

## My Partner

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Rated G

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Summary: For Lois, Clark is her partner first and foremost, and has been since the day he arrived in Metropolis.

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Thank you to Emily for GEing this for me.

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1993

What was he thinking? Seriously. Kent? Deep breaths, Lois, deep breaths. You'll never get Perry to rethink this partner thing if you aren't calm.

But Kent? Kent is nice. He's sweet. Which would be great if I happened to live in Smallville and was looking for a date to the Spring Fling. But I don't. I live in Metropolis. And I'm looking for a partner for the Daily Planet. Well, not really. I don't need a partner. I don't want a partner.

Anyway, it doesn't matter. Metropolis is going to eat Kent alive. The Planet will laugh as he's spit out as too sugary to even bother swallowing.

I just need to keep calm. Surely Perry will understand where I'm coming from. Saddling me with Clark is just not good for business. He's just going to slow me down, take too much time to mentor. I just need to remind Perry that if he really wants to partner me with Kent permanently, he's going to have to find someone else to write the front page stories. I can't be expected to babysit Kent and keep up with the level of writing I've been doing.

"Chief?" I ask as I poke my head into his office. I'm relieved to notice that I sound calm. Rational, even.

"Yeah," Perry says as he looks up. He's clearly distracted. Not a good sign.

"I just want to talk to you about this partner thing," I start, but he cuts me off before I can get any further.

"Now, Lois, I know you're not happy about this, but give it some time. You and Clark compliment each other well. I think you'll keep producing the great front page stories you've been producing since he got here."

Deep breaths, Lois, I remind myself yet again. "But Perry," I say. Hearing a whine creeping into my voice, I start again. "Perry, I was producing front page stories before Kent got here. I don't need him for that." Perry takes a breath, and I can just tell that he is about to argue, so I keep

going before he can. "Look. I understand the desire to have us work together. And I'm happy to do it. Really." Hmm... I fully expected Perry to look pleased and surprised by this, but he doesn't. He looks suspicious. This is not good.

"But?" he asks.

I sigh again. This isn't going to work, is it? "I don't have time to babysit him!" I say, the whine evident in my voice again, but I don't care.

"You're not babysitting him," Perry says, his voice stern. "You're working with him. You can learn as much from him as he can learn from you."

What? Has Perry taken leave of his senses? "You've got to be joking!" I say out loud, standing up, feeling myself wind up for a rant and not caring.

"I'm not, and I don't have time to watch your temper tantrum right now," Perry says, effectively dismissing me from his office.

A temper tantrum? What am I, a five-year-old? "Fine," I tell him, slamming his door as I walk out of his office.

I can learn from Clark Kent? What? The best way to reap wheat? I'm sure Clark would be very helpful in that arena, but why would I care?

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1994

"So," I ask, "what did you have planned for tonight before this came up?" I keep my eyes trained out the windshield while I ask. I'm nearly certain the answer will have something to do with Mayson Drake. Not that I care, per se. It's just that... Well, whenever I hear her name, particularly uttered by Clark, my stomach clenches up.

"Nothing really," Clark says, and I can see him shrugging out of the corner of my eye.

I should just drop it now, but I can't. "What? No plans with Mayson?" I ask as I face him. I'm just a glutton for punishment, aren't I?

Clark chuckles as he looks at me. "Is it physically impossible for you to say Mayson's name without sneering?"

I grit my teeth. Does he have to call me out on everything? "I just don't like her."

"Oh, I know, Lois," he grins at me. "You aren't that good at keeping it hidden."

I have no answer for him and his smug smile, so I turn back around in my seat, staring out the windshield again. Besides, how am I going to see who is coming and going from the warehouse if I'm staring at my partner all night?

"So, can I ask you a question?" Clark asks, his voice serious.

"Sure," I tell him, wondering what it's about.

"Why don't you like her?" Oh. I hadn't realized his question was about Mayson.

I shrug. "She just rubs me the wrong way," I tell him. "I'm not really sure why."

He nods, but still looks perplexed. "It's just that... you seem to have a lot in common."

