

Rules of Family

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: In this installment of the “Rules Series,” Lois and Clark celebrate their first Christmas together as a couple. After stopping Winslow Schott from turning the city of Metropolis into a mob of greedy children, the couple share Christmas Eve with Lois' mother and Christmas morning in Smallville with the Kents. (4 of 10)

Story Size: 8,036 words (44Kb as text)

A/N: Big *huge* thanks to Feli and Vicki for helping with this one.

This story continues on from “[Rules of Battle](#).” View the [complete list of stories here](#).

Previously on Rules of Battle...

“You’re late,” Lois pointed out, looking toward the clock.

“Yeah, Superman had to return the magnetic field device and Corbin to STAR Labs this morning. They wanted to make sure there weren’t any hiccups with the transfer,” Clark explained.

“Do you think he’ll be in good hands at STAR Labs?” Lois asked.

“Now that they know the Kryptonite is his power source, they’ve removed it and are keeping him powered by a cord and battery pack to keep him from escaping,” Clark explained with a sigh of relief.

“That’s good,” Lois reasoned. “I’m glad Dr. Klein was able to help. Sounds like he’ll make a good source for the weird and strange things that pop up in Metropolis.”

“Yeah, he seems like a trustworthy guy,” Clark acknowledged. “I’m just glad we were able to catch Corbin without another Kryptonite exposure.”

“Me too.” Lois smiled. She noticed Clark look away and prodded, “What?”

He took her hand in his, perching himself on the edge of the desk. “Lois, I’m really sorry for the way I reacted the other day. I’m not used to needing saving.” He shared a small smile with her. “You saved my life. I want you to know I’ll never forget that.”

Lois smiled, leaning in to kiss him. “I figure I owed you a few.”

“Aw, hells bells can’t you two keep that mushy stuff out of my newsroom?” Perry teased, walking up to them as he wagged a rolled up copy of the Planet at them.

“Morning, Chief,” Lois said, unfazed as she pulled away from Clark.

“Morning?” Perry echoed with the roll of his eyes. “I thought I told you two to take some time off.”

Lois and Clark exchanged a smile before Clark offered, “I know, Chief, but I guess this place is habit forming.”

“You’re starting to sound like someone else I know.” Perry gave a knowing look toward Lois.

“I had a lead to follow up on.” Lois shrugged. “So sue me.”

“What kind of lead?” Perry asked.

“Well for starters where did Emmet Vale get his hands on Kryptonite in the first place?” Lois pointed out.

“You thinking there’s more to this than meets the eye?” Perry asked with a knowing expression.

“It is awfully suspicious that a former LexLabs employee with little means has in his possession a meteorite that’s value is over a million dollars when he can barely pay to keep the doors to his lab

open,” Clark pointed out.

“Stay on it,” Perry ordered.

“Chief!” Jimmy called, walking up to them with a smile on his face. “I see you ran my photo. I guess you liked my work yesterday.”

Perry nodded, “Yeah, Jimmy, I like it a lot.”

Jimmy seemed to hold back for a moment, glancing back toward Lois and Clark where they were seated at her desk. She and Clark both nodded their encouragement and Jimmy cleared his throat, “Well... I think in light of this good work, I uh... well... deserve a raise... sir.”

Poor Jimmy looked like he was about to faint as his eyes looked pleadingly to Perry. The Chief gave a pensive expression, running his hand against his chin before adding, “I think you’re long overdue for a raise.”

“You do?” Jimmy’s eyes lit up. “Then why haven’t I gotten one?”

Perry shrugged, “You never asked.” With that he walked off, leaving a dumbfounded Jimmy who glanced back to both Lois and Clark. Lois suppressed a giggle and Clark chuckled.

A young blonde woman in a blue uniform held a clipboard as she approached the security desk of STAR Labs. “Can I help you, miss?” the clerk asked.

“Yes, I’m looking for a Dr. Klein?” the woman said, looking at her clipboard. “I’m supposed to assist in the transport of Metallo.”

“Metallo?” the guard frowned. “I’m not showing him cleared for transport yet.”

“It was a last minute change,” she said, holding a gun up. “Open the door.”

The guard nodded frantically and pressed the button to clear the intruder into the secure area of STAR Labs and to the unsuspecting Dr. Bernard Klein’s laboratory. She pressed the trigger and a white haze released from her gun, knocking the guard unconscious.

“You’ll have a killer hangover in the morning,” She muttered to herself, making her way down the long hallway.

Two Weeks Later...

Lois laughed, watching as Clark flew Perry into the sky in his Santa sleigh. It had been a crazy few weeks, and once again they had wrapped up another story with a little super help. Winslow P. Schott had been caught trying to drug Metropolis with his Space Rats as revenge for what he deemed a Greedy Metropolis.

Thankfully, she and Clark had been able to convince him otherwise. Superman’s statement to the police and a very lenient prosecutor—that was not Mayson Drake—helped everyone come to a compromise all parties were happy with. Schott and his secretary Ms. Duffy would perform five years’ worth of community service and help provide toys for the Coates Orphanage. As long as they stayed out of trouble the charges would disappear.

