

Guy Rule Number One

By Folc4evernaday (folc4evernaday@gmail.com)

Rated: PG-13

Submitted: August 2017

Summary: What if Lois Lane overheard a conversation about the “Guy Rule” and made one too many assumptions about Clark’s relationship with Superman? Set during the episode “Operation Blackout” and after “Church of Metropolis.”

Story Size: 27,906 words (154Kb as text)

A/N: In response to the Guy Rule challenge posted on the boards, “Guy Rule Number One” is the first in a series dubbed, the Rules series. Thanks to Framework4 for making the challenge. Huge thanks to Vicki for being Beta on this one and thanks to Julie for being GE on this one.

<<“*She’s your girl.*”>>

Lenny Stoke’s words echoed through Lois’ mind as she closed the window behind the Man of Steel. Her record player still played in the background the strands of “Fly Me to the Moon.” She swayed to the music by herself, recalling what it had felt like to be dancing with Superman.

How had that happened?

How had any of this happened?

One minute she’d been mourning the loss of her dance with her partner and the next Superman had been asking her to dance. It had been...magical. Too good.

The memory of last summer sprung to her mind.

<<“*Superman, is there any hope for us? You and me? I’m so completely in love with you....I can’t do anything else without knowing.*”

“*Lois, I do care for you but...There are things about me you don’t know, that you may never know.*”

“*It doesn’t matter. I know **you**. I don’t mean you: the celebrity or you: the superhero. If you had no powers at all, if you were just an ordinary man leading an ordinary life I would love you just the same. Can’t you believe that?*”

“*I wish I could Lois but under the circumstances, I don’t see how I can.*”>>

Lois recalled her heartache when she turned back to face him, and he’d disappeared. Something had been holding him back last summer. She wasn’t sure what it was, but something big had kept him aloof from her, so different from all the previous times he’d visited her. It seemed lately that his visits were becoming more frequent, giving her even more conflicting emotions.

Another admission popped in her head. Something she tried not to think about.

<<“*I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.*”

“*I knew...I mean, I guess that I knew that you liked me, that you were attracted to me, but...Oh, Clark, I’m sorry. I just don’t feel that way about you...romantically. You’re my best friend, the only partner I could ever stand to work with. I admire you, and I respect you, and I do love you ...as a friend.*”>>

Clark. There was another issue she still wasn’t sure about. One minute he’d been professing his love for her then just as quickly he’d taken it back, leaving her confused about her own feelings for him. The latest dealings with Mayson Drake and her obvious flirting with him weren’t helping things. Right now she wasn’t sure if it was just jealousy or possessiveness that was driving her anger at the new Assistant District Attorney.

It was obvious Superman felt ... something toward her. Why

was he holding back?

‘*Big Mistake.*’

‘*Huge Mistake.*’

Clark couldn’t get the image of Lois’ face when he’d arrived at her apartment after Mayson had interrupted their dance earlier in the evening.

Why couldn’t he just let it be?

He’d gone there to thank her for her advice and leave.

Then he’d been dancing with her...as Superman.

‘*Why?*’

They’d been so close tonight. He’d seen the way she was smiling at him when they were dancing at the ball then...it had stopped. She’d stepped away when Mayson asked to cut in.

‘*Why?*’

He still couldn’t wrap his head around Lois’ logic or thinking tonight. They’d been having a good time then, just as quickly, she’d walked away. He could tell from the look on her face that she was upset. Then he’d overheard her tell Perry “No matter what happens I’ll never lose Clark.”

‘*Lose him?*’

Thinking she might open up to Superman he’d gone to her apartment under the ruse of thanking her for her help with the Skins and Intergang then ended up dancing with her instead.

‘*Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.*’ He chastised himself. He’d really stepped in it this time.

The next morning, Clark arrived at the Daily Planet, looking for Lois. He needed to talk to her. He needed to know what she’d meant last night by, “No matter what happens I’ll never lose Clark.”

He watched as the elevator doors opened, revealing a frazzled Lois Lane as she shoved her way through the maze of reporters that dared stand between her and her desk. After making sure her coffee was warmed to her liking, he approached her desk with a cup of coffee. “Morning Lois,” he said as he handed her a mug of coffee.

She took it gratefully. “Thanks. I didn’t have time to grab a coffee on the way in.” She took a sip, savoring the taste for a moment before glancing at the clock. “Crap, we’re late.”

“Late?” he asked, confused. He’d checked the calendar, and there wasn’t anything scheduled this morning. He’d planned on taking her to lunch so they could talk and...

She threw him an annoyed look. “Fort Truman? The new artillery weapon demonstration?”

Realization dawned on him, and he fought the urge to curse himself for not remembering. Why hadn’t he remembered? Because he’d been too focused on his argument with Lois when Perry had told him about it yesterday. “Right, I’ll grab Jimmy, and we can head out.”

She nodded, grabbing a travel mug to pour her coffee in. “Let’s go.”

He let out a long breath before turning to find Jimmy. It seemed his conversation with Lois would have to wait.

They arrived at Fort Truman with Jimmy in tow jabbering their ears off about the latest Military Rogue game that had a weapon just like the ATAS, the ‘All-Terrain Automated Soldier.’ They were going to see demonstrated today. It had been informative the first ten minutes, but after listening to him go on and on about it for the past half hour, Clark was ready for the demonstration to be over with so Jimmy would stop talking about the video game.

He spotted the wooden benches across from the demonstration field where General Marshall stood, pointing at the targets behind him and adjusting the trajectory of the ATAS team with his team of specialists.

They climbed the benches, and he couldn't help but laugh as Lois commented, "They spend eighty million dollars on a new weapon, but we've got to sit on these hard-wooden benches."

"Well, the Army's not known for being big on comfort," Clark reasoned, taking a seat next to her.

Jimmy took a seat on the other side and yelped in pain, "Tell me about it." He rubbed his backside, cautiously lowering himself back down to the bench, "I just got a splinter in a very embarrassing place."

Lois offered him a sympathetic smile and a pat on the shoulder before turning to the officer that had been standing next to General Marshall earlier. "It is now my great honor to introduce the base commander of Fort Truman, General Ralph Marshall."

There was a scatter of applause as General Marshall approached the podium, "Thank you, Colonel Fane." He then turned toward the weapons system they'd all been given pamphlets on, 'ATAS.' "What you are about to witness is a demonstration of the 'ATAS.' The first step toward taking the United States Military into the twenty-first century." He held up a remote control as he gave the orders, "Forward, five yards!"

The robotic weapon with a long neck and rotating head began to move forward.

Jimmy leaned in to snap a photo. "Check it out!" He pointed, "Killer robot."

Lois read from the brochure they'd been given, "Actually, the ATAS is an 'All-Terrain Automated Soldier.'"

Jimmy gave her a dumbfounded look, "What's the difference?"

Clark smirked and added dryly, "About a hundred thousand taxpayer dollars' worth of P.R." He glanced back toward the ATAS and watched as it came to a stop twenty-five feet from the target.

"The ATAS has the ability to replace the fire power of an entire infantry platoon, with pin point accuracy," General Marshall explained as he pulled the remote to him and gave the next order, "Center target, fire! Lower left quadrant, fire! Target three niner west, fire!"

The wooden target in the center was sprayed with a round of bullets, tethering the wood to pieces. Lois and Clark exchanged a look. It was impressive. If this robot could do what they said it could, it would save so many lives when the military was forced to engage with enemies in war.

"The ATAS swivels and fires upon a troop truck, exploding it in flames." General Marshall continued.

Jimmy continued snapping pictures. "Remote voice-activated. Cool."

Lois handed Clark the binoculars she was using. "Want to try these?"

Nonchalantly he shook his head, "Don't need 'em." She gave him a surprised look, and he scrambled for an explanation, "Uh...they're hard to use with my glasses."

"If the target is out of visual contact, the ATAS will automatically reposition itself," General Marshall explained then spoke into the remote, "Target one zero, zero south, one six zero East. Fire."

The ATAS rolled down the field ten yards then turned around and aimed itself at the crowd. "Get down!!!" Clark held his breath as he pushed Lois and Jimmy down inside the bleachers as he felt gunfire ricochet off his back. The crowd around him scattered in the hail of gunfire as he inched his way to the back of the bleachers and made a quick change into the suit.

Clark landed in front of the ATAS, blocking the gunfire from the crowd, catching the bullets at super-speed as he reached for the base of the ATAS to stop it from firing. He tore it off, and the ATAS fell silent.

Clark spotted Lois and Jimmy coming down from the bleachers and approached them, "Are you all right?"

Lois gave him a shaky nod, "Yeah I think so." She looked at

the platform that had been destroyed and managed a shaky, "Thanks." She then looked around in confusion and asked, "Where's Clark?"

"He...went to get an ambulance." Clark lied, hoping she'd buy it.

Jimmy shook his head, looking at the platform where General Marshall had been standing, "It's too late. General Marshall's dead."

Lois threw her things down at her desk in a huff. "Unbelievable."

"It's not that bad," Clark said, taking a seat next to her.

"All my notes. Gone."

"It's the military, Lois. What do you expect?" Clark asked, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze. There it was. That spark.

'Stop it.' She chastised herself. 'Don't think about that. Remember last night?'

Steering her mind back to the present she awarded him a half-smile, "I think keeping Fort Truman's business under wraps and out of the press went out the window already."

He took a seat next to her and smiled broadly, "That may be true, but that doesn't change the fact that they're currently in damage control mode." He gave her knee a gentle squeeze, and she did her best not to react.

'Snap out of it.' She told herself. 'What about Superman?'

She looked up and saw Clark looking at her with a hesitant expression on his face, "What?" She asked, unsure if she wanted to know the answer.

"I wanted to talk to you about last night. I shouldn't have..."

"It's fine, Clark. Really," she cut him off before he could finish his thought. "We're friends. It's not like it was an actual date or anything."

"Right, but..."

"But what?" Lois looked back at him, uncertain if she wanted to know the answer.

He seemed really upset with himself for leaving her to herself after Mayson had cut in on their dance. He'd still been dancing with Mayson when she'd gone home for the evening. At the time, she had been upset...really upset about Mayson intruding on their dance. But now, after spending the evening in her apartment with Superman...There was something there. Something she was determined to discover in depth with the man of steel. She wouldn't be distracted by a silly crush.

The last few months they'd grown closer. He was her best friend. Seeing him with anyone else was hard, but it was something she'd grow to tolerate. Even if she couldn't stand the pushy blonde District Attorney, she'd play nice for Clark's sake. Last night she'd seen a glimmer of hope on a dream she'd thought was dead and buried after her confession of love for the man of steel during the time of her failed wedding to Lex.

"You left early," he pointed out.

"I was tired," she shrugged.

"Are you sure that's all it was?" he pressed.

Alan from Research approached them with a message slip. "Clark, you had a missed call from Mayson Drake while you were out."

"Oh." He gave Alan a weak smile as he took the phone message from him.

"You should give her a call," Lois said curtly. "I'm going to check with Jimmy and see if there was anything left on that roll of film he had in his camera." With that, she got up and headed toward the darkroom leaving a confused Clark Kent behind her.

What had just happened?

Clark stared after Lois as she talked with Jimmy who had just come out of the darkroom with his prints. It was like she had done a complete 180 from yesterday. The last few days he'd done

nothing but argue with Lois about Martin Snell and her suspicions about Mayson. He still wasn't completely sure about the young District Attorney, but he found it flattering to have someone finally see him, Clark Kent, and not Superman. Whether that would ever blossom into anything else, he wasn't sure. He knew he had had a good time with her last night, but after his dance with her, he'd found Lois had disappeared. When he went to find her, Perry said she'd gone home.

He never should have gone to her apartment as Superman. That had been a mistake.

One minute they'd been talking and the next minute he'd been dancing with her, showing off—as Superman. It would have been fine if he'd gone to her as Clark, but now all the work he'd put in over the last few months trying to rebuild the trust between them after his confession of love and her rejection of him was gone. If given a choice between his identities Lois would always choose Superman. That was a fact that continued to torment him. He wanted more than anything for Lois Lane to see him—Clark Kent—as more than a friend.

They had grown close over these last few weeks. He thought they were finally moving past everything that had happened this summer...closer even. Now she was back to pushing him away it seemed. He stared down at the message slip in his hand. "Choices, choices..." He muttered to himself.

Lois stood by the printer, waiting for the last of her notes to print off and avoiding Clark as much as she could. She really didn't want to pick up the conversation she'd been having with him earlier.

<< "You left early." >>

<< "Are you sure that's all it was?" >>

"I'm telling you I saw it with my own eyes!" Dianne's voice caught Lois' attention, and she looked toward the coffee machine where she and Darlene were fixing their coffee and gossiping.

"No way! Clark Kent has been hung up on Lois Lane since day one. There's no way he'd start looking at the first floozy to throw themselves at him." Darlene argued as she stirred her coffee.

'Hung up?' Lois thought to herself, 'Boy is she wrong...' She glanced toward her partner who was sitting at his desk on the phone—probably calling Mayson back to plan another date—Why did that bother her so much?

"Well, last night he was," Dianne sniffed then grinned back at Darlene. "Floozy?"

Darlene shrugged, "If I'd known he was on the market I'd have made my move already. We all would have."

"I still don't understand Lois. I mean she's got a guy that hot following her around...working next to her day in and day out."

This conversation was heading into dangerous territory. Did they seriously think Clark was...what? She recalled his confession of love last summer and his other confession outside the Planet. She'd felt like she had the wind knocked out of her when he took his declaration of love back but later she'd accepted it and thought it best. They were partners. Friends. Nothing more. The gossip of the Planet seemed to tell a different story though...

"But we all know Lois Lane only has eyes for Superman."

"There's a laugh." Dianne snorted.

'If she only knew.' Lois thought to herself. 'It wasn't a laugh when he was dancing with me in my apartment last night.'

"I know!" Darlene shook her head. "Doesn't she realize how hopeless that pipedream is?"

"Not only that, but it would never happen. It goes against the guy rule." Dianne emphasized her point by slamming the creamer into the fridge.

"What guy rule?" Darlene asked.

"Guy Rule Number One," Dianne smirked. "Don't go after another guy's girl. Everyone knows Clark's hung up on Lois."

There's no way Superman would do that to him...If he did, that'd be very un-Superman like."

'Guy rule?' Lois thought to herself. 'Guy rule? What kind of ridiculous...?'

"I didn't think they were that close," Darlene commented.

<< "Superman, is there any hope for us? You and me? I'm so completely in love with you....I can't do anything else without knowing."

"Lois, I do care for you but...There are things about me you don't know, that you may never know."

"It doesn't matter. I know YOU. I don't mean you the celebrity or you the superhero. If you had no powers at all, if you were just an ordinary man leading an ordinary life I would love you just the same. Can't you believe that?"

"I wish I could Lois, but under the circumstances, I don't see how I can." >>>

"Close enough that Superman could stay with Clark Kent during the heatwave." Dianne reminded her.

<< "Son, you got a place to stay tonight?" >>>

<< "Why don't I stay with Clark? I don't think he'd mind." >>>

"Poor Lois. You think she'll ever wake up?"

"Who knows?" Dianne shrugged as they made their way back to their desks. Neither of them noticed her standing by the printer where she'd just overheard their entire conversation.

Confused, she stared back at her partner who was just hanging up the phone and muttered to herself. "Guy rule?"

Clark sat at his desk cradling the phone as he listened to the fifth verse of 'Windy' come through the airwaves. After calling Mayson back and getting her voicemail, he'd left a message and then started going through the list of contacts they'd been furnished at the demonstration at Fort Truman. He and Lois had been making calls all afternoon, but so far neither of them seemed to be getting anywhere. There had to be someone somewhere that knew something about what had happened on base today.

"Isn't there anyone at the Pentagon who can say something besides 'no comment?'" Lois asked into her phone with that familiar tick in her tone. She was growing as irritated as he was with the run around it seemed. A moment later she was hanging up the phone, "'Goodbye' wasn't exactly what I had in mind." He threw her a sympathetic look, and she sighed, looking back to him, "Are you getting anywhere?"

"No, but now I know all five verses of 'Windy'." He joked. Just as he said that a voice came on the other end. "Yes, this is Clark Kent with the Daily Planet, and I'm trying to get an official statement regarding the death of General Marshall..." The caller hung up before he could finish and he sighed, hanging up the phone as he said sarcastically, "I see. Would that be 'click' with one exclamation point or two?"

Lois awarded him a half-smile then got up to walk toward him. "No luck either, huh?"

