

# The Game

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: In this diversion from the second-season episodes "A Bolt from the Blue," "Metallo" and "The Eyes Have It," Clark lets it slip to Lois that she knows his real identity -- and even works with her! So Lois challenges Superman that she'd be able to learn his true identity if he gave her a few little clues. How good at this game will she be?

A/N: First of all, my thanks to CarolM for BRing this. Secondly, this story is set during the three episodes 'A Bolt from the Blue', 'Metallo' and 'The Eyes Have It', and any lines 'borrowed' from these scripts belong to their respective writers, as do the plots, I just twisted them into something almost new. The plot bunny came to me while watching 'A Bolt from the Blue', and honestly expecting Clark to say... well, what I have him say in the following story, even though I knew that wasn't what he was going to say.

This story was originally posted on the fanfic message boards under the heading of 'The Game Trilogy', and each part was posted under its own title, but to make life easier I decided to archive it as one story. Any events that occurred on the show up to the third part, 'Final Score', that I haven't fiddled with in the following story happened as per canon, including the episodes 'Seasons Greedings' and 'Chi of Steel' which slot in around the episode 'Metallo' (just in case anyone has a need to know where/when things actually take place in relation to the show, but this information isn't really needed to understand the story). TOGoM was the episode shown before 'A Bolt from the Blue'.

Standard disclaimers apply.

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## Part One: The Game Begins

Lois was standing by her car, waiting as patiently as Lois could for Clark to return from his trip to the bathroom. She heard a familiar whooshing sound and the crunch of feet landing on gravel.

She paused, letting her anger rise slightly before confronting the man she knew had appeared at the other side of her car. It would be easier to confront the Man of Steel about his lies with adrenaline pumping through her veins. She turned around. Yes, he was there, arms folded across his chest in typical Superman stance, with almost a guilty look on his face, as if he already knew what she was going to say.

She strode around the car to confront him, her anger rising further with each step. "Did you lie to me?"

His expression didn't change; he looked like a little boy who'd just been caught with his hand in a cookie jar. "What makes you say that?"

Lois didn't have time for this. His very presence was calming, even when it was *him* she was mad at. "Either you know what I mean or you don't."

"I didn't lie."

"All right. Did you lead me to believe something that wasn't exactly true?"

"Yes."

Well, what had she expected? Him to deny it, to lie even more? He was Superman. She still couldn't quite believe that

he'd lied in the first place. Of course he was going to admit he'd misled her. And his doing it made her even less angry. She was just upset now.

"I wouldn't have expected that from you."

She walked away from him, and suddenly her anger returned. She turned round. "When I kept Kryptonite a secret it's because it's life-threatening. This is news."

He was angry. She could see it in his face. Angry, and perhaps a little scared.

Superman was almost shouting as he spat back at her, "Do you have any idea what would happen if this information became public knowledge? Everyone would want super powers. Everyone would think that they deserved super powers. I mean, if you found out what my real name was, would you print it? Sure, it's not life-threatening, not if you don't count that I wouldn't have a normal life any more, or that the world's criminals would suddenly make a beeline for my friends and family. Of course it *would* be news. People have been wondering about my life ever since I appeared on the Messenger shuttle, even you. Just because it isn't life-threatening, doesn't mean that it wouldn't be harmful to print it."

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Lois stared at him, her mouth open, unable to get any words out, and suddenly realisation dawned on Clark. He'd just told her that he wasn't really Superman, that he had a *normal* life, as an ordinary man. There was only one way she could look more shocked, some annoying little voice told him, and that's if you had also accidentally blurted out something more stupid such as 'would you write the headline: Clark Kent is Superman'?

"Lois," he took a step towards her, and she took one back, her arms wrapped around her body. This wasn't a good sign. "Please, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have . . ."

"What? Told me the truth. No, wait a minute, you haven't. You haven't just told the truth about who you really are, all you've done is admitted that you've been lying to me for over a year. I thought we were friends, I thought..." She shook her head, tears appearing in her eyes. "I almost thought that you had feelings for me."

"Lois."

"Maybe not love. I know that you've told me that you didn't want a relationship with me, but I thought that I was at least a really close friend of yours."

"You are." He moved forward to touch her, comfort her.

"But how can I be?" She dodged him again. "How can I be your friend, when you say Superman isn't who you really are?"

Clark shook his head. This was bad. This was really bad. Would telling her the truth now make it any better? He risked looking into her eyes for a split second. No, it would do no good. She at least needed to calm down first.

"I suppose," he swallowed, and tried again. "Lois, for a while now, I've been considering telling you the truth of who I really am. I started wondering whether to when Luthor..." He couldn't say 'proposed.' Only Clark knew before their engagement had been announced that he had asked her to marry him. It was possible that Clark would have told Superman, but right now he wanted to distance the connection. "...and you got engaged."

"Why? And why didn't you?" She was still mad, and upset, but ever curious.

Clark almost smiled. "Why? Because if I did, maybe you would have changed your mind about Luthor before the wedding. Why didn't I?" He could feel her eyes glaring at him. "Because it shouldn't have made any difference at all. Why have I still not told you after admitting this much?" He glanced at her. Yes, that question was about to be brought up. "Trust me when I say, it's complicated."

"Complicated." She gazed up at the heavens, as if looking for inspiration. "Complicated! What, you're married? Got five kids

and a mortgage? Have several different names you go by, not just two? Are a politician, a soldier, spy? How is it complicated?"

Clark gritted his teeth. He wasn't going to tell her, not just yet. He was going to wait until she could take the news better. He knew she was never going to take it well, but she could take it better than she would right now. "Not like that. I'm single, I'm renting, I only have one other name and my job isn't that any more high profile than yours."

"Job?" Lois appeared to mull that thought over for a second. "I'm surprised you manage to keep one. Don't you have to keep running off all the time?"

He fought the impulse to grin. Didn't she ever wonder why her partner kept doing that? He tried to change the subject.

"Look, Lois, I'm only asking you to think about it, talk it over with Clark."

"Does he know who you really are, or have you kept him in the dark about it as well?" Lois' voice sounded even more irate, it suddenly dawned on Clark that he was in danger of incurring her wrath twice over if he let her think that Clark had been keeping this from her.

"I haven't told him." Which, technically, was true enough. "I meant, talk to him about my powers being transferable. Right now, that's the big issue." She snorted. "That's the story everyone wants to know. People are wondering more about that than Superman's secret life right now. And about *that*, I need a little time before I can tell you that. Can't you try and understand?"

Lois nodded sharply, her body stiff as she fought to control her anger against him. "I can try. You can think, and I'll discuss with Clark what to print about how 'Resplendent Man' got his powers. But right now, Superman, right now I don't want to be anywhere near you. Do *you* understand *that*?"

"I think so. And if you stay out of trouble I won't need to be." Clark flew off before he had a chance to say any more. He had been trying to disarm the situation as best he could. Damn Lois Lane. Anyone else, *anyone* else, and he wouldn't have got so worked up. He wouldn't have blurted out that he wasn't really Superman, that he lived another life as a normal man. Anyone else, and it would have mattered a lot less to be told that he was really Clark Kent, and there were some people who he trusted enough that he would have told them. Not that he didn't trust Lois with that information. He couldn't see Lois writing an article that said that she'd been working closely with Superman all this time and not known it. That, at the very least, he could count on.

The trouble was, as he had told her, it was complicated. And really, getting more complicated. He should have just told her, like pulling off a Band-Aid, all in one go. He wasn't really Superman. He was Clark Kent.

He was Clark Kent, and he was only supposed to have left her for a few minutes. No-one should take that long visiting the little boy's room who didn't need serious medical attention. As he headed back to the institution, he picked out the sound of voices arguing. Below him was the railway line. A car was sitting on the line, as a train was hurtling towards it, and that silly little man was busy arguing with the driver. Clark headed towards the ground. At least he could vent some of his anger out towards Mr. Waldecker.

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Clark knocked on Lois' window, hoping that she wouldn't just close the curtains and ignore him.

