

# Inspector Big Mouth

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Summary: What happens when Inspector Henderson inadvertently lets Lois in on a secret?

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"Lane?" came the voice on the other end of the line. "It's Bill. Henderson." I glanced at the clock. It was six in the morning. Why was Bill Henderson calling me at six in the morning?

"I need you to drop out of sight," he added, and now I sat up in bed. I was dreaming still, clearly. Right? Either that or I had just landed in Bizarro world.

"You what?" I asked, glad this was a dream, since I knew I was nearly incoherent.

"There was a gas explosion on Clinton. No one got out alive. So we need an alibi for Kent. An explanation for where he was and why he won't be rushing right home to assess the damage. You can handle that, right? Until he gets back?"

I nodded my head, although nothing he was saying was making any sense.

"Lane?" he asked. "You there? You can cover for Clark until he gets back from Indonesia?"

"Uh huh," I said into the phone, more confused than before.

"Great. I gotta go deal with this mess." Click.

I looked around my room. Clearly I was still dreaming. So, I lay back down and closed my eyes, falling back into a dreamless sleep immediately.

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"Hey, Lois, have you seen CK?" Jimmy asked me as I got into the newsroom. "I have those pictures he wanted analyzed."

"He's not here yet?" I asked, surprised. Given my weird dreams last night, I had woken up feeling poorly rested and decided to sleep in, so I was late. It was nearly eleven now. Clark should be here.

"No. I haven't seen him all morning," Jimmy said, concern showing on his face.

"I'm sure he's fine, Jimmy." I tried to reassure him. "He's probably just meeting with a source."

"But what about the explosion on his block? Was his place one of the ones damaged?" Jimmy asked.

"The explosion?" I asked. ~There was a gas explosion on Clinton. No one got out alive.~ That was just a dream, right?

"The one on Clark's block," he repeated.

"No idea," I said, starting to worry that maybe I did. "I'm sure he's fine, Jimmy. Someone from the police department would have called if he was hurt."

"Right," Jimmy said, only sounding partly convinced.

I took a seat at my desk, glancing up at the television screens showing Superman at a rescue in Indonesia. ~You can cover for Clark until he gets back from Indonesia?~ It was just a coincidence that I dreamed Henderson called about Clark being

in Indonesia, right? I mean, why would Superman take Clark with him on a rescue? I stared at the television blankly for a moment before deciding. I was sure he was going to be annoyed at me for calling, or maybe amused that he was in my dreams, but just in case. He had sounded so serious in my dream.

"Forty-fifth precinct," someone answered my call. "How can I help you?"

I almost hung up. He was going to be so... well Henderson-like about this. I knew it. But just in case... "This is Lois Lane. Can I talk to Bill Henderson please?"

"Just a moment," she answered.

I stared up at the television for another moment while I waited. I should just hang up. Really. But what if...

"Lane, you're supposed to be lying low, not calling in!" he answered the phone.

"So you *did* call me this morning?" I asked, surprised.

"What?" he asked. "Of course I did. Where are you?"

"At the Planet!" I told him, annoyed. Where else would I be?

"Do you want the entire world to find out that Clark wasn't in his apartment last night?" he asked, sounding exasperated.

"Wasn't..." I started, trying to figure out where he was.

Henderson wouldn't even know if Superman had taken Clark to Indonesia to cover the earthquake so how did Henderson know that Clark was in Indonesia? If he was right, that was.

Just then, LNN showed a close-up of Superman. He looked tired and worn out. He looked... That rat fink! Low lying... "I need to go," I told Henderson, hanging up the phone.

I stared at the images of Superman while I seethed. I couldn't believe it. He was my partner and he hadn't told me. How could he keep something like this from me? What was he *thinking*?

Then I remembered what Henderson had said. I needed to lay low. If I wanted to be the person to expose Superman for who he really was, I needed to get out of here before someone else realized Clark Kent was missing.

I got up, grabbing my purse, when a voice stopped me in my tracks. "Lois, my dear. I see you are all ready."

All ready for what? I looked up. Oh, right. I was supposed to be having lunch with Lex today. "I'm sorry, Lex," I told him. "I can't. I completely forgot, but I'm not even supposed to be here right now. I need to..." I started to tell him. The truth that is. That I needed to go into hiding to protect Superman's secret. I mean, surely, if anyone could be trusted it would be Lex, right?

