

Operation: Cupid

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Summary: Valentine's Day can be depressing when you are single. Luckily for Lois, Clark is determined to change her mind about that.

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Author's Note: This takes place on Valentine's Day 1994, which would be Lois and Clark's first one knowing each other. For the purposes of this story, Lois and Lex are not dating. Because, seriously, ewww.

Clark Kent's head snapped up from its current position of being bent over the pile of research on his work desk. He counted down in his head. 5...4...3...2...1. The elevator softly dinged, and the doors slid open. Even over the din of the Monday morning hustle and bustle of the bullpen, it was easy for him to pick up on the one heartbeat that gave his own meaning.

Lois Lane swept into the bullpen, babbling to Jimmy at about a thousand miles a minute. A smile ghosted over Clark's lips. Most people couldn't stand Lois' tendency to babble, and went to great lengths to avoid encountering it. But, while occasionally it made Clark's head spin, he found that he actually liked it most of the time. He found it oddly endearing. Tuning in his super hearing to her voice, he could instantly tell that she was not happy this morning. He frowned as he watched her progress through the thick of the newsroom. At a sharp word, Jimmy scampered away, promising to redouble his efforts to find the information that she needed for the story that she and Clark were working on. As she came closer, Clark bent his head again and pretended to be focused on the huge stack of papers before him.

"Ugh," Lois complained as she reached her desk and set down her purse.

"Good morning, Lois," Clark said cheerfully, acting as though he was just noticing her arrival.

"Please, tell me that you've got something on the corruption at City Hall," she said, half demanding, half pleading.

"Good morning, Clark," he said aloud. "How are you this morning? Oh, I'm great, Lois. Thanks for asking."

Lois' eyes narrowed into slits as she sat in her chair and crossed her arms before her chest. "Don't start with me today, Kent," she said venomously.

"Everything okay?" Clark asked, now growing concerned. He could usually get at least a half-smile out of his partner when he teased her.

"No, everything is *not* all right," she snapped back.

Clark stood from his desk and moved to Lois'. He leaned his hip against the side of the desk. His hand lightly came to rest on her shoulder, and he gave it a gentle squeeze.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked soothingly.

"No," Lois said firmly, shrugging out of his touch.

"Oooo-kay," Clark replied, stretching the word out, unsure of what he could say next. He shoved his hands in his pockets, like a shy teenager.

"Today is a disaster," Lois said, launching straight back into babble-mode before Clark could drift away from her desk. "My car wouldn't start this morning. Six cabs passed me by before I found one who would stop. My mother wants to have lunch with me today. Personally, I'd rather have a root canal. But she won't take no for an answer, so I'm stuck. Plus, my sister sent me an email all about her newest boyfriend, like she wants to rub it in or something. I *finally* get to work and buy a cup of coffee, only to have some idiot bike messenger try to cut me off to get into the elevator, knocking the cup from my hand. Four bucks, down the drain just like that." She snapped her fingers for emphasis. "And now, I am in the middle of what could be a Kerth-worthy story only to find dead-end after dead-end. So yes, I'm a bit grumpy today. Deal with it."

Lois' rant came to an abrupt end as Perry bellowed for her. She rolled her eyes and stood, slamming her palms down on the desktop as she did so. Without another word, she turned and stalked off to the editor's office. Clark stood in place for a moment, stunned. He didn't think that she'd even paused to take a breath during her tirade. In a way, it was kind of impressive. Still, knowing that Lois was so upset this morning bothered him. There had to be something that he could do to alleviate some of her distress. He wasn't a mechanic, so fixing her car was out of the question. He could offer to take Lois to lunch, or at least accompany her, so that she didn't have to face her mother alone. There was nothing that he could do about Lucy's email.

He shook his head as he ran through his options. Then it came to him. Caffeine. Another small smile crossed his features. With swift, purposeful strides, he headed for the elevators, stopping only to tug on his coat.

