

Just a Little Note

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Co-Written by: The initial late night phone conversation was written by Queen of Capes (Lois's part) and Lynn S.M. (Jimmy's dialogue).

Rated PG

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Summary: Lois discovers a note possibly written by Superman. While hunting down confirmation, she re-evaluates her feelings for Clark.

Disclaimer: The characters were created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. Many thanks to the writers on the show, especially Deborah Joy LeVine, Tony Blake and Paul Jackson from whom I quote directly. I did not create these characters nor do I own any rights associated with them. I thank the characters for visiting my muse and whispering this little story into her ear. The plot of this story (after the initial phone conversation) is entirely my own.

Gratitude: I would like to thank Mary, Queen of Capes and Lynn S.M. for inspiring me with their little "Half-A-Conversation" story starter. I also pay homage to Lynn's "Gofer No More?" story, which motivated Jimmy's love of eggs in my story. This story is twice as strong due to my wonderful Beta Readers: IolantheAlias and Stopquidont for their great advice and comma revisions. Thank you.

Set: Season 2, after "The Eyes Have It".

Saturday Morning — around 3 a.m.

Lois grumbled and reached over to grab the phone. "Whatever it is, it'd better be important. Do you have any idea what time it is?!" She rubbed her eyes, trying to wake up a little. She listened as Jimmy sang off-key, "*Get me to the church on time!*"

"Huh?"

Jimmy slurred out, "*Hey, is Shuperman there?*"

"*Superman?*" She sat up a little straighter, a frown crossing her features. "Have you been drinking?"

"*I'm drunk on love. I'm gonna get married.*"

Her hand came up to rub her eyes again. "Calm down, okay? I can't follow a word you're — *Married?!*" She glared at the phone. "You **have** been drinking."

"*Jusst a liittle. To celebuhbrate. I hoped Super-duper-man could fly me and Candy to Vegas tonight. He there?*"

"Uh huh. What?! No! No, that's a very bad — just — just stay right where you are, okay? In fact...do you want me to come get you?" She started to climb out of bed.

"*Oh, Hey there! Loish, he's here. Big Blue himshelf.*"

"What? Oh, he is? That's...that's good, then, I guess."

"*He musta heard me talking 'bout him. What? Aw darn. He jusht told me he promised to be somewhere in a few minutes. No wedding tonight, but he can take me home. I'm gonna flyyyyyyy.*"

"Yeah, you do that. I'll see you tomorrow, then?"

"*It'sh my day off. Be in on Sunday.*"

"Okay. Goodnight."

Lois hung up the phone, yawning as she settled back into bed. It was only a matter of seconds before sleep reclaimed her.

Saturday Mid-Morning

Lois stared at her computer screen, not seeing the words there. The ding of the elevator broke her out of her reverie, causing her to glance up. Clark entered the newsroom. He saw her watching him and a smile slipped onto his lips. She shook her head and tried again to concentrate on her monitor. She was miffed that he still hadn't told her where he disappeared off to last weekend while Superman was blind.

Clark touched her shoulder as he stopped by her desk. "Good morning, Lois. What are you doing in the office on this beautiful Saturday?"

Lois's head still throbbed from her crazy dream last night. Clark's usual upbeat happiness was too much. "Working. What else? What are *you* doing here?" she said it more out of politeness than actual curiosity.

"Superman accident over in Queensland Park."

"Superman?" Lois gasped, suddenly interested. "Is he okay?"

"Superman *rescued* people in a car accident, Lois," he clarified, his lips both pressed together in disappointment and curled up in delight at the same time.

"Right. Of course." She shook her head. "What were you doing over in Queensland Park?"

Clark held up the pastry in his hand. She hadn't noticed it when he had come in.

"What? None for me?" she asked wryly, causing him to sputter an apology. Kent was too easy a mark.

"Sorry. I had a dream about Superman last night," Lois continued, leaning back in her chair.

Clark's brows went up, though not in surprise.

"Not *that* kind of dream, Smallville."

"I wasn't... Was it a flying dream? I have those a lot," he told her, crossing his arms now that he was done with his breakfast.

"Kind of. It was strange..." Lois started to explain when Clark broke eye contact to look up and to the right.

When his gaze returned to her it was almost apologetic. He lifted up a finger. "Hold that thought."

"What?" she grumbled, knowing exactly *what* was coming next.

"I just remembered I have a library book due and they close at noon today. I'll be right back and then you can tell me all about your Superman dream," Clark said in a rush before he side-step jogged out of the newsroom. "I'll bring you a coffee," he called before disappearing.

Lois shook her head and pulled out a list from under her keyboard. "Library book. Check. Hmmm. Fourth one this month." She wondered where Clark actually went when he made his mad dashes away from her, but this thought was cut off by the ringing of her telephone. She reached over to pick it up as she slid the list back. "Lois Lane," she said into the phone.

"Lois," Jimmy moaned. "*Not so loud. My head.*"

"Jimmy? Are you okay?" she asked, concerned, yet more hopeful for a story.

"*Hung-over.*"

"Were you out drinking last night?" The familiarity of this conversation tugged at her, but she brushed the feeling away.

"*Yeah, I think so. Angela dumped me. So, my roommates and I checked out that new club... I forget the name...*" Jimmy spoke slowly as if each word was painful to say. "*Say, am I diabetic?*"

"Not that I know of. Why?" Lois asked, not quite listening now as she pulled out her Clark excuse list again.

"*There was a note on my dining room table this morning. It said: 'Stay away from Candy and apologize to Lois. What am I sorry about, Lois?'*"

Her eyes opened wide. That dream wasn't a dream after all! Jimmy did wake her up in the middle of the night. "Jimmy Olsen! You called me at quarter to three in the morning asking for

Superman. Want to explain that one to me?" she snapped.

"Ow, Lois. My head," Jimmy groaned. "I don't know. Why *did* I want Superman?"

"To fly you to Vegas so you could marry some bimbo named Candy," she informed him, tapping her pen impatiently on her desk.

"I'm married?" he gasped. She heard a shattering of glass over the line.

"No, I believe Superman took you... Jimmy, did you say you had a note? Was it signed?"

"Signed? No. I don't know who wrote it," Jimmy replied.

"Hey, Lois, I've got to go. I've spilt my orange juice."

"Has anyone else touched that note besides you?" she shot out at him.

"Ow. Lois! My head. No, I don't think so. Just me," he whined.

"Don't let anyone else touch it and put it in a plastic sandwich bag. I'll be right over," she said, pulling her briefcase out from under her desk.

"Right over? No, Lois. I'm not up to entertaining right now." Jimmy yawned for good measure.

"Fine, Jimmy, we can just talk on the phone. I've got some questions for you. First off, you woke me up when you called me at quarter to three in the morning looking for Superman. Why did you think Superman would be at my apartment in the middle of the night while I'm asleep in bed?"

Lois listened as Jimmy sputtered his lack of an answer into the line, before finally muttering, "See you in a few, Lois."

She grinned in victory. "See you soon, Jimmy."

Lois looked at the note in her hand. "This can't be right," she mumbled. Then she looked over at Jimmy. "Do you remember how you came home last night?"

Jimmy slowly blinked his bloodshot eyes at her, each time wincing as if his eyeballs were sandpaper. "No."

"Did you take a cab or fly?" she repeated her question in another manner.

"Lo-is! I don't... Did you say fly?" Jimmy inquired with a hand to his forehead.

"When you called me last night you said that Big Blue had just arrived and was about to take you home. Is that true?" She was in her reporter interview mode.

"What?! I don't know," he stammered. "I doubt I'd even be able to pick Candy out of a lineup though. Was I really going to get married? Me?"

Lois ignored his questions as she held up the note. "Who wrote this?"

Jimmy leaned forward and stared at the note, squinting. "I don't know. Looks kind of like CK's handwriting."

She pressed her lips together. That was what she had thought, too. Standing up, she headed for the door. "This is mine. By the time you come in tomorrow I want a detailed account on why you thought Superman would be at my place in the middle of the night."

"I was *drunk*, Lois," Jimmy whined by way of an explanation.

"Not good enough," Lois responded, making sure she shut the door with a slam. She could hear Jimmy groan. Good! That would teach him the consequences of getting drunk.

Lois marched into the Twelfth Street Precinct Station and directly up to Inspector Henderson's office, entering it without knocking.

Bill Henderson glanced up from some paperwork, hiding his startled expression well. "Morning, Lois. What can I do for you?"

"I want to see the Lex Luthor case files," she announced.