"Nope." He said uneasily, watching as she took a seat next to him.

"What's a guy rule?" She blurted out, staring at him.

"Huh?" He looked at her in confusion, not sure where this conversation had come from or where she was headed with it.

"What's a guy rule?" She repeated as if it was the most natural conversation in the world.

"I..."

Thankfully, Jimmy chose that moment to approach with a folder in hand. "Shots from the accident just off the printer." He beamed at them.

Clark took the photos from him, and Lois continued. "I mean, I've heard people talk about guy rules before but I never really understood what they are...I mean, is it just something you all come up with when drinking beer and watching sports or is there more to it than that?"

"I'm not sure what you're talking about," Clark began cautiously.

"Guy rule?" Jimmy interjected. "Yeah, of course. Guy rules are the code. We live by them."

"Really?" Lois asked, looking at Jimmy in interest.

"Sure, I mean for instance you don't date another guy's ex. You always step up if a guy needs a wingman. Don't let your friend embarrass himself over a girl..."

Lois looked from Jimmy back to him before asking, "And you actually follow this stuff?"

"Well, I—"

Clark found himself cut off by Jimmy once more. "Of course, I mean, it's a brutal place out there. Dating has its rules along with friendship. Girls have their rules, right?"

"Well, I'm not exactly sure I'd call them 'rules'," Lois said dryly.

"Rule number one, never go after a girl your friend is interested in," Jimmy explained. He elbowed Clark in the shoulder, "Right, CK?"

"Uh, sure?" Clark wasn't sure where this was going. Watching the wheels turning in Lois's head, there was no telling where her train of thought was headed.

"Really?" Lois asked, narrowing her left eyebrow as her lips pursed in that familiar 'I've got a plan' look on her face. "So, no exceptions?"

"Well, there are always exceptions," Jimmy explained nonchalantly.

"Exceptions?" Clark asked, not sure if he wanted to hear Jimmy's list he was sure the young man had.

"Sure!" Jimmy grinned, "So you can't go after another guy's girl. That one's in stone. You can't go after a girl another guy likes unless...he's given permission or has moved on."

"Permission???" Lois looked to Jimmy then him as if he'd slapped her across the face. "Permission, really?"

"It's the code," Jimmy shrugged.

"It's *stupid!*" Lois shot back.

"Maybe." Jimmy pointed to the folder in Clark's hands. "What do you think, CK?"

Clark looked down at the photos in his hand, recalling Jimmy's original reason for coming by. "Um..." He grimaced looking at the photos. Most of them were of his feet. "They're kinda blurry..."

"Let me see." Lois reached out for the photos, and he handed them to her. She flipped through them and frowned, "Jimmy, these are *all* blurry. This one's completely out of focus. Is this the best we have?"

"Yeah, sorry, my finger froze on the shutter. That happens when you're being shot at."

"Is this a picture of your feet?" Lois held up the offending photo.

"Yeah, but you can see the killer robot right between them." Jimmy pointed out in a hopeful tone.

Clark gave him a weak smile as Lois sifted through them. "No...no...no...no." She stopped, scrunching her nose up as she flipped the last picture back.

"I'm sure we'll find something we can use," he tried to reassure his disheartened friend.

"Oh, my God!" Lois stared at the picture in her hand in shock.

"What is it?" Clark asked.

"This man's dead!" Lois pointed at the picture.

Jimmy looked at the image of General Marshall on the ground at the podium and looked back up at her in confusion, "I know I'm still kinda new at this, but that seemed kinda obvious."

"Not General Marshall." Lois huffed irritably, "This man!"

Clark leaned over to look at the picture she was pointing at. It was of a tall, dark-haired man standing by the bleachers and carrying a briefcase in his hands.

Uncertain what to say and thinking she might have mistaken the man for someone else, Clark edged, "Lois, dead people rarely walk."

Lois threw him an annoyed look. "Clark, this is Ryan Wiley! I went to college with him. He was a computer engineer at Fort Truman...where he *died* a year ago!" She threw the photo against his chest to emphasize her last point.

Still not believing her but wanting to lighten the mood she was in, he placed the photo on his desk with a nod, "So, he's a ghost? Well, why didn't you just say that in the first place?"

Jimmy snickered, and Lois glared at him. "I'm gonna go... develop something or something," he muttered heading toward the other side of the newsroom to get as far away from Lois' wrath as possible.

Lois moved the chair toward him to confront him, "Is that supposed to be sarcasm?"

"What? I wasn't clear enough?" He smiled back at her. He was certain it was just a case of mistaken identity, but Lois always had to be right. His attempt at humor with her seemed to be having the opposite effect on her right now.

Lois crossed her arms defiantly and said, "He dated my best friend in college. They were engaged to be married. So I think I would know what he looks like and I'm telling you... *this* is Ryan!"

Clark stared at the photo on his desk, looking at it more closely. If Lois was right and this guy was supposed to be dead, he had a lot of explaining to do...both to the military and to Lois' friend. Lois was still looking at him, waiting for a response. "If he's alive..."

"Which that photo proves," Lois cut him off.

"If he's alive then that would mean he faked his death, right?"

"That would be the logical leap, yes," Lois said irritably.

"Why would he fake his death?"

"I don't know. Money? Maybe he was on the run from someone?" At his look she looked down, "He wasn't exactly the best guy."

He picked up the photo and began to examine it. Seeing the 'Press Only' sign pinned to the bleachers he observed, "The bleachers were reserved for press only."

"The direction he's walking toward in the photo," Lois prompted, "Isn't that the switchboard that was controlling the robot?"

Clark looked at her exasperated, "Seriously?"

"What? He's got a background in computer engineering. I guarantee you he knows how to override the programming they had on the ATAS," Lois added smugly.

"So, you think your, uh, *dead* friend here not only faked his death but assassinated General Marshall in front of everyone?" He gave her an 'Are you serious?' expression.

"Stranger things have happened," Lois shot back. "When did you become so skeptical?"

"When I have good reason to be," he said with a shake of his head.

"I know I'm right."

Realizing she wasn't going to let this ridiculous theory of hers go, he sighed, "Okay, fine. Let's say for argument's sake you're right and it is Ryan Wiley in these photos. What would he be doing at Fort Truman?"

"I don't know," she looked at the photo on his desk thoughtfully, "but we're going to find out."

"Okay," he relented. "We'll look into it."

"Great!" she cheered, looking at him happily, reaching for the photos on his desk at the same time he reached over to hand them to her. Her hand touched his, and he did his best not to react. She pulled back, turning to stand up from her chair. "I'm just gonna give these to Jimmy and..."

"Yeah, that sounds good," Clark nodded. He felt her eyes on

him as she continued to stare back at him. “What is it?” he asked.

“Do you think there’s anything to what Jimmy said?”

“What exactly are you referring to?” he asked cautiously.

“The ‘guy rule?’” she prompted. “I mean, you don’t actually follow something like that, do you?”

He still wasn’t sure what she was getting at with this line of questioning. Why was she so interested in this ‘rule’ all of a sudden and why did it matter what he thought about it? Recalling how close they’d been the previous evening and the intrusion by Mayson, he suspected the new district attorney might have something to do with it.

“I don’t know,” he began carefully. “I think there should be a certain amount of respect for friends and their relationships.”

“Uh-huh,” Lois reclaimed her seat, pulling it up to him as he continued to walk the very unsteady line that had become their relationship over the last few months.

“I mean, if your friend has feelings for someone ... to me, then it would be disrespectful to pursue that person.”

“Even if that someone didn’t return the feelings?” Lois asked.

“Well, it depends...” Clark began, taken aback by her question. “If the guy is still hung up on someone —someone he cares about—it wouldn’t be right for this friend to come along and move in. A) He’d be a bad friend. B) It’s showing a lack of respect for his friend and his feelings.”

“I guess I can understand that,” Lois said quietly.

“What is she plotting?”

“You’re a good friend, Clark.” She observed.

“Thank you...I think.” He watched as the wheels began to turn in her head. Yeah, he knew that look too well.

“I mean, you’d never do something like that. Interfere in someone’s relationship—well, unless they’re about to marry a sociopath...” She stopped, looking away at the last observation, recalling his ‘confession’ he’d later taken back after the fiasco with her almost wedding to Luthor.

“I thought we weren’t going to talk about that anymore,” he said quietly.

“We’re not,” she said with a sigh. “So, you and Mayson, huh? I mean, personally, I think you could do a little better. She’s got a chip on her shoulder the size of the Titanic...”

‘Yeah, this has to do with Mayson.’

“Lois, is there something you want to talk about?” he asked, interrupting her mid-babble.

“No. I’m fine. Perfectly fine. I’m happy for you.”

“Uh-huh, well, as nice as that is...and I use the term ‘nice’ loosely. I think you’ve got the wrong idea.”

“I do?” She looked at him in surprise. “Aren’t you two...? I mean, not that it’s any of my business...”

The idea of him and Mayson together seemed to really be bothering Lois so he put her mind at ease. “Lois, I’m not in a relationship with Mayson. We danced...one dance. That was it.”

“Oh,” Lois said quietly.

“She’s a friend. That’s it,” he added, hoping that would help put her mind at ease.

“Friend,” she repeated uncertainly.

“Yes.”

“You’ve got a lot of friends.”

“I’m a friendly person.”

“You’re friends with me, Jimmy, Perry, Steve... Mayson.” She said the last name with a bite in her tongue. “Even Superman.”

He shifted under her gaze nervously, “Yeah.”

“Does he consider you a friend too?”

“Who?” he asked.

“Superman.”

“I guess.” He wasn’t sure how to respond to that.

“I mean, you did let him stay at your apartment during the heat wave.” Lois continued.

“He needed a place to go.”

“Another thing a good friend would do.”

She kept emphasizing *friend* as if it proved a point somehow. “Lois, what is this all about?”

“Nothing. I just want to know more about...”

The phone rang on his desk.

“You should get that,” she said.

“I’ll call them back.” He smiled at her, “What’s going on?”

“Just some questions.”

“I get that, but...”

The phone transferred to Alan who poked his head over the divider of his desk at him. “Clark, Mayson’s on line two.”

“Like I said, you should get that,” Lois said, getting up and heading back toward her desk.

He followed her with his gaze as he reached over to pick up the receiver of his phone, pressing the button for line two. “Hi Mayson...”

Lois sat down in the first booth at Fudge Castle, doing her best not to think about the events of the morning any longer than she had to. She took her red plastic spoon and swirled it around the chocolate fudge ice cream that was beginning to melt.

She shook her head in disgust as she shoved a bite of the melted chocolate in her mouth. She’d sat at her desk listening to Clark talk to Mayson about setting up a lunch date to talk.

‘Hadn’t she done enough talking the other night?’ Lois wondered as she took another bite.

It was obvious the new District Attorney was smitten with Clark. If Mayson wasn’t so irritating, Lois might even be happy about her friend finding someone. There was just something about Mayson that bugged her. For starters, she was desperate and pushy and that kiss she’d witnessed the other night...

‘It has nothing to do with that,’ she tried to convince herself. *‘She hates Superman. Who hates Superman?’*

“Superman.” She said the name with a sigh. She’d thought she had moved past everything that had happened last summer but after last night...

There was something there. She could feel it. She knew he’d felt it too. Why did he keep holding back? Was it really as simple as Jimmy had explained?

‘Guy Rule?’

Maybe he thought what Dianne and Darlene did? That Clark was hung up on her? She sighed, recalling the conversation she’d overheard earlier and flashed back to the conversation she and Clark had had outside the Planet when Mr. Stern had announced the return of the Daily Planet.

<< *‘I’m not in love with you.’*

‘You’re not?’

‘I would have said anything to keep you from marrying Luthor.’>>

Jimmy had said he would have to give permission to pursue a relationship with another guy’s love interest—even if that girl didn’t share the guy’s feelings. A stupid rule. An idiotic rule, but for whatever reason, it seemed to keep some sort of respect among the masses when it came to dating. Something she found to be lacking in her friendships with women.

<< *‘You can’t go after a girl another guy likes unless...he’s given permission or has moved on.’*>>

Did Superman need Clark’s permission to pursue her? Was that why he had pulled away that night? Clark said he’d have said anything to stop her from marrying Lex. Did that include misleading Superman on his feelings for her? If Superman had thought Clark was in love with her when he’d come to see her that night—that would explain why he had been so distant.

Clark had been the one to send him to her apartment.

‘No. That’s crazy. Clark wouldn’t do something like that.’ She pushed the thought out of her mind.

<< *‘If the guy is still hung up on someone—someone he cares*

about—it wouldn't be right for this friend to come along and move in.">>

Maybe she needed to talk to Superman? Make sure he knew there was nothing between her and Clark?

'Yeah right,' she thought to herself. 'Like he's going to believe that.'

No, he'd need more than just her word. She'd need to prove that Clark had moved on. 'Not that there had been anything to move on from,' she thought quietly to herself.

He was dating Mayson right now it seemed, so that had promise, but there still was something about that woman that just rubbed her the wrong way. Maybe she could help push Clark into the dating scene a bit? Give him a friendly shove and help stop these rumors that they were an item so Superman would feel safe to pursue a relationship with her without worrying about his friend's feelings.

Could it really be that simple?

For months she'd been obsessing over every detail of the last year trying to figure out how she'd read both men so wrong. Then out of the blue, the answer came to her. It made sense. Now all she had to do was get Clark into the dating game—preferably with someone other than Mayson Drake—and everything would fall into place.

She stared down at the chocolate melted ice cream soup that once resembled her sundae and sighed. "Time to get to work." She pulled out her phone and began to dial, waiting impatiently as the connection was made and the phone began to ring. "Jimmy? I need a favor..."

After avoiding Mayson's obvious hints about wanting to spend the weekend together, Clark hung up the phone with a sigh. What was it with all the women in his life acting so strange lately? Lois with her questions about a 'guy rule' then Mayson seeming to think they were dating now after one dance and a lunch that hadn't exactly ended on the best of terms. He'd told his parents he wasn't sure how he felt about Mayson, but that wasn't true. He knew he liked her—as a friend, but he also knew her distaste for his alter-ego made it so there could never be any relationship between them. Lois' infatuation for Superman may be tiresome at times but he always knew he could count on her and he knew on some level she accepted him—both sides of him.

She treated Clark differently that she treated Superman—everyone did. Where Lois would always jump to his alter-ego's defense, Mayson, it seemed, jumped to the worst case scenario. It was a change of pace, and it was flattering to have the other side of him given the attention he'd sought from Lois for so long, but it was a moot point. He was still hopelessly in love with Lois Lane. No amount of dates or flattery from a beautiful woman would change that.

He continued to hold out hope that Lois would look at him the same way she looked at Superman one day. Until then he would have to be content being her friend—her partner—and pray she'd one day return those feelings for not just the superhero in tights and a cape but the man beneath the suit as well.

After an hour of making calls and getting nowhere and no sign of his missing partner, he decided to give up on waiting her out and head off to lunch. Just as he was locking his computer, a young blonde approached him, claiming the seat next to him.

"Hi."

He looked up, not recognizing the young woman sitting at his desk. She was young. Her choice in business attire left a lot to be desired with the short mini skirt and v-neck blouse showing way too much of body parts that were better left to the imagination.

He looked up, forcing himself to stay focused on her eyes and not certain parts that were popping out. "Uh, hi?"

"I'm Candi," she smiled at him, kicking her ankle as she spoke. "With an 'i' not a 'y.' Lots of people get that confused."

Still confused what 'Candi' with an 'i' was doing at his desk he cleared his throat, daring to ask the question, "Okay, Candi with an 'i,' is there something I can help you with?"

"You should take me to lunch," she grinned at him flirtatiously.

"Why would I do that?" he asked cautiously.

"I'm someone you'd want to get to know."

"Well as ...tempting as that offer is, Candi, I don't go to lunch with strangers...and I have no clue who you are. So, if you don't mind...?" He pointed to the chair she was occupying where his jacket was.

She looked at him in surprise, then recovered, "Well, don't say I never offered." With that, she was gone.

Clark rolled his eyes after she left. "Weird," he muttered to himself. "Definitely weird."

"Candi? Seriously Jimmy?" Lois took a seat at the young man's desk, glaring at him

"Last minute, that's what I got," Jimmy shrugged. "Why are you trying to set Clark up on a date anyway? Isn't he dating that Mayson from the DA's office?"

"I wouldn't call it dating," Lois sniffed.

"Uh-huh." Jimmy gave her a look, and she glared back at him.

