

# A T-shirt Revelation

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Summary: Lois feels it's time that Clark had one of these, and it's his birthday soon, so it's the perfect present. What will come to light when he wears it?

Acknowledgements and Comments

This idea came to me when my husband started wearing Superman t-shirts earlier in the year. He gradually acquired about 5 different t-shirts with pictures or logos on them. One day it occurred to me that a plain blue t-shirt with the logo on is obviously the real t-shirt of choice for Superman wannabees and what would happen if Lois caught a glimpse of Clark dressed in one. It's been months since then and I've struggled with getting this down and being happy with it. Thankfully I have two wonderful betas who kept asking me how it was going. I'd like to say an awesome thanks to KenJ for providing me with some superb scenes to use as flashbacks along with inserting real-life knowledge of the location for this story. Hopefully it will make you feel like you are really there. Thanks also to Cynthia (Morgana) for her comments and encouragement which are greatly appreciated.

Although this story was initially supposed to fulfil the revelation challenge for July it currently fulfils the Exotic Locale challenge for September.

^^^ indicates flashbacks

\*\*\* indicates scene changes or character POV changes

Character thoughts are in 'single quotation marks'

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Part 1

Clark sneaked a sideways look at the woman 'shucking' out of her light, white cotton jacket. His heart flipped over at the sight of her tight, strappy top perfectly displaying all those parts of her body that he fantasised about each night. Well, all of the parts that were above the waist anyway. Below the waist... he refused to let his eyes wander there, fully aware that she was only wearing shorts.

He glanced around the beach and immediately took in the whole scene around him. Beautiful sandy beach, clear sky reflected in a crystal clear azure sea, other tourists putting out their blankets, deck chairs and beach umbrellas. He sighed in contentment. There was no more perfect place to spend today and no more perfect person to spend it with. When Perry had decided to send them both on a week-long conference to Pensacola, Florida he'd been overjoyed. A week with Lois, in the warm sun, away from work, was his idea of paradise. And the fact that it was to be in the winter, getting both of them away from the bitterly cold weather in Metropolis, was a real bonus.

He took in a deep breath and smiled. Behind them was the Hampton Inn, Pensacola Beach where the conference was taking

place. This morning seminars had included a talk on removing redundancies in prose by Larry Edwards and the correct use of commas by someone with the unlikely name of Artemis. Both had actually been incredibly fascinating but Clark had still been itching to leave. His eyes had drifted to the clock far too often knowing that today's lectures were morning only. One thirty pm could not come around fast enough as far as he was concerned. Except both lectures had run over significantly and it was now almost mid-afternoon. He'd rushed Lois off immediately, before she could become captured by some post-lecture discussions, once Artemis had finally drawn to a close, and led them straight out onto the beach at the Hampton rather than walk back to the Holiday Inn.

Staying at one hotel while traveling on to another for the conference put Clark in mind of the flight here a few days ago. Lois' reactions at the check in desk had been memorable.

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She was squinting at the boarding pass suspiciously. The trip had been arranged by the travel department and this was the first that Lois was seeing the itinerary. She questioned the clerk at the desk. "This says that we are going to Atlanta! I thought we were going to Pensacola, International Airport."

The clerk checked her monitor and replied with a friendly smile. "You are, but there is a half-hour layover and plane change in Atlanta."

"Layover and plane change?" Lois blurted out. "Why weren't we put on a non-stop flight?"

"There are no non-stop flights from Metropolis to Pensacola," replied the agent.

Lois was incredulous, a frown crinkling her forehead. "No non-stop flights to another *international* airport?"

"Your plane departs from gate D-33 in forty-five minutes," smiled the clerk, wisely choosing not to get into a discussion with the irate customer.

"Gee, thanks," came Lois' sarcastic reply. Turning to Clark she spoke in a resigned tone, "Let's go Clark, D-33. I *hope* we can find it without getting lost."

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It had only taken Lois about three days to get over her surprise at the size of Pensacola airport and finally lose the last remnant of sarcasm: the same number of days it had taken to realise, once Perry has informed them of this trip, that Clark's birthday fell right in the middle of the conference week. For some reason she'd been especially put out by that, but Clark couldn't figure out if that was because she truly thought he wouldn't want to go to any seminars on his birthday, or that she didn't want to have to interrupt *her* seminars to spend any 'birthday' time with him.

Returning his concentration to his bag he knelt down and unfastened it. He laid out the red picnic blanket and then placed the bag at one corner, dropped his jacket at another, then slipped off his shoes to anchor a third point. He lowered himself down and waited for Lois to join him, or to make some indication of what she expected to happen.

The picnic lunch on the beach, although it was more like late afternoon, had been Clark's idea when he'd discovered that the conference was only a half-day on his birthday, but surprisingly, Lois had jumped at the suggestion. Her enthusiasm worried him rather than soothed his nerves, though. Lois was only ever this excited about something when she figured she was in charge and that everything would go her way. But Clark resolved to make the most of this chance. He was spending his birthday, on the beach in Pensacola, with the woman he loved more than life itself. He intended to romance her... in an extremely subtle, best friend/partner way and to that end he leaned over, as Lois slid down next to him, and pushed his hand into the pseudo picnic basket: his bag. It didn't take long to feel for the small bottle. He

pulled it out then dived right back in for the plastic glasses.

Lois was removing her sandals as he unscrewed the bottle. She carefully placed them, side by side, on the fourth corner of the red blanket, then turned to face him.

“Clark, are we gonna... oh!” Her eyes widened when she saw him pouring out the wine. A grin came to her face, unbidden. “Clark. This is *your* birthday. You’re not supposed to supply your own wine. That’s for your friends to do.”

