

The Three Rules

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Summary: The moment you find out the name of the man who once saved your life can only be eclipsed by finding out that he may also moonlight in tights.

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Margaret Hart lived by three rules: always drink your tea with a dash of milk, always go to church on Sundays, and always say thank you for a kindness done.

Taking a tentative sip of her piping hot Chai Tea, she smiled in satisfaction. She may not have approved of the little coffee shop's trendy new look, but they still made the best tea this side of Metropolis.

It was a cold Tuesday morning, so she'd dropped in a bit earlier than her norm to wrap her hands around a toasty warm mug. She frowned, as she always did when she dared to look up at the giant blown-up black and white photo that completely covered the wall opposite her. What mad designer thought that anyone in their right mind would want to stare into the freakishly giant faces of a young couple while enjoying their hot beverage of choice?

There was still a slight smile on her lips as a tall young man walked by her table. It was his looks that made her do a quick double take, though not in the way that one might think.

No, she'd seen the man once before. To say he'd made an impression the first time they'd "met" would be quite the understatement; he'd saved her life, and he didn't "save her" from drugs or booze or abuse or homelessness or countless other hardships... no, he saved her from being run down by a bus.

The twenty-something, black-haired, brown-eyed, spectacled gentleman in the charcoal business suit, waiting in line to order, had literally saved her life in an astounding way.

He'd stopped the bus with one hand. With what seemed little effort, he stopped a bus from running over a handful of people, granting her the privilege of celebrating her fifty-first birthday two days later.

That was about a year ago, and she hadn't dared breathe a word to anyone about the incident since. Surely her girlfriends would have thought she'd gone off her rocker if she'd mentioned it when it had happened.

However, a lot had changed in Metropolis since then; the most notable being the appearance of Superman. She'd always wondered...

She took another sip of her tea, testing its temperature. Finding it had cooled a little, she took a healthy swallow as she studied the man discretely while he ordered.

It was the man who'd saved her, no doubt about it.

She set her cup down gently, and leaned back in her chair, unsure of what she should do. Not only did she have no idea who he was, she also had no idea what he was, and that prevented her from approaching him. Could he be the Man of Steel, perhaps in disguise? The looks seemed to be similar enough, but with his glasses on and the distance between them it was hard to be certain.

She continued to watch him as he grabbed a newspaper from the stand nearby while he waited for his morning pick-me-up. Seemingly upset by the front headline, he put it down after what could only be a quick glance, and snatched up the to-go coffee he'd been waiting for with a small wave to the man behind the counter. It seemed as if he came here often.

Once he'd left, she was suddenly aware how anxious she'd become the moment she'd seen him. Relaxing back into her chair and releasing the stranglehold she had on her cup, she quickly came to a decision. She downed the rest of her tea like there was no tomorrow, stood up and went over to the man behind the counter.

"Excuse me," she said, and the teenager looked up just as he snapped the lid onto a steaming cup of coffee. "That man who just left: the one in the charcoal business suit... do you know who he is?"

The man shrugged. "He comes here a few times a week. I forget his name," he answered, then turned to the lady at the register and asked if she knew his name.

"Oh, you mean Clark Kent?" the lady said after a moment of thought.

Clark Kent. The name sounded familiar and she said so to the lady. The lady nodded her head and then told her why: he was a reporter for the Daily Planet... or at least used to be before it blew up.

Margaret smiled, said her thanks, and then turned her attention to the newspaper he'd picked up before he left.

The Metropolis Star. The big headline was the upcoming marriage of Metropolis billionaire Lex Luthor to Daily Planet reporter, Lois Lane. Could that have been the headline Mr. Kent was upset about?

Lois Lane *was* a lovely looking lady, she thought, as she looked at the picture of her in The Star.

Contemplative, Margaret set the newspaper back down, now certain that The Star's headline was what had upset Mr. Kent, and she was beginning to develop a motherly inkling as to the possible reason for his distress.

Stepping outside, Margaret was immediately assaulted by a cold wind. She wrapped her coat tightly around her as she made her way back down the avenue, towards the bookstore she worked at and owned.

Mixed feelings swirled around uncomfortably in her stomach as she began sorting through the box of new arrivals in front of her. It was a funny thing, but the more she thought about it the more unbelievable the possibility seemed, and the weightier the potential truth became.