He headed out into the cold February air. A light snow had begun to fall, and the large, fat flakes gave promise that it would not be lasting too long. Little puffs of steam rose into the air at his every breath. He had to act quickly. He knew that he didn't have much time before Lois returned to her desk. He judged that he had only ten or fifteen minutes. He'd heard Perry launch into one of his Elvis stories when Lois had entered his office; in this case, the random trivia becoming a saving grace for Clark as it bought him precious time. He began to jog down the sidewalk, heading to one of Lois' favorite local coffee shops. He sighed in relief when he saw that there were only three people in line, and he swiftly joined the back of it. When he finally reached the counter, he ordered two coffees and a box of donuts. Then he headed back to the newsroom.

He had just reached his desk when Lois came striding back to hers. She looked even more displeased than she had before. In fact, Clark could swear that he saw Jimmy literally jump out of Mad Dog Lane's warpath. Not to be discouraged, Clark brushed the snow from the shoulders of his coat, then slipped out of the garment and hung it up. He grabbed up the breakfast that he had purchased and brought it to his partner's desk. She looked up with surprise as he approached.

"You looked in need of a coffee," he explained as he set down the steaming Styrofoam cup. He held out the box with his other hand. "And donuts."

That finally brought a tiny smile to Lois' lips. "More like a *dire* need. Thanks."

"Anytime. We can't have tomorrow's headline reading 'Reporter Snaps: Kills Six,'" he teased.

"Watch it, mister. Or you'll be number one," Lois said, though Clark could see the laughter dancing in her eyes.

Lois sipped her coffee gratefully. Clark noticed as her eyes slid blissfully shut at the first hot, caffeinated taste. After a minute, she grabbed for the double chocolate glazed donut that Clark had bought specifically for her. She bit into it and sighed a little. Clark felt a surge of pride that he could alleviate some of Lois' tension and anger.

“Better?” Clark asked, sitting on her desk and munching on his vanilla frosted donut. The icing was a pale shade of pink, in deference to Valentine’s Day. Red and dark pink sprinkles decorated the top of the sugary treat.

“A little,” Lois admitted.

Lois finished her breakfast and frowned again. Someone had put up paper heart decorations during the night. She pulled down the tissue-paper thin, heart-shaped garland that had been draped over the front of her desk. For a moment, she examined it, then promptly wadded it up into a ball and tossed it into her garbage can. Clark was glad that Lois didn’t have heat vision, or there would have been a fire blazing in the garbage pail.

“Ouch,” Clark said, raising an eyebrow. “Talk about a heart-breaker. What did those decorations ever do to you?”

“Nothing. Except that they perpetuate a stupid, meaningless, greeting-card holiday.”

“It’s not meaningless,” Clark said, defending the holiday that was currently under assault. “It’s a time to reflect on love.”

“No,” Lois said, shaking her head. “All it does it lower the self-esteem of single people. I refuse to be a party to that.”

For the first time, Clark noted that Lois was one of only a handful of employees who wasn’t wearing red. Jimmy was in a red sweater. Cat Grant was in a red and pink leather dress that was several inches too short and way too tight. It left absolutely nothing to the imagination, Clark thought with mild disgust. Ralph was bedecked in red from head to toe. Even Perry was wearing a tie with tiny purple hearts. Clark realized that his own ensemble somewhat fell into the color scheme of the holiday — black pants with a white shirt, a maroon jacket and matching tie that had purple and white swirls. Of course, his outfit had been unintentional. He’d simply grabbed the first thing out of his closet before bolting out of his door to get to work on time, after he’d helped out with an early morning bank robbery. But not a shred of red was to be found on Lois. Instead, she was garbed in a black business suit with an icy blue shirt. If Clark had to guess, he would have said that she had purposely avoided any and all shades of red that day.

“That’s not what it’s about,” he argued again. “You don’t have to be with someone to appreciate a day that celebrates love. Love comes in all forms. Like the love between family members.” Lois gave him a hard look. *Oops, wrong thing to bring up*, he thought. He tried again. “Or between friends.”