The soft ring of her mobile phone reached her ears, and Lois sighed, pulling it out of her purse. “Hello?”

“Lois? It’s nearly eight o’clock!” her mother’s voice screeched on the other end of the phone. “Where are you?”

‘Where was she?’ She frowned looking around the crowded street outside the Coates Orphanage she was standing on.

“Merry Christmas Eve!” she heard an inebriated Santa shout out from across the street.

‘Crap.’ Lois thought to herself, burying her face in her hand as realization dawned on her. She cringed, anticipating the tirade her mother would be on for forgetting such an important event. “Oh, right! Dinner.” She recalled the plans she’d made last week for her and Clark to attend her mother’s annual Christmas Eve party. It had been years since she’d been to one but considering Lucy would be there as well and given everything that had happened

last week she decided to try and go.

“Yes, dinner. The Christmas Eve party?” Ellen Lane prompted.

“I know, I’m sorry, Mother,” she offered half-heartedly. Truth be told she was hoping the story would have taken longer so she’d have an excuse not to go. Dragging poor Clark to Ellen Lane’s Christmas Eve party seemed like cruel and unusual punishment.

“Your sister is already here. After everything she went through last week, the least you could do is show up!” her mother rambled on.

Lois let out a long sigh, running her hand over the back of her neck. “I know. Just give me a few minutes to wrap everything up here, and Clark and I’ll be there.” She hit the end button before her mother could add any more commentary to her lecture.

It hadn’t even been twenty minutes from the time she’d hung up with her mother until she arrived home. That didn’t seem to bother Ellen Lane as she continued to call wondering where Lois was.

Lois finally turned the ringer off on her phone and finished getting ready. If it weren’t for Lucy’s latest failed relationship—if you could even call it that—she wouldn’t be going to this party at all. Lucy’s last boyfriend, Johnny Corbin had been turned into a Cyborg by the Vale brothers. Then to make things worse, his body had disappeared from STAR Labs before they’d had time to get the Kryptonite from him.

Lois finished applying her lipstick when she heard a familiar knock on the other side of the back window of her apartment. She set the lipstick down and went to greet Clark, opening the window for him, smiling as she watched his cape billowing in the cold winter wind. “That was fast.”

“Perry and Alice are talking,” he said with a blush, stepping inside her apartment.

She closed the window and pulled the drapes closed, turning back to him with a smile. He disappeared into a red and blue blur, reappearing in a charcoal suit and glasses. “It is *so* not fair you can be ready in just a few seconds.”

He grinned, pulling her toward him. “It does have its advantages.” He leaned in to kiss her, running his hand over her cheek as his lips caressed hers. “You look beautiful.”

“Thank you,” she smiled back at him, running her hand over his shoulder. “I should warn you my mother is in crazy babble mode right now. If you want to back out, now would be the time to do it.”

“I think if I can put up with you on a sugar high mid-babble mode I can handle your mother’s babbling,” he joked.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” She playfully loosened his tie, leaning in to kiss him. A grin crossed her face and she murmured against his lips, “We could always stay here.”

“You already told your mom we were coming,” he pointed out, running a hand through her hair. “Do you really want to deal with that phone call?”

She sighed, knowing he had made a valid point. It was too late to back out now without the wrath of Ellen Lane coming down on her. Surely it wouldn’t be as bad as the parties when she was younger. She was the best in her field, and she actually had somewhat of a personal life now. Plus, Lucy would be there. “Yeah, I guess it is too late to flake on her.” She walked back toward the living room to grab her purse.

“It’s a party not a funeral wake, Lois.” He gave her a grin. “You may surprise yourself and actually have fun.”

“Christmas Eve with Mom isn’t your typical family get together,” she said, unsure how to explain the family dynamics of growing up in a broken home where Christmas was more about one upping the other parent or presenting the perfect image rather than family. As a child she craved a normal Christmas more than anything. She wanted her parents’ approval. She wanted to enjoy the holidays like Clark did, but it was hard when every Christmas

she could remember had been filled with pain and loneliness.

“Lois, you’re stalling,” Clark reminded her.

“Just remember we can leave anytime,” Lois said pasting on a grin.

“Come on, let’s go.” Clark wrapped an arm around her shoulders, and they headed out the door.

Clark looked around the crowded room. Lois stood by his side, nursing the champagne flute that had been shoved in her hand by the waitstaff the moment they’d arrived. After the exchange of greetings upon their arrival, Ellen Lane had been pulled away by another woman he recognized as one of the judges he and Lois had worked with on a story last year. Most of the crowd seemed to be someone in Metropolis. An atmosphere he found intimidating for meeting Lois’ mother for the first time.

“Hey, Clark,” a friendly face poked through the crowd.

He smiled when he recognized Lucy dressed in a knee-length, sweater dress. “Hey, Lucy.”

