

Wondrous Stories

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Rated: G

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Summary: What do you do when the grandchildren come over for a visit? Easy, tell them stories! But these are not just anyone's grandchildren and these are not ordinary stories. Told in the "Stranger" universe, this is a loose follow-up to "Garden of Memories."

This little story picks up several years after Garden of Memories, which allows us a peek at Lois and Clark's descendents. But it is also a tale about heritage and some of the extraordinary ways to pass down a family legacy. Hope all who read enjoy!

Thanks go to FoLC writer Janet Owens who has been a tireless cheerleader for many of my stories! It doesn't seem that long ago when she assisted me through some of the plot problems with Stranger in Our Midst! Not to forget others who have been a fantastic help: Bob, KenJ, Stacy and Andreia.

Legal disclaimer: The characters in this story are property of DC, December 3rd productions and Warner Bros. No Copyright infringement is intended. I have just borrowed the characters for a tiny morsel of time to play in their universe.

Wintertime Evening in Metropolis — Late Twenty-First Century

It was a cold, crisp midwinter evening as Marta sat warm and comfy, wrapped in a sapphire blue shawl quietly looking into the old stone fireplace which held a myriad of brightly flickering flames. <They should arrive soon,> she thought. <This will be a lovely weekend visit and a chance to spoil them again!> She got up, walked over to the window, and looked out into the inky darkness while she listened to the gentle sound of snow whispering against the glass. <Where are they? It is getting much too cold. As soon as they arrive, we can all sit down to a lovely dinner and perhaps afterwards eat dessert in front of the fire.>

Just outside, one adult and three young children walked up the flight of stone steps to the ancient brownstone. The sharp wind and raw cold of the outdoors did not seem to affect the man, while the little ones who clustered around him stamped their feet to ward off the cold. Their father lifted the shiny, heavy brass knocker and let it fall; the sharp sound reverberated around them.

The man smiled as the heavy black wrought iron and glass outer door opened wide, bright light cascading from within the townhouse. Nevertheless it was not the beckoning light or even the mouth-watering scents of apple, nutmeg and cinnamon that surrounded their noses, promising warmth and comfort. It was the generous and welcoming smile from the silver-haired, petite woman with twinkling brown eyes like his that made him smile.

"Come in! Come in! These giant snowflakes will cover my little ones!"

"Grandma! Grandma!" a happy trio of small voices chirped and shouted as one. As they raced inside, they stomped their feet anew, this time to keep the packed wet snow from melting onto the shiny wooden floor.

The children's father spoke. "Thanks for taking them this weekend. We have so much to do before the launch... well, you know how it is."

Marta's eyes shone with memories. "Ah yes...well, space launches are a very important part of this family's history," she said with a twinkle in her eyes. Then she turned to the excited trio gathered before her in the large vestibule. Bending down, she welcomed each one with a hug and a kiss. "Come in! Let's not stand in this cold! The fire your grandfather made is warm and toasty. Besides, these youngsters want dinner, a bath and maybe a special dessert?"

Three sets of eyes lit up in eager expectation.

"Chocolate chip cookies?" asked DJ.

"Pumpkin pie?" Kalee breathed.

"Vanilla Bundt Cake!" Michael shouted.

"Stories!" they cried in a happy chorus.

"Nothing's happening until we get all of you out of these cold and wet garments." She turned to her eldest son and said reprovingly, "Daniel, couldn't you have landed the hovercraft closer?"

Her son, a strikingly handsome middle-aged man, shrugged massive shoulders and smiled. "They *wanted* to run in the snow. Besides, we are parked only a block away. Ma, isn't that what snow is for? Having a rollicking good time? They're city kids. This stuff is great for walking in. Nonetheless, as pretty as it is, I'm glad the Prometheus 12 does not have to launch in this mess."

