

# Deserving to Know

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Summary: When Lois saves Clark from Johnny Corben, he feels that there's something she deserves to know.

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"Jimmy, find a phone, call the police! I'm going for Lucy," Lois says, flashing me a slightly worried glance. "And you stay here and rest," she adds, her tone of voice leaving little doubt about this being an order.

I'm tempted to tease her about it. After all it's usually just the other way round, and Lois never stays. But even the short trip from the chair to the door has left me thoroughly exhausted. My head is spinning and my legs feel pretty wobbly. I feel like crap and I'm not that good at hiding it. So, instead of just rushing away, Lois eyes me warily, obviously afraid that I might shatter to pieces.

"I'm okay", I state as convincingly as I can. She wiggles her eyebrow at that, not buying my assertion. "Honestly, Lois, I'm fine, just a little shaken. It's nothing that a good night's rest wouldn't heal." Or a few rays of sunlight for that matter. The sky is already painted in glowing red and yellow as the sun is about to set. I feel the last comforting rays of sunlight caress my skin. It soothes some of the aches, but I'm afraid it won't be enough for my powers to return.

"You sure?" Lois asks hesitantly, her voice full of concern. I nod and straighten myself, trying my best to look a bit healthier to support my point. "Okay, I'll be right back", Lois promises and dashes around the corner of the building. That, too, would usually be my part.

As soon as I'm alone, I collapse against the wall and let out a shaky breath. This was a close call and I know it. I haven't come as close to dying as I was when Luthor had trapped me in his cage, but I couldn't have gone on much longer. With morbid curiosity I study my wrists. The skin is badly scraped from several futile attempts at breaking the ties. I guess Superman will not be making an appearance anytime soon. When Corben caught me, I had been pretty out of it to begin with. Yesterday, I had been fortunate to have just enough of my powers left to fly into a deserted alley to change and crawl home. After spending the last few hours right next to a kryptonite powered cyborg, I will not again be so lucky. Right now, all I can do is hope that whatever harebrained plan Lois has made up is going to work without getting her killed.

"Kent's gone," an angry voice yells right behind me. "I told you the bonds weren't going to hold, but would you listen?" It is Rollie Vale. "So tell me, are you going to get him back or would you like telling that mechanical moron to do the job instead of flirting with his girl?"

So Lois got Lucy to distract her boyfriend. It shouldn't surprise me. After all, Lois said she would go for Lucy. But in my hazy mind I didn't make the connection. To make things worse, the Vales are certainly going to search for me. Corben is not exactly the kind of man who likes to be told what to do. Resting against the wall just beside the window doesn't seem like such a good place to hide anymore. Looking around, I search for the best possible way to escape without being seen. Jimmy is probably waiting somewhere for the police to come and Lois...

I feel pretty sick as a sudden realization hits my foggy mind. If those goons find Lois they might recognize her as a means to

get Superman. Having them hold her captive instead of me wouldn't be an improvement at all. And seriously, even if the police arrive, how could they possibly stop Corben? Bullets won't hurt him and stupid as he might be, he won't let anyone get close enough to remove the kryptonite that powers him. And as for Lois' plan, I am pretty sure it involves Superman pulling up some miraculous last-minute saving, despite all odds.

I steady myself against the wall and stagger onward, following Lois and hoping that she hasn't already gotten herself into trouble. The sun is just above the rooftops, so there probably has not passed as much time as I think. Still, I curse myself for not considering this earlier and for letting myself be weakened by the kryptonite, even though I had felt its effects. When I met the Cyborg-version of John Corben for the first time, I should have flown off while I still could. Instead I had stayed to fight, which sounded awfully heroic but in fact had been just plain stupid. Maybe the kryptonite affects not only my powers but also my higher brain functions? It's something worth thinking about.

I reach the corner of the Vales' house and find myself behind another building. The backside yard is covered with knee-high grass that no one seemed to have mowed in a long time. The grass is flattened where Lois walked along. Next to the house is a small alley leading to the street. My stomach does a nervous somersault. What am I supposed to do? My legs are barely able to support my weight. On the other hand, getting closer to Corben is not going to improve my chances, anyway. Fighting from a distance it has to be, then. While I move as silently as I can, I weigh my options. There is my breath and there is heat-vision, or normally would be, if I hadn't been exposed to kryptonite.