“Mom abandoned you?” Lucy asked, reaching over to hug Lois.

“Got pulled into something,” Lois shrugged. “How are you holding up?”

“Good. I start classes after the first of the year, and the new psychologist I’m seeing—Dr. Friskin—she’s helping me work through some issues.” Lucy said, looking down at the drink in her hand.

“I’m sorry, Luce,” Lois said sympathetically.

“It could be worse, right?” Lucy offered. “He could have already met daddy.”

Clark did his best not to react to the tension that fell in the air between the two sisters at the mention of their father. The look exchanged between Lois and Lucy told him not to ask.

An elder woman with her silver-grey hair pinned back in a bun and white dress and pearls walked up to them, tugging on Lois’ arm. “Lois Lane, what on Earth are you doing here?”

Lois forced a smile, turning to the woman. “Mrs. Camden.” Her grip tightened over her glass.

“I would have thought you’d be planning your own party by now,” the woman said in a chastising tone.

“My own party?” Lois looked at her confused.

“Yes, weren’t you engaged to—Oh, what was his name? You’ll have to forgive me. I don’t keep up with the news anymore. Too depressing... Now, what was his name?” Mrs. Camden looked confused as she tried to recall the name.

“It got called off last summer,” Lucy interjected, cutting into the conversation. Mrs. Camden looked at Lucy in confusion and Lucy continued, pointing to Clark, “This is Clark Kent, Lois’—” She looked at Lois for the right term but found no help. “—boyfriend.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Kent,” the woman said, taking his hand to shake. “I’m Betty Camden. I run the DAR. Their mother has been a member for the last twenty-five years,” she said proudly as if the statement were to mean something of high importance.

He wasn’t sure what the DAR was, but he could tell asking was probably not the way to go from Mrs. Camden’s body language. “That’s... impressive,” he finished weakly.

“Yes, Lois used to come to our meetings as a child and...” she trailed off, looking at Lucy in confusion.

Lois sighed, “Lucy Lane. I’m the other daughter.”

“Oh, yes, I remember,” the woman nodded. “The artist, right?”

“Sure,” Lucy forced a smile that mirrored her sister’s.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up anything,” Mrs. Camden apologized to Lois.

“It’s fine, really. I couldn’t be happier.” Lois said, tightening her grip on the champagne flute that was now empty. A member of the waitstaff approached and handed her another one.

The woman seemed to sense the tension and excused herself. Clark placed a hand on Lois' shoulder. "You okay?"

"Fine," Lois said in a tone that told him otherwise.

"To holiday cheer." Lucy held up her glass of champagne to toast.

"Here, here," Lois grumbled, clinking her glass with her sister's. Neither woman seemed enthusiastic about being there.

"Lois, Lucy, don't just stand there!" Ellen walked up to them, shooing them toward the dining room.

At Clark's quizzical expression Lois hooked her arm in his and sighed, "I guess we're being summoned."

"Help me make it through the night," Lucy said, finishing her champagne flute and moving toward the dining room where a long spread of the best of the best food was on display.

"Whoa," Clark let out an impressed breath.

"Looks like mom didn't spare any expense," Lois commented looking around the room as she took another sip of her champagne.

"How long has it been since you've been to one of these?" Lucy asked, grabbing a plate to make her way down the aisle of food and prepare her plate.

"I think the last one I went to was about four ...no, five years ago," Lois said grabbing her own plate behind her sister.

"Did you just say *five* years?" Clark asked, baffled at the idea of not being with family for the holidays once, let alone for five consecutive years.

"Mom's a bit hard to take in around the holidays," Lucy explained in a whisper.

"You'll see what she means if she stops long enough to have a conversation," Lois said with a knowing look.

After finding their seats with the other guests, they began working through the hors d'oeuvres. As they finished, they found themselves being treated to the next course in perfect synchronization by the waitstaff. Clark wasn't sure what to make of the presentation. The dishes were an art of themselves, and it seemed a shame to ruin the chef's hard work. As dinner progressed, the tension Clark sensed earlier seemed to grow while Ellen continued to entertain her guests.

It was true, Ellen Lane certainly put Lois to shame when it came to rambling. Though many of Lois' babbling moments seemed to be an outlet for excitement or nerves, he had discovered over the past year it also worked as a defense mechanism—especially in her most vulnerable moments. It seemed to be more the latter for Ellen, rambling on and on about parties and caterers as her attention moved elsewhere. He watched as her eyes darted to the end of the table that remained empty. Given the layout of the room and the rest of the house he'd seen, he could only assume that was where Lois' father once sat.

The room was filled with food and lights, but the atmosphere seemed tense for both Lois and Lucy. Neither woman appeared to enjoy the dinner conversation as Ellen rambled on about the neighbor's dog not being on a leash the day before last.

Ellen appeared to notice the uncomfortable silence from her daughters and grew quiet, pushing the cranberry sauce toward him, "Clark do you like cranberry sauce? My ex-husband never could stand it, but Lois always enjoyed it, so I always try to make it."

