

Revealing Time

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Rated: G

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Summary: This story is a sequel to [Blooming Time](#). Please, read it first!

Story Size: 4,882 words (28Kb as text)

Disclaimer: No copyright infringement is intended. The characters aren't mine and I am just borrowing them for fun, not for profit.

This story uses premises that were developed in "Barbarians at the Planet" written by Dan Levine and Deborah Joy LeVine. You will also recognize some lines from "That Old Gang of Mine," written by Gene Miller & Karen Kavner.

This is my second fanfic in the LnC:TNAoS fandom, and English isn't my first language.

My Deepest Thanks to Cuidadora for being a fantastically patient and infallibly encouraging Beta.

Her right hand hovering over Clark's glass front door, Lois took a deep breath.

Would she or wouldn't she knock?

Despite Superman's previous hints, she wasn't quite convinced if Clark were still awake at this late hour. Or even home.

She was even less sure she would have the nerve to face Clark and reap her just deserts for her blindness.

As soon as Superman had flown away from her window, Lois had hurriedly picked up her phone and tried to reach Clark. Unsurprisingly, she had merely gotten his answering machine.

Listening to his cheerful recorded voice tugged at her heart, and she had hung up without leaving any message. *You've got it bad, Sister*, her mind had sneered.

It had scared her like very few things had frightened her before.

What could she say to Clark, anyway? I'm sorry for hurting you? I didn't mean it?

I've reconsidered my options, and... oops, sorry... after all, I believe that maybe...

No, there was *nothing* she could say that he didn't deserve to hear, face-to-face, without her hiding behind a phone.

She didn't lament her unsuccessful phone calls, believing Clark *would* have hung up on her. Thinking back on it, Lois wouldn't have blamed him if he had. He had every right to, after her previous rejection, and he wouldn't be human if he hadn't seized that golden opportunity to pay her back with her own coin.

Yet, she was standing in front of his apartment door, anxiety gnawing at her insides, half-wanting to turn tail and flee to the safety of her loveless home.

Clark will slam the door in my face if he's home, she reasoned, eager to seize any reason to take the coward's way out. *Especially if awakened at one in the morning.*

The last look of anguish he had given her hours before in the park was still branded onto her retinas.

Her sin of hurting him was no slight he could easily forgive and forget. This was no bickering they could agree to disagree

about. Nothing that was already filed under the myriads of ups and downs that defined their sometimes-prickly relationship.

None of their past differences had prepared Lois for this night. They were *professional* differences, for starters, and they either settled them amicably enough, or with the help of Perry's more forceful nudges.

And besides, whatever the outcome, she knew then she *had* been right. Wasn't she top banana in their partnership?

Not now. She was at a disadvantage.

In a moment of clarity, she had told Superman that she had acted in the worst way imaginable towards the man she lov—

Burdened by that certainty, Lois hung down her head, and a deeper sigh escaped her. Her hand still hung above the glass panel, slightly shaking, while her feverish brain considered the odds.

There were ninety chances in a hundred Clark wouldn't talk to her.

Not after their previous... conversation in the park.

Not *now*.

Not *ever*.

There was one chance in a hundred Clark would be dead drunk by now and sleeping it off.

But even if drowning one's sorrows with booze was a way to escape disappointment, Lois didn't really believe Clark would take that road. Despite his mild exterior and country charm, Clark had a core of strength—fortitude—her mother sorely lacked.

Another possibility chilled her and stopped her fingers a hair's breadth away from the glass pane.

Perhaps, an embittered Clark had left his apartment, looking for some... company for the night. Any typical male would...

Yet Clark was everything but typical, Hope whispered into her ear.

If he had gone bar-hopping, Lois knew he wouldn't find himself alone when he woke up the next morning: she had seen how women responded to Clark's gorgeous smile and—

Lois herself had ardently responded to him, throwing away *all* seven veils...

Lois's breath caught as she remembered the sensation of being hard-pressed onto a bed, Clark's firm flesh on top of hers, while he enthusiastically kissed her in their suite at the Lexor. She had begun to reciprocate when he had suddenly stopped, throwing her into such confusion she had willingly decided to ignore the incident and file it under a "Stake-Out Ploy, Subterfuge #2" sticky label.