"Nope." Henderson leaned back in his chair, his fingertips

together, waiting.

"Why not?" Lois snapped.

"First of all, you didn't say please." A teasing smile hinted at his lips.

Lois rolled her eyes. "Please."

"Nope."

She pressed her lips together and grunted. "Why not?"

"Because it's boxes and boxes of files, and I'm not going to bring them up for you to sift through. What do you want 'em for, Lois?" Merriment danced in the Inspector's eyes. He loved tormenting her.

"I want to see Superman's statement," she finally admitted, shifting to the other foot.

He sat up. "Superman's statement? Why? Is this about the Kryptonite cage Luthor built for him?"

Lois's jaw dropped. This was the first she had heard of a cage. "He did *what*?"

Henderson tried to hide the comprehension that he said too much as he glanced back down at his paperwork. "Never mind, Lois. It wasn't important. No, you can't see the file."

"Bill?" Lois murmured, her voice soft. "Did Lex cage Superman? In Kryptonite? When?" She swallowed. "Why?"

"It's been nice seeing you, Lois. Drop by again next year," Henderson replied, not looking up from his papers and waving her out of the office.

Lois continued to stand in the office staring off into space. "On my wedding day? Lex caged Superman in Kryptonite on the day of our wedding? Why would Lex do that? Is that why Superman didn't save him? Because he couldn't?" She gasped. "Why didn't he say anything?" Suddenly she remembered where she was and to whom she spoke, but the words on the edge of her lips fell out anyway, "To *me*?"

The Inspector stood up from his desk, walked over to Lois and wrapped an arm around her shoulders as he led her out the door of his office. "Why do you think, Lois?"

She raised a finger to ask one last question, but the door to his office shut in her face. Pressing her lips together as her brow furrowed, she shook her head. Going down the hall into another office with many desks, Lois picked out the one occupied by a mousy auburn-haired Detective with beautiful fingernails. "Hello, Detective Reed. I'd like to see the file on the Harrison case. Not the whole file, just Superman's statement."

"Whatcha need that for, Ms. Lane?" Betty Reed asked in her Southern drawl.

"I just want to see it, okay?"

"Not okay," replied the Detective, placing a satisfied smile on her face.

My God, how many bridges had she burned in this Precinct anyway?

Lois nibbled on her bottom lip and she thought over her options. Finally, in an exasperated tone, she said, "Okay. Fine. It's my conditioner. If I give you the name of my conditioner, can I please see the file? Five minutes, that's all I ask."

"Your conditioner?" Detective Reed looked over at Lois's bouncy bob with envy and then she grimaced. "No," she murmured more to herself than to Lois. She raised her voice and spoke slowly to the reporter, staring her directly in the eye, "Do I look like I can be bribed, Ms. Lane?"

Lois harrumphed in frustration.

One more stop on Lois's tour of MPD. She found Sergeant Zymak in the police break room, eating a donut. Big surprise. The man was always eating. She decided to go with the friendlier approach this time.

"Hi, Sergeant Zymak. How are you doing?" Lois smiled sweetly and waited for an answer.

The pudgy, ill-mannered policeman took another bite of his

powdered donut and chewed slowly. Then he took a sip of his coffee. Finally he spoke, “Lois Lane. How can I help you?”

“Last year Superman was arrested for contempt of court. I was wondering if he filled out a statement form. And if he did, could I see it?” She smiled politely at the police officer. All this nicety was making her sick to her stomach. “Please.”

“No, he didn’t fill one out,” replied Zymak. He took another sip of his coffee.

Lois pressed her lips together. “Are you sure about that?”

“Yep. Nothing worked that day. We couldn’t even get his fingerprints because he pressed so hard he broke the machine,” said Zymak, taking another bite of his donut.

“Convenient.” Lois thought for a moment. No fingerprint to match the note with. Darn. “A signature? Nothing?”

Zymak shook his head. “We didn’t need it.”

“What about for the case of Perry White’s missing bearer bonds that you worked? From the Metropolis Men’s Club? Did Superman give a statement about that?” Lois asked hopefully.

“I don’t recall him being a witness in that case,” said Zymak.

Lois rolled her eyes. “How about this? Do you recall anytime Superman wrote anything down or signed anything, anything at all, for the MPD? Witness forms? Statements?”

Zymak shook his head to each of her questions.

Lois pursed her lips together. “Anything?” Annoyed, Lois said as she turned to leave, “I don’t think those donuts are low-fat. I hope the Mrs. doesn’t mind you falling off the diet while you’re at work.”

“Hey, Ms. Lane!” Zymak called after her. “I just remembered. I do have a statement issued by Superman in my latest case file.”

Lois brightened as she turned back to him. A little blackmail never hurt. He waved for her to follow him to his desk. He pulled out the file folder and removed Superman’s statement about a robbery at an electronics store dated from that morning, around the time she had left for Jimmy’s.

“It’s typed!” she grumbled.

“Yeah. He types all his own statements,” replied Zymak taking another bite of his donut. “He says it’s faster that way.”

“Superman types?” Somehow Lois couldn’t picture that.

“Yep. He’s a pretty fast typist too,” said the Sergeant.

“Image that,” Lois stated flatly as she rolled his eyes before focusing them back onto the statement. His signature was a big S and a long wavy line after it. Figures. “Anyone could have signed this.”

Zymak shrugged. “It was him. Witnessed it myself.”

She took one last glance at the statement, running her thumb over Superman’s signature before handing the paper back to the Sergeant. “Thank you.”

Looking down, Lois double-checked the address on the paper in her hand and then knocked. Murray Brown of the Galactic Talent Agency, dressed casually in his robe and boxer shorts, opened the door to his apartment. “Ms. Lane!” he gasped in surprise, closing his robe quickly. “What are you doing here?”

“I’d like to see the contract Superman signed on the rights to his image and name. Actually, scratch that. I’d like to see any notes he may have given you about allocation of funds, complaints about infringements to his image, or anything at all that he may have handwritten to you.”

Murray shook his head. “He usually conducts all business in person. He doesn’t leave notes. All that is confidential information which I wouldn’t share with you anyway.”

She harrumphed again, stomping off without any gratitude.

Lois stood at the doorway of someone’s house where she truly did not want to be. But she was down to her last straw, the last place, the *very* last place where she might find the

information she sought. She was empty of ideas except this last one, otherwise she wouldn’t be here. She sighed and rang the bell.

“Coming,” the female voice called from inside.

Good, at least the woman was at home.

The door opened and there standing on the other side was Mayson Drake, pulling on a shoe. “Oh. Lois. I thought...” She shook that idea out of her head.

Mayson couldn’t possibly think that she was Clark, could she? Not after he stood her up last weekend at the cabin? Lois’s brow furrowed. Did Mayson and Clark have a date for tonight? For Saturday night? Nooooo!

Lois swallowed and placed an innocent smile on her face.

“Mayson, could I come in?”

“Sure,” Mayson backed up and let her inside, showing her to a tasteful living room.

The style wasn’t anywhere near as nice as Lois’s own living room, but — Lois’s chest ached at the thought — it was comfy, Clark comfy.

“I don’t have much time, Lois. I’m expecting company.”

The reporter glanced down at her wristwatch. Quarter to five. Really? That early? Were they retired and going for the early bird special? Focus, Lane! Superman’s handwriting sample. Right. Lois cleared her throat. “I’m following some leads and I was wondering...”

Mayson raised a curious eyebrow. “You’re here on an investigation?”

“Of course. Why else would I be here?” Lois snapped more harshly than she wanted to, but it had been a long day.

“Yes, why else?” Mayson murmured, pressing her lips together. “Lois Lane is always on the job.”

“I am not! Why... Why... just recently I took some days off. To do some stuff. To relax,” Lois caught herself. Rambling. To Mayson. Get a grip, woman!

“What were you wondering, Lois?” Mayson sighed. She was ready to get rid of her as much as Lois was ready to leave.

“Has Superman ever — during the course of any of your investigations or trials — ever written you a note or statement of any kind by hand?” There. She got the words out of her mouth.

Mayson shook her head and looked to the ceiling with a sigh. Was that pity? Was Mayson Drake actually pitying her? “Lois, again with Superman? Does everything in your life circle around your school-girl crush on that man in tights?”

“No. Of course not, Mayson. This is part of an active investigation,” Lois sputtered. “And I don’t like Superman just because of his suit.”

“Right. Is that so? You don’t like the flash and the glamour and flying and strength and whatever else he does?” Mayson inquired with exasperation. “A man is more than what he can do, Lois. It’s the man under the suit that counts. Some of us can be happy with an ordinary man, in an ordinary suit, like Clark. I bet you wouldn’t give one of those the time of day anymore.”

