

# For A Moment

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: K+

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*I cannot **believe** it's been forty-two weeks*, Lois thought, staring up at the Fortress' crystal ceiling. *And it's not over yet. My God.* She was lying flat on her back with a large round crystal suspended over her. It glowed brilliantly, allowing the computers to minutely scan her pregnant belly without any kind of intrusion.

"Perhaps six or seven more weeks," Jor-El said. "Their lungs are not yet fully developed. It is difficult to determine."

Lois sighed. "Are we done? This isn't exactly comfortable, you know."

Clark slid his arm around her shoulders, kissing her forehead. "Honey, just a little longer. Jor-El's doing a complete scan. Just try to relax. Do you want a pillow?"

"I'll be fine," she murmured, closing her eyes. She caught Clark's hand and squeezed it, turning her focus inward. Pregnancy had turned out to be nothing like she imagined...

Clark stroked Lois' expanding belly gently as they lazed in bed on a Saturday morning, his head resting on his wife's shoulder. "So which are you hoping for?" he asked, apropos of nothing. "Son or daughter?"

From where her cheek rested against his hair, he heard a muttered, "Healthy."

He glanced up at her, recognizing that I'm-trying-not-to-look-worried light lurking in her eyes despite the small smile she gave him. They were both, even now, still adjusting to the knowledge of impending parenthood, but Lois was the more nervous. And the one trying the hardest not to show it. Lowering his head again, Kal-El nuzzled his nose into her hair, strong arms surrounding her. "Lois, you can stop worrying. Everything's okay. All the tests so far have been *fine*."

Lois sighed heavily. Sometimes it was both a blessing and a never-ending annoyance that he could read her so well, especially on this topic. Especially when she was a little shamed by her uncertainty. "Yeah, but we're relying almost entirely on the Fortress' database, and your father can't help getting squicked out by the thought that we're growing this baby inside me - where's it's *supposed* to be - instead of in a proper Kryptonian birthing matrix," she growled, remembering their arguments. "He's dead certain this kid is going to be completely screwed up by my influence. The great legacy of the House of El, gone down the drain thanks to one human broodmare."

And there was another issue she'd been struggling with, he knew. Although Jor-El had been lightening up on Lois in recent months, which had been a blessing when the first mood-swings had begun, she still had moments where his first opinion still wouldn't let her go.

"I'm glad to have you carrying the legacy," Clark murmured, rubbing her shoulders. He didn't require any special effort to make his voice sound sincere; this was the simple truth. "I can't think of anyone else who'd be up to the task. I mean, you're *Lois Lane*. I'm honored that I got to father *your* legacy."

"I don't feel like Lois Lane right now," the reporter sighed angrily, although he didn't miss the smile that flitted across her lips. "At this point, I'm pretty sure I don't even feel like Lois Lane to *you*. What *I* feel like is like I swallowed a bowling ball. I had to buy a whole new wardrobe to fit around this kid, remember? See how honored you are in two or three months when I'm *twice* this size and still gaining."

The baby had been growing a little slower than a normal human pregnancy, which kept them out of doctors' offices. Kryptonian gestation was approximately twelve months, and at this point no one knew exactly how long it would take for a hybrid of the two species. Lois was glad that her weight gain seemed to indicate a shorter pregnancy than a pure Kryptonian - her reaction upon hearing 'twelve months' had been stark white-faced horror.

Kal-El bent to kiss her stomach. "Lois, don't be silly," he murmured. "You're *beautiful*." That, too, was perfect honesty. He found her changing figure a source of wonder and delight, and if Lois doubted his feelings, she had only to reflect on the fact that his interest in her hadn't waned in the slightest - though he was exceedingly tender now, out of concern for their child.

The look of absolute cynicism told him all he needed to know about her doubts. "Yeah, like the broad side of a barn," she snapped moodily, staring unhappily at the quite obvious bump that raised the fabric of her nightgown. "I'm getting to where I can't even see my feet. There are battleships that are smaller than I am at this minute, I bet."

He blew a raspberry on her belly, making her yelp. "Stop talking trash about my wife," Kal-El warned, looking up at her sternly. This tendency to speak ill of herself had to be stopped; Lois was entirely too worried about what pregnancy was doing to her looks, when it had only made her more beautiful in his eyes. "I'm serious, Lois. You've definitely got that pregnancy 'glow' thing going on..."

