

Memory in the Flickering Flame

by JJ-the elusive

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Rating: K+

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December 1996

Lois bit her lip to hide her excitement as she wrote up yet another story on the city's newly appointed guardian angel. It was a bit too Nietzsche, but the name Superman really stuck after she first uttered it before she fainted from disbelief. That was a few months ago when he first made his presence known to the world when he saved Lois from plummeting to her death from a helicopter teetering off the roof of the *Daily Planet*. Since then he'd helped thousands of people around the world and averted many potentially disastrous events, including the time when he basically blew Hurricane Cathy off its course with his "super-breath", saving Haiti and the Dominican Republic from certain doom.

"Oh, h-hey Lois."

She looked up to see her new partner, Clark Kent, hovering over her like he always did. Well, he wasn't that new, actually. Her protests notwithstanding they'd been made partners a while back, and it actually seemed to work out pretty well. Despite being hopelessly nerdy and seeming like he was chronically clumsy, he did hold up well against the double forces of potentially dangerous investigative journalism and the wrath of Lois Lane. Perry had tried to partner her up with someone before when she first started, a veteran journalist of the *Planet*. In the end *he* left because of her. He "knew nothing of what it takes to be a hard-hitting journalist. He has no balls for this sort of stuff, and has no desire to go out there and gain any!"

Clark on the other hand, meek as he was, did manage to get a few crooked politicians to quake in their imported Italian loafers. He had no problem going out into the seedier parts of the city to sniff out a story with Lois. Readership was up because of their exposés, and Lois figured if things kept going at this rate they might even be nominated for an award or two next year.

She slid her chair back a little and smiled. He was actually really nice, and had a strange sense of humor that she only seemed to get. Those farm boy charms must have been wearing off on her..

"Hey Smallville."

"Doing anything special for Christmas Eve?"

"Nah, just going to spend it with my two friends Captain Morgan and Ben and Jerry's."

"I t-think that's three, Lois."

Clark picked up her stapler and began to fidget with it before she snapped it out of his hands and slammed it on the desk. God, why did the man have to be so damn awkward? He even dressed oddly. Huge unfashionable suits that hung off his large frame, slightly sloppy

dark hair and to top it off, glasses from frickin' 1982. Maybe fashion traveled slowly throughout Kansas, who knew?

"Ha ha. What about you? Going to go see your sweet white-haired mother in Kansas?"

He grinned widely and she rolled her eyes. Guessing from the cheesy grin, it meant yes. Such a dork. Noisily he pulled up a metal chair next to hers and awkwardly sat down, his knee banging on the leg of her desk.

Lois went back to work on her piece about how Superman saved a bus full of old ladies from the First Presbyterian Church choir from plummeting into the Delaware River. They were so grateful they asked him to attend their choir event in Philadelphia. He did, and actually joined in for a song. Mind boggling at best, but Lois found an angle that showed that Superman maybe was trying to find out more about Earth's culture by joining in. She surmised that he'd studied Christmas customs of America before, because he definitely knew all the words to "O Holy Night".

"Silver-haired."

"What're you mumbling about, Clark?"

"My m-mother. She's silver-haired, remember?"

"Right. Aaaaand done! See Clark? When you have your attention completely focused on the story, it comes to fruition and fast. Thus that means I'm outta here."

"O-oh, right. Here, let me get your coat."

He quickly stood up which meant he hit her desk so hard with his knee that it caused a whole pile of folders on the desk to slide off into a papery mess on the floor. Months ago this would have garnered a string of expletives from Lois' mouth, but she simply laughed and mentioned what a damn klutz he was.

"It's okay, Clark, I've got it." She knelt down to the floor and quickly gathered all the files and papers, throwing them onto her desk in a messy heap. "I'll deal with all that after Christmas. So, when are you leaving for Smallville?"

"Uhm, tonight." He held her coat open for her and watched as she slipped her tiny form into it and began to button it. God, she was so beautiful. The red cloth of her coat made her pale skin stand out, her hair dark and shimmering against it.

"Clark? You coming?"