Lois put her hands on her hips. “That’s not true. I would not...” Suddenly an image of Superman telling her that there were things about him that she didn’t know about him, that she might never know about him. That was after Lois told him that she would love him even if he were an ordinary man without any powers. He didn’t seem to believe her. Why? Had he heard her tell Clark that she didn’t have romantic feelings for him? Had Superman known about Clark’s crush on her? Was he secretly hoping that she would fall for Clark? Instead of him? That was when Superman broke her heart causing her to run off and accept Lex’s proposal. Could there be an ordinary man — like Clark — underneath Superman’s suit? No. He was too extraordinary. Too good and too kind and too truthful and too positive. A lot like...

“No, I don’t have any notes from Superman,” Mayson said, pulling Lois away from her thoughts. “Did you really think I

would?”

“No.” Lois pouted with a sigh. “Just hoped.”

“If ever he was to write someone a note, Lois, wouldn’t it be to you? Aren’t you the person he went to for help when he was blind last weekend?” Mayson asked.

Lois’s heart felt like it was pounding in her chest. Yes, last weekend. When Clark didn’t show up for his date with Mayson. She swallowed. No. It was ridiculous. She was tired and hungry and frustrated, otherwise she wouldn’t be entertaining these thoughts. “Thanks, anyway, Mayson,” Lois said, heading back to the front door.

Lois needed fresh air. She needed to clear her mind of these crazy thoughts about her partner. She needed to check something back at her apartment. Yes! Superman *had* written her a note! Well, not *him* him, but the other him. The fake him. She smiled. She wondered if Superman’s handwriting was similar to that of his clone’s.

As Lois went down the front steps of Mayson’s townhouse she noticed a familiar mop of curly hair coming up. “Bobby Bigmouth?”

“Hi there, Lois.” He smiled. Bobby was always happy to see her. Well, usually it was because she was holding a bag of food for him.

Lois just stared at him. *This* was Mayson’s date? Not Clark? Bobby Bigmouth? “What are you doing here?” she finally stammered.

“Mayson’s hired me to give her some private cooking lessons. She’s trying to impress some guy. My guess is that it’s Clark.” Bobby shook his head. “Should I just tell her she has no hope whatsoever in roping in your partner? Or should I just let her wallow? I mean, the poor woman got stood up by the man last weekend and she wants to learn to cook for him.”

“No hope?” Lois asked, her heart beating against her chest.

Bobby rolled his eyes. “Please, Lane. Don’t tell me you haven’t noticed.”

“Noticed? Noticed what?” Lois sputtered. Bobby couldn’t mean what it sounded like he meant. Clark told her he lied about being in love with her.

But Bobby just shook his head and continued up the stairs. “The women in this city are blind when it comes to men. Maybe there’s something in the water,” she heard him mumble to himself.

By the time Lois got back to the office to close down her work station for the day, it was almost six o’clock. She was starving and she felt like she hadn’t learned anything of importance. Except that Lex Luthor thought Superman was planning on interrupting their wedding and had imprisoned him. Why? Did Lex know about the impending investigation and arrest? Or did he think Superman was going to stop their wedding for personal reasons? Had Superman really cared about her? Lois sighed. Why hadn’t Superman told her about the cage?

Lois found a cup of cold coffee sitting on her desk directly on top of her Clark excuse list, leaving a ring. Oh, crap. Clark saw that. And he had brought her coffee, too, just like he said he would. She felt like she was about two inches tall for deserting him. He was her partner after all and she hadn’t told Clark word one about the note left at Jimmy’s. Clark was always doing special and wonderful things for her. Lois plopped down in her chair and pulled that note Jimmy had given her out of her purse.

Clark had said that was why he wouldn’t come to her wedding — because he loved her. Why, oh why had he denied those feelings for her later? Why couldn’t Clark have loved her like Lois had loved him? Was it, like he had said, because Lex had been so horrible and criminal Clark would have done anything to stop her from marrying the man? Or had Clark retracted them because he knew she still had feelings for

Superman? But if he was Superman, wasn’t it better that she like *both* sides of him? Unlike Mayson Drake!

Okay, Lane, it’s official. You’ve fallen off the deep end. Go eat. Check out the note from Superman’s clone. Then go tell Clark how you really feel about him. It’s about time he knew the truth.

Lois pushed herself out of her seat, turned off her light and grabbed the coffee that Clark had brought her. She dumped it into her dead, coffee-loving plant and headed for home.

Late that night, Lois clicked off the the TV and snuggled down into her pillows. She had chickened out of going to Clark’s to confess her feelings. Again. Probably not a good idea with him hot off a date with Mayson having home-cooked him a meal. Lois pressed her lips together. Probably not a good idea after spending all day chasing after Superman either. She sighed.

The note from the clone had been inconclusive. There just wasn’t enough of either note to compare handwriting. She had found some notes that Clark had written in one of her notebooks and again the note from Jimmy’s apartment was just too short to know for sure. After she ate, those coincidences she had tied between her partner and the Man in Blue seemed even more ridiculous.

Lois went to turn off the light, but for some reason her hand picked up the telephone. Before she knew what she had done, it was ringing Clark’s line.

“Hello?” mumbled a drowsy voice.

“Clark! You weren’t asleep were you?” Lois asked. How late was it?

“Lois?” Clark yawned. “No. I’m awake. What’s up?”

“I missed you,” she whispered.

There was silence for a minute. Finally Clark said, “Well, you did ditch me at the office, partner.”

“You ditched me first,” Lois snapped defensively, instantly regretting her tone. She hadn’t called to argue. “Anyway, I was working on something you wouldn’t be interested in.”

“Oh? I’m sorry, Lois, you’re absolutely right. I did abandon you first. You didn’t even leave me a note saying where you were and that you weren’t coming back,” Clark murmured. He sounded hurt.

“Yeah, I know. Thanks for the coffee, by the way.”

“You’re welcome,” he replied automatically. “Go to sleep, Lois.”

“Clark, I learned something today, and until I talk to someone about it, I won’t be able to sleep.” Lois took a deep breath and plowed ahead. “Did you know that Lex caged Superman in Kryptonite on our wedding day?”

The phone went quiet again.

“Clark?”

“Yes,” he whispered. She didn’t know if he was answering her question or her desire for him to speak.

“Why didn’t Superman tell me? Did he think I still wanted to marry that monster? Why do you think that Lex caged him? Do you think Superman was there to arrest Lex? Or was he there to stop the wedding because he still cared for me and Superman had just lied when he said there could never be a future between us?” Lois rambled off these questions at a hundred miles per minute.

“Superman doesn’t lie, Lois,” Clark reminded her softly.

“Oh. Right.” She sighed. Then a smile came to her lips. “Hey, Smallville. You don’t lie either, do you?”

Clark chuckled. “I try not to. It’s harder than it looks, telling the truth all the time.”

“Did you do anything fun and exciting last night? Hot date perhaps?” Why did you ask *that*, Lois?

“No, just watched the game.” She could actually hear Clark smiling through the phone. “You never got a chance to tell me your Superman dream, Lois.”

“Dream? What dream? Oh, yeah!” She grinned, wondering if she could worm a confession out of him. Maybe he *had* taken Jimmy home the night before. Clark him. Not this imaginary Superman / Clark hybrid creation in her mind. “It was the strangest dream. Jimmy called me in the middle of the night telling me he was eloping to Vegas. He was looking for Superman to fly him and his intended.”

“*At your place?*” Clark asked suspiciously.

“Yeah, I know.” Lois rolled her eyes. “I don’t have slumber parties with superheroes. Well, I guess I do. I mean I did, last weekend when Superman was blind. But that was a one shot deal. It’s not like he spends the night on a regular basis. Or at all. Ever. He slept on the couch. A perfect gentleman.” She had to stop this stream of consciousness speech right this minute before Clark hung up on her. Lois took a deep breath and continued, “Anyway, back to my dream. Superman then arrived and took Jimmy home and I went back to sleep. Isn’t that a funny dream?” She laughed, but even to her ears the laughter sounded hollow.

“*Hilarious,*” Clark stated more than agreed. “*Except for the part where Jimmy thought Superman would be at your place in the middle of the night.*”

“Yeah. I’m going to have to ream him good for that one,” muttered Lois as she pictured dipping the young photographer in hot oil.

“*I thought it was just a dream,*” Clark responded.

“Was it?” she asked carefully.

