

Different Directions

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Rated: PG (for language)

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Summary: What if Lois hadn't been working at the Daily Planet when Clark started there? What if she'd been living in a different city altogether? Would they still find a way to meet?"

Disclaimer: These aren't my toys. I just borrowed them. Length: ~5700 words.

A/N: I owe enormous amounts of thanks to Eva for her precious help and wisdom, but most of all for providing me with a brand new spark when I was drowning in the plot of something that wasn't worth the kilobytes it was taking up on my hard drive. Thanks to Barbara for being the world's best writing buddy and making sure I turned up a word count day after day, to Sue for her help, encouragement, and for agreeing to beta this beast, and thanks to Jessi for all the little things she does that make me want to keep writing.

This was written for iolanthealias, as part of a ficathon -- her request was this:

Three things I want in my fic:

1. The revelation
2. Some A-plot too
3. Alternate Universe or Elseworld or Different Beginnings or Start-At-Pilot-But-Then-Go-AU; it can cross over into the "canon" universe if necessary or if the author wants

Clark Kent hated Gotham City. It was dark, it was dirty, and it was a haven for the worst psychopathic criminals in the country. Just thinking about this place made Clark's skin crawl...

He'd been here a handful of times before, and each time he had hoped never to return. Luckily for him, they had their own resident hero, and hence had no need for Superman. In fact, something told him that Gotham City didn't even *want* Superman.

Besides the fact that he'd been forced to travel to Gotham today, Clark had recently been given several more reasons to dislike this city.

There had been an upsurge of crime in Metropolis as of late, which at first did not seem to have a logical explanation. For months, all that had really been apparent on Clark's end of things was that petty thieves and bottom-of-the-food-chain mobsters had gotten their hands on some pretty heavy artillery, giving Metro PD - and Superman - a bit of a hard time.

Clark had eventually found out that the guns were being shipped at regular intervals, crossing the bay between Gotham City and Metropolis, late at night, on cargo boats. He had also overheard a conversation between two gang leaders about the schedule for a drug delivery. A very big delivery. And that it was going to leave the city a few nights later, from the port of Metropolis.

It was then that Clark had understood that this was an exchange - the guns in return for the drugs. Knowing that, however, didn't mean that he could easily figure out who was pulling the strings in either city. While he had enough evidence to point the finger at the proper culprits in Metropolis, the same

couldn't be said of those from Gotham City. Clark had no real knowledge of Gotham's criminal underground, only that it was large, and it was powerful, and that it employed a lot of people who routinely took their "vacations" at Arkham Asylum.

Closing the net on the people responsible in Metropolis was one thing - and it was a good thing, too. But it would only prompt the factions from the other side of the bay to find different business partners to barter with, and they probably had a list of willing candidates already. Dealing a blow on both sides was the only real way to put a lid on this sort of activity and force mobsters and gang leaders to think twice before trying again.

While posing as a dockworker, Clark had heard about a meeting that was set to happen in Gotham - something about negotiating for bigger shipments, since things had been going so well. That was when he'd taken his findings to his editor who had promptly made arrangements to send Clark across the bay.

As the ferry approached the port of Gotham, Clark had to suppress a shiver of disgust. Even the air was foul in this city!

It was a little past five o'clock and the evening rush hour was in full swing. Clark almost had to fight his way through the crowd of people trying to escape the city. No one in their right minds seemed to want to stay on the island overnight. Only the mobsters, the criminally insane, and that Batman character, of course.

Sighing, Clark walked onto the street and toward the hotel he was supposed to be staying at tonight. There was very little chance he'd actually spend the night there - he was more than likely to fly right back to Metropolis to sleep in his own bed instead. However, since he had to maintain the appearance of being just a normal human man, and since a normal human man would be forced to stay in the city overnight, Clark would at least check into the hotel where a room was already reserved in his name.

Had he been sent anywhere else on earth, he would probably have considered staying for the night. But this was Gotham, and Clark hated being here so much that he barely felt any remorse at all for the fact that the Planet would be paying for accommodations he had no need - or desire - to use.

