

Backwards II: Return to Metropolis

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Summary: Upon their return to Metropolis, Lois and Clark conduct their first official joint investigation and learn a few things about themselves along the way.

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Very special thanks to Kathy for betaing for me! And to the readers on the boards for encouraging me to continue with Backwards and now Backwards II.

I have no money so even though the characters aren't mine, it's not worth suing me over ;).

And now...

Part 1

"Did I mention that I hate flying?" Clark said quietly, his head leaning back against the plush seat of the jet.

Lois rested her head against his shoulder. "Really? I would have thought you'd enjoy flying. You're going to take me, you know. I'm going to be homesick in a few days."

"Gladly. I just don't like flying on *planes*. I'm supposed to fly under my own power, not in a metal tube. This is better than the trip here, though. I thought the stewardess was going to have me thrown off or sedated or something."

Lois looked around the cabin. "It is pretty nice. Not that I've flown much but..."

"Gramps has got money. When he read about the beating I took from Trask, he insisted on chartering this jet to fly me — and therefore my parents — back. You're just hitching a ride, I guess."

"And you're sure he has room for me to crash at his place until I get settled?"

Clark chuckled lightly. "Yeah, he's got plenty of room. And if you decide you'd rather be in the city..." He leaned over to whisper to her. "...you can always bunk with me there."

Once he'd mentioned his dad was coming to Smallville, Lois had told him that they might have to 'bunk' together since all of the other rooms at the Kent Bed and Breakfast were reserved. When Clark told her that Sam Lane didn't *bunk*, she'd offered her tent and he'd suggested he either take her room or that they bunk together in there. Since then, they'd slept — and only slept — together twice. The first time had led to their first — incredible — kiss.

Lois glanced over to see his parents sound asleep as the jet sliced through the sky. Sam was even snoring softly. "Um, Clark, about that..."

He reached over and took her hand. "What?"

"The whole... bunking thing..."

He kissed the side of her head. "I'm not ready for that either."

"Really?"

"As much as I liked waking up to your beautiful face this week, I'm not pushing for anything more and I won't. I'll stay at my grandpa's house as long as you're there and commute to work. If we stay at my place in the city for whatever reason, I'll

take the couch." He gently stroked the back of her hand with his thumb. "You never did tell me where you slept the last two nights — since I took your room."

She didn't look at him. "Um... I haven't really. I mean, I went out on the porch swing and I dozed some but I haven't really slept."

"Afraid of the nightmares?" he asked softly.

She nodded. "If I don't sleep deeply enough to dream, I can't see him falling off the cliff and morphing into you," she whispered.

"You *had* to do it, Lois. Trask would have killed both of us in a heartbeat. And I'm fine. I'm not completely super again yet but I'm *fine*."

"I know."

He wrapped his arm around her. "We have a couple hours before we land. Why don't you try to get some sleep now?"

She curled up closer to him. "Thanks, Clark."

"I'm right here," he murmured into her hair. "And I won't let the dreams get you."

He thought over the last few days. His reluctance to go to Smallville in the first place. Meeting the beautiful woman now sleeping next to him. Finding himself sleeping with then waking up next to and then kissing her. Spending the day hiding in a small cave in the woods with her. Getting caught. Her saving his life when Trask came after them, fighting with Trask until he finally fell over the cliff. Pulling Lois back up. Smuggling his ship back to the Kents' storm shelter and looking it over for the first time with Lois. Dancing with her. Kissing her. How upset he was when he didn't think she was going to come back to Metropolis with him.

Seeing her when she got on the plane.

Kissing her until his parents' throat clearing interrupted them.

He kept his arm around her as she slept.

She slept until the wheels touched down on the tarmac in Metropolis and even then she didn't really wake up.

Clark helped her to the limo his grandpa had sent, carrying her more than she walked, but it had pulled up to the foot of the stairs so it wasn't very far. As soon as she was settled in next to him, she was sound asleep again and snoring softly.

"She's tired," his mom said quietly as the car glided out of the airport.

Clark gently stroked the hair at her temple. "She's had a long week. She's still healing. I don't think she'd ever let any of us know how much the line dancing hurt her ankle last night."

"Then why'd she do it?" his dad asked. She'd danced a two-step with him the night before.

"I don't think she wanted anyone to know how badly she was still hurting or how tired she was. If she kept moving, it wouldn't hit her."

"Has she had any nightmares?" Sam asked.

"That's why we ended up together the other night," Clark told them. "She had a nightmare, knew I was still awake and she came in to talk a bit and we fell asleep."

Ellen raised an eyebrow at him. "And why did you call Mrs. Kent 'Mom'? I mean, I know they're pretty informal and treat their guests like family but..."

Clark looked chagrined. "Sorry, Mom. I was joking with her. Lois had told me that in Lowell County if a couple sleeps in the same bed, they're considered legally married. Martha and I had joked about it earlier. That's all."

Ellen smiled. "So I have a new daughter-in-law?"

Clark laughed slightly. "Something like that."

The rest of the ride was quiet and, before long, they arrived at Nathan Lane's house in Pittsdale. The car pulled right up to the door. Clark was glad they were on the shaded side of the house so the sun wouldn't wake Lois as he carried her to one of the spare bedrooms, laying her gently on the bed and covering her up with

an extra blanket. She'd murmured something he didn't quite understand as he placed a soft kiss on her forehead before heading back downstairs.

"How're you feeling?" his dad asked as he sat at the kitchen counter.

"Much better," Clark told him. "I think I'll be completely back to normal by tomorrow. At least I hope so. The sun seemed to help the last couple of days so I may go sit outside for a while."

"Good idea." Sam took a long swig of his iced tea. "I want to look both of you over again later, too."

Clark nodded.

"That black eye is just about gone though."

"I do need to go into Metropolis today," Clark told him. "I need to get some clothes and stuff if I'm going to be staying here for a while."

"How long are you planning on staying?"

Clark turned to see his grandpa walk in the room.

"Hey, Gramps!" He gave his grandpa a big hug. "For a while, if that's okay. Couple weeks."

"You know you're always welcome here, Clarkie." Gramps kept his arm around Clark's shoulders.

"Thanks."

"But what's this I hear about having a friend stay?"

Clark stared at his hands. "Lois. She's from Smallville. She worked with me on the story. She's a great reporter and is hoping Perry might give her a job."

"If she can keep up with you, she's a shoo-in," Gramps said with a chuckle.

"More like the other way around," Clark told him. "If I can keep up with her, I can keep up with anyone."

Part 2

Lois slowly became aware of her surroundings.

Except she had no idea where she was.

She pushed herself into a sitting position and looked around the room. It was nicely decorated. The comforter underneath her was obviously high quality. In fact, the whole room screamed 'money'.

She pushed her hair out of her face, fixing her ponytail before getting up and looking around a bit more. There was a very nice attached bathroom with a huge Jacuzzi tub and slate tile in the shower and granite countertops.

She left the bedroom and went down a few steps to find herself in a large open area. On one side was an opening that looked down into a living area that was currently empty. There were two large circular staircases leading down to the first floor. She thought about exploring the floor she was on — there were a number of doors and hallways calling to her — but she decided to head downstairs instead.

The stairs took her to a large foyer with an elegant entryway on one side and the living room on the other. She had glimpses of both a library and a dining room as well. She heard something and headed to investigate. She didn't see anyone but walked over to the large windows along the other side of the living room.

There was Clark. He was wearing only a pair of shorts as he rested in the sun — one arm flopped over his eyes.

She bit her bottom lip as she watched him. There were few signs of the beating he'd taken only a couple of days earlier. There was one slightly discolored spot on his side below his ribcage, but it was nothing like the fairly angry-looking bruise he'd had a few days earlier.

"You must be Lois."

The voice behind her made her jump. She turned to see a distinguished looking man walking into the living room. She could see the resemblance to Sam Lane. She smiled. "You must be Clark's grandpa."

"That's me." He held out a hand as he neared her. "Nathan Lane, no relation to the actor."

Lois took the offered hand and laughed lightly. "Lois Kent. Of the Smallville Kents. No relation to anyone really."

"It's very nice to meet you. The article you and my grandson wrote was outstanding."

"Thank you. I wish we hadn't nearly gotten killed in the process."

"You look like you took more of the brunt of it than he did."

Lois hesitated. She didn't know if his grandfather knew that he was Kryptonian. What other reason would there be for Clark looking so much better than she did? "Well, he got knocked out pretty quickly," she improvised. "Guess Trask was more scared of him than of me."

"I think that was probably Trask's last mistake. Probably not his first one, but definitely his last."

"I didn't want to, you know." She turned to look at Clark out the window. "He would have killed us. And Clark said he's always been a fast healer."

Nathan chuckled. "Super fast, I guess."

Lois looked back up at him, shock written across her face she was sure.

"You think I don't know who my grandson is?" he asked with a raised brow.

Lois shrugged. "He didn't say anything about anyone but his parents knowing."

"Oh, I don't know officially, but I wouldn't be a man in my position if I didn't know a lot of things unofficially."

"Right," Lois said softly.

"Thank you. On behalf of myself and his parents for saving Clark and on behalf of the world who will never know what you did for them in saving Superman."

"I couldn't do anything else."

"He's falling in love with you. I'm not sure if he realizes it yet, but he is."

Lois didn't say anything but turned her attention back out the window as movement caught her eye. She stifled a sigh as Clark pulled his shirt on before standing up and coming inside.

His eyes lit up when he saw her. "You're up! Are you feeling any better?"

She nodded. "You weren't kidding when you said your grandpa had plenty of room."

Nathan chuckled. "Room, I've got plenty of."

She looked around the room. From where she was standing she could see the balcony where she'd exited her room, the foyer and impressive entry, the kitchen off to one side and a massive stone fireplace covering most of the wall to her side.

"I made most of my money when Sam was in college," he explained, gesturing for her to follow him. He headed towards the kitchen. "I'm still not entirely sure what possessed us to buy this place — or to have it built rather. Jenny and I went from fairly comfortable to extremely wealthy nearly overnight and it kind of went to our heads. One thing we'd always said was that if ever had this kind of money, we'd give lots of it away and we did. I still do. One thing we discovered was that if we were hosting a fundraiser for one of our favorite charities, having a place like this sure helped when it came to convincing people to give. Having a fundraiser someplace like the Metropolis Manor just isn't the same as having it at someone's home. It gives it more of a... personal flair or something." He shrugged. "I don't get it. I give when it's a good cause regardless of where the fundraiser is held, but not everyone feels that way."

Lois' brow had furrowed as he spoke. "The Metropolis Manor?"

"It's an old mansion on The Hill," Clark explained. "It's one of the oldest in that area. Like Boston has Beacon Hill or New York has the Upper East Side and Park Avenue and Chicago has

the Gold Coast. Metropolis Manor was turned into an exclusive restaurant and hotel, available only to the elite of the elite. You have to be a member of the Luxor Country Club to even be considered for membership at Metropolis Manor.”

“Wow,” Lois breathed.

“There are fundraisers held there,” Nathan told her, “but not often. I’m a member because it impresses other people.” He rolled his eyes. “I don’t care so much about impressing them, but it raises more money than I spend on the membership for causes I care a lot about.”

“AIDS prevention and treatment in Africa, orphanages in India — especially Mother Teresa’s — technology in the classroom in low income communities, open adoptions and options for birthmoms who know their children could have medical complications later in life, scholarships for the arts, scholarships for a lot of different things,” Clark told her.

“That’s great.”

Nathan shrugged. “I would have moved a long time ago — after Jenny died probably — if it hadn’t been for the ability to raise money for causes I believe in.”

“Don’t let him fool you,” Clark said leaning against the counter. “He loves it here. Every summer, there’s inner city boys, most getting ready to start their senior year, swarming around the place. They’re handpicked by Gramps to get to spend a month here. They live over the barn and spend a month working here — they take care of the horses and work on the grounds — all kinds of stuff. They also spend time studying and getting ready for the SAT or ACT which they take in July. For six weeks in July and August, he has younger kids here and it’s more of a camp-like atmosphere. They go horseback riding and hiking in the New Troy National Forest. They live in the barn six nights and camp the seventh. And it’s free for all of them. There’s a ropes course in the woods that different groups use — after school programs and the like.”

“Well, I’m glad there’s good being done in a house like this, rather than just to impress people.” Lois took the bottle of water Nathan offered her.

“Clark’ll give you the tour so you don’t get lost.”

Lois laughed. “Thank you for letting me stay, Mr. Lane.”

“Call me Nathan or Nate and any girlfriend of Clark’s is welcome here. Well, as long as they’re Superman fans.” He winked at Lois. “You know he’s a friend of Clark’s, after all.”

With that, he turned and walked off, leaving a gaping Clark behind.

Part 3

Clark turned to Lois to see her watching him with a smirk on her face.

“Do you think he knows?” he asked her.

Lois shrugged, her eyes wide and innocent. “How should I know?”

Clark leaned over, closing the distance between them until he could place a soft kiss on her lips. “I’ve wanted to do that since I got in here.”

“So does that mean I’m your girlfriend?” she asked shyly. “I mean, your grandpa said something but…”

“I hope so.” He reached out to take her hand. “You feeling well enough to go to town with me? I need to stop by my apartment and water my plants and pick up some work clothes since I’m staying out here until you get settled.” He glanced at the clock. “We could even stop by the Planet if you wanted to. I know Perry’s anxious to meet you.”