My breath still kind of worked back there in Luthor's cage. But I know for a fact that using that power in a weakened state results in a lot of coughing. Corben would most likely be alerted to my presence, before I could provoke any lasting effect on him. So freezing him is not really going to be an option. I'm close enough to the street now to hear the turmoil going on there, but I still can't see them.

"She lied to you. She's a diversion so Kent could get away. Kill her," Emmet Vale orders angrily.

"You betrayed me!" Corben sounds even angrier than Vale, which can't be good. Lucy lets out a pained cry.

"No, let go of me, Johnny," she begs, her voice laced with panic. It tears at my heart.

I'm running towards them. There are no more than a few yards left. Suddenly I see Corben and lower my glasses. He holds Lucy in a firm grip and yanks her towards Lois' car. My gut is twisted in knots. I've got this one chance, I better not blow it. Lucy groans as she hits the side of the car. I ache for her, but at least now she's in no immediate danger of being hurt by me. It's now or never.

*Please, let this work,* I send a silent prayer to heaven. Concentrating hard, I try to find what little power I have left and direct a beam of heat vision at Corben. The beam flickers, hardly strong enough to create a sense of warmth, much less melt whatever alloy he is made of. He's taking a step towards Lucy — and another. Taking a deep breath I concentrate even harder, channeling my energy into this one task. My knees buckle, no longer able to support my weight. But it works. Corben is slowing down, the legs of his trousers catch fire and slowly, gradually, his body melts into a silver pool of fluid metal. Black spots dance before my eyes, accumulating to a splitting headache. Without another flicker, the beam dies. Vaguely, I feel that I hit the ground. Then everything goes black.

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I come to as someone shakes at my shoulders vigorously. "Clark! Clark! Call an ambulance, someone!" The cry is replaced by a muffled sob. "What did they do to you?" I blink, trying to clear the haze and it takes a moment until the fuzzy shade in front

of me becomes Lois Lane. “God, Clark, you’re awake!”

“Lois...” I croak and try to remember why my body feels like it weighs a ton.

“Oh, Clark. Why didn’t you stay there and rest? What did they do to you? Are you in pain? Don’t worry, an ambulance will arrive soon and then we’ll get you to the hospital. You’ll be fine. Corben is out of commission. Just a bit of rest, you said, didn’t you? You’re going to be fine, aren’t you?” Lois gets into full babbling mode. Tears slide down her face. “Don’t you ever dare do that again, buster. You almost died on me, twice now!”

It all comes back to me now, Corben, Lucy and the Vales. “Is Lucy okay?” I ask anxiously.

“She’s fine, all things considered.” Lois replies, sniffing and dries her face off with the hem of her jacket. “I think she still has feelings for the Corben she knew.” She straightens her shoulders, fighting to regain her composure. I’ve rarely seen Lois so out of it. It tears at my heart and sends a sudden jolt of energy through my weakened body.

“I’m sorry,” I mutter, feeling a pang of guilt.

I never wanted to kill him, never wanted it to turn out like this. In a safe distance, Corben is standing like some perverse statue, stuck in a pool of metal that once was his legs. His face is a lifeless mask. Someone must have removed the kryptonite, leaving the man to be no more than a human-shaped piece of metal. This isn’t right. It was a necessary evil to save Lucy and Lois and everyone else, but that still doesn’t make it right. I struggle to get up, my arms shaking with the effort, but I manage. Lois puts a hand on my shoulder to keep me down.

“Don’t move. The paramedics will be here soon.” Lois says soothingly.

“I’m okay,” I protest, my gut twisting at the prospect of having to deal with paramedics. “I just need some rest.”

“Last time you said that, you passed out!” She sounds rather anguished than angry. “I can’t let that happen again, Clark. What were you doing here, anyway? You were supposed to rest.”

“The Vales had found out I was gone. They were going to find me. I couldn’t let them get hold of me again,” I explain truthfully. Finding a suitable explanation for my dropping unconscious right in the middle of things is more complicated, though.

“What did they do to you?” Lois asks again, her expression one of sheer terror.