He looked up and handed a glass over to her. “It’s only a mini bottle, and I wanted this picnic to be special.” As he proceeded to fill his own glass he looked over at her with a cheeky grin. “And I couldn’t exactly leave the responsibility of the picnic basket up to you, could I?”

Immediately recognising Clark’s banter for what it was, friendly affection, rather than taking offence, she countered in a mock-droll tone. “Not unless you think a trip to the hospital is an exciting birthday outing.”

He laughed and then his face was lit up by his smile.

“To spending my birthday”—he raised his glass and put down the bottle—“with the most amazing reporter I know.”

“In the world!” Lois corrected. Clark laughed and they raised their glasses together then sipped. Lois blinked a few times as she regarded Clark. Lifting her wine once more she spoke clearly. “To an amazing friend, who I hope has an amazing birthday.” She grinned. “In fact... may it be just completely Super.”

Clark blinked in shock. He hoped that his face didn’t reflect the jump his heart had just made.

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Lois lay back on the blanket and put her hands behind her head. She watched as Clark busied himself placing out more picnic items.

He hadn’t yet mentioned the lack of a present or even card from her, but Clark was just that way. Spending his birthday with her would be the present as far as he was concerned. Lois smirked to herself. *’Boy is he naïve. Naïve and sweet and... wonderful.’* The smirk dropped from her face. He considered her cynical and thoughtless, the complete opposite of himself. She frowned. Plus it actually didn’t bother him that she was this way. Well, she was determined to prove him wrong. The present she bought him was both hopeful and thoughtful. The symbol on it... well, it brought hope to the whole world, and she’d definitely thought long and hard about it, eventually coming to the conclusion that it fulfilled all criteria for the ‘perfect’ present:

1. He needed one.
2. Although he ‘needed’ one—in her opinion—it wasn’t a boring household necessity, practical or plainly disappointing.
3. It reflected his personality, his aspirations, his loyalties and friends.
4. It also, secretly, reflected the way that she’d begun to think of him recently.

She cast her mind back to when the package had originally arrived.

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Answering the door, Lois was momentarily shocked to see a delivery man rather than Clark. She panicked that, somehow Clark would come round the corner, that very second, and see her taking delivery of his birthday present. Grabbing the parcel quickly she thanked the delivery man with a barely raised smile then turned away while closing the door quickly. She walked over to the table and made a space by pushing her paperwork to one side then placed it down.

All urgency was suddenly gone even though Clark could arrive at any time. Her heart pounded, partly with the thought of being caught, and partly with sudden worry over what was in the package. Was the ridiculous impulse she’d given into two days ago going to cause her joy... or pain? It had seemed so right. She’d giggled, she’d grinned and she’d been completely elated

once she’d put down the phone after calling in the order to the fan club. But that mysterious subconscious guest called ‘second guess’ was making itself known. If Clark was offended, then she’d be disappointed... but only in her own ability to buy presents for her best friend, she convinced herself.

“Okay Lois,” she said to herself. “You can do this. Once you open it you’ll remember all the reasons you thought this was a good idea.” She nodded. “No, a *great* idea.”

Her hand swooped out, suddenly, and ripped at one edge of the brown packaging. Adrenaline surged through her muscles and she couldn’t stop until she’d exposed the item inside fully. Heart racing and palms sweating, she then stepped back to admire the item. She couldn’t stop the grin from overtaking her face.

“Oh, yes. It was definitely the right decision.”

Laid out on the table in front of her was Clark’s birthday present. Something she believed that he desperately needed, given his close, personal friendship with the superhero. An item he didn’t seem to currently have, which was a complete surprise to Lois. She would have thought that all ‘fans’ of the man would have something like this, yet Clark didn’t. It made no sense at all.

He was bound to love it. Something to show his loyalty, something to declare his hero-worship.

*‘Something you can ogle him in and fantasize about!!!’*

“No!” she shouted to the voice teasing in her head as she stepped back to move away from the teasing item. “That is absolutely not a reason on the list of ‘why this is the best present for Clark ever’.” She shook her hand in the air; a finger pointing up at no one in particular.

She picked it up and carried it through to her bedroom where an open suitcase lay on the bed: advance preparation for next week’s conference in Florida. She laid it on top of the other clothes and once more stepped away to admire the present. Reaching out she smiled and smoothed her hand over the blue fabric, tracing the red ‘S’. “But, you could be right. I bet he’ll look just ‘Super’ in this.”

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Bringing her mind back to the present and the sun baking down on her she looked over to Clark. If she gave him his present now, then he’d have to remove his top. She caught her breath at the image which flitted through her mind. He bent over to reach for something and his red beach shorts pulled tightly over his behind. Lois only just halted the moan in her throat before it spilled out. She gulped and closed her eyes. *’Okay, I admit it. One of the reasons for buying this present was because of all the fantasies it will inspire.’* She opened her eyes to find Clark looking at her.

“Hi,” he smiled.

*‘Okay, time to do this,’* she thought. Rolling over, she reached for her bag.

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Clark was still smiling at Lois when she turned away. Somehow, even though he was basking directly in the sun, he was sure that Lois’ presence was strengthening him more than the sun ever could. She turned back and levered herself up. The grin on her face hit him straight in the heart.

“Happy birthday, Clark,” she said and held out a package. Clark hadn’t noticed it when she’d turned back. He gave a little chuckle. How the heck he had missed that he had no idea, it wasn’t exactly a tiny box.

“Lois, you know you didn’t have to. I wasn’t expecting anything from you. Just spending today with you is enough.”