He gave a polite nod and took the dish from her. "It's an acquired taste." He served himself a spoonful. Truth be told he'd actually never had it before, but given that he'd sampled different dishes around the world during his travels he was never one to turn something down without trying it—especially when he was a guest in someone's home.

Ellen smiled and seemed pleased that he took some. "So, Clark, Lois said you're from Smallville?"

"Yes, Smallville, Kansas." He shared a look with Lois, mildly surprised she had shared his background with her mother given

their complicated relationship.

"I knew a woman from the Country Club in Kansas. I think it was Kansas City." Ellen tried to recall. A frown crossed Ellen's face, and he thought it best not to press who it was Ellen knew from Kansas.

"Yes, I think that was Gertrude." one of Ellen's guests replied.

"Gertrude. Yes." Ellen nodded in recognition.

"It's a lot of country. Smallville is mostly farmland," he supplied.

"Your parents are farmers?" Ellen asked.

"Yes, Lois actually visited once when we were working on a story there last year," Clark said, trying to steer the conversation off himself a bit.

"Oh? She never mentioned it." Ellen gave Lois a disapproving glare.

"It was the story about the federal agents and the meteorite," Lucy supplied with a smile. "Clark got into a fight with the crazy guy who thought he could contact Superman."

Clark looked at Lucy in surprise. To listen to Lois, you'd think Lucy didn't listen to anything she said. It seemed Lucy was more observant than she gave her credit for.

"Yes, I think I read that one." Another guest piped in. "Trask, wasn't it?"

"That's the one," Lois sighed, sharing a look with Clark before taking another sip of her champagne. His brow furrowed in concern. In all the time he'd known Lois she'd never had more than a single glass of wine or champagne. They'd only been here a few hours, and this was her third glass.

"Oh, yes, I remember." Ellen nodded, recalling the story.

Clark glanced at Lois who was quietly stirring her food. She seemed to be avoiding her mother's gaze and questions for the moment. He reached over to squeeze her hand. She glanced up at him with a pasted-on smile that quickly disappeared. He sighed, realizing the evening wasn't going how he'd hoped.

"You sure you're going to be okay?" Lucy asked after making sure her slightly inebriated older sister was safely in the backseat of the cab. "I can help if you need." She looked back at the three-story brick home behind them with several people still enjoying the festivities. "It'll give me an excuse to leave."

"If you need to use it as an excuse that's fine, but I'm more than capable of getting Lois home safely," Clark reassured her.

"Just make sure she takes some Tylenol before she goes to bed or she'll be a royal pain in the morning," Lucy said with a knowing look. "Trust me."

"I'll take your word on that, Lucy," Clark smiled at her, his hands remaining on the cab door, keeping it partially open for Lois. The incoherent mutterings of her older sister could be heard from the backseat of the cab and they couldn't help but laugh. He turned to her with an apologetic smile, "I think that's my cue to get her home."

"Probably." Lucy laughed, "At least it was only mom that noticed, but yeah probably a good idea. Merry Christmas, Clark. Good luck."

"Merry Christmas, Lucy," he said, taking his seat in the back of the cab with Lois. "Have a good night."

Clark had been around Lois while she'd been slightly tipsy a few times, but never like this. She wasn't what he'd call drunk, but she was definitely inebriated. For the most part, she had been entertaining, finding everything humorous and giggling uncontrollably.

He hadn't anticipated anything like this when he'd been invited to the traditional Lane Christmas Eve party. In all the time he'd known Lois, he'd never seen her drunk. He also hadn't seen her around her mother who seemed to carry around a lot of baggage as well. Thankfully, Lucy had been there as a buffer, but

he had a feeling the tension he'd witnessed between Lois and her mother was just a tip of the iceberg when it came to their relationship.

"Sir? We're here." the cab driver said as the cab came to a stop outside Lois' apartment building.

Clark nodded, thanking the driver and paying for the fare and helping Lois out of the cab. "That was a lot more fun than the last party she threw," Lois giggled, leaning against him as he helped her up the steps to her apartment.

"Uh-huh," Clark looked at her in disbelief, allowing her to put all her weight on him as they reached the top step. "That's not what you were saying an hour ago."

"I wasn't feeling the ef-effects of the holiday cheer yet." She smiled sloppily at him as he took her keys from her, unlocking the seven locks on the door for her.

"I'm sure you weren't," he said, turning the doorknob, sighing in relief when he opened the door.

Lois looped her arms around his neck laughing, "How'd you get the door unlocked so fast?" Realization crossed her face, and she giggled, "Oh, right. Shhh....It's a secret."

He quickly closed the door behind her, turning the main lock on the door. "Uh-huh." He gave her a look of disbelief, watching as she half-stumbled to the couch, "Lois, how about some coffee?" he suggested, heading for the kitchen.

"Mmm, no," she shook her head. "Coffee..." She let out a yawn, "Is not going to help the sleeee-ping thing."