But two things stopped me. First, Lex did own LNN. I didn't think he'd steal my story, but he didn't get to be the third richest man in the world by sticking to the rules, right? More than that, though, was the look in his eyes. When I told him I couldn't make it, he seemed... angry almost. It was just a brief second, and I'm sure I just imagined it, but just in case...

"I can't be here. I'm supposed to be undercover, but I needed to come in and give Perry an update. Clark is waiting for me," I finished instead.

"Of course, Lois," he said, his voice light and understanding. Any trace of the anger I thought I had seen was gone now. "Can I give you a ride somewhere?"

"No," I shook my head. "It's better that you don't. Your limo is not exactly inconspicuous." I smiled at him. "But I'll call you next week and we can reschedule lunch?" I asked him.

"Of course, my dear," he said, a trace of annoyance clear again before he turned around and walked out of the newsroom.

"Wow! No one knows how to swagger quite like Lex Luther, right, Lois?" Jimmy asked as he passed my desk.

"Huh?" I asked, but then watched Lex walk into the elevator. He did have a bit of a swagger. How had I not noticed that before? "Yeah, I guess you're right," I said instead, then turned and headed into Perry's office, prepared to put on a performance.

"Perry, we're onto something big!" I exclaimed as I opened the door.

“What? Lois, I’m in the middle of something,” he said, pointing at the phone he held to his ear.

“Right. I’m out of here, anyway. I just wanted to let you know that Clark and I went undercover last night and the story is even bigger than we thought. Kerth-worthy for sure. Maybe even Pulitzer winning. So we’ll be out of contact for the next few days.”

As I had hoped for, Perry nodded at me, just trying to get me out of his office. I was nearly at the elevator when I heard him call my name, but I pretended I hadn’t heard and kept going.

“Now wait just a doggone minute here! This is my newsroom!” I heard him shouting as the elevator doors closed. Just to be sure, I reached into my purse and shut off my beeper.

I ran home and packed some clothes. My plan was to drive out of town and stay at a hotel for a few days. I’d probably never get the Planet to reimburse me for the stay, though, since it wasn’t really related to the Superman story.

Then, as I finished packing, I had a better idea. Picking up the phone, I bought my plane tickets. Last minute plane tickets were a fortune, even to Smallville Kansas, but the Planet would be sure to reimburse these. They were going to get the Planet the exclusive on Superman. And they’d get me the Pulitzer.

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I had thought about it on my way over. In general, it was easier to be honest than to lie. Particularly in a case like this. I planned to stay in Smallville until Superman came back from Indonesia, so there would be lots of opportunities for me to trip over a lie. On the other hand, it was possible that Superman was telepathic. The last thing I wanted was for him to be forewarned.

But after careful consideration I decided that it was unlikely Martha and Jonathan Kent were Kryptonian. First off, both struck me as being like Superman – if they had superpowers, they’d be out helping. But there also was the more obvious evidence. This revelation explained how Clark was able to eat like an eight year old and look the way he did. Jonathan, though, had a bit of a belly. And unless even Kryptonian’s had vision trouble as they got older, Martha wouldn’t need the reading glasses she’d used when I was here for the Trask thing if she was from Krypton.

I had no idea how these two farmers became “parents” of Superman, but I was fairly certain that was the case. They were not his real parents. And finding out how they became part of the back story he created when he created the alter-ego Clark Kent would be part of what I spent the next few days doing.

Their lack of superpowers, though, meant I could tell them immediately that I knew what a lying cheat their “son” was and not have to worry about them warning him before he came back from Indonesia.

As a result, I didn’t bother with the nice and sweet act when I got out of my rental car. I was angry, and there was no reason for Martha and Jonathan not to know it.

Martha was on the porch seconds after I slammed my car door. “Lois?” she asked from the porch. “Is everything okay?”

I felt some of the anger ebb away slightly at the sound of the concern in her voice. Surely she couldn’t fake that, could she? But then I remembered. He had lied to me. Everyday. For months now. How *could* he?

“No, everything is not okay!” I told her as I walked up the steps.

“What’s wrong, honey?” she asked me, opening the door and allowing me to go through before her.

“He lied to me!” I nearly shouted once I was in the kitchen.

“Martha?” came a voice from behind me, and when I turned around, there was Jonathan walking in the back door. “Lois?” he asked when he saw me. “Is everything all right?”

What was with these small town farmer types? I didn’t act concerned about people I barely knew. Martha Kent could show up sniveling at my door and I’d slam it in her face, not act as if I

cared about what had her upset.

