

# The Greatest Gift of All

by Bellarata

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Rating: K+

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Clark's gaze found its way to the desk across from him, a typical occurrence during the course of a normal work day. A slight smile tugged at his lips as he witnessed the rapt concentration Lois was giving to her current task at hand. One thing that could always be said about Lois Lane - she threw herself into whatever project that came her way.

And he really needed to tell her his secret.

There was no doubt in his mind now; he was finished with giving himself excuses and ridiculous justifications. She needed to know who the real father of her child was. And he needed her to know. This wasn't just about him anymore. The time for selfishness had come and gone, leaving only a blatant and utterly adorable responsibility in its wake.

So he'd finally made up his mind that he had to tell her. He was just wasn't sure when would be the best time.

Or more importantly, how.

With Christmas just days away, the thought of possibly ruining her holiday was excruciating, even though it was almost a perfect time to tell her, since Christmas was the holiday of good cheer. However, Clark was fully aware that Lois Lane didn't always get that memo.

Plus he was invited to Christmas dinner.

Well, Clark Kent was invited to Christmas dinner. He didn't have much hope that Clark would still be invited when Lois learned that her old, goofy, work partner was actually someone who had misled her and lied to her almost every day of their acquaintance. Someone who had left her alone to deal with the aftermath of twenty four hours of unbridled bliss and selfishness at the expense of the entire planet. Five years he had been gone, all the while telling himself that he had been doing the right thing. That leaving Lois had been the right thing to do.

But he hadn't done the right thing and now he was paying for it. He had a son - but that son was now calling somebody else 'Daddy'.

And Clark was fully aware that he wasn't deserving of that title. Not yet, at least. Not while he continued to play the part of savior and allowing Lois to stay in the dark about who really sat next to her at work every day.

A deep sigh left his lips unbidden and he almost blew his lamp off of his desk. Thanks to enhanced reflexes, it was quickly grabbed before it took its final plunge to the floor below. But it had been a close one. This was nothing new - Clark Kent was always knocking stuff off of his desk and he didn't need super powers to hear the snickering that accompanied this current fumble. Sometimes it was exhausting keeping up the appearance of the resident klutz.

"Hey, Butterfingers, how many lamps has that made this year?" Lois teased, the loud clatter distracting her from her work. "Five? Ten?"

Putting the lamp down well away from the edge, Clark tossed Lois an embarrassed smile. "Well, gee, Lois. It's only been, uh, two lamps," he admitted.

"That's all? Huh, it just seems like more." Lois reached down to the bag next to her desk and retrieved a package from its depths. "So, Clark... Are you all ready for Christmas?"

"Uh, I think so. I don't really have a lot of people to buy for."

"Oh, that's right. It's just your mom, right? No other family?"

Clark's heart sent a pang through him. Not any family that he could claim as his own, and that knowledge only hardened his resolve to share the truth with Lois. He had to tell her who he really was, there was no other choice. Rather than answering her polite question, Clark got to his feet and approached her desk. "Lois, I need to talk to you about something," he began before he lost his nerve.

"Sure, go ahead." Lois waved her hand in his direction.

Clark looked around, taking note of the crowded newsroom. "Not here."

Lois looked at her partner sharply. "Clark, what's going on?"

"I just need to talk to you," he replied. "It's uh, it's important."

Lois sighed impatiently. Today was Jason's last day of school before Christmas break and the number of things she had planned to do today were piling up. She didn't really have time for Clark and his cryptic rambling right now.

"Is this about a story?"

He wouldn't meet her eyes. "No, it's... personal."

She hesitated.

"Please, Lois. It won't take long."

"Ok, fine," she agreed. This was so unlike Clark, to not let something drop. Usually she only had to huff a few times and he backed off. She really hoped that he wasn't going to spring a fancy gift on her or something like that because it didn't take a genius to figure out that her partner had a crush on her. And not just a little one. Even Richard had noticed and teased her about it. She often felt Clark's eyeballs on her a little too often for it to be anything else but a Clark-size crush. And sometimes if she looked up quickly enough, she'd catch him with that lovesick expression on his face, although she did her damndest to ignore it. "Just let me wrap this first, OK?"