Clark turned back to her and chuckled, taking a seat next to her on the couch. "I think we need to get you to *bed*, Lois."

She gave him a suggestive look, "Is that an, uh, invitation?"

He immediately felt a flush of his cheeks at the implication, "Lo-is, no. I just meant you need to sleep this off." He sighed, seeing the frown on her lips, "We're flying to Smallville in the morning, remember?"

She let out a stifled yawn, "Yeah, but a girl can dream, right?" She teased the lapels of his jacket, and he let out a long sigh, "We still haven't ex-exchang-ed gifts. I have yours on the, uh... kitchen."

"I'll give you yours tomorrow." He leaned in to kiss her. "I promise." He pulled away, running his palm against her cheek. "Right now, you need to get some rest, and I need to go home."

"What if I don't want you to?" she breathed, leaning against him as she ran a hand up his chest.

"Lois, you've been drinking," he reminded her, taking her hand in his before it could begin a trail into dangerous territory.

"But I'm not *drunk*," she pointed out, leaning in to kiss him.

It took all his willpower to break off the kiss. He slowly pulled away and murmured, "You're also not thinking clearly." He reached out to brush a stray lock of hair behind her ear.

"Maybe that's a good thing." She grinned back at him. "No more thinking. Thinking leads to excuses and reasons...and thinking is why it took *so long* for us to..." Her voice trailed off, and her lips caressed his, parting ever so slightly.

He groaned when he felt her tongue dart out, teasing his lips with the tip. "Lois," he sighed as the taste from her champagne tingled on his tongue. A reminder that she wasn't in her right state of mind at the moment. "I need to go home."

"Or you could stay here," she offered with a lazy grin. Her eyes fluttered lazily, and she looped her arms around his neck.

"I don't think that's such a good idea," he began to argue.

"Why not?" she pouted, running her hand up and down the front of his chest. "It's practical. One less stop in the morning. Saves time."

"Not really. I still have to go home and change," he pointed out, running his hand through her hair.

"Which takes all of two seconds," she retorted with a lazy smile.

"Weren't you the one pitching the idea of me saving time by

doing this?" he teased.

She giggled, "Okay, you caught me." Her voice dropped an octave. "Maybe I just don't want to be alone tonight."

"Lois," he brushed his palm against her cheek.

"Just stay with me tonight?" she pleaded with him one last time.

All coherent thought escaped him when she leaned in to capture his lips with hers once more. He debated internally for a moment before finally giving in. For whatever reason, she didn't want him to leave. Though he knew he probably shouldn't stay, he also knew he was a goner when she looked at him like that.

The smell of coffee brewing reached Lois' nostrils, pulling her out of the slumber she'd been enjoying for the last few hours. She groggily opened her eyes, wincing at the light that struck her pupils. She pulled her comforter over her face, blocking out the unwanted intrusion.

"You know you can't stay under the covers forever," Clark's voice came from outside the bedroom door. "Coffee's ready."

She pulled herself out of bed, preparing for the worst as memories from the night before came back to her. Thankfully, the headache didn't come. She looked down at the black dress she still wore from last night, noting the slept in appearance of her attire.

'*Coffee.*' her brain reminded her. She shook her head, trying to force her mind to focus. She stood up, stretching her arms over her head and made her way toward the door. The sound of a sonic boom from the living room caught her attention, and she frowned. Another thought came to her. '*What's Clark doing here?*' She looked down at her dress again and made a detour to the bathroom to change. She glanced at her reflection in the mirror and grimaced. '*Shower.*'

After her shower, she changed into the red sweater and jeans she'd picked out the day before. She glanced in the mirror and made sure she was presentable before making her way to the living room. The smell of coffee hung in the air. She found the coffee pot full and waiting for her with a note.

//*Trouble on the pier.*

Be back in a few.

Love,

Clark//

She smiled at the note, reaching for a mug from the cabinet to pour herself a cup of coffee. She took a sip of her coffee and walked back into the living room, waiting for the caffeine to work its magic. She noticed the blinking light on her answering machine. Curious, she hit the play button, listening to the machine give the standard playback. "You have one new message." She went through the prompts and played the message.

"Hey Lois, it's your sister. Just wanted to make sure you made it home okay." Her sister's voice turned into a giggle, and she added. "I still can't believe what you said to mom last night. No more champagne for you at the Christmas eve party. Anyway, give me a call when you get this."

Lois hung her head, recalling her conversation with her mother where she had told her to lighten up and quit trying to control everything. An ironic statement coming from her, but it was a thought that had crossed her mind over the years. She couldn't believe she'd actually said it to her.

She picked up the phone and began to dial. After a few rings, her sister picked up, "Hello?"

"Hey, Luce." Lois took a seat on the couch and cradled the phone in the crook of her shoulder while setting the coffee mug down on the table in front of her. "Merry Christmas."

She could hear the smile in her sister's voice as she cheerfully returned the greeting. "Merry Christmas, Lois. How you feeling?"