After registering and getting his key, Clark went up to set his overnight bag in the room. They'd given him a spacious suite on the top floor, which would certainly prove to be useful later, when he decided it was time to go home for the night.

Clark looked at his watch and realized he needed to hurry if he was going to be on time for the appointment he'd made with his contact. If this trip had a highlight of any sort, then working with Lois Lane would most certainly be it. He'd never met her before, but he'd heard of her of course. She had a solid, well-earned reputation as a hard-hitting investigative reporter.

She'd worked at the Daily Planet for a very short time, a few years before Clark had even started there. He wasn't certain of the circumstances in which she'd left... It was one of these things that people in the newsroom considered taboo and only ever discussed in hushed tones - especially if Perry White happened to be within earshot. All that Clark really knew was that Lois had been dismissed following accusations of plagiarism, and that trying to find out the details of this particular story was probably not something he should be doing if he valued his employment.

There had been a certain something in the chief editor's expression, however, when he'd told Clark that he'd arranged for him to meet with Lois, but Clark wasn't exactly sure what that was. He hoped he'd figure it out once he got the chance to meet her.

Without wasting any more time, Clark headed for the hotel's main dining room. He spotted Lois there right away, sitting at the far end of the room. She seemed completely absorbed, writing something on a pad of paper, but she looked up at Clark the

moment he walked up to her table, as though she'd felt him arriving. Or maybe she just had the most amazing sense of timing in the world...

"You must be Lois Lane," he said, extending a hand toward her. "I'm Clark Kent. Pleasure to finally meet you."

"Charmed, I'm sure," she replied with a smile, lightly shaking his hand. She motioned for him to take a seat before going on, "Let's just get one thing perfectly clear before we start..."

"All right," Clark said in a questioning tone, a frown creasing his brow.

"I'm in charge here," Lois told him. "This is my city."

"It's *my* investigation," Clark insisted immediately.

Lois's upper lip curled in a slight sneer. "And which paper do you think this story is likely to be printed in?"

"Wait... what are you suggesting?" Clark asked, befuddled.

"That I give you all my notes and play dead while you take all the credit for my work? I guess what they say about you is true then, isn't it?"

"No! I-- That's not--" Lois looked at him in shock. She took a deep breath. "Okay, listen. I don't know what they say about me at the Planet, and I don't care. They have it wrong anyway. I would never put my name on someone else's story. Ever. All right? Now, if we're ever going to expose these crooks, we have to work together. As in, you and me. Together. Fifty-fifty."

"But you said--"

"Yes, yes," Lois cut in, waving a dismissive hand. "Clark, the only way for the byline to list both our names is if the article is printed in the Gotham Gazette. I'm persona non grata at the Planet, or didn't you know?" She shrugged before adding, "Besides... this is Gotham. We do things a certain way here. It doesn't work the same way here as it does in Metropolis. So if we have any chance of succeeding, you're going to have to follow my lead. Okay?"

Eyes narrow, searching, Clark replied, "Why *did* you leave the Daily Planet anyway, Lois? What's the *real* reason?"

She sighed. "That's not actually relevant to this story, is it? Just tell me, are we on the same page or aren't we?"

"Fine. Your city, your rules," Clark grudgingly agreed.

They went over all of his notes carefully, with Lois absorbing the information she needed in order to be completely up to speed on the investigation, and occasionally filling in some of the blanks.

This done, she handed him back his notes. "All right, so it's seven now," she said, taking a quick look at her watch. "And they're meeting at nine, so that should give us just enough time to figure out what our cover is, get dressed appropriately, and go." She gave Clark an appraising look. "I hope you've brought another suit, because they're not even going to let you in wearing something that rumbled. Have you been sleeping in that thing?"