She laughed. “Just as I thought... farm boy.”

His shy look sent her into further peals of laughter. At his obvious confusion she brought her hand to her mouth and tried to get herself under control. “Sorry,” she said, embarrassed. Clark looked down at the present wrapped in shiny blue and silver paper currently resting on his crossed legs. The soft, flexible

feeling had him sure that it was going to be a blanket or something similar: maybe a tablecloth, although it would have to be particularly small! Possibly it was a scarf, useful once they were back in Metropolis. Anticipation filled his stomach as he began to open it. A bright royal blue colour was revealed and Clark slid out the soft item. As he began to unfold it more colours appeared. His anticipation turned to apprehension. When the yellow and red was finally in view it revealed the recognisable shield of his superhero alter ego. A stab of fear hit his chest and he flashed back to an incident at the airport on the way here a few days ago.

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Sitting in the car, traffic backed up for what looked like blocks up ahead, Lois slapped at the wheel in frustration. "This is just great. We should have allowed more time to get to the airport. This stupid rain is going to tie up traffic for too long! It's never gonna clear in time. Or is it snow? It could at least make up its mind instead of dithering between the two."

Clark laughed. "Look at it this way Lois, we are leaving all of this behind! We are headed for the 'land of sun and fun', Florida!"

"Yeah, if we can make it," she replied cynically.

The traffic began to clear and the snow finally gave up and became rain. Reaching the airport only half an hour later than expected, but still in time for check-in, Lois slid her Jeep into a space in the long-term parking lot. Clark carried all of the luggage while Lois ran for the covered walkway to the terminal holding her bag over her head. After she was under the cover she stopped and turned, looking back at Clark. She watched as his wet coat became soaked and his pant legs soaked up all the water from the puddles along the way.

When he was finally under the cover Lois laughed up at him. "Clark, how can you see?" she smiled and shook her head then reached for his face and snatched his glasses off. "Here, let me dry your glasses for you."

Panic set in immediately. His hair, plastered down against his head, and without his glasses... was sure to give the game away. He dropped the luggage in an attempt to stop her but it was too late. He was soon relieved to see that she was more concerned with finding a dry spot on the hem of her jacket to wipe his lenses with, than what he looked like without them. His heart beat wildly as he waited for her to notice. He ran his hands through his hair to ruffle it up, distancing his current look as far as was possible from Superman. He then resolved to just take his chances and he simply stood there waiting.

Lois held up his glasses to study them and, once she was satisfied that they were dry, she held them in both hands and carefully placed them back over his eyes. "There, now it won't be like you're looking through a waterfall." Glancing at her watch she started and then grabbed one shoulder bag leaving the rest for Clark again. "Oh, come on, Clark, we need to get to the ticket counter and pick up our boarding passes. We have to hurry, or we will miss our flight!" She set off at a rapid pace toward the registration desks.

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Had that been what gave him away? For sure this was her way of being angry with him, calling him out for his year-long deception. He looked up at Lois in terror. She was grinning at him. Possibly this was not what he initially feared.

"Oh, come on Clark, it's not such an odd thing to give you," she chattered, obviously misinterpreting the look on his face. "I'm actually surprised you don't have one already. I mean he is your best friend, or is that *you* are *his*? I know he and I are close, but I think you and he are closer. I guess that's 'cause you are both guys. Anyway I know you admire him. I'm sure there's even a little hero worship in there. So I don't understand why you don't already have a Superman t-shirt. I do. And you saw my

pyjamas." Lois' voice, although she continued to speak, faded away and Clark was suddenly back in their hotel room on the first night of the conference.

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They spent most of the first night in their room watching an old sci-fi movie making fun of the terrible B-movie clichés the whole time. Lois constantly pointed out how Superman could have saved the day and Clark pointed out the scientific principles violated in the plot. When the movie, along with Lois' ice cream, was finished Clark offered Lois first use of the bathroom. She got up and rummaged in her bag pulling out her pyjamas, toothbrush and toothpaste then headed for the bathroom.

A short time after the door closed Clark heard the shower start. Waiting for his turn in the bathroom he couldn't help but think about what might be going on behind that door. His super-hearing picked up on every sigh and giggle making him wonder just what was passing through her mind while she showered. He loosed the restraint on his fantasies and imagined being allowed to join her. He would scrub her back, wash her hair, maybe even soap up her body. He imagined running his fingers through those wet dark tresses. Suddenly the door opened and Lois exited wearing a robe.

Clark nearly jumped in shock. He gulped, turned away from the enticing sight of the woman he loved and then stood, reaching for his towel. As he strode across the room he noticed Lois taking off her robe. When his peripheral vision caught sight of bright blue and a familiar symbol in red and yellow he turned in surprise. She tried to hide what she was wearing by climbing under the covers as quickly as possible, but it was too late, he had seen her.

He turned to her and chuckled. "Lois!" he said, "I can't believe it! Superman pyjamas?"

She gave him a smug look and said, "Almost everyone has a Superman souvenir of some sort. Don't you?"

He shook his head in the negative.

"I can't believe that you don't," she replied, her tone indicating that she did know it was the truth, but couldn't understand why. "He's your best friend and you don't have something with a Superman logo?" As she finished she arched her brow.

He replied matter-of-factly, "Nope. Nothing."

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As Clark returned his consciousness to the beach Lois' voice became clear again. "Plus I also have a baseball cap, a mug, a throw cushion and this little squishy thing that kind of dangles off the bottom of my bathroom light switch. So I bought you this because I think you should declare your support for him to the world." When her rant finally trailed off he laughed delightedly.

He wasn't in any trouble after all.

