

Time After Time p2 - Live Like We're Dying

by Kala Lane Kent

© 26-Jun-10

Rating: T

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

Spoilers: Is actually the second and final part to the Time After Time mini-series, the first being

Author Notes: I can only say that I hope I made the final film in the Reeveverse series a little more bearable for some of you. There really are tiny little gems to be unearthed and polished from the film, you just have to look very carefully.

*Sometime we fall down and can't get back up
We're hiding behind skin that's too tough
How come we don't say I love you enough?
Till it's too late, it's not too late*

*Our hearts are hungry for a food that won't come
We could make a feast from these crumbs
And we're all staring down the barrel of a gun
So if your life flashed before you,
what would you wish you would've done*

*Yeah... gotta start
Looking at the hand of the time we've been given here
This is all we got and we gotta start thinkin' it
Every second counts on a clock that's tickin'
Gotta live like we're dying.*

~Kris Allen

After the press conference, Kal-El soared off to bask in the sunlight. As with most of his recreational trips, it was cut short by an emergency in the world below. But once he'd blown out a house fire in Bakerline he was free to fly back downtown to Lois' apartment.

For the first time, he was nervous. He had high hopes for this conversation and their future, but he'd wronged Lois deeply, and she wasn't known to be a particularly forgiving person. On the other hand, no matter how angry she was, Lois had still come to him when he

needed her.

As he landed at the balcony, Kal-El saw Lois leaning against the doorway with her arms crossed, watching his approach with a slight smirk. One thing had never changed - the sight of her made his heart feel suddenly weightless, as if it had discovered its own ability to soar.

Those hazel eyes watched him silently for a couple of heartbeats before she gave a soft snort of what sounded like amusement. "I'd ask if you circled a few times before you got here, but Cat Grant just announced the save a minute ago. At least I don't have to worry about the 'I need some fresh air' ploy again. Subtle, by the way. I have to hand it to you." The words were wry, but her left eyebrow was raised slightly. Not to mention the way that her lip curved upward just a tad.

"I had to leave you time to get home," he told her, unaware that he was still using his 'official' voice. Smiling slightly, Kal-El continued, "I have to admit, I'm glad I don't have to make excuses this time."

"Good." Lois' words were positive, but the dark-haired reporter grew serious then. A little frown line grew between her eyes, her gaze filled with bright consideration. And when she spoke again, the thread of her thoughts was clear. "Because it's about time that we stopped making them. Past time I think. Agreed? Because friends have to trust each other and we don't have the best track record of that."

Kal-El sighed. Lois was as torn as he was; in spite of how she made him feel, in spite of how much he loved her, he knew that any relationship between them would be fraught with difficulty. And he'd known this conversation wouldn't be easy - he had made mistakes, and now he had to face them. "Lois, I'm sorry. I should have trusted you. Just ... please, I need to know. Just tell me how you feel about all of this."

Lois was shaking her head then, a finger going to her lips. "Just hold your horses. It's not quite as easy as that. Things with us never have been. Just give me a minute." Arms crossed, she took a deep breath and walked toward the opposite side of the balcony. Well, not quite. She ended up leaning against the short wall on the other side of the planter. Again, that watchful look, then she sighed before she began. "One side of me has just spent the last year and a half wanting to tell you that you made your bed, now lie in it. It was your choice to stay or go and you not only locked the door and threw away the key, you made me forget the door was even there." Her voice was growing rather tight, but Lois didn't yell. It was clear, however, that this was stirring up emotions she had buried pretty deep.

"And the other side?" He managed to ask it clearly, watching her face with a feeling of trepidation that was palpable. Perhaps his hopes had been too high, perhaps in spite of all she'd done for him Lois simply couldn't forgive. Stealing anyone's memory was more curse than blessing, he now knew, but it was worse for a reporter who prided herself on such things.

Her whole bearing told him that whatever Lois said next, she was reluctant to say. Which meant it could go either way. Her eyes were skyward now, her expression clouded. "The other part can't stand me for the fact that you broke it off so easily and I kept my mouth shut and just dealt with it. Your 'memory kiss' or whatever didn't work very well on me and I just kept a lid on everything I knew, and felt, rather than confront you and have the last piece of you and I together taken away again. That, and it totally resents that fact that something in me died when I thought he'd killed you. That's how the other half of me feels."

