

# The Little Things

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Rated PG

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Description: Clark unintentionally gets Lois to view her life through his eyes, with unforeseen consequences. Missing scenes from "Vatman". A St. Patty's Day vignette.

A/N: My treatment of St. Patrick's Day at the Daily Planet is taken lightheartedly and very much in a secular way. I meant no offense to anyone who celebrates the actual religious holiday or to any Irish people.

Disclaimer: These 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. They do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros, DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). The story is set during S1's "Vatman" written by H. B. Cobb and Deborah Joy LeVine. These characters have invaded my psyche and forced me to write the following reenactment of their lives; although if you asked them, they might tell you that the plot is all my own.

I would like to thank Deadly Chakram's *Operation: Cupid* for inspiring this story and IolantheAlias for taking time to Beta this for me. Thank you.

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Lois walked up to the café table where Clark sat reading a newspaper. For once he was so engrossed in what he was reading that when she joined him he didn't acknowledge her beyond a friendly smile before returning to the story.

She waited until he had folded the paper and scooted it off to the side of the table before asking, "Which of my stories was so mesmerizing? Superman saves retirees in bus? Or my rehashment of the mayor's speech?" She yawned dramatically to emphasize her sentiment towards the mayor taking credit for the decline in crime in Metropolis, when everyone knew it had nothing to do with him.

"Neither," Clark said, nudging the paper towards her and pointing at the article. *Couple Renews Vows Despite Alzheimer's*.

"Really? Love conquers all?" Lois scoffed, pushing the paper back towards him. "You were engrossed in an anniversary announcement?"

"Stories like this give me hope," he explained.

"Superman gives me hope," Lois rebutted. "This sentimental stuff is a waste of newsprint."

"I disagree. Some of us want to read some good news every day."

"My 'Superman saves the day' articles are all the good news I need," Lois said, glancing at the waitress who had approached their table. "Coffee. Black. Non-fat milk on the side," she ordered before turning back to Clark.

He waited until the waitress had refilled his mug and set another pitcher of cream next to his first empty one before answering, "I'm glad Superman gives you hope, Lois, but some of us need to get our good news elsewhere, even if it's a chuckle from *Cat's Corner* or following someone's search for love in the Personals."

Lois hit a pink sweetener packet with her fingers, waiting for her mug of coffee to arrive. "More waste of newsprint, Clark. But go ahead. I'll stick with Superman." She beamed at him.

Her smile must have been catching because Clark returned it, reminding her why she had found him so attractive in the first case. But she was dating Lex Luthor now and she worked with Clark. He was her best friend and that was too important for her to risk for some mere flirtation.

She sighed. Rule number three.

"What?" he asked.

"I was just wondering if you read the entire paper — cover to cover — every article, blurb, and correction?" Lois inquired, though her mind had been nowhere near the topic.

"Every day. Every part. Especially the corrections. I like to know if I ever make a mistake," he replied, taking a sip of coffee. "It's important to me."

"Well, you'll never see my name in the corrections box, unless the typesetter misspelled it. I don't make mistakes."

"Oh, come on, Lois," Clark challenged. "Everyone makes mistakes."

"I don't. Not in print, at least," she amended so not to sound holier-than-thou. "Okay, I admit that I believed that fake Superman was the real deal at first."

Although Lois adored Superman with all of her heart and was still his number one champion, there was nevertheless a small part of her that didn't look at him the same way after that stranger with his face had held her down and pressed his mouth to hers. She hated that. She hated that the Superman clone made her look at the real man differently. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying and failing to block the images, the fear, and adrenaline from resurfacing.

Clark set his hand on hers and spoke softly, "Lois?"

The waitress finally brought her coffee and Lois jerked her hand away from Clark's to pour in her milk and add sweetener. "Can I have a to-go cup?" she asked the waitress. "I need to get back to work."

"Of course," the woman told her and went to retrieve one for her and one for Clark.

"Thank you," he said to the waitress. After she had left, he asked Lois again with concern, "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," she said, knowing the quiver to her voice belied her words. She took a deep breath and exhaled.

Clark took hold of her shaking hands and removed them from her mug, pouring her drink into the to-go cup for her.

"Just give me time and a good Superman story... a *real* Superman story," Lois said to him, standing up and grabbing her cup. "And I'll be fine."