She glanced down at what she was wearing. “Looking like this?”

He kissed her again. “I think you look great but you could go change if you wanted.”

Lois looked around. “Got a map with ‘you are here’ and

‘here’s your room’ markers on it?”

Clark laughed. “I’ll show you.” He took her hand and walked upstairs with her, showing her the room that was his and another that was his parents when they were there and his grandpa’s. “He and Gram lived in the master suite downstairs when she was alive, but he didn’t want to stay there after she died, so he moved up here,” he explained. “Something about wanting to be closer to me when I was here — that was the official reason, but I was fifteen by then so…” He pointed to his room. “I’m going to change and I’ll meet you downstairs in a few minutes.” He kissed her again, letting this one linger slightly.

“Thanks.”

Clark headed to his room, changing into a pair of Dockers and a collared long sleeved shirt in soft blue. He knew it looked good on him and he wasn’t above trying to impress Lois at this point.

He could hear her moving around in her room if he turned on his hearing. He was so relieved that most of his powers were back. He had one bruise still healing on his side, but otherwise all of the physical evidence was gone. He tried to float and found that he could, but that it took all of his concentration and he wasn’t able to maintain any altitude.

It would come. He heard Lois open the door to her room and he left, meeting her at the top of the stairs.

A few minutes later, they were in his Jeep heading for Metropolis. He told her it was a forty-five minute drive, which was why he’d decided to get an apartment in the city. Gramps had wanted him to move in to the house in Pittsdale. Instead, he spent his days off out there. Even though Gramps was in great health and members of his grounds and housekeeping staff lived on the property, it made Clark’s parents feel better to know that Clark was there regularly to check on him. They stayed there on a regular basis as well, but he was more open with Clark about any potential health — or other — problems.

“You look very nice,” Clark told her. She did. The silky blue top and black pants looked great on her. Her hair was done, differently than he’d seen before, but he’d mostly seen her ready to trek through the woods. He started slightly when he realized he’d known her less than a week. It seemed like so much longer than that.

“What?”

“Just thinking that it seems like I’ve known you a lot longer than what? Five days now?”

She nodded and he reached for her hand.

“It’s been a busy week,” she confirmed, linking her fingers with his.

“Are you nervous? Scared?”

Lois shrugged and stared at the passing scenery. “Change is always scary. Most of the time anyway. I mean, yesterday this time we were wandering around the Smallville Corn Festival and now I’m moving to Metropolis? No job, no place to live, nothing. Yeah, it’s scary.” She took her hand from his. “I left everything for a guy,” she said quietly. “That’s something I swore I’d never do.”

There was a long pause. “Did you leave for me? Or did you leave in part for me but in larger part for the opportunities you have here?” He was pretty sure he knew the answer, but he wanted to make sure she did.

She thought for a long moment. “Both I guess. I probably wouldn’t have come if it wasn’t for everything we’ve been through in the last week, without meeting you, but I don’t think I would have come if there wasn’t a great opportunity for me here either. I *doubt* I would have come if you were the only draw.”

“See there?” He grinned at her. “You didn’t come for a guy. You came for the opportunities which *happen* to be in the same place as a guy who is absolutely crazy about you.” He pulled the Jeep up in front of an apartment building. “Home sweet home.”

She followed him to his apartment, looking around as he packed a few things in a bag and pulled a couple of suits out of his closet.

“So where are the supersuits?” she asked, holding a small wooden statue in her hand.

He laughed and pointed at the statue. “You know what that is?”

She shook her head. “It’s cool looking.”

“I did a lot of traveling during the summers when I was in college and I tend to take all my vacation time at once so I can spend three weeks somewhere or whatever. A medicine man in Borneo gave that to me.”

She looked it over. “So? What is it?”

He moved towards her, his hands resting on her hips. “It’s a fertility statue.”

She shrieked and tossed the statue on his bed.

He laughed again. “That’s an appropriate place for it.” He pulled her in his arms and she rested her forehead against his chest.

“Does this mean we’re going to have like eight dozen kids someday?” she muttered as he chuckled.

“I’m glad you’re here,” he told her, his chin resting on her head.

She sighed. “Me, too.”

He squeezed her lightly. “Ready to go meet Perry?”

She shook her head. “No. And you didn’t show me where you keep the supersuits either.” She smiled up at him. “I haven’t seen you up close and personal in it yet.”

He groaned. “I saw your sister’s room. There’s plenty of pictures of me in it.”

“Not the same.”

He moved away from her and walked to the closet, tugging slightly on the tie rack. “There you go. Supersuits.”

She ran her hand over one of the capes. “When do I get to see it on?”

He shrugged. “Next time you’re dangling over a cliff? Except I’d prefer you not ever do that.”

“I won’t not do my job,” she said softly, fingering one of the suits. “I’ll chase down stories however I have to. You can’t keep me completely out of danger.”

He rested his hands on her shoulders. “I know, but promise me you’ll call me if you need me. Please.”

“I will. Unless there’s Kryptonite around.”

“What?”

She shrugged her shoulders under his hands. “Meteorite. From Krypton. Kryptonite.”

“Makes sense.”

She moved away from him. “Okay. Let’s get this over with.”

“What?”

“Meeting the venerable Perry White and getting my butt handed to me and being offered a job writing obits for a few months until I find some really juicy story and prove myself.” She sighed. “And I’ll take it, gratefully, because it means I’m working for the Daily Planet.”

He closed the wall in the closet. “I doubt you’ll be writing obits. Dog shows, maybe, but not obits.”

Lois groaned.

Clark laughed again, picking up his bag and the suits. “Well, let’s go then.”

She sighed. “Fine. Let’s go.”

Part 4

“Darlin’, I can’t begin to thank you enough for saving this big lug.”

Lois found herself wrapped in a big bear hug with the editor of the Daily Planet. “Only too happy to oblige,” she told him.

Perry gestured towards the chairs. “Have a seat and let’s talk

turkey.”

Lois took one chair, glancing nervously at Clark as he took the other.

“Now, I know you did a great job investigating in Smallville and I remember your Lex Luthor stuff from when it happened. That was good work, too. I waited to see your application show up on my desk but it never did.”

“My parents needed me at home,” she told him. “Dad had back surgery and helping them came before getting my dream job at the Daily Planet.”

He nodded. “And that’s commendable, but you haven’t really investigated much since college. So, here’s the deal. I want you to work with Clark. For the next couple weeks, at least, you’re his gofer, researcher, whatever he needs, you help him with. He’ll teach you the ropes around here. After that, we’ll look at making you full partners — working together to get leads, sources, stories.”

Lois looked at Clark. “What? You mean it?”

Perry nodded. “Clark says he’s never worked with anyone better and I trust his instincts.” He handed over a folder. “I need you to fill all that stuff out while Clark and I discuss your first assignment together.” He handed her a pen. “Lois Kent, welcome to the Daily Planet.”

“Thank you, sir. I won’t let you down.”

He snorted. “It’s Perry or Chief. None of this ‘sir’ nonsense.” He nodded at the folder. “Get started. I want you to hear this while you work on that.”

“Wait, Perry. I want to make sure I’ve got this right,” Clark said suddenly. “She’s not working *with* me, she’s working *for* me. I’m top banana, I call the shots, all that kind of stuff?”

Perry snorted. “You can look at it that way if you want to, but somehow I think that’ll end you up in a world of hurt.”

Clark grinned. “I think you’re right.”

Lois rolled her eyes as she opened the folder. She hesitated as her pen hovered over the address information. “Clark, what’s your grandpa’s address?” She looked at Perry. “I don’t have a place in Metropolis yet so he’s letting me stay there until I get settled.”

Clark scribbled it down on a piece of paper for her, along with his phone number and his own information for a local emergency contact.

“So what’s the story, Chief?” he asked.

“Cat was at the Metropolis Grand last night at some soiree of some kind and saw Congressman Harrington talking a guy name Roarke.”

“The arms dealer?” Lois asked.

Perry looked pleasantly surprised. “Yeah. You know him?”

Lois shrugged. “Not really. He was in People once. He’s an international arms dealer of incredible proportions, but that’s about it.”

“Well, Cat saw them together and followed them. She figured out what office they’re using. You two are going to set up surveillance in the hotel in a room that has a clear view of the office.”

Clark nodded. “Sounds like a good plan.”

Perry’s eyes twinkled. “That’s not the best part.”

“What is?” Clark asked cautiously.

“You two are newlyweds. Staying in the honeymoon suite.”

“What?!” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“You heard me,” he told them with a smirk. “And you need to get over there in the next half hour in order to get everything set up before the meeting Cat thinks they have tonight.”

“But Perry, Lois doesn’t have any clothes with her or anything,” Clark told him. “I have a bag in my car because I’m staying at my grandpa’s and that’s actually why we were in town but...”

“Sorry, kids.” He leaned back in his chair. “The meeting is

supposed to be in less than ninety minutes, so Lois needs to get her paperwork dropped off on my desk so I can send it to Personnel in the morning and that way she's an official Planet employee and is getting paid and everything. And you two need to get over there and checked in and set up. You'll figure something out."

Lois sighed as she signed her name to the last piece of paper. "All done."

She handed the folder over and waited as Perry scanned through everything. "Looks good," he said, shutting it and tossing it onto his 'out' pile. "Keep all your receipts for the expense report. Order room service because you're a couple happy and in love and on your honeymoon."

"Got it." Clark turned to look at her. "Ready, honey?"

"Don't push it, Lane," she growled.

Perry chuckled. "Have fun, kids. Call me in the morning and I expect you here for a bit tomorrow afternoon."

Clark was halfway out the door and gave a half-hearted backhanded wave. Lois followed him to his desk.

"Now what?" she asked.

Clark sighed. "Sorry. My powers aren't completely back yet so I can't fly home to get your bag," he said, keeping his voice low despite the nearly deserted newsroom.

"It's okay," she sighed. "I'll figure something out. Maybe I can stop at the gift shop or something."

"So I get to see Lois Kent in the honeymoon suite?" he asked, a twinkle in his own eye as he picked up a couple of file folders.

"Is it going to be any more exciting than our last wedding night?" she asked with a raised brow.

Clark glanced around the newsroom before giving her a quick kiss. "A bit, hopefully. We'll get the dirt on Harrington and Roarke and not get beat up in the process."

"That sounds like a good plan."

Clark took her hand and walked towards the elevator. "We need to stop downstairs and pick up the cameras and stuff and then we'll head over to the hotel."

Ten minutes later, they were in the Jeep on the way to the hotel. Clark pulled up in front of the Grand. A porter helped get the bags and suits out of the car as a valet took his keys.

"Can I take this to your room for you, sir?" the porter asked as Clark's arm found its way around Lois.

Clark nodded. "The honeymoon suite, please."

"Shall I unpack them for you as well?"

Clark put his other arm around her, pulling her close to him. "Uh, no. Thanks, but um..." He kissed Lois softly. "I, uh, think we better do that ourselves." He winked at her, obviously enough that everyone around saw it.

Lois giggled, snuggling in close to him. "Probably a good idea, studmuffin."

He kept his arm around her and their faces were close together as they walked towards the check-in desk. He kissed her lightly, repeatedly, as they waited their turn to check-in.

"Honey, I think I'm going to go over to the gift shop," she said, walking her fingers up his arm.

He leaned in close to her. "Okay, but that's Harrington over there in the black wingback chair, talking to the waitress so you probably can't get any clothes or anything," he whispered.

She sighed. "Maybe I'll just stay with you and send you down to get me something... pretty later." She rested her head on his shoulder and suddenly wished that this was the real thing.

Part 5

Clark sighed as Lois rested her head on his shoulder while they waited for the elevator.

They'd put on a good show for the lobby — happy and in love. Honeymooners. If the porter was still upstairs when they got there, they'd have to put on a good show there, too.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lane?"

Clark turned to see another well-dressed porter. "Yes?" he asked.

The man held up a video camera. "I'm here to document carrying her over the threshold," he told them with a smile. "Kiss for the camera?"

Clark glanced at Lois. She was doing her best to keep the annoyed look off her face. "Think about it, sweetums. We'll always have a record of you carrying me over the threshold. Isn't that grand?" How she managed to say that without actually clenching her teeth was beyond him.

Fortunately, the elevator chose that moment to return to the main floor. The porter put his key in the slot and turned the elevator into an express, heading straight to their floor. There must have been some kind of signal because the large double doors to the honeymoon suite were situated directly across from the elevator and were wide open. The porter who had been riding with them exited quickly to get into place.

"Pick her up," he instructed.

"Don't you dare drop me, sugarlips," Lois muttered.

Clark grinned, scooping her into his arms. "Never." He turned his head to kiss her lightly as he walked into the suite. He set her gently on her feet. "Now, you two can get out of here, right?" he asked both porters, handing over two five dollar bills to one of them. He'd have to remember to write that down for reimbursement.

They both left in a hurry, shutting the door behind them.

"Alone at last," Lois said, flopping onto the couch.

"Now to get the surveillance equipment set up." Clark picked up the bag of equipment and set it on the bed in the other room.

"Too bad we didn't bring swimsuits," he called seeing the gigantic heart shaped Jacuzzi.

"Why is that?" she asked, joining him in the bedroom. "Ah," she said, seeing what he'd seen. She picked up a tripod. "Where's the best place to put this stuff?"