Clark looked down at his jacket and ran a hand across its lapel in a futile attempt at ironing out some wrinkles. "Oh, sorry, it's just that--"

"It doesn't matter," Lois told him. "Besides, I think a tux would be more appropriate. You need to look rich enough to afford to be there. If you don't have one, I could probably--"

"No, no, I've got one," Clark replied, nodding an affirmative.

He hadn't brought one with him, but that didn't mean he couldn't fly back home and get the one he kept in his closet at home...

Clark got out of the cab at eight-thirty, right in front of Lois's apartment building. He promptly walked inside then typed Lois's door number on the keypad to signal that he'd arrived. She came on the intercom almost immediately and, after informing him that he was well over two minutes late, she told him she'd be right down.

He waited for her at the entrance, leaning against a wall,

hands in his pockets, whistling idly as he stared at the glass door. When he finally saw her on the other side of the door, coming toward him in a long, midnight-blue sequined dress, Clark sucked in a sharp breath - Lois looked absolutely breathtaking. She had a blonde wig on, styled in a loose bun with a few strands falling on her shoulders.

Lois strolled casually through the door. "How do I look as a blonde?" she asked, turning her head to give him a better view from all angles.

"You look--" said Clark, his eyes a little wide as he took in the sight of her. "You look just-- Wow..."

A slow smile spread across Lois's lips. "You don't look so bad yourself, Kent," she told him. "Ready to jump into the action?"

"I'm ready when you are," he said with a nod.

"Then let's go, Mr. Walters," Lois said, using the fake name she'd chosen for them.

"With pleasure, Mrs. Walters," Clark replied, smiling as he offered her his arm.

She slid her hand around his arm and they walked out of the building.

They hailed a cab and headed toward the club where the meeting was to take place.

It took a slight bit of convincing, and nearly a hundred dollars, but they managed to get past the doorman and enter the illegal gambling hall. A thick cloud of smoke and loud jazz music greeted them when they walked into the establishment on the third floor of an old gothic building.

After looking around for a good vantage point from which to observe the other gamblers, they strolled over to a blackjack table that was near the centre of the room. They sat there for a few minutes, losing a few hands on purpose while they glanced around at the other tables.

Clark scanned the room with his X-Ray vision quickly, having surreptitiously lowered his glasses for a short moment while the dealer handed new cards to all the players at his table. Besides a storage room stacked from floor to ceiling with bottles of alcohol, one large room with several locked safes and a few people counting dollar bills and change, there wasn't anything out of the ordinary anywhere that Clark could see.

Having lost a fifth hand in a row, Lois got up from the table, declaring, "Maybe I'll try my luck at craps instead. How about you, honey?"

"Sounds like a good idea," Clark replied, getting up from his chair as well.

As they started walking toward the craps table, Lois leaned in closer to Clark. "That man, over there," she whispered, "With the red bow-tie and handkerchief... that's Rupert Thorne. I think we've found who we were looking for."

She took Clark by the arm and pulled him in a corner, near a row of slot machines, so that they could watch him without it being too obvious. All of a sudden, Lois noticed a man coming toward them. He hadn't seen them yet, his head was turned to the left, but it was only a matter of seconds before he did. Panic rose inside of her - she knew this man, and he knew her. Wig or no, if he saw her face, he'd be able to identify her, and if he did, everything would be lost.

There wasn't anywhere to hide, and trying to do so would only get her noticed, so Lois did the only thing she could think of that would insure no one would give her or Clark a second look: she pulled him closer to her and kissed him. A long, slow, sensual kiss that took Clark completely by surprise, though lasted long enough for him to respond quite convincingly.

When she finally let Clark go, Lois reached a hand up to wipe away a little trace of her lipstick below Clark's lip. "Sorry," she said with a shrug.

"What was that for?" Clark asked, breathless and stunned.

Lois cocked her head to the side, frowning. "You know, I

think it's the first time I've ever kissed a guy only to have him complain about it afterwards..."

"I'm not *complaining*," he told her. "It's just that..." He shrugged, unable to find an explanation, a reason for having protested against her actions.

