

Lois and Clark Meet...Lois and Clark?

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Summary: After an unexpected interdimensional detour, Lois and Clark come face-to-face with two people who look a lot like themselves.

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Author's Note: This is in response to the challenge set forth by Queen of the Capes, which asked for Lois and Clark to meet some version of themselves, either from a different dimension or through time travel. The only stipulations were that a) each pair had to stay together for most of the fic and b) that the four had to meet up and have a real conversation, not just "where are we and how do we get home" kind of conversation.

The flash of light was so bright that Clark Kent had to shut his eyes against it. And even then, the searing white light seemed to cut right through his eyelids; the skin barely dulled the glare at all. Blindly, he groped in the direction of where Lois sat beside him in the weird sled-looking thing that H. G. Wells – or so the man claimed to be – had ushered them into moments before. He felt Lois' fingers after a few pounding heartbeats. They were twitching, as though seeking him out too. Wordlessly, he slipped his hand into hers. Instantly, he felt her grasp tighten. She was scared. He could tell just from the way she squeezed his hand – one unending, crushing squeeze – and from the cold clamminess he felt on her palm. When she was excited, she tended to pump little squeezes around his hand, and her palm would be warm and dry. He tried to listen to the sound of her heartbeat, but the vortex of sound crashed around him and blotted all other noises out completely. It was like he was drowning in the sea of nothingness that had swallowed them all whole. He felt disconnected from reality; as detached from life as a spirit loosed suddenly from a dead body, as the cartoons usually pictured it.

Then, abruptly, the nothingness disappeared and they were surrounded by cool darkness and the chirping of crickets. Cautiously, Clark opened his eyes, both a little scared at what he might find and relieved that the burning light had been extinguished. He blinked as Centennial Park coalesced before his gaze. His heart – so expectant at the prospect of time traveling and dimension-hopping – sank. Mr. Wells might somehow know his secret, but other than that, he was just another crackpot fraud hoping to get his fifteen minutes of fame it seemed. Beside him, Lois relaxed her grip on Clark's hand.

"That's it?" Lois grumbled irritably. "Some disco lights and a smoke machine and...nothing?"

"Miss Lane, if you'll please..." Wells began to say, sounding confused and a little embarrassed. He began to fiddle with the dials and gages on the machine's dashboard.

"Come on, Clark. This guy's out of his mind. I can't believe we wasted our time following him to this dinky piece of..."

"Something must have gone wrong! Some setting that got changed," Wells muttered, just loudly enough to cut off Lois' words. He peered into the little slot where he'd poured a few ounces of gold earlier.

"Setting? We're exactly where we started!" Lois huffed in annoyance. "We're still in the park, it's still night, everything is the same."

But Clark was looking around with a discerning eye. It certainly *looked* like Centennial Park at first glance. And yet... something felt *off* about the place. The short hairs on the back of his neck were standing at attention and his stomach felt coiled into uneasy knots. He wished he could put his finger on what, exactly, had roused his suspicions that they'd somehow left their own Metropolis behind.

"Look, I don't know what you said to Clark to get his attention, but clearly you need some kind of mental help, thinking you're H. G. Wells and a time traveler," Lois continued to rant. "We're leaving and if you follow us, I swear I'll have you arrested so fast your head will spin," she threatened.

"Lois...wait," Clark called cautiously as she clamored out of the time machine.

She stepped onto the ground and looked at him impatiently. "Well? Are you coming?"

Clark nodded reluctantly. "Something doesn't feel right," he replied in answer. "I'm not so sure we're in Metropolis anymore."

"Clark, what are you *talking* about?" She flung her arms wide, as if gesturing to the entire world around them. "This is exactly where we started." She pointed over her shoulder with her thumb. "You can even hear the fountain right over there, behind us."

Clark shook his head slowly. "I know. But look. It's awfully bright over there. Something's going on. It wasn't like that a few minutes ago when we passed through."

Lois' hands flew to her hips. "So? That proves nothing."