Clark heard something outside the door and glanced that way. He groaned as he realized they'd forgotten the 'do not disturb' sign. He tossed the equipment on the bed, covering it with the comforter. But...

"Trust me," he said, grabbing Lois by the waist and tossing her as gently as he could onto the bed.

He covered her body with his own, his lips automatically finding hers. Her startled gasp dissipated as she kissed him back, her hands winding their way around his neck.

He was aware of the door opening, but he barely heard something about towels before the door shut again. He pulled back, resting his forehead on hers, both of them breathing heavily. He started to move away from her when he heard the door opening again.

"Kiss me again," she whispered, pulling him back towards her.

He gladly obliged, trying desperately to remember that this was all part of the pretense.

"Clark Lane, I didn't know you had it in you," an amused voice from behind them said.

Together they broke off the kiss and he stumbled backwards off the bed, extending a hand to help Lois up. He took a deep breath and turned. "Cat. Always a pleasure."

The auburn haired gossip columnist tossed her hair lightly and laughed. "And who is this?"

"Lois Kent," Lois told her, holding out a hand.

Cat shook it. "Nice to meet you. Thanks for saving the big guy," she added, inclining her head towards Clark.

Clark had moved the comforter and started checking the equipment. "The maid was coming in with more towels," he said refusing to look at them.

Cat grinned. "He's a great kisser, isn't he?" she asked Lois,

sotto voce.

He glanced up enough to see Lois turning bright red and looking more than a bit annoyed. “What office is it we’re spying on, Cat?”

She sauntered to the window and pointed to a window a couple of floors below. “Right there.” She glanced at her watch. “They should be back in half an hour or so.”

“Um, Clark?” Lois asked, quietly. “Can I borrow something of yours until I can get some stuff of my own?”

Clark looked over at her to see that one side of her shirt and pants were soaking wet.

“What happened?”

She held up her empty water bottle. “I was taking a drink when you tossed me on the bed.”

He cringed. “Sorry.”

She shrugged. “It’s no problem, I just don’t have anything to change into.”

“Help yourself.”

He could hear her rummaging through his suitcase before she headed into the bathroom. “Are you sticking around?” he asked Cat as she helped him finish with the equipment.

She shook her head. “I have a thing to go to downstairs. I just wanted to make sure you got everything set up and were looking in the right place.” She turned to saunter back out of the room.

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” she called over her shoulder.

“Don’t worry,” he muttered.

“Don’t worry about what?”

Clark looked up to see her standing there in one of his blue dress shirts. The front was tucked into a pair of his sleep shorts. They were rolled at the waist, several times, leaving most her legs bare to his gaze.

She looked down at herself. “What?”

He leaned back against the window and looked her up and down. “My clothes have never, ever looked that good.”

She looked slightly uncomfortable. “You, um, didn’t have any T-shirts or anything in there so...”

“No, it’s fine. Really.” He walked towards her. “You know, one of these days we’re going to have to have a wedding night where we actually get to make-out without anyone walking in on us.”

Lois headed towards the living area. “On our next wedding night, we’re going to be doing a lot more than making out,” she told him.

In a flash, he was behind her, holding her to him. “I hope so,” he whispered huskily as he brushed a kiss along the base of her neck.

He could feel her tense up a bit. “Clark...”

He relaxed his hold on her. “There’s no expectations here tonight. You know that, right?”

She hesitated before nodding. “I know.”

“But...” he prompted.

She moved out of his arms and wandered towards the minibar. “But that kiss...”

Part 6

That kiss would forever be imprinted in her mind. She knew that. Even if they did get married and spend major portions of the rest of their lives kissing — and so much more — she would always remember the kiss on her bed, the kiss outside her bedroom door, and the kiss on the bed in the honeymoon suite.

She was sure there would be other memorable kisses but she’d always remember those three.

She started to say something else but was interrupted by the door opening across the street.

She used the binoculars and Clark took off his glasses while they watched the two talking. Clark whispered to her what they were saying. Something about a test.

Clark sighed as they left. “Harrington said something about being back in a few hours with Roarke. I guess we wait.”

Lois nodded. “I guess so.” She picked up a deck of cards. “Old Maid?”

“What? No poker?”

“You got chips?” she asked with a raised brow.

Clark shook his head. “I was thinking more along the lines of...”

“Strip poker?” she asked, her brow still raised.

“Truth or Dare,” he answered. “Winner of each hand gets a truth out of the other person or the loser has to take a dare.”

“No stripping?” she asked cautiously.

He shrugged. “I’ve already got your clothes off you, haven’t I?” He was trying desperately to hide a grin.

Lois threw a pillow at him.

“Hey!” he yelled as he ducked. He went to the door and put out the ‘do not disturb’ sign. “There. No more maids.”

She deftly shuffled the cards as she settled onto the couch. “Hold ‘Em?”

Clark shrugged. “Sure.”

“And no using your powers,” she warned, pointing the deck of cards at him. She quickly dealt the cards. “How do we ante?” she asked.

“Other stuff?” He looked at his cards. “I bet the bed.”

“What?”

“I bet the bed. You win, you get the bed.”

She nodded. “Fine, but we’re going to run out of stuff to bet pretty quickly that way.”

“Okay then... I bet a truth.”

She nodded then flipped the cards over.

Clark studied them carefully. “So we’re at a truth. I raise another truth.”

“So two truths?” Lois asked.

He nodded.

“I’ll see it.” She flipped over another card.

“Check.”

“Okay.”

She flipped the last card.

“Check,” Clark said, sighing to himself.

Lois looked smug. “I raise you a dare.”

“Two truths *and* a dare?” Clark verified.

She nodded.

He tossed his cards on the table. “Fold.”

She tossed her cards into the pile. “Shuffle while I think.” She regarded him through narrowed eyelids. “First truth. Who was your first kiss? Real kiss. Not second grade playground kiss. And describe it.”

He raised a brow at her. “Describe it?”

“You’re a writer. Write out loud.”

He sighed. “Fine. Mary. I was fifteen. I thought she was cute, she thought I was cute. We were under the mistletoe at some party. It was short and chaste. It didn’t give me goosebumps or anything — at least not because of kissing *her*. Maybe a few because it was my first kiss, but that’s it.”

“Okay. Truth two. First real date and describe it.”

He groaned. “Lisa. I was sixteen. We went to the homecoming dance. She disappeared. Found her making out behind the bleachers with Joe.”

Lois winced. “I’m sorry.”

He shrugged. “Last I heard their third kid was on the way.”

“Well, that’s good then I guess. And I get the bed.” She shrugged. “Deal.”

He dealt the cards, quickly losing the next hand and two more truths.

“Your most serious girlfriend. Tell me about her and why you loved her.”

“Is this *relationship* truth or dare?” he asked her as he walked

to the minibar to get a drink.

“For the moment.”

“There’s two, I guess. Karen,” he said, sitting back down. “She’s a computer programmer or something now. I don’t know that I was ever *in love* with her, but I did have real feelings for her. She’s great — funny, kind, a good writer when she wants to be but she prefers reading. I still see her from time to time. We were in college and in a literature class together. We went on our first date the week after the fall semester started. Eventually, we split up when spring semester ended. I was going to China and...” He shrugged. “What it really boiled down to, though, was that I wasn’t ready to tell her about myself and didn’t think I ever would be.”

“And the other?”

“Mayson. She’s an assistant DA here in town so we may run into her from time to time. I was considering telling her about myself but...” He shrugged again. “I really liked her and I think she was in love with me. She’d told me that several times but always said she wasn’t pressuring me into saying it, too. When I was talking it over with my folks — telling her about me that is — the idea for Superman was born. She... isn’t crazy about Superman so...” He shrugged again. “It took a while, but really, that was the end of that. I never told her and eventually we broke up.”

“Who else knows about you?” she asked quietly.

“Wasn’t that my second truth?” he grinned.

“Yeah,” she sighed.

“Tell you what, I’ll give you a freebie. You and your parents. My parents. That’s it. I wonder about Gramps, but...”

“That was cheap,” she muttered. “I already knew that.”

“Were you hoping someone else did?”

“No, but don’t worry, I won’t waste another truth or another freebie.”

“Sorry.”

“No, you’re not.” She dealt the cards. This time Clark won a truth and a dare from her.

“Truth first,” he said, grinning as he leaned back on his elbows.

“Fine.”

“Your first real kiss. Who and describe it, please.”

She rolled her eyes. It figured. “Pete Ross. I was sixteen. It was after our first date — my first date. He drove me home, walked me to the door and...” She shrugged. “Short and sweet. It was nice, but not toe curling or foot popping or anything.”

“So dare...”

“Enjoy it,” Lois warned. “You won’t get another one.”

He handed her the phone. “You have to make a prank call.”

“To who?”

“Jimmy.”

“Who’s Jimmy?”

“He works at the Planet.” Clark thought for a minute. “Tell him that Perry needs an Elvis costume first thing in the morning and that he has to find one. The white sequined one.”

He dialed as she held the phone to her ear.

“Hello?”

“Is this Jimmy?” Lois asked.

“Yeah,” the other voice said cautiously.

“This is...” She mumbled something indeterminate. “... from...” Another mumble. “... Costume Shop. Perry White’s Elvis costume is in. The white sequined one. He said to call this number when it was in and that he needs it *immediately*. We’d appreciate it being picked up ASAP.”

She ignored the protests on the other end of the line as she said thanks and hung up.

Clark chuckled as he readied the cards for their next hand. A minute later, he’d lost another truth and a dare.

“Truth,” Lois said, curling her legs up underneath her. “So we

did first date and first kiss. First time you and a girl... you know. Not *too* much detail but some.”

Clark raised a brow at her. “You want to know about the first time a girl and I...”

“Went all the way,” Lois confirmed.

He ran a hand through his hair. “Well...”

“You already know who my first was,” she pointed out when he stalled.

He stared at the deck of cards he held in his hands. “I haven’t actually...” he finally said.

“You haven’t?” Lois asked incredulously.

He shook his head. “I mean, there’s been plenty of opportunities but...” He shrugged. “It never felt *right*. I didn’t feel right being with a woman like that when she didn’t know about me.”

“You never just... lost control? Got caught up in the moment?”

“No. There’s only ever been one time that I wanted to just... lose control and that time was interrupted.”

“Okay. So tell me about that then.”

He looked her straight in the eye. “It was the morning I woke up in your bed and kissed you.”

Part 7

He was practically holding his breath as he waited for her reaction.

“Wow,” she breathed. “Me? Really?”

He nodded.

“I didn’t know about you then,” she pointed out.

“I know, but that’s the only time I’ve ever really just wanted to lose control. I’m not saying that we would have if your mom hadn’t shown up — I doubt we would have given that the door was open and everything else — but that’s the only time.”

“Not any of the other times you’ve kissed me?” she asked, suddenly staring at her bottle of water.

“I had tighter control of myself the other times. It had caught me completely off-guard — kissing your back like that and then kissing you. Besides we weren’t in bed the other times we’ve kissed,” he pointed out.

“True,” Lois conceded. “Except...” She nodded towards the other room. “Earlier.”

“That was different. Don’t get me wrong, it was a very nice kiss, but it was a ruse and then Cat walked in.”

“Have you ever kissed Cat?” she asked suddenly.

He grinned at her. “Nope. Not gonna answer that. You got more out of that truth than you deserved. So... Dare or back to the game.”

“Fine. Dare.” An evil little grin crossed her face. “I dare you to put the Suit on.”

“What suit?” he asked, puzzled.

“The super suit. You know, blue spandex, red cape, underwear on the outside. Symbol of truth and justice the world over.”

He groaned. “Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

He sighed. “Fine.” He headed towards the bedroom.

“You have one with you?” she asked incredulously.

“Yeah. Usually I wear it under my clothes but since I’m not officially back yet, I’m not. But I’m *almost* back so I brought one with me,” he told her, opening the secret compartment in his suitcase.

He spun, stopping when he was fully clothed in the Suit.

He strode — he always strode when he was in the Suit — into the living room, cape billowing behind him.

He heard Lois’ sharp intake of breath when she saw him and he smiled to himself. He knew the Suit had that kind of effect on many women — and probably more men than he cared to think

about — but he was exceptionally glad it affected her.

He wished his powers were completely back so he could *really* impress her but...

Maybe they were back enough.

He pulled himself into a sitting position in midair, legs crossed Indian style. He didn't look at her but did hear her gasp as he slowly lowered himself to the ground, making sure his cape was spread... regally behind him. He rolled his eyes at himself.

"How's that?" he asked, shuffling the cards.

"Very... nice," she managed.

"Glad you approve."

Clark quickly won the next hand and a single truth from Lois.

"So, what was your first impression of Superman?" he asked.

"Superman or Clark Lane?"

He grinned. "I already know what your first impression of Clark Lane was. I annoyed you because you were busy baking and had to interrupt it to check me in."

She rolled her eyes. "Fine."

"Your first impression of Superman."

She shrugged. "I was... impressed. But then again, so was pretty much everyone else."

He waggled his eyebrows at her. "Did you think he was hot? Did you want to haul him off to your lair, or have him haul you off to his lair or whatever?"

"He could *fly* — who cared if he was hot?"

"But...?" Clark prompted.

"But what?"

"Did you think he was hot?"

Lois' eyes narrowed. "Why do you want to know if I thought Superman was hot?"

He shrugged. "I'm curious."

"He was... fine. I had no desire to run off to Metropolis chasing after him or anything though."