"Candi is a 22-year old intern with no brains. She probably got the internship from..." Lois stopped when she noticed the young blonde approaching them.

"Jimmy, where do I put the files when I'm done with them?" Candi stopped in front of Jimmy's desk with a wide grin, holding the files to her chest where more skin than clothing was showing. Lois frowned glaring at the slit in her already too short mini skirt.

"In the file cabinet." Jimmy pointed toward the Archives where the file cabinets were stored.

"Right." She smiled back at him and turned in the direction Jimmy had pointed.

"See?" Lois pointed out, "How could you possibly think Clark would be interested in someone like that?"

"You said to find him a date by lunch. You didn't give me specifics," Jimmy shot back.

"Date. Not bimbo," Lois growled.

"Bimbo?" Jimmy echoed.

"That girl shows way too much cleavage and leg for a professional setting like the Daily Planet," Lois sniffed.

"Uh-huh."

"Clark deserves so much better."

Jimmy nodded, giving her a knowing look, "Right, better."

Lois noticed the tone in his voice and narrowed her eyes at him. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing." Jimmy turned away, "I didn't say a thing."

Lois pulled out the number she had for her old college roommate, "Well, while you're doing 'nothing' why don't you do me a favor and find me an address for 'Molly Flynn'." She scribbled down the last address she had for her along with the last known phone number. "This is her last known address and number, but the number's disconnected and the landlord said she moved without a forwarding address."

"I'll see what I can find out." Jimmy nodded, taking the paper from her.

Four.

Clark had counted four different women that couldn't have been older than Jimmy approaching him all afternoon, one by one, insisting on him taking them to lunch, dinner, drinks, and one even suggested food wasn't necessary if he was into that sort of thing. Thankfully Perry had walked by when he did, and he was able to make a break for the nearest exit. What was with everyone today? First Lois with her questions about a 'guy rule' and then all the interns were acting like they were under the influence of

Miranda's Revenge Pheromone.

He still hadn't talked to Lois about what had happened the other night. He needed to clear the air with her as Superman first though. He just wasn't sure how. He had stepped over the line of friendship, and he needed to rectify that situation before it created another hurdle in his and Lois's relationship. They had just gotten back to a comfortable routine with one another. He didn't want to wreck that by leading her on as Superman. The only way he would pursue a relationship with her would be if she started seeing him, Clark Kent as more than a friend. Superman was not an option. It would be easy to give into his impulses and pursue her as his alter-ego, but it wouldn't be real. He wouldn't be able to share the biggest part of himself, the real him. He didn't want a relationship like that, and he didn't want to do that to Lois. It wasn't fair to either of them.

Lois let out a long sigh as she placed the phone back on the cradle, staring at the address book in front of her. She'd called and left messages with a few acquaintances from college that she knew were still in the area. Unfortunately, it seemed just about everyone was attached to someone.

Three were engaged. Two married. One was pregnant with twins. The few that weren't attached were the ones she remembered as being very friendly and popular at the parties. She wasn't sure she wanted to put Clark through that. She wanted him to start dating again; not put him in a situation that would require a tetanus shot afterwards.

It was disheartening to hear how many of her old college friends seemed to already be starting their lives with 'the one' while she was still flailing in the wind. She'd spent so much of her young adulthood focused on clawing her way up the professional ladder. Now, she was at the top of her career—living her dream as an investigative reporter for the Daily Planet—but it wasn't enough. She had spent years ignoring invitations to parties in pursuit of a good story, putting off dates or friends to further her career. She had told Lucy she didn't believe in 'Mr. Right' and that had been true until someone had changed her.

Superman.

He had swept her off her feet—literally after saving all the passengers and herself from the bomb on the Messenger headed for the Prometheus space station. She had spent months pining after him, lusting after him and hoping he'd notice her too. There had been so many signs that made her think he felt the same way toward her—then, after Lex's proposal, she'd laid it all on the line—and he'd crushed her dreams.

She had convinced herself she could be happy with Lex. It wasn't until she was in the dressing room crying about being Mrs. Luthor that she realized how big of a mistake she had made. Every step down the aisle she'd been thinking of everything she was losing—mostly her friendship with Clark.

Understanding now that Superman hadn't been pushing her away as a way to hurt her but rather to protect his friend—made her love him even more. Even though she and Clark had never dated or been an item, he was trying to protect his friend. She could understand that. He was her friend too; but he'd told her himself he wasn't in love with her. Why did Superman think otherwise?

She cherished her friendship with Clark. It had been her sanctuary during the chaos that had been her life over the last few months. He'd been there to help cheer her up and talk after everything had come out about Lex. Those late night talks were something she'd become accustomed to but she knew they couldn't continue. She had to let him have his life back. Surely he wasn't just sitting around every night waiting for her to call him.

She glanced at the phone sadly.

'If I want him to start dating I've got to give him the freedom to do so,' she reminded herself.

It was hard but she knew it was for the best. She knew it was the only way to give her and Superman a real chance at a relationship and give Clark the space he needed to find someone he could love. Hopefully, it wouldn't be with that pushy District Attorney. Lois frowned. Mayson Drake was not a good match for him. The interns Jimmy had found weren't a good fit either. She wouldn't be a good friend if she let him get involved with someone that wasn't a good fit, would she?

The next day Clark walked with Lois to meet her friend Molly Flynn at her shop. Lois had spent most of the afternoon avoiding him. He'd had three different women approach him yesterday about everything from coffee to dinner and drinks after Candi's invitation to lunch. If that hadn't been confusing enough, he'd had to deal with what seemed to be the silent treatment from Lois. He wasn't sure what to make out of her confusing behavior so he'd ignored it, but now, here they were the next morning and she was still avoiding saying anything to him. Deciding it best to start the conversation out on something neutral he looked at his notes and asked, "Did the military ever say how this guy died?"

"Just that it was an accident. There were rumors that it had something to do with the *Hawkeye Strategic Defense System*," Lois explained, looking at her notes.

"Hawkeye?" He looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Top secret," Lois said as if that explained what it was. "Molly couldn't say too much, but I think it's some kind of killer defense satellite. Whatever it is Ryan was dead and that was that."

"But now he's alive?" Clark still wasn't sure about her theory but was willing to follow her gut for the time being. They had seen stranger things in the past.

"Pretty weird, huh?" She sighed, uncertainly, "What am I going to say to her? Your boyfriend's back and we think he's starting trouble? Hey la de lah." Her eyes twinkled at the last line, reciting the familiar tune's chorus.

"We don't know that for sure," he pointed out.

"The part that he's alive and walking around Fort Truman or the fact that he's up to no good?" she challenged, crossing her arms over her chest.

He knew better than to argue with her when she got that look on her face and turned away, spotting the shop they were looking for, "There it is." He walked toward the bookstore with the window painted, 'Molly's Greenhouse Bookstore.'

Lois followed him, looking over his shoulder at the shop with her nose scrunched up. Organic herbs were on display along with crystals and a book titled 'Technology Is Killing Us' by Molly Flynn.

"This can't be right." Lois shook her head.

Clark pulled out the forwarding address Jimmy had gotten from Molly's mailman, "It's the forwarding address Jimmy found for her."

"But Molly's a computer engineer. What's she doing running a flaky place like this?" Lois asked more to herself than to him. "And when did she start writing this junk?"

"Why do I get the feeling you and Molly aren't exactly on the friends and family program?" he cautiously observed.

"So we've drifted apart a little," Lois shrugged. "I suppose you stayed in touch with all your college friends?"

"Well, yeah," he began before she cut him off.

"Oh, sure, that's easy when you go to Smallville U with a graduating class of ten farmers and a cow."

"Midwestern. The graduating class was about three thousand," he corrected with a smirk.

Lois glared at him, "I was being sarcastic and illustrating a point."

"I know. You hate to lose those arguments," he said, opening the door for her.

"This is so bizarre. She went from Technology Guru to Hippie

in the span of five years.”

“People change,” he commented.

“Not that much. I wonder what happened.”

“Well, how about we go inside and find out?” He gestured to the open door, “Unless you want to do another chorus of ‘your boyfriend’s back’?”

“Cute.” Lois smacked him on the arm and made her way inside.

Lois did her best not to react to the obvious baiting Clark was trying to do. She was trying to put as much distance between them as she could. If this was going to work she had to make sure she kept Clark at a distance. She had to give him the freedom to date. That meant no more late night visits to one another’s apartments—even if it was for a story. She’d done a lot of thinking the past twenty-four hours trying to figure out the double meaning behind things Superman had said to her. It was obvious he cared. If he was holding back for the sake of Clark—she had to make him see reason. Sacrificing his own happiness for the sake of a friend’s feelings was very noble. It seemed impossible to come up with a plan on how to explain the holes in his reasoning. The only plan that made sense right now was to prove there was nothing between her and Clark.

If she could get Clark in the dating game then it would be less likely that Superman would see Clark as the wounded party. She just needed to find the right woman. Mayson wasn’t going to fit the bill. She was too pushy. Jimmy had sent four different women to Clark yesterday and he’d shot every one of them down. Getting Clark in the dating game was going to prove harder than she thought.

Now here they were investigating Ryan Wiley’s murder, face to face with her old college friend, Molly Flynn. The woman she barely recognized as Molly wore long beads and her hair up in a hemp tie. She screamed anything but ‘computer engineer’ at the moment.

“Molly,” Lois managed to squeak out.

“Lois?” Molly recognized her, turning to embrace her. “You look wonderful.”

Lois smiled, uncertain how to return the compliment, “Thanks and you look so...not yourself.”

Molly beamed back at her with a sigh, “I know.” She gestured to the store they stood in, “What do you think?”

“It’s, um...uh,” she struggled to think of a word that didn’t sound like an insult.

“Well, you had a word for it out front,” Clark reminded her. “I think you said it was...”

“Nice!” Lois cut him off, glaring at him with daggers before turning back to Molly. “Very nice.” She looked around the shop uncertainly. “Love what you’ve done with the place.”

“So, how’ve you been?” Molly asked. “It’s been...”

“Ages,” Lois nodded. “I know. I’ve been meaning to call.”

“Me too,” Molly smiled sadly at her. Lois could sense Molly was holding something back.

“Listen, Molly, the reason we’re here is...well, it’s about Ryan,” Lois began hoping to just dive in to get to the reason for her visit.

Molly turned to the display with crystals on it. “These have amazing healing properties. You can either wear them...” she pointed to the crystal on her necklace, “or meditate with them by putting them on your forehead.”

Lois took the crystal from her, frowning at her change of the subject and placed it on her forehead. “Wouldn’t it fall off?”

“You’re supposed to lie down when you do it.” Clark pointed out.

Lois shrugged, “I knew that.” She handed the crystal back to Molly. “Just a little new age humor.”

“Same old Lois. Still can’t admit you don’t know everything.”

Molly observed.

“Well, speaking of things not changing...” Lois pulled out the picture from Fort Truman and handed it to her. “What was Ryan doing at Fort Truman?”

“That’s not Ryan.”

“What do you mean it’s not Ryan?” Lois scoffed, looking at the photo. “Same jaw. Same eyes...”

“Similar features. That’s it. He died Lois!” Molly snapped irritably.

“Are you sure?” Lois shot back. “You said yourself there was no body...”

“Lois don’t do this!” Molly said exasperatedly.

“Okay, how about we all just take a step back and calm down?” Clark interjected.

Lois and Molly looked at Clark who was looking at them both with pleading eyes. Lois sighed, crossing her arms over her chest, “Fine.”

“Fine,” Molly repeated.

“Okay, Molly, Lois said you used to be a computer engineer?” Clark prompted.

“Yes, I was recruited to work on the Hawkeye project. It was the last project I ever worked on.” She glared at Lois, “Working on a machine that can kill people from space isn’t exactly what I was trying to major in in college.”

“Same project Ryan was assigned to right?” Lois pressed.

“Yes,” Molly said exasperated.

“Ryan, your fiancé?” Clark asked.

“Yes, my fiancé who was killed working on the Hawkeye.”

“Did they give you any information on how he was killed?” Clark asked.

“They said he was installing the trigger system on the satellite and it somehow exploded. They said the blast was so bad there weren’t any remains,” Molly said sadly.

“I’m sorry,” Clark said sympathetically.

“Thank you, Clark,” Molly said smiling at him softly.

“Anyway, after that project I stopped working with the military defense team. I opened up shop here and have been happy ever since. Working on the Hawkeye opened my eyes to how bad technology had gotten.”

“Well, without technology we’d be in the dark ages,” Lois snapped back irritably.

“Lois, it’s killing us. We’ve got to release its death grip and free the human spirit,” Molly said, handing her a copy of her book. “Here. You should really read my book.”

“You really don’t know anything about this?” Lois asked.

“I really don’t,” Molly said with an exasperated sigh.

“Fine,” Lois said pulling out her card. “If you hear from him or remember anything else call me.”

“Okay,” Molly replied coolly. “We should do lunch. Catch up.”

Lois gave her a half-smile, “Give me a call and we just might.” With that, she left, closing the shop door behind her.

Back at the Planet, Jimmy sat with Brian in the Breakroom, fixing his coffee. “I don’t exactly know who’s in relationships and who’s not. I know the girls in research and the new interns...”

“Why do you need to know?” Brian asked.

Jimmy looked around to see if anyone was paying attention to him and then continued, “You didn’t hear it from me, but I think CK’s having a hard time meeting women.”

Brian spat his coffee out.

“You okay?” Jimmy patted him on the back as Brian coughed, trying to clear his airway.

“F-fine,” he wheezed out, catching his breath.

“You okay man?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Brian said. “You were saying?”

“Well, I think he and Mayson hit it off okay, but between you

and me she's not exactly his type." Jimmy began evasively, not willing to tell Brian who had set him up on this mission.

Brian chuckled, "If you say so. I thought Kent only had eyes for Lois Lane."

"Things change." Jimmy shrugged. "Any ideas on who's available? I don't want to stick my foot in my mouth and I'd like to keep this on the down-low."

"Discreet is my middle name," Brian said, taking a sip from his coffee cup.

Outside the breakroom, neither gentleman noticed Darlene who had overheard the entire conversation. She headed toward the coffee maker where a few of her friends were chatting and sharing gossip. She couldn't help but grin. The piece of gossip she'd overheard was a doozie.

In the newsroom, Clark began making calls to the list of contacts Perry had that were retired from the military and thus more willing to speak to the press. He and Lois had split up the list, and she remained distant.

She wasn't unfriendly.

She was professional.

She just wasn't...Lois.

Something had changed, and he couldn't put his finger on it.

Lois was different somehow, and he couldn't figure out what had changed.

"Clark?" A hand waved in front of him, and he turned to see Kathy from Accounting standing in front of him, waving her hand at him.

He pulled himself back to the present and smiled, "Uh, sorry I was someplace else."

"I'll say," she mumbled under her breath, unaware he could hear her.

Ignoring the comment, he asked, "Can I help you with something?"

"I thought I could help you," she said, taking a seat at his desk.

His brow furrowed in confusion, "Help me?"

"There's a rumor going around that you finally let go of that silly crush you've had on your partner." Kathy began, running her hand through her auburn locks with a smile.

"What???" He looked over toward Lois's desk on impulse, surprised to find it empty.

Rumor? There was a rumor going around the Daily Planet Grapevine that he let go of his crush on Lois. How had they even known he'd had a crush on her? Okay, it was a lot more than a crush. He hadn't realized his feelings for Lois were that noticeable.

'Oh, no,' he thought to himself, looking back at Lois's desk. Was that why she'd been acting so weird lately? After her rejection of him last summer he'd taken back his confession in hopes that it'd help them get things back to normal. If she'd heard that rumor...

"I can't tell you what a relief it was to hear that. I mean, you're a great guy and should get out there and live a little. I'm not attached, and it wouldn't have to be anything too formal...I thought maybe if you're up to it we could try out that new Chinese place on 22nd Street." She dazzled him with a mega-watt smile, leaning toward him. "What do you say? You game?"

"I..." There were so many thoughts going through his mind he wasn't sure how to respond. "Where did you hear this rumor?" he asked carefully.

"Oh." Her smile quickly disappeared, and she sighed, "I heard it from Darlene in the Copy Room."

"Uh-huh," was all he managed to say as he headed toward Darlene's desk to do some investigating.

"Jimmy!" Clark caught up with the young man coming out of the darkroom with his hands full of pictures.

"What's up CK?"

