

Fortunately, There Are No Doors Here Tonight

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Summary: What if Lois and Clark actually got more of their first actual kiss? What if Clark had made it to save Mayson on time? Things change in the most surprising yet logical way in this "Lucky Leon" episode fix-it.

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Author's Note: This is what happens when you don't have an actual idea in your head...or something? I mean... I *had* an idea... that Clark needed to hurry his butt up so Mayson wouldn't die because he totally had time and then he wouldn't be a mopey jerk face and let Dan mess around for like 5 eps. Right? And so...me being me, I *thought* this was going to be a short thing. I was just gonna have them kiss, like, actually get most all of that kiss in! And then Clark runs fast enough to save Mayson, end of story, they can keep dating and be happy. But nope...it turned into a whole thing. A WHOLE thing! With the dang a-plot and everything.

But, as also happens to me a lot...amazing things happened! Like...really amazing. I really, really love how this one turned out, even though I had to fight with it at times! I hope you enjoy it as much as I do. :)

AnnaBtG makes fun of me for collecting BRs...and she's not wrong. It's my impatience to share and my need for constant validation (we all have imposter syndrome, right?). But in any case, I need to thank AnnaBtG and SuperBek and Socomama and lovetvfan and Queen of the Capes. They all had valuable comments and suggestions that helped make this fic the awesome that it is!! Huger thanks to SuperBek who prodded me to finish and held my hand and then prodded some more.

And a special thanks to Verity (PuffyTiger) for her fervent words about Lois in Discord that inspired a certain paragraph at the end. I imagine she'll know which one. :)

Thank you to Blueowl for GEing this story for the archive!

Chapter 1

"You slammed the door in my face last night," Clark said, pausing their walking and turning toward her. Lois paused too, her breath catching a bit in her chest at the

underlying question. His voice was gentle, but he wanted to know. Deserved to know.

Equal parts excitement and anticipation thrummed throughout her body. "That was...a mistake," she said, her voice and her posture softening, somewhat unconsciously, knowing that he'd already put his heart on the line twice for her. She shouldn't have....

"Don't let it happen again." He inched closer as he spoke, somehow letting her know all in one breath that her behavior since the end of their date last night had hurt him but also that he held no room in his heart for resentment. There was only room for her.

And she knew...this was it, this was the moment where it all really changed, the kiss at the end of the date that declared it a success. She'd delayed it, afraid that it would spell the end, that Lois Lane and her penchant for ruining relationships would single-handedly destroy not only their chance at romance but their friendship and partnership as well.

Now, as she leaned closer, her breathing shallow, she was almost excited, giddy about hanging on this precipice. Her voice was breathy as she tilted her head up, looking into those devastatingly handsome brown eyes as she spoke. "I guess we'll just have to see how things go, won't we?"

Her heart raced even faster as she felt herself being drawn closer, her eyes flitting to his full lips and back to his eyes. And he told her, speaking more with his gaze and the warmth and desire that seemed to radiate off of him, that there weren't any doors here tonight.

There was no more room for mistakes or getting scared except for the thrillingly terrifying feeling of longing and anticipation skating along her spine and down to her toes. There was only Clark. Right in front of her, drifting ever closer as his eyes darted down to her lips and back.

Her breath caught just a little, and she found herself leaning toward those lips. "Fortunately..." she whispered back to him.

Everything seemed in slow motion but for the wild racing of her heart as his lips so slowly and tenderly captured hers. It was brief but intoxicating, every nerve ending alighting as their lips touched, and he pulled back ever so slightly. And then, after a gasp or a sigh, she wasn't sure which, she was falling back into him. Her arms found their way around his back, and the warmth of his hand as he cradled her cheek and deepened the kiss only intensified things.

She heard little whimpers and moans and breaths but couldn't be sure if she was the one making them — all she knew was the intense desire and sense of rightness she felt. And she never wanted it to end.

All too soon, he was pulling away, the warmth of his lips disappearing and leaving her bereft. She opened her eyes to see him already a foot away, his shoulders turned but his gaze still on her and his brow furrowed in some kind of anguish. Before she could even react, she saw his eyes do some sort of dance — down the street, to his shoes, and back to her eyes — and she saw a look she'd never forget. It was regret and longing and admission all in one as his body finished its turn away from her and sped half a block away.

Sped.

As in, he was in front of her and then he was down the street half a block, standing in front of a silver sedan and ripping the driver's side door off as if no time at all had passed.

The seconds it took for her mind to connect back up with her body and tell it to move felt like an eternity. She watched in horror as the car exploded and engulfed Clark in a barrage of fire and smoke and debris. And she ran toward him as soon as her legs would move.

As the plume of fire and smoke cleared and she drew closer, Lois saw Clark still standing, cradling a woman in his arms who appeared to be unconscious.

"Oh my god! Is she okay?" Lois cried out as she came to stand next to Clark, slightly breathless from the short sprint. Her hand clapped over her mouth when she looked at the woman and saw who it was — Mayson.

The acrid stench of chemicals and smoke made her cough and burned in her nostrils, and she could feel the heat from the car still smoldering beside them. Clark stood there for a long moment, as if frozen with indecision or panic. The arm of his coat and the sleeve underneath looked to have been torn open by shrapnel, the material shredded in long, jagged slices that revealed a familiar shock of blue beneath.