"\*I\* have a lot in common with that..."

Clark leans over and places a finger over my lips. "Shh..." he admonishes me as I turn instinctively towards him, but I barely hear him. I can't stop staring into his eyes. For a brief moment I consider kissing the finger resting against my lips. Then he moves it away and I regain control of myself. What the heck is wrong with me tonight?

"Okay," he says, a smile in his voice, "you don't have anything in common with Mayson."

"No, no," I say, wondering why I'm bothering even while I'm talking. "You think we have things in common. What are they?"

Clark looks nervous now. Like he's afraid I'm going to blow up any second. Can't say I blame him for that. "You're both successful women in jobs that are dominated by men. You're both smart and a bit headstrong. You both want to make the world a better place and took jobs that help you to do that."

I can't help the pit in my stomach as he talks. He's right. Of course, he is. Mayson is all of those things. And beautiful. And completely smitten with my partner. She's going to steal him from me. Well, not steal really as I don't want him that way. I don't, do I? Well, regardless... he's my best friend. And if he gets together with Mayson, that's going to be the end of that.

"I guess," I tell him to his list of similarities.

"So?" he prods me.

"I guess," I take a deep breath. If he is my best friend like I claim, and he is, I should be able to tell him this. I'm really not sure why it's so hard. "I guess, I just worry that if you and Mayson get together... I'll lose you," I nearly mutter the words, so I'm not sure he can hear me, but feel myself flush anyway, so just in case, I add, "You know. I don't want to work alone. I'm used to having a partner."

Clark looks at me quizzically. "Why would you lose me? Do you think if I dated Mayson, I'd quit my job at the Planet? Besides, lots of people would love to be partnered with you."

"I don't want a different partner. I just want you," I think. But I don't have the nerve to say it for some reason.

"Look," I say, grateful for the interruption. "Derreck Anderson just came out of the warehouse."

Clark gives me a quizzical look as he turns to face the warehouse.

The rest of the evening, while we take notes on the comings and goings, trade speculations on the overall picture, and throw around phrases and terms we think would make the story sing when we finally write it, I can't help but mull over this conversation in the back of my mind. Clark's right, of course. There's no reason why he would quit his job if he got together with Mayson.

So what was it I meant? That we couldn't be friends anymore? Maybe. It seems likely. If I was dating Clark, I wouldn't want him to be friends with Mayson. Not that I wouldn't trust him. Clark's the most trustworthy guy I know. But I don't trust Mayson. Would she trust me?

But it's also different. Mayson has made no secret of her

interest in Clark. But I'm not interested in him. So she'd have no reason to worry about me. Right?

I steal another glance at Clark and can't help but notice how my breath catches in my throat for a second. He's so... good. That's so not the word I want, but there are no good words. He's just... honest and kind and... well, the best man I know. Plus he's not exactly hard on the eyes. I may not like Mayson, but I can't fault her taste in men. I'd be interested in Clark, too, if I wasn't...

If I wasn't what?

Scared.

No. That's crazy. I'm not scared, just not interested in Clark. You can't help who you're attracted to. It's not my fault that I'm not attracted to Clark even if it's sort of crazy not to be.

"Lois," Clark says, taking my hand in his as we stand in front of my door early the next morning, both exhausted from our all night stakeout. "I'm not leaving the Daily Planet. For anyone. Okay?"

I nod, not sure what to say, how to word the intense relief I feel at these words, or even sure if I want to find a way to.

"You won't lose me. I'm your friend and even if I did have to leave for some reason, I'd still find a way to keep in touch. I'd miss you too much not to."

I smile at him. "Thank you, Clark. That's good to hear. I guess that is what I meant earlier. I don't want to lose your friendship."

"You won't," he reassures me again as he wraps his arms around me. I sink into his chest, listening to the steady beat of his heart and wonder if I'm being completely honest with myself. Maybe I care about Clark more than I think I do?

But then I decide I don't care.

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1995

I look up and see the plate over my head. 'Deep breaths, Lois,' I tell myself. 'Deep breaths.'

