

Yours to Discover

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Rating: PG-13 for sexual situations

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Summary: Clark drags a reluctant Lois along to Canada for a journalism conference. Before they go, Clark works up the courage to ask Lois out on a first date while in Canada and she says yes! When Lois has a sudden change of heart about attending the conference, Clark assumes it's because of their date. But what if Lois has a secret of her own?

Story Size: 29,386 words (162Kb as text)

Author's Note: Well... here I am posting this on the last day's deadline for the ficathon because it took me this long to finish. Most people wrote awesome, short WaFFY/fluffy stories... apparently, I like to make it hard on myself. Really hard. To avoid potential minor spoilers, I'm putting the requirements and the story of this story at the end. ;) But, in short, this was written for Queen of the Capes for the 2021 Christmas Ficathon on the Lois and Clark Fanfic Message Boards.

Meanwhile, I would love to thank lovetvfan, AnnieM, and KathyB for their help in brainstorming and support. KathyB even wrote a few lines here and there!

And speaking of writing when I got stuck... lovetvfan is responsible for writing a large chunk of the date scene when I was stuck, and for that, I'm eternally grateful! She was also the bestest cheerleader (hand holder) and beta reader (co-author and enabler, really) a gal could ask for, and my go-to Canadian Consultant!

Lucky me actually had TWO fantastic Canadian consultants for this story. My other Canadian helper was LaraMoon! Thank you for your last-minute help! :D

In addition to the characters and such, I use dialogue from the show. I don't own anything; I just like to play with them.

I was also inspired by several songs, and I used some of the lyrics in the story because I just love them so much. I don't own those either. Here is the list of songs that I played non-stop while writing this story:

Hungry Eyes by Eric Carmen

Lost In Your Eyes by Debbie Gibson

Falling Fast by Avril Lavigne

Everything by John K

Can't Help Falling in Love by Elvis Presley

Can't Take My Eyes Off of You by Frankie Valli

Feels Like Home by Chantal Kreviazuk

I Guess I'm In Love by Clinton Kane

What Love Is by Tom Gregory

Superhero by Gary Barlow

I Fall So Deep by Gary Barlow

At Last by Etta James

Chapter 1

He was going to ask her. Soon. He just had to finish working up the nerve, and then find the ideal time... and the right words... In fact, he could even just ask her today. Not plan things and just blurt it out. Rip off the band-aid. He practiced under his breath, "Hey, Lois, will you go out with me?"

"Morning, Clark!" she said chipperly, coming up beside his desk. "Did you say something? I swear I heard my name, but I literally just got here. Traffic was the worst with all that snow and ice out there, but in brighter news, Dante had an extra latte from someone who didn't know how to order their drink properly. Ugh, stupid people. But your gain! Loads of sugar and chocolate stuff." She set the cup down on his desk and gestured vaguely. "Right up your alley."

Had she seen him startle? He hoped not. "Morning, Lois," he replied back, trying not to wince visibly at the fact that his voice had squeaked mildly. "T-thanks for the coffee!"

"You're welcome," she said brightly as she perched herself on the corner of his desk, dangerously close to the coffee she'd just set down. He did his best not to notice the fantastic view of her thigh she was giving him with her skirt just a touch too high.

She smiled broadly at him. Why was she in such a good mood this morning? Or no... she probably wanted something from him. A favor. Bad traffic, a free latte that wasn't for her, *and* she was late? A big favor. He grabbed his coffee so she wouldn't spill it, and his fingers accidentally glanced against the fabric of her nylons. He swallowed hard and took a sip of his coffee.

She cleared her throat softly. "So, partner..."

Here it comes. It was a favor.

"I was thinking... Perry doesn't really need *both* of us to go to the IAJ conference, wouldn't you say?" She smiled coquettishly and her voice had that certain pitch to it.

He hated it when she flirted playfully to try and manipulate him. His pulse raced a little without his permission. He couldn't pretend it didn't hurt his ego a little bit. And his heart. He held back a frown.

"Aaaand..." he prompted, not wanting to fall into a trap.

"I was thinking you could go, and I'll stay here and cover the local stuff. You're really the perfect fit for it, if you think about it. It's the *International* Association of Journalists, and you know more than a few languages, so you'll be able to network far better than I could. We can divide and conquer — Metropolis and Toronto — that's

what makes us a great team.”

“Being apart makes us a great team?” he asked, blatantly sidestepping her proposition.

She scrunched up her face at him and put her hand up on her hip. “We have complementary skills and can cover more ground when we work separately. And when we *are* together, we work flawlessly.”

She wasn’t wrong, but she was also just trying to butter him up. “Perry agrees with this assessment, your proposal to split up?”

“He will if we present a united front,” she said like it was the most logical conclusion.

“And I would do this because...?” he asked.

“Because I brought you coffee!” she cajoled, though failed to keep the whine out of her voice.

“Try again.” He couldn’t help but smile a little.

“Clark, please,” she whined. “I hate these conferences. They’re tedious and boring. You’re supposed to network, and I am *not* a people person. You know me. And it’s in Toronto. In *January*. Do you know how cold it gets there? Really cold. Really, really cold.” Her eyes pleaded with him, and he’d be lying if he said he didn’t secretly enjoy being the one with the power here.

“Gee, Lois. You’re really selling it there.”

She pulled a face at him and then quickly schooled it back to a smile as if she’d momentarily forgotten she was trying to persuade him to do something she didn’t want to do. He watched distractedly as she shifted her legs to slide down off his desk.

“Well, are you going to get up?” she said, waving a hand at him.

“Huh? Why?” Had he missed something while he’d been staring, or had it just been a Lois leap of logic?

“To go talk to Perry,” she said, and he could tell she was working hard to keep the impatience from her voice.

He stood and followed her blindly. How... how had he managed to lose that verbal sparring match when he’d been the one with all the cards? He sighed as they made their way to Perry’s office. He *really* needed to ask her out already before he ended up agreeing to wash her car twice a month for a year or something equally ridiculous.

“Perry?” Lois asked as she knocked on the frame of his open office door.

“Lois, Clark! Ah, good! I wanted to talk to you about the travel arrangements for the conference coming up.”

“Actually, Chief, that’s what we wanted to talk about, too!” she said cheerfully.

We, huh? He wondered how he’d been so squarely thrown under the bus.

Perry raised an eyebrow at Clark as if he knew exactly what was coming, and he gestured for them to take a seat in the chairs opposite his desk.

Clark groused inwardly as they both sat. He actually liked conferences, but he’d been looking forward to spending that time with Lois, not flying solo.

“Let’s hear it, Lois,” Perry said cautiously.

“Clark and I have decided it makes more sense if he goes to the conference, and I stay here and cover our beat.”

“You have, have you?” Perry asked and looked from Lois to Clark.

Clark offered up his best noncommittal smile at Perry, not wanting to get caught out by Lois, but also not wanting to throw his partner under the bus entirely. Because that wouldn’t be a very partnerly thing to do. Besides, he knew Perry could see right through her pretense. She knew it too. They all knew it. But they played their parts anyway. Perry always fared better than Clark did, for obvious reasons.

“Yes,” she continued on with more confidence than anyone ought to have a right to. “Whoever is gone for the conference will be gone for nearly a week, and that’s quite a long time to go without either of your best reporters. What if some big story hits while we’re gone?” She was still going. Had she breathed yet? “Plus, you and Mr. Stern are always concerned about the budget lately, and think of the money we’d be saving the Planet if you divided your resources — me here and Clark in Toronto — not to mention the travel costs and attendance fees.”

“I see,” said Perry, his look inscrutable. “Well, you certainly make some good points.”

“Exactly! I knew you’d see it my way,” Lois said confidently as she started to stand. She was assuming the deal, a tried-and-true sales tactic, and it often worked for her, especially with sources. But it wasn’t going to work this time, and Clark could see on her face the moment she realized it. All Perry had done was raise a finger.

Her butt fell back to the chair, and she folded her arms across her chest. “You don’t need both of us there, Perry.”

“Well, last I checked, I was still the editor, and it’s up to me to make these decisions,” Perry said, managing as always to sound authoritative yet marginally sympathetic to Lois’ complaints. He raised a finger again to forestall her protests. “Now, I’ll not only need you there for the networking, but this year, there’s a special track for team reporting.”

“But, Perry, we already work great together!” she cried. “Don’t we, Clark?” She swatted his chest with the back of her hand.

“We do make a great team already, Chief,” Clark couldn’t help but add even though he wasn’t aiming to go to this conference alone.

“I can’t deny that, but there will be more seasoned and established teams there running the workshops and sessions, and it can’t hurt to see what you can learn from them.”

Lois humphed in her seat, crossing her arms again.

“Your sentiments are duly noted,” Perry said. “Now, the other bit of business to cover is the travel arrangements. So, it turns out that there’s another big to-do going on at the convention center at the same time, a fan expo or entertainment something or other. Because of that, we had trouble securing more than one room. I’m sorry, you’ll have to share a room, but they did make sure it has two beds.”

He’d heard her gasp, almost inaudibly, but it’d been there. And now her heartrate had accelerated. She was... he could only assume she was having feelings about sharing a room with him, and it was driving him crazy that he couldn’t tell *what* kind of feelings. The thought that it might be the same kind of feelings he was having filled him with equal parts excitement and fear. This wasn’t a good idea, was it? For two people who had just started... well, *would*

start dating... hopefully... as soon as he managed to ask her out?

"Clark?" Perry asked.

"Huh?" He did his best not to look as panicked as he felt and tried to recall how much of the conversation he'd missed. "Sorry, Perry," he said, recovering himself quickly. "What was that?"

"Did you have any questions about the conference or arrangements before you two get yourselves back to work?"

"Uh, no, sir. I'm good." He *really* needed to focus better at work; thinking about asking Lois out was driving him to distraction.

"All right, you two, skedaddle," he said. "And close the door on your way out, will you?"

Clark got up and awkwardly followed Lois out of the office and shut the door behind them. On the way back to their desks, he was checking again on her heart rate and also trying to gauge just how mad she might be at him.

"So much for our united front," she grumbled, but there was no real anger behind her words. More of just a mild irritation. "I knew it was a lost cause." She sighed as she slumped down into her desk chair.

He was relieved that she didn't seem to be at all mad at him. That could only bode well for Operation: Ask Lois Out.

"C'mon, Lois. It won't be so bad. You'll see." Clark tried to cheer her up. "I spent a few months in Toronto during my travels, so you've got your own personal tour guide." He flashed an endearing grin her way.

"I'm sure you're just full of useful facts," she quipped. "Go ahead, hit me with some trivia. I've got to see if you're a good fit for the job." She looked up at him and gave him a teasing grin.

"Wait a minute! I'm offering my services for free, and you're making me interview?" he asked in mock indignation.

"You bet your sweet chumpy I am!" She laughed at their own private joke, and his heart flip flopped. "What's your most interesting fact?" she asked.

He made a show of sitting down in her guest chair, smoothing his tie out, and adjusting his glasses. "That's an excellent question, Ms. Lane. I'll have you know that Yonge Street in Toronto is the longest street in the world at 1,896 kilometers, or 1,178 miles long.

"Hmm, semi-interesting. Got anything else?"

"Well... speaking of Yonge Street, there is a law that prohibits dragging a dead horse down it, but only on Sundays."

"I..." She opened and closed her mouth a few times, and he gave himself a mental fist pump that he'd made her speechless.

Then she finally recovered. "Well, that is... definitely more interesting, if a little morbid. I guess seeing as you're the only applicant, and... you're pretty easy on the eyes, you're hired."

His pulse quickened and he wasn't entirely sure if he was breathing. Had she seriously just given him the once-over? "I... uh... thank you for this opportunity, Ms. Lane. You won't regret it." He stood and shook her hand, no doubt while grinning like a fool, and then made a hasty

retreat to his desk.

So, yeah. Soon. He would ask her soon. Not today. But very, very soon.

Clark stepped out of the elevator onto the newsroom floor. This was his second favorite part of the morning. Letting the familiar and comfortable din of the newsroom fall over him. He knew it wouldn't ever quite feel like the first time he'd set foot on this floor of the Daily Planet, the tingle of excitement and the jangle of nerves as he'd arrived for his interview at the greatest newspaper in the world. But it still felt pretty magical. The clacking of keyboards, gentle clamor of conversation all around, and the soft rhythm of her heartbeat.

He strolled down the ramp into the bullpen, and he smiled and waved at Lois as he passed her desk and headed for the coffee station. He grabbed their mugs and made their coffees before heading over to her desk.

This was his most favorite part of the morning, that moment when she looked up at him, glanced eagerly at her coffee mug, and smiled broadly at him. "Good morning, Clark," she said before taking a sip of her coffee. "Thanks."

"You're welcome." He went ahead and took a seat with her at her desk because he knew they had to go over their story notes to leave for Eduardo in case there was any movement on them while they were in Canada.

She took another sip of coffee. "Mmm. You know, it's probably just my imagination, but I'd swear my coffee is always the perfect temperature when you make it for me. Tastes better, too."

He shifted a little uncomfortably in his chair and straightened his tie. "I'm glad you like it."

She smiled again at him, holding his gaze for just a little bit longer than she usually did, and he felt a flush of warmth throughout his body. "Are you all packed and ready for tomorrow?" she asked.

"Yep," he answered cheerfully. He wasn't, but it wouldn't take him more than a minute tonight.

"Just let me check my email, and then we can do a final run through our notes?" she said.

He nodded and sat back, relaxed because today was going to be a good day. Yesterday had been a good day, too. And tomorrow? He got to spend all day with Lois, not working.

He wondered if she was still upset about having to go. She hadn't complained even once the last few days, and she seemed to be in a better mood in general. Which was just fine with him. It would make it easier for him to ask her out... whenever that would be. Oh, why hadn't he worked up the nerve yet?

After another moment, she was finished with her task. "I'm looking forward to this next week! I think we'll learn a lot." She had that look on her face, the one where her eyes crinkled a bit and her smile lit up her whole face.

Wait, what had she said? He gave her a puzzled look. "Lois, I thought you were dreading this. You've always said the IAJ is a bunch of stuffy snobs who wouldn't know real journalism if it bit them in the a —"

"I said no such thing!" she interrupted. "Besides, they've changed in the last few years," she said by way of

explanation as she waved her hand casually in the air.

“You said that *last week*.” He raised an eyebrow at her. “You know... when Perry ‘practically forced you’ to go to the conference?” He put up air quotes to remind her of her slightly over-dramatic response.

“Well, they’ve changed a lot in the last week!” she insisted, narrowing her eyes and tilting her head at him.

He pursed his lips, trying to think of what exactly to say because he did *not* want to be the one responsible for ruining Lois’ good mood. “Apparently so...” he trailed off noncommittally.

“I just changed my mind, okay?” she said defiantly. “Maybe I’m just looking forward to spending time alone with my partner.” She practically humped and turned slightly to get the folder with their notes for Eduardo.

Was she? Really? She was putting on a mildly defensive air, but he knew that was usually to mask her real emotions. “I am too,” he said softly and smiled at her when she turned back to face him.

He could tell she tried slightly to fight it, but she smiled at him despite herself. And then any trace of animosity, feigned or otherwise, was gone. “Get this,” she said excitedly, “there’s a workshop called Partners On Crime: Successful Strategies for Investigative Journalism Teams. Oh, and *plus* Mariane Theuriau is going to be there, and she would make a great addition to my Women in Journalism series if I can snag an interview with her!”

“That does sound promising. I’m glad you’re actually looking forward to things now!” She really did sound interested. Excited, even. Though Clark was still a little dubious of the rapid 180 on her feelings about the conference. He wondered idly what her feelings on dates were. Specifically, dates with him. “Maybe we could ask Perry for an extra day there, and we could go see Niagara Falls together?”

He saw a flash of uncertainty on her face before she smiled at him again. Oh, no. Had that sounded like a date? He hadn’t meant it to be! “I’ve just always wanted to see it,” he hedged, trying to backpedal the date sound of things. He really needed to ask her out already so he wouldn’t be so distracted. “It’ll be right there, so close. On the right side and everything.”

“I’ll have you know there’s nothing wrong with the New Troy side of it. Right side,” she mocked. “Everyone knows the New Troy side is the right side.”

Clark held his hands up in defeat. “Okay, you win. We’ll go visit the wrong side. In Canada.”

“Sure, sounds good, partner,” she agreed, smiling at him warmly.

And there was something in the way she’d said partner, unlike the hundreds of times before...

“Lois, will you go out with me?” he blurted out. Ohhh. He hadn’t meant to do it right then. She’d just looked so perfect and beautiful and she’d smiled at him again for the seventh time this morning.

“I mean... there was this restaurant in Toronto that I really wanted to take you to, but we could do it as just friends if you wanted.” He could hear her say something, but he was spiraling a little, so it couldn’t have been a yes. Just his imagination. “I probably shouldn’t have asked right

before a business trip, during the business trip. Oh, what was I thi — ”

Her hand on his arm stopped him and stopped his breathing, and he looked at her and fell into her eyes. He’d never seen this look before, not quite. A mix of nervous and giddy, and her voice was soft, breathy, and a little higher pitched than usual. “Yes.”

