

Strike (Clark's POV)

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Summary: Metropolis is hosting a celebrity bowling event, but the Man of Steel has a problem — he's a terrible bowler!

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Author's Note: This plot bunny was spawned by a reveal challenge on the Lois and Clark fanfiction message boards, as issued by VirginiaR. The only real specifications were that someone's secret be revealed. This is what my twisted muse came up with.

"Yes!" Lois said, punching a fist into the air, grinning from ear-to-ear. "Take that, Kent!"

Clark rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "Must *everything* be a competition with you, Lois?"

Lois walked over to him, reluctantly putting her back to the bowling lane she and Clark were sharing. Behind her, the machine swept away the pins she'd knocked over and replaced them with a new set, ready for Clark to take his turn. She stopped a few inches from him and put her hands on her hips as Clark tallied the score. Lois glanced at the paper briefly and smiled, satisfied with the severe trouncing she was giving him.

"What?" he asked, his eyes going to where her hands rested on her hips. "Did I say something wrong?"

"You can't honestly tell me that *you*, of all people, aren't all about sports competition, Mr. College Football Player."

"Bowling is *hardly* a sport," Clark replied, chuckling and shaking his head.

"Is too!" Lois countered. "They even televise the big competitions."

Clark shrugged. "So? I mean, do people actually *get* the stations they air on?"

"So...it's a sport," Lois said slowly, as though explaining the concept to a child, purposefully ignoring his second remark, if Clark was any judge. "And a high school friend went to college on a bowling scholarship." She jerked her thumb in the direction of the waiting pins. "You're up."

Clark shook his head again, stifling a laugh. He made his way to the ball return, selected one of the two he'd chosen for their weight and fit, and readied himself for his turn. He approached the throw line and released his grip, carefully reigning in his strength. The ball rolled down the lane, and, for a moment, all looked well. Then, about halfway down the lane, it began to veer to one side. It clipped all of three pins by the time it had finished its' journey, barely knocking them down and leaving the rest standing. He sighed. He wasn't even *trying* to do poorly, to maintain his cover and to make Lois happy. He really *was* just that bad of a bowler.

Retreating back to the ball return, he selected the spare he had and repeated the process. Immediately upon clearing the throw line, the neon blue and black ball wobbled and made a beeline for the gutter. Clark groaned as he threw his head back to look at the ceiling.

"You still aren't approaching it on the correct foot," Lois

said, stepping to his side. She patted his leg briefly. "You need to step off here. Then, one, two, three steps and release. Watch."

With a swish of her hair, she grabbed the swirled pink ball she had been favoring for the last game and a half. Demonstrating for Clark, she purposefully slowed down her motions before releasing the ball. It went practically screaming down the lane and knocked every pin over.

"Three in a row," she proudly crowed. "That's another little X, right here in this box," she added with a grin, pointing to the blank space on the score sheet.

"Hey, thanks," Clark teased, dutifully marking the X in question. He rifled his fingers through his hair as he looked again at the chasm between his points and Lois'. "What ever would I do without you?" He tallied the score and wrote it down.

"Did I mention that the loser buys the snacks?" Lois teased back.

"I thought the winner was supposed to buy?" Clark said, grinning. "You know. Nurse my deflated ego and all."

Lois laughed, her eyes sparkling. As always, Clark was entranced by the sound. It was so good, hearing her laugh, seeing her so relaxed and full of life. Until recently, he'd only gotten to see the professional side of Lois Lane, with glimpses into her real self more rare than a unicorn. And that professional side had loathed having him as a partner. But then, something had changed. They'd gone to Smallville together to investigate what they had thought was a simple EPA cover-up. Being home had relaxed Clark, and perhaps that had rubbed off on Lois. Over the days she was there, she began to unwind a little. Her professional demeanor had fallen away, giving Clark a spectacular view of the real Lois Lane, the woman behind the Mad Dog veneer. He had loved seeing her so comfortable, despite her initial awkwardness at being so far out of her comfort zone. In turn, she had relaxed him, even when he'd privately been dealing with the terror of learning what Kryptonite could do to him.

