

The Card

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Summary: At the end of the second-season episode "Tempus Fugitive," right before they return to their time and their memories are wiped, Lois writes herself a note on the back of Perry's birthday card so she won't forget that Clark is Superman... But what if Clark hadn't spotted it? And what if Lois had actually been the one to see it instead?

Story Size: 11,064 words (61Kb as text)

Chapter 1

There was just so much to do, and Lois knew it was going to be one of the busiest days of her long and illustrious career. She had an intriguing lead on a scandal at City Hall that she had been following for quite some time, as well as some kind of tip about a new budding crime syndicate that she received late the night before from Bobby Bigmouth, the most reliable of all her sources...

But as she exited the elevator, the thought suddenly occurred to her — she had completely forgotten about Perry's birthday. Somehow, with everything else she had been working on, his birthday had completely slipped her mind...

As she turned the corner around the banister, rushing down the ramp, Lois suddenly tripped over her own feet. She quickly caught herself, preventing an embarrassing spill right onto the floor.

"You're cutting it close."

It was Jimmy — and Lois sighed in relief. She was sure Jimmy would save her, just as he always did.

"I've still got eight minutes," she said. "What did I get him?" She paused as Jimmy handed her a gift, carefully wrapped and with a neat bow tied around it — but then, somehow, she suddenly knew exactly what was hidden inside the box... "Don't tell me — checked suspenders."

Jimmy raised his eyebrows in confusion. "How'd you know?"

Lois sighed deeply. Ultimately, it didn't matter how she knew — what mattered was getting all of this out of the way so she could focus on what was really important...

"Morning, Lois."

Lois cocked an eyebrow, glaring at Clark in response. "You're late," she said.

She really needed to narrow her focus, cut out the fat. She had been the best journalist in the world for years now, and that was exactly how she had gotten as far as she had — by cutting out every single piece of the fat and finding the meaty stuff hidden underneath.

And Clark Kent was definitely considered part of that fat.

"Morning, Clark," Clark said jokingly.

Lois would have rolled her eyes in response — she

really would have — but something felt off about all of this. It almost felt like they had already had this exact conversation in the past, but for the life of her, she could not figure out when that possibly could have been...

"I'm having the weirdest feeling of *deja vu*," she said.

Clark raised his eyebrows. "Don't tell me, you got him checked suspenders again."

Lois's eyes widened in surprise. "How'd you know?"

Clark shrugged. "Well, you got him that last year... Didn't you?"

"No, Clark, I'm serious."

Clark stared at her for a moment, then scratched his chin in confusion. "Well, now that you mention it, it does feel like we've done all this before..."

"Oh, no," she said as a thought crept into her mind. She really hated all of this nonsense... "I forgot to get the card... Jimmy!" She started scrambling through her handbag desperately. "Oh, here it is. How'd that get there?"

"Shhh! Here he comes, you guys!"

"Come on!"

Lois rolled her eyes as the elevator dinged, and Perry waltzed right out, a wide grin plastered on his face.

"Hey, everybody!" he exclaimed. "Well, I wonder what all this could be..."

Lois huffed loudly, collapsing into her desk chair as everyone around her rushed over to him.

Let them. She had better things to do...

"Aren't you going to go over there?"

Her head shot up, meeting a familiar pair of dark brown eyes that twinkled suggestively right at her...

And then, against her will, she felt her heart start racing in response, her heart thumping hard against her ribs.

Lois sighed. That man was a menace.

"Hmph, are you still here?" Lois asked.

Clark pursed his lips. "Well, I DO work here... Where else would I go?"

"Oh, I don't know, Smallville — how about that tiny town in Nowheresville that you came from in the first place?"

"Look, Lois," Clark said, cocking an eyebrow. "I know you have very important things to take care of —"

"You better believe it," Lois interrupted.

"But you might want to play the game. You know... it wouldn't hurt. You have the present already, anyway..."

He smiled at her, a grin that was somehow halfway between a warm smile and a mocking grimace.

Lois glared at him.

"Fine," she said, yanking the present off of her desk.

She grabbed the card too and then traipsed across the newsroom and over to Perry's door. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Clark trailing behind her.

And then, without bothering to knock, she grabbed the doorknob and barged in. Perry's head shot up from his desk, where he was surrounded by messy piles of presents.

"For god's sake, Lois, wouldn't hurt you to knock," he said.

"No time, Chief," she replied, tossing the present at his desk. He picked it up, contemplating it for a moment.

"Oh, and here," she added, dropping the card right beside it. "Happy birthday, or whatever..."

She saw Clark approaching from behind and she rolled her eyes, noticing Perry finally picking up the card as she started to turn away. He held it up, jamming his finger under the glued flap, and then he started to tear it open —

And that's when she saw it.

Or she thought she did...

But it had to have been her imagination. It had to have said something else...

She pivoted back around violently, smacking her shoulder into Clark in the process, and then she narrowed her eyes as Perry finally finished opening the envelope.

"Well, isn't this lovely," he said as he pulled the card out. "An empty card! No signature or anything! Well, thank you, Lois... I guess..."

"The present, Chief. Why don't you open the present?" Clark said, trying to cover for her neglectful mishap.

But Lois could barely hear what was going on around her. It was completely insignificant — especially in light of what she had just seen.

Or thought she had seen.

"Ah, good idea, Kent," Perry said. "Now, Lois, I can't wait to see what you bought this year. Your gifts are always so... thoughtful."

She had misread it. Clearly, she had misread it.

The envelope was now flat on the desk, those pesky, mysterious words hidden from view.

The words she had imagined, clearly. It was wishful thinking...

"What in Elvis's name is this?"

"Um, Chief, I think they're checked suspenders," Clark said, shifting uncomfortably, as if he couldn't even begin to figure out how to make this less awkward. "You know what they say, you can never have too many checked suspenders!"

Lois's head snapped towards Clark, her mouth gaping slightly.

Wishful thinking? This guy? Who the hell did she think she was fooling?

"Really," Perry replied. "Who says that, exactly? And Lois, correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't you get me this last year? I'm pretty sure I have a pair somewhere in my dresser, and I thought they were from you..."

"Well, Chief, it definitely doesn't hurt to have a spare..." Clark nudged Lois subtly on her shoulder. "Lois — didn't you have something you needed to work on?"

But Lois barely heard him at all, she was so entranced by the envelope, which was now under Perry's hand.

She needed to see it.

She needed to know.