Yet, there was also *one* chance in a thousand Clark would open his front door and listen, *really* listen to her.

She had to seize that chance. Clark was no ordinary man, after all: she *had* fallen for him. Hard.

It was high time she accepted it and acted accordingly.

Tonight was her very last chance at happiness.

Her knuckles connected with the door, and briskly rapped on it.

A dozen or so feverish heartbeats later, Clark's door opened.

The "master of the house" stood on the other side, hair tousled and glasses slightly askew. Obviously, he hadn't been to bed, as he was still sporting the black shirt and gray slacks he had worn that very afternoon when she'd—with such subtlety and kindness!—ruthlessly rejected his suit.

"Lois," he merely stated, his tone betraying neither surprise nor annoyance.

Observing him more closely, Lois noted that he was surprisingly collected and infuriatingly unruffled. What *was* going on? His coolness was suspicious.

So before she could check her impulse, Lois heard herself probe impetuously, "Have you talked with Superman since he came to see me?"

Clark gave her a look that was definitively amused, and tersely

answered in the negative. Without more ado, he opened his door wider and Lois stepped into his apartment.

Standing to the right of the tiny entryway, a tall Asian statue kept her silent vigil. Paperbacks still sat erect on the small cabinet next to it. Inanimate things were as they had been; only she—and her host, maybe—were changed.

Lois paused and considered his living room from her vantage point, past his threshold. Curious how believing she would never set a foot again in Clark's home made her reassess it.

It claimed neither classy-expensive furniture, nor the latest trend in interior decoration, yet it was homey in an almost dilapidated, relaxing, comforting way. Clark's knick-knacks, collected during his travels, even gave his apartment an inner sophistication that belied the first cursory glance.

All in all, Lois had spent more laughter-filled evenings here than in her own place. *Clark's had become a sort of home away from home*, she realized.

Behind her, the door clicked shut, and Lois heard Clark locking it. This was encouraging. He wouldn't throw her out at once. She had a few minutes, at least.

"Lois..." Clark's voice penetrated her daydream. "Lois?"

She shook herself back to the present, and, without waiting for him, in a daze, slowly descended the stairs.

At the bottom, she hesitated, somewhat unsure of the welcome she would get.

Clark gently led her to the couch, his hand fleetingly caressing the small of her back. Feeling his light touch, she suddenly understood they would probably be all right. She wouldn't give up without a good fight, if necessary. After all, Lanes never surrendered without first taking a stand.

She sat down on the edge of the couch where she had spent so many evenings snuggled next to him, wishing Clark would sit close enough for the hug she had craved since Superman left her for his newest emergency. He disappointed her by sitting on the couch, leaving a wider gap between them than he would have before. Close enough to be friendly; far enough to put some uncertainty on the outcome of the night.

"Well, you guys do seem as thick as thieves, and forewarned is forearmed..." Lois clarified, putting her foot deeper into her mouth. This definitively *wasn't* what she had rehearsed for her opening speech.

Her embarrassment mounted when Clark smothered a smile.

"When have I surrendered without a fight?" Clark calmly countered.

"Very funny, Kent!" She smiled her best engaging smile. "You do it all the time."

"I do?" Suddenly he didn't look so confident.

Round one for me, Lois thought with some satisfaction. *Good*.

She picked up the conversation. "This one time, let's pretend Superman didn't visit you first and blab away my secrets. Or that you didn't do it before."

"I-I... He wouldn't!" Clark exclaimed.

"You *do* know each other rather well, don't you?" She stared at him, so fixedly that she would have burnt a hole between his eyes if she had had the same powers the man she had professed to love.

"Err..."

"What else have you *forgotten* to tell me?" she asked in a dulcet tone.

Her stare didn't have her expected result. Clark parried it with an encouraging smile of his own, disclosing nothing. Not even his present feelings for her.

If he *still* felt anything for her.

Since he had opened the door, he had been courteous in that nice Kansas way of his, but his easy charm guarded his feelings better than an accomplished liar could do with all his cleverness.

This shield of steel she was unable to see through irritated her,

and she snapped, "I'm not asking you to reveal all your dirty little secrets!" His smile widened, and she added ominously, "Not yet."