"Let's just...take a look," Clark offered. "Before we jump to any conclusions."

"But..."

"Please. Just to satisfy my own curiosity," he added hastily.

For a moment, she stared at him like he'd suddenly sprouted an extra head. Then, Mad Dog Lane seemed to take over. A look of determination to follow him settled over her features, mixed with a need to know what the lights were. She nodded firmly.

"Let's go," she said.

H. G. Wells nodded distractedly as he checked his machine over. "Please, don't wander too far," he warned, his voice sounding as far off as his thoughts. "I still need your help with that Tempus fellow I told you about. I suspect the old chap somehow messed with my time machine. I'll get it sorted right out and get us some more fuel." He looked up at them sharply. "Hopefully, I can find some at this hour."

Clark tried to ignore the nagging feeling that Wells was asking *him* for assistance in securing more gold for the machine. He said nothing. He wasn't going to commit himself to anything until he was certain Wells was for real, and that the gold would actually power a real time machine.

Lois rolled her eyes so hard that it must have hurt. Clark climbed down out of the time machine and offered his hand to her. She stalked over to his side, still seething about what she figured was a waste of her time, and throwing dagger looks at Wells. She did not take Clark's hand as she nodded once at him.

"Let's go," she told him, some of her anger at Wells spilling over into her words and giving them a sharp edge.

Clark gave Wells an apologetic look before following Lois into the park, toward the too-bright area where the fountain stood. He had to jog to catch up with her as she stormed her way diagonally across the grass to meet up with the deserted pathway. He shook his head to himself in amusement. He was the fastest man alive, and yet Lois could outpace him in "Metropolis Walking

Speed” any day. He gently tugged on her sleeve to get her attention.

“Hey, wait up,” he urged, pretending to be winded from trying to match her speed.

Hearing his voice seemed to jolt her out of whatever thoughts were swirling around in her mind. She slowed her long, agitated strides down and gave him a somewhat reproachful look. He almost apologized, but bit his tongue at the last moment. He hadn’t done anything wrong! Sure, it had been at his insistence that they humor the slightly built, elderly gentleman in the bowler hat, but that had *only* been because Clark had wondered if the man might actually be who he said he was. And even if he wasn’t, Clark had wanted to know just how the man had known that Clark was Superman.

Lois stopped and faced him, tapping impatiently. “Well?” she asked, clearly looking for him to say something. They were just on the other side of the screen of trees around the fountain now, and a murmur of low voices could barely be heard.

“Look, I admit that maybe we wasted a few minutes of time with that guy,” Clark admitted, shoving his hands into the pockets of his gray dress pants. He kept his own voice soft, hoping to keep their conversation private. “But weren’t you just the least bit curious to see if he was telling the truth?” He didn’t say so, but he was becoming surer and surer that Wells was the real deal.

“About time travel? Clark, please! I gave up believing in fantasy a long time ago,” Lois replied, rolling her eyes again. “There’s no such thing as time travel or multiple universes or the Loch Ness Monster or magic.”

Clark raised a skeptical eyebrow. “Lois, are you forgetting that we live in a world where there’s a man who can fly and bounce bullets off his chest?” he teased.

The barest hint of a smile cracked the corner of her lips into an upward curve. “No. But that’s different.”

“Different *how*, exactly?” Clark prodded playfully. “Superman’s an alien from another planet. That’s textbook fantasy stuff.”

Lois opened her mouth to answer, but whatever argument she had, he never heard it. A voice yelled “Cut!” and a loud bell rang, the sound of it reminiscent of a klaxon schoolhouse fire alarm. Enthusiastic applause broke out beyond the trees as the voice called out again. “Okay, people, that’s a wrap! Nice work! Enjoy the weekend!”

Clark exchanged a confused look with Lois as the lights near the fountain shut off with an audible *click!*, leaving the area bathed only in the normal soft orangey glow of the street lamps.

“Clark? There wasn’t a movie crew at the fountain when we passed by a few minutes ago... was there?” Lois asked, sounding shaken.