The words *Prometheus 12* hung in the air. It was the name of mankind's first interplanetary vessel; it was preparing to depart from its geosynchronous orbit tomorrow. Daniel and Chiara, his wife, were technicians working on the Armstrong Space Platform. As part of the mission's team, they were designated 'Launch Specialists' and would carefully track the vessel on its lonely voyage beyond the solar system. Thanks to the Harmonic Crystal hyper drive developed by S.T.A.R. Labs, the interstellar voyage round trip would only take five years rather than several lifetimes.

<Dear old Uncle Bernie would have been proud,> she mused to herself.

"Dinner!" Kalee demanded, pulling on her grandma's sleeve. "What about dinner? I smell hamburgers and french fries!" With that said, she turned her tiny frame to the kitchen. Her father, wise to the little girl's ways, expertly caught her with blindingly swift speed.

"Ma!" Daniel said in mock horror, as he held onto the squirming, giggling child. "You promised – no fatty foods!"

"Your children can handle it. After all, they have *excellent* metabolisms. There's also a green salad which they'll have to eat *before* the burgers and fries."

DJ's face fell. "I don't like salad...especially vegetables!"

A tall man wearing an old plaid flannel shirt and blue jeans entered the front room. His hair was black, generously peppered with gray. Despite his advanced years, he was still quite handsome. Upon seeing the trio of children he knelt down and gave each one a gentle hug.

When he reached DJ, the big man said, "Did I hear *my* grandson say he didn't like vegetables?"

DJ, obviously delighted with his grandpa's attention, nodded his little head solemnly, his soft brown eyes failed to conceal a mischievous sparkle.

Not at all fooled by the youngster's behavior, Jon Kent responded with an equally solemn nod. He turned to Kalee and Michael and said with a wink, "Well, I guess that leaves more of the special dessert for you two!"

Excited as only a small child can be, DJ piped up in defense. "No! I'll eat my veggies!"

"That's my boy!" He stood and said, "Now, all of you say good-bye to your dad, change out of those wet boots into your slippers and wash up. Supper will be on the table in ten minutes." He turned and then winked at Marta and Daniel.

The children were as good as their word. DJ and Kalee gave their father a hug and a kiss. Michael, the oldest of the three, shook Daniel's hand with all the seriousness of someone twice his age. "Dad, please don't worry about DJ and Kalee. Grandma, Grandpa and I will look after them."

Daniel allowed himself a small smile. Michael was a true Kent. Only eight years old and already his eldest child was willing to take on responsibilities. "Thanks, sport, Mom and I feel better knowing that. See everyone soon!"

Michael turned, guiding his siblings up the stairs. DJ scrambled ahead of them and soon the gurgling sound of running water was heard from the guest bathroom.

"Dad," Daniel said, shaking his head, "that trick *still* works!" He had been hard put to keep from laughing while his children departed.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" his father responded with an equally hearty laugh.

Daniel glanced at his watch and said, "Much as I'd like to chat, they need me on the launch platform as soon as possible. Our shuttle departs in a little over three hours. You guys remember the intensity of pre-flight preparations."

"Indeed we do; it's how I meet your mother," Jon said as he gave his wife a squeeze. "Leave the hover craft key here. I can move it into the garage. Chiara must be anxious to get to the shuttle bay. I assume you are taking her via 'Pulsar' express?"

"Yes, sir. Since that's the case..."

"Leave via the garden," Marta said, nodding her head towards the French doors.

"Thanks! Chiara and I will be back in a couple of days to collect the kids!"

They gathered into a group hug, drawing strength and comfort from each other. Daniel broke from the embrace and without looking back, departed through the doors. Within seconds, they heard the familiar whoosh as the superhero Pulsar flew away.

Jon shook his head. "That boy of yours never was one for long good-byes. He kept the farewell to the kids short and sweet!"

"That's because he always says good-bye *before* he and Chiara drop them off here. Our son is very tender hearted; he doesn't want the children to see him cry. If memory serves me correctly, you were exactly the same at that age."

Jon, slightly embarrassed, ran his right hand through his hair. "Ah... yeah. Uh, but hasn't there been a marked improvement with age?"

Marta tried to keep a serious demeanor, but failed. "Perhaps," she said. "Like fine French wine..."

