

The Final Countdown

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Rated PG

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Summary: During the events of "All Shook Up," Lois arrives at Clark's apartment a few minutes earlier than in the episode and gets an eyeful. This was written as a Holiday Ficathon assignment, and the requirements are posted at the end. Written for ChiefPam.

Story Size: 5,331 words (29Kb as text)

Lois Lane was in a snit.

And not just a little one, mind you, but a snit of truly galactic proportions. She stomped down the street that would take her to Clark's apartment, practically daring anybody to waylay her. The atmosphere engulfing Metropolis was growing increasingly grim, and when the natives were grim, they were more than restless — they were downright hostile.

Humanity at its worst.

This discord was definitely not something she wanted to deal with today. Lois had her own problems. Important problems. Problems like... what she was going to say to Clark once she reached his apartment.

Why did this always happen to her? Why did she have to wait to finally admit what was going on in her heart until the very last possible second? At the rate things were going, even if he did share her feelings, they weren't exactly going to have the time to pursue anything of a romantic nature.

It was the story of her life.

And it was a story that just thoroughly pissed her off.

What she really needed right now was Clark. Her life — and quite possibly, the lives of everyone on the planet — was being measured by the unrelenting ticking of the countdown clock, and she felt that deep foreboding hanging over her head like unwanted mistletoe. Like the kind of mistletoe that Ralph always tried to use at Christmas so he could cop a feel or two. In fact, it was more than just a little sickening to contemplate, both Ralph and the impending end of the world, that is. She didn't want to die — there were just way too many things she had left to do.

But there was one thing she could set right before her existence was snuffed out.

She could tell Clark how much he really meant to her.

Of course, he wouldn't be able to truly appreciate the significance of her admission with his memory full of gaping holes, but that actually made it easier to serve her heart up to him on a platter. Which might have been part of the appeal, if she was honest with herself. She still wasn't quite willing to fully open herself up to potential heart trampling.

Because Lois didn't really know what she would do if he rejected her, how she would cope. And she really hoped that she didn't have to find out.

Lois sighed heavily. She should have gone to see Clark when she had called him earlier, regardless of the presence of his parents. This was something she needed to tell him — even with an audience. Plus she liked Jonathan and Martha. If anybody could put a bright spin on this huge rock-shaped curve ball that space was throwing at them, it was Martha Kent. Lois admired her ability to see the silver lining in any given situation. That had to have been where Clark had gotten it from, his mother. It used to annoy her when Clark insisted on pointing out the good in

everything, but now she found that she craved it.

Yep, she had it bad.

Her heart sped up as she neared Clark's apartment, the moment of truth almost upon her. The soft hint of voices made her pause just as she stepped off the curb in front of the alley right next to Clark's apartment, and Lois was instantly alert. That would be the story of her life — mugged and killed mere moments after finally admitting what — and who — was truly in her heart. And more importantly, the fact that she was actually doing something about it.

A movement above her head caught her attention and Lois looked up, gasping loudly at the sight that greeted her. Clark was standing on the ledge of his balcony, looking twitchier than Lois had ever seen him.

She shouldn't have left him alone!

Suicide was not something that Lois thought she would ever have to be concerned about with her typically annoyingly cheerful and optimistic partner. But then again, her typically annoying and cheerful partner had no memory of being annoying and cheerful.

Oh, this was a mess.

Lois opened her mouth to call to him when a familiar face appeared next to the twitchiness that was Clark.

Martha.

Oh, thank God.

Relief spread through her. If anybody could talk some sense into Clark, it was his mother. Martha had always seemed to Lois as the superhero of mothers — able to resolve any problems with a calm certainty and the least amount of damage. Kind of like Superman, really. She was the mom that Lois secretly wished she'd had and Lois knew that if Martha was on the scene, then everything would work out.

Well, this put a little crimp in her plans. What was the etiquette for telling somebody with no memory who was a bit suicidal that you were in love with them?

Oh yes, this was most definitely a mess.

But darn it, Lois had a mission here. She had told herself that she couldn't let the world end without telling Clark exactly how much he meant to her and she was determined to do just, fragile mental state be damned. Some might call her selfish but hey, she could live with that.

Well, if she lived beyond today. And with Superman AWOL, that particular feat was looking a little dicey.

