

Night Witness

By Mozartmaid [mozartmaid@gmail.com]

Rated G

Submitted: August 2010

Summary: What if Lois caught Clark floating in his sleep? Find out in this re-imagined version of the Season 1 episode, "Witness."

Thanks to everyone who commented on the boards on this story! It was a lot of fun to write! Thanks especially to Iolanthe for 'editing my copy.' Where would we all be without GEs?

Characters are property of Warner Bros. Some dialogue taken from *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, Season 1, Episode 10, "Witness" written by David Jacobs

Written for fun and not for profit.

Lois didn't question her motives, but simply jumped in feet first, as usual. She was heading home, she really was, but somehow she had found her way to Clinton Street, to Clark's door. She just couldn't bring herself to go home alone, not after that creepy call from Trevino. She had shrugged off Clark's offers earlier, saying she could take care of herself. But now she hoped he wouldn't remind her of her flippant disregard for his offer of protection — or remind her how in danger she really was. What if he had been right earlier, when he said that she had been shot at?

Before she could stop herself she was knocking on his door. Her heart was pounding, it was a mistake, she was sure of it. He'd laugh and say, "I told you so!" but he'd still let her in, still let her crash at his place, still be her best friend —

The door opened.

"Hi Clark," she said a little shyly, oddly out of character.

"This is a surprise. Wanna smoothie?"

There he stood, offering her a smoothie, looking so relaxed and comforting. She wanted to throw herself in his arms, have him tell her everything would be all right. She tried to stay cool.

"I'm not thirsty," she said to the offered beverage distractedly and brushed past him into his living room.

All she could think about were the near misses with her "landlord" this morning, and Clark's arms comforting her. And then, the cool warning in Trevino's voice on the phone this evening. What if she had gone home and —

He quietly shut the door, watching his partner closely. "Lois, what's wrong?"

She stopped pacing and turned to look at him. As she gathered herself, she tried not to look too ashamed about rejecting his earlier offer of protection. "Don't take this the wrong way..."

"What?" he asked, smoothie forgotten.

"I guess I'd just feel better if I could..." she started, not being able to bring herself to say what she really wanted, though her eyes shifted longingly to his sofa.

Clark immediately understood, "...stay here tonight?" he finished for her quietly, with no judgment.

She nodded, so relieved he didn't try to take a jab at her for finally admitting she needed his company. She threw her arms around him, so grateful for her partner. He gently took her in his arms, cupping his hand around her precious head. He smiled to himself, glad that she had come to him.

"It's okay, Lois. You know you can always stay here," he said

softly.

She tried to ignore the tightness in her throat. . [[Clark is such a sweet guy.]]

"Thanks, partner," she pulled away, smiling weakly at him, and hoping her eyes weren't too bright with the unshed tears of the strain she'd felt all day.

She walked towards the sofa, shedding her coat and slipping off her heels. Clark noticed her looking around, sizing up how comfortable she'd be sleeping in her work clothes on the sofa.

"Do you — want a change of clothes?" he gestured towards her, indicating her work wear, and giving her a sympathetic grin.

"Yeah, actually."

He walked in his room and picked out a t-shirt and sleep shorts, hoping they weren't too big for her.

"Here you go."

"Thanks. I'll be right back." She smiled gratefully as she took the offered clothes and wandered into the bathroom.

Clark went back over to the television. He'd been watching a Lakers game, but thought Lois might appreciate watching something else.

"Hey, um, 'Lethal Weapon 2' is on," he called to her, flipping through channels.

"Oh? OK," she said, coming back in. Work-Lois was gone, and there stood Comfortable-Lois in *his* t-shirt and shorts. They practically swallowed her up, but she did look awfully sweet in them. Clark's throat went dry. Who'd have ever thought her wearing his clothes would be so sexy? He was at a loss for a moment what to say and prayed she didn't notice his discomfited stare.

Lois was oblivious to Clark, with other, more important things on her mind. She wandered into the kitchen, nosing in his fridge. "So, have you got anything less healthy than a smoothie in here?"

Clark nodded, relieved to shift his thoughts. "Yeah, there's a few Double Chocolate Fudge bars left in the cabinet. And I may have some ice cream in there..."

She came out a few moments later double-fisted: ice cream in one hand, chocolate bar in the other, and a spoon in her mouth.

She settled in next to him on the couch, Clark making room for her.

"So, what are we watching again?" Lois asked in between bites of ice cream.

"'Lethal Weapon 2'."

Clark turned his head suddenly, his super-hearing picking up on distant screams. [[Why now?]]

He searched for a plausible excuse for leaving Lois. Clark wanted more than anything to stay there next to her, but it sounded like more than just one rescue was needed, and he simply had to go. And she'd be safe here, even without him. "Uh, how 'bout I'll run to the video store and get us a few movies? I've been wanting to do an old '30s marathon for a while."

"I'll come with you," Lois offered, not wanting to be alone. It is, after all, why she had risked her dignity to come to his place...

"No, no, you stay here. I'll be--back in a moment."

He had to grab his Suit in his room. "I just need to... get my wallet." He stepped into his cramped closet and spun into street clothes with the Suit underneath ready to go.

