore. We're pledged to each other, heart, soul, mind, and body. I'd never presume to tell you that you couldn't have the reversal surgery. But I have a right to know what you're doing, just like you'd have a right to know if I took a risk."

"You do *that* every morning when you go out," she muttered.

"Not necessarily," Clark argued. "There's very little in this world that can harm me, Lois. Except losing you."

"And Luthor. He's out there somewhere."

"He's one man. A brilliant, devious man, but he's only one man." Clark was stroking her palm now, easing the tension from her hand. "I'd rather deal with Luthor and kryptonite than risk never seeing you again. We've been through too much to lose each other now. Besides which, what would happen to Jason and Kala if there had been complications?"

"All right," Lois whispered, eyes downcast. "You've made your point."

"Have I?" He reached across the table and lifted her chin, making her look at him. "Keep me informed, love. You don't have to keep secrets from me."

Lois just sighed and covered her face with her free hand. "Why does this have to be so damn difficult? Why can't *anything* in this relationship be easy?"

"If it was easy, we'd take it for granted," Clark murmured. "It was easy the first time, and look how that turned out."

"Yeah, I turned out pregnant and you turned up missing," Lois snapped. "Real easy."

Guilt had always made her snappish, but knowing that didn't make it any less abrasive. Rather than argue, Clark looked away from her, still irritated. Why did she have to hide so much from him? Didn't she know he loved her completely - even at moments like this, when she could be stubborn and short-tempered?

His gaze fell on the dark-haired little girl, so like their own Kala. The thought of his daughter - so bold, and yet so hungry for affection; so sure of herself, and yet still craving his approval - softened his heart again. Of course he knew where Kala got that from: Lois. The tough-as-nails reporter found it so hard to admit how much she needed him, how much his support meant to her.

That showed him a new perspective on his actions. In spite of the fact that she'd kept it a secret, Lois had acted with the best of intentions. She'd confessed to him, embarrassed by the romanticism of it but still craving another child with him. And here he was throwing a fit because she *could've* gotten hurt, even though obviously she was fine. Letting go of his annoyance with a sigh, Clark started to hum the song they'd danced to at their wedding ... and at the Pulitzers, what felt like a lifetime ago. *Heart and soul, I begged to be adored. Lost control, and tumbled overboard...*

Lois still looked away, her shoulders tense. This surprise had gone badly, and after all, hadn't she known it would? Hadn't she known all along that he would be upset at her for taking risks? That was only his concern for her speaking, and she began to regret snapping at him.

After a moment, she started to hum the song along with him, its melody soothing her. *Look at me, it's got me loving you ... madly... That little kiss you stole, held all my heart and soul...* Then her gaze met his, and she whispered, "I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted," Clark told her. There was no use dwelling on it, so he resolutely left the spat behind. Besides, the simple fact that Lois - whose opinions on pregnancy and childrearing had once been infamous - wanted to have his children, *again*, was enough to utterly distract him. "Now, since you obviously came through the surgery all right, I guess I'm allowed to be excited."

As ever, his grin brightened her mood. "You're that ready to be a dad again? Only this time, you get to change diapers and wake up for midnight feedings and get spit-up on your best suit."

"Gladly," Clark replied. "Opportunity of a lifetime. I mean, these aren't just any kids. These are *our* kids. Speaking of whom, what will the twins think, do you suppose?"

Lois rolled her eyes. "*God*. They've both been hoping for a little brother or sister to tip the odds for the last couple years. The only way we can satisfy them is to have another set of fraternal twins."

Grinning wickedly, Clark said, "I'll try."

They spent the rest of the meal unable to keep their eyes off each other, much to the amusement of the staff.

The next day, Lois woke a little late. She poured espresso for herself and wandered out onto the balcony, idly thinking that Kal-El was late getting back. He had probably slept in as well, and with reason. Lois grinned at the memory; they'd picked up a bottle of Chateau Y'Quem and some petits fours on the way home last night. Consuming the dessert had wakened other hungers, and it was late indeed before they slept. So late it was early, in fact.

But he had still gone out to check on the rest of the world. *Kal-El's morning routine doesn't vary even for vacation. A few quick trips around the globe while I'm still asleep, make sure everything's mostly all right, and then he makes breakfast or picks something up on the way back in. Unless there's a landslide in India or something, in which case I actually have to cook.*

*The kids love it when I sleep in. I wonder why... Good thing they aren't underfoot now, much as I miss them. The twins could've put a serious damper on Project 'Get Mommy Pregnant'. Code name, Project 'Not **Another** Kent!' if Perry ever hears about it.*

Lois smiled a wicked little smile, sipping her coffee. For once she was fully awake and showered, although not yet dressed for the day. She stood barefoot on their balcony, wearing the red satin bathrobe that ironically complimented to the blue terrycloth one (with S-shield and the legend 'Superdad') the kids had given him last Christmas.