Lois tapped her foot a bit impatiently. Really, how long was it going to take Martha to talk her son off the balcony, for Pete's sake? It wasn't as if they had all the time in the world! She needed to see Clark safely tucked away before she could bring herself to march her way up to his front door. The old Lois would have used this current development to talk herself out of spilling the secrets of her heart. However, it was a good thing that old Lois wasn't here — and the new gut-spilling Lois was firmly in place. It had taken being propositioned by a man she used to admire to bury that old Lois and embrace the new, and she should probably be thanking the billionaire for making her see the light. However, she still had a serious case of the willies from seeing her apartment duplicated underground. Had he really thought she'd fall all over him with gratitude?

It was just downright creepy.

Forcing her attention back to the situation at hand, Lois sighed impatiently when she realized that the voices were too soft to make out what was being said. It didn't take a genius — or an award-winning investigative reporter — to figure out that Clark and his mother were arguing. Good for Martha. Hopefully she was telling Clark just how many shades of an idiot he was being. Something Lois intended to reinforce as soon as possible.

Lois watched as Clark seemed to come to a decision and turned around on the narrow, low edge of his balcony, facing the

alley way where she was currently standing. He looked down briefly, then focused his attention on the sky above him without removing himself from danger.

What in the world?

'Oh, Come on, Martha!' Lois muttered. Why wasn't the woman yanking her son to safety? Lois breathed a sigh of relief as Clark's mother walked to the ledge and situated herself right behind Clark. Edging a little closer, Lois kept her movements slow and silent, not wanting to create any type of distraction which might assist her partner in his suicidal ideation. Even though the entire planet was quite possibly doomed, she still didn't want him accidentally falling multiple stories to the ground just because she had startled him.

Ok, this was much better. Now, at least, she could somewhat make out what was being said. Sometimes, she just really wished she had her partner's lip-reading ability. It would make eavesdropping just so much easier.

"You want me to help you?" Lois heard Martha ask her son.

Help with what? Lois thought derisively. Help with getting his nicely toned butt off the ledge before he falls and breaks his fool neck? Why, yes, Martha, I think he does need help there.

"Why don't you just give me a count?" Clark answered his mother, and even from the distance, Lois could hear the uncertainty in his voice. Again with the what in the world? Clark needed a count to get himself off the balcony and out of harms way? Geez. If Martha was trying the whole reverse psychology thing, she was doing a really bad job of it.

Even Lois knew she could do a better job.

"On three," Lois heard Martha reply. "One, two..."

Lois held her breath and waited for Clark's mother to haul him backwards off the ledge to safety.

Except she didn't.

Lois' jaw dropped as she watched Clark's mother give her son a huge shove and rather than him being pulled to the safety of the balcony floor, Clark was sent flailing off the ledge. Lois watched helplessly as her partner plummeted to the ground; the look of fear on his handsome features not something Lois would ever forget. He landed with a large crash into a pile of garbage a few feet from where she was standing and Lois rushed over, her heart pounding in fear.

"Clark!" she screeched, throwing aside bags of garbage until she could reach his side. She mentally thanked whatever rude, inconsiderate citizen had piled those bags of garbage where they absolutely did not belong in the alley next to Clark's apartment building. She had to hang on to the barest glimmer of hope that his cushioned landing had spared his life, finding herself almost afraid to find out.

A huge, pent up sigh of relief left her lungs when Clark lifted his head just as she reached his side. Her heart broke at the confused, dazed look on his face and she couldn't even imagine the betrayal he must be feeling right now. His own mother had tried to kill him! The last woman in the world that Lois would ever think was capable of such a thing had cold-heartedly tossed her son into a pile of garbage!

It was mind-boggling.

"Clark, are you okay?" Lois rushed to ask, her hands traveling over his limbs to check for injury. She was relieved to find that he didn't seem to have a scratch on him.

"Uh... yeah. I'm fine," Clark muttered, confusion marring his handsome features. "Uh... what are you doing here?"

What was she doing here? Well, Lois was really there to tell him that she was in love with him, but this definitely put a crimp in things.