“No,” he answered with a shake of his head. “The area was deserted.”

“Yeah...that’s what I thought,” she replied in that same dazed manner.

He tried peeking through the trees but couldn’t see anything from his vantage point. He gestured for Lois to follow him, and together they crept silently forward until they could see better. A huge crew of people were packing up professional grade equipment. Clark saw a handful of different cameras, a powerful boom mike on a long pole, and too many lights to bother counting. Director chairs were being folded and heavy extension cords and cables were being coiled up as the set was broken down.

“Thank God this shoot is over,” one of the men called to the others as he unplugged one of the lights on a tripod.

“No kidding. I thought it would never end. My wife’s pissed that we’ve had such long nights lately,” one of the others agreed. He yawned. “I feel like I could sleep for a week after this.”

“That’s professional equipment,” Lois remarked, her voice so quiet it was just a whisper in Clark’s ear.

He nodded. “There’s got to be forty people over there,” he added. “There’s *no way* a group like this came in, set up, shot whatever it is they’re filming, and finished in the couple of minutes we were with H. G. Wells.”

“You don’t think...”

He shrugged. “I don’t see what other explanation there can be. His machine must have *actually* worked. We’re not in our Metropolis anymore.”

“Maybe we’re in the past?” Lois offered. “Or the future? What makes you think this isn’t our own world?”

Clark pointed to the horizon. “Look there.”

“I don’t see anything,” Lois replied with a frown.

“Exactly. We should be able to see the lights on top of Lex Tower. It’s not there. In fact, everything around here seems almost uniform in height. No tall buildings of any kind,” Clark explained.

Lois fell silent for a moment. Then she nodded slowly. “You’re right.”

“This can’t *possibly* be our world,” he concluded.

Lois griped his arm tightly in excitement. “Do you know what this means? We could go anywhere, cover any story!”

“Let’s not get too ahead of ourselves,” Clark cautioned, grabbing her arm to prevent her from running off toward the emptying set. “I’m not entirely sure that time machine is working the way it was intended. Wells wanted to take us to Smallville, remember? This...this is definitely *not* Smallville.”

Lois appeared to mull that fact over in her mind. “Even if it isn’t...” she began.

Clark just shook his head. “We should go back...make Wells take us home again, before he gets us stuck here.”

“We *are* stuck here,” Lois reminded him with a frown. “He said he needed more fuel, remember?”

Clark’s mouth turned down into a frown too. “You’re right.”

“So...let’s make the most of it,” Lois said, suddenly brightening again. “It won’t hurt to go take a peek at the set, right? They just wrapped, you heard them. Probably no one would mind, or even notice, if we just snuck a little look.”

“I don’t know,” he hesitated, thinking of a million reasons why they might get chased off the set by some irate production assistant or producer.

“Oh, come on, goody two-shoes,” she dared him, taking his hand and pulling gently to get him to start walking with her.

“We’re sneaking a peek, not committing a felony.”

He knew the look of determination she wore all too well. She was going, with or without him. He might as well go with her to keep her out of any trouble that might arise.

“Okay,” he relented. “But just a quick one. Then we should probably get out of here.”

“Deal,” Lois agreed, leading him onward.

The set wasn’t far. All they had to do was follow the path between a gap in the screen of trees. Everything in the area was wet, as though a torrential downpour had occurred just in that one spot. The concrete shone brightly as shallow puddles reflected back the light from the lamp posts all around. The air was cool and moist, and the scent of damp earth from the close-cut lawn around the area hung pleasant and heavy in the air. Beads of water lay pooled on the marble surface of the fountain, or raced down the sides of the stone to join its brethren on the ground. Clark pointed out the hoses and cranes all around that had been set up like fire sprinkles to simulate a rain storm.

“I wonder what it was that they were shooting,” Lois mused as she looked around.

“I haven’t a clue,” Clark admitted. “There’s nothing to suggest, well, anything about what was going on here, other than that it involves rain.”

