

Countdown

By Mouserocks <mouserocksnerd@gmail.com>

Rated: PG

Submitted: October 2017

Summary: Every new year can play a part in shaping who you are. The triumphs and trials of the different New Year's moments for Lois and Clark.

Story Size: 9,126 words (50Kb as text)

December 31, 1976

Clark couldn't believe it. Here it was, New Year's eve just barely fifteen minutes away, and he kept having to shake his parents awake on the couch. How could they possibly sleep? He had enough energy bubbling within him to run several laps around the farm's property and still come back inside in time to watch the ball drop.

Every time the tv cut to that image of the ball all lit up, Clark positively vibrated with excitement. The prospects of it all, the whole world out there celebrating, not caring about who they were or what was happening. In a big city like New York or Metropolis, you could just get lost in the atmosphere of it all. That was what made it so exciting, Clark decided. He wished he could be somewhere like that for New Year's Eve. Everything buzzed with excitement there.

Absolutely nothing like Smallville.

He couldn't help glancing out the window to the darkened sky beyond. While their nearest neighbors were a couple of miles away, Clark usually could see some sort of lights on in the distance, usually from the Irig's house. And even though it was almost midnight, he'd expected that there would be some people still up late on New Year's Eve.

Perhaps they were all out at the town's New Year's party. Yes, that had to be it. Even in the sleepy town of Smallville, they had to celebrate the coming of the new year. 1977 was going to be a big deal. Well, for him anyway. He'd be ten in just a few short months. And for some reason, he just had this feeling in the back of his mind— things were gonna change this year. Big things.

He thought about all the things that had changed for him in this last year already. How much stronger and faster he had gotten. Faster than he should have been, for his age. His parents had finally told him the truth about how they'd found him, about how little they knew about how he came to them.

That thought dampened his enthusiasm for a moment. He wished he knew more, but unfortunately he didn't think he ever would learn anything else about his birth parents. Briefly he wondered whether they were somewhere out there tonight, anticipating the new year as much as he was. Maybe they were watching the same television program, watching the same ball get ready to drop and the same musical groups performing live. Although it could be just as likely that they, like most of the adults he knew in Smallville, watched the more conservative Guy Lombardo on CBS.

Maybe they were thinking about him, just like he was thinking of them right now.

Jonathan's head snapped up suddenly as his head slipped off his fist and he jolted awake. "Hmm? Wha... Oh. Oh." He cleared his throat and carefully nudged Martha awake in turn.

A wave of guilt washed over him suddenly as he glanced at his dozing parents. He loved them more than anything— they were his parents, and always would be. There were just some days...

some times when he couldn't help but wonder about what his life would be if he hadn't miraculously made his way here, to his home in Kansas. How would it have been different? Would he have the same abilities? Would his birth parents love him as much as his real ones did now?

Clark glanced at the clock. Only two more minutes now. He smiled at his drowsy parents excitedly before turning his gaze back to watch Dick Clark counting down to the ball drop. He didn't understand how they could be so tired. Sure, they had to get up early in the morning, and they normally were asleep by ten, but he was wired. The lights, the music, the entire display— it was invigorating. He bounced slightly on the couch up and down as the last sixty seconds of the countdown began. He turned with a grin to shake both his parents' arms gently.

"Dad! Mom! Stay awake! The countdown! It's happening— it's the countdown!"

"We're awake, Clark," Jonathan murmured sleepily. Clark poked his stomach a few more times and he finally sighed and sat upright. "All right, all right! We get it, we're awake." He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes as Martha did the same. "How much time is left?"

Clark started the countdown enthusiastically. "Twelve, eleven, ten, nine..."

Jonathan chuckled and smiled at his wife over the top of their son's head. As over-eager as Clark was, they still couldn't begrudge him his excitement. Just seeing his eyes all lit up was enough for them.

"... Four, three, two, ONE— HAPPY NEW YEAR!!"

Clark leaped off the couch with whoop and a cheer as the ball finally dropped. Then the screen cut to some fireworks and then Dick Clark turning to kiss his wife. He turned back around to grin at his parents and caught them sharing a sweet kiss. He wrinkled his nose and uttered the obligatory "gross" at them, causing them to chuckle, but at the same time he felt a wave of happiness rise up inside of him. He knew one thing for sure— no matter what might his life might have been like if he hadn't wound up here, he couldn't imagine it being any more perfect than what it was now.

December 31, 1977

Lois hid halfway up the stairs, twisting her unkempt brown hair in her fingers, and listening to her parents fight and bicker once again. She didn't understand it. It was the end of the year! Did they have to fight with each other? Maybe they were just trying to get it all out, so that they wouldn't have to fight in the new year. Yes, that's what she would tell herself. Again. Maybe this year it would come true.

Wow, 1978. She would turn ten this year. Despite the arguing going on below, Lois couldn't help but smile at that thought. She was so excited! Things would surely be great by then. Ten meant no longer in the single digits. It meant she was an older kid now. A pre-teen. She couldn't believe it. Lucy was gonna be so jealous!

Her happiness was brief at the reminder of her younger sister, and Lois sighed. After listening to the fighting rage on for a few more moments, she finally got to her feet and padded quietly down the hall over to Lucy's bedroom. She knocked softly on the door. "Luce? Can I come in?"