She was sitting on the couch eating from a tub of chocolate ice cream as he knocked. Slowly she placed the tub on the floor and turned down the volume of the TV before standing up, walking over to the window, and opening it for him.

"What do you want?"

"To talk to you and to see how you are," he told her, referring to the earlier events of the day when Gretchen Kelly had locked her in a cage under a mausoleum.

Lois turned and walked back into her living room, leaving the window open so he could follow her. Clark was a little hesitant as he stepped down and walked across to her.

"I understand, I think," she began to say without looking at him, just staring blankly at the TV screen, "why people can only see you as Superman. I mean, look at all the trouble I've gotten into by being linked to you. It just wouldn't be safe for the people you're close to. But I won't lie to you; I'm hurt that you won't trust me with that information."

"Lois, it's not that I don't trust you with it. It's just hard for me to tell you, that's all."

She turned round to face him with a sad smile. "So don't. Just promise you will tell me when you're ready."

Clark stepped closer to her and touched her cheek. "I will. It's a promise I made to myself some time ago anyway."

She smiled again, a real smile this time. "Really?"

"Really. I've never wanted to hurt you, and at first, it never really crossed my mind that it would."

Lois eyed him suspiciously. "What are you talking about?"

Clark laughed. "Nothing, I suppose. At least nothing that'll make sense to you... yet."

"You are a strange one, Superman," she said, picking up her ice cream and heading towards the freezer.

"Am I?"

"Whoa," Lois grinned, "I just got the strangest feeling, almost like déjà-vu, only... not." She shut the freezer door and turned to face him. "Do you ever think you'll be able to tell me who you are?"

There was such hope in her face but at the same time Clark felt so unsure. Could he ever bring himself to tell her? The longer it went on, the harder it would be. Perhaps he'd never be ready.

Almost as if Lois sensed his uncertainty, she walked over to him, took his hand, and sat him down on the couch. "Listen to me, Superman. I believe you when you say you would like me to know who you are, and that you, for some reason I'm not aware of, would find it really tough to actually just say, 'Hey, Lois, guess what, I'm really so-and-so', so I have an idea."

"An idea?"

Lois laughed. "Just hear me out. What if, instead of you telling me, I just, figured it out?"

"What do you mean?"

"Come to the Planet tomorrow, as you, not Superman, and speak to me. You don't have to say something like 'guess who', just something so that I actually look at you, not just pass you in a corridor. I'm sure I'll recognise you, I mean, you're not wearing a mask or anything now, and Superman *is* your disguise, right?"

Clark fought a grin; why would she recognise him tomorrow when she didn't today? Still, if she was that eager to work it out, and it really was almost blindingly obvious that Clark was Superman, maybe she would. Maybe she would understand why he found it so hard to tell her. Maybe she would never speak to him again. That was just a risk he was now going to have to take. "OK, I will say something to you at the Planet, and I will give you a clue just to help you out a little."

"Superman, it's me, Lois. I won't need your help."

He laughed. "Lois, you *always* need my help. How do you think we became friends in the first place?"

Wait, why did he just ask her that? If she knew, she'd know the answer, and it wasn't that she was in a deadly scenario almost every week. She'd know it was because they worked together. Still, it was too late to take it back. Maybe when she worked it out, she'd have forgotten it. "Look, this is what my face looks like, but, normally, I do have something that kind of obscures it a little."

"Like what?"

He fought the smile that wanted to appear on his lips. "I thought you didn't need my help. I've got to go, but, I'll, uh, see

you tomorrow.”

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Lois watched as Superman flew out of her window. He had a normal life. He was single. Maybe she really could be with him after all. They could go to the cinema, have dinner in fancy restaurants, like a normal couple. Her and some man who was almost a stranger. Perhaps they could double date, Lois and Superman, Clark and Mayson. Jealousy flickered over Lois’ heart. No, she wouldn’t want that. She couldn’t bear to watch Clark with Mayson on a date, even if she was with Superman.

She remembered with some trepidation how she felt after Clark had been murdered. She pictured the double-date scene in her mind again, only this time she was the one dating Clark.

Strange, was it possible? Had Clark somehow overtaken Superman in her feelings? That couldn’t be right, but at the same time she knew it was. She could lose Superman if she had to, her life would go on, but if she lost Clark...

She glanced over at her phone. It was too late to call him, just to hear his voice and check that he was really alive again. She’d been calling him a lot more since the incident with Capone’s gang for that very reason. Just as after a couple of nights of them posing as a honeymooning couple, it had become necessary for her to say goodnight to him. How had that little worm managed to sneak himself into her life like that, and become such an essential part of it that she wasn’t sure she would be able to live without him?

She shook her head and brought herself back to her present conundrum.

Superman.

Just finding out who he really was didn’t mean that she was definitely going to date this mystery man. Besides, Clark had only once said that he felt more for her than friendship, and he had withdrawn it as soon as she was free from Lex. He didn’t want to be her boyfriend and maybe Superman wouldn’t, once she knew the truth.

Why didn’t Clark want to be her boyfriend? Was she really that repulsive? Or did he just not want to risk losing their friendship by suggesting it might be something more?

She got up and walked back over to the freezer and pulled out the ice cream. If that idiot hadn’t have fallen asleep the only time she’d felt brave enough to broach the subject with him, she wouldn’t be wondering all this now, and eating so much ice cream that her clothes were beginning to feel a little bit too snug for her liking. She flopped down on the couch and turned up the volume on her TV. Men. Life was a lot less complicated without them.

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She watched as Tad Waldecker walked over to the elevators, then Clark spoke to her. “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“How do you feel about not telling Perry everything we knew?”

Lois self-consciously tucked her hair behind her ear, avoiding eye contact with her partner. “Bad. I feel bad. But Superman was right.”

“Yeah.” Clark smiled broadly. “It’s one of his more irritating qualities.”

She looked at him, thoughts racing through her mind. “Do you think that that strange woman had Lex’s body all along?”

“I guess so.”

“What kind of person keeps a body frozen in a glass case?”

“Somebody who’s having a hard time getting a date?” he joked, as if trying to lighten the mood. “At least we know for sure that he is dead.”

“Absolutely. I saw everything go flatline.”

She watched her partner as he returned to his own desk. He had a good body. Lois mentally scolded herself for her wandering

mind. Why was she concentrating on Clark? She was supposed to be keeping an eye out for Superman. He said he’d come in and speak to her today. Had he already come in and spoken to her and she’d ignored him? It was quite possible, she thought sadly. She knew what she was like, even if she wouldn’t admit it to anyone else.

She sneaked another peek at her partner. She could use him as her eyes. He noticed everyone, especially attractive men who spoke to *her*. Maybe he did like her after all.

With an irritated groan, she forced herself to concentrate on her job.

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Clark looked over at Lois. That was the second time he had seen her looking at him. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Had she figured it out, or had he somehow irritated her again? There were still times when he managed to wind her up without ever working out how. He was just a master at annoying Lois Lane, whether trying to or not.

He watched her glance over at the elevators. Well, she hadn’t worked it out, because she definitely looked like she was hoping someone would burst through those doors and sweep her off her feet.

He fiddled with his glasses. Who was she imaging Superman would really be? No, he shouldn’t think about that, because it was only going to get him down when he compared what he imagined Lois was imagining with himself.

“Clark,” she called over to him, “you’re close to Superman, right?”

“You could say that,” he answered cautiously. Where was she going with this? Knowing, Lois, it could be anywhere.

“Well, I was just wondering...” she began.

What was she just wondering? Clark was watching her curiously. She couldn’t give much away; Clark would undoubtedly be hurt if he knew that his friend was keeping such a big secret from him. She had to be careful.

And now she had taken too long on this pause, still with no idea what she was going to ask him. “I was just thinking, you know, we don’t really know that much about him. We think we do, but when you get right down to it. We don’t know anything about him.”

Clark sighed. “I think there’s a very big possibility that you know more about Superman than you think.”

“What makes you say that?”