Now her skepticism was apparent in the way she rolled her eyes at him, her expression making it clear that she thought he was trying too hard to appease her. In Lois-speak, *I call bullshit*. "Uh-huh," was her smirking reply. "That is definitely just an old wives' tale. What you're actually seeing is the radioactive shine caused by all the crazy-ass fruit juices I've been chugging. Why couldn't I be like Lucy? *She* only craved cake batter ice cream with pickles on top at four in the morning. Then fast-food fish sandwiches and strawberry cheesecake shakes with Joanna. *Me?* **Ha!** Here I am going nuts when I walk past some tiny little hole-in-the-wall grocery store on a story and can't figure out what smells so damn good, and it turns out it's some freaky fruit from Chile that I can't even *pronounce*."

Kal-El grinned; that was one of the powers he could use to make things easier for her. Since the morning sickness had ended (mercifully) and her appetite had picked up, he had taken to bringing Lois a sampling of fruit from around the world, not sure what she would crave next. One week it had been a certain type of potato grown only the Andes and as much jicama as he could find; most recently she wanted passion fruit, pomegranates, and something called Cape gooseberry - a relative of *nightshade*, actually, but Lois had eaten nearly a pound of them in two days. One week she'd gone through an entire case of guava juice, amusing the *Daily Planet* employees who watched her drink it alongside her huge salads of raw baby spinach and kale. Right now, she was mad for cherimoya - a fruit whose skin could cause

paralysis and whose seeds were used as insecticide, but whose flesh tasted like sherbet. It would have been less funny if she hadn't constantly complained about the strangeness of her cravings.

Lois swatted his shoulder. He couldn't argue the abuse; he hadn't even tried to hide his amusement. "Sure, laugh at me" she growled. "You're not the one eating through a half a ton of fruit and gaining accordingly, hero. You laugh now. You won't even recognize me a month from now."

"Lois, you've lived on headlines, caffeine, and cigarettes for most of your life," Clark scolded her gently, moving to run his hand over the swell of her stomach with infinite care. "I have to say I'm glad to see you obsessing over something *healthy*. Although the way you complain about the fruit juices, people would think I was making you eat just unflavored oatmeal or something."

Again, the frustrated groan that usually accompanied the Lane Pout of Aggravation, although it was clear that she was fighting a smile of her own. The sun was starting to break through the clouds again; it was a sight, and a metaphor, he was getting used to. "Actually, no. I'm not obsessing. I'm at the mercy of whatever your child decides it wants me to nosh on, you big jerk. You act as if I have a choice. What it craves, I eat, or I go slowly mad."

"It?" Clark said, his eyebrows rising.

"Stop with the kicked-puppy look, Clark. You know I want them as much as you do. It's just... at this point, I get sick of saying 'he or she'," Lois explained with a shrug. "And we don't know which one we're having."

Clark looked up at her consideringly. "Would you like me to check?"

His wife glanced down at him just as thoughtfully. They had avoided the question so far; it would've been difficult to tell before now, and Clark hadn't wanted to peer into Lois' womb without her invitation. It seemed terribly presumptuous, even if the child was his as well. Not to mention the fact that it had never occurred to Lois before now.

She was quiet a moment longer, her expression still pensive as she considered. Finally, she asked with a trace of worry in her tone. "Are you sure it won't hurt him? Or her?"

"Of course not," Clark replied, shaking his head with a slight smile. "It's not really x-ray vision, people just call it that."

That seemed to make up her mind. Despite the way her nerves were on edge with the fear of knowing for sure not just what they would be having, but any potential problems, curiosity finally outweighed fear. "Then go on already," she urged, the anticipation coloring her features now that she had decided. "The tension's killing me."

Laughing softly, he finally let himself look. And look. He saw the curve of an arm, tiny fingers clenched in a loose fist, and then the roundness of the belly, legs drawn up, all ten toes delicate and perfect. Peripherally aware of Lois staring at him intently while she worried her thumbnail, Clark began to smile. "Well, Mrs. Lane-Kent, from what I see here, you're going to have a perfectly healthy baby boy."

The relief closed his wife's eyes, sagging back into the pillow. She had never realized just how much she had needed the reassurance that their child was all right. Knowing the sex was just an added bonus. "Oh, thank *God*," Lois sighed, opening up eyes that were teary when she met his gaze. It was impossible to hold back the smile that rose to her lips, the wonder clear on her face. "A boy. We're going to have a boy."