She could feel her mind processing everything at what must have been close to super speed even though it felt like the world around her was moving so slowly, and she gasped as he turned slightly. A large swath of his jacket and shirt was just gone — a rough, singed outline of where he must have taken the brunt of the blast. The blue material underneath almost shone in the glow of the street lamps, and she wondered for half a second where the cape must be.

Lois took a step closer to the still-dazed Clark, knowing he couldn't be seen in this state by anyone else. "Clark, you need to go call 911!"

"No, Lois, I need to —"

She touched his arm...running her fingers purposefully along the blue spandex through the rips in his shirt and said again, slowly, "You **need to go** call 911. Mayson looks okay — I know you'd have already rushed her to the

hospital if she wasn't — I'll be right here with her."

As if she'd flipped a switch, she watched him transform right before her eyes Clark's uncertainty morphing into Superman's stoic and reassuring presence.

He gave her a quick nod before he gently laid a still-unconscious Mayson down on the sidewalk in front of her office building. Lois watched as, all in the span of half a second, he scanned the area around them and then puffed out his cheeks to blast the car with his cooling breath, putting out the last licks of flame and clearing the tendrils of smoke.

His eyes found hers, and the look of trepidation and remnants of desire — Clark's eyes on Superman's face, still wearing Clark's ruined suit — made her pulse race and some unknown emotion tug at her heart. She watched, her mind still reeling, as he took half a step towards her and hesitated. The anguish in his eyes, his furrowed brow, stole her breath, and before she could even think about what it meant, he'd closed the distance between them and cupped her cheek, so briefly, and was gone with a whoosh.

Lois stared after him for long seconds, catching her breath, the slight warmth from his hand still on her skin, before movement out of the corner of her eye brought her attention back to the current situation. People were starting to trickle toward the scene, hesitation and morbid curiosity slowing their approach. She was glad to hear the familiar whoosh again and the sound of Superman's boots hitting the pavement before anyone got too close and started to question why the fire was already out and the victim not in Superman's arms.

Everything still seemed a bit in slow motion, her mind racing faster than time could possibly pass. Turning to find him, she was struck by how different he looked — not just from a minute ago, when he was Clark, but from how Superman normally looked. He gave her another slightly anguished look, his eyes saying far more than he could voice, and then he changed again — straightening to stand just that much taller and schooling his face.

And then time caught back up with her mind as she watched him rush to Mayson's side and crouch down to try and rouse her. "Ms. Drake, can you hear me? Ms. Drake?"

Everyone stood back a considerable distance, having halted in deference to Superman's presence, and Lois moved to join Clark — Superman at Mayson's side. Superman was reaching, about to pick Mayson up when she moaned and shifted.

"Wh-what happened?"

"Ms. Drake, there was an explosive device in your car. I — I managed to pull you out in time, but the force of the explosion must have knocked you unconscious. I'm going to take you to the hospital to get checked out, just to be sure."

Lois watched and listened, her mind still processing — it was surreal, hearing Superman’s voice and steady tone, but also small hints of Clark when there was hesitation or a stronger emotion.

“I...uh, I think I’m fine,” Mayson said as she moved to sit up, faltering with an odd sort of reluctance before taking Superman’s proffered arm to help her all the way to standing. “And I hear sirens in the distance already, so I should probably stay here to answer questions. The paramedics can just check me out. But...uh, thank you, Superman. Thank you for saving my life.”

“I’m glad I was nearby when I heard the timing device click on,” he said, his voice so very Superman-like, though Lois wasn’t sure she’d ever noticed so much undercurrent emotion from him before. It seemed almost obvious now, Clark’s relief that somehow carried with it a shade of regret. He crossed his arms over his chest, almost as though he was feeling a bit exposed, and looked off in the distance, presumably to check how close the emergency vehicles were.

There was an awkward air of silence layered over the background sounds of sirens approaching and murmurings from onlookers and the odd tinkling of metal as the remnants of Mayson’s car warmed and settled. Lois wasn’t sure if it was because she knew it was Clark beneath the suit or if he was actually feeling unsettled and a bit self-conscious, not making eye contact with either her or Mayson.

In a desperate need to fill the silence — and a sudden, deep yearning to ease Clark’s discomfort — Lois turned to him and said, “I can stay with Mayson until the ambulance gets here, Superman, if...you have...other things to attend to...”

She watched him process her words and realized she must have been *too* vague because he was eyeing her as if he wasn’t sure what she was trying to tell him. Honestly, she wasn’t entirely sure either.

Mayson’s eyes narrowed. “You’re not going to stay and give your statement to the police, Superman?”

Lois watched him flinch, almost imperceptibly, but it was there, and so was the tick in his jaw. “I...you’re right. I probably should stick around, given the nature of the event.” He turned to Lois. “I can give you a lift home, Ms. Lane, if you need, and come back?” he offered, almost as if he hadn’t wanted Mayson to get the last word in about his comings and goings.

“I’m fine, Superman. I’ll wait for Clark to walk me home,” she said, gesturing widely with her arm somewhere behind her in the direction they’d come from. “Besides, I saw what happened too — should probably give a statement.”

Superman nodded, almost absently.

“Where *is* Clark? Wasn’t he supposed to come with you?” Mayson asked, her tone softening considerably as she looked around, clearly hoping to see him.

Lois felt her hackles rise, but she did her best to keep the bite from her tone. The woman had almost died, after all. “He was...supposed to meet me here, but he must have gotten caught up at work with another story. But I’m sure...he’ll be here as soon as he can.” Lois looked to Clark, hoping these words couldn’t be misinterpreted.

