

Fallout

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Rated PG-13

Submitted: October 2011

Summary: This story is set in the latter half of Season One. It's our Lois and Clark, but with a twist on what actually happened on the show.

Comments much appreciated!

LOIS

"Everybody down on the ground!"

Lois Lane did as she was told, dropping to the tile floor of the courtroom. But unlike the others around her, she did not fall into a shivering heap of human cells. She kept her guard up, her ears perked, her senses keen.

This was going to make an amazing story.

Suddenly she felt someone grab her by her hair and yank her upwards. Resisting the urge to scream, she struggled to her feet to accommodate the wishes of her assailant. She couldn't see his face, but she knew that if this was the man who'd entered the courthouse with a gun, she wasn't about to try anything heroic.

"Nobody move, or she dies!" a loud, burly voice echoed in her right eardrum. *Oh, God*, she realized as the end of a gun was pressed against her head, *I'm a hostage. Why do these things always happen to me? I'm a reporter; I'm supposed to report on what happens to OTHER people — not to ME!*

The next moment, everything around her began to swim. *Oh no, not again!* she thought as her vision began to blur. She felt her knees go weak, as they had nearly once a week for the past two months. *Hold it together, Lane!* she urged herself, but her body wouldn't listen. The gunman must have felt her slipping. He must have panicked. Because before she could slip into unconsciousness, she heard a deafening sound. She felt an intense pressure on the side of her head, but to her amazement, it didn't hurt.

I've been shot. No pain. I must be dead. Now her knees buckled completely and she fell to the floor.

But she wasn't the only one.

The gunman was dead.

Witnesses all said the same thing: the gunman had pulled the trigger next to Lois Lane's head, and then somehow, somehow, he had shot *himself*. The gun must have backfired. At any rate, the bullet had killed him almost instantly.

At the hospital, Lois had been interviewed by police officers and was now being examined by a doctor for a second time when the door burst open and Lex Luthor strode into the room. The doctor looked surprised by the intrusion, but did not order Luthor out.

"Lois," Luthor said directly. "I just heard. Are you all right?"

Lois could only nod. She didn't trust herself to speak, but deep down she knew she *wasn't* all right. She had almost certainly been shot in the head, yet the only blood to be found on her was that of the gunman.

Luthor turned to the doctor. "Is she clear to go?"

"Well, we'd like to run a few tests if that —"

"No tests," said Luthor. "She needs to rest. I'll take her home now."

The doctor nodded, and with a quick, "Yes, sir," he exited the room.

Lois couldn't help but feel grateful. Although she did want to know more about what had happened and why, she was not feeling up to any more tests at the moment. She was shaken, confused, and puzzled, and — Lex was right — she needed to rest. To lie still and just *think*.

After signing the necessary paperwork, Luthor led Lois to his waiting town car and ushered her inside. Once the vehicle began to move, Lex put his hand on Lois's cheek and caressed it. "Are you truly all right, Lois?"

"I'm a bit shaky," Lois replied honestly.

"It's understandable," Luthor assured her. "You were inches away from losing your life. It's a miracle that only the gunman was injured. Clearly, it was not your time," he added with a small smile. "And for that, I am immensely grateful, my dear."

My dear. Always with the affection. Lois closed her eyes. She didn't mind that Lex cared about her; what was bothersome was that she didn't completely feel the same way toward him. She felt a bit guilty for this, but she knew it was nigh impossible to care for anyone in *that* way when your heart was solidly fixated on somebody else.

Though she never outright admitted this, she was sure Lex must suspect that she was in love with Superman. Lex wasn't an idiot. Still, Superman rarely seemed to want anything to do with her outside of saving her life and occasionally giving her a quote for a story. He treated her like a friend.

And then there was Clark... Lois begged her mind to focus elsewhere, but as soon as she thought of him, the memories started flooding her consciousness. Clark Kent... her friend and partner at the Daily Planet, who, two months ago, had become — for one night — more than just a friend. Guilt swept over Lois as she remembered the circumstances of their night of intimacy: The world was just hours away from being pummeled by the Nightfall Asteroid. Superman, Earth's one last hope, was nowhere to be found. And Clark, who had been hit by a car a few days prior and had lost his memory, yet who still looked at her with the same strong affection he ever had, was there, right in front of her.

So they slept together. She started it. Maybe it was fear of being alone, maybe it was the world about to come to an end, or maybe, deep down, she felt an attraction to Clark that she would never, at any other time, have admitted to, but something propelled her to lean forward and kiss him. And one thing led to another, and before long they were lying next to each other in his bed.