"Surprisingly, not as bad as I thought I'd be." Lois cringed recalling some of the things she'd said last night. She'd done worse, far worse before, but never in front of anyone other than

Lucy or her college friends. “No headache anyway. I don’t have any angry messages from mom, so hopefully, it’ll just blow over.”

“That’s good,” Lucy noted happily. “I think mom was too shocked the rest of the night to react. Maybe she’ll brush it off?”

“One can only hope,” Lois muttered dryly. She knew all too well that Ellen Lane never forgot anything, but she hoped her sister was right and this didn’t become another thing that hung over her head the next time she saw her mother.

“You okay?” Lucy prodded cautiously. “You normally don’t allow yourself more than half a glass at mom’s parties...when you do come.”

“Yeah, I know.” Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair. “I normally don’t go, but I thought she might be on her best behavior considering everything that happened recently,” Lois recalled Lucy’s boyfriend being turned into a cyborg just last week. She hoped she didn’t have to actually say the words. Lucy put on a strong front, but she knew her sister had to be hurting from everything.

“I know.” Lucy let out a long sigh. “I was hoping so too. I figured at the very least she’d try and tone it down considering the guest list and the fact that Clark was coming.”

“Yeah, I don’t think any of her guests noticed. Most of them were pretty cheerful when we got there.” Lois said taking another sip of her coffee.

Lucy giggled, “Did you see that neon light up suit the DA was wearing?”

Lois shuddered, recalling the LED lights he’d added to his suit. “Yeah, that was a big fashion don’t.”

Lucy chuckled her agreement. “Definitely on the ‘What not to wear’ issue.” There was a long pause before she added, “Thanks for coming last night for me. I know you didn’t want to, but I do appreciate you making an effort for me.”

“Of course, Luce.” Lois took another sip of her coffee. “Although, I think maybe next year we should just have our own party and not invite anyone that talks to mom.”

Lucy giggled. “That sounds like a plan.” Lucy gave a fake cough. “I think I can feel myself coming down with that cold already.” Lois giggled, taking another sip of her coffee and setting it down. Lucy broke the silence with a change of subject. “So, I guess Clark made sure you made it home all right. No broken bones or embarrassing photos I should start doing damage control on?”

“That was you.” Lois pointed out, recalling the memory Lucy was hinting at. A party had ended with Lucy having photos of herself three sheets to the wind on one of the attendee’s camera. Given that Lucy was in school uniform the photo could have gotten her kicked out of school. Thankfully it had been an easy resolution. Now that the years had passed they could both laugh about it.

“And I’m offering to return the favor.” Lucy giggled. “So no embarrassing photos to take care of, huh?” She let out a mock sigh before she chuckled, “There’s always next time.”

A sonic boom echoed outside, and Lois smiled, mentally counting the fifteen seconds it was going to take Clark to appear at her front door. On cue, she heard the knock just as she approached the door. He held a white pastry bag in hand and a small red box tucked under his arm. She pointed at the phone and mouthed, ‘Lucy’ to him as her sister continued to tease her.

He nodded and set the pastry bag on the counter then turned to pour his own cup of coffee. Lois turned her attention back to her sister. “You’re not funny,” Lois said with a smile. “Anyway, I’m gonna let you go. Clark’s here, and I need to get going.”

“Okay, okay, you two have fun. Tell Clark I said thanks for getting you home in one piece. Call me when you get back. Let me know how your Christmas went.” Lucy said.

“I will. Bye.” Lois hung up the phone, turning to Clark. “Lucy says thanks.” She set the phone back on the receiver.

“For what?” Clark asked, pulling out two butter croissants from the bag.

“Getting me home in one piece,” Lois said, taking a bite of the croissant.

“Ah.” Clark looked like he wanted to say more but held back, taking a bite of his own croissant. He leaned in to kiss her. “Merry Christmas.”

She smiled against his lips, stroking his cheek, “Merry Christmas.”

There was that look again. He straightened up, pulling away, “I figured we could leave whenever you’re ready. It’s a one hour difference over there, but I’m sure Mom and Dad are already up.”

“Just let me finish my coffee, and then I’ll be ready to go,” she said with a smile.

Clark took a deep breath, watching as his mom pulled Lois into the kitchen to help with the ‘secret Christmas cookie’ recipe. It had been over thirty years, and she still hadn’t told him what she did to make those cookies. He’d tried to figure it out but never could get the right consistency and taste. He felt a smile spread across his face at the idea that his mom thought enough of Lois to share it with her.

“Jonathan, we’re out of eggs,” his mom poked her head out of the kitchen door.

“So there are eggs in the recipe,” Jonathan said, tapping his index finger on his chin.

His mom gave them both a look, and they both stood to their feet. “Eggs coming right up,” his dad said with a smile.

“Thank you.” The door closed behind her and Clark chuckled to himself.

“I think that’s our cue to get out of the way,” his dad joked, walking toward the door.