He closed his eyes for just a moment and then gave her an almost imperceptible nod along with a tight smile. She sighed with relief that he seemed to understand her message. Was this what it would be like from now on? She used to fall all over herself to talk to Superman, used to long to be the focus of his attentions. But all she could think about right now was that she couldn’t go to her best friend and wrap her arms around him, giving him the hug he so desperately needed.

Mayson was muttering something off to the side, clearly disappointed that Clark wasn’t here for her to fawn over. It was some kind of cruel irony that Clark *was* here, but Mayson could barely tolerate his presence. Lois wondered if owing her life to Superman would make Mayson feel any differently toward him, if she’d be able to realize that he was so much more than a “vigilante in tights.”

She could almost pity the woman, if she didn’t hate her so much. Lois did her best not to glower over at Mayson, but it hit Lois then — taking in the sight of Mayson’s black-smudged face and clothing that had hints of singeing — just how horribly wrong the night would have gone if she and Clark hadn’t run late. A shiver ran through her. As much as she disliked Mayson, she didn’t wish her any harm.

But that meant there *was* someone out there who did wish to harm the Assistant District Attorney. Which also meant she and Clark had a new story on their hands, and while part of her was itching to get started on the investigation to put this dangerous criminal behind bars, there wasn’t much of anything they could do about it until tomorrow.

Two police cruisers, a fire truck, and an ambulance all arrived then in quick succession. There was a flurry of activity as she, Mayson, and Superman were all questioned by the police and the firefighters. At some point, a crime scene unit and the fire chief showed up as well to assess the car and talk with Superman. While Mayson was getting examined by the paramedics in the back of the ambulance, Lois overheard the fire chief convincing the officer in charge that Superman had assured them there was no need to call out the bomb squad. They’d have the car’s remnants towed straight to the crime lab for processing.

After what seemed like forever, the ambulance left with Mayson — the paramedics having convinced her it would be best to be checked out by a doctor to be safe, and the emergency workers seemed to give Superman some indication that it was all right to fly off. Everything at the scene seemed to be wrapping up — the firefighters cleaning up shrapnel and debris, and a tow truck hauling off Mayson's car.

Lois was suddenly feeling incredibly tired after everything that had happened, especially the past hour or more at the scene of the bombing. A bombing. There'd been a bomb in Mayson's car.

Mayson had almost died.

Lois had seen...worse things...happen to people, but never someone she knew. And Clark, god...was he even doing okay? While Lois was now a bit more secure in the knowledge that he hadn't ever been serious about dating Mayson, Clark was still...he was still friends with Mayson, wasn't he? And he wasn't the type of guy who was unaffected by such things.

All of a sudden, it hit her with such clarity why he always seemed to be in a mood when there'd been some natural disaster, why he'd always seemed so critical of Superman when the hero had been "less than super" or... too late. Oh, Clark!

Her breath stuttered in her chest, and she could feel her heart racing once more. She needed to see him again, make sure he was okay. Adjusting the strap of her briefcase on her shoulder for the second time in as many minutes, she scanned the sidewalk and opening of the nearest alleyway, unsure of which direction Clark would be returning from.

"Hey," his soft voice came from behind her.

Relief flooded her at the sound of his voice. She turned and saw him just a few feet away, rubbing the back of his neck and giving her a nervous smile as he closed the distance between them with slow strides. Her heart raced wildly and butterflies danced in her stomach as she wondered how he was feeling, whether he was okay.

"Hey," she replied.

He looked so different. She'd just seen him, not two minutes ago, but it almost felt like she hadn't, not since he'd first come back to the scene dressed in the familiar red and blue but wearing Clark's expression. But now he was all Clark...wearing a very similar expression to the one he'd worn while asking her out — a nervous kind of confidence, his chocolate brown eyes cautious but wanting.

And when she saw no trace of self-reproach on his features, no apparent guilt about what had just transpired with Mayson, a wave of relief washed through her. She wondered how he'd ever managed — dashing off for a rescue only to return to a seethingly mad partner — how

he found the strength most times to act like everything was okay when it wasn't.

...how he always came back to her, without fail. Again and again and again.

She held back a gasp. He loved her.

There was no doubt in her mind now, as the silence stretched awkwardly around them, the cacophony of emergency crews still cleaning up somehow muffled, maybe from the way her pulse was racing in her ears.

He ran his hand through his hair and gave her another smile, this one still anxious, but the sight of it made her flush with warmth all the same.

"You changed," she said, gesturing to his clothing. "I — I mean of course you *changed* changed, you know." She could feel her cheeks heating up. "But I meant you changed...a different suit. Uh, right, of course...you would have needed to because the other one...blew up — I mean...well, you know what I mean."

"Yeah, sorry. That's why it took me a minute longer to get back."

"It — it's okay. It wasn't so long." The awkwardness was only bearable because it was with Clark. Even though she couldn't seem to figure out how to string words together to form an intelligent sentence, she knew deep down it would be okay. He was okay, and she was okay. They would be okay.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked, the hesitancy in his own voice reassuring her a bit more.

Giving him a nod seemed a bit safer than trying to talk again right then. He tipped his head in the direction of her apartment, and they started walking together, eventually leaving the diminishing noise and chaos of the bombing scene far behind them.