So she did what she did best —

And she went for it.

"What in Sam Hill do you think you're doing?" Perry exclaimed as Lois suddenly reached for his desk. She violently pushed his hand out of the way, grabbing the envelope by the corner.

"I forgot — I need this —"

She quickly stuffed the envelope into the waistband of her skirt, obscuring it from view.

And then she let out a deep sigh. She would know soon enough.

"You need the envelope?" Perry asked, clearly immensely confused. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Sorry, Chief, I gotta go..."

"Lois!! Get back here!" she heard Perry exclaim as she darted away.

But she was too determined. She was too focused. He just didn't matter in the slightest. Not now, not when she felt the envelope burning into her skin under the tight elastic of her skirt...

She flew back through the door of Perry's office, still hearing him calling for her repeatedly in the background...

"Lois, what's going on?"

She blinked, startled to discover that Clark was suddenly standing in front of her.

Clark. The subject of the words she thought she'd seen on the envelope.

She shivered from the prospect and the overwhelming, desperate need to get to the bottom of this...

"Nothing, Clark," she replied, waving him off.

"Nothing's going on."

Clark tilted his head, once again cocking an eyebrow. "Really. Do you really think you can fool me like that? If you don't know this by now, I can read you like a book, Lois."

Lois narrowed her eyes. "Go away, Smallville. You're just embarrassing yourself. There's nothing going on. It's all in your puny little mind."

There it was again — that wry, knowing grin. It was as if he knew she was lying and as if he could see straight through her skull and into her mind...

But even Superman didn't have that ability.

"Whatever you say, Lois," Clark replied as he moseyed towards his desk. "I'm sure you'll let me in on it when you need my help. Just give me a holler, you know where to find me..."

He grinned slyly at her, his eyes twinkling right at her yet again...

And once again, her heart sped up in response.

She groaned. Damn it to hell with that man.

She let out another annoyed huff and then waltzed right back up the ramp and towards the elevator. The elevator doors opened the second she pressed the button, and she jumped in, and then, finally, the doors closed in front of her, cutting her off from the chaotic messy world of the newsroom.

And taking her away from Clark. Far, far away...

She continued to feel the envelope pressing against her hip as the elevator descended. The elevator seemed to be going impossibly slow, as if there were something in the shaft preventing its progress. She wondered briefly if Superman was inside there, trying to stop her from finding out the truth —

The truth — which couldn't possibly be the truth.

Because there was just no way. Absolutely no way. She must have misread it, clearly it said something else entirely.

She knew Clark. She REALLY knew him. She knew him better than she knew anyone, aside from herself, of course.

(Or maybe not... because didn't he somehow seem to know her better than she could begin to comprehend?)

Didn't he seem to know her better than she did?)

The elevator finally came to a stop, letting out a brusque chirp as the doors slid open before her. She barreled out, pushing through the crowds of people in the lobby. She had never been more eager to get out of there in her life...

And then, finally, she coursed through the rotating doors.

And she was free.

The chilly morning air blew through her hair, tossing it over her eyes, and she wiped it away absentmindedly, pushing it behind her ear.

And then her hand drifted to the envelope, which was still nestled in her waistband.

She had originally planned to go home to examine it, but she realized at that moment that she just couldn't possibly wait.

She needed to see it — NOW.

She darted past the bustling crowds, turning the corner into an abandoned alley beside the Planet building...

And then she finally let out a heavy sigh.

She was alone (aside from the rat that scurried across the outer edge of the building). She was free. And now — She would know.

Her hands were shaking in anticipation as she reached into her waistband. She took a deep breath, preparing herself for whatever may come —

And then she pulled it out.

Her eyes widened into large, round discs, and she gasped loudly, almost dropping the envelope from her suddenly weakened fingers.

She had expected to be wrong about what she saw. She really had.

But no, the words were there, clearly written with a black pen, and in her own handwriting, no less.

She blinked, expecting the words to change somehow, expecting them to morph into someone else's longhand...

But no, they just stayed the same. The same words, the same handwriting, that belonged to no one else but herself. There was no denying it.

And even though she didn't remember writing it — She had.

And at some point, she had truly believed these words: "Clark is Superman."

Chapter 2

"Clark is Superman."

It really said that, right there on the envelope. The words were written clearly, every single letter as clear as crystal, completely impossible to misread.

But it couldn't be true. It was impossible.

Because Clark was... well, Clark.

Her best friend. Her confidante. The dorky, adorable guy who ate popcorn with her late at night, watching the latest rom com with her without complaint.

And Superman... well, he was SUPERMAN.

No. It was impossible. Utterly impossible...

Wasn't it?

But then she thought about it, really thought about it, and suddenly, it couldn't make more sense than it did...

Because didn't it explain basically everything?

Lois knew Clark better than she knew herself, or at least, that's what she always told herself.

But was that actually true?

Really, the man was a menace, and in many more ways than she cared to admit —

Including the fact that he was an absolute mystery.

The truth was, she didn't know him. She really didn't, even if she wanted to believe she did. There were so many missing moments, so many things about him that she just couldn't explain.

But now, with these words written out on this envelope, finally, after all this time — Lois actually COULD.

She shoved the envelope deep into the recesses of her handbag, under her wallet and smushed somewhere against her keys, where she hoped it would somehow cease to exist entirely.

When she emerged from the alley a few minutes later (or hours, she wasn't entirely sure which), she was in a complete daze. She couldn't process anything around her — not the hordes of people rushing past on the sidewalk, nor the luscious smells of the food stands that always seemed to call her name...

So she ended up wandering the city streets for a while, with absolutely no destination in mind. Every now and then she would look up to the sky, thinking she saw him fluttering up above, among the fluffy, white clouds...

But no, it was just a pigeon. Or a tiny airplane, far away and high in the sky and barely visible to the naked eye...

So she continued wandering. She roamed past the arched entryway of Centennial Park, and vague memories that she couldn't fully explain suddenly flooded into her brain — memories of some kind of wooden chariot, a mystery man clad in strange, silvery garb, and memories of feeling remarkably anxious about...

Something.

She really couldn't put her finger on any more than that, or even when that had actually happened, or a single event that surrounded that strange memory.

But she knew it was real. There was really no doubt, and she knew, somehow, that it had to be connected to the envelope — the envelope that had managed to rock her entire world.

She just stood still, staring at the empty patch of grass, when suddenly she saw a flurry of movement out of the corner of her eye.