"And yet you did," he finished a bit smugly.

"No. I came to Metropolis chasing Clark Lane," she pointed out. "He's my... boyfriend. Not Superman."

"I'll remember that when you want to go flying," he told her, shuffling the cards.

He sighed as he lost a double dare before the flop.

Lois grinned smugly. "Okay, Superman. I want to see my boyfriend in significantly less clothes than he was wearing earlier so I can ogle properly. The spandex doesn't cut it."

Clark raised a brow at her. "Excuse me? Exactly how much fewer are we talking about?"

She shrugged. "I didn't say anything about *naked*, did I?"

"I thought this wasn't strip poker."

"Who said anything about stripping?" She waved a hand in the direction of the bedroom. "Go in the other room and come back in a pair of shorts."

"Just shorts?" he clarified.

"You can wear whatever sort of underwear you choose," she told him flippantly. "I won't look."

He sighed and walked towards the other room. "Can I at least wear socks so my feet don't get cold?"

"Sure," she called. "Socks are..." She stopped midsentence as he reappeared in front of her suddenly.

"Something like this?" he asked, looking down at himself. He was wearing a pair of sleep shorts and white athletic socks.

"Wow," she sighed.

"So you approve?"

"Does that bother you?" She tore her eyes away from him long enough to shuffle.

"Not really," he said with a shrug. "I'm glad my girlfriend thinks I'm ogleable."

"Is that even a word?" she asked, dealing the next hand.

"It is now."

Lois lost a truth to him that hand.

"Have you ever really been in love?" he asked quietly.

She stared at the hem of the shorts she was wearing, picking at a loose thread as she did. "I thought I was," she said quietly. "I thought I loved Lex but..." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I think I was in love with the idea of who I thought he was, but that wasn't who he was at all. Would it have lasted a lifetime if he'd really been the guy I thought he was and not a homicidal, suicidal drug boss? I don't know. I don't think so. Not..."

"Not what?" he said softly.

She looked up at him, tears filling her eyes. "Not like I think things could be with you. And that scares me."

He was by her side in an instant, enveloping her in his arms. "Why does that scare you?"

"The idea that so much of my future, my future happiness, is tied up in one guy scares me." She swiped at her eyes as she leaned against him. "What if we don't work out?"

"Why won't we work out?"

"Have any of your other relationships lasted?"

"Only one has to," he told her softly, his fingers brushing her hair away from her face. "Only one relationship has to last a lifetime. Like my parent. Like your parents. Like our grandparents. That'll be us."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I just am." He kissed her forehead and then her nose.

She shifted, turning so that her hands were on his chest as he finally kissed her.

Thoroughly.

Like she was meant to be kissed.

Like she was meant to be kissed by *him*.

And for the second time in his life, he wanted to just lose control.

Part 8

Lois kissed him back. Long and intense.

Loving.

She was falling in love with him and she was quite certain he was falling in love with her as well.

Rational thought fled as he held her close to his very bare chest, kissing her as though his life depended on it.

And she was kissing him back much the same way.

She heard a door slam — somewhere far away — and knew it ought to mean something.

"That's the last of the system specs."

Clark stilled with his head buried in her neck. He kissed her collarbone softly one more time before moving away from her. "I think they're back," he said, resting his forehead against hers.

"I'll have the information on the testing for you tomorrow. Dates, procedures, the whole thing."

By the time Harrington finished speaking, they'd moved to the window. Lois watched through the binoculars as Clark made sure the video camera was pointed the right direction. He turned the speaker down slightly.

"Good," Roarke said. "What about a new vote?"

Harrington threw up his hands. "I can't initiate a re-vote until after the test results are analyzed and the plan rejected. Hopefully..."

"'Hopefully' isn't good enough," Roarke told him forcefully. "That's why I bought insurance — *you*."

"You don't own me, Roarke."

Lois felt Clark tense as Roarke shoved Harrington against the wall.

Roarke's voice was cold as ice. "I own you, lock, stock and re-election fund, Mr. Chairman. Never forget that."

Harrington looked shaky as Roarke moved away from him. "I only meant that... Are you sure you can pull this off?"

"I guarantee it."

Harrington grew even more nervous. “Because if you don’t... What happens to me?”

Roarke gave a laugh Lois thought only existed in bad made for TV movies. “Pray you never find out.” He and the other companion laughed as Harrington scampered away like a scared rabbit.

“Lois, what would you say if I said I don’t have a clue what they’re talking about, but that whatever it is, it’s bigger than any of us thought — even Perry?”

Lois looked at him, her eyes wide and a bit scared she was sure. “I’d say... you’re absolutely right.”

They watched as Roarke and the other man left the office.

“I think they’re gone for the night,” Clark said, watching the dead bolt on the door click into place.

“I think so, too.” She turned around, heading back into the room.

“Tired?” he asked as she yawned.

Lois nodded. “I don’t know why. All I did was sleep all day.”

“You’re still tired,” he said practically. “You didn’t sleep for like forty-eight or more hours after being chased through the woods, twice, and fighting off an insane army colonel. Of course you’re still tired.” He moved in front of her, wrapping his arms around her before kissing her softly.

She rested her head against him and tried not to relive yet another unforgettable kiss. “I don’t want to go to sleep.”

“I know.”

“Will you stay with me for a while?” she asked nervously. “Just sit with me until I go to sleep?”

“Of course.” He chuckled before scooping her into his arms.

She squealed slightly. “Clark, what’re you doing?”

“It is our wedding night, right?”

She laughed. “I guess.”

“So I’m carrying my bride to bed.”

He set her down next to the large circular bed. The covers were still thrown back from their earlier attempt to hide the surveillance equipment.

“Thanks.”

“Let me go make sure everything is set in the other room and I’ll be right back.”

She nodded and slid under the covers, reveling in the feeling of the satin sheets on the skin of her legs. She suddenly wished that she was really on her honeymoon so that she could sleep in fewer clothes, but she quickly pushed the thought aside.

“All done,” Clark said, moving back into the room. “Do you mind if I take a pillow with me to the other room?”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” she asked, propping herself up on one elbow.

“Why?”

“To sleep in the living room. We’re supposed to be undercover as honeymooners after all.”

He sighed. “You’re probably right. Do you mind if I stay in here?”

She shook her head. “No. And I’m sure I’ll sleep better if you do.”

Clark slipped under the covers on the other side, rolling to look at her.

“Superman scares the nightmares away,” she said quietly.

He grinned. “I don’t think I want the rest of the world knowing that’s one of my powers. Bed could get awfully crowded.” His look turned serious. “I know we haven’t known each other very long but the connection I feel with you...”

“In the absence of the house of Ra, you have my blessing.”

Jor-El’s voice reverberated through her head and she wondered again what it meant exactly. What if there was someone else out there? What if his Kryptonian wife had ended up somewhere else — on another Earth-like planet that had much better technology and one day she’d come looking for him?

“Clark...” She laid her head back down on the pillow and looked at him. “Do you think about your birth parents much?” He shrugged. “Sometimes.”

“Did you hear what your father said when we saw him?”

“He said a bunch of things.”

“About the birth wife.” She rolled so she could stare at the ceiling instead of him.

“I heard it, but I have no idea what he was talking about. I mean, surely if there was another Kryptonian on Earth, he or she would have found Superman by now.”

“That was my thought.”

He reached out to take her hand. “Does that scare you? That some Kryptonian woman is going to show up and try to take me away from you?”

She shrugged. “The thought crossed my mind.”

He moved closer towards her until he could brush a soft kiss across her lips. “No one is going to take me from you. Lex Luthor has a better chance of waking up from his vegetative state than of some alien girl has of getting her hands on me.” He kissed her again, lightly. “And that’s all the kissing you’re going to get from me tonight.”

She rolled so she could see him better. “Clark, do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“Never mention Lex’s name while we’re in bed together.”

Clark chuckled. “Deal.”

Part 9

Clark woke to find himself curled around Lois, one arm around her waist holding her to him.

For just a minute, he let himself believe that this was how they woke every morning.

He hadn’t moved when Lois groaned. “I’m hungry,” she muttered. “Did we eat dinner last night?”

He thought for a second. “No. And you didn’t eat lunch either, did you?”

“No.”

He let go of her and rolled over. “Perry said to order room service so...”

Lois swung her legs over the end of the bed. “Sounds like a plan.”

She headed towards the bathroom while Clark went into the other room to get the menu.

Clark flipped through the folder, holding it out to Lois as she entered the room. Ten minutes later, they’d ordered breakfast fit for a king.

“Can I borrow some more clothes?” Lois asked. “I think I’m going to go take a shower before we head to the Planet. I don’t really want to go in wearing your clothes but...” She sighed. “I don’t really want to wear what I wore yesterday either.” She bit her bottom lip trying to decide what was the best course of action.

Clark levitated slightly and shook his head. “Sorry. I still can’t fly. Probably by this afternoon or evening, but not yet. We could always stop somewhere and pick something up for you.”

“That sounds like a better plan but until then...”

“Help yourself.”

She sighed. “No. I’ll wear what I wore yesterday. In case we run into someone or something.” She disappeared into the bedroom again. After the bathroom door closed behind her, he zipped around the room, stopping when he was dressed for work. He tossed his suit over the back of the couch and buttoned the tiny buttons on the cuffs of his sleeves. For some reason, he had a hard time buttoning those when using his superspeed.

Two hours, and four stores, later Lois had replaced the clothes she’d worn the day before with new ones and they walked towards the Daily Planet building. Lois stopped on the sidewalk

as Clark continued to walk. He stopped when he realized she wasn't with him.

"What?" he asked, moving back to her side.

She stared up at the globe. "I just can't believe I actually work here."

He chuckled. "Well, you do." He took her hand, linking his fingers with hers. "Ready?"

She glanced down at their hands. "Are we doing the 'married' thing here?"

He shrugged. "You are my girlfriend right? But if you're uncomfortable with it..."

"I don't want anyone thinking I got this job because we're sleeping together. Not that we're sleeping together really, but you know what I mean and they won't know that."

Clark snorted. "Anyone who knows Perry White knows that our relationship has absolutely nothing to do with you getting this job. If anything, it would have worked against you, except that you're too amazing a reporter for it."

"Thanks."

He tugged slightly on her hand. "Ready?"

"As I'll ever be," she muttered.

She still trailed slightly behind him, her hand nestled snugly in his, as they walked inside.

"Name the seven dwarves."

"What?"

"It'll take your mind off being nervous. Name 'em."

"Piece of cake. Happy, Dopey, Doc, Sneezy, Sleepy, Grumpy..."

"That's six."

Her brow furrowed in concentration. "Sleazy? Dippy? Bippy? Sloppy, wheezy... Joe? Steve?"

"It's so obvious," Clark said, grinning.

"To you maybe," Lois muttered.

"Bashful."

She rolled her eyes.

"Eight tiny reindeer."

"What?"

"Name 'em."

She ticked them off on her fingers. "Dancer, Prancer, Comet, Blitzen, Dasher, Cupid, Donner..."

"That's seven," Clark said, singsong, as they stepped into the elevator.

"Donner..." she repeated.

"You're stuck," he told her gleefully as the doors shut.

"I'm not stuck." She worried the tip of one finger with one from the other hand. "Rudolph!" she said triumphantly.

"He's not one of the eight tiny reindeer. He's a late addition."

"Oh." She bit her lip again. "Mittens? Buttons? Singer? Swinger?"

"You're stuck. Admit it."

She sighed. "Fine. I'm stuck."

He wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her tight to him, his other hand resting on her waist. "Vixen," he said triumphantly.

"Right. Vixen."

"My vixen," he said softly, kissing her lightly.

The doors to the elevator dinged open and Lois moved away from him.

"I don't want everyone's first impression of me to be hanging off your lips," she said under her breath, walking out in front of him.

She headed straight for his desk and he followed in her wake. A number of eyes were on them and his hearing told him that the whispers were wondering if this was the woman Lane had finally met his match with.

"Ladies and gentleman!" Perry's booming voice caught everyone's attention. He gestured towards them. "The lovely lady

who has just entered the room is none other than Ms. Lois Kent, the newest member of the investigative reporting staff. She's also the one who saved Clark's butt last week, so you can thank her — or not — later." Chuckles filled the room. "Stop by and say hi, but don't let it interfere with your work. And now I want both of you in my office," he said, looking directly at them.

Clark set the file folders back on the desk, gesturing for Lois to go first. He followed her into the editor's office.

"Have a seat." Perry sat in his chair as Clark shut the door behind them. "I read over your email and Jimmy's digging into all the votes from Harrington's committee in the last six months. Cat's following Harrington around. I've got... another source digging into Roarke. You guys got anything else?"

Clark shook his head. "Roarke was pointing to tonight on the calendar but... I'm not sure if it was a meeting or something else."

Perry sighed. "Okay. Well, get back there before long. Cat's supposed to call in if Harrington heads that direction."

"We keep an eye on them and work from there. Jimmy can bring anything he's got over to the hotel and Lois and I will go over it there."

Perry nodded. "That sounds good. Let me know if you come up with anything else."

"We will."

Jimmy opened the door and walked in, a big stack of folders in his hands. "Here's what I've got so far on Harrington and some stuff I dug up on Roarke while the Harrington stuff was printing and Harrington's recent committee votes and Apocalypse Consulting — they're the ones who've leased those offices." He plopped everything into Clark's lap. "And I'll be right back."

