

The Lemonade Stand

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Rated: G

Submitted: July 2012

Summary: A hot summer day leads Clark to a lemonade stand, where his life is forever changed.

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Author's Note: This story was inspired by the Summer 2012 ficathon challenge issued by MrsMosley on the Lois and Clark FanFic Message Boards. The idea was to take one prompt and turn it into a fanfic. My prompt was "lemonade".

"Whew! Sure is hot today," Jonathan Kent said, wiping his brow with an old red and white checkered handkerchief. "Must be close to ninety-five."

Clark shrugged. "I don't feel it. I mean, I do. But it's not bothering me."

Jonathan chuckled. "That's because you're special," he reminded him.

Clark shrugged again. "I guess." He rubbed the back of his neck in thought.

It was hard enough being sixteen years old. Teenage years were not easy, and terribly awkward, even for the normal kids. And Clark was far from normal. His continuously developing powers reminded him constantly that he wasn't like other people. They set him apart from the rest of the world.

They isolated him.

Sure, he still had plenty of good friends back home in Smallville. He got along with just about everyone in town. But, he knew he'd never be truly like them. No one else could outrun the local trains, let alone do it without breaking a sweat. No one else could bench press farm equipment as a stress reliever. Maybe a rake or a shovel, he thought wryly to himself. But certainly not the tractors and combine machines like he could. And that was to mention only a few of the frightening developments of the last six years.

All he wanted was a normal life. Oh, sure, he liked his powers, for the most part. It gave him a thrill to lift the farm machines as a way to blow off steam. He liked being able to finish his homework in seconds, thanks to his incredible speed. But, there were times when he hated them. Always having to hide what he could do. Always having to be conscious of himself, so that he didn't hurt someone when they collided during football games, or when shaking hands. Always having to pretend to be less adept than he actually was.

It was frustrating and incredibly wearisome.

"So, Metropolis University," Jonathan said, accurately guessing his son's heavy thoughts and trying to steer them towards something else. "It's been a whole day since we toured it, and you haven't said a word about it."

"Oh, didn't I?" Clark asked, distracted.

"No," Jonathan said, shaking his head.

"I don't know, Dad. It's an impressive school. They have a decent journalism program. Their football team is pretty awful though."

"Son, there's more to life than sports."

"I know that, Dad. But, let's face it. A school with a solid sports program is something that I want, as well as the

academics. If I can get a football scholarship to one of these schools, that would help you and Mom out a lot."

"Clark, we're already been over this. Don't worry about the money."

Clark shook his head. "No, Dad. A sports scholarship will pay not only for my education, but the room and board expenses too. And right now, you know I'm only playing at slightly above so-so level, which I plan to change come the fall. Don't worry. It won't be enough to raise any eyebrows," he quickly added, his voice lowered. "But enough to give me a shot at a scholarship. Besides, I'm not sure I'm ready to live in a city this big. I didn't realize how much Metropolis just sort of...swallows up a person."

"Well, you have to do what's right for you, Clark. And you still have plenty of time to decide."

"Yeah, I know. Say, Dad?"

"Hmm?"

"Mind if I wander alone for a bit? I'd like to see some of the city on my own. I know Mom's expecting you back at the hotel soon."

Jonathan reluctantly nodded. He didn't doubt Clark's ability to keep himself out of trouble, but his paternal instinct still wasn't comfortable with his son's budding independence.

"All right. Meet us back at the hotel by five so we can go to dinner."

"Will do."

Clark flashed his father a grateful smile, then headed down the sidewalk. He wasn't sure where he wanted to go next. He simply let his feet take him wherever they wished. As he walked, he silently appraised the bustling crowd all around him. The heat had put many of the citizens of Metropolis in a grouchy mood, it seemed. While waiting for the light to change at one corner, Clark saw two old ladies get into a verbal fight over a taxi. He shook his head silently. So much negativity in one place. He didn't care for it.

Half an hour later, he found himself at the Metropolis Park. He knew, from reading about the city in a musty old library book in Smallville, that it was one of two large parks in the city, though Centennial Park was the bigger of the two. From across the street, the park looked welcoming enough. Strands of trees provided thick patches of shade, and the slower pace of the area would be a much welcome change from the so-called "rat race" of the city streets.

Clark waited for the light to change, then crossed to the park. Though the heat didn't affect him, the heavily laden trees provided a comfortable respite from the sun's intense rays. Clark inhaled deeply as he walked, savoring the rich scent of soil and grass. Close by, a few areas of the sprawling lawn were being treated to an afternoon watering from automatic sprinklers. The wet earth was exquisite in Clark's refined nostrils. He took another deep breath.

Flowers.

