

Arrival of Destiny

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Rated: G

Submitted: September 2015

Summary: Lois has been waiting since she was 19 years old to meet a certain, super-special someone. Sequel to “Vision of Destiny” and Part 2 in the “Destiny” series.

Story Size: 23,673 words (132Kb as text)

Acknowledgements and Comments: This takes place in the Pilot episode. As the story is written completely from Lois’ point of view you will not see any scenes that she was not in. There are also scenes that she *was* in that I have cut out as they have no significant changes or bearing on the story, and I’m pretty sure that most readers know this episode like the back of their hand. Thanks, as always, go to my beta readers, KenJ and Morgana. They are awesome.

Disclaimer: Superman, Clark Kent, Lois Lane and all other character and place names are owned by DC and/or Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman. I own nothing ... except my fantasies — which frequently include Clark/Superman.

This story follows from the author’s [“Vision of Destiny.”](#)

Chapter 1

“Chief, I think there’s a story here and we should have this guy checked out, you know, the crazy one from this morning.” Lois began speaking the moment she burst into the office. Out of the corner of her eye she saw movement, but she continued to talk to Perry. “He was an engineer at EPRAD-”

“Hey, Lois, can’t you see I’m in the middle of something here?” Perry interrupted her.

“Oh.” She glanced around, very slightly embarrassed.

Perry sighed. “Lois Lane.” He pointed to her and then across his desk. “Clark Kent.”

“Nice to meet you,” she replied, automatically. “Anyway he worked on the Messenger,” she babbled, then her mind processed Perry’s words. Clark Kent. She looked up and saw the hand tentatively held out towards her. All the world drifted away and in that second her black and white world became colour. After ceasing beating for a moment her heart resumed its rhythm, but at twice its natural speed.

“Wait, wait, wait, wait a minute. What happened to that mood piece I gave you about the raising of that old theatre on 42nd Street.” Perry gestured slowly with his hands, painting a picture of the kind of article he was hoping for.

“I ...” Lois couldn’t form a thought. All she could do was stare at the man across from her. She couldn’t even order her arm to move so that she could return his handshake. He was wearing a soft brown jacket and white shirt. The yellow, blue and white geometric tie was actually quite subtle. For some reason she’d expected something more ... wild.

“Don’t tell me.” Perry spoke into the silence. “You weren’t in the mood?” Her mouth moved, trying to say something. To agree with Perry’s assessment of the story. To say ‘Hi’ to Clark. To smile at him. Anything. But instead she worried that she just looked like a goldfish in a bowl. “Now look, Lois.” A knocking at the glass window drew her interest. She turned slowly to see

Jimmy gesticulating at her. “You can’t come in here and tell me you-”

“Jimmy.” She spoke slowly, staring straight at Jimmy but not moving, the presence of the man to her right still overwhelming her. Jimmy continued to gesticulate and Perry turned away from her to look behind and see what had caught her eye. When Jimmy replayed his ‘phone’ gesticulation and then added a ‘tapping on his watch’ she finally broke out of her shock and blinked frantically. “I gotta go. I’ll catch you later.”

As she headed for her desk, her mind couldn’t help returning to the man about to be accepted into the Daily Planet family. Her heart continued to beat at double speed. Sitting down she reached for the phone but swivelled her chair so that she could see back into the office. Her hand waivered, trying to find the phone, but missing it. She had to glance back momentarily so that it connected with the receiver. Picking it up she looked back again, a smile coming to her face. He was here. Clark Kent was here. She brought the receiver up to her ear slowly as she watched Clark hold out his hand again. Perry took it and they shook. Her smile turned into a grin and she wrenched her eyes away. Tuning in to the phone at that moment she realised that whoever it was had given up waiting for her. The dial tone played in her ear.

She shrugged. Losing whatever source that had been was of little consequence now. Nothing could dampen her day. Clark Kent had finally arrived in her life. She’d been waiting for him for nearly a decade. Well, about seven years, actually. Looking back to the Editor’s office she saw the door open and watched as Clark exited. Her happiness dissipated as she saw the dejected look on his face. She could read his expressions like a book and at the moment he looked crushed. She frowned and stood. Her first impulse was to go to him. To put her arms around him and comfort him, just like always. But he didn’t know her. And, technically, she didn’t know him either.

She watched as he walked across the newsroom floor then entered the elevator. Her mouth was open in shock. She turned, took five strides, then wrenched open the door to Perry’s office.

“You didn’t hire him?” she challenged.

Perry turned around and settled a disapproving, fatherly look on his face. “What does it say on my door?”

“Um, Editor,” she squeaked out, suddenly feeling chastised.

“Exactly. And, no, I didn’t hire Mr. Kent. He had no experience.”

“He didn’t?” She frowned, feeling her eyebrows crinkle. That didn’t match her memory. But, then again, they weren’t really her memories, and they were fuzzy ... incomplete. Possibly she’d made some presumptions along the years when she tried to fill in those blank areas. “But he’s been all over the world,” she queried. That fact, she was sure of.

“And?” He raised his eyebrows.

“Well. He’s ...” Lois couldn’t bring anything to mind to help in her advocacy of Clark.

“He’s what, Lois?” Perry tilted his head in question, but she heard the condescending tone. “And how do you even know him?”

“I ...” she gulped and crossed her arms defensively. “I don’t.”

“Okay, then. Thank you for your input,” he continued in the same tone. “Now, would you be so kind as to bring me a story I can use for the morning edition?”

She uncrossed her arms, straightened her skirt, then turned and exited the office.

Back at her desk she sank into her chair and turned to her computer screen. Staring at the half complete story she hovered her fingers over the keyboard but then froze.

He wasn’t hired.

How could he have not been hired?

The shock of seeing her future husband, and then losing him, disrupted her thoughts for the rest of the day. She couldn’t write a

coherent sentence, formulate a single theory or confirm any fact with sources. Nothing went correctly for the remainder of the afternoon. Nothing felt right. Nothing **was** right.

At home, later that night, she sat in bed and considered the ironic and prophetic conversation she'd had with her sister when she returned from work.

"I just want you to meet a super guy."

Lois closed her eyes and rested back against the headboard. "You have no idea, Lucy," she murmured to herself, wistfully. "I met him today, you know?" she imagined telling Lucy. "And he really is Super."

She opened her eyes again and looked at the TV, still playing her favourite programme. She was no longer watching, though. The romance that she longed for would no longer be satisfied by *The Ivory Tower* now that Clark had arrived in her life. Reaching for the remote control she switched it off.

"But I expected him to get a job with me, and he didn't." She folded her arms in a huff at the universe. Her destiny had arrived, but then been ripped from her. Why didn't he get the job? This unexpected turn of events set her re-thinking through everything she knew about Clark Kent, and what she might possibly have embellished or presumed over the years. His employment at the Daily Planet was the first thing she considered. She'd always presumed that when he appeared, then the rest of her life would begin. But what if he went to another paper to get experience? What if it was years before he came back to the Daily Planet?

She closed her eyes, reached for the light and plunged the room into darkness.

"Smooth." Jimmy nodded.

"Um, yeah if you like that sort of thing." Standing in Perry's office towards the end of the next day Lois valiantly held back tears. Clark's article about the theatre was moving, and could easily have elicited the tears all by itself, but the real reason for her having to hide her emotions was the chance that he was about to be offered a job this time. From today he could be in her life. Day after day.

And then she'd have to pretend she didn't know who he was. Pretend that he meant nothing to her. Pretend that she wasn't crazily in love with him. Pretend that she hadn't been waiting for him since she was nineteen.

She brushed away the lonesome tear, which had managed to escape, as Perry offered his hand to Clark again.

"You know Kent, there's only one attribute I value more than experience and that's initiative. Clark Kent, welcome to the Daily Planet. Whoops."

Perry extracted his hand before Clark could really shake it. An odd thing for him to do, but she didn't care. Her heart leapt. He was here. Clark Kent was a reporter for the Daily Planet, and she was going to get to know him.

She wanted to be with Clark so badly. Nearly eight years knowing he was coming, knowing what it would be like to be with him, to be loved by him. But no matter how badly she wanted it, the possibility of destroying that future was much worse. Anything she did that was different, that wasn't how she would have *normally* acted, could skew her life into a different future, a different destiny, and she dare not risk that.

Despair had haunted her dreams last night, when she'd realised that everything she'd believed to be secure about her future, was actually completely fragile. In fact, they'd been more 'nightmares' than dream. The possibility that the man she'd been waiting for, been in love with, since her teenage years, was actually not real. He was just a fleeting acquaintance. The perfect marriage she'd been looking forward to was a fantasy. A black emptiness had followed her through the night.

What if everything she remembered, everything she *knew*

about Clark was wrong? What if he wasn't the man she'd fallen in love with over the years?

The future she'd been working towards, looking forward to, aiming for, was a lie.

She'd awakened this morning full of despair and grieving for that lost life.

But now, hope had returned. Clark was here. Only one day later and he'd secured his place at the Daily Planet, his place in her life. And all her dreams came back to life.

Still, the nightmares of last night were a warning. If she didn't play this right ... then she'd lose him. The only guarantee she had, was to act as she always did. Live the life that would have been 'Mad Dog Lane' if she didn't have this knowledge. She was going to have to do a lot of thinking in the days to come. She'd have to work out how she should behave around Clark. How she would feel about him, if he really were a stranger to her.

And that wasn't going to come easy. She'd known him, in her mind, in her memories, since she was nineteen. And she loved him.

Chapter 2

It was less than five minutes after Lois had listened to Clark's story, in Perry's office, and she found herself back in there again.

"I'll need a task force. I can't cover this story alone. Give me Clark."

"Kent's too new. You can have Jimmy." Perry didn't even look up from his desk.

"Chief, we're talking about the space program..."

"Okay. Take Myerson."

"He's busy," Lois crossed her arms.

"Burns."

"Budapest." She injected a disbelieving tone into her voice. How did Perry not remember what his reporters were doing when he'd given the assignments.

"Forget Kent, Lois."

"No, he's good man," Lois moved up to Perry's desk. "If you really feel this way ... think he's a 'hack from Smallville' ... then why did you hire him?"

Perry smiled and finally looked up. "Are you sure this 'Smallville' even exists?" He curled his finger in the air to punctuate the speech marks.

"Of course it does. You couldn't make that name up."

Perry's smile turned into a knowing smirk. "So it's Kent or nobody?"

Lois opened her mouth in shock. Perry had wanted her to take Clark all along, but he'd been testing her. Possibly this was because she'd burst in on him yesterday and argued Clark's case. He was intrigued by how she knew Clark, why she was defending him. She needed to be more careful. Perry couldn't suspect anything about Clark, or 'her and Clark'.

When Perry raised an eyebrow, still waiting for an answer, she tossed her head and turned. At the door she looked back over her shoulder. "And you used to say that I'd never be a team player." She smiled and then left to find Clark.

He was standing near the copy desk, holding some papers. It was impossible not to notice how his brown jacket settled over his wide shoulders. She approached him with caution, her heart pounding rapidly. It was the first time she would really speak with him. She hadn't managed a single word when they'd been introduced yesterday, and she hadn't actually spoken to him earlier, when his work was being read out.

"Hi, Clark," she smiled.

"Hi," he returned and placed down the papers.

"So, Perry's assigned you to help me." She made it seem like she was begrudgingly taking him as partner, terrified he'd figure out how she felt, otherwise — how she was desperate for some time with him.

“Really?” his eyes lit up.

Her heart skipped a beat and she panicked, automatically going into defensive mode and practicing misdirection. “So, let’s hit it.” She turned and walked away.

“Mind if I ask where we’re going?” he chased after her.

“To interview Samuel Platt. He’s convinced the Messenger was sabotaged. Came rushing into the newsroom last week shouting that it was going to explode. Somehow, he knew this was going to happen.”

“Sounds suspicious.”

Lois spun round when she heard the intrigued tone in Clark’s voice.

“Clearly! That’s why we’re visiting him.” She was suddenly overwhelmed by his presence, directly behind her. He was so large, so strong, so handsome. She whirled away, gulping and hyperventilating. She needed some way to get in control. He was going to hear her rapidly beating heart soon. Perhaps he already had!

“And let’s get something straight. I didn’t work my buns off to become an investigative reporter for the Daily Planet just to baby-sit some hack from Nowheresville.” The lie tripping off her tongue tasted rank. She’d worked her buns off *specifically* so that she’d be here, at the Daily Planet, just to meet him. Continuing to the steps she stopped then whirled around on him again. “And another thing. You’re not working **with** me, you’re working **for** me. I call the shots. I ask the questions. You’re low man. I am top banana. And that’s the way I like it. Comprene?” Striding off to the elevator he replied just as she past the door.

“You like to be on top. Got it.”

Her mouth dropped open, in shock. Had she really just given him that horrible attitude. He’d never fall in love with her if she behaved in that manner. And he’d turned her attitude into a joke with his reply. This was a disaster.

He entered the elevator and stood off to the side.

“I ... I’m sorry Clark. I’m not used to working with a partner,” she stuttered. She didn’t elaborate because it would have meant explaining that she’d rejected every previous partner because ... because they weren’t him. She turned and looked up at him, smiling shyly.

His stunned look reminded her of the unusual situation she was in, and she whipped her head back to look at the closing elevator doors. A tear squeezed out of the corner of her eyes and she held herself stiffly to keep from shaking.

“Lois ...” he spoke tentatively. “I’ve never worked with a partner before, either.” His voice was soft. “We’ll work it out together. Okay?” He sounded hopeful.

