

Cat's Corner

By Morgana <Cynthia.McCoy533@gmail.com>

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Summary: Catherine Grant returns to Metropolis after two years away and notices a striking change in Lois Lane.

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This fic is an answer to Kerth Challenge #6 and takes place before the beginning of *Honest to God, This Time We Aren't Kidding!* A certain striking auburn-haired beauty has returned to the bullpen, after living the 'dream life' in Los Angeles. Now, let us take a moment to find out what kind of thoughts might have gone through her mind after all the changes that happened between Lois and Clark during her absence.

Many happy thanks to KatherineKent for her cheerleading and excellent beta work!

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"Only four more weeks until our wedding, I'm so excited!" Lois said while staring at a glossy travel magazine which advertisements promised a tropical Honeymoon tailored to an engaged couple's most intimate needs and desires. A hazy, romantic dream of sun-kissed skin, the fragrance of lushly scented flowers to thrill the senses accompanied by warm, tropical breezes and golden sands caressing bare feet.

"So am I honey. Let's hope nothing happens this time to spoil it." Said her fiancé, as he placed a steaming cup of low-fat mocha coffee on the desk's surface careful to avoid spilling any on the magazine.

"Yeah, no frogs, clones or villains allowed!" said the young woman, cringing with unwanted memories.

The attractive couple chatted as if no one existed in the noisy bullpen but them. On the other side of the newsroom, a tall woman with auburn hair and cool green eyes watched them as varied emotions, the most prominent of which was admiration and a trace of envy ran through her heart. After spending three years on the West Coast, Catherine Grant had returned to work for the *Daily Planet's* as the new editor of the Weekend section.

How did Lois 'Mad Dog' Lane, one of the most unapproachable women I have ever met, snap up one of the best looking and kindest men in the Bullpen? Why did I leave and miss the whole crazy process?

Slowly, like a thread unspooling, her mind tumbled backwards in time.

During the short, but tumultuous days of Lex Luthor's ownership, in which he made dozens of sweeping deviations to the paper's daily operations and its bullpen staff. She had accepted a job at the *Los Angeles Times* as their lead entertainment reporter. The timing for her departure had been ideal because she wanted to stretch as a journalist and this position offered a myriad of opportunities to do so.

That's what she happily told everyone, but in reality, Cat had no desire to work for the billionaire. Oh sure, Luthor was mad sexy to look at and he was saving the paper and their jobs to boot. But despite all that, unpleasant rumors of his ruthless behavior had reached her ears, which had persisted – and intensified with the

appearance of Superman. Now, was the best time to get out of Dodge City – before the guns started blasting. It may have been a little cowardly, leaving amidst so much upheaval, still, she reasoned, 'a girl's gotta look out for her future'.

In the beginning, working in Los Angeles satisfied every dream facet of her career; swanky parties, fashion shows, Hollywood premiers and interviewing some of the most fascinating movers and shakers of the entertainment industry. One afternoon she could be sipping a distinctive full-bodied merlot at Monticello Vineyards in Napa Valley for a celebrity wine tasting. Then that evening climb aboard a flight out of LAX and the next day be in Maui, on the set of a multimillion-dollar blockbuster film. For a while, it was thrilling to be living out of a designer suitcase and typing up articles thirty thousand feet in the air.

It didn't hurt that the principal and very handsome actor in the film wanted to give her an exclusive private tour of the Black Sand Beach nearby. She smiled secretly at the memory; the tour and the intense conversation of his interests in the island's ecology were very much appreciated. It was a pity the guy was happily married.

Her new home, a spacious two-bedroom condo, was a blank canvas when she moved in, but not long after was decorated with sculpture, artwork, and furnishings from her many travels.

But after three years of living the 'dream career' she had had enough.

There had to be something deeper in life than attending an endless round of parties – not to enjoy the company of friends and have great conversations - but only to see and be seen. Existence among the 'beautiful people' of LA was superficial and quite meaningless. In all that time she had not connected with a single person who had an interest in the arts – besides makeup - even her newsroom battle of wits with Lois had contained greater substance.

All the long-term relationships with any men she had 'dated' had been just as shallow. Once upon a time, she found meaning in meaningless relationships. Now that was no longer the case. The mirror revealed she wasn't getting any younger. To be brutally honest, she no longer wanted to be alone. It was high time there was a special someone in her life who wanted to stick around for more than a fun weekend in Lake Tahoe.