Before Jon could reply, unexpectedly — or perhaps it was totally expected — they heard Kalee's tiny voice calling from upstairs. "Grandma! DJ won't wash his face and hands. He's blowing soap bubbles at Michael and me!"

"Coming!" Marta quickly kissed her husband on the nose and said, "We'll finish this conversation later. As I was saying, some things take time, like a fine bottle of wine. There are a few things we do in private that I *always* want you to take your time doing!"

"Minx!" Jon said as he lightly patted her retreating butt.

As per family tradition, the dinner dishes were cleared, washed and put away by the children. Marta and Jon firmly believed that chores befitting their age could do them no harm. Despite the occasional protest from DJ, it filled their hearts with contentment to hear small voices in the kitchen once again.

Family, Marta sighed to herself, as her eyes traveled over the happy scene, what a fantastic word.

Eventually, kitchen chores done, the children bounded upstairs and changed into their sleeping pj's and robes. They raced each other downstairs, past their bemused grandfather and

into the sweet-smelling kitchen. Upon arrival, three pairs of eyes eagerly watched Marta slice generous wedges of warm, spicy apple cake, which she put on a tray with ice-cold glasses of milk.

Little DJ could barely keep from hopping from one foot to another; *no one* made better apple cake than Grandma Marta!

The excited trio, each holding a frosty glass and plate, eagerly followed her into the living room where Jon had just finished putting another large log on the roaring fire. None of the children noticed the flames and heat did not seem to bother him.

"Hey, it's about time everyone joined me," He growled affectionately. "Where's my cake?" he asked expectantly. Marta handed him a plate, along with a cup of steaming Oolong tea.

"Oh Jon, what visit would be the same without all of us gathering around and playing games?" his wife responded.

Kalee couldn't conceal her disappointment. "Aren't we going to hear stories?"

"Yeah!" DJ piped up. "Fun stories about Surman and Lalan!"

"Please, Grandma?" Michael pleaded, as he came from the French doors after looking outside. "Since it's snowing pretty hard again, we can play Scrabble tomorrow."

Marta and Jon exchanged knowing glances. It was pitch black outdoors, yet Michael could see easily in the dark. Apparently he and his Kryptonian abilities were maturing rapidly.

DJ, four, Kalee, six and Michael, eight, were all olive-skinned and dark-haired, but each through some genetic quirk had a different eye color. Michael, who looked the most like his grandfather, possessed dark brown eyes. Daniel Junior had his mother's sparkling blue eyes as well as her warmth and charm. Kalee's eyes were a deep, calm violet. With her petite frame, long dark hair and friendly smile she was destined to draw lots of male attention as she grew older.

It pleased Marta immensely the youngsters wanted to hear stories about 'Surman' and 'Lalan', for she never tired of telling them.

The children sat cross-legged on the floor in front of the fireplace, each one wrapped in colorfully knitted afghans, while their grandparents sat together on the comfortable red couch. Marta had just begun to speak when a familiar, decidedly unwelcome humming sound filled the room.

Jon and Marta's eyes met, he sighed, quickly stood, extracted the cellular from his jeans pocket and walked towards the den. He listened, nodded his head a few times, and then put the caller on hold.

"Sorry, honey, I have to take this call. Start telling the story without me."

Marta and the children were disappointed. Grandpa Jon was always the one to add great scary sound effects! <Oh well,> she thought, <it could be worse — after all, he is retired from the family business.>

Turning her attention to the bewildered children, she asked, "Which story do you want to hear?"

"Oh! When Kal was trying to save Lalan from the wicked Nobleman Uthor in the green crystal cave and got trapped! That's my favorite!" Kalee gushed.

"No! How about the story when he saved the floating city from crashing into the ocean?"

"What about when he fought the wizard Temnar to save himself as a baby?"

"There are no such things as wizards!" Michael sternly corrected his brother.

"Are too! What about Mr. Gadz? He made things only a wizard can do!"

"Mr. Gadz was a bad *scientist*. Not a wizard!" his brother retorted.