They'd begun the trip as colleagues and had ended it as the best of friends.

"You wish, Farm Boy," she said, smiling.

Clark laughed, shrugging in mock defeat. "Okay," he said, making it sound like it was a sacrifice for him. "What do you want?"

Lois thought for a moment. "Mozzarella sticks. And a water."

"Okay, I'll be right back," Clark said, before slipping away.

"Hey! It's your turn!" Lois protested as he walked toward the concession stand.

Clark smiled to himself and pretended not to hear. A few minutes away from the absolute slaughter was exactly what he needed. Of course, it took him away from Lois at the same time. And Clark already hated every moment spent apart from her. He loved her, plain and simple, but he was still too nervous to actually ask her out. He didn't want to move too fast with Lois. He was afraid that he might scare her away. After all, it hadn't been all that long ago that she had finally opened up enough to allow him to befriend her.

Since it was the middle of the afternoon on a weekday, relatively few people were in the bowling alley. He and Lois both had the day off, but he'd still been surprised when she'd called him up and invited him to go bowling with her. Belatedly, he realized that she was probably only interested in going because all of Metropolis was abuzz with excitement for the rapidly approaching celebrity bowling tournament. Superman had been roped into the event, despite Clark's initial hesitation. He was still getting used to his alter-ego's celebrity status. But all of the proceeds were going to charity, so how could he possibly say no?

Of course Lois was swept up into the excitement. It didn't matter that it had been twenty-three years since Metropolis had last been chosen to host the event. Her hero would be there — the man she thought she loved when she understood next to nothing

about him. The cardboard cutout she fawned over while simultaneously ignoring the man beneath the flashy suit.

Clark sighed inwardly. He wished Lois would give up the Superman fantasy. He wished she would show even the slightest bit of interest in him, Clark. It was funny, in a way. She could have Superman if only she would give Clark a chance, but it seemed that Clark was the last man she would ever date. It really was a mess. And Clark dared not attempt to unravel the knots and snags in their relationship. To do so, he would need to reveal the truth about who he really was, and, though he wanted to one day be completely honest with her, he could not do so, not now. Not until he knew that she would chose *Clark*, the real man, above the mask of Superman.

A soft, second sigh escaped him as he thought again about the bowling tournament. He should never have agreed to it. What had he been thinking? He was a terrible bowler. Why couldn't it have been a basketball tournament? Or a game of touch football? Even fishing would have been preferable. In just a few short days, he was going to make an absolute fool out of himself.

In a way, he thought, it was good that Lois had asked him to go bowling with her. He'd planned to go alone, to get in some practice before the big event. He'd known he was in desperate need of some practice. He hadn't been inside an alley since the unfortunate days when he'd dated Lana, back in Smallville. Going with Lois had been a double blessing. Not only could he reacquaint himself with the game, but he got to spend some time with Lois. And, he had to privately admit, her tips were helping, at least a little. He'd managed to double his score from the first game. Of course, that wasn't saying much. He'd only scored a measly thirty points in the first game they'd played.

He ordered their food at the concession stand and leaned against the bar top, waiting for it to be cooked. It didn't take long at all. Within ten minutes, he was heading back through the building to where Lois sat, doodling on the edges of the score sheet with the tiny stub of a pencil the alley had provided. Clark slid into the seat next to her, putting down the tray of food in the same fluid motion.

"Here you go," he said as he sat.

"Thanks. Looks good," Lois said, eyeing the mozzarella sticks.

Clark grabbed up one of his nachos, dipped it in the dish of hot, gooey cheese that came with it, and popped it into his mouth.

"I didn't know you ate with your left hand," Lois observed.

Clark swallowed before answering. "Sometimes, yeah."

"How come?"

"I don't know," he replied, shrugging. "I just do, sometimes. I guess it's a habit I've had since I was a kid. I'm not even sure when it started, to be perfectly honest. Why?"