Lois and Clark both groaned.

"Guess I know what we're doing the rest of the night, apple dumpling," Lois said. "Some honeymoon," she grumbled.

Jimmy walked back in holding a garment bag. "Here you go, Chief. Elvis costume. White sequins. I couldn't find the shop that had it on hold for you but I did find this one."

The two reporters exchanged glances. Lois had a sudden coughing fit and Clark felt the need to clear his throat.

"What in the king's name are you talking about, Jimmy?" Perry asked, frowning.

"Uh, Chief, I think we're going to head out," Clark said, hoisting the file folders in his arms as he stood up. "We'll call you if we come up with anything."

He hurried out of the office with Lois close behind him. They made it to his desk before they started laughing and couldn't stop.

Part 10

It was several long minutes later before they managed to catch their breath.

"Look at that," Clark said, pointing to something behind her. "You've got a desk."

Lois looked. The desk across from his had a nameplate with 'Lois Kent' written on it. She walked over and picked it up, running her fingers over the letters.

"Lois Kent, Daily Planet," she said quietly.

"You've earned it," Clark told her, sorting through some of the folders on his desk.

She set it down before going around to sit in her chair, her hands splaying over the large calendar in the center of the desk. She looked up to see that there was no way she'd be able to look up from working without seeing Clark. She wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not.

He bent over to get something out of his drawer and she decided it might be a good thing. She quickly diverted her attention — looking around the newsroom, taking in the sights and sounds of the big city paper.

Her eyes narrowed as she noticed someone else staring at

Clark while he was digging around in his desk.

About her age, maybe a bit younger, the attractive brunette was definitely checking out Clark's butt.

Lois watched her for several minutes as Clark continued to search for something. She wondered if she ought to offer the other woman a fan.

The woman shook her head slightly and headed towards them. Clark, oblivious, looked up at Lois.

"Hey, I'll be right back," he told her.

The woman stopped as Clark walked off.

"Can I help you with something?" Lois asked sweetly.

She turned to look at Lois. "Um, I'm Sarah," she said, holding out her hand. "I just started this morning but I've heard a lot about Mr. Lane already. I'm glad you were able to help him out."

Lois took her hand and shook it firmly, before discreetly wiping her hand on her pants under her desk when they were done. "Lois. Nice to meet you, Sarah." She nodded towards the file folders. "Is there something I can help you with?"

Sarah looked down at the folders. "Oh, this is just some information for Mr. Lane."

Lois held out her hand. "Mr. Lane and I are working together now. I'll be happy to give it to him." She fingered the wedding band on her outstretched hand.

Sarah shifted uncomfortably. "Oh, I don't know."

Clark chose that moment to return to his desk.

"Clark, honey, Sarah here has some information for you."

Clark glanced up. "You can give it to Lois."

Sarah hesitated again. "Actually, Mr. Lane, I was hoping to talk to you for a minute about a possible story."

He turned, leaning against his desk, stretching his legs out in front of him. "Let's have it."

Sarah glanced at Lois again and Lois raised her brow as the other woman's attention returned to Clark. "I don't know that here's the best place for this discussion."

"Well, let's go to the conference room then."

Sarah nodded and headed towards the room on the other side of the bullpen. Clark hung back slightly, his hand resting on Lois' lower back as they walked.

"Play along, would ya?" Lois muttered.

"What?"

"Just do it, sweetheart."

They walked into the conference room. Lois hung back a bit until Clark had a seat. She moved behind him and rested her hands on his shoulders, massaging lightly.

"That feels great, sweetheart," Clark practically groaned, his head falling forward slightly as she massaged his neck with her thumbs.

Lois was watching Sarah's reactions out of the corner of her eye. The other woman's eyes had narrowed slightly and she looked more mad than uncomfortable.

"I thought you two were pretending to be married," she finally said.

"Oh, we're the real deal," Lois said, giving her another sickeningly sweet smile.

"Good to know."

Clark cleared his throat and Lois moved to the chair next to him. "So what's this story?"

"Well..." Sarah stopped as the door opened.

"Hey, guys," Jimmy interrupted. "Cat just called and they're on their way back to the office building. Perry wants you guys over there a-sap."

"On it," Clark said, standing up and holding a hand out to Lois. "Sarah, we'll get together in the next couple of days, okay?"

Sarah nodded. "Okay."

They stopped at Clark's desk, long enough to pick up the file

folders and put them in a duffel bag that Jimmy had left there so they wouldn't walk into the hotel with a pile of work to do.

When the elevator doors shut behind them, Clark turned to her. "What was that all about? I mean, I liked the neck massage but..."

Lois crossed her arms defiantly. "I didn't like the way she was checking you out."

"What?"

She sighed and leaned against the wall. "You were digging through your bottom drawer and she was checking out your butt."

Clark raised his eyebrow and tried to keep a smile off his face. "Really?"

"Yes, really." She moved closer to him, fiddling with his tie. "And I know I'm still getting used to the idea of *us* but that doesn't mean I want other women checking out your butt."

He set the bag on the floor and rested his hands on her waist. "You have seen my other outfit, right? Other women aren't exactly checking out my... butt."

"I know and I'm not crazy about that either, but at least you've got a cape then and that's..." She lowered her voice to a whisper even though they were alone. "...Superman. Superman is perpetually unattached, but Clark Lane, on the other hand..."

He held up his left hand — the one that sported the wedding ring Perry had given them — "Has a golden band?" he asked with a wink.

"For the moment and maybe — someday — forever, but for right now, ring or not, Clark Lane is taken."

The doors opened and they moved apart. "I like the sound of that," Clark told her, picking up the bag with one hand and taking her hand with the other.

"Me, too." She bumped into his hip with hers.

It took them ten minutes to get back to their room and to the window to watch what was going on across the street.

They watched as the door opened and shut behind the three men.

"And Clark?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't ever call me sweetheart again."

"Got it."

Part 11

They watched as Roarke and his friend threatened Congressman Harrington. They learned that the test was going to be at dawn.

And that downtown Metropolis was going to be wiped out by a giant tidal wave.

"At least they didn't close the blinds or shutters while they watched that tape," Lois said grimly. "Superman still could have seen it but now we have photographic evidence."

"But who do we take it to?" Clark asked, moving away from the window since they were all gone.

"Perry first. Maybe he has some Navy connections? Or Superman does?"

Clark nodded thoughtfully. "Actually, I have met the Secretary of Defense a couple of times. Or rather Superman has. If nothing else, I can try to get to him. Or find the ship that's going to shoot the torpedo and stop it if I have to — now that I can fly again, all of my powers are back."

"That could work."

"But first we call Perry."

The rest of the day was a flurry of activity. They called Perry, met him in his office along with Jack Olsen — Jimmy's dad who was also a bigwig at the FBI. He'd been investigating Harrington for some time. He called his contacts with the Navy and by midnight, when Lois and Clark stumbled back in to the suite, the tests had, theoretically, been stopped.

Superman was going to hover high over the warships in

question just to make sure that there wasn't some miscommunication somewhere down the line.

They, of course, had the exclusive ready for the morning edition of the Daily Planet. They even had a couple of updated variations ready for the afternoon edition.

Lois and Clark were going to keep an eye on the offices across the street, in case anyone came back, but everyone thought that was unlikely. APBs were going to be issued before long for Roarke and Bart — the man who had been with him — while Harrington was under FBI surveillance.

Lois stood watching out the window. Clark moved behind her, his hands resting softly on her shoulders. He gently massaged them, causing her to drop her head forward much as he had earlier, as his thumbs worked against the back of her neck.

She groaned slightly as he increased the pressure. "That feels *incredible*," she moaned, her forehead resting against the window.

He moved, his arms wrapping around her and holding her to him. "Why don't you go lie down and get some sleep? I'll keep an eye out for any activity across the way."

"You don't mind?"

He shook his head. "No. My powers are completely back and I don't need nearly as much sleep as most people. I can go a couple of days without sleep as long as I have something to keep me busy — like rescues or something — but one night shouldn't be a problem."

She turned to rest her head against his shoulder and wrap her arms around his waist. "Are you sure you don't mind?"

He kissed the top of her head. "Not at all. It's been a busy day. Get some rest."

"Wake me up in a bit to trade?" she asked with a soft sigh.

"Nah. I got it."

"If you're sure, I'm not going to say no to that."

He tipped her chin up and kissed her lightly, their lips lingering for several long seconds. "Get some sleep."

She kissed him again before moving away and heading into the bedroom, shutting the door behind her.

Clark stared out over the city, doing his best not to imagine what was going on in the room behind him. Was she going to borrow some of his clothes to sleep in again? She'd bought an outfit for work but that was it. He probably could fly back to Pittsdale, but the alarm would be set and he didn't want to take the chance on someone noticing he'd been there.

Mayson had borrowed some of his clothes a few times but they had never looked as good as when Lois had worn them the day before. He wasn't entirely certain why that was. Mayson was a very attractive woman and he'd enjoyed spending time with her, kissing her, even. She'd understood, even appreciated, his desire to take things slowly in the physical relationship arena. He thought she'd had the impression that he'd been burned badly in the past when it came to sex and she was willing to wait until he was ready.

But with Lois...

Everything was... different. Everything was... heightened. Everything was... more.

Maybe it was because she knew the truth about him and it hadn't fazed her. She wasn't repulsed by the idea that he was Superman, but neither was she attracted only to the powers. She simply accepted them as a part of who he was.

Of course, Superman hadn't interrupted their lives yet. He'd only realized he could fly again a few hours earlier. At some point, he was sure, they'd be in the middle of a conversation or a make-out session or... more someday and he'd hear a call for help and he'd have to leave her standing or sitting or lying there while he flew off.

He was rapidly coming to believe that she was the woman he was meant to spend the rest of his life with. But could she live

with that? Live with Superman constantly interrupting their evenings home alone? Missing birthdays or anniversaries or some other special occasion because of a mudslide or earthquake or other major international disaster? He wouldn't *plan* anything for those days, of course — no ribbon cuttings or teeing off at golf tournaments — but real life could still interfere.

His hearing kicked in slightly — just enough to hear clothes hitting the floor in the other room and the swish of the satin sheets being pulled back. He frowned slightly and then his eyes widened as he realized...

Before he knew what he was doing, he'd turned and tugged his glasses down to the bridge of his nose. The wall started to peel away before he came to his senses and pushed them back up, his hands covering his eyes as he groaned.

He'd heard clothes coming off.

He hadn't heard clothes coming back on.

She was trying to kill him. That had to be it.

Of course, she probably didn't realize that he'd heard all of that and she had made sure he didn't plan on going in there during the night — either to sleep or wake her up — so she probably thought he'd have no idea.

So Lois was in the bed in the other room, probably naked as the day she was born, and he was out here for the foreseeable future.

It was better that way, he told himself. Much better.

"Good night, Clark," came her voice from beyond the door.

He couldn't bring himself to respond.

"*Good* night, Clark."

He sighed.

"Good *night*, Cl-ark." She was starting to sound annoyed.

"Good night, Lois," he finally called back.

Long night was more like it.

Very, very long night.

Part 12

The snick of the door closing in the outer room woke Lois the next morning.

"Clark?" she called sleepily, sitting half way up before she remembered how brazen she'd been the night before, sleeping only in her underwear. She held the sheet to her bare chest as she looked around.

There.

On the nightstand was a note.

'Lois,

I told the desk you needed a wake-up call at six-thirty so if you're not up by then, you'll get one. I'm headed out to watch the Navy ships. I should be back in a couple hours. If you're not here, I'll check the Planet.

Clark'

She blushed hotly at the thought of him being in the room while she was wearing so little clothes. Even if she had made sure the sheets covered her completely as she slept.

She'd been right the night before. Sleeping on the satin sheets had been heavenly. It likely would have been more heavenly to sleep on them either completely naked, something she hadn't been able to bring herself to do, or with Clark, both of them naked or nearly so after...

She shook her head. Now wasn't the time to go there.

She looked around, just to make sure she was really alone, before climbing out of bed and putting on a pair of Clark's shorts and his blue shirt she'd worn the day before.

She called Perry to find out that there was nothing new on that end — and she had nothing to report except that Clark was out waiting for a meeting with Superman. She was staying there, keeping up surveillance on the Apocalypse offices.

A knock on the door didn't surprise her. Perry had said he was sending some more files over. She glanced in the mirror. She

looked a bit disheveled but there wasn't much she could do about it. She ran her hand through her hair, pulling it into a sloppy ponytail, as she headed towards the door.

She opened the door, surprised and annoyed to see Sarah standing there.

"Good morning," Lois said as the other woman stood there. She was suddenly very glad that she was wearing Clark's clothes and looking like she'd just woken up.

"Morning." Sarah looked around and behind Lois at the room. "Is Mr. Lane here?"

Lois shook her head. "He, um, left earlier. He wasn't sure when he was going to be back." She gestured to the room. "Won't you come in for a minute and show me what you've got?"

Sarah hesitated before nodding. Lois glanced towards the bedroom, glad she'd left the door wide open, leaving the clothes on the floor and a very messy bed fully visible.

Lois shut the door behind them. Sarah handed over the file folders she'd brought. Apocalypse Consulting was owned by NSJ Inc., but they hadn't gotten any further than that. NSJ was owned by some other entity but even Jimmy — and his dad — hadn't been able to get any further than that.

