

# Read My Mind - Twenty Years Ago

by Kala Lane Kent

© 23-Aug-09

Rating: K

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*On the corner of main street  
Just tryin' to keep it in line.  
You say you wanna move on and  
You say I'm falling behind.*

*Can you read my mind?  
Can you read my mind?*

*I never really gave up on  
Breakin' out of this two-star town.  
I got the green light,  
I got a little fight.  
I'm gonna turn this thing around.*

*Can you read my mind?  
Can you read my mind?*

## The Teenage Queen...

"No, Brad," Lana said, allowing a little of her irritation to show in her voice. "I told you it was over. I meant it."

He protested, of course, and Lana studied her nails while paying scant attention to him. Their big breakup argument had been a week ago, and she hadn't wanted to take his calls afterward, but her mother insisted. It would be *rude* to keep ignoring him. The poor boy was calling three and four times a day, and had even come to the house uninvited. Fortunately Lana hadn't been home at the time, but her mother was right; she had to say *something* to him.

"I'm busy Friday," she replied, cutting off his wheedling attempt to set a date.

"With what?" Brad asked, sounding churlish. "There's another guy, isn't there?"

"Brad!" Lana finally snapped. "My mother and I are going to visit some colleges. We'll be gone all week, checking out campuses."

They both went silent for a long moment, remembering the argument that had led to their breakup. Brad had come over one day to snuggle on the front porch swing. Lana, on the other hand, was busy reading college brochures, looking over applications, and finding information about grants, scholarships, and student loans.

She wasn't in the mood to cuddle, but was too polite to tell him to leave, so he wound up sitting beside her, trying to carry on a conversation. Eventually he'd grown impatient with only having part of Lana's attention, and he'd blurted out, "Why're you bothering with college, anyway? It's not like you're gonna have a career or something."

He'd snorted contemptuously as Lana stared at him wide-eyed. "You don't want to be one of those women who try so hard to be a man, bringing home the bacon, thinking you're smarter than everyone else just 'cause you have a fancy degree. I'll get a job with my uncle's truck company, we'll get married, and you'll stay home with the kids. Maybe you can work part-time at the store, just for a little spending money, but I'll take care of you..." Brad had trailed off into fond dreams of their future.

Lana had been horrified. She liked Brad well enough, they'd been going out for years, but she hadn't planned on starting a family right out of school. And she *really* couldn't see herself as a trucker's wife - the long lonely days while he was out of town would drive her insane. On top of that, she finally realized that Brad bore a grudge to anyone more intelligent than himself. To date Lana, he had to make himself think she was just another pretty, empty-headed girl, and if she went to college he'd wind up hating her.

He rambled on about a woman's place in the world and how when they started going to college and taking full-time jobs, that had been the death of the American family ideal. Lana had finally just stood up, taken off his letter jacket, and handed it back to him. The actual breakup had been half-hysterical for its unexpectedness, but Lana had told him in no uncertain terms that she was through with him right before she slammed the front door in his face.

"Lana?" His voice was hesitant on the phone. "You're ... you're really serious about college, aren't you?"

"Yes, Brad," Lana said, feeling a little sorry for him.

There was another long pause before he said, "Well, good luck then."

"Thank you," Lana replied. "Good luck to you, too, Brad." And before he could gather his wits enough to make another attempt at reconciliation, Lana hung up the phone.

The young redhead sighed heavily. She was uncertain enough about her choices already, without having Brad's assumptions weighing on her. Most people in Smallville didn't go to college - the ones who did tended to go to technical or vocational schools. But going to the

state university for a liberal arts degree? No one expected it of Lana. True, her father had an MBA, and her mother had an associate's degree from the community college. Everyone she'd told had just looked at her askance, probably thinking the same things Brad was thinking. A woman's place was at her husband's side. Even if these days some women had careers as well, they were never the primary breadwinner.

Lana didn't even know if she could handle college, wasn't sure what she wanted to major in ultimately - business seemed the most logical, but she felt like that was a cop-out. She had the chance, thanks to her grades and her parents' finances, to really *do* something, to go somewhere and be someone. If she was up to the challenge. She'd read somewhere that life was a journey, and to Lana's mind, that meant getting out of Smallville, at least long enough to learn about the rest of the world.

One thing was certain. Wherever life was leading her, it wasn't a future as Mrs. Brad Johnson.