Kal-El couldn't help wincing just a little. Oh yes, Lois was torn - and either way he looked at it, she had a reason to be angry with him. He couldn't walk away from this, though. There was no power on earth that could take back her knowledge. Furthermore, he no longer wanted

to; Lois had saved him when his treatment of her hardly justified it. "Lois, I do regret putting you through that. I was trying to spare you the heartbreak we were both feeling - I can't stand to see you in pain."

Again her eyebrow rose, nailing him with her gaze. "I understand that. And I appreciate it. Which means you're never going to try to hit the reset button again like you did the other day, I take it?"

"Of course not," he replied. "One, it doesn't work. Two, if it *had* worked, you wouldn't have known exactly how to inspire me to keep fighting, and who knows where I'd be right now. Three, I've been too close to losing my life to spend another moment of it lying to you or hiding from what we both mean to each other."

He could see her swallow with force, breathing in a slow breath. "Not so fast. What makes everything different now? And what if your father disagrees again, just like last time?" A flash of pain flickered over her features again. "Then what? Six months and then another Lana, another Lacy. I'm not twenty-five anymore, Kal-El. I can't keep doing this. I love you, but maybe we're just safer as friends." It hurt her to say it, he could see it did, but she forced herself to push on. They had said truth and that's what she gave him.

He shook his head slowly. "Nothing's different except I've learned from my mistakes. My father and I will just have to agree to disagree on this. As for the rest... I was never interested in Lacy, and it's Lana who's a better friend than anything else. Lois, I'm inviting enough trouble trying to have *any* relationship, but I don't dare involve a child. You, at least, can protect yourself."

She narrowed her eyes just a bit at that. "Yeah, I had wondered a little at the choice there. At first I wondered when exactly I stopped being important enough that you were seeing someone again, then I wondered if you not only stopped caring, but if you wanted something the complete opposite of me. And someone with a kid? Yeah, I think it's pretty safe to say I wasn't thrilled at the replacement. I guess I felt like if I wasn't going to rush out and get a love interest after that and I wasn't saving the world, why should you be able to? That said, playing the doctor's wife didn't seem to suit her well."

"No, it didn't suit her at all. I seem to have made quite a few mistakes around that time," he murmured.

"And Lacy's about five years younger than me. But I have to back you up on that. Even though she followed Clark around like a puppy. Which had to be a nice change." Her voice was a little too light.

Kal-El cut Lois a slightly stern look. "The executive's daughter? It was never like that. I tried not to encourage her, but what else could I do? It would have been odd if Clark had tried to push her away any harder. And her age was never an issue. I think we both know the reason for that. Why do you think the other relationships didn't last? Why do you think I didn't try to keep Lana in Metropolis?" And then he found himself trying to force words past the lump in his throat. "I can't ... Lois, I don't want us to be just friends. I don't want to lose you. You said you loved me. I love you, too."

That made her blink, the expression much like someone who been hit in the stomach. Clearly, in all of the events of the last few days, Lois had somehow forgotten exactly what it was she had said in that darkened living room. Or the fact that his memory was flawless. Her voice was quiet now, looking at him speculatively. "You won't lose me. I never went anywhere. I was here with you the whole time, remember?" She thought about that for a moment, a smile starting to break through when she thought about what she'd said. "Well, I

remember now. Just slow down. Are you sure you want to even try this? Or is it just because of Nukie's little *This Is Your Life*? Do you really think we're old enough this time to manage? Really?"

"I'm not jumping in with my eyes closed this time, Lois. We've done that, and learned how badly it can end." Kal-El remembered too well how terrible he'd felt when he realized what the three Kryptonian criminals had done while he was distracted from his mission. "It won't be easy - it will *never* be easy for me. But there has to be a way to balance my needs against the world's. And I do need you, Lois. Don't doubt that, not after this."

There was a small nod of her head, her wary look having faded. "I...I do. And we're older now, so you'd expect we could come up with something. But we can try it the way it once was. This is a whole new ballgame. And we shouldn't have promises this quickly. We need to take this a little slower and think things through. Especially since all the cards are on the table. Where do we even get started?"

"I ... I'm not exactly sure myself," Kal-El admitted. What he *wanted* to do was sweep her into his arms and kiss her, take her soaring above the city on a triumphant flight - but those things seemed awfully presumptuous in spite of their shared history.