He seemed to think about it for a moment before answering.

“Knowing people isn’t knowing every little fact about them, it’s about knowing what’s in their heart. Once you know that, something silly like their favourite colour, food or TV show doesn’t seem that important.”

She smiled at him. Trust Clark to think like that. It was a lovely thought, but that wasn’t how she saw things. She wouldn’t feel like she knew Superman until she knew, well, probably not quite as much as she knew about Clark. She knew Clark better than she knew anyone.

“So, what do you think about this?”

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Lois mulled the events of the day over and over in her head. Not that there was much to mull over. After his initial jubilation over the Waldecker scoop, Perry had sent her and Clark out to some conference that was so dull she’d forgotten what it was about as soon as she stepped outside. Luckily for her, Clark seemed to be on the ball. Just as well, really. He hadn’t *actually* been there yesterday when all the action happened; he had just helped her write it up. It was only fair that he did most on the work on their next article.

That wasn’t what was really bothering her; she had no problems with Clark, but for some reason she couldn’t stop thinking about Superman.

When she had the idea of working out his true identity, she'd seen it as a kind of game. It would be something to brighten up her day when she saw Superman, knowing that she would be the only one who knew it was him, and they could laugh together at everyone else's ignorance. They would make silly jokes like him having to fly when he had to leave because he heard someone in trouble. Now it was just irritating. She'd have understood if some major disaster had happened somewhere and he hadn't been able to make it, but there hadn't been, and yet she still hadn't seen him.

There was a tap on her window. Cautiously, Lois walked over and opened it.

"Chicken out?" she asked.

"No," Superman replied as he stepped into her apartment, his cape flowing behind him in the evening breeze. "I was at the Planet today, and I spoke to you."

Lois felt her jaw drop to the ground. "I... I didn't notice you." Superman looked a little guilty at her reaction. "Perhaps I'm not what you were looking for. You were looking for someone new. I saw you keep glancing at the elevators."

She blinked as she fought to understand what he was telling her. "You work there? With me; at the Planet?"

"Yes."

"Oh." She laughed, though she had noticed the touch of hysteria that had crept in. "Well, you were right about that. I... hadn't expected you to work at the Planet." She narrowed her eyes at him. "Does Perry know about you?"

"That I'm Superman?" he asked, pointing to himself, his finger landing in the centre of the large 'S' that adorned his chest. Lois nodded. "If he does, he hasn't given me any hint of it."

Lois flopped down onto her sofa, disgusted with herself. "So that's why it's so hard for you to tell me, right? Because I really do know you. The other you. Which does make it really complicated. Superman, you know what, maybe we should just drop this. I think you were right. It's all just too weird."

There was a pause, and she looked at Superman. He appeared to be mulling things over and for a moment she thought that maybe he was about to tell her. Then his face fell, and he shook his head slightly. "We can let it go for now, if you'd like, Lois. So long as you'd still let me tell you when I'm ready."

"I don't know that I *want* to know now. Some guy I've probably said a cutting remark to in passing, because, let's face it, that's about the only conversation I have with most of my work colleagues, is really the man I've..." She blushed and glanced at him, before looking down at the floor. She really should find some time to do some cleaning soon; there was dirt everywhere. "But I know I'll keep wondering every time a man walks past my desk, so. Yeah, you can still tell me. Though I'll probably work it out in a couple of days."

Superman smiled sadly. "Yeah, Lois," he replied, before stepping out of the window and flying away into the night sky, leaving the reporter alone and wondering what she was destined to one day discover.

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### Part Two: Rule Change

Lois sat in her jeep in the Daily Planet's car park, her head in a whirl. This was beginning to happen too often for her liking. It was one thing for her to put herself in harm's way; she always seemed to get out of it, mainly due to Superman, but Clark...

She gripped the steering wheel as she forced herself not to cry. Clark wasn't supposed to get into trouble because for some reason Superman didn't come flying to his rescue when he did. Now Johnny Corbin had Clark and he was planning on killing him if Superman didn't show up. Every member of the Planet's staff knew this, which meant that Superman knew, so why hadn't he appeared? All she needed was the sight of his red cape and his deep voice saying 'I'll save Clark' and she'd know that

everything would be all right.

She rubbed her sleeve across her damp eyes and dragged a notepad out of her glove compartment. She knew it was stupid for her to leave these notes in her car, but it was the only place she could keep them where she knew she wouldn't spend hours poring over them. It was her investigation into Superman's true identity.

After Clark's kidnapping, she'd rung Perry when she got stuck in traffic as she drove to the police station. She'd expected to have to hound the police until they got off their butts, but luckily Henderson had been there and he'd immediately got the force looking for Superman and/or Clark.

Now she had to return to work. She wasn't sure why, precisely. She just had nowhere else to go, and Perry would want to know what was happening. She'd also spoken to Bobby Bigmouth and several of her other sources; they were also on the lookout. Bobby seemed particularly concerned. She very nearly asked him if he knew Superman's real identity, but as much as she liked Bobby, she couldn't trust him to keep quiet about it if he had no idea it existed. So now it was down to her, and she had very little time to work it out.

She'd made a list of every male Planet employee that loosely fitted Superman's description, crossing out those without anything that obscured any part of their face, and come up with nothing.

Lois stared at the list through those tears that were coming back. She couldn't give in to her emotions; she had to save Clark. She blinked them back and looked at the names and photos. No, none of them. But he'd *said* he worked at the Planet. He wouldn't lie about that, she was sure of it.

She flung the notes away in disgust. [OK,] she told herself, [calm down. Think about this logically. It isn't anyone on that list, which means it's someone *off* that list. Possibly someone who isn't currently in the office, because he hasn't appeared to save the day like normal. Someone tall, with dark hair and eyes. Someone with a beard or glasses or something. Someone I left off the list because I'd never think it was them. Because it's...]

"Nah." She had to say this part out loud. "No, Lois Lane, that is the most ridiculous idea you've ever had."

But was it? There were three men who she hadn't bothered even *excluding* from her list, because she would have known if one of them were Superman.

Wouldn't she?

In a flurry of dread-filled excitement she rummaged around in the glove compartment. There.

She pulled out a wodge of photos from the Planet's Christmas Party and selected one she had taken of the three of them. She tore it up, isolating their faces so she could study them closely. She took in a deep breath as she conducted her analysis. There was Perry White, but he was too old, too grey, and too, well, fat to be Superman. Jimmy Olsen. Closer, but still no, there was nothing obscuring any of his face, except the odd lock of hair. Clark Kent.

She stared at his face, her eyes welling with tears again. Superman *had* to save him. Look at the state of her; she could barely function without him. [Objective, be objective,] she told herself. Her hands shaking, she put it next to the photo of Superman she'd been using for her research.

Lois broke down again, letting the tears fall freely onto her lap, as she hunched over, the photos falling between her fingers and onto the car's floor. Complicated? Understatement!

But it didn't make sense. If Clark was Superman, then why was Johnny able to kidnap him at all?

For the very same reason that he was able to beat Superman up, she supposed, as her sobs began to subside. Not that she knew why that was.

Horror clutched at her as she thought of something. She'd

only seen one substance have that effect on Superman before: Kryptonite. If Clark was Superman, and Corbin had Kryptonite, then he could already be dead. Again.

Or, her cynicism returned briefly, perhaps not *again*. If he was Superman, then Clyde Barrows could never have killed him in the first place. Of course, he would have had to pretend to be dead or his secret would have been out and neither he nor his parents could have a normal life.

His parents.

Lois lifted her head, blinking as the light forced its way into her reddened eyes. They would know if she was right, but she couldn't very well ring and ask. Apart from the fact that she had no idea what their number was, they'd probably deny it even if it were true. They had seemed to like her, but that wouldn't matter when it came to protecting their son.

So it came down to this. She thought she'd worked out where Superman was but it wasn't very helpful. It was completely the opposite. Lois would have to leave him out of the equation when it came to rescuing Clark. She would have to do it alone, somehow.