## The Loaded Gun...

"Watch your sister." There really was no way to explain just how much Lois Lane hated those words. No matter what country, no matter what the occasion, the refrain remained the same. Sure, she loved Lucy, but watching a little kid was *boring* when you were older than ten. Not to mention, a humiliating reminder of exactly what her father thought she was good for when he didn't have her out primitive camping or learning to fight hand-to-hand with boys in the far end of their teens. Babysitting wasn't high on the list of Lois' priorities; she'd much rather be hanging around the house, eavesdropping on the conversation between her parents. But no, always at the crucial moment when she might just learn something to give her leverage to get her own way for once, baby Lucy had toddled up to the General and asked to be taken to the park.

If Lois had done that, at any age, she would've gotten the brush-off, perhaps a scolding for interrupting an adult. Lucy, on the other hand, got picked up and cuddled before General Sam ordered Lois to take her to the park. And that was how the aggravated young teenager found herself pushing her little sister on the swing, Lucy's blonde hair flying out behind her.

Lucy laughed aloud, leaning back to look at Lois as she swung. The pure adoration in those blue eyes pained Lois in ways she hated to think about and she tried for a neutral smile; she wanted so very badly to hate her little sister, but she just couldn't. It wasn't as if she didn't have every right to sibling rivalry; Daddy's Baby Girl got spoiled by the same father who was perpetually disappointed in Lois. The dainty little girl had the angelic personality to match her cherubic looks, and everyone who met the family adored little Lucy. Momma loved them both equally, that much was obvious, but Lois secretly suspected that in the garden of Momma's heart, Lucy was the rose, and Lois was inarguably the thorns. Besides, any time Momma took Lois' side, it started an argument with General Sam.

Glowering unhappily, the girl tightened her jaw and let out an annoyed sigh slowly through her nose. That was fine; one day she would show them all. Let her sister be pretty and adorable and nice. Lois Lane would be remembered as more than General Lane's *girl* and her baby sister's keeper; one day, her name would be in bold print on the front page of the biggest newspaper she could find. Every year, no matter what the school, she always got excellent grades in her composition classes and had even had several stories in newspapers at schools she'd attended. She was going to be a reporter, and a damn good one; she was going to win the Pulitzer Prize, which Frau Yoder said was one of the highest honors for a writer. And once she did that, Daddy's slights wouldn't matter, because everyone in the country would know her name. *Her* name, not his.

"Higher!" Lucy's cry broke into Lois' thoughts, her voice trilling, and Lois let her simmering anger at her father express itself in her next push. Lucy shrieked in delight as the swing soared so high that she could look up and see the ground.

Lois, who had learned how to loop-the-loop on the swings by the time she was Lucy's age, just sighed. Before she'd been hastened out of the house, she'd overheard her parents talking about moving. Again.

For once, that might not be *completely* a bad thing. Japan, where Lucy had been born, was amazing in the diversity of things to look at. So was China, even if they hadn't stayed there long. She'd loved all of the ancient ruins and the food in Italy. But Hawaii hadn't been to her liking at all, not being the sort of girl who liked hanging out on the beach. *Booooring*. And the tropical weather wasn't to her taste, either; Lois had much preferred the two years they spent in Canada, where it could snow more than half the year.

But it still sucked to always be moving, always having to go to new schools. She'd given up on making friends at around ten, when she'd had to leave her best friend Lien behind in Beijing. Why bother, when you just lost them in a couple years? And they say they'll write to you once you're gone and they never do. Starting to get sad about it, Lois shook her head and pushed Lucy a little higher.

Enough of being a stupid crybaby kid. The part that worried her, though, was her mother's comment about settling down. That certainly sounded like her father was considering taking the permanent post he'd been offered in Momma's hometown. Lois wasn't sure how she felt about that. She'd been living the typical Army brat's semi-nomadic life for so long, she couldn't really imagine what it would be like to live in the same house until she grew up and moved out. At least with the constant moves, there was always something new to see, new trouble to get into.

To be tied down in one place wasn't quite in Lois' plans, and besides, she didn't even know if she'd *like* Metropolis.

## The Drop-Dead Dream...

Bracing his elbows against the edge of his desk, Richard White leaned forward to peer through the magnifying glass. His hands were as steady as they'd ever get, and he held his breath as he gently fished the decal out of the water with a toothpick. It hadn't wrinkled; quickly, he transferred it to the fuselage of the model airplane he was building.

