

# Distance

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Summary: If Clark had gone to see Lois as Superman after he was thought killed in "That Old Gang of Mine," what might have happened if Clark decided to tell Lois the truth? A continuation of the author's "100 Meters."

Disclaimer: This is a fanfic based on the television show, Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman. I have no claim on the pre-existing characters whatsoever, nor am I profiting by their use. The new story elements are mine. No infringement is intended by this work.

This is a continuation of 100 Meters. Reading that (very) short work first will be helpful.

Time frame: Season 2: That Old Gang of Mine

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## Part 1: Deflection

Lois opened the window to let me come inside. I knew this would be difficult. While I was floating toward her window, she looked angrier than I've ever seen. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I know why I'm here. Before I leave, it will be better for Lois. I hope it'll be better for me as well.

As soon as my feet touch the floor, I begin to speak. "Lois, L..."

"What the hell are you doing here?"

The blast freezes me for a second. I've never heard anger from Lois like this. "L..."

She cuts me off again. "I know you saw me turn my back just now! You have no business skulking outside my window! Damn it! Clark died! You let Clark die!"

I have to find a way to tell her. I try again. "I'm..."

"Shut up! Do you really think I'm interested in any stupid apology? I watched my best friend die tonight. I saw my..." The last sentence dies on her lips. Her gaze drops to the floor.

"Lois..."

She still isn't going to let me speak. "Get out!" She doesn't even bother to look at me this time. The volume is lower but the words are thick with anger.

This can't be happening. "Lo..."

Her head pops up and I see that rage again. Suddenly she charges toward me and pushes me toward the still open window. "You heard me! Get the hell out you worthless..." She cuts herself off. I'm sure that had she continued, I would have heard a string of expletives.

I don't know what to do. The way Lois is now, who knows how she'll react to the truth?

My mind is still spinning when Lois speaks once more. This time her voice doesn't carry anger, just infinite pain. "Just leave. I hate... I never want to see you again!" She runs into her bedroom and slams the door.

I feel like I just died for the second time tonight.

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## Part 2: Depths

I'm sitting on my bed crying. I don't think the door was completely closed when the tears started. Where did all the anger come from? Where did it go?

Why did Superman have to come here tonight? I guess I must have known something like this might happen. As soon as I saw him outside my window I tried to signal for him to go away, but he didn't seem to care. He came on in and I lost it.

I can't believe I yelled at Superman. Not only yelled, I pushed him toward the window. He might have fallen through. Not that he could get hurt. Not like Clark.

Clark... Why did you have to die tonight? Dillinger probably wouldn't have hurt me and Clyde would have had no reason to shoot if you would have just stayed back. I should have known that you'd try to protect me. You were always trying to do stuff like that.

It hurts so much. It's like a dull ache everywhere in my body. I didn't know something like this could cause physical pain. What god did I offend to be hurt so badly? How can I hurt so much when I need so little? How can men cause me so much pain?

Even Superman... One time I told him my feelings, and even the great hero kicked me in the gut that night. Well, right now, I'm just as glad. Hero... yeah, right!

But not you, Clark... Of the men that mattered, you were the one where I kicked first. You told me one time that you loved me, and I wasn't even really listening. Well, that's not true. I was listening but not thinking. I finally came to my senses, but before I could say anything, you took it back.

I've always wondered which was the lie. Was it your declaration of love, or the retraction? In the months since that day, I've come to believe you really did tell the truth on that park bench. If I had gone first that day in front of the Planet, would you have said something else?

Superman showed me something else that night I embarrassed myself in front of him. When he chooses to, he can be as rude as any man I've met. The remark about needing a lead-lined robe made me feel small. I couldn't believe he was so insensitive. But it was just that one time. Even just now, I screamed, cursed, and even shoved him. Tonight he never got angry. The more I yelled, the more he looked - hurt.

Why was that night different? Of all the times and situations where I've seen Superman, that was the only time he's ever been rude. All I did was ask Clark to send him to me...

Clark sent him! Clark, whose offer of love I just brushed off, and then asked to have Superman visit my apartment. Clark told him what happened - and Superman was angry. He was angry because I dismissed Clark to offer myself to him.

I guess that makes a certain sense. If Clark really was in love with me, he might have been bitter that day. But would he tell Superman? The only person I'd tell something like that would be my best friend.