The door cracked open briefly and a pair of frightened brown eyes peeked out at her. After ascertaining that it was only Lois, Lucy quickly opened the door wide for her sister before shutting it behind her equally as fast.

"So, what are you doin' in here— oof!!"

Lucy flung her arms around her big sister's waist firmly, knocking the wind out of Lois for a moment. Lois immediately returned the gesture, holding her tight as the sounds of muffled sobbing drifted up to her ears. "Shh-shh-shh. It's okay. It's all going to be okay," Lois was quick to reassure Lucy— but she didn't know what was happening either, to be honest. Mother and

Daddy always fought, but for some reason it seemed especially bad tonight.

She glanced at the clock on her sister's garishly pink walls and watched as another minute passed by. The smile returned to her lips. "Hey, you know what?"

Lucy sniffed and looked up at her with red-rimmed eyes, tears still dripping down her chubby face. "Hmm?"

"It's almost midnight," Lois spoke quietly and smoothed the five year old's hair down in a soothing gesture.

"I-It is?"

"Mm-hmm. We're less than two minutes away. See when that big hand lands on the twelve— the top number? That's midnight. It's only two lines away, see?"

She could tell her sister was immediately cheered by the idea, as she dashed away her tears and a smile immediately lit up her face. "Really?"

Lois grinned. "Really-really."

Lucy giggled. "Really really really?"

Lois rolled her eyes and reached down to tickle the girl's sides. "Yes, really!" Lucy squealed in delight and squirmed away to escape. Unfortunately for Lucy, Lois easily caught her and dragged her to the floor with peals of laughter.

As their giggling subsided, Lois looked at the clock once more. One minute now. She smiled and helped her sister up and guided her to the window. "Look, come here," she spoke firmly, sure of herself. Lucy came willingly and sat on the window seat by her big sister, completely in awe of her. Lois grinned conspiratorially at the girl. "Hey, guess what?"

"What?"

"In about thirty seconds, it's gonna be midnight, and the whole sky is gonna be lit up!"

Lucy's eyes went wide with excitement. "Like stars?"

"Better than stars," Lois grinned. "Watch." She glanced back at the clock and noticed they had about ten seconds left. She counted them down mentally as she turned her own eyes to look back out the window waiting for the fireworks to start.

"Three... two... one..."

Suddenly an explosion of color and light ripped through the skies high above the Metropolis skyline, in perfect view of the Lane residence's upstairs window. Lucy squealed with excitement and joy. The sound wasn't so loud from their vantage point, so she wasn't even scared of them anymore. Lois grinned happily, looking over to watch the colors play across her little sister's delighted expression. Unable to help herself, she pulled Lucy into her arms and pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

"It's gonna be a good year, Lucy," she whispered, and together the Lane sisters turned their focus back up to the display in the stars.

December 31, 1981

Lois couldn't remember a holiday this depressing. Sure, it was always tough when Mother and Daddy fought, but even the fighting and swearing and breaking of plates was better than... this. This awkward, horrible, emptiness. The silence.

She hated silence. She could literally hear the seconds ticking by on the large clock in the living room, and slowly at that. Mother had been asleep— passed out was probably the more accurate term— for the past two hours now. Midnight was closing in, but she wasn't about to try and wake her. At best, Ellen Lane simply wouldn't wake. At worst, waking her up would be accompanied by a barrage of curses, slurred words, and a hangover like none other. So no, Lois decided she would not be ringing in the new year with her alcoholic mother.

She huffed a sigh. She wouldn't be ringing it in with anyone, then. Lucy was at their father's, though not because either party wanted it that way. It was just that Ellen had the girls for Christmas, therefore Sam got them for New Years. It was the trade

off the courts had insisted on. And even though Sam Lane over the years had screamed and cussed at her mother about how much he didn't like any of them, how he would gladly give her full custody and never ask to see them again— the Sam Lane who always had to win got his way with shared custody, mainly rotating holidays and weekends. Lois only escaped it this time because technically the state couldn't force her to go. She was a freshman in high school now— fourteen, going on fifteen. And to be honest, she didn't think this whole arrangement was going to last very long anyway. Samuel Lane was easily distracted. He didn't insist much on her part anyway.

But, in the meantime, it left her here, all alone on a holiday. In silence.

That was probably the worst part of it all. That echoing silence. She felt this undeniable need to fill it, even though no one would be listening. The risk of waking her mother stopped her, of course, but the thought was nice.

She could write, but what exactly? She wasn't in the mood to write a story with a happy ending, and any poetry was likely to come out much darker than she intended. And she was not about to become one of those "dear diary" girls who wrote in pink gel pens with a cursive script about how they wanted to go out with this boy but he was dating some other skank. Just the thought made her roll her eyes. She hated those girls. They were so whiny all the time.

So, there she sat, next to her passed out mother, watching Dick Clark ring in the New Year on mute. It was pathetic. Huffing a sigh, she got up to turn off the tube and padded softly up to her room.