Righteous anger built up and erupted as Lois jerked her head up to lock eyes on the woman who had betrayed her son in the worst way possible. Oh, Martha wasn't going to get away with this! To do this to her own flesh and blood! Well, close enough to

her own flesh and blood, at any rate.

It was unthinkable.

Poor Clark.

"Clark, are you able to stand or should I call for an ambulance?" she asked gently, her protective streak coming out in full force. For the first time, Lois was glad that Clark was without memories. The pain of bitter betrayal most likely didn't sting as much to know that his mother tried to kill him. He couldn't remember what an amazing woman she had been before she'd obviously gone off of the deep end.

In reply, Clark merely stumbled to his feet, accepting the hand that Lois offered. He smelled like garbage, but Lois refrained from bringing it to his attention. Poor Clark had worse things to worry about.

"You're sure you're ok?" Lois asked, her eyes traveling the length of his body once more to check for any signs of visible injury.

Clark nodded slowly, the befuddled look in his eyes practically breaking Lois' heart. "Yeah. I'll... uh, be fine," he told her.

Lois' nostrils flared in indignation. "Clark, you are so far from fine, it's not even funny! Your own mother just tried to kill you! Your mother, Clark!"

Clark had no response for that, the bewildered look not leaving his eyes.

Lois grabbed Clark's hand. "Come on," she ordered, dragging him through the piles of garbage that had saved his life.

Clark followed, allowing her to drag him out of the alley. "Where are we going?"

Lois whirled to face him. "Where are we going? Where do you think?" She gestured wildly. "We're going to go confront your mother about why she just threw you in the garbage in an attempt to kill you!" Lois didn't wait for a response, merely pulled him along like a wayward child and Clark allowed himself to be dragged.

Oh yes, Lois was determined to get some answers.

Upon reaching the front door to Clark's apartment, Lois didn't even knock, merely flung the door open so hard that it crashed against the wall, the glass protesting at the rough treatment. How dare Martha Kent try to end the life of someone she cared so much for?

She stomped down the stairs, eyes flashing, leaving Clark to trail awkwardly behind. The object of her wrath entered the room nervously in front of her and Lois found herself almost too angry to speak.

Almost.

"How could you?" Lois bit out, eyes narrowed and fists clenched tightly at her sides. "You pushed your own son off the balcony!"

Martha's expression wasn't deranged, like Lois anticipated. Rather, it was almost... resigned. This wasn't quite making sense here. Jonathan moved into the room to flank his wife, his own expression mirroring that of his wife's. Resigned.

This was strange.

"Martha? Jonathan? Why?" Lois persisted, when a satisfactory answer wasn't forthcoming. "You could have killed him! Your own son!" She watched as a silent communication passed between the two people that should have protected Clark, wondering at the little nod Jonathan offered his wife. She glanced at Clark and cringed at the lost look on his face. Lois couldn't even imagine what he was feeling right now.

It was a good thing for Clark that she was here. Lois didn't even want to contemplate what other murdering measures the Kent's would employ to make sure their goal was achieved.

And she had thought her own parents were bad!

At best, they were inattentive. Martha and Jonathan Kent

took bad parenting to a whole new level.

"Uh, Lois, why don't you sit down," Martha began, gesturing to the very comfortable couches in Clark's living room in a hospitable manner.

That enraged Lois like nothing else had. "No, I don't want to sit down, Martha! I need to know why you just tried to kill Clark!"

Martha took a deep breath and glanced at her son, her expression sad.

"Lois, I wasn't trying to kill him," Martha finally explained.

"Well, you could have fooled me! Not sure what else your intentions were by shoving your only son off the balcony other than trying to end his life! God, Martha! If the city wasn't in such an uproar, I'd have you arrested so fast, you wouldn't know what hit you!" Lois was getting hysterical again, and she knew it. Nothing made sense here and she didn't like it when things didn't make sense. The Kents had always seemed like the last normal family.

"I told you, I wasn't trying to kill him," Martha announced, taking a deep breath before she continued. "I was trying to make him fly."

Well, that wasn't what Lois was expecting. She blinked. "What did you say?"

Martha stepped forward to take Lois by the hands, guiding her to the couch. "Have a seat and let me explain. Please, Lois."

For once, Lois did as she was told, her mind trying to make sense of the information she had just received.