She startled, shrinking against a tall bush that climbed up the side of the arch, as a yellow taxi slowed to a stop at the curb, right before her.

And at that moment, her instincts kicked in.

She didn't know how she knew this — but as a man climbed out of the taxi and was then approached by yet another man, both of whom had stern, serious expressions on their faces —

She knew this would be huge.

By this point in her career, she had learned that there was nothing more trustworthy than her own instincts, despite the fact that they often led her straight into danger.

She stiffened. But then she heard them start muttering to each other, quietly under their breaths, so she inched forward, making sure to keep hidden and obscure against

the bush.

She felt the pull of the story completely surrounding her, engulfing her, pulling her deep into its claws, and she let it, embracing it with welcoming, open arms. She really needed this right now — it was a perfect distraction.

She squinted, trying to make out the men's faces.

And then, suddenly, her heart felt like it came to a complete stop as the younger of the two men turned towards her, his dark hair settling onto his forehead, his features starkly obvious in the bright, mid-morning sun.

It was Billy Church.

Billy Church, of all people. The son of the billionaire — who was also an infamous crime lord, of course.

But Billy had always been stagnant in his opposition to all of that. He had been insistent, through his entire life, that he was the “good” one. He was the philanthropist, the one who used his money to help people, not to harm.

And sure, there were rumors about him anyway, that was nothing new...

But he had been out of Metropolis's hair for years now. He lived somewhere on the West Coast, and his word had been actualized over and over, with more and more institutions in the area bearing his name as his wealth spread throughout the region.

Truthfully, she never would have expected this, not in a million years.

And besides, Church was rolling in money; his father was one of the richest men in the US, supposedly even wealthier than Lex Luthor himself.

Why Church would ever choose to be involved with any of this, she could not even begin to contemplate.

The last thing he needed was money — and especially money obtained by nefarious means...

Another man followed shortly behind him, and when they started talking, she scrambled inside her handbag, searching for her tape recorder. She managed to pull it out, pressing record right as they started speaking.

“What do you have for me?”

This was it. She knew it was. This was that new crime syndicate that Bobby Bigmouth had already given her a whole earful on — Metrogang? Is that what he called it?

“Spit it out, I don't have all day.”

Somehow these things seemed to come to her, especially in potentially dangerous scenarios, like this one. She had a nagging feeling that it would be a mistake to approach this alone, and part of her wondered if she should sneak back to the Planet and grab Clark first...

But then she remembered the envelope, which she hoped had somehow magically disintegrated into dust, and those horrible words that were written straight across it:

Clark is Superman

Clark is Superman

No. She definitely didn't need Clark Kent.

Of all people.

She shrank against the bush, being careful to stay hidden among the rough branches. She felt them claw at her arms, likely leaving a web of scratches in their wake — but it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Nothing — but the story.

She reached out with the tape recorder so she wouldn't miss a single word...

Clark is Superman

Oh. That mattered, too.

She shook her head, trying to shake those pesky, horrible words right out of it. She couldn't let it take over her life like this. She was Lois Lane — top banana, the best reporter in the entire world. And NOTHING would get in the way of a story. NOTHING — not even him.

And then she narrowed her eyes, forcing herself to focus, as she struggled to hear what was being said.

“It will cost in the range of four million dollars — ”

“Oh that's just peanuts. That's not even in the league of what we're trying to accomplish — ”

Crap. She had clearly missed something. She started fumbling with her tape recorder and reached out even farther, struggling to catch every single word —

Until suddenly, something caught her wrist instead.

And then, before she knew it, she was yanked out from behind the bush by her wrist, the branches sweeping painfully across her in the face in the process, and she was looking him straight in the eye.

But they were still among the bustling crowds of people... All she had to do was let out a scream.

Any noise would do, really.

But instead, before she even had a chance to compose herself, and before her mind could finally settle on a course of action, she felt the butt of a gun press into the small of her back.

And then she was unceremoniously shoved back towards the abandoned alley.

She noticed that same rat scurrying along the edge of the building, as if nothing was amiss, as if nothing was out of the normal, even in the slightest...

And then the gun pushed her violently, and she found herself thrown against the brick wall of the building.

Her breath hitched as she tripped over her shoes, but she caught herself before she spilled onto the ground entirely.

And then she looked up, her eyes widening as she felt her heart beating loudly in her ears...

The gun was still held out straight towards her, the barrel open wide, threateningly pointing right between her eyes.

She looked at the gun, and at the hand holding it, and at the fingers clenched tightly on the grip. And then she followed his arm up to his shoulder, and then, before long, she was looking straight into his dark, brown eyes. He grinned, the corners of his eyes wrinkling as a wide smile spread from ear to ear.

“Well, now. I know who you are, of course.” He paused. “Lois Lane.”

Of course, she knew who he was as well. “You're making a mistake,” she said.

“Oh, no,” he said. “I don't think so.”

His finger was on the trigger — she saw it resting there, and it was trembling, threatening to end her life in an instant.

She knew what she had to do. It wouldn't even be difficult. She had done it before, so many times, and he always, ALWAYS came.

But it felt different now. In the past, it was Superman who came —

But this time it wouldn't be Superman — would it.
 "Please," Lois said, her eyes wide. "Please, you don't have to do this."

"You see, Ms. Lane, I really do. You've seen too much — and we both know you aren't exactly someone who tends to keep things to herself, now are you?"

Help, Superman!

That's all it would take — and he would come. And he would protect her, and he would save her.

Help, Superman!

The man grinned, his eyes focused on hers, the gun still pointing right between her eyes. And then his finger trembled on the trigger again, and then, to her horror, his finger started to pull against it —

Her mouth dropped open. She needed to say it. She needed to scream...

But she couldn't get the words to come.

And then, as he finally pulled the trigger, there was an impossibly loud bang —

And it almost felt like the entire world around her slowed as she thought so many things at once...

She was going to die. She knew she was. There was really no denying it.

But she was also going to die alone.

Alone. Horribly alone. With no one to miss her, no one to mourn her, no one to even remember her, not for who she really was, anyway. Because nobody could really get past her thick skin, through her facade —

Except for him.

Clark Kent. The only man who really knew her...

Although she didn't even know a single thing about him...

And then, as her life started flashing before her eyes, she wondered what it was all for. Because it couldn't have been for all the Kerths, or even for that Pulitzer.

In the end, all of that was meaningless...

She watched in horror as the bullet rushed towards her and she closed her eyes, preparing herself for certain death...