Following one such baseless liaison, she sat on a rainy Wednesday afternoon in the living room of her condo and thoughtfully picked through the landscape of the past ten years of writing entertainment articles and bits of gossip to find nothing truly praiseworthy. There were not many articles in the *Planet* or the *Times* that could be considered anything more than fluff. She was a talented writer, just as good as Lois Lane, Eduardo or Diane. She wanted to prove that to herself and the newspaper community.

But the big uncomfortable question now was; how to do it?

Lex Luthor's death had put an end to his ownership of the *Daily Planet* which was a dark stain on its history. But happily, a new era, thanks to Perry's late-night conversation with another billionaire, had dawned for the paper. Its new owner and publisher, Franklin Stern, also planned on modernization, but not to be the point that the paper would no longer be a beacon of truth, serving only his interests. Cat thought he was not as wealthy as the previous owner had been, but his power and prestige were not to be trifled with.

There was something else; Franklin Stern might be a firm man and able to make tough decisions, but from everything she had read and heard about him, that firmness was balanced by compassion and fairness.

Maybe the best way to go forward was by taking a crucial step backwards?

She had heard through the grapevine that Lina Thorne, the editor for the Weekend section of the paper, was retiring. Perhaps Perry might be interested in taking her on as a provisional

replacement until someone could be found? Who knows, maybe she could parlay it into a permanent position?

Of course, she thought with a touch of bitterness, the editor might have already asked Lois Lane to take the position. After all, the Chief's little pet had stuck around during the whole Luthor debacle while she had fled for the 'left coast'. Loyalty to the paper would play a huge factor in his decision. If he hired her again would she stay on and work or quit should another glamorous job opportunity appear?

It was going to be a tough sell, but if she could show him a different more serious ... Catherine Grant it might happen. Uttering a sincere prayer, she picked up the phone and began dialing ...

Cat's mind had to the present. Looking over to Lois' desk she noticed Clark had vanished, only to be replaced by Diane, Janet and Molly Flynn who crowded around Lois' desk making plans for lunch. They were her bridesmaids and with such positions, there were plenty of last-minute matters which had to be discussed. Who would have ever fathomed Lois Lane would not only be getting married but had girlfriends to help her put the event together?

For years Mad Dog Lane was a fierce loner who acted as if her life depended on getting an article above the front-page fold at least five out of seven days in the week. Her standoffish – and sometimes combative behavior was the stuff of newsroom legend. But then one day out of the blue, Perry hired rookie Kansas native Clark Kent and partnered them together. Only days later when the EPRAD story making headlines did his decision prove to be a stroke of genius. The stories each reporter wrote had brought praises – and circulation improvements.

After Cat's departure, she had heard through the grapevine that Lois began to grow and transform into a warm and generous person, someone that her co-workers and others were comfortable being around. A great deal of credit for that transformation had to do with Clark Kent. Who would have guessed a true gentleman could have arisen from the golden wheat fields of sunny Kansas?

She was more than a little ashamed of how she had treated him when he first arrived at the paper. The one and only time he was at her place to hide out from the Feds she had set out to seduce him. Her behavior during the Nightfall Asteroid event was especially reprehensible. Imagine bring survival items like champagne to the office in a bid to have him with her when the asteroid stuck? Thankfully, Clark had proved to be more of a friend by not accepting her offer. He was a class act. Not a high flyer like Superman, but great to have around.

Lois was a fortunate woman. Wouldn't it be perfect if someone like that stepped into her life? Sighing, she turned back to the monitor and finished typing up an article about the press conference she had covered announcing a limited partnership between Stark Industries and S.T.A.R. Labs. The former munitions manufacturer was working with the Metropolis based research firm on engineering better prosthetic limbs. Of all people to have pulled off this unlikely union was Lois' father, Dr. Samuel Lane, with the aid of the Superman Foundation. The partnership would bring additional technical jobs to New Troy and renewed hope for millions of amputees throughout the world.

Twenty years ago, most artificial arms and legs were unattractive, clunky and fragile. Thankfully prosthetic technology has advanced significantly since then. Vast amounts of research gained from treating American soldiers wounded in overseas wars have led to robotic knees and ankles that adjust to terrain and activity. The Para Olympics saw athletes run marathons, climb mountains and even skydive. One very exciting bit of information had come to light; trials for a new bionic arm powered by the thoughts of the person wearing it can mimic almost all the movements of a real hand. When Cat saw a young man, who had

lost his hand in an automobile accident, demonstrate this breakthrough by picking up a fluffy golden Lab Retriever puppy, she and the rest of the audience were moved to tears.