“Together,” she whispered. A memory of how ‘together’ they would be struck her and she recalled his sarcastic retort to her rant. ‘*You like to be on top.*’ Her heart rate accelerated when she began imagining being ‘on top’ at the same time as being ‘together’.

Lois wandered around the cluttered, rundown ... rooms. She couldn’t in all conscience call it an apartment, although clearly Dr. Platt was living here. He’d prattled on, in his softly spoken voice, about reports, and particles, and other scientific things that she didn’t understand. But, thankfully, Clark seemed to. Dr. Platt was currently travelling backwards and forwards, collecting, what seemed to be, random bits of mismatched paper.

“Dr. Platt, perhaps you could gather your report together some other time. I’ll have somebody come by and pick it up.” She encouraged him to stop, and calm down. The whole situation had her head buzzing. She took a deep breath and glanced down at the table where the papers were slowly gathering into an uneven pile.

Sitting at the edge of the desk was a photograph in a plain wooden frame. Lois recognised the man in the photo as Dr. Platt.

He was smiling, along with the woman and girl by his side. There was another photograph, slid into the corner, of the same three people, although clearly the young girl was a few years older now. Again, all three were smiling. Lois reached out and picked up the photograph.

Family.

She immediately had the overwhelming feeling of family, love, commitment, reliability, responsibility.

Ten years ago these things, these feelings, would have meant something completely different to her. Her parent’s marriage had been full of arguments, resentment, selfishness and blame. But she lived with the memories of a different marriage now. A marriage that was good, pure, giving, supportive.

Lois could suddenly feel Clark’s presence behind her, even though he was still at the other side of the room. She was overwhelmed by a longing to experience her own family. Now that Clark was here that longing had changed into an impatient desire, rather than a wistful waiting.

“My wife. We planned to live together on the Prometheus,” Dr. Platt explained.

“Where’s your family now?” Lois knew that they didn’t live here. No woman would live in this mess, and the girl ... well it was clear from the photograph that she was disabled. She sat in a wheelchair. But there was no possible way that a wheelchair could navigate this place.

“Gone. They left when ... well, it’s all for the best.”

Lois looked back at the picture once more. All three of the looked so happy. She knew that happiness. In her memories of her marriage to Clark. She would never consider, ever, leaving him. It seemed so strange to think that this woman could consider leaving her husband when she was so clearly perfectly happy with him, and their family. Even though they had a disabled daughter Lois could see the unconditional love in both parents’ eyes. Dr. Platt was telling the truth ... that his wife and daughter were not here, with him, but Lois could not believe that they had simply ‘left’.

She looked back up at the short, plump man but saw the pain in his eyes. He wouldn’t talk about his family if she pushed too much, so she changed the subject back to the reason for this investigation.

“Dr. Platt, who would want to sabotage space station Prometheus?”

“I don’t know. See the microgravity laboratory on Prometheus could be the key to curing hundreds of diseases here on earth. In a zero-gravity environment we can actually separate the proteins that form viruses and so many children with crippling diseases, my daughter, we could cure them.” When Dr. Platt mentioned his daughter Lois looked back to the picture in her hand one last time.

She placed it back down, realising that this was so much more than just a factual story. People had died, but also, people would continue to die ... if this really did turn out to be deliberate. The Messenger exploding by accident would be classed as a tragedy, and only one life was lost. Yet if it was deliberate, as Platt claimed, then someone was interfering in the development of medicine in a large way, and millions of lives could be lost.

She turned to Clark. “I think you and I should pay Dr. Baines a visit.”

Chapter 3

Lois glared at the woman flirting with her husband ... well, future husband.

“Let me know if I can be of any further assistance,” she offered, and fluttered her eyelashes.

“Thank you,” came the reply from Clark, followed by his devastating smile. Jealousy coursed through her body and took up

residence in her stomach. How dare he return her flirtations? He was supposed to be attracted to her. Theirs was a lifetime love ... a soul mate bond.

She turned to look at Clark, and for the first time since she'd seen him yesterday, experienced negative feelings towards him. She narrowed her eyes and included him within her glare.

Her jealousy grew even stronger as they walked away and he began to defend the lady scientist.

"She seemed cooperative."

"I don't trust her." Whether that was reporter's instinct or jealous wife emotions she really couldn't tell at the moment.

"Very attractive." He paused. "Young for a woman in her position."

"Typical," Lois accused.

"What?"

"That's a typical male response."

"Lois, trust me on this. I am not your typical male." He sounded almost amused ... thinking he knew something that she didn't.

"Don't I know it," she mumbled.

"What?" Clark exclaimed, almost looking scared.

"Well, a typical man would have found some excuse to feel my behind, or stare at my chest or ... or even ask me out by now, but you haven't done any of that." Lois realised that her jealousy had driven her to overt flirtation, challenging him over his lack of interest in her. She'd even pushed her chest out at that word, to emphasise her point. Lois noticed Clark's 'deer-in-headlights' look and felt even more daring. "Or maybe you don't like women. Do you prefer men?" she asked innocently.

"No!" he protested and she noticed him glance down to her chest. "No, I ... I definitely prefer women, Lois." He took a deep breath. "In fact ..."

Lois saw Clark's face change from worried to nervous. She suddenly had a clear memory of him standing at the top of the newsroom stairs and saying, 'can I ask you something?'. Her patchy, stolen memories immediately knew that he was attempting to ask her out.

Panic gripped her. It was too early. There's no way that she would have considered Clark Kent as a romantic partner if she didn't already know her future. Not willing to risk that future she turned away from Clark and put on an air of indifference, speaking before he could complete his sentence. "Anyway, we should be getting back to the office." She strolled away and tried to still her wildly beating heart.

Jimmy was giving Clark a tour around the office now that they had returned, as he hadn't gotten one before she'd whisked him off to EPRAD earlier. Filling her coffee cup she felt the two men pass behind her. A flow of air seemed to convey Clark's presence to her. The smile on her face had to be suppressed quickly when Cat sidled up beside her.

"Who's the new tight end?" she growled.

Lois felt her heart stop in terror. Cat could not be allowed anywhere near her Clark. She whirled around with a coffee stirrer in her hand and waived it directly in Cat's face. "Stay away from Clark Kent." Lois immediately knew she'd said the wrong thing when a knowing look crept over the other woman's face. Her lips twitched and her eyebrow rose. Lois left before Cat could say anything, stalking over to her desk as quickly as possible.

She turned in time to see Clark approach the coffee desk and Cat swivel, purposefully, into his way. "Excuse me," he said.

"Catherine Grant." Lois watched as Cat held out her hand. Clark took it and shook it very awkwardly. "Cat's Corner."

"Oh yeah, I've read your column," Clark replied, with a much too friendly tone for Lois' liking. Cat shifted her glance, momentarily catching Lois' gaze. She felt a scowl come over her face, but the underdressed woman had already given her attention

back to Clark.

"Oo, oh. Then my reputation precedes me."

"Among other things," Lois murmured to herself. Clark turned his head slightly and she realised that he'd heard. Of course. If she'd been on the other side of the room he'd still have heard.

"You know, I know what it's like to be new in town. Lonely. I'd be happy to show you around."

"Uh, that's very nice of you Ms Grant." He continued his friendly tone.

"Cat."

"Cat," he repeated.

"Don't do it Clark," Lois pleaded, in the quietest whisper.

"Uh, maybe when I get settled."

Cat patted Clark's chest then wandered off. "It's a date."

Lois' mouth dropped open in hurt. She felt the tears threaten at the corner of her eyes. Again, her patchy stolen memory screamed at her. This wasn't right. Clark was for her, and her alone. He wasn't allowed to date other women. Just her. But what if this was one of the gaps she'd filled in herself, with her own fantasies of what Clark was like.

Maybe she had to let him date Cat first. Maybe Clark wasn't hers ... yet.

The pain that hit her chest was almost unbearable and the first tear fell.

"Lois?" came a soft voice from behind. "Lois, what is it?"

Her heart skipped around in her chest. "Clark. Nothing's wrong. Just got something in my eyes." She turned around and plastered a bright smile on her face. "Eyelash, I think." She began to swivel back round when Clark's hand on her chair stalled the movement.

"Want me to look?" He smiled at her and dropped to his haunches.

Lois widened her eyes in panic. "No, uh no. It's okay. It'll come out soon enough."

His expression changed from caring to unsure at her brush off. "All right." He nodded slowly and then stood.

Once he'd left she returned to her computer screen and resisted the impulse to drop her head into her arms in mortification, as that would **definitely** not be something that original Lois would ever do. Thinking about this a lot had left Lois with the sure knowledge that she would have never let Clark get to her this way the first time around. In fact, she probably would have been acting completely superior. She **was** superior to Clark ... at least in a journalism sense.

Somehow she had to act in that manner, now. She had to pretend that Clark Kent meant nothing to her. No words he said could affect her. No dating decisions would bother her. And no offers to look for rogue eyelashes would ever be accepted!

Lois glared at the phone. Mitchell had cancelled. She couldn't go to the ball without a date. Well, maybe she could, but it was a waste of a ticket. She glanced over at Clark, who was fiddling with something on the desk opposite. Suddenly she was assailed by the memory of his arms around her. They'd danced, on many occasions, in her stolen memories. On the floor, and in the air ... above the clouds. If she asked him to replace Mitchell then maybe they could dance tonight.

Lois' breath hitched as she stood slowly. Walking over to Clark, on unsteady legs, she reminded herself to take a superior tone. As the memories of being held close to that strong chest washed over her once more she found it impossible to keep a smile of anticipation from creeping onto her face.

Lois reminded herself to act superior. OL would have been superior. She'd taken to referring to the real owner of her memories as OL, although whether that stood for Old Lois, Other Lois or Original Lois, she didn't know. But then she began to

consider that OL might not have even wanted to go with Clark at all.

She arrived at Clark's desk and her heart dropped. There would be no slow dance with Clark tonight. OL had to prevail.

He looked up at her. "Everything all right, Lois?"

"Sure," she nodded. "Just wondering what you're still doing here? I mean it's not as if you've got a story to write up. You haven't been assigned anything solo ... and I'm not ready to write the story yet. So ..." she allowed her voice to trail off. Hopefully that had sounded kind of superior.

"Oh. I guess I just didn't want to leave yet. You know. First day and all. I didn't want the feeling, the excitement, to end." He smiled at her and her heart melted. She could never resist that smile. It was the most handsome, loveable, trustworthy, wonderful ... super ... smile in the world.

"Well, all good things ... you know," she continued, trying to stay superior.

"Yeah ... must come to an end. I guess I should go back to my hotel room. I'll see you tomorrow, Lois."

As she watched him stand, reach for his jacket on the back of the chair, and then head for the elevator, she experienced a profound sense of loss. She wouldn't get to feel his hands at the base of her spine. She wouldn't feel his breath whisper, warmly, past her ear.

"I don't suppose you own a tuxedo?" she called out, suddenly, not able to keep the words from spilling out.

He turned and looked at her, a slightly teasing smile on his face. "I could get one."

She grinned at him, immediately overwhelmed by excitement for the coming evening, and possible dancing. "Great!"

Chapter 4

Lois watched as Lex Luthor descended his stairs. She needed to capture his attention. Somehow she was going to get this interview with the world's third richest man. But all she could think about was the tingle down her spine that told her someone was watching *her* as *she* watched Lex. That 'someone' was Clark. They'd arrived separately, but she'd been watching the door from the moment she arrived. When she saw him step inside, in his perfectly shaped tuxedo, she'd nearly melted to the floor in a puddle of goo.

Immediately she'd turned away. Knowing Clark was here was a relief, and now she was free to pursue her main goal for the evening.

"Lex Luthor," she shouted. "Why haven't you returned my calls?"

The slim, impeccably dressed man turned and looked at her with surprise.

"Lois Lane. Daily Planet." She held out her hand and he took it.

"Well, I can assure you, I'll never make that mistake again." His smile, although suave and handsome, did nothing for her. Another smile came to mind and she couldn't help that she returned it. Lex obviously thought her pleasure was directed at him and he drew closer, bringing his arm around her waist.

It was not the arm she wanted around her, but it was a means to an end. She **would** get this interview.

"I hope you'll forgive me for being so bold—" she began.

"Boldness is a trait I find very attractive in a woman, Miss Lane," he butted in, just as a flash of lightning and a thunder clap resounded around the room. Lois felt a little joy at his flattery. Even though she was not attracted to Lex, and her heart belonged to someone else for all eternity, it was nice to be admired. Although, Lex clearly found the boldness trait to be something a powerful man should have, too, as he'd whisked her into his arms and onto the dance floor without actually asking. He'd just presumed, and then taken.

"Thank you. Anyway, I was wondering, Mr Luthor—"

"Lex." He twirled her around as another flash of lightning and clap of thunder betrayed the terrible weather outside.

"Lex," she repeated. "I know that you're hesitant to give interviews—"

"Well you can understand a man in my position. I wouldn't want to be misinterpreted. And I have had one or two bad experiences with the media."

Lois felt a little uncomfortable. So far Lex had interrupted every single sentence she started. It was quite rude, but somehow he managed to make it seem quite the opposite. "But not with me." She tried to look as open and trustworthy as possible.

"So, why don't we make it ... dinner." He whispered into her ear, getting just a little too close to her neck for comfort. Her heart skipped a beat. The third richest man in the world was asking her on a date. She was under no misconception what Lex was after. But he wouldn't get it. Instead, she would get him. An in-depth, no-holds-barred interview. And she was beginning to suspect there might be more to Lex than she'd ever considered. His attitude toward her in just the last few minutes, while being flattering, had also disturbed her.

"Mind if I cut in?"