Clark gazed at her like she had struck him across the face, but she didn't withdraw her words. She had meant them, but not in the way her partner had interpreted them. It wasn't that Superman made her feel better than Clark did. The more time she spent with the Man in Blue, the more she would be reminded of the real man there, the man she respected, and cared about and the less she would be reminded of that fake Superman who had assaulted her. She needed to quash that little bit of fear or it would grow and take over her life.

Despite her harsh words, Clark caught up to her on the sidewalk — after paying for their coffees — and gave her a reassuring smile. She wrapped her arm around his to hopefully relay to him that she still considered him her best friend.

They arrived at the office a few minutes later. Lois had barely shrugged out of her coat, when Jimmy barreled in on them. "You guys up for drinks after work?"

"What's the occasion?" Clark asked, helping Lois by hanging up her coat.

"For two people in the news business you are oblivious to real life, aren't you?" Jimmy said with a shake of his head. At their blank expressions, he clarified, "St. Patrick's Day." He held out his arms to emphasize his green sweater vest.

Lois harrumphed. "Oh, God. Not another commercial

holiday. Didn't we just suffer through one of those last month?"

"I agree," mumbled Clark and Lois's gaze shot to his innocent expression.

Cat sidled up to the male reporter and pinched his butt, causing him to jump. "Morning, Clark," she purred.

"Cat!" he admonished her, holding out his multicolored tie. "I'm wearing green. See?"

The gossip queen shrugged. "What does that have to do with anything?" She threw him a dazzling smile as she sauntered off.

"Just what Cat needs, another excuse to pinch people," Lois mumbled with a roll of her eyes. "Sorry, Jimmy, I don't celebrate holidays that encourage drinking."

"Fine. Lois is out," Jimmy said, turning to Clark. "But answer me this. How is St. Patrick's Day commercial?"

"There is more to Irish people than the color green and shamrocks — and pinching people," Clark said, stressing this last phrase for the now absent Cat. "— which is what St. Patrick's Day has morphed into here in the States. If people went back to the roots of the holiday..."

"Wait a minute, Clark," Lois interrupted him as her partner's earlier words sunk in. She and Jimmy had learned that interrupting was necessary before Clark went off on one of his like-Perry-on-Elvis history tangents. "Did you just agree with me that Valentine's Day was a commercial holiday?"

Jimmy threw up his hands. "So, just me again then?" he mumbled, walking off — probably because he didn't want a history lesson either. "I'm going to call Benny and see what he's up to."

Clark chuckled at Jimmy's futility and sat down at his desk.

Lois leaned against the edge of his desk and crossed her arms, waiting for an answer.

He finally gave her an elaborate sigh, rolling his head, and with a grimace, admitted reluctantly, "Yes, Lois, I did just agree with you."

Lois grinned in victory. "So, 'love triumphs all' Kent believes Valentine's Day is commercial. Do go on. I've got to hear this."

He groaned. "First of all, I love the idea of Valentine's Day, but it shouldn't be necessary. If you love someone, you don't tell them once a year with chocolates, jewelry, and flowers. If you truly love someone, you tell them every day in all the little things you do."

Clark didn't believe love was grand, but *little*? "Run that by me again," Lois requested, stumped by his apparent change in attitude. If she didn't know better, she would think he had been switched out for a clone as well.

"Let me explain it this way. If once a year, Jimmy volunteered to work all night, pulled out all the stops, and gave you five-hundred percent, would he still be your go-to guy for information?" Clark raised a brow at his rhetorical question. "Would you show Perry that you're the 'top investigative reporter he's ever seen' — and I'm quoting here — by only turning in one Pulitzer worthy article a year? Or by your daily efforts to work your fingers to the bone, gathering up those cold hard facts that he loves, and turning in at least a half-a-dozen Kerth worthy stories in a year?"

Lois pressed her lips together with chagrin. "Only half-a-dozen?"

"Terribly sorry, Ms. Lane, two dozen Kerth worthy stories," he corrected himself with faux dramatic embellishment.

Despite that, she gave him a satisfied smile. "Much better."

"This was just a hypothetical example, Lois," he reminded her.

"Let me get this right," Lois said, holding up her hands.

"What you're saying is that the grand gesture once a year is well and good and you wouldn't turn it down, but if you really loved someone you wouldn't need to tell them because you had already showed them every day in all the little things that you do?"