In her mind, she’s probably going through the worst possible explanations for my weakness. I can tell that from the haunted look in her eyes. It’s one that I’ve seen before; when she saw a bullet hit Clark’s chest. She doesn’t know that my dying then had been nothing but an act to protect my secret. It isn’t fair to torture her like this. She saved my life today, Clark’s life. She has saved Superman before. She is my best friend and the woman I love. This is hardly how a beloved one is supposed to be treated.

I gulp. If I tell her, she is going to kill me, but I cannot continue to lead her on. Over the past one and a half years I’ve found so many reasons why it is a bad idea to let her in on the secret. But suddenly, I know without a shadow of a doubt, that I can no longer justify leaving her in the dark. Lois has long since earned her right to know — now more than ever.

“Lois, I’m okay, really. Just tired. I don’t need to go to the hospital.” I plead with her. “Can you just take me home? We can talk there.” I get myself into a sitting position. Surprisingly, Lois doesn’t try to stop me.

“You mean talk as in talk? Or will this be the ‘Gee, Lois, I forgot to return a video’ kind of talk?” she asks with a hint of annoyance in her voice. “Because, I’ve had enough of that,” she spits. It’s fascinating how she can change from worried to angry in a matter of seconds. But I cannot exactly blame her.

“Have any of you guys seen Superman?” Jimmy interrupts us, before I can say anything. He gives me a worried once-over.

“You don’t look too good, CK,” he says sympathetically.

“Thanks, Jimmy,” I mutter wryly.

“No, I haven’t seen him, Jimmy. But he must have been here. Who else could have melted the metal? I wonder why he didn’t show up in public?” Lois replies. “I just hope he is okay.”

“Why wouldn’t he be?” Jimmy reassures her. “After all, he has defeated the bad guys. Perhaps he was called away to another rescue.”

“Perhaps,” Lois says miserably.

For the moment, she seems to have forgotten about me. That tends to happen whenever Superman is concerned. I should be grateful that Jimmy has saved me from Lois’ immediate wrath. As long as she is distracted thinking about Superman’s fate, she isn’t going to drag me to a hospital. But it continues to irk me how she keeps preferring the hero over the man. My resolve to tell her is getting weaker by the minute.

The sound of an approaching ambulance hurls me from my musings and I decide that now is a good time to get up. Surprisingly, it’s somewhat less of an effort than I expected. I even manage with the first try, though I’m swaying a bit once I am upright.

“Whoa, careful there, CK,” Jimmy exclaims and reaches out to steady me.

“Thanks,” I breathe through a sudden bout of dizziness. It quickly subsides, though.

“Clark!” Lois’s lips continue to move, but her voice is drowned out by one last wail of the siren as an ambulance pulls in beside us.

The blue and red lights continue to flicker against the darkening sky. The paramedics get off the car, take their gear and soon they are on the street, searching for someone in the need of help. The one who is carrying most of the stuff looks young, almost boyish with his smooth skin and curly brown hair. The other man is graying, his face wrinkled, which gives him the air of a veteran.

“Over here,” Lois calls for their attention. “My partner was kidnapped and collapsed afterwards. He was unconscious for a couple of minutes.”

Before I can do anything to stop them, the paramedics are all over me. “Sir, we’re going to take you to a hospital,” the younger of them says, almost bustling as he wraps a blood pressure cuff around my arm and urges me to sit down.

“Do you remember what happened?” The older one seems a lot calmer as he shines a light into my eyes.

I blink. “Yes, I do. And I don’t need to go to the hospital.” I state as firmly as I can.

“You really should be seen by a doctor, Sir. Passing out is not to be taken lightly. It could hint to a cardiac problem, rhythm disturbances, you name it,” The young paramedic explains and swabs the tip of my right index finger with a wet pad. “I’m going to measure your blood sugar now.”

A surge of panic runs through me, as I feel a prick on my finger. Blood oozes from the spot, which is as much relieving as it is freaking me out. The droplet becomes bigger as the young paramedic squeezes gently. He puts it on a test strip and hands me a new pad to stop the bleeding. Another spell of dizziness leaves me reeling there for a few seconds. Whether that’s an after-effect of the kryptonite or merely the sight of my blood, is beyond me.

