

# The Ordinary Man

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Rated PG

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Summary: Superman callously rejected Lois' love when she offered her heart and more to him during the episode "Barbarians at the Planet." But what happened next? And more specifically, what could have happened if Lois hadn't accepted his snide remarks lying down?

Hi FoLCs!

This little vignette was originally a ficathon contribution for the dark side of the boards, but when I finally pulled it into the light of day, I realized it could still hold its own while staying (almost) completely innocent.

A Big Thanks goes to Mona, Kmar, and Mellie for the betaing and to Rona for being my GE. You're the best.

I hope you enjoy this little piece of fluff, and if you'd like to leave me a comment or two, please feel free to post in the Fanfic-board ([http://www.lcficmbs.com/cgi-bin/boards/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get\\_topic&f=6&t=001501](http://www.lcficmbs.com/cgi-bin/boards/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic&f=6&t=001501)) or just send me an e-mail. It is always appreciated,

Michael :)

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The setting is during 'Barbarians at the Planet' in Season 1; the few recognizable lines are from this episode.

Blocks in <> are literal thoughts by the character.

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"Superman," Lois whispered to curtains that fluttered in her open living room window as her heart broke and shattered into a million pieces. Her naked arms drifted upwards to hug her tightly, the air suddenly chill despite the warm summer night beyond the window. "Superman," she breathed again as a single tear trickled down her cheek and finally fell onto the modest, sky blue nightgown she was wearing.

No, she wasn't going to cry, Lois told herself, desperately clamping down on the sickening feeling in her stomach. She wasn't going to fall apart. Certainly not when she still had a wonderful job she would start tomorrow, and a handsome gentleman who wooed her with every trick in the book.

Lois turned around to stride gracefully into her open kitchen, her bare feet the only reason she didn't stumble during what turned out to be actually more akin to a mad scramble for the fridge. Pulling the door open with a decisive jolt, Lois tore through the contents of her freezer and appropriated a half-gallon tub of Rocky Road. The cool carton in her hand, she twisted on the spot and tore the lid open even as she used her left foot to gently kick the door shut with a decisive thud. Barely bothering to grab a large spoon from her cutlery drawer, Lois dug into the delicacy and shoved a mouthful of creamy, chocolate ice cream

into her mouth.

Yes, that was better, she thought after the first few mouthfuls of her favorite soul balm and a couple of turns around the kitchen island. Sure, her heart still hurt like hell, but the coldness did not only serve to numb her mouth, no, it also soothed her pain. It wasn't enough to heal the gaping wound in her chest, of course, but at least she could once again think more clearly.

'I'm so completely in love with you; I can't do anything else without knowing.' Those were the words she had said to her great love, only to have him callously ignore her feelings. Her right hand flicked about dejectedly, the silver spoon drawing fading patterns through the air while her left arm pressed the open container against her chest.

It just wasn't fair! Why couldn't her great love reciprocate her feelings? Lois dug another deep furrow through the ice cream and pushed the heavily loaded piece of silverware into her mouth. <Oh, god, this is so good,> she sighed, unable to speak around her overflowing mouth. All he did was 'care' for her. <Yeah, right!> She snorted in derision. If he really *did* care for her, he wouldn't have brushed her off like she was some sort of groupie, a crazed fan-girl, only interested in his body.

The spoon flicked accusingly towards the ceiling and a few drops of ice cream dripped down onto her nightgown.

"Ow, cra—," Lois half-muttered, half-choked, her right hand immediately at her lips to prevent an even greater spillage, as she still had most of her latest spoonful inside her mouth. The potential disaster averted, Lois put the container and the spoon down on the kitchen island and began to dab at the chocolate stain squarely on her right breast. She was never going to get this one out, she thought dejectedly.

But still, it was her favorite nightgown — one of the reasons she had chosen to wear it on this particular night — and there was no reason why she shouldn't at least try to fix the mess. Not wanting to give the chocolate the time to insinuate itself into the fabric, Lois yanked it over her head and turned around to take the five steps that separated her from the sink.

She barely got the chance to finish the second step when she felt herself being yanked back. Still carried by her forward momentum, Lois didn't stop to investigate and was immediately rewarded by a strange sound, oddly reminiscent of fabric being torn apart. The pull on her arm ceased immediately thereafter, and Lois halted in her movement as she held the blue garment in front of her for inspection.

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no... *NO!*" she wailed at the sight of the long tear that ran almost halfway down on the left side of the delicate material. "This is so unfair!" She threw the ruined fabric over the kitchen island and noticed for the first time the culprit that was responsible for the premature demise of her nightgown. A disgusted slap with her right hand sent the offending cutlery drawer shut, and Lois marched off in the direction of her bedroom. It was high time she dug out her oldest Daily Planet sweats.

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Lois rummaged through her dresser until she finally found the faded gray cotton pants and dark green shirt with the yellow print that she had bought as a souvenir during her senior year of high school. Lois' high school newspaper, The Student's Eye, had arranged a field trip for the aspiring reporters so they could visit the time-honored publication, and Lois had immediately known where her future would lie. Of course, now the Daily Planet was gone and she would start her work at LNN tomorrow morning.