"Aw, you're no fun! Always acting so mean and serious!" Kalee interjected.

Marta chuckled to herself. <They are so full of life and so

much fun to have around; all the joys of parenthood as I remember it.> The children were beginning to get a little too rambunctious, so she clapped her hands and shouted above the clamor. “Ok! Settle down. It’s getting late and soon it will be bedtime. Only one story will be told this evening.”

Disappointed, yet eager to begin and content not to be packed off to bed, the children settled down into their toasty blankies and began eating into their desserts. Their grandmother smiled, cleared her throat and started speaking in her ‘storytelling voice’. A voice filled with ‘ancient mysteries and incredible deeds’, perfect for a winter’s night beside a roaring fire.

“Once upon a time, long ago and far away lived a man named Kal and his best friend and work partner Lalan in the country of Troi’s magnificent capital city Opolis. They were reporters on a newspaper called The Globe. Every day they wrote exciting, important stories, uncovering evil and greed, making the lives of Opolis’ citizens secure and happy.”

“Weren’t they in love?” Kalee asked, a dreamy light in her violet eyes.

“Boo! Mushy stuff! Get to the cave!” DJ said around a mouthful of cake.

“Please don’t talk with your mouth, full young man.” Marta reproved him gently.

“Sorry,” the small boy mumbled, then swallowed noisily.

Marta shook her head, chuckled and continued. “The gentle Kal was very much in love with Lalan, but the spunky, pretty reporter considered him too mild-mannered and shy for her tastes. She was completely unaware of the strong and brave heart that beat for her.

So they worked side by side each day, with their good friends, Lord Franklin and Olin James.

The richest citizen of Opolis, Lord Uthor, held an annual gathering called the White Orchid Ball. All leading citizens were invited so Lord Uthor could entertain them and flaunt his amazing wealth.”

“Right,” nodded Michael. “He flew in white orchids from all over the planet to display. It was really expensive.”

“Yes. Lord Uthor liked to impress people. But it didn’t impress Kal. It only made him extremely cautious around the nobleman. The only reason he attended the event was to escort Lalan. As her best friend, he couldn’t allow her to go alone.”

“Grandma, tell us, what about Lalan’s dress? Did she wear lots of pretty jewelry?” Kalee’s words tumbled from her lips and her magnificent violet eyes shone with anticipation.

“Indeed, she did! A shimmering gown of midnight blue velvet! She wore the most perfect set of sapphire jewelry. The exotic blue of the stones made her smooth creamy skin glow from within. The ensemble looked so alluring, when Kal beheld her, his heart skipped several beats with joy. It was at that moment he determined to reveal both of his deepest secrets: his long-standing love for her and the great powers he used to help people – as the powerful crime fighter who assisted the city’s guardians — Surman!

Sadly, that evening Lord Uthor noticed the beautiful Lalan as well and decided he wanted the enchanting young woman for himself. He danced, flirted and flattered her to such a degree she was blinded to the man’s true character and was convinced he truly cared for her.

Poor Kal’s heart was splintered, but not broken. Despite his sadness, he continued working with Lalan, writing stories during the day and fighting crimes at night. It was not easy to see Lalan on Lord Uthor’s arm for one lavish event or another. Yet Lord Uthor was a busy man; it was very hard to see Lalan whenever he wished. So when she wasn’t working or spending time with friends Molly and Kitty, she stayed home – all alone. Lalan was lonely sometimes, so Kal flew to her home as Surman and he told

her about his adventures in Opolis and she would write them up for the newspaper. Never once in the quiet times they spent together did he reveal who he truly was.”

“Wasn’t that kind of mean?” Michael asked, his forehead creased in concentration.

“Uh... well...” his grandmother fumbled with her words.

“Michael! Please let Grandma tell the story!”

Grateful to Kalee, Marta charged back in. “Um, where was I? Oh yes! Lord Uthor was not just wealthy, but was corrupting many of the weaker nobles in the land. You see, he desired the king’s throne and thought he could bribe his way into the position. The plan was to raise an army and attack Opolis, putting an end to good King Periwinkle’s long and just reign. The Globe was the most important newspaper in Troi; everyone who appreciated truth and justice read it.”