"What, then? Didn't they have girls in *Smallville* when you were growing up?"

Clark's eyes went wide. "How--? How do you know I'm from Smallville?" He'd never given her any personal details about his life, and he didn't know a lot of people who were even aware that he was from the small Kansas farm town.

"I've done my research," Lois told him with an enigmatic smile. "It's what reporters do."

Clark was about to argue that the story wasn't about him, and so there was no reason to research him, but just as he opened his mouth, he heard a voice he recognized coming from further away. He turned and looked in the direction where his heightened hearing had caught the man's voice, then turned back to Lois. "Bruno Mannheim has just entered the building. I think we have our men," he said.

"Well," Lois said, moving away from the corner where she'd been standing for the last few minutes. "This was easier than I thought..." Then as an afterthought, she added, "Actually, this was almost too easy."

"Well, it's not over yet," Clark said. "Someone might still decide to make trouble."

"Of course they will," she said, before moving through a row of slot machines toward the group of men that had gathered near the entrance and among whom she recognized a few faces. "I just wish I knew who and what it was going to be..."

Clark followed closely, and after warning her to not get too close, which earned him an icy glare, they both stopped in front of a huge *Texan Tycoon* slot machine, feeding it a few coins so as not to look suspicious.

In a few moments' time they'd identified all of the seven men. The two crime bosses they'd previously recognized, one from each of the two cities, another two were their right hand men, and the others were bodyguards of sorts.

Lois placed her evening bag on top of the machine where the small, ultra-sophisticated tape recorder she had hidden inside would be able to catch as much of the group's conversation as possible. Meanwhile, Clark snapped a few pictures using a tiny, hidden camera that doubled as a cufflink.

"They're armed," Clark told Lois, having spotted an Uzi concealed inside a bodyguard's trench coat.

"Of course they're armed, silly," Lois replied, rolling her eyes. "This is Gotham. You don't do business here unless you're armed to the teeth. This kind of business anyway. Seriously, haven't you done your research at all?"

Clark just sighed. "I think we've probably seen and heard all we needed to. Maybe we should go..."

"Are you kidding? Their meeting is just getting started!"

"Lois," he hissed. "I mean...*Jackie*... I think it's probably dangerous for us to be here."

"But I *like* danger, darling," Lois told him with a wink.

"Yes, I've heard," he replied, leaning in closer to give the appearance that they were having a more intimate conversation. "But I think it would be safer for us to leave. I don't think there's any more that we need. We know who they are, and we have proof that they've met, which is more than enough to expose them."

"Maybe," Lois said, "but who knows what else we could get from them? If we--" She stopped short, having spotted the man she'd tried to hide from earlier. "Dammit, I think we've been made," she told Clark, grabbing him by the arm. "We need to get out of here."

"See! I told you it was dangerous," Clark replied, following

her closely as they headed toward the fire exit.

"Oh, shut up, will you?"

"Yes, dear," Clark said, swallowing back a chuckle. He glanced over his shoulder and noticed a man who was coming right at them. He had a handgun out and pointed directly at them, and Clark immediately understood the seriousness of the situation. "Hurry, he's right behind us," he told Lois.

A moment later, she slammed into the door which flew open right away, revealing a small metallic staircase onto which they escaped. They were about halfway down when shots were fired. Clark immediately grabbed Lois, holding her tightly against him, protecting her from the shooter - acting as a sort of human bulletproof vest - and he carried her down to the ground and to safety. Most of the shots missed, except one that hit Clark right on the back of the shoulder, bouncing right off his invulnerable skin, but not before having burned a bullet-sized hole in his tuxedo jacket.

When they finally got off the fire escape, Clark ran into the nearest alley. He let Lois down, then ran back to the side of the building and looked for the shooter, but the man seemed to have disappeared. Clark turned back to find Lois standing right behind him, a bewildered look on her face.

"Are you all right?" he asked, looking her over.