I slowly lower my hand. I like this dish. There's no reason to smash it. It's not Clark's. It didn't come from Clark. It had no part in any of this. The phone ringing brings me out of my thoughts.

"Hello?" I ask as I pick up the phone. Well, okay. That was really more of a growl than a normal answer, but it's been a bad day.

"Lois?" asks the voice on the other end of the line. She doesn't sound scared of me and my growl. But then she knows better.

"Hi, Lucy," I say, as I feel my shoulders relax. I can spend the next forty-five minutes or so listening to her talk about her petty boyfriend trouble. It will be perfect. Take my mind off my boyfriend trouble. Although, now that I think about it, I guess I don't have any. If Clark has broken up with me for my own good, I don't have a boyfriend. Viola! Problem solved. Ugh!

"Are you okay, Lo?" she asks me.

"I'm fine, Lucy. How are you?" I ask, wanting to get the

conversation off of me. I can hardly explain my fight with Clark to her, and even if I could, I don't really want to. I've been thinking about it nonstop for two days now. I need a break.

"I'm good," she says slowly, and I can tell she's about to ask me about me again.

"So how are things going with Rich?" I'm nearly certain things are over with Rich -- Lucy goes through boyfriends the way I go through hand towels. To be fair, that may be as much a statement of my housekeeping skills as Lucy's seeming distaste for real relationships. Regardless, I'm sure they've broken up. It's been at least a month since the last time we talked. More than enough time for her to have found something she finds annoying about him and move on. Which is perfect as then she'll want to tell me all about her new guy.

"Really great!" she says, gushing. Lucy is gushing? Over a boy she hasn't just met?

"Really?" I hear myself ask and then bite my tongue. Probably not the best response.

But Lucy just laughs. "I know. It's long past time for me to have moved on. But I like Rich. He's just so... normal. And, Lois?" she asks, her voice soft -- reminiscent of nights spent in our bedroom as teenagers.

"Yeah?" I reply, keeping my voice low as well.

"I think... I think maybe this is it," she tells me. "I mean, I know it's still early, and I'm not running off and getting married. But this feels different. Real, you know? He's so grounded, he feels more like a grown-up than the other guys I've dated. And I feel like he cares about me more, too. We have this complete honesty deal..."

"What?" I cut into her monologue to ask. Complete honesty?

"Complete honesty. We don't keep any secrets from each other. Rich says that if we love each other, we shouldn't want to. We should only want what's best for each other."

"What's best for each other?" I give a bitter laugh. "As in, if what he decides is best for you is to see other people, he'll have to tell you first?"

There's silence on the line for a second, and I realize that may have seemed like a weird question to Lucy.

"I guess..." she replies uncertainly. "But not quite. Because we'd discuss it first. Well, I mean, if he really did think it was best for me, and it wasn't some nice way of saying he wanted to break up, I guess. But anyway, yeah, we'd discuss it. We want to make decisions together."

"We?" I ask. This doesn't sound much like Lucy.

"We talked. The complete honesty thing is Rich's idea. He's been lied to before and really hurt. Different than me, I guess. He was engaged once before and found out a week before the wedding that his fiancée was sleeping with someone else."

"Ouch," I mutter.

"Yeah. And so he said he wanted complete honesty and asked if I had any hot button issues. I couldn't think of any at first, and then remembered how Mom and Dad used to

be. How he was always telling her what to do. I decided that was my issue. I don't want to be in a relationship like that. So, I said I wanted us to make decisions jointly."

I sigh. She sounds so mature. When had she grown up? I used to think of Lucy as being flighty. And now she is behaving older than Clark.

Ugh! Clark!

"That's a great idea, Luce," I tell her.

"Thanks, Lois. Do you really think so?"

"Yeah, I do," I tell her. "It really hurts when people make decisions for you. Even if they think they are for your own good. Even if they have justification for thinking that way."

"Lois?" Lucy cuts in.

"Um... sorry. Yeah, I think it's a great idea."

"Maybe this is a hot button issue for you, too?" she suggests quietly.