He grinned and looked down at the item in question and his face dropped as it suddenly hit him.

Oh yes he was.

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Part 2

"So, go ahead. Try it on." Her teasing, lighthearted voice clashed with his worry.

*'I can't possibly put this on. Far too dangerous.'* When he saw the innocent, expectant look on her face he swallowed his fear. Reaching for the bottom of his t-shirt he grasped and then pulled, sweeping it over his head. He heard her gasp and his heart skipped a beat. Glancing over at her while he reached for the new t-shirt he watched her carefully. Her mouth was parted from her gasp and her breathing was shallow. He listened in to her heart and discovered that it was racing. His heartbeat kicked up in sudden hope. Possibly she finally saw him as something more than just a partner and a friend.

He slipped the new t-shirt over his head, pulled it down and

quickly adjusted his glasses. It stretched tightly over his chest. "Didn't exactly get my size right there, Lois," he teased looking down. Lifting his head, his gaze met hers.

"Yeah. I uh... I'm sorry," she replied by rote, staring straight at his chest. He got a sudden suspicion that she wasn't sorry at all.

*'Okay, something is definitely going on here,'* he thought to himself.

Lois' gaze finally left his chest and travelled up to his face where her eyes widened considerably. He saw her mouth drop open and the fear returned. She blinked and shook her head then smiled at him, forgetting that only a moment ago she'd agreed with him on the t-shirt being too tight. "Perfect," she stated in a lighthearted tone.

*'Except for it being as tight as my suit which is probably not a good idea,'* he thought.

"Thanks," he smiled at her, maintaining his calm as well as he could. "So," he paused and just let himself gaze at her for a second. "Sandwich?" he finally asked.

"Sure," she nodded.

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Lois finished off the sandwich, wiped the crumbs from her hand and laid herself back onto the blanket. Gazing up at the clear sky she idly wondered what it might be like to fly through that beautiful sky. Somehow her imagination had nothing in common with the actual memory of coming in to land a few days ago. She felt the breeze whipping through her hair as she soared over the Gulf of Mexico. Below her were the islands, the sandy beach far ahead.

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"... we will be landing shortly. Please remain seated and thank you for flying with us." Lois looked up to see the seatbelt light flashing on. Glancing to Clark she saw that he was already strapped in. *'Typical of Clark and his Boy Scout ways,'* she thought.

She turned to look out of the window. Tricking Clark into giving it to her had been a breeze. The plane banked and brought into view the Gulf of Mexico. Lois was treated to the sight of blue-green waters and just a glimpse of barrier islands. She continued to watch as the plane executed a 180-degree turn and headed back toward land. She continued to see mostly water and then suddenly, directly below, there was land and a lot of personal dwellings. In only two minutes they were on the ground and taxiing toward a small building.

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Strong arms held her. The sun warmed her, countering the cool air in the stratosphere. Looking down she saw the shore. White sand beckoning, if he would only just float them down to land.

"Help," the shout rose from the direction of the sea and Lois emerged from her fantasy. She sat up abruptly and sheltered her eyes against the sun. She glanced at Clark who was suddenly standing over her. He turned towards her, a look of horror on his face. The call came again. He turned away from her and began running in the direction of the surf. Lois slowly got to her feet, watching in fascination as Clark sprinted to the water's edge. Lois knew her heart was in her mouth as she finally spotted the person floundering out at sea. Looking around, Lois realised that there were no lifeguards on duty. Thank goodness Clark was a fast runner. She only hoped he was just as good at swimming.

When he dove into the surf Lois held her breath and took an involuntary step forward. When he surfaced next to the young girl in trouble, only a moment later, she let out the breath and began walking towards the shore line. She watched as he swam back slowly. In comparison to how quickly he got out there it seemed ridiculously slow. When he reached a reasonable depth he placed his feet to the ocean floor, hitched the girl into his arms,

cradling her close, and began striding out of the water.

Lois was overwhelmed by a feeling she would almost name déjà vu when Clark's chest began to appear. The 'S' symbol, the rescue position, the red shorts. It was only when she returned her gaze to his face that she remembered it was Clark. Somehow he'd managed to keep his glasses on his face and his hair was plastered flat to his forehead, tangling over his glasses.

The girl's parents splashed into the surf when he got nearer and Clark handed her over to the man holding out his arms. Lois watched as Clark shook his head to the couple at whatever thanks they were giving, smiled shyly then turned away,

As he approached her, 'the handsome hero', her heart hammered wildly. He ran his hand through his wet hair and ruffled it even more. When he stopped in front of her he smiled. "Hi," he said.

"Uh, hi," she replied.

"You okay, Lois?" he asked and frowned in query.

"Me?" she retorted. "Are you okay, Clark? You...you dived in there and disappeared under the waves for..." she stopped and thought then frowned in confusion. "Less than a second... how did you get to her so fast?"

"Oh, you know, Lois. Time always flows funny in a tense situation."

"Yes, but..." she trailed off but continued the thought in her head. *'It's usually the other way round. Things that only last a couple of seconds seem to last a minute.'*

"Anyway, I think it's time for a birthday ice cream," Clark grinned in an attempt to distract her from his speedy swimming. He began to walk in the direction of their picnic. Lois turned around to follow but was immediately struck by a sight that she knew would enter her fantasies from now on. The well-defined shape of Clark's body was on clear display with his soaking t-shirt and shorts. Lois was treated to a few moments of watching the most perfect backside in the world walk away from her. *'More perfect than Superman's,'* she stated as fact. *'Although it's hard to tell: his cape usually being in the way.'* Lois paused for a moment in her thoughts. Clark's behaviour, the rescue, the outfit... She shook her head and finally came to her senses then set off up the beach after Clark.