Lois shrugged in turn. "No reason. I just think it's interesting, that's all. Come on, it's your throw."

Clark wiped his hands on a napkin, took a sip of his soda, and stood. Like a condemned man, he dutifully picked up his bowling ball and advanced. Mindful of Lois' helpful tips, he tried to follow what she'd demonstrated for him. But the very thought of the way her long legs had moved when she'd shown him what to do threw his concentration. He hit the correct foot on the release, but the ball still wobbled as it left his hand. It hit the alley with a thud and rolled down the long length of wood before it finally knocked seven pins down.

"Nice!" Lois said, genuinely sounding pleased with his progress. "You did much better that time. But you're still not letting go at the right spot. If you'd waited another second or two as your arm came up, you would have had more control over the ball."

"Thanks. I'll keep it in mind," Clark said, smiling.

He picked up his spare ball and repeated the actions, this time trying harder to release at the proper time. But a sudden burst of

sound from the speakers in the alley, alerting the owners of a blue Dodge that their car's lights were still on, caused him to utterly lose control over his throw. The ball sailed into the gutter.

"And that's the end of the game," Lois announced. "I win."

"No kidding," Clark said, shaking his head. To himself, he could only think of how much trouble Superman was going to be in, once the tournament started on Saturday. "If it wasn't for the gutter, I think my balls would be homeless. Err, I mean...well...you know." He blushed as the double meaning that his words held hit him.

Luckily, Lois only laughed at his sudden discomfort.

Trying to save what was left of his dignity, Clark gestured to the lane. "Another round?"

Lois nodded. "One more, I think. My arm's getting a bit tired. Isn't yours?"

"Uh, sure," Clark said, grabbing another nacho from the paper bowl on the tray. He dunked it in the cheese and ate the chip.

"Okay, five minute break," Lois announced, slipping into one of the seats, while Clark sat next to her. She grabbed one of Clark's chips and ate it plain.

"Food thief," Clark said, grinning.

He darted his hand over to Lois' mozzarella sticks. She slapped the offending hand, but not before he stole one of the sticks. Triumphantly, he bit into it, enjoying the way Lois shook her head in laughter.

"Takes one to know one, apparently," she mock-complained.

Clark shrugged innocently and smiled. "What? It's simply a tax imposed for being the one to get the food."

Again, she laughed, the most precious sound in Clark's world. She brushed a lock of hair behind her ear as she bit into a mozzarella stick. For several long minutes, the two sat in companionable silence as they ate and drank. Finally, Lois wiped her mouth and hands on a napkin and looked back at the pins at the far end of the lane.

"Ready?" she asked Clark.

Clark wiped the grease from his fingers and took a long swig of his drink. "Ready," he nodded. "You first." He wrote their names on a fresh score sheet.

This time, Clark did much better. His score, once in the paltry double digits, soared to a respectable one hundred and twenty. He breathed a discreet sigh of relief as he tallied the final scores. Maybe Superman wouldn't get knocked out of the tournament in the first round after all. Maybe the Man of Steel would walk away from the tournament with at least some of his dignity left.

"Great game," Lois announced, flopping onto the hard plastic seat next to Clark. She pried off one of her bowling shoes and bent to retrieve her sneakers. "Looks like you finally found what works for you."

"Yeah. And thanks," Clark said, trying his shoelaces. "You still creamed me though."

Lois shrugged. "At least you gave me a challenge, this game."

Clark laughed deeply. "Glad to be of service."

"Are you going to the celebrity tournament on Saturday?" Lois asked, trying her other shoe.

He shook his head. "No." It wasn't technically a lie. Superman would be there, but Clark Kent would not be.

"How come?"

"Standing around, watching a bunch of rich and famous people bowl?" He shrugged and stood. "It doesn't exactly scream 'fun way to spend my day off.' But, let me guess. You're going, right?"

She nodded her affirmation. "Of course. Superman will be there."

Clark tried hard not to let his exasperation show. When would Lois *finally* get over her Superman crush?