Neither knew what to do next, acting like a pair of skittish children scared of the other's next statement. Afraid that this newborn truce could be broken by a single misstep, a pause in the wrong sentence. It was Lois, in the end, that had to burst out laughing. "This is just ridiculous. I mean, we've been lovers; this shouldn't be so complicated." Cocking her head to the side, she asked the first question. "Okay, so say that we try this. How do we deal with the dual identity? Seeing as how I know about both, how do we go forward without anyone guessing that something's up?"

And that was something he hadn't gotten around to thinking about. Clark had an obvious crush on Lois. Superman and Lois definitely had a more-than-business spark to their exchanges in public. So if she got involved with either of his identities, the other would have to suffer - they couldn't afford to have Lois cozying up to what the world thought were two very different men.

No matter how much of a headache this was, Kal-El still wanted it. He actually had a chance to be with Lois, and he'd put up with any amount of aggravating inconvenience to be able to claim her as his. "We really only have two choices. I don't like the idea of keeping it a secret - there's too many ways that can go wrong. So we'll have to decide which of my two disguises gets the girl."

Kal-El didn't even stop to consider how the statement had come out, so caught up in planning, but the way Lois tilted her head with her brows raised incredulously made him pause. The wince he gave when he ran his words back through his mind made up for it. A snort of laughter from Lois, who wasn't even trying to hide her smile now. "Ah, yeah. Right. So, tell me, just who *will* we auction me off to?"

That blush that started to warm up his face was pure Clark Kent. "Well, it's really lady's choice."

Her grin was cat-like now. "Actually, I think it's going to end up being only one choice if you really want this. And it leaves one of them pining, just so things can never get awkward."

"I'm sure we'll find a way to make things awkward," he murmured sotto voice. "So whom do you want the public to see you with? The man, or the hero?"

Lois' eyes were sparkling with evil devilment. No way she was going to make it easy on him. The longer she could draw it out, the better. "Wow, when you put it that way, I not sure if

I can sound any more like a heel before I even give an opinion. I told you, there really is no choice, really. They'll all be blown away, of course."

He hesitated just a fraction of a second. "You'll hear a lot of snide remarks about journalistic bias if you choose Superman. And we'll never get a moment of privacy."

A snicker from Lois. It really was evil to keep him guessing; then again, she deserved to exploit the little bit of uncertainty he still felt. Especially since she had already decided the best solution herself. "Privacy is overrated and I've been dealing with that since I met you."

Kal-El sighed, but it *was* her choice more than his. "You do realize, of course, that you can never go on a dinner date with Superman. Not unless you enjoy a side order of paparazzi."

"You trying to tell me you want to take me out to dinner?" she teased, laughing a little. But she finally stood up and started across the space between them. "Why, Superman, this is so sudden." Her eyes fairly glowed with mirth.

"Actually, it's rather late. We skipped straight through the whole dating thing the first time." His voice took on a wistful note. "I would've liked to go out with you, you know - dinner, a movie, that kind of stuff. So much of my life is completely out of this world. You're what keeps me anchored in reality."

Although all of those things were innately Clark, Lois stopped and stared at him for a moment. She'd known for a long while now just how much of each persona was the man underneath; that said, it had never really occurred to her that they really could do one or two normal things from time to time. It had always been so complicated... It really would be like having her cake and eating it, too, and all of it with him. They would have to be careful just how much of it was public and not expect more than time and circumstances were willing to give them. Whatever time they could get would be enough; it was so much better than trying to be apart. "I love you, too. And I guess it's a good thing that I choose Clark this time, huh?" She grinned impishly at him.

For an instant, his expression was pure Clark befuddlement, but then the sunny smile broke through. At last, *someone* saw through both disguises to realize that Clark was a lot closer to who he truly was than anyone would suspect. And finally, the mild-mannered reporter would get the girl... His goofy grin said it all, but Kal-El couldn't help adding, "Shall I pick you up at eight, then? And when and how are we going to go public with this?"

And that was when Lois finally threw her head back and laughed. For the first time in a long time, she truly felt light-hearted around him. No secrets, no sadness, none of that BS. And here he was rushing to take her out. Everything seemed to be moving faster than it really should yet again, but this time it was okay. They were older, wiser, and had nearly lost each other too often to be so guarded. Though, maybe he was jumping the gun just a bit. "Slow down. There will be talk enough the first time they see us after this. I was in your apartment in the middle of the night and don't think that Jimmy missed all of that. It'll be all over the paper before the morning edition goes out." She was standing before him now and it was useless to even try to dim the smile on her face.