“Oh please. Don’t give me that,” Lois said acidly. “Like it doesn’t bother you that you don’t have some girl to wine and dine tonight. Even though every restaurant in the city has jacked up their prices and you would have needed to make reservations at least a month ago. Longer for the really exclusive places.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Clark said, shrugging.

In his heart though, he knew that that was only half true. He didn’t want “some girl” to wine and dine. He wanted Lois. Cupid’s own arrow couldn’t make him be more in love with her than he already was. His heart literally ached for her. But he also knew that it wasn’t yet time to even attempt to go down that path. He and Lois were still, in some ways, learning to be each other’s best friend. He could be patient a little longer, before he approached the frightening prospect of asking her out on a date. He only hoped that when the time *did* finally come for that, that it didn’t wind up wrecking their friendship. He could not imagine living in a world where he and Lois were not in each other’s lives. He needed her in his life, as much as he needed the sunlight.

“Liar,” Lois snorted.

“Oh, but I suppose you’re going to tell me that it doesn’t bother you to be in the same situation?” Clark asked gently, unwilling to let her get the upper hand in this discussion.

“It doesn’t.”

“So this whole anti-Valentine’s Day thing…”

“...is my disapproval of a holiday that tries to make people feel bad for being single, by choice or otherwise,” Lois finished for him, with a look that told him that the discussion was over.

Clark chuckled and slid off her desk. “You just keep telling yourself that,” he said, as he grabbed a second donut and went back to his desk before she could make a retort.

For the rest of that morning, Clark found it hard to concentrate on his work. It bothered him to see Lois so vehemently against what he considered a harmless holiday. That wasn’t to say that he didn’t understand where she was coming from. It was sometimes hard to see other people in loving relationships when he himself was not. Especially, he thought to himself, when he knew that he’d never truly experienced love in any of the relationships that he’d ever been in. He’d thought that he had, when he had dated Lana in his college days. And breaking up with her had been hard. She’d dumped him right after school had resumed after the Christmas break of their senior year. He’d spent that Valentine’s Day brooding in the Arctic Circle atop a glacier, his face a frozen mass of salty tears. But when the dust had settled, he’d found that part of him had been relieved to not be with her any longer. He knew that he’d never truly loved her, not in a forever kind of way. He’d also realized that he never could have been comfortable with her knowing about his secret.

The instant that he’d met Lois, however, he had known true love at last. He knew that he’d never love another. From that first glance, she’d managed to imprint herself on his heart and mind, never to be erased. In fact, only a month before, Clark had suffered a bout of amnesia after hitting the Nightfall asteroid too hard, too fast, and at the wrong angle. He hadn’t known his own name when he was found in the crater that his body had made when he’d hit the ground. But he had known that he loved Lois. It had been the one beacon of hope that had kept him going and given him hope that he’d find his memory again.

To see Lois so unhappy now was breaking Clark’s heart. He wanted to show her that the holiday didn’t have to be a depressing affair. And despite Lois’ assertions to the contrary, he knew that beneath it all was a deep sadness that she had no one special to celebrate Valentine’s Day with. Why else had she brought up the fact that Lucy had emailed her about her new beau? Clark knew that he had to do something to brighten up the holiday for Lois. And bringing her coffee and donuts wasn’t going to do the trick. Neither would finding a hook for their investigation of missing city funds, though he knew that if he *could* find something, Lois’ mood would improve considerably. As he stared at the faxes on his desk, but not really seeing them, a seed of an idea took root in his mind.

He immediately dubbed it Operation: Cupid.