Could the resident superhero of Metropolis — the Man of Steel himself — really be living among them undiscovered? Would he really have the time for a normal life and everything that came with it; a job, house, friends and relatives?

The door jingled open and a cold breeze preceded the young lady who came in. Margaret welcomed her with a preoccupied smile before returning to her task at hand.

Pulling out a stack of books from the box, she began sorting them by their condition. The Metropolis Book Nook sold primarily used books, and when they received a box from a library, school or large collection they all had to be sorted, catalogued, and priced by condition and rarity of the title. She tried to imagine Superman doing something so mundane. She chuckled a little at the thought of him standing where she was now behind the counter; bright spandex and cape fluttering as he studied the spine of Darkest Fear with an expert eye, determining its condition and price before placing it in the appropriate pile.

"Mistaken Identity," a voice said, startling Margaret. Best thing really, as the image in her mind's eye was almost too ridiculous to bear a moment longer.

“Pardon?” she asked, looking up from the book in hand, slightly startled and unsure of what she’d heard the girl say.

“Do you have the book *Mistaken Identity*? I forget the author but it’s a mystery and I was wondering if you could look it up?”

“Oh! Yes, of course,” Margaret said, setting down the book in her hand and entering the title into her nearby computer. “We have a few books with that name, but I think you may be talking about the one by L. Scotlyne. Follow me.”

Walking her towards the back of the store, Margaret quickly found the area she was looking for and after another moment of searching, plucked the title off the shelf and handed it to the girl. “Is that the one? It’s the only mystery we have with that title.”

The girl gave the back cover a short glance before giving Margaret a wide smile. “This is the one! Thanks!”

The girl left a couple minutes later, happy with her find, and Margaret wondered if she could be completely wrong about her assumptions.

Clark Kent had saved her life. He’d done it in a super way. Those two things she knew for certain.

Yet, that didn’t necessarily mean Clark Kent was Superman. They looked similar, yes, and Clark Kent demonstrated strength far beyond that of a normal man that day he’d saved her life... but she could think of other possible explanations for them all. Brothers, perhaps? Or maybe Clark Kent was strong for some other reason entirely; a mutation, like those comic book heroes or a test subject from some top-secret experiment.

She nearly tossed *Good-Evil Intentions* into the Fair pile. OK, so she didn’t have *good* explanations...

However, she’d read her fair share of mystery novels — even tried to write one under the watchful gaze of members from her writing group — and things weren’t always as they appeared.

Superman himself was a testament to the old adage “truth can be stranger than fiction.”

So where did that leave her, other than in a used bookstore without a clue? For once in her life, she could be on the cusp of something fantastic, on the verge of discovering the biggest secret in Metropolis, and it wasn’t found between two pieces of paper, or hidden within a paragraph set between two other paragraphs. This secret practically fell into her lap, and it begged...

...not to be told.

Her fingers idly tapped the now-forgotten hardcover underneath them. She knew what she should do, knew what she wanted to do, and knew what he probably preferred for her to do... and they were all different things.

Then there was the doubt. The little what-ifs that filled her mind. What if she was horribly mistaken, despite everything she’d seen? Maybe in her age she’d not seen what she’d thought? What if he hated her for bringing it up?

What if she was right?

A week and a half later, and she was in just the same state; frozen with indecision.

However, events had not stopped as she had, and a lot had happened in that time; most of which was concerning on just about every level. Lex Luthor leapt to his death on the very day he was to wed Lois Lane; during the wedding, even! Then, in the days following his death, the secrets came out; so many, so fast that it was hard to digest it all... much less believe it.

She wasn’t surprised that Lex Luthor was a crook. Men with that much money and power were often guilty of something.

Besides, all that news — while certainly a train wreck of the rich and famous — was not what had her concerned.

Superman had seemingly vanished.

He hadn’t been seen since before the wedding, days ago. He hadn’t saved Luthor... or anyone else for that matter, and his absence was starting to fill in the gaps on the front page, as dirt

on Luthor began to thin out.

Speculation was running rampant, and she’d read everything from *Superman Dead?* to *Superman homeward bound?* to *The Super Love Triangle* and she suspected none of it was true.

With all this going on in that little span of time, all Margaret had managed to do was find Mr. Kent’s home address, which hadn’t been very hard. Now she wasn’t even sure the address would do her any good.