But at the moment that she expected the world to go black, instead — she felt a sudden, intense gust of wind, so strong it swept her hair behind her shoulders and off the back of her neck.

She gasped, her eyes popping open —

Just as his hand closed around the bullet, grabbing it in midair, only centimeters away from her face.

And then she realized he was looking at her, straight into her eyes... Her breathing ceased entirely, as though she had completely forgotten how to breathe.

He peered into her eyes. As always, his eyes were big and warm and filled with an overwhelming, overriding goodness that no one else in the entire world could possibly match. He was a force in and of himself. He stared at her, his fist closing tightly around the bullet —

And then he grinned.

"You ok?"

She didn't answer. She didn't think she could possibly speak, even if she tried...

He noticed her unsettled expression, and his face immediately filled with obvious worry and concern. "I'll be

right back," Superman said. "I just have to deal with Church — then I'll take you home."

No — not Superman. Clark. It was Clark who said it...

He peered deep into her eyes again, almost as if he were trying to reach into her soul. And she realized that all she saw — all she would ever see — was Clark.

He was Clark. So completely Clark. It was uncanny, really, and she wondered how the hell she had never seen it...

Lois swallowed.

She blinked several times, watching as Superman — Clark — sped forward towards an obviously shocked Billy Church, grabbing him by his shoulders as a satisfied twinkle flashed in his eyes.

And she didn't even wait for him to disappear before she turned on her heel, launching straight into a run.

She ran and she ran — and then she ran some more. She couldn't possibly go fast enough. She needed to run away — not from the scene, but from this horrible, profoundly disturbing reality entirely.

Her world didn't make any sense anymore. And Lois couldn't live in a world that just didn't make sense.

Clark. Superman. Clark. Superman.

This couldn't be happening. It just couldn't.

She remembered absolutely nothing of how she got there, and she could barely even remember if a taxi was involved — but then suddenly, somehow, she found herself standing at the front door of her apartment building. She glanced at the brown bricks, her hand shaking as she pulled her key out of her handbag, and then she pummeled straight through the front door.

She stumbled up the stairs, tripping over her own feet as she continued on...

And then, finally, after her trembling hand fumbled for far too long with the lock on her apartment door, she barreled straight into her apartment. She quickly locked the door behind her, securing all three locks, and then she collapsed straight onto her brown, worn-out couch.

And she just sat there. Her eyes were glazed over, and she couldn't even come up with a single, coherent thought.

Until, suddenly, she startled as she heard three loud knocks at her door.

Clark wasn't new to saving Lois Lane.

He had done it so many times at this point that he had completely lost count.

(No he hadn't — he had saved her exactly thirty-seven times as Superman and another dozen as Clark. But the actual number of times Lois had had such near-misses alarmed him more than he cared to admit, so he chose not to let himself ruminate about it too much.)

He knew that her response to Superman was always reliable and always consistent. She was always enamored by him, far more than he could even begin to dream of as Clark Kent —

Enamored — and entranced.

And she always waited for Superman afterwards.

Always.

That is... until today.

When Clark returned to the archway at the entrance of

Centennial Park in order to retrieve Lois so he could usher her back to the Planet, or to her apartment, or to whatever destination she chose —

He was fairly surprised to discover that she was gone.

He stood on the sidewalk for a moment, taking in his surroundings, and he nodded absentmindedly to people greeting him as they passed by on the sidewalk.

He briefly scanned the area, searching for her in case she had decided to wait on a bench inside the park...

But part of him knew that she was really, truly gone.

He KNEW something was off. He knew it. She had been acting odd at the Planet, especially to him. By this point, he had a fairly good read on Lois Lane and on exactly what made her tick — and he should have realized that when he picked up on her strange mood; he never should have just let it go...

So he stretched his arm over his head, squeezing his hand into a tight fist, and then he launched straight into the sky, disappearing into the clouds above the tall buildings.

He continued to scan the city as he flew, both with his super vision and with his hearing —

And then he found her.

It wasn't exactly difficult to do so. It was almost like she was a magnet, pulling on his heartstrings with such vigor that he had no choice but to follow...

And so he landed quietly in the narrow alley behind her apartment building, his feet falling so softly that they didn't make a sound.

He spun in place, and a moment later he was pushing his glasses right back against his dark, brown eyes...

And then he strolled casually towards the front door of the building.

As always, the front door of the building was locked. He searched around for a moment, ensuring that there was no one around him —

And then he lowered his glasses to the edge of his nose. He narrowed his eyes, focusing all of his inner energy directly onto the lock —

And a small jet of red light suddenly shot out of eyes and right towards the lock, which immediately disengaged with a subtle click.

He trotted up the stairs, all three levels of them, until he finally reached Lois's floor. And then he emerged from the staircase, and before he knew it, he was standing right outside her door.

He knocked three times, bouncing on his heels eagerly as he stuffed both of his hands into the pockets of his pants.

And then he waited, quite impatiently, beyond ready to get to the bottom of what could possibly be bothering Lois...

But there was no response.

He knew he shouldn't peek inside. He knew he should allow her the privacy she clearly needed...

But then his glasses were once again at the tip of his nose, his vision passing right through the opaque, beige walls of the hallway.

Ultimately he couldn't resist; when it came to Lois, he could never resist.

She was sitting smack in the middle of her couch, her hair draped over her hands as her face hid inside of them.

And then his hearing kicked in, and he heard a small sob...

There was really no question. Something was very, VERY wrong.

He shook off his X-ray vision, pushing his glasses back against his eyes. And then he knocked again, even harder this time.

"Lois?" he called. "Lois, are you there?"

She didn't respond, but his hearing picked up on the sound of her shuffling around inside.

Slightly encouraged, he tried again.

"Lois? Are you in there?" He knew she was, obviously, but, as always, he had to play the game. "Can you let me in?"

No response again, but the shuffling sound got louder. He jumped back a few feet, giving her the space he knew she needed.

And then he started hearing the sound of her locks clicking open, one after the next.

There were three of them in all, plus a chain on top, and, as always, they were all locked, to keep the dangers of the city out and far away from her — or maybe it was really the reverse, to keep herself far away from the city.

Lois finally unlatched the chain at the very top, and then he watched the doorknob turn, the door finally opening a small crack...

But as he looked at her, and straight into her eyes, — he startled, his eyes widening.

It was so much worse than he even imagined.