By the time her wavy black hair had dried, he arrived home. Lois smirked at the sound of the key in the lock, but composed herself to look sleepy. Kal-El came to the balcony door, moving almost silently for such a large man. "Lois?"

"Mmmm?" she replied, turning to face him. He had to be able to smell the spicy vanilla scent that clung to her, had to see the sultry look in her eyes.

"Did you just get out of bed?" he asked teasingly.

"No," Lois purred, setting the mug of coffee on the solid railing. "But I'm more than ready to go back if you are."

As a wonderful expression of surprise spread across his features, Lois slowly pulled the

knot out of her belt, and the red satin robe fell open. The black lingerie beneath brought an entirely different expression to his cerulean eyes, and Kal-El grinned as Lois came back into the apartment toward him.

Once back across the threshold, Lois shrugged the robe off her shoulders, reaching up to kiss him as Kal-El slid his arms around her greedily. Farther into the apartment, out of sight of prying eyes, Lois had to stand on tiptoe to nibble his earlobe affectionately. Laughing, Kal-El lifted her up, carried her easily to their bedroom. "You, my darling husband," Lois chuckled, "are wearing entirely too much clothing." With those words she set about disrobing him, lips greedy on his exposed skin, every now and then breaking off to swat his hands away from her lacy slip.

"What's got you so suddenly playful?" Kal-El asked her between kisses, vaporizing one strap of the slip with a brief flicker of heat vision. He slid his hand up to cup her breast before Lois could wonder why the slip was suddenly slipping.

Lois purred, arching into his ministrations, and then wriggled down out of his grasp to unbuckle his belt. "What we talked about yesterday," she murmured in reply, trying to shrug the now-nonexistent strap back up.

"Oh, is this an apology for keeping secrets from me again?" Kal-El teased, catching her wrists and pulling her close for another long kiss.

Winding her leg around his, Lois pulled back to catch her breath before replying, "No, *last night* was the apology. You didn't forget already?"

He pinned her against his chest, and his warm breath tickled her neck as he murmured, "I'll never forget the taste of Sauternes on your skin, Lois. Sweet wine ... sweeter woman."

Trying to deny her sudden shiver of recall, Lois protested, "I am *not* sweet."

Kal-El laughed again, and the wicked gleam in his eyes made Lois wince with realization before he even said, "Yes, you are - and I would know."

The memories momentarily rendered Lois incapable of fending him off, and she found herself on the bed, his lips on her collarbone, before she could stop him. "Why do I get the impression I'm not going to be the one in control like I planned this time?" she asked faintly.

"Because you're a better guesser than planner," Kal-El whispered against her skin, and then his mouth was on her breast and Lois couldn't form a complete sentence.

As things turned out, they saved the Louvre for the last few days of their trip. The fortress-turned-museum contained works of art that rendered even a voluble reporter like Lois Lane speechless. She and Clark took their time wandering through the various rooms, knowing that the sheer size of the museum and the fact that only parts of it were open on any given day meant that they had to come back at least twice.

By then they'd fallen into a routine of waking early, having a light breakfast, going shopping or sightseeing, and breaking for lunch around 2 PM when the tourists started to taper off. Many restaurants wouldn't seat them after the normal lunch hours, and Lois was overjoyed to realize that *Bisaha* continued serving between the prescribed mealtimes, albeit with a limited menu. It seemed like the restaurant had a devoted group of regulars, for Lois and Clark noticed the little girl who looked like Kala again, as well as several college students who seemed to show up every day just to drink wine and talk about theatre.

In the afternoons, they visited museums and galleries, indulging in a surfeit of all types of art. Once they took a boat tour of the Seine, chuckling at the irony of the city's oldest bridge being named Pont Neuf.

And of course, as the vacation drew to a close, Lois tried to make the most of every hour. Particularly those hours they spent in the apartment. *Something in the water must be an aphrodisiac*, she thought, leaning against Clark's shoulder as they left the Louvre and walked toward their apartment. *Not that I'm complaining, mind you. It's just a little surprising to realize we've been married a year and we're still this interested in...*

Lois' pleasant reverie came to a halt at the moment Clark stopped walking. She looked around, but didn't see anything. "What is it?" she murmured, noticing the wary expression on his face.

His voice was so low she could barely hear 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."

Cursing softly, Lois muttered, "Just fabulous. Can't we go *anywhere* without something like this happening?"

Clark was already looking around, missing the former ubiquity of phone booths. Lois caught his arm, whispering furiously, "You do realize the tabloids are gonna love this, right? 'Superman in Paris - on Lois Lane's anniversary vacation.' Will we *ever* hear the end of it?"

"You have a better idea?" he muttered, spotting a revolving door two streets over that might be useful.