"*And a perfectly healthy baby girl*," Clark added, grinning. He'd looked past the first baby only to see another, just as perfect, this one sucking her tiny thumb. "We're having *twins*."

Lois could only stare at him, thunderstruck. As if being pregnant in the first place hadn't been a shock, now they were having twins? *Twins?! No wonder she was huge!* The reporter suppressed the urge to wail like a champ, only managing, "Oh *God*, Clark, forget the battleship. I'm going to be bigger than the Titanic *and* the Mauritania put together!"

Richard White, visiting his uncle's newspaper between college semesters, stopped at the water cooler to survey his surroundings. Very nice place Uncle Perry had here; a constant hum of conversation buzzed in the air, and the clacking of keys added percussion as reporters typed. The scent of newsroom coffee - black as a lobbyist's heart, thick as a politician's skull, and stronger than a reporter's hatred of those two little words 'no comment' - permeated the entire room. "I could get to like this," Richard muttered under his breath.

"Goddammit, the whole frikkin' place reeks of coffee, and I can't have a *drop*." That snarl came from Richard's left, and he turned to see a vision in red sweep past him. A gorgeous woman with black hair and impossibly long legs, *very* delectable, the sway of her flared skirt nearly hypnotizing him. Richard watched appreciatively as she headed for a desk at the front of the bullpen and called, "Jimmy, will you run out and get me some orange juice? Please? It's bad enough I had to give up the damn cigarettes..."

"Sure thing, Ms. Lane," the photographer called. Richard's eyebrows went up. So that was Lois Lane, huh? No *wonder* Perry's paper got all the Superman exclusives. Couldn't blame the guy - she had to be the hottest thing in any galaxy. She paused to get something out of a desk drawer, bending slightly, and the editor's nephew grinned.

Another man had come up to the water cooler, and Richard remarked in the conspiratorial tones of a dedicated bachelor, "Now *that's* nice. God, those legs are incredible..."

The other man froze in the middle of reaching for the cold water tap. "You *do* realize she's pregnant, right?"

Lois, still unaware she was being watched, chose that moment to take off her jacket. "Damn, it's hot in here," she muttered under her breath, tossing the jacket over the back of the chair. Now Richard saw her profile, the black blouse fitting close against the curve of her belly.

A few months along, maybe, nothing drastic - and the lady was still gorgeous. Chuckling, Richard said to the other man, "That's fine, I like kids."

His first remark had sounded disbelieving, almost prudish. Now the man's tone was a trifle sharper. "She's also married."

*Oh, one of those guys. Mr. Morality.* Richard couldn't resist tweaking the man's sensibilities just a little. "Never stopped me before," he said with his best wicked grin, regardless of the fact that he generally did respect the bonds of matrimony.

That was probably the wrong thing to say, he quickly realized. The other man straightened up all the way, pulling his shoulders back, and Richard was suddenly conscious of the fact that the guy had several inches and at least forty pounds on him. In spite of the fact that he was wearing glasses, all of sudden the other man didn't look so meek. "She happens to be my wife," he said stiffly.

*Aw, shit. I'm about to get my ass kicked. Uncle Perry will be so proud.* Richard managed a weak chuckle. "Then you are the luckiest man I ever met," he replied, offering his hand. "Richard White. D'ya know where I can get some ketchup for my shoe? I've got a serious case of foot-in-mouth disease."

Blue eyes narrowed, and he introduced himself simply, without shaking hands. "Clark Kent."

As Richard was wondering if Mr. Kent had decided whether to toss him out a window or just pound him into the floor like a tent peg, someone hollered "Hey!" from across the room. The gorgeous raven-haired woman that had brought about this mishap, however unknowingly, was leaning against the door to his uncle's office, arms crossed, one eyebrow arched. "Good Lord, Clark, would you tone it down? I swear, *I'm* supposed to be the one with the mood swings."

Richard saw Clark relax, and all of a sudden he looked like an ordinary guy. The editor's nephew couldn't believe he'd ever been nervous. "Sorry about that," Richard added. "I'm not really that much of a dog; I was just yanking your chain."

"Apology accepted," Clark said, and shook hands at last.

Lois had approached them, and swatted Clark's shoulder lightly. "Forgive him, he's a little overprotective lately," she said to Richard, giving Clark an arch look. "Lois Lane. Pleased to meet you, Mr. ..."

"White," Richard said, avoiding the view of her cleavage with considerable effort and meeting her eyes instead. "Richard White. I really admired your series on the Metropolis Strangler - a lot of journalists wouldn't have the guts to interview the guy in prison after they caught him."