The night was purely wonderful. She had never felt so loved, nor so satisfied. But the next morning, when she woke, she was alone. Clark's side of the bed was empty. Lois lay there for half an hour, mentally kicking herself for letting things go this far. And yet... wondering if maybe it didn't matter, if this was truly The End anyway.

With tears in her eyes, she got dressed, wrote Clark a note, and headed for the Planet, intent on waiting there until Nightfall made its appearance.

But as soon as she hit the streets, Lois recognized a change in the atmosphere. Whereas in days prior there had been moaning and mourning galore, there was now cheering and whooping and hugs among strangers. She nabbed the first cheerer she saw and asked what was going on.

"The asteroid's turned around!" the woman cried. "We just heard it on the radio! It's reversed direction!"

"Superman!" was all Lois could say.

The woman shrugged. "Well, what else, I guess? Who cares? Everything's going to be okay after all!"

Lois couldn't believe her ears. After days of terror and fear... it was going to be all right. The world *wasn't* ending. There would be a tomorrow. And a next day. And she would have to live with what they had done. No... what *she* had done. Making love to a man who didn't even know who he was! Would he ever

forgive her? Could she ever forgive herself?

She glanced back toward Clark's apartment building. Should she return, wait for him to come back (where had he gone, anyway?), and share the good news with him?

With a steeling of her heart and a shake of her head, she raised an arm to hail a cab to the Daily Planet.

"Lois? We're here."

Lois opened her eyes. Lex was peering at her worriedly.

"Where are we?" she asked. Then, with an embarrassed smile, she realized: he had taken her home.

"Let me walk you up," Lex said.

As they headed toward Lois's front steps, Lois noticed the street seemed oddly quiet. She wondered if she was losing her senses.

Lex offered to stay with her, but Lois declined. He kissed her goodbye on the cheek and instructed her to lock her door. Like she didn't always.

After securing five out of the seven bolts, Lois slipped off her shoes and went toward her bedroom. There, she threw herself upon her bed.

I nearly died today, she could not stop thinking as she lay there. It was, she had to admit, a strange thing to think, because, as a tenacious, headstrong investigative reporter, she had "nearly died" many times before. But this time, it was different. Those times, her wits and quick thinking — and limited but still effective self-defense skills — had gotten her out of jams. Or Superman had arrived in the nick of time to catch her from being splattered on the ground or blown into a million pieces. But never before in her recollection had she been saved by... well... a miracle. A non-Superman-related miracle.

Or *had* she? Maybe Superman had actually been in the courtroom, and maybe he had, in the quickest of motions, stopped the bullet with his hand, and perhaps it had just ricocheted and hit the gunman instead. Then Superman had made a quick exit before anyone could see anything but a faint rush of blue.

Okay, that was possible... if it were *just* today... if strange things hadn't been happening to her for weeks now.... What about the boiling water she had accidentally splashed on herself that hadn't done anything more than get her arm a bit damp? Or the time she'd been running toward a story and had tripped and landed sprawling on the ground and hadn't even torn a hole in her nylons?

Something strange was happening to her, but what? *Why?*

Riiiiinnnggg! The sound of the phone jarringly forced Lois out of her ponderous state. She reached for the receiver beside her bed. "Hello?"

"Lois, honey, is that you? Are you all right? It's all over the news. Gosh, I'm glad you weren't hurt. Should I get someone else to cover the trial, or are you going to be able to do this? If you think you're too close to it now, I understand, but —"

"I'm okay, Perry," Lois lied. "Everything's fine. I'll be back in that courtroom as soon as they decide to resume."

"Well, it sounds like it's business as usual in the morning. They think today was an isolated incident. They're going to amp up the security at the courthouse, though, that's for sure. Do you want me to send Kent in with you tomorrow?"

"No!" Lois spoke almost too quickly. "I mean, no... no, there's no need to have two reporters there. I'm sure lots else is happening in Metropolis... plenty to report on elsewhere...."

"Well, all right. Keep me posted. I'll talk to you tomorrow. You stay safe now."

"Thanks, Perry."

No sooner had she hung up the phone than it began to ring again. "Hello?"

"Lois Lane? This is Erica Spelling, with the Metropolis Star.

I'd like to ask you a few questions about your ordeal today. First off —"

"How'd you get this number!?" Lois spat. Then, "You do realize I'm a *Planet* reporter!?" The nerve! "I have nothing more to say," she said firmly and hung up.

Ten seconds later, it began to ring again. Lois felt ready to scream. She yanked up the receiver and growled, "WHAT?"

There was a brief silence on the other end, followed by a very meek, "Is... this a bad time?"

Color flooded her cheeks. "Oh, Clark... hi... sorry, I —"

"I heard about what happened. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Really. It was just one of those crazy things. No harm, no foul, though. I'll be back in the courtroom tomorrow."