“Who lied to you, honey?” Martha asked from behind me.

“Him,” I said, gesturing wildly at the radio in the corner, broadcasting the news of Superman in Indonesia. “Clark. Superman. Whatever his name is.”

Jonathan actually paled, and Martha sat down heavily on one of the kitchen chairs.

“And you know the worst part?” I asked, realizing as I said it that this is what made it sting so much. “He didn’t lie to everyone. You know who he is. Both of you. He even told Inspector Henderson.”

Martha shook her head in confusion. “Who’s Inspector Henderson?”

“An inspector in Metropolis,” I answered, wondering if Martha was stupider than she looked.

“He told him?” Jonathan asked, taking a seat at the table next to Martha.

“Are you sure?” Martha asked. “He never said anything to us about it.”

Rather than answering them, I moved to the phone. Let him tell them directly. They almost looked as shell shocked as I was. Not that that was fair – they knew!

The phone on the wall was one of the cordless kinds with a speakerphone attached, and I used that to make my call.

“Henderson here,” came the voice on the line after I got connected.

“Henderson, it’s Lois,” I told him. “I’m here with Clark’s parents.”

“Is he okay?” he cut in. What was with everyone’s concern today?

“Yes,” I said, trying to keep the exasperation out of my voice. “When did Clark tell you he moonlit in tights?”

“Lane, what are you up to?” he asked, suspicious.

“Nothing,” I told him, as innocent as the day I was born. I hadn’t started telling police investigators willy nilly, and not bothered to tell the people who were pretending to have raised me. “Apparently Clark didn’t tell the Kents he told you.”

“He didn’t,” Henderson said, sounding tired and vaguely annoyed. “He doesn’t even know I know. And by the way, Lane, for an award-winning journalist, you’re not so on the ball today. Maybe next time you decide to ask a question about Clark’s other job, you should ask in skywriting. I’m on speaker phone. My door could have been open, you know. You could have just announced it to half of the 45th precinct.”

I blushed, realizing he was right.

“How did you figure it out?” Jonathan asked, sounding panicked. I looked at him closely. He wasn’t about to do something stupid like have a heart attack, was he?

“When Clark was found after the Nightfall thing. He was working with our staff psychiatrist to get his memory back, and early on we were listening in to see if he had any information we could use find Superman. Some of the stuff he remembered... well, I don’t think anyone else caught on, but it made me wonder. Since then it’s just been obvious.”

“So other people at the station could know, too?” Martha asked, the worry clear in her voice. I almost felt badly for them. Clearly they didn’t want others to know. Why they cared, I didn’t know. Really, it wasn’t like Superman was really their son.

“Maybe,” Henderson sighed. “But I don’t think so. It wasn’t like the things that he said were obvious. I don’t think any of the cops here have dealt with Clark as much as I have, and well, honestly, I didn’t get to be Inspector because I could yodel.”

Martha nodded, but I could see she was still worried. Not that it mattered. In a few days everyone at the precinct would know. Not that I planned to let the Kents in on that yet. I didn’t imagine I’d have to do that much digging as long as they didn’t know I planned to print everything they told me.

“Thank you for your time, Inspector,” Jonathan said.  
 “No problem. Listen, when Clark gets back, let him know how impressed we are all. He looks beat out there,” Henderson said before hanging up.

Martha and Jonathan looked a little lighter as I hung up our end of the phone call.

“So how did you find out?” Jonathan asked, and surprisingly, he didn’t seem nearly as upset that I knew Clark’s secret.

“Henderson told me. I guess he just assumed I knew,” I told them. I explained about the gas explosion and how Clark needed an alibi.

“So you came here to be sure you’d be out of touch until Clark could return?” Martha asked. And for an instant, I felt badly. She clearly was thinking of what I good friend I was being to him. She had no idea that I was only keeping this secret so I could win the Pulitzer for it.

“Yes,” I finally said.

“I understand that you’re upset he didn’t tell you, but I’m glad you’re being such a good friend to him despite that,” she said. I still didn’t get it. Why did she care about him so much?

“He wanted to tell you,” Jonathan added. “He just...”

“Well, he doesn’t trust Lex Luthor,” Martha picked up when Jonathan trailed off.

“Plus, he wants you to love him for himself. Not the cape,” Jonathan said.

