

Waiting in Line

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Rated G

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Summary: Clark visits Metropolis for a “Christmas away” with his parents and ends up waiting in line with an annoying girl to see Santa.

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“Mom, mom,” Clark tugged on his mother’s arm. “Santa. I wanna see Santa.” Martha stopped her walk across the square and looked in the direction that her five year old son was pointing. A large red tent in the centre of the square: or more particularly the sign saying Santa’s Grotto, seemed to be the focus of his attention. The line of excited children started just outside the entrance flap and wound around the edge of most of the square. Fraught and overloaded parents supervised their impatient children whilst waiting. Martha’s eyes tracked the length of the line and estimated the wait time to be at least twenty minutes and she sighed. Clark deserved the chance to see Santa. He was such a good little boy and he’d trailed around Metropolis with her all day without complaining. She lifted one arm, fully laden with heavy bags, and attempted to read the time on her watch.

“Four thirty,” she mumbled.

“Mom, please?” came the voice that tugged at her heart strings.

She looked down into Clark’s warm brown eyes. Deep pools that reflected a deep soul: even at five years of age. It made Martha wonder what he remembered of his earlier years: what he thought about during his quiet moments. Did he remember anything of the time before they found him? If he did, would he ever be able to describe it, vocalise it? Or was it too far beyond his understanding. Or perhaps there was *nothing* to remember. As far as Martha and Jonathan were concerned Clark’s life had begun the moment they found him.

“Alright, honey. We don’t need to meet your father for another hour. I’m sure we can manage it.”

“Yay!” he whooped and went running along the line. He followed it round until he made it to the end and then skidded to a stop just behind a blue double buggy and just in front of a girl, almost equal in height to Clark, about to join the line herself. “Come on, mom,” he called out as she carefully made her way across the slippery flagstones. How Clark had run all that way, following the curve of the line as well, without slipping was beyond understanding. But then there were many things about Clark that Martha just allowed herself to accept sending up a prayer of deep gratitude that he was just here ... with her and Jonathan. *My son*. She smiled.

“Hey, stupid. That was gonna be my spot.”

Clark turned around at the sound of the annoying girl. “Yeah, well now it’s mine. I got here first. You were too slow.”

“You don’t even have your mom with you yet. You shouldn’t be allowed to wait till she gets here.” Her childish, superior tone immediately set his nerves on edge.

Clark’s eyes widened and he stared incredulously at the rude girl. “My mom is on her way,” he bit back. “And I’m old enough

to wait in line without her. I’m five.”

“Well I’m six, so that makes me older, and definitely in charge, so get to the back buddy.”

“Buddy?” Clark laughed. “Where’d you get the idea that I’m your friend?”

She rolled her eyes at him and clucked her tongue. “It’s supposed to be sarcasm. Haven’t they covered that yet in *Kindergarten*?”

Clark narrowed his eyes and glared at the girl. She was wrapped up warm in a red duffle coat with white fur trim around the hood. Wisps of brown hair peeked out from under that hood. Behind her was a shorter girl in a blue duffle coat. Her hood also up but revealing an almost definite sibling relationship with identical brown hair escaping in wisps.

“I guess I don’t need to ask what *your* favourite lesson was in Kindergarten then.”

The taller of the two sisters, his current foe for the better spot in the line, brought her gloved hand up to her forehead and pushed back the hood forcefully. She stepped forward then jabbed a finger to his chest. “Just for the record ...” she paused, “it’s Diary Time.”

“Huh!” Clark was suddenly lost. *What does diary time have to do with sarcasm lessons in Kindergarten?*

“My favourite lesson. You said you didn’t need to ask.” She stepped back and her angry expression seemed to fade. “But you obviously did. It’s Diary Time. I like to write up my news from the weekend on a Monday morning.” Clark blinked. The whole feel of the conversation had suddenly shifted. “Don’t you do the same thing? I presumed every school did Diary Time,” she said in a superior tone.

“Uh. Yes. But Miss Brewster calls it Journal Update.”

“Oh, right.” She went quiet then and folded her arms across her chest. Clark had an uncontrollable urge to do the same. Her commanding stance got to him on a subconscious level and he folded his arms too. She ‘hmped’ and turned away.

“Lois, honey. Keep your hood up,” came the voice of the woman stood behind the two girls. She reached out and tugged the red hood back into place then tried to tuck the wisps of hair out of sight as well. “You don’t want to catch ...” she stopped half way through her line and brought her hand to her head, swaying a little. Clark watched as the lady attempted to steady herself.