Lois hung her coat up in her closet with a smile. How could such a klutzy person exist? Regardless, she had definitely picked up on the not so subtle look of adoration he gave her as she was buttoning her coat, since they occurred so frequently. Naturally the farm boy would have a crush on her. It would seem wrong if he didn't. Little country boy comes to the big city and what does he do? He falls in love with the first city girl he meets. She shook her head wondering what would have happened if he met Cat Grant first.

But he was lucky. He was going to do something special for Christmas because it meant something to him. Someone was waiting for him to come home, someone that actually wanted him to come home. She was pretty sure the General didn't even care that it was Christmas Eve. Lucy was somewhere in Europe partying it up with some hot rich guy she didn't even know. Lois on the other hand, despite her brazen attitude towards it earlier had a soft spot for Christmas Eve. She remembered when she was a little girl she would light holiday candles with her mother around the house and turn off the lights. The darkness would be illuminated only by the soft glow of the flames and the lights on the Christmas tree. Her poor excuse of a Christmas tree was sitting on her coffee table, complete with battery-operated lights-- but it

was something at least. Earlier in the week she'd gone to the store and bought a couple of large white candles with flowery silver vines on the sides. Not as Christmassy as the ones years before, but nice enough. She set them on her bathroom counter and lit a couple of small white votives as well.

The reflection in the mirror showed the flickering flames and Lois as she bent down to work the bathtub faucet. What the reflection also showed was Sal Malone, a former source of Lois' from Suicide Slum hiding behind the bathroom door. Not too happy with what she had done with the information he gave her, and the fact that the East Bay gang immediately knew that he was the one who ratted them out and "took care of business" so to speak, he'd come for simple revenge. It wasn't pretty, what the gang had done to him that night. He'd lost a few fingers, teeth and almost lost an eye--and that wasn't the worst of it. He lost everything he held dear: his reputation, his place to stay, and his fledgling business selling replica watches, his life essentially. It was all because of that damned pretty but bossy-assed Lois Lane, and she was going to pay. But first, maybe he'd enjoy the show...then he could kill her.

Lois sighed with a tired smile as she began to unbutton her blouse, knowing that all her aching body needed was a nice, hot soak in the tub. The scent of the jasmine bubble bath was a lovely aroma, especially mingled with the vanilla smell of those candles she'd bought. She slipped off her slacks and was reached behind her back to unhook her bra when something caught the corner of her eye. Did the bathroom door just move a little? She stepped out of the bathroom and into her bedroom, trying to figure out if there was a draft or something that could have caused it. She turned back to the bathroom to see a ski-masked man pointing a small black gun to her chest. Immediately she shrieked in horror, and just as fast or perhaps even faster the intruder was suddenly gone, he'd seemingly vanished into thin air. She stood rooted to the spot for a few moments, her mind trying to process just what the hell happened. A deep, familiar voice came from behind her, making her exhale a breath she didn't know she was holding.

"Miss Lane? ...Lois?"

She whirled around to see *him* standing there with a look of concern. Suddenly she remembered she was wearing nothing but her bra and panties, and not even the good ones or the pink ones at that. He of course made no indication he noticed, and stepped forward with an even more concerned look when she didn't answer right away.

"Are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

"Uh, n-no." Great, now she was stuttering like Kent. "I'm fine. How did you...?"

"I heard you scream. I was just, I, uh, happened to be flying by and..." he simply smiled quickly and nodded. Right.

"Right. Well, thank you. A lot. I mean, so much." What was it about this man that turned her into an idiot that couldn't speak? "Uh, what about Sal Malone?"

"I took Mr. Malone to the authorities. The police will be here shortly to get a statement, of course."

She nodded, wide-eyed now at the revelation that Superman was here, in her home of all places. This was an amazing, no, *historic* moment in her life. Here she was talking to the most amazing being on the planet, albeit in her undies, but the one who had saved her life yet again. She didn't ask him to, no one asked him to help them and yet he did, every single day with a smile. Despite her knack to get into trouble, he seemed to have a penchant for Lois, giving her the only exclusive interviews and staying for hours afterwards just talking about everything and anything with her. He was larger than life but somewhat accessible, yet a close friend to

her. He was simply...

"Wonderful." Her voice took a swooning lilt of its own volition and she quickly corrected herself before mentally slapping her forehead in embarrassment. "Great, I mean! That's just... Hey, do you celebrate Christmas at all?"