"You're sure?" Clark sounded surprised.

"Yeah. I mean, I'm a reporter; I've got a job to do. Can't let the public down, right?"

"You're more important than the public, Lois."

"That's sweet, Clark, but really, what else could possibly happen? The psycho who tried to kill me is dead. What are the odds that *another* gunman will take up the job tomorrow?"

"With your luck?" Clark teased.

"Very funny." But this brought a smile to her face.

"All right, well... have a good evening. I'll talk to you later."

"Bye, Clark."

As she laid the phone in its cradle, she pulled the cord out of the wall. No more calls tonight. She needed her rest.

CLARK

Clark stared at the phone in his hand and sighed. He was glad he'd had a chance to talk to Lois, glad that she'd picked up and actually conversed with him. These days, he never knew if she'd give him the time of day or just brush him off completely. Ever since their night together, she had seemed so distant and guarded. He didn't understand it, and a part of him wished that night had never happened — if only because it had derailed any progress they'd made in their relationship up to that point.

But why? They had both seemed to enjoy it that night. She had seemed so content, and as he watched her drift off to sleep afterwards, he had felt nothing but love for her. He knew at that moment that he had always loved her. And he knew it because, all of a sudden, all his memories came pouring back.

The Nightfall Asteroid. EPRAD. Kissing Lois goodbye. His parents. His first day at the Daily Planet, seeing Lois storm into Perry's office. The heat wave, the pheromone perfume, the Toasters, Lois in a chicken outfit, the Invisible Man, Jason Trask, the Kryptonite, the bomb on the space shuttle, the Superman costumes his mother had made —

And as he lay there, with a sinking feeling in his heart he realized he'd done something he had sworn he'd never do. Of course, not until that very moment did he remember about his self-promise, but now it was too late. He had always dared to dream that someday things might go this far with Lois, but if they did — IF they did — he would tell her his Secret first. She had a right to know. And if learning the news caused her to run in the opposite direction, then so be it. But he *would* tell her.

But here they were, and... he hadn't. He knew, deep down, it wasn't his fault. *He* hadn't even remembered he was Superman until just now, so how could he have told Lois? But *now* he knew. And now he felt like he'd somehow knocked over a priceless vase with his elbow and let it fall to the ground. He had, without meaning to, done something huge. Huge and irreparable.

No, perhaps it wasn't irreparable. Perhaps if he told her everything now, she would understand. But she was asleep now, and sleeping so peacefully. He would wait. There would be plenty of time for that.

No! No, there wouldn't! The Nightfall Asteroid was speeding

toward Earth at that very moment! There was no time to waste. He slipped out of bed and went toward the closet where he kept the suits. Moments later, he was taking off toward the sky, intent on stopping that asteroid one way or another.

Clark remembered the people at EPRAD saying that he — Superman — had managed to break apart the asteroid in his initial attempt. Now there was just a three-mile-wide portion headed for Earth. Clark wondered if he could tackle that on his own. Well, there was only one way to find out....

He sped toward the chunk of asteroid, but slowed himself when he got near it. He would not risk smashing into it this time. No, he would push, push with everything he had. And if that wasn't enough, then... well, he didn't want to think about that.

At first it felt like he would not succeed. It felt as if the asteroid were merely pushing him along with it. But with all his strength, he steeled himself against it, and to his relief, he felt its pressure begin to diminish. When it had come to nearly a complete halt, he took a deep breath and began to push again. As his mind flashed to Lois, his parents, and everything else on Earth he was fighting this battle for, an extra ounce of adrenaline kicked in, and he felt the asteroid moving in the opposite direction.

Relief. He'd done it. He flew back to Earth. As he approached Metropolis, he could hear cheering in the streets. He headed to his apartment. He would tell Lois everything. Right now. No matter what came of it, she deserved to know.

But when he got there, she was gone. There was a note, scribbled in her handwriting, saying she'd gone back to the Planet and he could join her there if he felt up to it. A glance at the clock told him he'd been gone for longer than he'd realized. Oh no! How it must have looked to her, to wake up and see that he wasn't there....

He rushed to the Planet. She was there; they were all there, toasting each other over the good news of the asteroid's retreat. A noisemaker blew near his ear. Cat planted a kiss on him. But all he cared about at that moment was speaking to Lois.

"Hey, Clark," she said when she saw him. "Did you hear the good news?"

He could only nod.

"Well, great, because we've got a story to write."

"Lois... can we... talk?"

She looked at him strangely. Then she shook her head. "Clark, if it's about last night... there's really nothing to talk about. It shouldn't have happened. I'm really sorry about that. You without your memory, and —"

"No, Lois, my memory — it's back!"