Once Clark's Superman t-shirt had dried Lois was again reminded of how tight it was. The water obviously made it cling but it continued to show every muscle and ripple even when dry. She lay herself down on the sand and closed her eyes. Yes, her fantasies were definitely getting lots of inspiration today. During one embarrassing private thought she finally admitted to herself what was really going on. *'I'm trying to turn the two most wonderful men in the world into one man. And rather than taking Superman and putting him in normal clothes—which I might have done up to a few months ago—I'm starting with Clark... the one that I really... well, starting with Clark and turning him into the superhero.'* She sighed. *'And he's fitting the role perfectly. As if he were born for it.'*

"So," Clark's voice interrupted her reverie. "Are you ready to head back?"

"Sure... if you are." She kept her eyes closed, just wanting to linger on the beach for a couple more seconds.

"I could go for a nice leisurely stroll back to the hotel," Clark suggested obviously referring to the reasonably short distance between the conference centre and their hotel.

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"First thing we need to do is find the hotel and check in." Lois said.

Checking their itinerary, Clark said, "Travel booked us at a Holiday Inn on Ft. Pickens Road in Gulf Breeze." He fumbled with the map a bit. "There it is. Okay, go straight out on Airport Road and make a left on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue. You can't miss it, there appears to be a large mall on the corner. We take that to Chase

Street. That will take us over a bridge and into Gulf Breeze, but we have to go across another bridge to the barrier island. The motel is on Pensacola Beach.”

As Lois drove, Clark regaled her with some trivia. “Seeing that name reminded me of something. I was sure that Pensacola was famous for something. Fort Pickens... It was used as a prison at one time, right after the Indian wars; Sitting Bull was imprisoned there. According to the map, the prison is just down the road from the motel. Maybe we will have time to go out there.”

“Why would I want to go see an old pile of stone? I see the insides of Metropolis prison enough when we send crooks there or have to visit someone for an interview.”

“Aw, come on Lois, it’s history!” Clark challenged.

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Lois opened her eyes to see the sun setting over the ocean. It had gotten late. It was now evening. She turned her head to the side to find Clark. His position on the blanket reflected hers perfectly but had the added extra of an irresistible smile. “Sounds nice,” she smiled back at him. “As long as you don’t walk us past the hotel and on to that prison you’re desperate to visit.”

“I promise,” he grinned. “I’ll pack up the picnic. You get your shoes and jacket.” Clark levered himself up and collected together their plates, cups, boxes and rubbish. By the time Lois was standing with her thin cotton jacket around her waist, Clark was picking up the large red picnic blanket they had been lying on. When he held it out and shook it vigorously to dislodge all the sand Lois’ mind fixated on it. One final thing was needed to perfect her ‘Clark as Superman’ fantasy. She knew she was having difficulty keeping the sly grin from her face immediately.

“I’ll fold that Clark. You need to get your shoes yet.” She reached out and took the blanket from him before he could protest.

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Clark recognised the inflection in Lois’ voice as the ‘I’m planning something’ tone. He eyed her warily as she began folding the blanket. When nothing seemed to happen he turned to pick up his shoes then set off back towards the road. After they crossed the low grassy dunes and entered the large hotel parking lot he disposed of their empty wrappers and unfinished food in the waste receptacle. Brushing the sand off their feet they slipped on their shoes and Lois picked the blanket back up from the sidewalk. Hanging it over one arm she took Clark’s and linked it with her other.

Leaving the beach behind Clark remembered the unexpected reaction from Lois at their first walk out onto the beach at their own hotel on the first morning.

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Leaving the hotel it was only a short walk to the end of the parking lot and to the beach access. They ascended some steps, crossed a dune and descended down the other side. At the bottom Lois stopped and placed her hands on her hips. “I thought we came down here to get away from the snow.”

Clark laughed. “It may be white as snow, but trust me, it’s sand.”

“This is the whitest sand I think I’ve ever seen,” she replied with a tone of wonder creeping into her voice.

“According to the brochure, Pensacola Beach is famous for its white, white sand.”

Walking a short distance, the early morning sun warming him softly, he had to resist the natural impulse to reach out and weave his fingers into Lois’. She was walking so close that he could feel as the soft hairs on her arm brushed against his.

“Oh look,” she suddenly spoke. “What kind of creature made those?” She pointed to the small mounds of sand surrounding holes in the sand. “They aren’t anaconda holes, are they?” she said, stepping back when the thought hit her.

Clark chuckled. “The anaconda is native to South America, Lois.”

Lois hmped. “You and your trivia,” she interrupted

He continued, ignoring her jest. “Those are probably sand crab holes.”

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Clark brought his picnic bag up to his shoulder and they crossed the parking lot, heading for the main road. As they strolled along, slowly heading in the direction of their hotel, Clark ran over the events of the afternoon in his mind.

Firstly, the t-shirt. He’d been afraid that she was about to lay into him dramatically, but when it turned out that it really was just a gift his relief had been immediate. That only lasted a second though, once he realised that it actually still might give away his secret.

Secondly, Clark had seen the way Lois had been looking at him. Half the time she seemed confused, the other half she was practically drooling. He was well aware of the unique physique he had and its effect on the female population in general, but Lois was not one to be interested in a ‘body’ unless she was also interested in the ‘person’. Even when she had a crush on Superman it was more hero-worship than lustful desire, at least until she *did* know the superhero as much as was actually possible for a make-believe character. Once a true friendship began between her and his alter ego the hero-worship had turned... extremely romantic.