Flowers lined the cobblestone footpath. Lilies mostly. Clark would know their scent anywhere. But there were others too. Sunflowers, lilacs, roses, impatiens, even some carnations. Clark delighted in them all. It was a far cry from the stench of bus fumes and sweaty bodies, which he'd encountered in full force on the city streets.

Laughter.

Children were running about on the grass, squealing with delight as they played in the spray of the sprinklers. Even a few adults stood at the edges of the sprinklers' reaches, letting the cold water droplets fall onto their bare or sandaled feet.

Clark smiled to himself and kept walking, moving further into the park with each step. Not too far in, he saw a small group of people clustered around something he couldn't quite see. Curiosity drew him forward and he quickly joined the ring of people. One by one, the crowd began to drift apart, some

muttering to themselves, most with paper cups in their hands.

In a few minutes, the crowd was gone, leaving only Clark. He was standing at a lemonade stand, next to which was another table filled with baked goods. A couple of Girl Scouts were manning the tables, their bright green uniforms unmistakable even in the comfortable shade. Clark saw all this with a glance. But his eyes were riveted to the girl who stood opposite him, behind the lemonade counter.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

Clark nodded. “I’ll take a glass of lemonade, please.”

The girl shook her head slightly, her long dark hair bouncing with the movement. “Sorry, I’m all out. Unless you’d like to wait. My troop leader just went to get more. Could be a few minutes though.”

Clark shrugged. That was just fine by him. He had time to kill, and, he thought, he was in no hurry to tear himself away from the girl. This was the perfect excuse to hang around without looking like a creep.

“I can wait,” he said simply.

He leaned one hip gently against the front of the wooden stand. As discreetly as he could, he gave the girl a once-over with his eyes. His heart fluttered in his chest. She was about his own age, and had to be the most beautiful girl he’d ever seen in his whole life. Her large, dark eyes had such depth, such intelligence. Her frame was slight and trim. She held herself confidently, a quality Clark respected. Most of the girls in Smallville were farm kids, like him, and held themselves with far less grace than this girl did. Even at perhaps sixteen, she exuded femininity.

Her uniform was neatly pressed and was bedecked with more badges than Clark had ever seen. Not a square inch of her sash had room to spare. Clark wondered idly if he was seeing only a fraction of her accomplishments. With his speed-vision ability, he took them all in. It appeared she was a member of Troop 182, and had completed some of the more difficult badges, though none appeared to be connected to cooking. Of course, he was no expert on Girl Scout badges, but if they were anything like the ones he’d achieved in the Boy Scouts, he was duly impressed.

“What are you staring at?” the girl asked after a moment of his silence. Clark could tell by her tone that she was on the defensive.

“Just...admiring your badges,” he said honestly. “I’m impressed. Some of those are pretty hard to come by.”

“Oh,” the girl said, blushing a little. “Thanks. Are you a scout? I mean, a Boy Scout. Because, obviously, you aren’t a Girl Scout.” The words tumbled out of her mouth with shocking speed.

“Former Boy Scout,” Clark clarified. “Troop 1015.”

“1015?” the girl echoed. “I’m not familiar with that one. You’re from Metropolis?”

Clark shook his head. “Kansas. I’m Clark, by the way.”

“Lois,” the girl replied.

Clark offered her his hand, and she shook it. Her grasp was strong and sure, unlike his. He felt distinctly nervous talking with this beautiful girl.

“Kansas, huh? You’re a long way from home.”

“Yeah. I came in to check out the college.”

“Oh. Metro U? It’s a good school.”

“It is,” Clark nodded thoughtfully. “So...is all this for another badge, Lois?” he asked, gesturing to the empty lemonade pitchers and the adjoining table full of cake, cookies, donuts, and cupcakes.

She shook her head. “Trying to off-set the cost of this year’s camping trip.”

“Ah, I see,” Clark empathized. “How’s it coming along?”

Lois smiled, a little shyly. “Why so interested?”

“Just...I don’t know...I guess because I’ve been there. My troop grew and sold fresh fruits and vegetables one year to help pay for a trip. So, I know what’s it’s like.”

“Well, when you put it that way...we’re doing okay. The hot weather is helping. You wouldn’t believe how fast the lemonade is going.”

Clark chuckled. “I can imagine.”

He glanced over at the table with the snacks. Many of the items included chocolate, and weren’t holding up well in the heat. Icing was sloughing off the cupcakes and the chocolate chip cookies looked stuck together in one grotesque mass. Lois followed his gaze.

“Let me guess...sales on the baked goods are slow?” he asked with a grin.

“How’d you guess?” Lois said back, her voice playful.

“Just lucky, I suppose.”

At that moment, a middle-aged woman with fire-engine red hair came bustling down the path, lugging heavy drink coolers. She was clearly struggling. Clark shot Lois an apologetic smile.

“Excuse me,” he said, before rushing to give the woman his assistance. To the woman he said, simply, “Here, let me give you a hand.”