"Really?" Now she looked indeed happy. "Clark, that's great!" She quickly turned toward her desk and began rummaging through the top drawer.

"Yeah, and, well... there's something I need to talk to you about. Could you come with me to one of the conference rooms?"

"Clark, can this wait? We really need to get this story out by the afternoon edition. Where IS that stupid thing? Oh, there it is," she said, extracting what appeared to Clark to be an ordinary pencil.

"I guess it can wait," Clark said quietly. "But we do need to talk later...."

"Yeah, sure, fine," Lois said, studying the pencil tip as if it were something odd and fascinating.

But "later" still had not come. Clark had tried several more times, and Lois had always put him off. After a time, she began to snap at him whenever he'd suggest a conversation, and eventually it became clear that it was not going to happen. Clark became discouraged. *How*, he reasoned, *can I tell her my Secret, trust her with something that big, when I can't even count on her to engage in an important conversation?* No, Lois was playing things her way, and Clark knew the only thing he could do was

back off for now. Maybe someday....

LOIS

Lois awoke with a start. Her alarm clock was screaming at her, urging her to rise. She reached over to shut it off, misjudged the distance, and sent it careening off the nightstand. *Thud.*

Oh. So it was going to be one of *those* mornings.

It had been nearly three weeks since the incident at the courthouse. In fact, the trial itself had come to an end yesterday. Today she'd be back at the Planet. Lois decided she wouldn't miss starting her days at the courthouse — they had the *worst* coffee.

She stumbled to her closet and began rifling through her outfits. She pulled out a blouse, skirt, and matching blazer and began to dress. As she fastened the skirt around her middle, she was dismayed to find that it felt snug.

A nagging thought resurfaced, but she pushed it aside. It had been pawing at her for two months, but... no, she wouldn't listen to that craziness. It could *not* happen to her. She had just eaten too many fudge bars, that was all. And she hadn't had much time to go to the gym since the trial started. She would just have to watch what she ate. She'd be back to normal in no time.

Normal, she mused, as she went for a different skirt. *I haven't been 'normal' since...*

Suddenly she fell to the floor in a heap and let the tears fall and fall. It couldn't be true. It just couldn't! She couldn't be, no... her career... everything she'd worked towards... and how was she going to explain this to Lex? To Perry? To... no, not to Clark. Darn it if she was ever going to speak to *him* again!

By the time she arrived at work an hour later, all evidence of her breakdown had vanished. She'd managed to pull herself together. She was determined to get through today without letting anyone know anything was amiss.

"Good morning, Lois," Clark said, in his cheerful but slightly-hesitant way, as Lois approached her desk.

"Morning," she replied, refusing to look at him.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Fine," she answered tightly, taking a seat and turning on her computer. "Now if you'll excuse me...."

"Um, well, actually, Perry said he wanted to see us in his office as soon as you came in."

"Us?"

"Yes, us."

She heaved a great sigh. "Fine," she muttered, "but this better be good."

CLARK

Clark glanced sideways at Lois as Perry filled them in on their new assignment. Something was definitely off with her. Clark couldn't quite put his finger on what, but there was something. Did she *look* different? No... she was as beautiful as ever. Had she done something with her hair? Was he supposed to have noticed? Was she mad because he hadn't said anything? *Had she done something?*

"Kent! Are you listening?"

"Sorry, Chief, what?"

He could swear he saw the corner of Perry's mouth twitch into the tiniest of smiles.

LOIS

Lois bought two tests, one with the plus and the minus signs and one with the pink and the blue. They both gave the same result: positive.

Now what? she thought miserably. She had never been pregnant before. In fact, she had never even had any pregnant friends and had no idea what she was to do next. Was she supposed to send out an announcement? Make reservations at a

hospital? Tell someone?

Let's see, she thought, who should I tell first? Mother so I can get screamed at for 'throwing my life away'? Lex so I can be promptly dumped? Oh, I know, why don't I get the Planet to just put out an announcement on the front page so the entire world can be informed at once?

The Planet... Well, maybe putting something in the paper was a *bit* extreme, but it might help to tell Perry, at least. He had kids of his own; maybe he'd know a thing or two.

Of course, having and raising the baby wasn't her only option — she knew that. And despite what her mother might say about destroying her life, Lois knew that in this day and age, having a baby wasn't *necessarily* a career killer. More like... a career *hurdle*. A bump in the road. But certainly not the end of the world.