“What about the ‘net?’” Michael asked.

“Oh, this was long before the ‘net was used. Anyway, Lord Uthor knew if he stopped The Globe from publishing the truth, it would be the first step towards taking over Troi.”

“Why?” DJ asked.

“Because the people would read only the ideas and news *he* wanted them to read! The smaller newspapers didn’t reach as many readers.”

“That’s my smart Kalee!” Marta beamed with delight. “Now, Lord Uthor approached both the owner, Lord Franklin, and the managing editor, Mr. James, offering to buy The Globe. Neither man would listen to anything he had to say. Infuriated, Lord Uthor put a terrible plan into place... the destruction of the newspaper, heedless of the pain that destruction might cause. His henchman, Sir Nigel, tried to destroy The Globe’s building, but Surman prevented it in time. Sir Nigel departed the scene of his crime, but in his haste he left his reading glasses. Not just any reading glasses but a pair designed especially for him made in Zurich. Kal’s resources as a reporter were able to track down the designer, which led them to Sir Nigel.”

“Didn’t Kal bring the stuff to Lalan?” DJ asked.

He flew immediately to her modest apartment, but discovered she was gone. “There was only a note taped to the fish tank from the evil Sir Nigel, saying he had taken Lalan to a place outside Opolis. Sir Nigel figured Kal would come looking for her, so the note instructed Kal to contact Surman only – no guardians – otherwise she would die. Of course since Kal and Surman were one and the same, he immediately flew out of Lalan’s apartment to the outskirts of Troi. He followed the instructions to a desolate, mountainous area several miles away from Opolis. Flying high above, he saw a long black car and recognized it as Lord Uthor’s. Landing quickly and using his microscopic vision, he studied the steep rocky path leading from the car and saw three sets of footprints leading towards a cave entrance. At that point, he noticed a small part of the ground was disturbed. Suddenly the three sets of footprints became two. One set, the larger, sunk into the gravelly soil as if carrying a heavy burden.”

“A grim thought crossed his mind. <Lalan must have fought Sir Nigel. He’s probably carrying her.> At that instant he heard Lalan’s frightened heartbeat.”

Marta paused; two members of her young audience were silent, their milk and cake forgotten. Michael, on the other hand, had heard his grandmother tell this story on numerous occasions. Since this was his favorite part of the tale, he allowed his usually disciplined mind to drift off and imagined himself in the role of Surman ...

The Green Crystal Cave

His own heart beat wildly. All he could think of was the beautiful girl of his dreams and her safety. The cave was a dark, black abyss; Surman with all his amazing abilities was never happy in dark, cramped places. Up ahead, he could see the

faintest glimmer of white light in the blackness and something green...

Pain!

Unlike any he had ever experienced slammed like hot giant boulders on his chest. A wild, primal scream tore from the depth of his throat, as if a feral animal were clawing desperately to escape. His joints and muscles betrayed him, as once-powerful knees buckled and he fell helplessly to his face.

It seemed like hours later when he won the fight to regain consciousness, lying on his back, still feeling the pain tearing wildly across his body. The passageway was lit by two powerful flashlights. A sickly green glow seemed to surround him.

"Ah, my lord, it seems the guest of honor of our little gathering has awakened to join us." The very vibrations of Sir Nigel's cultured, accented voice pounded Surman's very sensitive ears.

"Indeed he has." Lord Uthor's voice seemed to float down from an impossibly great height. "Pity the green crystals of this cavern sap his powers. The alien is now, at least physically, one of us." Directing his words towards Lalan, he said, "You see, my dear. He is nothing but a weak mortal when exposed to this crystal. It should be easy to choose life with me, rather than death with that thing."

"Man or Surman. Human or outworlder, he's a thousand times nicer than you!" Lalan spat out.