Maybe Clark did tell his best friend. That would explain why Clark could always get him a message. I never thought about it, but what if Clark is Superman's best friend? ...was his best friend?

It wasn't just my Clark that was killed tonight. It was his Clark as well. Maybe we both lost our best friend this evening.

Could it be that Superman came by tonight because he needed to talk to someone? He probably feels terrible and I jumped all over him.

What I said! I was so unfair. I need to talk to him. Maybe I can go to my window and call for him. Perhaps the roof would be better. He might not come back. After what I said... what I did.

I need to try. As I stand, I realize how tired I feel. That anger... now that it's gone I feel so empty. I wish there was someone to hold me. I wish Clark were here.

But Clark's gone. The thought triggers a chill. I feel so cold. I don't know that I'll ever feel warm again.

Right now, I have to see if I can reach Superman. He's not Clark, but he deserves better than I gave him tonight.

As I start for the door, I have to hope that he's still in the area. Maybe if I go up to the roof and yell a few times he'll give me

another chance and we can mourn our lost friend together.

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### Part 3: Darkness

I wish I could leave, but I can't. Lois told me to get out and I will, but not until she knows the truth.

I've been hoping she'll remember to turn out the lights before she goes to bed. I don't want to knock on her door to tell her I'm still here, but I will if that's what it takes.

I hear her moving. It sounds like she's heading for the door. I hope she doesn't yell too much more. At least, not until I tell her.

She emerges with the look of a person on a mission. I hope she doesn't mind an interruption. If I have to, I'll make her stay. She takes two steps into the outer room before realizing that she isn't alone.

"You're still here!" she says in a startled tone. She doesn't sound angry anymore.

"I'm sorry, Lois, but I can't leave until you know the truth." I mean to sound hopeful, but my voice comes out flat.

She looks nervous as she takes a step closer. "Superman, I'm sorry that I got so angry. I just hurt - so much. I never knew how much Clark meant to me and..."

I have to stop her before she says something that will make this even harder. "Stop!"

She looks like she's been slapped. She obviously wasn't ready for the abrupt tone. "What?" she asks.

Here we go. "Clark isn't dead." I try to use my best Superman voice, but it's just not there.

That really seems to rock her. She's just staring. My mind is screaming but I just have to wait. Suddenly I notice her eyes seem to glaze over and her knees are giving way. I catch her well before she reaches the floor. Her eyes are open and there is a level of alertness. I guess this wasn't as much fainting as it was a shock-induced dizzy spell. I carry her over to her sofa and set her down as gently as I can.

"Lois, are you okay?"

"Superman, what did you say?"

"I'm sorry, Lois. Clark is alive."

"He's alive! How? Take me to him!"

I wish I could. So many things would have been so much easier if Clark and Superman really were different people. "You'll see Clark in a minute. But first..." If I don't say these things now, I may never get the chance. I kneel down beside her so we can talk on the same level. "Lois, I need to tell you some things. When I'm finished, you'll see Clark. Okay?"

I can see confusion on her face. "I don't want to talk now. I need to see him! Please take me to him!"

"Lois, I can't do anything until you hear what I have to say. I promise that it will only take a minute."

I'm surprised the anger from earlier tonight hasn't reappeared. She looks calm but confused as she replies. "Okay, but first tell me, is he okay?"

"He's fine - physically. Now will you please let me do this?"

"Go ahead." There is a note of questioning in her reply.

I feel like I should just blurt it out. However, if I just tell her I'm Clark, I may never get to say the rest. Lois, please forgive me for this approach. "Remember that day on the bench when Clark said he loved you?"

"Of course."

"What he didn't say was that when he met you, his whole life changed. Since that first day, he's been in constant fear of doing something - everything - wrong. That fear caused him to make one stupid mistake after another. One of the biggest mistakes of all was when he took back his declaration of love."

"You mean..."

"Clark has been in love with you from the very beginning." It feels so good to say it, even if this may be the only time.

"Superman, why are you telling me this?"

There's one more thing I have to do first. "There was another

mistake back when you were going to marry Luthor. I should have told you what I knew about him. I was trying so hard to do what's right, but I got so confused. I was all mixed up with my own feelings and confused about how to deal with you and him. With all that in my head, I ended up just standing by and letting it happen. Then, that night, I was so hurt - and mad. Instead of being your friend and telling you the truth, I drove you right to Luthor. Lois, I'm so sorry."