It was the type of positive and uplifting piece she had wanted to write since returning to the Daily Planet. One which was so much more fulfilling than wasting words and ink on what some bubble-brained starlet wore at the latest movie premiere.

Something else positive occurred at the press conference, she was introduced to George Amundsen; a leading S.T.A.R. Labs engineer and colleague of Dr. Bernard Klein. The announcement for the limited partnership took place in S.T.A.R. Lab's impressive wooden and glass atrium. In eleven hundred square feet of space, the atrium incorporated a wide variety of technological and aesthetic innovations in a lush, green environment and an atmosphere of gardenlike tranquility in the midst of Metropolis.

She remembered a very anxious Dr. Klein coming over with a tall, serious-looking man by his side. "Oh, there you are Miss Grant. Glad the paper is covering this event. Weren't Lois and Clark coming with you? Never mind. May I introduce you to a good friend of mine, Dr. George Amundsen. He's one of the chief architects of this entire venture." The harried scientist spoke so rapidly that to Cat's ears all the words seemed to run together.

Only seconds after Dr. Klein introduced them he was pulled away by some equally anxious Stark employee. For a moment, Cat stood awkwardly by the engineer sipping a cold glass of sparkling water. Dr. Amundsen was quiet, not knowing whether to stay or leave. So, rather than letting an interview opportunity pass by, Catherine began asking questions.

"Dr. Amundsen, this joint venture will be of benefit to so many amputation patients. Everyone who participated to put together this partnership should be very proud of themselves. The Daily Planet's readers will be thrilled to learn about this endeavor! Please tell me, why was the conference held here and not in a medical facility?"

He gave a tiny smile and answered. "Holding the conference here was a personal choice of mine. We wanted all the reporters to feel at ease, this is after all a happy event. Also, on a more personal note, the atrium with all its flowers and greenery reminds me of the Villa Borghese in Rome."

Cat looked up surprised and said, "Have you been to the Galleria Borghese Museum?"

His eyes lit up from the memory. "Yes! I spent a summer in Rome as an exchange student. Some of the best examples of seventeenth-century paintings are located in that particular museum. It was a magnificent experience. When did you visit Miss Grant?"

They walked around the atrium discussing Italy during the Renaissance and Leonardo Da Vinci, Jan van Eyck, Donatello and other painters of the era. She found him to be an intriguing combination of brains and good looks without being egotistical. George was athletic, taller than her, blue eyes and with dark blonde hair marked by a receding hairline. His manner was a touch on the serious side and at first might be a bit intimidating, were it not for a ready smile and a fine sense of humor.

Amundsen was not the type of man Cat found initially attractive, but as they talked, became more intrigued by him. The guy held his own while conducting a decent conversation and he didn't say or do anything *risqué*. Considering her previous good-time party girl reputation with men that made her appreciate him further.

The discussion was really starting to warm up when George was himself called away. Hastily he pulled out a pencil, took a cocktail napkin off a nearby table and scribbled down his phone number and e-mail address. "Ms. Grant, please let's continue this exchange, it is so rare to find anyone who appreciates talking about the Renaissance ... unless it has to do with a software program."

With a respectful nod, he disappeared into the crowd, leaving Cat feeling light-hearted in an innocent, way she hadn't felt since her early teens.

The memory of her conversation and his invitation to chat again brightened the workday, but as the acting editor of an important section of the paper, it was time to get back to the job at hand. Yet she still could not help musing: maybe call him this weekend. There was a lovely little coffee shop simply called *La Petit Café*, not far from her apartment that served freshly made gelato – in her opinion - the best outside of Italy. Perhaps they could get together there for a tasty treat this Saturday afternoon?

Meanwhile, the little group that had gathered around Lois' desk had departed, except for Molly Flynn who whispered in her friend's ear. "Don't forget to give her an invitation. See you on Saturday, gotta get back to the shop." The two friends hugged, Molly dashed up the ramp just in time to catch the elevator.