"Clark?" asked Lois in alarm, hearing strange noises coming from his room.

"I'll be right back," he said as he came through the living room, not looking at Lois, diving for the door.

She sighed. [[What's so urgent about going to the video store? I love 'Lethal Weapon'.]]

Clark was back an hour later. The rescue had been a fire in an apartment building, and it took him the better part of that hour to take care of it. The video store had taken less than a minute.

He walked in casually, with about ten videos stacked in his hands. "OK, got 'It Happened One Night', with Clark Gable... 'King Kong', 'Scarface' —"

"Clark!" Lois rushed over, taking some of the videos from his hands.

"What's wrong?" he asked in alarm, hoping nothing bad had happened while he was gone.

"I just saw Superman on the news. There was a huge fire near Hobb's Bay. He rescued dozens of families!"

Clark sighed. "Oh, really?" he tried to say in an interested tone. He hated this ruse with Lois. How many times has he had to do this? Fly in as Superman and then be the completely-in-the-dark-to-what's-happening Clark? [[Someday this will end.]] he thought. [[But not now.]]

She nodded eagerly, "Yeah, and now they're saying it might be arson. Who would do that, Clark? It's a story! We should get on it —"

"Lois, not tonight. I can talk to Superman in the morning and get the scoop. It's already past midnight. You've had a harrowing day as it is--"

"Don't tell me what kind of day I've had, buster!" She started to protest. Then she yawned, making Clark's point evident and acquiesced reluctantly. "I suppose it's too late to contact Superman anyway.... But we'll get an early start tomorrow!"

"Sure. And I'll make breakfast." he offered.

"Sounds great. And...I am tired. But, some old movies might do me some good," she smiled sweetly and took 'It Happened One Night' out of his hands.

They were not fifteen minutes into the movie when Lois fell sound asleep on the sofa, her head resting against his shoulder. Clark sighed.

[[Thank goodness she didn't decide to go after the story tonight. She certainly didn't have the energy for it, no matter how much she protested.]] He sat there as long as he could, until the weariness of the day made him drowsy as well. But he wanted to stay next to Lois as long as possible. Awake she was a pistol, but when she was asleep, she was an absolute, irresistible angel.

Clark lifted her gently and took her into his room. He smiled ruefully to himself. How many times had he imagined taking Lois to his bed? Well, this was a purely innocent night. The most he dared was a kiss on her forehead as he tucked her into the covers.

Clark retreated silently back to the sofa to sleep alone.

Lois awoke in the middle of the night. She was on the verge of a nightmare, but had shaken herself out of it. She looked around the dark room, suddenly remembering where she was. She let out a breath of relief. Clark's place.

But she couldn't get back to sleep. She had that edgy feeling of having shaken off a bad dream but not wanting to go back to sleep just yet.

With a resigned sigh she climbed out of bed.

[[I'll just get a glass of milk to calm me.]] she thought.

She made her way to the kitchen and got out a glass and milk carton as quietly as she could. It was very dark in the apartment, the only light coming from a neon sign outside the window. She glanced over at the sofa where Clark slept.

She let out a stifled yelp, the milk carton hitting the floor, spilling its contents. *Clark was floating.*

She walked over to him slowly, cautiously. She was afraid to wake him, yet wondered if she was still dreaming. What was going on here?

She knew the answer, though she wouldn't let the words fall together in her mind just yet. She stared.

Lois tested, just to be sure, waving her arm above and below

him. Nope, no strings. She let out an unhinged giggle, stifling it in her hand.

Clark. Is. Superman. [[Are you kidding me?]] No wonder he was always disappearing with lame excuses! Is that what took him an hour at the video store that was literally only a block away? The fire that Superman had taken care of?

But what else could it be? Why else would Clark be floating in his sleep?! She couldn't stop staring at him, seeing for the first time what had been right there all along. All the pieces fell into place. She took off his glasses, gently, feeling slightly sorry for him that he didn't even feel comfortable taking them off to sleep. And then there he was, absolute proof right there in front of her.

[[Unbelievable. Clark? Really?]]

She suddenly remembered the spilled milk and desperately searched the kitchen for some towels. Why that became a priority, she didn't know. But it seemed a way to distract herself as she sorted out what to do.

What to do, indeed? She peeked up from cleaning the floor, peering over the counter top again. Yup, he was still doing it! She felt almost hysterical. Partly too, from lack of sleep, and the stress of all this Trevino and Mr. Make-Up business.

Finally, the kitchen mess was cleaned up. She came back into the living room, just staring at her partner in mid-float.

At first she was mildly amused, but the more she thought about it, the more embarrassed she became. How many times had she fawned all over Superman? He must have been secretly laughing at her behind her back, especially since she told Clark he didn't have a chance with her. She then started to get a little angry. Her partner had seriously been holding out on her! Did he enjoy making her look like a fool!? Or did he just not trust her to tell him? Did he think she'd make his secret into a story--and what a helluva story it would make too! Though even as the thought formed in her mind, she knew that she would never ever do that to him. He must have had good reasons for not telling her. She suddenly remembered the incident with the rogue government agent, Trask, and how he had been so sure that Superman was raised in Smallville. [[And he was indeed. By the sweetest parents anyone could ever hope for.]] What would happen to them if it got out who Clark really was? She realized that they were the ones who had nurtured his gentle nature... and also the ones who probably instilled a fear in him so deep not to tell anyone the truth about what he could do. [[Not even me. His best friend.]]