"No," Lois sighed, resigned herself to *another* break-room gossip session about herself and her 'ex'. "Go do your thing ... hero."

Clark kissed her cheek and disappeared, only a swirl of wind to mark his departure. Knowing better than to get too close - even if there were no other reporters around, every blogger had a camera these days - Lois ambled nearer, watching the sky. That was another thing she'd never admit to, but he probably knew. The sight of him in uniform, going about his duty, still affected her. *He may drive me nuts on occasion, but ... a more perfect man simply doesn't exist. That's me, Lois Lane: never settle for less when you can get the best.*

The whole thing was over in just a few minutes: a frightened squeak from the would-be robber as he was flown above the city's roofs to the nearest police station, the murmurs of awe and surprise from the few pedestrians in the area, and then less than five minutes later, Clark was strolling up to her, adjusting his tie.

Lois couldn't wipe the silly smile off her face, even if she was trying to look stern. "Well, at least the *Star* doesn't have to wonder what to print in the gossip column this week," she said sarcastically, running her fingers through his hair to smooth the curl.

Clark returned her grin, sliding an arm around her waist. "Too bad it would create more gossip to fly you back to our apartment, hmm?"

Letting her fingers trail down the side of his face, fascinated as always by that handsome profile, Lois purred, "Too bad, indeed. I might not be as ... inspired ... by your heroics when we get there."

He hugged her tight to his side. "You love it. Admit it, Lois, you enjoy the heck out of bedding a superhero."

The scolding look she shot him, accompanied by a smack to the shoulder, only made him chuckle. "Shut up!"

"That's all you can come back with? Must be true, then..."

This time she punched his shoulder, glaring in mock fury, and Clark dissolved into laughter as he led her home. All Lois would say to him after that was a muttered, "Be glad it's our last day in Paris, or I'd make you sleep on the couch, Kent."

Clark sighed disappointedly, but his eyes gleamed with mischief. "But Lois, there's no room for both of us on the couch, unless you..."

"Hush!" Her hand was starting to sting from swatting him, so Clark relented for the few moments it took them to walk to the apartment.

And then had the satisfaction of hearing Lois yelp with surprise as he picked her up and carried her over the threshold.

Lois stepped off the jet at Kansas City International Airport, Clark just behind her. *It's good to be back in the States ... although I'm going to miss the food in Paris. Not the elevator in the Tower, though - if I **never** see that again, it'll be too soon.*

She didn't get much time to reflect on their homecoming, however. As soon as they cleared the gate, they heard two young voices shrill with excitement "Mommy! Daddy!" Lois grinned, dropping her carryon bag and kneeling with outstretched arms. Kala thudded into her embrace first, shortly followed by Jason, and the intrepid reporter nearly fell over backwards. "Mommy! Mommy!"

Laughing out loud, Lois could only hold them tightly. There was nothing in the world like the love that washed over her when these small arms were around her, not even her love for Kal-El. And she knew he felt the same way. "Careful, guys. I missed you both so much, but Mommy would like to make it back to Metropolis in one piece, if that's okay."

Clark had caught her shoulder as they giggled, and the twins swarmed him next. "Daddy!" Jason yelled, leaping into his father's arms. Other passengers turned to smile at the tall man whose two children hugged him ecstatically. "We missed you!" "Did you see that Eye Tower?" "Was Paris neat?" "Did ya see where we were born?"

Martha helped Lois up, murmuring, "They were perfect little angels until Kala heard your plane come in. After that, well..."

"Sorry," Lois whispered back, trying to hide a smile as both women watched Clark and the twins talking excitedly, Kala now perched on her Daddy's shoulders, "they're getting better with hiding it. It's just that when they get excited sometimes..."

As Ben walked up, the dark-haired woman smiled at him fondly. Clark and Ben were still having trouble adjusting to being a permanent part of each other's lives, but the older man was trying to make a conscious effort to shore up the awkwardness. She appreciated that he was so earnest about it and knew that he would eventually win him over. It would just take time. Going to hug her father-in-law, she continued, louder now, "Hey, Ben. Thanks again for looking after these rascals. The older they get, the more energetic they get. It's all I have to keep up with them myself."

"You're welcome, but they're no trouble," he replied. "We're taking both trucks, mine and Martha's, so you have enough room for everyone and the luggage."

"Thanks, Ben," Clark said, trying to walk with Jason on his hip and Kala hanging from his leg. Martha hugged her son warmly, chuckling at the twins, and then shooed them all toward the baggage claim.

What with all the flights arriving, it took the group of them some time to get back to the parking lot. All the while Jason and Kala bounced around them, whispering excitedly. When they all finally got to their vehicles, they loaded the luggage in the back. Any confusion about who would ride with whom was solved in typical Lane fashion by Kala, who grabbed Clark's hand and proclaimed, "I'm riding with Grandpa Ben! Daddy, you'll come with us?"