His hand brushed accidentally against hers several times as they made their way to her apartment, and she wished he would take hold of it. But she knew they were both too nervous, too unsure after everything that had happened.

Mayson. The bomb. The revelation. The kiss.

The kiss — oh god, that kiss — had made everything seem so clear, so right. No kiss had ever made her feel so alive, so desired, so loved...except maybe the one she'd shared with Superman on the tarmac of the small airfield, though even that paled in comparison. But all along, that had been Clark — mild-mannered but also apparently super and always in love with her Clark.

Her mind warred against her heart, trying to convince it that he'd lied to and deceived her and deserved her wrath. But her heart was far more vocal and far more persuasive. He hadn't done it to hurt her, and when it had come right down to it, he'd revealed himself in front of her — a split-second decision about the single biggest secret of his life.

And that had to mean there was a monumental amount of trust he had in her.

Lois snuck a glance at him as they walked, wondering what he was thinking about. He was biting his lower lip ever so slightly, and the thought flitted through her mind that she would very much like the chance to bite his lip too.

Oh god, she shouldn't be thinking that. Should she?

Mayson had almost died, and...well, Mayson was okay. Clark didn't *seem* to be brooding, though he was walking a bit more stiffly beside her than he usually did. Her mind flashed back to a few months ago, when Superm — when Clark had been too late to save all of the people in a bridge collapse. She'd fussed at him, irritated that he would be criticizing Superman, especially when he was likely blaming himself already. Not that Superman should be, she'd clarified. Then she'd gone on to lecture Clark on how it was times like those that they should be on the ground, digging into and exposing the corrupt politicians who were really to blame with their misappropriation of infrastructure funding and special interest lobbying.

God...if she'd known it was him... She choked back a desperate laugh at the thought that she'd yelled at Clark because he wasn't being more supportive of Superman. Now that she knew... God, why did that make the idea of extending sympathy and support to him seem so much more daunting?

He was Clark. And Clark was...so...real, so vulnerable.

Impulsively, she grabbed for his hand — to reassure him — but a heated and anxious tingling flooded every part of her body as they touched, and she almost felt guilty for it, for feeling this way when she'd meant to comfort. But then his warm fingers instantly curled around her hand more fully, and he looked over for just a second, their eyes meeting. He gave her a hesitant smile and squeezed her hand.

God, was this... Was this what dating your partner was like? Dating your best friend? Someone you...loved?

Was he feeling the same way? The tingling and the heat of desire and the nervous anticipation of what came next?

And what *was* next? They needed to talk, she knew, but that was bound to be all sorts of scary and uncomfortable. Kissing, however, that had been comfortable. Very comfortable. She swallowed hard, her body flushing at the memory of that kiss, his lips so soft and warm against hers and his hand on her hip, fingers flexing as though he itched to pull her closer. That same hand that still held hers so securely as they walked.

She forced herself to take a deep breath and then another, trying to calm her racing heart. It was late enough

now that the city's noises had faded to a low din, and she could actually hear the cadence of their footsteps against the sidewalk as they finally neared her apartment.

When they rounded the last corner and started up the stairs to her building, she realized with a start that this was how the night had ended last night too — except now, *everything* was different. Last night, they definitely hadn't been holding hands. He'd opened the door and followed her in, his hand on the small of her back. But as much as she secretly loved that, tonight she was feeling suddenly very reluctant to let go of his hand. She wasn't ready yet.

Apparently, he wasn't either, because he simply reached out with his right hand and opened the door, letting her lead them through it, holding her hand the entire time. Even on the elevator ride up and the walk down the hallway to her front door, he didn't let go.

And now, here they were at the door to her apartment. Again. For the second time in less than twenty-four hours. He was still holding her hand, and she had no idea what to do next. Other than not slamming the door in his face.

Should she kiss him again? Could she kiss him again?

She watched as he raked his free hand through his hair and took a deep breath. "Well, I suppose we should probably...I mean, I'm sure you wanted me to..."

"Kiss me," she breathed. Oh god, had she said that out loud?

"...talk," he finished, his voice hoarse. She could almost see the heat rising in his cheeks, and she felt his grip on her hand tighten ever so slightly.

He was standing there, looking so unsure, searching her eyes for something he should be finding but...maybe he was too scared to think he'd found it.

"Clark..." she whispered, stepping toward him until there was hardly any space between them. "Kiss me."

The air hung charged between them for long seconds, but she could feel his breathing had quickened. His thumb ran slowly along the back of her hand once, then a second time with just a little more pressure as his gaze danced between her lips and her eyes. Then, finally, he let go of her hand and brought his own up to her face, cupping her cheek and threading his fingers through her hair.

"Lois..." he rasped.

The words started to form on her lips once more, but she didn't need to ask again. His head dipped down, and he captured her mouth in a desperate, almost possessive kiss. Her toes curled and her heart lifted, chasing after everything he was offering. If he'd been holding back before, he wasn't now. She couldn't get enough of the way he tasted and the way his lips and tongue moved against hers, knowingly, familiar, as if he'd been kissing her for a lifetime already.

She melted into him, her hands running up along his shoulders and to the nape of his neck, and she urged him to kiss her more deeply, if that was even possible. His other hand was on her hip again, fingers flexing, but still not pulling her closer even though she almost ached to feel his body flush against her own.

Instead, she felt him gentle his kisses, slower and less desperate with each caress of his lips. He pulled back slightly but she followed, as if by some magnetic force, her lips capturing his once more before retreating.