At lunch, Clark offered to accompany Lois. Lois jumped at the chance, dreading being alone with her mother, even if only for an hour. It was as bad as Lois had warned Clark that it would be. Ellen Lane spoke almost non-stop. And most of what she had to say was in the form of complaints or criticisms of some type or another. A good portion of the discussion had been an attack on Lois’ status as a single woman. If Lucy could find a boyfriend, why couldn’t Lois? Didn’t Lois realize that in a few short years, she’d be thirty? And had she heard that their old neighbor, Debbie, had had her second child? And she was a lawyer to boot! Did Lois realize that her baby making years were passing her by? If Debbie could juggle work and a family, then why couldn’t Lois? What about Lex Luthor, who had wanted to date her? Didn’t Lois realize that single, rich men were hard to find? Why was Lois being so stubborn? Or did she intend on being just like her father — so focused on her career that she would never have time for anyone besides herself?

Clark could usually find a ray of sunshine in just about any situation, but by the time he offered to pay the bill, even his

eternal optimism had suffered a crushing blow. No wonder why Lois always tried to avoid her mother. Clark felt sorry for his friend. He couldn't imagine growing up in a household like that. An hour was more than enough for him. But Lois had seemed grateful to have him with her, so at least his presence had done something positive. They were both more than thrilled to finally head back to the bullpen after the waitress returned Clark's credit card.

"Wow," Clark commented, after they rounded the corner and left Ellen far enough behind. "That was..."

"Brutal," Lois agreed.

"I wasn't going to say that...exactly."

"But you were thinking it."

Clark had to nod his agreement. In fact, brutal was one of the milder terms that had crossed his mind. A lioness tearing apart a gazelle was kinder and gentler than Ellen had been.

"I'm sorry that you had to witness that," Lois continued. "And thanks."

"For what?"

"For trying to rescue me a few times when Mom went into rant-mode. I appreciate that."

"You're welcome," Clark said, giving her a friendly smile.

"You know, ever since you arrived in Metropolis, you've always been there for me when I've needed you," she mused.

You have no idea, Clark thought wryly. "That's what friends are for," he said instead.

They were nearly back to the Daily Planet building when Clark's hearing picked up a shout for help. He groaned. Lois heard it and spun to face him.

"What?"

"Lois, I almost forgot. There's something that I need to buy this afternoon. I really ought to go do it before it gets any later."

"Clark, we have to meet Bobby Bigmouth in an hour," Lois huffed. "What could be so important that you have to rush off now?"

"Trust me, Lois," Clark pleaded. "I'll even pick up Bobby's food. I promise."

"You better," Lois said, her mood darkening slightly.

"Cross my heart," Clark promised, before dashing off in the opposite direction.

He disappeared down an alleyway and spun into the suit. Less than a heartbeat later, he was flying off towards the source of the distress call. A man was teetering on the edge of a building, swaying drunkenly. Below, a crowd of onlookers stared in horror. Some pointed, some chewed their nails nervously. All were muttering to themselves, the people around them, or yelling up to the man on the ledge. Clark came to a halt and hovered in the air before the man.

"Sssssshhhuperman!" the man slurred. "Get outta my way. I don't wanna live."

"Hey," Clark said gently. "What's the matter? Whatever it is, suicide isn't the answer."

"You don't know nothing!" the man said, swatting the air before him as if he could simply knock Superman out of the way.

"Maybe I can help," Clark prodded, "if you tell me what's the matter."

"Lydia left me!" The man's voice went from sad to angry. "She's shleeping with my besht friend. I got nothing left to live for. I was gonna propo..propo..propo...ask her to marry me. The unfaithful witch."

At that, the man burst into tears.

It was far from an isolated occurrence. Over the course of the afternoon, Clark responded to six more attempted suicides. All were people depressed over the holiday and their failed relationships. Two of the people had been so completely drunk that it was a wonder they were still standing. The others had been disturbingly sober. Most had been desperate for a shoulder to cry

on. One had actually jumped from the building she was standing on, then made empty threats against Clark when he caught her.