She bit her lower lip nervously as she stared out the storefront window to her right. The Daily Planet was barely visible as it stood down the street, a ruined testament to honest journalism for over a hundred years.

Looking at it absently, she couldn’t help but feel a bit like a stalker. It wasn’t a pleasant feeling. Catching herself, Margaret turned away before her actions disturbed her any further.

What was wrong with her? She either needed to drop this whole foolish worry, or go see Mr. Kent and get it over with. She pulled a piece of paper — neatly folded in half — from her purse and set it down beside her tea cup, not yet ready to open it. If she were to open it, she’d see Mr. Kent’s address written in her neat and decidedly girly cursive.

Her original plan was to write a short, simple thank you note, send it, and leave it be. Now the situation had changed and she couldn’t help but wonder if he was even alive to receive it.

She was a bit bowled over by how easily she’d been drawn in to this man’s life. It wasn’t as if she’d ever been nosy or a meddler, and she tended to stay out of things more than she got herself into them... but perhaps she shouldn’t have been surprised.

If it weren’t for Mr. Kent, she wouldn’t be enjoying tea now, and she was finding it difficult to just walk away without knowing for sure that he was alive and well.

Even sitting in the same spot in the same coffee shop, on the same weekday, at the same time had not magically made Mr. Kent reappear.

So it seemed both Superman and Clark Kent were missing — at least to the public — and although the implications of this were startlingly clear, she refused to deal with their reality just yet. She was much better running on worry than she was on tenacity and right now she thought she’d better stick to what she was good at.

She fiddled with the paper sitting beside her. Did this little piece of paper really hold the address of a superhero? Perhaps even a fallen one? What would a criminal do to obtain such information?

It chilled her just to think about it.

It was mid-afternoon when she found herself on his doorstep; it seemed to be a decent-sized apartment in a not-so-respectable area of Metropolis. It was not the place you’d expect to find a superhero — if he was one — but then again, where would you expect to find one? In some solitary fortress made of ice or inside an active volcano?

Margaret knocked on the door, hoping it hadn’t sounded as tentative as it had in her ears. Then she waited. After a minute, she knocked again, and became increasingly nervous the longer she stood there.

A light clicked on inside, visible through the drape-covered sidelight beside the door.

Belatedly she realized that he may not live alone, an actuality she had not prepared herself for. Before she could fully panic, the door opened and there stood Mr. Kent. She sucked in a quick, steady breath and forced an awkward smile.

“Hello... Mr. Kent?” she asked, not even sure why. She knew who he was, but she felt that it might sound less... creepy... if she faked not knowing for certain.

“Yes?” he said with a soft-spoken voice that took her by surprise, accompanied with a small smile.

“I...” she started to say, and then stopped herself. Why hadn’t she thought this through a bit further? Looking down at the ground she was somewhat embarrassed to find herself feeling forty years younger than she was.

He opened the door a little further, his expression more curious by the second, yet he remained quiet, waiting for her to continue.

She laughed nervously, still looking at the concrete beneath her feet. “This is going to sound silly, really.” Taking a deep breath, Margaret forced herself to look at him. “I came here to thank you, Mr. Kent.”

His expression turned from curiosity to confusion. “Thank me? What for?” he asked.

She looked behind her, towards the stairway that led to Mr. Kent’s apartment. The last thing she wanted was to be responsible for someone overhearing what she had to say next.

“I know this must seem odd but... can we speak in private?” She blushed, then continued, “I hate to impose but I don’t want to take the chance that someone overhear us.”

Margaret offered what she hoped to be a reassuring smile, but she saw the worry in Mr. Kent’s eyes at her words. She waited for him to reply, and he seemed to be contemplating his options, before finally opening the door fully and stepping aside to let her in. “Of course, Miss...?”

Once inside he closed the door and she introduced herself properly. “Hart... Margaret Hart.”

“You said you wanted to thank me?” he asked as he stepped down the few steps that separated his entry and living room. Now in his apartment he seemed more at ease and gestured for her to take a seat on the sofa.

“Yes.” Sitting down, she took in the eclectic loft. It was not at all what she’d expected it to be like, yet she couldn’t have said what she expected if she’d been asked.

“I’m sorry to have to ask you this, but have we met before? You seem familiar, but...”

She smiled a bit, and returned her wandering eyes to his questioning ones. “Yes, Mr. Kent. You saved my life.”