With a smile Clark looked her straight into the eyes and replied, "Yes, Lois, that is exactly what I'm saying."

Lois felt a tingle go down her skin from the intensity of the gaze he gave her. "I'd like to see that," she mumbled, retreating to her desk.

"See what?" Clark asked, clearly confused.

"Clark Kent in love," she replied, turning away to answer her phone, before she had a chance to shoot him a mischievous grin.

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Later that afternoon, Lois sat lost in thought at her desk as today's story was unable to catch the forefront of her mind. They didn't have any proof that the fake Superman was a clone. Dr. Leek had denied that as a possibility, the liar. Plus, she was unsure if they should write an article about the clone.

Should the public be made aware of this vulnerability of Superman? If they wrote about the clone, it could harm Superman more than help him. Would it put Superman at risk from other criminal masterminds, who might want to make their own clone? Would people be afraid of the real Superman, knowing that there was a fake one flying about? Or would people be as nervous around him as she was?

Right now, it was just her, Clark and Superman who knew. It wasn't Superman's fault that someone had cloned him. He hadn't been in on it. He was the victim here. Since they didn't have those cold hard facts that Clark reminded her that Perry loved, maybe they didn't have enough to write the story. Would Superman see her killing the story as a little thing or a big thing?

Clark's words flowed over her in a wave. She remembered back to what she and Lex had done for Valentine's Day, a month earlier.

Lex had whisked her away — via helicopter — to New York for dinner at the most extravagant restaurant in town. They had sat in an exclusive private dining room, where a violinist played just for them. After dessert of white chocolate mousse, he presented her with a pair of what must have been expensive sapphire earrings. When she had returned home that night, her apartment had been filled with roses. All very romantic, big gesture items. In truth, she had felt Lex's admiration very strongly that night.

Only...

Lex had ordered lobster for her — not one of her favorite seafoods — he had just assumed she would like it without asking. The violin music, though beautiful, made it difficult for them to converse more than a few sentences at a time. The helicopter ride had been exhilarating, but cold for February — and although Lex had offered her the use of his overcoat — there wasn't really anything she could do to fix her hair she had spent forty-five minutes on before he had picked her up. The earrings were exquisite but not at all her style or taste. She couldn't imagine where she would ever wear them. Maybe the next time Lex held a ball? Possibly the next Kerth Award banquet? And sapphires? She hardly ever wore blue. She didn't even want to think of the *white* chocolate mousse.

The little things, Clark had said.

These were all little things that she hadn't nitpicked about because it had been Lex. Any other man and she would have spoken up or been offended at how she had been treated or how little he knew her. She didn't know what it was about Lex, but one didn't complain with him. So she had brushed away the flaws, imperfections, and inconveniences, because she was sure that he wouldn't have wanted to hear them. She had wanted him to please her as much as he had wanted to please her. And, strictly speaking, they were minor criticisms that hadn't ruined the evening. She had still thought the date a grand success and very romantic. Yet, she couldn't help thinking...

Clark would never have made those mistakes.

Her partner would have asked her preferences for dinner,

instead of ordering for her. Or, like the time when he brought Chinese food while they were working on the Messenger explosion, he would have offered her a selection from which to choose.

Clark instinctively knew that music was background to anything she had to say.

If they were to eat alone, it would have been because he had made her dinner himself at his apartment — or that one time, he had actually come to her place and cooked. Clark knew that one of the joys of eating out for Lois was people watching.

Any gift he would choose for her would certainly be hand-selected for her and her tastes. For Christmas, Clark had found a store specializing in handmade dark chocolates — which any chocolate aficionado knew was the *only* true flavor — with a selection of different fillings.

On the thirteenth of February, Clark had walked her home through the gently falling snow, holding her elbow to make sure she hadn't fallen. At her apartment, he produced a small bag of dark chocolate shavings — actual chocolate, not that powdered stuff that came in a box — with which he made from scratch hot chocolate, using real milk, a pot, and a stove, to warm her up.

Clark hadn't given her anything on Valentine's Day itself and now she knew why. Anything would have been compared and paled against anything Lex had given her. Not that she expected anything from Clark; they weren't romantically involved — just friends, best friends, work colleagues. She hadn't gotten him anything either. Clark had treated the 'holiday' just like any other day of the week.