"Superman, I'm getting more confused. What does all that have to do with Clark?"

"I'm sorry that I've messed things up so much. I can tell it's going badly tonight. I hope that some day you can find a way to forgive me. I hope that when this is all done, you can find some way to remember that I love you."

"But..." The words seem to die in her throat. I hate confusing her like this but I don't know what to do!

"Lois, I've been in love with you since the moment you stormed into Perry's office during my interview."

I can see the gears turning now. She's figuring it out. I wish she were smiling.

Another few seconds tick by. Too many lies. Too much confusion. There's a way to clear this up right now. I straighten up, take a step back and spin into Clark Kent clothes.

"Lois, I've wanted to tell you for a long time. I never meant to hurt you like this, but I can't leave you believing that I'm dead."

She looks to be in shock. "So you... this person, Clark, isn't real?"

Not that! "No. It's just the opposite," I plead. I put my hands on my chest. "This is real. My being Clark is real. Being your partner is real! It's Superman that's - fake. He's just a costume to let me to help people and still have a life."

"How can I believe that?"

"You've met my parents. Do you honestly believe they aren't real?"

"Clark, you've lied to me. You've never been honest with me at all."

She can't believe that. "That's not true. I've been honest about everything other than Superman."

Now I can see that some of that anger is back. "What am I supposed to think? You're dead. Then you're alive. Now you're Superman. You say you lo... I thought I lost my best friend tonight. Now I don't know what to believe. I thought you cared about me. You've done nothing but lie to me from the very beginning!"

I wish there was less truth in that accusation. Lois is right. I have lied. I had so hoped that it wouldn't go this way. She's so important to me, but it looks like I've carried the secret too long. I came here to help Lois, and I guess I've succeeded. She'll be better now, even if my life is over. The lies hurt her so much. More than I ever realized.

She's just sitting there. I wish I could read her better. She looks so lost and hurt. I want to hold her in my arms but I fear that time is past. I feel the weight of what I've taken from her this night. I love her, but I've taken so much.

It suddenly occurs to me that there's one last thing I can offer. "Lois, there's nothing I can do to make up for the lies I've told. I fear that I'll be paying the price of those for the rest of my life." This is so hard. Now I feel too tired to stand. I step over to a chair and sit down.

"If I could undo this, I would. Since I can't, I want to give you what I can. You've always wanted the definitive Superman interview. If you'd like, I'll give you that now. I'll answer any and every question you can think to ask. Smallville, secret identity, discovering I was different, whatever. It might be worth the Pulitzer that you deserve. All I ask in return is that you give me time to get my parents into hiding before you publish the story. Well, and I'd ask that you try to believe that I never meant to hurt you."

I can see that she's hearing the words, but she appears to be in a state of shock. I wait for over a minute but she never replies. Finally, I stand and spin back into the suit. "You can reach me at my parents' house. Please let me know when you want the interview."

As I step toward the window, Lois finds her voice. "Clark, why are you doing this?" I don't hear the anger any more but the pain I hear in her voice is killing me.

I turn back and face her with a heavy sigh. "A room full of people saw Clark Kent die tonight. I didn't know what else to do. I should have stayed away, but I came to see how you were. When I saw you, I had to tell you the truth. You were suffering and I can't let that happen if I can do something about it. I came in tonight because... because your well-being is more important than my own."

Once more, I wait for Lois to reply. Again, she's just staring at me. It hits me that this is the end. My dreams of a future with this incomparable woman are another casualty of this horrid night. I try to memorize her features. If she calls me at all, it will be as a reporter preparing to expose - the great deception. I shift to super speed and dart out the window. I hope someday I'll find a reason to smile again.

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Part 4: Discovery

He's gone.

And I'm not so angry anymore. Except for when he first came in my window, I'm not sure I ever was that angry. Surprised and hurt... yes, but angry? Okay, I was angry. Clark sure seemed to think I was about to look for a baseball bat. A Kryptonite baseball bat.