Perhaps it was the fighter inside her, but Lois knew even then that she wanted to keep this baby and give raising it a shot. Why couldn't she be an ace reporter *and* an ace mother? Just because her parents had totally dropped the ball raising *her* didn't mean *she* was doomed to raise a screwed-up human being. No, she could totally do this. Why couldn't she? Why *shouldn't* she?

One thing was for certain, though: she was *not* going to tell Clark the baby was his. Never. Let him think she'd gotten knocked up by a random source, but never, ever, ever would she let him know that their night together had left any permanent remnants. She could just picture his reaction if she told him the truth. *Let me do something. Let me help you.* Or worse: what if his wholesome Kansas upbringing required a ring before a baby? What if he insisted they tie the knot immediately lest they disgrace the entire Kent family tree?

Shotgun wedding or no, eventually everyone was bound to know that she was pregnant. Her heart hit rock bottom when she pictured Superman's reaction. How would she ever be able to convince him she loved him now?

She cried herself to sleep that night.

The next morning, there was a knock at the door. A telegram. Of all things, a telegram from Lex telling her he had enjoyed her good company these past few months, but that it seemed their relationship had run its course. She was stunned. She was being dumped via telegram! Why? Did Lex have spies in the drugstore where she'd bought the pregnancy tests? Was it just a crazy coincidence? Did it matter? No, it didn't, she supposed. Lex would have probably dumped her anyway once she'd told him.

And now she was alone. One hundred percent alone. Choking back tears, she dressed for work.

Lois had given up driving since her first dizzy spell — it was just too risky. Now she either walked to work or took a taxi. This morning she chose to walk, figuring the spring air would do her emotions some good.

She was just passing the park when she became aware of an altercation about twenty feet away from her. A fight? A mugging? Before she could even process what she was seeing, she heard a familiar *whoosh* and saw a flash of red and blue. Superman was there, breaking up the tussle. Her heart began to beat rapidly. *Please don't let him see me!* she thought fervently. She ran a hand through her hair and let it fall against her face, shielding her profile.

Hiding from Superman! It had come to this! She felt silly, but didn't know what else to do. She was sure that somehow he'd be able to tell her secret just by looking at her. He *was* Superman, after all. What *couldn't* he do?

"Lois!"

Oh no, he'd seen her! He was coming toward her! *Act natural.* She turned toward him with a winning smile.

"Hi, Lois!"

"Hi, Superman," she said sweetly. *Yeah, you keep that eye contact, mister!*

"How are you?" he asked.

"Good," she lied. "You?"

"Fine." He folded his arms across his chest. "I read all your articles about the Beymer Trial. Sounds like a pretty exciting..." he trailed off. "Lois — are you all right?"

It was happening again. A dizzy spell. *Not now!* she thought. *Please, not now!*

Her last conscious thought was that it felt awfully good to be in Superman's arms. Almost as good as being in Clark's....

CLARK

It took every ounce of willpower not to eavesdrop on the conversation between Lois and her doctor. Clark was dying to know what was being said — not only because he was so concerned about Lois, but also because he was pretty sure that when Lois got out of the exam room, she was *not* going to be forthcoming with information. Sure, maybe it wasn't any of his business. But he cared about her so vehemently, he felt *not* knowing what was wrong was asking too much of him. He had to know. He loved her.

"You didn't have to come," Lois said to Clark when she was finally released. "But thanks," she added when she saw the pitiful look on his face.

"No problem. So... um... is everything okay?" he asked, trying to sound light-hearted, like his very essence didn't depend on the answer to that question.

"Low blood sugar," Lois said. "Mixed with low blood pressure. A deadly combination," she added jokingly. "Nothing to worry about."

He didn't believe her. He wanted to, but he could tell she was holding something back. *Why, Lois? Why don't you trust me? Why don't you let me in on this?*

But he didn't voice any of this. Instead he said, "Perry said to make sure you got home okay, so I called a taxi..."

"Thanks, but I'm really feeling a lot better now, and I think home is the last place I want to be. Let's just head to the Planet."

"You sure?"

She nodded.

LOIS

Back at the Planet, Perry was none too thrilled to see his star reporter. "Lois Lane, what are you doing here? I want you to take the rest of the day off!"

"Perry, I'm *fine!*"

"That's not what I hear!"

"What have you *heard?*" Lois asked challengingly.

"Well, according to Superman —"

"Superman!" Lois cried. "Look, I know he's the one who told you guys I was in the hospital, but *honestly!* How many times has he rescued me? Like, a million? And how many times has a rescue by Superman prompted you to give me a day off? Really, Perry, if this becomes the norm, I'll probably never be stepping foot in here again."

"Lois, honey, we've known each other a long time. And I know something's not been right with you lately. And, well, this little trip to the hospital..."

"Which was *nothing,*" Lois tried to assure him.