Agonizing seconds tick by until the paramedic finally announces, “Eighty-four. That’s normal.”

The relief that is washing over me almost makes me pass out again. I fight the dizzy spell, struggling to stay alert.

“Look, you checked me out. I’m fine and I’m not going to come with you.” I say and once again try to get upright.

“You can hardly stand on your feet, Clark!” Lois argues. “If places were reversed, you’d certainly make me go see a doctor.”

The paramedics nod, obviously grateful for the support. Of

course Lois has a point there, which doesn't exactly help my case. I'm running out of arguments, but I cannot tell her the truth, not with the paramedics and Jimmy listening in. Whatever I might say now, will only lead to other questions I cannot answer.

"I appreciate your concern, but I know what's wrong with me and I'm absolutely sure it doesn't require medical treatment." It's the best I can do for now. Silently, I pray that they are going to leave me alone.

"So tell me what is it, Clark? What's wrong with you?" The daggers in Lois eyes demand answers. "See, you can't say. Just take him with you, it's not like he could put up a fight!" she points out, almost yelling at the paramedics and making the younger one jump in his skin.

But the older one just shakes his head. "We can't force him to come with us, Lady," he says with a sigh and then addresses me. "We need you to sign a refusal of treatment form. Be aware, that like my colleague said, a sudden loss of consciousness can hint to a serious illness. You can call emergency services anytime. And it would be better if someone stayed with you."

"Thank you. Where am I supposed to sign?" I reply, interrupting Lois before she has a chance to say anything else.

"Fine, I'll take you home!" she exclaims, exasperated. "But don't you think for one moment that you're left off the hook." Her stance leaves little doubt that letting me go home is not admitting defeat but merely a change of strategy.

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Twenty minutes later the Jeep turns into Clinton Avenue. Roughly five minutes earlier Lois has lapsed into silence. Throughout the signing of the waiver and the ensuing ride, I've had my fair share of lecturing. Jimmy was smart enough to stay at the scene and take more pictures for Perry. Hopefully, they will earn him a raise. On the way, we dropped Lucy off at the diner. I'm pretty sure that she would have preferred to go home. But that would have meant listening to her sister's rant for another ten minutes, which she declined for obvious reasons. According to Lois, Lucy isn't as grateful for being rid of Corben as she should be. I cannot exactly blame Lucy for making a quick escape.

As soon as we were alone, Lois compensated for Lucy's absence with more complaints about my being irresponsible, chicken-hearted and just plain stupid. It went on and on. So, at first the silence was kind of refreshing. Now, its hostility is bordering on intolerable.

It's all part of her strategy on getting me to talk. And I seriously consider telling her everything just to shake the awkwardness. But this is a tough decision to make. I'd like to think Lois' behavior means that maybe I'm more to her than just a friend. But I'm fairly certain Jimmy would have received the same treatment, if our places were reversed. Of course, he wouldn't have dared to defy her in the first place. Aside from that, there are plenty of other reasons why Jimmy could never share my current predicament which doesn't make him such a good example, after all. However, I'm not again going to confuse reality with wishful thinking. Lois is in love with Superman. Clark is just a friend. And in a few minutes I'm probably going to tell her that they are one and the same. All I can do is hope to survive the fall-out.

Lois pulls in next to my apartment building. She hits the brakes so hard that I'm pushed into the seat-belt. It's testament to her anger. Turning off the engine and getting out of the car takes her no more than a couple of seconds. As I set my feet onto the sidewalk, Lois is already standing in front of me, hands on her hips.

"I really don't know why I didn't just take you to the hospital, Clark!" she says, practically waiting for me to give her any reason to change her mind about letting me go home. "This is so incredibly insane I hardly know where to start!" I guess that is what she had in mind all along. She has been watching me out of

the corner of her eyes throughout the whole ride, probably hoping that I would fall asleep or pass out again.

"I appreciate that you didn't." I smile at her briefly. "We'll talk inside and if you still think that taking me to a hospital is a good idea, then I'll go." I offer.

She looks at me, dumbfounded. Obviously, that knocked the wind out of her sails. Instead of arguing, she just follows me as I walk to my place. After I've spent the last twenty minutes doing nothing but sit in a car and listen to Lois, I don't feel quite as out of it as I did before. Actually, I think I'm almost back to normal human strength. So I manage to climb the stairs without any more swaying or needing to rest. I might be a bit more out of breath than one would usually be as I turn the key to open the door to my apartment.