[[Poor Clark.]] She suddenly had the urge to touch him, to reach out and try to understand this complicated man. She leaned towards him, her arm poised in the air to maybe touch his face. But suddenly, like a compass pointing due north, his body swung towards her hand. She wasn't sure she heard it, but she thought she heard him mumble her name.

Lois was terrified of waking him, yet part of her wanted him to wake, just to see what he'd do. [[What crazy excuse could you come up for this one, Flyboy? You're practicing meditation, and yeah, they taught you how to float?]]

"Lois," he murmured again. Yup, she definitely heard it. She dared to brush his hair away from his eyes. It flopped back by his ear, apparently troubled by gravity, unlike the rest of him. His hand reached out for hers, gently. She startled, afraid he'd awoken. But no, he still slept.

He took her hand and placed it under his on his chest. "I love you," he sighed, settling back into his 'mattress' of air.

She froze. [[I love you? Does he mean *me*? He's dreaming, of course. I can't think he means anything by it. Can I?]]

Part of her thrilled. Here it was, Superman's confession of love! Albeit while he was asleep and dreaming... But was it Superman talking? Wasn't it really Clark who had spoken, the guy she'd been half ignoring for months now, who'd put up with all sorts of mood swings from her, and had watched her swoon

over his alter-ego?

[[Who are you really, Big Guy?]] she wondered. [[Which one of them are you?]]

Watching him and thinking about their relationship--er, relationships, the answer suddenly struck her. Of course it wasn't Superman talking, it was Clark. Clark loved her. That was why "Superman" had never encouraged her crush on him, and why Clark would at times appear outright jealous of Superman. Jealous of himself! He must have wanted her to love him as plain old Clark. Though how difficult for her to see him when he kept flashing Superman in her face! [[Maybe that's the point, Lois,]] she thought to herself. [[He needs to see that I can see through the flashy costume to the man underneath...]]

Suddenly feeling very affectionate towards him, she took her other hand and again stroked his face. She knew she was risking a lot. If he woke up there'd be some intense questions on both sides. But she just couldn't quite pull her hand from the flame...

Suddenly, he swung her up parallel with him. His arm held her up, practically spooning her in mid-air! [[Lucy would never believe this!]] she mused.

Oddly enough, it felt really comfortable. His body was strong, yet comforting, undemanding. She felt like she belonged there. Tears came unbidden to her eyes, as the two men she respected most in the world slowly, irrevocably melded into one in her mind. Her comfortable, dependable partner, and her rescuer and hero. Now that she knew, she felt a little bit like a child at Christmas who had unwrapped a precious gift too early... she didn't want to know yet... it was like she cheated somehow.

She decided that she would pretend that she knew nothing. She wouldn't tell him she knew. She wanted to give Clark a chance to tell her on his own, this man who was Superman, but who was also shy, vulnerable where it counted, smart, sweet, and darn good-looking. She had wanted a relationship with Superman, but now she wondered, who was Superman? She had always wondered what he did when not off saving the world, and now she knew. The more she thought about it, she realized Superman had to just be an excuse for helping, so Clark could try to live a normal life--well, as normal as a workaholic partner at a newspaper could be. [[And he said he loved me. Right?]] She would date him if he ever asked, trying to tell herself it wasn't because he was Superman. Clark was sweet and special all on his own, too. [[But it took me learning about Superman to realize it,]] she couldn't help admitting to herself.

But she simply couldn't just tell him she knew his secret. He knew she loved Superman. And now she knew he loved her. And if he knew she knew he *was* Superman — could he ever believe she could love Clark, the man under the suit? She figured that it was his place to tell her, and until she could build that trust in him to do so, she'd have to pretend she didn't know anything. He'd have to tell her this on his own.

They were suddenly moving. Lois tensed. What was happening now?

She never felt fear, though. Just curiosity. Clark held her close, and they drifted towards his bedroom.

[[Well this is a smooth move, if ever I saw one.]]

But he made no physical demands on her. They simply floated softly into his bedroom and then hovered over the bed a moment. Then, he floated down, with Lois in his arms until at last they rested gently on the mattress. He pulled her into him again, spooning her, and sighed softly into her neck.

That sigh sent shivers of pleasure up and down her spine.

[[Wow.]]

She had never felt so right in her life, as she did lying in his arms.

[[Don't worry, your secret's safe, Clark,]] she thought at last, before sleep carried her away and more pleasant dreams began to fill her head.

Morning light gently woke Lois. A heavy arm was laying on her waist. [[Clark! *Superman!*]]

She sat up carefully, intent on getting out of bed before he awoke. But it was too late.

"Lois?" he asked in confusion. "What happened? I thought... what happened?" he said, a look of panic on his face as he felt for his glasses that weren't there.

"Um, well, nothing..." she said, sprinting towards the bathroom, leaving him looking after her in confusion as she ran and slammed the door.

She had to think of something, fast. She brushed her teeth, a little too intensely as she thought. [[Clark is always good at coming up with excuses. Why can't I think of one?]]