Perry leaned back in his chair, sighed, and shook his head. "Okay, maybe, maybe not. I can't say you *look* sick; heck, you look like you could run a marathon and not feel winded. In some ways, I think you've never seemed better."

"See? So I'm fine."

"Fine people don't pass out on street corners."

She narrowed her eyes. "Perry, please. It was a one-time thing."

"Are you sure there isn't anything you wanna tell me?"

They locked eyes for a good solid minute. Lois knew she'd

have to tell Perry the truth sooner rather than later, but telling him *now* would mean he'd have won this battle. And she wasn't about to let that happen.

"Nope, nothing. Now, can I get back to work, please?"

"Go," said Perry, giving her a wave of his hand. He'd known Lois long enough to know when she wasn't going to budge. "Oh, but send Kent in here, would you?"

CLARK

"I don't know *why* she's been acting different, Chief." Clark tugged at his necktie nervously. "Maybe it has something to do with that gunman in the courthouse."

"Could be," said Perry, "but she's been acting funny for longer than that. I know I didn't see much of her when she was covering the Beymer Trial, but something's been up with her for a while now. I thought if anyone would know something, it'd be you. You're her partner, after all."

"Sorry, I... I really can't say." Clark just hoped his body language wasn't giving him away. *Actually, Chief, Lois has been acting strange ever since we slept together. Oh, didn't I ever tell you about that?* Oh man, if he were to ever let it slip... Lois would definitely be on the warpath.

Perry scratched his chin thoughtfully. "I guess she was pretty shook up by that whole Nightfall thing — we all were — but shoot, the Lois Lane I know is more resilient than that! Gosh, I'm just worried about her."

"I know," said Clark. "I am, too."

"Well, just keep an extra eye on her, would ya?"

"I will," Clark promised.

LOIS

Lois dialed her mother's phone number and then promptly hung up before it could so much as ring. *Ughhhh! This is maddening!* She was now, by her calculations, three months pregnant, and she still hadn't told a soul. And it was eating her up inside. She just had to tell *somebody* before she went crazy!

Lucy... she could call Lucy. No, wait, Lucy was on a road trip with friends, Lois remembered. She doubted any of Lucy's pals had a cellular phone. Unless Lucy were to call *her*, Lois had no way of reaching her until they returned.

Perry... maybe it was time to tell Perry. It had been a week since their meeting in his office; enough time had passed that she could tell him the truth and still hold on to some of her dignity. But it was getting late; maybe she should wait till tomorrow.

She felt an unfamiliar, strange sensation in her belly. Was it a kick? Was this baby old enough to be kicking? Maybe it was indigestion she was feeling. No... not likely. She'd heard tales of morning sickness, but she hadn't experienced an ounce of that. The dizzy spells were the only symptom of her pregnancy — if that's what they even were. No, up until this very moment, her stomach had felt better these last three months than ever before. It was almost as if this baby were doing the exact opposite of what babies were *supposed* to do. Dizziness aside, she felt better, physically, *pregnant* than *not*.

Weird.

The sensation subsided almost as quickly as it appeared. Shrugging, she turned toward her dresser and began to change into her nightclothes. It was a bit early for bedtime, but she wanted to lie down and process some of her swirling thoughts.

She lay on top of the comforter and stared up at her ceiling. With one hand, she caressed her slightly-rounded belly. She closed her eyes.

Her mind began to drift and she thought of many things. The baby. Her parents. The Planet. The story she was working on.

She wasn't sure how much time had passed, how long she'd been lying on the bed, but there came a time when she was suddenly aware of the fact that she felt like she was floating.

It was a strange, wonderful feeling. Like flying — with Superman. High above the Earth, where nothing could touch her, nothing bad could hurt her. Just her and Superman, alone together. Her in his arms, with his sweet, gentle, perfect way of touching her. Just like he had that night....

No, wait, that was... that wasn't Superman, that was Clark. *Oh well, no matter*, she thought as her thoughts continued to come and go in waves. *That'd been quite nice, too*. Except... *Oh, Clark... it should never have happened!* But it had happened, and it had been amazing. *But... we were colleagues, friends... we should never have....*

The first rays of morning light hit Lois's eyelids and shook her out of a deep sleep. As she opened her eyes, two thoughts struck her: one, morning had come much too quickly, and two, she was pretty certain that last night she'd been floating.

But now she felt the bed securely beneath her. No, she hadn't been floating, only dreaming.

I guess pregnancy makes you a little loopy, she mused. She checked the clock beside her bed. She still had another half hour before her alarm was due to go off. *Maybe I'll just lie back and try to have just one more of those dreams....*

CLARK

"Hey, Lois, looks like you've been *dumped*," Cat Grant's surly voice rang out across the newsroom. "How does it feel to be shunned by the second-richest man in the world?"