He had walked her to work, having brought her a piping hot to-go coffee, fixed just the way she liked it. On the way to work, they had talked about whatever story they were working on, some political scandal about which they were supposed to interview someone at City Hall.

There had been a Superman rescue the Man of Steel had mentioned to Clark. Her partner had said he told it to her just as Superman had told it to him, but Clark had embellished the details to make the story come alive with his words. Clark must have embellished it; there was no way that Superman would have mentioned the frost on the little boy's eyelashes when he had found him in the woods. Or how, though tired, scared, and half-frozen, the little boy had still hid from Superman, worried about disappointing his hero by getting himself lost.

Only how could they have been embellishments, Lois wondered, when Clark — next to Superman — was the most honest man she knew? Those two details, though moving enough to cause her partner's voice to crack with emotion, hadn't made it to Clark's printed story. It had been as if Clark had saved them for her ears alone.

When they had reached the office, it had been just like another day at the office. Clark had helped her off with her coat — like he had when they had come back from the café this morning, she recalled. About an hour before they had left for their interview with the secretary from City Hall, Clark had taken her cold mug and refilled it with hot coffee without her asking. He just knew, somehow, that it had gone cold.

After the dead-end interview, Clark had suggested lunch — as he was often apt to do — her choice, his treat. She had decided on hot dogs from that cart around the corner from the Daily Planet. She laughed, remembering how Clark had gotten mustard on his cheek. And how when she had told him about it, he had gone and wiped the wrong cheek.

"Something funny, Lois?" Clark asked, suddenly appearing by her desk.

Lois hadn't seen him come back from his errand. Actually, she hadn't seen him since that morning before Superman had dropped her off at the office and gone to deal with his clone. She remembered Superman had pointed at her, and once more said,

'Stay here,' with a serious, yet teasing smile, before disappearing back through the office windows.

She waved off her laughter, which didn't help dissipate it in the least. "I was remembering the last time we had hot dogs and you got mustard on your cheek."

"Okay," Clark replied. Subconsciously, he wiped the wrong cheek again and Lois's smile grew.

"What's up?" she asked.

"Oh," he said, flushing slightly as he produced a pink chrysanthemum from behind his back. "I'm sorry about the color. It was either this, red, or green."

Lois stared at him, perplexed. Why had Clark bought her a flower? A pink flower?

He took her scissors out of her drawer, snipped off most of the stem and then pinned the flower to the jacket of her suit. "I know how you feel about wearing something specifically green today, but after Wally pinched your arm earlier, I thought you wouldn't mind this — before Ralph got any crazy ideas." His eyes widened in trepidation. "I'm not too late, am I?"

She shook her head and he exhaled with relief, before heading to his desk. He was right; she preferred the pink to red with her grey suit. And of course the stem was green to ward off the pinchers.

Lois lifted the flower to her nose and breathed in. It was just a little thing, but it smelled better than the overpowering scent her apartment had developed after two days, closed tight with Lex's six dozen red roses. She couldn't wait to toss the flowers after three days.

"Thank you, Clark," she said.

He glanced up from his phone messages. "For what? Saving Ralph's life?" He gestured in an off-hand manner as she had earlier. "It's nothing."

Lois was sure Clark meant that buying her the flower and saving her from Ralph's pinches was nothing. Although, it sounded as if to her that Ralph's life meant nothing. She couldn't resist the huge grin that spread across her face. "I couldn't agree more."

Soon, they were both laughing uncontrollably at this silly, tasteless, and completely unfunny comment.

Clark's eyes sparkled as he continued to smile at her.

Lex never smiled at her like she was his entire world. He couldn't make her skin tingle just by accidentally brushing his hand against hers, like Clark had when he had pinned the flower to her just now.

Lois always knew that Clark cared for her. How could she not? But for some reason she had never taken it seriously.

From that very first day, after he had read her Chinese fortune cookie for her and he had then stared into her eyes as if he fallen into them, she had warned him then not to fall for her, but when did he ever listen?

She had known it from the way he had accurately guessed that she had been jealous of Toni Taylor and the way he kissed her goodbye when he left because Superman had been banished. He had shown her in the way he had resisted her seduction while drunk on Revenge, even though he did finally cave after she had recovered, and in the teasing manner he had offered to share the honeymoon bed at the Lexor.