"Lois?" he called again, a worried tone in his voice. "Did... did anything happen last night?"

Inspiration. She had it.

She stepped out of the bathroom, trying not to notice how nicely his t-shirt outlined his perfect chest and biceps. [[Superman's perfect chest and biceps,]] she thought to herself, feeling her cheeks redden. Though she did notice he had found his glasses again.

"I... had a nightmare. And you came in to sit with me."

"I did?" he asked, totally confused. "I don't remember."

"Well, you were half asleep. So... but nothing happened, Clark. Don't worry. I think we were both so tired... it's fine, really." she said as reassuringly as she could.

But he seemed to accept her answer. "If you say so... sorry to... uh, well, I didn't mean to fall asleep here, I guess," he tried, not sure why he was apologizing except he felt a little embarrassed to have woken up beside her.

"It's fine, Clark, really. Actually, it was kind of... nice," she smiled, remembering floating in his arms. "I mean, nice to have you nearby. Yesterday was a bit... crazy."

"Hm, well, I'm glad then," his smile was uncertain, but he was happy if she was happy. "OK, why don't you get a shower and I'll make us some breakfast?"

[[Clark is Superman! Clark is Superman!]] She couldn't get that single thought out of her mind. She was washing her hair, scrubbing her scalp with her fingers. A song came to her mind, "I'm gonna wash that man right outta my hair, I'm gonna wash that man right outta my hair, and send him on his way..." Though she didn't want to 'wash' Clark out of her hair, she just wish she didn't know he was Superman. She had fancied herself madly in love with Superman and fond of her friendship with Clark. How could she reconcile the two relationships? How could she try to look at Clark and see if she felt more for him without it feeling forced because she was in love with his other persona? [[But what was I in love with in Superman? Aren't the qualities that I find attractive in him in Clark?]]

She sighed, turned off the water and rested her forehead against the tile for a moment. [[Should I tell him I know?]]

"Lois?" Clark tentatively called. "Breakfast is ready. And Perry just called. He needs us to try and get in a few minutes early if possible to get a head start on the arson story..."

"I'm coming!" she called.

She wished this Trevino business was over with. She wanted to think all this over in her apartment, without *him* to distract her. [[Well, at least I know I'm safe around Clark. He'll protect me for sure.]]

She at last got dressed, realizing she was putting on the same clothes as yesterday. And when she and Clark went to the Planet — well, it would look as if, as if — she felt panic rising.

"Oh, Lois? I, uh, I actually went by your apartment last night, when I went to get the movies, which was why I was so late. I brought you a change of clothes. They're on my dresser," Clark

told her from the kitchen.

[[Yeah, I'll just bet you did. How gullible do you think I am?]] She thought to herself, realizing that she was pretty gullible where he was concerned. Did Clark do *super* things like that all the time and she simply failed to notice? [[Well, I'll notice now.]] When did he really have time to get her clothes, anyway? [[While I was in the shower? And he was making breakfast?]] That floored her. That Superman could make coffee, cook eggs, and fetch her clothes all in one swoop.

"Thanks, Clark."

All morning at the Planet Lois covertly watched her partner. She would watch him thinking of him as Clark, as her handsome, sweet, slightly naive partner... and then think of him as the man floating last night whispering to the dark that he loved her. She laughed a little at herself, thinking how when they met she thought she understood him completely. How she had missed the mark. A small-town hack, with ideal dreams to conquer the big city, she had thought. In a way, though, he'd done just that. As Superman. Yet, from her talks with Superman and what she knew of Clark, she knew that he didn't want all the fame and glory that came with being Superman. He hadn't even given himself that name, she had. He was the most humble, giving, generous person she knew. And he was also the strongest man on the planet. It made her catch her breath a little. [[Can all that really be in one amazing person?]]

And he could be funny and loose, too. As Clark only, she noted. She wondered if he ever felt confined by Superman. He had taken easily to acting as two people, but couldn't that drive a person a little nuts once in a while? Maybe that's why he so covetously protected his identity as Clark. Clark allowed him to cut loose, relax and eat Chinese takeout on the sofa with her. She could never imagine herself doing those things with Superman. Yet, he was Superman as well. And he had all those powers — [[Hey, wait a minute,]] she suddenly thought. [[I wonder if he ever uses his powers to scoop me on a story... There have been a few times when he had information that just seemed too good to be true.]] But she couldn't blame him. She'd do the same if she could. And besides, Clark/Superman was so moral and ethical, that if he did do anything a normal reporter couldn't, she imagined he'd do it sparingly.

[[Yet how many 'super' things do I miss on a daily basis?]] she wondered. Would he speed-read through old articles when doing research? [[I would...]] Super-hear what people are saying about him? [[Yup, I'd do that too...But would Clark? Nah...]] she decided. He was a bit of a boy scout in that regard.

But on her 'stakeout' from her desk that morning she didn't catch him doing anything *super*. It was more than annoying. He seemed to always know when she was watching him, as if he had some sort of radar. [[Well, duh, he's Superman!]] But once she got past that thought, she started to wonder if it wasn't a bit more than that. There had always been at least one moment in their work day when she'd catch him watching her. Sometimes he'd have a soft smile on his lips, and she'd have given anything to know what he was thinking. And other times, there was a sadness there, a longing. At first she pitied it, but lately that look had hit her in the gut. wrenched at her heart to think that he was hurting — [[over *me*?]] she'd ask herself.