They both stood there, catching their breath, and he took half a step back as though he needed just that much more distance between them.

“Oh god,” she breathed, her hands resting on his shoulders, steadying herself. “Wow.”

He nodded, still looking a little dazed.

She still had no idea what came next, but if it involved more of that...

Lois watched as he took a couple deep breaths, and some look seemed to cross his face, some internal decision he'd come to. “Can we talk?”

“Talk?” She couldn't even think straight with his hands still at her hips. Talking certainly sounded like a logical next step, but all of a sudden, inviting her partner in for coffee after a long day seemed like a really dangerous proposition. She didn't trust herself, not if he kissed like that when he wasn't holding back, when there weren't any secrets between them anymore.

“Yeah...” He let his hands fall to his sides as he blew out a deep breath, and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

Secrets. A secret. The secret. Somehow, she'd all but forgotten. “Oh! Oh right. About...” Her eyes dropped down, following her hands as they slid down from his shoulders and came to rest over his chest.

He inhaled sharply, his chest rising slightly under her hands, and it seemed like, for a moment, he was struggling to find the right words, and out of the corner of her eye, she saw his fingers flex at his sides, almost as if he was talking himself out of putting his hands over hers. She wished he would.

But as the silence stretched on for a long moment, she let her hands fall back to her sides and tried not to fidget.

Finally, he spoke. “I...there are some things...well, I wanted to...explain, I guess. We have...a lot to talk about,” he said, giving her a weak smile. “Can I come in?”

She tried to keep her breath from catching, but failed. And he'd noticed. “I — I...it's late, Clark. And it can wait, really. I promise. But it's been a long day and we have a big story to start chasing down in the morning — figuring out who put a hit out on the ADA — so we should probably get some sleep. Right?”

His expression was guarded now, but she hadn't missed the flicker of hurt and uncertainty in his eyes.

“Yeah, you're probably right.”

“We'll talk. We will, Clark,” she rushed to assure him as she felt around blindly for her briefcase before realizing that it had fallen to the floor. She blushed and bent over to pick it up and quickly fished her keys out to start unlocking her apartment door. As the last of the locks disengaged, she opened the door and then turned back around to face him, her keys in one hand and the briefcase in the other. “So, I'll, uh, see you tomorrow...”

“Tomorrow...” he echoed tightly. She watched his jaw tic, and she found herself unable to meet his eyes.

What was she doing? The nervous energy running through her wasn't so different from last night. She still had no idea what came next or what to do or what to say. No, that wasn't true — talking, that's what came next, but not tonight. Tomorrow.

But suddenly, tomorrow and all its possibilities seemed far too quickly approaching, yet somehow not nearly soon enough. Should she invite him in?

“Lois...” Her name sounded more like a plea, and she couldn't help but hear the traces of anguish in his voice. She'd been standing silent too long, avoiding eye contact, and he could probably very well hear the trip-hammering of her heart.

Her breath caught and her eyes went wide as she realized what he must be thinking, that her behavior in the last two minutes must seem like she was about to run, hide, slam the door in his face again. She shook her head at him, finally meeting his eyes.

“Clark...” Her briefcase and keys hit the floor with a thump and a clatter, and in two quick strides she closed the distance between them, cupping his face with both hands and pulling him in for a desperate kiss. He accepted eagerly, his hands coming up to settle at her hips. As their lips met again and again, she tried to put all of her emotions into her kiss — the excitement, the fear, the desire, the uncertainty, and the way she felt so safe and so loved when she was in his arms.

When they finally pulled back, he rested his forehead against hers, and she let her fingers trace his jawline before settling her hands at the nape of his neck. “It's not...this isn't...I wasn't going to slam the door in your face.”

She could see his smile and feel the small puff of breath from a laugh against her skin. “Good. I think I like this much better.” He shifted to press a brief kiss to her lips.

“It's just that I have a lot to process, and when you kiss me like that, I can't think straight.”

“Like this?” He tilted his head and dipped in for another kiss, capturing her lips tantalizingly slow. His

tongue sought entrance to her mouth and she granted it willingly, and his fingers pressed into her hip again as his other hand came up to cup her face. Slowly, after her whole body was tingling with desire again, he pulled back and met her eyes as he drew his thumb softly against her cheek.

She let out a shaky breath and nodded.

“So...” he started, less assuredness in his voice this time, “you’re...okay with...everything?”

“Yeah,” she said softly, reveling in the warmth of his hand still against her skin. “I think so, assume so. Like I said, lots to process...and we still have to talk.”

“Tomorrow?” he asked, a slight edge of hope and uncertainty still in his voice.

“I promise. But first...the story,” she said, feeling hesitant until he gave her that lopsided grin of his.

“I’ll bring coffee.”

Chapter 2

This door was going to be the death of him, he just knew it. Or...more likely, the fiery tornado who would open the door as soon as he had the courage to knock. Last night, standing in this very spot and being kissed very enthusiastically and thoroughly by said tornado — even after they’d agreed to say goodnight, the kissing went on for ten more minutes — Clark should have every reassurance that Lois was as far from angry with him as she could get.

Yet, as he stood there, coffees and pastry bag in hand, staring at the 5 and the 0 and the 1 of her apartment number at almost 7 o’clock in the morning, Clark’s mind was full of hesitations, uncertainties, and the lingering possibility that he had just had a really, really great dream last night.