"I just had a very interesting conversation with Darlene," he began following Jimmy to his desk. "Seems you and Brian had a very interesting conversation yourself this morning."

Jimmy looked back at him in surprise. "Yeah, look about that..."

Clark pointed toward the conference room. "Conference room. Now."

Jimmy nodded, setting the photos down on his desk and followed him to the Conference Room. He closed the door behind him as Clark struggled to regain control of his anger and disappointment in his young friend. "All I want to know is why?"

"Why what?" Jimmy asked.

"Why are you talking to Brian of all people about my personal life?" Clark fumed irritably.

"It's wasn't like that, honest, CK," Jimmy stammered. "It just seemed like you were having a hard time getting out in the dating game. I figured Brian might know who was available..."

"If I wanted to date I would, Jimmy."

"It just seemed like you needed a little push. That's all."

Jimmy continued, "I didn't mean for it to get back to Darlene. I'm sorry about that."

Clark sighed. "I need you to put a stop to this," he ordered.

"Stop to what?" Jimmy asked.

"The talk around the Planet about my relationship with Lois. The women showing up at my desk with some misconception that I need a date..."

"Sorry about that," Jimmy apologized. "The only girls I know that are available are the interns."

"Why would you do something like this?" Clark asked, "If you had a concern you should have talked to me about it."

"I know. We weren't thinking. I'm sorry, CK."

"We?" Clark's ears perked up. "What do you mean by 'we'?"

"Well, um..." Jimmy looked toward the door.

"Well?"

"She said you needed to find a date. I was just trying to help, honest." Jimmy squealed out hurriedly.

"She?" His eyes narrowed.

"OLSEN!!!" Perry's voice echoed outside the door, and they both looked to see Perry standing on the other side of the glass pane door.

"I gotta go," Jimmy said heading for the exit.

"This isn't over," Clark warned.

"We'll talk later. I promise." Jimmy called over his shoulder as he headed toward Perry who was waiting impatiently on the other side of the conference room door.

Clark sighed, watching his friend leave. He knew Jimmy. He knew he would never purposefully interfere in someone's life like that. He'd been put up to it by someone. Who he wasn't entirely sure on, but he had a pretty good guess.

He glanced toward the empty desk of his partner's and then picked up the phone in the conference room and began to dial.

Lois sat across from Molly's shop with binoculars, sipping on her coffee as she watched Molly close her shop up. She was right about Molly. She knew she was hiding something and she was going to prove it.

The look on Molly's face when she'd mentioned Ryan's name had been like a deer in headlights. She had known Molly for years. She knew when she was lying.

Clark still seemed to think her theory was far-fetched. He'd given her a skeptical look when she pitched the idea of staking Molly's shop out. Since he was already calling Perry's contacts, she figured now was as good as any time to begin her stakeout.

She'd done pretty well at remaining professional but not

stepping over the lines with him this morning. No grabbing at him or touching him when they were talking. Working together but at their individual desks. At first, she wasn't sure she'd be able to do it. She'd been accustomed to working close with him day to day for over a year. It had taken a lot of reflection to realize how unfair she'd been over the past year. All the little gestures that were like second nature could be viewed as flirting. The more she thought about it, the more she realized she had been flirting with him—more so recently.

He'd made his feelings perfectly clear the day the Planet reopened for business; he wasn't in love with her. So whatever her feelings may or may not have been didn't matter. All she could hope for was to move forward. He couldn't blame her for that, could he? She'd help him find someone he could fall in love with and hopefully wouldn't drive her insane in the process.

Superman would see his friend was not in love with her and then hopefully they could finally stop this dance they'd been doing for the past year and a half. It was clear he felt something for her. She didn't imagine he stopped by just anyone's apartment on a daily basis after his patrols—or danced with them to 'Fly Me to the Moon.' She had fallen hard for him from their first meeting. She recalled telling her sister, Lucy about the connection she'd felt when he'd carried her into the newsroom after lifting Prometheus into space.

The backfiring or a motorcycle brought her back to the present. She watched as the blinds to Molly's store closed, and the lights went out. There was no sign of Molly but judging from the time listed on her door, and what the digital clock on her dashboard blinked back at her, she knew something was amiss.

Her phone rang, and she jumped, looking over at the phone in her console. She pulled the antenna out and answered it with a sharp, "Lois Lane."

She spotted the door to Molly's shop open, and Ryan Wiley stepped outside with a very distraught looking Molly next to him. He was holding her close to him—too close. They didn't look like a loving couple that had just been reunited. Something was wrong.

"Lois? Where are you?" Clark's voice echoed on the other end of the line.

"I'm following a lead. I'll call you back." She hung up the phone and watched as Ryan walked with Molly toward an old Chevrolet pickup truck. From her viewpoint, she could see something metallic pointed at Molly as she was forced into the truck. Whether it was a gun or not, she wasn't sure.

"What do you think you're doing?"

She jumped, seeing Clark's profile blocking her view as he folded his arms over his chest, looking at her with that 'I'm disappointed' look he always gave her.

"How did you get here so fast?" she asked, looking at him in surprise. She'd just hung up the phone with him.

"Mobile phone," he said quickly, "and don't change the subject. What do you think you're doing?"

"Coffee, binoculars and double fudge crunch bars. What does it look like I'm doing?" She snapped, trying to get him to move out of the way as she tried unsuccessfully to peer over his shoulder. The truck had disappeared. "Would you move? I can't see what's going on!"

"I told you we didn't have enough information to warrant staking your friend's shop out. Why are you...?"

"I know Molly, and I know she's lying," Lois shot back.

"We're supposed to be partners. I'm over there doing all the heavy lifting while you're reaching because of some old feud with your friend."

"I am not reaching!" Lois snapped. "If you would move out of the way I can show you..."

She stopped when she saw the empty parking spot where the truck had been moments ago. "Great. Just great."

"What?" Clark asked.

"I lost her," she mumbled incoherently, banging her head against the steering wheel lightly.

"Lost who?" he asked, confused.

"Molly," Lois said, blowing a stray hair out of her face. "She came out of her shop—with Ryan."

"What?? Why didn't you call me?" Clark asked.

"I was trying to see what was going on first," Lois snapped irritably. "If someone hadn't decided to come pick a fight with me I might have seen which way they went."

He had the decency to at least look remorseful. "I'm sorry." They were both silent for a moment. "Do you think she was working with him?"

Lois shook her head, "No. I think Ryan just kidnapped her." Clark hung his head and gave her shoulder a squeeze through the open window of the driver's side of her Jeep.

"Come on." He got in on the passenger side of her Jeep.

"What are you doing?" Lois asked.

"Helping you," he said matter-of-factly. "Let's head back to the Planet and see if we can make any headway with those old Army buddies of Perry's."

"What good is that going to do? Molly's been kidnapped! We need to call the police, Henderson, Superman..."

"You said yourself everyone thinks this guy's dead, right?" Clark pointed out.

"Yeah," Lois admitted, not seeing where he was going with this.

"So we need to find out who was in charge of this guy's investigation and get a copy of that file. In order to do that we need someone on the inside with access."

He was right. She hated it when he was right. "Fine. You're right."

"I know I am, but you can say it again," he smiled back at her.

She scowled at him as she turned the key in the ignition. "You know you don't have to be so smug."

Clark sighed an exasperated sigh as he followed Lois into the lobby, waiting by the elevator with Lois. She had hardly said two words the entire drive back to the Planet. She was mad at him. That much was certain, but what he'd done to get out of her good graces he still wasn't sure. He had a sinking suspicion Lois was the 'she' Jimmy had been referring to earlier, but he'd kept his cool most of the morning to prevent a big blow-up.

"So, you seem quiet today," he finally said, breaking the tension.

"I've had a lot on my mind," she shrugged, pressing the call button once more.

"All day?" he challenged.

"Yes, all day. Dead guy came back from the dead, remember?"

He could tell from her face she wasn't being upfront with him. "I think it's something else."

"Oh, do tell!" she glared at him.

"You have been acting strange since yesterday," he pointed out as he followed her inside the elevator car.

"Well, getting shot at usually drums up some emotions," she retorted, pressing the button for the newsroom.

"Never seemed to bother you before," he said.

"Well, some people change," Lois said haughtily.

"And sometimes they stay the same," he shot back.

Lois rolled her eyes, "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Don't play games!" Clark snapped, "I know it was you."

"Me?" Lois shrugged, "What are you talking about?"

"You know, I thought you had a problem with Mayson, but I didn't think you'd stoop that low," Clark added irritably. "I have to work here, too. I don't appreciate you airing my personal life on the Planet Grapevine just because you can't stand..."

"What are you talking about??" Lois snapped, "I haven't done anything!"

“Oh, so you didn’t tell Jimmy that I needed a date?”

“Well...”

“You are unbelievable!” he fumed angrily. “Who do you think you are?”

“I was trying to help!” Lois snapped back.

“Help??” he scoffed. “You’re joking, right?”

The elevator dinged and the doors opened. On the other side was Mayson Drake. He stepped off the elevator, and put on his best smile, “Mayson, what are you doing here?”

“I thought I could come steal you for lunch. Maybe talk?” she gave him a warm smile.

“Gladly,” he said, shooting a warning glare at Lois as he walked past her. Mayson grinned ear to ear as he followed her into the elevator. Lois shot daggers at him as the elevator doors closed, and he did his best not to react.

The elevator doors closed and Lois turned toward the newsroom, feeling her anger at Clark begin to boil over. She stalked down the steps toward her desk, daring anyone to get in her way. The image of Mayson Drake with her arm around Clark as the elevator doors closed gnawed at her as she took her anger out on any inanimate object that got in her way.

“The nerve of that man...” She muttered under her breath, slamming her drawers of her desk as she grabbed a pen from her top drawer. “Of all the...” She looked around the room. “Jimmy!!”

Brian poked his head up from his desk, “He had to run an errand before lunch. Something I can help you with?”

Lois scowled, throwing her pen down on her desk, “No!”

This was a mistake.

He knew it from the moment he’d stepped into the elevator with Mayson.

He’d made the conscious choice not to pursue a relationship with her yet here he was, having lunch with her and what’s worse—leading her on. What was even worse—he knew what he was doing. He was doing it to get back at Lois because he was mad at her. Using an innocent woman’s attraction to him to get back at Lois. His parents would be horrified at his behavior.

The more he thought about it, and the longer he sat there with Mayson, the more disgusted he was with himself.

He was scum.

Dirt.

Lower than dirt.

“I have to admit; I was afraid you were giving me the brush off after the other night...”

He hung his head, trying to force himself to say something—anything. What was he supposed to say? ‘I’m sorry I mislead you. I’m a jerk that was trying to make the woman I’m secretly in love with mad?’

“Help! Somebody!! He’s got my car!!”

‘I can’t win,’ he thought to himself.

“I’m sorry Mayson, I just remembered I have a...” He tried to think of a reasonable excuse but unable to lie he just finished with, “I’ve got to go. I’m sorry.”

With that he left, leaving her stunned at the table.

After stopping the carjacker on 4th Avenue Clark headed back to the Planet. He needed to talk to Lois. He’d lost his temper. He still wasn’t sure why she’d done what she’d done but avoiding her wasn’t going to solve any of this.

He was just about to land on the roof when he noticed all the traffic lights turn green—and Jimmy in the middle of the crosswalk, reading a Rolling Stones magazine.

All four lanes had cars racing toward the intersection. He dove down, grabbing Jimmy at the last second, dropping him on the curb then returning at the last second to stop the cars from colliding, motioning for all the drivers to stop.

After assuring himself everyone was more annoyed than injured, he returned to Jimmy’s side to check on his young friend, “Are you all right, Jimmy?”

“I’d uh... feel better if my breakfast... stopped dancing,” Jimmy said, looking around at the chaos on the street. “What happened?”

“I don’t know.”

“Stupid Clark and his stupid girlfriend on their stupid lunch date...” Lois grumbled under her breath. Who did he think he was? Yelling at her like that? Couldn’t he see she was just trying to help him? He hadn’t been on a date since Linda King, and her big hair had rode into town. How did he expect to...

‘What?’ her conscience chided her.

She was in a miserable mood. She’d called every contact she had from Met U, trying to find anyone with a connection to Ryan Wiley. Unfortunately, the only person that could tell her anything had been kidnapped—and thanks to her lunthead of a partner she had no idea where he’d taken Molly.

“Metropolis Transit Authority reports that all 10,400 traffic lights are stuck on green. There have been several near disasters, but thanks to Superman, no serious injuries,” the LNN announcer said from the television.

Forgetting her anger at her partner for the moment, Lois looked toward the television where Perry was standing with a few other reporter and where Jimmy had just walked up, clutching a magazine in his hand.

“You can say that again,” Jimmy said.

Lois glared at him. She needed to talk to him and find out what exactly he’d said to Clark.

“All available police officers have been put on traffic detail...” the announcer continued.

Perry looked toward Jimmy. “Jimmy, why are you standing here watching pictures when you should be out taking them?”

Lois frowned. It looked like her talk with him would have to wait.

“Right, Chief,” Jimmy nodded. “I’ll get my camera.”

“That would help,” Perry said with a raised eyebrow.

Lois watched Jimmy head to his desk and followed him. She was just about to pull him into the conference room when she spotted Clark coming down the stairwell, readjusting his tie. She wanted to say something—anything, but the look on his face told her not to even try.

“Clark, where have you been?” Perry asked.

Clark pointed to the monitor, “I was, uh...stuck in traffic.”

“Oh.” Perry nodded, “Well, now that you’re here, see if you and Lois can piece together a story on this mess for the afternoon edition.”

“You know actually...” Clark began at the same time she started with, “That’s not a good idea.”

Perry looked between them, “Is there a problem I should be aware of?”

“No, just something...personal,” Lois said hurriedly.

Perry looked around, “Well, last I looked this was the Daily Planet, not an episode of ‘Lane and Kent’s Drama!’” He pointed toward her desk. “Whatever it is you can fight about it on your own time. There’s too much going on right now, and I don’t have the patience...” He glared between the both of them. “Are we clear?”

“Yes,” Clark said flatly.

“Yes...Chief,” Lois said with a scowl. She wasn’t thrilled about the idea of working with Clark right after their fight, but she was still a professional.

Perry left for his office, and Clark followed Lois to her desk, “So, any word on what caused this?”

Lois shrugged, “I was going to make a call to the Department of Transportation...”

“Okay.” He nodded, “I’ll get started on writing up the story...” With that, he headed back to his desk. She glared at his retreating figure, jerking the phone off the headset irritably as she began to dial.

Clark watched Lois out of the corner of his eye. He was still angry at her. He never thought she of all people would stoop so low. Especially after everything she went through with Claude and Luthor. The rumors that were floating around the office—her personal life on display at the newsstands. How could she do something like this? She’d pulled some numbers on him before, but this one came pretty close to surpassing her rejection last summer.

He finished typing the last paragraph and began reading it over. Lois’s voice intruded his thoughts as she walked over to him with her arms crossed over her chest, “It sounds like sabotage. The DOT got an anonymous note saying...” She looked down at the notepad in her hand, “Cars are isolating us from each other. Walk among your fellow man.”

Something about that phrase resonated with him. “Walk among your fellow man?” When she nodded, he pointed out, “Lois, that’s a direct quote from Molly’s book.”

“Well, we know it wasn’t Molly; seeing as how she was kidnapped a few hours ago—which direction Ryan took her we’ll never know.” She bit back at him with a glare.

“I told you I was sorry.”

“Yeah, right before you *helped* me call around to try and find where Ryan could have taken her.” She glared back at him. “You know it was so much fun calling all three hundred of my old classmates to see if anyone knew anything about Ryan. Probably would have gotten through the list sooner if someone hadn’t disappeared on me earlier to go on a *stupid* lunch date with his *stupid* girlfriend!”

“Wasn’t that the point of all this? You’re not happy if I’m not dating and you’re not happy when I am. I can’t win with you.” He glared back at her.

“That is not what I’m mad about, and you know it! You should have gone to find Superman like I asked you to!”

“That’s your answer to everything, isn’t it?” he retorted. “Find Superman. Sometimes he can’t help, Lois.”

“You could have tried.”

“Well, sorry for not feeling very generous. I’d just found out my supposed friend was over there talking about me behind my back,” he hissed back irritably. “Finding your superhero so you can fawn all over him wasn’t exactly high on my list of priorities.”

He was angry; furious with her. The more he argued with her, the more he could feel his anger begin to boil over. He got up to leave, and she followed him up the stairs to the elevator, “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Out. To clear my head.” He pressed the call button to the elevator.