Lois especially knew how Clark felt about her when he had stared at her in shock after she had confessed that she loved him because she thought that the world had been going to end. She didn't know why exactly she had retracted the words by adding the false disclaimer about loving Clark like a brother. There had been a split second of silence when he hadn't responded and she had needed to fill that dead air with something. She couldn't let those words hang between them and chance that he would say he didn't reciprocate her feelings, even though she knew deep in her heart that he did. She would always regret not giving him at least

fifteen seconds to catch his breath and respond.

The smile fell off Lois's face as she quickly reviewed all the horrible, insensitive, mean, petty and vindictive things she had ever said and done to Clark since she had met him. She couldn't think of one positive aspect she brought to their friendship. And, yet, he always forgave her. He was always there for her.

It was just like she had done that morning at the café, when she had refused to admit how it had made her feel when Clark had stood up to the fake Superman and protected her. Of how it had reminded her of him saving her from Mr. Make-Up and how Lois wanted nothing more than to crawl into Clark's caring arms and never leave again. Instead, she had cruelly and untruthfully implied that she didn't need him.

"Lois? Are you all right?" Clark inquired, moving from his desk and sitting down next to hers.

Lois looked up into his eyes and felt herself falling for him again as she promised herself she wouldn't do. "No, Clark. I'm not all right," she admitted for the first time, standing up and grabbing her coat.

"Let me help you with that," he said, gently taking her coat out of her hands and holding it up for her. It was nothing really. Just a little thing.

She saw him standing there holding her coat and she exploded, grasping her coat out of his hands. How dare he! How dare he love her! He deserved so much better than her. "Stop it, Clark! Just stop it," she pleaded under her breath.

His mouth fell open and she saw the same stunned expression on his face she had the day Nightfall was supposed to crash to Earth.

"Stop bringing me coffee and pastries. Stop walking me to and from work. Stop buying me chocolates and flowers." She pulled the flower from her lapel and threw it at him. "Stop helping me with my coat, opening doors for me, and correcting my grammar. Stop treating me with respect I have not earned. Stop not giving up on me."

"I can't," he whispered, his head bowed. "I don't know how."

"Neither do I," she replied, setting her hand on his chest for a moment. "Neither do I." Lois turned away from him and stomped over to the elevators, leaving him once more in the dust.

The elevator doors opened and Ralph stepped out in a hideous green sports jacket. "Yo, Lois, where's your Irish?" he asked, reaching out to pinch her.

Lois balled her fist and punched him in the jaw, sending him stumbling towards the vending machines. "And stop trying to save Ralph's life!" she screamed at Clark with a shake of her fist before stepping into elevator. She lowered her head and mumbled to herself as the doors closed, "He doesn't deserve it any more than I do."

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Clark dragged his feet into the newsroom. It wasn't even eight o'clock yet and he had already experienced the worst day of his life. He had gotten hardly any sleep; he didn't want to have time alone with himself to think about Lois' rejection. So, Superman had spent the last couple of nights flying from city to city all over the globe and saving as many people as he could. This morning, he had come across a car wreck here in Metropolis, but he had gotten there too late. The woman had died at the emergency room less than an hour later.

Correction: his worst day was several days earlier when Lois told him outright to give up on ever having her return his love and Clark had to let go of a part of himself. But today was in his top ten and rising quickly.

Personally, Clark hadn't wanted to come into the office this morning. He didn't want to face Lois again, but he didn't have a good enough excuse to stay away. He needed to see her and make sure she was okay. Despite everything Lois had said and done, Clark still loved her. But he no longer had anything he could pin

his hopes on.

In the few days since Lois had blown up at him, she had apparently forgiven him for falling in love with her. Maybe she had realized what he had: resistance was futile.

He stopped two paces away from her desk. It was empty. Only briefly did he let himself wonder where his partner was before moving on to his desk. He held his lone coffee cup in his hands, feeling incomplete for not having gotten her one. But that was what she wanted. She wanted him to stop loving her. *Stop doing the little things*, she had told him. So, he was trying to comply with her wishes. It was the hardest, most painful task of his life — not showing Lois that he loved her by doing little things for her.

Superman had caught and disposed of the dying clone. He ached again for acquiescing with the dying clone's last wish. It was cruel to create life so incompletely as to let it just get a taste of living before it died. Whoever the clone's "father" was, he had better not cross Superman today.

