

Burning Down the House

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Rated: G

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Summary: While visiting Smallville for the holidays, things don't go as planned for Lois.

Lois rushed into barn, screaming, "Martha? Where are you? Martha! *Martha*, come quick. The house is totally ruined."

Martha stepped out of a stall, shovel in hand, halting Lois in her tracks. She must've misheard what her daughter-in-law had said. "Ruined?"

"It's smoky and black and totally destroyed..." She sniffled, leaving a line of black soot across her face as she wiped away a tear. "I got distracted for a minute. Only a minute, I swear. Jimmy called with some research on one of my ongoing series. You'd find this very interesting, it's about the percentage of men and women who fall back into traditional gender roles when they get married, no matter how progressive and..."

Martha leaned against her shovel and gazed at her with a raised eyebrow. "Only a minute, huh?"

Lois smiled sheepishly, reminding the older woman of her son.

Martha set her shovel aside. "Well, you're not the only one to get distracted. I just came down here for a minute, after Maisie called about borrowing some horse blankets for the sleigh hayride tonight, and then remembered I should clean out Bella's stall, and..." She took a deep breath. "It's just as much my fault as it is yours. Clark warned me not to leave you unsupervised in my kitchen."

"He did *what*?" Lois growled. "How dare—"

"Sweetie, this really isn't the time for a 'how dare Clark' moment, now is it?" Martha said, giving her a stern look.

Lois held up a finger. "Just because he was right, doesn't mean he should ever have said it," she insisted. "I'm just glad that Clark and Jonathan aren't here to witness this."

"Come on," Martha said, nudging Lois's elbow. "Let's see what we can salvage from the ashes of the house."

"It isn't *that* bad, Martha. The walls are more like charcoal briquettes than ashes," Lois said, obviously trying to put a positive spin on this disaster.

Clark arrived in a whirlwind of snow and hay from the other end of the barn. "The *what*? Are you okay? Were you burned?" He blanched, taking his wife into his arms before instantly pulling back to examine her hands. "Oh, God, Lois, what did you do? Please tell me you didn't burn down my parents' house!" he groaned. "Two hours! We just went into town for two hours!" In another windstorm, he zipped past them and out the door that Lois had come through a few minutes before.

The women exchanged a look.

"It was *your* house that burned, right? Not mine?" Martha asked as they continued through the door.

A snow twister came down the drive and stopped in front of the women. Clark looked at them in exasperation. "The house hasn't burned down."

"Of course it hasn't, Clark," Lois scoffed. "I may be helpless in the kitchen, but I'm not 'burning down the house' helpless." She patted his cheek and they walked around him, leaving him

standing in his tracks in stunned bafflement. "I really don't know what happened, Martha," Lois continued. "I pulled it out of the oven within five minutes after the timer went off, but it was smoking and black, completely inedible. By the way, you're out of molasses, so I substituted dark corn syrup; I hope that was okay."

Martha set her hand on Lois's shoulder. "Oh, honey, you should have said something. I have more molasses down in the cellar."

"Oh." Lois shrugged. "Well, you were on the phone with Maisie and I didn't want to disturb you. Anyway, I thought since they're both thick and sticky..."

Martha chuckled. "That's probably why it burned, sweetie; corn syrup cooks more quickly. Come on, we'll whip up another batch together. This time we'll be sure to watch it, so your gingerbread doesn't burn before you and Clark have time to build your house."

"Thanks, Martha," Lois said with a grateful smile. "I only wish I hadn't ruined Clark's surprise."

"Trust me," Clark called from behind them. "I was plenty surprised."

THE END

Disclaimer: Inspired by the characters created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. The characters do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros., DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). The plot of the story is my own.

The title "Burning Down the House" comes from the (1982) Talking Heads song of the same name, although this is in no way a fic based on that song.