My eyes bugged out a bit at that. He wants me to love him? Had he taken complete leave of his senses? And what did Jonathan mean “for himself”? Who was he if he wasn’t the man with the cape? I mean, the whole Clark Kent history was clearly fabricated. Superman had only arrived on Earth a few months ago.

Martha gave Jonathan a pointed look. “Sorry,” he said. “I’m not the best secret keeper.”

“Except for the one where the man pretending to be your son is actually an alien from outer space,” I pointed out.

“Pretending to be...?” Jonathan asked, clearly confused, although I wasn’t sure what he was confused about.

Martha shook her head at him. “I think it’s time for dinner. Lois, I assume you’ll be staying here until Clark gets back?”

I nodded my head as I watched the Kents with interest. They were amazingly well engaged in this lie they lived.

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“So,” Martha said as we finished dinner and were sitting around the table eating pie. “You’re not really here to provide an alibi for Clark, are you?”

“What?” Jonathan asked, his fork falling onto his plate.

“It’s pretty clear,” Martha said. “Lois feels lied to. Well, she was lied to, but she feels betrayed. She doesn’t trust anything she’s ever known about Clark. You’re here to learn who Superman really is. And since you don’t believe that’s Clark, I can only assume you plan to use that to write a story.”

I started to deny it, but then I blushed. This was my biggest weakness. I was a master liar – I could think things up faster than the average person could tell the truth. But I never expected to be sussed out. It always caught me by surprise and there was no recovering from it.

“It’s okay, Lois,” Martha smiled at me. “We’ll help you.”

“You’ll help me?” I asked, surprised.

“Of course,” Martha replied.

“We will?” Jonathan looked a bit peaked again.

“Yes,” Martha said. “Lois wants to know all about Superman’s history. She came here hoping to learn about how he knows us, what our story is. So, we’ll share it with her.”

“We will?” Jonathan asked again.

“Yes, we will,” Martha said with an air of finality. Was she up to something? I wanted to believe she was, it was the only reasonable explanation. But the reporter in me didn’t believe it.

She just seemed too... honest, I guess. Too straightforward. If Martha Kent had a disingenuous bone in her body, she was a better liar than I was.

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I spent the night in Superman’s room. It was well decorated to keep up with the pretense that a normal farm boy had lived here. There were the fake trophies from playing high school football I had noticed last time, and even yearbooks. Curious, I picked one up. They really went all out – there was a picture of a boy that did look a bit like Superman only younger, bearing the name Clark Kent.

I wondered, for a moment anyway. What if Kryptonians didn’t really look human, but could take on any shape they wanted? What if Superman came here and found the Kents? Maybe he even picked them because they had a son who had died. Then he just sort of assumed the boy’s identity, taking on a form that looked like him.

I had to admit though, that that seemed improbable. I wasn’t really sure why, except for the fact that Clark Kent looked nothing like his parents. In all likelihood, it was just a random kid. Not sure if they stole his picture or he had modeled for it, but whatever, it made a very realistic yearbook.

Of course, it was signed by just about every person in the school. Or so it seemed anyway. Well, if you’re going to fake it, you might as well pretend to be popular, right?

I read one of the notes – one with frilly, girly handwriting.

Dearest Clarkums,

I’m going to miss you so much next year! I can’t believe we didn’t both get in to any of the same schools.

I’ll think about you and write to you every day, though.

The last year and a half has been like a dream. I should have said yes the first time you asked. I should have looked past how shy you were. But, whatever, at least once you joined the football team, I noticed you.

I love you oodles and oodles, Clarkie.

With all my heart, Lana

Ick! Lana sounded like a real drag.

I put the yearbook down, looking around some more, although not sure what I was looking for.

Then I wondered, did Superman keep a journal? Would he keep it here if he did?

I imagined for second what one of the entries might be like if he did.

Dear Diary,

Stopped another kidnapping today. Of course, I had to leave Lois alone to do it, but it’s not like she ever notices anything. She’s the stupidest woman alive – I mean she works with Clark Kent by day, Superman visits her at night, and she never realizes they are one and the same? Even for a human, she’s pretty dense.

I did have to help her write an article, you know, to keep up the Clark pretense. I guess I’m lucky that’s easy for me, so I don’t need to think about it and can focus on Superman things.

One day, I’ll find a way to live without money at all, and then I can give up this dual identity thing, but for now, it’s sort of fun seeing how many people I can lie to and fool.