“Really?” he choked out.

She nodded and ducked her head down, smiling at him from beneath her lashes as a slight blush crept over her cheeks. “I’d love to, Clark.”

Chapter 2

“Twelve dollars a day, Clark. Twelve dollars. A day. Because we’re not married. Can you believe that?!” Lois exclaimed as they both wheeled their suitcases towards the rental car. “I mean... would they have asked for our marriage license? We could have just lied and told them we were married. How would they have known?”

“But that would have been dishonest.”

“Clark, twelve dollars a day is dishonest! Highway robbery.” She scoffed and groaned audibly. “What’s the point of having an assistant make travel arrangements for us if they don’t make *full* arrangements? How did they expect us to get around?”

Clark winced as he remembered when Scott in finance had asked about the rental car and whether or not they needed to pay extra for an additional driver. He should have known better than to have himself as the primary driver. Then again, considering her penchant for road rage...

“Uh... that might be my fault,” he said as they reached the small sedan outfitted with snow tires for the season. “I told him we didn’t need to spend the money on an additional driver since we’re really only driving from the airport to the hotel and back.”

She glowered at him from the passenger side of the car. “Well, then maybe they should have just booked us a cab or something.”

“Maybe that was more expensive?” he tried.

“Maybe.” She shrugged. “But why were *you* listed as the driver and not me? I always drive. You don’t even have a car!”

“Sorry, that’s my fault too.” he said, wincing and throwing up his hands in surrender. “I just assumed I would drive since I’m more familiar with the area.”

“Clark!” She gave an aggravated sigh. “If I didn’t know you so well, I’d accuse you of male chauvinism, needing to drive and be in control.”

“But you do know me so well, yeah?” he said, a hint of amusement in his voice, as he placed his suitcase and messenger bag in the back seat and shut the door.

“Of course. I’m your partner. I’m sure I know you better than anyone, save for your parents,” she said confidently as she tossed her suitcase in the backseat along with her briefcase.

“Care to make a small wager on that, Lois?” he wagged his eyebrows at her over the roof of the sedan.

She grinned back at him. “Always,” she said, getting in the car and then closing the door as she sat.

He chuckled as he got in himself and sat down, then

closed the door and said, “I take that back. It’s never wise to bet against Lois Lane.”

“Oh, see? I knew you were smart!” she flashed a wide grin at him and swatted his arm playfully, clearly some of her irritation having dissipated.

“Well, my mom did have me tested... ” he teased.

“I’ll just bet she did.” She laughed and his heart danced a little.

They both buckled up, sitting in a comfortable silence for a minute while Clark adjusted the mirrors and seat. Lois opened the glove compartment and rifled around for a second before producing a map.

“Ah ha!” she said. “Need me to navigate?”

“Would you be mad if I told you I memorized the route already?”

“Yes. Yes, I would be mad.” She tossed the map back in the glove box and then crossed her arms over her chest. “It was all in French, anyway,” she said with a pout.

He stayed silent for a moment, not sure if she was actually mad or still in a teasing mood. “How about I tell you some trivia instead? *We are* finally in Canada now, so I should be dutifully fulfilling my tour guide role.”

She was scowling, but he was pretty sure he’d caught the hint of a smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. “Let’s hear what you’ve got.” She gestured for him to begin.

“Well, the provincial slogan of Ontario is *Yours to Discover*, and it’s been on the license plates since the eighties.”

“That’s fascinating, Clark.” She uncrossed her arms and smoothed her hands over her jeans. “What, did you swallow the travel guide? Try again.”

“So, we’re going to be on Highway 401, which is the largest multi-lane highway in the world at 16 lanes wide,” he cited as he started backing out of the parking space and heading out of the parking garage.

“Sounds like you memorized a lot more than the route,” she said dryly.

Okay, so she was still a tiny bit mad. “I’m sorry about the additional driver thing, Lois. I thought you’d be more comfortable with me driving anyway, since this 401 reportedly turns into a parking lot of a highway daily. I shouldn’t have assumed.”

“Thank you,” she said quietly. He saw a small smile when he glanced over. “And it’s fine, really. You’re probably more used to all the kilometers and French all over the place anyway.”

He chuckled lightly as he pulled to a stop behind another car also waiting to exit.

“Like ‘sortie’. What the hell is a sortie?” She gestured towards the sign just ahead.

“Lo-is,” he said in mock admonishment.

“Okay, fine. I’ll stop complaining.”

He pulled up when the car in front of them moved. Then he raised his eyebrows, giving her a doubtful look while trying unsuccessfully not to smile.

“I’ll *try* to stop complaining,” she amended.

“That’s all I can ask for,” he said, and he grinned widely at her.

“Besides,” she said as Clark pulled out onto the 401.

“This highway can’t really be as bad as everyone says it is. I’m sure they’re exaggerating — oh, wow, this is big!”

“Yeah, and now I have to weave my way through this mess to find our exit.”

Lois was silent for the next 15 minutes or so while he worked to navigate his way through far too many cars and far too many lanes to find their exit to Gardiner Expressway. He didn’t care for driving so much in the first place, let alone in the snow, so that had been stressful to say the least. And while he hadn’t planned on taking Lois’ option to drive away from her, he was quite glad that she hadn’t been the one driving given her propensity for road rage. Especially since it seemed that Gardiner Expressway was also a parking lot.

“I get it now,” she said, finally breaking the silence.

“What’s that?” he asked, relieved to finally be on the road that eventually led to the hotel. Once the gridlock moved.

“Why Canadians are so polite. I get it now.”

“Care to enlighten me?” he asked, amused to find out where this was headed.

“Well, it’s obvious, isn’t it? They save up all their rage and all their anger for when they are stuck in traffic, and then all bets are off — Hey! Buddy!” Lois leaned forward and shook her fist at the window in the SUV’s direction. “Your signal broken or are you just blind?” she yelled and Clark winced a little at her volume. “He just cut us off! Did you see that? Why didn’t you honk?”

“I was busy avoiding hitting him. Plus, it wouldn’t have accomplished anything.”

“Clark, you have to honk to let them know they did something wrong,” she said, exasperated and falling back in her seat again.

“Oh, I’m sure they knew they did something wrong and simply didn’t care.” He shrugged.

“Ughh! That’s so frustrating.” She blew out a hard breath.

“Yeah, it can be,” he agreed.

“You know what else is frustrating?” she said irritably.

“I’m sure you’ll tell me?”

“Your eternal optimism and good cheer,” she grumped.

“Oh.” He felt his heart sink a little.

But then she put her hand over his on the shift stick. “But it’s also one of the things I love — like best about you.”

“Oh,” he said again, a little breathless this time.

“I’m sorry, Clark. I just *really* hate traffic and people who drive like jerks.”

“I know. It’s okay.” He really wanted to turn his hand over and hold hers, but he wasn’t sure if he could or not. If he should. There was a whole new set of rules and boundaries now that he had asked her out and she’d said yes.

“Man, this parking lot highway claim is no joke. Should I try to find some music or something on the radio?” she said. She lifted her hand to turn the dial, and his skin still tingled where she’d been touching him.

“Why don’t you distract me with some trivia of your own?” he suggested, wishing she’d put her hand back where she’d had it.

“Okay,” she agreed and dropped her hand to her lap.

She thought for a second. “Well, I don’t know any Canadian trivia, but I can do Superman trivia?” she half shrugged and gave him a sheepish grin.

He let out a somewhat strangled chuckle, and he saw her out of the corner of his eye tilt her head at him in question, maybe wondering if he’d managed to choke on something. “Sure,” he said, hating that his voice had squeaked a little. He just hoped nothing too awkward would come up.

“Well, let’s see...” she started, scrunching her face a little as she thought. He loved that face. “Oh! I actually *do* know some Canadian trivia... sort of.” She laughed lightly and then continued, “Did you know that some people speculate that Superman is half-Canadian?”

What? He chuckled at the ridiculousness of the idea, not entirely sure he believed her. “Really? I hardly think that’s true!”

“I didn’t say I believed it! Just that some people do. Like a harmless conspiracy theory?”

“So, do you think it’s because he’s so polite?” he joked.

Lois laughed. “I’ll bet that’s exactly why.” He loved hearing her laugh.

“So what’s the next piece of trivia you’ve got, Ms. Superfan?”

“Well, Superman can lift more than 4 million pounds, probably much more. Talk about a bench press, am I right?”

“Wow! Seriously?” He’d had no idea. “How... Where did you learn that?”

He peeked over to see her reaction, and she seemed rather pleased that she’d shocked *him* with trivia for once.

“Let me guess, you can’t reveal your source?” he ribbed.

“Yes, no... it’s nothing, really. Just some ancillary research I did when writing that long-term follow-up piece on Prometheus and the International Space Station.”

“Oh? I don’t remember reading that fact in your article.” Traffic moved slightly, so he inched forward.

“You read that?” she asked, sounding slightly surprised.

“I read all your work... partner,” he said softly, smiling over at her briefly before turning his eyes back to traffic. “It was an excellent retrospective. With the perfect balance of facts and human interest,” he said earnestly, glancing over to give her a warm smile.

“Oh. Thanks.” She ducked her head a little and smoothed a lock of hair behind her ear. “I think some of your talent for writing the touchy-feely stuff has rubbed off on me over the last year or so.”

She looked adorably sexy when she did that. “Then we’re even, because I’ve been learning from you since I started.”

He caught the small hitch in her breath when he’d said it and wondered briefly if his voice had come out too ardent or husky, but then part of him couldn’t bring himself to care because he didn’t want to hide his feelings from Lois. Not anymore, now that she’d agreed to go out with him.

It was silent for another moment before she spoke. “See? That’s why we make such a great team.”

“It is,” he agreed softly, though he couldn’t resist teasing her a little. “Even though you said last week being apart made us a great team.”

“*You* said that,” she laughed. “*I* said we had complementary skills.”

“You’re right as usual.” He inched the car forward again.

“Of course I am,” she said, clearly pleased with his acquiescence. Then, she added, “So, are you going to buy me coffee tonight as kind of an almost-first date?”

His heart leapt with hope and a tiny bit of apprehension. “Really?” *She* was asking *him*. On a date. He’d never been happier to be stuck in traffic.

“Why not? I heard the waterfront is really pretty this time of year. And if we are going to freeze our butts off, I can’t think of anyone I would rather do it with.” She smiled, her eyes crinkling, and he caught a glimpse of a blush.

“I can’t think of anyone I’d rather freeze my butt off with, either,” he said. If he’d known their banter would change like this, make him feel giddy and exhilarated, he would have asked her out so much sooner.

“Besides,” she continued, “it will give me an idea of what kind of date you’ll be.”

“Well, if all you want is coffee, that sets the bar rather low, doesn’t it?”

“Well, I do also expect scintillating conversation,” she said playfully.

“Then you’re in luck. I’ve got plenty more trivia to share with you.” He grinned and tapped his temple.

“Nice try, Kent.” She swatted lightly at his arm. “I’m not sure that counts as scintillating.”

He wished she’d touch his hand again. It would be too awkward to reach over and offer to hold her hand, right? “I guess we’ll find out,” he said a bit lamely, already his conversational skills starting to wobble.

“So, where are you taking me?” she pressed.

“What? Um... the hotel?” Traffic was finally starting to clear a bit. They’d probably be there soon.

“No, for our date tomorrow, silly,” she clarified.

“Ohh.” He chuckled self-consciously. “Is it all right if I surprise you?” He hoped so. He wanted to dazzle her.

“Yeah, that’s okay.” She ducked her head slightly and blushed, but then added with a flirty confidence, “So, you’re going to pick me up at seven?”

He laughed lightly. “I’ll be at your door at seven,” he said, noticing that his voice was sounding a bit husky again.

“But my coffee date first tonight?”

“Absolutely.”

Chapter 3

They’d finally gotten to the hotel, checked in, and unloaded their stuff in their room. It’d been a little awkward to enter the modest hotel room and be reminded that they would be cohabitating for nearly a week. But it’s not like they’d be staying in the room all day and night as they had when they’d been undercover in the honeymoon suite.

He *really* needed to keep that memory locked up tight this trip. Just the idea of their fast-approaching first date, and the thought that there was a good chance they’d have their first kiss — first *real* kiss — was giving him a heady feeling. He was already driven to distraction by the flirting they’d done in the car. Their banter had crossed solidly into flirting territory, and his nerves were all delightfully tingly.

He was sitting on the bed, thumbing through the hotel's small guide to the amenities and local businesses, waiting for Lois to freshen up. There was a Tim Horton's within walking distance of their hotel, and he figured it would be their best bet for coffee.

She came out of the bathroom and grabbed her coat to put back on. She picked up her purse off her bed and turned to him. "You ready?" she said, smiling and taking her gloves out of her pockets.

"You look great," he said.

"I didn't do anything but splash some cool water on my face and touch up my makeup," she said, pushing her hair behind her ear and letting out that breathy sounding laugh she made when she was feeling a little nervous or unsure.

"Well, you still look great," he said again, this time feeling a touch breathless.

"Thank you." She paused for a moment to stare at him before diverting her gaze. "Well, I guess we should go."

He held the door open for her, letting her go first, a gentle hand on the small of her back, before he followed her into the hall and fell into step next to her as they made their way to the elevators. Once inside the closed elevator, it was as if the small area was containing their combined nerves, the air charged with electricity.

The feeling seemed to follow them as they crossed the lobby and exited the hotel. He didn't feel the chill hit, but he noticed her shiver slightly next to him as they walked into the cold winter air of early evening. She grabbed his arm suddenly to stop him and he turned back towards her.

"Are things weird, Clark? They seem weird." She looked about as jittery as he felt... and they hadn't even gotten to the coffee shop yet. "I don't want them to be weird," she said with an almost excited desperation.

He smiled nervously, watching their breath swirl and cloud in the air. "Maybe not so much weird as... different... But hopefully in a good way?" he ventured.

Her breathy exhale billowed above and between them. "Yeah, I think so," she replied in a small voice. "But you feel it, too? The weir — the different?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I do," he assured her, and then reached for a gloved hand. "C'mon... your coffee date awaits." He gestured ahead of them in the direction of the coffee shop.

It was just before sunset and some of the surrounding buildings were lighting up with varying shades of white and amber lighting. They made their way across the snow-lined walkways and closer to the waterfront.

"Here we are," he announced as they stopped in front of a modern-looking shop nestled between some other specialty shops. There was a shallow awning with vertical yellow and brown stripes, a bright white oval near the top with red, handwritten-style script saying Tim Horton's.

He opened the door for her and she ducked in before him and he followed. She took her gloves off and unbuttoned her coat as she looked up at the menu board. "Oh, Clark, look. They have soup and sandwiches, too. We should probably grab an early dinner while we're out."

"Sure, anything you want." He glanced up at the board, too, quickly scanning and deciding on the old fashioned chili. He shed his gloves as well and grabbed his wallet out

of his slacks, waiting for Lois to decide before they approached the counter to order. "Ready?" he asked.

She glanced at his wallet. "I can't let you pay for all of it, Clark. You only agreed to take me out for coffee." She started to reach for her purse, but he put a hand on hers gently to stop her.

"How about I pay for the coffee and the Planet pays for dinner?" He grinned at her.

"Oh, right," she said. "I all but forgot we were on a work trip."

She might not have realized what she'd said, but Clark couldn't help but delight that he'd somehow managed to drive Lois Lane to distraction. "For the record," he said, "I wouldn't have minded either way."

She smiled warmly at him. "And for the record, I wouldn't have let you get away with it." She patted his shoulder through his winter coat. "After you." She swept her hand

ahead of her for him to order first.

He told the cashier his order and then stepped aside to let Lois order her chicken noodle soup and bagel combo.

Clark paid for everything, asking and graciously thanking the cashier for splitting the receipt. Lois found them a table and teased him about having a politeness war with the Canadian behind the counter. She took off her coat and hung it over her chair before sitting down, and he did the same while trying to act indignant.

"I don't think you can technically have a *war* using politeness, Lois."

"Ah, see, *now* it feels like work because you're editing my copy.

He laughed heartily. "But you still think I'm overly polite?" he nudged.

"Forget Superman, are you sure *you're* not half Canadian?" she kidded.

He tensed briefly. "I'm *sure* we're both not Canadian," he hedged with a grin and a chuckle, feeling a little uncomfortable even though she'd just been teasing anyway.

It wasn't long before they had their food at their table and were both digging in, both having forgotten how long it'd been since they'd last eaten. When she was finished, Lois pushed her plate away and declared herself stuffed.

"So you don't want to try a Timbit?" he asked, scooting the small box of donut holes towards her.

Her eyes widened and zoned in on the chocolate one he'd ordered just for her. She picked it up with her thumb and finger and examined it, some of the whitish glaze flaking off as she did so. "What *is* a Timbit anyway?"