Seeing the two Supermen together on the back lot of Metro Brothers Studios, had seemed to snap Lois out of her fear of the Man in Blue with whom she was once again obsessed. Perry had jumped off a bridge for his fiftieth birthday, gotten rid of that ridiculous toupee, and was back to his old Elvis-loving self again. Everything and everybody was back to normal again. Except him.

Lois had figured out that Clark loved her and she didn't care. No, he corrected, she cared. Only she once again thought his love was that of a brother.

Clark swallowed down that bitter word.

*Brother*: For a few short hours he had found a brother of his own. True, the clone wasn't really his twin and it certainly wasn't him, but it was nice to think Superman wasn't alone. Yes, Lois had told him that she would be his family. He sighed. Correction: Lois had told Clark that she would be Superman's companion. What had been her exact words? 'I'm available.'

Well, better that she pinned all her hopes on Superman instead of Luthor. Actually, wooing Lois as Superman was still a temptation he hadn't ruled out yet. A last straw effort, should Luthor start to become serious with her.

No one would be cloning Superman again anytime soon. Dr. Fabian Leek had been found dead in Hobbs Bay, an obvious body dump. Both Clark and Lois had surmised it had something to do with the failure of the clone. Dr. Leek's Frankenstein lab had yet to be discovered and if the clone's "father" had anything to do about it, it probably never would. Clark still had hopes that this mess was of Luthor's doing, but he doubted even Luthor would have approved of Super-clone's obsession with his girlfriend.

Jack walked by Clark's desk and dropped his mail on it, murmuring, "Mad Dog at two o'clock."

Clark raised his gaze from his papers and saw a tight-lipped woman storm into the bullpen from the elevators. Like adding oil to water, their co-workers flowed away from her as she zeroed in on her favorite punching bag. He sighed, waiting for her wrath to fall.

"Where in the hell have you been?" she thundered.

"Good morning to you, too, Lois," he replied with his usual calm.

"*Good morning?* This has been anything but a good morning," she snapped.

"I agree," he murmured.

Suddenly her fury melted, leaving her face pale and her eyes wide. "*You?* You haven't had a good morning, Clark?" she sputtered, almost as if someone had stolen her breath.

"Fabulous!" he retorted with a heavy dose of sarcasm. "And I see it's only going to get better."

"Fine!" she said, finding her backbone. "If that's how you feel, we can forget the whole thing."

*What whole thing?* he wondered. For once he wasn't up to playing Mr. Nice Guy. "Who says I'm not allowed to have a bad day every once in a while?" he fired back. "You don't have a monopoly on them, you know."

"Clearly," she growled and then he saw something fold inside of her as her voice softened. "Who *are* you? I want my Clark Kent back."

Her words punched a hole through his abdomen. "*Your* Clark Kent? Is that like *your* Superman? Or do you mean your partner, your best friend, *your* brother? You sent him away, remember? All you've got left is..."

"Kent!" Perry roared. "My office. Pronto!"

Clark turned away from Lois and marched into his boss' office. The Chief closed the door behind him.

"What's gotten into you today, son? This isn't like you," Perry said.

"Not you, too. What? Am I not allowed to have a bad day?" Clark scoffed, knowing full well he had suffered through many of his boss' bad days as well.

"No... uh... No, you're not," the Chief said, sitting down at his desk.

"That's unfair," Clark countered, about to lay it on thick at Perry's feet, when his boss interrupted again.

"Look here, son. Of course, you're allowed to have a bad day every once in a while, and you're probably long overdue. But what I'm telling you is, today isn't it," the Chief informed him with a knowing expression that Clark didn't understand.

"What? Are you saying that I have to pick and choose my good days and bad days? I don't think it works like that," Clark grumbled.

"I'm saying in the grand scheme of things, you can either look back on today as the worst day of your life or the best."

Clark raised an eyebrow as he looked at his boss skeptically. "*Those* are my options?"

"Yep. That's them. Take 'em or leave them."

Clark opened his mouth to respond when Perry held up a finger and said, "Don't make that decision just yet, Kent. I take it you haven't had time to read today's paper."

This statement threw Clark. "No, that was what started off my bad day. I spilled..."

Perry threw him a copy of the paper. "Take your coffee and the paper into the conference room until you've calmed down. I can't have you both riled up."

"But, sir..."

The Chief pointed out his office door. "Go!"