"It feels great," said Lois. "And I'm surprised, Cat. Lex and I broke up over a week ago, and it took you *this* long to get the memo? For shame. I think you might be slipping."

Clark couldn't help grinning at Lois's sassy retort. He loved that about her, that she could hold her own even when she was being ridiculed. Of course, if it were up to him, the ridicule wouldn't happen at all. Darn Cat, anyway. But at least Lois had the tenacity to put Cat in her place.

Cat's news came as no surprise to Clark; he'd seen the Planet's society section earlier that morning. The pages were splashed with photos of Lex Luthor and his new leading lady: a former model, an heiress, a budding fashion designer. The word was out: Lex Luthor and Lois Lane were no more. Not that they'd ever been anything more than dinner and dancing partners, really. At least, that was what it seemed like to Clark. Never a cause for too much alarm, just some minor jealousy. If it had progressed further than that... well, Clark wasn't sure what he would have done. He knew who Lex *truly* was, and if Lois had actually fallen for Lex... well, he would have had to make some drastic moves.

"Lois! Clark! My office!" Perry's voice called.

Clark stood up quickly. He met Lois's eye as she hurried past him toward the Editor-In-Chief's office. He arrived after her and shut the door.

"What've we got today?" Lois asked. "A murder? Kidnapping? Scandal? I need some excitement."

"Whoa there, cowgirl," Perry said, chuckling. "Okay, I can see you're in fine spirits this morning. Is this just so I'll stop buggin' you about your health? Well, maybe it's working."

"So what's the story?"

"Hold your horses. Sit down, you two."

Clark and Lois sat in the two chairs across from Perry's desk and leaned forward to hear what Perry had to tell them.

"There's this woman, Ronna Salvatore," Perry explained. "Lives over in Metropolis Heights. She called a little bit ago and said she had a tip for us. Actually, she asked to talk to the two of you, specifically. Seems she might know somethin' about all those robberies and muggings on the West Side. Like who's behind 'em. But she's afraid to leave her house, so she asked that you come to her. You up to it?"

"I'm game," said Lois.

Clark nodded.

“Good. Here’s her address.”

They hailed a cab and rode in silence to the Salvatore home. When they reached the place — an impressive Victorian mansion, by the looks of it — Clark paid the cabbie and he and Lois started up the walkway.

“Why don’t you let me do the talking,” Lois said. “You know — she’s a woman, I’m a woman — I’m sure I can get something out of her.”

“Whatever you say,” Clark said.

“Fine,” said Lois, feeling a mite ashamed for being so bossy. But she felt a pressing need to be in control — somehow, somehow. This was her way.

They rang the doorbell and a maid answered the door.

“Welcome,” the maid said in a heavy accent. “Mrs. Salvatore is downstairs in her office. She asked that I show you the way.”

They were escorted to a doorway, which led to a flight of stairs. Without a word, they descended the steps. At the bottom, they found themselves in a room with three closed doors.

“Which one do you think it is?” Lois asked absently before calling out, “Mrs. Salvatore?”

The door to their left opened, and a woman clad in a black dress appeared. She held a gun in her hand.

“You’re just in time,” the woman said darkly.

This was not good. Clark quickly lowered his glasses and x-rayed the gun. Loaded. He made a move to put himself between Lois and the woman and tried frantically to think of a way to get them both out of the situation safely.

Lois kept her cool. “Mrs. Salvatore?” she asked, as if she hadn’t even noticed the gun.

“Formerly Mrs. SalvaTORE,” the woman spat. “My good-for-nothing ex-husband can KEEP his last name for all I care, along with everything else he’s probably going to get!”

“Ma’am,” Clark said, putting out one hand. “Just calm down, please. Tell us what we can do to help you.”

“You can HELP me by taking back those LIES you printed about my brother in the paper!”

“Uh, help us out here,” Lois said. “Who is your brother?”

“ARTHUR MONROE!”

The Monroe Story. Four, five months ago? Clark racked his brain for details. “I remember the story,” Clark said. “If you’ll just put down the gun and talk to us calmly, I’m sure we can get to the truth about your brother. If we misrepresented him in any way, we can print a retraction....”

“I don’t want a RETRACTION! I want my life back! YOU HAVE RUINED MY LIFE! So help me, I will KILL YOU BOTH!”

LOIS

“Ronna, Ronna, Ronna,” a smooth-sounding voice broke through the void. A man stepped through the door directly opposite the stairs. He, too, was brandishing a gun. “Please excuse my sister,” he said suavely. “She gets a bit excited. Good afternoon, Ms. Lane, Mr. Kent. Won’t you step into my office for a moment?” He nodded toward the room to their right.