"Well, according to the story painted up on the wall behind you, Tim Horton was a hockey player who died in a car accident and..." he trailed off at the face she made.

She put the Timbit back on the plate gingerly. "I'll pass, thanks."

"Lo-is, it's only a chocolate donut hole," he insisted with a laugh.

"But why would they name a little... well, you know? Is that one of the things we're supposed to *discover* donut holes made of bits of dead hockey player?"

He laughed. "I think the more pressing question is what Lois Lane is doing turning down chocolate," he teased. He

picked up the Timbit and danced it in front of her face, intending to taunt her with it before he popped it in his own mouth. But then she stole his breath when she opened her mouth and closed her eyes in silent invitation for him to feed it to her.

He felt his mouth go dry, and he could see and feel his hand trembling slightly as he reached to place it in her mouth. She closed her mouth around it as he pulled his fingers away.

“Mmmm.” She opened her eyes and brought her hand up to cover her mouth as she chewed, seemingly oblivious to the exact effect she was having on him. Her hand dropped as she finished chewing, and his eyes flitted to the small flecks of glaze that remained on her lips. His heart raced. His whole body was on alert, and he about died when her tongue darted out to catch up the rest of the glaze.

Then she looked up and... whatever look had been on his face made her blush furiously. He realized his mouth was hanging open, and he shut it. He tried to think of something to say, but he was stuck for words.

She cleared her throat and tugged at the bottom of her shirt to straighten it. “Um, those are... really good donut holes.” She let out a breathy, self-conscious laugh and grinned, and he found himself doing the same.

“I... it’s getting late,” he said, not even looking at his watch. “I guess we should go back to the room? Uh... I mean... I don’t mean... I just...” He let out a breath. “Want to go for a walk on the waterfront?” He was not going to survive the night.

She nodded. “Yeah, I’d like that.”

He quickly gathered all their wrappers and trash went to put it in the waste bin. When he came back, she was picking up her coat off her chair. He motioned to take it from her. “Here, let me.” She smiled and handed it to him, and he held it up for her to slide her arms in easily.

“Thanks,” she said with a shy smile and in a soft voice that did nothing to calm his riotous libido.

“Of course,” he said. He grabbed his own coat and put it on, and they both put their gloves back on. He found his hand gravitating instinctively to the small of her back to guide her to the door and then through it when he opened it. This, unlike all previous times, it felt a bit charged where his hand was putting gentle pressure against her coat so his hand could make contact.

They walked a short ways, hands in their coat pockets, to the nearest section of the waterfront. It was dusk, the sun just finishing its descent for the night, and the deep pastel colors reflecting off Lake Ontario were stunning. They seemed to glint and sparkle against those parts of the lake that were frozen this time of year. The boardwalk was lined with tall but young, currently leafless trees, alternating intervals with vintage-styled lamp posts that glowed faintly in the dusk of the fading sunset.

Next to him, Lois gasped. “Oh, Clark, look how beautiful it is!”

“It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?” he said, awed and grateful that he was getting to spend this moment with her, that she’d said yes, that this was the start of something wonderful.

As they walked, Clark marveled at the magical feeling

of it all, the snow drifts on either side of the boardwalk adding a damper to the sound of people milling about and the distant sound of kids having a snowball fight. There was a dream-like quality to everything, and then Lois threaded her arm through his and huddled in closer to him. His heart sang. If she knew how much this moment meant to him...

She looked up at him and smiled. “Thanks for the coffee, Clark,” she said, sounding like she was thanking him for a whole lot more than the coffee.

“You’re welcome, Lois,” he said softly. They were approaching a bench that faced the water where the railing was lower and the view was mostly unobstructed. “Did you want to sit?” he asked, not wanting the evening to end yet.

“Sure,” she said, nodding.

The bench must have been recently used because it was free of snow, so he took a second to warm the wooden slats with quick zap before they sat down.

She unhooked her arm and sat in the center of the bench. He sat down right next to her, feeling mostly confident that sitting this closely would be okay. All the best friend boundaries he’d carefully cultivated over the last year and a half had all but disappeared, and now everything was a little uncertain, but exciting all the same.

“Oh, wow, it’s not freezing like I expected,” she said, clearly pleasantly surprised. He smiled, secretly pleased with himself. “Heated benches. These Canadians sure think of everything!”

He chuckled lightly, suddenly feeling a touch of nervousness and guilt at the small deceit. He found himself at a loss for what to say, what to talk about, but she didn’t seem to mind for the moment.

A moment later, she broke their silence. “How about some more trivia, farmboy?”

He grinned. “Sure thing. Lemme see...” he said, trying to recall any facts at all about Toronto. “The province of Ontario was named after Lake Ontario, though many people think it’s the other way around.”

She arched an eyebrow at him. “Interesting, but I think you can do better.”

He laughed lightly. “Okay. Hmm...” He put his gloved finger up to his chin and pursed his lips in exaggerated thought. “Toronto is home to North America’s only castle, Casa Loma.”

“There’s no way that’s true!” she cried, shifting to face him and thwapping him on the chest.

“It’s true! That’s what I heard from a very reliable tour guide,” he insisted, throwing his hands up in defense.

“This very reliable tour guide isn’t *you* is it? Because your reliability, as far as your current employer is concerned, is still under question,” she said, eyeing him dubiously.

Shoot. Was some of his trivia inaccurate or outdated? “I’m under obligation to protect my source.”

She eyed him skeptically. “Mmm hmm. Likely story.”

Time for diversionary tactics. “What makes you say it’s not true?”

“I spent half a year in Ireland when I was an exchange student. I *know* castles,” she declared, shrugging her shoulders and emphasizing words with her hands. “And I’m telling you that there can’t only be *one* castle in *all* of North

America!”

“Well, I guess we’ll have to just wait until we can research this one, won’t we?” Clark challenged, feeling slightly off balance for being wrong, he assumed, but also because playfully sparring with Lois just felt different now. Sexier? Oh, God. He was in trouble.

“Fine, we’ll put a pin in that one. Other than the fact that, even *if* true, it was definitely not weird enough.”

“Oh, well you didn’t tell me I was going for weird. I’ve got weird. Let’s see... Well, a few hours’ drive southwest of here, there’s the Mapleton Taxidermy and Cheese Store. You can go in and get a mounted deer head and some cheese curds to snack on for the way home.”

“I’m sorry, the what now?” She laughed heartily, hitting his thigh with her hand a few times to punctuate her laughter. “Tell me you’re joking. You’re joking, right?”

“It’s true!” he exclaimed. He chuckled along, her laughter contagious.

“Okay, I’ll give you that one. It sounds just weird enough and Canadian enough to be true.”

“This is your precise and analytical approach to trivia approval? It sounds a little suspect to me.”

She threw up her hands this time, closing her eyes briefly and shaking her head. “Hey, if you don’t wanna take the win, that’s on you.”

“I’ve already won,” he said, his voice suddenly earnest and husky.

She’d been smiling during their jesting, but now her face was serious, searching his face for something he could only guess at and hope she found. Her eyes flitted to his lips briefly, and he knew his had darted at hers at least twice.

Oh, how he wanted to kiss her. Should he? Did she want to kiss him?

It was colder now that the sun had set. Though he couldn’t feel it, it was evident in the plumes of their breath intermingling between them as the seconds stretched on.

She looked down at her hands in her lap, and the spell was broken. “I guess it’s getting late and pretty cold. We should probably head back.”

He nodded and smiled. “Of course,” he said, standing and offering a hand to help her up from the bench.

She gave him a grateful smile and took his hand readily. Any disappointment he might have felt vanished when she lifted his arm to drape it over her shoulders and snuggled close into his body. He squeezed her tightly for just a moment before they started walking back to their hotel.

They didn’t speak as they made their way back, but Clark was grateful to find that the silence between them was still relatively comfortable. He didn’t think he’d scared her, exactly, with his husky declaration, but he was definitely sensing apprehension from her.

He supposed it was only fair, he thought, as he paused to open one of the main lobby doors. He let his hand slip down from her shoulders to the small of her back as she went through the door. He’d been thinking about dating her, kissing her... much longer than she’d been thinking that way about him.

The elevator ride this time was charged with anticipation. She was standing close, but only close enough that their coats were touching. And he could hear her heart

beating faster than usual. Then they were out of the elevator and headed down the hall to their room.

“It’s been a while since we had to share a room in a hotel,” she said all of a sudden. “It was kinda fun, playing games and...” she trailed off.

Kissing. Was she thinking about kissing? Oh, why had she brought up the honeymoon suite? His nerve endings twitched at the thought of what had happened in the honeymoon suite.

Without warning, she stopped abruptly and turned to face him. “Clark?” she said, her voice trembling but breathy, and her eyes so intense with...

“Yeah?” he croaked.

“I changed my mind...”

She what? From what? About the date?

“I didn’t want... no, I was scared to... on the bench... I changed my mind. I want you to kiss — ”

His lips were on hers before she could finish, and her arms came up around his neck, pulling him closer. His hands cupped her face, but... gloves. He couldn’t feel her skin. His lips still exploring, teasing, loving hers, he blindly reached down to tear his gloves off. And then his hands were cupping her face as his mouth slanted against hers again and again.

She whimpered into his mouth, searching out his tongue and then sucking on his bottom lip. He felt himself losing balance, and the next thing he could tell, her back was against their door and his body pressed flush against hers. Her hands were like fire on his neck, pulling him closer and threading through his hair. He barely registered that she must have taken her gloves off too at some point.

He pulled eagerly at her lips and then moved in to delve his tongue into her mouth. Her hands slid down to his chest and roamed underneath his coat and around to his back. He put his hands on the door on either side of her head to brace himself as he brought his lips down on hers as if he could never get enough of kissing her.

Then he felt the pressure of her hands pushing on his chest, and she said his name again on a whimper against his lips. “Clark...”

He pulled away and saw her face, flushed with desire and her eyes heavy-lidded. He leaned in for one more quick, but passionate kiss, then rested his forehead against hers as they both fought to catch their breath.

He stepped away slowly and took a deep breath, running a hand through his hair. That was *not* the first kiss that he’d had planned... Not that he’d planned anything, exactly. But...

“I, um... that was...” he struggled for words, his whole body alive and tingling. Not sure if he should be apologizing for getting carried away or if he should be kissing her again.

“Intense?” she said, still a bit breathless. She pressed her palms against the door to straighten herself, seeming a bit shaky on her knees.

He wanted to kiss her again. He wanted to spend the rest of his life kissing her.

And if he wanted that, he needed to slow down. Lois Lane didn’t trust very easily, and he’d be damned if ruined his first and potentially only chance at what he could only

hope was a forever relationship.

“So, um...” he started but trailed off, and he decided to fish his key card out of his coat while he was fishing for something to say. “You mentioned something about playing games? I think I saw that the front desk had some games to check out.”

She laughed lightly. “Sounds perfect, Clark,” she said. She bent down to pick up his gloves and then hand them to him. “Here, you, uh... dropped your gloves.”

He felt his cheeks flush. “Thanks.” He grabbed them and shoved them hastily in his coat pocket.

“Why don’t you go to the vending machine down the hall and see if they have any cream soda,” she suggested. “I’ll head down to the desk and see what games they might have for us.”

Before he could even respond, she grabbed the lapels on his coat and pulled him towards her for a deep, possessive kiss. And then she was off towards the elevator, throwing a “see you in a minute” over her shoulder.

Chapter 4

Yesterday had been the most remarkable day, especially the evening. As almost-first dates go, he couldn’t have asked for better. And Lois seemed to have a similar opinion, if the smiling, though slightly shy partner he’d woken up to was any indication.

After that surprise kiss she’d planted on him in the hallway, there’d been no way he wasn’t bringing her some cream soda. He’d slipped up to the roof and dashed off to the minimart for a few small bottles.

They’d played a lively game of Trivial Pursuit, during which his trivia chops had been challenged again, and he’d managed to get fired from his tour guide position.

Lois had won. Barely. And they’d made plans for a rematch, a kindness Lois was willing to extend to him, she’d said, making sure he knew that she didn’t grant just anyone a rematch.

They’d studiously avoided any discussion of the kissing that had happened earlier in the hallway. As well as any talk of the subsequent kissing that had happened during and after the game. None had been as impassioned as that first one, though.

After a tender and brief kiss goodnight, they’d each retired to their own bed for the night. Clark had lain silent on the bed for some time, replaying his favorite parts of the day in his head... which was pretty much all the parts.

When he’d been sure she was asleep, he’d risked sneaking out for a quick patrol of Metropolis. Then, finally all settled for the night, he let the closeness of her heartbeat fill his senses and lull him to sleep.

And now, after a slightly shy and awkward wake up and morning routine, they were sitting down for breakfast at a table in the hotel dining room. Actually, they’d mostly finished breakfast and were lingering over their coffee as they finished reviewing and choosing their sessions for tomorrow after the keynote. The Team Track was all of Saturday, and Sunday was mostly breakout sessions and networking.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come to *Tugging on Heartstrings: How to Inspire Your Audience to Action* with

me? Maybe it’ll help fine tune your skills more,” he tried teasing lightly.

“Oh, but I couldn’t possibly do that! I’d risk being so good I wouldn’t need a partner, and I can’t have that.” She reached over the small table and patted his cheek.

His heart raced a little at her touch, something it had been doing far more readily since just yesterday. He laughed lightly. “Okay, fair enough.” And then laughed a little harder when his eyes landed on an interesting session title. “So, how about this one? *Get Your Copy Right: Common AP Style Errors and How to Squash Them in Your Copy?*” His eyes danced as he looked at her.

“Oh, haha!” she said, clearly not offended in the least despite her tendency to write slightly sloppy copy.

“Whatever would you do if you didn’t spend all your free time editing my copy?”

“Hey, I *do* have a life outside of work, you know?” More than she knew...

She patted his forearm. “Sure you do, Clark.”

“Heh, you got me there, I guess.” He raised his hands in mock defeat. “Oh, here we go,” he said after spying another good session option for her. “I’m sure Superman and I would both appreciate you taking this one... *Safety in Journalism: How to Find Your Story and Not Trouble.*” It would help his stress levels tremendously.

“Clark!” She’d flinched ever so slightly.

Shoot... he hadn’t exactly been teasing, more like a friendly suggestion, but it seemed like she’d taken it personally. But in typical Lois fashion, she schooled her face quickly and served it back to him.

“First of all, *you* get into just as much trouble as I do! Okay, almost as much trouble. We investigate *and* find trouble together, thankyouverymuch. Second, you and Superman are not my bodyguards. And barring the odd drop off a building or kidnapping, I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry, Lois.”

“Apology accepted.”

“But you *are* coming with me to *The First Amendment and Ethical Journalism in the Media*, right?”

“I think so...” She glanced down at her program and scanned for the session title. “When was that again?” she asked without looking back up.

“Ten-thirty tomorrow, remember? We’d talked about doing the lunch and learn after?”

“Right... right...” she said, clearly distracted and looking like she was trying to remember something.

He watched silently as her eyes hopped over to the next page of tomorrow’s schedule, same times, different track. The server dropped off the check silently on his way to another table.

“They added a session called *Women in Journalism: Breaking into the Boys’ Club* that I wanted to go to,” Lois said as she shifted in her seat a bit.

“Well, you don’t need any help with that one. In fact, you practically run the Boys’ Club in Metropolis, Lois,” he said, feeling proud and grateful that she had let him be her partner long enough for him to prove himself.

“Don’t try to score points.” She narrowed her eyes at him, but he could tell she was slightly pleased with his

comments.

"I'm not trying to... well, I might have been a little, but that doesn't change the fact that it's true. There's not a man in Metropolis in our profession who doesn't admire you, whether they want to admit it or not."

"If by that you mean hostile and antagonistic, sure," she said, laughing a bit disparagingly. "And, I know, I know," she waved off his objection preemptively, "it's just because they're intimidated."

Oh. He hadn't quite realized. "Are they really hostile and antagonistic?" he asked, all the teasing and flirting gone from his tone now.

"Yeah," she said solemnly. "That's how the Boys' Club works."

"I had no idea. I'm sorry." He felt the sudden urge to apologize for being a man, but he sensed that wasn't helpful in any way. Though he did idly wonder if not being a *human* man exempted him somehow... but then he reminded himself that he didn't need exemption from being an antagonistic jerk.

"It's okay... I mean, it's not okay, the whole culture. But it's okay that you didn't know. Now you do." She smiled at him, but it was more weary than affectionate.

"What can I... I mean... *can* I do anything? Should I?" He had no idea what to do, given that he hadn't even realized it was so much bigger than the odd male journalist just being a sexist jerk. Was this a helping thing? Or a stand back and not help thing? "Should I go to the session too?"

Her eyes had been warm when he'd started asking, but at the last question, she'd seemed to startle slightly. "Uh... no, no. The session is really meant for women only. It's... yeah, we'll just stick to the divide and conquer tactic for most of tomorrow's sessions. Then Team Track on Saturday." She ended with another smile. "Partner," she added.