"Yes, yes," she said dismissively, "But you're not. You've been hit." She grabbed the front of his jacket in an attempt to unbutton and remove it so she could inspect the injury she was sure he'd suffered.

"I wasn't hit," Clark said, trying to stop her without hurting her. "I'm fine. I promise," he added in a reassuring tone.

"No! You were hit. On the shoulder. I saw the hole in your jacket!"

"Lois, I'm *fine*," Clark insisted. "It's probably just a cigarette burn. Please let it go."

"Let me see!" Lois insisted, frantic.

"There's no time," Clark told her. "We should get out of here before he comes back to finish the job. I don't expect he thought scaring us away would be suffi--"

Clark's last words were drowned out by the sounds of more shots being fired, from a window on the third floor. Immediately, Clark threw himself in the bullet's trajectory, pushing Lois down to the ground, covering her with his own body.

He looked up at the window from where the shots had been fired, and ignoring Lois's protests that he get off of her right this minute, he used a quick burst of heat vision to superheat the thug's gun. Just as he did however, more shots were fired, from elsewhere in the alley. Clark cursed under his breath. They were caught and unless he did something drastic and did it now, Lois would be lying dead in this alley in a matter of seconds.

No matter what he chose to do, Clark realized that he would end up having to give up his secret identity in order for them to get to safety. Enabling the thugs to match Clark Kent's face with Superman's identity was definitely not an appealing choice, but the reporter wasn't very well known in this city and Clark was fairly certain that no one had seen him closely enough yet, so getting out of there before they had that chance was his best option.

And the quickest way to do that...

"Hold on tight," he told Lois, and immediately they flew up into the sky, avoiding the barrage of bullets that followed their ascension.

Lois screamed at first, and her wig fell from her head back down to the pavement below. It took a moment before things started making sense to her, and by that time, they had landed on the roof of a tall building, several blocks away.

Clark let her go gently. "I'm sorry," he said. "There was no other way out that I could see."

"You're-- You--?" Lois choked out, taking a step back. "I--"

But-- And-- How--?" she stuttered, confused.

"I'm sorry you had to find out this way," Clark told her gently. "But the important thing is that you're safe and we have the information we came for."

"The information!" she gasped. "My evening bag! The tape recorder! They're still in the club!"

"What?"

"We left in a hurry, I-- I didn't have time to grab it," she explained apologetically. "I'm sorry, I meant to, but we were running out and I didn't think and... I'm sorry!"

Clark sighed. "It's all right, I'll just go back and get it."

"You can't go back there!" Lois argued, shocked. "What if they see you? They'll kill you!"

"Lois..." Clark said, placing both hands on her shoulders to try and get her to calm down. "Relax. They can't hurt me, I'm Superman." He stepped back and in a swirl of black, red and blue, went from being Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter from Kansas, to Superman, invulnerable hero from another planet. He lifted off the roof of the building, saying, "Stay here, I'll be right back."

"Well, of course. Where else am I supposed to go?" Lois asked in frustration as she looked around. They seemed to be on the rooftop of one of the tallest buildings in the city. There wasn't much of a chance she could get anywhere without his help. She looked up in the direction where Superman had left, saying, "Be careful," before realizing it was a silly thing to tell *Superman*, and she rolled her eyes at herself.

He landed on the rooftop again just moments later, handing Lois her evening bag. "I'm always careful," he told her with a crooked smile.

"Right." Lois shook her head and took the evening bag, checking it for the tape recorder. She rewound the tape, making sure that it had picked up the conversation. Looking up to Superman again, she said, "Can we get off the roof now? I'm starting to have vertigo up here..."

"Of course," Superman said, walking up to her. He picked her up carefully, then lifted up into the air. "Your place or mine?" he said with a playful wink.

"How about neither," Lois replied. "Let's go to my office and we can type this story up."

"Yes ma'am!"

They'd been sitting at Lois's desk at the Gotham Gazette for about an hour, typing up notes and assembling them into an article. It was late, and Lois was tired. She rolled her office chair away from the desk and stretched, yawning.