His mother *hated* this hobby. Richard's room tended to smell of super-glue, balsa wood, and paint. Four completed models hung from the ceiling, the largest with a five-foot wingspan. He'd made several others, but he only had room for five. The others, a few of his earlier efforts with simple kits, he'd sold or given away. That was okay - he didn't have time to fly all of them, and they were being enjoyed by their new owners.

The gull-wing model Richard was currently working on was his pride. It didn't come with a kit - it was sold as a set of plans. The aspiring flyer had to buy balsa wood and cut out all the parts, buy and install all the wiring and servos, cover it in authentic silk and dope, and paint it. Richard was nearly finished; he'd given the plane an accurate cherry-red paint job, and was now affixing the decals that made it look like the real thing. He had several hundred dollars in this project; he'd actually gotten a summer job just to support his hobby, bagging groceries at Publix.

Sylvia couldn't understand how her son could spend so much money on remote-control planes. She'd thrown a fit when he had spent his entire first paycheck on the kit, and Richard had never told her how much the transmitter cost. At least Richard was a good flyer; he'd never crash-landed one of his good models, and the few times he'd gotten them caught in trees, he'd been able to climb up and get them.

There, the decal was perfect. Richard sighed in contentment and leaned back, feeling the cramps in his shoulders from too much detail work. Another of Sylvia's complaints was that constantly hunching over his desk working on models would ruin Richard's posture. That had been one of the rare occasions when Theo contradicted her. He pointed out that he had always been the one to drive the boy out to the model airfield, and he'd seen his son fly the planes. When he was staring up at the sky, controlling every tiny motion of the miniature aircraft by the transmitter in his hand, Richard leaned back far enough to counteract any ill effects from actually building the planes.

Richard snickered. His mother hadn't been able to come up with a reply to that. It sounded patently ridiculous, but then, so did her argument. Eventually she must've seen that Richard's posture wasn't suffering, so she moved on to the money he spent and the fumes associated with model-making.

The one thing she couldn't see was how badly Richard longed to escape. He loved anything that flew - birds, planes, hot air balloons, anything that shrugged off its tethers and soared high above the dull earth. Richard craved that freedom more than anything else.

It wasn't that Sylvia was a bad mother; on the contrary, she was a little too good of a mother. She worried constantly about her son, reminding him to take his vitamins every morning and wear his jacket whenever the temperature dipped below 70. Richard had been delighted to go to kindergarten on his first day, racing around the classroom without a second glance at his mother, who was wondering aloud if perhaps she ought to keep him home another year.

His teacher, Mrs. Brown, had dealt with overprotective moms before and managed to shoo Sylvia out. Richard had blossomed in her class, becoming an extroverted class clown who managed not to cause *too* much trouble. Unlike a lot of kids, he *loved* school and wished he

could go seven days a week. Over the years, his teachers both challenged him and let him work things out for himself, two experiences he never got at home.

School had given him the confidence to argue with his mother about some things. Richard built the model airplanes over her protests so he could have a taste of freedom, and he also watched horror movies for a thrill of danger, however vicarious.

That was another of his obsessions that Sylvia utterly detested: the old black-and-white horror films, from the days when horror meant more than a bunch of idiotic teenagers getting sliced and diced. Richard liked monster movies the best; sure, the effects were sometimes a little primitive, but the *acting* sold the films. As he'd learned from reading up on Hollywood in those days, some of the actors were *actually* frightened out of their wits at the time. For example, Tippi Hedren had been terrified of the trained ravens in *The Birds*, promised she would be attacked only by mechanical puppets and then faced with live, cawing, angry ravens pecking at her arms and face. To Richard, living in a gated community in Fort Lauderdale where the most frightening thing the homeowners' association could imagine was someone letting their yard grow wild, those scary movies were like a drug. They called to him almost as strongly as the wide blue sky.

Freedom and danger, the two things Richard craved most: it was little wonder he secretly dreamed of becoming a pilot.

## The Chosen One...

The setting sun had begun throwing long shadows across the cemetery, striping the grass with alternating bands of darkness and light while Clark Kent stood at his father's grave. A slight breeze played with his hair, setting free the one curl at his forehead that always seemed to fall in his eyes. Smoothing it back, the young man sighed, trying to figure out how to begin. Given how tongue-tied he felt, he was going to be here a while, so he sat down beside the grave.