"Clark!" she smiled in relief. "Lex, this is Clark Kent. Clark works at the Planet." Her smile was all for Clark although she glanced back and forth between the two men.

"A pleasure." He barely acknowledged Clark before turning back to Lois. "Later then."

Clark slid his arms around her and she sighed in contentment. She let her arms drift up to his shoulders and she allowed her gaze to meet his. She immediately recognised the look on his face. Awe and devotion. Already! Possibly she was not as good at interpreting his face as she thought. Maybe this was another thing she'd embellished over the years because there was no way he felt like that already. For one thing, he'd agreed to a date with Cat!

Remembering that made her stomach churn. Her anger towards Cat reminded her to act superior to Clark.

"I would have thought square dancing was more your style."

"Actually I learned from a Nigerian princess who studied ballroom dancing in England."

"Really? How fascinating." Her jealousy doubled with that knowledge and she pushed away from him and strode off. Her tears fell freely as she raced to find some place to be alone.

"Wait, where are you going?" he called out after her but she continued to push through the crowds. Spying a closed door she aimed for it, hoping it indicated an off limits room and also hoping that it was open.

It was both, but unfortunately, the man she was trying to distance herself from followed her in.

"Lois, what are you doing in here?" he challenged her, grabbing her arm, gently, and turning her. She knew that he immediately saw her tears as his disapproving tone vanished. "Lois," he whispered. "What's wrong? Did I do something?" He looked terrified that he might be the cause of her tears. She definitely remembered this look. He was always blaming himself for whatever might upset her.

"You. Why ever would you think you could upset me? We've know each other for a day, Kent. And you certainly haven't impressed me in that time. You mean nothing to me." Clearly her jealousy was still in control.

He let go of her arm and stepped backwards. He looked devastated. But Lois couldn't trust her interpretations of his face any longer. She'd been convinced she saw love in his eyes earlier, and there was no way that could be correct.

"Then—" Clark paused, shifted on his feet and put his hands in his pocket. "Then what is it, Lois? And can I help?"

Lois had to turn away. Clark had suppressed his own hurt and

immediately made her well-being his priority. This was the man she had fallen in love with. Her jealousy faded. The anger dissipated. All that was left was hurt and disappointment. While she knew that they would have the most perfect marriage in the future, she'd forgotten in the last seven years, that he wasn't hers yet. There would be other women. First Cat, and now a Nigerian Princess. How many more would there be before he turned to her?

"You can't, Clark. In fact, there's nothing to help." She turned back around, smiling. She knew the tracks of her tears would still be on her cheeks but she hoped she could explain them satisfactorily. "I'm just overwhelmed by finally meeting Lex Luthor. He's agreed to an interview with me. I've been after this for so long that I'm completely shocked and overwhelmed."

Clark looked at her and nodded slowly. She got the feeling he didn't believe her, probably due to her using the same, unimaginative, word twice within two sentences. Not very good for someone who was supposed to make her living from putting words together, in the best possible order, to make interesting articles.

He drew a hand out of his pocket and a handkerchief came with it. "Here you go, Lois." He held it out tentatively and she reached forward to grab it just as the door opened and their host walked in.

Striding swiftly down the sidewalk Lois replayed the embarrassment of last night's discovery in her mind. It gave her adrenaline to keep pushing through all the pedestrians blocking her way. Having Lex Luthor walk in, as Clark was handing her a handkerchief, was mortifying. Not to mention that they had been in an off-limits room.

Thankfully Clark had been especially adept at putting their host at ease. But, in contrast, Lois hadn't liked Lex's treatment of Clark. Lois had already figured out that Lex's reason for allowing an interview was more man/woman than reporter/subject. Entering the room at the moment he did quite possibly gave him the wrong idea about her relationship with Clark. The green-eyed, jealousy monster seemed to be having a prolific evening.

"Morning," came the sexy voice from just behind her. Her traitorous heart skipped a beat immediately. She closed her eyes and was immediately back in a dream from the previous night.

A voice whispered 'morning' into her ear as she cooked the eggs. She turned around to see him dressed in tight blue and red. Smiling and sighing at the same moment she let her eyes roam over his body, the shape of which was barely concealed by his costume.

"Morning," she replied in almost a whisper as she opened her eyes. She was seriously out of breath, possibly a combination of the brisk walk and the sudden proximity of Superman. Stopping to catch that breath she turned to properly greet Clark. He looked so perfect, so handsome in his soft blue denim shirt and brown jacket. She couldn't help but smile at him. He looked at her in confusion, for a second, then his smile returned. It looked as if he was about to speak when an explosion rocked the ground.

Lois turned and rushed in the direction of the dust cloud.

"Hey. There's a man down there. Call the fire department. We need help." The shout came from someone crouched on the floor.

Lois turned to look at Clark. His face was a picture of horror. Lois didn't know what to say to Clark. She felt her mouth move but nothing came out. There was no Superman. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Was this another fantasy she had added on to 'Clark Kent'. What if Clark Kent really was just a sweet Kansas farm boy and nothing more?

"Back off, back off. People ... back. Get back. There's a man down here. Back off, okay." The call came even more urgently from the soot-blackened worker and Lois swivelled back.

A small breeze behind her caused her to hold her breath. Was

that what she thought? She looked back but Clark was nowhere to be seen.

"Get these people back."

A commotion in the smoke drew her attention and she saw a man seemingly climb out of the manhole. He began coughing and was then dragged clear of the hole by someone else. Lois felt her heart speed up in anticipation and hope. Was this proof that Superman wasn't her own fantasy? Was this actually even Superman's debut?

A brush at her elbow had her turning in surprise. Clark was back.

"That man. That man saved me. That man ... pulled me out." Lois eyes widened when the rescued worker pointed to Clark.

"He's delirious," Clark claimed.

"Obviously." Lois injected as much disgust into her voice as possible. She didn't want the people standing around getting any ideas. Noticing Clark's attire she had an epiphany. "You're a mess. From now on do what I do. Bring a change of clothes to work."

As she strode off, Clark following and trying to brush away the dirt, she brought her hand up to her mouth. Had she just given Clark the idea for Superman? What if he wasn't supposed to have the idea yet. Surely OL wouldn't have suggested such a thing.

Chapter 5

Lois watched through the conference room windows and saw Clark being accosted by Cat. Cat practically draped herself all over him. Lois tut-ted in disgust. Clark, thankfully, managed to end the conversation quickly, sliding his tie out of Cat's grasp, but not without bringing out that devastating smile. Cat would never stop trying to get her claws into him as long as he used that irresistible weapon.

Unable to restrain the jealousy inside she immediately jumped on him when he opened the conference room door. "Cat-napping?"

He raised his eyebrows and slid into a chair. "Anything?" he asked while motioning towards the papers scattered around, clearly ignoring her comment. Lois didn't know if he was ignoring it because she was clearly being catty herself — insulting a fellow worker — or possibly because there was nothing for her to worry about, or possibly because it was actually none of her concern and she should just butt out of his life?

"I must have called fifty ex-employees who worked at EPRAD when Platt did. None of them are talking. I don't know, maybe there's nothing to talk about." She chose to ignore his lack of comment and just get on with the investigation.

"So, what do we do now?"

"Well, first, we piece together Platt's report, if that's possible. Then, we try and figure out a way to prove that Dr. Baines got a copy of it and if there's any written evidence that Platt found coolant devices and Baines ignored it ... I hope you didn't make dinner plans."

Clark rested his arms along the divider at the edge of the desk. "I am all yours." He dropped his chin onto his arms and grinned at her. She had to look away. Those words coming from Clark's mouth had been her undoing. He quite clearly meant them in a professional capacity, but oh how she wished they were personal instead.

Focussing on the papers covering the desk she began to move them around, but couldn't concentrate on any of them. She'd spent more than a day getting to know the real Clark Kent rather than a fuzzy stolen memory of Clark Kent, and she was more in love with him than ever. Funny, how your fantasies and heroes don't usually live up to reality. Not in this case. Clark was so much more in reality. Being able to talk to him, touch him, smile at him, laugh with him ... he surpassed all her expectations.

And he'd just said 'I'm all yours'. The fluttering in her abdomen was almost too much to bear. She had to fight the impulse to run to the rest room and bring up the contents of her stomach.

Hours later and, while she had managed a little bit of success when it came to her runaway heart, there was no success with their investigation. Papers had been sorted into piles and then checked, often moving between piles on the second look-through and back again on a third.

"This is impossible. Nothing matches, no dates... We're never gonna get through this..." She stuck her pencil behind her ear. "Oh, and I'm starving. I wish I knew some good Chinese take-out."

"I know a place. I'll be right back." Clark pushed his chair away and stood without waiting for her response.

"Don't you even want to know what I want?" She frowned. She was pretty sure she could guess Clark's favourite meal but there's no way he could know hers yet.

"I'll bring an assortment." She nodded and he disappeared. An assortment of Chinese would be nice. She returned to the scattered papers and tried, once again, to categorise them, or match them, in some way, in *any* way.

As she crossed another paper off her 'no date found' list she suddenly realised that Clark had said he knew a Chinese place. He'd only been in Metropolis two days. And he'd spent most of that time here, or with her at Lex's ball. So, actually, he'd spent the last two days with her.

How did he know a good Chinese takeaway already? Maybe there was one near his hotel. She shrugged and returned to work.

Unexpectedly a set of bamboo containers appeared on the papers she was looking at. "That was quick."

"I took a short cut," he explained.

As Clark took off his jacket Lois began opening the nearest container. "Mmm... still hot." Taking out a dumpling she bit into it, vigorously, then had to hold herself a little stiff when the heat and flavour took her by surprise. "Mmm," she moaned. "This is out of this world."

Her eyes widened as she suddenly realised how close to being true that statement probably was. Clark's short cut ... probably took him all the way to China. And it was still hot because ... well, the air at 10,000 feet was probably pretty cold so his short cut wasn't responsible for the heat ... his eyes were.

As they ate Clark tried a little small talk with her, but she was so nervous that she brushed off all his comments and questions and focussed on the food. Sitting as stiffly as possible she devoured everything in sight. Clearly she was comfort eating. But, as she wasn't actually relaxing, instead, getting more and more uncomfortable, maybe it should have been called 'nervous eating'.

She reached for a fortune cookie, to finish off the meal, and noticed Clark's smile from the corner of her eye. Was he thinking that she was an overeater, or a greedy eater? He seemed to find her amusing anyway. That wasn't good. He was supposed to find her adorable and irresistible.

She sat back and cracked open the fortune. "It's in Chinese," she whispered in delight. It proved her earlier theory. She turned to look at Clark and her eyes widened. He really was ... different. She couldn't wait till she shared in his whole life.

He reached out and took the piece of paper from her. She grinned. It was quite easily believable that he'd be able to read it.

"A good horse is like a member of the family."

"What?" Her smile dropped. "I hate that. That is not a fortune."

Clark laughed and smiled, his eyes warm and deep. She frowned, childishly.

"Well, it isn't. A fortune says something like ... 'Today you

will meet a dark haired stranger' or 'Beware the man with the pimple on the end of his nose'."

When Clark laughed again she realised that she actually had, finally, relaxed. "I once got a fortune that said 'Don't leave the house tomorrow or you will lose your car keys.'." Lois smiled at that comment from Clark. "I don't own a car," he continued, and she laughed.

"How about ... 'You will eat again tomorrow'?" Lois volunteered and picked up her coffee for a swig

"Good one. Um ... 'The Red Sox will win the world series.'"

"Wear pink. It suits you."

"A man in blue will change your life."

Lois sprayed her coffee all over the stack of papers on her desk and stared at Clark. Did he know? Sometimes it seemed like he did, like ... maybe ... he'd had the same kind of experience as her.

He reached out with a napkin to wipe up the moisture on the paperwork. "Sorry, did that hit too close to home? Maybe you had an experience with a police officer, or something?" he queried.

"Um, nope. No police officer. No ... man in blue." She gulped and tried to smile. "So, uh ... maybe 'Eat another cookie. You can always exercise more tomorrow.'"

Clark obviously caught on to her avoidance and picked up the game again. "'Cut your hair tomorrow.'"

"Don't trust the next person you see."

"Your best friend will go on a foreign vacation next year."

"Never try to open a can of beans with your teeth."

"What about 'The next phone call will be from your brother's neighbour's cat'?"

Lois giggled. "I don't have a brother."

"Well, then that fortune is going in the trash," Clark deadpanned and threw the original paper over his shoulder.

Lois' giggles turned into real laughter and she had to clutch at her stomach. "I think we're ... about done ..." she managed to wheeze out. Looking up she found Clark smiling back at her. The laughter suddenly died. She straightened up, removing her hands from her stomach. Clark leaned a little closer.

"Lois," he whispered.

Another memory ... hundreds of snippets of memory ... told her what was coming next. Panic mode set in. "Don't," she whispered in terror, her eyes wide.

Clark stared back at her, frozen. After a wait, that was both too short and too long, he pulled away and turned to start collecting the takeout containers. Lois felt an incredible sense of loss. She'd just stopped Clark from kissing her. She was sure. But why? She had a list ... of three things she missed ... three things she was waiting for. Kissing Clark was one of those three things. She longed for it, every day, since *that* day ... when it had all started, when she'd 'acquired' these memories. And she'd panicked.

She busied herself, tidying her side of the table. Once the cartons were dealt with she spied the mess of paperwork, now revealed again.

"Come on," she sighed. "Let's go find Platt. Maybe he can help us decipher this."

Chapter 6

The cab ride over to Platt's apartment felt strained. Not only were they both, clearly, frustrated with the lack of progress in piecing together the report ... and therefore the lack of progress for the whole investigation, but Lois was having to deal with her own inexplicable behaviour.