Her breath hitched in her throat when he stepped forward and gently cupped her cheek in his warm palm, a soft smile gracing his features. He moved even closer and leaned down a little to give her a soft kiss on her forehead.

"Merry Christmas, Lois."

A split-second later, he was gone.

Later that night Lois put one of the large white candles on the top shelf of her closet for safekeeping. Every year since she would uphold the tradition and light the candle on Christmas Eve. She would remember that amazing night when her life had been saved once more and when Superman let her know that he cared about her as much as she cared for him.

December 2008

Christmas parties at the *Daily Planet* were the stuff of legends for more than one reason. First, only a select few knew about what Gil really did to Toby from copy in 1996, and never spoke of it save for when they became extremely inebriated during the subsequent parties (well after, seeing as how they worked on the morning edition then went to the Ace O'Clubs Bar) but since everyone else was just as drunk, no one remembered what was said thus making it a mystery legend once more. Second, everyone remembered when Superman dropped by (or was it flew by?) in 1998 and brought a rather large Douglas Fir tree for the bull pen. Everyone decorated it with as many spare paper clips, rubber bands, makeshift paper snowflakes and coffee filters as they could find and it actually didn't look half bad in the end. That is, until Clark accidentally walked into it and toppled it over. Years later, Clark disclosed to Lois that he actually did accidentally walk into it because he'd been so distracted by watching Lois almost kiss Jimmy under the Mistletoe.

Lois slowly lowered her swollen form into her desk chair and surveyed this year's party as it quickly got underway. Even though it was indeed Christmas Eve, a newspaper never slept. Production for the morning edition of the paper was still being done, but a few of the reporters left carried on their work as they relaxed a bit and chatted with one another about their plans for the holiday. The food and champagne had been brought out, the music turned on, and the ties had been loosened. Lois put one hand on top of her large belly and rubbed the underside with her other, getting a swift kick in reply.

"It's okay, baby." She murmured and looked down with a smile. "It's just your landlord checking in on how you're doing down there."

At nearly eight months along, she still couldn't believe she and Clark were having another child. The big difference this time being that they were married, and of course that Clark would actually be here for the birth of their child this time around. He had come back in October of 2006, but it still seemed like it was only yesterday. A couple of months after the New Krypton incident she and Richard finally broke things off and he left for the newspaper's Boston office. Lois, even though knowing it was for the best was affected by it profoundly. He'd left because he said he couldn't compete, because he felt like he had lived a lie for the past five years and (this one drove the stake through her heart and left her in tears) because he realized he was a placeholder for when her preferred lover came back. Harsh words, but they rang true to Lois' ears and it was difficult to get over the fact that she had caused him so much pain. Jason, resilient child that he was, took the break-up a bit more mildly but was still upset

of course. As for the lover who came back, though they realized they had a child together, Lois knew from the years before somehow that a life with Superman could never be. Those same feelings from before came rushing back, and her heart ached for him even more now that he was home, but it was to no use. Still, that December when she broke up with Richard, she and Jason lit candles around the house including the white one from years before, and she remembered that amazing night with sadness. Both mother and child were hurting, and both found one man to help and comfort them, Clark Kent.

Jason had quickly found a friend the first day they'd met, and friend morphed into father figure as the child always made a beeline for Clark's desk when he was there with his mom. Every afternoon one could see Clark working sources at his desk while Jason would be on the end of the desk-- reading, doing his homework or coloring in his Superman coloring book. That or Clark would lean back in his chair holding Jason close, regaling him with tales of growing up on a farm and about the places he'd been in his travels. Later he'd be at work on his computer, with Jason fast asleep with his head on Clark's broad shoulder.