"Now, Lois, you know that I love my boy more than anything, right? And I would never willingly endanger his life, don't you?" Martha's expression was almost pleading.

"If I hadn't just seen you push him off the balcony, then yes, I would say that was true."

Martha was nonplussed by the accusation. "Ok, let me ask you this — why do you think Superman hasn't informed the world that he made it back to earth safely?"

"What does that have to do with what just happened?" Lois asked testily, even though she had asked herself that very question more than once since Jimmy had made his great discovery in Suicide Slums. "Something obviously happened to him so that he isn't able to report in, that's all."

"Maybe something like... losing his memory, perhaps?"
Martha prompted.

"What?" Lois asked, glancing over at Clark. "Are you trying to tell me that maybe Superman lost his memory like Clark? How could you possibly know this? Have you talked to him? Do you know where he is?" The questions erupted in a flurry as a small hint of excitement and hope struck her. If they could find Superman, then they might have a future.

"My mom and dad keep trying to tell me that I am Superman," Clark announced suddenly, shoving his hands into his pockets, the forlorn look on his face something Lois had never seen before.

Lois whipped around to face Martha, an incredulous look painting her features. "You told your son that he was Superman? Your son who has no memory of... oh, absolutely anything? And then you push him off the balcony? What kind of sick parent does something like that?"

She got up and began to pace. Poor Clark. She couldn't even imagine how awful this must be for him. The psychologist at the precinct had told her that Clark suffered from Superman Syndrome and she had laughed it off.

Well, she wasn't laughing anymore.

"Lois, listen to me," Martha demanded, stepping in front of the younger woman to halt her frantic pacing. "Clark is Superman."

The sad thing, Lois realized belatedly, was that Martha really believed it. She looked at Clark's father, hoping to find an ally

against this ridiculous declaration that her amnesiac partner was the one man that had the power to save the world.

Except Jonathan looked just as determined and serious as his wife.

Not to mention completely sane.

Lois was beginning to get a bad feeling about all of this. Yes, it would make sense that Superman hadn't appeared because he'd lost his memories, but it didn't make sense that Clark was that man.

Or did it?

Actually, it was starting to make just too much sense.

Lois finally landed her gaze on Clark and her heart melted just a little bit more. He looked so lost... So sad. She didn't like seeing him like this, regardless of the situation.

"Take off your glasses, Clark," Lois ordered, fisted hands finding their way to her hips.

As the glasses slipped off, Lois gasped. Now that she had an idea what to look for, she realized that Martha and Jonathan were right.

Their son *was* Superman.

Clark held her gaze, and something about his forlorn expression expelled any anger over his duplicity from her mind. "Oh, Clark," she breathed, crossing the room and wrapping her arms around his waist. If anybody looked like he needed a hug, it was her partner.

"Help me remember, Lois," Clark whispered, holding her tight. "Please."

Lois felt the tears well in her eyes and cursed them. Here was the most powerful man in the world begging her for help, practically crying on her shoulder.

And he was also the amnesiac partner that she had finally admitted that she was in love with. Why had she never seen it? That she didn't have strong feelings for two different men — but rather one very special man?

Pushing those thoughts out of her head, Lois drew out of Clark's embrace and smiled bravely up at him. "Ok, first things first," she told him. "We need to get your memory back. Then you have to go save the planet. Oh and then I have to yell at you for lying to me, but that can wait until after you save the lives of everyone on earth, I guess." She looked at a relieved-looking Martha and Jonathan. "Okay, I need to know what you've tried already, other than shoving him off the balcony. That obviously didn't work."

Clark smiled fondly. "Now this is familiar. You always barge in and take charge, right?"

Lois gasped in indignation. "I don't *always* barge in and take charge, Clark! Geez!" At the look her partner was giving her, she sighed and admitted, "Ok fine, I do sometimes. But you like it."

"You know, I think you're right." His grin was dazzling and very familiar. "I think I do like it."

"Exactly. See, you're remembering more than you think." Lois grabbed Clark by the hand and made him settle next to her on the couch. "Ok, so this is what we're going to try..."

Several hours later, Lois was about to scream with frustration. Nothing they had tried had sparked any recognition, and while Clark's invulnerability was intact, he didn't have control of his other powers.

And without his other powers, the planet was doomed.