He nodded lamely and smiled back. He was worried that he'd offended her somehow with his offer or even with his ignorance at the topic and culture in general. But he was hesitant about asking any follow-up questions, at least right now. He looked down at the table and saw the check sitting there, so he added a tip and their room number before signing and setting it aside.

He looked back up at Lois and he found her still smiling, waiting patiently for him to finish up with the check. "Do you... think you'll still be able to do the lunch and learn with me? Or... even just lunch... together?" He hoped he didn't sound as desperate as he felt. Her face fell a little bit, though, at his mention of lunch, and his heart sank along with it.

"I was going to try and catch Mariane Theuriau after her lecture and snag a lunch interview. Sorry... I forgot about our plan for lunch and learn." She did look genuinely sorry rather than avoidant. "I didn't see a better day to do it without compromising our time on the Team Track Saturday."

"It's okay," he said, trying desperately to keep the dejection out of his voice. She wasn't rejecting him or anything. "I hope your interview goes well."

"I don't have it yet!" she corrected him.

"Oh, you will. No one escapes the brilliant and

tenacious Lois Lane." He beamed at her and was rewarded with her radiant smile.

"Well, now you *are* trying to score points," she said, her eyes twinkling with a touch of humor.

"Nope," he said, shaking his head soberly. "That's still just the truth."

She held his gaze but tucked her hair behind her ear.

His breath caught and his heart sped up. "You're so beautiful," he said, his voice a husky whisper. "And I'm the luckiest man alive that you're my date tonight."

He heard her sharp intake of breath, and her eyes were searching his face. "You... that was..." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "... trying to score points..."

He shook his head again. "Just the truth." He reached across the small table for her hand, covering it with his own. "And I don't need to score points. I told you I've already won."

Her eyes glistened as she stared intensely at him for a beat before ducking her gaze and then looking around the dining room. Oh, right... he'd almost forgotten where they were. He was suddenly feeling a little self-conscious, and she looked as though she was too. He took his hand back shyly.

She cleared her throat and he looked back up at her. "I... uh, are you done with breakfast, Clark?" she asked abruptly as she stood and grabbed her purse. She seemed in a big hurry to leave, and he worried again that he'd misstepped somehow, said too much and scared her off.

He nodded and moved to stand as well and grabbed his messenger bag. She practically raced out of the dining room, and he followed quickly, slinging his bag over his head and shoulder as he went. Was she okay?

Once outside of the dining room, she paused, looking around purposefully. Her eyes lighted upon something, but before he could even try to discern what it was, she grabbed his hand and dragged him in the direction she'd looked.

Bewildered when they'd presumably gotten to their destination, he scarcely had the time to look around the small alcove she'd pulled him to before her hands were on the back of his neck drawing him in. Her lips crushed against his with a hint of desperation he'd only ever fantasized about. His mild confusion quickly turned to enthusiastic participation. He brought his hands up to cup her face so that he could focus more intently on pressing his lips to hers, delving his tongue into her mouth, and letting her do the same.

She continued her beguiling assault. "Oh... Lois... Lois... beautiful... Lois..." he breathed against her lips between kisses, which only seemed to spur her on. He felt his whole body responding as she moaned quietly against his lips before capturing them yet again. And then she was pulling away, panting for breath, her hands coming to rest on his shoulders as if she might need him to stay balanced.

He was feeling... very off balance, captivately so. And breathless.

After a moment, her hands slid lightly down his chest and fell back to her sides. "I... um..." she started. "I... don't have an excuse for that."

"I... don't think you need one?" His mind was so slowly coming back into focus.

She laughed breathily.

He had no idea what to do next. Heaven help him if she kissed him like that again.

And then Superman walked by.

“What...?” he said, feeling disoriented and unbalanced for a completely different reason. “What?”

He vaguely registered Lois turning to see what he was gaping at, but he could almost feel her tense.

Was there a clone? A lookalike? Why was... he..how...?

“Clark?”

He could hear her calling him, and she’d probably said his name more than just the once. But she hadn’t called... him... er... Superman... the stranger in the suit his mom had made for him. Why hadn’t she cared that Superman was here? Not that he was... here. Well... not that she knew, anyway. Or *did* she know? Why hadn’t she called to him?

“Clark... Earth to Clark...”

Finally, he focused in on her face, her very concerned face. “I’m here,” he said a bit numbly. “Here. I’m...” He reached up to check his glasses.

“Are you okay?” Her hands were back on his shoulders.

“Superman. Why is Superman here?” he asked lamely. What else *could* he ask?

“That wasn’t Superman,” she said confidently. “He was far too short and the cape was all wrong.”

“Then who... or what was that?”

“I don’t know,” she said, waving her hand in the air. “Probably some weird Canadian who likes to dress up. Oh! Or he’s one of those people that dress up and busk out on Hollywood Boulevard or Times Square. I’ll bet that’s it.”

He eyed her dubiously, though it did sound more logical and probable than clone. “I guess it’s a good thing I got fired as your Toronto tour guide because I did *not* know that the city was home to any buskers.”

“Well, I guess that’ll teach me to hire based solely on looks,” she said, a definite flirtatiousness in her tone. “Then again, I’m not exactly unhappy with the service.” She winked at him — winked — and started walking off.

He wasn’t sure where in the world bold, flirtatious Lois had come from, but he wasn’t about to question his continued good fortune. He scampered to catch up with her and then fell into step beside her.

He was curious where they were going, but he was feeling a little intimidated and also a little hesitant to break whatever sort of spell they were under. Or... maybe the spell was already broken? What did that expression even mean, and what could he do to get Lois to kiss him again like that?

Before he could ask what they were doing, she came to a halt in front of a set of wide double doors.

“Of course there’s a French sign,” she said, gesticulating at the door as if it had done something wrong. “I haven’t heard one person speak it... but it’s there.”

“Lois, by law all signs and public notices have to be posted in French and English. It’s their second official language.” He heard the words coming out of his mouth, but he couldn’t quite believe that Just Had the Most Insanely Arousing Kiss in His Life Clark was saying

anything that might risk the occurrence repeating itself.

Thankfully, she’d already launched into rant mode before she’d really heard what he was saying.

“This is a weird country, Clark! There, I said it. They look just like us, but their milk is in bags, their signs are in French when nobody speaks it, their donut holes are named after bits of dead hockey player, and they have a store that sells both taxidermy and cheese. They’re just... weird.”

“Are you done?” he asked, somehow equal parts amused and aroused.

She took a breath, finally, and turned to look at him, taking in his expression. “Yes,” she said simply, a hint of amusement playing at the corner of her mouth. “So... should we hit up the Exhibition Hall or the Salle d’Exposition?” she asked, only partially butchering the pronunciation.

He flashed her a delighted grin and chose the door with the English on it, opening it for her to enter first. Tonight was going to be amazing. He might not survive it, but at least he’d die happy.

After wandering through the exhibitor and advertiser booths for a while, gathering pamphlets and contact information for the Chief along the way, they grabbed a quick lunch and then returned to the room. There’d been a bit of an awkward dance of a conversation as they tried to figure out the logistics of getting ready for their date tonight. Clark had offered to go ahead and get dressed for tonight and wait in the lounge downstairs for a while and then come back to ‘pick her up’ at 7pm.

He took the opportunity to fly down to Metropolis to do a semi-leisurely patrol. As he flew his usual patrol route, he let his mind wander back to the look Lois had given him when he’d emerged from the bathroom dressed in a charcoal suit and tasteful patterned tie. Her mouth had been slightly parted, her eyes ran up and down his body, and she’d made this little, almost imperceptible sighing sound that bordered on a moan. And... more than the look on her face, her breathing and heart rate had changed pace.

Lately, he’d found himself tuned in more often than usual to her heartbeat. Ever since he’d asked her out, in fact. He hadn’t meant to notice, and it almost felt like an invasion of her privacy or somehow cheating at dating, but he actually wasn’t sure how to stop it.

From the instant he’d fallen for her, he’d somehow become attuned to her heartbeat. After a time, it’d quietly faded into the background of his everyday life, like a soothing white noise that was always just there. He really only noticed it when it changed drastically, like when she was arguing passionately during a story pitch or when she was in danger.

But the wild stampede of beats that had filled his senses when he’d asked her out? The unrestrained rhythm as they flirted? The unbridled, riotous thudding after they’d kissed?

Reactions that told him that she was more affected by him — by the prospect of dating, having a relationship, being intimate with him — than she liked to pretend or admit. But that was just the thing... while she hadn’t outright admitted it, she was definitely not pretending or hiding it anymore. In fact, after breakfast this morning,

she'd been downright dauntless.

While that fact alone ought to make him more confident and excited for tonight, he'd be lying if he said he wasn't feeling just a tad intimidated. Well, more intimidated than usual.

Thankful that his patrol had been fairly uneventful, given his extreme preoccupation, Clark headed back to Toronto. He landed on the hotel's roof and spun into his date suit, carefully checking to make sure everything was still in order before straightening his tie and heading back downstairs. He checked his watch. It was still a bit early.

He wasn't sure what to do with the time. Maybe he should have stopped to get her flowers or something. But given that he didn't think any florist shops would be nearby, nor open at this time of night, she would wonder where he'd gotten them. He wandered over to the gift shop in the lobby instead, figuring he could spend a few minutes of nervous energy there.

There was quite a bit of Canadian memorabilia there, which made sense given that the attached convention center was a popular venue for international conventions and the like. But it was more tasteful than an airport or strip mall gift shop, the items not as loud and garish. There were mugs and glassware with Canada and a red maple leaf in various fonts and layouts, little flags and CN Tower replicas, and all the rest of the usual tourist souvenirs. And also an unusually large amount of maple syrup. All kinds, in a variety of novelty shaped bottles. Nothing that he particularly cared for.

As he was wandering out, a certain chocolate bar among the candy selection at the register caught his eye. He smiled and decided to grab one to purchase, telling the cashier he didn't need a bag or receipt. Then he glanced at his watch again and saw that he'd be right on time.

His nerves jangled as he rode the elevator up to their floor, chocolate bar in hand. Once out, he checked his hair and overall appearance in the reflection of the shiny elevator doors. He tried desperately not to think about this night being the be-all and end-all of their relationship and any potential future they would have together. It was one date; it didn't have to be *everything*. But... it was the *first* date, and if it wasn't a good one... that could spell disaster in a way that he didn't even want to imagine. The pressure was immense.

He took a deep breath and let it out as he approached their door. He reminded himself that she'd said yes. She'd asked for an almost-first date before their date. She had kissed him already. Several times. The latest of which had felt like a glorious attack of unbridled passion. There didn't seem to be much if any doubt that she was attracted to him.

That thought helped calm his apprehension about whether or not the date would go well. But now he was nervous and jittery for a whole different reason. He glanced at his watch one last time. Right on time.

Chapter 5

He knocked gently and waited.

"Coming!" He heard her call through the door. "I still have 30 seconds!"

He grinned. Always one for details, Lois. She swung the

door open wide and announced in a breathy voice, "Seven p.m. on the dot."

His grin fell away and his heart started beating faster in his chest. She never failed to take his breath away. Her dress was black and tastefully low cut with narrow straps, showing off an intoxicating amount of skin. Stacked strings of pearls brought his eyes up to her neck and accented her collarbone. He breathed deep and tried to banish the thought of trailing soft kisses along it. His eyes wandered down to her legs, her dress falling to mid-thigh, and then... he swallowed. Black boots that seemed to mold to her calves, accentuating her incredible legs, the chunky heels bringing her that much closer to his height.

"Is something... do I..." she stuttered a bit, smoothing her hands over her waist and down the front of her dress and ducking her head.

"You look... breathtaking," he rasped.

She blushed and he felt his blood warm further. "Thanks," she said shyly. "You don't look so bad yourself. Charcoal looks... really good on you. Like, really good."

He swallowed. She'd definitely given him the once-over this time. "Thanks," he said, and he could feel his own cheeks getting warmer. "Are you ready to head out? It's just a short walk to the restaurant."

She glanced down at his hand. "What's that?" she asked.

"What?" he replied before he could remember that there was indeed something occupying his hand. "Oh, right." He held up the Double Fudge Crunch Bar. "I couldn't find flowers, so I figured..." He shrugged and held it out lamely, all of a sudden feeling like it wasn't as clever as he'd thought it was.

But then she laughed breathily and smiled at him as she reached out to take the chocolate bar from him. "So much more practical than flowers," she said. She set it down on the small dinette table against the wall. "We can share it later for dessert."

"Sure," he agreed, relieved. "Ready for dinner?"

She nodded. "Just let me grab my coat first."

"You got reservations at the CN Tower restaurant?" she asked as they entered the tower's lobby, a delightful touch of awe and excitement in her voice. "The one that rotates and you can see the whole city while you're dining?"

"Yeah." He smiled, feeling a peculiar kind of pride that he — Clark — could give her this, dining in the sky, a romantic date with an unparalleled view of the clouds and cityscape. "I wanted to dazzle you," he admitted softly.

He'd swear his heart skipped a beat at her smile. He held his bent arm out in invitation, and she stepped closer to hook her arm through his. At her close touch, his body was quick to remind him of how it'd felt kissing her earlier, her body pressed against his.

They found their way to the restaurant reservations counter and confirmed their reservation. The young, uniformed man indicated which direction they should head to join the line for the elevators. Thankfully, the line wasn't very long, and it was a brief wait before they were in the elevator car rocketing up to the restaurant level.

Stepping out of the elevator and towards the host stand,

they were greeted with their first glimpse of the twinkling lights of the cityscape beyond the elegant tables and through the large paned-glass windows. He heard a faint “Wow” from Lois as they were led to their table for two right by the window.

They both took off their coats and hesitated for a moment. The host set the menus on the table and correctly read Clark’s intention to be the one to pull out Lois’ chair for her, so he left, bidding them a wonderful meal and evening.

Clark stepped around her to pull out a chair, and he gently took her coat from her to drape over her chair. And then he was gesturing, gallantly he hoped, for her to have a seat. But she wasn’t even looking. Instead, she’d been staring out at the night sky, the lights of the city, and the lake beyond. He moved to stand next to her and just smiled as he watched her for a moment.

She turned to look at him and said in a soft voice, “Consider me dazzled.”

His heart skipped another beat as she leaned towards him and brushed a kiss against his cheek. As she pulled away, the sound of her wild heartbeat filled his ears, and he couldn’t resist the urge to kiss her. He leaned in to catch her lips with his and kissed her, briefly and with a gentle firmness as he fought the desire to deepen it. Just being around her now made him want to lose control.

He pulled back, breathless, and moved back to gesture again at her chair. He caught her eyes darting back to his lips, and then she ducked her head and went to sit, moving towards the table as he pushed the chair in for her. Then he sat down across from her after draping his own coat on the back of his chair.

He couldn’t keep his eyes off her, and it seemed like the feeling was mutual. “The view is stunning,” he said.

She ducked her head slightly and looked up at him through her lashes. “It’s beautiful,” she breathed, her eyes still on him.

Clark was rendered speechless by both the look in her eyes and the sound of her voice. Luckily, he found himself saved by the approach of the waiter, who asked if either of them would like anything to drink.

Lois glanced down at the menu as if suddenly realizing it was there. She scanned it for a few minutes, then squinted as if slightly confused.

She eventually ordered a glass of the house white and Clark did the same. When the waiter left, he watched as she scrunched up her nose in a way he found beyond adorable.

“Something on your mind?” he asked, mildly amused.

“Ice wine,” she said to him eventually. She pointed to it on the menu. “What on Earth is ice wine? I know this country is cold, but do they have to go out of their way to freeze everything?”

Clark chuckled, wondering if there was anything that she could do or say that he wouldn’t be completely charmed by. So far, the answer was no. When she fixed him with an accusatory — but not angry — stare, he found himself even more entranced.

“I suppose you know the explanation for ice wine?”

“If I say yes, will it make me seem nerdy... or sexy?” Did he just say that? Did the word ‘sexy’ just leave his lips?

He swallowed heavily and waited for her answer.

She blushed, and for a second he worried that he’d crossed some sort of line, but then she replied shyly, “Sexy.” Her hands came up to tuck her hair behind her ears. “But since you’re my tour guide, your knowledge is only to my benefit.”

Oh, wow. Sexy. She’d called him sexy. He swallowed, not sure he would be able to find his voice. “You fired me last night,” he croaked. “Remember?”

She grinned at him. “Fine, you’re re-hired. Now spill it... what’s ice wine?”

“It, uh...” Oh, great, he sounded like a fifteen-year-old boy. Had his voice just cracked? He cleared his throat and managed to speak normally. “It’s wine made from frozen grapes still on the vine. The grapes are pressed while frozen, which means the juice that comes out is much sweeter. That’s why it’s a dessert wine. You also don’t get as much out of each grape, which makes it more expensive.”

“A dessert wine, huh? Anything that goes with chocolate?” Lois said.