Lois and Clark had been made partners again the same week he'd come back and the two quickly fell into their old pattern of working together that they had years before. She'd felt horrible about being slightly aloof towards him on his first day back, but of course it was because she'd been holding in the hurt and anger she'd felt over him leaving without a trace. There were so many times she'd call places he'd mentioned in France, Argentina or any place a postcard had come from recently only to find that he'd never been there, that or there was miscommunication because her French and Spanish skills were rusty. They'd become close again after her anger was put aside and she came to trust him again. He comforted her when she needed it, listened to her when she needed to talk, and was pretty much the same wonderful yet ridiculously klutzy guy he'd been before. This time around however she couldn't quite put her finger on it, but there was something more to the adoration in his eyes when he would glance at her when he thought she wasn't looking. Finally letting Clark's gentle insistence win, and trusting her ever so complicated feelings, she went on a date with him in June. The rest went on swimmingly for the next six months of course, as they realized how they'd loved each other all along and just couldn't admit it to each other. But then again there was that giant temporary relationship roadblock when he told her who he really was, and what he had done. She was upset naturally, so upset that they didn't spend their first Christmas as a couple together. That was the first time in years that she didn't light the candle, she didn't feel it would be right seeing as how hurt she felt. Eventually they had many a talk and in the end she found that she just didn't want to waste time and argue anymore. Everything had fell into place as it should have, and enough time had gone by that they weren't together, weren't even on the same damn planet and frankly, she was done with the waiting. They were married in March of this year and would finally be spending their first Christmas together as an official couple.

Lois had a little while before she had to go pick Jason up from his aunt's house and bring them to their relatively new home. The small family originally moved into an apartment after the wedding, but soon after the honeymoon ended they'd discovered they were expecting, and realized that a mid-size apartment wasn't exactly the best place their growing family. Thus they searched and found a decent and affordable home in Bakerline and had moved in that summer.

Perry's voice suddenly boomed in the air as he beckoned Lois to his office. She made her way into the room, sitting in one of the leather chairs in front of his desk and immediately went to business.

"Chief, I think I have an idea for Friday's morning edition. I was thinking that with the..."

"Lois, are you okay? You shouldn't be out so late, and you know you could have emailed me your article from home. I know your leave starts in a couple of weeks, but maybe you should go earlier."

Why did Perry always have to interrupt her like that?

"I'm fine, Perry. Now about the article. The Associated Press ran a-

"Why don't you go on a semi-maternity leave and work from your house? I don't want another repeat of what happened with Jason. You almost had him here, for goodness' sake!"

With a huff, Lois awkwardly stood up, mentally cursing herself for wearing these shoes today. Two inch heels or lower, it still hurt like hell at the end of the day. Her usual comfy shoes didn't go with the skirt she was wearing, so sue her.

"First, I am not going anywhere! And second, do you want to hear my angle or not?"

"No. Unless it's from your office at your house where you can very soon go into labor and holler all you want, just not here!"

Rolling her eyes, she left the room and promptly sat back down at her desk. Since when did Perry actually want her to go on leave? When he found out she was pregnant the first time he'd lamented for weeks about how his star reporter would be out of commission!

"Too bad you can't join in on the partying, Ms. Lane!" Jimmy sat on the corner of her desk with a glass of champagne in his hand.

"It's Ms. Lane-Kent to you, bucko. And it's okay, the baby is having a little party of it's own, it's been kicking almost nonstop since the morning!"

"It? So you and Mr. Kent want it to be surprise, huh? Where is he, anyway? Last I saw him, he left to go after a source."

"Oh, right." Lois' voice trailed off. She knew all too well of his whereabouts. "He must still be out there on the story."

He was off doing his "other job", and she was fine with it, but... If they wanted a life together, she had to be. But hormones be damned, she was upset that he wasn't here. She'd only seen him briefly this afternoon, and before that had seen him two days prior at home, and even that didn't last long. It was Christmas Eve, and she was beginning to wonder if he would be able to make it. She looked up to the row of TV screens, seeking out a familiar blue and red form in any of the news reports, but no such luck. Wherever he was, people needed help. Who was she to deny or envy them? If she and Jason had to be alone tonight, it was okay, they'd done it before. Clark would come home eventually. Right?

"Ms. Lane? I mean, Ms. Lane-Kent! Are you okay?"

"Hmm?" Lois looked up to see Jimmy reaching towards her in concern. "Oh, yeah."

She wiped at a stray tear, and smiled. Damn hormones. Suddenly as if on cue, her cell phone began to ring. The caller ID showed that it was her sister, Lucy, and Lois flipped the phone open and pressed it to her ear. Lucy had Jason for the day and knew of his unique abilities and how to handle them.

"Hey, Luce. Is everything okay?"