As Lois walked towards Cat she studied her, although she was using the professional name of Catherine Grant these days. The former office flirt had completely transformed from her days as a vamp. The fresh look was actually stunning in an understated way; her hair was done in a long, sleek ponytail, tortoise shell glasses and black knit turtleneck dress which showed a suggestion of curves rather than the overly tight outfits she wore in the past.

It was not simply in the wardrobe department where Cat had changed; her taking over as editor of the Weekend section was initially met with not a little resistance from some in the bullpen - counting herself in that group. But Perry and surprisingly, Lina Thorne firmly believe Grant was the right person for the position. Especially considering the innovative, updates made to the Weekend section's layout and the positive comments those changes garnered had been receiving, proved they were right.

With all that going in her favor, Lois could now take Catherine Grant seriously as a journalist and colleague.

All in all, the woman before her behaved very different from what she had once been. In fact, not once since her return to the newsroom had Catherine been snippy or difficult. Oddly enough, California had changed her for the better. Lois' reporter's instincts kicked in, she wondered what happened out there to cause such a metamorphosis? Maybe someday Catherine might share the story. The first part of learning that story was to build a bridge, starting with inviting her co-worker to the wedding.

"Um Cat, do you have a second?"

Looking up from the monitor she said. "Sure, what's up? Perry wants something?"

"We ... um that is Clark and I would like you to come to our wedding ... and reception." Quietly she handed over an invitation.

Taking the offered lavender-hued envelope, Cat bit her lip. The thick stationery in her hand felt rich and sensuous to the touch, it was made of linen. Impressive. A linen finish is a lovely choice because it has a texture to it, almost like the softer version of an artist's canvas. Thanks to her years of covering megawatt celebrity weddings she could tell someone had dropped a heavy dime for this invitation.

"Thank ... thank you. I'm touched you asked." Cat said, her voice had suddenly gone dry. She couldn't speak another word.

Lois was also at a loss for words, then she said. "Cat, the three years working in California don't count, you've always been a part of the Daily Planet family. Bring a date if you want. Oh, if I didn't say so before, let me it say now, welcome back. The bullpen has not been the same without you."

Cat nodded, she better than anyone knew how much it took for Lois to say that. So instead of saying something meaningless she replied with a genuine grin. "Thank you. Lois, unexpected catastrophes always happens at weddings. Sometimes the bridal party need an extra set of hands. Is there anything I can help with?"

"Ah well, you've always been great with hair and make-up, could you stand by when the photographer's taking shots outside after the ceremony with lip gloss, hair spray and stuff like that?"

Cat beamed excitedly. "Absolutely! You can depend on me."

At that moment Clark appeared, adjusting one of those wildly colored ties while walking downstairs, he searched the bullpen for his future bride. Upon spotting her, he strolled over to the women.

"Hey Lois, can I talk to you for a minute? Superman just gave me inside information about Mr. Gadget. We need to get downtown!" The couple strode away, deep in conversation.

Cat shook her head in amusement. Those two were always racing somewhere, especially when it had to do with the Man of Steel. A plus one on a wedding invitation meant she needed a date. George had given her his number, perhaps he might think she was a touch aggressive, but there was only one way to find out.

"George Amundsen? Hello. This is ... Catherine Grant, I work for the Daily Planet, we met a few days ago at the Stark Industries/S.T.A.R. Labs press conference?"

A very masculine voice answered. <<Yes, I remember. Still thinking about the museum gardens and the Italian Renaissance Miss Grant? As previously mentioned perhaps we can continue the conversation?>>

The sincere smile in his gentle voice was evident to her ears. "I would like that very much. There is a little coffee shop called La Petit Café..."

While standing by the elevator, Clark picked up on the conversation, leaned over and whispered to Lois. "Cat called George, Bernie's friend. She asked him out for a coffee."

Lois glanced over her shoulder and grinned mischievously. "Oh good! If coffee works out maybe, she'll ask him to be her date at our wedding. Bernie mentioned George couldn't stop talking about her, but was too shy to say anything."

"Somehow I don't think shyness will be a problem for either of them once they get started." Clark held the elevator door open for Lois and they stepped inside. Ready for another adventure.

On the other side of the newsroom Catherine Grant had put down the handset and resumed working on the S.T.A.R. Labs/Stark Industries article. George had agreed to meet for a coffee and gelato this Saturday afternoon. The striking auburn-haired beauty was all business on the outside, but within a quiet thrill went through her. This was a new beginning.

THE END