“I saved your life?” he asked, surprised. It was clear that this was not what he’d been expecting. The way he’d stressed the “I” in his sentence set her mind working once more, and she looked at his face more carefully.

Really looked.

Before, she’d been too flustered and nervous to take in his appearance, but feeling calmer now, she could truly take in the man before her.

When she did, what she saw so plainly made her take in a small, startled breath.

He didn’t look well at all. He seemed extremely tired, his complexion was pale and drawn, and he had dark circles under his eyes...

...and he was Superman.

She was certain of it. Now that she saw the clear resemblance in the two men it was hard to understand how no one else saw it too. He seemed to notice her close scrutiny, and nervously fingered his glasses, adjusting them needlessly.

“Are you alright?” Margaret asked. Superman couldn’t get the flu, or the common cold, could he? Was he more vulnerable than everyone thought, or was it something more serious?

Clark Kent sat back in his sofa chair, taken aback by her quick change in topic. After a moment he shook his head slightly. “I’m fine. Just a little tired.”

If there was one thing she could spot, it was a lie, but it wouldn’t have taken an expert to spot this one. Superman was a bad liar, but then she wouldn’t have expected he’d be a good one.

She wondered briefly why she was surprised he was a bad liar, and not surprised by the fact that he’d told one in the first place. Wasn’t Superman above all that?

Looking at him now, he certainly didn’t look like an alien or a superhero.

He looked like an ordinary guy.

The thought nearly took her breath away when it hit her; here was this guy living what seemed to be a totally ordinary life, yet he held the weight of the world on shoulders that had to worry about not only saving people from every disaster imaginable... but paying bills and having a career and all those little subtleties of life. It was truly astounding, when she thought about it, and she’d no idea how in the blazes he managed such a feat.

“I’m a year late, but I came here to thank the stranger who saved my life one early Tuesday morning.”

His eyebrows crept up slowly, and he began to interrupt, but she didn’t let him.

“You don’t remember? Is it such a normal, everyday thing for you?” She chuckled a little at her own comment, and then answered her own question. “Of course it is...”

“Miss Hart,” he said, holding out his hands as if to get her to stop. “I’m sorry... I’ve been ill, and I’m just not myself... but if I saved your life I’m sure I’d remember. Maybe you could explain exactly what I did?”

“You stopped a runaway bus.” There, it was out. She gave him a meaningful look which she hoped conveyed what she wasn’t saying: *with only one hand*.

He blanched further than his already pale complexion should have allowed, and she was actually worried he might faint.

“What?” he asked, perhaps more high pitched than he’d intended. “You must have me confused with someone else. I couldn’t have stopped a bus with my bare hands; it’s not possible.”

She bit her lip at his obvious slip, not wanting to trap him this way but feeling it was necessary to get it all out in the open. “I never said you stopped it with your hand, Mr. Kent.”

He swallowed hard, looking cornered and nervous; perhaps she was seeing the reason for his flashy costume and make-believe name: fear.

What must it be like to be so different from everyone else, yet the same in so many respects?

“I don’t have any agenda, Mr. Kent,” she quickly assured him. “I just wanted to thank you.” She sighed, deciding to get it all out. “I had no idea who you were a year ago. I thought I’d seen something impossible, witnessed a miracle. Then Superman showed up, and in the back of my mind I always thought that you, the stranger who saved me wearing a simple business suit and glasses, may have been Superman in disguise...” she paused a moment, and tried to read his features, but found it impossible to do so. “...or vice-versa. I’d had the opportunity to thank Superman at a children’s charity event a few months ago but it didn’t seem right. Superman didn’t save me.”

“So how did you find me?” he asked, clearly curious.

“I saw you a few weeks ago in a coffee shop; recognizing you, I asked the lady who manages the till who you were and I finally learned the name of the man who saved me... Clark Kent.”

When she finished Margaret was a bit surprised by what she saw in his eyes.

He seemed almost sad, yet if it was possible, touched at the same time. There was a long silence between them, and she let it be. Perhaps he had nothing to say, but she had the feeling it was more that he didn’t know what to say. Finally, he asked, “Would you like some tea?”

She smiled. “If you knew me you’d know I never say no to a cup of tea.”

He set the piping hot oolong in front of her, then sat heavily onto the couch. She still thought he looked sickly, and was beginning to think it was the reason Superman had been missing

for so long.

“That was before...” he said, and it seemed so out of the blue that she had to think back in their conversation.