Nerves escalating, Clark nodded and watched as Lois retrieved her secret stash of wrapping paper from her bottom desk drawer and focused on the task at hand.

"Is that for Jason?"

Lois shook her head. "No, it's for his teacher. I was going to give it to her when I picked up Jason after school today."

Clark eyes narrowed with recognition. "Hey, isn't that the box of candy that Jimmy gave you?"

Lois looked at him in exasperation. "Yeah, so?"

"So you're giving it Jason's teacher?"

"What, they don't regift in Kansas?" Lois demanded. "It's the chocolates with the fruity centers. I hate those. They're disgusting."

"Well, how do you know Jason's teacher likes them?"

Lois shrugged, expertly wrapping the box on her desk. "I don't know. If she doesn't like them, she can just give them to somebody else."

Clark wisely kept his mouth shut. He didn't need to get into a morality debate on Christmas etiquette with Lois when he really needed her in the most forgiving mood possible. "I don't like those fruity centers either," he finally said to placate her.

She shot him a brilliant smile. "Of course you don't. It's because you have taste. Jimmy should have known that I like the chewy ones with the nuts." Clark watched as she wrapped the gift, obviously well-versed at the art of package wrapping. It made Clark sad to think of all the Christmas mornings he had missed with Jason and how many carefully wrapped gifts he had missed seeing his son open.

He should have been there.

Quickly writing out a card, Lois put the wrapping paper back in her desk drawer and got to her feet. "Ok, I'm all yours."

*I wish,* Clark couldn't help but think to himself, wisely keeping his mouth shut least he say those words aloud.

"So... want to go to the little coffee place down the street?" Lois suggested, grabbing her coat. "I don't really have tons of time. I have to pick up Jason in an hour, and I want to make sure I get there a little early." She looked out of the window closest to her desk and frowned. "Oh *great*. Look at the weather! I hate it when it is snowing and windy. People always drive like idiots when it's like this. It's like it gives them license to drive faster. I should really do an editorial about that," she grumbled. Crazy, idiot drivers in bad weather were one of Lois' pet peeves, and Clark well knew it. Except he didn't dare ever mention to her that she could be included in that category. He might be invulnerable, but he wasn't stupid.

She turned to him and he could see it in her face. She was going to try to weasel out of talking to him and he refused to let that happen. Nothing was going to stop him from sharing the truth, not even bad weather. It would take a Superman emergency of massive proportions to tear him away. "This won't take long. I *really* need to talk to you."

Lois gave him a sharp look and sighed. Clark had purposely left his usual high-pitched stutter out of his voice, and he knew it wasn't what Lois was used to hearing. As usual though, she refused to really see or hear him, even when he made it obvious.

It was the story of his life.

"Fine, Clark, let's go then," she conceded. "But if I'm late to pick up Jason, I'm blaming you. And if I'm too late, I won't be able to give Jason's teacher her gift either. And then I'll be one of those tacky parents who didn't give their child's teacher a gift at Christmas time and I'll have to avoid making eye contact for the rest of the year." She took a breath. "And it will be all your fault."

It was his fault that Lois had left the gift until the last minute? "Wait, wasn't Jason supposed to bring the gift to school with him this morning? I know we always did it that way when I was in school" Clark unwisely announced, forgetting his earlier vow to avoid antagonizing her. He was quickly reminded when her eyes narrowed in his direction.

"Well, *Clark*, maybe that's the way they do it in *Kansas*, but here in the real world..." she

paused and gave him a dirty look. "Alright, fine. I forgot. Ok? Happy now?" She brushed past him and stormed in the direction of the elevator. "Come on, Kent. Chop, chop."