"I'm not a lot of journalists," Lois replied, offering her hand. "Perry's nephew, the flyboy, right?"

"Precisely," Richard said, shaking hands. "Four years in the Air Force. I'm a bit nuts about flight - including a certain flying story of yours. I'm a fan - I may never wash this hand again, now that I've shaken with Superman's chronicler."

Lois chuckled, looking amused and slightly speculative. Richard knew that look; she'd noticed his admiration, and her expression said, *If I wasn't married, I might... As it is, too bad, I'm taken*. She simply smiled and said, "Yeah, I get that a lot."

For some reason, Clark was barely suppressing a chuckle. "Well, honey, you *are* one of Perry's star reporters."

"*One* of?" she said archly, turning a glare at him. "Yeah, because *you* get so many Superman exclusives."

"There *are* other stories in town," Clark replied with a smile. Richard couldn't help grinning at the pair of them; on even such a brief meeting, they seemed connected on such a deep level. And Clark was clearly so confident in her love that even the mention of her most famous story - and supposed lover, according to certain rumors - didn't faze him. And that took some serious guts. Besides, Lois was not only strikingly beautiful, she was also a brilliant reporter, and based on the last two minutes of conversation, a sharp wit as well. *I want a wife like that*, Richard thought to himself. Remembering the blonde cousins he was currently dating, though, he amended, *Well, someday, anyway*.

"I won't interfere in marital bliss," Richard said. "Besides, my uncle will want to know what I think of the place. See you two later." And laughing under his breath, he went to find Perry.

Looking distinctly unhappy, Lois sat on the couch frowning at her husband as he moved around busily. "I hate this. I feel like I'm giving a press conference or something, which is more of *your* thing," she grumbled. Nervous, she munched a handful of macadamia nuts, her current

craving; she kept a bowl of them handy even at work. Lois swore she was eating twenty hours of the day, and gaining appropriately. "I told *all* of you, *especially* Momma, I didn't want a baby shower."

"It's just family," Clark scolded her gently. "And they want to know what's going on."

That earned him a sigh of aggravation from the party on the couch. "Yeah, too bad we can't tell my family I'm having *aliens*," Lois groused. "Oh well, at least they got over the news about twins." She made a face; Lucy had actually squealed, and Ella had acted as if her oldest daughter had been named President of the United States. But only Martha had wept, which had truly touched Lois. Her mother-in-law had never expected to have grandchildren, and now *twins*...

Although getting the mothers together had not been the happiest day of Lois' life, either. Ella and Martha had quickly discovered they had a lot in common, and the two women had formed a bond of mutual respect and affection. Unfortunately for Lois, this meant she was now fighting an uphill battle against *two* determined grandmothers.

The baby shower was a perfect example. Lois hadn't wanted one; it seemed to her like a selfish thing to do, demanding gifts when she could easily afford to buy her own baby supplies. But it was *traditional*, and the grandmothers had insisted. They'd been denied a bridal shower and attendance at a wedding, so they were definitely having a baby shower. Lois could only go along with their plans.

The doorbell rang, and Lois sighed in annoyance as Clark got up to answer it. She heard Lucy before the younger woman was even in the room. "Where's my big sister?" Lois fought the urge to run and lock herself in the bathroom. Then Lucy turned the corner, and her eyes widened when she caught sight of Lois. "Wow, you really *are* my big sister now. Lois, you're huge!"

"Thanks a lot, sis," Lois grumbled. "That's always the first thing I want to hear, especially from the expert on the topic of pregnancy. That I look like a cow."

"Nah, cows are sweet-tempered," Lucy replied, ignoring the implied insult and hugging her.

"Yeah, well, you weren't exactly petite when you were pregnant with Sam, if my memory serves," Lois muttered, returning the hug. "No one would have believed that you had been a cheerleader the year before."

"Oh no, I looked like I'd been eating watermelon seeds," Lucy chortled. "I'm so proud of you, Lois."

The comment made Lois scoff. "What, for getting pregnant? Yeah, that's *such* an accomplishment. All I did was screw up and forget to take my pill. Because being absent-minded is a trait that should be celebrated."

As usual, Lucy took it all in stride. "No, silly," the younger Lane laughed. "For going through with it - for getting with a good guy and marrying him and getting pregnant and becoming a mom. I know it's not what you dreamed of all your life, but you'll love it. I promise."