When I close the door behind us, Lois finds her voice again. "Do you think this is funny?" she asks, her voice trembling. I can see tears glistening in her eyes, but she blinks them away. "You had me scared to death, Clark. You're my best friend and I can't lose you, not again. Not after you died or almost died, when Dillinger shot you. Not after Lex managed to drive us apart, so that I would have no one left to turn to. I have never had a friend like you. I need you!"

Lois closes the distance between us, and I pull her into an embrace. She rests her head against my shoulder.

The rest of her words are muffled by my shirt. "Why are you being so stubborn, Clark? Do you think you're less of a man to me, if you need help? Do you think that would change how I feel?"

There we go again, beating around the bush. We've been playing this little game since this whole Luthor debacle, ever since I declared my love for her. That wasn't such a smart move, I know that now. Lois doesn't love me the way I love her. And despite all my efforts to convince her, that I too want nothing but friendship, I guess she has been suspecting the truth for a while now. But we never really talked about it. Lois now and then drops a hint that she knows and for the most part, I try to ignore it. I can deal with us being just friends, though I admit the idea that someone else might come along and get what I can only dream of is slowly killing me. But I don't think I could stand another rejection.

"Lois, there is something I need to tell you about me," I say slowly and take a deep breath, trying to brace myself for what is to come. Consciously, I know this is the right thing to do. I've looked at it from every possible angle. "You might want to sit down." I add and loosen the embrace. "This could take a while." Or this will be over in about five seconds, complete with Lois running out on me, fuming with anger.

"O..okay," Lois replies cautiously, a hint of fear in her eyes. She lets me guide her to sit down on the sofa.

I too, am scared. Telling her my secret now could very well be the end of our friendship. It could be the end of any hope that she might fall in love with Clark. But what if I'm exposed to kryptonite again — as Clark? What if Lois chooses that very moment to throw herself into the claws of death, thinking that Superman will save the day when she could have known that he can't? It could very well have happened today. And what if, by any chance, one day she'll see more in me than just a friend? Could she ever forgive me if I waited to tell her until after we became lovers?

"Clark? Why don't you say something?" she asks, irritated by my silence. "It can't possibly be that bad, can it?"

I gulp. "This is a bit awkward. I never told anyone about this. At first I wasn't sure I could trust you. But we're friends and I think it's time to tell you." I start babbling. Usually that would be Lois' part. "Please believe me that I never meant to lie to you. The time just never seemed to be right. It's not something that comes up in a conversation. I just... This can't ever be printed,

not that I actually think that you would..."

"Clark, you're making me nervous. Just spit it out," Lois begs.

"I...I...I'm Superman," I breathe, closing my eyes and waiting for the hurricane to hit.

The proverbial quiet before the storm is deafening. There is nothing to be heard but the roar of blood in my ears. The tension in the room is almost palpable. I wish there was some way of knowing whether the next thing I'll hear is the sound of my door falling shut behind Lois or her voice yelling at me. Actually, it proves to be neither of the two.

"What?" she gasps, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I am Superman," I repeat, my voice somewhat firmer than before. I open my eyes and look into her blank face. She seems frozen with shock, disbelief, anger or maybe all of that. "That's why I passed out. Corben was powered with kryptonite. I had practically none of my powers when you rescued me. Melting the metal took what little energy I had left." I feel compelled to explain and take off my glasses to strengthen my point.

"But...but that can't be," she mutters weakly. "You..."

Whatever objection she might have in mind dies on her lips. Her expression slowly changes from flabbergasted to angry as the truth of my words dawns on her. "You lied to me! All those times you pretended to be too weak to open a jar or stumble over your own feet. I can't believe I let myself be fooled by a pair of glasses," she goes on, fuming with anger. "I figure you don't even need them."

"You're right, I don't." I agree. "Lois, I'm sorry. I hated lying to you."

Lois doesn't seem to hear me. She isn't finished yet. "You made me believe you were dead, when Dillinger shot you! But bullets bounce off of you," she yells.