“Arthur Monroe.” Lois sucked in her breath. She remembered that greasy-haired jerk. She could have sworn he was in prison. Yet here he was, in his sister’s basement, with a gun. “I guess we don’t have much of a choice, do we?” she muttered.

Arthur laughed menacingly. “I guess you don’t.”

“What do you want from us?” Lois demanded as she and Clark were forced into the third room, a windowless box with cement walls.

“We only want you to suffer the way you’ve made *us* suffer,” Ronna said sweetly, as she handed her brother a length of rope. “Here, Arthur, I’ll let you do the honors,” she said.

For a moment, Lois wondered if she should make a desperate move — take a flying swing at Ronna, a swift kick at Arthur. If she could survive a bullet to the head, she was sure she could somehow survive this altercation. But could Clark? No, with two guns in the picture, better to just play it safe. Superman would surely get them out of this... eventually....

So there they were, in a position that was not altogether unfamiliar to the two of them. Held captive by a madman — and a madwoman, in this case — intent on revenge.

The door to their cell had been locked and they’d been left alone for fewer than two minutes when Clark blurted, “Lois, there’s something I need to tell you — ”

Lois opened her mouth to protest, but then thought better of it. Clark had been trying to talk to her for months. She had pushed him away over and over. And where had that gotten them? Here, that’s where. Tied up in a lunatic’s basement, their backs to each other, with two crazy people out there with loaded weapons. How much worse could it possibly get?

“There’s something I need to tell you, too,” Lois said before she could stop herself. She checked herself. *Should I? Should I tell him everything? Oh, what the heck. I’m sick of keeping this secret from everybody. Besides, now’s as good a time as any.* When Clark didn’t reply, she continued, “So, um... something really strange has been happening to me... for a while, now. That gun in the courtroom — it shot me, Clark — I felt the bullet hit me... but it didn’t hurt me. And just now, I... I’ve somehow managed to undo the ropes... I think I’ve broken them, actually....”

She turned to face him. His eyes were wide with — was it fear? Horror?

“Say something, please,” she whispered.

“I’m Superman,” he said quietly.

She blinked. The room began to spin.

“Lois? Lois, are you okay?”

She became aware of the fact that she was lying in his arms, and he was looking at her with deep concern.

It all made sense now. Complete, off-the-wall, amazing, thrilling, terrifying sense. It was so simple. Her resistance to bullets. Those strange sensations. The floating feeling. She was... he was... *they* were....

She lifted her head and looked directly into his eyes.

“Clark... why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“I — I *wanted* to, but — ”

“Do you know what you’ve put me through these last three months?!”

“What I’ve put *you* through?” he gasped. “What is *that* supposed to mean?”

Men! They were so... *clueless!* “I’m pregnant!” she told him matter-of-factly. “And it’s *yours*, thankyouverymuch.”

There. It was out. She watched with some amusement as his jaw dropped and his eyes got very wide.

“And I have news for you, mister,” she went on, sitting up. “This baby is definitely giving me a taste of the Superheroics, and I’m not so sure I like them! Sure, they’ve saved my life a couple of times, but if you think I’m raising this child on my own, you’ve got another think coming, pal.”

“You’re — you’re sure that you’re — ” Clark said, gazing at her in wonderment.

“Darn sure.”

“Lois, I wouldn’t dream of letting you do it alone,” he told her.

She watched his expression closely. She believed him. How could she not? This was Clark, who was always faithful, always patient, always there for her, whether she wanted him or not. And yet — he was also... (she still couldn’t quite wrap her mind around it)... *Superman*. He was the man that she’d loved since that first day — the day he’d saved her and then flew her over the

city and through the open window of the Daily Planet newsroom. Who had told her he'd "be around" when she asked how she could find him. The man who'd turned her heart completely to mush with that one look. The man who she'd secretly saved her heart for ever since the beginning. The man she feared she could never have.

And here he was now, right in front of her. But not only was he *that* man, but he was also *Clark*. Lois could stand it no longer. Her lips raced toward his and she kissed him. He seemed taken aback, but only for a second; then he responded eagerly. She began to run her hands through his hair, and she felt his hands caressing her body.

"Hey, you two! Cut that out!" Ronna Salvatore was back, standing in the doorway to their cell, looking peeved. "And how'd you get untied?"

Lois slowly broke away from Clark and gave him a wily grin. "Do you want to take her, or should I?"

"Why don't you let me get his one?" Clark said.

And with one more kiss, he stood up to make his move.

THE END