He could have sworn he saw her tongue dart out briefly to lick her lips, but honestly, at this point, he wasn’t entirely sure this wasn’t just an elaborate fantasy he was having. The very sight of her made his body tingle. This was the most thrilling date he’d ever been on and they hadn’t even placed their order!

His fantasy was still staring at him, awaiting an answer.

“Uh, I think a Cabernet Franc might work? But we could ask the waiter to be sure?” he said.

It was at that point the waiter returned with their drinks and placed them on the table. When he asked if they were ready to order, Lois was ready with her selection, but he’d been too busy looking at her, he hadn’t had the chance. He glanced down and read the menu at super speed. A small part was tempted by the gourmet poutine, but given how messy it was, the last thing he wanted to do was ruin his suit and make a fool out of himself in front of her.

This being on a date with Lois was much harder than simply being friends. How many times had he spilled take out on himself while at work? It hadn’t mattered then, so why should it now?

Because now she might kiss you again if you play your cards right, his inner voice reminded him.

“Sir?” the waiter said, and Clark was embarrassed to realize that he must have zoned out.

“I’ll uh... have the chicken parmesan,” he replied, picking the first entree he saw.

Satisfied, the waiter walked away, leaving the two of them alone. Once again, silence stretched out between them, and Clark found himself at a loss for topics of conversation. This was a woman he literally bantered with on a daily basis, and suddenly he couldn’t think of a thing to say!

She clearly felt the same way, because after a few moments of total silence, she gave a nervous laugh. “I don’t know why this is so hard,” she said, voicing some of the same things he’d been thinking. “I’m so nervous right now. Are you nervous?”

“Yes!” he exclaimed, feeling an immense wave of relief

flood through him. “I’ve been nervous since the moment I saw how gorgeous you look tonight.”

“Why?” she wondered, blushing ever so slightly. “I mean, it’s not as if we don’t know each other. This date should be the easiest thing in the world.”

“Well,” he said, his nerves on overdrive. “For me, I think it’s because I have wanted this to happen for a long time. I... I’ve had feelings for you for a long time. And in some ways, it feels like if something goes wrong, I might never have this chance again.”

“Oh...” She sounded somewhat stunned, and he worried that he might have said too much. “I didn’t realize... I mean... I have feelings for you, too. Big feelings. Scary feelings. I thought that maybe you... well, I wasn’t sure...”

She reached her hand over the table and he took it, the warmth of it causing a surge of electricity.

“Not sure of what?” he asked, his heart racing in anticipation of her answer and also from the feel of her hand in his.

“I mean... you did ask me out. You... certainly kiss me like you want me...”

“But... ?” he prompted.

“But you took it back... you haven’t always been clear about what you want... if you want me.”

“I want you,” he blurted out in a husky whisper.

Her heartbeat was racing in his ears again. Finally, she said, “I think I want this to work just as much as you do.”

Clark felt the tension drain from him, as the tone of her voice and the look in her eyes told him that she meant everything she’d said. It had never occurred to him — even after those intensely passionate kisses — that her feelings for him might be as deep as his were for her.

“I didn’t realize,” he said softly. “But... you don’t know how happy I am to hear that.”

“I think maybe I do,” she said, her lips curling into a smile that seemed to warm him everywhere.

The conversation for the rest of the meal was effortless. They talked of his traveling and wanderlust and her path to success before she’d come to work for the Planet. He felt immense privilege that he got to learn more about what had helped shape her into the world-famous journalist today. He’d known her relationship with her family was complicated, but he hadn’t realized what she’d gone through. Hearing it only made him admire her more.

Even on the nights she’d spent at his place watching movies late into the night — the ones where he secretly looked forward to the part of the night where she’d snuggle in close and fall asleep on his chest — he hadn’t felt this close to her. This was more... intimate. More exciting.

In addition to the more intimate conversation, their dinner had been filled with small touches and reckless flirting. The romantic backdrop only amplified things. The lights of the city sparkled and, as the restaurant rotated slowly, the reflections glinted slightly off the lake, beautifully distorted in places where the lake was frozen over.

The waiter came finally to inquire if they wanted dessert, and Clark told him they’d take a few minutes to decide.

Lois looked directly at him and said, “I think we should go back to the room for dessert.”

Her voice sounded sultry and his mouth went dry.

“The chocolate! I meant for the chocolate bar!” She was blushing furiously now, and Clark didn’t think he’d ever been more turned on.

He had to clear his throat a few times before he felt confident speaking. “Sure, we can do that.” He smiled at her. “Did you want to check out the Observation Terrace first?”

“Yeah, I’d like that,” she said, seemingly grateful for the tactful response to her suggestive slip of the tongue.

Clark paid the waiter with only the briefest of protests from Lois about sharing the cost. He wouldn’t be swayed. They collected their coats and made their way to the Observation Terrace.

When they got there, they stepped onto the main part of the floor and Lois squeaked. “Clark... there’s no floor. You can see straight through to the ground!”

He chuckled at her comment, but his heart flip flopped at the fact that she’d grabbed onto his arm for ‘safety’. “They just installed a glass floor last year. You can stand on it and look straight down 1100 feet.”

She eyed him suspiciously, though they both knew she was mostly playing at being worried.

“Honest, it’s safe! They say it’s five times stronger than what’s required for commercial flooring. You can put 35 moose on it and it wouldn’t break.”

“So... 36 moose is out of the question? And are you sure that moose is the plural of moose? It just sounds wrong. Mooses? Meese?”

Clark laughed heartily and then, because she was blissfully still holding onto his arm, tugged her gently onto the thick glass panels that made up the floor.

She hugged his arm closer to her. “So, Mr. Tour Guide, you got any more trivia? I wouldn’t want to find out my decision to re-hire you was too hasty.”

He grinned. “Well, did you know that the CN Tower was officially the World’s Tallest Free-Standing Structure when it was finished in 1975? Or that the American Society of Civil Engineers, just this year, classified the tower as one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World?”

“Nope, I didn’t know. Seems your position is safe for now,” she teased.

“You know, I’m starting to think I should have re-negotiated my pay rate... free seems like you’re getting an awfully good deal.”

“Hmm.” She turned to face him, her brow furrowed as if she were giving this serious thought. She tilted her head up and met his lips for a brief but teasing kiss.

“Was that an offer or a distraction?” he asked, his eyes flitting down to her lips and back up to her eyes.

“What do you want it to be?” she asked, her tone slightly seductive.

He didn’t bother to answer, only pressed his lips against hers and gently urged her mouth open so he could kiss her more fully. She complied eagerly and leaned into him. He ended the kiss far sooner than he wanted to, but he was all too aware they were in a public place.

Her smile was captivating, and for a moment, all he

could do was stare. Then his hand fell to the small of her back, and he guided her over to the tall, angled panes of glass that allowed for an unobstructed view of the cityscape. They stood side by side looking out, and he reached down to take her hand in his own. She smiled up at him and squeezed his hand as she leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulder.

Part of him still couldn't quite believe that he was with her here and now, like this... on their first date and holding her hand. The city below seemed to twinkle as it stretched into the horizon.

"It looks like it just goes on forever, doesn't it?" she said, a hint of awe in her voice.

"Yeah," he agreed softly. "It's kind of peaceful up here. I mean, I know there are other people around us... but there's just something about seeing a city from up above that's pretty magical."

"He must be used to this... Superman, I mean. He sees this every day. I wonder what that's like."

He tensed slightly against his will. "I know, Lois..." he said, trying desperately to keep the jealousy and disappointment from his voice. "You want to fly with him. I remember."

"I used to think I did... but now I'm not sure," she seemed to be wondering aloud as much as to him. "This is his world. He lives up here. Eventually, it must seem pretty mundane... seeing this every day. And if I lived up here, maybe I would stop seeing it too."

He... hadn't expected that. And he felt ridiculously conflicted about the feelings of jealousy of his alter ego as they warred with his own desire to be the one to show her the city from the skies. Mundane? Nothing with Lois by his side could be anything but magical.

She let out a slight sigh. "It might be pretty impressive to see the view from the sky with him. But... I think I like this better." She squeezed his hand and snuggled in against him a little deeper.

Chapter 6

The walk back to their hotel had been uneventful, but now that they were back in the elevator as it counted floors between the lobby and the moment they'd be back in their room... together... alone... his heart was racing again with anticipation, and so was hers. He was looking forward to kissing her again and not having to worry about having to stop kissing her.

Would she let him kiss her for the rest of their lives?

The elevator chimed, announcing their arrival on their floor, and time seemed to stand still for a moment before the doors opened. Clark took an unsteady step into the hallway and she followed. They stood there as the doors closed behind them and the quiet hum of the motors took the elevator car back down.

There was no protocol for taking the love of your life out on a first date and walking her to her door... which happened to be the door to your shared hotel room. His heart seemed to be thudding in his chest, and he was sure she must be able to hear it.

He couldn't exactly kiss her goodnight and go home. The comfort and ease they'd found earlier in the evening

seemed to disappear, and they both walked a bit nervously the short distance to their room.

She fished the key card from her purse and opened the door, turning to face him as though it was her apartment and he was dropping her off. She opened her mouth to say something, but no words came out. He watched her eyes move to his lips and back to his eyes, and before he knew what was happening, her lips were on his and she was pulling him to her as she backed into the room, the heavy door falling shut behind them.

He crushed his lips against hers and she kissed him back with equal intensity as she tugged at his overcoat, pulling it off his shoulders. He shrugged his arms out quickly and moved to remove her coat, too, giving him access to the smooth expanse of her collarbone. He tore his lips away from hers and dropped his head to trail kisses along her delicate skin. She let out a whimper and he moved up to run his lips and teeth lightly against the hollow of her neck.

Another whimper, and then her hands were finding his face and bringing him back to her mouth so she could kiss him with a desperation they were both feeling. His hands wandered as his mouth plundered. He trailed a gentle caress of fingertips along the strap of her dress and then down her arm. She shivered and started tugging at his tie, pulling him closer still but also...

He intercepted her hand and brought it up to his mouth as he pulled away from hers. He kissed her knuckles, the back of her hand, the inside of her wrist... and continued his distraction up along her arm until he was kissing the part of her shoulder where the strap of her dress met skin.

She let out a gentle moan and that was almost his undoing. He recaptured her lips, dancing his tongue against hers and then pulling gently at her bottom lip. His hand came up to cup her cheek and the other wandered along her back and down to rest on her hip.

And then he felt her hands tugging at his shirt where it was tucked into his pants and he tore away from her, panting. She looked confused, her eyes hazy with arousal, and she was working to catch her breath as well.

"I... uh... I just need a minute," he stammered. "I'll be back." He all but ran to the bathroom and shut the door behind him. He leaned his back against the door and took a few more breaths to get his breathing back under control. What was happening? This was their first — first — date. Neither of them were the type to...

But then, it wasn't like they were strangers, and he'd learned tonight that he hadn't been the only one holding back his true feelings and urges. He desperately wanted to go back out there and continue kissing her. But he needed to take off the suit. He couldn't keep circumventing her attempts to take his clothing off. He'd fantasized about kissing Lois. He'd fantasized about making love to her. But he'd somehow never considered before the idea that making out might include wandering hands... wandering hands that might want to explore bare skin.

He took a deep breath to try and calm his raging libido. Then he spun quickly, taking off the super suit and stashing it hastily in the air vent, hoping it wasn't too terribly dusty in there.

He came back out of the bathroom and looked at her.

“Hi,” he said on an exhale. “Sorry, I just... uh, needed to use the restroom.” Lame. That was lame.

But Lois didn’t seem to mind. She gestured at the door behind him and said, “I, uh, should probably go too.”

She walked past him somewhat shyly and closed the door behind her. Clark let out another breath. He needed to slow things down just a little. He took off his suit coat and tossed it on the nearby chair.

His eyes fell on the clock radio. Oh! Lois had lamented the absence of a dance floor at the restaurant. He went to the radio on the nightstand and turned it on, fiddling with the dial until he found a suitable station with some soft classical music playing.

He turned when he heard her coming out of the bathroom. She’d taken off her boots but still wore the dress and pearls and makeup. Something about seeing her in bare feet — even though he had before — made the moment feel that much more intimate. Impulsively, he toed off his shoes and socks, too, shoving them to the foot of his bed.

She was also wearing a trepidatious look on her face as he eyed him, her heartbeat thrumming just slightly fast in his ears.

“Are you okay, Lois?”

She bit the corner of her lower lip and she nodded. “Yes. No... Mostly yes,” she said, playing with her fingers. “I need a favor. Is that... is that okay?”

“Of course,” he reassured her quickly. “What is it?”

“Can we... I’m not sure how to say it... pause our date for just a minute?” she asked nervously.

“I, um... yes, of course. Anything you need, Lois. Anything.” He was confused and worried. What had happened?

“I just wanted to pause because I need to talk to my best friend,” she said anxiously.

In an instant, he gathered her into his arms and gave her a hug. She melted into him and buried her head in his chest, breathing deeply.

“I’m falling, Clark,” she whispered against his chest. “I’m so scared but excited and... I’m falling so fast... I need you to catch me.”

“Always,” he promised, holding her tighter. “I’ll always catch you, Lois.” His heart soared. He placed a gentle kiss on the top of her hair and let the hug linger on, making sure she got what she needed. And then, he looked down and hooked a finger under her chin to bring her gaze to his own. “No matter what happens, I’ll always be your best friend.”

“Oh, Clark,” she said, her voice tremulous and her eyes filled with unshed tears. “I was so confused for so long, but all I really needed was you.”

His breath hitched at her words, and he wanted to freeze this moment in time. He wanted to memorize every second of it. She’d chosen him. Said she was falling... for him, for Clark.

Her hand came up to his face, her fingertips drawing a gentle path from his cheek to his jawline, and then they wandered over to his slightly parted lips and traced them lightly. He kissed them reverently.

“I need you too,” he murmured. “Is it okay if I kiss you now?” he asked, unsure if she still needed them to be paused.

She nodded ardently, and he didn’t wait to dip down and capture her lips with his own. This kiss was full of the promise of a love he’d only dared to hope for, and now it seemed to be here in his arms. He kissed her soundly, trying to convey all the love and desire within him that he wasn’t sure he was ready to say and she wasn’t quite ready to hear.

Soon, the restrained passion turned to a fervent pressing of his lips to hers, again and again, though he wasn’t sure if she’d deepened things or he had. Her hands were winding around his neck and drawing the most tantalizing pattern as they played with the hair at the nape of his neck. He could feel his body responding and her thudding pulse in his ears. Her body seemed to melt back into his as her tongue played against his lips and delved into his mouth in some erotic game of tag.

He couldn’t stop a moan from escaping, and he was starting to feel heady as though he might lose his balance. Her hands had moved, without him noticing this time, and they were tugging again at his shirt. He hurried to help her unbutton it, all the while completely uncertain that he’d survive the feeling of her touching his skin. And then her hands found their target and all thought fled, replaced by the exquisite feeling of her hands on his chest, his stomach, his back.

She grabbed the two open sides of his shirt, pulling him to her as she backed up towards her bed. He leaned into the move eagerly. Too eagerly.

They lost their balance and fell to the bed, him atop her. He quickly shifted so that not all of his weight was on her, but he was now certain that she could feel the evidence of his arousal against her thigh. They stayed, unmoving, for a long moment, both of them working to catch their breath.

She was looking at him with such desire and... reverence? She surprised him by speaking, “Remember that time in the honeymoon suite... when the maid came in?”

Remember? It was burned into his mind and body. It was the fuel for countless fantasies. His mouth was dry again and he could only nod.

“I didn’t want you to stop,” she admitted in a whisper, the seductive tone of it making it nearly impossible to think straight.

“Do you want me to stop now?” he rasped, wanting her desperately to say no... but also yes. Was he ready for this?

She shook her head and bit her bottom lip. She snaked a hand out from between their bodies and reached over to open the nightstand drawer. He looked at her quizzically, but then his eyes lit upon a box of condoms.

She started babbling, “I wasn’t... assuming or planning or anything... I just... well, considering earlier and... I don’t know... I guess I just wanted to be prepared for the possibility. Sorry, I know it seems presumptuous — ”

He closed the distance between them, pressing his lips to hers, parting them and delving his tongue into her mouth, and trying to tell her with his kiss just how long he’d waited for her touch, how much this moment meant to him. He pulled her close and kissed her with all the fire and passion and love he was feeling.

They made love, and Clark, in all his fantasies, he’d never imagined it could be like this, feel this good... that it would feel like so much more than a physical connection.

When they were spent, he turned to face her, watching her as she came down, her chest rising and falling rapidly and then eventually slowing as she caught her breath. He was having a little trouble focusing his eyes as he recovered himself. He reached over to caress her face, and she turned to face him as well.

He just stared for a long moment, taking in the most beautiful sight in the world: her eyes heavy-lidded with spent passion, her skin flushed and a thin sheen of sweat, and the way she was looking at him like he was the only person in the world that mattered to her. Was that true? Could it be real? Was it possible for all his dreams to come true?