There was the sound of a keycard in the door to the suite. Lois looked up from where she was sitting on the couch to see Clark walk in, a satisfied look on his face.

"Hey," he said, his face lighting up when he saw her. "All taken care of." He saw Sarah standing there. "Superman talked to the captains of the ships in question to make sure that the test had been called off. It had been. Roarke and Bart have been arrested and Harrington has been brought in for questioning."

"Ten to one says he says he was setting up a sting of some kind," Lois said with a roll of her eyes.

"Got it in one." Clark sat next to her, his arm stretching around the back of the couch — close to her but not touching.

"Well, um, I guess you won't be needing this stuff here then," Sarah said, standing and taking the file folders with her. "I'll, uh, see you back at the Planet."

Clark, ever the gentleman, stood and walked her to the door. "Thank you, Sarah. Tell Perry we'll be in before long?"

Sarah nodded. "I will. Thanks."

He shut the door behind Sarah. He turned to Lois. "Alone at last without a potential tsunami looming over us," he said dramatically.

She laughed. "And without the new girl who has a crush on you."

He zipped back to the couch, this time wrapping his arms around her. "Just you and me."

Lois rested her head against him. "We should probably head back to your grandpa's, though. Check out and get back there so I can change and then head back to work."

He gave her a long, lingering kiss before zipping around the suite, setting the bags by the door. "Why don't I put these in the Jeep and then we'll fly back to Gramps' place?"

Her eyes lit up. "Really?"

He nodded. "Really."

"I would love that," she said with a huge grin.

He gave her another lingering kiss. "I'll be right back."

Lois wandered around the suite for a few minutes as he took the bags down to his Jeep. She wondered idly what it would be like to share the suite with Clark if they really were on their honeymoon. She had no doubt that it would be amazing.

Super, even.

She smiled to herself.

"Dollar for your thoughts." The quiet voice startled her.

She turned to see Clark leaning against the door, smiling at her.

Lois shrugged. "Nothing really."

"Wondering what it would be like if we were really here for

real?" he asked, his smile growing nearly imperceptibly.

"The thought crossed my mind," she answered, turning away from him.

"Tell you what. Someday, I'll bring you back here for real," he told her, crossing the room and resting his hands on her shoulders before running them up and down her arms.

"I like you a lot, Clark, and I know you like me, too, and I know it only has to last once, but what if we aren't the one that lasts?"

"Then I hope the lucky guy, whoever he ends up being, takes you somewhere even more amazing. But I have this feeling that it's you and me from here on out."

"I hope so," she said softly. "And not just because of the flying."

"I haven't even taken you flying yet."

"And when exactly are you going to rectify that?"

"Now." He moved away from her taking her hand and leading her towards the door. She followed him, surprised when he led her to the stairs and then onto the roof.

He let go of her hand, stepping away from her before crossing his arms in front of his chest.

He turned into a blur that turned blue and red before coming to a stop. His arms were still crossed in front of him, but he was Superman.

"Wow," Lois breathed before he scooped her into his arms and lifted into the air.

Part 13

Clark had flown with people many times before. First with his parents and then with innumerable others after creating Superman. He'd even flown with Mayson once — though she hadn't known it was really him, of course.

But that was nothing compared to flying with Lois in his arms.

His mind started spinning at all of the places he wanted to go with her someday. He could take her to a deserted beach he knew of in the South Pacific for a picnic dinner, dancing under the stars in an Alpine meadow, standing on the top of Mount Everest in the off-season, hovering over a bubbling volcano but far enough away she wouldn't get hurt. He'd taken his parents to one of those deserted beaches several times before but he'd dropped them off, left in a hurry and not dared appear less than thirty minutes *after* the agreed upon pick-up time.

As it turned out, that had been a wise move more than once.

Lois was trying to decide — he thought — between snuggling close to him and watching everything around her. She finally decided on watching everything. It didn't surprise him.

"Enjoying yourself?" he finally asked as they neared Pittsdale.

She turned to look at him. The only word he could think of to describe the look on her face was 'glee' — childlike glee.

"This is *amazing*! I can't believe you'd do anything but fly — constantly!"

He chuckled. "I guess I *could* but..."

He decided quickly to the long way around — over the New Troy National Forest that bordered his grandpa's property.

"This is incredible," she breathed as they swooped down, close enough to the treetops that she could actually reach out and brush her fingers against the branches.

He dipped down again as they reached the lake — not close enough to touch because it was already too cool that high in the mountains — but close enough. He soared high into the sky, near the clouds and stopped to hover, the arm hooked below her legs releasing them so she was standing in front of him. He kissed her softly and she responded in kind.

"Do you trust me?"

"You know I do."

“Put your hands at your sides and close your eyes,” he told her softly. “I’m going to move behind you and I don’t think you’ll even realize it because I can move that fast, but…”

She did as he asked and then nodded slightly.

In less than a split second, he was behind her, his arms wrapped tightly around her waist.

“Open your eyes,” he whispered.

Her gasp was everything he’d hoped for. He loved floating among the clouds at night, gazing at the stars, but just as often he floated over some remote part of wilderness watching the ground below, in awe of its beauty.

“Clark… I’m a writer and I don’t have the words.”

“I know.”

He had them turned away from Metropolis and towards the rugged national park. Green mountains were below them like a carpet, broken only by the pristine blue lake that nearly rivaled Lake Tahoe in size, beauty and depth of color.

“Wow,” she sighed. “This is beyond anything I could have imagined. Flying in a plane would be one thing, but here… it’s just us.”

“Just us,” he said, pressing a kiss lightly into her hair. “I like that.”

She sighed. “You do know we’re going to do this often, right?”

“I hope so.”

“But right now, unfortunately,” she reminded him with a sigh, “we need to get my things from your grandpa’s house and then get to work. I can’t give Perry any reason to fire me and I’m sure we’ve got a newsroom full of work to do on follow-ups and stuff.”

In just longer than the blink of an eye, they were standing on the balcony of the room Lois had slept in when they arrived. Clark took her suitcase from her, left and thirty seconds later was standing in front of her again, suitcase safely deposited on the roof of the hotel.

He held out his hand. “Ready?”

“To fly with you?” she asked. “Always.”

He grinned as he scooped her into his arms, floating out the balcony door. He stopped long enough for her to slide it shut behind them. “Do you often fly with anyone else?”

She shrugged, trying to remain aloof as he took to the air. “Occasionally.”

“Really? Like who?”

She rolled her eyes. “Justin, okay? The guy from the strongman bell thing. He’s a pilot by day and he’s taken me up in his plane a few times.”

“He doesn’t hold you like this does he?” Clark asked, holding her a little closer to him.

“No.”

“Then that’s fine with me.”

A few minutes later, they landed on the roof of the Metropolis Grand. Clark put his Clark clothes back on and reached out to take the suitcase Lois had picked up.

He held her close with one arm as he zipped them to the floor of the honeymoon suite. He waited in the living room while Lois quickly changed into something more appropriate for work.

Once done, they took the elevator to the lobby to finish their checkout procedures. Lois waited in the lobby while he took her suitcase to the parking garage. Ten minutes after leaving the suite, they were walking the few blocks to the Daily Planet building, hand in hand.

Clark was pointing out some unusual architecture on one of the buildings when they ran into another woman.

She was talking on her cell phone, while digging for something in her purse and not paying enough attention to where she was going.

The contents of her purse scattered across the sidewalk.

“We are so sorry,” Clark said instantly, squatting down to help pick up the assorted items now strewn across the sidewalk. “We weren’t watching where we were going.”

“I’ve got to go, Martin. I’ll call you back.”

Clark’s hands stilled, though Lois’ were still busy picking up some loose change. He knew that voice.

He looked up to see her standing there, snapping her phone shut.

“It figures,” she muttered under breath. He was sure Lois hadn’t been able to make out what she was saying.

“I am so sorry,” Lois said, holding out a handful of change. “Where do you want this?”

The other woman ignored Lois’ outstretched hand, choosing instead to cross her arms in front of her.

“Clark Lane. Fancy running into you.”

Clark stood, sighing heavily as he did so. “It’s good to see you.”

She turned to Lois, finally extending a hand. “Hi. I don’t believe we’ve met.”

Clark sighed again. “Lois, this is Mayson Drake. Mayson, this is Lois Kent, my new partner at the Planet.”

Part 14

Lois’ heart stood still.

Mayson.

Clark’s ex-girlfriend.

The one who’d been in love with Clark, but could hardly stand Superman.

Of course.

Who else would it be?

“You’re an assistant DA, right?” Lois asked, trying her best to paste a smile on her face. It hadn’t escaped her notice that Clark hadn’t given Mayson any sort of designator — like ex-girlfriend or old friend or whatever — but he had given her one.

New partner at the Planet.

Nothing more.

What did that mean? If anything?

“Right.” She shoved the things Clark handed to her into her bag. “I’m going to need to talk to you sometime soon, Clark, about the Ladderman/Harrison thing. Superman, too, if you can give him the message.”

Lois didn’t miss the note of disdain that crept into the other woman’s voice when she mentioned Superman.

“Why don’t you like Superman?” she asked Mayson suddenly.

“What?” both of her companions said in unison.

Lois shrugged. “I can hear it in your voice. You don’t like him.”

Mayson’s eyes narrowed. “Why should I? Sure, he hasn’t done anything too untoward yet, but that much power with, literally, no restraints on him whatsoever… Who’s to say he’ll always be… magnanimous with what he can do?”

Lois raised a brow. “Has he ever given you any reason to believe that?”

Mayson shook her head. “No, but…”

“Then why are you prejudging him? What about the whole innocent until proven guilty thing?”

“Do you really think that applies to a man who can fry any of us with his eyes?”

“Doesn’t it apply to everyone?”

Clark put a hand on Lois’ arm. “Lois, we’ve got to get going — Perry’s waiting for us.” He turned to the other woman. “Mayson, we really are sorry for running into you and I’ll get back with you on the case and tell Superman when I see him.”

She felt the pressure of his hand on the small of her back. “Nice to meet you, Mayson,” she called as they walked away.

There was no answer.

“What was that about?” Clark asked quietly. She looked up at him, but he wasn’t looking at her. And he looked kind of mad.

Lois shrugged. “I don’t like her and I was curious.”

“You didn’t like her, sight unseen, and you took the opportunity to take a dig or two.”

“So I didn’t like my boyfriend’s ex before I ever met her. Is that really such a shock?”

She lengthened her stride slightly trying to get away from him a bit, but he kept up easily, his hand still resting on her back.

“I guess not, but was it really called for?”

“Probably not, but I did it anyway and it’s over, so why don’t you drop it and you and your new partner can get to work?” She knew she was snapping at him, but for the moment she didn’t care.

He stopped and his hand on her elbow stopped her in her tracks.

“What?” she asked, looking pointedly at his hand.

“What’s this about?”

“What?”

“The attitude. You’re snapping at me and I have no idea what I did, if anything, to deserve it.”

She sighed. “Nothing, okay. You did nothing. Can we go to work now?”

“Not until you tell me what’s going on.”

“Is that all I am?” she asked, tears suddenly filling her eyes.

“I’ve been in three real relationships in my whole life and, except Josh which was in high school, they ended in complete disaster and so I’m not sure that anything I learned from them applies to us if we’re going to end up different than those did. I mean, I know you’re not going to throw yourself off a building and even if you did, it wouldn’t matter. And I know you’re not going to propose to me in the middle of the Corn Festival without knowing that I’m going to say yes and, essentially, only in the hope of getting sex from me. But we really don’t know each other very well and I’m just not sure about what you mean when you say something or why you say it and how can I really be sure that you really want me, only me and aren’t some smooth-talking player and really do have a girl in every city — or at least more than one in this one — because I’ve known you less than a week and...”

She’d started walking at some point during her speech, but she suddenly found her way blocked and her lips occupied.

He pulled back, his hand cradling her face as he looked at her, his eyes gentle. “Whatever it is I said or didn’t say, I’m sorry. But, Lois, it’s you and me from here on out. I *don’t* have any other women in my life, not romantically anyway. I’m falling for *you*, no one else. Not now, not ever. I get why you didn’t like Mayson before you even met her but I don’t know what I did or didn’t do. Honest. You have to tell me, because I have *no* idea.”

She stared at him for a long moment before deciding that he probably really didn’t understand. “You said I was your partner at work. That’s it. We run into your ex-girlfriend and you don’t call her anything but you call me your work partner and don’t say anything about our personal relationship and I don’t know what that means and I don’t like being insecure and that’s how I’m sounding and...” Her voice trailed off at the look on his face.

“What?”

His amused grin widened. “You’re babbling.”

“I’m not babbling. I *don’t* babble.”

“Lois, honey, you were babbling like a brook. It didn’t mean *anything*, honest. I know that Mayson’s had a few very short, very disastrous relationships since we broke up and I didn’t want to get into all of that. That’s it. I promise. And you already knew she was my ex-girlfriend. There was no reason for me to mention it.”

She sighed. “I’m sorry, Clark. Honestly, I’m new at this

whole non-dysfunctional relationship thing.”

“Me, too. But we’ll figure it out. Together, but you have to talk to me.” They’d started walking again, hand in hand. “And don’t automatically assume the worst in whatever.”

Lois nodded. “I know and I’m not normally like that but everything is just changing and... I’m more than a bit out of my comfort zone and it’s throwing everything off.”