Lois stared at her for a moment, then looked at Clark with the most deadpan expression he'd ever seen. "She's all excited because I did something normal. Clark, she's probably going to be disappointed when I win a Pulitzer."

"Oh, no, it's only a matter of time 'til you win one," Lucy said. "You're the best in the business; you're the best at anything you set your mind to, Lois."

That at least won Lucy a smile. The doorbell rang again, and Clark hurried to open it.

Martha and Ella had arrived together, and Lois scowled again as they both broke into delighted cooing. "Oh, look how big you are," Martha crooned, while Ella presumptuously put a hand on Lois' belly.

The reporter just glared miserably at her husband. Lucy caught the look and nudged her mother's shoulder. "Momma, personal space much?"

"Oh, darling," Ella sighed, brushing her fingertips over Lois' forehead to soothe away the stress lines. "Lois, you're lovely."

"So I keep hearing," Lois muttered with a sigh.

"Besides, once you're pregnant, you don't own your body any more," Lucy chimed in to inform her. "It belongs to those kids and everyone who wants to meet them. Get used to it."

That earned Lucy yet another unfavorable look. "So says the woman who has been pregnant three times before she turned twenty-three. Since it's coming from the source, Mother Nature, I'll take your advice."

"Now, Lucy, don't frighten her," Martha said, finally coming forward to inadvertently save Lucy's life. "Lois, may I?"

The reporter knew from their getting-acquainted discussions that Martha had always longed for a child, but had been unable to conceive. She could only imagine how much the older woman wished *she* could have experienced what Lois was now going through. Martha would've been one of those women proudly thrusting her belly out before her, beaming at everyone who exclaimed over her girth ... a lot like Lucy, in fact. For her sake, Lois tried to be graceful instead of grumpy. "Sure, Mrs. Kent. Since you were nice enough to *ask* first, unlike certain ungrateful grandmas..."

Ella just chuckled at her eldest, stepping back so that Martha could place her hand gently on Lois' belly. The twins chose that moment to wake up, and Martha's face lit up in a delighted smile at that faint movement. "They moved!"

"You should be here when we turn on the TV sometimes and they decide this is American Freakin' Bandstand," Lois muttered with a tired chuckle, but Martha's pure joy and wonder were affecting her. "They aren't really kicking yet, but they do get active."

"Probably not much room to kick, with both of them in there," Ella opined as they made their way into the living room. "Twins must have come from your family, Martha. The Lanes have never had twins that anyone can remember, and there haven't been a set of twins in the Tremaine family since 1908."

Martha shrugged. "It's possible. I think my cousin had twins." She shared a quick smile with Lois as the younger woman lowered herself back onto the couch; they figured twins weren't that common on Krypton. It was just Lois' luck to get pregnant with twins, thus doubly horrifying her father-in-law.

"Enough pawing my sister. It's time for presents," Lucy sang out. "C'mon, that's the whole point: presents and food. Lois, open mine first."

"I'll bring out the food," Clark said. "Anyone want to try a cherimoya?"

Lois immediately looked up. Just the name was enough to make her mouth water. Insane pregnancy hormones. "Careful, you guys, they're poisonous if you eat the wrong part. And, of course, I crave them like mad. Go figure."

When all of them were settled with plates and drinks, Lucy brought over her gift. Lois had tried to keep this little party down to just family, but her friends had sent gifts anyway. A side table was now tastefully stacked with what Lois referred to as 'baby loot'. She had the horrible feeling that somewhere in there would be some article of clothing with fluffy pink

and/or blue bunnies on it, and she would have to go outside and scream after seeing such an atrocity.

"Open it," Lucy urged, practically bouncing in place. Lois first eyed her little sister, then the gift. The package was fairly small, and she let out a heavy sigh. This was *not* going to be good...

...and, as always where her cheery sister was concerned, it wasn't. "What on earth...? A *nursing bra*? With pink roses on it? Lucy!"

That prompted a nonchalant shrug. "Hey, you're a rebel," Lucy said innocently. "I figured you'd want to feed them in public and shock people."

"Yeah, okay, right. But how then, *Lucinda*, does that explain pink roses?" Lois grouched. "So what, I'm gonna horrify my friends with my hideous fashion sense?"

"They're all like that!" Lucy exclaimed, but the twinkle in her eyes told Lois the choice had been all too deliberate. The dark-haired woman swatted at her sister half-heartedly, Lucy giggling.