For now, Superman

Did he want to give up the Clark Kent thing? I didn’t really know. I guess that was one of the things I’d need to learn from Martha.

And once I wrote the Pulitzer winning exposé on him, maybe he’d realize I wasn’t so stupid after all.

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She started in pretty much the moment I awoke the next day. Not surprisingly, since they got up at some ridiculous hour, when I came downstairs Jonathan was out in the fields and Martha was doing something in the living room. I’m not sure what, but I was pretty much useless before my morning coffee.

“Coffee is in the pot, dear,” Martha called out as she heard me come down the stairs. “And there are some pancakes being kept warm for you in the oven.”

I grumbled a bit, which I hoped Martha took as a thank you, but really meant “I hate being stuck here in the middle of Happyville, U.S.A. Aren’t you people ever less than perfectly polite?”

She came in a few moments later and took a seat.

“Thank you,” I said, feeling slightly better now that I had some coffee. “The pancakes are delicious.”

“They’re Clark’s favorite breakfast food as well,” she told me.

I nodded my head. Still with the charade – even though she now knew what I was up to.

“Go ahead, honey,” she said. “Ask.”

“Ask what?” I asked her, confused.

“Whatever it is you’re thinking about. You’re clearly questioning something I said. Is it that those pancakes are Clark’s favorite? Why would I lie about that?”

“He doesn’t even need to eat. He just does it to fool the rest of us,” I pointed out.

Martha sighed. “I guess I can understand how you could see it that way. But that’s not how I see it.”

Of course she didn’t. I tried to keep the annoyance out of my voice as I replied, “Well, forgive me for any disrespect, but since Superman has spent almost no time in Smallville, I think I’ll continue believing my view.”

Martha nodded. “This is true. But Superman doesn’t eat. *Clark* does. And he’s spent a lot more time in Smallville than in Metropolis.”

“That doesn’t make any sense!” I exploded. “If you agree that Superman has spent almost no time here, than how could Clark have spent more time here than in Metropolis?”

“Because while Superman didn’t exist until a few months ago, Clark Kent grew up here,” Martha dropped this bombshell quite calmly.

I thought this over quickly. Superman had been here all his life. He’d been hiding in plain sight for years. This was perfect. It was going to make the best story ever!

“Superman has been here for years?” I confirmed.

“No,” Martha replied. “Clark Kent has.”

“It’s the same thing!” I said, dismissively, getting annoyed at her continual corrections.

“To you perhaps. But not to me or Jonathan. And certainly not to Clark.”

“Whatever,” I said, getting up to wash my plate.

“If you hope to come away from here with a real understanding about Superman, enough to write the definitive exposé or whatever it is you’re hoping, you’re going to have to understand this, Lois,” Martha said with a tone that reminded me a bit of Perry when he was trying to improve my writing. “Clark and Superman may inhabit the same body, they may look alike, they may even both be the only known Kryptonian on Earth, but they are not the same thing.

“Now, if you are interested in learning more about Clark Kent, I’m happy to help you. If you want to learn more about Superman... well, as you said, you’ve spent more time with him than I have. I think you’ll find, though, that all you don’t know about Superman is Clark Kent.”

Feeling properly chagrined, I didn’t say anything.

When I didn’t say anything more, but took a seat across from her, she took a deep breath. “Clark Kent arrived here in Smallville when he was about three months old. Well, I guess he wasn’t Clark Kent then. He was Kal-El.”

Three months old? He was a baby!

“Jonathan and I found him out in Shuster’s Field. We saw his ship fall out of the sky. We couldn’t have children, and as soon as

I held him in my arms, I knew he belonged there.” There were tears in her eyes, and I realized at that moment that it wasn’t an act for them. Superman might be a lying fink, but Martha and Jonathan Kent were good, honest people.

“We took him home, concocted a story about him being one of my cousins and got paperwork filled out.”

“Who, or what, did you think he was?” I asked her.

“We didn’t know. We had ideas, of course. We thought maybe it was some sort of sick practical joke. Someone who decided to play a cruel joke on their child and see how far they could go in a makeshift spaceship. But the ship seemed too well built for that. We thought he might be an alien, but I don’t think we really believed that was likely back then. Mostly, we thought he was probably the product of some government thing. Either ours or someone else’s, most likely Soviet. Some poor kid they’d been doing science experiments on. We weren’t sure what they were doing and if the tests were really on him or on the ship, but whichever, we got rid of the ship and made a home for him here.