Clark opened his mouth to speak twice and couldn't quite articulate his whirling thoughts. "Well, Pa, I graduated," he said at last, ignoring the way his voice sounded choked. "Straight A's, too. I just... Everything's changing."

That sounded lame to his own ears, and he laughed. Didn't everyone say that as they left high school? No more yellow bus to school each morning, no more long summers off, no more cafeteria camaraderie. All around him, people complained of the changes in their lives as twelve years of public schooling gave way to college and careers. Most of the other kids were trying to enjoy one last wild summer before they had to become responsible adults; the Sheriff's Department was still trying to figure out who'd painted the Wilsons' barn bright orange and purple.

Clark felt like a still, small eddy in a great swirling river. He was a good kid, rarely indulging in the hell-raising antics of his peers. Ironically, the other teens were bemoaning the changes in their lives, and they had nothing to compare to *his* trials. Not only had Clark just lost his father this year - the sapling he and Ma had planted at the grave was still little more than a brave twig - but a whole other set of issues had raised themselves right after Jonathan's death.

He'd only recently learned the truth about his own life, and that knowledge threatened to color his perceptions of everything else. His mother and father weren't his birth parents; his hometown wasn't on the same planet as his birthplace; he wasn't even human, wasn't the same species as all of the people he regarded as family and friends.

It was a lot to process. It seemed like that afternoon was just yesterday, his father alive and full of sage wisdom after yet another embarrassment in front of Lana. Pa had always been there to make sense of things, even those things that he felt as though would never make sense, and it seemed so impossible that he wouldn't ever be here again to help him think the harder decisions in life through. Ma was still coping with her own grief, and Clark didn't want to burden her with his problems. It had been enough that she finally told him the truth, that morning when she'd found him in the barn cellar, holding a crystal and staring at the ship that had brought him to this planet.

*Who am I?* Lots of kids his age asked themselves that, but it meant a little more for Clark than it did for them. All along, he'd thought he was just lucky - that some chance blessing had given him his speed and strength and invulnerability. But now he had to confront the fact that those things came from his ... *alien* legacy.

The word still bothered him. He had always felt like a little bit of an outsider, never quite fitting in with the other kids out school, but never standing out too much. But now to find out that maybe that was why all along floored him. How could such a thing even be possible? It sounded like the kind of lame joke Brad Johnson would have made just after threatening his life for looking at Lana during football practice.

The thought of Lana made him cringe. The day after his discovery in the barn, he had driven the truck into town to get Ma a few weeks' groceries, as well as some supplies of his

own before he started out. He had been paying Martin Lang for his bill when he heard Lana's bright laughter just before she, Mary Ellen, and Susie came into the general store. With his new awareness of his true heritage, he couldn't even look her in the eyes when she called out a greeting, only mumbled briefly and scrambled out. Just one more thing that would always stand between him and the girl of his dreams. What would she say if she knew what he really was?

But as hard as he was struggling to reconcile the surreal reality he was currently living in, he had been raised to confront his fears, to seek the truth, to do what was right even if it might be unpleasant. Giving a frustrated sigh, he looked up into the deeply blue sky over his head, his enhanced vision spying a plane seven miles in the air above him, impossible for anyone else to see short of a tiny silver glimmer. Ever since his abilities enhanced, Clark knew he should have suspecting something like this. No ordinary kid could do the things he could do. For better or worse, it was time to accept that he was truly child of two worlds. So there was only one thing he could do: pluck up his courage and learn about this newly-revealed background.

The natural curiosity that had led Ma to encourage him toward a journalistic career also served him now. A whole alien civilization, that the world around him didn't even know existed, and its secrets were his birthright. Somehow, Clark knew that the crystal would be the key to unlock all of those mysteries.

He looked down again, at the still-new granite of his father's tombstone. Regardless of what would happen to him next, he had an unnerving feeling that that final discussion with his father would always color his experiences in life. Slowly getting to his feet, Clark murmured, "No matter what it is that I was sent here for, Pa, I promise I'll make you proud of me. I promise."

*Oh well I don't mind, if you don't mind*

*'Cause I don't shine if you don't shine*

*Before you jump,*

*tell me what you find*

*when you read my mind.*

*The stars are blazing like rebel diamonds cut out of the sun.*

*Can you read my mind?*

**~The Killers, *Read My Mind***