“Fine. See if I care? Go! Run off with your little girlfriend and leave all the heavy lifting to me *again!*”

“Do the words *let it go* mean anything to you?” he snapped back, pressing the call button again.

“Let it go?”

The lights flickered, and the newsroom and the emergency lights came on. Mumbles of angry reporters echoed through the newsroom.

“See what you did?” She snapped angrily.

“You really are a piece of work; you know that?” he muttered under his breath. Seeing his computer screen had gone black he headed back to his desk with Lois behind him.

“Hey, where do you think you’re going now?”

“To check and make sure I didn’t lose my story,” he snapped.

Perry charged out of his office shouting, “Somebody get me MIS! My computer’s frozen and the power’s out in the office.”

Clark frowned as he leaned over his desk, tapping at this keyboard a few times. Nothing. “So is mine.”

“We’re a half-hour from deadline! Somebody call the Systems Operator! Never mind, I’ll do it.” Perry picked up the phone and frowned, “It’s dead!”

“*What???*” Lois raced over to him, looking over his shoulder as she tapped at the keyboard.

“It’s gone,” Clark muttered in disgust.

“Chief!” Jimmy raced into the newsroom with his camera bag over his shoulder and a piece of paper in hand.

“I thought I told you to get some pictures!” Perry roared.

“You’ve only been gone twenty minutes.”

“The guard downstairs found this taped to the lobby door.”

Jimmy handed the paper to Perry.

Clark moved toward Perry and Jimmy to read over his shoulder with Lois in hot pursuit. “The phones of Metropolis are mute, its computers silenced. We have released the death grip of technology and freed the human spirit.”

“Free the human spirit?” Lois echoed.

“Sounds like what your friend Molly was going on about ...”

Clark began.

“But it’s *NOT* Molly, is it?” She snapped, glaring at him. “If someone hadn’t gotten in my way earlier we’d have a lead.”

He met her glare with one of his own, shaking his head. “For the last time...”

“Hey, hey, hey!” Perry interrupted. “I thought I told you two to give this spat a rest!”

They both turned toward Perry who was looking at them like he had just caught them with their hands in the cookie jar.

“Fine,” Lois said haughtily.

“Good,” Clark added.

“All right, now if you two are done, I’d like to get back to the story?” Perry prompted, looking at the note in his hand.

“Yes,” Lois cheered, “Sounds good.”

“Great,” Clark added unenthusiastically.

“Now, are you saying you know who wrote this?” Perry asked, waving the note in his hand.

“I know who wrote a book with those ideas,” Lois corrected.

“She was kidnapped earlier today.”

“Kidnapped?” Perry echoed.

“By her dead ex-fiancé,” Clark added.

Perry looked at them in disbelief before adding, “Boy these leads get stranger and stranger...” He looked at the duo with an annoyed look. “What are you two standing around for? You’ve got a lead! Follow it!”

Lois angrily stalked down the stairwell with Clark behind her. After the fight they’d gotten into earlier, she was doing everything she could not to talk to him. He was being such a...

“Here,” Clark opened the door. “This is the Lobby.”

“Oh,” she mumbled, walking through the open door. She pushed her way through the lobby that was darkened from the lack of lights. They made their way outside in silence and headed toward the parking garage. “We need to go back to Molly’s shop. See if we can find anything.”

“Fine,” Clark said flatly.

She climbed into the Jeep and slammed the door, shooting Clark a glance as he got in on the passenger side. She was still angry at him, but she had to work with him. She couldn’t do that with him acting like a two-year-old.

“You sticking to one-word answers for the rest of the day or are you actually going to help find Molly?” she snapped irritably.

“For now, I think it’s best if we don’t talk,” he said with an eerie calm in his voice. “I’ll help you find Molly, and I’ll help with the investigation, but don’t expect me to just ignore what you and Jimmy did.”

“Fine,” Lois snapped, turning the key in the ignition.

“Fine,” he echoed.

Perry watched Lois and Clark leave through the stairwell and sighed. Somedays he wanted to hug those two and others, he wanted to pull his hair out with them. He looked back at Jimmy and the other reporters that were looking at him for direction, “Okay, everybody, listen up. We may have lost the battle, but not the war. We’ve still got a paper to put out.”

“Chief, we’re fully computerized,” Jimmy argued.

Perry sighed, “Olsen, you’re young, so I’ll excuse that. Believe it or not, there was a Daily Planet before there were computers.”

“But there’s no wire service or faxes...” Jimmy stammered.

“So we pound the pavement, just like the old days. First rule of journalism: publish or perish!” He barked, turning to the staff, “Kathy, rustle up some typewriters! Virgil, see if that old linotype machine down in the basement still works...” He looked around. “Jimmy?”

“Right here, Chief,” Jimmy said from behind him.

“I want you to stick with me like glue. You’re gonna learn what it’s like to be a real newspaper man.”

It took everything in him not to get out of the car and fly off. Lois had managed to press every button today. She didn’t even realize what she’d done was wrong; that was the mind-boggling part in all of this.

“We’re here,” Lois said, parking on the left side of Molly’s shop. He nodded, waiting a few minutes for her to get out before following. He was angry with her, but he still wanted to help find Molly. He’d been too angry with her at the time to focus on what was going on. By the time they both realized what had happened Ryan was long gone with Molly; thus igniting Lois’s anger at him.

It had been a madhouse on the streets. Police were directing traffic and keeping everyone off the roads. He kept a close ear out for anything the authorities weren’t able to handle. Finding Molly was priority number one though. Lois said she used to be a computer engineer. Though he didn’t think she seemed like the type to perform terroristic acts like shutting the power down on an entire city...he knew there were two sides to everyone. They had to find out who was behind the sabotage on the power-grid system and get the power restored.

Lois walked from the door of Molly’s shop to the parking spot she told him she saw Ryan parked at. “There’s nothing here.” She kicked at the gravel angrily.

Clark lowered his glasses, checking for anything that might be invisible to the naked eye and smiled when he spotted an expired military badge beneath the gravel by Lois’s foot. “Do that again.”

“Do what?” She kicked the gravel and more of the badge stuck out.

“Right there.” He pointed, leaning down to pick the badge up. Unable to resist he added, “I guess your temper does come in handy sometimes.” Before she could respond, he showed her the badge. “Looks like Molly left a clue.”

“That’s her old military badge from when she worked on the Hawkeye,” Lois said, taking it from him.

“Think she’s trying to tell us something?”

“Well, the badge was issued for access on Fort Truman.” Lois sighed, “I guess we start there.”

“How?” Clark asked. “They’re not going to just let us walk on base.”

“No, but maybe one of Perry’s army buddies has an idea on how we could get on base,” Lois commented. Sirens began going off around them, and they looked up to see several tanks driving down the road and several soldiers marching down the main road in cadence. She moved toward the sirens, “What in the world?”

Lois moved to follow them, and he reached out to stop her. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Finding out what’s going on,” Lois responded, annoyed.

“Lois, this isn’t some criminal you’re trying to follow. That’s the Army. You can’t just interfere with their patrol,” Clark argued.

“Then what do you suggest we do? Sit here and wait for the Metropolis STAR to tell us what’s going on?” Lois snapped irritably.

“No, that’s not what I meant, and you know it. There’s got to be a better way to...”

“I’m sure asking a few questions wouldn’t hurt.”

“Of course, go barreling in guns a blazing like you always do. Although you might want to consider that when you get arrested and thrown into military prison, Superman might have a hard time getting you out,” he snapped angrily.

“You’re a jerk!” she spat out.

“Takes one to know one,” he retorted.

“You have no right to throw Superman in my face like that. Who do you think you are?” She poked her finger in his chest.

“Just giving you the facts. Sorry, it doesn’t fit into your self-absorbed bubble,” he snapped back irritably. “Even Superman has to follow the law.”

“Oh, give me a break! This has nothing to do with my wanting to talk to those soldiers, and you know it. You’re still pissed at me for earlier...”

“We gonna work on the story or continue arguing?” Clark asked, trying to change the subject. He really didn’t want to get into this with her right now.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve!”

“I guess we’re going to do this, huh?”

“You’re damn right! You abandoned me today, and then you tried to turn it around on me! What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Wrong with me??? You’re the one that had Jimmy poking his nose in my personal life like the local paparazzi!”

“I did not!” Lois snapped back.

“Really so it became common knowledge on the Planet Grapevine that I need a date by accident?”

“What are you talking about?” Lois fumed. “I never told anyone...”

“You told Jimmy!” he pointed out.

“He knows more about everyone’s personal lives. He’d never”

“Obviously he did,” Clark snapped. “I can’t believe you’d do something like this! After everything you went through this summer...How would you feel if you had random people coming up to you trying to proposition you at work?”

“I had nothing to do with that!” Lois argued. “I would never do something like that. You should know me better than to...”

“Newsflash, Lois! It did happen. You did have something to do with it. Right now you’re no better than the paparazzi that was harassing you after Luthor’s death!”

“I am not!” Lois snapped angrily. “That was different!”

“How? My personal life is being aired just like yours was. Please explain the difference.”

She glared at him, uncertainly, “I think we should get back to the story.”

“Good idea,” Clark retorted.

Lois walked back to her Jeep, but he remained where he was. “Are you coming?”

“I’ll walk.”

“Fine!” She slammed the door, and he watched her drive off.

He let out a long breath. Everything seemed to be setting both of them off today. Lois still didn’t see that what she’d done was wrong. Then when they were trying to work together on a story, throwing caution to the wind once again—he crossed a line. He knew it from the minute he made the remark. He was trying to get a reaction. She’d hurt him. Even if it was unintentional, she’d hurt him. This was something he couldn’t just sweep under the rug as he had with her past transgressions.

With all his gifts growing up, he'd always had to keep his guard up; keeping friends at a distance. It wasn't until he'd invented Superman that he'd felt he could really let his guard down, solidifying the separate personas to the world and feeling at ease with himself as Clark Kent. Lois was the first person he'd really let see past the walls he'd built up over the years. Having his life put out there as gossip among his colleagues had been hard—but learning it had been done by someone he trusted so completely—that had been the part that hurt him the most. He knew he needed to find a way to forgive her. They couldn't continue to work with one another like this, and he couldn't stop Ryan Wiley—if that's who was behind the sabotage of Metropolis's power grid—without Lois's help. He just wasn't sure if he was ready to forgive her yet.

"Help somebody! My wife's having a baby! Help!!"

Hearing the cries for help he leaped into action, tugging at his tie as he headed for the nearest alleyway. Maybe doing a long patrol around the city would help clear his head.

As Clark came in to land, he spotted a man in his late 20's by the payphone, slamming it down and turning to his pickup truck that was parked on a curb. "The phones are still dead! I can't get an ambulance..."

He landed by the passenger side of the truck and saw the young woman around the same age crying. With a quick scan, he saw there was no time to fly her to the hospital. The baby's head was already crowning. "It's gonna be okay," he reassured her, leaning into the rear passenger door that was already open.

She let out a loud scream, and he watched in wonder as the rest of the baby finished making her way out and into his grasp. He grabbed a nearby towel that was hanging on the back of the seat and wrapped the baby in it. "She's going to be fine." He reassured then turned to the father who was pacing around the street frantically.

"Not how you planned it I'm sure, but still the same result."

He handed the man his daughter, "Take your daughter and get in the car. I'm gonna fly all of you to the hospital..."

"I can't believe it. My daughter was delivered by Superman..."

Lois headed back to the Planet, making her way through the backroads that were now being directed by the National Guard soldiers and local police officers. Luckily there was a bit of a delay when merging onto Main Street and she was able to get some information from one of the soldiers. The governor had declared a state of emergency, and New Troy's National Guard had been deployed from Fort Truman. She found it very odd the same base that Molly had worked on the Hawkeye with Ryan and the same base that had the faulty weapon's demonstration was where all the troops were coming from. There was a connection there she just knew it. Unfortunately, thinking about the possible connection wasn't coming easily to her. All she could think about was her argument with Clark today.

Arguments.

How dare he throw her feelings for Superman back in her face like that?

How dare he imply that...

She let out a long breath.

<< "Well, sorry for not feeling very generous. I'd just found out my supposed friend was over there talking about me behind my back." >>

<< "Finding your superhero so you can fawn all over him wasn't exactly high on my list of priorities." >>

<< "You have no right to throw Superman in my face like that. Who do you think you are?" >>

Over and over everything came running through her head. Every snide remark. Every dig. They'd fought before but never

like this. Clark was angry at her in a way he'd never been before. Every time they fought, it was usually her starting it. Today had been different.

Yes, she'd gone behind his back.

Yes, she'd talked about his personal life with Jimmy.

Yes, she'd enlisted Jimmy's help in finding a suitable date for Clark.

Did she intend for everyone at the Planet to be talking about Clark's dating life?

No.

She parked in the parking garage and made her way through the stairwell, climbing the steps until she reached the floor of the newsroom.

Would he be there?

Would he talk to her?

<< "You're the one that had Jimmy poking his nose in my personal life like the local paparazzi!" >>

<< "I can't believe you'd do something like this! After everything you went through this summer... How would you feel if you had random people coming up to you trying to proposition you at work?" >>

She'd been so focused on trying to fix this 'guy rule' between Clark and Superman she'd forgotten to consider how Clark would react to all of this. Yes, she was trying to be a good friend and set him up with someone less obnoxious than Mayson Drake, but she'd forgotten to ask him. She'd forgotten to talk to him.

She opened the door and suppressed a groan when she saw his empty desk. It had been hours since their fight, and she'd been caught in traffic. Surely he could have walked there in less time. He'd done it countless times.

Was he avoiding her?

<< "I would never do something like that. You should know me better than to..." >>

<< "Newsflash, Lois! It did happen. You did have something to do with it. Right now you're no better than the paparazzi that was harassing you after Luthor's death!" >>

<< "That was different!" >>

<< "How? My personal life is being aired just like yours was. Please explain the difference." >>

He'd compared her to the paparazzi that had been hounding her after Lex's death.

That had hurt.

But he wasn't wrong.

She'd crossed a line.

She needed to make it right.

The question was 'how?'

She didn't anticipate a conversation with Clark going over very well right now, but she needed to try. He was typically the first person to apologize after their fights—whether he'd been in the wrong or not.

She was going to have to be the one to make the first move this time. To do that she needed to find him. Typically Clark was able to pass along a message to Superman for her. Maybe it would work the other way around?

The city was dark as he flew above the downtown area. Most of the disasters had been diverted fairly easily. There were a few medical emergencies he'd had to intervene with and many instances of road rage as drivers sat in their cars for hours trying to make their way through the city that had essentially been shut off from all technology. The power, phones, internet... Everything was cut off. What he couldn't figure out was how.

A sharp beeping echoed in his eardrums. He looked around and groaned when he realized the source.

Lois stood on the roof of the Daily Planet holding up what looked like the old watch of Jimmy's.

He could fly away and ignore her.

He should fly away.
 After their fight earlier, talking to Lois wasn't exactly high on his priorities.
 She'd hurt him.
 Betrayed his trust.
 Holding a conversation with her as Superman would be hard.
 He should fly away.
 But he couldn't.
 He didn't.
 He landed on the roof.
 "Do you mind?" He pointed to the watch in her hand.
 "Sorry." She clicked the button. "I didn't know how else to get ahold of you without falling out a window or—"
 She was quiet.
 "—or talk to Clark?"
 "Yeah." She gave him a weak smile.
 "Well, I'm here, and for the moment there aren't any calls for help. What do you need?"