There was still a chance she was wrong, she thought as she pulled out a bottle of water and splashed some on her face to remove any evidence of her tears, and Superman would show up. She wouldn't completely abandon hope. She'd just work on her own plan without him for now.

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Perry paced around the conference room, trying to remain calm. It wasn't the first time one of his reporters had found themselves in a life-threatening situation, and as long as Lois was still working there, he doubted it would be the last. It didn't make it any easier for him, though, but it was his job to maintain order here. Clark wouldn't be happy with him if he let the whole paper fall to pieces just because he'd gone missing.

"All right, no matter what the outcome this is the biggest page-one lead we had all year. And I wanna make sure all my bases are covered. Langdon, I want you and Taylor to cover police headquarters."

"Yes, chief. On it." Langdon replied.

"Robertson..." Perry heard movement in the conference room doorway. He glanced over. "Lois?"

She looked terrible, he thought, though typically Lois. Over the sorrow that she was trying not to acknowledge, there was a grim determination. When in doubt, Lois did her job, and her job was to save her partner and bag the story, though he knew well enough that the story was currently second in her thoughts, if it was in them at all.

"Did you hear from Superman?" he asked her.

She shook her head. "The whole city's out looking for him," she told him.

Perry tried not to let his face fall and decided to follow her lead. Concentrate on getting the job done. "All right, Robertson, cover city hall."

"Got it, chief."

"Find out what the mayor intends to do if Superman doesn't show."

"He'll show, Perry," Lois cut in indignantly, automatically sticking up for her hero. Then her strength fell. Of course he would. He wasn't really Clark; he wasn't in danger. She'd got it wrong. For the first time in her life, Lois wanted to be wrong. She couldn't lose Clark. "He has to."

"Lois, I'm worried about Clark too. And I want Superman to show up just as much as you do. But if he doesn't, we still got a newspaper to get out."

She wanted to yell at him, tell him that he could stuff his paper, but the calm numbness she had embraced as she forced herself to come up here had spread through her body, rendering her incapable of showing her emotions. Like always. Except in

front of Clark.

"Lois?" She whirled round to see her ashen-faced little sister stood at her desk. An immediate feeling of relief washed over her. Lucy was here. Lucy knew Johnny. Lucy knew where Johnny lived.

"Lucy." Lois rushed over to her, talking hurriedly. "Where have you been? Johnny kidnapped Clark. Where did he take him?"

"What? I don't know. When?"

"About an hour ago," Lois replied, fighting to keep the tremor out of her voice as Lucy sat down on her seat in shock. "You know, your boyfriend Johnny is not just a criminal."

"I know. He's not real. I know." She started to cry.

Lois felt terrible. She'd been so caught up in her own problems, she'd completely forgotten about what her sister must be going through. She stroked her hair, old unwanted memories returning. She had look out for her baby sister; she couldn't trust her parents to do it. She'd never been good at being the older sister. "Oh, Lucy."

"Lois."

She squeezed Lucy's shoulders in a brief hug. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"I am too. You were right, Lois. I can't believe my intuition about men can be so far off."

Lois grimaced. She knew that feeling. Right now, she knew it all too well. "Yeah, well, it's sort of a family trait."

"At least Lex Luthor was human. Johnny... I saw his chest. It was a piece of metal. It was hideous. I mean, they even branded him with a symbol."

"What kind of symbol?" Lois' reporter skills kicked in.

There was a pause while Lucy thought. "He called it a Mobius strip."

"A Mobius." What had Clark said before Johnny shoved him into the van? Something about an address for Infinity Laboratories. "Doesn't that look like the symbol for infinity?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Lois glanced at Lucy, then called out across the news room, the fire back in her voice. "Cindy, get me the address for Infinity Laboratories. Jimmy, get your camera."

"On my way, Lois." She heard his faint reply as she smiled down at Lucy. They had a lead, thanks to a double-helping of that Lane luck. She didn't need Superman. She could rescue Clark without him. Or she could rescue *him*. She still wasn't completely sure which.

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Lois closed her eyes as she played with the bubbles in the bathtub and listened to the music playing in the background. This was so nice. Everything was right again. Lucy was talking to her and not dating a criminal cyborg. Clark was safe and well. She could relax now.

Well, she could almost relax.

The events surrounding her partner's rescue still played in her head. Clark had broken his bonds, Lois was pretty sure of that. He'd just needed that extra bit of oomph from Jimmy. As soon as he was free, and she and Jimmy had run off, Superman had shown up. He would have to do an awful lot to convince her he wasn't Superman now. Something like stop running off at odd moments and actually be seen with the superhero.

It was strange how easily they had all accepted that the two of them were friends without ever having seen them together. Lois couldn't think of a single occasion when she had seen Clark *and* Superman.

She gathered a handful of bubbles in her palms and blew, giggling as they floated around her before settling back down into the bath. At least she'd never had to choose between them, and that whole death-threat thing had taken the sting out of the lie. She'd seen how torn up Superman had been about telling her his

real name. She understood now, of course telling her scared the living daylight out of him, and if she hadn't been so worried about him, she would have really overreacted when she worked it out.

Not that she was just going to forgive and forget that easily. Oh, no. She intended to make him squirm for lying to her like that for all this time.

What if she didn't tell him she knew? Clark always seemed pretty, well, jealous over her crush on Superman, which made no sense now that she knew the truth. After all, if he meant all those things he'd told her after Lex's proposal, then why had he turned her down as Superman?

Because he was Clark. He didn't see himself as Superman. He'd told her Superman was just a disguise. So, what better way to wind him up, than to throw herself at his alter-ego?

Would he ever believe her that she wanted Clark instead of Superman if she did that? She sighed as she stared at her fingers. They'd gone all wrinkly.

She stood up and got out of her bath, wrapping her robe around her. She'd barely finished tying the knot when a gust of wind announced Superman's entry into her apartment. He looked slightly embarrassed when he saw what she was wearing.

"I'm sorry. I guess I didn't realise how late it was."

Lois smiled at him. He looked so like Clark. How had she not seen it? Because she hadn't looked for it. "Well, it's not late. I was just taking an early bath."

"I wanted to apologise for having left so abruptly the other day."

She moved over to get closer to him. If she was going to seduce Superman to annoy Clark, she may as well start now. "You don't have to apologise. I mean, I guess I was a little worried. Actually, I was very worried about you."

"Lois--"

"You know," she placed her hands on his arms, and lightly ran them up to rest on his shoulders as she spoke, "I thought for a while there that I might never see you again."

He took her hands in his, pushing them away from him. "I'm--I'm sorry you had to go through that."

She glanced down to their hands, barely touching each other. "Lois, I want you to know that I think what you did for Clark showed incredible bravery."

"It was nothing." She shrugged it off. Of course, she'd forgotten that part of Superman's conduct. Always pushing her towards Clark, agreeing with Clark, coming over and telling her the exact same thing Clark had in the hope that she would listen to him in the suit. Why hadn't she seen through that?

"Was it?"

Lois thought about it. "I guess not. I guess there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him." [Oh, great start, Lane,] she mentally cursed herself. [Start your seduction of Superman to get back at Clark by practically admitting to Superman that you are in love with Clark. You can't even admit that to yourself, even now you know he's Superman.]

Lois saw Superman's face brighten slightly but he quickly set it back to neutral. "I think you two are very lucky to have each other."

He looked into her eyes for a moment. "Good night, Lois."

She watched as Superman flew out of her apartment. She turned her eyes away from the window, and they landed on her telephone on her bedside table. Was there a chance she was wrong?

She wandered over, and sat down on the bed, pulling the phone onto her lap as she lifted the receiver and dialled one of her best known numbers, the only one that didn't ring into a take-out restaurant. It didn't ring for long before she heard Clark's voice over the telephone.

"Hi, this is Clark. I'm not home right now, so please leave a

message after the beep and I will call you as soon as I can. Thanks."

She cradled the earpiece against her cheek with her shoulder as she heard the muffled beep. Lois sighed as she put the telephone back where it belonged, picked up a cushion, and curled up on her bed, placing her head on the soft satin cover, a smile playing on her lips.