Fortunately, the rest of the gifts were far more likely to be used. Lois thanked them all for the baby clothes, blankets, and rattles, as well as the dual stroller and matching mobiles. Ella had brought the cherry-wood cradle she'd used for Lois and Lucy, and Martha had found a second one that matched almost perfectly. Lois needed very little at the end of the gift-opening, and she was embarrassed to discover herself sniffing back tears of gratitude. Damn pregnancy hormones...

Seeing it, Lucy leaned over and hugged her sister. "Hey, we love you," she said. "And we know this isn't exactly what you had on your planner for this year. Expose a scandal, win a Pulitzer, narrowly escape death while chasing stories, interview Superman ... those are the kinds of things *you* schedule in, sister mine. Getting married and having kids were always in the 'to do later' column. So don't worry about us helping you out - we love the chance to do it. And if you ever need anything, we're here. We've all done this a time or two, right, ladies?"

Martha and Ella both chuckled, though for different reasons. Lois hugged Lucy back with real feeling and then gathered up her composure. "Yeah, especially you, you broodmare," she teased the younger woman. "All right, if we're done spoiling me, we *did* buy a cake for you guys. Just not one of those cutesy ones shaped like a rattle or anything."

That was the cue for Clark, who had been hanging back out of the way, to bring in the cake. While he was slicing it, Ella asked, "Have you two decided on names yet?"

That prompted a sigh. Lois shot Clark a long-suffering look as she answered, "Well, I didn't want to name them until I got to see them in person, but Dad here had other ideas. We decided that the little boy is going to be Jonathan Michael." Martha smiled at that, covering her mouth slightly as her eyes shone. Lois tipped her a wink before continuing, "And after much debate, and several rejections, the little girl will be Mia Isabella."

Lucy chortled. "People will think she's Italian," she pointed out.

Ella cleared her throat. "Considering your father's family, Lucy, it's possible there's some Italian somewhere."

"I was tipping a hat to *you*, Lucinda Isabelle," Lois said. "Since you named *your* kids after everyone else, it's high time we had a kid in this family named after you."

She shot Clark a wry look, thinking of the *other* reason her first choice had been vetoed. Lois had wanted to name the girl Kala, but Clark had informed her that in Kryptonian naming convention, that would make her Kala Kal-El. They'd decided that was a bit too much, and after more discussion, had finally settled on Mia instead.

The baby shower ended with all of them in good spirits, Lucy and Martha still honored by the choice of names, and Ella barely managing to contain her joy and hopes for the future of the little family.

Lois was trying to nap when she felt eyes on her. She tried to ignore the stare, but it bored into her, and her extended tummy made her feel like a beached whale. At last she opened her eyes with an aggrieved sigh and met the gaze that had been fixed on her for several minutes.

Sorrowful chocolate-colored eyes looked up at her pleadingly from where Bagel rested her chin on the bed. "What, dog?" Lois said, and the puppy gave a short whine, her white-tipped tail rising to beat the air. "You want up on the bed?" Lois asked. Bagel understood *up* and *bed* perfectly, and she whined louder, her whole body wriggling with excitement. "Okay, fine, I give in. You had a bath two days ago anyway - after rolling in garbage, you little psycho. C'mere."

The reporter still had to help the puppy get up on the bed, but once there Bagel scrambled around happily, licking Lois' face and wriggling with glee. At last Lois put her arm over her face to discourage the kissing and held still. Playing dead was the only sure way to get the dog to leave her alone.

After a while Bagel decided that what was good for humans was good for beagles as well, and curled up to take a nap. However, she chose Lois' belly as her napping spot, treading around in a circle before collapsing suddenly. The reporter stared at her incredulously for a moment, thankful that she didn't weigh any more than she did, and then sighed disgustedly. "Just because you slept there before doesn't mean you're *always* gonna be able to sleep on my stomach, Brat," she informed the puppy, who opened one eye and wagged her tail slightly. "My gut's only gonna get bigger. Pretty soon your dad won't be able to sleep in the bed with me; I'll need all the space for myself and his gigantic twin spawn."

"I heard that," Clark called from the living room.

"You were meant to," Lois called back, and closed her eyes again. Bagel's weight was warm and oddly comfortable, and she began to drift off to sleep...

Sudden pain lanced through her, and Bagel shot off her belly, yelping. The tiny dog landed on the bed, all four limbs braced, her hackles on end and the whites of her eyes showing. Staring at Lois' stomach, she started to bark loudly.