Despite his pigheadedness, he seemed sort of relieved all of a sudden. For a second, he had looked... nervous?

Lois reined in her feeling of aggravation, and reminded herself she had to stay on track. *Calm*, she repeated to herself, *I can do calm. Clark... This is about Clark. Not about Superman. Nor whatever they know about Lex.*

Obviously, Clark wouldn't volunteer anything before she had explained the reasons for her presence.

He was watching her, boundless patience in his eyes, yet doing nothing but waiting for her to say what she had come to reveal didn't phase him in the least. Instead of displaying weakness, his remoteness gave him an aura of... *Big, strong and silent type*, whispered the bodice-rippers reader side of Lois's mind.

Like Superman.

Wondering how the Universe could have gone topsy-turvy in the space of one day, Lois gathered her scattered thoughts with an effort. She finally stated, "I came because..." She glanced at Clark. Still motionless, she felt he was hanging onto her words.

Her earlier artificial flippancy vanished, and she repeated, more softly, "I'm here because... because... I owe you an apology."

Clark remained silent, while he settled more comfortably into his battered couch.

He wouldn't make it easy for her, would he?

No, he wouldn't, her inner voice whispered. Why would he?

Unless...

Unless he was already over her. Unless he was pulling a Rhett Butler on her.

Could he? So quickly?

Lois gasped.

In her favorite romance novels, for pages on end, the male lead usually clutched at his hair or some other telltale manifestation of despair, moaning the loss of his beloved. Till the tear-jerker reconciliation, happy ending, white picket fence and two point four kids, whaddah whaddah.

But in real life, there was no such constancy, nor happily-ever-after endings.

Other romantic heroes erred at first, finding true love after their hopes were dashed by the villainess of the story. Even Romeo had courted a... Rosalind—or some other girl—before meeting his Juliet.

Was she the Rosalind to Clark's Romeo? Could she have really blown it this time?

The thought terrified her.

She had never truly considered that her rejection could have turned Clark's professed love into disgust.

Not after Superman's visit. He seemed to be privy to Clark's innermost secrets. He *had* to know!

Lois had always thought Clark was the epitome of dependability, even to the point of absurdity. Even if she sometimes mocked this trait of his, she could not help respect and admire it: in an uncertain world, Clark Kent was the last honest man on Earth. Someone she could depend on, who would always, somehow, be... right here.

Here, sitting on his couch, while he waited patiently for an apology which she had the worst trouble articulating.

She wryly smiled at her own ineptitude, and frankly told him, "I'm terrible at it, aren't I?"

"You are." His smile spread upward, crinkling the corners of his eyes. Suddenly, she felt an irresistible urge to kiss him there, where his skin moved with his mirth.

"I know. I usually don't do apologies." She shrugged nonchalantly. "So consider yourself lucky you got one."

"Or even half of one?"

"Whatever."

"Oh, I feel lucky, all right," he teased, his eyes saying

something else that told of acceptance and understanding.

Relieved, she kicked her shoes off and leaned back on the couch, folding her legs under her.

“Nice socks,” Clark said conversationally, looking at the yellow-dotted socks she had previously put on at Superman’s advice. She had kept them on as she hastily threw on some clothes.

“Hmm? These old things? Don’t try to be nice, Clark. I meant to throw them away... but I forgot.” She extended one denim-clad leg and wriggled her toes. “They’re useful for lounging around, though.”

“So you came here, at... nearly one in the morning for... lounging around?”

She blushed. “Cla-ark...”

He mimicked her, his voice trailing away. “Lo-is...”

Her heart beating wildly, she moved a little closer to him.

“Clark, can we cut the crap?” Her eyes locked with his. “Please...”

As she inched towards him, he suddenly looked dead serious. Lois placed a tentative hand on his forearm. He had rolled up his sleeves and his skin was smooth under hers.

The tremor she felt under her fingers was not entirely hers.

Lois bit her lip. “Clark... I-I’m sorry!” The floodgates suddenly opened and her words stumbled out. “Clark, truly I am.” She raised her eyes and dared to look him in the eyes. His face had a rapt, intense look that precipitated her moment of truth. “I was so wrong. About a lot of things... I don’t understand how I could —”

She grabbed his shirt, suddenly desperate not to lose contact—fearing she would be torn away from him, forbidden his closeness and warmth—forever exiled in that former dark, icy wasteland she had chosen previously.