A few hours ago, I think I would have given anything to have another moment with Clark. Then I'm granted a wish beyond my wildest dreams, but instead of holding him, I'm watching him leave. It turns out that he's the biggest liar I've known. I was sure that title would forever be reserved for Lex. I can really pick men!

I guess he was sort of right. I am angry. What is it about being in the same room as him tonight that makes me so I can't think straight? Right now, I'm also angry that he took off so quickly. He dropped a bomb... actually several bombs, and he seemed to think I was going to be able to process all of it so quickly?

Clark is Superman. Or is it Superman that is Clark? Does it really matter?

He thought it was important to for me to know that Clark is the real person. I can still see the look on his face when I said Clark wasn't real. No, in his mind he's certainly Clark. I'm not sure I understand why that's so important to him. They're both real. If Clark was a soldier, would he insist that I love him only when he wasn't in uniform?

Did I just think that? Love him? How can I love him after what he's done to me? It would serve him right if I took him up on his offer, wrote the real Superman story and got that Pulitzer. Yeah, it would serve him right for making a fool out of me.

I won't. Not because of Clark... well, not just because of him. I could never do that to his parents. They are about the nicest people I've met. How could they raise their son to... do that?

I should be more angry - or sad - or happy. I'm not sure what I'm feeling. I guess I am angry, and sad. I've gained and lost so much in the past hour. I don't know.

Maybe I'll be better off without Clark. I did fine before he came along. Three Kerth awards tell me I don't need him... but I will miss him... terribly.

Why did he think Clark Kent had to die after tonight? All he had to do was say that he was wearing a bulletproof vest. He could claim to have been knocked out by the shock of the bullets and say that he woke up later. The gangsters obviously never looked at him closely, or they'd have known he wasn't dead. He

could claim that Superman gave him the vest and Superman would conveniently back up his story.

Despite everything, I have to smile. Poor Clark. He never could think on his feet. I'm amazed Superman is so effective. I guess that explains all those strange disappearances and stupid excuses. No wonder he always had to rush off to somewhere. Will Superman disappear now as well?

If Clark is real, and he's been around all this time, why did Superman only show up last year? Somehow, I think that's important.

I still need to decide what to do about him. I wonder if he really thinks I'll expose him for the story. I hope he knows me better than that. When we first met... well, maybe. I guess I'm glad I didn't know then.

I need to work through this. I need to talk. But who? It can't be anyone here. Everyone I know thinks Clark is dead. I can't very well complain to them about him right now. In a flash, I know and head for the phone.

I dial the number and hope. After only three rings, I'm rewarded with a sleepy, "Hello?"

"Lucy, it's Lois, can you talk?"

"Lois? Do you know what time it is?"

"I'm sorry, but I need to talk with you. Is that all right?" I suspect I sound desperate.

"Sure, sis. This is unexpected. Which is it, Mom or Dad?"

"Neither. Why do you ask that?"

"Think about it. Since I left Metropolis, how many times have you called me?"

"Um, a few."

"Okay, how many times have you called where you weren't complaining about either Mom or Dad?"

"Lucy!"

"Lois!"

She's right. "Okay, I don't call much. But this is different. I need your advice."

Her voice turns sarcastic. "I'm glad I'm lying in bed. My big sister is asking me for advice. I need to mark down this day."

"Lucy, please. I need this."

I think she can hear the stress in my voice. "Okay, Lois. I'm sorry. What's it about."

"Do you remember my work partner, Clark Kent?"

"Are you two finally dating?" I wish she didn't sound so happy.

"No! It's just - complicated. We've gotten closer and recently I've been thinking along those lines..."

"Go for it! I remember him. He's worth it."

That's what I thought until... "It's not that simple. See, first, there was this - accident. I thought he'd been - well, killed. It really tore me up and, well, it got me thinking that he's become pretty important to me."

"You sound upset, but you don't sound like your best friend is dead. Is he okay?"

"Yeah. It turned out that he wasn't hurt after all. But I just found out he's been lying to me about some important parts of his life."

"Don't tell me he's got a secret wife or something."

"It's nothing like that."

"Have you managed to fall for another crime lord?"

"Lucy!"

"You're the one that said he's been lying about parts of his life. Instead of my guessing, why don't you tell me what he's been lying about?"

"Well, I can't tell you too many details. It's like he has a secret part-time job. He's not doing anything unethical but... Well, he's lied to me!"