“We didn’t want him to have to go back to wherever he came from,” Martha said. “And we raised him like our own.” She got up with that. “If you want to come into the living room, you can see pictures of him as a baby and a little boy.”

“Did he do anything... super yet?” I asked as I went. “I mean could you tell he had these powers?”

“No. Clark was a normal little boy until he was a teenager. He was never sick, but we didn’t really notice that at all aside from the perfect attendance certificates he’d get from school.”

We spent the rest of the afternoon with Martha telling me stories from when Clark was a boy. They were interesting, they’d make nice background for my article, but they weren’t the meat yet. He had no powers and he seemed sweet. Nothing like the lying cheat he turned out to be.

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“It’s getting hot out there!” Jonathan said as he came inside. Martha and I were in the kitchen – she was preparing lunch for Jonathan.

“The news reports sound bad. It doesn’t sound like Clark will be back before tomorrow,” Martha informed him.

“How’s he look?” Jonathan asked.

“Tired,” she said. “Like he could use a good night’s sleep.”

Jonathan shook his head. “I’m proud of him, but... sometimes I worry that this is too much for him.”

“Too much? I thought he was basically invincible,” I said from my place at the table.

Jonathan looked up at me in surprise. “Sorry. I thought you’d be off snooping in Clark’s room or something. I didn’t notice you here.”

“I’ve been giving her information this morning. She can save her snooping for later,” Martha said. As opposed to Jonathan, she didn’t sound quite so annoyed when she said ‘snooping’, more matter of fact.

“So is he invincible or not?” I asked, not caring to dwell on the snooping charge. I had done some already anyway, and planned to do more.

“Mostly,” Jonathan confirmed. “But that isn’t what I meant anyway. He can handle it physically, but he’s not nearly as tough inside as he is outside. It’s hard on him to see all this death.”

I scoffed at this, but didn’t say anything. Nice try, Jonathan, but it’s too late. You can give up the game.

Martha looked up at me. “I told you earlier, what you don’t know about Superman is Clark. Don’t you think it would be hard on Clark to see so much death and crime?”

I shrugged. “I would have, but that was when I thought I knew Clark. When I thought he was real.”

Now Martha looked annoyed. “The stories I told you this morning didn’t convince you that Clark is real? He grew up here, Lois. No super powers, nothing special about him at all aside

from being a foundling. He is as real as you are.”

I nodded. I understood why she wanted to believe that. I imagine I would to if I had raised him. But that wasn't who he was anymore. Now he did have superpowers, and he spent most of his time lying. But it didn't seem worth arguing about – I wasn't going to convince her and I wasn't even sure I wanted to.

I decided to stay quiet, give Martha some time to cool off a little. I was sure she would give me more information for my story, but if I pushed her, she'd stay focused on the boring parts from when he was a kid and had no powers.

Martha finished preparing lunch shortly after that and we all sat around the table. “So, when did his powers first come in?” I asked hesitantly.

“We don't know,” Jonathan said, sharing a smile and a knowing look with Martha. “Clark just started noticing he was stronger and stronger.”

“Until one day we found him lifting the tractor in the field,” Martha added, laughing.

“He was so scared when he saw us,” Jonathan took over the telling, chuckling. “I think he thought we were going to make him leave the farm or something.”

“Why would he think that?” I asked, confused.

For a moment, Martha's annoyance with me came to the fore again, but then she shook her head and seemed composed. “Try to imagine it, Lois. Really imagine it. Please, just for a second, forget all that you know and feel towards Clark right now.

Imagine being a teenager – one whose parents left you alone with no way to find them as a baby, no way to know who they are, and then one day you realize you aren't anything like anybody you've ever met. You can lift things that no normal man can lift. You can't get sick. You can hear things acres away.

“Do you really think your first thought is going to be excitement?” she asked, pinning me with her eyes.

I started to tell her yes – I mean what else would it be, but then I did what she asked, and tried to imagine it. “I guess it would be scary,” I admitted. “You'd wonder what was wrong with you.”

“Right,” Jonathan said, sober now. “And if you're a freak, and if anyone you know will want anything to do with you.”

I nodded. I could sort of understand that. Of course, by the time Clark became Superman things were different. He knew better. But I could see how when he was a teenager he might have been worried for a little while.

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Martha spent the afternoon telling me more stories about Clark from when he was a teenager. These were more interesting stories about his powers coming in and dealing with them. Jonathan added some more information when he came in from the field at the end of the day.