I sigh. Maybe it is. "Maybe," I concede. "But you know what? It doesn't matter. It's still wouldn't be right even if it wasn't. No one should decide to break up with you for your own good. I'm a smart woman -- he told me so himself. Why can't I make up my own mind about what's good for me?"

"Whose 'he'?" Lucy asks, and I can hear a smile on her face. I hadn't meant to go off like that, and I can tell that she knows that.

I sigh. "Clark," I admit.

"Clark?" she asks, and I can hear gushing in her voice. "That's so great, Lois. You guys are perfect together, and I know he really loves you."

"We're not together, Lucy," I remind her.

"But you said..."

"We were together. For a second. And then he decided to break up with me for my own good. So now we're not."

"That... that... are you sure you didn't misunderstand?" Lucy asks.

"Misunderstand what? He told me he thought it would be better for me if we weren't together. What was to misunderstand there?" I ask her, feeling myself starting to get worked up.

"It's just... he loves you so much."

"Lucy," I remind her, "you've only met Clark once or twice. How do you know how he feels about me?"

"It's all over his face every time he looks at you," she tells me. "He looks at you like... like you are the sun."

"Well, maybe," I say, finding that rather than making me feel good, her words only fuel my anger. "But it doesn't change the fact that he broke up with me."

"Why would he break up with you for your own good?" she asks. "What could be better for you if you weren't dating him?"

"He has this crazy idea in his head that it's dangerous," I tell her. "That if..." I stop midsentence suddenly remembering why I had thought I couldn't tell Lucy about this.

"That what?" she asks when I say nothing.

"You know, I don't really understand it," I tell her, hoping she won't push me. "It's stupid anyway."

"I'm sorry, Lois. I never would have thought... I really thought Clark was devoted to you."

"Me, too," I say, realizing as I say it that it's true. Not only is it true, but it's part of why I'm so angry now. I thought Clark was the one guy who would never hurt me. I always felt like... well, sort of like I was the one with the power, the one who cared less. But now it turns out that's not the case. Clark doesn't care about me nearly as much as I thought he did.

"So, how are things now?" she asks me.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're still partners, right? How are you working together?"

Her question brings me up short. We are still partners. We haven't been acting much like it, but we are. Clark can't just keep ignoring me the way he has been. We need to work together.

"We haven't been," I tell her. "He's been calling in stories and... I don't know what. But I haven't seen him."

"What are you going to do when he stops avoiding you?" she asks me quietly.

I feel the dread in my stomach at the thought of seeing him again. And at the same time, the hope that he'll see me and realize what an idiot he's being. "I don't know," I tell Lucy.

But as we say goodbye and promise to talk again soon, I think more about this. I don't want to deal with the feeling of dread every time I hear the elevator ding at work and wonder if it's Clark.

But the only way to avoid that is to confront him myself. I can do that. I can do that tonight. Remind him that we're partners, and we need to work together.

He can decide he doesn't love me, or maybe he does and really does think this is better for me, but regardless of that decision, I'm still going to be a part of his life. He's my partner whether he likes it or not.

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1996

This is stupid. Certainly with all the missteps and time we've spent thinking we were going to finally do this and then not, I've had lots of time to think about it. And I love Clark. I do. I want to spend the rest of my life with him.

So, what's the issue? Why would getting married be a problem if I know I want to be with him?

And it's not usually. Most of the time when I think about the wedding, Clark is here, and I know just by looking at him that this is what I want most in the world. To be able to wake up everyday and see Clark's face first thing.

But now I'm not sure.

I see the pile of Ivory Tower videos on my dresser and consider throwing them across the room. They are the reason why. Clark bought me an entire season of videos last week. Just because. Just because he loves me. Because as much as it's my one guilty pleasure that no one knows

about, I let him in on it. Because I wanted him to know my secret. I mean it's no 'I moonlight in tights,' but still.

And the videos, he said, were his way of letting me know that he loves me, all of me. Even the me that likes to watch silly soap operas.

But what if that's the me that wants to get married? The me that sits up at night and stares at the screen wondering just when Derek and Ivanka are going to get together. Can't they tell how perfect they'd be together?