Looking around, she realized how baby-ish it was. She was in high school now. She shouldn't still have the frills on the skirt of her bed, or the dolls or the ballerina wallpaper-border that ran around the top of her walls. It was 1982, for goodness' sakes. She wasn't a child anymore. She determined that over the next year, she would try to grow up some more— and she started by moving all her toys and dolls off her bed and desk. Desks were for work and beds were for sleeping— anything else was an unnecessary distraction. Besides, she was considering joining the school paper after she finished her journalism class this semester. That would require a lot of outside of class activities, and she didn't want the older kids to make fun of her silly little room. They'd probably already make fun of her for her divorced parents, or her drunk of a mother. She had to do what she could to fit in, be normal.

Pink was not normal.

Her hands stilled as they finally came to rest on the last stuffed animal on her bed— Tedo, the teddy bear. Lois couldn't help but smile at him as she picked him up and raised him to her eye level for inspection. He was her favorite, as evidenced by how worn out and tired he looked, his brown fur a bit tattered and a few strings hanging here or there. She remembered getting him, when she was only about three or four years old. She remembered how excited she'd been, when her father pulled his arms out from behind his back, bearing this gift for his little princess.

Suddenly a pang of sadness washed over her, as the memory of her father as he was faded and the memory of the man he was today reasserted itself. Why did anything ever have to change? She didn't understand it. She remembered times when they had all been happy— why couldn't they have stayed that way? For a moment, Lois hated the thought of growing up, wanting to crawl back into that three year old self and stay there, content, forever. But she knew that was foolish. Everyone had to grow up someday. Disappointment was a part of that, she had come to accept.

That's just the way it was.

As Lois looked into Tedo's glassy, black eyes, she debated over what she should do. She should put him away in her closet with the rest of her dolls and toys, ready to get a new start on the new year...

But.

She couldn't put him down. Couldn't bring herself to part with this relic from her past. She smiled at the bear and set him back down on the mattress, propping him up against the pillow gently as she turned to prepare for bed.

After all, it was still only 1981. She could pretend for a night.

December 31, 1983

"Say cheese!" the photographer spoke with a grin.

Clark wrapped his arm around his date and smiled broadly at the camera. "Cheese!"

The camera flashed, and the photographer waved at them. "See you back at the Smallville Press in the new year, Clark?"

He grinned and pushed his glasses back up his nose. "Yeah, definitely. See you later, Bart."

Clark turned back to find that his date had left his side. Frowning, he scanned the room for her before finally resting on her blonde locks, as she mingled with a large crowd of other teenagers from their high school. With a sigh, he quickly jogged up to her side and grazed her elbow. "Lana? What are you—"

"Oh, good!" She drawled slowly, giving him the impression that she was rolling her eyes to her friends as she spoke to him before turning around to face him with a fake smile plastered on her face. "Clark, could you go get me a drink? Some pop sure sounds nice."

He couldn't help the sigh that escaped him as he turned to do as he was told. Here they were, finally dating, and together at the Smallville New Year's Party—and Lana acted like she wanted nothing to do with him. He knew she could be a bit shallow at times, and yeah, she was known to serially date members of whatever sports team was in season. But for some reason, Clark had still believed that deep down, Lana was still the nice little girl he'd met in kindergarten and been so taken with. They had been best friends growing up. It made sense to him.

Not to Lana, though. High school happened and everything changed. She started to only care about her hair and makeup and which boys were the hottest—and he was a nerd. A freak. Especially in that crucial time when he had just started to come into his own as a teenager—well, he had lost quite a few friends to his somewhat reclusive behavior as more and more powers began manifesting themselves to him. He was the weird one, the awkward one, and Lana—ever so desperate to be popular—had jumped on that bandwagon faster than a... well, faster than he could have even.

That had hurt.

But slowly, Clark became more comfortable with who he was, got a little bit more control over his powers and his life. He made friends again. And as of last year, when he made varsity on the school's football team, Clark had suddenly known what it was to be popular. And Lana finally noticed him again.

Still, it had taken her some time before she decided that he was worthy dating material. Time, and mostly that accidental winning touchdown that he'd gotten a couple of months ago in the playoffs game.

Clark finally approached the snack stand with his shoulders hunched over and his hands shoved deep into his pockets to find his mother manning the station.

"Hey, honey," Martha spoke warmly to her son as she poured a glass of punch for Pete's parents in front of him. "How's your night goin' so far?"

"Um... alright I guess. Lana wanted me to get her a pop, so... I'm here."

He saw his mother's nose wrinkle slightly in distaste. He knew what she thought of Lana, but he also knew it wasn't something he was prepared to get into now. "Don't—"

"I didn't."

"But you were about to."

"I was not," she countered stubbornly.

Clark rolled his eyes and held his hand out for the drink. "Can you just hand me a bottle of pop, please?"

She smiled sweetly at him as she reached for a glass bottle that was stored under the table. "Sure thing, sweetie."

He took it graciously out of her hands and smiled at her.

"Thanks."

"You don't want something, too?"

Clark shook his head. "I'm fine."

"You sure? You know I can slip you something stronger, if you need it."

Even without the wink and the stage whisper, Clark knew his mother was teasing, but he was in no spirits to be made fun of. "Mom, I'm not eighteen for another two months. I can't drink. Besides, I don't want anything."

"Well, you know this might be your only chance. They're trying to raise the drinking age to twenty-one nationally now."

Clark shrugged and spoke softly, but a glint of humor was in his eye. "It doesn't matter anyway. Alcohol doesn't affect me."