Her eyes were bloodshot, swollen, and puffy, as if she had been crying for quite a while, and her cheeks were covered with trails of dry tears that had since been covered with streams of fresh ones. And as she looked at him vacantly, almost haunted, he knew that whatever it was — it was bad.

Really, really bad.

His surprise transformed into genuine concern and he took a step towards her, reaching for her hand...

But then, to his shock, she jerked away.

He blinked in response, completely at a loss.

"Can I come in?" he attempted.

She just stared at him, her expression unwavering.

"Lois..."

"Suit yourself," she spit out, shrugging. And she turned away from him, drifting right back to the couch and settling onto it.

He tried to catch her eye again as he entered the living room, but she couldn't have been more clearly avoiding his eye. She was staring out through the living room window and at the city landscape, where cars rushed by on the street down below.

"Lois, what's going on?"

She didn't reply.

"Lois, you know I can read you like a book," Clark said, slowly inching further into the room. "Something's been going on all day. You even seemed off at the Planet this morning —"

Lois jerked towards him, and yet she still clearly couldn't get herself to look him in the eye. Looking right past him, she sighed, rolling her eyes.

"Just — leave me alone," she said. "I'm fine."

Clark's breath hitched as he continued to watch her, and then he shook his head. She was seriously the most frustrating woman he had ever met in his life...

And boy, did he love her for it.

He moseyed over to the kitchen. Maybe he could bring her something to eat. That usually worked when it came to Lois, especially if it was something sweet.

He pulled the fridge door open and peeked inside — and then he, too, was rolling his eyes.

Mustard and pickles.

That's all she had — a bottle of mustard, which was almost empty, and a full jar of pickles.

Well, he would have to go with the pickles...

He snatched the pickles off the shelf and deposited it on the counter. He noticed that it was still sealed, and so, without thinking, he closed his fingers around the lid and pretended to struggle with it.

It wasn't long before Lois finally looked at him — but she was staring at him, almost as if he had two heads.

"What the HELL do you think you're doing?"

"I..." he stammered. "What do you mean?"

She stared at him, her face totally blank — but then her eyebrow cocked severely as she narrowed her eyes, intensely glaring at him.

"So now... you can't even open a pickle jar by yourself."

Clark didn't even know what to respond. This had ALWAYS been part of his facade, this was nothing new...

Her glare continued as she pushed herself onto her feet and made her way across the kitchen. And as she approached him, she snatched the pickle jar right out of his hands. She glanced at it for a moment before she smacked the lid on the edge of the counter, leaving a very obvious dent in the laminate countertop, and then she lazily closed her fingers around the lid and easily turned it.

"Thanks," Clark said.

And her eyes narrowed even more...

"Lois — please tell me what's going on. Please. Something is clearly bothering you, eating away at you. Let me help."

Lois's eyes were wide and round as she was clearly thinking... something. What she was thinking, Clark couldn't even guess...

And then she closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Lo — "

"Okay," she finally said. Clark raised his eyebrows.

"Okay. You're right. There is — something. There's something — and I'll tell you what it is."

She paused, opening her eyes again and looking up at him. And then she peered straight into his eyes, burrowing deep into him, so deep he was convinced she was laying him bare, leaving him completely exposed.

And suddenly he couldn't help wondering exactly what she knew...

"Look, Clark," she said. "I — "

And that's when he heard it.

Help, Superman!

He stared off into space, listening closely, trying to make out exactly what his super hearing was picking up.

He heard a loud crash, a crackling fire, and screaming, followed by yet another desperate call for help —

Superman! Help, please!

He blinked, once again seeing Lois, who was still standing in front of him. Her lips were pursed, and Clark realized she was no longer talking.

Almost as if she knew what he was about to do...

SUPERMAN!

He had to go. He really had no choice.

"Lois..." he said, loathing himself yet again for what he had to do. "Lois, I'm so... I'm SO, so sorry — "

But then she said something that he never could have expected.

"Go."

Clark blinked. "What?"

"Go," she repeated, louder and more urgently this time. "Go return your video to Blockbuster, or whatever you're going to say you have to do."

Clark sighed. "Lois, look — "

"No, I'm serious Clark. Go. Go take care of it — your 'Cheese of the Month' subscription's waiting..."

"Lois, it's ok if you're mad. I get it. I'm doing the same thing I always do, I'm disappearing right in the middle of an important conversation, like always — "

But then she reached for him, nudging his shoulder. "I'm not mad," she said, her voice steady and calm. He cocked his eyebrow in response. "I'm not! Just — go. I'll still be here when you're done — and then we can continue this — "

Clark shook his head. "Okay, now I REALLY know something's wrong."

But she just nudged him again.

HELP!

He heard a loud crash coming from the site —

And he knew he couldn't delay.

He glanced at her, his eyes wide and pleading. "I'll be right back — "

"I'll be here," she said, her voice revealing nothing of her emotions underneath.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

And then, as hard as it was to do — he turned away from her.

He turned — and he knew he couldn't look back. Because if he did, and he caught her eye even for a second, he would never find the strength to continue on...

But the world needed him. The world needed Superman.

He had no choice...

He fled into the hallway, breaking into a run as he disappeared into the staircase.

And he was finally alone. He spun in place, going faster and faster as the beige blur became a brightly colored, red and blue one, transforming him into another man entirely.

And then, taking a deep breath, he launched himself forward into superspeed —

And he disappeared, leaving only a strong, intense gust of wind in his wake.

Chapter 3

And after all of that, once again, she was left alone.

She listened carefully, and when she strained her ears,

she could hear the telltale whoosh as he disappeared. She knew she could find out where he was in an instant and that he would inevitably be featured, front and center, on every television station.

And then, before she knew it, she was picking up the remote from the side table. She turned on the TV, which was already turned to CNN from the last time she had wanted to keep an eye on Superman's escapades —

For "Planet business." Right, that's why she usually tuned in to watch him, night after night, performing his saves, one after the next, in all of his glory...

It was for "Planet business." Not for any other reason...

Not because she cared about him. Not because she loved him...

No. DEFINITELY not that.

This time, the cameras were focused on a burning building of some kind, and the headline at the bottom of the screen seemed to indicate that the fire was located somewhere in New York City. The building was completely engulfed in smoke, so obscured by the thick clouds that it was barely discernible at all.

A reporter was shouting into a microphone in the foreground, his wide, bulging eyes portraying the desperation he clearly felt inside. "We are receiving reports of a child trapped inside the building. Rescue attempts are underway... No word if the child is still alive..."