"What do you need?"
 Those four words were such a loaded question for Lois right now.
 She decided to just dive right into the problem at hand and hope for the best. "I did something I shouldn't have. Did something I really, *really* shouldn't have," she began cautiously. "I know you and he are friends... good friends and..." She stopped, seeing the stern look on Superman's face. "I hurt him. I hurt him, and I don't know how to make it right."
 Superman's face softened slightly, "Clark?"
 "Yes," she whispered tearfully. "I know he's your friend, and I know you have your... guy code or whatever, but I was hoping you could maybe be my friend, too?"
 "Guy code?" He looked confused. "What are you talking about?"
 "You know?" She looked at him annoyed, "I know that's why you didn't..." She stopped herself mid-sentence. She'd promised herself she'd never discuss what had happened last summer with Superman.
 "No, I don't," he clarified in a confused tone. "What 'guy rule' are you referring to that I supposedly know about?"
 She took a step toward him, '*Just rip the band-aid off*' she told herself. "Last summer." She took another step toward him. "You lied to me."
 He looked down then back up at her, confusion on his face, "Excuse me?"
 "You lied to me ... last summer." The words hung in the air like a hundred-ton weight. She'd finally said it.
 "I've never lied," he corrected. "Everything I've said was the truth."
 "Yeah, except you left out that the 'reasons' for not being able to..."
 He was growing annoyed. She could tell from his tone, but she needed answers.
 "Do you have any idea what you were asking? The only reason you were asking that... The only reason you were asking that was because you were scared that what Clark had warned you about Luthor was true..."
 "Is there anything you two don't talk about?" she accused.
 "Like you said, we're friends. We talk," he corrected.
 "So I see," she said haughtily.
 "I wasn't trying to hurt you, but what you were asking wasn't something—still isn't something I can give. Superman—what I do—saving everyone everyday... It's not a regular job. It's not something that allows me the freedom to..." He let out a long breath. "I can't give you what you were asking—not like that anyway."
 "Not like what?" she asked, her eyebrows narrowed at the

choice of words.
 "Nothing," he said, stepping away from her.
 "It didn't sound like *nothing*." She accused. "It sounded like an 'out' like you're covering yourself... Is that what you're trying to do? Cover yourself?"
 "Of course not." He sighed, "I just meant the way you went about everything last summer..."
 "Yes?"
 "You were backing me into a corner, and I don't respond well to that type of..."
 "Backed into a corner? It was a simple question. You'd been sending me mixed signals for almost a year and..." She let out a long breath, "I swear you're worse than Clark sometimes..."
 "You wanted an answer, and I gave it to you as clearly as I could. I'm sorry if you didn't like the answer I gave you. I never meant to hurt you, but..."
 "No? You certainly did a great job at trying to hide that."
 "You were trying to force a decision. Superman belongs to the world and..."
 She narrowed her eyes at him. "What did you just say?" She took another step toward him. "Why do you keep talking about yourself in the third-person?"
 "I..." He seemed to notice the slip. "I've got to go. Please don't use that unless there's a real emergency."

Several hours later, Perry stepped out of his office, grabbing one of the runners, "Tell the sports department I'm going to need their copy two hours sooner for paste up." He nodded and headed toward Sports and Perry walked through the pit, seeing his reporters type away at the typewriters. "Type faster people. I don't have a computer to help me edit."
 He spotted Lois hard at work at her desk, applying white-out to the copy she was working on, "Look at that. I haven't seen white-out in I don't know how long. Boy that brings back a lot of memories. Mainly about mistakes," Perry said.
 She shot him a warning glare. "Perry, it's hard enough to re-create my story—without my partner here—on this antique without feeling like my teacher's standing over my shoulder."
 "Things still haven't smoothed over between you and Kent, huh?"
 Lois sighed, "No, and it's not like I can just pick up the phone and call him either..."
 "I'm sure he'll show up once he's cooled off," Perry reassured. Lois glared at the typewriter angrily, and he sighed, "Startin' to go through technology withdrawal, aren't you honey?"
 "Yeah, I don't suppose you've heard from any of your Army buddies before the lights went out—literally."
 "Not yet, but I've got Jimmy..." Perry stopped when he spotted Jimmy struggling to hold his short wave radio set.
 "Where do you want this, Chief?" Jimmy asked as it began to slip out of his grasp, "Hopefully somewhere close..."
 "My office." Perry pointed.
 "Is that a short wave radio?" Lois asked.
 "Sure is. Battery powered. Used to be a hobby of mine. Until Alice decided I was talking too much to it and not enough to her."
 Lois smiled. "Do you think you could get any of your contacts in Washington on that?"
 Perry smiled, "I could get Paris if I wanted to. Unfortunately, I'd have to talk to the, uh, French." He gave Lois a sympathetic smile, "Still trying to find your friend?"
 Lois nodded, showing him the Fort Truman badge. "This was found where she was abducted. There has to be someone that could help get us access to Fort Truman."
 "You think your friend is at Fort Truman?" Perry observed.
 "It couldn't hurt to look," Lois said.
 "I'll give Stormin' Norman a call and see what he can do. Probably won't hear anything till tomorrow though."

“Stormin’ Norman?” Lois asked, “Schwarzkopf?”

“Haberstetzer. Retired Admiral. Stormin’ Norman is his handle.” Perry explained. “Why don’t you go on home? I’ll send a runner if we hear anything.” He had told Clark the same thing a few hours ago when he’d stopped by with an update on Superman’s activities.

“Thanks, Perry.” Lois gathered her things and headed out.

Lois stared up at the apartment building on Clinton Street. The usually well-lit building was dark. She didn’t know what had possessed her to come here. After all the fighting today, she should have just gone home.

But she couldn’t.

She couldn’t go home and lie in her bed—unable to resolve the tension between her and Clark. She needed to fix this, and she needed to fix it now. Her fight with Clark was spilling over into every part of her life. Work. Friends. Even her relationship with Superman was being affected.

She put the car in park and locked it, then proceeded to climb the steps to his apartment building until she was in front of his door.

Was he home?

She didn’t know.

Would he answer?

She hoped so.

She lifted her arm to knock on the door only to see the door being pulled away from her as it opened. There, standing in front of her was her partner in shorts and his matching green sleeveless shirt. The apartment behind him was dark, dimly lit by candlelight.

“Hi,” she breathed, looking anywhere but at his face. Her eyes wandered down his legs, taking in the rare occasion she got to see him in something other than a suit. He really was nice to look at...

“Hi,” he said cautiously, pulling her attention back to his face which wore a confused expression at the moment. “Lois, what are you doing here?”

Recalling her reason for being there and the harsh words they’d spoken to one another she took a deep breath and said the two words she hardly ever said to anyone. “I’m sorry.”

His face softened slightly, but he still stood in the opening, blocking her from entering his apartment. “You’re sorry?”

“You were right. I was...wr...wrong.” She stammered.

Thinking back to the chaos she’d gone through with the paparazzi over the summer she looked back at him, “For what it’s worth I never meant for your personal life to become a part of the Planet gossip.”

“Well, it’s too late for that now, isn’t it?”

He wasn’t going to make this easy for her, was he? She took a deep breath and continued, “I know. I’m sorry. I really am. Can you forgive me?”

“Why did you do it?” he asked.

“What?” She looked back at him in surprise.

He looked at her tilting her head to look at him. “Why? I get that you’re sorry, and I can forgive you, but I have to know... why?”

“Because I’m an idiot?” Lois swiped at the tears that began to run down her face.

“I don’t understand.”

“I was trying to be a good friend. Last week at the Church Fundraiser...everything with Mayson—I didn’t handle it very well.”

“I know,” he said quietly, “but Lois you know that...”

“Please just let me get this out?” she pleaded. “Things have been...complicated between us for a while.”

“A lot happened,” he said solemnly.

“I wasn’t trying to hurt you. I just...I don’t like Mayson,” she stammered out.

“I noticed,” he smirked.

“When Jimmy made the remark about the ‘guy rule’ it started to make sense. Your friendship with Superman. Why he was acting one way one minute then completely different the next and why both of you seemed to hate Lex for no reason—” He opened his mouth to retort, and she cut him off. “Or so I thought at the time. It just never made sense to me why Superman felt like he had to keep his guard up around me...”

“And you think it’s because of this...guy rule?” he asked cautiously.

“Yes,” she said confidently. “Isn’t it?”

He shook his head, opening the door wider as he leaned back against it, crossing his arms over his chest. “No.”

“Oh.” She grew quiet.

“Why didn’t you just come and ask me instead of trying to organize a bunch of blind dates for me? I am capable of managing my dating life on my own,” he pointed out.

“I know,” she said, not thrilled about being reminded of the sight of him with Linda King or Toni Taylor or even more recently Mayson Drake.

“So what were you hoping to accomplish? I start dating, and then you start dating Superman?” He narrowed his eyes at her.

“I figured it was worth a shot,” she mumbled, staring down at her feet. “You already made it perfectly clear we were ‘just friends’, right?”

His face went from anger to shock to disbelief in a matter of seconds. “Why would you...? What were you...? What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means, I was getting tired of being jerked around by the two of you!” she snapped irritably. “Do you have any idea what you put me through this past summer?”

“I’m sorry, I put *you* through???” he shot back. “I’m not the one that was ...” He stopped himself, tightening his lips in a thin line. “I thought we weren’t going to talk about this anymore.”

“I think we need to talk about it,” she shot back. “We can’t continue to ignore it.” She sighed, picking at the button on her jacket, “You hurt me...When you wouldn’t come to my wedding.”

“I wasn’t going to sit there and watch you make the biggest mistake of your life,” he said solemnly. “I warned you what he was and you didn’t listen to me. You *never* listen to me...Until it’s too late.”

“That is not true!”

“Isn’t it?” he snapped back. “Lois you have no idea what that summer was like for me or Perry or Jimmy. You were too busy planning your wedding to the world’s largest criminal while he planned on ways to get rid of everyone...Superman, me, Jack...”

“What are you talking about?” Lois stopped.

“Jack got a new cellmate, Joe Black the day he escaped from prison—sent there to take care of him. Superman got tricked into visiting Luthor’s wine cellar where he trapped him in a Krypt—” He stopped mid-sentence.

“Kryptonite?” Her eyes narrowed at him as the gravity of what he was saying began to sink in. Lex had known about Kryptonite. He had known about Kryptonite and he had tried to kill Superman...and Clark had known about it. She’d discovered it’s existence during the fiasco with Arianna Carlin and the double she’d tried to make of her. Did Superman tell Clark? Had Clark known beforehand? Finally, she found her voice, “How do you know about Kryptonite?”

“I just—do,” he said carefully.

“Uh-huh. What else do you know about that you’re not telling me?” she asked.

“Lois, you’re missing the point.”

“No, I think I’m getting the point real well. You and Superman seem to have a real nice friendship. What do you do sit there and laugh at how you messed with my head that day? Share stories?”

“Of course not, Lois. I would never do something like that.”

“Well, you seem to know an awful lot that Superman knows,

and he seems to know an awful lot that you know,” she shrugged, “Just connecting the dots.”

“What is it with you that makes it so hard for you to admit you could actually not know all the answers?”

“With me?? Oh, you’ve got a lot of nerve!” she snapped angrily. “After everything you put me through!”

“Put *you* through?? *YOU*???”

“Yes! *Me!* How *dare* you sit there and admit feelings for me like that and then take it all back like it was *nothing!*!” she cried angrily. “Do you have any idea what *you* put *me* through??”

He looked down, then lifted his eyes up to meet her gaze. “I lied.”

“What?”

“I said, I lied.” He whispered.

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.”>>

<<“I’m not in love with you.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

“You said that before.” She said cautiously. “When you insisted on going first.”

“I didn’t want to lose my best friend.”

“You should have let me go first.” She dabbed at the corners of her eyes, turning away, looking down into his darkened apartment, uncertain if she wanted to stay or leave at this point.

“What would you have said?”

She turned to face him, leaning her head back against the doorframe, “I would have told you that you were right about everything,” she felt her voice crack, “and that I was sorry I didn’t believe you...And that...” She felt her throat trying to close up as she came closer and closer to admitting the truth she’d suppressed for so long.

“What?”

“Perry and Henderson didn’t stop the wedding. I did.”

“Oh.” He was quiet a moment and stammered, “I thought...”

“I stopped the wedding because I realized it hurt more to lose you —

my best friend—than it would have hurt to lose Lex. That’s when I knew I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t go through with it.” She said cautiously, “I couldn’t go through with it because all I could do was think about that day at the park and wonder...”

“Wonder what?” he asked, his voice was hoarse and shaky as the question came out.

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.”>>

<<“I’m not in love with you.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

“*This.*” She threw caution to the wind, finally giving into the urges that had plagued her for the last year as her lips pressed against his. Just as she felt him begin to respond, she pulled away, whispering softly, “I love you.”

Both hands moved to cup her face, and his lips found hers. She let out a soft moan as he kicked the door the rest of the way closed. His solid frame pressed against hers as her mind replayed his confession over and over in her mind.

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.”>>

<<“I’m not in love with you.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

Her purse dropped to the floor and her arms wrapped around his neck, pulling him toward her as she felt her way up his broad shoulders. His hands moved down the side of her face, outlining

her neck with one hand and the frame of her face with the other as his lips devoured hers.

“I love you, Lois,” he murmured against her lips. His hand cupped her cheek, running his hand through her hair. “I’ve always loved you.”

“Oh, Clark,” she sighed happily against him as she whispered back, “I love you, too.”

As she whispered those words once more, it felt like a floodgate had opened. The passion she’d felt from the time their lips first met multiplied ten-fold as he poured his soul into the act of kissing her. It was becoming increasingly hot and uncomfortable standing on the steps of his apartment in her work attire. She quickly shed her jacket, allowing it to fall to the floor. He lifted her up, allowing her legs to wrap around his waist as he carried her down into the living room, never losing contact with her lips.

She sighed happily as she felt the weight of his body press against hers when they landed haphazardly on the couch. “Are you okay?” He pulled back, looking at her in concern. The light from the candles reflected off his glasses.

“Very,” she whispered. She could see the reflection of his smile in the dark. She tugged his head to her and recaptured his mouth with hers, sliding her body onto his lap as she continued their embrace. Her hands roamed up and down his back, seeking the feeling of his skin against hers. Every touch, every caress didn’t seem to be able to satisfy her insatiable desire for more. She needed to be closer. She needed to kiss him deeper. She needed to hold him closer. She needed to feel him...

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

His hands roamed up and down her sides. Her hands moved up the back of his head, burying her fingers in his dark silky hair. The room was growing more and more uncomfortable as she sought the feeling of his body against hers. His skin against hers. He released her mouth from his, moving his attention down her throat. His hands continued to roam up and down her sides as she hovered over him. She fisted his hair as he nibbled his way down her throat seductively.

How was it possible that he could make her feel so much with just a kiss? Even her handful of experiences making love had never made her feel like this. She could feel the tightening in her abdomen as her body seemed to be following her mind’s train of thought. Why had she fought this so long?

The spark between them was obvious. From the time she’d caught him in a towel at the Apollo to the time he’d kissed her in the Honeymoon Suite as a ruse, that spark had been there. Even when she’d been sprayed with the Pheromone spray, it hadn’t been Superman she’d been lusting after. It had been Clark. That should have been her first clue. She could easily envision a life with Clark. That had been what made her call a halt to the wedding... What made her doubt everything... She could easily picture a life with Clark whereas with Lex she couldn’t—not a happy one at least.

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time.”>>

She needed more. She could feel his hands moving up and down her sides, creating a heated path as his lips traced the curve of her neck. It would be so easy to throw caution to the wind, strip

one another down and give into their impulses. It wouldn't take a lot of persuading. After over a year of suppressed emotions, they both were teetering on the edge of no return.

The three words she'd thought she'd never hear again had finally been spoken. Then when she'd finally said them aloud, it seemed to have opened a floodgate for both of them. The things he was doing to her rivaled any form of foreplay she'd experienced or any fantasy she'd ever had about Superman. This was different. This was real. This was ... Clark, her best friend.

His hands moved up and down her back, and she slid closer to him. His teeth grazed against the sensitive skin of her throat, and she murmured her approval, pressing herself against him. She lowered herself more fully on his lap. He stilled his motions and leaned back against the couch, whispering, "We should stop."

She moved back again, feeling a tingle down her spine as she moved against him. Five years. It had been five years since she'd...

"Stop?" she echoed. "Why?"

The question came out through her voice cracked. Didn't he know what he was doing to her? Didn't he know how badly she needed to finish what they'd started? She could think about the consequences later. She just wanted him to keep kissing her senseless and...

"Lois, what are we doing?" he asked half-heartedly as she leaned into him again.

"Right now?" she asked, leaning back again. She could see his resolve slowly begin to disappear each time she moved. She couldn't help but smile, realizing how much power she held over him at the moment. She leaned toward him, and he let out a low groan. She whispered her lips against his. "I thought we were enjoying ourselves..."

"Lois, you have no idea how many times I've fantasized about this," he reached up to cup her cheek, "I would love more than anything to keep kissing you senseless and holding you...like this."

"But?" She couldn't help but smile back at him, watching as he continued to struggle to remain in control.

"But right now if we don't stop I'm not going to be able to," he tried to explain with a heated gaze.

"I'm not stopping you," she pointed out, tracing the outline of his six pack through his shirt.