By the time they headed to bed for the night, I thought I had learned all I could from Martha Kent. I poked around the living room for a little while, but after looking at more pictures of Clark growing up, headed to bed myself.

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“Oh, honey. It's not your fault,” I heard Martha saying as I came down the stairs the following day.

“Two hundred people, Mom. Two hundred people died,” Clark replied.

He was back. I was almost surprised that he had called Martha Mom even when no one else was around, but then I realized that she had raised him. He might not be Clark Kent anymore, but she was still his mother.

“And how many people lived because you were there?” she asked him.

“Some of them were babies,” he added.

“And how many babies did you save?” she shot back.

I had paused at the bottom of the stairs, watching their verbal

volleyball. He had clearly showered since he got home, but not slept. He looked worn out still, but clean. Plus he was wearing a t-shirt and sweatpants, rather than the suit. He also looked... haunted. Yeah, haunted. By the deaths? I wasn't sure.

I gasped, it was a slight sound, and no one but a super-powered Kryptonian could have heard me. Suddenly, all I knew about Superman came back to me. Forget what I knew about Clark, since I wasn't sure how much of that was true. Since I had figured it out, though, I had been incapable of thinking of Clark as any more than a lying fink. I forgot. He wasn't all bad. Superman cared about people. Even if he did lie to them.

He looked up at my gasp. “Lois?” he asked, confused.

“Hi,” I said, suddenly shy.

“I didn't realize you were here,” he said, sounding confused.

“Of course you didn't,” Martha pointed out. “I hadn't had a chance to tell you yet.”

“Yeah, it's just...” Clark trailed off, and then amazingly, he blushed.

“It's just what?” I asked, immediately curious.

“Nothing,” he said, staring at the plate of pancakes Martha had placed in front of him.

“What is it, Clark?” I asked, trying not to sound too upset, just firm.

He continued to avoid my eyes. “It's just... I normally notice your heartbeat when you're near by,” he mumbled.

“Well, you are pretty tired,” Martha pointed out.

Clark looked up at me in alarm, finally seeming to put the pieces together.

“Did you even go back to your apartment at all after Indonesia?” I asked him, reaching for the syrup. “Or did you come right here?”

“What?” he asked, confused.

“Did you go back to your apartment? There was a gas explosion there on Sunday night,” I told him.

“There was?”

“Yup. Got a call from Henderson at an ungodly hour asking me to disappear for a few days. Provide an alibi for you when you failed to check out your apartment,” I said, loving the look in his eyes as he fully comprehended that the jig was up.

“Henderson knows?” he asked, looking like a lost little boy.

“Said he figured it out during Nightfall,” I told him. “Best I can tell, no one else knows though.”

“And you?” he asked. “You know? You aren't angry?”

“Lois just figured it out. And she's angry, honey, but she's controlling it well. She came here to find out what she could to write the exclusive,” Martha said matter-of-factly.

“The...” Clark floundered, and now I found myself blushing. Why? I had nothing to be embarrassed about, but somehow I felt ashamed of myself.

“Well, come on, Clark. Your secret identity could likely win Lois her Pulitzer,” Martha added.

“Right,” Clark said, realization dawning, the light leaving his eyes. “I think I'm just going to head to bed. Could we do this later, Lois?” he asked.

“Do what?” I asked.

“Well, you have everything you need here, right?” he asked, “But I'm sure a quote or two from me would help. I'm just not up for it right now.”

“You're going to give me quotes?” I asked.

“If I don't, will you not write the article?” he asked me.

“You've already decided, haven't you? Whatever the impact on me or my folks?”

I stopped at that. I hadn't considered the impact on his parents. The impact on him, sure. But I didn't care about that. But the Kents – as I had guessed they weren't super powered. What would the impact be on them?

“You should definitely get some sleep,” I told him, not sure

how to answer him.

He nodded his head, taking my lack of response for agreement, I'm sure. "If Mom hasn't shown you my fort, you can find some things that would probably be good for a story in there, too."

He got up and walked to the stairs with slumped shoulders. I couldn't figure out what he was doing – why he was helping me. I looked over at Martha and had to look away. The look on her face of love and concern for Clark made me feel like I was intruding on a private moment.

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"You find what you were looking for?" he asked as his head poked above the floor of the tree house.