But he’d been standing here for two whole minutes already, and he’d only served to work himself up more. He just needed to knock, and then she’d answer the door and...

That was the problem. With Lois, he had no idea whether to expect a good morning kiss or the cold shoulder. And while her unpredictability was one of the things he loved about her, it might also be the thing that would be ultimately responsible for his demise here on her doorstep.

Finally, he called on his nerves of steel and raised his hand to knock. Then he held his breath. After a moment, he heard all the locks disengage and then she called to him through the door. “It’s open! I’ll be just another minute.”

Okay, being greeted with a kiss was off the table, he thought as he opened the door and let himself in, closing it behind him and finally letting out the breath he’d been holding. That was okay. Fine, really. He’d gotten far more

kisses than he’d ever dreamed of last night, so really, he shouldn’t be so overeager.

The fact that she was now yelling to him from the bedroom, even though she should maybe have realized she didn’t need to, made him smile. “I already called Jimmy and he’s started compiling a list of Mayson’s case load for the past two years, including the backgrounds of the defendants. Then we can cross check that list with those who are familiar with explosives or know people who are. I figure that’s good to start, but we really need to get down to the DA’s office first and see what we can see.”

“Sounds good, partner!” he hollered back as he set the coffee and the bag down on her kitchen table. He’d gotten firing-on-all-cylinders-first-thing-in-the-morning Lois, and he couldn’t help but feel a bit energized himself. Watching her dive into a story with all her verve and passion was... intoxicating.

When she emerged from her bedroom, his heart and his thoughts skittered wildly at the sight of her. Her suit was burgundy — it’d been less than two days since they’d had that conversation, that he’d always imagined her in burgundy. He shook himself mentally; he was being ridiculous. This certainly wasn’t a new suit, so it wasn’t like she’d worn it just for him — the perfect color, tastefully short skirt, and low-cut blouse under the closely tailored suit coat.

“Are you ready to go?” she asked softly, interrupting his thoughts, and he could almost tell from the sound of her voice and the blush in her cheeks that he’d been staring.

“Uh, yeah, though I wasn’t sure if you wanted to eat here or in the car,” he said, gesturing to the items he’d left on her table. “I brought coffee, as promised, and some chocolate croissants.”

Her eyes lit up, and she snatched the bag from the table to open it and look inside. “Ooh, those ones from Nadine’s Bakery that taste so close to authentic?”

“No, I...uh...they’re from a patisserie in Paris...”

Lois looked up from the bag, her mouth agape. “You... you went to Paris to get me *pain au chocolat*?”

“Yeah.” He smiled wide, feeling pretty pleased with himself as if he hadn’t spent ten minutes debating whether or not to...show off. “The coffee’s just...it’s from Joe’s. But it’s your favorite — non-fat caramel macchiato, just how you like it.”

She set the bag back down on the table and walked slowly toward him until there was hardly any space between them. His heart started hammering as she neared, a hint of citrus from her recently washed hair hitting his senses. And then she tipped her head up and leaned in to plant a slow, gentle kiss on his lips, her fingers coming up to linger on his jawline.

“Thank you,” she said as she pulled away, her voice just slightly higher pitched and a bit breathy.

Yes, this woman was going to be the death of him. At least it would be an enjoyable death. “Y-you’re welcome.”

<...units near Bessolo and Broadway, 211 in progress...suspect is armed...Wayman’s Jewelers...>

Not now...

<...en route, ETA 2 minutes...>

“You need to go...don’t you?” Lois asked quietly, and when he focused back on her face, he saw her mind working, probably remembering all the times he’d had to leave her.

“I...” He paused, then shook his head. “It’s a robbery and the police are nearly there.”

“Are you sure?” Her eyes held a bit of worry. “Does the robber have a gun? Are there people there?”

He worked to focus his super hearing on the jewelry store and listened. Two men...one fearful, the other agitated...Clark’s gut clenched with dread. “I — I...should go. I’m sorry, Lois, I — ”

Her fingers on his lips cut him off. “It’s okay. Go. You can catch up with me later.” She looked at him with a level of compassion and understanding that he hadn’t fully expected. Then urgently, “Go!”

He pressed a kiss to her fingers and nodded, a lump forming in his throat as he stepped away and sped out of her apartment, changing into the suit as he went.

Forty-three minutes later, as he was walking into the District Attorney’s office to meet Lois, Clark could hear Lois’ heartbeat...she was mad. He fussed at the knot of his tie even though he’d just fixed it. She’d urged him to go — odds are she wasn’t mad at *him*.

She knew now...it was supposed to be easier, right?

His heart fell just a bit as he realized that it had been harder to leave her now that she knew, not easier. Maybe that was because they were still on the precipice of something new. Everything was different now, and they hadn’t had a chance to talk yet.

Clark followed her heartbeat, a bit disconcerted that she seemed to be in the direction of Mayson’s office when he’d assumed Mayson would have taken the day off given last night’s attempt on her life. As he neared Mayson’s office, he felt his shoulders tense up a bit at the sound of their arguing, their heated words filtering through with his enhanced hearing — or maybe it was just their loudness echoing off the walls and down the hallway. He sighed and braced himself.

“I should charge you with first-degree trespass!”

“That’s not even a thing.”

“Who’s the lawyer, Lois?”

“Well, it doesn’t even matter because the door was

unlocked!”

“This is the District Attorney’s office — you can’t just go where you please!”