"Of course," he said instead, working hard to keep his tone neutral.

"You should come. We could hang out together. I'll even buy the snacks this time. Besides, it's for a good cause."

"I know," he nodded. "But I've got other plans." That too, was the truth. He planned to *participate* in the games, not to watch them. He shrugged into his jacket, then helped Lois into hers. "Where to?"

Lois glanced at her watch. "Five o'clock. I don't need to meet up with Lucy for another four hours."

"You want to come back to my place for a while? I could run out for some Chinese food in a bit."

"I'd like that," Lois said, giving him a smile. "Should we pick up a movie?"

"Sure, if you'd like," Clark said, leading her to the counter. He placed his rented shoes on the counter, pulled out his wallet, and peeled off a few bills to pay for the rounds they'd played.

"Here, let me help," Lois said, unzipping her purse.

Clark waved her off. "My treat. Maybe I'll let you get it next time."

"You're on," she said, grinning. "Now come on, let's get out of here."

Saturday rolled around far too quickly for Clark's liking. He groaned as he got out of bed, showered, and dressed. He'd never gotten a chance to go back to the bowling alley to practice some more, as he'd planned. Between the stories he and Lois had been working on, and his side work as Superman, he hadn't seen his bed before three in the morning, let alone found any time to sneak in a game of bowling.

Today was going to be humiliating; he just knew it.

With the tournament not starting until two, he forced himself to get a few chores done — washing the dishes he'd left in the sink the night before, dusting the living room, cleaning up the library books that lay strewn about in almost every room of his apartment. He no longer needed them for his research, and figured he could drop them off before work on Monday. He left them in a neat stack on his coffee table, where he would be sure to see them and remember.

Even at normal speed, it didn't take long to do, giving him ample time to sit and worry about the tournament. A few times, his phone rang. At first, he reached to retrieve it, but then stopped himself. What if it was Lois calling? He'd told her that he had plans that day, that he would be too busy to accompany her to the bowling alley. Sighing, he dropped his head and attempted to watch his television. But soon, he was fidgeting in his seat. He needed something to do, to occupy both his mind and his body. Spinning into his Superman suit, he took to the sky, giving Metropolis a quick patrol.

When that uncovered nothing more insidious than one mugging in a back alley in Hobb's Bay, he moved on, crossing the New Troy state line in search of an emergency to which he could lend his aid. For two hours, he found ways to occupy himself, assisting at two car crashes, and stopping a third. He saved a family from a house fire and rescued a puppy that had fallen through a broken sewer grate. Then he was heading back to Metropolis for the tournament.

He felt uneasy as he entered through the doors to the midtown alley. It was a different one than the place where he and Lois had shared some friendly competition. But all alleys were essentially the same. Hiding his unease, he affixed a happy smile to his face as he pushed the doors open and greeted the gathered crowd. Normally, knowing Lois would be there somewhere, he would've search out her heartbeat, because it always soothed him and calmed his nerves. But far too many people were gathered in that too-small place, making it impossible for him to focus his hearing. Regretfully, he had to remain within the realm of normal

hearing.

"Superman! Over here!"

It seemed every paper, television news station, and radio station was there, all clamoring for his attention. He wasn't surprised to see such heavy media coverage. Clark politely waved and dipped his head in acknowledgment, but it was far too noisy in the alley for him to answer questions. Besides, he had to check in with the coordinators and choose the balls he'd be using for the duration of the tournament. Still, as he passed the clusters of onlookers, he had to look for Lois. After a quick scan, he caught sight of her near the front, waving and trying to get his attention. Unable to help himself, he gave her a nod and a smile, and was delighted by the smile he received in return. At the same moment, he could have kicked himself. Why was he continuing to give her some kind of false hope that there could ever be more than just friendship between the superhero and Lois? If he was smart, he would stop encouraging her and, instead, treat her with the same professional courtesy as every other reporter in the city, and hope that she would, in turn, learn to see him for who he was — Clark. But, it seemed, he was completely helpless in her presence.