Lois was about to say something when a young man rushed at them from the far side of the area. He was dressed in a thin grey hooded sweatshirt, blue jeans, and worn sneakers. He had a

clipboard tucked under his left arm and had a headset on with a battery pack clipped to his belt on his right side. A lanyard with an ID card hung about his skinny neck. Clark thought the man couldn't have been more than nineteen or twenty. He looked nervous.

"Mr. Cain? Ms. Hatcher? I'm sorry to bother you... I know I'm a new PA and all...but I must insist you head back to your trailers. The crew needs to get the heavy equipment broken down and it's just not safe for you to be here right now."

"But we're not..." Lois started to say, but the younger man's attention was on his headset.

"I'm sorry," he apologized, as he ushered them off the set with many a backward glance at the progress the rest of the crew was making. Clark could see the gleam of silver metal reflecting back the street lights not far off. The man turned away from them as soon as they'd cleared the set and arrived at the trailers Clark had glimpsed. "Say again, Rodrigo?" he said, pressing the earpiece closer to his head as he walked away.

"What was that about?" Clark wondered aloud, watching the production assistant retreat back to the set.

Lois shrugged as he turned toward her again. "No idea. He thought we were other people."

"Probably actors from...whatever this is," Clark agreed.

Lois nodded warily. "I've never heard those names before. I wonder..."

"Lois, *no*," Clark warned her quietly, lifting one cautionary finger. "We are *not* sneaking around here any longer. If we resemble people from this world, things could get messy fast."

"You aren't the least bit curious?" she half asked, half accused.

Clark sighed. "*Of course* I'm curious. But don't you think it's better to play it safe than be sorry? We have *no* idea what time or place we're in. We could seriously wreck this world's timeline if..."

He never got to finish. The door to the trailer on his left opened and out stepped...

"Is that...*me*?" he gulped, his stomach flip-flopping queasily. He wasn't scared of meeting his doppelgänger, per se, but who knew what the consequences of such a meeting might be?

His twin blinked in surprise and he stopped in his tracks as he stared, open-mouthed, at Clark. Then he swallowed hard and called out in a slightly quavering voice. "Teri?"

"Just a second," came the muffled response from within the confines of the other trailer.

Clark caught a glimpse of a dark silhouette behind the thick white curtains in the windows, which were slightly ajar to let in the refreshing breeze. Someone was pulling on a jacket, it seemed. A moment later, the door opened and the spitting image of Lois appeared in the doorway. Like the man, she too stopped dead in her tracks.

"Dean?" she questioned, tossing the scantest glance at Clark's double. "What is this? Some kind of weird joke?"

"No idea," he replied. "Did the studio say anything about new stunt doubles?"

She shook her head. "Not that I know of."

"We should go, Lois," Clark prompted in a low voice, mentally noting the alarm in the other's faces. "Now," he added hastily. He dared not stay long enough for these people to call for the police or do something else that would make escaping back to their own world more complicated than it needed to be.

The woman blinked. "Did...did you just call her...Lois?"

"I, uh," Clark stammered, without really knowing how to answer that. He felt like the proverbial deer in the headlights; paralyzed with indecision of what he should do next.

"Who are you?" the man, Dean, asked, his voice firmly demanding a response. "Some kind of crazed fans?"

"Fans? Fans of who?" Lois asked, crossly.

"Of us! Of the show!" Dean clarified. He spread his arms wide

as if to refer to all the area around them.

"Show?" Lois repeated, her brow furrowing.

"Lois, now might not be the best time to..."

Lois gave him a dismissive wave. "Clark, please."

"Teri, are you hearing this?" Dean sounded incredulous.

Teri nodded. "Tell us who you are, right now, or I'll call studio security. They don't take too kindly to set crashers."

"Look, this is all just a big misunderstanding," Clark offered. "We had no idea we..."

"Bull," Teri interrupted, her eyes narrowing. "Who are you?"

Lois sighed. "I'm Lois Lane, and this is..."