Nonplussed, she asked, “Before?”

“I stopped that bus without thinking. It was before I ever... well, before I had a disguise or secret identity. I was so...” He trailed off suddenly, and stared into his own cup of tea as if it could help him finish whatever he’d been meaning to say.

She knew she should let it drop, but she wanted to know. “So...?” she prodded.

He cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Afraid,” he said quietly. “That someone would remember, recognize me, put it all together.”

Great; so she represented his fears. Perhaps, even his greatest fear. She smiled a little in reassurance. “Mr. Kent...”

“Clark.”

“Clark. Coming here was the hardest and scariest thing I’ve done in a long time. Maybe it says something about my dull life, but... it was so important for me to thank you if I could...”

“If you could?”

She bit her lip and looked away, taking another sip of tea. “Superman has been missing, and I hadn’t seen you at the coffee shop in —” she stopped, mortified. “Oh dear me, I sound like a stalker.”

He shook his head a bit, setting down his tea. She was surprised to see the amused smile playing across his lips, and it bolstered her confidence.

“I was worried, I guess.”

He regarded her for a long time, and it seemed like he was deciding whether to confide in her or not.

She gathered Clark Kent didn’t confide in people often, if ever, but with such a huge secret to be kept she certainly couldn’t blame him.

No, she was a stranger and had no special place in his life. She had no place at all, really, and the more she thought about it the more uncomfortable she became with her decision to come. She’d needed to say her thanks, but never thought of the stress she might put him through in the process.

“I’ll be OK,” he finally settled with.

She didn’t believe him, didn’t think he believed himself, yet it was not her place to question his word or to demand total honesty.

What was she to him, really?

Someone he’d saved.

How many other people had he saved since? How many people had he saved before? Countless, she was sure. So that made her just another victim, didn’t it?

Yet, he’d saved her without the disguise, without the cape and shield and flashy show of powers. For some reason that fact alone made it different in her eyes.

She had to ask herself, why?

She knew though, deep down. He’d done it with risk to himself. Perhaps not physical risk, but risk to his life as he knew it.

She understood now. When he was Superman there was so much less risk, at least at a personal level.

But her feelings made no difference in the end. To him, she was and would remain a stranger. In a way, that realization left her feeling disappointed. Even now, sickly and in his everyday clothes he was an impressive figure, and a seemingly kind man. She wished, perhaps childishly, that she could know him, but maybe that was an unrealistic wish. Did anyone really know him?

In all appearances, the strongest man on this planet seemed to live a somewhat lonely life.

But she wasn’t the right one for him to bare his soul to. To him, she wasn’t anybody at all.

She was a stranger.

She finished her tea as quickly as possible and stood abruptly. He followed suit, seeming a bit surprised at her sudden need to leave.

“I’ve taken up enough of your time,” she said by way of explanation. “Please don’t worry. I don’t plan on saying anything to anyone about this,” she said hurriedly, willing herself to slow down but unable to calm her nerves enough to do so.

A mixture of emotions flickered across Clark Kent’s face and for a moment it looked as if he would stop her, and to her astonishment he did. “It’s alright. You don’t have to go.”

“I think I’d better. I shouldn’t have come. I’m sorry for putting you out.”

“Don’t be sorry, Miss Hart. I’m glad that you did.”

She unlocked and opened the doors of the Metropolis Book Nook at eight o’clock sharp. Every first and last Saturday of the month, she hosted a local novel writing workshop. An aspiring novelist herself, she looked forward to the get-togethers.

Almost all the regulars were there early, eager to get the morning pastry of choice before all the good ones were gone. She poured herself a cup of coffee and greeted an old friend and a new couple as they entered the store.

When it seemed like the last people had come in, she joined the rest of the group and waited for Professor James Mile, today’s presenter, to get set up. He was a good friend of hers and an excellent writing mentor.

His topic this Saturday was creating in-depth characters with special abilities and gifts. If she found it ironic then, she found it doubly so when Clark Kent walked into the store a moment later, waving to her from the doorway when he spotted her.

To say she was surprised would be an understatement. Once she regained her composure Margaret excused herself from the group and met him at the door.

He smiled shyly and gestured toward the group. “You have room for one more?”

She opened her mouth, then closed it, a million questions running through her mind at once. She opened her mouth again and managed to ask, “How?” which he may not have heard at all if not for his super sensitive hearing.

