

The Bakery Redux

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Lois has another strange encounter in a mysterious coffee shop.

A/N: At the request of kabuki_party in response to the Timestamp at LJ meme.

Lois Lane was hot, tired, and cranky. She had spent the morning trying to track down witnesses to the Wedding Destroyer's latest rampage. It should have been a slam dunk – there had been hundreds of people at Saint Mary's Church for the Schuster-Gold wedding but not a single one admitted to actually seeing anything except for Superman's arrival.

Luckily, the Man of Steel had been able to deal with the bomb and so no one was hurt – it would have been a catastrophe had the hero not arrived in the nick of time. But none of that was helping Lois find out why Myrtle Beach, AKA the Wedding Destroyer, had targeted this particular wedding out of the dozens that were scheduled for last weekend.

"Lois, anyone who knows anything is afraid to talk," Clark had reminded her again just that morning, before he headed out of the Daily Planet's newsroom to work on his own assignments. "Or maybe you're burned out, off your game, getting old..." he suggested overly brightly as the elevator doors closed on him.

"Off my game, my ass," Lois muttered to herself. At twenty-six she was one of the most honored journalists at the Daily Planet – three Kerths, one Merriweather, and she'd been short-listed for the Pulitzer just last year.

Her feet hurt. She knew she should have worn better walking shoes but these new Jimmy Choos were just too nice looking to leave in her desk. Now she was going to pay the price in blisters.

She looked around for a coffee shop where she could sit down, have something drink and go through her notes. She spotted an unfamiliar storefront across the street, tucked between a New Age bookstore and a flower shop. 'The Bakery – coffee and sweets' was the name painted on the door in ornate script. Beneath it was also a UPC style code done in silver.

Lois was as familiar with Midtown as anyone; and she didn't remember ever seeing a door there. But there was also something oddly familiar about it as well.

When a man who flies decides to openly become the defender of Metropolis and the world.

'Where did that come from?' she wondered as she crossed the street. Superman was the only one she knew of who actually flew under his own power. And he'd made Metropolis his home for the past three years. It was generally accepted that he'd arrived on Earth only a short time before he made his first appearance in the City of Tomorrow.

She opened the door and walked in, expecting a tiny hole-in-the-wall place with maybe one or two tables. Something pricked at her memory when she saw the place was far larger than she'd expected, and the customers weren't the usual coffee shop mix. The men were in business suits and the women were fashionably, if conservatively, dressed for business as well. The exceptions were two little dark-haired girls playing in a corner. Even the one teenage couple – they couldn't be more than sixteen – were

dressed for either a funeral or a business function. Considering their expressions, it was probably a funeral.

The woman at the counter smiled brightly. Her name tag identified her as 'Madge.'

"A tall cappuccino," Lois ordered. "And one of those chocolate éclairs, and an old fashioned, please."

"Certainly, Lois," Madge said.

"How do you know my name?" Lois asked.

Madge smile became even wider. "You look like a Lois."

The second pink-uniformed counter person handed Lois her pastries and coffee. She nodded to one of the tables away from the door. "I think your friend is sitting over there."

Lois turned to see who she was talking about.

Clark was sitting with two men who seemed to share his execrable taste in ties. One of them, the younger of the two men, seemed to be explaining something, his hands waving in the air as if demonstrating a flight maneuver. Clark was listening with rapt attention.

'But Clark hates to fly,' Lois mused as she approached the table.

"A flat spin is a lot like a skid," the man was saying.

"So you need to steer into the spin while you slow it down," Clark said. "Otherwise the plane may come apart on you."

"Although the wings coming off may not be a bad thing, especially if the only place you have to put it isn't big enough for it."

"Like a baseball stadium?" an older man at a nearby table asked with a grin.

"Give me a break, okay? It was a 777, wings and tail on fire, in a flat spin at terminal velocity. Nobody died."

"Clark?" Lois said, interrupting.

Clark's mouth dropped open as her presence registered.

"Lois? How...?"

"How did she find this place?" the older man with Clark asked. "Has she plane-hopped or time tripped?"

Clark nodded. "It was a couple years ago."

"That's how she found it," the older man said. "Those events leave a quantum level marker. This place is designed to be a safe haven for people in that sort of trouble."

"Plus, it serves a pretty good cup of coffee," the younger man said with a grin.

"What do you mean, time tripping?" Lois asked. "I've never..."

"Yes, you have," Clark contradicted. "You just don't remember."

"How could I forget something like that?" Lois demanded.

The older man smiled. "I'm sure you had help."

A cell phone chimed. There was a moment of confusion in the room as people checked their phones to see whose it was.

The younger man at Clark's table held up his phone. "It's mine," he announced, dropping it back in his pocket. "I'm needed. Oil refinery fire," he said, getting up from the table. He held out his hand to one of the little girls. She ran over to him, waving goodbye to her playmate.

They disappeared out the door.

"Oil refinery fire?" Lois asked. "Clark, why are you just sitting there? Let's get going."

"Lois, that fire isn't going to be in our copy of the Daily Planet," Clark said, not moving from his place.

Two more phones chimed.

"Well, it's going to be in my copy," a man at one of the other tables said. He and his dark-haired female companion collected their briefcases and headed for the door.

"And mine," another man announced as he and a blonde woman followed the first pair out. That's when it hit Lois – all three men looked uncannily alike, even down to their choice of eyeglass frames. Six three or four, two hundred or so pounds,

black hair, blue eyes.

"What's going on here?" Lois demanded. "And what do you mean, that fire isn't going to be in 'our' copy of the Planet?"

"Lois, this isn't just a coffee shop," Clark said. He was using his 'calm Lois down' voice and it annoyed her. "That fire isn't in 'our' Metropolis. It isn't even on 'our' Earth."

"Then where were they going?"

"Home," the older man said, "to deal with their fires."

"And how are they supposed to do that?" Lois asked. "They didn't exactly look like Superman."

The man chuckled. "None of us do."

A dark-haired woman in jeans and a sweater walked into the coffee shop. "Clark, earthquake in northern India," she said, addressing the man as she held her hand out to the remaining little girl.

"Be right there," the man said. He hurried toward the door and Lois caught a glimpse of a blur then a red cape as the door closed behind him. The newcomer and the little girl followed him out.

"But..." Lois sputtered. "Was that Superman?"

"He's not our Superman," Clark said. He made a show of checking his watch. "And if we don't get back to the office, our Perry is going to have a fit."

Clark grabbed Lois's elbow and guided her out the door, waving goodbye to the women behind the counter.

Lois pulled away from him when they reached the sidewalk. She looked around for the woman and little girl. They were nowhere to be seen.

"What was going on in there?" she demanded.

Clark gave her one of his innocent looks. "What makes you think something was going on?"

"I will figure it out," Lois stated. "You know I will."

He grinned at her. "I know you will, Lois. Eventually."

THE END