"Clark Kent?" Dean filled in, his voice questioning, as though he didn't believe it.

"How did you...?" Clark began.

"There's no way," Teri argued. "Show me your IDs."

Clark shrugged, wondering how these people knew his name and figuring that showing them his press pass couldn't possibly hurt at this point, though he pondered how badly this might throw the world's timeline off. He slipped his press pass out of his wallet and approached the two actors slowly. The last thing he wanted was to approach them too quickly and make them panic. Lois did the same. Dean and Teri both took the IDs, looked them over in wonderment, and handed them back.

"You're really them, aren't you?" Dean finally said breathlessly. He had a look of boyish awe on his face. "Oh, man, this is so *cool*!" He gestured to himself, then the woman. "I'm Dean and this is Teri."

"Them?" Lois asked. "You mean...you know us?"

"We *are* you...in a manner of speaking," he replied with a grin. Then, looking around, he beckoned them all to follow him back into his trailer. "Come on in. Something tells me this conversation would be best had inside. With pizza. And beer."

He led them into the trailer, which was lushly furnished and far more spacious than it had appeared from the outside. Teri came in last, but she was the first to plop down on the comfortable looking leather couch. Dean gestured to the spaces next to her as he pulled up a chair from the small table near the kitchenette. Then he went to the narrow fridge and pulled out a pizza box.

"Not a word to my trainer," he warned Teri with a grin as first Lois, then Clark, sat down warily.

Teri laughed. It was clear from the sound of it that she was completely at ease with him, just as Lois and Clark were with each other. "As long as you don't tell mine," she promised.

Dean put his hand up like he was swearing a solemn oath. "Not a chance," he vowed.

The pizza went into the microwave and, as it cooked, Dean offered them drinks. Lois and Clark politely refused. Dean shrugged, then rummaged around in his fridge again. He emerged with two cans of Budweiser, handed Teri one, cracked open his, and drank deeply. After a moment, he put the can down, retrieved the pizza, and set it down on the table.

"Help yourself," he offered, choosing a slice.

"Thanks...no," Lois said politely.

"So, what's this all about?" Clark asked. "This...you being us, but not really."

Dean swallowed a bite of pizza and closed his eyes blissfully. "Man, that's good," he said with a sigh. "I'm going to pay for it next time I get suited up, but after these night shoots, I needed this." He opened his eyes again. "We play you on TV," he continued, at last answering Clark's question.

"Really?" Lois sounded intrigued, flattered, and a little disbelieving all at once.

"Really. You caught us coming off a night shoot."

"A very *long* night shoot," Teri emphasized, grabbing a slice of pizza as well. She stretched tiredly. "A chilly and wet one at that. I'm glad to be done."

"Me too," Dean admitted. "I don't mind the hours but being

soaked to the bone for such a long time is a killer.”

“So...there’s a TV show...about...Clark and me?” Lois pressed, bringing them all back to the point.

Dean nodded. “Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman,” he confirmed.

“Superman? What does...?”

“You’re kidding,” Clark interrupted, astonished.

Dean shook his head, amused. “Not kidding,” he promised. “We just started Season Three. Actually, we just wrapped the first episode of the season.” He stretched and they all heard his back pop. “Ratings have been pretty decent.”

“So...in this world...we’re...real people? Or...?” Clark’s brain was spinning as he tried to make sense of all of this.

Teri shook her head. “No offense but...you’re completely fictional here.”

“We aren’t real?” Lois replied, an expression of shock on her face. “But you’ve heard of us somehow? None of this makes any sense.”

Dean shrugged. “Everyone in this world has heard of you! I mean, there’s comic books, movies, TV shows – and not just ours, mind you, - cartoons, novels, statues, action figures, video games...” He ticked off the points on his fingers. “Superman is a cultural *phenomenon*. You can hardly walk down the street without seeing a kid or even adult with the big S on his or her chest. *Everyone* knows your story.”

That was more than a little terrifying for Clark. He gulped to steady his voice. “Really?” he asked, unenthusiastically, his voice sounding squeaky in his own ears.