Slowly... Clark began to reach the conclusion that possibly Lois was interested in *him*... Clark... romantically, or at least if the idea had never crossed her conscious mind before, then if it did now, she wouldn’t immediately discount the possibility. That was all still hoping that the idea would actually ever occur to her.

As they strolled along Clark offered to carry the blanket and was rewarded with a horrified look.

“No!” she shouted back and held it tighter to her body.

“All right,” he soothed. “You can keep the blanket if it means that much to you.”

Walking along the Casino Beach Boardwalk, side by side, Clark gave thanks for the unseasonably warm weather. February in Pensacola was expected to be reasonably warm, but this was wonderful. The opportunity to share an... almost... romantic picnic on the beach with Lois gave him the perfect birthday. With her arms still linked in his he could almost imagine that they were a couple. For a moment or two he let himself indulge in that fantasy.

Reaching the main road he felt an awkward pulling on his arm. He turned to see Lois climbing up onto a metal crash barrier at the edge of the road. About a foot high it followed the length of the road round the oncoming curve and Lois seemed to want to walk on it. Her girlish giggles put him in mind of a happy six year old returning from a day building sandcastles and splashing in the surf. As she tottered along the barrier he grinned and sighed in contentment, looking up into the dimming evening sky.

“Superman,” came the call from behind him and he swivelled around in shock. “Help!” Lois called then leapt off the barrier. His instinctive reaction was to catch her. She slid her arms round his neck automatically. He looked down to her face and she must have seen the terror showing on his, but as before she misinterpreted it. “Oh, Clark, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to shock you. I just couldn’t resist.” She giggled at him and he shifted his hold on her slightly, bringing her closer to his chest. Caught in her eyes he felt his heart racing. It seemed Lois was caught in the gaze too and her lips parted on a breath. Gradually a look of confusion stole over her face and she flicked her eyes round his face and then down to his chest. Clark suddenly felt in danger again and quickly put her down.

“So, how did I rate as a superhero?” he asked, attempting to lighten the mood.

"You were..." she paused and looked up at him. A smirk appeared and she continued. "Super." He grinned at the compliment. "But you were no *Superman*." She laughed and put her hand on his chest, patting him in jest.

"I guess not," he laughed back.

A little later they made it back to the hotel. Clark entered the room first, Lois following. "I'll just put this stuff away then make us a drink, all right Lois?" he asked as he put his bag down on the bed and unwrapped his coat from his waist. He headed for the small table and drinks area aiming to put on the coffee. "Just put the picnic blanket down on the table," he called out to Lois.

"Oh, I don't think so," came the sultry reply, but before he could turn he felt two hands dive over his shoulders and tuck something into his t-shirt. He twisted round in shock and then looked over his shoulder to see the red blanket hanging down his back like a... cape.

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### Part 3

He gulped and looked back to Lois. Her grin was totally unexpected. He was sure he would see accusation, triumph, anger or any of a multitude of other things designed to show him that she'd beaten him, she'd figured him out and today had been all about torturing him. But there was just joy on her face. She still didn't know. Was Clark so completely ordinary that, even dressed like this, Lois couldn't see the truth? But as he watched carefully her face dropped, joy being replaced by confusion.

Suddenly her hands shot up and she ripped away his glasses. They immediately dropped from her fingers and one hand came up to cover her trembling mouth. She turned away. Clark raised one hand and reached out for her shaking shoulder. He almost touched her as he reached to rest his palm on her arm in comfort but just before the final contact he heard her whisper. "I've been made a fool of by the man I love." Barely heard, even for his super ears, he caught his breath in shock. Reaching out again he missed touching her as she raced for the door. He sped there ahead of her and put his hand on the door handle.

"Let me out," she breathed.

"Please don't go Lois," he asked.

"Let... me... out. You can't keep me here, no matter the size of your super-biceps," she growled at him. Her eyes met his and he saw anger and pain. Stepping back he gave her room and her hand reached for the handle.

"Please, Lois." His voice was now a pleading whisper. "Don't go."

She turned to look back at him as she pulled the door open. The pain in his heart spilled out and he felt a tear track down his cheek. She turned away from him, ignoring his pleas and his pain. When the door slammed shut behind her he collapsed against it.

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Lois raced down the corridor and headed for the stairs. Stopping to wait for the elevator was out of the question. 'Please, Lois,' the ethereal voice played in her mind as she reached the ground floor. 'Don't go.' But rather than invoke her pity or forgiveness it increased her ire. As she stormed passed the desk on her way to exit the hotel, memories of checking in did nothing at all to help her disposition.

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Lois leaned forwards onto the counter. The young woman behind the desk was nervously explaining the situation. "Yes, miss, I understand, but this is the peak of the tourist season. We are fully booked. When the reservation came through it was the only room we had left."

"You're telling me that we have to *share* the room?"

"I'm afraid so, unless we get a cancellation." The eager-to-please girl smiled as understandingly as she could. "If we do I will notify you immediately. Plus it is a twin room," she rushed

out in a conciliatory attempt.

Lois turned on Clark as she whipped the two key card from the desk. "Well, if this doesn't beat all. At least the last time we had to share, it was the honeymoon suite at the Lexor."

The young clerk, overhearing part of what she had said, and desperate to please the customers spoke up again. "Oh, I didn't know you were honeymooners! I will have a complimentary bottle of champagne sent up to your room immediately." She turned and began to scribble a note on the pad beside her.

Lois turned back and laid an incredulous look on the lady. "If we were honeymooners then why would we want separate rooms? We're partners."

The clerk blinked in confusion, not getting where the conversation was going. "Oh domestic partners. I understand. So this isn't really a honeymoon."