He couldn't resist; having her that close and in such a triumphant mood made him want to hug her. Kal-El swept Lois into his arms and hugged her tightly - still cautious, of course, of his great strength and her delicate build. But it was so very good to hold her again. While he pressed his cheek against her hair and inhaled the faint scent of her shampoo, he asked, "Why did you come and save me, Lois? After how I treated you, why would you even bother?"

The questions froze her in his arms briefly before she nestled further into the embrace. It really shouldn't have surprised her that he asked, but the answer was myriad. And the strongest

reasoning would likely sound too unreal. It certainly had to her. "All I did was give you the usual pep talk. It was hardly jumping into Hob's Bay and dragging you out," she said almost too lightly, trying to get around it. "And, as it why, you mean other than you nearly checking out on me? I think that might have something to do with the motivation."

Kal-El softly stroked her cheek, looking into her eyes intently. "Why is it that all the most important moments between you and I seem to happen right after someone almost gets killed?"

A little nervous chuckle then, Lois glancing away. "Maybe because sometimes that's what it takes for your subconscious to kick you in the ass."

He smiled a thoughtful smile. "Hmm. You never know how good you've got it until it's almost gone? And you never quite live so fully unless you've nearly died?"

"Yeah," was her quick response, nodding as she leaned against him again. The last thing she wanted to look like at the moment was an overtly romantic fool, especially considering the event that got her moving. She'd had more than enough of that foolishness. But it didn't make the dream feel any less real.

After all this time, he knew her very well. Kal-El could spot the signs of a full-out Lane fury building while Lois was still in the arms-crossed-and-breathing-deeply stage, and he could see all the little signs that told him she was being evasive. Leaning against him to distract him and hide her expression, speaking a trifle too quickly ... there was something else. "Lois, I don't want there to be any secrets between us," he reminded her quietly. "Tell me whatever it is you're not telling me."

He heard rather than saw her frown, felt her fidget a little before heaving a heavy sigh. "And have you think that I'm some nut trying to close in for the kill with some half-baked destiny crap? It was just a dream, that's all. And it was enough to give me a reality check, alright? Isn't it enough that I'm here?"

He sighed, nuzzling her hair. "Yes, love, it's enough that you're here. And I'm here, too. There's no kill to close in for, no deal to seal - we've belonged to each other since I caught you that first time." She could feel his lips against her temple as they curved up in a smile. "I still want to hear about this dream. Especially if it was part of your decision to come to me."

The response was utterly deadpan. One day she was going to have to get better about hiding her reactions from this man. For a woman who could slice and dice you at cards, she somehow had a million and one tells in this man's case. And this was shaping up to be a lesson in embarrassment she'd never forget. "Do I have to?"

"Lois!" His long-suffering tone made it clear that Kal-El knew just how difficult it was to get Lois to do something she didn't want to do. "No, you don't *have* to, but I wish you would."

As uncertain as she was about his potential reaction, she forced herself to pull back and look him in the eye. "I'm not so sure you're going to think so when I tell you. It wasn't like we were living the perfect life," she murmured self-consciously, torn between discomfiture and wistfulness. "I had a dream that I got pregnant after that time in the Fortress and you disappeared for a few years, trying to find Krypton. I didn't find out until after you left and you didn't tell me you were going"

That startled him. He'd never given any thought to the possible consequences of their sole night together; he wasn't even from this planet, and had no reason to expect that he might be able to have children. But he *had* given some thought to leaving the planet, when things were at their worst, with Lois' memories erased and his own all too clear. "And then?"

She gave him a sardonic look. "I had twins and you were in outer space, that's what happened then. Seems like I had no idea if you were coming home. Although I was wrong. By

the time you got home, I was engaged to Perry's flyboy nephew and the kids were six. And you caught the space-plane I nearly took a nose-dive in."

That sent a cold chill down his spine. Perry did have a nephew who had watched Lois a little too closely on the occasion when the younger man had been in Metropolis. How much of Lois' dream was pure fantasy, and how much was what might have been? "Well, the space-plane part sounds just like us," he said gamely.

The little shade of green she saw him turn made her a little more encouraged, a tiny smirk creeping back in now that she was sure that that was the only reason he was weirded out. "And that's when things got a little crazy. Suddenly Richard and I were on the rocks, you and I kept going back and forth between arguing and ending up in the supply closet, and Lex stole the kids."

"I'm not sure if I like this dream," Kal-El said. "We got the kids back okay, I assume?"