She was supposed to be aloof, cynical, superior. Well, at least, pretend ... act ... that way. Instead she'd got into a cute verbal sparring match, seeing who could come up with the most

ridiculous fortune cookie saying. And then, to make matters worse, Clark had made a move on her ... which she'd rejected. Why would she ever reject a romantic move from the man she was totally in love with?

As the cab pulled up at the side of the road she began to re-evaluate her theories once more. OL would not have been interested in Clark Kent. She would have considered herself superior. But then, how did he fall in love with her? Maybe he didn't fall in love with her until a few years had gone by, and she'd softened towards him. In that case, why did she keep seeing his 'adoring' face whenever he looked at her? He couldn't possibly already be in love with her. And if he was ... then why was she fighting it? Why was she acting superior and ... horrible to him ... when she just wanted to be with him?

She slammed the door to the cab and strode out into the night, pushing through the junk to get to Dr. Platt's doorway. Worryingly, it was slightly ajar ... at five in the morning!

"Lois," Clark called, as a light flickered through the door. "Lois, let me look first." He gently took her arm.

"Don't be silly. I've seen it all, okay? War, crime, famine..." She continued to push into the apartment. Typical of Clark, always trying to protect her. While one part of her loved it, another part needed to prove to herself, and Clark, that she was perfectly capable ... herself.

Inside the apartment it became clear that the flickering light effect was not from the standard light bulbs. Lois noticed the light switch and flicked it back and forth. No lights came on ... or went off. Nothing.

As she advanced further into the room she could see a high backed chair. The subdued, flickering seemed to be coming from that direction.

"Dr. Platt?" she called out. A gentle touch on her arm stopped her again.

"Wait. Wait. The water..." Clark pointed to the puddle of water that could be seen surrounding the chair.

Lois continued to inch forward, an ominous feeling settling in the pit of her stomach. Clark was continuing his protective behaviour, standing as close as would be accepted for working partners who might be in a dangerous situation. He followed her as she peered around the chair. When the scene came fully into view it only took a second to sear it on her mind forever.

She started to sway. The world faded, her vision blurred and there was a buzzing sound in her ears. She felt a pair of arms surround her and she melted into Clark's embrace. Turning her face and burying it in his jacket she suddenly felt her strength return again. She was safe. She was in Clark's arms, item number three on her list, and it felt like coming home.

Sparks of lightning were flickering all around her.

"Suicide? That's ridiculous."

Darkness was interspersed with random light patterns.

"The man's name was Samuel Platt. He was brilliant, a scientist, and **someone** who cared about others."

An electrical popping sound fizzed around her head.

"We should have known. We should have protected him."

A heavy weight was on her heart.

"It's only six. Why don't we try and get a few hours sleep. I'll come by for you at nine."

Suddenly there was something constricting her. Tight arms held her still, held her close. She burrowed her face into the chest holding her closely. There was no worry, no fear. Even though she couldn't move she was safe. She squeezed her arms up and snaked them round his neck. Burrowing higher with her face she came upon his neck.

His arms tightened around her, if that were even possible.

Giving in to all the sensations raging through her body she parted her lips and tasted the skin at the junction of his neck and

shoulder. Moving higher she found his earlobe and began to nibble.

His hands were under her t-shirt, roaming freely. His lips found hers. He pulled her closer and she felt their, suddenly bare, chests meet.

Lois cried out as he lowered her to the bed. "Yes, Clark." He nuzzled just under her ear and then began to trail down her body. At her stomach he stopped and kissed her belly button then looked up and grinned at her. She loved that grin. It was a combination of cute, shy, little boy and sexy, confident, virile ... man.

He kissed his way back up, stopping to investigate her sensitive chest and then continuing back to her lips, where he began to tease. His heavy weight, pinning her to the bed, was comforting, familiar. His legs tangled with hers, the sheets tangled in among them.

She reached for him, emotions spiralling higher and higher, until ...

An unwelcome beeping sound intruded. She forcefully opened her bleary eyes and turned to see the alarm clock. A weary hand reached over to shut off the intrusive sound. Once the room had returned to its silent state Lois flopped back and brought her arm up to her forehead. Closing her eyes again she could feel Clark's hands on her. It was so real. Her skin tingled where he'd stroked with his fingertips, it burned where he'd kissed.

But she knew if she opened her eyes and looked to the side then her bed would be empty. He wouldn't be there.

Over the years she'd dreamed of Clark, on occasion. Never before had it been so vivid. The dreams usually felt ethereal, emotional. On extremely rare occasions she dreamed, what she presumed, were real events that had happened to OL, but they never lasted long, or revealed any pertinent information.

But this one...

Her heart was still racing and she felt ... unfulfilled.

She dropped her head down, cradling it in her hands, and took a deep breath. It wouldn't do to dwell on this, or to let her emotions out. Her list ... the three things she was waiting for, desperately, had something missing. Something that didn't make the list. Not because it wasn't as good as the other three, not because she didn't miss it.

Because ... she thought about the things on her list a lot. She dwelt on them, fantasised about them. If she put ... making love to Clark ... on the list, then she'd think about it. Too much. Too often. And she'd be emotionally crippled for the rest of the day.

It didn't go on the list.

It couldn't go on the list.

It surpassed the list.

She dragged her hands down her face. Pushing the tangled sheets to one side she stormed out of her bed and into the bathroom, determined to face the day in control, rather than filled with longing.

She'd told Clark she'd pick him up at nine, and there was no way she would be late. There was so much to do in this investigation and she intended to show up on time ... looking fresh, looking beautiful.

"I said nine. I thought you'd be naked ... ready." Memories of last night's dream assaulted her. If that towel fell ... she wouldn't be complaining. In fact, if Clark just grabbed her and dragged her over to the bed ... then she'd be completely willing.

"I was on the phone. I'll be out in jiff." He strode off, the towel riding low on his hips. It must have been extremely tightly secured because Clark seemed to be very trusting that it would stay in place as he wandered over to the bathroom. Lois kept a vigilant eye over every moment of his body. As the door closed behind him she sighed in great disappointment. That one look at

his bare chest had confirmed that last night's dream was pretty accurate and it had reawakened all her unfulfilled longings.

She was still staring at the blank bathroom door, lost in her memories, when it opened and Clark emerged, fully dressed, only thirty seconds later. She widened her eyes in shock and turned away. She was both scared — that he'd wonder why she was staring after him — and confused — that he'd get himself dressed so quickly and give himself away.

She turned back and looked him up and down, sighing. He was so good-looking, so handsome, and his body was shaped in the most perfect way. Clark clearly noticed her reaction and looked down at his attire then back up at her, questioningly.

A sudden dryness in the mouth had her licking her lips. "Uh, do you have anything to drink. I'm parched." She breezed around the room and noticed a glass on the counter. She picked it up and turned to the refrigerator.

"Lois ..." he began, as she reached for the handle on the refrigerator. "I ... uh," he continued. She glanced back to him, when he sounded nervous. What was he nervous about?

"What?" she questioned, frowning.

"Um, well," he stuttered as she opened the door. The sight which greeted her was both a shock and familiar. The shelves were stuffed full of junk food. She turned to look, once more, at Clark. She knew what was hiding under that smart suit. And she knew that he didn't need to worry about calories.

His embarrassed look shocked her back into reality. She needed to be Mad Dog Lane. She needed to be OL.

"We'd better go," she spoke, stiffly, and closed the refrigerator, placed the cup back down, and headed for the door. "It's not fair," she grumbled. She suddenly turned to him, stopping in the doorway.

"What's not fair?"

"That you can eat like an eight-year-old but look like Mr. Hardbody."

He looked a little nervous — as if she would ask him how that was possible. "I guess I'm just blessed with a fast metabolism."

"And then some ..." she murmured, setting off, and the door closed behind them.

Chapter 7

Lois sat back in her chair and watched as Mrs. Platt ushered her daughter away. A sharp pain pierced her chest. Family. Children. Mother. Wife. All those words were, and had been, a dual edged sword for seven years. She missed them all, she longed for them, she wrapped herself in the joy that her memories brought her.

This woman in front of her felt exactly the same. She could see it in her eyes. She saw it in the photographs on Samuel Platt's desk. And now the woman also felt the two edged burn. Loving your family, but not being with them. Feeling like a whole chunk of your heart was missing.

She glanced over at Clark and fought against the wistful longing that threatened to overwhelm her.

"I uh, I haven't told her yet. You see, everything we worked for was for Amy. The space lab Prometheus was the only hope... and now..."

"Mrs. Platt, you and your husband obviously love Amy very much. Why ... why was he living in that place? Why was he alone, unprotected? Why did you leave him?" Lois had to know.

"No. We never left him. He made us leave," Mrs. Platt explained. "He left us ... moved away — somewhere out of the way, unexpected. He was sure that they were gonna come after him. He was afraid that Amy and I would get hurt, so ... he sent us away."

"Do you have any idea who might have -" Lois began to ask, but was cut off.

"All I know is that Samuel knew that Prometheus was being sabotaged and that knowledge got him killed." Mrs. Platt paused before continuing quietly. "Please. Help me," she pleaded. "Don't let his daughter grow up believing her father committed suicide."

"We'll try. We promise," Clark reassured her.

"Thank you." Mrs. Platt held out her hand and Lois took it. They shook gently and then Mrs. Platt returned to the elevator where her daughter was waiting.

"Clark, how are we going to prove that Platt didn't kill himself?" she sighed. She could imagine the other woman's pain, and the burden of getting justice for her and the girl were currently weighing heavily on Lois' shoulder.

She felt Clark's hands on her shoulders and he gently turned her around to face him. Looking up into his face she saw a determination in his gaze that immediately reminded her of Superman. "I don't know *how*, I just know that we will, Lois. We will. Possibly it will even be the report that Star Labs is currently looking over." He smiled at her, trying to convey hope.

She nodded and attempted a small smile herself. "Yeah." She nodded again, more emphatically. "Yeah. Jimmy should be back soon with their results. And they'll show that Platt was right. Won't they?" She said, with more confidence than she actually felt.

Lois watched as Jimmy exited the conference room. She turned to Clark, beaming. "He was right! Platt was right!"

"Now we can write the story..." His face was alight with joy. She'd never seen him look more handsome.

"And, if we can convince people there was sabotage and who was behind it..."

"We can stop them." He held his arms open and Lois automatically fell into them. It felt so right. It was where she felt safest ... in Clark's embrace. But then she reminded herself that she was reading him wrong. He'd only gestured ... widely — yes, but to emphasise his words. That's all.

She pulled away and schooled her face to look impassive.

"Why don't we have dinner?"

"Dinner?" she whispered, suddenly breathless. Her heart had started racing. Clark was asking her on a date. Really. She'd managed to avoid this, when she'd recognised it coming at EPRAD. And she managed to avoid a kiss from him ... but the thing was ... she didn't want to avoid it. It was so hard. OL would not want Clark yet. Not after only two days of acquaintance.

"We should celebrate," he continued, taking her lack of an answer as confusion.

"I'm sorry." She stared at him, heart breaking. "I ... I can't, I have plans tonight." He stared back and she had to wrench her gaze away and distance herself. Exiting the conference room she headed in the direction of the elevator.

"Luthor?" she heard just behind her.

"Yeah."

"Already? You only just met him." His disbelieving tone upset her. Didn't he know that she was the best reporter alive? It only took one conversation and she had hooked Lex Luthor. How come it was taking so long to hook Clark Kent.

"Well, coming from you that's really ..."

He arched his eyebrow in question. "Coming from me ..."

She turned. "Cat." She folded her arms and stared at him. "How many seconds did it take there. You arranged a date with her at ... twenty seconds, was it?"

"This isn't about me and Cat ..." Her stare turned into a glare and she gritted her teeth, seething with jealousy. "There isn't a 'me and Cat', Lois. You know that." His tone was suddenly quiet and pleading.

"Really," she scoffed. "She's all over you. Have you seen it?"

He looked down to his feet and shuffled a little. "Lois, you

have to know that I'm not interested in her. She ... I ..." He took a step forward. "I'm not encouraging her interest at all."

"Hmm, well, she is a man eater ... and you'd do well to stay away from her. Just warning you." Lois held up her hand and pointed at his chest, nodding.

She turned and set off for the elevator once more. "Plus, this ... with Luthor ... isn't a date. It's business."

"Really?" He sounded disbelieving, possibly even jealous. "Tell me something ... how far are you willing to go to get this interview?"

"What?" she shouted and stopped. Turning she glared at him, breathing heavily. "How dare you ... after everything—" Lois widened her eyes and turned away. She'd been about to say 'everything we've been through'. But they hadn't ... been through things together, so how was he to know her? How was he to know that she had very high standards when it came to intimacy, when it came to men? A couple, over the years, had come close. Her heart had fluttered — a little — for Claude, but he'd still been a poor substitute for the man she was really waiting for. Her crush had flickered and died pretty quickly, actually.

In fact ... there'd never been anyone. She wouldn't ... couldn't ... consider being intimate with anyone but Clark. Not since these memories.

Her worry and embarrassment, over nearly blurting out something that would have seemed very odd to Clark, suddenly changed. Anger grew in its place. The fact that he could suggest she would do such a thing, just to get an interview, a story, an article...

She stalked away, making it to the steps up to the elevator.

"I'm sorry," came a soft voice over her shoulder, just as his hand touched her arm.

"Why..." she stopped her climb, but didn't turn. "Why would you even say such a thing?"

"I'm sorry. I guess I was just disappointed when you couldn't have dinner with me."