“*How should I know?*” Clark laughed softly.

No denials there. No disclosures either. Lois sighed. “Good night, Clark.”

“*Good night, Lois.*”

Lois hung up the phone and snuggled into her bed. She liked talking to Clark last thing before she went to sleep. He always made her feel good. Loved. Maybe Bobby was right. Maybe Clark did still have feelings for her.

Sunday

Lois walked into the newsroom the next morning with two cups of coffee in her hands. It was much harder than it looked when Clark did it. Maneuvering around with both hands holding hot coffee. When she got to his desk, she noticed that Clark hadn’t arrived yet. She beat him in again? She shrugged. Miracles could happen.

She set down his coffee on his desk and took a sip of hers, grimacing. Oops. Wrong cup. She switched the cups. Then she noticed her lipstick smeared on his lid. Not good. So she switched the lids. From now on she would let him be the one to pick up the coffee; he was much better at it. She turned to head to her desk to find Clark standing behind her with two cups of coffee.

“Howdy, Partner,” he said with a Texan accent.

“Great minds thinking alike?” Lois asked, holding out her hand.

Clark smiled and handed her the extra coffee he had gotten her. “Guess so. What’s the special occasion?”

“I felt bad about the coffee going to waste yesterday. I figured it was my turn to bring breakfast,” she replied.

“You brought breakfast?” he asked eagerly looking around.

“I brought coffee,” she said with a weak smile. “Breakfast of reporters.”

Jimmy entered with dark sunglasses on. “Coffee.”

Lois handed him her extra cup. “See?”

“Gee, thanks, Lois,” Jimmy said with surprise. “I was sure you were going to kill me.”

She grinned innocently at Clark and moved Jimmy away to her desk. She set down her coffee and crossed her arms. “You lucked out on the coffee. Have you come up with an answer, yet, Olsen?” She hardly ever called him Olsen; she must have been

channeling Perry.

Jimmy shook his head rapidly. “As soon as I know how to get both my sneakers out of my mouth, Lois, you’ll be the first to know.”

“As long as it isn’t considered ‘common knowledge,’” she stated.

“Absolutely not!” Jimmy replied, shocked and then lowered his voice. “It’s *not* true, is it?”

Lois’s eyes went to slits, before she snarled between gritted teeth, “Jimmy Olsen!”

“Leaving!” he said, hightailing it over to his desk. “Thanks for the coffee, Lois.”

Clark moved over to her desk, his lips pressed together. “Dream, huh?”

She winced. Damn. Clark figured it out. “Well, when I started to tell you about it yesterday morning, I thought it had been a dream. Then Jimmy called to apologize after you left.” She pouted, batted her eyelashes at him, and put on her sweet voice, “Forgive me?”

Clark shook his head sadly. Or was it in pity? Why was she garnering so much pity lately? Then he sighed, before heading back to his desk. Yet, she heard him murmur, “Always.”

A new and genuine smile slipped onto her face. Maybe Mayson was right. Maybe she should look at the man under the suit. She shook her head. That just sounded dirty when she put Clark in the context. Now if only he were also Superman, then . . . then Clark would be perfect. A big fat liar, but perfect.

Lois drank her coffee while flipping through the stuff on her desk. As soon as she noticed Clark was absorbed in some file, she turned and stared at him. Why again had she thought he was Superman? Oh, right, the note looked like his handwriting. She kept on staring at him as she drank her coffee. And then there were all those disappearances. Lois glanced down at her Clark excuse list. Wouldn’t it be nice if she could explain those away by having him be Superman? It was better than the alternative.

Secret girlfriend? There better not be. Secret wife? Ditto. Secret boyfriend? Absolutely not! The man was in love with her. Wasn’t he? She sighed. Right; only on her wedding day and in her dreams. Well, he was dating Mayson. This line of thought wasn’t improving. Next!

Secret life of crime? Clark Kent? No. Secret gambling problem? Well, after watching him lose pathetically to her and Perry on poker night . . . *big* possibility. Secret drinking problem? No, she had never seen him drunk. Secret drug problem? Ditto. Secret medical problem? He did run off fairly often to the pharmacy for someone she had never seen sick. Did he still have headaches from the Nightfall amnesia?

Clark glanced up and caught her watching him. “What?”

“Do you have any lingering aftereffects from your amnesia?” she asked. “Headaches? Ear ringing? Memory problems? Anything like that?”

“Lois,” he said hesitantly. “That was over a year ago.”

“I know. I just want to know you’re okay.” She smiled. “I wouldn’t want you to be hiding anything from me.”

Clark returned her stare for a minute before answering, “I’m healthy, Lois. Really.”

Lois nodded with a relieved smile.

He returned again to his work and when he glanced up a few minutes later Lois was still staring at him. “What?”

“Who found you? Why were you dressed in those rags? Who gave you glasses? How did you end up at the Fifth Street Shelter?” she shot each question out at him and noticed him jump with each like she had actually shot him with a gun. “What happened to *your* clothes and glasses?”

“Why all these amnesia questions all of a sudden?” he inquired.

“I’m curious. We didn’t explore it much at the time because

of Nightfall and then I got hunted by Mr. Make-Up and we never went back to it,” she said.

“Are we so lacking in story material at the moment, you once again have to delve into my personal life for your next headline?” he asked.

Had she really done that often enough for Clark to be bitter about it? Lois hadn’t thought so. “How about we just do it for us then?” she replied.

“Us?”

“You to know and me to satisfy my curiosity. Do you know any of the answers to those questions?” Lois inquired, walking over to his desk.

Clark got a perplexing expression on his face as he thought back. “It’s all kind of fuzzy, actually. I’m just happy to be me with my memories again. I don’t need to know all the details.”

She grabbed his arm and pulled him out of his seat. “Come on, Clark. One trip to the Shelter and your partner will leave the topic alone forever. Deal?”

He groaned but stood up.

“Who knows, maybe we’ll get a story out of it as well.” Lois grinned as she continued to hold his arm as they walked to the elevator.

“Lo-is!”

As soon as they arrived inside the Fifth Street Shelter, Clark got that funny expression on his face again. Lois waited for it and he didn’t disappoint. Well, not in the excuse department at least.

“I think we forgot to feed the meter. I’ll be right back,” he called, already out the door.

“Clark! It’s Sunday; we don’t have to feed the meter!” she hollered after him, but he was already gone. She shook her head. One of these days...

The Shelter’s director came up to her. “Can I help you?”

“Lois Lane, *Daily Planet*,” she informed him, shaking his hand. “Last year around the time of the Nightfall Asteroid my partner...” She embarrassingly pointed her thumb over her shoulder out the door. *Clark, this would be easier if you didn’t dash off all the time.* “... who just ran out the door...”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Kent. We love Mr. Kent here at the shelter,” the man gushed.

“You do?” she asked. This surprised Lois. She knew he was a big supporter of the orphans — just like Superman — but she didn’t know he spent time here as well. “Does Clark Kent volunteer here at the shelter?”

“From time to time, but not often. But at least once a month, he comes by with a donation of pharmaceutical items, toiletries mostly: aspirin, shaving cream, combs and brushes, deodorant, bandages, ointment, toothpaste and brushes, that sort of thing. Our guests often comment on how nice it is to have access to some new personal hygiene items that Mr. Kent donates,” the director told her. “And if we’re lucky, he brings some exotic cheese as well.”

“Really?” No wonder Clark was always making trips to the pharmacy. But it wouldn’t explain the urgency of those trips if he only made donations once a month. And cheese?

“Is that why you are here today?” The man seemed quite hopeful.

“No, I’m sorry. We were wondering if anyone recalled when Clark Kent was discovered here last year with amnesia. We were hoping to find some answers as to what had happened to him that day,” she explained.

“Well, that certainly explains why he is so generous to us. Let me ask around.” The man nodded to Lois and went to talk to other members of the staff. Just in case, she had pulled Clark’s amnesia photo from the file so she could show it around.

Clark returned about five minutes later as Lois was talking to some men having breakfast.

“Get lost?” she teased him.

He didn’t answer but she saw the telltale signs of a blush.

“There’s the man you’re looking for, lady,” one of the homeless men said, pointing at Clark.

“I’m not lost anymore,” Clark explained, his face still rosy. “But I was lost during Nightfall. My partner here thinks someone might be able to answer some questions she still has.”

Lois noticed that *she* was the only one with questions according to Clark, yet he wasn’t willing to fill in the answers to those questions.