"I'm sorry, sis." She sounds genuinely concerned now. "He seemed like such a nice guy. How did you find out about his secret?"

"He told me."

"What!"

"It was all part of that - getting killed thing I mentioned. He thought it was the only way to show me that he wasn't dead. Like I said, I was very upset."

"So he told you this secret because he was worried about you?"

"I guess."

"He sounds like a real crumb." I think she's been practicing her sarcastic voice.

"Please be serious!"

"Give me a break Lois; he's already ahead of most of the guys I've dated. But I'll try. Just exactly why did you call me tonight?"

"I don't know. I'm - confused. Last time I got confused like this, I tried to work it out by myself and I ended up almost marrying Lex. I was hoping... Lucy, I don't know. I needed to talk and I don't have anyone else."

"All right, I'm glad you called. I'll help any way I can."

"Sis, you've had a lot more experience with men and relationships than I have. I know I haven't always been as understanding as I should, but - I need whatever advice you can offer."

"I think the best I can do is to go over where I've run into mistakes with men, and see if Clark falls into any of those categories."

"Thanks, Lucy. Anything you can think of will help."

"First, these secrets you talked about, is there anything that will get him - arrested?"

"No. In fact, it's more like - I don't know - community service."

"He lied about performing community service?"

"It's complicated. But it's not about what he does; it's the secrets and lying."

"Did he lie to take advantage of you?"

I have to think about that one for a second. Was Clark keeping the Superman secret to take advantage of me? No, if he wanted to do something like that it would have been easy.

"No. Clark wouldn't do anything like that."

"Did you hear what you just said?"

"What?"

"You're defending him. Either he's a lying rat or he's a nice guy that made a mistake. You need to decide which it is. This is where you have to be careful. It's easy to get this one wrong. I certainly have enough times."

Of course, Clark is a nice guy. He's Superman. And he's Smallville. And he said he loved me three times tonight. Four if you count the bit about my welfare being more important than his.

"Lois?"

"Sorry Lucy, my mind was wandering."

"You said that when you thought he was dead, you were all torn up."

"Yeah."

"Were you upset because you thought a friend had been killed? Or was there more to it?"

I have to think about this for a moment. I've known people that were killed. Some of them were even friends. "It's hard to say. Clark is my best friend. I've never had someone that close to me die before."

"This is tough, sis. You thought he was dead?"

"Yeah."

"So you felt bad. I get that. But was it because you were going to miss your friend or - was it like you had lost part of yourself?"

"I wish I knew. All I know for sure is that I've never felt so empty. Once the initial shock was past, I felt like I'd lost - everything that mattered."

"Lois, that's pretty powerful stuff." She pauses for a minute

as if trying to think of something else. "Okay, you've known him for nearly two years. If you forgive him, do you think he'll do anything like this again?"

"No, I don't think so. Learning this explained so much I hadn't understood before."

"What does your heart tell you?"

I guess this is what it all comes down to. "I want to be with him." As I say the words, it feels like warmth has come back to my soul.

"I think you have your answer. But Sis, make him grovel first."

I wish Lucy could see my smile. Hopefully she can hear it. "Don't worry, I will."

"And chocolate. Make sure he brings you lots of the good dark kind!"

"Lucy, thanks. You don't know how much this helped. I... I love you."

"I love you too, Lois. Now hang up and call Clark."

As soon as I hang up the phone, I start searching for the number. For a few minutes, I'm afraid that I lost the number for Clark's parents. How often do I need to call Smallville?

It's late, or more properly, early, but I have a feeling that no one is sleeping at the Kent home tonight. The phone only rings twice before I hear Martha's voice. "Hello?"

"Hi Martha, it's Lois."

"Lois, um, I heard the news about Clark being shot. Perry already called me."

"May I speak to Clark?"

A long silence. "I don't understand," Martha stutters.

He hasn't told them that I know. She's not nearly as good at this as Clark. "Martha, Clark was here earlier this evening. He was wearing - his uniform. He came by to tell me he was okay. When he told me about - his other job, it didn't go so well. He said I could reach him there."

"Lois, honey, I'm so glad he found the courage to tell you.

He's wanted to for so long. Please don't blame him too much for not telling you sooner. I'm afraid that Jonathan and I scared him while he was growing up."