Clark grinned, following his dad out. “Nice to see some things don’t change.”

“And it’s good to see some things do,” his dad smiled at him. They made their way out to the shed where his dad had installed a fridge for storing more of the colder items that didn’t fit in the farmhouse. Most of the eggs from the chickens were stored there. Next to it was a large deep freezer for keeping meals mom prepared for when she was out of town. His dad opened the fridge and grabbed a carton of eggs to take back in the farmhouse.

“Things are definitely different these days.” Clark ran a hand through his hair, looking around the familiar surroundings.

“Well, you have to keep moving. Change is a part of life,” his dad said, closing the door of the fridge as they headed back to the farmhouse.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. Change is good. Sometimes it can be scary, but sometimes it’s really good and ...” Clark let out a breath, preparing himself to say the words that had been on his mind for the last month.

His dad looked at him with a knowing look, “Uh-huh. Something you trying to ask, son?”

“How did you know?” he finally asked as they approached the front door.

“Know what?” his dad asked, reaching for the doorknob.

“That mom was the one you wanted to spend the rest of your life with?” he finally asked.

He watched his dad almost drop the eggs in his hand. He reached out to catch them before they fell. His dad slowly released the handle on the door and turned to him. “A little warning next time?”

“Sorry,” he flashed a sheepish smile at his dad.

“I swear those two are impossible sometimes.” Martha shook her head, looking back at Lois.

Lois nodded, looking around the kitchen where food was set out for Christmas dinner. In all the catered meals she’d had for the

holidays she'd never seen a feast so colorful. Ham and turkey with dressing, and several different pies. Given her lack of talent in the kitchen, it was a bit intimidating to see how easily Clark's mother could whip up a full course meal without breaking a sweat.

"Everything looks great," she managed as she watched Martha pull different dry goods from her cabinets. Sugar, flour, vanilla...

"Thank you," Martha smiled back at her. "Clark helped with a lot of it earlier in the week."

"He did?" Lois asked surprised.

"I can't cook a spread like this by myself anymore." Martha shrugged, pulling out the last of the ingredients. "Every year we have Christmas dinner at the Town Square, and everyone comes together and shares in the feast. We rotate who cooks the turkeys and hams each year. Started out with just a few neighbors but now it's grown quite a bit in numbers."

"It's definitely impressive." Lois looked warily at the pies that were cooling on the counter. "I don't think I could manage to make a single pie look like that." She pointed to the apple pies on the counter. "Let alone six or seven."

"You should have seen the ones that ended up on the floor." Martha chuckled. "It's a nice tradition. Feels like we're actually giving back by sharing our food with others. Feels more like what the holidays should be about. Opening your heart to family and friends."

"Eggs are here," Jonathan's voice echoed from the other side of the door.

"Just leave them on the counter." Martha said, opening the door for him and pointing to the counter with the mixing bowl on it.

"Sugar, flour, and vanilla, huh?" Jonathan noted the ingredients on the counter.

"Out." Martha grinned, pushing him out the door.

"Have fun," Jonathan called over his shoulder.

"What was that about?" Lois asked curiously.

"It's a running joke we have every year. The Christmas cookie recipe is only shared with the Kent women. Jonathan's mother taught it to me when we spent our first Christmas together, and her mother-in-law taught it to her." She shared an evil grin, "I think they just enjoyed driving the men crazy at the idea of not knowing everything about everything."

Lois laughed, "Somehow I don't think you're far off on that train of thought."

"It's a very simple recipe. Five ingredients." Martha said, handing Lois the mixing bowl. "Let's get started."

After giving his mom the eggs she needed for the cookies, his dad returned to the front porch where Clark stood waiting for him. Several thoughts continued to race through his mind as he went over his dad's reaction.

Was it too soon to be thinking like this?

If this was how his dad reacted how would Lois react?

"So." His dad took a seat on the rocking chair and pointed to the bench next to him. "You wanted to talk?"

"Yeah," Clark looked at him warily, unsure what to expect from this conversation at this moment.

"The third date," his dad said with a smile.

"What?" He looked up surprised.

"You asked when I knew I wanted to marry your mom. It was on the third date. It was the worst date in human history. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong, but your mom just took it in stride. She found the positive spin to everything that went wrong. The truck broke down—that's just more time for us to spend together. We got the wrong order at the restaurant—that was a chance to try something new." His dad chuckled at the memory.

Clark chuckled at the image his dad painted. He could see his mom trying to talk his dad out of a bad mood like he'd seen her do

so many times growing up.

"By the end of the date I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her," his dad added, rocking in the chair for a moment before adding. "The question you have to ask yourself is, even though you're thinking about it and ready to make that change, is she?"

"I don't know," Clark said softly.

"You won't know until you ask, but keep in mind the answer may not be what you're expecting. And you have to be prepared for that," his dad said with a solemn expression.

"How did you know?" he finally asked, breaking the silence.

"I didn't," his dad said with a chuckle. "She turned me down the first two times I asked her to marry me."