Surman's vision was gradually clearing, but the harsh illumination from the flashlights hurt his eyes. Yet the first sight he could make out was of Lalan. She looked just awful, her lovely, long brown hair was a mess and streaks of mud and tears stained her face and her favorite gray pantsuit. He knew she would never wear it again. Yet, despite her appearance, the words she just said made her prettier to him than the night of the White Orchid Ball.

"Tsk. Tsk." Lord Uthor examined his nails absentmindedly and then spoke. "Ugly anger from a beauty such as you is truly unbecoming. It is really a pity." His voice went hard as he stared at her. "I would have laid Opolis at your feet. Together we would have transcended the mundane. Ah, but a request made is a request honored." He pushed her roughly towards Surman; she stumbled and fell by his side.

"Come, Sir Nigel, we have business elsewhere! Now that Surman is out of our way, we can take care of Messrs. Franklin and James. Without their interference, The Globe's Board of Directors will sell the newspaper to me! Good-bye to you both. Dear Lalan, the fond memory of your beauty will remain with me forever."

The foul villain blew a kiss and walked towards the entrance. His voice floated back to them. "Oh, by the by, we set up a nice little house-warming present for you. In around fifteen minutes the cave's roof will collapse. I trust these last minutes shall be pleasant!" There was a moment's silence, then, his tone serious, Lord Uthor said, "Lalan, my dear, let me offer one last chance to change your mind..."

"Stuff it, you black-hearted monster!" Lalan shouted angrily.

"Very well, have it your way!" Lord Uthor's light footfalls were heard rapidly receding away from them. Incredibly, as if issuing a final insult, he began to whistle.

"That man is going to be *very* sorry when I get out of here! To think I seriously considered marrying the pompous fool!" Lalan growled. Then she turned her attention to the gravely ill superhero by her side. She took his face in her hands and said in a suddenly frightened voice, "Surman! What's wrong?"

With an effort, he shook his head. "Escape... before the... bomb... goes off..."

"Not without you!"

With those words, she draped his arm over her shoulder and half dragged, half pulled him down the passageway. Precious

seconds ticked by as the duo made slow, laboriously painful progress down the dark rocky tunnel and further away from the deadly green crystals. Surman's strength inched slowly back into his body but without time and the healing rays of the sun, would it be fast enough?

"Lalan...please get away before it's... too late. The thought of you dying here with me is too painful. I...I love you."

Her voice, as soft as a summer's breeze, floated into his ear. "I know that now... Kal."

Startled at the revelation, the big man stumbled over a stone and nearly fell. "How...how did you know?"

"Lalan, winner of the Nova prize for investigative journalism, not be able to deduce Surman's secret identity? What do you think I am...galactically stupid? Help us escape from Lord Uthor's trap and I'll explain everything."

Happily energized by Lalan's totally unexpected confession, Surman stepped up the pace. He was surprised again to realize his super vision along with his other enhanced abilities were returning even faster. He felt a strong gust of wind flowing down the passageway. He picked up Lalan and began to run; where there was wind there had to be a shaft leading out of the mine. A ladder came into his view and he flew up the shaft into precious sweet air and brilliant sunshine.

At that instant they felt a rumble underneath their feet. Then an explosion! Surman carried his beloved away from the disaster before she could be injured. Upon arrival at the city, Surman publicly confronted Lord Uthor with his crimes and had him and Sir Nigel arrested. Opolis and its unsuspecting citizens were safe from his evil tricks forever after.

Lalan told her beloved partner she guessed it was him coming to visit on the nights Lord Uthor was busy. She noticed the two men looked very similar and the rest was history. They were married two months later in a lovely ceremony on top of the same mountain where they declared their love.

THE END

As soon as his grandmother stopped speaking, Michael's attention turned towards the present. He wondered just who Surman and Lalan were. None of his other friends' parents told such wondrous stories. Someday he was going to have to ask his grandparents the story *behind* the stories.

"Yippee!" DJ shouted victoriously.

"Lord Uthor and Sir Nigel got what they deserved!" Michael snapped.

"He shouldn't have messed with the woman Surman loved," Kalee interjected.

"Urgh!" DJ said, making a face, "More mushy stuff!"