Clark grumbled as he marched back to his desk. It was unfair. Perry had bad days. Jimmy had bad days. Hell, Lois owned the patent on them. But he had one bad morning and *he* was sent to have a timeout.

He reached for his coffee, misgauged the distance, and spilled it all over his desk. "This is sure stacking up to be the worst day of my life."

He went to the storage closet for paper towels. When he returned to his desk, Jimmy wandered up.

"Bad day?"

Clark glowered at him, picking up a soaking wet envelope and wiping it off. "Second cup I've spilled today," he admitted, mumbling.

"Ouch!" Jimmy sympathized, helping him by holding up a pile of papers, so Clark could wipe his desk more thoroughly. "I've had days like that." Jimmy set down the papers on Clark's newly dried desk and walked off.

*Great*, Clark thought to himself. Now, he would have to settle for bullpen coffee. He threw the soggy paper towels in the trash and went to the coffee machine to fill up his work mug. The carafe was empty. Someone had taken the dregs and hadn't made a fresh pot. He took a gander around the newsroom and — low

and behold — saw Lois sipping from an almost full mug with a smug smile on her face.

Typical. He started cleaning the machine and prepping it for the next pot. He dumped the grounds in and slammed — gently enough not to break it — the carafe back in place and pushed the start button.

"Here, Clark, take mine," Cat offered, holding out her to-go cup. "I've only taken one sip and you look like you could use it more than me."

He smiled his first genuine smile of the day. "Thanks, Cat I appreciate that," he told her. He took a sip and grimaced.

"Oh, I forgot to warn you. They were still running a mint special at my coffee shop."

Clark nodded his appreciation nonetheless, and headed back to his desk to retrieve that morning's paper.

"Whatcha doing?" Lois asked when for the sixth time he had passed her desk since leaving Perry's office.

"I've been sent on a timeout," he grumbled, nodding to the conference room.

"I'm sorry," she told him, causing his feet to pause. Lois Lane did not apologize.

"For what?" he asked, unable to halt his curiosity.

"For blaming you for my bad day. You're right, I've been taking you for granted. It won't happen again."

Okay, Clark felt like his life as he knew it was spinning out of control. Not only had Lois apologized, she had also admitted that he was right?

"Are you a clone?" he inquired suspiciously.

She grinned, turning back to her desk. "Not that I'm aware of." The perfect political non-answer.

God, he loved that woman. Clark sighed, moving into the conference room. But he wasn't ready to return her apology for blowing up. He was going to have his bad day — and gosh, darn it! — he wasn't going to let anyone take it away from him.

Slowly, he flipped through the newspaper, reading it at human speed as he sipped Cat's horrible coffee. He didn't want to go back into the office and face Lois. He didn't feel like reporting on someone else's bad day. He read through every article, every blurb, every Personal ad, every...

Correction.

Clark's brow furrowed. This didn't make any sense. He read it again, trying to understand and remember from which article that it had come.

*In Lois Lane's article on what everyone was doing before Superman saved Earth from Nightfall, she was misquoted as saying, "Like a brother." It should have been, "Not like a brother."*

Clark stood up as Lois' rant echoed between his ears, "If that's how you feel, we can forget the whole thing."

Perry's words rushed back to him, "...you can either look back on today as the worst day of your life or the best."

Clark opened the conference room door and looked at Lois.

She was on the telephone with Lex and sounding quite hesitant. "The opera? Saturday night? *Madame Butterfly*? I don't know, Lex..."

Clark took the phone out of her hand and said to the billionaire, "She'll be busy." Then he hung up.

"Clark!" Lois gasped, standing up so that her face was even with his. "How dare you tell Lex..."

He didn't let her finish before cupping her jaw with the palm of his hand. "I'm sorry," he whispered and covered her lips with his.

It wasn't a long kiss.

Or a deep kiss.

Just a little kiss to show her that his love wasn't that of a sibling.

And that he would be repeating this kiss later on, privately.

He felt Lois melt against him just slightly.

When he moved his mouth away, she whispered a tad breathlessly, “What was that for, Kent?” Her normal animosity was there for their co-workers to hear, but there was also an added note of tenderness.

Clark smiled. “I thought it was about time for a grand gesture.”

Lois shrugged, still not moving from her position against his chest. “I don’t know. Anyone can do big gestures. It takes a special man to get the little things just right.”

THE END