Martha put a hand on her hip and pointed a serving spoon at him with a frown. "Excuse me, young man?"

Clark just grinned and sauntered away, back towards Lana and her clique. As he approached however, he heard snippets of conversation coming from their tight little circle.

"So what are you going to do, Lana?"

"I don't know yet. I really like Clark, I do. He's a great guy, really good-looking, and he's even a quarterback. It's just... he's not really moving that fast. I'm pretty sure he has no idea what he's doing in the, uh, romance department, you know?"

"But if Brad wants to get back together with you—"

"I know, I know."

"Well, would you go all the way with Brad if he asked?"

"And just to be clear, he is asking..."

Giggles erupted from the handful of girls that made up Lana's posse and Clark found himself rooted to the spot, several feet away from his so-called girlfriend with his mouth agape. Lana was thinking about leaving him? And for someone like Brad?! He couldn't believe it! Belatedly, he realized that he should do something besides stand there like an idiot, waiting for someone to notice his odd behavior. He spun on his heel and stormed back across the town square, trying to put as much distance between himself and Lana as he possibly could, muttering apologies to the people he accidentally cut off or bumped into on his path.

Suddenly he collided with his father's large form and nearly knocked the both of them over in the process. "Woah, Clark! Where's the fire, son?"

"Sorry, Dad," he murmured, attempting to get around him in a rush.

"Hey now, hold on a minute," Jonathan's hand on his arm stayed him, and Clark had to shut his eyes tightly out of irritation. "What's wrong, Clark?"

"I-I just... I can't..." he spluttered, keeping his eyes shut behind his glasses.

Jonathan, recognizing a problem, carefully guided him around the crowds and through to his favorite, secluded spot, even in a small town like Smallville on a night where nearly everyone was about. "Come on. Let's go talk for a minute."

Clark gave in with a sigh and followed his father through the crowds, out towards an empty field out behind the grocer's. Most everyone would be heading toward the other side of the town, to catch the fireworks show, but Clark knew his dad had always liked this spot. If they walked out further they could reach the pond, but not tonight. Tonight he just wanted to sit and think, looking up at the stars.

"Clark," Jonathan prodded gently. "What's on your mind, son?"

He paused, wondering whether he was ready to talk about it

yet. He didn't want to— talking about it made it seem more real. But on the other hand, he always felt better about his problems whenever he discussed them with his parents. He ran a hand through his hair before diving straight in. "I overheard Lana, talking with some of her friends."

"Clark," Jonathan warned.

"I know, I know. I didn't mean to listen in, I just... I kind of overheard and then she said my name and now I find out that she's thinking about ditching me to go out with Brad! I mean, Brad?! Come on! Dad, you know how he is! He's a di-jerk. Major jerk."

Jonathan repressed his smile at his son's catch. "Well, what was Lana saying? Was she really considering it?"

Clark nodded, depressed. "Yeah. She seemed like it."

He sighed and scuffed his foot in the dirt. "Look, Clark. I'm not going to tell you what you should do. You've gotta make that decision on your own. I can tell you what your mother would say, but that won't help you out much. I can say though that I think you need to consider where you're taking things with Lana."

Clark stared up at the stars, hands resting heavily on top of his head out of exasperation. "I know. It's just... hard to hear." He shot his father a brief smile. "You mind giving me a few minutes just to myself? I wanna think for a bit."

Jonathan nodded and put a hand on his son's shoulder. "Just don't think too long. We're only about thirty minutes from midnight. I'm going to go help Wayne and a couple of the others finish setting up the fireworks."

Clark's smile didn't quite reach his eyes. "Thanks, Dad."

Jonathan smiled at him in return before turning and walking away, leaving Clark to his thoughts. He sighed, slightly in relief. He needed time to think about all this, alone.

Lana got into his head. That much he knew. But what was it about, really? Was it really love? He supposed not. Lana had never professed such feelings for him before. Did he love her? Clark thought a moment, before deciding he must not. They were close, good friends— at one point, anyway— but they were by no means in love with each other. If they were, Clark assumed he wouldn't even have to be asking these questions. He knew what love was— he had witnessed it from his parents for the past seventeen years of his life. He wouldn't fool himself into thinking that he and Lana had anything on the scale of that.

Still, he did like her a lot. And she seemed to like him, tonight's comments aside. Well, she cared for him, or at least what others thought of him. Clark winced slightly. He knew she felt like she was settling by going out with him. But did he deserve to be treated like that? Did he really want to be with someone who was only going to put him down all the time?

Could he trust his secret to that someone?

That was the million dollar question. Clark knew that one day, he'd have to tell whoever he loved the truth about himself— powers and all. But could he tell Lana, especially now knowing that it was always in the back of her mind to leave him? What if she found him disgusting after learning the truth? What if she told his secret to the world? He didn't think she would do that, but then again, he hadn't thought that he'd have to worry about her ditching him for Brad, either. It wasn't too much of a stretch to imagine.

"Clark?" Lana's voice drifted into his awareness and he turned around to find her slowly walking across the field towards him. "There you are. I've been looking all over for you. What are you doing out here? Fireworks are about to start soon."

He didn't respond until he felt her arms wrap around him, and he suddenly found himself pulling away from her, unangling himself from her limbs.