But the truth is that Derek and Ivanka aren't real. I don't know too many real couples that really make it work.

Sure, there is Martha and Jonathan Kent, but they are as much of the problem as Derek and Ivanka. They are happy, but look at them -- Jonathan is a farmer. And Martha is a farmer's wife.

That's not what I want. I want to be a reporter. Not a reporter's wife.

What if, by marrying Clark, I lose myself? What if Clark secretly wants that?

It seems silly, doesn't it? I mean, Clark loves me partly because I'm smart. But his mom is hardly an idiot, and yet her career is still mainly supporting Jonathan. Maybe secretly, in a part of himself Clark isn't even aware of, what he wants is a smart woman he can come home to.

On the other hand, Clark isn't stupid. What exactly is he coming home to? He certainly doesn't want me making dinner.

But still, it's different now than it would be. He has his own place. I have mine. He expects me to be... well, Lois Lane. But things could change after we get married. He could want me to become Lois Kent. I mean, I know he said he doesn't care if I change my name, but it's just a name. Secretly, he could want a marriage like his parents. Where I'm a smart woman supporting my man while he makes the money. And, I guess in our case, saves the world.

'Knock, knock.' I feel my stomach drop a bit at the sound. It's three in the morning, and the knocking is from my window. No question who it is.

And it's not that I don't want to see him. It's just that... well, I'm not sure I want to see him. What if I see him and become... Ivory Tower Lois? The Lois who wants to be swept away in the romance of marrying the man I love?

"Lois?" his voice is soft, and I can tell he's trying to whisper in case the light in the living room doesn't mean I'm awake.

"Hi," I say, giving the Ivory Tower videos a little push as I leave my bedroom. I won't become weak Ivory Tower Lois just because he stopped by. "Busy night?" I ask him.

He nods, "But nothing big. Is everything okay?"

"Fine," I tell him. "Why?"

He chuckles. "Well, it's three in the morning, and the lights are all on in your apartment. And you were pacing. And now you're avoiding my eyes. Plus... well, you just sound off."

Somewhere, deep inside me, Ivory Tower Lois swoons a bit at having a man that knows her this well.

"I'm fine, Clark," I say, but avoid his eyes as I say it. I can tell I still sound weird.

"Lois?" He asks sounding unsure of himself. "Is something wrong? Did I do something?"

"No," I reassure him. "You didn't do anything."

He is silent for a moment, and when I look up at him to determine why, I realize he's scanning my apartment with his vision thingy. What's he looking for?

"What are you doing?" I ask him.

He doesn't say anything, but then seems to finish. "No one's here. No bugs. You're not in trouble?"

I flush. Is it ridiculous to be embarrassed because when I don't sound like myself, my boyfriend's second assumption is that I'm in some sort of trouble? And it would be his first assumption if he wasn't so insecure.

"I'm not in trouble, Clark," I sigh, but make sure he notices that I used his name. No way would I call him Clark when he's in the suit if we weren't alone.

He nods his head, seeming at a loss, before saying, "Okay, I'll let you get back to... pacing." His shoulders are slumped and he looks hurt. I suppose over time I'll get used to this, but I haven't yet -- seeing him this way as Superman. I mean, I get it now. I'm no longer surprised by the little reminders that Clark Kent and Superman are the same person.

But this -- this hurt Clark thing. Well, it's hard enough to take when he's Clark. When he's Superman, it just seems so... wrong. Superman shouldn't look beaten down. And honestly, I don't want Clark to either.

"Everything's fine, Clark," I tell him again, hoping to see him straighten up or something. Instead, though, he nods his head, still looking like a superhero that just lost his best friend.

I almost giggle at the thought -- a picture of Clark like this would be worth millions on the black market. Incontrovertible proof that Superman is not invulnerable.

But then the thought brings tears to my eyes. He's not invulnerable. And maybe more than anyone else, I have the power to hurt him. Even over something silly like not sounding like myself.

"I love you," I tell him, seeing him nod his head again through the tears in my eyes.