She leaned in to kiss him, a slow but no less loving or passionate kiss than they'd shared earlier. They traded slow, simmering kisses for what seemed like long minutes before she pulled back and just looked at him again. He'd never quite seen this look in her eyes before. It wasn't the soft affection or admiration she'd often shared with her partner, and neither was it quite the infatuation he'd seen her give... Superman.

He felt a hint of guilt tugging at his conscience, but he refused to acknowledge it. At least not right now. "I, uh... should probably go clean up," he said lamely. They never showed the awkward parts of romance in books or TV.

She nodded and smiled shyly, and he leaned over to kiss her once before he got up.

He shut himself in the bathroom and cleaned up, then stood staring at his reflection in the mirror.

He glanced up briefly at the vent. Should he have told her first? What were rules here? Did two enthusiastically consenting adults have to bare all their secrets before being intimate? He didn't necessarily think so, but... he also hadn't thought he was the type to sleep with someone on the first date.

It was Lois, though, and she'd said she was falling for him. And after two days of intense flirting and her obvious interest, he wasn't too surprised at how the night had ended up. But he probably should tell her, and soon.

He suddenly felt a little exposed, and he wished he'd brought clothes in with him. But then again, that would be even more weird than walking out in a towel. Was there a level more intense than being self-conscious? His eyes flitted up to the vent where his suit was. He could just... wear that and walk out of the bathroom. Surprise, Lois!

No, it would be better to wait to tell her after they got home and she didn't have to work closely with him for the weekend. Despite everything amazing that had happened in the past two days, she was still Lois. She wouldn't take being lied to very well, and she might need some space... hopefully not too much space.

He opened the door and braved the awkwardness of being naked in front of his partner... now lover. She had the sheets and comforter pulled up over herself, but they were folded down on the other side of the bed, a clear invitation that he was both grateful for and heartened by. The sight of her lying there, a soft smile on her face, looking at him with what he could only hope and assume was love... it tugged at his heart in a way he'd never felt before.

His dreams and fantasies had always included

unremarkable, everyday scenes that others might find mundane. But not for Clark. For him, he yearned for ordinary in a way he was sure that no one else did. As much as he had sexual and romantic fantasies about Lois, he had fantasies of her watching him make dinner in the kitchen, grocery shopping together, and reading the paper and drinking coffee in companionable silence on a lazy Sunday morning.

This scene was nothing new to his mind, and in fact, one of his favorites. But to actually live it, experience the reality of it... he felt his heart overflow and fill his chest. And he couldn't, wouldn't ruin this moment for anything. He would tell her later.

"Hey," he said softly as he crawled under the covers and laid down. His heart surged again as she scooted over to settle into the crook of his arm, her head on his chest and her body snuggled close against his. She draped her arm across his stomach and hugged him.

"Hey," she replied sleepily. "Thank you," she murmured.

He kissed the top of her head. "For what?"

She didn't reply for a few moments, and her heartbeat was slow enough that he thought she might have fallen asleep, but then she said softly, "For the absolute best date I've ever had in my life."

He felt a lump forming in his throat. "You're welcome," he whispered, his voice cracking. "It was the best night of my life."

Chapter 7

Clark woke up early on Friday morning, having slept quite possibly the best he ever had in his life. Waking up with Lois in his arms was a dream come true. He was loath to move and start the day because that would mean the end of the dream. She was still sleeping, still snuggled close to him, and he could hear the calm, steady beat of her heart. He closed his eyes to try and memorize everything about this moment.

The sound of squealing tires and crunching steel filtered through, and while it didn't sound as if there were any terrible injuries from what he could tell, he took it as a sign that it was past time to get up. He gently edged out from under her, floating slightly above the bed so as not to disturb her. He quickly found his clothes for the day, and then went into the bathroom to collect and spin into the suit. After writing a quick note to Lois about going to grab breakfast, he was out the door and up to the roof.

By the time he got to the accident, it was... there were... he was staring at a few mangled cars, mildly injured passengers, and... a Superman and a... Superwoman. Two people in the costume his mother had made for him, and they were crouched next to the driver's side of a blue sedan. The frame of the door was badly crushed and it didn't look like there was an easy way to get the injured female driver out.

Superwoman looked up and noticed his presence. She was directing the other Superman to brace the shattered windshield that was dangling from the frame, and then she turned to Clark. "Superman, I need you to pry the door off at this point here," she said. "The fire department is still

eight minutes out with the jaws of life, and the ambulance will be here before that.”

He did as he was told and pried the door off carefully according to her direction. Then he looked to her for his next move; clearly she was some sort of off-duty first responder, and he knew it was always best to take their lead on the scene.

“Can you scan her for spinal and other internal injuries?” Superwoman asked.

He nodded and scanned. “No spinal or cervical damage. Looks like maybe a bruised kidney or something? And her left wrist is broken,” he told her. “Do you need me to fly her to the hospital?”

“No, I think she should be fine on the bus to the hospital. It’s not far at all.”

Clark extracted the driver carefully and loaded her onto the back of the ambulance that had just arrived. Other Superman gave some vitals and other information to the EMS team in the ambulance, and then closed the doors, hitting them twice to let the driver know everything was closed up.

Other Superman then turned to Clark and stuck out his hand, and Clark gave him a firm handshake. “Thanks for the help, Superman! It was a real honor running a rescue with you!”

“Sure, of course,” he said, still not sure what to make of the scene now that the emergency part was handled.

After briefing the on-duty firefighters, Superwoman came over too. “Wow, Superman! Thanks for your help! What brings you to this neck of the woods for a simple car accident?” she asked, but quickly followed up with, “Not that we’re not grateful for your help any time you can spare it! It’s just that you tend to stick to Metropolis.”

“I, uh... I was just flying over and heard the crash, but it seems like you two had it handled just fine,” Clark responded, hoping they wouldn’t think too much more on his presence here for such a minor incident. “You’re off-duty fire department, I assume?” That was an easy question to ask, but... there was a bigger elephant in the room, so to speak, and he wasn’t sure how to ask it.

“Yep! TFD Station 34,” Other Superman answered proudly. “Hey... I normally wouldn’t do this, but since you’re still here and the scene is cleared of injuries... would you mind posing for a photo with us?”

Superwoman smacked Other Superman on the leg and said something under her breath about taking up Superman’s valuable time.

Clark smiled slightly. “Sure, I don’t mind.”

“Great, thanks!” he said, and then dashed over to the sidewalk where he must have left his bag when the accident happened. He grabbed a small camera out of it and came hurrying back.

They asked a bystander to take a picture of the three of them. Clark put his arms around them and smiled for the group picture. And then he couldn’t go any longer without asking...

“Sorry to pry... but I was... curious why you’re wearing my... uh, the costumes?” he asked hesitantly.

Superwoman was quick to answer, “Oh! You probably don’t hear too much about these things, do you?”

“What things?” he was afraid to have asked.

“The SuperCons. Conventions where Superman fans come from all around to talk all things Superman. We have discussion panels, exhibitions, games... you name it. It’s really a great time.”

“Ah, yes,” Clark said. He’d heard of these things. Usually, he cringed about them, and then promptly put them out of his mind. “I didn’t realize there was one in Toronto this week. I, uh, really should be going. Thank you for your public service.”

They both nodded, both a little giddy and ecstatic. As Clark flew off, he could hear Other Superman exclaim, “The rest of the three-four is *not* going to believe this! Neither will the other fans!”

Clark shook his head and headed back to the hotel. He’d just landed on the roof when he realized he’d forgotten breakfast. He couldn’t come back without breakfast. Especially not after last night...

He tried to keep his mind from replaying the last part of the evening. He couldn’t think about that while in public. He turned and found an alleyway near the waterfront to change into his Clark clothing. After grabbing some coffee and a few items, Clark hurried back to the hotel room, hoping he hadn’t been gone too long.

Once he got to the room, he found Lois dressed and ready for the day. She was sitting down at the small desk in the room, jotting down notes of some kind. When she heard him come in, she grabbed the notepad and shoved it quickly in her bag. She smiled at him as she got up and walked towards him.

“More Tim Horton’s?” she asked, grinning.

He smiled back, though he suddenly felt nervous about... everything. *You’ve seen her naked*, his mind supplied. No. That wasn’t helpful! He couldn’t think about that right now. “Yeah, I couldn’t *not* bring you your coffee, and you did seem to like the Timbits the other night...”

She took the coffee from him and had a sip. “Mmmmm. Perfect. My hero,” she declared.

He flinched inwardly. She just lived for coffee. It was an expression. It was fine. Everything was fine.

“I also got you a yogurt with fruit and granola,” he croaked. Why was his voice breaking? And what exactly was he supposed to say to her? What did people talk about the morning after... their first time? *I’m Superman*, his conscience told him. Not now. Later. Now wasn’t the time for that.

“Thanks, Clark.” She grabbed everything from him and set it all up on the small dinette table. “Care to join me for breakfast?” she asked with a slight flourish, though she did seem to have a small undercurrent of unease about her.

“Sure,” he said as he walked over to the table. Was he supposed to kiss her? Were they that casual now? What was the new boundary? He needed to know the boundary. This was awkward enough without the whole secret identity truthbomb hanging over his head.

She hadn’t sat down yet, as though she’d been waiting for him to get close enough. They were both standing next to the small table now, just inches from one another. His body was extremely aware of her closeness.

She spoke first. “This is a little awkward, isn’t it?” she

said in a small voice, her eyes searching his.

“Yeah,” he rasped. “A little awkward.” It was a lot awkward. She didn’t even know how awkward it was.

“I think... I think it would help if we just...” she trailed off, but she was also leaning closer in.

He met her the rest of the way, unable to keep his lips from hers. His hands came up to frame her face as he paid loving attention to her lips. Soft and tender and almost too brief. He could get used to kissing Lois every morning.

On their way through the hotel lobby and across the way to the convention center, Clark saw another ‘Superman’. Yesterday, Lois had assumed it was a busker... but they didn’t usually hang out *inside*, and it was still a bit cold out to see street performers, he assumed. He shook it off and tried to concentrate on the day and *not* think about last night.

They entered the auditorium for the keynote speaker and took two seats near the back. Lois leaned close to whisper to him, and he could feel her breath on his ear. He tried to focus on what she was saying.

“I’m glad they asked Yvonne Starford to do the keynote this year. More women definitely need the podium. I heard the guy last year was horrible,” she whispered.

“You didn’t even go. You hate these things, remember?” Clark reminded her in a teasing tone.

“Yeah, yeah.” She waved him off with her hand. But then turned to wink at him. “But I think I’m starting to like them.” She winked. God, she was sexy when she was flirting with him.

It was just as well that the host started speaking to introduce Ms. Starford right then, because Clark was finding himself stuck for words. Again.

He tried to pay attention, but he was too preoccupied. Something was gnawing at him, but having Lois so near was making it hard to concentrate on what was bothering him. The scent of her shampoo, the gentle rhythm of her heartbeat... the memory of last night when she’d — No. He couldn’t think about that. Not now. He forced his mind away from the tantalizing memories.

The speaker mentioned something about covering Superman world events. Superman... Supermen and a Superwoman. That’s right. A convention. A whole convention about him; it made him a little ill just thinking about it. He couldn’t comprehend why people were so obsessed with his alter ego that they had whole conventions, that they even dressed like him, and discussed him on panels. Even Lois hadn’t been that obsess —

And then things started clicking into place.

“Lois?” he whispered.

She turned to look at him in question.

Was this why she had had a sudden change of heart about the IAJ conference? Why she was planning to go off alone today for most of her sessions? Why she hadn’t batted an eye when a guy dressed as Superman had walked by?

She raised her eyebrows at him, clearly still expecting him to start talking any second.

But should he ask her? Confront her? Was she still obsessed and infatuated with him, with Superman? His heart sank a little at the thought, but he quickly banished it.

No Superman talk until after they were home.

“Nevermind. I’ll tell you later,” he said, chickening out.

She smiled and shrugged at him and turned her attention back to the speaker.

His focus, however, was well and truly shot.

Had she only planned to come so that she could sneak off to the SuperCon? No, she was more professional than to blow off the whole conference, especially on the Planet’s dime. How had he not realized that Lois was... what did they call themselves? One of *them*. He’d never known one, or so he’d thought; he’d always just appreciated their fanaticism from a distance when he came across them.

Looking back at her history with Superman, it made sense. So he really shouldn’t be surprised. It made a small part of his heart ache, though. The part that still harbored the hurt and humiliation of being turned down in favor of his sexier, flashier, more god-like self. And there was a part of his heart that was remorseful for that night, too. He’d been cruel and reactive in his refusal. He’d still felt raw from her rejection and her reckless callousness in asking after Superman right after.

He glanced over at her and wondered... knew that she had a similar wound on her heart. They’d both done damage to one another. But thankfully, wonderfully, amazingly, they’d found their way to each other. And... last night...

She looked over at him and smiled, as if she’d felt him staring at her or thinking about her. She intertwined her hand with his and gave it a gentle squeeze. Her focus was on the speaker, but he couldn’t tear his attention away from the way their hands were joined and resting on his thigh. He tried to memorize how tremendously right it looked and felt.

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He had to tell her. It was clear she’d chosen Clark, and that made his heart undeniably happy. But for thoughtless and impulsive reasons, he’d never considered what would come after.

Had he honestly thought she’d be happy to find out there was more to her choice than met the eye? What kind of fool did that make him to encourage her dismissal of Superman only to turn around later and say, ‘Surprise, free gift with purchase!’?

This wasn’t a good surprise. Oh, on the surface and after the dust settled, sure, she might be thrilled to be getting both Clark and Superman in the same package, but this package was wrapped up in lies.

She was gently stroking her thumb across the back of his hand, and he hoped dearly that she could forgive him this.

After the keynote and a few minutes of mingling and saying hi to a few familiar faces, Lois had awkwardly excused herself to go to her panel discussion. Theoretically, her *Women in Journalism* panel, but he knew now that it didn’t really exist. He’d scanned the program a few minutes ago and hadn’t found it. She’d surprised him with a quick kiss on the cheek and a breathy ‘see you later’ before making her excuses and leaving.

It didn’t feel very good to be lied to. He groaned aloud. The irony was not lost on him.

He watched her walk down the long hallway and past all

the IAJ rooms, and he followed her at a distance. She headed for an entirely different wing of the convention center, one that was increasingly more populated with Superman lookalikes of all sorts the further he walked. He felt weirdly exposed even though he was a literal stranger in a crowd of Superman fans, or SuperFans, as a loudly colored poster declared them to be. In fact, he was almost feeling a bit panicked, like his secret would surely be exposed even though the odds of that happening were pretty much nil here amidst a sea of red and blue and S's.

A little unsteady and overwhelmed, he sat down on a nearby bench and let Lois disappear into the crowd. He could always find her when he was ready. He was still trying to wrap his head around all the thoughts vying for attention in his head. He was trying not to be jealous of himself or resentful of her infatuation, especially given all the clear-as-day signs she'd given him, but he was well and truly confused.

After last night, he'd have thought there was no mistaking her feelings for him, for Clark. But she had to be still a little obsessed with Superman if she'd come all this way... The people who went to these things were a little... enthusiastic about him.

Lois was a SuperFan, and he was entirely unsure of how he felt about that.

There was a discarded SuperCon program on the end of the bench, so he scooted down and grabbed it. He leafed through it with a morbid curiosity. He just... wasn't sure what to do with the information he learned there.

What made karaoke *Superman Karaoke*? There were parties and fan art and a ball. And the discussion panel topics? He shifted uncomfortably as he read some of them:

Superman and His Powers

SuperLegal: Vigilante or Hero?

Supertropolis: Why is Superman So Focused on Metropolis?

Kryptonomnicon: What Astronomers Postulate About Krypton

He felt both sad and curious at that one. Maybe he'd have to seek out the panelists later and talk to them. He read on... and whimpered a little. *Superman and Sex Appeal: What's Under the Spandex?* He really hoped that's not the one Lois was going to. He couldn't read any more.

He put the program back down on the bench and started tuning into the sound of her heartbeat. He used it like a homing beacon and located her quickly. She was, thankfully, in the "Supertropolis: Why is Superman So Focused on Metropolis?" discussion room. It was a larger auditorium because the convention organizers had guessed correctly that this would be a highly attended discussion panel.

Clark surveyed the room before entering to see where she was sitting. He scanned the entire audience and didn't see her. And then... he tensed. She was a *panelist*. Why was she a panelist? Sitting at the tables at the front of the room. So not only was she a SuperFan, but she was enough of one to be named a group expert and be on the panel.

He tugged at his tie a little, suddenly feeling a little warm. He snuck into the room and sat in the far back, Lois' eyeline to him mostly obscured by some audio equipment.

As he listened to the discussion, he was uncomfortable at how much people had gotten right when speculating about his private life. The discussion leaned in the direction that Superman had some sort of lair/headquarters/home in the Metropolis area. Though, with more than 15 million people in the greater metro area, he didn't feel too worried about discovery from that one.