As Clark sifted through the research on his desk late that afternoon, he felt himself getting a little down-hearted. Was Lois right? Was Valentine's Day just out there to make single people upset? He had to believe that it wasn't. And he had to believe that his plan to lift Lois' spirits would work. If he could make her happy, perhaps he'd be able to make himself feel better by extension.

He typed the last sentence of the article that he was working on, detailing how Superman had stopped the armed bank robbery that morning. Then he read over his work, made a few changes, and sent it off to Perry. Discreetly, Clark shot a look over at Lois' desk. Two candy wrappers lay crumpled on her desk. Various faxes and printouts made a sort of strange looking tablecloth. And Lois was unhappily typing away at her computer, her phone pressed to her ear as she sat waiting on hold. As Clark watched, she took a sip of coffee, winced as she realized it had gone stone cold, and promptly poured the icy drink on the poor African Violet plant that sat half dead on her desk. The plant seemed to wilt right before Clark's eyes, and one browned leaf broke off and fluttered to join the rest of the chaos on Lois' desk. If she noticed, she didn't react.

Clark glanced at his watch. It was nearly six at night. He had to get going if he wanted enough time to put his plan into motion. He stood and stretched, then casually sauntered over to where Lois sat. Her eyes darted up to look questioningly at him.

"Lois," he started to say.

At that exact moment, the lead that Bobby had given them picked up the phone. Lois waved Clark away with one hand as she launched into an explanation of who she was and why she was calling. Defeated but undeterred, Clark went back to his own desk. He grabbed a pad of paper and wrote a simple note.

Lois — Swing by my place at 7:30? You won't be disappointed. -Clark

He tore the paper from the pad, folded it, and dropped it onto Lois' desk. She saw it, but did not read it. She was still talking rapid-fire into the phone, and scribbling notes furiously. She did, however, nod her acknowledgment of the note. Clark nodded back, then checked with Perry that there were no changes to make to his article. With his boss' approval, Clark headed back to his apartment.

Once there, he rummaged through his refrigerator and cabinets. He had almost everything that he needed. He'd need to make a quick run to the store for one or two items. He was about to head out again when a cry for help reached his ears. With a sigh, he spun into the suit once more, and streaked out of the apartment. For the next half an hour, he helped out at the five car pile-up that he'd been drawn to. Three people were severely hurt, and one young man had been killed. The rest had minor injuries.

Finally, he was able to return home after a quick stop to pick up the things that he needed. Once safely back in his apartment, he didn't even bother to spin back out of the suit. Instead, he dashed around his kitchen, employing his super speed as he began to prepare dinner. In less than a minute, he'd accomplished all of the prep work and had things simmering on the stove. With another burst of speed, he cleaned up the living room, putting away the books and magazines that had littered the coffee table and recycling the empty soda cans that he'd forgotten to dispose of when a late night emergency had demanded his assistance. He dusted the room for good measure, then moved to the dining room table. In about ten seconds, he'd set the table, uncorked the wine, and set out two tapered candles. He checked on dinner and then headed into the shower when he was satisfied by what he saw.

Seven-thirty came and went. Lois did not come knocking on his door. Clark had long since placed the food on the lowest heat

possible to keep it warm without overcooking anything. Seven forty-five came. Clark was just giving up hope that Lois would show up when there was a soft knock on his door. He lowered his glasses and x-rayed through the wood. It was Lois. He breathed a sigh of relief, and his heart did a little flip-flop in his chest. He swung his eyes around and lit the candles on the table with two quick darts of his heat vision. Then he replaced his frames on his face and went to the door.

“Sorry I’m late,” Lois apologized as the door opened. “My dad decided to call and I couldn’t get him off the phone.”

“It’s okay,” Clark said, ushering her inside.

“So, what did you find out on the missing funds?” she asked eagerly, allowing Clark to help her out of her coat.

“Nothing yet.”

“Funny, Clark. Your note said…”

“…nothing about any leads,” Clark finished for her.

“You lied?”

“No. I never said anything about our work. You came to that conclusion all on your own.”