He moved to the check-in table, but the coordinators had already checked him off on their list. One of them, a seemingly very star-struck young woman, sent him in the direction of lane twelve, almost directly in the middle of the building. He found it with ease, then went to select two bowling balls to use, as it appeared most of the other bowlers had done. Then he sat and waited to see who else would be sent to his lane. It was still early, and only a very few celebrities had arrived.

Not long after, he saw Bruce Wayne, of Gotham City, arrive. The man mutely inclined his head at Clark, ever so slightly, so that only Clark's keen vision could detect the movement. Clark gave the man a more public nod, as he had at every passing newcomer. He had, on a few occasions, lent his aid to Batman with situations that the Caped Crusader could not undertake on his own. One of those nights, a freak set of circumstances had ended with them finding out the other's true identity — secrets they both guarded with their lives. As luck would have it, Bruce was also assigned to lane twelve. Clark shook his hand, pretending to be meeting him for the very first time.

That, at least, was a relief, to have a familiar face there. Of course, he also knew that if he bowled as poorly as he suspected that he would, Bruce would never let him live it down.

For the next forty-five minutes, Clark watched as various television, movie, sports, and music personalities all filtered into the alley. Many made it a point to shake his hand, and Clark happily chatted with each of them, even signing a few autographs for some of them to bring home to their children. In some cases, Clark himself felt a little star-struck as he met celebrities he'd always been a fan of, especially those who made their living playing sports. In those instances, he did his best to keep the unreadable mask of Superman intact. It simply would not do to have the Man of Steel acting like a star-struck fan.

Lex Luthor was there as well, having used his money and influence to become the sole sponsor of the game. Clark wondered if it was because Luthor wanted to look like the benevolent hero who had helped the tournament become a reality, or if it was a way for him to ensure that he didn't need to be lumped in so "common" a group as those who were competing in it. The thought crossed his mind that perhaps both reasons were correct. The billionaire made the rounds, meeting and greeting every single celebrity guest in the place, shaking hands and making small-talk. When it came time for Clark to shake his hand, both men forced as much pleasantness into their demeanors as possible. Clark only hoped that, to the spectators, it hadn't appeared to be as awkward and forced as it had felt.

It was almost a relief when the tournament began. Almost. Soon, it would all be over, then Clark could finally put it behind

him. He would either do poorly and become the butt of numerous jokes, or he would do well and help make a lot of money for charity. In either case, he planned to spend the night relaxing, if possible. Superman would relegate himself only to the very worst emergencies that might arise that night.

The first round started. Clark picked up his ball and prepared to make his first throw. He took a deep, steadying breath and tried to remember all the advice Lois had given him a few days before. One, two, three steps as he brought his arm back. The upswing and the release, but not before he second guessed himself. The ball plopped unceremoniously into the gutter. He tossed his head back and groaned. This was exactly how he hoped things would *not* go.

He heard scattered chuckles ripple throughout the crowd. He supposed it *would* be kind of funny, to see the unstoppable hero struggle with something so simple. The thought made him laugh a little at himself. He picked up his spare ball and repeated the same steps. This time, he was concentrating so hard that he forgot to rein in his strength. The ball flew from his fingertips, albeit in a straight line, and pulverized the pins that stood waiting in neat rows.

“Oops,” he said, blushing a little. “Sorry.”

“Judges?” one of the officials asked, looking for a ruling.

The panel of judges conferred for a moment before nodding in agreement. On the monitor above the alley, a diagonal slash appeared, flashing black before shrinking down and finding a home in the first box next to Superman’s name. A spare. They’d granted him a spare, even though the pins hadn’t technically been knocked down.

One or two dissenters in the audience spoke up, voicing their unhappiness with the ruling.

“He didn’t knock ‘em down!” yelled one young man, louder than all the rest.

“The pins aren’t standing either,” one of the judges calmly replied with a smug smile. “Our ruling stands. Superman gets a spare. But, Superman, let’s try not to destroy any more pins today. Okay?”