"So is he there?"

"He's upstairs with his dad. He came in about ten minutes ago more upset than I've ever seen him. He was here earlier tonight and that time he was angry and worried about being shot in front of everyone. Then he left for a while and when he came back it was worse. I guess that must be when you saw him. When he got back here, it was like the life had gone out of him. He just trudged up to his room and closed the door. Jonathan's been up with him, but I haven't spoken to him yet. Did the two of you have a fight?"

"Sort of."

"About his - other job?"

"It was mostly about lying to me. But Martha, he never gave me a chance. I was hurt and angry but he took that and... I need to talk to him. Would you ask him to come back to my apartment?"

"Sure, Lois. Do you want me to send him right over?"

"Yes, please. We need to work out some things."

"Okay. I'll go upstairs and tell him you're waiting to talk to him."

"Thanks. Um, Martha, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, but I may not be able to answer."

"Who is - the person in the uniform?"

A long pause. "Martha?"

"I think you have to ask Clark that question."

"I intend to. But I've received a few shocks tonight and I'm trying to bring my world back into focus. I'd appreciate hearing your thoughts on this. What happened last year to cause Clark to suddenly decide to start using his abilities to help so much?"

"He'd been helping out for years. When he would get caught doing something - special, he'd just move on. He wanted to help

more but until he got to Metropolis, staying in one place wasn't that important. So the simple answer is that Clark - put on the uniform so that he could stay in Metropolis."

"I don't imagine you'd be willing to say why staying in Metropolis was important?"

"No." I can hear her smile. "I think you can guess, but that's a question you'll have to ask Clark."

"I will. Please tell him I'm waiting."

"Okay. Bye, dear."

"Goodbye."

She's such a sweetheart. Clark is *so* lucky to have parents like that.

I need to set the stage before he arrives. I have a plan but he owes me some hard truths.

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Part 5: Dawn

I'm hovering outside Lois's window for the second time tonight. Or should I call it skulking? I've only been here a few seconds, but what I saw when I arrived was enough to kill what hope I had.

When Mom came to my room and told me that Lois had called, I thought there might be a reason for some hope after all. I hadn't expected to hear from her before tomorrow, at the earliest. I tried to ask Mom what sort of mood Lois was in. She went all poker-faced on me and all I could get out of her was that Lois wasn't happy. I could have guessed that part.

Lois is sitting in her living room. She's pulled two chairs so that they're facing each other. The way the room is set up, it looks like this is going to be the interview. I made that offer because I felt that I owed her something, and I couldn't think of anything else. I never expected her to take me up on it. I drift over to her open window and go in. As my feet touch her floor, she continues to stare forward with that same serious expression that I saw from outside. If she hears me, she doesn't give a sign.

I try to be as upbeat as possible. "Hi, Lois."

She continues to stare at the empty chair. "Please come and sit down." Her voice is cold. It's not anger, just a very businesslike tone. She doesn't even look at me.

I can't bring myself to do this in the suit. I move away from the window and spin into my Clark clothes. Then I step over to the chair and sit down. I'm trying to smile as best I can. I'm failing.

She doesn't have a note pad. I'm not sure what that means. I've never seen her do a serious interview without taking notes. She looks up at me. I wish I could read that expression.

She takes a second to gather herself and says, "Tell me why I should believe anything you're going to say." Now I can see some emotion. She looks so hurt that I just want to crawl away.

"Because I have nothing left to hide." I wonder if it sounds as pathetic to her as it does to me.

"Everyone has secrets, Clark."

"Yes. I have the same kinds of personal secrets that other people do. I have my hopes and fears - and dreams. If that's what you plan to ask, then I guess I won't be able to keep my promise for this interview after all."

"Do you really think I'd ask personal questions like that for an interview?"

"I didn't think you'd be interviewing me for that story at all. I thought... It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does!" She still sounds hurt. Maybe my coming back tonight wasn't a good idea. But, after she called, I had no other choice but to come.

"I made that offer for an interview because I've hurt you, and I felt like I had to offer something to try to make up for what I've done. If it's what you want, I'll do my best to complete the interview. Honestly, I didn't think you would write a story to expose me and my parents."

"Who said I was?"

My head pops up. "What?"