“Mommy?” came a small sweet voice from just out of sight. The younger of the two girls had slid behind but was now looking up at her mother in concern.

“I’m alright, Lucy.” She took a few deep breaths and straightened up. “Just the bright sun and cold air I think. Nothing to worry about.” She smiled down at her two girls.

Martha put out a hand and took the lady’s arm when it looked as if she were about to waver again.

“Are you alright?” she asked.

She nodded and straightened. “Thank you.”

“I’m Martha,” she offered.

“Ellen,” came the one word reply.

Martha had arrived in the line to hear Clark arguing with the young girl. It was so out of character for her sweet little boy that she allowed it to continue, fascinated to hear him defend himself against the barbs thrown by the street-wise city girl. Because, it was obvious that she was well practiced at this herself. She briefly considered the young girl that had exposed a previously hidden side to Clark and then glanced back up to her mother. Martha’s heart clenched when she saw the glassy look in the mother’s eyes. Was she just a little ill — a cold — or was it something much more sinister. Did the mother know? Did the girls know?

“We’re here in the city for a few days. A break from the farm,” Martha volunteered hoping to start up a conversation with

the possibly ill and tired woman. She smiled back. “Jonathan and I run a farm out in Smallville, Kansas.” Clark heard a little snicker come from behind. “But, this year, had the opportunity for a break, a Christmas away. I managed to convince Jonathan that we could stock up on items the big city can supply.” She lifted her heavily laden arms to demonstrate.

Ellen nodded, knowingly. “I love shopping in the city. It’s a good thing Sam is always busy on his research. Gives me plenty of time to shop.”

“Research?” Martha asked.

Ellen nodded, “Doctor. Well, not a practitioner any more. He came up with a revolutionary surgery technique. A lot of time was needed on research and he found that he loved it. Now it’s all he does. Looking for new and better ways to cut people open.” Ellen swayed again and closed her eyes. She reached into her bag for a bottle of water.

“Smallville,” Clark heard a whisper behind him then a giggle. He turned and peered over his shoulder to see the older girl whispering in the younger girl’s ear. Her whispering wasn’t particularly good, though, as he heard every word. “He really comes from a place called *Smallville!* And lives on a farm!” The young girl giggled back and the two sisters laughed with each other.

Clark turned away, a frown on his face. To him Smallville was the best place in the whole world. His mom and dad and the farm were all in Smallville. The bookstore and the lake, the school, Pete, Kenny, the park. Nothing could compare to Smallville.

Time passed and the line moved forwards. Clark held his mom’s hand sometimes and swung himself around. Other times he played at jumping around the large flagstones, trying not to hit a crack. The friction between him and the girl behind didn’t return until they were about half way down the line.

“Hey,” Clark suddenly shouted and turned around. The girl was completely facing the other way, but Clark knew what he’d felt. He narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth then turned back. A few moments later he felt the tugging on his scarf again. “Hey,” he shouted louder this time and swivelled all the way round.

“Hmm! What is it, farm boy?”

“Leave my scarf alone,” he eyed her up and down.

“What!” she choked out mock innocently. “Why would I want your scarf. Maybe it was Lucy,” she sing-songed. Lucy turned and looked up at her older sister in confusion.

“What?” came the quiet toddler voice.

“Nothing, Lucy,” she replied.

“Luffy!” she repeated.

“Yes, Lucy, that’s you.”

“I really don’t think it was Lucy that was after my scarf,” Clark challenged.

“It so was. And why would I want your dumb blue scarf. It wouldn’t go with my red coat.”

“Red and blue do so go together,” Clark challenged.

“Pah!” exclaimed Lois. “What planet were you born on? Everyone knows that you should never put two primary colours together.” Clark narrowed his eyes to glare at her. “Oh sorry. You probably haven’t learnt what a primary colour is yet.” She tipped her head to the side and smirked at him. “Well,” her voice took on a mocking, patronising tone. “Red, blue and yellow are all the primary colours. If you mix two of them together you will get the secondary colours: green, oran ...”

“I know what the primary colours are,” Clark shouted out to try and interrupt her. “And I’m free to wear whatever colour I choose, miss ... smarty pants.” Clark’s pause before his insult, and lack of particularly biting insult also, showed his innocence when it came to this type of confrontation. “And just to prove you wrong I’m gonna wear all three together tomorrow.”

“Oh honey, you don’t have any yellow t-shirts,” Martha looked down at her son adoringly, trying to stifle a laugh. He could easily supply the red and blue items but Clark didn’t own anything remotely yellow.