[Oh, Clark. Of course you couldn't answer the phone, you were flying around the city. You've been lying to me ever since you met me, and now it's time for payback. You've just proved that you want me to want Clark, not Superman, by pushing me away and telling me how lucky Clark and I were to have each other. How obvious is that? But, my flying friend, the rules have changed and the game's still on. I'm gonna make you squirm, and make you wish you'd been honest with me from the start.]

Lois tossed the cushion away as she turned over to grab the little black bear Clark had won for her. She cradled it next to her chest as she fell asleep, dreaming of what she was planning to do to him.

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### Part Three: Final Score

Lois stared at the lights of Metropolis from the safety of Clark's arms. Ever so slightly, she pressed herself against his body and massaged her fingers against his neck. Somehow it was easier to act seductively around Superman since realising his true identity, and a lot more fun knowing that he had no idea she knew.

"Thanks, Superman."

"You're welcome, Lois."

She was irritated that he appeared to be showing no signs of discomfort at her attentions. That was when she noticed that something was wrong. Not that he normally reacted in any obvious way, but she could normally sense him tense up.

"I don't want you to think I'm complaining, I'm just curious. Why are you flying so slow?"

"Well, because I can't see. I can't see anything at all."

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Clark could sense Lois' relief as they flew closer to her apartment's window. He would be happier once they were in surroundings that were more familiar and easier to find his way around than the cold night air above the city. He never thought that he'd ever *want* to stop flying with Lois in his arms.

"Okay, now a little to the left. Now, down, just a few feet. No, you've gone too far. Up, up. A little bit more. Now. Now. Now."

His arms felt light as Lois pulled herself into her apartment. He heard her stumble slightly, then she spoke again. "Now you've gone a little bit past it, so come to your right. To your right a little bit, and then come straight in."

Clark followed her instructions and found himself crashing through an unopened window.

"Or to the left."

"Sorry," he apologised. This was so horrible. He hated this, this darkness. He knew Lois' apartment pretty well, but not as well as his apartment or the farm he grew up on. Even there, though, he'd probably feel just as disorientated as he did right now.

"No, no, it's my fault. I..." Lois rushed over to him. "Can I get you anything?" She took hold of his shoulders and manoeuvred him round to her sofa. "I just don't know what to do. I'm so sorry. Here. Here, sit down."

He did, not knowing what else to do.

"Is there anybody that I can call? Just tell me what to do to help you." Lois sat down beside him.

She didn't know what to do? Clark sure as hell didn't know what to do, and who could she call at this time of night? Even if he asked her to call his parents, after explaining why Superman

wanted the Kents to know, how could that help? He should just leave and go home, but how? He couldn't find his way. He could ask Lois to drive him to Clark's, but she'd want to know why he wanted to go there and she'd want to know why Clark wasn't there and why Superman had some keys to his apartment. So, how could she help?

"You could let me sleep on your couch tonight."

"OK. Fine. Are you hungry?"

"No." Clark heard her stop and turn around to look at him.

That had been a bit too harsh, but after everything else he'd had to endure that night, Lois' cooking would be the last straw.

"I'm not hungry. Thank you. And I'll try not to impose on you past tonight. It's probably temporary. And I'm sure everything will be fine by tomorrow." He stretched out his arm slightly, an almost unconscious movement, and sent her lamp smack onto the ground. He heard it shatter and he grimaced. He could just imagine the anger on Lois' face and the tirade that was about to come out of her mouth.

"Yeah, I'm sure you're absolutely right," she said, not sounding at all angry with him. Then she added softly, "and you're not imposing."

She sat back down beside him, taking his hands in hers. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm," he paused, biting his lip, "a little scared."

"I'll bet. Are you gonna be comfortable enough to sleep in that? I could run over to your place and pick up something better if you like."

Clark shifted uncomfortably. "Er, Lois. I thought we'd agree to drop that for now."

"Yeah, but..." She cut herself off. "If you're sure. I just couldn't see me being able to get to sleep in that suit."

He grinned, and they fell into silence. After a moment he felt Lois caressing his hands.

As Superman, Clark knew he should take his hands back, maintain his distance from her, but instead he gave her fingers a light squeeze, then let out a huge sigh. "Lois, what's gonna happen to me if this *is* permanent?"

"What do you mean?"

Clark paused but then decided to carry on anyway. He needed to voice these doubts, needed to hear her come up with crazy but reasonable solutions and voice her belief in him. That's what she had always done for him, and not always realising it.

"I could probably carry on my normal life. I know Braille. I can use that for my job, but what happens to Superman? A blind superhero's not going to be much use is it?" He couldn't keep the bitterness out of his voice.

Lois edged closer to him. "Listen to me. I know that we're going to sort this all out, that you will get your sight back. Don't ask me how, I just do. And even if it doesn't, most other blind people find that their other senses increase, they notice things through them instead of sight. You have an advantage in that. I know your hearing's super, what about the other senses?"

"Well, I suppose all my other senses are, as you put it, 'super'."

"There you are then." Lois grinned. She was right about the senses. He knew she was grinning by the tone of her voice. "It may well be that you could still be Superman, you might have to wait until you've got used to the blindness before you return to it, but that's the worst case scenario that *isn't* going to happen."

He chuckled. "You didn't sound too convinced when I said it."

"No," Lois admitted. "I guess it's tricky trying to keep positive without getting your hopes up."

"Yeah."

Lois reached up and stroked his hair, then she leant forward and gave him a quick peck on his cheek.

"Lois," he warned her, finally turning his face to her

direction. There hadn't really been much point in trying to look at her; all he would have done was look near her. Some part of him said he would look less blind and less disabled if he didn't try to focus on anything and keep his eyes averted from her.

"It was just a friendly kiss," she said breathily, the air from her words caressing his lips, she was so close.

Clark moved forward and placed a tentative kiss on her lips, nothing passionate, just something. She flung her arms around his neck, intensifying the kiss to new depths.

"Lois," he managed to say, without breaking the kiss.

"No," she interrupted, "just kiss me."

[Just kiss me.] Clark fought the impulse to raise his eyebrows. Not that she would have noticed; she was too involved in their kiss. Couldn't she tell how this kiss was affecting him? The suit wasn't designed to hide his body after all. He should pull away. He should order a cab to take him to his friend Clark's apartment. He could get away with that. He needed to be with a friend, and Clark was well known as one of Superman's best friends, and obviously it would be bad for the Man of Steel to be seen staying the night in Lois Lane's apartment, a woman frequently portrayed as his girlfriend, at least in the eyes of his enemies. It was a shame that he couldn't find the strength to leave her. It was a shame that he needed her so badly right now. Then she pulled away.

"Wow," she gasped, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have."

"No," Clark agreed, trying to appear unaffected in his voice, which resulted in it sounding flat, "we shouldn't have... Why did you stop?"

She giggled. "I stopped because you may not need oxygen, but I do."

"Oh, sorry."

"Don't be." Lois replied, moving herself onto his lap, nibbling his ear, moving around to kiss him on the mouth again. Then she pulled away again.

"You know," she said, hesitating. "This couch isn't *that* comfortable."

"No?"

"No." She paused slightly then pressed her body up against his. "But my bed is."

Was she really suggesting what he thought she was? He wasn't sure, and with Lois he felt he couldn't be sure without looking at the expression on her face, which he couldn't. Then she was kissing him again, pulling at his suit and standing up, bringing her with him. She was serious. This was bad; he should go. Now. But he couldn't. He didn't want to. He needed her, wanted her and she wanted him. But she didn't know he was Clark, this was just a terrible but wonderful idea.

"Don't you want to?" She breathed the question in his ear.

"I want to," he replied just as quietly, he even managed to keep the 'but' that was forming from spilling out. [Bad idea, Kent, this will all blow up in your face in the morning.]

"Good," she said, pulling him along with her, into her bedroom. He heard her turn off the lights as she went. That was finality, he realised. She didn't intend to return to the rest of her apartment until the morning.