And today, he was more attentive to her than usual, afraid Trevino would jump up behind a potted plant or Mr. Make-up would show up in the form of Jimmy or something... But the day passed pretty ordinarily.

There was only that one slightly "super" moment, just before lunch. Lois and Clark had planned on going to lunch together. Suddenly, as they were getting ready to go, his eyes got that 'deer in the headlights' look, and his head jerked to the side. That look that had always baffled her before.

[[Oh, now I get it,]] she thought. [[At least now I know he's not crazy.]]

"Lois — I--I can't go to lunch with you. I have to--have--a--dentist appointment, I forgot!" he got out, inspired at the last second.

Lois smiled secretly. [[Yeah, I'll bet, Superman.]]

"Um, OK. I'll be fine," she answered casually.

He took a second to give her a perplexed look. Usually Lois was a little more annoyed with his last minute appointments.

"See you later," she waved, wondering why he was waiting. Maybe someone was dangling off a building or there were kids trapped in a fire! [[Go save 'em, Superman!]] "Bye!" she tried again, resisting the urge to shoo him away.

Clark shook his head, as if trying to clear his confusion, and then dashed off. Like always.

Thirty minutes later, Lois had worked herself up into a frenzy.

[[Should I tell him I know? The poor guy... always making those lame excuses... We're partners and best friends. It would be easier for both of us if I just say, "Hey, Clark, remember last night? Well, um, you were floating and I know you're Superman. No more lame excuses necessary!"]]

Lois paced in the ladies room. The secret wanted to burst out of her. [[How had Clark kept it for so long?]] she wondered. She stopped and looked in the mirror. [[Probably because he was scared to do anything else.]] She sighed. [[I should tell him. He needs to know I know.]]

But she worried how he'd feel about her. Would he think she was trying to cozy up to Superman? Could he accept her feelings for him as Clark? [[And what were those feelings?]] she asked herself pointedly. [[I don't know! I love being around him, laughing with him... I love our casual intimacy. Touching his shoulder, his arms around me when I need them...OK, I am attracted to him. But do the feelings go deeper? He had never even hinted at feeling anything deeper for me than friendship! But last night —]]

She felt like she was hyperventilating. It was all too much, too soon. [[I wish I didn't know, I wish I didn't know!]] she cried silently to herself. [[I need to get out of here. Go work on something else. Get out of the Planet for a while...]]

But she couldn't do that. Trevino was still out there. She was still in danger. Her apartment wasn't a refuge. The only place that was safe was with Clark. And right at that moment, it also seemed the scariest place for her to be.

Lois got herself straight when someone else entered the ladies room. She would go back to her desk. It was after lunch, Clark would be back soon... [[Did Clark even get any lunch?]] she wondered.

Suddenly, she was inspired. [[Maybe if I leave hints that I know, I can ease both of us into telling each other the truth. Maybe if I let him figure out I know... we can still be friends. And I... can try and stop mooning after Superman.]]

She decided to buy him lunch. It was nearly one o'clock and he'd be back soon, she hoped. Surely crises left little time for lunch...

She went to their favorite deli and got his favorite sandwich. When she got back upstairs, he was already back at his desk.

Lois handed him the bag, an innocent smile on her lips.

"What's this?" he asked, genuinely surprised.

"Well, with a dental appointment during your lunch break, I didn't think you had time for lunch."

"Thanks... I... didn't...no," he said, then suddenly skeptical.

"Why are you being so nice, Lois?"

She was a little hurt at that. [[Am I really usually such a jerk?]] "Just because. You were so sweet, letting me stay at your

place last night. Just think of it as a thank you."

With that she went back to her desk. She could feel her heart racing. Was it too nice a gesture? [[We're partners, helping each other out. No big deal, right?]]

She dared a glance at him. He was looking at her oddly, but she couldn't make out why, which made her panic even more.

Lois plastered on a smile, "Bon appetit!"

Clark could hear her heart racing. [[What was that all about?]] he wondered. Maybe something *had* happened between them last night? [[No, I would've remembered...]] Or had waking up next to him had made her realize some feelings for him? He squelched that hopeful thought. [[Does she *know*?]] He suddenly thought, fighting the wave of panic. [[Lois would surely have skinned me alive this morning if she knew.]] At the very least, he thought, she was up to something...

For the rest of the day Lois was a nervous wreck. She nearly jumped out of her skin, yelling at anyone that came near her. Clark figured she was just nervous about Trevino.

"Lois?" he came up to her, after she sent another Planet employee off shaking his head at how crazy Lois was acting today.

She had her head down on the desk. [[I can't think. I don't know what to do! I am going crazy!]]

She jumped when Clark gently touched her shoulder.

"Yeah? Oh, Clark, right," she nodded. [[Superman. My partner. What do I do?]]

"Lois? Are you okay?" he asked gently.

"Yeah--no! I don't know. I guess I'm okay. Just a little...confused."

"Confused?" he asked, surprised.