Marta's countenance beamed with a knowing smile as she thought, <Someday, little DJ, 'mushy stuff' won't be quite so ... mushy!>

"Tell us another one!" they begged in chorus.

"Sorry, my little ones," Marta said in a gentle, soothing voice, "time for bed."

They all tried to cajole their grandmother into telling another story. It really was one of the chief delights of their visits to the ancient townhouse on Hyperion Avenue. But she held firm; made them carry empty plates and cups back into the kitchen. The children were beginning to run out of energy as they mounted the staircase and entered their respective bedrooms.

"Grandma, do you suppose Surman and Lalan really existed somewhere?" Michael asked while pulling the covers up to his chin and failing to stifle a yawn.

"Yes, I am sure they do ... er ... did. Maybe someday you'll learn more about them."

"That's good. The stories seem real somehow, almost like

they were... a history or something.”

“History is full of stories,” Marta said with a lilt in her voice. “Sleep now, we’ll play games and make a snowman tomorrow.”

She thought DJ made a comment, muffled by blankets, but the small boy had fallen fast asleep. She kissed both children on soft cheeks, turned out the light and closed the door.

Seconds later in Kalee’s room, Marta listened quietly as the child chatted about the story and refused to give in to slumber. “When I grow up will I meet someone as smart and cute as Kal?” the little girl asked, her violet eyes dazzling with expectation.

“Only time will tell, sweetheart. Until then, become a kind, wise and brave person. Such good qualities will draw the right friends ... and the right man.”

“OK!” she chirped and dove under the blankets.

Marta laughed, tucked the little girl in and said good night. Just outside the door in the lighted hallway stood Jon, with a contented look on his time-weathered face. He took Marta’s small hand in his and led her downstairs.

Her voice carefully lowered, she asked, “Ultra Woman didn’t have any problems with that refinery fire?”

“No, everything settled down after she discovered the source of the explosion.”

“Good! Your niece is really picking up where her mother left off. The entire family is proud of her.” Changing conversations, Marta said, “Next time, you tell them about the Floating City and the unexpected descent to Earth. It’s a careful way to introduce the New Kryptonians to the Surman saga. Besides, DJ really loves listening to those sound effects.”

“Maybe, but the kids love your way of telling stories, honey. Michael is a sharp one; he won’t be fooled for much longer. His abilities are beginning to manifest themselves. Sooner rather than later, we are going to have to let him in on the ‘family secret’. Especially how their great-great grandfather Clark Kent, aka *Superman* was not in a green crystal cave, but a kryptonite cage. *Lois Lane*, their great-great grandmother, was not captured by an evil nobleman but was going to marry the billionaire Lex Luthor on that particular occasion. Someday I should ask Grandfather and Grandmother to return from Mars and introduce themselves to him.”

“True, but the Surman and Lalan stories are ones we have told in your family for generations. They are part and parcel of their heritage. Besides, they are ever so romantic. For now, these are just stories we tell them as a form of instruction. They don’t need to know everything about the family just yet, let them enjoy their childhood as long as possible. Would it be wise to have them meet Lois and Clark too soon? They have built new lives and identities on Mars Base Alpha. The children are still young yet, let’s give them a year or two. In any case, it is their parents’ decision.”

Jon Kent, grandson of Clark Kent and Lois Lane, merely nodded his head in deep thought. “It’s something to consider in the months ahead. Come on, let’s warm ourselves by the fire and we can pick up on our earlier conversation this evening.”

The familiar rumble of Jon’s voice caressed her ear. “I am all for warming ourselves by the fire, maybe even doing more than just a *little* warming! Talk about romantic!” The couple laughed and made their way downstairs to the comfort of the roaring fire.

THE *REAL* END.

Author’s Note: In order to understand just why and how Lois and Clark ended up on Mars it is important to read Garden of Memories. It should be explained that this is part of a loose series of stories starting with Stranger in our Midst. It might be good to read them in this order:

Stranger in Our Midst
The Globe

Café Americana
Garden of Memories
Wondrous Stories