Clark was just as frustrated as Lois and she was ready to strangle him if he apologized one more time.

"Clark, it's not your fault, ok? You didn't ask to fly millions of miles into space — we asked *you*, remember?" Lois told him, not for the first time.

"I know... Well, I think I know, "Clark complained. "But still, it just doesn't feel like me. That I'm this super powered being from another planet, flying around in a bright spandex suit

that my mom said she made for me.”

Lois turned to Martha. “You made those suits?”

Martha nodded.

“Wow. They are... um, very... nice,” Lois commented lamely. In truth, while she had always disliked the bright colors, she had certainly appreciated what the tight spandex revealed. It had taken her a while before she had lost the temptation to direct her gaze downward when in Superman’s presence, and she still sometimes lost the battle. It was probably like a guy at Hooters — no matter how hard he tries not to look, his eyes get drawn down towards the physical attributes in clear view.

It didn’t hurt that Clark Kent wearing tights was a very nice sight to behold.

Martha beamed proudly. “Thank you, Lois. I told him when we first put it together, that nobody would be looking at his face.”

“Mom!” Clark’s face flooded with color. “Come on! You’re my mother!”

Martha laughed. “And that’s exactly what your response was when I first said it.”

“Clark, maybe you should go put on the suit,” Lois suggested. “It might spark some memory. You’re supposed to be surrounded by the familiar, remember?”

Clark sighed heavily. It was clearly not something he was looking forward to.

“They are here, right?” Lois asked Martha.

“Yes, they are in a secret compartment in Clark’s closet.”

“Of course he has a secret compartment in his closet,” Lois muttered under her breath, marching into Clark’s bedroom. “Wonder how many other secrets he has hidden away.”

“I don’t know,” Clark called from the couch. “I can’t remember anything, remember?”

Lois whirled around. “You heard me?”

He nodded. “Well, yeah.” Clark looked at his parents. “You heard her, didn’t you?”

Jonathan and Martha shook their heads. “No, ‘his dad’ commented, “but it looks like your super hearing is coming back.”

Clark’s brow furrowed in consternation. “Huh. That’s weird. I guess it is. Everything seems really loud.”

“You had to learn how to filter it,” Jonathan informed him.

“Clark, can you come in here, please?” Lois called from the bedroom. She had found the suits and was amazed that he had more than one. They looked so weird just hanging there, so... not as impressive. The man did more for the suits than the suits did for the man — that much was clear. Grabbing one off a hanger, she held it out to him. “Here you go. Now why don’t you go into the bathroom and change into your suit like a nice little amnesiac superhero.” She patted his arm in a patronizing manner.

Clark held up the suit and grimaced. “You’re sure I really wear this?”

Lois nodded. “Yes, and you wear it very well.” Realizing what she had said, she back-pedaled. “I mean, you stand out when you wear it. Everybody in the world recognizes this suit.”

And that was something she was going to have to get used to. That her partner was the most famous man in the entire world, and if he managed to get his memory back and stopped the asteroid fragment from hitting the earth, every single person on the face of the planet would owe him a bit of gratitude, regardless if they liked him or not.

It was truly something that boggled the mind.

Yet, she knew it never went to his head. Clark was the most down to earth person she knew. Briefly, she pondered if the term ‘down to earth’ still applied to somebody from another planet.

And who could fly.

Ok, she was definitely losing it.

She needed coffee. Badly.

In the end, all that had been required for Clark to regain his memory was for Lois to scream at the top of her lungs.

In the middle of making much needed coffee while Clark changed into his suit, a mouse had streaked across the floor of the kitchen, right in front of Lois.

And Lois had screamed. Loudly.

Within half a second, her spandex-garbed partner was at her side.

“Lois, are you ok?” he asked worriedly, gathering her in his arms.

Lois nodded, a little overwhelmed at both the presence of a rodent in Clark’s kitchen and the full reality of seeing Clark dressed as Superman. “Uh yeah. Sorry. I guess I overreacted a little, didn’t I?” she asked, a little embarrassed. She didn’t usually like to admit that she had a fear of mice, but the truth was a little hard to deny after she shrieked at the mere sight of one.