"They do. Most of the time, anyway," I admit with a slight nod. "I just didn't know what to do other than to pretend I was dead. I never meant to hurt you."

"Oh my God, you were shot by Arianna Carlin and I didn't even know it was you," Lois whispers, shocked. "I mean, of course I knew it was you, but..."

"I know this can be pretty confusing. Sometimes even for myself," I reply with a small smile. "Lois..."

"She tried to kill you, seeking revenge for Luthor's death," Lois interrupts me, obviously recalling that fateful evening. "But... now that I think about it, you tried to save him, didn't you?" She eyes me suspiciously, probably trying to confirm it from my facial expression.

"I tried, but I couldn't. Luthor had kryptonite, too. I was powerless." The lingering ache from my most recent exposure to the deadly rock flares up with the memory of that night. It leaves me with the sickening feeling that I'm in for some more nightmares to deal with.

"Lois, I understand that you're angry. This is a lot to take in," I take a deep breath, trying to find the right words to continue. "Please know that it was never my intention to lead you on. This is a secret I have been keeping my whole life. And I have never told anyone else, I never really wanted to. But you're my best friend and I guess you long since deserved to know. The timing just never seemed right." I watch her furrowed brows relax somewhat. "I have yet to thank you for saving my life, Lois. Thank you very much."

"You're welcome," Lois says almost gently. "I guess I owed you one. Thank you for saving Lucy. I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't stopped Corben."

"I am just glad I was able to help." I sink against the backrest of my couch, feeling drained.

This day has taken its toll on me, both physically and emotionally. My eyes drift shut as part of the tension recedes that has kept me on edge. Lois knows and so far she is taking the

news remarkably well. At least, she hasn't killed me yet. And she hasn't stormed out of my apartment. But I'm not so naïve to believe that she has already accepted and forgiven my deceit. If anything, this is just a truce.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay?" Lois asks softly.

"Yeah, as soon as the sun comes up." Fighting against the kryptonite induced lethargy, I look her in the eyes and see worry there. "Hey, I'm gonna be fine." I brush a strand of hair back behind her ear, glad that she doesn't flinch away. "After all I'm the guy who lifts rockets into the orbit. I'm not that easily defeated," I joke, trying to lighten up the mood. Lois doesn't laugh, though.

"Are you mad at me? For not telling you sooner?" I ask, trying to interpret the serious expression on her face.

"I don't know — maybe. I'm still trying to come to terms with it. I mean, it makes sense and it certainly explains a lot of things about you. But I'm not quite sure I really believe it yet. "A small smile creeps across her features. "You're really sure you didn't get knocked on the head?"

"I am. I'd prove it if I could. Maybe in a couple of hours I could take you flying." I offer. "Until then, I could answer all your questions."

"I'd like that very much." The smile on her face broadens. I know how much Lois enjoys flying, we both do.

I feel myself relax. "This is not quite how you imagined spending an evening with Superman, or is it?"

"That depends," Lois replies with a mischievous grin on her face.

"On what?" I ask.

"On whether I get to kiss Superman," she says. The smile on her face now threatens to knock me off my feet.

Her words however, have quite a sobering effect. Even though I have kind of expected that reaction, it hurts no less. I shouldn't be sulking now; after all I knew what I was getting myself into telling Lois about my secret. And what's the difference, really? It's still me, she wants to kiss and that should be all that counts. Only, it doesn't feel like it's still me. And that's not due to the lack of powers.

"There's another thing, you need to know, Lois."

Uncomfortably, I shift on my spot on the couch.

"More secrets?" The smile on her lips is gone.

"Not exactly." God, I shouldn't tell her this. I should just suck it up and kiss her. That's what she wants. That's what I want. Only — this isn't quite so easy. "You will never get to kiss Superman, Lois. It will always be just Clark, because, in my heart, that's who I am. Superman is what I can do. He's not real."

All of a sudden I feel the need to get away from Lois. Sitting on the same couch beside her seems much too close for comfort. I struggle to get up and take a few steps across the room. The world around me starts spinning slightly, but I do my best to ignore it. Lois remains sitting in the same spot. I can feel her staring at me, can almost feel her gaze as if it is touching me.