"Clark, I'm not going to expose you."

I feel the stirrings of hope but I don't dare go there. "Then what's this about?"

"It's about trying to come to terms with who you are and what that means. It's about us."

I can't believe she just said that. Can there still be an us? "Lois, please tell me what I can do."

"You can be honest. This is just between you and me, but I want the most complete truth possible."

I feel the hope growing but I can't get ahead of myself. "When I told you about my identity, I intended that there would be no more lies, distortions, half-truths or anything else. Give me the chance to prove I can do that."

"Then tell me about what you've felt and why you've kept the Superman secret from me all this time." There is a cautious tenderness in her voice. For the first time tonight, I feel like I'm in the same room as my best friend.

I think for a few seconds. "Lois, it's a long story and - sort of complicated. Are you sure you want all of it?"

"Clark, I need to understand what you've been thinking. This is very important."

"Okay." I think for a moment how to present this part of the last year and a half. "Well, the whole point of Superman was to be able to use my abilities to help, while keeping the secret that Clark Kent was different from anyone else. When first I got the idea, I couldn't imagine telling anyone. Then, when I made my first appearance, I was just happy that you didn't recognize me. Then, a little later I think I would have told you but..."

"What, Clark?"

"I wanted you to like me as Clark, but you hardly noticed me. Do you remember Alan Morris? You know, the Invisible Man. As Clark, that's what I felt like during those first months. When you got so... I'm sorry Lois, but you wanted the truth. When you got so obsessed with Superman, it messed up my mind. When I look back, I can see I was sending all kinds of mixed signals. It was a mistake, but I couldn't help myself. It was the only way to get you to see me at all. When I was in the suit, you'd look at me that way that I wanted you to. But as Clark..."

"You aren't being fair!" There is an edge of anger but it's more defensive than attacking.

"I'm trying to be! You said you wanted me to tell you the truth about why I presented myself as two different people. Do you want my version of the truth, or do you just want me to say it's all my fault for being stupid?"

She takes a second to compose herself. "I'm a big girl. I want to know the truth as you saw it."

I do my best to smile. "Thank you, Lois. Please believe me when I say that the last thing I want to do is get you angry again tonight. But these are things that played a role in how we got here and... well, if you want the truth, they're important."

She actually manages a small smile. "I understand. We need to get these things out if we're going to have a future."

At that last phrase, I'm sure my heart skips. She's thinking about a future... for us! Okay, now it's my turn to compose myself. "Anyway, I know I didn't help matters, but as Superman I could help you and - hold you and I got to see that smile. As Clark, there was nothing like that, and it was too hard to resist. After a while it seemed like you were ready to give Clark a chance so I tried backing off as Superman in the hope that you'd become more interested in me as Clark. Unfortunately, you turned to Lex."

Lois jerks forward. "Clark! What did you expect? You never seemed that interested and Lex was..."

"I'm not blaming you. I wish I would have handled that differently almost as much as you do."

She had almost jumped out of her chair. After a second, she leans back and motions that I should continue.

"I was still floundering with what to do when Lex proposed. As you know, that was enough to scare me into telling you about my feelings."

"I'm not sure this is the time to go over that episode. "Lois, can we just say that I was very confused during that time and whatever else I was thinking, it didn't seem to be a good idea to tell you about my identity when you were about to marry Luthor."

"I think we can skip over that time - for now," she says. I don't think she wants to talk about that period either.

There is one thing from that time that I fear needs to be brought up. I steady myself and change forward. "Lois, I'd like to bring up one thing that happened during the time of your engagement to Lex. I know it's going to be painful but it is part of why I've kept the secret."

"Go ahead." She sounds as nervous as I feel.

"After the time in the park where, as Clark, I told you - how I feel, I came to you as Superman and you told me that you'd love me if I were an ordinary man. With what you know now, you can imagine how much that hurt. I'm not going to claim to be perfect or even right about a lot of the things I've done, but after that, I was convinced you'd never see Clark as anything but a coworker."

"Clark, I'm very sorry. I hope you can believe that." She sounds so sincere. How could I not forgive her?

"You don't need to apologize. You asked me to be as truthful as possible about why I've kept the secret from you. I only mention this because it was part of that bigger picture. Aside from the pain of that moment, it left me very confused and more convinced than ever that you had no interest in Clark Kent."