"This is very new to both of us," he pointed out, "and I don't want either of us waking up the next morning with regrets because we rushed into things."

"Are you saying you'd regret making love with me?" she asked.

"Never," he whispered huskily.

How was he able to do that – reject the idea of crossing that line of intimacy and make it sound like it was the most romantic thing in the world? It would be so easy to give into their desires. They'd both gotten caught up in the moment after her declaration. She'd never been kissed like that in her life. He'd kissed her as if his life depended on it. It had been easy to forget everything that was going on around them—forget the implications that came with crossing that line. It would be so easy to throw caution to the wind and fall into each other's arms. Based on his darkened eyes as they bore down into her with desire, she had a feeling it wouldn't take a lot of convincing on Clark's part, but something in the back of her mind prevented her from doing so.

"I love you, Lois," he whispered, "I don't want a one-night-stand, and I don't think you want that either. I want forever..."

"Forever?" she echoed as her voice cracked under the weight of what that one word meant.

"Forever." He leaned in to kiss her, softly caressing her lips with his. This kiss was different from the previous kiss they'd shared. It wasn't insistent or demanding; instead, it was loving and tender as he slowly slid her off of his lap.

"You know what I was thinking?" She asked, looking around the darkened apartment.

"After the power comes back on we should go on a date," he grinned back at her.

"A date?" She looked at him in surprise.

"Several."

"What makes you think I would want more than one date?" Lois teased, "What if it ends badly?"

"Not possible," he countered. "We've already spent the last two hours proving how very right the end of any date would be."

"Aren't we full of ourselves?" she giggled.

"Very," he countered with a grin.

"Okay," she nodded. "After all this mess is cleared up A date."

"Several," he corrected.

"Whatever," she sighed.

"Say it."

"Fine, several dates." She grinned back at him with a laugh.

"Are you laughing?" he asked with laughter in his tone.

"No, of course not I just find it funny that you insist on emphasizing these 'several dates' when we've yet to have one."

"You shouldn't laugh. You're about to fall head over heels in love." He grinned back at her confidently.

"I thought I already was."

"Not yet, but you will be."

She wasn't used to seeing this side of Clark. He was confident and self-assured and incredibly sexy. Was it always going to be like this? Going from practically ripping each other's clothes off one minute and returning to the friendly banter and teasing the next.

"You sound pretty confident there," she observed.

He grinned, leaning in to kiss her once more. This time his lips lingered on hers as his hands moved to cup both sides of her face.

The faint sound of a sharp knock coming from his front door echoed in the back of her mind. She whimpered in protest. "I swear if that's Jimmy he's going to get fitted for a body cast."

Clark laughed, "I doubt it. That sounded too official to be Jimmy."

She watched in admiration as the light from the candles around the room reflected off the gray shorts he wore in just the right angle to give her a view of how perfectly the shorts spread across his backside. Her eyes wandered over his broad shoulders, admiring the tight green cotton that stretched over his hard-chiseled muscles.

How had she worked beside him for all these months and not done this sooner?

Clark opened the door and standing on the other side was a tall man in a green brim hat in a Class A uniform. "I'm looking for Lois Lane and Clark Kent?"

"Yes," Clark said hesitantly motioning for him to come in.

Lois approached, moving to stand next to Clark as the Admiral introduced himself.

"Admiral Haberstetzer of the 22nd Brigade at your service."

"Yes," Lois recalled, "Perry said you were retired."

"I still assist when needed. I can get you access to the base."

The Admiral remarked with a smile. "I'm told you believe there is a civilian being held captive on base?"

"Yes," Lois explained. "She was kidnapped by one of your former soldiers that was supposedly killed during the Hawkeye development."

The Admiral frowned, "How do you know about Hawkeye?"

"The woman that was kidnapped? Her name is Molly Flynn. She designed it," Lois explained.

"Jesus," the Admiral muttered. "We'll need to leave by 22:00 in order to make it in time."

"Make what in time?" Clark asked.

"I'll explain on the way."

"I guess we're going on a road trip," Lois said with a wry look.

The door closed and the ignition started. Clark stole a glance next to him at Lois who was looking out the window. The memory of her body so closely intertwined with his continued to haunt him. It wouldn't have taken much. All she would have had to do was ask him one more time, and he would have caved.

He was grateful she hadn't.

There was still so much they needed to work through. She still didn't know about Superman. Before they ever crossed any threshold like that, he had to tell her.

He'd promised himself he'd never take that step with anyone unless he could share everything with them. He'd known for a long time that Lois was that person. That was why it had hurt him when she'd tried to push other women at him—even if it was through Jimmy. It had been just another reminder of how little she'd regarded him. Superman would always come first—or so he thought.

Her tone with his alter-ego and the confrontation about last summer on the rooftop replayed in his mind. He'd hurt her. Both sides of him. Superman by rejecting her. Clark by walking away from her and refusing to come to her wedding. It had been a painful time for both of them. He had thought taking back his confession would help let them recover from the pain and hurt they'd put one another through. Little did he know doing so would have robbed them of any closure.

<< "I love you." >>

They were three simple words that had meant so much. After all the pain and almost losing Lois to Luthor, he'd almost given up hope of every fulfilling his dream of having someone he could share everything with. When he'd heard her walking up the steps to his apartment tonight he'd been prepared to pick things up where they'd left off earlier. All day seemed to be nothing but fighting—it'd even crossed over with Superman.

He'd made a slip of the tongue and talked about himself in the third person—in front of Lois—something his mom had warned him about just a week ago. He was going to have to tell her soon. There was no way he'd be able to have a relationship with her without telling her. She would figure it out. How she hadn't already was by chance and luck. She'd come so close so many times....

Tonight she'd done something he hadn't expected—she'd apologized. Really apologized. After hearing her half-baked plan to go after his alter-ego—again—he'd been angry. He'd been ready to tell her to leave and not to bother coming back—a warning he knew he'd never be able to follow through on. It wasn't until he'd heard the remark about them being 'just friends' and how he'd made it clear that that was what he had wanted that his tone had changed.

The hurt in her eyes made him press for an explanation. An explanation that had led to them both confessing what had been suppressed for so long. He had been madly in love with her for almost a year. Finally being able to hold her and kiss her the way he'd wanted to for so long—so much wasted time.

He'd enjoyed every second of the torture she'd put him through tonight. His lips still tingled from where they had been pressed against hers. He'd never kissed anyone like that. So much emotion that had been suppressed for so long bubbled over after hearing her say those three words he'd longed to hear from her for so long.

It would have been so easy to let those emotions take over. They could have very easily ended the night in the bedroom. It was clear where Lois stood on the idea of crossing that threshold. It wouldn't have taken very much to convince him. He may be Superman, but he was still a man. Holding Lois like that, kissing

her—the effect wasn't lost on him. He still had so much to tell her before they were ready for that step. Hopefully, she would give him a chance to earn her trust back after he told her about his alter-ego.

She'd agreed to 'several dates' with him which he would spend earning her trust back and show her the real 'Clark Kent' that no one but his parents got a chance to see. Once they put a stop to Ryan Wiley's terrorist scheme and rescued Molly, he would spend every second delivering on his promise to make her fall 'head over heels' in love with him—the real him.

The Jeep came to a stop, and they looked toward the gate they were approaching where three armed guards stood. "Get your IDs ready," the Admiral instructed.

Clark nodded, pulling his wallet out and finding his ID.

After showing their IDs and a few minutes of banter between the guard and Admiral, they were let in with instructions to go directly to Special Operations to meet the MPs.

Admiral took a deep breath. "Smells like home. Perry tell you I used to be Commander here at Fort Marshall before I retired?"

"No." Lois perked up, looking at the Admiral in surprise before sharing a look with Clark. It was clear from the long gaze she'd given him where her mind had wandered on the drive as well. He gave her a warm smile before turning to the Admiral who was looking at them waiting for someone to continue the conversation with him.

"So, Admiral, you used to be Base Commander?" Clark asked as they drove through the base looking for the Special Operations division.

"For thirteen years," Admiral said proudly. "Perry and I served in 'Nam back in '63 before he settled down at the Planet. If you'd have met him back then—" He grinned. "He was a pistol. Still is to this day."

"Sounds like you've got quite a few stories to tell," Lois observed with a grin. "Thank you for doing this. I can't get anyone in Washington to look into this or take me seriously."

"Well, I always liked Perry's open mind about the possibilities in the world. I figured if you took the time to make up a story, you'd make one up a bit more creative than that, being a writer and all."

"One would think." Clark grinned back at her.

"Check the red folder in the dash. There's a copy of that Wiley character's personnel file." Admiral continued as he veered off to the left down a long line of brick homes.

"What's all this?" Lois asked, gesturing to the houses.

"Officers' housing for civilian families," Admiral explained. "Just around the corner is the Specials Operations where the Hawkeye was originally developed. If what you're saying is true, I'd guess Wiley would be there. It was never finished so he'd need Ms. Flynn to finish it."

"Yeah, but why try to resurrect an old military weapon?" Clark thought aloud.

Lois read through the file in her hand and shoved the file in Clark's face. "Clark look! The officer that investigated Ryan Wiley's alleged death? Colonel Charles Fane."

"Fane!?! As in the new base commander that's been ducking our calls?" Clark shook his head in disgust.

"Mighty hard to explain how a man you swore was dead is walking around your base," Admiral observed.

"I wonder if they're all in this together," Lois said. "I mean, he takes over Fort Truman after General Marshall dies thanks to that ATAS malfunctioning."

"Or was it?" Clark asked. "It could have been a setup to allow Colonel Fane to take over as base commander."

"Base Command is right up front. If Fane is responsible, he'll have the MP's to answer to..."

Lois watched in frustration as the Admiral walked toward the Military Police post. She had a feeling Colonel Fane wasn't going

to be as respectful to the Military Code of Honor as the Admiral thought. “Come on, let’s go.” She pointed to the open door in the building marked ‘Base Command.’

“Lois, you heard him we need to—”

“Unhand me! Do you know who I am??”

“Still think we need to stick around and wait?” Lois asked with a pointed look.

“Come on!” He scanned the area for any sign of MPs, but it seemed to be clear. They ducked down behind the Jeep and walked toward the Base Command unnoticed behind the line of military Jeeps parked out front.

Lois pressed herself against the wall, flattening herself between the small closet and opening where anyone could walk in and catch them. She spotted several uniforms hanging up from dry cleaning on the wall behind her. The sound of tapping from the other side of the office could be heard. They needed to get inside but how?

Checking to make sure no one was coming she turned around to check the tag on the uniforms. “What are you doing?” Clark asked.

“We need to blend in. We stick out like sore thumbs.” Lois reasoned. Finding a uniform that she knew would fit Clark, she pulled the hanger down and handed it to him. It was a Class A uniform not the typical ACUs that many of the soldiers patrolling Metropolis and the base wore, but it would fit.

“I cannot believe I’m doing this...” he muttered, turning to open the door. She let out a sigh of relief, turning to check that the movement had gone unnoticed before sifting through the rack for a uniform that would fit her. In the back of the rack, she found her size. “Well, here goes nothing,” she mumbled to herself.

She turned back to the wall and spotted Clark stepping out of the closet, readjusting his tie. He looked good...really, really good in just about anything, but seeing him in that uniform with the material stretched so perfectly over his muscles sent a chill down her spine. It really wasn’t fair that he looked that good all the time.

“Lois?”

“Hmm?”

He pointed to the door, and she nodded with a whisper, “Right.”

“Come on,” Clark motioned for her to follow him down the hallway after the officer that had been working down the hall left. “The coast looks clear,” he said, scanning the office and finding no one else around.

Lois visibly relaxed when they turned the corner and saw the empty cubicles. “Fane must be around somewhere. I have a feeling he was behind the Admiral’s arrest.”

Clark began sifting through the files on the desk next to the fax machine. “Nothing here on Hawkeye.”

“Would there be?” Lois asked, grabbing the paper off the fax machine from the feed tray. Her face changed to a frown as she read it, “Clark, look at this!”

He moved to read over her shoulder, ““To the Joint Chiefs. Fort Truman has just been destroyed. The Hawkeye Satellite is now under our control. Like my book says, ‘Technology is killing us. Literally.’”

“They’re willing to risk the lives of hundreds of civilians and soldiers for what???” Lois fumed angrily.

“And frame Molly,” he pointed out. “Quoting directly from her book.”

“We’ve got to find her,” Lois said, panicked.

“When’s this set to be sent?” he asked.

Lois eyed the fax machine, “The timer’s set for nine a.m.” Her face turned to worry. “That’s fifteen minutes from now.”

“It was a diversion,” Clark said, realizing the events over the last twenty-four hours had been a setup.

“What?”

“Metropolis. The city being shut down and under siege by soldiers? Don’t you see? They killed General Marshall so they could empty the base and hi-jack the satellite without interference.” Clark explained.

“We’ve got to find Molly. She built the satellite. There’s got to be a way she can stop it,” Lois said, heading for the door.

“Okay, I’ll see if I can find Superman and get him to help find her. Maybe there’s something he can do to stop the satellite from space,” he said, following her.

“Okay,” She took a deep breath, turning back to him.

“Be careful,” he said, following her through the doorway down the hall.

“One more thing?” Lois said, turning to him. She leaned in to kiss him, grabbing him by the knot of his tie and pulling him to her. Before he could respond, she pulled away and headed out the door.

He grinned to himself, watching her leave. “Whoa.”

He scanned the hall he was about to turn down and stopped when he saw Colonel Fane with three officers with him. He quickly spun into his Superman suit to confronted the Colonel on his misdeeds.

“You sure you saw them headed this way?” The Colonel asked as he turned the corner with the fellow officers behind him.

He stopped when he saw Clark standing there in his Superman pose, “Colonel Fane, I believe you have some explaining to do.” He held up the letter from the fax machine with a scowl.

Lois headed down the darkened hallway following the signs that read, ‘Warning’ and ‘Danger’ with a wry look. From what she recalled with her conversations with Molly before they’d had that falling out about Ryan it was just above the floor with the Nuclear missiles in the Special Operations building that she used to work in during her time on the Hawkeye. If Ryan had kidnapped her to make her work on it, it would be in the same place, right?

“Is it ready?”

She heard Ryan’s voice coming from one of the labs ahead of her. She looked around, spotting a large metal door to hide behind in case he came out. She didn’t have anything to fight him with if he did have a weapon on him.

“I..I don’t know,” she heard Molly cry. “Please don’t do this.”

Lois peeked over the edge of the door and saw Ryan kneeling over Molly with a gun to the back of her head.

“Get it done!” he snarled.

She winced, hearing the loud slap of his hand across Molly’s face. She had to get out of here and get some help. She heard the sound of someone moving toward the door and flattened herself against the wall, praying she would remain hidden. She had to get out of here. She had to...

The door jerked open, and she found herself face to face with the barrel of a gun and Ryan Wiley.

“Thanks, Superman,” Admiral said with a grim expression as he rubbed his wrists. “I’ll keep a close eye on MISTER Fane here and keep him out of trouble.”

“You’ll never stop him!” Fane spat back. “In a matter of minutes this place will be nothing but ashes, and there’s not a thing you can do about it.”

The Admiral took his handkerchief and shoved it in Fane’s mouth to shut him up. “You’re a disgrace to the uniform and everything we stand for!”

“Admiral, where was the Hawkeye installed?” Clark asked, realizing he probably wouldn’t be able to depend on Molly to stop it in time.

“Oh, it was positioned right by the Prometheus Space Station. Could reach anywhere in the world with the click of the button. It was supposed to have been dismantled.” He gave a glare at Fane.

Not even waiting long enough for the Admiral to finish, he was soaring toward the space station where the Hawkeye stood in a round silver and white gleam, pointing its deadly rays towards Earth. Whether they were able to stop the programming or not, it was too deadly a weapon to keep.

“Lois Lane, why am I not surprised?” Ryan hissed in her ear, shoving her inside the high tech command center where Molly was handcuffed to the lab table. “Still sticking your nose in where it doesn’t belong, aren’t you, Lolo?”

“Lois!” Molly cried in surprise looking up.

“Molly!” Lois winced as the barrel of Ryan’s gut pressed against her back.

“He made me do it. I would never...” Molly cried frantically as she pointed at the screen which showed the satellite image of the base.

“I know...” Lois winced as Ryan threw her to the ground.

“I’d love to stay and chat, catch up on old times. I missed out on the reunion being dead and all, but I’ve got a satellite to hijack.”