"Clark? What's wrong?"

He felt his breath hitch. What was wrong? He couldn't exactly tell her the truth, especially if she was considering leaving him already. If she even suspected something slightly off, he could be

doomed. But did he really want to end things with her, on New Year's Eve? They were even planning on attending prom together in the spring, and it would be so hard to break up with her before something like that— no. There was no way he could let her string him along for that long. And it wasn't fair to drag her along any longer either.

He took a deep breath and let his eyes drift shut for a moment as he composed himself. Just rip it off, like a bandage. "Lana, I can't keep doing this. I know you're not really that into me. I don't want either of us to be stuck with each other just because... well, just because."

The look that materialized on Lana Lang's face would have been priceless, if it didn't cut him to the core. This was obviously not the conversation she had been expecting. "Wait a minute. Are you— are you breaking up with me?"

Her tone was incredulous, and for a moment he wanted to take it all back, shout "just kidding!" and pretend he'd never brought anything up in the first place. But then an image of Lana and Brad flashed through his head and he resolved to see this through. "I'm sorry, Lana."

Her mouth hung open. "Wh-where is this coming from? I thought you- I thought we had a good thing. Don't you like me at all, Clark?"

His gut clenched and he took a step closer to Lana, resting a hand on her shoulder gently. "I do care about you, Lana. I care a little too much. But I know you're not as invested in this relationship as I am. I know there's probably other guys out there you're interested in... I don't want to get in your way."

Dawning seemed to read in Lana's eyes, and her whole body language changed with a flip of blonde locks over her shoulder. "So that's what this is about. You found out about Brad."

Clark felt guilty at that, and looked to his shoes. "I've heard some rumors," he admitted.

Lana shook her head with a sad sort of smile. She seemed to know she had lost. "You're a good guy, Clark. And I would never do anything deliberately to tear us apart. But—"

"I know," Clark couldn't get the last bit of bitterness out of his tone.

"I wish it could have been different."

He flashed her a tight-lipped smile. "It would have come to this sooner or later. We want different things out of life." Clark shrugged his shoulders. He didn't have anything left to say and even if he could come up with something, he no longer had the energy to say it.

Lana smiled at him. "I'm sorry, Clark."

He nodded sullenly.

"Happy New Year?"

A short laugh managed to escape him at that. "Yeah. Happy New Year, Lana."

With that she ran off, leaving him to sulk by himself in peace. Clark sighed and looked up at the stars. He wished... he left the thought right there, because there were so many things he wished in that moment. He wished he hadn't had to break up with Lana, wished he'd never overheard anything, wished he was normal, wished he knew why he was this way, why he had these powers... the list could go on and on. Inevitably he would just end up spiraling and then he'd ruin everybody's new year.

The sound of fireworks exploding rippled through the cold night air, startling Clark out of his musings. He spun around and tilted his gaze to look at the flashes of color painting the inky black sky just above the buildings blocking his vision. He remembered, when his hearing had first started to come in full force, how frightened he'd been of the fireworks— how he'd spent the whole Fourth of July hiding under his bed, his parents trying to coax him out so they could go enjoy their picnic. Clark chuckled to himself. Things changed a lot since then. And they would continue to change. After all, 1984 was going to be a big year for

him. This was his senior year, he'd start college in the fall— Clark refused to focus on the negative right now.

Plastering a smile on to his face, he turned back towards town in search of his parents.

December 31, 1986

Lois stumbled along the hallway as the alcohol started to settle in a bit. She wasn't accustomed to drinking yet— on the few occasions where she had snuck something in the past, it wasn't nearly the same amount of free booze that was flowing at the dorms tonight. Luckily for Lois, no one seemed to care if you were twenty-one yet or not.

She steeled herself as she clumsily made her way along her path, determined to just get this over with. Sure, Paul had turned her down several times over since their first "date" a few weeks ago, but surely he wouldn't turn her down if she went to his dorm room and directly asked him.

Well, okay, there was a slight risk, but Lois didn't care. She was drunk and admittedly horny and she was Lois Lane, dammit. She fought for what she wanted and she wanted this. Even if he turned her down. Even if he made fun of her. Even if it ruined her reputation at the paper.

Finally, after what seemed like the longest, twistiest hallway in the history of hallways, she reached Paul's door and slumped against it. She took a deep breath, straightened herself up, ran a hand through her long dark hair and ultimately got up the courage to knock.

No response. Maybe he wasn't in. It was New Year's, after all. Maybe he'd be back later. To be safe, Lois knocked again, swaying gently on her feet as she waited. Still nothing. She sighed out of exasperation and tested the handle— and it immediately gave way. She stumbled in through the door unexpectedly and found herself cursing loudly as she tripped over herself, trying to get her bearings. This was less than ideal. Thank god he wasn't here to see her, but then again—

"EEEEEEKK!!!"

The shriek made Lois wince and cover her ears. She looked up to find the source of the horrid noise scrambling to cover up in front of her, wide eyes and bottle blonde hair and skin and sheets, draped over none other than—

"Paul?"