[[Oops. Wrong word.]] "Not confused. I don't know. Just... why weren't you more upset we woke up in bed together this morning?" she blurted out suddenly, not even realizing the question was there.

"Lois," he said warningly, nodding at the looks people were giving them.

She covered her mouth, and could feel herself blushing. "Um, maybe we should go to the conference room?"

He rolled his eyes. "Wish you had said that about three seconds ago," he murmured.

They went in and shut the door. Lois sighed, not looking at him.

"Are you okay?" he asked again.

"I--do you like me?" she challenged, pretty certain of the answer, but daring him to say it in broad daylight.

"Yeah, Lois. Of course I do. We're best friends, you know that." Clark had no idea where she was going with this.

She nodded, started pacing. "But do you *like* me? I mean... really like me?" she asked, her voice quiet and those deep eyes round with questions.

[[Where was this coming from?]] Clark wondered.

He came closer to her and sighed. He looked her in the eye and nodded. "Yeah, I do," he said softly.

She let out a breath she hadn't known she'd been holding.

"And... do you...like me?" he ventured when she didn't say anything, completely thrown by her questions.

She looked up at him, tears in her eyes. "I don't know!" she cried.

Suddenly sobs were coming from nowhere. She was so confused... All those nights longing for Superman... all those lovely days spent working beside Clark... and they were the same person. She should be overjoyed, but —

"Shh. What is it?" he took her in his arms, trying to soothe her.

She was trembling, trying to get hold of herself.

"I need to tell you something —" she began.

Just then, Perry came in.

"What in the Sam Hill is going on in here? We have two hours to get the paper to bed, and I haven't seen word one from either of you. Now, do we have that front page arson story ready to go or not?" Then Perry stopped, noticing Lois' tears. "What's the matter, honey?" Just like that, Perry went from scary editor to comforting father figure.

Lois straightened up, setting herself some distance from Clark. "It--it's just been this whole Trevino mess. A bit of stress is all. But I'm okay now, Chief. I'll have that story ready to go within the hour."

"Hm, okay. Kent, you get back to work," Perry said, mentally assessing what might have really been going on in here.

"Yes, Chief."

Perry headed for the door, Lois a few feet behind him. But Clark stopped her.

"Lois. You were going to tell me something?" he asked.

"It can wait. Let's get this story done first, okay?"

Clark racked his brain, wondering what Lois was going to confess. He had been hopeful that at last she might admit she had some feelings for him. But that confused 'I don't know' really baffled him, and scared him. [[Did I do anything "super" last night?]] He kept trying to make eye contact with her, but she avoided looking at him. He was sure it had something to do with last night, but he couldn't think what. [[How did we end up in my bed, anyhow? I don't remember waking up at all to comfort her from a dream like she said...]]

Later, it was time to go. Clark wanted to wait for Lois, but was also anxious to find Trevino before she harm to Lois or anyone else. They had had a few leads during the day, and he planned on checking them out as soon as he could leave the Planet. But Lois' safety was his top priority.

"Lois, we still need to talk."

"I know. We will," she said with a bracing intake of breath.

[[Maybe I don't want to hear this,]] he suddenly thought.

"I want you to promise me you won't leave before I get back," he said.

His hovering was sweet, but it was also a bit annoying. They were at the Planet, perfectly safe! Besides, she could use the few minutes without him there to think about what she was going to say. Having him there all day watching her had made it difficult to concentrate.

"Promise?"

"You want it in blood?" she asked dramatically, feeling irritated.

"Okay... I just don't want to leave you here alone."

Jimmy walked by. "Ill stick around, CK. I don't mind, really."

Clark nodded, "Okay. I'll be back to pick you up, Lois."

[[I need more pencils. I swear, I go through them like water, or something.]] Lois had broken half a dozen this afternoon mulling over her dilemma. At first she would be distracted by memories of Clark holding her last night... and then she thought about those few kisses he had given her since she'd known him, all under a pretense, of course, but still. They counted. The one on Trask's plane. She had initiated it, but the way he reacted had totally taken her off guard — *snap* The one at the Lexor hotel to thwart the maid had also really thrown her. The way his body had lain over her, his lips sweet but gently insistent. *snap* And then, Superman. *snap, snap* That kiss Superman had given her when affected by the pheromone spray. *snap* And the way he had been so wonderfully supportive of her through this scary Trevino business... *snap* Yeah, she had gone through a few pencils today.

Lois made her way to the supply closet. She was startled by a

cleaning lady. "Whew, you scared me," Lois said, relieved.

But the woman turned to face Lois, taking off her wig. Wait, that wasn't a cleaning lady. It was Barbara Trevino! With a gun!

Trevino was going on about some business about the Consortium, but Lois couldn't focus on that. All she could think about was the gun pointing at her and Clark/Superman was out somewhere, when he should have been here, protecting her!

"...And Finn left a loose end," Barbara finished.

"Me?" asked Lois, swallowing.

Lois feared Trevino was going to kill her, right there. No time left to talk to Clark. No time to tell him she knew he was Superman and that she was totally confused as to who she —

Suddenly, they heard a noise coming from outside the store room. Lois used the distraction to reach for the gun. They wrestled with it. The gun went off, the bullet hitting the ceiling, but Lois couldn't get it from Trevino's hand.