“Apparently, I can sinc — ”

“Good morning, Mayson!” Clark interrupted cheerfully as he took a few steps into the office, hoping he seemed far more oblivious to their argument than he was. He nodded to Lois. “Morning, partner.”

Mayson gaze shot to him from where she stood behind her desk, and Lois’ body shifted toward him slightly as she turned to look at him. The flickering glimmer of heated argument still in her eyes set his heart racing, but before he could wonder why it seemed to be affecting him more intensely, Mayson cleared her throat.

Clark swallowed once, and then again when Mayson eyed him carefully, as if she was assessing him for wounds even though she’d been the one nearly blown up.

Tossing her hair just a bit before she looked directly at him, she raised her eyebrows. “Clark. Coming to give me your statement about Lucky Leon twelve hours late? Or... did you come to see if — maybe you heard what happened last night?”

The question ended with an almost plaintive twist of hope in her voice that made his heart sink like a rock in the pit of his stomach when he realized how this must look to her. Mayson had never seen Clark last night, only Superman.

He faltered, his panicked thoughts stumbling right into every single excuse he could think of, none of them good enough to explain why he wouldn’t have at least called to check on her. His lips parted, but no words would come, her stare and the awkward tension silencing him.

“I talked to him last night after...everything.” Lois started. “He couldn’t get through — the police had the whole block shut down. I — I might have...led him to believe it wasn’t that big of a deal...”

He watched Mayson’s eyes go wide, and he knew his own mirrored hers. “What...wasn’t that big of a deal, Lois?” he asked carefully, thankful that his wariness in tone served a dual purpose.

Mayson’s eyes were now narrowing at Lois, and her jaw hung slack, clearly stuck for words.

Lois’ eyes danced nervously, but he could see her mind working overtime. She took a breath and gestured at Clark. “Clark, you worry too much. I didn’t want you to worry. No one was hurt. It was fine.”

“Was it fine?” he asked, looking between Lois and Mayson.

Mayson finally found her voice. “Someone planted a bomb in my car, and I almost died last night. But yeah, Lois, it was fine. No one was hurt.”

“Thanks to Superman,” Lois cut in.

“Yeah,” Mayson said, her tone softening. “Superman saved me. I was...incredibly lucky he was nearby.”

The fuse that had been running short on the tension in the room fizzled out, the harsh reality of last night sobering them all.

“I’m really glad he made it in time, Mayson,” Clark said hoarsely, his heart heavy at the thought that he almost hadn’t.

Mayson’s brow creased, and he realized his choice of words had sounded odd, but she said nothing.

“I’m sorry, Mayson,” Lois said, looking at Mayson and ducking her head a little for a lie that wasn’t hers. “I didn’t want Clark to feel guilty for not being there. Sometimes he’s really too hard on himself.”

His heart lifted and soared with some kind of feeling he’d never known before, almost painful in its relief and... something else he couldn’t put a name to. And when she looked over at him and their eyes met, his breath caught — it was there, in her eyes...a fierce protectiveness and... acceptance.

A loud cough startled him, Lois too, and they both turned to Mayson. “I...uh, suppose you’re here to talk about — to investigate the attempt on my life?” she asked, her voice a bit hoarse and low as she took a seat in the leather office chair behind her desk.

They both nodded mutely.

Mayson sighed quietly, pulling herself close to her desk and covering a thick file folder with her hand. “Fine. I want the people caught more than you do, I assure you, and I can’t deny you’re good at your jobs.”

“People?” Lois asked, leaning in closer but then settling in one of the two chairs opposite Mayson. “As in, you know there’s more than one person involved?”

He could tell by the way Lois was sitting, her heart rate slightly elevated, that she knew something she was holding back, and he had to suppress a grin as he adjusted his tie and seated himself in the other chair.

Nodding, Mayson picked up the folder and passed it across the desk within Lois’ reach. “Yeah, I was...” She paused, glancing sidelong at Clark just long enough for him to see the flash of regret tinged with humiliation in her eyes. She cleared her throat. “I was planning on sharing this with you last night if you’d have bothered to show up on time...or at all.”

Lois grabbed the folder and started leafing through it, while Clark sat silent, wondering how he’d apparently managed to hurt Mayson so grievously.

Mayson continued, “Diego Martinez, age 29, died in prison three weeks ago of natural causes. Sean Mallory, 28, died in prison two weeks ago, also of natural causes.”

“What does ‘resurrection’ have to do with this?” Lois asked, and Clark suddenly tried to calculate exactly how

much time Lois might have had alone in Mayson’s office.

Mayson gave Lois an irritated glare before answering. “It’s been reported that Martinez and Mallory are indeed alive. I got a call last week from a prisoner wanting to cut a deal in exchange for information. Until last night, I wasn’t sure the information was any good.” Biting her lip, she hesitated for a moment before reaching over to the corner of her desk to grab her purse. “This morning, I got a disturbingly early home visit from some DEA agent.”

“The DEA?” Lois asked.

“Yeah, apparently.” Mayson sighed as she dug around in her purse, finally pulling out a business card and handing it to Lois. “This guy, Scardino,” she said his name with a sneer, “he comes pounding on my door at 6 a.m. and tries to warn me that — ”

“ — your car might have a bomb,” Lois finished for her.

Clark’s eyes went wide, wondering what else this Scardino guy might know, or...if he might have even been the one responsible, stopping by to finish the job Superman had so narrowly prevented last night.