Without quite knowing when he moved, she felt his arms surround her and she found herself sprawled into his embrace, breathing into his open collar. She nestled her forehead under his chin, her lips brushing his neck, finding comfort in the world’s only safe place for her.

Besides Superman’s chin, when he flies you away from danger, her inner voice helpfully reminded her.

Oh, do shut up! she flung back at the pesky voice that had misled her, taunted her and confused her for weeks on end. She locked that nuisance in an underground cellar, in the farthest crevice of her brain and threw away the key so it wouldn’t pester her anymore.

Letting go for the second time in ten hours, she sobbed into Clark’s shirt about her once-reluctant love until she couldn’t draw breath anymore.

Lois woke up with an insistent crick in her neck.

Floating between dreamland and reality, she realized Clark was still holding her. It gave her a sense of inner peace that none of her journalism awards had managed to instill in her for long. Stretched on the couch alongside him, she could still feel the heat of his hands on her spine, where they had traced geometric patterns while she wordlessly relieved herself of her regrets.

It had been soothing, and even thrilling, to feel that repetitious sleep-inducing movement. As soothing as now hearing his regular breathing, and the deep drumming of his heart against her cheek, while he slept, presently lost to her in his own dreamland.

Lois shifted carefully, trying to find a way to ease her discomfort without waking Clark. What she glimpsed of his face allowed her to see that he was still wearing his glasses. Behind them, his eyes were closed, with bluish circles underneath showing the strain he’d been under recently.

Struck by remorse, she buried her face into his shirt again, stroking the spot where her tears had left streaks on the dark cotton.

“Lois?”

At the sound of his drowsy voice, she raised herself a little, and saw that his eyes were still closed.

“Yes, Clark?”

“Are you all right?”

As the question left his mouth, she was suddenly aware of an imperious call of nature she hadn’t felt previously, and she replied, quite embarrassed, “Err... I have to go.”

“Go?” This woke him up completely, and he scrutinized her worriedly.

She shook her head, and muttered “Bathroom,” as she rolled over and slid somewhat awkwardly from the couch.

As she padded through Clark’s bedroom, she saw that the alarm clock on his nightstand indicated six in the morning. No wonder she felt as if she hadn’t slept a wink.

Putting the bathroom into good use, Lois bathed her face, scrubbing away the grimy leftover of the night. Dark smudges circled her eyes where her tears had mingled with mascara. She could not remove it all, and also had to content herself with finger-brushing her hair.

Obviously, she was cursed with crying her heart out to the men in her life! Raw nose and red-rimmed eyes, she could well do without. She looked positively ghastly.

But Clark hadn’t drawn away. The more she cried, the more he had whispered soothing... sweet *things* that had helped her find the solace she had sought. *Lois Lane never cries* was her motto. But when she did, she pulled out all the stops. No half-hearted crying from Lane women either.

When Lois got back into the living room, Clark was brushing back his hat hair with both hands. He froze when he saw her.

She sat down next to him; gently, wordlessly, she pulled down his forelock at its usual place. As she did so, she felt him tense, then suddenly relax.

“Better now!” she smiled up at him.

“Much better,” he repeated, his thumb caressing her cheek.

“Now you don’t look like you have two black eyes, Ms. Panda.”

“Still needing lessons how to sweet-talk a girl, Smallville?” She histrionically heaved a huge sigh. “I don’t know how I pick them...” She playfully seized a cushion from the couch and threatened him with it.

Clark ducked mock-seriously and got up.

“Coffee, milady?” He bowed with an exaggerated flourish.

“Muuuuch better,” approved Lois. She stretched leisurely, easing her cramp, and slyly noticed how his eyes followed the stretching of her sweatshirt, then followed him into the kitchen area.

As Clark prepared the coffee, she pulled two mugs out of the cabinet, and then helped him to gather pastries and... stuff... for their early breakfast. Leaning against the kitchen counter, she watched him fix breakfast.

Sliding back into a normal routine settled her nerves.

She could not stall for much longer.

“I’m stuffed.”