Feeling defeated by his own mother Clark crossed his arms in a huff and turned back. He immediately noticed that there were only four people in line before him. Well, four children, three families. He wasn’t counting the adults. His heart beat in anticipation. “Santa. I’m gonna see Santa soon. I know what to ask him for. I know,” he whispered under his breath.

As the elf helper opened the flap and guided in the next family Clark grinned, shuffling forwards.

“So, what *are* you gonna ask for, farm boy?” came the voice of his nemesis. He narrowed his eyes and ignored her. That’s what they always said at school. Ignore the bullies, don’t give them the reaction they want and they’ll give up. “I know. You need a new milking bucket. Oh, no. It has to be a straw hat.” Clark couldn’t resist peering over his shoulder and he caught her jumping up and down with excitement. “No, no. I’ve got it,” she shouted triumphantly. “A new bath tub. To wash off the smell of all those cows.” She laughed. Clark swivelled round to find her doubled over and clutching her stomach in fits of laughter.

“If anyone smells around here it’s you,” he bit back. Her comments hurt. More than any other teasing he’d received before. He loved his home, his farm, his cows.

“I do not.”

“You smell.” Clark revelled in finally finding a real insult he could use.

“Do not,” she stamped her foot.

“All girls smell.” Clark knew that for a fact in his five-year old mind.

She opened her eyes to retort, eyes glistening brightly, but was stopped when the flap of the grotto fluttered again. The red and green striped elf with a pointy hat and red plaits down either side directed another family inside as the previous one left. Clark turned to watch. *Only one family left.* He grinned as the mother with the double buggy shuffled forward. Nothing could dampen the excitement of seeing Santa. Not even the smelly girl.

Something tugged on his scarf again. He grabbed and tugged back then slid the scarf from around his neck. Balling it up he pushed it into his pockets out of the way, no longer able to tempt the girl, no longer able to distract him. He fiddled with his zip on his coat, sliding it up and down. He pulled off his woolly hat and played with the frizzy bobble for a minute. The tent flap opened and Clark’s eyes widened. He pushed the woolly hat back onto his head and watched as the double buggy in the line before him disappeared out of sight. Soon after that he began bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet impatiently.

“You know,” she muttered behind him, “it would have been so different if you’d just let me have my place in line, farm boy.” Clark grinned even wider. No matter how much she tried to get at him he was still the one in front.

“Aw. What a pity you’re so slow. Just think. Santa’s been giving out presents all day.” Clark turned and opened his mouth in shock as he pretended that something had just occurred to him. “Oh no. What if he’s tired? What if he’s about to run out of presents. And I’m in front of you in the line.” Glistening hazel eyes widened back at him. Clark noticed the tell-tale shine and the drop of expression on her face. “I’m so sorry,” he attempted quietly, then bit his lip to try and suppress the grin that was begging to get out. He had to turn away quickly as he could no longer hold his expression. As he turned he saw the flap on the tent rustle and his heart leapt.

Lois watched as the boy, almost the same height as her, pushed excitedly past the tent flap. “That should be my spot,” she mumbled. She felt a little hand worm its way into hers and she

looked down at Lucy.

“Next?” she asked.

“Yes, we’re next Lucy,” she nodded.

“Me first,” she jumped and Lois narrowed her eyes to glare at her little sister.

“I’ve already lost one spot to a stupid, smelly farm boy. And I bet he really does smell like cows. Why should I let you sit on Santa’s knee before me. Besides, I’m the older sister.” She frowned but there was no passion behind her words. Truthfully the affection she felt for her cute sister was much stronger than her annoyance. She smiled and her heart broke when Lucy’s bottom lip stuck out in distress. “Lucy,” she laughed. “I think you **should** go first actually.”

“Yay! Me first,” Lucy shouted.

Waiting in line, watching for the shuddering movement of the tent fabric Lois felt her heart beating faster. Soon she’d be seeing Santa and she could tell him her wish. *What I want for Christmas is ...*

The flap opened and out stepped the nice lady who’d talked to her mother. Behind her came the young boy. He looked up and met her eyes then smiled and lifted his hand to wave as he walked off. As she raised hers back, he mouthed out a ‘bye’. The elf led her inside but she craned her head to watch the boy walk across the flagstone square. He was still waving at her. She smiled and raised her hand even higher, giving a final wiggle of her fingers before she slipped into Santa’s Grotto.

THE END