They stopped walking as they reached the Planet.

“Just let me know what I can do to help,” Clark said softly. “I am so glad you’re here and I’m looking forward to getting to know everything about you and seeing what happens with us, but I don’t want it to be any harder on you than it has to be.”

“Take me to see my folks tonight?” she asked. “I know it’s only been a couple days but I miss them.”

“Of course.”

“Thank you.” She tugged on his hand. “Now we have work to do.”

Part 15

They didn’t make it back to Nathan Lane’s house until after dinner.

“What’s all this about?” Lois asked as they drove past a well-dressed guardian at the front gate.

“Gramps must be having a fundraiser,” Clark said, his brow furrowing. “Yeah. He mentioned it last week but I forget what cause it is this time.”

There were valets and assorted other personnel at one side of the massive house, but Clark pulled into the porte cochere on the other side and then into a parking space.

“We’ll just avoid them all together,” he told her, pulling their suitcases out of the back of the Jeep.

He stashed the luggage near one of the side staircases and they headed into the kitchen to get a bite to eat.

“There you two are!” They turned to see Sam standing there.

“What’s up, Dad?” Clark asked around a mouthful of appetizer.

“Your grandpa thought you were coming tonight and wondered where you two were.”

Clark groaned. “Do we have to? I hate wearing a monkey suit.”

Sam laughed. “No you don’t. You hate trying to get your tie on straight.”

“Go ahead, Clark,” Lois told him. “Your grandpa wants you there.”

“You, too, Lois,” Sam said.

Her eyes widened, in shock or fright — Clark wasn’t sure.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she demurred. “I don’t have anything to wear to something like this and...”

“Nonsense,” a new voice said. Ellen moved to Lois’ side and rested a hand on her arm. “Nate knew you might not have anything — at least not with you — and he had several dresses and accessories sent over from the store run by an old friend of his. I’m sure we can find something for you.”

Clark watched as Lois walked off with his mom. He popped another appetizer in his mouth. “I guess I should go get dressed, too,” he said with a sigh.

His dad clapped him on the shoulder as he walked off, grabbing the bags they’d brought with them as he headed up the stairs. He set Lois’ outside her closed door and headed to his room to get dressed.

There was a knock on the door as he was attempting — again — to get his tie straight.

“Come on, Lane,” came the voice from the mildly irritated Lois. “I’m not going to this soiree by myself.”

He chuckled as he went to open the door. “I wouldn’t want you to. I wouldn’t want any of those other guys to get any...”

He stopped midsentence when he saw her standing there.

“Wow,” he breathed. “You look... incredible.”

For all of his writing abilities, describing dresses weren't among the things he'd learned over the years. All he knew was that she looked *amazing* in the deep burgundy dress his mom had surely helped her pick out.

“You done gawking yet?” she asked, softly and he could hear the underlying pleasure in her voice.

“Hey — you got to ogle, why can't I?” he asked turning to walk back into the bathroom, Lois following him into the room.

He could see her in the mirror and she shrugged. “Double standard.”

“It's just as well you're waiting for me to go downstairs. If I don't claim the first dance, I won't get one at all.”

She looked panic stricken. “Dance?”

“Yeah. We've danced together before, remember?”

“That was the Two-Step and a slow dance in *Smallville*, not some fancy fundraising shindig in *Pittsdale*.”

“You'll be *fine*,” he promised before sighing. “Now, if I could just get my tie on straight...”

“Let me try.”

Clark moved back into his room to stand in front of her, lifting his chin slightly. “Straighten away.”

She was biting her bottom lip as she tugged first this way then that then tweaked the tie just a bit.

“All done.”

Clark turned to look in the mirror. “I'm impressed. I can never get those right.”

“Well, you look very nice,” she told him, taking the opportunity to look him up and down. “Very nice.”

He grinned as he turned around. “Shall we?” He held out his arm and she tucked her hand in his elbow.

Together, they headed down one of the circular staircases into the main hall.

They stopped when they heard a whistle come from behind them. They turned to see Clark's grandpa standing there.

“I knew Della and Ellen wouldn't let me down,” he said.

“Lois, my dear, you look simply marvelous.”

Lois blushed deeply. “Thank you so much, Mr. Lane. The dresses were all beautiful.”

He smiled at them. “A dress is just material without a beautiful woman to wear it. And, Lois, you are certainly a beautiful woman. I do hope you'll save at least once dance for me this evening. It can only improve my stature around here.”

They turned to head down one of the halls to the east wing where the fundraiser was being held. Clark barely stifled a gasp as he put his hand on Lois' back to guide her the right direction.

He hadn't expected bare skin that low on her back.

His arm slipped further around her, pulling her towards him slightly.

“You're trying to kill me, aren't you?” he whispered, his voice husky even in his own ears.

“What?” she asked, honestly unsure what he was talking about.

“This dress.” He moved away from her, taking her hand and spinning her, drinking in the sight of her.

“What?”

The three straps on each side crossed in the middle of her back, leaving it mostly bare all the way down to several inches past her waistline.

“You're incredible, you know that?” he whispered, pulling her close to him.

“Because I look good in what is probably a *very* expensive dress?” she asked, her arms winding their way around his neck.

“No, just because you're you.”

He kissed her softly, tenderly. She kissed him back the same way.

“I'm falling in love with you,” he said softly. “I know I am.

I'm never letting you go.”

“That's good to hear because I think I'm falling in love with you.” She kissed him again. “But right now, there are pterodactyls flying around my stomach. Let's get this over with.”

Clark chuckled, stepping back and tucking her hand in his elbow, covering it with his own. “You're going to knock 'em dead.”

She groaned. “I hope so.”

He laughed lightly and they headed towards the music coming from that end of the house.

Part 16

Lois felt extremely self-conscious as they walked into what Clark was telling her was the first of two rooms where the fundraiser was being held.

This particular room was for mingling and the other had the dance floor.

She was sure that everyone would know that she was really just a farmer's daughter from Kansas. She wasn't sure she belonged at something like this.

Clark's hand tightened over hers. “You okay?” he asked quietly.

“Maybe.” She took a deep breath. “Got any wine or something around here?”

“Probably. Gramps doesn't normally keep it on hand because Grams and Mom both had alcohol problems in the past, but he does have some for this.” He smiled at her. “Don't suppose you'd want to dance before we mingle though?”

She nodded. “Yeah. That sounds nice.” Any excuse to be in his arms instead of smiling politely at a bunch of people she didn't know.

He led her through the wide door and into the next room. A string quartet was set up on a small stage in one corner. A second later, she was in his arms, one hand in his. His other hand was splayed on her bare back.

She had tried on all of the dresses his grandpa had had sent over. As soon as she'd slipped this one on, she'd known it was the one, but she'd felt it was... unfair of her not to try them all on. She felt like Cinderella going to the ball.

The pleated bustline was held up by three slim straps. Those crisscrossed her back to the other side of the gown as low as her waist. It was cut much lower in the back than she would have preferred but otherwise she loved the dress. There was no way on God's green Earth her dad would have let her wear it, ever, even now, for that reason alone — even though the front of the dress was perfectly modest.

It hung from the bustline to the floor, pooling slightly on ground even when she was in her heels. There was a bit of a train in the back, but not much.

What she loved the most about it was the sheer overskirt. It gave the whole thing a fun, flirty look to it while the back was sure to make Clark gasp a bit — just like he had when he'd spun her around.

Two of the others had fit well enough, while two just hadn't hung right. Clark's mom had agreed that this particular dress was the right one — and had even giggled a bit with her about Clark's reaction to it. Ellen had also helped with a simple hair-do and choosing appropriate accessories.

In the end, she'd chosen a simple pendant necklace that Ellen had said was a family piece and gold earrings that weren't really seen as her hair hung in waves to her shoulders.

She was conscious that her nails hadn't been done and that they were bitten on more than they should be and that she'd have to make sure to do something about that if she was going to hang out with Clark and go to things like this on a regular basis. Ellen had told her that her watch and bracelet — given to her by her parents at her college and high school graduations respectively —

would work nicely.

She closed her eyes as Clark's warm breath played with the hair at her temple. She didn't want to see everyone staring at her like she was sure they were.

"What?" Clark murmured.

"Everyone's staring, aren't they?"

She could feel him look around a bit. "Maybe."

She groaned. "I knew it. I don't fit in here and they know it."

"Not at all. I come to these things pretty regularly so I know most of these people at least in passing and I've never brought a girl to one of these things before, so that's probably part of it. But everyone is jealous of us so..."

"What? Why?"

"All the women are jealous that they don't look like you and all the guys are wishing they get to dance with you like I do."

"Speaking of dancing with other men, may I cut in?"

Lois moved away from Clark to see his grandpa standing there, a smile on his face.

Clark moved further back. "I can't say no to Gramps," he told her with a grin. "I'll catch up with you later."

Lois nodded, moving into Nathan's arms.

"I must warn you," he said. "I dip suddenly and I dip deeply."

No sooner than the words were out of his mouth than he dipped her, deeper than she'd ever been dipped before.

She laughed as he pulled her back up.

"Clark's right, you know."

"About what?"

"That you're the most beautiful woman in this room. I'm glad you chose that pendant," he said suddenly.

"Ellen said it was a family piece."

"It was Jenny's great-grandma's," he told her softly. "It's been worn by every woman in the family since then — always on their wedding days but other times, too, of course — and has been handed down to the oldest daughter each time. I have two sons — Sam and Mike. Mike's never been married, so she willed it to Ellen when she died."

Lois didn't say anything as the song ended. Sam claimed the next dance. She chatted easily with him, but her mind was spinning a million miles an hour.

Clark's birth father had, it seemed to her, given her his blessing on a relationship with Clark.

And now, Clark's adoptive mother had given her a family heirloom — something worn by every bride in the family for generations — to wear to their sort of 'coming out' as a couple. Was it her stamp of approval? Hers and Sam's since it was from his family and all?

Or was it just a pendant that happened to go well with the dress?

She danced with a number of different men after Sam. All were very polite, asking the same questions of her — was she new to Metropolis, how had she met Clark, where was she from. Several also commented that she was the first woman Clark had brought to a fundraiser. She found herself having a fairly good time by the time the quartet took a break and Nate went into the fundraising portion of the evening.

She didn't pay too much attention to his speech — she had no money to donate at the moment anyway — as her head continued to spin with the potential implications of the night. Clark's first fundraiser date, the pendant.

What did it all mean? Did it mean what she was afraid to let herself hope it meant? And why was she afraid?

She took a sip of the wine she'd picked up as she'd walked off the dance floor, wondering where Clark was.

He was nowhere to be seen the rest of the night.

She pasted a smile on her face. Nate escorted her around the room, offering one glib excuse after another for Clark's sudden disappearance and introducing her to some of Metropolis' elite.

She'd never expected to rub elbows with the likes of Arthur Chow or Tim and Amber Lake.

After several hours, she excused herself. Most of the other guests were gone, Sam and Ellen were talking to another couple and Nate had gone to the kitchen, she thought.

Her feet hurt as she climbed one of the main staircases to her room. She was sure there was a shorter, more efficient way, but she didn't know what it was.

With a final sigh, she headed into her room to call it a night.

Part 17

Clark sat on the edge of the bed, shoulders slumped.

He wasn't sure if this was the right place for him to be but he didn't want to be alone and he didn't know where else to go.

The door opened behind him, but the light didn't come on. For that he was grateful.

"Clark?" He could hear the surprise in his voice as Lois shut the door behind her but he still didn't move.

He could hear her walking into the bathroom and a few clinking sounds followed by two thunks.

"My feet are *killing* me," she called from the bathroom.

"Where've you been anyway? You disappeared and no one knew where you were. You weren't supposed to abandon me, you know. Did you hear something? A rescue?" she asked, walking back out and towards him. She tipped his chin up so she could see him. "Clark, what's wrong?"

He fiddled with the end of his cape as she sat next to him. "It was bad," he finally said.

Hkker arm wrapped around his back and her head rested on his shoulder. "Tell me about it?" she asked softly.

"I heard the bulletin. Not the crash or the sirens. There was a three-car pileup on the turnpike near the state line. I listened to the dispatch and there were no major injuries or anything so I figured the authorities could handle it. It's a fairly rural area out there and it took the highway patrol a while to get things moving and traffic was backed up about a mile or so — maybe a bit further. There are no exits for about twenty miles before the accident so there's no way for anyone to get off and you can't cross the median there to turn around."

He stared at the red material between his fingers. "The traffic was just sitting there. It was at a complete standstill by the time the big rig ran over at least three cars. He didn't even touch his brakes. He just ran over the top of three cars and knocked into other cars which knocked into other cars. One guy saw it happening in his rearview mirror and threw his car into drive and yanked the wheel to the side and when he got hit he moved to the shoulder and not into the car in front of him."

He took a deep shuddering breath. "I've seen a lot of things since I became Superman, but I think this was one of the worst. The cars were crumpled underneath the semi. It was almost like a tornado hit. At least one of the cars was absolutely unrecognizable as anything but a mass of metal. I got there as fast as I could when I heard that bulletin. I scanned the vehicles near the truck but there was nothing I could do for any of them — not then. If I'd been there in time to stop the truck maybe but not by then. There were another dozen people in other cars hurt, needing medical attention. The closest hospital actually wasn't even in New Troy. The wreckers had to take a forty-five minute detour through two other states to get there."