“Thems look like one of Henry O’s specs and duds,” one of the men said. He took a closer look at Clark. “Yeah. I remember you. You came in with Henry O that night.”

“What does Henry look like?” Lois asked, excited that they had a lead.

“He doesn’t look like anything anymore except maybe worm food. He died around Christmas,” the man responded, taking another bite of his scrambled eggs.

Clark swallowed. He genuinely looked saddened by this news. “Older gent with a shopping cart? Wore lots of pairs of glasses around his neck?”

“That’s the one.” The man nodded. “He got hit by a lady in a minivan. She got off though. Something about being bitten by a rat from outer space or some other hooley.” He shook his head. “What a way to go. Henry was a good soul.”

Clark nodded. “He sure was kind to me. Thank you.”

Lois could tell that her partner was ready to leave. His eyes appeared moist and his shoulders slouched just ever so much. She patted his arm. “Come on, Clark. Let’s go. I think we learned all we can.”

Clark nodded again and let her lead him from the shelter. He seemed quiet on the walk back to the car.

“What do you remember about Henry, Clark?” Lois asked him, sliding her hand into his. He seemed to need some kind of physical contact.

He shrugged. “Not much. He found me lying in the dirt, gave me some clothes to wear, took care of me. Good man. Good, good man.” He was quiet a minute and then he chuckled softly to himself. It seemed contrary to his mood.

“What?”

“The reason I was wearing his glasses. He said that it would make me look smarter, having been found in a hole with no clothes on and not knowing who I was.” Clark smiled tenderly. “I was lucky he found me. He...” Her partner took a deep breath. “He had been my guardian angel that night.”

Lois gulped. Clark had never told her that before. He had been found in a dirt *hole*? Without any clothes on? Hadn’t Jimmy found part of Superman’s crest in a hole? Lois reassuringly squeezed his hand in hers.

“Death is horrible whenever it happens, but to die like that. Due to Space Rats.” Clark shook his head. “That’s a tragedy.”

They reached the car and Clark reluctantly let go of Lois’s hand to get in the passenger side. For some reason it felt like he took her soul with him. When they sat down in the car, Clark looked as if he wanted to say something, but then he didn’t. Lois just wished he would take her hand back in his and make her whole again.

They came across a fire on the drive back to the *Daily Planet* and Superman arrived while Clark went off to call the fire department. It was just a normal everyday type fire, old electrical, not arson. And thanks to Superman everyone made it out of the building alive. He really was quite an impressive man.

Clark went home shortly after they returned to the office and Lois offered to file the story on the fire and Superman’s rescue for them both. Clark had just nodded. The death of the old homeless man seemed to have affected her partner and brought

him down. Maybe a little R&R at home would make him feel better. She decided that she couldn't wait another night. Tonight she would tell him the truth about her feelings. No ifs, ands, buts or excuses.

Lois pulled her Cherokee up outside of Clark's Clinton Street apartment and turned off the lights. A hint of smile appeared on her lips with a scoff. She remembered when she had followed Clark to this apartment, thinking he was meeting Superman. That was right after Superman had arrived in Metropolis. Right after Clark Kent had arrived in Metropolis. She shook her head again. *Stop thinking that, Lane. There is no way Clark Kent is Superman. Please. Clark Kent?*

Lois walked past the mailboxes to Clark's apartment. She stopped and headed back to the boxes. There was a package addressed to Clark sitting on top of the row of mailboxes. Why hadn't Clark picked up his mail the day before? He had gone out. She had seen him at the *Planet*. Surely, he should have noticed he had mail when he had come home.

She picked up the box with a shrug and carried it up the stairs with her. Glancing down at the return address, she saw it was from the Cheese of the Month Club. Lois's jaw dropped. He *really* belonged to a Cheese of the Month Club? Why hadn't he shared any of the cheese with her?

She pressed her lips together, marching up the last of the steps to his apartment. Just to make sure that Clark was alone, she took a glance in through the glass doors of his apartment before knocking. Her eyes widened. Mayson Drake was standing not ten feet from the door! Lois jumped off to the side to hide beside the potted plant there. Luckily Mayson was facing Clark and didn't see her. Lois peered around the plant and looked through the window again. Clark — his back also to the front door and his hair dripping wet — was pulling on a t-shirt.

Lois leaned against the wall and slid down into a crouch. *Why* was Clark getting dressed? What had he and Mayson been doing that would require him to put clothes on? Unless they had taken clothes off! And his hair was wet like he had just taken a shower!

Lois dropped the box of cheese and ran down the stairs, a hand over her mouth to stop her sobs. No! Mayson and Clark had been intimate? No! It was too late for her. His and Mayson's relationship had moved beyond just dating. Of course it was serious. Mayson had invited him out of town the weekend before. An out of town weekend meant intimacy. And he had accepted, which meant he was ready to take his relationship with Mayson to the next level. True, Clark had skipped out on Mayson. But Lois guessed they moved passed that little speed bump this weekend. It must have been that home-cooked meal. Oh, Clark! No!

Picking up her keys off the floor by her front door for the third time, Lois finally got it unlocked. She entered her apartment and shut the door behind her, relocking all her locks. She just let her briefcase slide off her shoulder and kicked off her heels as she wondered the best way to drown her sorrows. Heading straight for her freezer, she pulled out what was left of her half-gallon of fudge ripple ice-cream and then stepped out onto her fire escape.

"Superman," Lois whispered through her tears into the wind. Her voice was hoarse from crying the entire drive home. "I know you can hear me. I know you aren't usually my confidant, but I can't talk to my best friend, and I have no place left to turn. Can you please just be my friend tonight?" She took a bite of her ice-cream and let it melt a bit in her mouth before swallowing. "I have no one else I can talk with about this. And I need to tell someone what's raging through me or I'll go nuts." She pulled her knees up to her chest. "I've lost Clark Kent." Then she started to cry out loud again, her head buried in her knees.

"Lois?"

She looked up and saw Superman floating just off her fire escape. Jumping to her feet, Lois wiped the tears off her face. "Thank you for coming, Superman," she tried to say cheerfully, but the raw emotion of knowing she had lost Clark to Mayson hit her again and the tears started to fall again in earnest.

He landed softly onto her fire escape and took her into his arms, comforting her. "How have you lost Clark, Lois?"

"He... and Mayson..." Lois tried to speak through her sobs. "They... they... they've become intimate."

"What?!" Superman sounded as startled as Lois felt.

"I know... How can he be serious about her?" She wiped her nose on his cape and then realized what she had done. Ashamed, she looked away, hoping he hadn't noticed as she rubbed the spot with her sleeve. "With you and him being such good friends and she thinking you're some crazy vigilante."

"Oh." He nodded. "Maybe you should talk to Clark first and make sure you have your facts straight, Lois."

She chuckled through her sobs. "You sound like Perry. 'Cold hard facts, Lane! I saw them... Superman... with my own eyes...'" Lois cried. "He was half-naked and wet and she was right there with him..."

Superman pulled her back from his shoulder and placed a kiss on her forehead. "Still, Lois. You should talk to Clark. Maybe what you saw isn't what you thought you saw."

"Huh?" she said and then started shaking her head. "No! No, I can't face Clark. I can't hear him confirm my worst nightmare. No!"

"He's your best friend. If you can't talk to your best friend, who can you talk to?" Superman asked, wiping the tears off her cheeks with his thumb.

A slight smile came to her lips through her tears. "That sounds like something Clark would say. Clark!" Lois wailed and buried her head into Superman's shoulder as she started crying again.

"He's not dead, Lois. And if you talk to him, I'm sure you'll find..."

"I need to stop crying about this." She pressed her lips together, sniffing, and took a deep breath. "I know what I need to do." Lois looked Superman in the eyes. "Can you drop me into the sea?"

"What?" Superman exclaimed. "*No!*"

"No, a cliff would be better. I want to jump off a cliff." Lois wrapped her arms around his neck. "Can you fly me to a cliff?"

"No, Lois. I won't let you jump to your death," replied Superman, refusing to pick her up.

"Who said anything about committing suicide?" She sniffled. "I love Clark, but I'm not going to kill myself because he's made a bad life choice." The sniffles turned back into tears. "Clark!" After a few moments, she swallowed, able to talk again. "After all, he didn't try to kill *himself* when I almost married Lex." She buried her head into Superman's chest again.

"Lois," Superman whispered softly.

She lifted her head. "I need the adrenaline rush of jumping off a cliff to get the tears to stop. Like when Perry did that bungee jump off the Metropolis Bridge for his fiftieth birthday. To remind me that I love life and that I want to live again." Lois looked him in the eye. "If I wanted to kill myself, Superman, I wouldn't have asked you to take me there. I want you to catch me."