Several people speculated, with data points, that Superman definitely resided in Metropolis, probably near midtown. That was uncomfortably closer to the truth. He was going to have to vary up his flight and landing patterns more.

It was the relationship conversation that really struck a nerve with him. And actually with Lois, too. A small, seemingly intense faction believed that Superman stayed in Metropolis because of various personal relationships, including friendships and one or more romantic relationships. He believed in monogamy, dangit!

And then they started in on Lois, and he almost lost it. But he should have known she would handle her own. And his.

They fired their questions at her like bullets, and he was helpless to stop them.

"Do you have a relationship with Superman, Ms. Lane?"

Well, she doesn't exactly know it yet, but...

"Have you slept with him, Ms. Lane?"

Yep, she totally did.

"Is he faster than a speeding bullet?"

He flinched at that last one, all of them, really, but Lois looked absolutely unruffled. Her heartbeat said otherwise, but only he could tell that she was in the least affected by this line of inquiry. He highly suspected that she'd anticipated these types of questions even if she didn't welcome them. He watched her with newfound awe and respect.

"No comment. No comment. No comment," she said loudly but firmly as though she were at a press conference instead of a discussion panel. The effect was the same. An awed silence came over the audience and remaining panelists.

"While I may be his friend, I know very little about his private life. I assume he wants it that way purposely, because could you imagine what people might do to those people he held dear if he dared to do so? He sacrifices a personal life so that people can stay safe. I imagine he stays close to Metropolis because we've treated him well, and he has to have some sort of home base. Can you imagine how lonely he is? Foregoing relationships to keep people safe? For all the good Superman does, we ALL need to show him more respect. More privacy. More dignity."

Another appalling question came flying out. "What's under the spandex?"

A few lone wolf whistles followed, but Lois didn't let it show that she was rattled. She laid into the lewd commenter instead. "Are you serious right now? Read the room, buddy!" He could tell she was resisting standing to make her point, assuming that it would show too much how she was affected. She sat and leveled a glare and an accusing finger instead. He'd been on the other side of that, and it

was terrifying. “You’re in the wrong panel. The degenerates are down at Superman and Sex Appeal discussion.”

She huffed out a deep breath and glanced at her fellow panelists for solidarity, and they seemed to be with her. “Superman stands for integrity and truth. He stands as the world’s moral compass, and when we try to bring him down to Earth, it only makes people show the worst side of themselves.”

And then she refocused and brought up the next — serious — discussion topic, seamlessly and flawlessly. “Which brings us to our next topic of discussion: Superman as a beacon of hope, something for humanity to strive towards. While it’s not specifically related to why he seems to be based out of Metropolis, I think it stands to reason that it makes sense to build a foundation for that beacon, that symbol of truth and justice. Thoughts?”

He watched in quiet reverence and admiration as she helped lead the panel and the audience in crafting a narrative around the idea of Superman and what he stood for and weaved it carefully into why he might have one city as a de facto base of operations. He literally couldn’t have thought of anything better himself, and he was eternally grateful.

And even more in love with her than he thought he ever could be.

All this time... he’d thought she’d been blinded by the flashy, exciting suit and the superpowers, effectively a sexy god in tights. How wrong and self-centered had he been? Had he really thought her so shallow that she was only after his powers? He’d been blinded, unable to see past his own desperate need to be normal so much that he’d assumed that she’d only love the extraordinary part of him.

He sat in the back of the room, reeling from his revelation and not hearing the rest of the discussion. He’d never realized before... she had to love both sides of him in order for them to ever really have a chance at a successful relationship. There was no separate Clark and separate Superman. He was both. No matter how much he yearned to be normal, to be an ordinary man, at the end of the day... he wasn’t.

And Lois saw that. She didn’t even know his secret, and she’d seen that.

If he’d thought he was the luckiest man alive before, he’d been even more right than he could have hoped to realize. He had to tell her. Now. It couldn’t wait any longer. She deserved so much more than he was able to give her, but he’d give her all he had.

Chapter 8

The discussion seemed to be winding down, the offensive commenters having been effectively silenced by Lois and/or escorted out by security. He’d spent the rest of the time watching her in great admiration and affection. The other panelists had more or less defended him and his higher purpose, especially in respect to his significant presence in Metropolis, but Lois had been a staunch and tireless defender of Superman on every front.

He was so distracted by her passion and brilliance, as well as his own thoughts, that he didn’t realize that the session had come to an end. Some attendees had filtered out

and... he looked up to see that she’d noticed him. Her pulse had started racing when they’d made eye contact, and she looked a little panicked.

He watched as she made hasty goodbyes to the other panelists and bypassed the fans waiting for autographs. She made a beeline for him, and he was sure that he was in for a lecture. But instead...

She ran up to him and put her hands on his lapels. “I’m sorry! It’s not what you think, I promise! I wanted to tell you, but I wasn’t sure you’d understand, and... after the date, after last night... well, I just... I’m sorry,” she said all in one breath. “Don’t be mad,” she pleaded.

That wasn’t exactly what he’d been expecting. She was worried that *he’d* be mad. And he guessed that made sense. She’d lied.

He’d lied. So much more than she had. And he needed to tell her now. No more waiting or stalling. “Can we go somewhere to talk... privately?” he asked softly. His emotions were running wild around in his mind and making it hard to think. “Back to the room?” he suggested.

She nodded, still looking a bit worried. After a moment’s hesitation, she took hold of his hand and walked with him toward the hotel.

They walked in silence for only a few seconds before she paused and turned to him. “Is everything okay? I’m sorry, Clark. I really am. I hope you’ll give me a chance to explain... It’s not what you think.”

It was what he was thinking, but that was a good thing. An amazing thing. A thing he didn’t even realize he’d been missing. He hadn’t thought he could love her more than he did already.

“Everything’s okay,” he tried to reassure her, and gave her a quick kiss. “Or at least I hope it will be.” He knew he was being cryptic, but he couldn’t tell her here with all these people around. And he was worried that things *wouldn’t* be okay after he confessed his secret.

They finally made it to the room after a tense yet intimate — and mostly silent — walk to the hotel and then up to their floor. She’d held his hand the whole time, as if she were afraid to let go of him, and to be honest, he was afraid this might be the last time he would get to hold her hand.

When they got to the room, she awkwardly let go of his hand as they both searched for their key cards. Clark found his first and opened the door.

Lois took several deep breaths, and she sat on what was technically her bed in the room. She tented her fingers in her lap nervously and seemed to be waiting for him to speak. She was assuming she was the guilty, injurious party here, but it was him. It was so very much him.

He was reluctant to start this conversation, one he’d been vaguely pondering for months now as the urge to ask her out had become stronger and stronger. He was certain now that she needed to — deserved to — know, but he was so frightened that this would be the end of everything wonderful that he’d ever had in his life.

He couldn’t think of where to start. “So... you weren’t excited to come to the conference after all. It’s because the SuperCon was here... because you’re a SuperFan?” he asked softly, no real accusation in his voice, not after what

he'd just heard.

She looked almost pained as though she was afraid he'd dismiss her casually if he so much as suspected any affection for Superman. His fierce and irrational jealousy of himself... Had he done that to her?

"Clark... It was just a whim, Clark. Sometimes I get these ideas in my head, like I could be a real friend to him. I know I — he can't have a relationship, why it's dangerous for him to even think about it. I know it's not logical for him to be with anyone, and besides, I *want* to be with you."

He stood motionless, on tenterhooks, waiting to see what she would say next. He felt like it was wrong to wait and not say anything, but he couldn't help himself.

She continued, "I feel responsible for him... no, to him? Oh, God, this probably sounds ridiculous, but sometimes I get the feeling that I helped create Superman, in a way... no, not create him, but..." She trailed off, seemingly lost in a memory or gathering her thoughts. "I've never told anyone this, but... the night Superman came to me for that first interview? He didn't seem all that confident or... prepared to be on the world's stage, if that makes sense."

He nodded, then went to sit down next to her on the bed, facing her with one leg hitched up on the bed. She shifted slightly so that she was facing him too. He hadn't realized she'd read him so well then. Of course she had.

She put a hand on his knee. "Clark, I wrote the article that introduced him to the world. Yes, at first there was an obsession, an infatuation... maybe even something I'd mistaken for love." She ducked her head and looked at her hand. "But I shaped the narrative of how the world views him. I feel responsible for that, for doing what I can to uphold that mythic truth so that he can keep doing all the good that he does. It might be a bit foolish or fanciful to imagine myself his partner, that I'd be that important to him. It just seems like he has such an overwhelming responsibility on his shoulders, and he seems so lonely at times. I just want to make sure that he always feels welcome here, that he —"

His lips were on hers before he could even think about it. His hands framing her face as he kissed her, desperate to find a way to show her how much he loved her, how much she meant to him. Her hands found their way behind his neck, pulling him closer still. Oh, how he loved her! Their mouths moved in perfect symphony, her tongue exploring his mouth, him tugging at her bottom lip, their lips meeting and parting again and again. Finally, he pulled away, their hands dropping back to their laps.

"Wow," she said breathlessly. "What... what was that for?"

"Because you're the most amazing and wonderful person in the world." He reached over to cup her cheek, running his thumb against the flushed and silky skin underneath. Her eyes were so expressive, so full of... love. He hoped so. He dropped his hand and found hers to hold.

"Because I'm fanatical about Superman? And a little preoccupied by his loneliness?" she asked, clearly perplexed.

"I'm not lonely, not anymore," he said, his voice gruff with emotion. "And you *are* that important to me."

Her eyebrows knit together in confusion, and her eyes were reading his face. He could see her mind working. Her chest was rising and falling as her breathing quickened.

"And you're exactly right, about all of it. I wasn't ready, not at all. I've always wanted to just help, quietly and without attention. My mom had just finished the suit, and then we heard the shuttle was in trouble... and I wasn't ready. But I had to be."

"Oh my God," she breathed, her eyes wide and staring at him. The space between them seemed both too great and not enough.

He held his breath and braced himself for the anger, and then she started laughing. Or sobbing? Maybe both? "Lois?"

Her hand was covering her mouth and her other arm was wrapped around her stomach as she doubled over. Tears were streaming down her face, and he still wasn't sure if she was laughing or crying, though it sounded suspiciously like laughing.

"Lois?" he tried again. He was almost worried he might have broken her; this was *not* a typical Lois reaction.

"Sorry," she managed to get out as she straightened again and tried to catch her breath, her eyes crinkled from laughter. She started wiping the tears from her face.

Laughter did not make any sense. "Are you... okay? Are you mad?" he asked cautiously.

She shook her head but then pursed her lips as if she was trying to hold back more laughter. Then after a moment, she spoke, "Can you imagine? I mean... the odds are literally astronomical." She sputtered, definitely trying to hold back more laughter.

He was *so* lost. Maybe she... hadn't understood? Why wasn't she mad? "... imagine what?" he asked, hesitant but throwing caution to the wind anyway because nothing made sense.

"I, a closet SuperFan, come to Canada *WITH* Superman to sneak off to a SuperCon. It's hilarious!"

He chuckled lightly. "Yeah, I guess so," he agreed lamely. He was glad that she was amused, but he was kind of waiting for the other shoe to drop. "You're not mad?"

"Mad?" She sniffled a little. She shook her head. "Not really. Annoyed, maybe, frustrated... relieved."

"Relieved?" he asked, confused but daring to hope.

She looked deep into his eyes, and he could see it then, the tinge of... sadness that had been masked by the laughter. She brought a hand up to run her fingers across his brow and down his cheek. She pulled his glasses off gently and examined them briefly before folding them and setting them to the side on the bed.

She looked up at him again. "I felt confused and guilty for so long..." she said softly.

"Guilty?" What did she have to feel guilty about?

"I thought I was in love with two men at the same time, and I was so confused how that could be possible... and I felt guilty because I didn't know what to do." Her eyes were still glistening from her tears, and she suddenly looked down at her hands in her lap. She took a deep breath and let it out.

"In love?" he asked. He wasn't entirely sure he was breathing as the hope and relief started flooding his chest.

She looked up at him through her lashes, and she nodded.

“Can I... can I kiss you?” he asked, almost afraid to do or say anything for fear of this perfect moment disappearing, this dream come true.

She nodded again and drifted towards him. He leaned in to meet her and capture her lips in a slow and deep kiss, letting free all his love for her now that he knew for certain that she loved him back. He pulled back slowly to look at her and just take in the beauty and get lost in her eyes. He used the pad of his thumb on her cheek to wipe away a stray tear that had slipped out.

“I am so in love with you, Lois Lane,” he uttered, his voice slightly husky.

She smiled at home, so lovingly, so warmly. “I love you, too, Clark. More than I thought I could love anyone.”

He leaned in for another kiss, brief but full of promise. “Thank you.”

“For what?” she asked.

“You do so much for me, more than I even realized. You *are* my partner, in every way. I don’t think I could be Superman without you.”

“Oh, Clark,” she said gently, placing her hand on his chest, over his heart. “You have such a beautiful soul and the kindest heart.”

He covered her hand with his. “I’m sorry, Lois. I feel like I maybe should have to you about Superman before we...”

She shook her head. “Don’t apologize for that. I made the decision to make love with you, with Clark... and that’s who I made love with. The fact that you’re also Superman is still a bit surreal, believe me, but... I don’t regret what we did. And I hope you don’t either?”

“No, no, I could *never* regret making love with you.” His heart was so full. He pulled her into his embrace, and her head came to rest on his shoulder. “What did I ever do to deserve you?”

He could feel her smile against him. “I don’t know, but it must have been pretty spectacular. I’m quite a catch, I’ll have you know!” She pulled back and gave him a teasing grin.

“Oh, I know. Trust me, I know.” He chuckled. “Though, I’m not too bad myself, right?” he teased back.

Her eyes seemed to sparkle as she nodded. “Apparently, you’re *super*,” she said wryly but with affection.

He couldn’t hold back the laughter, and his heart felt so light and free.

“So, I guess this means I probably can’t convince you to enter the costume contest to win the prize for me?” she asked with an amused grin and a gleam in her eyes.

He dropped his head, shaking it as he laughed lightly. Of course there was a costume contest. “There are SO many questions...”

“Like... where do I sign up?” she said, a little too eagerly.

“Lois, you’re serious? That’s cheating!” She couldn’t be serious.

“Okay, okay. Fine. I was only half serious, anyway. But just to be sure... maybe you should model for me? See if you’d even pass muster?”

His jaw dropped. “You don’t think I’d win?” he asked incredulously.

“There are some pretty good lookalikes out there with professional-grade costumes.”

“Lois, I *am* Superman. I have *the original* costume. How could I not win?” He hated that a slight whine had slipped into his voice.

“Well, you should know better than anyone that people see what you want them to see.” She snagged his glasses from beside her and handed them back to him.

He put them on, almost an automatic reflex, and he had the good sense to look a bit apologetic. “Fair point.”

“There are several categories, so even if you didn’t win Best Overall, you’d probably be a shoe-in for Sexiest.”

He blushed furiously. Last night had erased any doubts that she found him attractive, but he couldn’t help but feel a bit ridiculous about loving the fact that Lois was telling Clark he’d be sexy in the Superman costume.

“So, c’mon, are you going to model for me?” She raised her eyebrows at him in question and anticipation.

He whimpered, suddenly feeling very self-conscious. “You’ve seen me in the suit before!”

She shook her head. “Nope. I’ve seen Superman. I’ve never seen Clark in the suit.”

“That’s the same thing!”

“No, it’s completely different, I assure you.” She stood and crossed her arms over her chest. “Now go change,” she commanded, leveling that look at him, the one that meant she was going to get her way no matter what he did.

He let out a heavy sigh and took his glasses off and handed them to her, and then he stood slowly and stepped back a bit from the bed. He’d always fantasized a bit about being able to do this in front of her, but now that the moment was here, he was finding it slightly terrifying. He tugged at the knot of his tie and started unbuttoning his shirt and then moved at super speed, changing into the Superman suit.

He came to a stop, the cape swirling around him a bit from the momentum. He was still feeling oddly flustered, and he wasn’t sure what to do with his arms, so he just crossed them over his chest. “So... do I pass muster?”

Lois was still standing at the edge of the bed with her mouth hanging open. Was that good or bad? Had to be good, right? She’d flirted with Superman plenty of times.

“Wow,” she said, breathless.

He smiled, feeling a little surge of pride. And then he felt a flush of arousal mixed with self-consciousness as her eyes traveled up and down his body. She’d seen him naked.

Now was not the time to think of that. Nope.

“So, do I pass?” It was ridiculous how much he was concerned with this. It’s not like he was going to *enter* the contest.

She put her thumb and forefinger on her chin to inspect him. “Hmmm...” She walked in a circle around him, and he’d swear that her heart beat a touch faster when she paused directly behind him. This felt extremely uncomfortable but also... arousing.

“Superman is a little taller.”

Was she serious? He stood taller and pulled back his shoulders. “Better now?”