"How does coffee sound?" she asked, getting up and heading for the coffee maker without waiting for an answer from him.

"Sounds great," Clark said and he got up to join her.

Moments later, Lois was leaning against the wall near the coffee maker, watching as Clark stirred a half-dozen sugar packets into his mug. "So, Superman, huh?" she commented in hushed tones, even though there wasn't anyone besides them in the office. "No wonder Perry likes you..."

Clark frowned. "He doesn't know..."

"Oh, don't be so sure," Lois replied in a chuckle. "Believe me when I say he didn't get to be Editor-in-Chief because he can yodel."

"Well no, but..." Clark shrugged. "Anyway, how would you know what Perry White likes and doesn't like?"

Lois gave him a crooked smile. "I talk to him every week," she confessed. "And let me tell you, he talks about you *all the time*. It's always Clark this, and Clark that. For a while there I was afraid you'd turn out to be some kind of a saint..." She chuckled and added, "Well, all right, apparently you are."

"You talk to him every week? Really?" Clark asked, surprised.

"Yeah, well..." Lois shrugged. "It's a long story. And we should probably go back to the one we're supposed to be working on, it's more relevant, I think."

"Lois?" Clark asked when she started walking back to her desk. He waited for her to turn and look at him again, before adding, "I can...trust you, can't I? I mean, there wasn't much of a choice back there, you might have been killed, and--"

"Don't worry, Clark," Lois said reassuringly. "I know how to keep a secret. Or two or three..." She sighed. "But, all right. I'll trade your secret for one of mine. How's that?"

"Is it a dark and mysterious secret?" Clark asked in a chuckle as they headed back to her desk together.

"Nope," Lois told him. "But it's something no one else but I can tell you." She placed her coffee mug on the desk, then sat down and looked over to Clark. "You wanted to know why I'd left the Daily Planet? I'll tell you."

"You know, you don't *have to*," he said, sitting down beside her.

Lois smiled. "I'll tell you anyway. Besides, I hear it's what friends do, trade secrets and life stories. I already know most of yours from Perry, so it's only fair, I guess..."

"Friends, huh?"

"I trust you've heard of the concept?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. "Anyway, you probably know the basics of this tale, and probably heard a few variations on the plagiarism theme as well." At Clark's nod, she went on, "Well, here's what really happened..."

Lois proceeded to explain how, when she'd been just a rookie reporter, she'd fallen head over heels in love with a senior correspondent - a French man named Claude - who'd turned out to be a low-life, lying, manipulative bastard. He'd gotten everything he wanted from her, including a night of passion, and all her notes on a really big, really important story she'd been working on.

The next morning, she'd found her notes had been turned into a front-page article - with his byline. When she'd accused him of stealing her work, he'd accused her right back of sexual harassment. Her notes had disappeared, and hence she had no proof of what she was accusing him of. In the end, Claude had gone to one of his friends on the board of directors in order to get them to get rid of her.

"They got Perry to fire me," she said with a sigh. "Against his better judgment, of course. He'd long since seen through Claude's lying and conniving schemes. But the bottom line was it was Claude's word against mine, and since everyone else believed *him* somehow, I can't exactly blame Perry for dismissing me. If he hadn't, he'd have been replaced too, and that would have been just wrong. A few months later I ended up here which, in retrospect, is actually a pretty good career move."

"But it's *Gotham*..." Clark said, obviously doubtful that this city could be anything but awful.

"Believe me, Clark, Gotham isn't as bad as you seem to think it is," she said. "I guess it kind of grows on you after a while."

"Of all the places you could have gone, why here? There are other newspapers in Metropolis and--"

"Are you kidding?" Lois said in a huff. "I wasn't about to go work for Preston Carpenter at the Star and actually have to lie on my back to advance in my career... And let's not even talk about the National Whisper which isn't even deserving of being called a *newspaper*. Besides, you know, the Gazette is the second most important publication in the country. I'm lucky I had someone who was willing to pull some strings to get me a job here."