Superman ran his hand over her hair, brushed it off her cheek and tucked it behind her ear. "Just when I think I've got you all figured out, Lois, you go and surprise me again."

Lois shrugged with a slight smile. "What can I say? I'm complex."

Superman gave her a rare smile as he picked her up into his arms and lifted them into the sky.

Lois didn't ask him the question burning in her chest as they flew in silence. She knew Superman didn't love her. Clark was right. Superman said there could not be a future for them and he didn't lie. Still, she wondered why Lex caged him in Kryptonite on their wedding day. It made no sense unless Superman was planning on stopping the wedding.

Superman landed on a barren, rocky cliff far from spying eyes. The sky was lighter, either from dusk or dawn, she could not tell. There was a bit of a chill to the air.

"I would like to repeat what I said earlier, Lois. You should talk to Clark instead. If I were to miss..."

She smiled and placed a light friendly kiss on his cheek. "You never miss."

"I'd hate for this to be the first time," he murmured.

Lois hugged him and stepped back. "I trust you, Superman." She took a few more steps away from the edge as Superman flew over the canyon.

"A running start would be best to get you as far away from the edge as possible," he suggested.

She nodded in agreement taking a few more steps back.

"Anyway, I can't let Clark know how I really feel."

"What?" he stammered.

Lois ignored his question as she took a deep breath to steel her nerves. She started running and when she reached the edge she jumped. "I love you, Clark Kent!" she screamed into the wind.

She felt like she had only fallen a foot, even though it was probably closer to ten before Superman swooped her into his arms. His chest felt warm against the cool morning or night air.

"Don't ever do that to me again," he murmured, pulling her so tight against his chest that she could actually hear his heart beating, loud, strong and fast. Superman kissed her forehead. "I love you."

Lois smiled and pulled back far enough to place a gentle kiss on his lips. "I love you, too, Superman. But I'm *in* love with Clark." She set her head on his shoulder. "That's why I can't talk to him about Mayson. I can't come between them or I'd lose him completely, just like I did when I agreed to marry Lex."

"You never lost Clark, Lois," Superman murmured.

"Do you know what I was thinking while I was walking down the aisle to Lex?" she asked.

"Lois, I'd rather not..."

"How I wished it was Clark waiting for me instead of Lex."

She sighed. "That's why I told Lex 'no'."

There was a pause before Superman spoke, "You told Lex 'no'?"

"Didn't you... No, I guess you couldn't," she whispered.

Then she asked that question burning in her chest. "Superman, why didn't you tell me that Lex caged you in Kryptonite?"

Superman was quiet for a minute and then answered without looking at her. "Truthfully..."

Lois laughed softly, interrupting, "Sorry, Superman. But you always speak the truth."

"I was embarrassed," he murmured.

Her jaw fell open. Of all the possible answers out there, she didn't expect this one.

"I felt helpless and alone. I was in more pain than I had ever felt in my life, and I didn't know if it was the Kryptonite or from the fact I could hear the wedding march playing upstairs, but there wasn't anything I could do to stop it." He sighed. "Lucky for me, it seemed that Clark Kent rescued you that one time without even knowing it." He chuckled and shook his head. "You're in love with Clark." It was almost as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"I was going to confess to Clark how I felt when Mr. Stern announced the rebuilding of the *Daily Planet*, but then Clark said he had lied to me. That he didn't really love me after all." She

took a deep breath, trying to keep the tears at bay as they were threatening to return already.

Superman didn't speak, but for moment Lois thought she saw pain flash across his face.

"Did he lie to me, Superman?" she whispered.

He nodded. "Yes."

"So, he lied to you as well." She shook her head in disbelief. How could Clark lie to Superman?

"Me?" Superman asked in shock.

"Yes, isn't that why you told me you couldn't love me like I thought at the time I loved you? Because you thought Clark loved me and you didn't want to come between us?" Lois inquired.

A smile hinted at the corner of his lips. "You figured that out, did you?"

"See, he lied to us both," Lois told him. She shook her head.

"Clark," she sighed his name.

"No, Lois, he only lied to you when he told you he didn't love you," Superman corrected softly.

"What?" Lois gasped.

They were back in Metropolis now and Superman lowered them down onto her fire escape. They stepped into the privacy of her apartment.

"Talk to Clark, Lois. Things may not be as they seem."

Superman took her hands in his and gazed at her with love. For a moment, he actually looked like Clark. Then he blinked and his expression changed and she saw Superman again. "I hope you are feeling better. Go take a hot shower, make yourself a cup of hot cocoa and take yourself off to bed. Things will look brighter by morning, Lois. I promise."

Lois took a step forward and kissed his cheek, lingering long enough to take a deep breath through her nose. He even smelled like Clark. "Thank you for being my substitute best friend, Superman." She smiled weakly.

Superman let go of her hands, smiled gently at her and then disappeared through the open window.

Lois went to the fire escape and retrieved her half-melted ice-cream and then shut the window. She wondered why she kept seeing Clark in Superman. Then she laughed, remembering what she had told Clark back when she was doused by pheromones. "Every woman in love thinks her man looks like Superman." This time she had it backwards. She was so in love with Clark, she kept seeing him in Superman.

Lois took Superman's advice and was just settling herself down into bed after her hot shower when the phone rang. She set down her cocoa mug and picked up her phone. "Hello?"

"Lois?"

Her heart quickened as she heard Clark's voice. She swallowed, trying to keep those pesky tears at bay. "Hi, Clark."

"It's so good to hear your friendly voice. I tried to call you earlier but your phone just rang off the hook," he told her.

"I went out," she replied simply. "And then I took a shower."

"Can I talk to the part of you that is my best friend, Lois?" he asked falteringly.

"Do you want to talk to me about Mayson, Clark?" Lois hazarded a guess.

"Yeah." He sighed. "I understand if you don't want..." he started saying.

"I'm listening, Clark." Lois winced in anticipation, hoping that if he just told her, she could get it over quickly, like a pulling a band-aid.

"Mayson stopped by unannounced this evening and I told her that I didn't want to date her anymore. That although I liked her, I didn't like her for more than a friend," he said apologetically. Almost as if telling Lois this story was tantamount to telling Mayson again. "She told me I led her on and threw her glass of water in my face, ice-cubes and all."

Lois sat up. Her heart beating louder. “What? You told Mayson *what?*” That was why he was changing his shirt. Why he was all wet?

“She was really upset at me, because she had made dinner for me last night and then there was this stand-off at an office building and...”

“Oh, Clark, you didn’t stand up Mayson for a story, did you?” Lois gently scolded as glee built up inside her.

“Yeah, I did.”

“Oh, Clark.” Lois shook her head. “Tsk-tsk. You’re lucky that she didn’t throw the glass along with the water and ice-cubes.”

“Yeah.” Lois could just picture Clark hanging his head in shame. “*I feel like a heel.*”

“You should. You are a heel. A total heel, Clark. And as your best friend, I’m not allowing you to date anyone else. As your punishment for being a heel, I don’t think you should date anyone else for a while,” Lois replied evilly. She didn’t want him to move on before she had a chance to build up her courage again.

“Well, the truth is, Lois, there’s someone else I’ve been wanting to ask out for a while...” Clark murmured.

Lois felt her stomach drop again. “What?”

“And no matter how much I liked Mayson, I know that this other woman is who I really want to be with,” Clark continued as if Lois hadn’t said anything. *“I’m thinking about asking her out tomorrow at work.”*

“What?” she stammered. Someone at work? No! Clark, no! She couldn’t watch Clark be in love with anyone else, not at the *Planet*. It was her haven. “No! Clark, it’s too soon for you to be asking anyone else out. Much too soon.”

“Oh?” Clark’s voice sounded sad. *“I’ve been in love with her for a while now, and the only reason I haven’t asked her out earlier is because...”* He took a deep breath.

Lois hoped he didn’t say anything about making Lois feel uncomfortable.

“... because I lied to her about my true feelings a while back, and I didn’t think she would forgive me.” He said this last part so fast, Lois smiled. *“And she told me she didn’t like me that way. But I’ve gotten the feeling recently she might have changed her mind about me.”*

“You’re picking up my rambling habits there, Clark. Soon Perry won’t be able to tell us apart,” she teased, wondering whom Clark was thinking about asking out. Because his explanation made it sound like he was going to ask *her* out. Lois Lane! No, he couldn’t possibly be thinking of her.