Dean seemed oblivious to his discomfort. “Oh yeah!”

“And the rest of our friends?” Lois questioned.

“You mean Perry and Jimmy and the rest?” Teri answered with the wave of her hand. “Oh yeah. Like Dean said, everyone knows your names and stories. How Perry White is the great editor in chief of the Daily Planet. How Jimmy Olsen takes the photographs. How Jor-El and Lara sent their infant son into space before Krypton could explode. How Kryptonite can kill Superman. How Lois Lane and Clark Kent are this unstoppable reporting team. How Lex Luthor would stoop to literally any level to kill Superman...” Her voice trailed off.

Then she snapped her fingers. “Wait a second! How did you guys even *get* here? Don’t tell me that time machine thing actually is real!” Her eyes gleamed with excitement.

Clark rubbed the back of his neck in his uneasiness. “Um...”

Lois looked mildly alarmed. “How did you...?”

“It *is!*” Teri crowed triumphantly. “And H. G. Wells? And Tempus?”

“That was a fun episode,” Dean added with a smile. “Lane was a lot of fun to work with. Kinda hoping we get to revisit Tempus at some point.”

“Well...Mr. Wells appears to be the real deal,” Lois responded before Clark could, and cutting off the note of nostalgia in Dean’s voice. “And he *says* there’s a guy named Tempus. We haven’t actually met him. At least...I don’t *think* we have. Wells seemed a little...weird. He acts like we’ve met him before or something but he’s been a bit...secretive about answering our questions about it. Honestly, trying to figure this all out is giving me a headache.”

Dean took another swig of his beer. “This is *fantastic!*” he declared. “I mean, how cool is it that the *real* Lois and Clark are here? You could tell us if the show’s storylines are accurate!”

Teri looked dubious about that prospect. “I don’t know. Does it even really matter?”

“Well, we should try to do justice to their story,” Dean pointed out. “Shouldn’t we? *Especially* now that we know they’re real.”

“Sure, but, it’s not like we can change what’s aired. Or what scripts are coming down the pipeline to us,” Teri argued. “Even if you and I both threw our hands into the writing arena, there’s no way we can dedicate enough time to accurately document their

lives *and* keep up with the hours we’re needed on set. And the powers that be would never allow it anyway. The writers would be calling for our heads.”

“True, but aren’t you the least bit curious?” Dean prodded. “After spending so much time being Lois, aren’t you curious to know if you’re portraying her story accurately?”

Teri blushed and fell silent a moment before admitting, “A little.”

Dean laughed. “See? I’m not the only one!”

“I’m a little curious about your show too, to be honest,” Lois ventured, ignoring the pleading look Clark was giving her. *Of course* he was interested to see how he and Lois had been presented to the show’s viewers, but at what personal risk? It was safer to feign indifference. “Like, for instance, was it always so obvious to everyone who wasn’t me, how evil Lex was?”

Dean chuckled again. “Yes. But, again, it’s all part of the lore, since the very beginning of the Superman comics. Plus, the audience saw a lot more...shall we say, behind the scenes, than you would have.”

“Part of the lore.” Clark shook his head. “You have no idea how weird that sounds. Like some fantasy story come to life.”

“Well...you kind of *are* a fantasy story come to life,” Dean pointed out with a smile.

Even Clark had to give a nervous chuckle at that. “Yeah, I guess that’s true,” he conceded, while running a hand through his hair.

“So...would you mind if we...compared notes, so to speak?” Dean asked. “About things that we’ve featured on the show versus what might or might have happened to you?”

“I’m game,” Lois immediately piped up. “I would really like to know what you guys have put us through on the show.”

Dean’s face broke into a brilliant grin that Clark knew to be the twin of his own. “Okay, I guess we should start at the beginning. Did Perry really pass on hiring you at first, Clark? Personally, the decision to nearly *not* make you a member of the Daily Planet felt risky, but was a nice twist on the typical story.”