Lois looks more shaken than I expected. She asked for the truth. I don't think she expected it to sound like this.

"Lois, please believe that I'm not trying to make this your fault. When I came over, I was ready to take all the blame, but you sounded like you honestly wanted my perspective on all this. I've been very confused, but there were reasons for what I've done."

I see a small smile. "I believe you," she says. "This is important. Your side of this is way more complicated than I expected, but I'm glad you're telling me. So what's happened since - the Planet was rebuilt?"

"Well, since that time, it's been a question of how to move forward. Once I'd known you for a year, it meant that I'd been maintaining two identities for that long. I wasn't invisible to you anymore, and I started to think that maybe you'd come to see me, as Clark, in a different light. I've wanted to tell you, but I knew that whenever this time came, it might make you angry enough to tell me to - get out of your life. I guess I've been hoping that we could get close, maybe dating or something, and if it worked out, then I'd have the courage to tell you."

She's just sitting there. I wish she'd say something. She stands up and takes one step toward me.

"Clark, that day in front of the Planet, when you said that you didn't really love me... Why did you do that? From what you said here earlier tonight, that was a lie. And that had nothing to do with Superman." I hear something that I thought I'd never hear again. Could it be affection?

"Like I said, that day I was convinced that you weren't interested in a personal relationship with me as Clark. I was afraid that you wouldn't work with someone that was - in love with you. I wanted so much to be with you, even if it was only as your partner, that I panicked. I guess I was afraid again. Didn't I say that earlier also, that I've been afraid and that's caused me to make stupid mistakes?"

She reaches out and touches my cheek with her right hand. I can't describe how wonderful her touch is on my skin. "If you would have let me go first that day, I would have told you that I stopped the wedding because I realized I felt more - love - for

you...Clark...than I did for Lex, and I still do."

The next second is a blur and I'm standing, holding her. The feel of her in my arms is intoxicating. However, the best part of all is the realization that she's holding me as tightly as I am her. Earlier tonight I died. Now I feel born again. I don't know what the future will hold now that Clark Kent is dead, but with Lois, I'll survive.

Having your life handed back to you can be distracting. I completely lose track of time as I bask in the warmth of her embrace. I'm pulled from that euphoric bliss by her voice. "Clark, we're floating."

I open my eyes to discover Lois's ceiling just inches from the top of my head. "Lois, you've always done this to me. Do you want to go down?"

She turns her head and leans against my chest. "Not yet, just don't float us out the window."

I leaned my head slightly forward and kissed the top of her head. "Lois, I do love you. There's no way I can't tell you that now."

Even though we're still floating, she pulls back so I can see her face. She's been crying too. She sniffles a bit as she begins to speak. "What I discovered tonight, even before I knew you were alive, was that I still feel the way I did that day when you should have let me go first. I love you, Clark, not because you're Superman but because you're my best friend - and so much more."

Which reminds me that we have this small problem. "But Clark's dead."

I see a smug, happy smile that's so bright it should hurt. "That's another reason you need me. You're in a jam, and who here is the expert in those situations? I figured out how to solve that problem before I called your mom."

I never doubt for a second that if Lois says she has the solution to a little problem like my being dead, then the problem is solved. "So Clark Kent is still alive?"

"Yes. Although it would have been polite to have told your partner that Superman had provided you with a bullet-proof vest. That way, when the force of the bullets knocked you out, I wouldn't have been so upset."

It's so simple that I can't believe I didn't think of it myself. But genius is like that. Lois sees simple solutions where I see none at all. "Does that mean I can get a do-over on this evening where I show up at your door with that story?" I hope she can tell that I'm joking.

She fixes me with a serious, but not unpleasant stare. "Would you really want to?"

"And lose this? Lois, as painful as this evening has been, I'd do it a hundred times over to be where we are now."

"And where are we?" The form is a question but I can't help but hear it as an invitation.

I lean in so that my face is within inches of hers. "Together."

As the distance between our faces dwindles and we approach our first real kiss, I feel the first rays of dawn streaming through Lois's window. For a fleeting instant, I can't help but think that this truly is the first day of the rest of our lives. In less than a second, I feel Lois's lips on mine and my ability to think is lost in an explosion of joy.

THE END