He was avoiding it. He knew he was. He didn't want to tell her the worst part, but he also knew he had to.

"We got the rest of those folks to the hospital or paramedics," he told her. "Then we turned our attention to the truck and the cars underneath. There were sixteen people total. One car had an elderly couple and their two grandkids in it. It wasn't too bad as far as the grisly factor went."

He stopped.

“The others were worse?” she finally asked softly.

He nodded. “The second car he hit was a family. Mom, Dad, three kids in an SUV. They were all crushed. All of them — all the ones who died — had to have died instantly or nearly so.”

He wasn’t sure when she’d moved but she was sitting behind him, one leg tucked underneath her, the other leg alongside his. He barely noticed how far up her leg the skirt had hiked. Her arms were wrapped around him and her cheek rested on his back.

“The first one was the worst?”

He nodded. “The car was just a mangled pile of metal. It was a minivan. It was so hard to tell where they were, who they were, how many of them there were. By the time it was all said and done, we think Mom was turned around in her seat and probably saw it coming. The car was stopped. Traffic was stopped. There was no real reason for her to think that it wasn’t safe to turn around. The kids…”

“How many?” she prompted.

“Five. The oldest was probably only seven or eight. A boy. The little girl was about five. Another boy of three and twin baby girls. Still in their car seats. It was two and a half hours before I even realized the oldest boy was there. I thought we’d gotten everyone out. I could have moved the truck much sooner, but we waited until the wreckers got there to help and it shifted in the meantime and crushed that part even further. One of the troopers found the license plate and found the family. They were contacting the next of kin and that was when they found out there was probably one more person in the vehicle and I went to look again.”

Her arms tightened around him and he found himself linking his fingers with hers, drawing strength from her.

His mind was replaying everything over and over. There was nothing he could have done once he arrived. None of the other victims were in life-threatening condition. None of the three other accidents in the west-bound lanes — caused by rubbernecking — were much more than fender benders though he’d helped clear those off, too.

She stood and moved in front of him, stepping in between his legs and wrapping her arms around him and drawing him to her. His arms went around her waist, pulling her even closer as the tears began to fall.

“I should have been there,” he said after long minutes in her arms.

“What?”

“I should have been there in time to stop the truck. I should have responded to the first accident,” he said with more conviction.

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I was here. Because I didn’t know that it had closed the turnpike. Because I was dancing with you.”

She moved back from him and when he looked up, her eyes were flashing fire.

“Don’t you dare,” she hissed. “Don’t you dare blame yourself or me or anyone else. The *only* person at fault is that truck driver and then only if he didn’t have some kind of unpreventable mechanical failure. You are *not* pinning this on you or me or your grandfather for having a fundraiser in the first place.”

“I still should have gone.”

“Clark, you are entitled to a life. Or are you going to feel guilty every time you miss some accident or something?”

He didn’t respond.

“If we’re on our honeymoon, on our wedding night and we’re going to *really* bunk together for the first time and you hear something that the authorities should be able to handle and you turn off your hearing and you focus on me and on being together and making love and then later find out that it turned out worse than you thought, are you going to blame yourself for that? Because if you are, this isn’t going to work. You are entitled to

have a life, to choose — for whatever reason — not to respond to emergencies and that’s okay. Otherwise you will never have a vacation or a moment’s peace as long as you live. And if it’s not okay for you not to respond then Clark Lane needs to disappear into the ether and you should go be Superman full time because that’s ridiculous. You already don’t respond to everything you *could* because you have a life and a job and a family who loves you and if that’s not okay then that’s a decision you have to make. It’s the wrong one, but only you can make it.”

Part 18

Lois wasn’t sure if this was the right tactic to take with Clark. They’d only known each other a week. She didn’t know what the best way to help him was, but everything she’d said was the truth.

If he wasn’t going to give himself permission to not be everywhere at once then he was going to have to make a choice. She refused to be the scapegoat for him missing things. If she absolutely insisted he stay for no real reason and there was something huge going on, then maybe, but not for wanting to have a life with him. She wasn’t going to apologize for wanting to spend time with him, to want to have an uninterrupted honeymoon someday or vacation or to insist that he be with her when she was giving birth — if that was how their life together played out.

She’d moved three or four feet away from him, her arms crossed in front of her as he sat slumped on the end of her bed.

She barely heard him when he finally spoke.

“You’re right.”

“What?”

“I said you’re right, okay?” He sounded irritated.

“I honestly didn’t hear you,” she said softly, moving towards him again and wrapping her arms around him as his head rested against her. “Whatever you can do, Clark, it’s enough. You can’t be everywhere at once. You can’t do everything you think you should be able to without losing Clark to the superhero. You would burn out so quickly.”

“They say I should be there.”

“Who says you should be where?”

“Anytime something happens and I’m not there and they — whatever they, victims, officials, first responders, families, whoever — say I should have been there faster or done more and I can’t.” His voice broke. “I can’t do everything they want me to. I can’t be everywhere they think I should. Even if I was Superman full time, I couldn’t do it.”

She stroked the back of his head and suddenly missed the softness of Clark’s hair — Superman’s was full of gel, slicking it to his head. “You have to let yourself have some downtime. Not even presidents are on duty 24/7. They get downtime. They have Camp David to retreat to — and they don’t get whole days off or anything and they might be considered ‘on call’ most of the time, but no one expects them to not have some quiet time with family and friends where they’re not officially working. Emergency workers have limits on the number of hours they can work at a time and the number of days they can work in a row and everyone has to sleep — even you.”

“I know, but it’s hard.”

“One thing I knew about Superman even before I knew he was you was that he had to have some other guise or at least some other clothes because being Superman full time was impossible. You can’t be him all the time. You have to take a break, have a life. You have to take time to rest, to recharge, so you can be him when you need to be, when you’re truly *needed*, or you’ll end up in some Arctic fortress hiding from the world, from life. Then the world would lose not only Superman but Clark Lane.” They were silent for a moment. “And as much as the world would miss Superman, I’d miss Clark more.”

She didn’t know how long she stood there, holding him in her

arms, but it was an eternity.

He finally pulled away from her with a big sigh. “Thank you,” he told her quietly. “I needed that.”

She moved to sit next to him, her head resting again on his shoulder. “I’m glad. I have to admit I was a bit worried though.”

“Why?”

“You just disappeared. No one knew where you went. I mean, I know most of those people you *couldn’t* tell but you didn’t tell me or your parents or even your grandpa.”

“Gramps doesn’t know.”

She snorted. “Yeah, right.”

He looked up at her, shocked. “He knows?”

“He wouldn’t be a man in his position if he didn’t know things.”

“Huh. Interesting.” He turned further, shifting so he could put his arms around her. She moved into his embrace. “But still, thank you.”

They stayed there for a long moment. “Could you do something for me, though?”

“Sure.”

“Could you at least try to take a few seconds and let someone know that you’re going and where and maybe how long you think you’ll be gone? I know things come up suddenly or that you could be out doing one thing and something else happens and then something else or whatever, but if you can, could you at least try?”

He nodded against her. “I’m sorry. None of you were around. You were dancing with Tim Lake. Mom and Dad were dancing and I didn’t see Gramps anywhere and I didn’t know that he knew.” He pulled back to look at her. “I can’t promise I’ll always be able to.”

“I know. I just ask that you do when you can.”

He kissed her temple lightly as she settled against him again. “Fair enough.”

“I do wish we’d gotten to dance again.”

She could hear the amused tone in his voice when he spoke. “That wasn’t dancing.”

“What?”

He stood, moving to the sound system mounted in the wall, pressing a few buttons. He turned and held out his hand towards her. “Ms. Kent, may I have the pleasure of this dance?”

She smiled. “Certainly, Superman.”

He glanced down. “Do you want me to change back into my tux? I’d forgotten I was still in the Suit.”

“Nope. You’re fine just like you are.” She took his hand and moved closer to him. “How many women get to say they’ve danced with Superman?” she whispered.

“A few,” he admitted. “I’ve done some charity stuff where women have bid on dances and even dinner and stuff.”

His hand pressed against her lower back, holding her tightly to him.

“Not like this, I hope.” She rested her cheek against his ‘S’.

“No,” he answered huskily. “Not like this. And not like this either.”

She gasped as she felt her feet leave the ground. They twirled around the room as the song played. “I love this song,” she sighed, resting against him.

“Gramps has the whole house wired to a central stereo system.”

“So the whole house is hearing ‘Fly Me to the Moon’?”

Clark laughed. “No. I just set it for this room.”

They floated in silence as the music filled the room. Clark set her gently on the floor as the moonlight streamed through the French doors to the balcony.

One hand came up to frame the side of her face and he kissed her, soft and sweet.

He pulled away to look into her eyes. “Lois, can I bunk in

here tonight?”

Part 19

Clark watched her as she looked at him, slightly startled. “No,” he backpedaled. “I was just wondering if I could sleep in here with you tonight, that’s all.”

“Oh,” she said softly.

“I mean, after nights like tonight, I tend to not sleep well. Bad dreams and all that. I just don’t want to be alone. That’s all.”

She smiled up at him. “Of course.”

“Did I tell you that you look amazing tonight?”

She ducked her head and blushed. “Yeah, you did.”

“I love the pendant,” he told her. He’d recognized it the moment he’d seen it as the family heirloom. He was quite certain his mom wouldn’t have loaned it to Lois if she wasn’t giving her implicit approval of their relationship.

“Your mom loaned it to me.”

“I know.” He pulled her closer to him as she yawned. “You ready for bed?”

“Yeah.”

They stood there for another long moment before Lois headed towards the bathroom to change. He spun into his tux before heading for his room and returned in less than a minute dressed in a pair sleep shorts and a dark green sleeveless t-shirt.

He stared out over the pasture where he could see three horses still out grazing. Beyond that was the New Troy National Forest.

Lois had been right.

He *couldn’t* be Superman full time. He knew that intellectually but sometimes it was hard for him to accept that he couldn’t be everywhere, couldn’t save everyone.

He just needed a knock on the head sometimes to knock some sense back into him.

He heard the door open behind him. He turned to see her standing awkwardly near the bathroom.

And then he saw what she was wearing and groaned. “Really, Lois?”

She looked down at the blue Superman shirt and the red pajama pants covered with his yellow ‘S’ emblem. “What?”

“Seriously?”

She laughed. “Lucy gave them to me for my birthday last year. They seemed appropriate.”

“I guess.” He gestured towards the bed. “Um, which side do you want?”

She shrugged. “I don’t care.” She pulled the covers back on the side closest to her. “This one’s fine.”

He went to the other side, mimicking her actions until they were both under the covers. They rolled to face each other.

“Thank you,” he told her again.

She rolled her eyes at him. “You’re going to have to quit saying that. I’m just glad I was here when you needed me.”

He lay on his back and reached out a hand towards her. She snuggled in next to him, her head resting on his chest, one arm thrown across his stomach and one leg across one of his. “I’ve never really had anyone I can talk to like that. I mean, my parents are here for me but I don’t like to burden them, you know? That’s one thing I’ve been searching for for a long time, but I could never really define it. Before I became Superman, I was looking for someone I could tell about *me*, who I could really be myself with. Superman helped with that, some, but I could still only really be *me* around my parents. I mean, I couldn’t exactly make Mayson a cup of tea using my eyes or reheat cold pizza that way if she was around.”

He brushed a kiss against her hair. “And when I found you, when we were hiding together, I knew that I’d found someone I could be that way with, someone I could turn to when it’s really bad out there. And that’s not the only reason why I’m so glad

you're here, but it's one of many and I don't mean to just dump stuff on you but..."

She put her fingers to his lips. "Shh. That's one of the many reasons I came. To be here for you. I've seen you leave rescues and hoped that you had someone you could go to. When I came here, I hoped I could be that someone for you. Even if I hadn't come, I'd hoped that you knew you could come see me on a night like tonight. You do so much for other people, both as Clark and as Superman, and I want to be able to do this for you."

"Thank you," he murmured against her fingers.

"I thought I told you stop saying that," she said, a trace of humor in her voice.

"I will. Someday. But right now... thank you for coming to Metropolis. Thank you for being here for me tonight. Thank you for just being you."

"You're welcome. Besides, I don't know how to be anybody else."

He held her a little tighter to him and before long her deep, even breathing told him she was asleep.

It would be a while before sleep claimed him, he knew, but he also knew the dreams wouldn't be as bad as they usually were on a night like this. He knew it was because of the woman lying next to him.

It amazed him that he'd only known her a week but she'd turned his life completely upside down in that time. And she accepted and was coming to love him for him — for Clark Lane from Krypton. She wasn't falling for Clark the reporter, adopted son of Sam and Ellen Lane from New Troy or Superman, the powerful figure from outer space — but for the amalgamation of both of them.

For *him*.

He closed his eyes and breathed deeply, inhaling the scent of her papaya shampoo or conditioner or whatever it was that he'd noticed on her pillow when he'd slept in her bed in Smallville. The real thing was much better, he decided.

He took another deep breath and let it out slowly as the sandman came much sooner than he ever would have expected.

He fell asleep in her arms as she had in his.

Together.

THE END

Notes:

Gramps' house [second floor, links to rest]:

http://www.lcfcmbbs.com/cgi-bin/boards/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic&f=1&t=011530

Ch. 17:

<http://www.newson6.com/Global/story.asp?S=10602722>

http://www.joplinglobe.com/local/local_story_177231848.html