Clark took a deep, steadying breath and followed. He knew that after this, his life would never be the same. He knew Richard was out of town until later that evening, and he wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. One thing he knew with certainty, he would be keeping an eye on Lois driving to pick Jason up from school. Lois in a normal mood was a scary sight on the road - Lois in a rage was asking for trouble. As far as Richard... well, Clark would deal with that later on. Clark didn't intend on leaving him in the dark and suddenly the tiny circle who knew his secret was about to expand.

And it scared him to death.

Lisa Peterson sat at her desk and watched Jason White color yet another picture of the Man of Steel. When cold weather struck, Jason was always her shadow during recess since the cold seemed to exacerbate his asthma. And even though the other teachers had lamented about being stuck with a student instead of being able to head for the break room, Lisa didn't mind since she'd always enjoyed his company. He was as close to a 'celebrity student' as she had ever taught and she liked seeing how his mind worked. He was a bright and well-mannered little boy, but since the incident with Lex Luthor, she had been worried about him. He had changed. He was even quieter and more serious since his terrifying experience at the hands of that madman, and Lisa hoped that his parents were getting him the help he needed to deal with those series of events. She could do her part though, to help him deal get over his ordeal. So a close eye was kept on his moods and his drawings.

"So, Jason, are you excited about Christmas?" she asked, stacking the gifts she had received into a nice neat pile on the floor by her desk.

Jason looked up at his teacher and nodded, hoping that his mommy remembered to get Mrs. Peterson a present. He'd reminded her a few times but she'd forgotten. Luckily, he had made her a card the night before and he'd given her that. His dad always told him that anything homemade was better than anything store bought, and he hoped Mrs. Peterson thought that way also.

"Do you have any special plans?" his teacher asked, the fondness in her voice not faked like she sometimes had to do with some of her more un-endearing students. His frailness always concerned her and she didn't blame his parents for being overprotective with his health. She'd seen him in the throes of an acute asthma attack and it had terrified her. She'd do anything to avoid aggravating his condition if it meant not having to see Jason fight for breath again.

"No, not really. Just the usual," he answered. As he turned his attention back to his drawing, Lisa reflected on the ordeal Jason had experienced several weeks ago. He'd missed a few days of school after the whole New Krypton incident and when he returned, she'd watched him for any signs of lingering mental trauma. He didn't like to talk about it with her or the other students, but Lisa knew he'd almost died that day. Apparently saved by Superman just in the nick of time, if Jason had his story straight. The only thing he would say about his near-death experience had been, *'the bad men locked us in a room with olives and the ship broke in half and we went under water. Then Superman pulled the ship out of the water and saved us.'* It had seemed a little far-fetched, but she'd had a quick word with Jason's father the next day, and he'd confirmed the story Jason had shared. Mr. White had not volunteered any more details than his son had, though, and Lisa didn't pry.

That was fine with her though. She knew it had been a lot for a little boy to go through but she would never satisfy her own curiosity at the expense of a little boy's mental well-being.

Jason's mother was someone she'd admired for quite some time, even before Jason had been born and long before he'd wound up in her class. Mrs. Peterson had followed Superman's introduction to Earth under Lois Lane's byline with rapt attention, like most of the world. It was a story that never grew dull. Those five years Superman been gone, Lisa had mourned with the rest of the world and cheered at his return. And once again, Jason' mother seemed to have the inside track to the Man of Steel.

The day that Superman fell from the sky, it had shaken her when the news footage of Jason and his mother had aired. Even in the aftermath of the earthquake, she couldn't tear herself away from the TV as she waited for word of Superman's fate. When she had spotted the familiar mop of hair making his way through the crowd with his mother, she had been surprised to see the path being cleared for them. She'd been even more surprised when Lois Lane and Jason had been granted passage through the closely guarded doors of the hospital. When Jason had returned to school, Mrs. Peterson couldn't help but discreetly question Jason about what had occurred once they'd gotten inside. '*Superman was sleeping,*' was the only answer he'd given her, which didn't really answer her question but again, Lisa didn't pry. It had given her a small thrill to know that her student had been one of the few people in the world who had been allowed to see Superman at his most vulnerable moment in history. The footage that had been captured by home video of Superman falling from the sky and hitting the ground had been replayed over and over, and it had not lost its initial shocking impact the more times Lisa had seen it. She had been ecstatic when it had been reported that Superman had left the hospital under his own power.