He swore and tried to cover up. "Uh, Lois! I, uh, I was going to call—"

Furious, she spun on her heel and stormed out of his room. Now uncomfortably sobered— well, relatively speaking— Lois managed to keep her balance the entire way back to her own dorm, not even wanting to hear their excuses. Not even caring that her supposed best friend was hooking up with her supposed boyfriend, and editor. She'd have time to digest that later. Right now, she just needed to get into her bed and sleep.

She swung open the door to her room and slammed it swiftly behind her. As she unceremoniously deposited herself on her mattress, she noticed irritably that the television was still on in the corner, displaying all of the happy faces of the people ringing in the new year. How 1987 was going to be the best year, and they wouldn't break any of their resolutions this time around, and they'd kissed their partners under the lights and fireworks and to be honest Lois just wanted to shove it all. If she were feeling well enough to try to stand again, she'd go turn off the box herself, but it was late and she was tired and — were those tears on her pillow? She marveled slightly at that. It had been a while since the last time she cried.

Suddenly the dam broke and all her tears started gushing forth. Lois cried herself to sleep, thinking of how awful her night had turned out, despite all of her hopes to start, thinking of how much she hated Paul and Linda, thinking how she wished she could actually go home to a nice, happy, un-broken family, or just to

simply have someone there for her in general. As her eyes finally started to dry and drift closed, she caught a glimpse of the screen once more and one last thought ran through her head.

1987 was going to be her year. And there wasn't a damn thing anybody else could do about it.

December 31, 1988

The streets were the busiest he'd ever seen in his life. Despite having traveled around quite a bit, he had never experienced any place quite so busy. And smelly. Oh, god, the smells were everywhere, worse than the people. The people were packed in and more than a little abrasive, but they served their purpose— keeping him hidden. It was claustrophobic in the streets of Ahmedabad, tonight especially of all nights, and that would work to his advantage.

The smells, however, did nothing to help him.

Clark couldn't believe it. Here it was, New Year's Eve, and he was a million miles away from home, alone, and in hiding. Not that he really had anything to worry about. But the state of Gujarat had caught onto his presence, and as a result, he was being extremely cautious of his comings and goings. He knew he was being followed for some time now. He couldn't just up and leave, much as he'd like to. Besides, he'd still have to get all of his stuff together, and the family he was staying with— while nice people, of course— didn't really need the trouble of the government pestering them.

Clark didn't know how he could have been so stupid. The man had been hurt— bloody and beaten and in desperate need of help — and he was just being a good Samaritan. The man was being chased through the fairly empty desert; his followers had weapons drawn. Clark felt it only too natural to step in.

He hadn't known that, in reality, he had ended up helping a prisoner of the Gujarat government escape custody. Not until afterwards, when it was aired on the local news station.

Clark had felt guilty. So, with a little use of his special abilities, he had relocated the escaped prisoner and dropped him back off into police custody.

The unfortunate part of all this was that someone had made him. The lucky part was that they had only seen him when he was dropping off the convict, and not when Clark was helping him. If they had seen that, then they'd likely be arresting him instead of just keeping close tabs on him. Clark thanked his lucky stars for that. He couldn't very well explain himself. He could barely explain it now, not without revealing some very personal secrets. And he had to get back to school in three weeks!

So. He would put up with a little bit of surveillance for a couple of days and then quietly make his exit from the country. In the meantime, he was stuck in India on New Year's Eve.

He called his parents earlier to let them know of his predicament, and they were concerned but understanding. They claimed that it was fine, they didn't expect him to be there for every major holiday— he had his own life now. That didn't keep Clark from feeling a little guilty over missing it.

Clark decided he would make the best out of it. So he went into the city, looking for a good place to view the fireworks, maybe eat a nice meal somewhere. If only he could find some place— any place— that wasn't so darn packed.

He checked his watch. It was ten-thirty already, and he still hadn't eaten. With a small huff of irritation, Clark turned down yet another packed street to search for some place with food. He had already wasted a lot of time trekking through the restaurants surrounding the American consulate, hoping perhaps to get a little taste of home while abroad. That was a BIG mistake. It seemed like everyone and their brother had been thinking the same thing. Not to mention it was all too expensive or needed a reservation in order to even step foot in the door.

He couldn't help but sigh again. This was why he hated cities.

Finally, he happened upon a little hole in the wall place that seemed to be serving food and wasn't all too busy. The smells didn't make it seem promising, but he'd eat anything at this point. His body didn't necessarily need nourishment, but he was tired and upset and wanting to eat. If he didn't get some food in him right then, he was liable to do something stupid, like fly home and hope they had some leftovers.

He walked in and deliberately avoided looking at the ground or towards the kitchen, just in case. He looked at the menu on display, frowning as he saw the grab-bag mix of dishes of all types of cuisine. He wasn't sure if the owners and cooks really had that much experience with those various types of entrees, but he highly doubted it. Most likely they just found out what some of the most popular dishes were for the tourists in the area and took a couple from each culture, pairing them alongside dishes of typical Gujarati cuisine.

"Ki maim tuhadi sahaita kar sakda ham?"

Clark blinked at the man standing before him at the counter, not quite realizing how he had gotten to the front so quickly. He took a moment to process what the man was saying, translate it through his under-nourished brain before nodding. He was still somewhat new at Punjabi, and while he was picking up rather quickly still, comparatively speaking, he found it more difficult than most of the other languages he learned simply because there were so many different dialects. The language was hard to read, hard to speak, hard to hear. Everyone picked up different words here and there, and it had him completely befuddled. So in spite of his usual quick wit, he opted to get by with his English.