“Sure. I think you’d pass,” she said in an analytical tone as she came full circle to stand in front of him. “I’m not sure you’d win Best Overall, but...”

She leaned in and reached up with her hand to tousle his hair out of Superman’s classic, slicked back style. “There,” she said, seemingly satisfied. “Now you could be a top contender for Sexiest.”

“Superman with messy hair?” He raised his eyebrows at her.

“Clark hair,” she corrected. “Superman with Clark’s hair, very sexy.”

He was a bit speechless, so he just blurted out the first thing that came to mind. “Do I even want to know what the prize is? A date with Superman?”

“How does that even make any sense, Clark?”

She called him Clark in the suit. And he felt a little part of his heart melt. “What do you mean, ‘how does that make sense?’”

“Most of the people entering the contest are men... why would they want a date with Superman?”

“I’ll have you know that plenty of men find me attractive!” he insisted.

“Okay, fair point. You *are* really attractive.”

Oh, that was sexy to hear. Somehow they’d gone from casual flirting to reckless flirting faster than a speeding bullet. “So is it a kiss from Superman?” he asked huskily.

She shook her head. Her cheeks flushed and she ducked her head.

“So you’re saying you don’t want a kiss from Superman?” He stepped towards her, all traces of nervousness now gone.

He heard her heartbeat increase. She shook her head again. “No, I’m saying that’s not the prize.”

“Technicality,” he said as he took another step towards her. “Do you want a kiss from Superman?” he asked again.

“No. I want a kiss from Clark.”

He closed the distance between them and took her in his arms and kissed her soundly, his mouth slanting against hers and exploring its depths. There was something about hearing her call him Clark when he was in the suit that was just... something he’d never imagined wanting or needing. Her arms found their way around his neck, and she melted into him. He didn’t think he would ever get enough of kissing her. She knew. She knew everything and was in his arms, eagerly and passionately kissing him back.

She shifted a little closer still, brushing against his red briefs, and then made a small whimpering sound against his mouth. He pulled back, breathless. How did she always make him breathless? “Sorry,” he rasped. “It’s, um... the suit doesn’t hide much. And... I... this might be... this is one of my fantasies,” he said, blushing furiously. “You and... um, me... in the suit.” Why was he explaining things? Part of him wanted the earth to open up and swallow him whole to save him from the embarrassment. The other part wanted... her.

“It is?” she asked curiously, her skin still a little flushed and her lips swollen from their kisses. “I mean... I’d always kind of thought so... that Superm — that you wanted me, but you always pulled away. I think that’s what made me even more confused.” She ran her fingers over the seam

where his tunic met his skin. “I guess we were both confused, not knowing what to do.” She smiled ruefully, but softly.

“I’m so sorry, Lois,” he said, grateful that she hadn’t left his embrace. “I made a mess of things, and I’m sorry I lied to you for so long, sorry I led you on... I just...”

“Wanted to be normal? Lead a normal life? Like... an ordinary man leading an ordinary life?” He saw fresh tears building in her eyes. “Oh, I’m sorry, too, Clark!”

“Shhh, you didn’t know. You couldn’t have known.” He brushed her hair behind her ear and then wiped a lone tear away. “It’s my fault for lying in the first place.”

She shook her head. “Can we just skip past this part? The blame and the apologies and... we’ll probably need to talk about a lot of things later, but I kinda just want to... be with you, be in love for a while first.”

He nodded eagerly and dipped to kiss her again, still wondering what he’d done to deserve her love and support. Her lips were warm and pliant against his, and her hands were wandering under his cape and across the smooth spandex on his back. “As much... as I hate to... say it...” he said against her lips between kisses. “We should... probably... get back... to the conference.”

She pulled away to look at her watch. Then she started kissing a path from his jawline down his neck. “We’re too late for lunch and learn...” More kissing on his neck. “... and the next sessions don’t start for another forty-five minutes.” Now she was moving to suck gently on his earlobe, and he was having trouble thinking.

“What about lunch? Don’t we need to eat?” he said lamely, though he wasn’t even sure why he was protesting. Why was he protesting?

She paused to look at him. “As I recall, you don’t need to eat. And I’m not hungry... for food.” Then her lips were back on his neck.

“But...” he started, but the protest died on his lips when he felt her teeth rasp lightly against his skin.

She paused again and pulled back slightly to look at his face. “Are you... ? Do you not want to?” she worried. “I’m sorry. I thought...” Her eyes darted down and back up again ever so quickly.

“I do... I...” He wasn’t even sure what to say or how to explain.

“What is it, Clark?” He watched a touch of uncertainty cross her face, and he hoped dearly that she wasn’t feeling rejected.

“It’s... I don’t know how to do this... this, um... I don’t even know how to explain it.”

She was waiting patiently as he fumbled for the right words. He couldn’t find them; they were all the wrong words. He kissed her gently on the lips before he stepped away and ran a hand through his almost-Clark hair.

She cleared her throat and spoke softly, “If you don’t want... um, if you want to change to Clark, that’s okay. I guess I was being kind of forward... and I don’t want you to think I’m after...” She gestured vaguely at his suit. “I want *you*. All of you. I’m not just... throwing myself at Superman. I mean, I *am* but he’s you... just stop me before I stick my other foot in my mouth.”

“It’s not that,” he said, “I promise. I think you, uh,

showed me last night how much you want *me*.” She blushed and he could feel the heat rising in his own cheeks. “It’s that... well, ever since last night, I don’t know how to be around you and... not want you.” He watched her brow furrow. “I’m butchering this...”

“It’s okay. Take your time,” she reassured him, though he could tell she was a bit nervous about what he was trying to say.

“You drive me to distraction, Lois. I haven’t been able to think straight since last night because I can’t stop wanting you, being aroused by you. I definitely *want* to. I just don’t know when I’m supposed to give into the urges and when to tamp them down. If I gave in every time... we’d never leave this room.”

She blushed again. “I... I’m flattered. But a little confused... you’re worried that you want me too much?”

“Yeah?” he squeaked.

“Clark, I’m the one seducing you, in case you hadn’t noticed.” She grinned wickedly at him. “You’re allowed to play hookey every now and then. Now shut up and kiss me.”

Oh, God, he was going to die happy. He did as he was told and kissed her soundly. Her hands resumed their exploration underneath his cape, and he groaned into her mouth when she dropped her hands down to his buttocks and squeezed.

He’d kissed Lois as Superman plenty of times — probably far more than he should have — but he’d always held back the intensity for one reason or another. Not the least of which was because the suit was far too revealing... and restrictive. It was quickly becoming uncomfortable.

Their kisses now felt... far more intense, not just physically but emotionally. She knew everything, even more than he’d realized there was to know. She was in love with him, all of him.

As their kissing grew more heated, his hands did their own wandering. Her back, her hips, her butt. But he craved more. Needed more. He pulled her flush to him, pressing himself against her.

She was tugging at his cape, at his briefs, on his belt, and she growled against his lips in frustration. “Why won’t this come off?” She pulled away and stepped back, letting out a strong puff of air. “Everyone thinks the suit is sexy. And sure, it looks great, but it is *not* sexy that it won’t come off easily.”

Was it wrong to find her so sexy when she was flushed and frustrated? “It comes off easily,” he countered huskily. He smiled devilishly at her and spun around, stopping fully naked in front of her.

She gasped, and he could feel the heat of her gaze, her own version of heat vision. “I take it back. That was sexy.” Her tongue darted out to lick her lips. “Do me!” she said excitedly.

“I’m trying to,” he laughed rakishly.

“No, no. My clothes.” she said. “The faster we get undressed — ”

He had her out of her clothes and underneath him on top of the bed before she could finish talking.

“ — the more time we... wow, that was fast,” she breathed. “I’m glad you don’t do everything that fast,” she

said impishly.

He moved to lie down beside her, facing her, and she eyed him in anticipation. “Have I told you how beautiful you are?” he asked.

“Not today, I don’t think,” she said with a blush.

“Well, you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen,” he rasped. She smiled at him and his heart danced.

They made love again, this time with no secrets between them. Clark’s heart had never been more full. When they finished, his body sank into the mattress, and she laid down flush against his chest to kiss him almost reverently.

“Amazing,” he breathed out.

“Incredible?” she supplied.

He nodded, a ridiculous grin on his face.

“Sensational?”

“Definitely.”

“Mind-blowing?”

“That’s the one! Mind-blowing.”

“Absolutely intellectually incapacitating,” she added.

“Hey, stop using big words when I can’t think straight!” he whined.

She quirked her head as though she’d had a sudden thought.

“What is it?” he asked.

She grinned and looked away for second. “I’m not sure if I should say... if it’s... appropriate?”

“It’s okay,” he assured her. “Just say it.”

“Kryptonite’s got nothing on me?” she said tentatively but with a slight gleam in her eye.

He laughed heartily and brought her down for another kiss. “Accurate.” He kissed her again. “Amazingly accurate.”

Chapter 9

The rest of the day went by in a blur for Clark. It wasn’t that it had passed quickly after what he had happily learned was a ‘nooner’, it was that he was floating on air — metaphorically. Lois knew. She was in love with him. *All* of him. And he’d learned that she was a better partner and friend to him than he ever could have hoped for.

They attended the rest of the day’s conference sessions, some together, some apart. Then they went down to the hotel restaurant to enjoy a simple dinner, during which they argued whether or not it counted as a second date.

Now, they were lying in bed after having made love for the second time today. Clark had a brief but stray thought, wondering when he’d go from knowing exactly how many times he’d made love to not knowing because it’d been too many. Right now it was three. Two days. One date. Well, two dates if you asked Lois.

He was obsessed with the way her head was laying on his chest. She fit perfectly, like they were made for each other. And maybe that was a bit of a fanciful thought, but he was so happy he didn’t really care.

She was tracing lazy patterns on his chest with her fingertips. He had his arm around her, and her leg was hitched up over his and intertwined.

“So...” he started, waiting to continue until she shifted a little to look up at him. “You never did tell me what the prize was.”

She scrunched her face and averted her gaze for a second. "It's silly. It's fine. I don't need it."

"C'mon, tell me," he goaded.

"It's an all-expenses paid trip to Superman WorldCon in Paris," she said, and he could tell she was feeling a little self-conscious about the whole thing.

"I'll take you," he said impulsively.

"You'll what?"

"I'll take you," he repeated. "To Paris. To WorldCon.

"You have tickets? Why... how would you get tickets? Those have been sold out for *months*."

"The, uh... guest of honor..." He drew an S on his chest with his finger. "... doesn't need a ticket."

"Oh! Right! Right." Part of him wondered if she had forgotten he was Superman for a moment or just hadn't known he'd be going.

"I normally try to avoid these things at all costs, but they made an impassioned plea I couldn't refuse. So I said I'd be there. Besides, something happened today that made me realize that these conventions aren't such a bad thing after all." He smiled broadly at her.

"Yeah? You met a hot SuperFan and got lucky?" she teased.

He barked with laughter, and they both laughed together. Then, he brushed a lock of hair behind her ear and cupped her cheek. "I met the best SuperFan and got luckier than I ever dreamed possible."

"Oh, Clark." She brought her hand up to cover his and closed her eyes briefly. "What did I ever do to deserve you?"

"I don't know, but it must have been pretty spectacular," he said, grinning impishly as she smacked him playfully on the chest. "I'm quite a catch, I'll have you know!"

"Careful, you!" She narrowed her eyes at him. "Or I'll show you just how much of a catch you are," she threatened mischievously.

"Wait, what?" He was confused. "What does that even mean?"

"So... there are fansites for all sorts of Superman things..." she started, and then suddenly looked a little hesitant.

He wasn't sure he wanted to know...

"There's even one for erotic fiction. About Superman."

"Oh, God." He was absolutely mortified. And then realization hit. "You haven't read any of it, have you? Please tell me you haven't read any of it."

She flashed him a rather evasive smile.

"Oh my God. You have, haven't you?"

"Well..." She was enjoying this far too much.

"Lo-is!" he whined.

"What?" she asked, acting all sorts of innocent.

His eyes went wide when he had another realization. "Have you... have... you... written any of it?"

"Why?" She raised a suggestive eyebrow at him. "Are you looking for some... reading material?"

He honestly wasn't sure if he was embarrassed or aroused. Maybe both. "I, uh... have no idea how I feel about this whole idea that people I don't even know..." He looked pointedly at her. "... and possibly one person I know... write erotic fiction about me. It's... um... it's

something."

She moved her leg up and down against his for a moment, her knee brushing against his now obvious interest, and said, "I think at least *part* of you knows how you feel about it."

"Lo-issss!" That... wasn't fair.

"What? I can't help if you're aroused by the idea of me writing erotic fiction about us."

"... wait, *us*?" Just the thought of it sent shocks of heat to his groin.

She blushed furiously and ducked her head into his chest, and he finally felt a little more on equal footing. She peeked her head back out. "Well, you didn't think I was going to write about Superman having sex with someone else, did you?"

"No! I mean... I... I guess not. I mean... I can't really imagine ever making love to anyone else but you." he stammered.

"Oh," she said softly, a hitch in her breath.

"What?"

"You said 'ever'."

"Yeah..." It just slipped out. He'd always just thought of her in terms of forever, even if she'd never agreed to go out with him. There wouldn't ever be anyone else but her. But he knew she had serious reservations when it came to relationships and trust.

She stared and searched his eyes, his face, and she looked slightly apprehensive.

"It's okay, Lois," he rushed to reassure her. "I don't expect... I know that you have... Well, just know that my feelings for you will never change, but I don't... necessarily expect that you —"

She shifted and crushed her lips to his, a deep and soul-searing kiss. When she pulled back, she ran her fingertips across his brow and down his cheek as if memorizing his features. "I never thought..." She trailed off, seemingly lost in thought or searching for the right words.

Her hand came back to lay on his chest, and she rested her chin atop her hand. Her eyes were soft, but held a hint of sadness, and he could see the glint of fresh tears.

"Falling in love... it's something I never thought I'd have. Romance and happily ever after? Those were for fairy tales. I didn't have a great childhood. My parents had a toxic relationship that ended in divorce." She paused and looked away, scrunching up her face, maybe in an attempt to remember something else? Or forget something else? Or in an effort not to cry? "All the relationships I *did* find, some I even thought were love... those were all federal disasters."

She shifted and snuggled in closer to hold him tighter, her head back resting on his chest. He kissed the top of her hair and wrapped his arm around her tighter.

"I don't know how to do this, Clark." She sniffled against him. "What I feel for you? It's stronger and more amazing than anything I've ever felt before. It feels like... it *feels* like forever, but that... terrifies me." She took a shuddering breath. "It terrifies me because it's so new that it can't be real, can it? It's so real and so perfect that I hope it lasts the rest of my life. But if I ever lost it... lost you..." She turned her head to look at him again and the look on

her face stole his breath. "I don't think I would survive it. It's too strong... do you know what I mean?"

"I think so," he said softly. He gently shifted out from under her and turned on his side so that he could look at her, really talk to her. "I don't know how to do this either. All I know is how I feel when you're not with me, how I feel when I think about a future without you in it." He tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear and stroked her cheek with the back of his fingers. "I know I'm the strongest person in the world, but I'm honestly nothing... nothing without you. And today, you showed me just how much more I need you. You and me together is stronger than me alone."

She smiled and leaned in to kiss him, soft and slow on the lips. "I like 'ever'. 'Ever' works for me," she said.

"Really?"

"Definitely."

"Seriously?"

"Absolutely."

"Cross your heart?"

"This is getting silly. But I love it. I love you. And I was thinking that, the next time we get some vacation time, we should come back and see Niagara falls. We never did get to see the wrong side."

"Really? And what about your tour guide? Do you think you'll be needing his services?"

"No, I don't think I need a tour guide. I think I would rather just go with the man I love." She snuggled close to him again.

His heart swelled and sang. "That sounds perfect."

"You know, I think Canada might be my favorite country..."

a little bit. Wheee! Oops!

I hope you enjoyed, Queen of Capes!

THE END

End Notes:

Queen of Capes gave the following requirements:

Want:

1. Clark kissing Lois in the Superman costume
2. A setting that isn't Smallville or Metropolis
3. A happy ending

Don't Want:

1. Dan Scardino
2. Mayson Drake
3. Clones

The don't want list? I am **TOTALLY ON BOARD** with leaving those far, far away from my story! In fact, Mayson and Dan were on my own list of don't wants. Happy ending? Done! Setting that isn't Smallville or Metropolis? Ooh, that's a bit harder... but okay, I can think of something! And then my brain took that first one? Yeah, I read it literally. And... I know some people call the suit a costume and vice versa, but... I spent a ton of time trying to figure out just how I could get Clark in a Superman costume and kissing Lois. Way too much time. Then I brought in friends to brainstorm the initial idea (thank you, lovetvfan and AnnieM!!). And then I wrote. And wrote. And went on vacation and still tried to write. And kept writing. And it took me almost 28,000 words, but I got Clark in a 'Superman costume' kissing Lois. And then I kept going for