Clark chuckled. *“Well, let’s see. We’re both brown-eyed, brunette investigative reporters who look cute in black chiffon. How in the world can he tell us apart now?”*

Lois guffawed at his awful joke. “I love you, Smallville.” She gulped. Oh, God! Had she said that aloud?

“Right back at you, Metropolis,” he shot in trade. *“Good night. Thanks for making me feel less like a cad.”*

“Good night, you big heel,” Lois replied, her heart rising in relief that he hadn’t realized that she meant she loved him in earnest. She hung up the phone and picked up her cocoa again. Sinking back into her bed, Lois smiled in amusement at the thought of Clark in one of her black chiffon dresses. It made her tempted to wear one to work tomorrow. But black chiffon definitely wasn’t Monday morning work wear.

Lois had told Clark that she loved him. She could finally check that off her to-do list. She wouldn’t let herself think about who Clark was going to ask out the next day. She wouldn’t let herself hope.

Monday

Lois stood by the coffee machine refilling her coffee mug. Clark had been staring at her all morning. Was he embarrassed about his confession on the phone last night? To make him feel

better, she had pretended the conversation hadn’t taken place. She wondered if he had gotten up the courage to ask the woman out that he had mentioned. She sighed. She still wasn’t allowing herself to hope it was her.

As she poured some sugar into her coffee mug, Clark joined her. Her heart began to race. This was it.

“Lois, I... wanted to ask you something...” her partner started to say.

“I’m not going to like it, am I?” she said, teasing him.

Knowing exactly what it was that he wanted to ask her.

“What makes you say that?”

“You’ve got that tone in your voice, you know that people get when they’re uncomfortable.” She stirred her coffee and gazed at Clark with pressed lips. “Like when they want to borrow your car, or money, or clothes...”

“You’ve got me, Lois,” Clark murmured, lowering his voice. “I’ve come for that black chiffon number we discussed last night.”

Lois grinned naughtily, setting her hand on his chest. “I actually had been tempted to wear it today. If you asked to borrow it, it would have left me with...”

Clark swallowed. “Nothing.”

She pointed her stir stick at him. “Precisely.”

“Lois, what I want to say is...” He followed her down the steps towards her desk.

“I know what you want, Clark,” Lois said, continuing to tease him.

“You do?” Clark actually had the gall to look flummoxed.

Poor man.

“I know you much better than you think,” she replied. She paused a moment to let that sink in and then asked, “How much to do you need?”

“What?” he asked incredulously. “I don’t want money.”

He was such an easy mark. Did he really not think she had figured it out? “Clark, you don’t have to be embarrassed. That’s what friends are for. Just tell me...”

“Lois, I want to go out with you!” He had spoken so loudly, the bullpen had gone quiet.

“What?” Lois was stunned. He had done it. He had actually asked her out. Finally! Her dreams had been answered. She had never thought they would get to this moment. “You’re asking me out?”

“Yes, you know... like on a date,” Clark clarified. He actually seemed mystified that all his hints the previous night had fallen on deaf ears.

This current conversation definitely wasn’t being held with deaf ears. The whole bullpen was listening. She saw some money pass from desk to desk over in the sports department. *Thanks guys, betting against me again.*

“A date? You mean a real date? Like where I take out my best perfume, the one I bought after seeing *Love Affair*, the good one not the remake, and put a dab behind my knee, even though I have no idea why?”

“Yeah... I guess that’s what I’m saying,” Clark replied, a smile brushing his lips. He was thinking about that dab of perfume behind her knee. And him thinking about it made her wonder exactly what he thought about it.

Lois bit her bottom lip as she thought. “I wonder if I still have that sample of *Revenge* at home,” she murmured, soft enough just for him to hear, as she took hold of his tie. “I never did get to finish that dance of the seven veils.” She pulled him towards her and then let go of his tie. She remembered seeing Cat use this move on him and wondered it would work better for her.

“Lo-is!” Clark actually had the audacity to blush. A-ha! It did work.

“Clark!” She smiled with a wink. “Did you really think I didn’t know what you were going to ask me?” Lois sat down and

he joined her, sitting on the corner of her desk. Her tie pulling trick seemed to break the ice of the bullpen's curiosity and people started going about their business again.

"Well..."

"It's not every day that I tell a man that I love him," Lois whispered, gazing up at Clark. "While jumping off a cliff."

Clark blanched. "Excuse me?"

"Oh? That wasn't you. My bad." Damn. It had been worth a shot. Oh, God! Then that means she just told Clark she really loved him.

"You told Superman that you loved him?" Oh, dear, Clark was starting to look worried again.

"No," Lois corrected, setting her hand on his leg to calm him down. "I told Superman that I loved you." She sighed. "I thought I was telling you, hoped really, but I guess I was wrong about that." She casually shrugged her shoulders, hoping he wouldn't discern how nervous she actually felt.

Clark set his hand on hers. "Are you saying that you would only love me if I'm you-know-who?"

Lois stared into his eyes and smiled. Knowing he was nervous too, calmed her. "No. I'm saying that I love Clark Kent. You. This ordinary man under this ordinary suit with one wild tie. You being Superman might have made our lives more exciting. And would have explained your frequent disappearing acts. And how you survived being shot by Dillinger." She shrugged, this time with a wink. "But then I'd have to explain to Jimmy what Superman really *is* doing at my apartment at 3 a.m. in the morning. And I'd rather not have *that* conversation."

Clark swallowed, uncomfortably. "Lois..."

"Yes, Clark?" she replied, innocently, savoring having his hand holding onto hers.

"Can we start with that initial date first? And work our way up to 3 a.m.?" Clark asked with care.

Oh, gosh, had she really implied *that* to Clark? She smiled demurely, feeling a slight flush rise to her cheeks as she opened to mouth to respond. At that moment Jimmy came up to her desk and interrupted.

"Lois, the reason I called you when I was looking for Superman the other night..." The young photographer paused and looked at Clark and then at Lois. Then he looked at Lois's hand on Clark's leg and Clark's hand on Lois's hand on Clark's leg. Then he returned his gaze to Clark's face, where it was obvious that Clark was waiting anxiously for Jimmy to finish his sentence. Jimmy took a step back and then another. "I don't know, Lois. Maybe I thought you were letting him crash on your sofa again, like last weekend, 'cause you are just friends. That's it. That's all. Just friends. You know, I think I hear my phone ringing. Got to go."

"Lois, you're going to have to say 'yes' now," Clark informed her after Jimmy had left. "It's already around the newsroom."

"Clark, are you saying that if it's water cooler gossip then it must be true?" she asked him incredulously. "We work at the *Daily Planet*, not the *National Inquisitor*. We deal in facts. And the fact of the matter is... I've already accused you of being Superman and hiding it from me. And I confessed that I love you. What's a little date after all that?"

"Heaven."

"Nah. There has to be someplace better than that," she teased, standing up. She leaned close to his ear. "Maybe that someplace better is where we'll go when we finally have that first kiss."

Clark swallowed, standing up as well. "Lois, I hate to disappoint you, but we've already had our first kiss. And our second... and our third."

Lois laughed. "Well, here's to lucky number four."

Clark looked at her expectantly. Did he want a kiss? No, evidently, he wanted a clear answer to his question.

She smiled, leaning forward to set a soft unexpected kiss on

his lips. "Yes, Clark. I will date you."

His face lit up as if doused in sunshine. Lois had never seen him happier. She liked knowing she had made him feel that way.

Then that look disappeared as a new one appeared. He stopped focusing on her and seemed almost to be listening to something. *Yeah, right, Buster. You're not Superman.*

Clark looked at her apologetically. "Lois, I've got to..." He paused.

"Zip home and pick me up some of that Cheese of the Month you've been bragging about?" she suggested. Two could play this game. If he was going to throw out some dodgy excuse, the least she could do was make it a better one.

He froze for a moment and then grinned in elation. "You read my mind," he said, jogging out of the room, loosening his tie.

"Take your time," she called after him. "I'll leave you a note if I head out anywhere."

Several hours later, lunch was fast approaching and Clark had yet to return. Lois still felt like celebrating. She was in love with a wonderful man, who might — or might not — be Superman. And, strangely enough, it was all due to Jimmy Olsen's drunken exploits and the note Superman had left for him. Lois walked up to the young researcher's desk and started swaying back and forth, almost in a jubilant little girl fashion.

Jimmy glanced up at her. Then that glance turned into a full blown stare. "Lois, are you feeling okay?"