"Oh yeah, things are fine, sis. I just wanted to tell you that we're in Centennial Park, having a ball! Why don't you come and join us if you're done for the day, huh? You need the exercise and I promised Clark I'd look after you, didn't I? Trust me, Lo. Lots of women think that they shouldn't move around as much this late in the game, but it's better for you and the baby if you do. And didn't Clark's real father say things would go fine this time around? Jason was born early and sick, this one's going to be the opposite. I know you're worrying, stop!"

Inwardly, Lois groaned. The park was all the way on the other side of New Troy, and more than 20 minutes by taxi because of the late afternoon hour. Oh well, she might as well. She was done her article and had handed it in a little while ago, and had just wanted to relax a bit. Given the fact that she'd come in at 8 AM like she always did, and her current condition, needless to say she was tired. She didn't dare say it aloud, though because then Clark would quickly agree with Perry that she needed to go on her maternity leave early. The notion of staying in the house for more than a week and not coming to work? Scary. She'd done it before of course when Jason was born but it wasn't easy in any way.

"Lois? Come on, get up off your chair! The kids haven't seen their Aunt Lo-Lo since Thanksgiving!"

"Okay, okay. But you do realize there's a potentially massive snow storm coming, right?" She glanced up to the TV above her to see the WGBS weatherman, Todd Bosley, excited pointing to a giant blob of white passing through Southern Pennsylvania and heading in the direction of Metropolis. It would probably turn to rain considering the somewhat mild temperatures they were having, but with her luck it would be a frickin' blizzard.

"Oh please, Lo. The weathermen are never right, and it's probably just going to turn into rain. And whatever you do, don't mention the 'S' word in front of the kids. They'll go nuts and stay up all night looking outside the window. On top of that they won't sleep because they'll be listening for Santa." Her voice went to a whisper. "And if they do that, how will Ron and I get the presents under the tree?"

Lois chuckled. "And which 'S' word would that be: snow or Superman? Fine, I'll be there in a half hour at most."

Of all of the city's parks, Centennial Park was the largest. It was where Superman had fallen after he'd thrown New Krypton into orbit. The crater made from the impact had since been filled, but a tall statue of him had been erected nearby, dedicated for his years of help and service to the city. It was actually quite beautiful, with him standing in a regal pose with his legs apart and holding a Bald Eagle on his left forearm. She remembered how moved Clark had been, his only complaint that it should have been painted bronze rather than gold.

"Well, it's dedicated to a guy who wears colorful tights, Smallville. So it's rather fitting don't you think?"

"Well Lois, since you really enjoy the tights, it's okay."

She laughed quietly to herself at the memory as she walked on the main path of the park towards the soccer fields at the other end. On her way she passed the statue on her right, where some people sat on the benches circling it, probably watching their kids as they climbed up and jumped from the base of the statue with glee. It was all decked out for the holidays, a rather large Santa hat on his head and there were Christmas lights on the trees surrounding it. She knew Clark must have got a kick out of the hat, a goofy grin probably going along with it.

As soon as she reached the soccer fields Jason came running in her direction.

"Mom!" He hugged the side of her, his head resting against her hip.

"Hi, kiddo!"

Lois gently bent down and engulfed her son as much as she could in a hug. Gone were the days of him calling her "Mommy" and she calling him "Munchkin", since now he was a seven year old and he was "more 'growned' up". She only laughed and could imagine what he'd be saying at fifteen, oh Lord. She looked up to see her nieces and nephew, twins Sarah and Erica,

both five and Peter, cute and chubby at three years old running towards her and joining in on the hug with a chorus of "Aunt Lo-Lo! Aunt Lo-Lo!"

"Glad you could make it, Lo. Are you tired? Do you want to sit down?"

Lucy helped Lois to her feet after she kissed the cousins hello and led her to a nearby bench where they watched the older children kick a soccer ball to each other. Little Peter would try to kick it with all his might, but his tiny foot would only send it a couple of feet. Annoyed, he'd try even harder until one of his sisters or Jason kicked it away from him and resumed playing kick the soccer ball. Soon a little ball of nothing but thick down jacket and a fuzzy hat came crying to the women, and Lucy picked her son up, sitting him in her lap. She reached over and patted Lois' belly gently.