"Help!" Lois managed to call, praying Clark would hear her.

Trevino somehow got her hands around Lois' throat. Lois fought with all her might. [[I can't let her kill me! I have to tell Clark! I have to tell him I love him!]]

Suddenly, she was free from Trevino. [[Superman?]] But no, it was Jimmy.

Lois struggled for breath, "Thanks, Jimmy!"

She was so relieved she thought she'd cry. [[I'm not going to die. I can tell Clark — wait, back up. Did I just admit to myself that I love Clark. *Clark*]] she clarified to herself. [[Not Superman?]] Her internal monologue confirmed, [[Yep, Clark. You said it. Don't blame me.]]

Suddenly, Superman was at the door. She looked up at him with relief, but not for the reason everyone thought. She thought she knew how she would handle this now.

"Cutting it a little close there, aren't you, big fella?" she said ruefully, but with no heat.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine..." Suddenly, she remembered what Trevino said. Superman had to stop her! "... but they're going to cut down the rain forest!"

Superman nodded, and then was off.

Lois sighed, [[Yeah, I know. We'll talk later.]]

Lois had her story. Trevino was in prison and the rain forest was safe, thanks to Superman.

Clark came into the Planet shortly after they had it confirmed that the mining had been stopped. Lois grinned. [[Clark appears completely in the dark about it all, just like always.]]

"Sorry I took so long," he said apologetically, adjusting his tie. "Anything happen while I was gone?"

Lois rolled her eyes at Jimmy.

"Come on," she said, grabbing Clark's arm.

"Where are we going?" he asked, hoping she was finally going to tell him about last night.

"I thought you might walk me home," she offered.

"I thought you didn't need a bodyguard," he chided.

"Who said anything about a bodyguard?" she smiled. Then she turned serious as she added "Besides, I still have to talk to you about something."

"So, what is it you wanted to tell me?" Clark asked, trying to stay casual.

They were walking arm and arm down the street.

Lois knew what she had to tell him... but what should come first? The chicken or the egg? The fact that she knew about Superman? Or the possibility that she had feelings for Clark? She wouldn't admit to herself again that she *loved* Clark, not yet. Those feelings had been summoned under duress... but there *was* something there for her partner. So how to begin...

"Clark, I sorta lied this morning when I said nothing

happened last night."

He stopped and turned to face her, panic clearly on his face. "You did?"

"Calm down, it's nothing that earth-shattering... well, maybe it is —" she hesitated. "But I really want to wait till we get to my apartment to tell you... Can we just, walk?"

Clark's mind was racing. [[What *did* happen last night?]]

"Sure, Lois," he said, uncertain what else he could say.

Her arm slipped down and she searched for his hand. He glanced over and noticed she was looking at their clasped hands. She had a look on her face like when she was about to solve a crucial part of a story. Lois had some hypothesis forming in her brain. But about what, he had no idea.

Finally, they got to her place. She hadn't let go of his hand the whole way back, Clark noticed.

"You want anything to drink?" she said, making her way to her kitchen, turning on the lights.

"No, I'm fine... Lois? Just tell me. What is it? You've been acting strange all day," he said, concern evident in his eyes.

She knew it was time to stop prevaricating. "Clark?"

"Yeah?"

She stood in front of him, starting to pace. "I have been driving myself crazy all day, trying to decide if I should tell you... and *how* to tell you...Clark... I like you. [[OK, so the egg came first.]]

"I mean, I know I've pushed you away and told you not to bother... but, well, I've reconsidered," she looked up at him shyly.

"What do you mean?" he said quietly, coming over to her.

She shook her head. "Clark... I heard... I heard you say something last night in your sleep that really made me think."

"What did I say?" he asked slowly, afraid to ask.

She looked down at her fingernails. "You... admitted feelings for me... that's why I asked you today in the conference room. To see if you'd tell me face to face... and you did."

She turned to look at him now.

"So, it's got me to thinking... Clark, you're the best man I've ever had in my life. My best friend. And I know I haven't always played fair with you, yet you've always been there for me." She fought the lump in her throat, thinking too, of the many times Superman had rescued her. "And, I have finally admitted to myself that—I have feelings for you, too."

"You do?" he asked softly. He tentatively reached to stroke her cheek, his eyes full of hope.

[[A girl could drown in those eyes,]] she thought.

He leaned in closer to her. A second more and he might have tried to kiss her. But she couldn't let that distract her. She had to finish what she started to tell him or she never would get it out.

Reluctantly she pulled away.

"Wait, Clark. There's more."

"What 'more'?" he asked, worried.

"There's — something else I need to tell you, Clark," she turned from him, wringing her hands.

"Okay..."

She sighed heavily. "This is where I am afraid I'll look like the total jerk..."

"Look, Lois. We're best friends, you can tell me anything," he tried, hoping his calm words belied the nervousness in his stomach.

"And can you?" she countered back to him, suddenly a little angry.

"What?"

"Can *you* tell me anything? I seem to be the one who is always spilling my guts to you," she said with frustration.

He looked her straight in the eyes. "My life is an open book, Lois."