"What makes you think I would have said yes, even if I hadn't been interviewing Lex Luthor?" She turned and challenged him, her hair flicking around her shoulders.

"I ... I don't know." He backed away, looking uncomfortable. "I'm sorry. I..."

"Stop. Stop saying you're sorry. You always do that. Not all the world's problems are your fault, Clark."

He frowned and his disappointed look turned wary. "What?"

"Never mind," Lois rushed out and then turned away again, quickly. She'd avoided one faux pas, just to stick her foot in another instead. What was Clark going to think? She wasn't supposed know that he felt this way about the world ... that he constantly apologised for things. She stepped into the elevator and begged the universe to close the door behind her immediately, before he could follow ... before he could say anything. With her eyes closed she had no idea whether it had worked but a slight movement of air, and a quiet 'shhh' noise told her it had. She opened her eyes and turned around to look at the door.

Her breathing slowed in relief. She could imagine Clark, standing on the other side of the closed doors, looking particularly confused. Hopefully he'd have got past that by tomorrow morning. And she could also prove to Clark that her interview with Lex Luthor was pure business by bringing in the article she would spend the evening writing — once she returned home from the interview.

Lois turned at her doorway, intending to say something about rescheduling the interview — as he'd somehow managed to lead the conversation in his own direction — but the intense look on his face gave her pause. Her heart began to race and he leaned

forward. She gulped, frozen in his stare.

When his lips touched hers she had to resist the desire to gag. It would not do to offend this man. Even discounting the uneasy feeling she got whenever around him, he was still a rich and powerful individual.

And she still wanted an interview with him.

He stepped back and smiled at her, then turned and walked away. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath then turned and wrenched open her apartment door. Stepping through she slammed the door shut behind her. Striding over to her table she threw down her keys, purse and coat.

"Well." Lucy's voice was hopeful.

"Oh I blew it, I didn't get the interview!" She was so mad with herself. She knew, even before the evening started, that Lex Luthor was not after a business interview. Rather, he was after female companionship. Still, she'd been convinced she could work around that.

"No, did he ask you out again." Lucy was always encouraging her to find a man.

"Oh I don't know." Hopefully he had ... and she'd be ready for how good he was at dominating the conversation. "I guess so."

"You guess so? I hope you said yes. Lex Luthor is the most eligible bachelor ... Mr. Right could be right out there." Lucy gestured towards the window ... possibly indicating the billionaire who'd just dropped her off.

She stepped up to the window and grasped the curtain. A movement outside caused her to catch her breath. "Oh come back to earth Lucy, this is reality we're talking about." She attempted to sound cynical, but knew there was a smile on her face. Mr. Right was most certainly 'right out there'.

Lois continued to stand at the window, hoping for another glimpse of Clark. Glancing down to street level she noticed Lex Luthor just reaching his limo. He turned to look back up at her apartment. His smile, when he saw her watching, sent a shiver down her spine. She didn't like him.

Looking away she raised her gaze to the stars, pushing the curtain a little further out of her way. She sighed and closed her eyes, letting her heart drift upwards. It was almost as if she could join him in the sky ... if she just believed hard enough.

Chapter 8

Lois exited Perry's office and began to stride, angrily, back to her desk, confident that Clark and Jimmy were following her.

"What we need is physical evidence," she stated.

"I'll call Dr. Baines' office — see if I can get permission to set up an independent examination." Clark offered his suggestion and, even though it was reasonable, Lois' disappointment at being chewed out by Perry was churning in her gut.

"Clark! Baines is not going to let you do that! She could be involved! Besides, we don't have time to play by the rules. The colonist transport goes up in two days!"

Clark looked at her and she could see the same disappointment she was feeling written all over his face. "I'm making the call. Maybe someone else at EPRAD will authorize it."

He was already walking away as she called out a response. "You do that." She dropped into her chair and then let her head fall to rest in her hands, elbows resting on the desk. She tried, in vain, to breathe calmly. She had spent most of last night writing out her notes for this story. Well, she couldn't exactly write out the Lex Luthor interview ... as it hadn't happened. She still felt a great deal of annoyance at her gullibility the previous night.

This morning Clark had done his usual stellar job of editing her copy ... although it wasn't 'usual' yet. It would 'become' usual in the future. Lois let herself recall the feeling of Clark standing just behind her. He had reached over to point at her

screen numerous times. His breath was in her ear ... on her skin. She lost herself, many times, in imagining him placing a barely felt kiss on her neck, or her cheek. In her dreams ... her memories ... he did it often.

She looked back up to see Clark disappearing around the corner and out of sight. He wanted to call someone ... get approval for an official examination. Well 'official' didn't always get the job done. She stood, a feeling of calm coming over her. She knew what to do, she knew how to salvage this story. The calmness became intermingled with anticipation. It was always a little exciting when the investigation required 'hands on' investigating rather than paperwork, phone calls and interviews.

Looking in the direction that Clark had walked she considered going after him for a moment, but then knew — without a doubt — that he'd talk her out of this course of action. Plus, she suddenly realised, OL would never have looked to Clark for backup at this stage of their acquaintance.

She picked up her bag and stalked off toward the elevator. "Where are you going?" came the question from behind her. "Nowhere," she replied sarcastically. "I'm coming, too." Jimmy scuttled up beside her and they both stepped into the elevator.

Dr. Baines pulled the bindings around Lois' wrist tighter and Lois knew that this was the end. Jimmy lay unconscious at her side. No need to tie him up, except that they had just bound his hands together behind his back. If he woke up once they were gone there was at least a chance he could escape, but Lois was strapped to a solid pillar.

This was it. The time that her impulsive need to be the best at everything, to get the story, would instead get her killed. If only she'd told Clark, asked him to come with her, asked his opinion on whether it was a good idea, or maybe even demanded that he come. It was certainly more OL's style, to demand things from Clark. That's probably what OL had actually done, otherwise how did she get out of this situation alive?

If only she'd spoken to Clark ... in some way ... then he'd be here and she'd know that they were safe. If only.

And that's when she realised how stupid she'd been. Trying to second guess her every decision, just so that she'd do what OL did the first time around ... it had actually led to the very thing she was trying desperately to avoid. A life ... a future ... without Clark.

Because she would be dead.

She rested her head back against the pillar as Dr. Baines stopped tugging on the straps. The thug with her began to pull on the straps around her chest, instead. Lois closed her eyes and remembered the first time her impulsiveness had led to a dangerous situation.

It had been her first month at the Planet as an intern. She was still at college but she was determined to have a full reporter's position by the time she graduated. She'd overheard Perry telling a couple of senior reporters that someone needed to get the scoop on the Police Chief. Anyone. There were rumours, and Perry was desperate to confirm them. Lois hadn't thought anything of it ... until later that evening, when her path had unexpectedly crossed with the Police Chief's, and she'd recalled Perry's demand of his reporters.

She'd followed the Police Chief, on the spur of the moment, all the way to Suicide Slum. Her heart had been pounding as she crept around every corner once they arrived in the disreputable area. It had jumped and leapt about in her chest every time she ducked behind a dumpster. But it had been worth it, she thought. She'd overheard a conversation proving that the Police Chief was taking all the confiscated drugs from raids and arrests and selling it back out onto the streets. Her shocked gasp had set off a chain reaction of movements which culminated in an empty metal

canister crashing to the floor next to her, and the Police Chief and drug dealer turning in her direction.

The tension, as they moved closer and closer, was almost more than Lois could bear, but at the last moment a mangy looking dog skittered out from under the dumpster and ran across the alley causing a further ruckus and leading the men to believe the dog had been the cause of the first clatter.

The rapid beating of her heart was still evident ten minutes later as she stood in a phone booth to ring the story through to Perry. Of course he was both overjoyed and annoyed. Lois, the new intern, had brought him a fantastic scoop, but there was no solid proof, so there was nothing to print. She carried a tape recorder in her pocket from that day on.

Her mind then drifted until it recalled another phone call where her heart had been pounding out of her chest.

The loneliness had gotten too much for her in her third year at college. The college paper editor, the one who had clashed with her over many different stories, had been dismissed and a new one taken on. He'd been worse, but Lois hadn't seen that to start with.

Paul wasn't afraid of printing controversial stories. He had no worry about the safety of his position, or the politics of the college, or a 'play it safe' attitude, the way Alan Braithwaite had. Lois had admired that in Paul, and even though her thoughts and dreams were filled with Clark, she found herself liking Paul, and thought that he liked her.

She'd been proven wrong. Paul's openness to printing controversial stories was nothing to do with a deep belief in truth and justice and the freedom of the press. It was not even a 'hippy-like' protest at rules and regulations and those in power above him. He was just an arrogant jerk who thought he was better than everyone around him, and she thankfully found out before it was too late, and before she made a fool of herself. No-one even knew she'd ever allowed herself a crush on him. Unfortunately it *had* been too late for her room-mate and best friend, Linda. She'd never recovered from the way Paul used her, and over time, Linda had actually turned into a female version of Paul, just to cope.

Still, after her slightly broken heart, Lois turned back to her dreams of Clark. Her memories of the perfect man. Loneliness took over her life and she'd convinced herself that she could wait no longer. She needed Clark.

It hadn't been hard to track down the number for the Kent farm in Smallville, Kansas. Two years of random fuzzy memories and emotions had given her enough snippets of actual information about Clark to know where he came from.

While she dialled the number her fingers trembled and her heart pounded. When a deep, friendly voice answered "Kent farm," her heart stopped beating entirely. She opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. "Hello?" continued the gentle voice, in question. She tried to speak once more, but her words and her courage, failed her. She hung up.

It was a strange feeling that she carried around with her for days afterwards. There was joy, at having recognised the sound of his voice, and getting the first piece of proof that Clark Kent was real, but there was disappointment that she didn't know him yet. Thankfully, though, the loneliness had disappeared. Even though she wasn't 'with' Clark, she no longer felt alone.

Lois opened her eyes at the sound of crashing metal only to see the warehouse door flying through the air.

"Let her go," came the commanding voice.

"Clark," she whispered in relief and delight, a smile filling her face.

"Put down those guns or I'll ... I'll," he continued and then trailed away.

"Or you'll what?" came Dr. Baines' sarcastic reply.

Clark just shrugged.

“Oh, Clark,” Lois cried to herself. There was still no Superman and he’d barrelled in like he was going to save everyone, but he was dressed in a suit and tie — burgundy and brown — wearing his adorable geeky glasses. She hung her head. Her suggestion for a change of clothes had fallen on deaf ears. And, worst of all, she didn’t know if that was a good thing, or not, anymore. Second guessing whether OL would have made the suggestion, worrying over ruining her future with this man ... it had just gone too far.

She watched as Clark let himself be chained to the metal beam next to her. He used the same column as her to rest his back against. She understood exactly why he couldn’t do anything out of the ordinary, anything ‘Super’, but it still bothered her. They should be free by now. If he’d come in wearing the cape then he could have tied up Dr. Baines and the thug within a second and flown her and Jimmy out to safety. But, instead, they had to wait. He had to bide his time until no-one was watching.

Not even her, she realised.

Thankfully their backs were towards each other so he’d be able to do ... whatever he was going to do ... without risk of her seeing. It was a shame that she couldn’t just tell him that she already knew. But tied up in a warehouse was not the place to drop her universe-sized bomb on him. And it really would ‘explode’ his universe when she told him. When, not if. Even if they waited years until they were together, she would still have to tell him, and explain, at some point. Even if she never made a silly mistake that caused him to become concerned over what she knew and how she knew it, he still deserved to know ... at some point.

Dr. Baines and the tattooed man wandered off and Lois waited expectantly for Clark to make his move. She was, once again, overwhelmed by relief that Clark was here. If she hadn’t based her earlier decision, not to get Clark involved, on whether she thought OL would tell him, then maybe he could have been here all along. But, thankfully, he was here anyway. Now that Clark was here she knew they’d get out of this. Now that they were saved ... she resolved to live her own life ... not OL’s.

Chapter 9

Lois watched out of the corner of her eyes as Dr. Baines and her muscular associate finally wandered out of sight.

“Okay, they’re gone. Do something, Clark,” she spoke quietly but decisively.

“Do ... something ...?” came the confused reply.

“You know,” she shrugged and jiggled at her bonds.

“Exactly what do you expect me to do?” came Clark’s sarcastic retort. “It’s not as if there is a weak link in this chain.” She heard the rattle as he held up his bound hands.

“Well,” she paused. “There *could* be,” she proposed, tentatively. “Why don’t you just look?”

“All right,” he sighed.

“Just ... look quickly,” she interjected some sternness into her tone. “Baines is going to be back any minute to kill us. I don’t know why she hasn’t done it already.”

Trying not to sneak a peek over her shoulder, while Clark pretended to rattle away at the chains, her eyes wandered over to Jimmy, still unconscious on the floor.

“I told Perry I needed a task force. A *task* force. And what do I do? Take Jimmy with me instead. Urgh,” she growled at herself. “But then ... I still can’t believe you came barreling in here like some five hundred pound gorilla. Why didn’t you change int-” She clamped her mouth shut.

The rattling of the chains stopped as Clark ceased his pretending. It was *pretending* wasn’t it?

“Change ...” he encouraged her to continue.

“Nothing, Clark, forget it. I already know. Because you’re

like every other man in Metropolis. You’ve got this testosterone surplus that says, ‘I can do it myself.’” But, in Clark’s case, it was true. He **could** do it all himself. And the most unbelievable part was that he was actually humble about it, rather than egotistical. Lois knew all this instinctively. It was part of what made him so easy to love.

“Now hold on a second. I’m not the one who snuck in here ...” But, even so, he could still be argumentative with her, she realised.