"What's wrong?" Clark called worriedly, running up the hallway. After her initial gasp, Lois started laughing. Bagel was barking so loud and so hard that her entire body jerked with each violent explosion of sound. Clark burst into the room, and Bagel whirled around, launching at him. He barely had time to catch the puppy before she scrambled up onto his shoulder, frantically licking his face and whining. "Calm down, Bagel! Lois, what on *earth...?!*"

"One of the babies kicked her," Lois chortled, holding her belly. Tears had started sliding down her face, and laughter had stolen her breath. "Oh, Clark... The little nut was sleeping on my belly, and one of the twins kicked. You should've seen the poor dog's *face...*"

"They kicked?" Clark went from worried to excited in a heartbeat. Putting the puppy down - and shushing her some more - he sat down on the bed next to Lois, resting his hand on her stomach. "Do you think they'll kick again?"

"They usually do," Lois replied, smiling up at him. The twins had only recently begun to kick, and he hadn't been home during any of their sporadic efforts. After a moment without movement, Lois rolled her eyes. "Of course now that I said something, they'll make a liar out

of... *Oh!*"

Clark jumped a little as well, startled by the strong kick. "*Wow*," he said, gingerly replacing his hand. "Hey, you two. Settle down in there."

Bagel whined urgently from the floor, and Lois imagined a hint of worry in the little hound's voice, as if she were warning Clark away from the dangerous belly. He was paying no attention to her at the moment, looking intently at Lois' stomach. "That was our little girl," he murmured softly. "Her brother has figured out how to suck his thumb, and he's content for now. She's the one upset ... *oh*, she just kicked him! Now he's awake... Calm down, you two." Clark leaned against her stomach, closing his eyes to listen. A slow, wondering smile spread across his features, and after a moment he whispered, "Their hearts beat together, Lois."

"I'd tell you how weird it is that you can see them and hear them, but then you might stop telling *me* what they're doing," Lois murmured, stroking his hair. If nothing else brought home to her the rarity of this experience, the utter unworldly amazement of it, then his ability to see his twins did.

Lois was dozing, caught in the gossamer strands of a very sweet dream. Something about flying, being carried in his arms, and then the subtext of the dream began to change. Somehow he was caressing her, his hands so warm, and Lois pressed her slim hips against him with a soft sigh. He laid her back on a cloud and kissed her neck, her hands buried in his hair, the star-strewn sky seeming to wheel above her...

...and woke slowly, to the realization that she was lying atop the comforter, not on a cloud. But the feel of Clark's mouth on the curve of her shoulder was very real. She sighed and turned toward him, catching his lips for a loving kiss, and then chuckled softly. "Oh, God, here we go again," she murmured, nuzzling against him.

Clark kissed her cheek. "Lois, you sound almost disinterested," he whispered, stroking her belly gently. Its burgeoning curve hadn't diminished his desire for her in the slightest; if anything, Clark was more affectionate, more passionate, though very gentle. Certain side effects of pregnancy - increased sensitivity to touch and a flood of hormones - made Lois more receptive as well. The fact that the twins tended to sleep well after their parents made love was an added bonus.

"Oh, I'm hardly disinterested," she purred. "For someone who claims to know me so well, you were *way* off on that one."

His hand rose to cup her breast, and Lois arched her back; always sensitive, her breasts had become almost excruciatingly tender. Clark's feather-soft caresses and gentle kisses stirred her blood to heights of passion she never expected to associate with being pregnant. He ran his fingertips across her nipple through the thin fabric of her slip, and she gasped, her voice lowering to a moan as he mouthed her neck.

From the foot of the bed came a low chuffing sound, which Lois and Clark both ignored. He kissed her slowly, moving from behind her ear down her neck and over her shoulder, tracing that pale curve with luxurious adoration. Lois sighed, trailing the tips of her nails over his back, her eyes half-closed in bliss. "I love you," Clark murmured, nuzzling down her neck.

"I love you too," Lois whispered, and the words became a soft chuckle of anticipation as he nudged the neckline of her slip down, his mouth tracing kisses ever lower. "Clark, you know ... *ohh* ... you know how sensitive..."

"I know," he whispered back, glancing up at her with a hint of devilry in his gaze. "And I know you love it." With that, he slipped the strap off her shoulder, letting the satin slide down

to her waist, and resumed his kisses. Lois shivered eagerly, raking her hand through his hair, and moaned aloud when his mouth closed around her nipple.