Lois felt her temper rising further. She replied, perhaps a little more sharply than she necessary. "No! We definitely are *not* domestic partners. Look, we both work for the *Daily Planet* and we are *writing* partners. We are here for the conference being held at the Hampton Inn." She turned back to Clark briefly and muttered under her breath. "Why travel couldn't have just booked us in there to save all this hassle I don't know."

The flustered clerk began to blush. "But, I heard you say that you were in the honeymoon suite."

Lois rolled her eyes. "We were undercover."

The blush deepened and the young, embarrassed woman lowered her head. "Well, uh, I guess that's what the honeymoon suite is for. Lots of time under the covers."

If looks could kill, the clerk would have died a thousand deaths in that moment. "Not 'under the covers'. Undercover! We were on a stakeout. You know... spying on the bad guys."

The clerk's head came up, her mouth dropped open and she looked back and forth between Lois and Clark. "But... but... you two... I thought..."

"What? What did you think?" Lois replied as she tilted her head to one side in mockery.

"Um, nothing. I apologise. Enjoy your stay."

"That's yet to be seen," Lois snorted then grabbed Clark's tie and started to drag him toward the elevator. "Let's go, Clark. I'm hungry and you're buying me dinner."

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Leaving the lobby and emerging out into the cool night her raging anger did not fade, not even a little bit, when the air met her enflamed cheeks. She sped up her walk, determined to put as much distance between her and... him... as possible. As she quickened her pace she found herself jogging and then finally running.

*'It's not real. It can't be real,'* were the only thoughts repeating in her head. They went round and round. *'He wouldn't do that. He wouldn't let you act so foolishly.'* *'But he did,'* she replied to herself. *'And not just today, letting me give him the Superman t-shirt, he's done it every day since we met. Made a fool out of me.'*

After a while she found herself back at the entrance to the beach outside the Hampton Inn. "Scene of the crime," she chastised herself. The sun had set behind the ocean an hour ago and the sky was turning dark. "He didn't make a fool of you. You made a fool of yourself Lois," she voiced her thoughts, and the anger dissipated to be replaced by hurt and betrayal.

She began to stroll slowly over to the patch where they'd sat earlier. The look on Clark's face as she'd left suddenly invaded her mind. A tear had fallen down his cheek as he pleaded with her to stay. Those pleas had angered her as she left. Now they melted her heart. *'I don't think I've ever seen him cry before.'* she thought. *'For someone as full of love, friendship and compassion as him, how come I've never seen him cry?'* As the tears began to stream down her own face she closed her eyes. She resisted

letting them turn into sobs but still they fell. Tilting her head back she opened her eyes to see the clear darkening evening sky, hoping for some serenity but instead she noticed a blur streak overhead.

"You're up there, aren't you?" she said, realising immediately what that movement above her had been. Although the comment had actually been spoken to herself, quietly... rhetorically, she knew that he would be listening as well as watching. "I bet you never even got changed. That is so like you. You think it's your job to look after me. You think I can't possibly be all right by myself." She paused and sighed. "Or you just worry too much. I know you. You worry about everything don't you? You have this overdeveloped sense of responsibility. You feel that you have to fix everything; fix the world; fix me." The tears dried up as she began the catharsis of speaking her thoughts out loud. "Well, you can't fix me." She paused, unable to continue the lie. Clark had been 'fixing' her from the first moment they met; healing her heart, teaching her to trust, to care, to love. "You know, I wanted to give you the t-shirt because... because." Her breath shuddered. "Because... I've given up on my Superman fantasy. I have a new fantasy. But, something just came over me when I was looking for a present for your birthday and I got the wonderful idea of combining the two. Old and new. Superman fantasy and... Clark fantasy." There, she'd said it. She knew he was listening and there was no turning back now. "I wanted to turn you into my own personal Superman. You two are my... the only... I..." she faded off. "Argh," she shouted and waved her fist in the air. "You two mean everything to me. No one else in the world... and I just wanted to pretend that I could have both of you, just for a day." She looked down at the sand and began swishing at it with her toes. Her voice dropped in volume as she continued. "I had a lot of fun today. And seeing you turn into Superman one little bit at a time... I wanted you more and more." She smiled shyly. "When I saw the red blanket I knew I had my final piece. I considered wrapping it round you after you caught me at the barrier, but you looked at me in such a way. I thought you were, hoped you were, going to kiss me. I also got the weirdest sense of déjà vu, which had been hitting me all afternoon. I guess I know why now. But, anyhow, I decided to wait. I decided that I'd let us get out of the open, safe back in the room, then I'd pounce on you with the 'cape'. You know, I was gonna kiss *you* then. I resolved to kiss you, to take a chance, and I was going to do it while you were dressed as Superman, to show you that I could think of you as Superman, that you could be *my* Superman."

She stopped swiping at the sand and looked back up to the sky, clasping her hands behind her back. "I'm mad at you." She breathed deeply. "And I'm mad at myself. You hurt me. You deceived me. I... I want to forgive you, but I just can't. Not without some kind of recompense from you. I need something."

A quiet voice came to her on the breeze, so quiet she wondered if she'd imagined it. "Anything."

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"Anything? Really?" Clark listened from his position in the sky. "Well then. I guess, seeing as I feel such a fool, maybe you should too. Your next rescue has to be exactly as you are now." He saw Lois grin and his stomach dropped. "I know. You never got changed, you still have your red shorts on, the red picnic blanket cape, which is probably only dangling from one shoulder by now, and most of all, you are still wearing the t-shirt." He glanced at his shoulder. She was right. The blanket was only held in place on one side now. "So! Off you go. Rescue something, foil a robbery, anything. I'll be waiting. And once Superman has been seen in a less-than-perfect suit causing just that little bit of embarrassment, I'll forgive you."