Clark nodded. “It’s true. I can’t say I blame him though. I was pretty green at the time and the Planet’s a major paper. I was really just taking a shot in the dark by applying.”

“But you fell for Lois at first sight.” It wasn’t a question.

Lois answered Dean for Clark. “I told him that I didn’t have time for it. But he didn’t exactly listen.” She gave him an impish grin as Clark’s neck went hot and red.

Teri laughed. “I take it you’re in the dating stage now.”

Lois nodded. “New to it, but yes. Are you two...uh...?” She pointed quickly between Teri and Dean.

“Oh, God, no. We’re just friends,” Teri immediately answered. “And I’m married. But the show has you two dating.”

“Oh, right, sorry,” Lois apologized, her face going as scarlet as her suit jacket. “I didn’t mean to offend you. Or to assume too much.”

Teri waved away her concern. “You wouldn’t be the first to jump to that conclusion. At least you have a *reason* to suspect that we might be an item. After all, we’re playing you two on a TV show and we look just like you. It’s probably easy to forget that we’re not the same people, from different universes or timelines or dimensions or...whatever this is.”

“New to dating. So, sometime after the Lucky Leon episode,” Dean said, more to himself than others, sounding like he hadn’t heard a whit of what had just been said. He steeped his fingers together, his pizza long forgotten. “And Mayson Drake?”

Clark’s face fell and he shook his head. Dean nodded in understanding. He turned to Lois instead, perhaps to hide some embarrassment about bringing up such a sensitive topic.

“You nearly married Lex Luthor, right?” he asked, and while Clark was glad to move the topic away from Mayson’s death, Luthor was an even more sore subject for him.

At least Superman hasn't factored into the discussion. Yet. He swallowed nervously at the thought.

Lois scowled at the mention of Luthor. "I try not to think about how stupid I was back then."

"Oh. Sorry. I didn't mean..." Dean leaned back in his seat, his steepled fingers just under his chin as he thought. "It's just that – and I may be wrong on this – you're the only Lois in the lore that I know of that ever..."

"No, no, that's wrong," Teri interrupted. "I did some research around the time we were shooting House of Luthor and Barbarians. There was some alternate universe comic where she actually *did* marry Lex."

Dean frowned as he sat forward once more. "Really? I must have missed that one. But some of the other Earth stuff is trippy." He took another drink of his beer. "Okay, different topic. Um...oh, I know. I wouldn't normally think of this one, but I wrote the script for it and..." He shook his head, as though to clear his thoughts and start over. "Did you guys ever deal with Atomic Space Rats?"

Clark wrinkled his nose. Every time he thought of those pesky rats he could smell the horrendous odor of the chemicals they'd sprayed just as sharply as if one had been placed under his nose again. "Unfortunately, yes," he answered.

"Those things were the *worst*," Lois replied sourly. "I couldn't believe how we all behaved after getting a whiff of them. Perry couldn't look Clark or me in the eyes for *weeks* after that incident."

"Not just us, but the whole staff," Clark gently corrected her, leaning forward in his seat a little and resting his elbows on his knees. "I think he was more embarrassed that it had affected him than because of the way any of the staff acted."

"Doesn't matter," Lois responded. "It was awkward as all hell in our staff meetings. 'Uh, Valdez, uh, how's the, uh, school board scandal shaping up? Peterson? Uh, uh, how's the, uh, police station, uh, arson story? Any, uh, new leads?'" She did her best to mimic Perry's soft Southern drawl – this time even more drawn out by uncertainty – while staring at the floor and toeing the carpet, just as Perry had done.

Clark chuckled. "At least he got over it."

"Oh, this is *awesome*," Dean said in excited wonderment. "We've been *actually* presenting a *real* telling of your lives."

"Speaking of, what were you shooting tonight?" Lois asked, jerking a thumb over her shoulder, indicating the set they'd walked through earlier.

"Oh, that. Pretty much my favorite scene we've ever shot – the uncomfortable rain effects aside. Clark's proposal to you," Dean said enthusiastically, like a kid describing what presents Santa had left under his Christmas tree.