“Death must have affected your brain cells. How are you going to get all this equipment out of here in ten minutes?” Lois asked, trying to portray a sense of confidence she didn’t feel as she moved toward Molly.

“Don’t have to,” he sneered, moving toward the main computer system with a screwdriver to remove the motherboard. “I’m using the mobile remote system. You remember that one don’t you, Molly?”

Molly looked at him in disgust. “I’m sorry I ever designed it.”

“Spoken like a true anti-technology queen,” he sneered.

“It’s people like you she’s against; not technology—”

“Actually—” Molly began to argue.

“Not helping!” Lois hissed back at her.

“Ladies! Ladies! You only have a few minutes to live don’t waste it bickering,” Ryan said with an evil grin as he headed for the door.

“What are you going to do?” Lois shot back angrily as she worked on picking the lock to Molly’s handcuffs. “Use the satellite to blackmail governments so you can feel like the big man you never were?”

“Oh, aren’t we catty?” he sneered. “But you’re right. All done in the name of the great anti-tech author Molly Flynn.”

“Nobody’ll believe it. Anyone that knows Molly knows she’d never resort to terrorism!” Lois shot back still fiddling with Molly’s handcuff lock.

“Yeah! If I was going to do something, I’d force Chinese herbs down your throat. You look like you could use them!” Molly spat back angrily.

“Well, according to the letters the great Molly Flynn left around Metropolis and here at the base the evidence will point to you.” Ryan countered in an eerily calm tone.

“You’re a monster!” Molly spat.

“Maybe, but very soon I’ll be a very rich monster. Free and clear to spend my millions while you and your sidekick, Lolo, disappear without a trace. Even if someone did start to dig, they’d never find anything. I’m already dead, remember?”

“You can’t leave us in here!!” Molly screamed angrily as the door shut and sealed with a tight lock.

“Got it!” Lois cheered as the lock unhooked.

“Thanks.” Molly rubbed her wrists as the handcuffs fell off.

“Can you stop the Hawkeye from here?” Lois asked, looking at the screen that showed the Hawkeye satellite positioning its aim toward Fort Truman.

“I don’t know,” Molly whispered, moving toward the computer Ryan had just torn apart.

“Why did you lie to me?” Lois accused quietly.

“What?” Molly looked back at her, grabbing the screwdriver

off the desk as she began to work.

“You lied to me about him being dead. Why did you lie to me?”

Molly sighed, “I thought he was dead! Until he showed up at my door and told me he faked his death. He said he’d stumbled onto military secrets and the Army was out to kill him.”

“And you fell for that??” Lois looked at her in surprise.

“Don’t start with me, Lois!”

“Don’t get snippy with me! I’m not the one that...” She stopped mid-sentence. “I’m not the one that dated a psycho.” That was what she’d been trying to say when she realized how wrong it was. She had dated a psycho.

“What?” Molly asked, pulling a motherboard from one of the computers on an empty desk and moving toward the computer Ryan had been working on.

“Just thinking twice about something.” She gave her a weak smile.

“Lois Lane thinking twice about something?” Molly teased, “Where’s the ‘Guinness Book of World Records’ when you need one?”

“Very funny,” Lois sniffed. “I’m not that bad.”

“No, you used to be worse,” Molly shrugged. “Okay, hand me that flat-head screwdriver there.”

Lois reached for the screwdriver Molly was pointing at. “What are you doing?”

“Replacing the motherboard he took with this one. Pray it’s compatible.” Molly said with a panicked look.

“If it is, can you stop it?”

“I don’t know, but I gotta try something!” Molly’s voice was slightly panicked.

“Okay.” Lois backed off, trying to calm the inner voice that was asking what would happen if Clark couldn’t find Superman in time. She watched the monitor change, showing the coordinates for the base as it slowly zoomed in from the Earth’s atmosphere. “Molly, it’s the base! The base!”

“I see it!” Molly fumed, “I can only work so fast!”

“Well, do whatever you’re doing faster!” Lois spat. “All this over money and greed?” she mused aloud. “You really know how to pick ‘em.”

“Lois, in what may be our last minutes together here on Earth is this really what you want to talk about?” Molly spat as she finished tightening the last screw into the motherboard.

“Well...” She thought about it and then pressed through, “Yes! Just once, I’d like for you to agree that I was right about Ryan.”

“Look, he was cute; we had a lot in common, we fell in love,” Molly fumed as she powered up the motherboard, typing in a few commands on the computer. “How was I supposed to know he’d turn out to be a psycho??”

“Hah! So you finally admit it!”

“Okay, I admit it,” Molly shot back. “But we’re still going to die, so what good does it do??”

“Well, I feel a little better,” she gave her a weak smile.

“Great.” Molly rolled her eyes. “You know what bugs me?”

Lois looked at her uncertainly, “About me?”

“Yes, about you! It bugged me when my best friend dropped out of my life over my boyfriend.”

Lois looked at her, exasperated. “Well, what was I supposed to do? I hated him, and you ignored me, and that was that.”

“A real friend would have respected my feelings and kept our relationship alive. But I guess that would require someone who’s not judgmental and self-absorbed.”

Lois wasn’t sure how to respond to that remark. Was she really judgmental and self-absorbed? A red blinking on the screen caught her attention. “Look!” Lois noticed the phrase ‘Read Error’ on the screen.

“No! No! No!” Molly fumed angrily.

“What does that mean?” Lois asked.

“Read error,” Molly echoed. “I can’t boot it. I can’t get in the system.” Her tone was an eerie calm as tears fell down her cheeks.

“So, this is...?” Lois couldn’t bring herself to say it.

“It,” Molly breathed as she reached out to hug Lois.

A loud banging on the security door caught their attention.

Lois looked up on the large screen, “Molly, look!”

“Hawkeye out of range?” Molly read the words on the screen.

“Superman,” Lois smiled. “Clark got to him in time.” She couldn’t hide the grin on her face.

Another loud bang could be heard as the security door was ripped from its hinges. There standing in the doorway was Superman with a crowd of soldiers and Ryan Wiley tied up.

“Are you two all right?” Superman asked.

“We’re fine...now.” Lois smiled, giving Molly a half-hug.

One of the officers approached them, “You’ll have to come with us for debriefing.”

“Debriefing?” Lois and Molly asked in unison.

Three soldiers pushed Ryan into the room and laughed, “Not so tough now that your satellite’s facing the other way, are ya?”

“You!” Ryan growled angrily.

“Attempted murder, terrorism, and oh, fraud!” Molly spat back. “That should get you at least a few lifetimes in prison.”

“Officers, is there anything else you need from me?”

Superman asked.

“No, we’ll take it from here,” one of the higher ranking officers said. “Thank you, Superman.”

“Glad I could help.” With that, he disappeared.

Lois spotted The Admiral approaching and looked around with a frown. “Admiral? Have you seen Clark?”

“I thought he was with you,” he said.

Before she could respond Clark approached still in the uniform, she’d had him change into earlier. “Clark!” She ran up to him, wrapping her arms around him.

“Are you okay?” he asked, pulling back to look at her.

“A little shaky but I’ll live.” She glanced back at Molly, who was surrounded by three soldiers that appeared to be giving her a look over, examining her wrists and the handcuffs on the desk. Molly met her gaze and smiled at her. She turned toward the Admiral who was talking with one of the senior officers. “When can we get out of here?”

“Might be a few hours. Once the officials have deemed we aren’t a threat to national security, we should be able to leave.”

“How long will that take?” Clark asked nervously.

“Twenty minutes. If you write fast.” One of the officers from behind them asked. “I’ll need all of your statements. Write legibly.” He handed them a pad of paper and pen. “Don’t leave anything out.”

Lois looked back at Clark with a half-smile then walked with him toward one of the desks to begin writing.

Later that morning after giving their statements and going over everything that had happened repeatedly with several officers, they were finally released. The drive back had been quiet. Molly hadn’t said much after they’d been freed to leave.

“This is it,” The Admiral said, pointing at the small shop Molly had given them directions to.

“I’ll walk you,” Lois said, following her to the door to reassure herself she was indeed safe. Clark stayed back, seeming to sense she needed to talk to Molly alone. He was always so good at reading her. It was scary how well he seemed to know her; almost as well as she and Molly used to know one another. They’d gone to school together then gone to college together. Molly was her rock through the fiasco with Paul and Linda. They were best friends—until Ryan happened.

<<Judgmental and Self-absorbed.>>

“So, this is it.” Molly pointed at the shop. “I have a cute little apartment in the back. You want to come in for a minute and have

some coffee? The Admiral and Clark can come in, too.”

“We really shouldn’t,” Lois apologized. “Perry’s probably wondering where we are. We can maybe grab lunch tomorrow, if you’d like?”

“Yeah, that’d be nice,” Molly said with a warm smile. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too,” Lois admitted. “Senior year certainly wasn’t the same without you.”

“I know,” Molly said sadly, “I can’t believe we let a man come between us. I haven’t met a man yet that is worth giving up a good friend for.”

“You think I’m a good friend?” Lois asked skeptically.

“I do,” Molly said with a smile, leaning in for a hug. “So, you and Clark, huh?”

Lois blushed, “We’re still figuring things out.”

“I bet you are!” Molly wiggled her eyebrows in a teasing tone. “He seems nice. Not a psycho.”

“Always a plus.”

“Quite a track record between us, huh?”

“Are you going to be okay?” Lois asked, sensing she was covering.

“Nothing a couple hundred thousand dollars of therapy won’t cure.” Molly gave her a watery smile. “I’m fine. Really. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

Lois leaned in to hug her. “Tomorrow.” She held her a little longer. “Take care of yourself.” Then she headed back to the Jeep where Clark and the Admiral were waiting.

Lois watched the Admiral drive off and sighed as she and Clark walked toward her car that was parked across from Clark’s apartment. Recalling what had almost happened a few hours ago and the tension that hung in the air after her close call with death again.

He did look really good in that uniform.

Too good.

He felt really good.

She moved her hand up his shoulder tentatively, uncertain what she was allowed to do or not do. How could so much change in such a short amount of time?

<<“I love you, Lois, I’ve always loved you.”>>

“I guess we should get that story written. I’m sure Perry’s wondering what happened,” she said nervously. The smell of his cologne hung in the air. What was it about that smell that made her want to inhale and let it linger on her nostrils. Had he always smelled that good?

<<“Are you saying you’d regret making love with me?”

“Never.”>>

“Yeah, what time did the General say the power would be restored? Maybe we can power up one of the laptops,” he suggested, stopping when they got to the driver’s side of the Jeep.

<<“I love you, Lois. I don’t want a one-night-stand, and I don’t think you want that either. I want forever...”

“Forever?”

“Forever.”>>

“I think they’re both still at the Planet,” she said, leaning back against the door. She should get in the Jeep and go home. Sleep. Shower and change. These were things she should be doing, but instead, all she could think about was that kiss. That incredibly mind-numbing kiss that had made her weak in the knees.

They hadn’t even been on a date, and she was already fighting the urge to give into her impulses to grab him and pick up where they’d started. What he must think of her... Trying to seduce him like that.

<<“You shouldn’t laugh. You’re about to fall head over heels in love.”

“I thought I already was.”

“Not yet, but you will be.”>>

"Then I guess we should head back to the Planet," he said, moving his hand to cup her cheek.

"Right." She relaxed as his palm brushed against her cheek. She moved her hand to cover his, meeting his gaze. "I'm glad you were able to get Superman to stop the Hawkeye in time. One of these days you're going to have to teach me how you do that. I tried to contact him with Jimmy's old watch from STAR Labs. I don't think that went over very well."

He chuckled, "I'm just glad everything worked out okay."
"Me too."

She met his gaze, and she could see the struggle he seemed to be having within himself. Was he finding it just as hard not to pick up where they'd left off? Was he fighting the urge to pick up where they'd left off too?

"We should get going," he said, pulling back. "Don't want to keep Perry waiting."

"Right," she nodded. "Perry."

Clark pushed through the rotating glass doors, following Lois through the lobby and into the stairwell. It was still dimly lit with the battery powered lanterns Perry had put on each floor to make sure everyone could make it up and down without falling in the dark. He could pick up the faint beat of Lois's heartbeat as they moved up the stairs. She was upset about something but what that something was he wasn't sure.

"Clark?" She turned back to him as they approached the floor to the newsroom. "Do you think I'm judgmental?"

"No... not really," he edged cautiously, not sure what had brought the question on.

"Am I self-centered?"

Judging by the look on her face he could tell it really bothered her. If he'd been talking to the Lois Lane, he'd first met over a year ago the answer would have been a definite 'yes' but now things had changed. She had changed. She still had her moments, but she was more caring than self-absorbed these days.

"No... not often." He smiled at her.

"Do you think I always have to be right?"

He couldn't help but smile at that question. She did have a need to be right, but she could also take criticism if given to her ... gently. "Well... not always." He moved toward her, running a hand down her jawline. "Lois, what's this all about?"

She looked down remorsefully. "It's just something Molly said." She gave him a sad smile. "Do you think I'm a good friend?"

He grinned, "I think you're a *great* friend."

"Really?" she asked, not quiet believing.

"Really." He leaned into her, feeling her relax in his embrace. "You're a very caring person that fights tooth and nail for everyone and everything you care about. Anyone would be lucky to have you as a friend. As long as they don't try to scoop you."

She let out a groan, "I still can't believe you tricked me like that."

"You stole my story," he countered with a half-smile.

"I did apologize for that," she argued.

"No, you didn't," he laughed. "You tried to turn it around like it was some great teaching moment."

"Oh, yeah," She gave him a weak grin, "Well, I'm apologizing now. Better late than never, right?"

Clark chuckled and reached for the door behind her, "I accept your apology."

They stepped into the newsroom and spotted Perry with a copy of last night's newspaper in his hand. "Hey you two, you just missed Stormin' Norman! I heard you two held down the fort. Nice work!"

"Thanks, Perry."

"How's your friend?" Perry asked as they walked toward their desks.

"Molly? She's good. She's got a lot to work through, but she'll be fine. I told her we'd have lunch tomorrow and talk." Lois said with a nod toward Clark.

He smiled back, "I'm sure you two have a lot to catch up on."

Perry gave them a look, "So I assume whatever was going on is, uh, taken care of?"

"Gone and buried," Lois said, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Sorry about that Chief," Clark apologized, recalling how he and Lois had disrupted the newsroom earlier.

"Every partnership goes through its rough patches," Perry reasoned. "As long as you were able to work through it, I don't got a problem."

Lois looked back at Clark with a grin, and he put an arm over her shoulder, sharing a look with her. There was still a lot he and Lois had to work through, but that was something they'd work through together. He knew what he needed to do. He needed to tell her about Superman, but right now wasn't the time. They were both exhausted, going on very little sleep.

"Where's Jimmy?" Clark asked, looking around. He still needed to talk to Jimmy about his part in all of this. He wasn't happy with what he'd done, but he also wasn't proud of the way he'd spoken to his young friend either.

Perry pointed toward his office where Jimmy was fast asleep on the couch, "I think he's got the heart to be a real newsman. Just lacks the stamina."

The lights flickered, and he and Lois both looked at one another then to their computers which were powering up. Lois reached for her keyboard and hugged it as the sounds of televisions and phones filled the newsroom. Reporters cheered around them.

"All right! Looks like we'll be able to run an Extra edition!" Perry cheered. He looked to Lois and Clark, "We're going to lead with your story." He took a deep breath looking toward his office, "I hate to do this." He walked toward his office, "Jimmy! Wake up, son!"

Jimmy's exhausted voice reached Clark's ears, "I'm up. I'm up."

Lois turned to him with a shy smile, running her hand over his chest, "I guess it'll take more than a few terrorists to bring down this paper."

"With Perry and Jimmy on board? Definitely." Clark nodded, "So, what do you say we get this article written sleep for a day and then you have dinner with me tomorrow night?"

"Sleep does sound good." She smiled. "Are you sure you still want to date a self-absorbed, judgmental, know-it-all that steals stories from her friends?"

"I have it on good authority she's worth it." He reached over to cup her cheek. "So, is it a date?"

She ran her hands up his chest until they were resting on his shoulders and whispered, "It's a date."

His smile spread across his face, and he held her gaze. "You won't be sorry."

She looked back at him with a smirk. "You seem pretty confident about this date. What if it doesn't work out? What makes you think I'm not going to have a horrible time and leave?"

"That won't be possible." he responded with a twinkle in his eye.

"Pretty sure of yourself there, aren't you, Kent?"

"I am."

THE END

Read the sequel in [Rules of Trust](#).