“You swore that I wouldn’t be disappointed,” Lois pointed out.

“And I hope you won’t be. Take a look around.”

“It does smell wonderful in here,” Lois observed. “What is all of this?”

“This is our very own, private Valentine’s Day dinner.”

“Clark…” Lois’ voice was heavy with warning.

“Like I said this morning, the day doesn’t have to be about *romantic* love,” Clark quickly clarified. “It can be about celebrating the love that exists between two people who just happen to be best friends. Forget the greeting cards, the overpriced dinners, and the heart-shaped boxes of chocolates. Tonight, let’s just celebrate us, and the friendship that we’ve built over the last several months.”

Lois’ mouth hung slightly agape. She finally noticed the candles on the dining room table, and the spray of yellow roses that sat in a vase in the center of the table. She looked questioningly at her partner. Clark grinned at her.

“How is this not supposed to be romantic?” Lois asked as she gravitated to the table, somewhat mesmerized. “Roses… candles… a home cooked meal?”

“Ah, but they are *yellow* roses,” Clark said, a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“So? I fail to see how that makes any difference.” She was half teasing him now, and he knew it.

“Yellow roses stand for friendship,” he explained, the grin still on his face.

“Is that what you ran off to get this afternoon after lunch?” Lois asked.

Clark nodded. While it hadn’t been his main reason for leaving her, he *had* picked the flowers up before he’d returned to the Planet.

“Why?” Lois asked. “Why go to all this trouble?”

Even without his super hearing, Clark could hear the emotion in her voice. His gesture had touched her. So far, his plan to make Lois happy seemed to be working. And he was already feeling better in return.

“Because,” he said, turning serious, “I thought that we could both use a pick-me-up tonight. Look, I may not be your dream guy. And I’m not a knight in shining armor, coming to rescue you from atop my white horse. But Lois, you are my best friend, and it breaks my heart to see you get upset. So, I’d like to ask you… would you be my valentine? Is… is that… okay?” He suddenly felt very nervous.

“It’s more than okay,” Lois said, smiling softly. “And I’d love to be your valentine, you sentimental marshmallow.”

“Good,” Clark replied, a thousand watt smile lighting up his face. “I hope you’re hungry.”

“Starving,” Lois confirmed.

They dined that night on chicken parmesan, glazed baby carrots, and steamed broccoli. Thick garlic bread and a side of penne with fresh marinara sauce added to the meal, making it feel as though they were dining in one of Metropolis’ most exclusive restaurants. They each had two glasses of wine. It was one of the best bottles that Clark had in his modest collection. And they talked, about everything and anything. Though neither of them knew it, they each had the passing thought that this felt very much like a date. Both of them wondered if a date would be as comfortable as this friendly, no-strings-attached dinner that they were sharing together.

When the meal was done, Lois helped Clark to clean up. They laughed as they bumped into one another a few times as they moved about the kitchen. Then they moved to the couch. They sat in silence for a moment, just enjoying each other’s company. Clark turned to Lois.

“Clark, that was an amazing meal,” she said, smiling at him. “You are one *heck* of a cook.”

“Thanks.”

“Keep this up, and you are going to find yourself cooking every time we have a late night of research ahead of us.”

“You mean instead of ordering takeout every time? Oh, the horrors,” Clark teased her.

“Well, it’s either that or I cook. And you know what? I’m getting too fond of you to kill you with my cooking.”

“Thanks,” Clark said, snorting back a laugh. “So, how about a movie?”

“Just so long as it’s not some sappy romance film,” Lois answered, nodding.

“There wasn’t much left when I hit the video store after work,” Clark said, chuckling and shaking his head. “But I don’t think Star Wars counts as a romantic movie.”

“Perfect,” Lois said.