Since that day however, Jason's drawings of Superman had become more and more frequent and Lisa couldn't help but study them, knowing that children often drew pictures of the things that bothered them. She'd expected pictures of Lex Luthor, but the Man of Steel had been the one most prominently featured, and always in a happy light. The crude drawing of a little boy sleeping in bed with a caped figure standing beside him with tears on his face had given her pause, but she had refrained from asking Jason to explain the drawing.

It stood to reason though, that since his mom was friends with Superman, then Jason would see him more than the average child.

Her gaze settled on her hard-working student and she smiled. He really was a precious little boy. Suddenly, his head popped up and she saw him frown.

"What is that noise?" he asked.

Lisa listened carefully. "I don't hear anything, Jason. Maybe it is the kids on the playground. There is a lot of snow out there, I'm sure there are a lot of snowballs being thrown."

Jason shook his head, frowning. "No, it's a creaking sound, like something groaning. Like when the ship we were on broke in half and we fell into the water."

She listened again. "I don't -"

Before she could finish her sentence, a loud 'crack' was audible to even her ears and the events that followed seemed to occur in slow motion. Screams from the playground filled the air and a loud crash followed. Part of the ceiling rained down upon her and she turned terrified eyes to Jason.

"Get under the desk!" she yelled, trying to jump to her feet to rush over to assist him in

getting himself to safety. A large chunk of the fractured building struck her on the side of the head and she fell to the floor, just as the massive, mature tree that had stood for hundreds of years next to her classroom crashed through the roof; the bulk of it heading straight for her. There was no time to scurry out of the way and Lisa threw her arms over head in a futile attempt to protect herself against the falling weight of the tree that was about to crush her. Another large chunk of the roof fell and pinned her legs, but Lisa didn't even feel the pain in the adrenaline-filled agony of what were surely to be her last seconds on earth.

Except the tree never touched her.

As the noise eased, Lisa lifted her head to see how close the tree had come from killing her before the desk had stopped its rapid and deadly approach.

It wasn't her desk that had stopped the downward plunge.

Jason White stood over her, hands stretched over his head and fully supporting the massive weight of the tree trunk that had crashed through the roof of the classroom. She was alive because Jason White had stopped the tree from reaching her.

She didn't even want to consider the implications of such a feat.

"I don't know if I can hold it," Jason whispered, tears welling up in his eyes. He'd acted on instinct and the tree hadn't been heavy, but now he was starting to feel it. He could see Mrs. Peterson's legs squashed under a big chunk of the roof and he began to panic. Tossing back his head, Jason yelled for the one person who he knew could help him right now.

*"Daddy!"*

Lois held the elevator door open for her partner. "Come on, Clark. I don't have a lot of time," she called, stepping aside as Clark passed through the double doors and into the cramped confines of the elevator. He always took up a lot of room and this time was no different.

When Clark noticed that Lois had pushed the ground floor button, he reached over and hit the button that would take them to the roof.

Lois looked at him sharply. "I thought we were going to get coffee. Why are we going to the roof?"

Before Clark could respond, a crashing noise shot through his carefully filtered hearing and he concentrated on it, hoping it was something that he wouldn't feel compelled to respond to. Somehow he didn't think that would go over well with Lois if he hurried off.

*"Daddy!"*

It was Jason. And he sounded scared.

Well, so much for the subtle approach and working his way up to breaking the news to Lois gently. This changed things.

"Lois, we have to go, Jason is in trouble," he told her in a low voice, grabbing her arm and pushing the emergency stop button.

Lois shrugged out of his grip and whirled on him. "What do you mean, he's in trouble? How do you know that? What sick game are you playing here?"