"You speak English?"

The man suddenly disappeared, leaving Clark wondering if he'd done or said something wrong, when he just as suddenly returned with a teenaged boy. He spoke several sentences of what sounded like Gujarati mixed with the more common Punjabi before throwing his hands up and running off to do something else.

Clark smiled at the shy kid before him. From what he could make out, the previous waiter indicated that the boy was learning some English. But he seemed so quiet—he must be very nervous, and obviously quite new at this. Clark decided to make it easier on him, and offered a simple hello in Punjabi. The boy smiled and nodded in return, and Clark felt a bit more settled as a result. "I'm sorry. You speak English?" he enunciated slowly.

The boy nodded. "Yes. Speak little English."

Clark smiled. "Thank you. Can I get something to eat?"

The boy nodded. "Yes. What would you like to order?"

"What's good? You choose."

The boy's eyes lit up. "Okay. I choose."

Clark found a small table and took a seat, just ready to be done with it all. He sighed. It wasn't even close to midnight yet in Smallville—he was thirteen hours ahead here in India. On the one hand, it would be neat to see what sort of traditions the culture had to offer; on the other hand, he was so relentlessly homesick.

The boy brought out a steaming hot plate of indistinguishable foods, and Clark smiled gratefully, taking a bite. His brows jumped up in surprise. "Very good," he spoke after swallowing. "Bahuta acha. Tuhada dhanavada."

The boy's eyes lit up. "You're welcome," he spoke quietly, but proudly nonetheless, before leaving Clark to his meal in peace.

It was actually quite good—a little on the spicy side, but he liked spicy food. The twisting in his gut must have been residual homesickness. He sighed. Nothing really compared to Mom's food when it came down to it.

A loud crack of explosives startled through Clark's ears and he flinched, head snapping in the direction of the window. Fireworks bloomed above him as he stared over the rim of his glasses and through the walls—brilliant reds and greens and all different shapes and sizes. He couldn't help but smile to himself. "Hello,

1989," he murmured.

He quietly went back to enjoying his dinner, wondering what the new year might have in store for him.

December 31, 1993

Lois swung her hips to the music, her movements loosened and exaggerated by the application of one two many sips of bubbly. Clark grinned as he watched her shake it out, let go of the day's earlier near-miss. As tight-laced and hard-nosed as Lois Lane was, it was easy to forget sometimes that she had a softer side.

"Hey," a sultry voice snuck up behind him and hissed in his ear. Clark flinched, brushing away the sensation of Cat Grant's breath against his ear with a literal brush of his fingers. He smiled politely at her, noting in a glance that she was three sheets to the wind already and likely wouldn't even remember what was happening.

"Hey, Cat."

She giggled and grabbed on to his shoulder with more force than he thought she had, rocking into him. "You got someone to rrrrrring in the new year with?"

A sloppy finger toyed with his jawline in a move Clark assumed was supposed to be flirtatious. He grimaced, pushing her off him gently. "Uh, no."

Another giggle as she slurred through her words. "Tick tock, Kent. I'll be your rrringer... I'll ring you... I'll—"

"Oh, give it a rest, Cat. Sink your claws into someone else tonight."

Clark's eyebrows shot up at the voice. "Lois?"

"Hush."

Before he knew what was happening, he was being dragged away from the aggressively-drunk-and-flirtatious Cat and onto the dance floor behind his partner-slash-crush. Even if alcohol did affect him, Clark didn't think his head could be spinning this fast.

Finally, when Lois seemed to be comfortably situated in his arms and swaying to the notes of some popular song off the beat, he cleared his throat. "Um, Lois?"

An eyeroll—back to the Lois he knew. "It's not a big deal, Clark. Can't a girl come to her best friend's rescue? You looked like you were being mauled."

Her word choice pricked his ears. "Best friend?"

Her eyes seemed to widen for a second as she realized her slip, but she relaxed her shoulders in defeat. Her tone, however, she kept sharp. "Well, why not, Smallville? Is there any harm done in admitting you're one of my best friends?"

Clark bit his cheek to suppress the giant grin that he knew was on his face and focused on keeping his feet on the floor. "No, nothing wrong with that at all."

The notes of the countdown sounded across the television sets, voices chiming in around them, but Clark couldn't seem to take his eyes off his partner—no, best friend now. She seemed to notice, and a lovely crimson flush rushed across her features.

"Four... three... two... one! Happy New Year!"

And while everybody else erupted into cheers and calls, blowing party horns and clinking glasses, there they stood. Rooted to the spot, staring each other down. The space of tension between them seeming to stretch on for a lifetime. Cat's words about ringing in the new year on a loop in his mind.

And then.

She stepped away from him, and the moment was gone, slipping through his fingers. Lois tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear and shot him a small smile. "Happy New Year, Clark."

His mouth was dry, but somehow he managed to croak out a "Happy New Year, Lois."

She was gone, just like that.

Clark stood there, a little flummoxed by the feelings raging in

his chest. One thing was for sure: it was definitely gonna be a good year as long as he had Lois in his life.