“What are you saying? Are you saying that this is *my* fault? At least I had the guts to come in here and ...” Lois paused and rolled her eyes up to the ceiling. “What am I saying? It *is* my fault.” She took a shuddering breath. “Oh god. I sometimes do things ... you know, like jump into the pool without checking the water level first. But, Clark, it’s the only way I know how to do it. How to get the job done. To get the respect that I want. That I *deserve*.”

Lois paused, letting the silence linger for a moment.

“Do you remember when you accused me of sleeping with Luthor to get the interview?”

“Lois, I ... you know I didn’t mean that. I apologised. I’m really sorry.” The pleading in his voice was sincere.

“No, Clark. It’s okay.” She spoke quickly to calm him. “I mean ... what you didn’t know, couldn’t know ... is that I’ve never ...” She sighed. “There were a few times that I got close to people — other reporters, I thought they respected me. I thought they liked me. So I ... I let myself like them back. Instead, it turned out that they were just using me. There was one man in particular who I ...”

“You slept with someone at work?”

“NO! No. But I considered it.”

“It wasn’t Jimmy, was it?”

She was insulted by this insinuation and it was in her voice as she responded. “Don’t be ridiculous. It was a long time ago. When I first became a full reporter at the Daily Planet. Claude — he was French. I was in love with ... uh, someone, but I couldn’t be with him. Claude was nice to me. Paid attention to me. Made me feel special. For a while I thought he might be a substitute for y ... the man I was in love with. But in the end, I couldn’t forget y ... him.”

“And now?” Lois wondered at the tone in Clark’s voice. “This man you can’t be with?”

“Um, things have changed. I ...” Lois gulped, wondering whether she was being wise, telling Clark this. She’d already decided that it wasn’t a good idea to tell Clark all about her intimate knowledge of him while tied up in a warehouse. Still, she continued on. “I’m still in love with this man. But ... the circumstances have changed.”

“Oh.”

Lois felt a pain strike her heart at the hurt evident in Clark’s voice. She hated it ... would hate it, rather ... when he was hurting, emotionally. Why would the knowledge that she was in love with someone be hurting Clark?

“Lois? You know what you said, about respect? Well, I just want you to know that everyone at the Planet — everyone — thinks you’re just about the best reporter they’ve ever met. Perry told me that the day I interviewed.”

Her tone held a hint of surprise as she asked, “He did?”

“Yeah. And not that it really means anything, coming from a “hack from Nowheresville”, I think you’re pretty terrific, too.”

“Really?” Lois whispered out, incredulously, while grinning. Clark liked her. Maybe her interpretations of his actions, the looks he’d been giving, were not that far off. She second guessed herself whenever she’d thought he was gazing at her in adoration. What if she shouldn’t have? What if she was right.

“Clark ...” she began, her heart beating wildly in her chest.

Before she could continue another voice spoke. “Well, I hope

you'll forgive the accommodations." Dr. Baines had returned. "But then again, I never was much of a hostess."

"Answer one question. Why?" Lois glared at the woman, unable to understand how anyone could be so selfish and uncaring of their effect on the world around them.

"It's simple, Lois. Profit. Outer space is no different than any new frontier. It'll belong to those who get there first and seize the high ground."

Selfish. That was the word. Lois couldn't understand selfishness. Although ... she did feel pretty selfish and jealous when it came to the man tied up with her.

"Sorry you won't be around to enjoy the rest of the evening, but accidents do happen."

"Accidents?" Jolted out of her thoughts of Clark, Lois hoped that Dr. Baines didn't mean what she thought.

"Yes. You see, while dismantling the orbital manoeuvring system, the monomethylhydrazine leaked and mixed with the nitrogen tetroxide... Unfortunately, the blast killed three nosy reporters who didn't bother to read the sign."

She did. Dr. Baines had used the age-old cliché of 'accident' when she actually meant murder. Well, Lois *had* already figured that Dr. Baines would want to kill them, she had just credited the doctor with a bit more intelligence than to use such a terrible cliché.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw the blonde haired, scientist begin to crouch down. She twisted her head to look over her shoulder and gasped when Dr. Baines' lips touched Clark's. Her heart lurched and her stomach churned. Turning away she rested her head back onto the post and closed her eyes tightly. The sound of Dr. Baines' heels clicked on the floor as she hurried away.

Suddenly there was a tugging on her bindings. She opened her eyes and saw Clark towering over her, reaching out a hand. She took it and he pulled her up.

"Missing link?" Lois grinned up at him, joyfully.

"Uh, huh," came his affirmative grunt as he bent down to get Jimmy.

Lois pushed on the cab door handle and then clambered out as the door swung open. Clark climbed out after her and closed the door behind them. As she headed for the steps to her apartment she left Clark to pay for the cab. He would. Somehow, she knew it.

"Um, Lois?"

She stopped on the top step and turned. The cab was driving away and Clark looked incredibly unsure, waiting at the bottom of the steps. She smiled. "Come on up, Clark." She nodded with her head in the direction of the building entranceway.

He smiled and seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Clark." Lois started up the stairs once they were inside, and then turned back to check that Clark was following. "Thanks for rescuing us. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't turned up."

She continued up the steps, her heart pounding in anticipation. Hopefully Clark would think that it was the exercise causing her heart rate ... if he happened to listen in.

"You're welcome, Lois."

"How did you know to come looking for us?" Lois had a good idea of the answer to that question, but she needed to seem 'curious', otherwise Clark might get curious.

"When you and Jimmy weren't at the staff meeting I got worried."

"Oh," she nodded. It was a reasonable enough explanation, and if she continued and asked something like, 'how did you know *where* to find us?' then that could bring trouble so she smiled back at Clark as if to say that it was enough of an answer. "Well, I'm really glad you came for us." She exited the stairs at

the top and began walking along the corridor to her apartment. Clark was still following, a few steps behind.

Her palms began to sweat and her fingers trembled as she reached for her keys. She wanted this. She wanted to invite him in and show him that ... what? What did she want to show him? That she had feelings for him? That she loved him? That she knew all about him?

Her hand shook as she slid the key into her lock and she let out a breath and paused.

She'd invite him in, they'd talk, she'd make it clear that she liked him, but that was it. She was living her own life now, not OL's, and she wanted to be with Clark. But that didn't mean she should be silly and ruin her chances by rushing it.

She turned the key and the door swung open immediately. The other locks and chains were not engaged. Lois' eyes widened as she remembered that Lucy was here. She couldn't invite Clark in now. It would be awkward and embarrassing and how would she deal with all the questions that Lucy would have afterwards?

"Um," she faltered and turned to look at Clark while pulling the door closed a little. "I'd like to ask you in, Clark, but I ... I can't at the moment."

Clark's gentle, handsome face changed from friendly to disappointed in a moment. He nodded. "Oh. I understand."

"It's just, you see, I have someone ..."

"Him." Clark almost bit out the word.

"Him? Him who?" Lois asked confused.

"Him. The man you are in love with, the one you couldn't be with years ago, but now you can." Clark was looking down at his shoes and trying to effect a nonchalant attitude.

"What?" Lois shouted incredulously. "NO. No, it's my sister. She's staying with me for a while, and it would be awkward beyond belief if I invited you in. That's all. I really would have loved it if you could come in. Really, Clark." She reached out a hand to touch his arm.

He looked up again. "Your sister." He smiled. "Not ... him."

Lois nodded. She watched as many emotions played across Clark's face. He was obviously thinking through some things. When the final emotion that settled on his face looked to be sadness she felt her heart lurch.

"Well, I'll be off then. Back to my hotel room. Night, Lois." He turned abruptly and strode away.

Chapter 10

"Take me flying, Clark."

Lois tossed and turned in her bed.

"Your arms. Around me."

She moaned.

"Come up to the roof me with," she asked Clark as they exited the stairs. Instead of aiming for her apartment she continued up to the roof. There was no nervousness, no worry, no trembling fingers.

Lois opened the door and stepped out into the clear night sky.

"For nearly a decade now, well actually I was nineteen so more like nearly eight years, I've been waiting for three things, Clark. Missing them."

She looked up into the starlit sky and paused. Clark came up beside her.

"What three things, Lois," he whispered huskily.

"Number three." She turned to face him. "Your arms. Around me." She reached out and took his arms then drew them around her waist, pulling him close.

He gulped.

"Number two." She paused again. "Take me flying, Clark."

"Flying?" He looked scared for a moment.

"Yes, Clark. Please take me flying." She looked into his eyes, trying to portray to him how much she loved him.

"All right," he smiled and changed his hold.

As they rose into the air she snuggled into his shoulder.

Lois rolled over and pulled the covers round. There was a smile on her face.

“When you pulled us out of the warehouse and flew us across the yard, just in time to miss the explosion, and miss that puddle of mud, I knew I needed to fly with you again. And soon. I’ve been waiting too long.”

“Where do you want me to fly to, Lois?”

“Anywhere. I just want to fly with you, Clark.”

It was hours later when they landed. Lois had her head nestled in his shoulder again. He held her cradled in his arms.

“We’re back, Lois.” His voice was husky again.

She raised her head and looked into his eyes. As he lowered her to the floor their eyes never wavered.

“So,” he smiled, “what was number one, then.”

“This,” she whispered and drew his lips down to meet hers.

Lois pondered whether she should have done exactly what her dream suggested all day the next day. If she’d found the courage to just go for it, to tell Clark everything, then maybe she would have spent the night in his arms. Or at least got one kiss out of it. Clark was far too gentlemanly for anything more to happen on a first date. It was just that, in Lois’ heart and mind, they were already married.

She glanced over at him, smiling and enjoying the festivities. He looked so nice and innocent. His sweet, farm-boy routine was completely adorable, and utterly genuine. But Lois also knew that he could be naughty. Well, more like — playful and teasing ...

“I just spoke to ground control over at EPRAD.” Lois jerked out of her fantasy at the sound of Perry’s voice. “They went back over the colonist launch vehicle with a fine tooth comb. Found the same coolant problem in the protective bands and fixed it.”

She looked sideways to see Perry standing in the area between her and Clark’s desks. He was speaking to both of them. “The launch is all set for tomorrow morning.” He turned to face her. “It’s a no go for you, Lois. No reporters allowed.”

That was no surprise. She knew that she was probably on EPRAD ‘keep clear’ list after this morning’s article with her by-line on it, and the ‘no reporters allowed’ was a simple way of keeping her out. But that wouldn’t stop her. “Imagine the Daily Planet getting an exclusive personal account of being on the colonist transport?”

“No can do, Lois.”

“All right. Another time, maybe.” Perry was quite right. There was no way he could endorse this if EPRAD had already slammed that metaphorical door. But, what Perry didn’t know ... he couldn’t disapprove of.

Perry turned to Clark. “Now Clark, you’re gonna be pleased to know that Platt’s widow and his daughter are back on board.”

“Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate that.” Clark’s smile filled his face. Lois knew that his compassion for those in need, those hurting, was as big as the moon. She felt her heart swell with love once more. Rising from her seat she made her way around her desk and strode across to Clark.

He rose to meet her as any old-fashioned gentleman would.

“Once again, thank you for getting us out of there.” She made sure to look him directly in the eyes, and convey all her gratitude.

“I’m glad it all worked out.”

“And — uh — one other thing ... what I told you ... about the man I’m in love with ...”

“You can trust me,” he jumped in before she could finish.

Nobody here knew about this, she’d never told anyone about her experience at nineteen, and if Clark were to start asking about a man that Lois was in love with, then everyone would become immensely curious.

Lois exhaled gently and smiled shyly at Clark as she nodded and walked back to her desk.

A few hours later and Lois was enjoying the best meal of her life. Mid-day had come and Clark had suggested going for lunch. As the two of them had exited the Daily Planet Lois looked across the street. On the sidewalk opposite she’d caught sight of a café which had a particularly strong pull on her affections.

Now they were seated at the very same table where she’d met OL ... well, the tables had actually changed, they were still circular, but made of cheap plastic rather than strong wood. Yet, the position was the same. That was enough for Lois to fall into nostalgia and wistfulness.

Clark caught her off guard well into their meal. She’d been happily enjoying his presence, and not feeling any need to talk. She just smiled, sometimes internally, sometimes externally, at the thought that she was finally sitting here, in this café of all places, with Clark. So it was a shock when he asked about ‘him’.

“Him?” Lois looked up from her salad.

“You mentioned you were having tomorrow off. Will you see him?”

“Him who?” she asked, confused.

“The man you are in love with,” he replied, also sounding confused. “And can now be with.” His tone clearly indicated that he couldn’t understand why she didn’t know who he was referring to.

“Oh. Um no, I won’t.” She returned to her salad, fingers trembling slightly while trying to hold her fork. “And even though I *can* now be with him ... I’m *not*.”

“You’re not.” He coughed, almost choking. “But I thought ...”

“Even though I’ve wanted to be with him since I was nineteen, he’s not ready yet.” Lois avoided looking back up and put her fork back down. She hadn’t even made it to her mouth with the food.

“Really? Since you were nineteen? And he’s not ready. How is that possible?”

“I’m not sure if he feels the same ... yet.” She began to play with the salad, pushing around the cherry tomato with her fork, and then trying to pick out all the chicken pieces afterwards.

“Maybe he does. I see him looking at me sometimes, and I think maybe he might.” She shrugged. Hearing a sigh from across the table she looked up.

“Tell me about him,” he asked quietly.