Clark didn't like the instinctive suspicion in Lois' voice, but he knew it was probably deserved. "Because I can hear him, he is calling for help."

She gaped at him. "How could you possibly know that?" Lois demanded.

"Because," he began, taking hold of his glasses, "you know that thing I wanted to talk to you about? Well, I wanted to tell you that I'm Superman."

Lois glared at him. "You know, this isn't really funny," she hissed.

"I'm sorry, Lois, we don't have time for this, Jason is in trouble."

"Clark, you're not Superman-" whatever tirade Lois was about to unleash on him was abandoned when Clark took off his glasses and grabbed her.

And a second later, they were shooting up the elevator shaft, leaving behind only a pile of clothes that trickled through the open hatch of the elevator car

He hadn't been lying.

From the rigid way that Lois held herself in his arms, Clark didn't have hope that he'd survive this with their friendship intact.

And he deserved every little bit of her anger.

"I'm sorry, Lois. I didn't want to tell you like this."

"Just shut up, Clark. We need to help Jason," she snarled, fear for her son nearly overwhelming her. Even though she didn't want to believe a word Clark said, she couldn't deny that he had every reason for telling her the truth here. Her son - no, their son - was in trouble.

Clark didn't try to talk to Lois again during the short flight to Jason's school.

Lois gasped in dismay when they touched down on the playground of the elementary school Jason attended. Whatever had happened had obviously just occurred, judging from the shell-shocked faces of the students and teachers standing around. Not even the arrival of Superman had created much of a stir. She gasped when she saw what had created such panic - the bulk of a huge tree had fallen on the school, smashing whatever had been in its path. And what had been in its path had been Jason's classroom. Her eyes flew over the students looking for a glimpse of her son, her fear growing by the second when she couldn't find him on the playground.

"Where's Jason?" Lois demanded, clutching Superman's - no, Clark's - arm. She watched as those familiar blue eyes scanned the school yard. "Where is he?"

"He's inside," he quickly told her, offering her hand a quick squeeze. "He needs help. Stay here."

And before Lois could even blink, he was gone.

When Clark had located Jason, it was one of the first times in his life that he actually felt fear. His son needed his help and he cursed even those few seconds that he'd spent trying to explain things to Lois.

When he burst carefully into his son's classroom, his breathing hitched. At first glance, he had thought that Jason was buried under the tree. Now he could see that that wasn't the case at all. Jason wasn't smashed under the tree.

He was holding it up.

The pain that Lisa Peterson was feeling was becoming excruciating and she wished that she had the strength to remove her legs under their heavy shackle so she could crawl out of the way. But multiple attempts to do just that had been futile.

And Jason continued to hold that massive tree away from her, even though she could see what it was costing him. The seconds ticking by felt like hours and Lisa was only beginning to hear the faint hint of sirens approaching from afar. She prayed that nobody else had been injured in this freak attack of Mother Nature. So long that tree had shaded her classroom. But the recent earthquake, coupled by the heavy blanket of snow weighing down its branches, must have pushed the tree further than it was capable, leaving the laws of gravity to assist its

crash to the ground. At least it hadn't occurred when class was in session.

Jason's breathing was becoming labored as even more seconds ticked by, the asthma that he'd been in the classroom to avoid becoming more pronounced the longer that Jason did the impossible.

"Jason, it's OK," she managed to get out. "You can let go of the tree."

Jason shook his head emphatically. "No. If I do, it will squash you." He tried to shift his weight and Lisa could see the effort it was costing him. She was beginning to get a much clearer picture of things and the story behind Jason's picture of a boy sleeping with Superman standing beside the bed was beginning to make a lot more sense than it had before.

A hint of movement from the doorway caught her attention and the bright primary colored figure of Superman appeared.

"Daddy, help!" Jason cried desperately, the last remnants of strength finally seeping from his arms. This wasn't like the piano, he hadn't had to think about that. He'd had to think about holding the tree though and he was afraid.