"What?" Clark's eyebrows rose at the revelation. It was hard to picture his parents as a young couple like him and Lois. It was even harder to imagine Mom turning Dad's proposal down. "What did you do?" he finally asked.

Jonathan shrugged, "I sulked. Dove into my work. Unfortunately, it was the middle of winter. So I looked pretty silly plowing all those fields in the snow."

Clark chuckled at the mental image, "That I would love to see."

"I'm sure you would," his dad retorted with a snort and continued, "Anyway, around the springtime came, I finally realized that getting married wasn't just about my feelings. Your mom was young and scared. She knew she loved me but was it a lifetime kind of love?"

"How do you know?" he asked.

"You take the leap. You ask the question," his dad said with a long sigh, "I'm not telling you this to scare you. I just want you to be prepared. Don't make the same mistake I did. I really hurt your mom by shutting her out when she asked for time to think."

Clark nodded, "Knowing what you know now would you have asked her when you did?"

"In a heartbeat," his dad smiled. "I wouldn't trade it for the world."

The creak of the screen door caught their attention, and they stood up, seeing his mom and Lois standing in the doorway.

"Cookies are ready."

"Lead the way," his dad said, standing to his feet.

Lois sat on the sofa with Clark, listening to the Christmas music that played on the Kents' stereo. Christmas cookies that she'd helped make were on the platter in the middle of the coffee table. Though the traditions were much more low-key than the ones she'd grown up with with her parents, they seemed to hit a chord with her more profoundly.

Here were people that continued to share their home and love they shared with others on a daily basis. The finer things her mother prided herself on when entertaining the holiday parties were nowhere to be seen, but the love and joy they shared with being together was something she craved.

After the gifts were unwrapped and the food wrapped up and taken to the Town Square for the annual Smallville Christmas dinner, Jonathan had taken Martha on a drive. "So, not what you were expecting, huh?" Clark asked her.

"No, I have to say I was pleasantly surprised. I actually enjoyed myself today. I get it now." She grinned back at him, turning to face him.

"Get what?" he asked curiously.

"The love you have for Christmas. The joy. The hope. I get it now," she repeated, looking around the room. "Growing up with this...it's hard not to love it."

He smiled at her, "I'm just glad I was able to share it with you, Lois." He brushed a strand of hair out of her face. "After last night, I guess I can understand why you wouldn't get excited about the holidays. I don't think I've seen a synchronized

Christmas dinner like that before.”

Lois groaned, recalling the dinner from the night before, “Mom enjoys putting on a show. It’s not really about the holiday but about the presentation.” Her tone grew sour for a moment, “Probably why she and daddy stayed together as long as they did, too.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up bad memories for you,” he apologized.

“It’s okay.” She smiled back at him. “Thanks for not saying anything about last night,” she said, meeting his gaze.

“You seemed like you wanted to avoid talking about it this morning,” he remarked with a knowing expression. “Drunk Christmas Eve dinner is completely forgotten.”

“I wasn’t *drunk*,” Lois argued.

“You had three glasses of champagne,” he pointed out.

“Okay, maybe I was a little.” She giggled. “You were still a perfect gentleman.”

“Of course,” he grinned back at her.

“Kind of a rarity these days.” Her eyes sparkled as she looped her arms around his neck.

“So is being able to fly and bend steel over your head,” he teased, leaning in to kiss her.

“You know, in all the excitement we forgot to exchange gifts this morning,” Lois realized. “I completely forgot yours on the dining table.”

“That’s okay,” Clark said, pulling out a small red box from his pocket. “I grabbed it before we left.” At her surprised expression, he said, “You were a bit distracted this morning.”

“So don’t just sit there. Open it.” She grinned happily, clapping her hands.

“Okay,” he nodded and began to carefully peel back the wrapping paper. Inside was a small velvet box. “What is this?” He peered at her in amusement. He opened the box, and she watched in anticipation, waiting for him to put the pieces together. “A key?”

“To my apartment,” she said shyly. “I just thought...” she shrugged, “...it would be easier when you’re coming and going.”

He leaned in to kiss her. “Thank you,” he whispered against her lips. “I’ll have a key made for you when we get back.”

Her face relaxed, and she smiled back at him. “I’d like that.”

He pulled out a small box from his pocket wrapped in a blue ribbon and handed it to her. She pulled the ribbon loose and opened the box, revealing a simple silver chain necklace with a small star-shaped pendant on it. “Oh, Clark, it’s gorgeous,” she gasped in surprise. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“And you won’t,” he responded carefully. “Every star is different and unique in its own way.” He brushed his hand against her cheek, “Just like you.”

“Star?” Lois asked in surprise.

“Just one of the smaller ones.” He said, fingering the crystalized star with his thumb.

“It’s beautiful. Thank you,” she whispered, leaning against him.

“Merry Christmas, Lois,” he said, stroking her cheek.

“Merry Christmas, Clark,” she murmured against his lips, capturing his mouth with hers.

THE END