"Ha, I don't think so," she countered.

Then she sighed. She really didn't want to fight with him. She

just needed to tell him the truth. Lois took his hands and pulled him down to sit next to her on the sofa.

She sighed, forcing herself to touch him, to look in his eyes. Afraid if she didn't otherwise, she'd run. She'd run from him and run from her emotions. "Clark. *I know*. I saw you floating last night in your sleep. You're... Superman." There she said it. The words were out.

He let out a long breath, taking his hands from hers. "And so now you're suddenly interested in me because I'm Superman?" he said slowly, not looking at her.

She shook her head, afraid she was losing him.

"That's just it, Clark. Why I've been going in circles all day. Yes, we both know I've had a thing for Superman, but I've been growing so fond of you, too."

"Fond of me?" he tried out the phrase, not sure if he liked its implications. Sounded awfully close to "love you like a brother," to him.

She threw herself against the back of the sofa in frustration.

"Yeah, that's the thing... I think... if I had had more time... Ugh, I'm so confused! You see, I've been close to falling in love with Clark, too." This last was whispered.

She suddenly stood up.

"But I wish I could forget what I saw last night, Clark! I wish I didn't know!"

He felt himself cringe. His worst fear had been realized. She had learned the truth and it disgusted her. She would never accept him now...

"Lois, I'll leave. If it's all too much. If I'm... not what you thought, maybe it's best if I leave Metropolis. I'll tell Perry--"

"Leave? Clark! What are you talking about?" she turned to him, shaken out of her own torment by his statement to finally notice Clark's own pain.

"You just said you wish you didn't know the truth about me. Maybe I — maybe you don't want me here anymore," he said, standing, and heading for the door.

She grabbed his arm.

"Clark! Look at me. The reason I wish I didn't know is because I feel like it's too soon. Too soon to know everything about you. I think I *want* to fall in love with Clark. I think I've been close to it for a while, but been terrified to leap. Yet I don't want to feel like my feelings for Superman are pushing me to leap either. I'm not ready to fly yet," she said, with an ironic smile at her choice of metaphor.

"No one is pushing you, Lois," he said gently.

"Maybe I'm pushing myself, then... I just feel so... confused!"

"Yeah, you keep saying that," he said, running his fingers through his hair, uncertain. "I'm surprised you're not... more mad at me."

She shook her head. "I was. For a minute. I mean, I know I should be. But maybe I understand you better than you think I do. Especially after I realized what was probably really going on in Smallville a few weeks ago... it's dangerous for people to know, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it could be... I--I've kept the secret a long time, Lois. I thought — eventually if anything — happened between us, I'd tell you. But actually, I think it's a relief that you know," he smiled.

"Well, it may be for you, but I have a lot of thinking to do..."

He touched her shoulder gently. "Take all the time you need, Lois. I'll be here."

She felt traitorous tears well up in her eyes. "See, that's what I mean. You are the most generous person on this Earth, Clark."

She turned to him and they hugged.

"Are you sure you're not disappointed that your hero is really just... me?" he asked, pulling out of their hug.

"No! Not in the slightest! In a way, it's... comforting. I mean, now I know what Superman does when he's not saving the

world... I... know I care about you, Clark. A lot. But I don't want you to think that I care because I know you're Superman... although it did make me think about my feelings a bit. And you're not going anywhere, right?" she asked suddenly.

He took her hand, "No, Lois. I'll stay here. As long as you want me."

"Oh, Clark!" she threw herself into his arms again. She sat back, just far enough to see into his eyes and stroke his cheek.

"You mean the world to me. Both of you. It's just... well, you've been like a brother to me as Clark. And Superman always took my breath away... I just need time to see where the two meet in the middle." She leaned in to him to kiss him gently. "Do you understand?"

"Yeah, I do. It's okay, Lois," he said.

They sat together, quiet a moment, thinking.

Suddenly Clark sat up, "Wait. You still didn't answer how we ended up in my bed this morning..."

She blushed. "Well, you sorta... floated us in there."

"I did?" he asked in surprise.

She couldn't look him in the eyes.

"Yeah, I... well, I came over to you... you can give a girl quite a shock, floating like that you know... and well, suddenly, I was in your arms."

Now Clark blushed.

"And then you... floated us to the bedroom."

Neither could look the other in the eyes. Then Lois dared a peek at him at the same moment he glanced at her. They both started laughing.

"Sorry, Lois! Guess I couldn't resist getting you into my bed one way or another!"

"I thought it was quite a smooth move myself!" Lois giggled.

Then, they were both laughing uncontrollably. It was to relieve the tension more than anything. Clark was thoroughly embarrassed, but it was good to laugh about it.

When he could calm down he said, "Look, let's not worry about anything tonight. We don't need to make any decisions you aren't ready for. Why don't we just--be? Go on a few dates. And then, we'll see where life takes us."

She smiled at that, clearly relieved.

"I think that's a great idea... Would you like to get those movies from last night? We were watching 'It Happened One Night'. I think I fell asleep before my favorite scene..."

"I love Gable and Colbert in that movie."

"Me too. They make quite a pair."

"So do we, Lois," he said with a soft smile.

She grinned back. "You bet your sweet chumpy we do."

THE END