"Pro...posal?" Lois blinked in surprise, dragging the word out in astonishment.

Teri swatted at Dean's arm. "Dean!" she scolded. "We probably shouldn't divulge things that haven't happened to them yet."

"Well, he's *going* to propose at *some* point. Err...I assume he is," Dean weakly defended himself. "Aren't you?" He looked to Clark to save him from the foot he'd just shoved into his own mouth.

Clark nodded, feeling dazed and taken off guard. But what could he say, if not the truth?

"Yes," he said with conviction. "Eventually. I mean, it's still *really* early in our relationship. But," he turned to look Lois in the eyes. "Lois is the best thing that's ever happened to me. We may be new to dating each other, but I already know that I've found the person I'm meant to love forever." He gave her a soft smile. "I always have. That is, if Lois can stand the thought of spending a lifetime with the person who constantly edits her copy."

The mild joke had its intended effect and Lois laughed lightly,

and the tension in the room broke just a little. "We'll just have to wait and see, Farm Boy." She patted his arm affectionately, then paused for a moment. "Although, I wonder..."

She was not permitted to finish. The door to the trailer swung open with an unexpected bang as it hit the wall. An elderly man clutched the sides of the doorframe for a moment before he moved into the trailer.

"Ah, Miss Lane, Mr. Kent. There you are," huffed Wells, a bit out of breath. It seemed like he'd been running around – as best he could in his advanced age – looking for them. Relief was in his features now that he'd located them. "I've finally found you. I've figured out what went wrong with the machine and I have some fuel. We really do need to get going. Tempus isn't going to..." He stopped short as he seemed to notice Dean and Teri for the first time. "Oh dear," he said fretfully.

Dean blinked in surprise. "You're him. H. G. Wells. You look exactly the way the show's portrayed you."

"Show?" Wells squeaked uncomfortably.

"I'll explain later," Lois said, casting him a lightning-fast glance.

"He's right, Lois. We really should go," Clark reminded her, feeling a sense of urgency, not only to get back to their own world and time, but also to drop the subject of his – eventual – proposal. He stood, getting ready to say his goodbyes to their otherworldly selves, mentally counting himself lucky that his proposal was the only sensitive subject to have been raised.

"One second," Lois said, gesturing dismissively at Clark's words. "I have one more question." She looked at Teri.

"Shoot," Teri encouraged her.

"So?" Lois asked curiously. "Do I say yes? To the proposal you mentioned." She gave Clark a playful grin and his heart did a nervous backflip.

Teri hesitated. "Well...no. Not exactly."

Clark's heart sank. "No?" he repeated hollowly. Every private hope and dream seemed to smash into oblivion right before his very eyes.

Teri fidgeted in her seat a little and scratched behind one ear, as though uncomfortable. "Actually...you don't say no either," she hedged, addressing Lois.

Lois' brow furrowed. "So I...just don't give him an answer?" she questioned. "That...doesn't exactly sound like me."

"Well, it's not in the episode we just shot," Teri explained.

"We haven't been given the next script yet. For all I know, it starts with you giving an answer one way or the other."

"You see, it's kind of complicated," Dean cut in, leaning back in his seat, looking comfortable and relaxed. "The thing is, Clark's just proposed to Lois, but he still hasn't told her that he's Superman, but she's already figured it out..."

Clark's face went stark white as all warmth and color drained away. His heart seemed to both pound in his chest and fall away to hide in his feet at the same moment. He gulped hard, trying to remoisten his suddenly dry throat. He wished he could shrink away into nothingness to avoid Lois' wrath as she turned to him with a dangerous flaring of her nostrils and fire in her eyes.

"You're *what*!?" she demanded.

Clark stuffed his hands into his pockets as his neck, ears, and face went hot and red with a blush. He cleared his throat, too scared of the conversation ahead to immediately answer Lois. "So...about that time machine, Mr. Wells..."

THE END