December 31, 1999

Lois groaned and shifted uncomfortably as her husband raced across the tv screen in full Superman regalia. A minor spasm pinched at the base of her spine, and she gasped, clutching the spot. She wished Clark were here— he had a way with the pillows, making them curve and support her back perfectly and she just didn't have that knack.

Thanks to her large belly, mobility was a factor as well.

She grumbled. She was ecstatic that they were finally pregnant, that they were having this baby— of course. But some of the logistics of pregnancy were no picnic. The feeling like a blimp part was no fun. Neither was the discomfort or the fact that she had to pee every time she did get comfortable.

A small flutter-kick against the front of her belly made her chuckle and she pressed a hand to the spot where their child was protesting. "I know, baby, I know. You're more than worth it."

The tv personality running the streets on screen called out for her husband as he passed by. She smiled at the screen as Superman floated down and back to her side politely.

"A lot of people are excited but nervous for the new millennium. Do you have any words of advice for the public tonight as we head into the year 2000?"

Clark nodded and looked into the camera. "Sure. Just stay safe, don't drink and drive under any circumstances, and don't worry. A lot of places have already started the new year, and the local law enforcement will be out and working overtime to make sure your new year is a safe one."

A bigger, harder succession of kicks pounded against Lois' stomach at the sound of Clark's voice through the tv set. Lois grinned widely. "That's right, bean. That's your daddy. You're the smartest little bean I've ever known."

"And don't forget, of course, to enjoy your night, have a little fun. It's not every year we get a new millenia."

"Very well put, Superman. Oh, and it looks like our countdown is starting! Care to count with me?"

He smiled but shook his head. "Thanks, but I've got another rescue to take care of. I'll start you out though: Twenty, nineteen, eighteen..."

Then he disappeared in a rush of air, leaving the reporter a bit starstruck and windblown even as she kept the countdown going. Lois smiled. Of course he would be off to another rescue. If he couldn't be home with her tonight, then he'd stick to doing something noble—

A gust of wind burst through the windows, and Lois sat up in surprise. "Clark?"

He drifted through gently, cape billowing behind him and a crooked grin on his face. "I wouldn't miss your New Year's kiss for the world. Especially not this one."

She bit her lip shyly and gestured for her husband to come closer. "Three..."

"Two..." he followed her cue as she picked up with the countdown.

"One," she whispered, and his lips sealed against hers.

December 31, 2015

The house was loud, filled with the sounds of happy, playful children and raucous chit-chat and laughter. Clark smiled as he drank it all in. A retired Perry White and his re-married wife, Alice, swapping stories with Martha and Ellen and Sam. Lucy and her husband conversing with Jimmy and his wife, who was rocking a baby to sleep in her arms. His nieces and nephew, who were following his youngest son around the living area in some sort of train and trailing giggles and mischief behind them. His two teenagers, bickering good-naturedly about something or other.

And Lois— beautiful, wonderful wife Lois...

Where was Lois?

Clark frowned slightly and sought her out, scanning the walls subtly until he came across her standing out on the balcony, looking up at the stars.

His heart stirred at the sight of her, and he quietly made his way out to meet her there. The glass door sealing behind him gave him away, and she turned around to face him with a soft smile.

"Hey."

"Hey, Smallville."

Clark smiled at the term of endearment and snaked his arms around her waist. "Party's inside, you know. In case you got lost."

Her slight snuff of laughter was enough for him, and he pressed a kiss to her cheek from behind. "Just... lost in thought, I guess."

"Anything you'd like to share?"

She was quiet for a few long moments, and Clark just let her ponder out the right wording. Sometimes, when it came to matters of the heart, Lois needed the space to collect her thoughts.

"It's just... tonight. I had the weirdest feeling. Looking at everyone in there, how I've spent each New Year with them. And I just thought about the drastic differences. When I was growing up, it was never so loud and happy. More often than not, we had very quiet, sad December thirty-firsts, followed by a similar January first. Not much to it. A lot of times, I spent it just like this— alone, looking out at the stars. Hoping for fireworks that were mostly disappointing."

His heart clenched at her pain. He knew things were better now between Lois and her parents, but every time he was reminded of her childhood, he had a moment of irrational anger flare up inside his chest. He gripped her tighter against him. "I'm sorry, honey. But we've done well, haven't we? I mean, look at everyone in there."

Clark turned them both around to look inside the warmly lit brownstone, watched as Jimmy refreshed all the adults' wine glasses and the kids snuck some more candy. Lois grinned widely and spun around in his arms to face him. "We've done fantastic, Clark. That's what I'm saying. This used to be such a hard day for me, and the fact that now we get to have this? It's incredible. I just think I appreciate it more."

His smile could have cracked his face if it got any wider. "The same goes for me, you know. I spent a lot of new year's eves wondering about my biological parents and if they missed me, or if this was finally going to be the year I fit in. But I didn't really have that feeling until I met you. And now look: I've got a ton of family. You have no idea what that means to an adopted child."

His wife's eyes teared up. "I guess we're meant to be or something, then."

"I guess so," Clark replied, wrinkling his nose with his smile.

She leaned in and kissed him, smearing her lips over his passionately, so much so that it drowned out the rest of the countdown in Clark's ears and carried them through to the new year.

THE END