“What else did he say?” Clark asked, trying to keep the edge of fear from his voice. Maybe he would need to keep close watch on Mayson until this was all over. “You didn’t let him in, did you?”

“I’m smarter than I look, Clark,” Mayson deadpanned.

“I didn’t mean — ”

She held a hand up. “It’s fine. I did let him in, actually, figuring anyone trying to kill me wouldn’t make so much noise, waking half my neighbors up. His badge was real, and...”

“And?” Lois prompted impatiently.

“He said ‘resurrection.’”

Dead prisoners. Bombs. The DEA. Resurrection. Clark shifted uncomfortably in his chair. But then the sound of Lois’ heart racing fast again filtered in, and it managed to calm him just slightly.

“What does all this mean, Mayson?” Lois asked, all but sitting on the edge of her seat.

“According to Scardino, the Resurrection pill was something the FDA flagged as highly dangerous in addition to denying approval. So when it was found that the lead scientist for the drug, Stanley Gables, was still purchasing the chemical compounds used to make the drug, they called in the DEA.”

“So this drug...does what, exactly?” Clark asked, finally finding his voice.

Mayson swallowed. “It’s a form of synthetic barbiturate. Taken in large enough doses, it could produce a temporary state of suspended animation. And given that Martinez and Mallory had funerals, burials...”

“The cemetery has to be in on this!” Lois exclaimed.

“That’s what I was thinking,” Mayson agreed. “I had my friend at the ME’s office do some...ah, inquiring —”
“Snooping?” Lois smirked.

Mayson narrowed her eyes and almost begrudgingly gave her a small smile in return. “If you insist. Yeah, he did some snooping and found out that the funeral expenses were tied to someone named Albie Swinson.”

“So, if you have all this information, where do we come in?” Clark asked. “What can we do to help?”

For the first time since she’d given him that long, regretful stare, Mayson looked him in the eyes. But she averted her gaze quickly, as if it were somehow painful to look at him. She took a deep breath before continuing. “The evidence linking Gables to the use of the Resurrection pill to break criminals out of prison is circumstantial. If we can find a connection between Gables and Swinson, that would help. Not to mention, there’s the question of *why* Gables is doing this. He’s obviously up to something grander, and I fear, even more dangerous than orchestrating prison breaks.”

Clark nodded, noting that the tension in his shoulders had returned, along with a strong sense of foreboding sitting squarely in his gut. Gables was dangerous; they just didn’t know *how* dangerous.

Lois, for her part, seemed to be invigorated, exhilarated by the possibility of putting a madman like Gables away. She stood abruptly and gathered up the file folder against her chest. “I assume we can borrow this?” Lois asked with a doggedness that made Clark think that making a run for the door with the file wasn’t out of the realm of possibility for her.

A thrill of arousal and awe ran through him, making for an unexpected collision with the unease he was feeling about the potential for danger in this investigation. God, this felt strangely enjoyable.

Mayson’s voice cut into his wandering thoughts. “That’s your copy; I had it made up for you yesterday.”

“Thanks, Mayson,” Lois said, and he could tell Lois was doing her best to contain her enthusiasm in front of Mayson.

“Don’t thank me. Just get me what I need on Gables, and I’ll get warrants issued for the lot of them. Just don’t let Superman interfere with the arrests — I don’t want anything to jeopardize the case I’ll have against these criminals!”

Clark flinched but could sense Lois about to launch, so he quickly stepped over to her, putting a hand on her lower back and ushering her out of the office, barely throwing a “Thanks, we’ll be in touch” over his shoulder as he closed the door behind them.

“Can you *believe* that woman? Clark!” Lois seethed, even as he continued walking them down the hall toward

the exit. “You *saved her life* last night, and then she just turns around and — and — how can you stand it? How can you —”

She halted mid-rant when she turned and saw his face, whatever expression he must have been wearing stopped her in her tracks as they hit the top of the steps in front of the DA’s office. That feeling, the one from earlier, the indescribable emotion, filled his heart and overflowed, and he couldn’t do anything but rush in and kiss her, capturing her lips as his hands came up to cup her face, his fingers threading through her silky hair. God, he loved this woman.

Even as he leaned to deepen this kiss, she seemed to melt into him, a quiet whimper escaping her as they parted — just a hair’s breadth — before he tilted his head and recaptured her lips again. Slender fingers made trails of fire along his shoulders and up to the nape of his neck, and another whimper only fueled him more as he tasted, caressed, loved. He let one hand slip down, falling to her hip, where he flexed his fingers, needing just that extra touch. It all seemed like almost too much but not enough all at once, but then he was feeling the unusual need to come up for air, so he slowed his kisses, reminding himself that he was now allowed to come back for more.

“Wow.” She trembled slightly as he pulled away, trying to catch both his breath and his equilibrium. “What was that for?”

He let his thumb trace lightly over the flushed skin of her cheek. “For being you,” he said, his voice a husky murmur.

She inhaled sharply and he saw her eyes start to shine with the threat of tears, and he promised himself right then and there that he would let her know more often...*so often*. ... He’d remind her that she was smart and deeply passionate and she blazed with brilliance, inspiring him every day with her determination and resolve to make the world a better place.

“I love you,” she said suddenly, so softly he almost wasn’t sure he was meant to hear it, but the look in her eyes told him everything he needed to know.

“I love you too,” he breathed. He drew her back toward him as he leaned in to place a tender kiss on her forehead. “God, I love you too.”

THE END