Clark sighed in relief. “I haven’t heard you shriek like that since Trask threw you out of that airplane,” he informed her. Then he froze in place.

Lois stiffened and pulled back to peer into Clark’s face. The look of sheer wonder on her partner’s face was a beautiful sight to behold. “Clark?”

A broad smile transformed his face. “I remember.”

Clark’s parents entered the kitchen, their expressions hopeful.

He turned to his parents. “I remember!”

Martha’s hand flew to her mouth as tears sprung to her eyes. “Oh, Clark...” she breathed.

Grinning, Clark cupped Lois’ jaw tenderly. “Thank you, Lois.”

“For what?”

“For making me remember.”

“All I did was scream.”

Clark nodded, wrapping his arm around Lois’ waist. “Yeah, but it was familiar. A million things ran through my head when I heard you scream and the only thing I could think of was getting to you, to save you. And then it was like a light bulb had been turned on.”

“Well, if I had known it was going to be that easy,” Lois complained as she leaned into the welcoming warmth of Clark’s embrace, “I would have thrown myself out the window and yelled ‘help, Superman!’ instead of tearing my hair out trying to make you remember!”

“Well, I’m glad you didn’t,” he commented, the relief at having his memories back evident in his voice.

“So, you’re completely back, right son?” Jonathan asked, pride and relief coloring his voice.

Lois gasped as Clark levitated them several feet off the floor. “I’d say that’s a yes,” she announced. “Clark! You have to go stop that asteroid fragment!”

He lowered them to the floor and gave her an engaging smile. “I know. I’ll make sure it’s all stopped this time, though.”

Lois gave a sigh of relief, shooing Clark in the direction of the window. She had to laugh at the logic leap she had made earlier when she’d witnessed Martha shove Clark off the balcony. It almost seemed another lifetime ago.

“Will you be here when I get back?” Clark asked worriedly.

Lois shook her head. “No, I’m going to the Planet. Somebody needs to write this up and it might as well be me.” At the look he gave her, she hurried to assure him. “No, I’m not saying anything about your amnesia. But I do plan to put a spin on it so that every person on the planet will know exactly how much they owe you.”

He gave her a grateful smile. “I’m sure it will be your usual amazing story.”

“Of course it will.” She put a hand on his arm. “Clark? Be careful out there, ok? I uh... need you to come back. We’ve got a lot to talk about.”

He grimaced. “Just don’t yell at me too long, ok?”

"I'm not going to yell at you," Lois assured him, catching his disbelieving look. "Ok, fine, I don't plan on yelling... much."

He nodded. "I have to go."

"I know. Come back to me, ok?"

"I'll see you at the Planet before you know it." He turned to the open window.

Mindless of the audience, Lois reached out and grabbed his arm. "Clark, wait."

He turned expectantly in her direction, unprepared for the armful of Lois Lane he was suddenly in possession of. Just like when he'd taken off for the initial attack against the Nightfall asteroid, she surprised him with a kiss.

Except this time Lois knew exactly who she was kissing.

And it wasn't just Superman.

She was also kissing Clark Kent and it was incredible.

Aware of the embarrassed coughs coming from behind her, Lois tore her lips away before she really wanted to and gave Clark the same self-conscious smile she'd given him at EPRAD.

"We'll continue this later," Clark whispered softly as he released her.

"Oh, you better believe your cape-covered fanny we will be continuing this later," she replied, pushing him once again towards the window. "Now, go. Fly away. Save the world."

And with another lingering look, Clark was gone. She couldn't help but watch with awe at the sight of his primary clad figure streaking away, truly trying to reconcile the superhero with her best friend. "Hurry back so I can tell you that I love you," she whispered, not realizing that her words were overheard.

Clark reversed direction and hovered outside the balcony for a moment. "You know," he almost whispered, "I think my life's about to change forever."

As Lois opened her mouth to respond, he continued, "And I can hardly wait."

Then he was gone, his Cheshire smile still lingering there and warming her heart.

THE END

Three things I want in my fic:

1. Waffyness
2. Revelation
3. Humor

Preferred season(s)/holiday [if applicable]: whatever

Three things I do not want in my fic:

1. Angst
2. Scardino
3. Lex (ok, I'm sorry about this, he's in this story but I purposefully never mentioned him by name, LOL.)