Clark bobbed his head in an embarrassed nod. “Sorry about that. It won’t happen again. I promise.”

“Good,” the same woman said, though not without amusement. She gave him genuine smile.

By the end of the first game, Clark was in decent shape. His score fell squarely in the middle, saving him from an early elimination and a great deal of embarrassment, even if it might have been only within his own mind.

From each lane, the lowest scoring celebrities were taken out of the competition, though almost all of them stayed around to cheer on friends and colleagues. A few ducked out early, apologizing to the spectators and citing reasons from early flights to personal reasons. Those who stayed mostly sat in their same seats, cheering on the others, or wandered from lane to lane, talking to those they knew. As before, a few approached Clark to shake his hand and offer a few words about what fans they were of the things that he did and stood for. He gracefully accepted each word of praise, thankful, as he always was, that people really *did* appreciate what Superman did each day.

The next round began. Clark watched as Bruce easily knocked down eight pins with his first throw, then one more with his second. Then it was his turn. He stood and selected one of the balls he’d chosen — a neon blue one with flames painted on it. Aware of everyone’s eyes on him — especially Lois’ gaze — he geared himself up for the throw. The ball shot from his fingertips and for a moment, it looked good. Then, as he carefully stepped backwards, watching the progress, it wobbled off course. Inches from the pins, it finally teetered off the edge of the lane and into the gutter. Clark threw his head back in frustration. After a moment to collect himself, he retreated back to the ball return,

picked up the one that was painted to look like a billiards ball, and took his second throw. This time, four pins went down.

“Nice move, butterfingers,” Bruce said in a confidential whisper as Clark sat down next to him again.

Clark grunted and nodded slightly, but couldn’t think of anything witty to use as a retort.

“Fry?” the other man offered, holding out a large basket of French fries toward Clark.

“Thanks,” Clark said, reaching out with his left hand and grabbing a few of the slender, crinkle cut strips. He bit into one and chewed thoughtfully, eyeing the lane and watching as other competitors took their turns.

And so the day progressed. Clark’s bowling fell somewhere between terrible and terribly mediocre. He barely squeaked by, making it to the third round. The same held true for the fourth as well, where he finally bowled poorly enough to get knocked out of the competition by those who were more talented than he was. With a good-natured grin, he politely sat by, watching the rest of the tournament. With so many bowlers knocked out of the game, the lanes consolidated, with the remaining celebs grouped together into fewer lanes.

Crowded out of his seat, Clark moved, leaning back onto the divider wall between the lanes and the lobby area. He folded his arms before his chest, adopting a relaxed stance as he watched the rest of the game play out. Bruce had been eliminated before Clark had, so he stood to Clark’s side. Every once in a while, Clark would reach over and, since the man had been nice enough to share, steal a fry or two to eat.

After the winner was determined, the celebrity guests stayed to sign memorabilia to be auctioned off to raise more money for their respective charities. Clark signed a number of photographs that the Daily Planet had donated — he recognized Jimmy’s handiwork as he glanced at each glossy photo. He also signed a couple of fabric capes, plush Superman dolls, and S-shield t-shirts as well. He wanted to leave after the signing, but, short of faking an emergency, he didn’t want to be the one person who left at that point of the day. So, instead, he watched the auction.

He was mildly surprised when he saw that Lois wasn’t bidding on anything. He was certain she’d at least attempt to purchase one of the Superman items, enamored as she was with the superhero. Perhaps she was strapped for cash at the moment. He knew what her salary was — he was, after all, on the same pay-scale as she was. And, he also knew that she’d recently had to replace the tires and brake pads on her Jeep. He’d even teased her about taking it easier on her car in the future to prevent as much wear and tear. He did notice, however, that her eyes rarely left him as he stood there amongst the other bowlers.