From the foot of the bed came a series of staccato barks, sounding more like the kind of noise made by an angry chicken than a startled beagle. Lois cut herself off in mid-moan, laughing, and Clark dropped his head to her chest with a groan. "Bagel, you *really* need to work on your timing," he muttered.

"She's just worried that you're hurting me or something," Lois snickered. "Bagel, hush, it's okay."

The little hound barked again, louder, and Clark swung out of bed. "C'mon, little brat. If you can't keep your opinion to yourself, you're leaving the room. Besides, I wouldn't want to scar you for life." He picked up her crate and carried her, still cluck-barking, out to the living room. Lois curled up on her side, laughing until her sides ached.

Clark came back and stroked Lois' hair off her face. "Glad to know you're amused," he said archly. "Especially considering *you're* the one who can't keep quiet enough."

"I was under the impression you *liked* hearing me," Lois purred, rolling onto her back. She reached up for him imperiously, and Clark bent to kiss her.

"Oh, I *love* hearing you," he murmured. "But I don't like the dog - and the neighbors - hearing you."

"Jerk," Lois muttered, mussing his hair. "Fine. I'll go sleep on the couch then..." She pulled up the one side of her slip and was about to get up, but Clark put a hand on her shoulder and pinned her to the mattress. Lois arched an eyebrow at him, and he just grinned wickedly. "Okay, *fine*, wise guy. If you don't want to hear anything this time, I'll just ... *ohh...*"

As Clark proceeded to prove that clucking beagle puppies couldn't distract his mood, Lois did her best to keep her voice down. She gasped and whimpered softly, but refused to let herself get any louder, biting her lips to keep quiet. Amused, Clark listened to her breathing grow heavy and watched her skin flush with desire, intrigued by the absence of the sounds that normally accompanied those reactions. Lois was still just as eager, still arched her back just as wantonly, and he found himself enjoying just watching her react.

Watching wasn't enough, no matter how beautiful she was, no matter how lovely her quiet writhing was. Clark kissed her mouth again as he caught her knee and lifted it, then leaned back just slightly, more careful of her belly than he really needed to be. Lois couldn't help it then; she cried out, loud and lustful, as he took her.

From the living room, they both heard Bagel start barking, but at the moment they were too absorbed to pay any attention to her. Lois moaned, rocking her hips against him, completely forgetting that they were supposed to be keeping quiet this time. It was too good to keep silent, and she wrapped her legs around Clark's waist. Hands clenched in the comforter to keep from breaking her nails on his invulnerable back, she cried out his name.

Clark savored it, loving how exquisitely sensitive she was now. Lois had always been passionate, but even more so right now, and he was perfectly glad to take advantage of that. He cradled her with an arm around her waist, bringing her tenderly up to each thrust, and let his eyes slip closed in the wonder of loving her.

At the continued moaning, Bagel's barking had gotten frantic, louder and faster. As Lois cried out again, the little hound paused. Then, just as Lois and Clark were both forgetting about her outburst, a completely different sound erupted from her throat. Bagel threw her head back and let loose with her first grown-up bay.

That howl cut across Lois' nerves like a hacksaw and froze Clark in mid-stroke. The

sound was far louder than any ten-pound puppy should've been able to produce; it sounded like a full-grown bloodhound in their living room, instead of a baby beagle. "What the *hell*?" Lois gasped.

Bagel, apparently proud of her accomplishment, bayed again. Lois and Clark had read about the breed's vocal tendencies, and both had been secretly wondering when she would start baying. Lois had expected that a siren in the street below might set her off, but this was unbelievable.

Clark groaned in frustration. "Now I wish I'd gotten you *jewelry* for Valentine's Day," he growled. The remark brought Lois out of her shock, and they managed to laugh together.

Lois remembered that last with a chuckle. *Only a few more weeks*, she thought. *While I have to admit I've loved carrying them - enjoyed being pregnant far more than I expected - I will be glad when this is over and I can see them, too.* The visual display from the crystal scan was amazing, much clearer than the sonogram they'd gotten to keep Ella from guessing that they weren't actually seeing a doctor, but Lois wanted to be able to hold them and touch them.

Catching the longing look on her face, Clark smiled down at her and squeezed her head. Lois felt the pressure, hazel eyes opening to look up into his. "Not much longer now, love. They'll be here before we know it."

A smile flitted over her lips, she sighed slightly and answered, "Not soon enough."