Lois couldn't help smiling at the question. The fact that he was worried about their possible kids in a dream world said all that needed to be said about the man. "If having to put them in therapy is okay, yeah. Then again, that may also have been because of how the little adventure panned out. Richard married Lana. And she planned our wedding a few months later." She let him digest that first before adding, "I don't think we had a perfect life in the dream, but we were happy. And together."

She was biting her lower lip now, her brow furrowed lightly. "When I woke up, I realized that that dream could have been us if we hadn't been dancing around all of this. We were too scared to try to make it work and look what we missed out on. Sorrow, sure, but all of the rest of it, too. I decided there and then that I wanted to take another chance at this before we're too old or something else comes long and takes you from me. If you showed up this morning in one piece, I was going to have the guts to lay it all out there."

He nodded slowly. Some of his dreams were like that, too - a whole lifetime lived in the scant hours between falling asleep and waking up. And this one seemed like a warning. They'd messed up once and missed out on everything Lois had dreamed. Perhaps this was their last chance to get it right. "And I want that chance, too," Kal-El told her.

"It was six years in the dream, you realize?" Lois was finally looking him in the face, eyes on his to gauge what he was actually feeling. "I think it was showing us the six years we've blown. I doubt we can get any of that back, but there's plenty of time to write new stories, right? Even if babies aren't in the cards. Maybe we'll just get a chance to be us, be together. I know what the odds are this time, what we need to be cautious about. Let's see what we can actually make of this, huh? Live like each day's the last, enjoy every minute we can?"

"Sounds like a plan to me," he said, grinning at the prospect. "Starting with meeting somewhere I don't have to worry about your neighbors watching us. Maybe the Fortress - there's so much there I never got to show you."

That elicited a snort of amusement from Lois, her left brow arched and an irreverent smile curving her lips. "You did give me a grand tour before dinner and a show, you realize? But I find my memory's not as good as it once was. And far be it from me to turn you down for a flight. Maybe tonight? After work?" Pausing for a moment, her grin grew even more devilish. "Wait. Perry's going to be hitting me up for an interview as it is, seeing as how you talked to me at the press conference. And this might just be a perfect opportunity to hit him up for some time off. Does the Chief know you're back yet? I can keep Jimmy quiet."

"He knows. Perry always seems to know where his employees are - with a couple of notable exceptions." They shared a grin over that before he continued, "And I'd love to see

you tonight. We still have a lot we need to talk about."

Rolling her eyes but still smiling, Lois agreed. "I had totally forgot the old man had given you an assignment when you showed up. Just figures. Okay, tonight. And I'll tell him that I'll get the interview then, so I have the whole weekend to work it up." She was pulling away then, "I'll grab lunch and meet you back at the office. You take care of taking out the trash before you came by?" It was clear that she meant Luthor and that loud-mouth nephew of his.

"Of course," he replied, and caught her hand, bringing it to his lips for a farewell kiss. "I'll see you later, Lois." He turned to go, and stepped onto the parapet, but couldn't resist looking over his shoulder for one more glimpse of her. Kal-El caught Lois turning for another look at him, and they both laughed at themselves. What a pair of romantics they were. Speaking of which... "I do wish I could've seen this dream. I wonder what our children were like. Maybe it's not too late to find out?"

Lois' response was to shrug, expression wistful. "Who knows? Maybe not in this lifetime, but it felt like they existed. Somewhere out there, I kinda think they do. The twins were a boy and girl. Jason, yeah Jason, I think. Her name was Kala. Kala Josephine. Not too good at hiding the fact that I missed you and knew the secret, huh? And the little boy had your eyes."

There were no words that could encompass how he felt at that. It was absurd, really, to be this proud of children who might only exist in a dream - but now he had the chance to make that dream a reality. "Lois?" Kal-El said, and when she looked at him questioningly, he beamed at her. "I love you. Always."

As he lifted into the air, still looking down at her, Lois returned the smile just as brightly, unbearably happy. Never had she been quite so proud and grateful for the courage she'd had in the darkest moment of the previous evening. Plenty of time to write new stories, she'd said. Maybe so. Just maybe so. "I love you, too. Now get back to work. See you in twenty in the bullpen."

And that was his Lois - a romantic at heart, perhaps, but also pragmatist enough to know when to tell him to stop floating around admiring her and get on with his job. He waved to her, then turned and soared off, a bright speck in the sky.