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He was too scared to open his eyes. He could feel Lois' naked, sleeping body in his arms and more than anything he wanted to see her. He hadn't seen her last night while he'd been making love to her, but it had been night. Even with his sight, he wouldn't have seen that much.

Now it was early morning. He knew it was early because Lois' alarm hadn't gone off, and he knew it was morning because he could hear other people in the building getting up and there was an unmistakable smell of coffee in the air. Only in the morning did that many people make coffee at the same time.

Clark wanted to open his eyes and see the morning light

falling on the face of the woman he loved, nestled up against his chest, but he didn't want to open his eyes and find the world just as dark as it was with his eyes closed.

Oh, this was stupid. He was Superman. Opening his eyes had to be the least frightening things he'd ever have to face, so he should just do it.

Darkness.

Pitch black.

He fought back the tears that threaten to engulf him. Had he really thought that his vision would return like magic? God, Lois was right; he was amazingly naive. He raised his hand and stroked her silky hair. He could feel its texture beneath his fingers, feel where it stopped just above her shoulders and smell the perfume of her shampoo but he couldn't see its deep chestnut colour shining in the sunlight.

Very soon this would all be lost to him as well. As soon as she found out he was Clark, she'd never speak to him again. He wouldn't let him get close enough to her to use his other senses to 'see' her.

[Clark.]

The name echoed through his head. Why was it doing that, prodding at his memory, urging him to recall something? He knew his name was Clark. What was he missing?

[Oh, Clark!]

Wait a minute! Lois had groaned that out last night while they were making love!

He couldn't stop the laugh escaping his lips. He had always easily imagined that if Clark had ever managed to sleep with Lois, with or without telling him about his alter-ego, she would have called him 'Superman', but calling Superman 'Clark' in the heat of passion--now that he had not expected.

"What's so funny?" came Lois' croaky, sleep-filled and slightly annoyed voice from against his skin.

"Nothing."

"Yeah, right."

He felt cold air touch his skin as she lifted her head, and heard the rustle of bedding as she moved, probably to prop herself up so she could see his face. "Tell me."

Should he? Well, he might as well as not. His whole life was falling apart fast, why not just speed it up to get it all over and done with. "I was just remembering last night. You called me Clark."

"Oh."

For a moment he got no response, then she placed her head back on his bare chest. "Is that a problem? I mean, it is your name."

Her head vanished from his chest an instant later. "Isn't it?"

She knew? She had said it so calmly, like it wasn't a problem. Then sheer terror came into her voice when she asked him that last question. She had been convinced he *was* Clark when she had slept with him and the idea that he wasn't horrified her. That he hadn't expected either. She was just full of surprises, all of them pleasant, he thought as a warm glow spread through him. She wasn't going to freak out at learning she had slept with Clark; she'd wanted to sleep with *him*, not just Superman. She didn't like the idea that Superman might be someone else.

"Um, well, yeah. How long have you known, and why didn't you say something?"

Lois smiled as she traced patterns on her lover's chest. She adored that word now. First Clark had been her partner, then friend, then best friend, now lover. She felt like they had skipped a huge section. Surely he should have been her boyfriend, and possibly her husband, before he became her lover? Still, it couldn't be helped now.

"I worked it out when Corbin kidnapped you. Clark, you had no idea how terrified I was that something awful might happen to you, again, and I needed to discover Superman's identity, fast,

because he hadn't appeared to say that he'd meet Corbin and rescue you. I'd kind of tried, half-heartedly, to work it out without any success because I hadn't bothered including *you* in my research. Once the idea came into my head, everything just slotted into place and I was a little upset, so I decided to make you squirm by flirting a lot with Superman. I know how much that annoyed you, because you wanted me to want the real you--Clark, not Superman."

He kissed the flesh under her lips, sending a little ripple of heat through her body. "And I do. I did mean to tell you before we went this far."

"So did I." He hugged her closer to him. "Sorry."

"Me too. We're just as bad as each other, really, aren't we?"

He grinned. "You know, I have wondered how you would react to finding out millions of times. None of them were as pleasant as this."

"How's your eyesight?" she asked him after a pause.

She felt him tense beneath her. Realising it was a touchy subject, she got up and slid into her robe. "I'll make us some breakfast."

She looked over at him, then picked up his outfit off her bedroom floor. "Your suit's on the foot of the bed. If you need any help getting dressed, let me know."

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Lois bent down with her dustpan and brush to sweep up the remains of her vase. Deciding that the flowers were too badly battered to be saved, she disposed of them along with the china.

"Why don't I just sit at the table?" Then, after a pause.

"Lois?"

"Yes?"

"I know this is newsworthy, the fact that I'm--Superman's--blind. But--"

"Do you really think that little of me? Do you really think I'd tell anyone?" Lois asked him as she got a jug of orange juice from the fridge, the liquid rippling across the pitcher as she tried to not let her anger at his statement show.

"No, of course not." He sighed. "I trust you. I guess I'm just feeling paranoid and vulnerable right now. I didn't mean that I thought you'd... I--I don't know why I said it. My world's gone a little bit haywire. So's my thinking."

"What about Clark?" Lois asked idly as she poured out two glasses.

"Huh?"

"Well, I assume Superman's going to be lying low for a while, but what about Clark? What are you going to do?"

Clark let out another sigh. "I suppose Clark could be blind. I wear glasses anyway. Maybe it's a degenerative thing. I've never explained them. People have never asked why I wear them, just if I've ever considered contacts."

Lois smiled at him as she put the glasses on the table, amazed at how quickly she'd let his earlier statement slide. Suddenly going blind, it had to be confusing, and he knew well enough how she could get when there was a story to be had. "So, what? Do you want to come into work, or just ring Perry and tell him you're ill? That might be better. There's got to be some way of getting your vision back. I wouldn't go out and buy a white stick just yet."

She sat down and looked at him earnestly. "Is it any better? Can you see anything at all?"

She waggled her hand in front of his eyes.

"No. Lois, I was wondering if STAR Labs had anyone on staff who might be able to help me."

"Well, yeah, I'm sure they would. That's a good idea. They open at 9. I'll give them a call."

A moment later he spoke again. "Lois, when I said I liked my bacon crisp, I didn't mean..."

Lois, realising what he was hinting at, got up and rushed over



to the stove and frantically tried to fan down the flames that had appeared on the bacon. Clark walked over and solved the problem by placing his hand on the burning meat.

"Alternating current is deadlier than direct current," Lois told him. She had no idea why. The words hadn't even popped into her head; they just came out of her mouth.

"I have some Pop-Tarts," she quickly added, trying to cover her previous statement.

He smiled. "Pop-Tarts it is. You're right, I'll ring work and tell them that I need a few days sick leave, and hope that STAR Labs can help."

"OK." Lois rummaged in her cupboards for that elusive box. "But considering you're not exactly, well, normal, you'd better still be Superman when the person from STAR Labs comes. Just in case."

She slammed the cupboard door closed in frustration.

"Problem?"

"I can't find the Pop-Tarts."

Clark shrugged. "It's not a problem. I don't really need to eat, and you can grab something on your way to the office."

Lois couldn't help it; his words touched her and she needed to hug him. After she'd launched herself into his arms, she felt him gingerly place his arms around her. "You OK?"

She pulled away slightly, then reached up to give him a brief kiss on the lips. "Sure. It's just that you're still being you. Apart from that one little comment, you seem to be taking this all in your stride. I feel like it's just me that's falling apart."

He chuckled. "No, I'm falling apart. I'm just focusing on you so that I stop thinking about it."

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Lois put the phone down. A Dr. Bannerjee should already be on his way to her apartment to look at Clark. Well, to look at Superman, anyway. Now she needed to make a quick call home to fill 'Superman' in and she'd then be on her way to sit in on the appointment.

"Where is Clark?"