“Uh, he’s wonderful.” Lois spoke carefully, and vaguely, hoping that it would be enough for Clark, but he sat quietly, waiting for more. “Kind, gentle, strong, compassionate, loving.” Clark’s eyes never wavered but she saw his jaw tighten. Suddenly she felt free to tell him the truth. He didn’t know that he was the man she was describing. He had no idea, and she was free to express her feelings, without any embarrassment. “He’s probably the most handsome man I’ve ever known, too. When he touches me I shiver in delight. When he kisses me I feel like I’m flying.”

“But you just said that you are not ‘together’.” She heard a strain in his voice.

“It’s complicated, I can’t explain. Believe me I want to, and one day I will tell you, Clark.”

There was uncomfortable silence until he spoke quietly once more. “How did you meet?”

“Uh,” Lois nearly laughed manically at the irony of where she was sitting. “That’s another thing that ...”

“You want to tell me but can’t,” he continued for her, letting a little bit of sarcasm seep into his words.

“I will, Clark. One day I will explain everything and I hope that ...”

“What?” he prompted when she trailed off.

“I hope you will understand and ... and that I won’t lose you.”

“Lose me?”

“It really is complicated, and unbelievable, and ... so very strange.” She shook her head. “Telling you could change everything and, even in just a few days, you’ve become a good friend, Clark. I don’t want to lose you.” She put down her fork and reached across to lay a hand on his arm. “I hope you feel the same.”

“I do.” His voice was so gentle, his eyes so full of love, yet there was no smile on his face. He was being utterly serious and truthful. The last few words echoed around in her head as the meal continued.

I hope you feel the same.

I do.

Chapter 11

Lois tried to calm her heart. Keeping her head down, as she passed her papers over, she tried to look inconspicuous. Once inside she separated off from the crowd and noticed a secure room where she could ride out the journey. While the papers she handed over might look real on quick glance it would become clear that something was wrong if she tried to take a colonist’s seat and there was no room for some other person ... who then turned out to be legitimate.

She closed the heavy door behind her as she entered and then turned. The room was some kind of engineering station. There were a few consoles with flashing lights and plenty of blank metal-panelled walls that probably concealed wires and conduits. Lois spied a drop-down seat at the other end and immediately aimed for it. She slipped her legs through the straps and sat down then pulled the straps around her shoulders. Once clipped in she tugged on the flaps to pull the straps as tight as they could go.

A smile came over her face once she was secure. She dropped her head back and closed her eyes. The smile grew as she imagined collecting her Pulitzer for this story. This was definitely the one, the story that would prove she was the best. Possibly she could even ask Clark to be her date. Her fantasy swiftly moved forward to the end of the evening where he would see her to her door ... and this time Lucy would not be there. She would invite him in. Thank him for the wonderful evening. Encourage him that it would be his turn for the Pulitzer next year. He would smile and laugh in his humble manner, and then he would look into her eyes and the smile would fade. She’d lean forwards, slowly ...

Lois wasn’t really sure how much time had passed when she became aware of a repetitive bleeping sound. She opened her eyes and it only took a moment to locate the source of the sound. A small grey box was attached to the wall and a timer was counting down in sync with the beeps. An ominous feeling stole over Lois. While there were plenty of lights and clicks and ‘countdowns’ going on around, this countdown was a minute behind the official one, and the light-switch sized box was fixed to the wall with malleable putty.

Lois slipped out of her straps and ran over to look. It was immediately clear what the item was.

“It’s a bomb! Baines. It’s a bomb.” She knew who was ultimately to blame for this, even if already dead. Baines’s death obviously set this in motion through an underling.

Lois ran to the entrance, pulling open the door she had shut behind her earlier. She banged at the glass door. “Someone help, there’s a bomb. Help.” The engines fired and Lois’ panic increased. Everyone was stuck on board, about to lift off into space, with no escape.

She ran back to the device and attempted to pull the casing off, just in case there was something ... *anything* ... she could do.

It wouldn’t budge.

Looking around in desperation she noticed the grey panel to the right. Opening it she was confronted by a tangle of cables. Possibly one — or more — was linked to the bomb. If she could

just disconnect it from whatever source was powering it ...

It only took a moment to locate a pair of cutters and she immediately dived into the wires. Sparks flew as she dug into the mess, but she dare not stop. This was the only chance the Prometheus and its passengers had. And if the bomb was self-sufficient ... well this could still be helping. Launches were cancelled for the slightest malfunction and there was definitely a higher statistical probability of survival if they were **not** a thousand feet in the air when the bomb exploded.

There was no change to the bleeping sound and the numbers continued to drop. Her panic increased. This was it. Her compulsive need to out-do everyone had finally led to her downfall. She remembered having a similar thought two nights earlier, but Clark had come to her rescue that time.

Well, he wouldn’t come this time. Why would he even know there was anything wrong? He’d become suspicious two days ago because she’d gone missing from work. Except, today, she’d purposefully taken the day off so that no-one could interfere with her plans.

Clearly OL had done something different. Possibly, because she’d not been acting skittish and worried around Clark, they’d bonded quickly and she’d told him her idea. Lois knew it was pointless to dwell on this for more than a second though. Living OL’s life was no longer Lois’ goal. And if she made it out of *this* dangerous situation she’d be doubly sure to live her own life.

Over the speakers Lois heard the announcer halt the official countdown and the shuddering of the rocket suddenly stopped. She looked back to the bomb, the cutters still in her hand, but completely forgotten now.

Moments later there was movement out in the corridor. Lois stepped away and widened her eyes. The racing of her heart, which until this moment had been because of fear for her life, was now of a completely different type.

“Superman,” she whispered out, joyfully, and smiled in absolute relief. Her panicked heart began to slow. He **had** come. He always came. It was like déjà vu blossoming in her memory. She knew. Clark always came.

He stopped for a moment and looked at her warily then flicked his gaze to the bomb on the wall.

“It’s a bomb.” Lois stepped forward. “Can you do something?” Her voice trembled. She was unsure what was causing the tremble though. There was a bomb, ticking down, currently at 21 seconds. But that should no longer be worrying her because Superman ... Clark ... had just made his first appearance. She felt elated. Possibly *that* was the reason for the tremble in her voice.

Clark stepped up to the bomb and then glanced at her. He looked nervous and unsure. She began to panic again, her heart rate climbing higher as the numbers dropped lower. It seemed that he didn’t know what to do.

“Please,” she pleaded with him. Surely he could figure this out. Surely he knew what his powers were capable of.

He looked back at the bomb and reached up, sliding the outer casing off with no trouble. Inside was a tangle of wires, looking like a smaller facsimile of the panel she had been systematically destroying moments earlier. He reached in and when he withdrew his hand there was a flat, black circular object held between his fingers.

Lois gulped. It was the bomb. She took a deep breath.

Clark held up the bomb, looked at her warily once more, and then popped it in his mouth. A moment later he swallowed.

Lois let out her breath and grinned. “Yes,” she hissed quietly.

There was a muffled explosion and then Clark burped, more gracefully and gently than she’d ever seen anyone do before.

“Excuse me,” he said, his Kansas upbringing coming through loud and clear in his politeness.

Her grin grew even wider and she finally allowed herself to

admire him. He opened his mouth and took a deep breath, then stepped toward her, but a noise in the corridor had him turning away instead.

Parts of her dreams and memories came into crystal clear focus now. Superman was impressive. Well, she'd known that anyway. But she'd never actually thought about how tight, how revealing, how distracting the suit was. She'd not even been sure of the design ... except for a large amount of blue ... and a red cape.

As he strode out into the corridor, Lois was assailed by memories. Seeing Clark dressed as Superman had brought them into stark relief.

He caught her as she tumbled through the air.

He burst through a wall as she was about to lose consciousness, grasping her and holding her aloft as she took in a sweet breath of air.

He had his arms around her. They floated up, further and further, until they were in the clouds.

He dived for her mouth, bringing his arms around her while twisting both of them. He landed underneath her on the couch.

On and on they came. Little snippets of memory that were now so much more real than they had been before.

He caught her again.

He reached for her and they kissed.

He held out some flowers.

He held out a ring.

He was gone.

Launching the Prometheus into space with his bare hands.

After leaving her in the engineering room to investigate the happenings back at the entrance he'd encountered colonists and scientists, all ready to discard their hopes and dreams. But he'd handed those hopes and dreams straight back to them when he'd insisted he could get them to the space station.

She paced back and forth. He said he'd be back, but what would she say to him? She thought back over the last thirty minutes and realised that most of Clark's confusion and nervousness was her fault. He hadn't been unsure of his own abilities, or worried about what to do. Rather, he'd been shocked to see her there. He was probably even worried that she might recognise him.

Plus, she'd not been at all shocked to see him. How would she explain that? What could she say when he asked why she'd called him Superman. Or why she hadn't been confused over who he was, or what he was doing, or why he was dressed in a skin tight blue costume, and how the heck he could swallow a bomb and lift a rocket.

She'd even encouraged him to deal with the bomb. He must surely be wondering how she knew that he was capable of that.

She ceased her nervous pacing and focussed on the lockers at the end of the room. Each colonist had been assigned one — Lois included. Her clothes and handbag were in there. Striding forward she retrieved the key from her pocket and took out her belongings.

She really needed to change out of the dark cream jumpsuit. It belonged to EPRAD, and it was not exactly flattering. She blushed as she pictured the sight that must have greeted Clark as he strode into the rocket. Yes, she'd change back into her normal clothes, style her hair, apply some makeup, and Clark would return and find her looking smarter ... more attractive, hopefully. But, then again, Clark had already seen her in her work clothes for the last few days, and if he didn't already find her attractive — which she sometimes thought he might, and sometimes not — then changing now would make no difference.

Still, she slipped into her shoes, finishing her changeover, and then stuffed the jumpsuit into the now empty locker.

Maybe ... maybe this was the opportunity to tell him. He

must have questions. But possibly he wouldn't feel he could ask them. Lois shouldn't even know that there was any reason for him to worry that she would recognise him, so he definitely wouldn't be asking ... 'Why didn't you get scared at the sight of a man in blue spandex? or 'How come you trusted me at first sight? or even 'Don't you recognise who I am?

No, he'd play the stoic hero, but then worry internally.

If she saw even a tiny trace of that worry on his face when he returned she wouldn't be able to stop herself going to him ... caressing his face ... kissing away the worry lines.

She began pacing again. Her hands wouldn't stop trembling so she crossed her arms over her chest. It became uncomfortable so she uncrossed them and let them dangle once more.

"Argh," she let out as a groan of frustration. She just wanted Clark to come back, to get this over with. Yet she also knew she wasn't ready. She hadn't figured out what to say. He better not come back yet.

She perched herself on the edge of a table and let her head fall into her hands. Moments later a voice shocked her back to her feet.

"Miss Lane."

He was back. It was time.

Chapter 12

"Su ... Superman," she stuttered then smiled, nervously.

"Miss Lane. Are you ready? I promised you a ride home as long as *you* promised to leave the colonist transport."

"I'm ready." She frowned. He was acting distant. Getting straight on with the job. Didn't he have *any* questions for her? And there was not an ounce of worry showing on his face. After all her pacing and contemplating for the last forty minutes ... and they weren't actually going to have *that* conversation.

"Superman, I ... " she paused and this time he frowned at her, instead. "Thank you ... for saving all of us."

"Who is this Superman? Why do you keep calling me that?" Clark strode forward until they were almost toe to toe.

"I ..." she faltered and gulped. "It just seemed the most appropriate thing to call you." Gaining confidence she continued in a stronger voice. "What with the large S on your chest, and all. Not to mention the super strength and ... other stuff." She waved her hand up and down indicating his stature.

"But ..." he frowned once again and looked unsure. "It just seemed that ... it's as if you *knew* that my name was Superman. It was the very first thing you spoke when I entered. You asked me to help with the bomb. How did you know I could?"

"I ..." she faltered again. He actually was asking the questions she'd expected. But, what could she say? Really? Would he believe her if she said that she was privy to memories from a future version of herself? Maybe she should just launch herself into his arms and kiss him senseless. There would be a time, in the future, when he wouldn't be able to resist her, physically. And it was a sure fire way of distracting him from this line of questioning.

"Please? Tell me. Do you know who I am?" Lois recognised the look on Clark's face, completely at odds with Superman's usual 'emotionless guardian' look. He was pleading with her, he was after information from her. He looked like a lost little boy.

This was completely unexpected. She'd thought that he would ask if she'd *recognised* him, and that there would be fear and worry in his eyes. Instead, it seemed like he was hoping she knew who he was. But Lois got the impression that he wasn't meaning 'Clark'. He didn't think she'd recognised him, but rather he wondered how she knew about his *abilities*.

Did he not know? He wouldn't be asking in such an eager way if he did.

Lois widened her eyes in shock. Her heart pounded and her mouth dropped open. Clark didn't know who he was, where he

came from, why he was different. And her reactions to him had given him hope that maybe *she* could tell him.

But the only way she could explain — the only way to tell him that he was an alien from ... some planet she could never quite get the name of — was to tell him about OL; to tell him about her memories; to tell him about ... *them* ... as a couple.

She couldn't tell him that. Not yet. They needed to be closer friends. He needed to trust her. He needed to be, at least a little, attracted to her first. Until then, this information needed to wait.

So she closed her mouth, gulped and shook her head in answer to his question.

Immediately his face was wiped clean of emotion. "I'll take you back now." There was a tightness to his voice.

"All right." She kept her eyes fixed on his face as he swept her up into his arms.

This was it. She was in Clark's arms ... and they were flying. Superman was flying her back to the Planet. Superman was real. It was, for Lois, the final confirmation of all her mashed up dreams and memories.

As they flew she couldn't help but stare at him, her heart racing, breathing shallow, and body trembling.

He was acting distant and aloof again while she knew her face was betraying all her inner emotions, but she couldn't help it.