But then, suddenly, a very familiar red and blue figure appeared in the periphery of the screen...

Lois's heart quickened as she watched the scene unfold before her, her eyes completely transfixed on the TV screen.

She watched as the red and blue figure became nothing more than a blur and then shot forward and straight into the thick plumes of smoke, disappearing from view entirely.

Though she knew it was him, it was still so hard to believe, as if her mind refused to settle on this new reality. She was having an incredibly tough time taking the leap from knowledge to acceptance and truly comprehending that it was CLARK who had disappeared into the clouds of smoke. CLARK, not Superman.

And then, as quickly as he had disappeared, he reemerged, his arms wrapped tightly around a small bundle of blankets. But then the bundle shifted in his arms and a small head popped up, two immaculately French-braided pigtails swaying gently in front of his face. Someone had clearly taken the time and labored over those braids, making sure they were perfectly done, almost like a crown on the little girl's head.

The little girl was clearly beside herself, and she was visibly shaking in his arms, completely panic-stricken, with trails of tears streaking down her face. He held her securely in his arms, ducking under a low-hanging beam and carrying her towards the EMTs waiting eagerly in the street.

Lois stared at the screen, her eyes wide and unable to even blink, and she continued to watch him with bated breath. She watched as he suddenly paused and then peered down at the little girl, pushing the braids behind her small, bony shoulders. He smiled meekly, catching the pair of large, brown eyes that were fixed on him...

And then the little girl wrapped her small arms around his neck, her dimpled elbows flexed, and she pulled herself

against his chest, burying her face under his chin.

And, of course, just as he was always so apt to do, he responded in kind, stroking her back in soothing, soft circles.

He was the only alien known to mankind — but despite that, Lois suddenly wondered if there was anyone in the entire world who was more human than he was...

Her mind was still reeling from all of the events of the day, and from the man she thought she knew. It was surreal how untrue all of her widely held assumptions were — about Superman, about Clark, and even about the entire world.

She let her face collapse back into her hands, feeling tears start to flow between her fingers. She was being so ridiculous, so pathetic — Lois Lane just didn't cry, she never did...

The tears continued to flow, falling straight through the cracks between her fingers and landing on her skirt, where they were sucked up by the fabric, leaving tiny, wet circles.

Pathetic, so pathetic.

But she couldn't stop. So the tears continued to flow, until they were steady streams...

There was an unseen truth under all of this, something that Lois didn't even admit to herself. But it was there, taunting her with its horrible, menacing claws, and as soon as she recognized it, she couldn't possibly look away —

She loved him.

She didn't want to love him. He was wrong for her in SO many ways. And that was before, when she thought he was just a simple hack from nowheresville, back when she thought she knew him...

But now she knew the truth — Clark Kent didn't really exist. And so she was actually in love with... a ghost. A fantasy. An imaginary person who was actually someone else entirely.

In the end, Clark Kent wasn't real — so did that mean that her love wasn't either?

But her love FELT real. It felt so real that she could almost see it hanging in the air right in front of her; it felt so real that she was convinced that if she were to reach out and touch it, she would actually feel it with her fingers.

Because she always felt it. Always. Every time she looked at him, every time she peered into his warm, luscious brown eyes, every time he whispered her name, every time he held the door for her or pulled out her chair or even simply brought her a cup of coffee...

It was impossible to deny the truth. Her love was real — even if the person she loved was not...

In the end, Clark didn't return right away, despite his promise to do so. She knew he must have gone straight to another emergency and possibly a third one after that. And soon enough, when she looked up and peered through her living room window, she was surprised to see the sun dropping lower in the sky, so low that it cast an orange hue on the tall buildings outside.

But then her eyes popped open as she finally heard the telltale whoosh once again, immediately followed by his distinctive set of three loud knocks.

She glanced at her door, realizing that she hadn't even thought to lock a single one of her four locks. "Come in,"

she called softly, her voice cracking. She didn't bother shouting — she knew he could hear her anyway...

She looked away, once again glimpsing the sun through her large window and marveling in the golden city that glittered in its rays.

"I'm sorry that took so long," he huffed as her door creaked open.

She closed her eyes solemnly, not bothering to respond.

The door clicked shut behind him, and he shuffled slowly across the room. And then he finally reached her, letting out a deep sigh as he settled onto the couch next to her.

But then her nose caught a whiff of a strange scent and she flinched, her eyes popping open on their own accord.

"What is it?" he asked.

Once again, she didn't respond. She looked down at her fingers, lacing them together on her lap.

"Lois, again, I'm sorry it took so long. Blockbuster was closed when I got there, and I had to go to the further one, you know, the one down by the other end of the park. But when I got there, it had a long line out the door, and then one of the customers was having an issue with her credit card, and —"

"You didn't think to just use the drop box?" Lois interrupted, not bothering to look at him as she spoke.

Clark stopped talking abruptly, and now he, too, was fidgeting with his hands. "Oh, the drop box. You know what, Lois, I didn't even think of —"

She shook her head slowly. "You know what, just stop," she said. "Stop."

Clark cleared his throat, sighing tentatively. "Lois —"

She sniffed loudly, and then her eyes widened even further. There it was again — that smell. It was SO strong and SO obvious, and she wondered how she had never picked up on small details like this before...

It was almost as if she had WANTED to stay in the dark all this time... It was almost as if she preferred not to know, as if she WANTED to deny the truth...

Well, those days were very obviously behind her...

"Look, Lois, I really am sorry. I know you were trying to talk to me about something really important earlier. And not only did I leave, but after I promised you I would come right back — I didn't. Trust me, I feel awful about it. I wish I could have come back earlier, but I —"

And then she finally turned to him, peering right into his eyes. And as she felt him stare right back into hers, she became completely absorbed by his eyes, cocooned inside them like a warm, fleece blanket. He looked at her with such intensity, with such vigor, and, most of all, with such love —

Because he clearly loved her just as much as she loved him.

It was so blatantly obvious that it was impossible to deny. No matter who he really was — he loved her. He REALLY loved her.

She shivered as she thought about it, grabbing her arms. And she watched as he cocked his eyebrow, confused by her response.

"Look, Lois, you told me that something's going on. I know I probably missed the window of opportunity to

discuss it, whatever it is — but please. Please, let me help."

It was time to end this. All of this.

So she took a deep breath — and then she went for it.

"You smell like smoke."