She looked up to see their boss walking over. She had thought that Clark was going to phone in sick. He obviously hadn't done so yet. She could tell Perry the truth, she supposed, that Clark was blind and waiting in her apartment for a doctor from STAR Labs but she decided to lie instead. *Superman* was the one in her apartment.

"I don't know, Perry."

"Are you his partner?"

"Yes. I'm his partner, not his keeper."

"Are you and Clark fighting again?"

She closed her eyes and played for mercy. She just wanted to get Clark back to normal; she didn't need this cross-examination about a work colleague.

"Clark and I don't fight, Perry. OK, so we *disagree* sometimes..."

He seemed prepared to let it go. "Well, it's not like Clark to be late without calling in..."

"Maybe he left early on his weekend date," Jimmy interrupted.

Lois avoided looking at him, in case she was blushing. She'd forgotten about his weekend away with Mayson, but considering what he'd been doing with her last night, she doubted that he'd go, even if he got his eyesight back.

Jimmy decided to fill the following silence. "If I had a babe like that Mayson Drake after me, I'd leave early."

[Ignore him.] Lois told herself as she dialled her own number. [Don't get annoyed, or jealous, he's not running off with Mayson Drake. And you can give him hell for letting Jimmy think that he has later.]

"You probably would, Jimmy," Perry stood up for the absent reporter, "but it's not Clark's style."

The phone rang out. Lois heard her own voice barking out forced pleasantries followed by a long tone.

"His name is Bannerjee," she said in a low voice. "I'll be there as soon as I can. I need a word."

"See if you can find him."

As she stood up, Lois realised that Perry's command had been aimed at her. Well, she would find him when she got home, but... "I have something else to do, Perry. I'm sure he'll turn up soon."

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There was something not quite right about the STAR Labs doctor but Clark decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. He'd recently come into contact with Dr. Bernard Klein, also from STAR Labs, a scientist interested in learning more about Superman and he was also decidedly strange. Clark hadn't quite made up his mind about Dr. Klein yet. But there was definitely something wrong with Bannerjee's assistant, who was clattering around Lois' apartment.

"You are completely without sight?" Bannerjee asked him.

"Yes."

"No colours, no shapes?"

"No."

"You cannot perceive the light that I am shining into your eyes at this instant?"

"No."

There was a click; Clark assumed that the examination was over.

"You understand your eyes are not like human eyes," Bannerjee said.

"Yes. A man shined a light into my eyes. A purplish light."

There was a loud noise and Clark turned his head in the direction of it. "What is Mr. Gomez doing, Dr. Bannerjee?"

"Ah, he is trying to find the facilities, Mr. Superman. Like you, Mr. Gomez is visually challenged, but he will be more careful now, isn't that correct, Mr. Gomez?"

"Yes, doctor," came a sullen response from somewhere in the apartment.

"So," Dr. Bannerjee continued, "a man shined a light into your eyes. Was this a deliberate attempt to blind you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Hmm. I do not know for certain what happened of course, how could I? But it is the case that ultraviolet light makes certain substances opaque, substances that are otherwise transparent. Clear glass, for instance. Perhaps it is the same with the Kryptonian eye."

Clark fought the impulse to roll his 'Kryptonian eyes'. This wasn't helping him see. He didn't care how his eyes worked, just so long as they did, and right now they didn't. "Can anything be done to restore my sight?"

Bannerjee seemed to ignore him, captivated by his own hypothesis. "It is an interesting theory, yes? Though the loss of sight is always tragic, the man who thought of this method of blinding you is clearly a genius. I would like to meet him."

"So would I," Clark muttered darkly.

"But, of course, your sight is more important than anything else, and I am apologising now for wandering down this path of theoretical science when clearly you are most disturbed about your condition."

Bannerjee was interrupted by the sound of a key in the door. Lois. Clark didn't see why Lois felt she had to be there but perhaps a dose of Mad Dog Lane was just what Bannerjee needed to actually get to the point. She opened the door.

"Superman!" Lois yelled. "It's the men from the park! The man who blinded you!"

Clark reacted instantly, grabbing Bannerjee. He heard other noises. He assumed that was Gomez going after Lois, and hopefully Lois bettering him.

"Lois?" he called. "Are you all right, Lois?"

More fight noises reached his ears, causing Clark to tighten his grip on the doctor. If the doctor's friend hurt Lois at all...

Then Bannerjee started to gasp. Clark realised he had him by the throat and he loosened his grip. That was all the leeway Bannerjee needed to struggle free. He heard two sets of footsteps running away from Lois' apartment.

"Lois?" he called. "Lois?"

"I'm fine, Clark," she replied. "I'm calling the police."

"No."

"No?"

Clark paused, then spoke. "Call Mayson Drake. I know you don't like her, but she's trustworthy, she's discreet, she's —"

"Unavailable," Lois finished for him.

He was confused. "Unavailable?"

"She's gone to the mountains for the weekend. With Clark."

"What?"

"So Jimmy thinks. I thought you were going to call in sick. Now Jimmy's convincing everyone that you and the discreet Ms. Drake have gone off for a long, dirty weekend."

"You could have told them where I was."

"No I couldn't. I can't tell people where Clark is. I can't even tell them where Superman is, which is who you are right now.

And if I tell Perry that Clark's blind and staying in my apartment, then somehow it gets out that Superman's been blinded and is staying in my apartment, he might put two and two together."

"So tell him I'm sick!"

"How do I know you're sick?"

Clark rubbed his forehead as his brain fought to keep up with Lois. "Well, why wouldn't you?"

"Maybe because I'm your partner, not your girlfriend."

"You're not my girlfriend?"

"No. Last night doesn't make me your girlfriend."

"OK then. Because you're my friend."

Clark found the phone thrust into his hands. "Call Perry and tell him you're at home, ill, then I'll call Mayson and ask for her help."

He lifted the handset. "And Lois? When things have calmed down a bit, can we talk about last night and what it means? I'm not convinced it doesn't make you my girlfriend."

"When the rest of the world thinks that you're spending this weekend *with* Mayson Drake, *nothing* you say or do makes me your girlfriend."

Lois was deadly serious. Clark knew that, but something in the tone of her voice made him think that she was smiling. He loved that woman.

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She looked under the couch Clark was holding up for her.

"Thanks, but there's nothing under there but dust bunnies..." Clark lowered it back to the floor. "It would help if I knew what I'm looking for. It must be something small, or he wouldn't have been looking under the chair."

"Think back two nights ago, back to when Dr. Faraday came in. Did he have anything in his hand?"

"I don't know. I've tried to remember, but I just don't." She looked around. "I guess that's it. There's nowhere else to look."

"I wish I could help."

"You did help. You lifted furniture. Really heavy furniture that hasn't been moved for eons. And now I know how much dust accumulates under really heavy furniture that never gets moved."

He smiled at her ramblings. "I mean I wish I could really help. If I could see, I could've searched this place in a few seconds."

Lois watched as Clark felt his way along to sit on the couch. She wanted to go and help him but she wondered whether his male pride would be hurt. "I don't know what to do. When you feel your way along the wall or along the furniture, should I offer

to help you, or should I let you do it yourself? I don't want to make you feel..."

"Helpless?" Clark asked as he finally sat down. "Dependent? Clumsy?"

"Well, yeah. Pretty much. I just feel so bad. I'm so sorry."

"Me too. I don't like this. I *do* feel helpless and dependent and clumsy. But we all have to play the hand we're dealt, Lois. If the blindness turns out to be permanent then I'll just have to figure out how to be the best blind man I can be, because I really do believe that we're put on this earth—or whatever planet we're put on—to do better than we think we can, to be kind and helpful and generous and forgiving."

"Oh Clark, cut the Superman bit, will you? You're not fooling anyone." She sat beside him and squeezed his hand. Then, in a gentler voice, she added, "You do know you can count on me, don't you?"

"Thank you, Lois."

She leant forward and gently kissed his lips before pulling away. She licked her lips, then leant forward to kiss him again when there was a knock on the door. She paused but didn't rush to answer it. Clark cocked his head to one side.

"It's my parents."

"Your parents? What are they doing here?"