"I don't know what I'm looking for anymore," I admitted. I had spent more time in his "fortress of solitude," as Martha said he called it, trying to think about the implications of my exposé than looking for evidence for said exposé. I was starting to think I wasn't going to write it.

I wanted to. I really did.

But I didn't want to be responsible for putting Martha and Jonathan in danger just because they took in a baby twenty-seven years ago that turned out to be Superman.

"I'm sorry you found out this way," Clark said softly as he sat beside me on the floor of his fort.

"Don't you mean 'you're sorry I found out'?" I asked him, my anger coming back a little bit.

Clark sighed. "A little bit," he admitted. "But not because I didn't want you to know. More because... well, you could tell Luthor. Not that it matters if you're planning to publish it on the cover of the Planet."

"I'm not," I said, although I hadn't firmly decided until that moment. "I don't want to ruin your parents' lives," I told him.

He smiled. "Thank you."

"I'm not doing it for you," I pointed out, and the smile left his eyes.

"Still, thank you. That means a lot to me," he said softly.

"Does it? Do you really care about them? Or is it just those of us you've lied to that you don't care about?" I asked him, standing up to pace.

"I didn't want to lie to anyone," Clark said softly. "If there was any other way..."

"Way for what?" I asked him, cutting him off.

"To be Clark. To not... lose myself to the man in the cape. But there isn't. If everyone knew Clark Kent was Superman, I'd be Superman all the time."

"What's the difference?" I challenged him.

"What's the difference?" he asked. "You don't know? When was the last time you watched a movie with Superman? Or Superman played poker with Perry? Or went to a ballgame with Jimmy? Can you even imagine him doing any of that? Superman isn't real," he finished quietly. "He's just a... comic book hero or something come to life. But he can't have friends or... a wife."

"Why do you care?" I asked him, surprised to realize I really wanted to know. Not for the story I wasn't planning to write any longer, but just to know.

"Wouldn't you? Do you want to spend your life alone?" he asked me.

"No," I admitted, my voice soft as all my anger fell apart inside. "I guess I wouldn't." I nodded. "So you didn't lie because you wanted to, but because you needed to. But to me?"

"I thought you might tell Luthor, and I don't trust him. I thought you might use it to write a story." He raised an eyebrow at me as I started to argue with him and I had to back down.

"And..." He paused, seemingly out of steam.

"And what?" I asked, but then I knew. Jonathan had said it when I first arrived. ~He wants you to love him for himself. Not the cape.~

And Martha was right – Clark had just made that clear. Clark and Superman were not the same.

I sighed. If this was a movie, this would be the part where I realized that I did love him. I'd tell him, we'd kiss, and the screen would fade to black. But it wasn't a movie. I liked Clark, I did. I even, unbelievably, thought I still trusted him more than anyone I'd ever known. But I didn't love him.

"I can understand that," I said finally.

"Understand what?" he asked, and I realized he had never answered my question and had no way of knowing his father had.

"That you'd want me to love you for you and not Superman," I told him. "Your father accidentally told me." I brushed off his confusion and embarrassment. "I don't love Superman," I said. "I was sort infatuated with him," I said, having to admit to that. "But I don't love him. And I like you, Clark, a lot. You're like a brother to me."

"And Luthor?" he asked, moving quickly past the pain I saw in his eyes when I told him I loved him like a brother.

I shrugged. "I'm not sure. Why don't you trust him, anyway?"

He pointed to a stack behind me. "What is this?" I asked as I went through it. "Why didn't you show me any of this before?" It was piles and piles of evidence against Luthor. Circumstantial evidence, sure, but if only half of it was true, Luthor was still the biggest crime boss Metropolis had ever seen.

"None of it is real," Clark said, but took it back quickly when he saw my face. "I mean, it's real, but it's just stuff I heard as Superman. I can't prove any of it. That's why I keep it here. It doesn't really serve much purpose in Metropolis, but I can't bear to get rid of it. Maybe one day, I'll find something real and this stuff will be useful."

"Well." I smiled at him as I felt the pieces falling into the place, the anger from the last couple of days fading completely. "Luckily you have me as a partner. You owe me partnership on this," I told him. "If I'm not going to get the Pulitzer for the Superman exposé, than maybe we can get it for Luthor one."

"Seems fair." Clark smiled at me. He moved closer to me to help sort through his evidence. "I would have shared it with you anyway," he said as he moved. "Once I knew you'd listen."

"I know," I admitted quietly. "That's just the kind of guy Clark Kent is."

THE END