Lois licked a last crumb from her fingers. *Where did Clark find such heavenly pains au chocolat? She’d have to ask him.* She had devoured hers, not caring a fig about her unladylike manners, and broke the last of her fast with some marmalade toast. She would have to double her efforts at the gym, but for once, she didn’t feel guilty indulging herself.

“More coffee?” offered Clark, seated across her at the kitchen table.

“No thanks.”

Lois wiped her fingers on her napkin and seized Clark’s hands, squeezing them softly.

“Clark...” she began just a bit hesitantly. “Yesterday, I did some heavy thinking...” She shyly looked at him from under her

lashes. “Like... what it would be like without you in my life. I thought—” Remembered pain flickered over her face, and she felt Clark’s fingers squeeze hers comfortingly.

“I thought I had lost you for good.” She raised her eyes from their intertwined hands and was surprised at the depth of emotion she saw in his eyes. “I thought about how much I missed you, how much I was going to miss you for the rest of my life... Well, I started to think maybe there’s more to our relationship than just friendship...”

Silently, Clark encouraged her to go on, the warmth of his hands spreading from her icy fingers to her heart. She swallowed. “I wished... I wished I could turn back time, and do it again. Centennial Park—what I said to you.”

“What would you have said?” he whispered.

She slanted toward Clark, as far as the rim of the table would allow, feeling pulled into his vibrant, mesmerizing eyes. She felt herself drown into them, the universe shrinking to the tiny sparks of lava throbbing in their depths she could almost imagine seeing.

The room spun around, and she felt alternately hot and cold, floating away from reality, overcome by his intensity. She blinked and closed her eyes, blinded by the radiance his eyes emanated.

“Yesterday... yesterday night, I would have said...” She bit her upper lip to stop it from trembling, and forged ahead. “I would have said... there is an eensy-weensy, microcosmic although highly likely possibility—”

Far away, she thought she heard his delighted gasp.

“—that I could feel some sort of *something* for you.” She opened her eyes and met his, sparkling with merriment, and above all, tenderness. “But I won’t, now.”

“You won’t?”

“No.”

She shook her head from left to right to emphasize her point. “I won’t.”

Unhappy with the wooden barrier between them, she freed her hands, circled the table, and stopped a few inches from him.

In turn, Clark pushed back his chair and got up. They were standing so close she felt his breath caress her cheek, imparting into her courage she hadn’t believed she possessed.

“What I’m saying now is... Clark... I couldn’t help falling in love with you. I admire you. I respect you.” She took a deep breath. “And I do love you, Clark Kent.”

Instead of taking her into his arms as she expected, he stayed rooted to the spot.

His serious brown eyes meeting hers, he challenged, “And what about Superman?”

“Superman’s a friend. And that is as it should be.” Saying it aloud, she understood she wasn’t toying with the truth. “You should be grateful to him, Clark. We both should. Without my... feelings... for Superman, I would never have understood how much I loved you.”

“And what about Lex?”

This was more uncomfortable. Superman had been a fantasy; Lex, a potential future.

Lois fiddled with the hem of her sweatshirt, and volunteered with a touch of embarrassment, “Lex... Lex was safe.” Darting a stubborn glare at him, she dared him to contradict her.

He didn’t. Yet.

She went on. “I liked him. I still do. But... I’m not really comfortable with him. Not like—” Her gesture encompassed it all.

Clark opened his mouth, and she hastily bade him silence with another glance, fearing that if she were interrupted, she’d never have the guts to bare her heart one more time.

“It was pleasant dating Lex. And, in a way, exciting. Going to Italy... Exploring places I could never see otherwise.” She paused, willing Clark to understand. “It took me a whole afternoon waiting for Superman to know I-I merely wanted to be a-a tourist in Lex’s world.”

Would Clark find her shallow and mercenary? Maybe. She had to take that chance.

“Lex... He made me feel as if he would do *anything* for me. Give me *everything*. It was... intoxicating, I suppose.”

Lois raised her eyes from her scrutiny of the kitchen floor; Clark was looking at her without condemnation, but with an irony that puzzled her.

“But in the end, I could not talk *with* him. We never were friends.” She swallowed, and added, more slowly, “I missed you.”