"I know you do," he says back, his voice quiet. He doesn't tell me that he loves me, too, but I know he does. His leaving now, rather than pushing me to tell him what's wrong, proves it.

He steps onto my windowsill, but before he can take off, I call out, "Clark!"

He turns around, and the hope that I'm about to clarify what's going on is all over his face.

"I'm scared," I whisper.

He's immediately beside me. And I mean immediately. It's a little weird dating Superman that way. "Of what? What can I do?" he asks.

"What if..." I stumble, trying to find the right words to explain this without hurting his feelings. "What sort of

marriage is it you want?" I finally settle on.

"Huh?" he asks.

"What is it you're looking for in a marriage?"

He leans over and pushes a strand of hair behind my ear. "To be with you," he says.

"But I mean..." I stop, knowing I'm still not being clear.

"Do you want a marriage like your parents?"

He smiles. "In some ways, yes. They are so happy. And so supportive of each other."

I feel my anxiety increase, and clearly something gives it away as the smile is off Clark's face in an instant.

"What is it, Lois? Was that the wrong answer? What is it you want?"

"I don't know," I tell him. "But... well, yeah, I mean I want to be as happy as your parents. But they are so... traditional," I finally say.

"Traditional?" Clark asks.

"Your dad runs the farm, and your mom takes care of the house."

Clark looks at me like I'm crazy. "Are you worried that I want you to quit your job?"

I start to tell him no, that's crazy, but then stop. Isn't that precisely what I'm worried about?

Clark laughs, but then seems to catch himself and stops. "How could I want that?" he asks me. "You wouldn't be Lois Lane if you weren't a reporter."

"But maybe after we're married, you won't want Lois Lane. You'll want Lois Kent."

Clark moves closer, taking both my hands in his. "I'll always want Lois Lane," he tells me earnestly.

I smile slightly. "What if you don't realize that's what you really want?" I ask him.

He pulls on my hands to bring me over to the couch. "Can I have a second?" he asks me.

"I guess," I tell him, not sure what he means. He flies through my window, but is back a second later, and spins into Clark clothes.

"Sorry," he says. "I didn't have anything but the suit with me."

I nod. I'm sort of glad he changed. I feel more comfortable having this conversation with Clark than with Superman.

He sits down beside me, taking my hands in his again. "Do you know what I see when I picture our future?" he asks me. I shake my head. "I see us pouring over papers at the living room table, trying to write a story while our kids are asleep upstairs. I see me looking over and watching you sleep while you try to do an overnight stakeout when pregnant. I see us holding hands while accepting the first Kerth we win together."

I smile at him, loving the images in my mind as I picture the things he's saying.

"I mean," he says, "I do see other things, too, that are unrelated to work. I see you holding our baby. Or one of us, usually you, carving a turkey at Thanksgiving with our families there."

"Our families?" I ask, wanting to hear more.

"Yeah. Mom and Dad. Your parents. Lucy and maybe some boyfriend or husband. Even Perry and Alice and Jimmy."

I smile as I move closer to him, leaning my head against his chest. He lets go of my hands to wrap his arms around me.

"What else do you see?" I ask, once we're settled.

He chuckles softly, but I can feel the rumbling of his chest more than hear it. "You, thanking me when you win the Pulitzer."

I giggle, although I'm not sure why.

He pulls away from me slightly, looking serious. "I do have one image that doesn't involve us being partners."

"You do?" I ask, not sure what to make of his words. My fears had been melting away, and his words don't bring them back per se, but still, I feel a bit nervous.

He nods. "I see you looking at me across the desk in Perry's office."

"You're editor?" I ask him.

He rolls his eyes at me. "Yeah, right. No, you're editor."

I flush with pride. "You think I'll be editor when Perry retires."

"If you want to be, I can't imagine why you wouldn't," he tells me.

"I'd miss being partners with you," I tell him, all my fears gone.

"We'll always be partners, Lois," he says, leaning his head against mine. "Even when you're editor, we'll be partners here at home."

I snuggle in closer to him. "I can't wait."

THE END