Finally, the event was completely over. He could leave. Thoughts of a leisurely dinner and some time spent unwinding with a good book filled his brain. He could scarcely wait for the quiet solitude of his apartment after the ear-splitting and constant noise of the bowling alley. If it had been possible for him to suffer from a headache, he knew his head would be throbbing at that point. He looked forward to being alone and not having to listen to anything more than the faint noise of the city beyond the windows of his place.

Just one more obstacle to overcome. The entire lobby was still filled with adoring fans calling out to their favorite celebrities. And beyond that, in the parking lot, standing in knots flanking the doors, stood all of the media personalities, waiting to shove their cameras and microphones into the bowlers’ faces as they called out rapid-fire questions. Squaring his shoulders and putting on a happy face, Clark began to move toward the doors, ready to brave the onslaught.

“Superman!” Cat Grant called out.

Clark swiveled his gaze to her. He wasn’t surprised to see her there. Of course the Planet’s top gossip columnist would have

been at the tournament.

“Superman!” she called again. “Can you comment on your bowling scores today?”

“I’m just glad I was able to participate,” he hedged. “It was a great event for a great cause. I’m very happy with the amount of money we were all able to raise for all those charities today.”

“But what about your scores themselves?” the woman pressed. “It seems like you aren’t too familiar with bowling.”

“I’m familiar enough with it,” he said, shrugging. “I guess it’s just not really my game though. Now, if you’ll excuse me...”

With that, he swept passed her, taking long strides out into the cracked and uneven parking lot that stretched from the bowling alley to the corner of the street. He contemplated just flying off from where he was, but he didn’t want to seem too rude. As he retreated though, a familiar set of footsteps shadowed him.

“Superman?” Lois called out. “A moment?”

Clark groaned inwardly. Normally, he’d love talking to Lois, but all he wanted at the moment was to get home and relax. Then, maybe once he’d had time to unwind, he might give her a call, just to hear the sound of her voice. At the moment though, his sensitive ears were still ringing a little from the hours he’d just spent in the noisy bowling alley.

“Hi, Lois,” he said, stopping and turning to her.

“Hi, yourself,” she said, reaching his side. She gestured away from the crowd. “Can we talk for a minute?”

“Sure,” Clark said, unsuccessfully trying to gage what she wanted to talk about. Perhaps she was looking for an exclusive interview with him?

Lois started to walk away without another word. Confused, Clark followed, keeping just a pace or two behind her.

“Lois?” he ventured after a few feet.

“Just a second,” she replied. “I’d rather speak in private.”

“Uh, sure,” Clark said.

After another minute, Lois paused. Clark realized she was standing by her Jeep. For a second, she merely looked at him, then she crossed her arms and leaned against her rear bumper. Her face changed instantly from normal to serious.

“Is something the matter?” he asked gently.

“You tell me, *Clark*. What could *possibly* be wrong? Other than you lying to me since the moment I met you. No, I don’t want to hear it right now. I’ll meet you back at your apartment and you’d *better* explain yourself. And Kent, don’t you *dare* even think about faking an emergency.”

Clark knew he was standing with his face pale and his mouth hanging agape. Something perked up his ears and he used his super speed to check the area. There, across the way, far enough to be unable to hear Lois but close enough to see her angry expression, Bruce Wayne leaned against his car and laughed. At least someone found his situation funny.

But Lois!

She was going to be mad at him for a long, long time, wasn’t she? How could he explain? How could he make her understand? Would she even trust him when he tried?

He nodded slowly, letting Lois know he would be there, waiting for her at his place. Letting her know that he was ready to come clean and answer all her questions. Letting her know that he wasn’t going to try and deny her accusations. He turned from her and rose silently, slowly, into the air.

“Clark,” she called to him in an even softer voice than she’d managed to use when she’d dropped her bombshell on him.

He paused, but didn’t turn, too afraid to see the scorn he was sure would be there in her eyes.

“If you’d told me before...I could have helped you improve your game more,” she said, and he was infinitely relieved to hear the teasing tone creep back into her voice.

He smiled and laughed as he took off, heading back to his

place. Maybe things wouldn’t be so bad with Lois knowing his secret after all.

THE END