She smiled and Jimmy swallowed. Oh, dear, had her lighthearted smile been interpreted as an evil 'you're dead meat, Jimmy' smile? "I'm heading to lunch at the café across the street and wondered if you wanted to come. My treat."

Jimmy's jaw dropped. "Lois?"

Perry had overheard this tidbit, stopped and stared at her as well. "Lois?"

"What?" she snapped, brushing aside her *joie de vivre* and pressing her lips together. "A girl has got to eat."

"Sure," replied Jimmy hesitantly, glancing up at their boss.

"I'll come too," said Perry. This surprised Lois. The Chief never went out to lunch.

"Oh, come on, guys. I'm not acting that strange. I just felt like sitting in the sunshine and having some lunch," she harrumphed, marching back to her desk. *Men!*

"She's floating," Perry murmured to Jimmy. "Lois doesn't float."

"CK finally asked her out," Jimmy mumbled back.

"Ah. I thought it might be that. Took him long enough," Perry replied. "That man must be blind as a bat not knowing Lois is half in love with him."

Lois rolled her eyes as she jotted a note to Clark. Was there anything in her life that the Chief didn't know about? She dropped the note on her partner's desk and grabbed her briefcase. "You boys ready?"

"Boys?" Perry inquired.

"When you gossip like little girls, you get to be called boys," Lois replied, knocking her chair back under her desk with a bump of her hip. Perry chuckled while Jimmy just looked ashamed.

"Where's Kent?" Perry asked as they rode down in the elevator.

"Story," she replied vaguely. "He'll meet us at the café."

They were just being seated when Clark joined them. "...Um, guys..." He glanced around and lowered his voice, "Why don't we eat at that place down the block?"

"Kent, we're already here," replied Perry tersely.

"Man, I haven't eaten here since the *Planet*..." Jimmy said and then let his words fade.

They all looked up at the globe circling across the street and smiled.

"It's still a beautiful sight." Their boss sighed.

"It sure is," agreed Lois as her eyes came down and met Clark's. He had sat down in the chair next to hers.

"I still think that the restaurant down the street..."

Lois raised an eyebrow at her partner. What was up with him?

Jimmy opened his menu. "Do you think they'll let me add a fried egg to my ham and cheese?"

A shadow darkened their table as their cute, blonde, bouncy waitress approached. Clark actually cringed. Had *he* dated this woman? The server took one look at them, and her eyes turned black and fierce. "Hi, my name is Candy," she growled with a sneer. "And there is no way in hell I'm going to be your server today."

Oh!

Jimmy blanched a moment before Candy dumped her entire pitcher of ice water on top of his head and marched off.

"What the...?" stammered the Chief. Obviously it was only Lois's life that Perry knew every detail of.

"Candy! Wait!" Jimmy gasped, jumping to his feet and running after her.

Lois scooted her chair closer to Clark's. "How did you know this Candy was Jimmy's Candy?"

Clark smiled at her sheepishly.

Lois pressed her lips together. "As a matter of fact, Clark. How did you know Jimmy's drunken intended was named Candy at all? I don't remember mentioning her name when I told you the story."

Her partner's smile became even more sheepish. She hadn't thought that that was possible. He swallowed as she waited for an answer. Finally, Clark confessed, "Jimmy called me first the other night. I'm the one who told him to call you to see if you could contact Superman. I thought it might delay him long enough for me to catch a cab and get over to him and stop him from running off to marry Candy."

Lois glared at Clark before pulling her briefcase into her lap, flipping it open and pulling out Jimmy's 'Superman' note — still in its baggy — and flinging it in her partner's face. "So, you wrote this? Not Superman?"

There was Clark's sheepish smile again.

She scooted her chair closer to him as she faced him to yell, "I spent all day Saturday tracking down a handwriting sample from Superman to compare that to and it *was* written by you the entire time!"

Clark moved his chair closer to hers as well. "If you hadn't run off on your fool's errand leaving me high-and-dry at the office, I would have been able to correct you on your asinine assumption earlier."

"Asinine?" Lois snapped. "Well, if you had just signed your note to Jimmy I never would have spent all day thinking it was written by Superman."

"Well, if you weren't so obsessed with Superman you would have recognized my handwriting," Clark retorted.

"And if you had signed that note I never would have agreed to go out on a date with you," she said glaring at him.

Clark pointed at her. "A-ha! So, you admit it. You only agreed to go out with me because you thought I was Superman."

Lois snorted and turned her back on him, crossing her arms. Clark mimicked her only with a scoff instead of a snort.

Perry whistled and formed a T with his hands. "Time-out, you two. As of this moment I'm installing a no-dating policy at the *Daily Planet*."

She turned to her boss and placed her hands on the table. "NO!"

At the same time Clark pleaded, "*Chief?*"

With skepticism Perry looked between the two of them. "No?"

Lois gazed at Clark and he glanced over at her and they both

smiled. She dropped her hand off the table and Clark took hold of it with a squeeze.

The Chief two-finger pointed at Clark and then at Lois and then back again. "This. This thing between you isn't going to become a problem at work?"

"It won't," Clark promised, running his thumb over the back of her hand.

"Lois?" Perry asked.

She shrugged. "Clark and I always act like this. Dating or not."

Their boss looked to the sky and muttered, "Great shades of Elvis!"

Clark smiled at her, squeezing her hand again.

Lois flipped open her menu and glanced at her partner out of the corner of her eye. "So, Smallville, where's my cheese?"

Epilogue

Six Months Later

Lois watched as Clark walked into the newsroom from the elevator and over to her desk. The man should look guiltier for what he did to her.

Lois glared at him. "What did Bobby want?" she snapped, her lips pressed together.

"So, you are talking to me again. Does that mean you've forgiven me?" Clark grinned, falteringly, yet hopeful.

"Forgive you? Not only did you lie to me, Smallville," she growled. "You kept on lying to me after I guessed correctly. Made me feel like my intuition was wrong. Nope. But we're partners, and I promised Perry I wouldn't kill you."

"Kill me?" he repeated wryly, an eyebrow raised.

Lois looked at him. Yep, she bet she could find some Kryptonite and do him in. She could do it, if he kept up this attitude and if she didn't love him with all her heart and soul. "Watch it, buster," she warned.

Clark gulped and handed over a white envelope.

"What's this?" she asked. It was made from heavy cardstock paper. She flipped open the flap of the envelope where Clark had unsealed it and pulled out the card. "This is a wedding invitation!" Lois's eyes bugged. *No!*

"Actually, it's a reception invitation. All-You-Can-Eat Chinese buffet over on Third and Mertz Ave. They eloped to Atlantic City over last weekend," Clark informed her.

"And they invited *us*?" Lois asked incredulously. "I thought it was in bad taste to invite ex-boyfriends to a wedding?"

Clark shrugged. "I guess she wanted to take the higher moral ground. Anyway, Bobby's always liked us." Then a wicked grin slipped onto his lips as he backed towards his own desk. "Or maybe she just wanted to make you buy her a wedding gift."

Lois rolled her eyes. Yeah. She could see that. Then her lips pressed together and she glared at her boyfriend again. Standing up, she stomped over to his desk, throwing the card against his chest. "What does it say about our relationship, Clark, if Mayson — *Mayson* Drake — married her rebound guy before you've gotten up the nerve to ask me to marry you?"

Clark wasn't going to let her have this one. "Actually, Lois..."

"Nope! It's too late, Smallville. Now anything you say will make me think you are just proposing because I told you to propose." She turned on her heel and returned to her desk. "You're going to have to wait another six months."

Glancing back at Clark, Lois saw that he looked like she had stabbed him in the lungs with a Kryptonite dagger, and he was having trouble breathing. Oh, dear, she found something other than Kryptonite that would kill Clark. She rolled her chair over to him and enfolded him in her arms. "Where is it?" she murmured.

Clark pulled open his top desk drawer and pulled out the small black box.

As he went to open it, Lois set her hand on top of his,

stopping him. “No, Clark, not here.”

He took a lungful of air and gazed at her hopefully.

“My place. 3 a.m. How you get there is up to you.”

Clark’s jaw dropped.

Lois winked as she rolled back to her desk. “My answer, on the other hand, depends on your presentation.”

Clark gulped and stared at the box in his hand.

Five minutes later as Jimmy walked by, Lois saw Clark grab the young photographer’s arm. “Hey, Jimmy.”

“What’s up, CK?”

“Do me a favor. If you get the urge to go out drinking with your buddies tonight...” Clark said just loud enough for Lois to overhear, despite waiting on hold with elevator music in her ear.

“*Don’t.*”

THE END