"You have friends in high places, I see..."

"No I don't, you lunthead," Lois replied, rolling her eyes. "It was Perry." She sighed. "Anyway, we need to get back to this article or we'll be at it all night. I'm sure you have better things to do with your time than spending it here, don't you?"

"What makes you think I mind being here?" he asked with a crooked smile.

Lois raised an eyebrow. "Besides the fact that you obviously hate Gotham?"

"It might be growing on me a little..."

Clark had insisted that Lois not spend the night alone at her apartment, but she wouldn't hear of spending it at his hotel, even after he promised she would have the suite to herself. She'd also adamantly refused that Superman hang around outside her window while she slept or any such nonsense. Besides, she'd argued, the building she lived in was equipped with state of the art security systems on account that the owner was a very paranoid man.

The only thing Clark had managed was to convince Lois to let him walk her to her building.

"You'll be careful, won't you?" he asked, once they got to the building's front door.

"I'm *always* careful," she told him with certainty.

"Lois," Clark insisted, "Someone tried to kill you. They're still out there and it's likely going to get much, much worse when the article comes out exposing all of these people. Promise me you'll be careful?"

"Yes, sir," she said with a mock salute. "Don't worry, if I sense the slightest bit of danger, I know people I can call for help. I have lots of friends at the GCPD. And elsewhere..."

Clark smiled. "Good to know." He pulled open the door for her and said, "It was nice working with you, Lois."

"Likewise," she replied, smiling as she walked inside the building.

"You know, if you ever wanted to come back to the Planet one day..."

"They'd never hire me back," she snorted. "It would be asking the board to admit they'd been manipulated by a ruthless, vindictive French jerk. Besides, don't you think Perry tried about a million times already?"

"Of course. Well, if you're ever in Metropolis, give me a call, we could have lunch together." He let go of the door. "Goodbye, Lois," he said, walking away.

"Hey wait," she called, pushing the door open again. "Isn't this the part where you hand me your phone number on a little folded note with 'call me' written on it in nice, big, hopeful print?"

Clark walked back toward her. "What? And deprive you of an opportunity to find it yourself?" he asked, raising an amused eyebrow. "I would never do that." Then, leaning in closer, he whispered to her ear, "Or, you know, you can just scream. *Help Superman...* it works for most people."

"I'm not most people."

"Oh, trust me, I've noticed," he said in a soft voice, pulling away just slightly.

For a moment it seemed like he was on the verge of kissing her, but then he turned his head abruptly to the side and looked up. "Someone's watching," he told her, frowning deeply. "It isn't safe for you to stay here, Lois..."

She glanced at the building on the other side of the street and saw what looked like a human-shaped shadow on the side of a gargoyle near the ledge. "It's all right, he's one of the good guys."

"Wait-- Is that...?"

"Yeah," Lois replied in a sigh. Then, almost immediately, her eyes went wide and she blurted out, "But it's not what you think."

"Oh?" Clark asked, raising an eyebrow amusedly. "So he's got nothing to do with you being rescued mysteriously all the time?"

"Oh, that..." She shrugged. "Well, yes... but that's not what I meant. I meant that he's not-- or rather that I don't--"

"I know," Clark said softly. He leaned in and brushed a quick,

gentle kiss on her cheek. "Good night, Lois."

"Good night," Lois replied in a whisper as he started walking away.

Then, looking up at the dark shadow still standing by the side of the gargoyle on the building across the street, Lois asked, "Don't you have anything more important to do?" She walked inside her apartment complex just as the shadow disappeared.

Early the next day, Clark boarded the ferry that would take him back to Metropolis. Hands in his pockets, he took one last, long look at Gotham, its tall, gothic buildings bathed in the early morning light.

As he watched the sun breathe new life and hope into this darkest of cities, Clark couldn't help but think that perhaps Gotham wasn't as bad as he'd always believed.

After all... Gotham City had Lois Lane.

THE END