The woman nodded gratefully, and Clark easily lifted the coolers, careful not to bang the spigots into his legs. He didn’t want to risk spilling a single drop of the precious liquid inside. He brought them over to the stand where Lois was, and gingerly placed them down on the counter. Then he turned back, grabbed the other two coolers, and repeated the process.

“Wow,” Lois said appreciatively, as Clark’s muscles rolled and flexed beneath the tank top he was wearing. “I mean, you didn’t even break a sweat.”

“Oh,” Clark said, fumbling for a moment. “Just used to it I guess. You know, helping on my parents’ farm and stuff.”

He silently berated himself. The excuse had been completely limp in his ears. But Lois only nodded.

“So...anyway,” Clark said, trying to steer the conversation away from himself again. “I’ll take a glass of lemonade, please.”

“Oh...right,” Lois said, blushing again. “Coming right up.”

She quickly refilled one of the pitchers with the pale yellow drink, added some ice cubes from a different cooler, and poured Clark his drink.

“Actually, make it two,” he said, grinning.

Lois filled a second cup and handed it to him. But Clark refused it.

“For you,” he said. “My treat.”

“Oh, you don’t have to...”

“I insist,” he said. “You look like you could use it.” Then he pointed to a sad, half melted vanilla frosted cupcake. “I’ll take that too.”

“Really? You’re the first person all day to buy any of the food items.”

“What can I say? I’m a sucker for cupcakes,” he said.

A different girl handed Clark the cupcake in question.

“So, what’s my total?” he asked.

“Seventy-five cents,” Lois said.

Clark set down his drink and snack. He pulled out his wallet, fished out a ten dollar bill, and handed it to Lois. She reached for the dented cash box and started to count out Clark’s change. Clark shook his head, reaching over in that same moment to touch Lois’ wrist. He wondered when he’d become so bold. But his touch achieved his goal. Lois stilled her movements while fireworks shot through Clark.

“No,” he said quietly. “Keep the change.”

“But...it’s too much,” Lois argued.

“Let’s just call it a donation,” Clark said. “From one former Scout to another.”

“I...thank you,” Lois said.

“Don’t mention it.”

Inwardly, Clark felt only the barest hint of guilt for spending so much. It was for a good cause, he knew that. But he was also saving his earnings from his part-time position at the Smallville

Post as a go-fer. He intended on using every cent to fund his college education, in the event that he didn't score a full scholarship to his chosen school, be it through sports or through his academic prowess.

To try and dispel his thoughts, Clark raised the cheap paper cup and clinked it gently against the one that Lois was holding.

"Cheers," he said.

He brought his own cup to his lips and drank. The lemonade was perfect. It was icy cold — so much so that it stung his dry throat like frozen daggers. It was sweet too. Not overly so, like the cafeteria at Smallville High was infamous for. This drink was just the right balance between the natural sourness of the freshly squeezed lemons — he was sure from the taste that they were — and the sweetness of the added sugar. He drank deeply, draining the cup in only a few swallows.

"Wow," he commented. "That's pretty good. I'd like a refill, please."

"Sure," Lois said, smiling brightly. She poured him another glass, and Clark dug out a quarter from his pocket, placing it on the counter.

"Lois," he said after a moment of contemplating the drippy white icing of his cupcake. "I was wondering...would you like... maybe...to hang out tonight? Maybe catch a movie or something?"

"I wish I could," Lois said, her voice regretful. "But my grandmother is coming into town for the night. I haven't seen her since Christmas."

"Oh," Clark said, trying not to show how deflated he felt inside.

"But...maybe tomorrow night?" Lois offered.

Clark groaned. "I can't. I'm flying back to Smallville tomorrow morning."

"Oh." Now it was Lois' turn to look defeated.

"I guess...it wasn't meant to be," Clark sighed.

"Yeah. Too bad," Lois agreed.

Nearby, a clock tolled. By the sound of it, it was a heavy iron bell somewhere in a clock tower, probably at one of the local churches. The distinctive sound rolled across the park, slow and sonorous. Clark groaned again.

"I have to go," he apologized to Lois. "My parents are expecting me soon."

"I...oh. Okay."

"Well..." Clark stammered, suddenly shy and insecure again, "it was really nice meeting you, Lois."

"It was nice meeting you too, Clark."

"Bye. And good luck with your lemonade stand."

"Thanks. Bye."

Clark gave her one final smile that she returned. Then he turned, taking his drink and snack with him, and, with long, purposeful strides, headed back down the cobblestone path. Soon, the shade of the trees in the park thinned and he found himself back on the street, heading towards his hotel. But in that short walk out of the park, Clark had come to one very important decision. Even if he chose not to attend Metropolis University, he would be back someday.

One day, this city would be his home.

THE END