"That's insane, Clark." Lois replies after a moment of probably collecting her thoughts. "You are Superman, you just told me so yourself. And why are referring to yourself in the third person?"

"Bad habit," I say defensively and turn back around to face her. "But that's not the point."

"No? Then what is it? Because I really don't get it." Anger is creeping back into her voice, she frowns.

How am I going to explain what I hardly understand myself? Of course, Lois is right, this is completely insane. Mom keeps saying that as well. However, my heart doesn't agree.

"Remember how you told Superman...eh, me...that you would love me just the same if I was an ordinary guy leading an ordinary life? Well, you had rejected the ordinary guy just an hour before that." I say quietly. The anger, hurt and humiliation

of that very moment is still fresh in my memory. I look away, trying to remind myself that this has happened months ago.

“But I didn’t know that…” Lois defends herself.

“Well, that’s just the thing, Lois. You didn’t want Clark then. How am I supposed to know that you want him now, flaws and everything? I can’t live up to your image of Superman.” I take a deep breath, before I go on, trying to calm myself down. I start pacing, turning the anger into movement before it seeps into my words. “When you asked Clark to get a message to Superman, do you think I didn’t know what you were going to ask? And I was tempted to say yes, because I was so desperately in love with you.” This is the first time I admit this, even to myself. “Because I wanted to save you from Luthor so badly that it was driving me insane. But…”

“Do you honestly want me to choose between Clark and Superman? Even now?” Lois asks, raising her eyebrows.

Slowly she gets up from the couch, her gaze never leaving me. The tension in my living room is palpable and involuntarily I stop pacing. The way she puts it, my argument sounds downright silly. And it is — maybe the kryptonite affected my mind as well. I should just give in and let her kiss me. Only, it’s probably already too late for that. She looks mad and I can’t exactly blame her. After all, there really is nothing to choose. And now she’ll yell at me and walk past me and there isn’t anything I can do about it. My legs still feel pretty wobbly and I already regret that I started pacing in the first place.

The anger I felt earlier is suddenly gone. All that is left is a distinct fear. “I’m sorry, Lois.” I say softly. “I didn’t mean to tell you how you should feel about me or ask you to choose. It’s…it’s just — when you turned me down — that hurt much worse than kryptonite ever could.” Admittedly, that hadn’t been the worst pain. Seeing her accept Luthor’s proposal, knowing that I could have prevented it, had been far worse. But would it have been fair to take advantage of her misconception? My heart is thudding in my chest as I daringly reach out to cup her cheek. She doesn’t flinch at my touch. “At the end of the day, you’ll find that I’m less of a hero than you thought. Just be sure that realization isn’t going to disappoint you.”

“Oh, Clark. What makes you think I’m going to be disappointed?” Lois replies, covering my hand with her own. “Knowing that it is really you underneath the suit doesn’t make you less of a hero. You risked your life to save my sister and me. I’m sure Corben would have beaten both of us up if it hadn’t been for you. It’s not your powers that make you a hero, it’s your heart. I admit that it took me some time to realize how much you mean to me, Clark. I love you, both as Superman and as Clark. That confused me to no end. How could knowing that I don’t have to choose one over the other disappoint me?”

I must have fainted again. This cannot be anything but a dream. Lois loves me — Clark? I stare at her, not daring to even blink, afraid that this blissful moment will turn out to be no more than a creation of my mind. So I keep staring at her open mouthed, unblinking until eventually, I can’t help it anymore. But she stays with me, smiling, touching my hand that still rests on her cheek.

“I didn’t realize that I was in love with you until I walked down the aisle to become Lex’ wife. That should have been the happiest days of my life. But all I could think about was you Clark and how silly I had been to turn you down.” A tear runs down her cheek and I feel the wetness on my thumb. Suddenly, I know without a shadow of a doubt that this is real.

I bent forward to kiss her. Though it’s not the first time our lips touch, it certainly feels that way. I feel their warmth, their silky texture before her lips part in response to deepen the kiss. There is nothing but the sweet brush of her tongue against mine, sending shivers down my back. A soft moan escapes her throat as my lips grow hungrier, relishing her creamy taste that I’m already

growing addicted to. I don’t know how I had ever been able to stop kissing her before. It sure seems like a waste of precious time.

THE END