"So, how's super baby, there? Are you getting enough sunlight?"

"Luce, not so loud!" Lois quickly looked about to see no one around, just the city skyline and a dark gray sky.

The young blonde woman smiled and set Peter down to the ground again.

"Go on, honey. Tell them Mommy says they have to let you play with the ball, too." She then turned to her older sister. "It's okay, Lois. So are you and Clark all set for Christmas? I take it you found your Christmas stuff in all of those unpacked boxes in the basement?"

"Yeah, we did. The tree's all set up of course. Clark and Jason flew to the Rocky Mountains and picked it out."

Lucy laughed mirthfully. "From the Rockies, huh? Of course."

Everything was set as Lois said. Presents were bought, but not so many as the previous years due to obvious reasons mentioned in the news. She just couldn't find one little thing, the white and silver candle she'd saved from twelve years ago. She hoped it hadn't been thrown out accidentally during the move, and she really wanted to light it this year since it was their first official year together. But what if Clark didn't get to come home on Christmas Eve? Or Christmas Day for that matter? It wouldn't matter if she never found the damn candle. She felt tears welling up and quickly wiped them away before Lucy could notice.

"Aww, Lois. What's wrong?"

She sniffled as she shook her head. "Nuffing."

"Your eyes are watery, your nose is red and you're talking funny. I don't think nothing's wrong, Lo. Come on, what is it?"

She let out a long, calming breath and watched the kids some more before explaining herself.

"Clark's been pretty much gone for the past few days and I'm just concerned that he might miss Christmas Eve. Normally I take it all like I always have. I mean, he has an obligation to the world, too. But Luce." Lois turned to her and took her hand. "It's our first Christmas together, I want it to be special and I have a feeling it'll just be me and Jason again."

"Lois, he'll be here, okay? Stop worrying so much, it doesn't go with your glowing complexion. Ah! Glowing! Get it, get it?" Lucy reached over and put a hand to Lois' stomach again, letting it rest there. "I can feel the warmth through your coat! It really is a little solar battery!"

Both looked up suddenly when they heard a series of cheers and laughter from the children. Thick white snowflakes had begun to fall slowly, catching on everyone's hair and clothes in little white clumps.

"There goes no mentioning the 'S' word, huh Luce?"

Thankfully, Lucy had given her sister and nephew a ride home and by the time they'd gotten there, the snow was coming down pretty hard.

"D'ya think it's going to snow a lot more, Mommy?" Jason looked up at his mom hopefully as she put her key to the front door.

"I don't know, honey. Maybe." She put a hand to his warm cheek, smiling at his slip of calling her *Mommy*. Lois finally got the door opened and followed her son into their darkened home. There was no sign of Clark being there.

Figures, she thought. *He hasn't been here all day and if he were home, he would have called me. Hell, he would have joined us in the park.*

Sighing, she took her coat and Jason's and hung them in the hallway closet, then turned to her son.

"Why don't you go upstairs and change, honey? I'll get dinner started."

The little boy smiled mischievously and shook his head. "Uh uh. Let's go into the sunroom, Mommy. Come on!"

"Jason, what?" Lois questioned as he took her hand and quickly led her towards the back of the house.

The house was still dark as they went through it until they came to the sunroom. It was bathed in soft light from quite a few candles that were set around the room. The soft lighting from the Christmas tree on the far end of the room added to the ambiance, as did the lively fire in the fireplace. Clark stood with a huge grin as they came into the room, gasping at the lovely spectacle.

Lois felt like crying as she melted into his arms and felt his warm, broad chest against her cheek.

"I heard you say you wanted our first Christmas to be special, Lois." He put his head down and whispered into her soft hair. "And it will be. I remember the night you first lit this, when we were still falling in love. Well, for the first time, anyway. Then the whole memory kiss and the wipe and...never mind."

She rolled her eyes with a smile. Smooth, with a hint of dork here and there. God, she loved him.

He let go of her and went to the nearby coffee table, picking up a white candle. Lois gasped a little, realizing it was her candle from years before! After handing it to his son and reminding him to be careful with it, he held his wife close again.

Lois closed her eyes as she felt Clark's hand cup her cheek and his lips touch her forehead with a kiss.

"Merry Christmas, Lois."