As he listened to Lois giggling, obviously imagining the hilarious picture of him stopping a pile up on the freeway dressed in his pretend suit, he seriously considered swooping straight

down to talk to her. She couldn't possibly mean for him to really show Superman to the world in this light? Yes, Clark would be embarrassed, but this would destroy respect for Superman the world over. Surely she was only teasing him, showing him how annoyed she was with him. Showing him how much work it would take to get through this. But then he realised what she'd said. 'Rescue something.' He shot off into the air searching the city for the scenario he had in his head. There was bound to be one. Surely. And if he did this then he could really prove himself to Lois. He would have done exactly as she asked, even though she didn't mean it because it was too dangerous for him in reality. He'd perform his next Superman feat dressed as Clarkman... or SuperClark... or... what could he call himself in this guise?

He found his intended target in under 30 seconds. Caught at the top of a tree in a small back garden the black and white kitten had obviously been too adventurous for its own good. "Kind of reminds me of someone else," Clark muttered with a smile on his face as he returned the feline to the ground. Now, the question was, how would he prove to Lois that he'd fulfilled her request, unless he showed her the kitten. She'd just have to believe him. But was that really a possibility at the moment. Would she ever believe anything he told her again?

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While she waited to see if Clark would take her seriously she sat down and allowed the memories to overtake her. Memories of kisses, memories of unguarded looks. '*How did I not see it before?*' She felt foolish again. No matter how different the glasses and hair made him look, and she had to admit that was really only a passing resemblance between the two of them especially with the clothing change, she should have recognised his facial expressions. Both Clark and Superman looked at her with such hurt and hope, such longing... and such love. '*I've kissed both of them. How did I not notice the identical tingle when their lips touched mine: when **his** lips touched mine?*' And then came the memories of her behaviour. She'd always treated them differently, dramatically so to start with, and even now, when she no longer dismissed Clark, there were differences. Superman got her awe, Clark got her friendship... and, she finally accepted, they *both* got her love. She sighed as she came to her final conclusion.

"I'm a fool," she whispered to herself. A whoosh followed by a soft sound on the sand had her standing and turning. Looking up into his unobscured face, with natural wavy hair, her heart skipped about wildly. '*A fool in love with you.*'

"Lois," he began softly. She reached out her hand and grasped the piece of red material at his right shoulder. Tucking it in more securely she smiled. '*I was right. He didn't change, and it's only hanging by one corner now.*' She looked back up into his face again and the beginning of the song in her head came to her. '*A fool in love with you... Earth Angel.*'

"Lois, I'm so sorry." He spoke again. "I wanted to tell you... so badly, but I didn't know how. And this was never about keeping you in the dark, or not trusting you. Lois, I..."

"Shhh," she put her fingers up to his lips.

"I love you," he whispered past them.

She smiled up at him: a combination of Superman and Clark, combination of alien... angel... and Earth: Superman's face, Clark's expression, Superman's suit, Clark's clothes.

"Clark, my angel... Earth Angel."

"I did it. I did what you asked Lois." She saw the pain and the hope in his eyes. "I rescued a kitten from a tree dressed just like this. I know it's not much, but I'll do anything. Please forgive me, Lois. Please. After all... it is my birthday." He chuckled nervously at that last comment hoping she wouldn't think that he wasn't taking this seriously at all.

"I forgive you." The relief in his eyes, the way his shoulders relaxed back, was echoed in the smile which covered his face.

”Clark, how could I not?”

He stepped forwards and her heart quickened in anticipation of the kiss she craved. Instead his head passed her and his arms surrounded her in a tight hug. She brought up her arms and encircled his chest, then buried her head in his neck. He wouldn't presume to kiss her. Not even now. She smiled. *'So like Clark.'*

“Earth angel, earth angel,” she began to mumble into his shoulder. ”Will you be mine? My darling dear, love you all the time. I'm just a fool,” she felt his arms tense around her in anticipation. Did he expect her to say it, or did he expect her to stop. She drew back and looked into his warm, chocolate-coloured eyes. ”A fool in love... with you.”

The joy and shock on his face filled her heart with happiness. His eyes searched hers. She saw them flick down to her lips and his head twitched forward. *'He still can't do it. He still can't presume.'* She smiled and slid her hands round from his back to his chest and then up to his neck. As they linked behind his neck she pulled and his lips descended to meet hers. She felt his arms hold her tighter. His lips nibbled hers, gradually deepening the kiss. When her lips parted his immediately took advantage and her whole body vibrated with pleasure as she experienced the true level of passion that Clark Kent felt for Lois Lane. Her muffled thought processes vaguely compared the feeling to dream-like floating. Their lips parted for a moment giving her a chance to gain her breath and she let out a single breathy laugh when she realised why it had felt that way. Stars sparkled above her. They also sparkled far below her; the lights of Pensacola.

As Clark's soft, warm lips touched hers once again she thought back to the moment she'd finished packing her suitcase. Two thoughts in particular played over in her head. She'd warred over whether it was the right present to choose for her best friend. Just once or twice she'd played second guess with her decision. Zipping closed her suitcase she'd finally dispelled her worries.

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“Oh, yes. It was definitely the right decision.”

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She'd also long since accepted the ulterior motive for this present too. She wanted to see Clark's bare chest again... and she wanted to see him dressed as Superman.

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“I bet he'll look just 'Super' in this.”

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And she was sooooo right.

THE END