Before Lisa could even register what was happening, Superman had relieved Jason's burden of the tree with one hand, scooping up the little boy with the other. With an ease that was awe-inspiring, Superman moved the huge bulk of the tree and lowered it to the ground, Lisa no longer in its path.

"Are you alright, ma'am?" Superman asked her, causing Lisa to blink rapidly. Was she alright? That was debatable. Her legs were still stuck and it hurt, but she didn't know what to do about the other thing. That thing where her student had held up a tree that only one other person in the world could have held off of her - and Jason had called that other person Daddy.

On second thought, she really wasn't alright.

"Uh, my legs are pinned," she finally managed to get out. With one careful move of his hand, her legs were no longer being held down and Lisa scooted herself upright, carefully watching the Man of Steel. She could feel his eyes on her and it didn't take a Superman expert to know that he was x-raying her legs.

"I think there is a small fracture along your tibia, but nothing else looks broken. I think you're going to need stitches though," he informed her, gesturing to the wound on the side of her head when the ceiling had caved in and had knocked her to the ground. That came as a surprise, she was sure her legs had been shattered, but the pain was far less without the weight of the roof pinning them down.

"Thank you, I think I'll be ok," she stuttered, not knowing what else to say.

"I caught the tree," Jason told Superman softly, and Lisa was suddenly struck by the resemblance between the two. She'd seen Superman look caring before on TV and in magazines, but not like this. This wasn't just caring; this was pride, worry and love wrapped into one.

This was looking like a parent.

"You did really good, Jason. I'm proud of you." Superman smiled down at the boy in his arms before setting him down on his feet. Now that he wasn't exerting himself, his breathing settled down without the aid of his inhaler.

"Jason!" a feminine voice called from the door.

"Mommy!" Jason called, running across the room and into his mother's welcoming arms.

"Are you OK?"

Jason nodded. "I'm OK. The tree almost squashed Mrs. Peterson though, but I caught it."

Lois Lane looked up sharply and Lisa had no trouble making out the fear and wariness in

her eyes as Jason's mother looked in her direction. Since Lois Lane had always maintained that Richard White was Jason's father, Lisa could well imagine that Jason's true paternity was something best kept a secret.

"I owe your son my life, Ms. Lane. As far as I'm concerned, the tree fell and missed us both, but my legs were pinned until Superman came to help me," Lisa announced decisively. "Nothing else happened. And I never heard Jason call Superman 'Daddy' either," she added as an afterthought.

The relief in the room was almost palpable and Lisa didn't miss the silent communication between Superman and Jason's mother, who didn't look very happy with the Man of Steel.

Lois finally looked at her son. "You know?"

Jason nodded solemnly. "I heard you tell him in the hospital. You told him that he was my daddy.."

"Well, I guess keeping secrets from me runs in the family," she grumbled, shooting Superman a harsh look. Lois gave Jason a quick hug though. "I'm so glad you are alright though."

The guilty look on Superman's face was easy to read and Lisa couldn't help but wonder what was behind it. There was no doubt about it, Lois Lane was not happy with Superman.

The sound of sirens grew louder, then stopped, and Lisa knew that EMS had arrived on scene. Superman seemed on the verge of saying something to Lois but apparently changed his mind, instead turning in her direction, offering Lisa a grateful smile and she was struck by how human he looked in that instant. He'd always seemed so much larger than life, but she realized that he really was just a man.

A man who had fathered a son.

A shiver ran through her and it had more to do with the reality that Superman was the father of Lois Lane's son than the cold air streaming through the crushed building.

"Thank you," Superman finally murmured to her, looking definitely uncomfortable with the situation. "Uh, the fire department is here, I'll let them know you need treatment. And then I'll move the tree off the building." He walked to the door, only stopping to whisper something in Jason's ear. Lisa watched as Jason's face lit up proudly and then the caped figure was gone.

As Superman made his way out to meet the fire department, his mind was a myriad of conflicting emotions. One thing stood out clearly though.

Lois owed Jason's teacher a whole lot more than a regifted box of candy.