His eyes twinkled and he leaned in closer to her. “I have a few tricks up my sleeve.”

She looked up at him in wonder, and he chuckled. “I was a reporter for the Daily Planet, after all.”

“Oh!” She laughed as well, leading him towards the rest of the group.

“So let me get this straight: *You* are trying to write a *novel*?”

“Is it that shocking?” he asked, grabbing a Styrofoam cup from the stack and filling it with coffee. She was sure she reddened slightly at his chiding, embarrassed at the way she’d sounded.

Margaret shook her head as he dumped three bags of sugar into his cup of coffee. “I guess I really shouldn’t be,” she said. After all, Clark Kent had done nothing but surprise her from the moment she’d seen him a year ago.

“I’m not very far along on it,” he admitted after a moment, stirring in the ridiculous amount of sugar he’d unloaded into his coffee. “But since the Daily Planet is currently out of commission I’ve been trying my hand at creative writing. It’s way more challenging than I thought it would be... I have a lot to learn.”

Nodding, she led him over to the group. “A lot of people think writing is writing, but there is a big difference from one form to another.” She gestured towards a spare seat and looked at the group. “Hey everyone, we’ve got someone new. Clark Kent.”

Several people seemed to recognize his name, and within a couple minutes he’d introduced himself to the bunch. She regarded him as she sat down in the chair beside him. He looked better, but still pale, and Superman had not yet made an

appearance. At least not one she'd heard about.

She leaned over and said quietly, "You're in luck. Today we'll be learning to create believable, three-dimensional superhero characters."

His gaze, at first on James, now snapped back to her. His eyes widened and she couldn't help but laugh at his disbelieving expression.

"That figures," he muttered, but it wasn't long before he was smiling too.

As the workshop progressed she finally understood why no one made the connection between Clark Kent and Superman. While Superman was no-nonsense, Clark Kent was easy-going, and while Superman was bold, Clark Kent was understated. His disguise was quite effective because it not only was a change in looks, but an entire transformation in personality as well. Clark Kent clearly created Superman, but Superman was not Clark Kent. Somehow, it not only seemed to work, but made sense.

As the lecture began she found herself understandably distracted and, for the first time in a good long while, special.

Clark Kent had gone to a lot of trouble to seek her and her novelist workshop out. Perhaps she wasn't just another victim to him after all. She felt warmer inside with the knowledge, and it had nothing to do with the coffee she was drinking. He'd found a place for her after all.

As everyone left, Clark hung back and when they were the last ones in the store he walked over to her and leaned against the wall. "It's my turn to say thank you, Margaret. I don't think I showed it but your thanks the other day..." He took a deep breath. "It meant a lot. You may not believe this, but I was feeling a little useless and it was good to be reminded that Clark can make a difference, too."

Sad. Sad and a little lost. That was the look he had in his apartment that she couldn't place, the look that he still had. Only, today it was a little less pronounced and a little more hopeful.

He'd found her, so she hoped it made the next question all right to voice.

"What happened to Superman, Clark?"

"Superman, he... made some foolish mistakes and let things spin out of control. When it caught up to him, it was no surprise that he was hurt."

She looked away and frowned. "Seriously hurt?"

When she looked back he was looking at a bookshelf to his right. He nodded in confirmation but kept silent.

"Will he come back?" she asked, and almost felt silly. The man was standing in front of her; he wasn't gone or dead... yet he was sick, and it was her way of asking if he was going to get better.

He gave her a sad smile. "We'll just have to wait and see."

He didn't know. Did that mean... what? He was sick and didn't know if he'd get better? That seemed the only explanation.

She wanted to tell him that Superman would be back, but she couldn't because she didn't know enough to assure him that. Instead, she handed him a donut. "I hear you're one of the best reporters in Metropolis."

"Second only to Lois Lane, I hope," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. Her switch of topic had done the trick. She pointed at the donut in his hand. "The multicolored sprinkles are always the last ones finished. If you want the good stuff I suggest getting here early next time. You were eight minutes late."

He had the good grace to look chagrined. "I was hoping nobody would notice."

She raised her eyebrows.

He held the donut up in thanks, and moved towards the door.

"Can I ask one more question?" Margaret called out to him and he stopped at the threshold. He turned back to face her and nodded.

"Isn't it confusing to talk about yourself in the third person all the time?"

THE END