This was number two on her list, and she was finally experiencing it for real, rather than through OL's patchy memory. It was only a few days ago that she got to experience number three — being in Clark's arms, held tightly, gently and safely. Now it was number two.

When would she get number one for real?

Her rapidly thumping heart skipped a few beats as she realised how close to that first kiss she really was. Clark's mouth was actually only inches from hers. She could reach out ... stretch up just a little.

But how would he react?

Somehow she knew it would be too much of a shock for him. Despite sometimes interpreting the looks on his face as affectionate, hopeful, wistful, even loving, Clark had actually shown no interest in her romantically, nor had he made any moves. She'd thought he was about to ask her out on a date once, and also anticipated a kiss on another occasion, but she could have easily just been projecting her own feelings onto the situations.

In fact, his predominantly distant attitude over the last hour, while dressed as Superman, had pretty much sealed the idea in her mind that he had no romantic interest in her. Surely he would have had reservations about her recognising him if he was at all interested ... surely he would have been nervous. Instead, his one break of emotion had been eagerness, rather than worry. So, she concluded, any offer on her behalf would be summarily rejected.

Her wildly beating heart plummeted.

Someday ... probably quite a distance in the future ... he would want her, and it would be fantastic, passionate, soul-changing love. But right now, she was a new acquaintance, a work colleague and potential great friend and partner. She'd have to wait, be patient.

But 'patient' was something Lois Lane didn't do. She'd work on him over the next few weeks. She'd invite him to her apartment for 'work assignments', she'd have lunch with him, she'd be his best friend and she'd make herself indispensable to him.

If he wasn't already attracted to her, then he soon would be!

The silence continued on. She realised that it was creating a metaphorical distance between them, and the longer the flight continued the more the distance was increasing. She attempted to reach out to him. "Thank you, again."

"You are welcome, Miss Lane."

There it was again, that stoic, polite voice.

"I told you, my name is Lois." She tried to hide the hurt from her voice but didn't succeed.

"Okay. Lois, then." He finally turned his head to look at her as they drifted along. Their eyes met and she suddenly read hurt in *his* gaze. What had hurt *him*? Had he *wanted* her to recognise him as Clark? But why? Possibly he was disappointed that she'd shaken her head at his questions about himself. Did he *want* her to know?

Her heart lurched and she lifted a hand from round his neck. She cupped her hand to curl around his cheek, but just before they actually touched she remembered their circumstances. She couldn't comfort him in what would become the 'usual' manner, but she could still use words. If he was hurt — for some reason — then she needed to encourage and uplift him. She needed to reassure him, whenever he doubted himself.

"I don't think I can ever say enough how grateful I am ... and the colonists, of course." She smiled at him, and let all her love for him show in her eyes. "You were fantastic. Saving us from the bomb, and then lifting the Prometheus into space." She was momentarily distracted by the thought that she was in those very same strong arms that had lifted the rocket not long ago. "And how you spoke to the colonists, and to Amy Platt — singling her out, making her feel special. It was wonderful." She knew why he had singled out the disabled child. He felt compassion for those in need, those struggling with a difficult life. But he also felt responsible for Samuel Platt's death. If only she could tell him that it *wasn't* his fault.

At her gentle praise and loving gaze he seemed to soften. He even smiled back at her.

Time passed as they just looked at each other. Lois felt her heart rate increase in anticipation. She even imagined that his gaze flicked down to her mouth for a brief second. His arms tightened around her. She parted her lips.

He coughed and looked away. "Are you sure this is where you want to go, Lois? I can take you to your apartment."

"I'm sure. I need to write the story. Perry would kill me if I didn't bring in an 'on the spot account' within the hour."

"I guess he would," Clark chuckled, probably not realising what his statement could have revealed to a more oblivious Lois. His face was set straight ahead once more, but his hold on her body was not as stiff. The Daily Planet was in sight and her debut flight with Superman was coming to an end.

He pushed open the windows high above the newsroom floor and they began to drift down. She tightened her grip involuntarily, not wanting this moment to end, not wanting to let go. He turned to look at her and she knew that there were tears, not yet falling, that were causing her eyes to sparkle.

Touching down next to her desk she released her arms from his neck but left them resting on his shoulders. "I think, considering the fact that I saw you first, you owe me an exclusive." She tried to sound professional, but the tears threatening to spill brought a tremble to her voice, and the flight had left her breathless. *He* had left her breathless. She gazed into his eyes and found herself drowning in the deep warmth that looked back at her.

"Is that the rule?" There was humour in his reply. His stoic distance had faded a little after her latest reassurances and thanks.

"Well, no. But ... I'd appreciate it very much." She dropped her hands reluctantly. "Please?" She let all her love show in the sparkle of her eyes.

"I'll think about it, Lois." He laughed. "But I wonder if maybe you know more than you are letting on, already." After an initial moment of teasing his gaze became intense. She gasped and gulped. Could he read the guilt in her eyes?

Turning, he lifted into the air and drifted back out of the open

window.

She stood, rooted to the spot, gazing after him. How long would it be until Clark came strolling into the newsroom as if nothing extraordinary had happened? Would he say anything, drop any hints that she was supposed to pick up on? Would he pretend to be completely oblivious to what had just happened? Would he ask to speak to her and pull her into the conference room demanding to know what she knew?

“Did you find out what the ‘S’ stands for?” An annoying voice at her shoulder commanded attention.

“Super,” she whispered out, then looked round and confronted Cat face to face and boldly declared to the room, “Superman.”

Chapter 13

Lois’ eyes flicked to the elevator every time it dinged. It was now three hours since Clark had flown out of the newsroom but he hadn’t returned. She’d expected him to leave — dressed in blue — and return — dressed in brown, or maybe grey ... or possibly even charcoal. But it turned out that he’d taken the day off, just like her.

Still, she’d expected him to show up. Why, she had no idea. Logically he would want to distance ‘Clark’ from ‘Superman’ as much as possible. Except ... she just had this feeling that ... Superman should fly off ... and Clark should immediately walk in.

She sighed and looked back to her computer. The questions which had been fired at her by the other reporters had been uncomfortable to say the least. But, she’d recognised that the public would actually be asking exactly the same questions, so she’d put the answers to most of them in her article. There was much more information contained in her memory that she hadn’t put in, though. Facts she shouldn’t, logically, know yet. Plus, facts she wouldn’t print even when she did *legitimately* know them.

Now, the article was done. Superman had been introduced to the world. She just needed to submit it to Perry. Nerves assailed her as she pushed the print button. What if she’d gotten something wrong? What if she’d put in a *fact* that wasn’t a fact? It was a constant possibility with her mashed up memories from OL.

That was one reason why she’d wanted Clark back. He could have read it over and would definitely have pointed out anything he was unhappy with, but he could have done it under the guise of ‘editing her copy’.

She stood and sauntered over to the printer, then took a glance around the newsroom. The chatter and buzz was higher than usual and all the televisions were on and displaying constant news feeds. Usually one or two were on around the room, but every single television was tuned to a news channel, and they were all covering Superman. A few amateur videos had made their way into the hands of these media outlets and they were shown repeatedly. One of the videos was of the Prometheus taking off. You could barely see Clark at the bottom of one of the boosters. The rest were from out and about in Metropolis. One reason that Clark had not returned was because he was making his presence known. Widely!

The elevator ‘dinged’ and she instinctively looked towards it again, but it wasn’t Clark.

She still felt as if he should return to the newsroom ... to her. But he clearly wasn’t going to. It was his day off. And he had an alter ego to establish. And he *wasn’t* desperate to spend time with her. Possibly that was because he wasn’t interested at all, or possibly because he was concerned and confused by what happened earlier.

“Lois. You got that exclusive for me yet?” came the Chief’s voice from the doorway of his office.

“Uh, yes.” She tore her gaze away from the nearest screen, which was currently showing a still, but blurry, photograph of Clark’s cape, the yellow diamond ‘S’ slightly off centre in the picture. She held up the sheet of paper which had been in her hand for five minutes, waved it at Perry, and then began to stride towards him.

“Here you go, Chief,” she declared as she reached the doorway. He took the proffered paper and grunted in acknowledgement.

“How much red ink am I gonna need on this, Lois?” he questioned, carefully.

“Chief?” she replied in horror. He raised an eyebrow and she rolled her eyes. “I used the spell check this time.”

“Really. Well, let’s just see, shall we?” He turned and closed the door behind him. Lois watched through the slats in his blind as he made his way back to his desk, already reading through her copy.

She headed back to her own desk, taking a slight detour past Clark’s. She trailed her hand over the edge and smiled. There wasn’t much on here yet: his computer and phone, a notepad, some pens and a coffee mug.

As she sat down opposite and looked back over she wondered how long it would be until he brought some personal items. Maybe a plant. And how long until a photograph of the two of them had pride of place? She could almost see the photograph that would be on her desk if she closed her eyes and concentrated enough. But then it would blur and fade within seconds.

“So, I guess he showed you the stars, eh, Lois,” came the sarcastic voice from behind.

She opened her eyes and rolled them up to the ceiling before twirling round on her chair. “It’s daytime, Cat,” she drawled. “Or, are you confused at being able to see everything without turning the lights on?” Lois grinned. “It’s called the Sun, you know. Opposite of the Moon. It comes out in the daytime. Stars kinda fade away with how bright it is, you know.”

Cat glared at her. “I get it. He wasn’t interested.” She laughed. “I am not at all surprised. I mean, a god in a cape, with awesome powers, and a ... seriously sexy body ... would find it hard to raise any interest in a workaholic, emotionless—”

Lois stood in anger and her chair skittered out behind her. Cat immediately stopped her insults and took a step back.

“Whoa! Hold on there, Lois.”

“For your information, Cat ...” Lois opened her mouth and then realised that anything she said next would either incriminate her, or Clark, or Superman or any combination.

“Hey!” Cat held up her hands in surrender. “If you can’t take a little teasing ...” She laughed again. “It’s just a pity your handsome partner wasn’t around. I’d have liked to see his reaction to you in another man’s arms.”

Cat began to walk off. Lois called after her, frowning. “What the heck is that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing, Lois. Nothing at all.”

Lois turned back to her desk as Cat’s voice faded. Drawing her chair back up she sat down.

It’s just a pity your handsome partner wasn’t around. I’d have liked to see his reaction to you in another man’s arms.

Was she hinting that Clark wouldn’t like the idea? That was a given ... years in the future. But what about now? Lois’ heart began to race. She glanced up at the elevator doors once more. Oh, Clark was not coming back, but it was an instinctual reaction she had to thoughts of him. Either that, or looking across at his desk.

Lois began to recall instances over the last few days. Leaning back in her chair she began to swing it a little. Clark had asked her out ... clear and simple. She’d also intercepted and cut off two other possible requests for a date.

Now, there was a chance it was her own projected emotions,

and she'd misinterpreted all those situations, but ... she'd also seen affectionate looks on his face. She drew the line at calling them 'devoted' or 'loving' in case she was overestimating. Still, there was something. And Cat had just indicated the presence of ... jealousy — from Clark.

Her heart skipped a beat once more. A smile came to her face and could not be contained.

Since the life-threatening circumstances of the last few days she had come to the realisation that trying to live OL's life would not necessarily guarantee a life with Clark. So, she should live her own life.

And that meant being with Clark. Now.

If he wasn't attracted to her, then she was resolved to work on him. At every possible opportunity. But maybe he already **was** attracted to her. All she needed to do was make her interest known.

She couldn't wait. She dropped her gaze to the floor and a cheeky smile stole over her face as she considered telling him all about 'Superman'. Possibly the jealousy card was the perfect card to play to win this game.

"Morning Lois." The voice of her future husband came over her shoulder.

"Clark, where've you been?" Lois immediately felt altogether disappointed, worried and rejected that he'd never returned to the office yesterday. She pushed away those unhelpful thoughts and, instead, remembered her resolve to let him know her interest in **him**, but also to tease him and rouse a little jealousy.

"Around," came Clark's vague — but completely truthful — reply. Lois had to suppress a laugh.

"Well, not that it's anywhere near as exciting as the stories you covered on your round the world adventures, but Superman was in the newsroom and I've just about nailed down the exclusive." She grinned in triumph and happiness.

"Well, congratulations." His voice was bright and encouraging, but his eyes looked wary.

"Clark, you should've seen him, up close." Clark deserved all the teasing that was coming to him for ignoring her, for not finding her attractive — possibly — for not giving her an interview and for not returning to work yesterday. "He is the most magnificent figure of a man I've ever..."

"Sounds like he made quite an impression on you." His voice was extremely wary. Did he not like her admiring his body?

"He did... why? Are you concerned about his legitimacy?"

"Superman? No!" His sudden defence of his alter ego was understandable. "No," he spoke more calmly. "He seems genuine ... uh, what I saw anyway."

Lois slid her arm into Clark's and began leading him toward the elevators. "What you saw? What *did* you see of Superman?"

"Um, the same as everyone else I guess."

"Really, cause I didn't see you around the newsroom at all yesterday." She stopped them and looked up at him.

"Uh." His eyes were wide. "So, where are we going?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Terrorist shoot-out on Sixth." She couldn't help but smile. It was cruel, to play these tricks on him, make him uncomfortable. But it made her feel better at the moment. Until he was in love with her she'd comfort herself with this little game. "And Clark." They arrived at the elevators and Lois turned. "Just to make sure you are pulling your weight in this partnership ... it's your turn to ask the questions. Then after that ... you're taking me to lunch."

THE END

Fear not. The story will continue in *Coping with Destiny*.
(Although it may be quite some time off — sorry.)