She stopped trying to bend the spoon that had found itself in her hands, and placed it carefully back on the table. Her voice shook. “I never thought I would feel so... so empty without you.”

“Lois...”

Her eyes briefly blinked under the onslaught of that abyss, but that spell was sufficient for Clark to take her in his arms.

She leaned on him, losing her balance slightly as her stockings skidded on the floor. Clark’s hands remained on her shoulders and drifted down, completing his embrace.

Lois felt her head spin, and shut her eyes more tightly against the outside world, feeling with every nerve in her body Clark’s fingers brush the small of her back, and then hold her possessively as she went on tiptoe, her arms encircling his neck.

Her skin tingled under the pressure of his hands, her sweatshirt no barrier to the sensation; an awareness she had already felt elsewhere, in another place. Puzzled, she abandoned herself in his embrace before the recent memory of another man whose hands had also drifted down from her shoulders, whose unfinished gesture had moved her as deeply as Clark’s, flashed into her mind and superimposed on reality.

And without cracks of lightning, rolls of drums or elaborate special effects, the curtain opened... and she *knew*.

Eyes were overrated. Even glasses were overrated. Lois thought woozily, wanting to laugh aloud in sheer relief. *Touch was a sense that didn’t lie.*

No wonder she had got Superman mixed up with Clark. He was Clark.

Or was Clark Superman?

No matter.

He loved her, and that was all that mattered.

Shards of memories, snippets and isolated pieces of an incomplete puzzle game began to reassemble themselves into a cohesive picture.

Clark had made that crack about the robe. His mother would wash his mouth with soap if she knew! An incongruous image of Superman in all his glory pursued by a tenacious Martha Kent made her giggle out loud.

The next thought sobered her up. That... that dolt... that lunkhead had almost played Lois Lane for a fool!

No. Wait...

Yesterday, Lois Lane would have given the Man of Steel a deathly blow, i-if she hadn’t begged—an ordinary man leading an ordinary life...

Did an eensy-weensy, microcosmic part of her somehow know? Like she had known Clark truly loved her?

She felt Clark’s hand cup her cheek and slowly tilt her head back, and she was breathless with anticipation. *How would he kiss her? Slow and passionate, like the kiss the maid had interrupted at the LEXOR Hotel? Or hard and intense, drinking her breath and at the same time assuaging her thirst, giving her a glimpse into his soul, as he had done when he had left to confront Nightfall?*

The feel of Clark’s lips on hers shushed her questions for a few minutes. She drew back a little, breathing hard.

Wait a minute... Superman was invulnerable! She had been so eager to kiss him she hadn’t considered anything else... The one hundred percent solution couldn’t have affected him at all... but her previous Salome impersonation could. And did. Big Blue had faked it at the airport! Clark had previously resisted her for two

days, before folding. So... even Superman had his limits. She smiled triumphantly. This was good. This was very good.

“I want forever, Lois. You know that.” Clark’s voice intruded into her second epiphany.

She acquiesced, feeling at peace in spite of the thousand questions crowding her brain. “I do. But it may be a few years before I’m ready to say *that* to you.”

But not that long before she would wear her blue satin nightgown for their wedding night.

“Pulitzer at the top of your list?” he teased.

“We can share it,” she offered, realizing she meant every word. “We can share *everything*.” Together, they were stronger than the sum of them both.

She opened her eyes to his delight.

He smiled down at her, letting her know that he understood her implicit promise.

“I’m a very patient man, Miss Lane.”

She gave him a mischievous look. “I know that, too...” At his look of dismay, she elaborated, “You waited for me to know myself. At this rate, it could have taken years!”

“Or never. I know.” His eyes had a stricken look.

Not wanting to see him retrace his steps into the desolate country where she had exiled him yesterday, she hastened to add, “I have been known to change my mind, though.”

“You have.”

“But I happen to be a sensible woman—” He snorted. She went on, not minding the interruption, “—so, *no* wedding before we can both pay the rent.”

“An added incentive to have the *Planet* rebuilt, Miss Lane?”

“Indeed, Mr. Kent. You can begin by telling me all you know about Lex.”

She patted his chest encouragingly. “And afterwards, you can tell *everything* about Superman.”

Fin.