She continued staring right into his eyes as she watched him absorb her words.

"I... what?"

His eyes were wide now, as his negligence to fully address the post-save cleanup was clearly dawning on him.

"You smell like smoke," she repeated.

"I smell like..." His eyes glazed over as he was clearly trying to come up with yet another lie... "Oh, right, you see, I ended up passing really close to a structure fire down by the docks, and boy, that smoke was rising in huge plumes —"

She flattened her lips, her gaze piercing and unwavering. "Did you... did you get everyone out?"

Clark's forehead wrinkled in confusion. "Out?"

It was almost as if he was TRYING not to understand. Almost as if he preferred to remain in denial about what was really happening, about all the truths that were slowly coming to light...

"Out. Of the apartment building. Did you get everyone out?"

She stared at him, not even blinking once.

"Lois, I'm not sure what you're —"

"Clark, I'm tired. I'm just tired. Of all of it. Of all the lies, of all the twisted truths. I'm tired — and I'm just done. There was no structure fire by the docks — we both know that. So please, just drop it."

His eyes widened, and he opened his mouth, clearly struggling to come up with a response.

"I, um, you know, I really don't —"

"The little girl," she said, interrupting his stumbling mess of words. "The little girl — with the pigtail braids. She was clearly very shaken up — is she going to be all right?"

She watched as he stared at her, his breath hitching in surprise, his eyes widening even more as the reality of what she had just said dawned on him. He was frozen, almost like a statue, and it was almost as if he couldn't remember how to breathe.

He was still staring at her, his big brown eyes wide with shock and wonder...

And then, finally, he managed to muster the courage to speak. "Yes," he said, his voice barely louder than a whisper. "She's going to be fine."

He had said it. He had actually said it.

It wasn't as if any of this was a surprise to her — clearly not. And yet, now that he had actually said those words, her heart was racing yet again.

There was a long, heavy pause, as Lois couldn't come up with even one word to fill the silence. The revelation that she now knew was clearly weighing on him just as much as the revelation about who he really was had been weighing on her.

"You... you know," he finally stammered, choking a bit on his words.

She tried to respond, but it was as if her voice was no longer working at all.

They were sitting next to each other on the couch, frozen in place, like the two seated statues they often strolled past in Centennial Park. Lois glanced at his dark frames, the only thing that still stood between them...

And then her hand drifted upward, completely of its own volition. She tried to make it stop, she tried to pull it back, but instead it kept drifting, up and up and up, inching closer and closer to his face...

And he didn't make a single move to stop her.

Her hand finally reached the edge of his glasses, the tip of her index finger wisping by the dark, metal frames...

And then, without any deliberation at all, her fingers suddenly looped around the arm of his glasses.

And he didn't even flinch.

So she went ahead and tugged gently, and slowly, his glasses peeled off of his face, leaving his brown eyes large — and open — and bare — and free.

And here he was.

Clark. Superman. They were one and the same.

Clark. Superman. They coexisted, in one, single individual. Or maybe they didn't actually exist at all...

But here he was. The man underneath it all. The REAL man, continuing to stare at her, his eyes blazing...

And then, finally, he broke the gaze, closing his eyes and sucking in a deep breath through his pursed lips. And then he opened his eyes again, searching inside hers to try to grasp the full meaning of it all.

"I guess the first question is — how long have you known?" He was speaking slowly and tentatively, as if he barely believed any of this was happening at all. "Followed by — how did you find out — "

Lois cleared her throat. "Really," she interrupted. "That's the first question."

Another pause.

Clark's eyes were still wide and desperate, and then he reached out to her. "Lois — "

"Since this morning," she said. "As far as how I found out — it's complicated. I found — something. Something I clearly wrote; it was in my handwriting — but I had no memory of writing it. But when I saw it — when I saw it, I KNEW. I KNEW it was true. It was almost as if a curtain was lifted — just seeing those words made me realize the reality of it all. And then — there was no doubt."

"I... I see," Clark replied, swallowing heavily. "So I guess the next question is — how angry are you?"

She shook her head. "Oh, I'm not angry — "

Clark narrowed his eyes. His big, brown, Superman eyes... "Lois..."

But Lois just shrugged casually. "I'm not."

"Wait a minute," he said, the corners of his mouth curving into a wry grin. "A second ago I was talking to Lois Lane. I know she's around here somewhere, but clearly she's disappeared — "

Lois huffed. "Stop. I'm not angry! I'm just... I'm hurt."

She blinked as she glanced at him again.

"Oh," he said. "Look, Lois, I'm — "

"Sorry? Is that what you were going to say?" She scoffed under her breath. "Sure, I bet you are. Sorry I found out, maybe — "

"No, Lois, that's not true. You have no idea how long

I've wanted to tell you, how long I've been — "

"So why didn't you?"

He blinked several times, clearly taken aback by the question.

"You don't have an answer, do you? But seriously, Clark, why didn't you tell me, if you wanted to so badly? I mean, it's not as if I've told you EVERYTHING about me..."

Clark pinched the bridge of his nose. "I really did want to. But it just kept being so complicated. First you were infatuated with Superman, while at the same time completely ignoring me, and you can imagine how that made me feel — "

"What are you talking about? You ARE Superman!"

"And then there was the whole thing with Luthor. And — I don't know, Lois. I guess I was scared. I've never told anyone about this — anyone. I don't think you understand what that — "

"Are you kidding me??" Lois replied, jumping to her feet. "I don't understand? Clark, the things I've told you — trust me, I haven't told anyone those things either. And I mean — ANYONE. You think I just stroll around blabbing about what happened with Claude??"

"No, of course not — "

"I thought we had something special, Clark. I thought we had the kind of friendship where we didn't keep secrets — where we really knew each other. Where we trusted each other."

"Lois," he said, his eyes drooping. "We do..."

Clark pushed himself to his feet and then stood directly in front of her, clearly completely unsure of how to handle this. But she didn't care — it just wasn't her problem.

It was his.

"You know what," she said suddenly, throwing her hands in the air, "I changed my mind. I am mad. I'm VERY mad. In fact, I don't think I've ever been this mad in my entire life — "

And then, suddenly, he grabbed her by the wrist. Her eyes snapped upwards and met his. They stood like that for a moment, staring into each other's eyes with such incredible intensity that Lois could almost feel him boring straight through her, deep into the crevices of her brain and straight into her soul...

"Lois — "

Her name sounded heavy on his lips. Heavy — and loaded with so much emotion, so much meaning...