Martha grinned at them both, linking her arm through Lois'. "Let's let Kala and the boys

ride together. We'll take our young radioactive lizard here to protect us from any bandits on the road."

"Yay!" Jason crowed with delight, stretching his arms up so one of them could pick him up. Lois obliged, carrying him to the truck's cab. Looking at Martha, he whispered, "Can I tell Mommy now?"

"Not if you want it to be a surprise," Martha replied serenely, and that mysterious discussion was all Lois could wring from them on the topic.

Ben's truck arrived at the Kent farm first, Martha just behind. The trip had been less awkward than most of the times Clark found himself alone with his stepfather, probably because Kala didn't know the two men were still a bit discomfited in each other's presence. Her cheerful chatter, a running commentary of everything the twins had been doing interspersed with questions about Paris, kept them from having to talk about anything else.

"An' me and Jason got you and Mommy a present for your anniversary," Kala added as Ben switched off the ignition and Clark got out of the car. "I hope you like it a lot!"

"I'm sure we will," Clark told her, ruffling her hair. Although he'd loved the time away from the demands of family and work - one of his jobs, at least - it was delightful to see the kids again. Jason had no sooner jumped out of Martha's truck than he ran to Daddy again, towing Lois by one hand. "C'mon! You gotta see the present!"

Martha and Ben were both laughing conspiratorially, and Clark and Lois let the twins drag them into the house. Jason and Kala disappeared into the kitchen, and over the sound of them quarreling over who got to present this mysterious gift, Ben and Martha came inside. "Now, you too, they picked this gift all by themselves," Martha said quietly. "So be happy, all right?"

"Of course," Lois replied, her eyes briefly rolling heavenward at the memory of some of the gifts she and Lucy had gotten for their parents when they were young. Ella still had a pair of fuzzy slippers somewhere...

"Surprise!" Jason and Kala chorused, padding back into the room. They'd compromised at last, and Lois' jaw dropped to see Kala holding a bright purple leash while Jason carried the sleepy-eyed puppy it was attached to.

"A dog?" she said with not a little surprise, shooting a glance at Martha. *What the... We live in an apartment in the city, guys!*

Clark, however, dropped to his knees. "Aww ... look, Lois, she's such a cute pup! Beagle, right?"

"Uh-huh, she's a purebred Beagle," Kala said proudly. "An' she's just old enough to leave her mommy, so we can take her home right away."

"That's really sweet of you two," Lois said, knowing full well she couldn't find a diplomatic way out of this with Clark stroking the pup's droopy ears and cooing. Already she could feel a headache forming... "So what's her name?"

Jason and Kala looked at her like she'd gone crazy. "She's *your* present," Kala said sternly.

"*You* get to name her," Jason finished. "But I like Mothra."

His sister elbowed him. "I like Elizabeth. It's actually a *girl's* name, not like *Mothra*."

Clark beamed up at Lois, the tiny puppy licking his fingers with a slow seriousness as her tail wagged. "Let's call her Bagel."

The Pulitzer-Prize-winning reporter crossed her arms and stared at him. "Bagel."

"Yeah, Bagel," Clark said, scratching the dog's chin.

"You want to name the Beagle, Bagel," Lois stated blandly.

"Of course. Don't you think it fits?"

I think that's the most cheese-tastic thing I've heard since ... nevermind, I don't think I've ever heard anything that cheesy! Sometimes I forget just how much of him was always Clark Kent. And that the innocent screwball humor of the Clark I knew wasn't really was that much of an act at all. But all she said aloud was, "Sure, honey. I think any dog would be proud to bear the name of breakfast food."

After yet another flight the next day, this time with Bagel the Beagle in a special carryon bag that Clark kept talking to for the entire trip, Lois finally made it back to her apartment. *Their* apartment, she reminded herself, lying back on the bed with exhaustion while Clark and the twins fussed over the puppy. *Well, I wanted to come home from Paris with a baby. I just didn't know Clark's new 'kid' would have four feet and a sock fetish.*

The landlord had been almost as delighted with Bagel's sudden arrival as Lois herself, but when Clark held the tiny black, tan, and white pup out to him, and promised to pay for any damages she caused, the man was won over. Lois just rolled her eyes.

For a while she'd been hearing yapping from the kitchen, where Bagel was now ensconced, but silence descended on the house. It seemed that the puppy had finally decided to rest for a while, and for once Clark and the twins were being quiet, too.

Lois closed her eyes and sighed. It had been an exciting week - a deliciously exhausting one as well. Hopefully all of their recreation had achieved the desired result...

Gently, one hand drifted down to rest on the curve of her belly, an old familiar gesture from nearly eight years ago. She heard Clark come in quietly, and opened her eyes enough to turn to him and smile hopefully. *Maybe I got my wish after all ... maybe we both did.*