Clark stood and crossed the room. He inserted the VHS tape into his player and turned on the television. He sank down onto the couch next to Lois as the movie began and the scrolling credits informed them of what was happening in that galaxy far, far away. At some point, and Clark couldn’t be certain when, he found Lois’ head on his shoulder as they watched. He thought that it might have been as early on as when Luke and Obi-Wan entered Mos Eisley Spaceport to hire Han. He relished the sensation of having her so close, and he nervously put his arm around her. When she didn’t pull away, he grew more confident, and even tightened his embrace a little. He heard Lois sigh in contentment, and he did the same. The thought came to him that he’d always enjoyed Star Wars. Now, he had yet another reason to love the movie. Slowly, he moved his head to rest his cheek against the top of Lois’ head. He sighed softly in utter bliss.

Eventually, the movie ended. The good guys won the day and the Death Star was destroyed. The heroes were given medals of honor, blissfully unaware of the challenges that lay ahead in the next two movies. The credits began to roll. Clark turned off the television and VCR with the remote. Lois stirred and moved away from him. He instantly felt colder and mourned the loss of the contact with her. But Lois was smiling at him, if not a bit tiredly. Clark smiled back.

“Care for some dessert?” he asked her, his voice low and soft.

Lois playfully arched one eyebrow. “Depends. What are you offering?”

“Double Chocolate Explosion ice cream.”

“Ooooh. You are a dangerous man, Kent.”

Lois’ eyes sparkled as she teased him. Encouraged, Clark went to the kitchen. He retrieved the tub of ice cream from the freezer and spooned out two bowls. It wasn’t his favorite flavor, but he knew that it was one of Lois’ food weaknesses. He handed her a bowl and a spoon, then dug into his own after plopping

back down on the couch next to her. It didn't take long for them to finish their ice cream. By then, it was getting late. Lois stood from the couch and stretched.

"I should get going," she said, though a little remorsefully. "It's late."

Clark nodded. "I'll walk you home."

"Oh, you don't have to do that."

"I insist."

"It's cold out."

"I don't mind the cold." He shook his head for emphasis.

"Well...if you insist and all," Lois said, suppressing her glee that she'd get another fifteen or twenty minutes with Clark as they walked to her place.

"I do," Clark grinned.

He helped her into her coat before shrugging into his own. He offered her his arm, and she took it, pressing her body close to his as they walked. Metropolis was quiet this time of night. They saw only one older man out and about as he walked his dog. The weather had turned bitter cold, and it had begun to lightly snow again. By the time they reached Lois' apartment building, they both had a fine layer of white flakes in their hair and on their jackets. Clark handed Lois the bouquet of yellow roses that he had bought for her.

"Thanks for everything tonight, Clark," she said, facing him and looking him deep in the eyes. "I really needed that."

"So did I," he confessed.

"I had a good time."

"Me too."

"Well...goodnight, Clark."

"Goodnight, Lois."

Lois closed the distance between them and reached up. Her small hand was cold from the chilly night air, but it set Clark's skin aflame as it alighted on his face and cupped his cheek. She studied his face for a moment, then stretched up on her toes. Clark held his breath as he waited to see what she would do. She finally closed the last inch that separated them and kissed Clark lightly on the cheek. He smiled at the gesture, his heart soaring in his chest. He knew not to take the kiss for anything more than it was — a friendly peck on the cheek. But his spirits and heart took flight to greater heights than even he could normally attain. It left him breathless, even more so than the times when he'd kissed Lois on the lips. Most had been passionate, yet fake, ruses meant to deceive. And one had been mournful as he had said goodbye to her during the heat wave not two months past. This kiss, though chaste, was born out of true feelings, and that made it incredibly powerful and sexy. It didn't matter that the true feelings in question were solely those of friendship. He gave her a broad smile and kissed her cheek in return.

"See you tomorrow," he said at last, hating that he was to be separated from her for the next eight or so hours.

"See you tomorrow," she echoed. "And this time, Clark, breakfast is on me."

"Deal," Clark grinned again. "Happy Valentine's Day, Lois."

"Happy Valentine's Day, Clark."

THE END