But ultimately — it just didn't matter.

She snatched her arm away from him, causing him to jump in surprise.

"I think you should go," she said abruptly.

He took a deep breath, his gaze continuing to hold steady and unwavering. "I... look, Lois — "

"No," she replied, her voice steady and firm. "Go. Now."

He didn't budge, almost as if he couldn't believe what she had asked of him.

"Clark, please."

He continued to stare at her, blinking several times —

And then, finally, his shoulders fell as he sighed in defeat.

He closed his eyes.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay, I’ll go.”

“I... look, Clark — ”

But he had already turned his back to her, and he was facing the door —

And then, suddenly, she started doubting herself and her instincts that had led her to throw him out in the first place.

She really didn’t know why she was doing it. She was mad — but it wasn’t even rational for her to feel that way. She knew that it wasn’t...

And then she was really second guessing herself. She opened her mouth, preparing to call his name...

But then, as she blinked, she felt a strong gust of wind blow across her face —

And when she opened her eyes again, he was gone.

The elevator doors opened, and the quiet refuge of the elevator was immediately replaced by the familiar, boisterous hustle and bustle of the world-famous Daily Planet newsroom. Clark usually thrived in this atmosphere — he loved it more than he could even put into words.

But today, instead of feeling as energized as he usually did, the pervasive noise and nonstop action made his stomach squeeze into tight knots.

And still, he found the courage to step off the elevator and onto the landing, where Perry spotted him immediately.

“Oh, Kent, it’s about time,” he said. “For Elvis’s sake, where the hell have you been?”

Obsessing about Lois, perseverating, really, and wondering if she would ever speak to him again, much less look him in the eye...

“Uh, sorry, Chief, I guess I slept in a little bit — ”

“Well, I guess I can look the other — oh, Lois!”

Clark’s head swerved towards Lois’s desk in the bullpen, where he watched her eyes snap up towards Perry. Clark noticed how she expertly avoided meeting his eye... That was no accident...

“What is it, Perry?”

“When you head out for your Metrogang investigation, take Kent with you — ”

Lois glared at him in response. “I don’t need a partner, Perry, I can take care of myself.”

Perry only had to glare at her in response.

And then, before Clark knew it, he was following Lois like a puppy, making sure to maintain a large enough distance that she wouldn’t feel threatened by his presence. They finally reached the elevator, and as they piled into it, he tried as hard as he could to focus on the motions of the newsroom, the colors, the sounds —

That is, until the doors finally slid closed in front of him, shutting them away from that world entirely —

And he was left staring at a blank, metallic door, with only his own, convoluted thoughts to distract him.

His thoughts — and the knowledge that he was alone in an elevator with Lois Lane.

Truthfully, he didn’t know how he was going to get through this assignment, and he was sure that Lois felt the same —

Even if she didn’t show it.

“You know what, this is stupid,” Lois suddenly said.

She pulled the emergency lever, and the elevator suddenly jolted to a stop.

“Huh?” Clark replied.

He was afraid to even glance at her. But then he peeked out of the corner of his eye —

And he realized that she was staring right at him.

Her expression was hard to read, and he assumed that it wasn’t an accident. Whatever she was feeling, she was putting in an exceeding amount of effort to cover it up, to push it deep inside her where he would never even get a glimpse of it.

“We’re professionals,” she continued. “We both are. We just need to do our jobs. I know I won’t have a problem with that — will you?” She narrowed her eyes at him, daring him to talk back.

“Oh... No, of course not,” he replied quickly.

“Good,” she said. She looked away, her lips pursed into a satisfied grin, and then she pushed the emergency lever back in. The elevator immediately came to life, its faint whirl barely discernible behind the walls.

“You know, you never fooled me,” she said.

Clark blinked. “What?”

“Your secret — I might not have figured it out, but I always knew who you really were... ”

“You did?”

“Oh sure,” she replied. “I always knew you were a hack from nowhere — I just didn’t realize how far away your nowhere really was... ”

Clark’s eyebrows shot up in response as he watched her. And then, slowly, she turned her head, meeting his eyes —

And she flashed him a wide grin.

“Krypton, Smallville — doesn’t really matter when it comes down to it. All that matters is that I was right.”

And then, despite everything, Clark felt a smile creep onto his face.

“I guess I shouldn’t be surprised,” he said. “Because you’re always right — right?”

“Oh... quiet, Smallville,” she said, rolling her eyes. “But anyway... you aren’t wrong about that.”

And then she smiled at him, her face lighting up as her eyes wrinkled at the corners, and it occurred to Clark how genuine her smile really was. Lois always wore her heart on her sleeve, and today was no different...

“So, since you’re always right,” he said, “I assume you have a plan.”

“A plan?”

“For investigating Metrogang, I mean.”

And then she reached out, patting him casually on his forearm. “Seriously, Smallville, do you really have to ask?” Lois rolled her eyes again, even more dramatically this time. “Just watch and learn, Clark, watch and learn — and you’ll see how a real reporter gets it done... ”

He grinned to himself as the elevator doors finally slid open and Lois grabbed his arm, pulling him through the crowds of people in the lobby.

It wasn’t exactly a perfect ending — not even close. But maybe it didn’t need to be.

Because really, when it came down to it, it was more of a beginning.

They traipsed around the city for a while, eventually

reaching a door at the base of a large, concrete building. Clark could feel Lois's excited energy as she reached for the doorknob, her hand shaking with excitement as she attempted to turn it.

"Clark," she said, suddenly exasperated. "The door is locked... Think you can do something about that?"

He glanced at her, noticing her watching him impatiently, tapping her foot on the ground...

She asked as if it were nothing. As if she were asking him to flip a light switch...

He paused, his eyes widening, as he could barely believe this was actually happening.

"Well??"

He gently pushed her aside, peering down at the lock, and then he subtly lowered his glasses. A jet of red light immediately shot out of his pupils, and the lock clicked open in response.

"Oh, thank you," she replied without thinking. "Now we can really get down to business."

Yes — it was definitely a new beginning...

A new existence, where they would finally be able to be partners — real partners — in a way they had never been able to be before.

As far as the rest of it — there would be plenty of time for that...

One day.

Lois grabbed his hand, pulling him alongside her and into the building, pummeling headfirst into another investigation that he knew would inevitably grow sour...

But whatever they faced — it would be together.

Clark grinned. He couldn't wait to see where his life would go next.

THE END