"I called them, told them what had happened. They must have decided to come to Metropolis."

Lois rolled her eyes. "Yes, fine, but what are they doing *here*?"

"You could let them in and ask them."

"Oh!" She leapt up and opened the door for them. "Jonathan, Martha, come in."

"Hi, Lois," Martha greeted as they walked past her. "Oh, Superman. How are you? We're so sorry, we should've called. Clark wasn't home, so we thought... Well, I guess we didn't think."

"Mom." Clark smiled at her Oscar-winning performance. "It's OK, Lois knows. I should have told you."

Martha looked at Lois, who nodded. That seemed to be enough for Martha, who rushed forward and embraced Superman in a hug. "Oh, Clark."

Jonathan wasn't far behind her. "How are you, son?"

Lois noticed that Clark avoided answering his dad's question. "When I called you, I told you that you didn't have to come here, Mom."

"Oh, Clark. Honey, of course we're here. Your dad and I love you more than anything on earth."

Lois felt uncomfortable in the face of all this family love; it wasn't something she was used to. She looked over and found Jonathan watching her.

"How long have you known?"

"Oh," she replied. "I worked it out when Corbin kidnapped him. I knew that there had to be a good reason that Superman hadn't come to his rescue."

"Really?" Martha asked, surprised. "You've known that long?"

She nodded. "Yeah. I just only let him know I knew last night."

Martha led Clark back to the couch and made him sit down. "Now then, you two, what's the plan?"

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Lois had only popped out for some supplies. With Martha and Jonathan now also helping them out, she'd decided to go and get some actual food for them to eat. Unfortunately she'd been kidnapped on her little trip. On the plus side, however, she now knew from her captor how to cure Clark's blindness. At least, she did hypothetically.

"Where is it?" her capture asked as they entered the Daily Planet newsroom. Lois pointed at Clark's desk and they walked

over to it.

The doctor looked through his pen tray, the last place she'd seen the device they were looking for, but it wasn't there.

"You lied to me!"

"I did not! It was right there!"

"Enough! No more Mr. Nice Guy. Now I will extract it from you painfully. You will wish you had not lied. Munch!"

Lois glanced at the doctor's henchman, worried.

Suddenly the room went dark. Lois dropped to the floor as Munch lunged for her and she crawled to hide under a desk.

"Don't let her get away, Munch! Do you have her?"

"No, doctor."

"Do you have a flashlight?"

"No, doctor."

"She can't have gone far. Find her. You go that way, I'll go this way."

The pair stopped talking as she assumed they began their search for her. One set of footsteps started getting closer. She froze as a pair of legs came into view. Then a face grinned down at her.

"I've found her, doctor."

There was a strong gust of wind. Lois held onto a desk for dear life as the unnailed-down contents of her work place flew past her.

"I know you're here, Superman," the doctor called out into the gloom.

"Yes, Dr. Leit," Superman's voice replied. "I'm here. And I have the device. Lois, can you get to where I am?"

Deciding that both of them would be safer together, Lois made a dash for Clark's voice, just as Leit and Munch grabbed her. She struggled but they weren't about to let her go.

"Lois? Are you all right?" Clark sounded concerned.

"She's fine for now, Superman," Leit answered him. "And she'll stay fine if you'll roll the device this way, toward the sound of my voice."

Munch's grip on Lois tightened and she let out a whimper of pain.

"All right, doctor. Catch!"

A second later Lois heard the device fall on the hard floor but her captors still kept hold of her.

"Nice try, Superman. Munch, retrieve the device, please."

Munch did as he was bid and as soon as he let go Lois stomped down as hard as she could on Leit's foot. As he cried out in pain, she grabbed the light used to blind Clark from his jacket pocket and ran towards the superhero.

"Superman! Look this way!"

She shone the light into Clark's eyes, praying to whatever might be out there looking over them for it to work.

"Drop the device," he called out to Munch.

"No!" Leit yelled. "Give it to me! Give it to me!"

Lois watched as Leit lunged for the device, just as it exploded in a ball of light so bright she had to shield her eyes from it. When the light faded she opened them to see Leit and Munch fumbling around the newsroom. She glanced over at Clark, her eyes adjusting to the dim light coming in from the street. He was looking back at her, *right* back at her, smiling. She felt herself smile back at him.

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"Hi."

It was Monday morning after what had been easily one of the best and one of the worst weekends of Clark Kent's life. He'd been blinded and he'd made love with Lois. He hoped that the misunderstanding with Mayson had been cleared up, at least as far as the office was concerned. Martha had called Perry and told him that Clark was sick and that she and Jonathan were in Metropolis looking after him. Clark still hadn't had a chance to discuss things with Lois, however, since they'd been too busy

tying up the Leit story.

Just as he reached his friends who were standing together in the Daily Planet newsroom, they all walked away, muttering things that Clark could barely hear. Turning around he saw Mayson stood behind him. Mayson, ironically the one loose end Lois hadn't forced him to sort out.

He smiled uneasily at her. "Hi..."

"I want you to know I was really humiliated when you stood me up..."

Clark tried to interrupt, but Mayson carried on regardless.

"... and I still think it was a rotten thing for you to do, but I've met your parents now, and spent some time with them, and they are such wonderful people that I'm willing to assume that any son of theirs wouldn't do what you did and that this weekend was some kind of misunderstanding. I won't ask you for an explanation, and I won't ask you out again, but if *you* want to ask *me*, I probably won't say no."

She leaned forwards and planted a light kiss on his lips, and then walked off without giving him a chance to speak.

He glanced over at Lois. Her face was stone but he could tell from her eyes that Mayson's actions had upset her. Well, her actions and his inactions, he supposed.

"Mayson, wait!" he called as he raced over to the elevator.

She paused as the doors opened behind her.

"Yes?" she asked hopefully.

"I want to explain about this weekend..."

"Clark," she interrupted. "I don't want you to explain--"

"No," he spoke over her, glancing back at the newsroom as he did, pleased to see that everyone had appeared to find work to do and no-one was paying them any attention. He purposely didn't look to see if Lois was watching them. "Please, this time let me speak. You keep interrupting me and that only leads to misunderstanding. So, let me finish this time. First of all, I didn't agree to spend the weekend with you in the mountains, and if you'd let me speak when you asked me to go I would have said no."

Her face fell. "Oh."

"And I haven't been well. I couldn't have come even if I'd wanted to, but I am sorry that I didn't think to let you know that I was ill. I didn't want to leave you feeling stood up."

"But if I'd let you speak when I asked you out..." she trailed off and sighed. "Yeah."

"And I won't be asking you out in the future."

He saw her eyes flicker into the newsroom before returning to him. He was pretty sure he knew what she was looking at.

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because I'm going to ask Lois out."

"She might not say yes."

"You're right. But I think she might. I'm sorry, Mayson, but I don't want to unintentionally lead you on."

She nodded. "Well, I know my place. Actually, I think I always did, but I liked you so much that I knew that I had to at least try. Good luck with Lois. I hope you'll be happy."

Mayson turned around and pressed the button for the elevators again.

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Lois furiously hit the horn to declare her annoyance to the stationary traffic. Beside her, Clark laughed.

"What is that supposed to achieve?"

"It's supposed to make me feel better."

"Did it work?"

"Not as much as I was hoping. And why am I driving, anyway? Why didn't you fly us to this interview?"

"You didn't give me a chance to offer."

She thought about it. "I guess I didn't."

"Anyway, it might not be such a bad thing. At least this traffic jam is giving us time to talk."

“About what?”

“Us.”

She felt her breath catch. “I don’t know that there’s an us.”

“Could there be an us?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean... would you like to go on a date sometime?”

She glanced over at him. He looked equally eager and apprehensive. When she had thought that Superman was someone else, not Clark, she had begun to realise that she had stronger feelings for her friend than the superhero. But now she knew that there was no choice. She could have both.

She looked back at the road as the car in front began to move, feeling the start of a smile on her face. “Yeah, why not. Sometime.”

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