Time for more ice cream, Lois thought miserably as she slipped into the comfortable clothes she always put on when she needed to feel safe and cared for. The sweats did indeed help to calm her down a bit, but there was still an eerie melancholy to feeling the worn cotton on her skin...

Once she was fully dressed, Lois quickly retraced her steps

and picked up the ice cream, immediately pushing another spoonful of it into her mouth. The piece of silverware still firmly between her lips and the tub clutched under her left arm, Lois shuffled back to the sofa and flopped down on the white cushions before she pulled her legs underneath her body.

High on chocolate, Lois' mind flashed back to another tidbit of the fateful conversion she had had just ten minutes ago. 'I'll just put on a robe.'

At first, she'd fully intended to greet him just as she had, clad only in her understated, yet flattering nightgown and not bothering with a robe. After all, the garment had been extremely modest and had covered more of her luscious body than some of her evening dresses did. But when she'd seen *him* standing there in the shadows, his posture oh, so forbidding, all her courage had left her and she'd offered to cover herself up.

And what had Superman done? The... the... *jerk* had actually told her not to bother; he could x-ray her robe just as easily as he could her nightgown! Lois' left hand flung out, hitting the backrest with a solid thud.

What was *wrong* with him? He'd never before behaved like that, not even when he'd kissed her after getting a dose of the one-hundred percent pheromone compound. But tonight, tonight he had made her feel like a skank, throwing herself at the big star.

And she probably should be grateful that he had chosen to simply jilt her instead of asking her if he could stay the night. In the state she'd been in, she might even have considered such a lewd proposal and once again woken up to a cold bed in the morning. But no, instead he'd actually had the *nerve* to tell her he wasn't interested in her.

<Yeah, right!> There was another thud as her left fist jumped back from the upholstery, propelled by the recoil from the collision with the backrest. First, he had most likely gotten himself a full-body snapshot of her with his x-ray vision, and then, when she'd all but told him that she would be his if he would only have her, he told her that the 'circumstances' made it impossible for him to accept her offer. What was *wrong* with him? And just what *did* he know about her circumstances, anyway?

Lois dug another spoonful of the sweet, brown cream from the tub and shoved it into her mouth. Was it that much of a crime to be looking for someone to come home to, to be her friend, her confidante, her partner? Was it that much of a crime that she wanted to ask the man she'd dreamed about for almost a year now if he shared her sentiments before she chose to settle for friendly companionship instead of deep, all-encompassing love? Well, apparently it was, or Superman wouldn't have blown her off just because Lex had asked her to marry him.

And she knew just whom she had to thank for all this, she thought, suddenly spurred into action. Clark Kent! That little, backstabbing corn-cob must have told Superman all sorts of things before he'd sent the caped hero to her. Well, if he'd hoped that he could get away with such treason, he was in for a very rude awakening, she promised herself on the way to the front door.

About halfway there, Lois realized she still had the ice cream tucked under her arm. She paused for a moment, torn between leaving the chocolaty goodness to melt and tearing her ex-partner limb from limb, before she rushed back into her kitchen. Once the tub was carefully deposited inside the freezer, she hastily slipped on her running shoes and grabbed her purse on her way out the door, barely taking the time to lock the entire array of deadbolts before she continued down the five flights of stairs.

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Lois dashed up the stairs to Clark's apartment, where she immediately began to make her presence known. "Clark Kent!" she shouted while her fist repeatedly connected loudly with the wooden doorframe. "Open up!" After a few seconds without any reaction from the other side of the door, Lois went back to

shouting in addition to her fist's steady rhythm. "I know that you're home, Clark! The *lights* are on, and unless you want me to break in, you better come and open this damn door *RIGHT NOW!*"

She was about to start looking for the key, which the hack had probably hidden underneath the doormat, when the heavily abused door finally opened.

"Lo-is," Clark greeted her, his voice belying his annoyance at her presence. Which would be his problem, she decided with satisfaction. After all, it hadn't been *her* who had told Superman that she was considering marrying Lex. "You're going to wake all my neighbors."

"Your neighbors can take a hike, Clark!" she flippantly disregarded his concerns. "I'm sure they can handle one night with an angry reporter in the house." Lois pushed past Clark into his apartment, ignoring the tight, purple t-shirt that left his well-defined arms exposed and the pair of very well-fitting jeans that hugged his hips.

"Sorry, Clark. — Oh, no problem, Lois. Why don't you come inside? — Why, thank you, that's very nice of you, Clark."

"Oh, shut up, Clark!" she threw a comeback for his mockup of an invitation over her shoulder, even as she stormed down the short flight of stairs to his living room. There she kept going until she reached his couch and whirled around to glare at her former colleague and supposed best friend as he followed her down the stairs.

"I take it you're not here for small talk then," Clark stated a flat-voiced non-question while leaning against the banister with his arms folded over his chest.

"Don't play coy with me, Kent!" Lois snapped, her right hand waving accusingly in front of her. "How dare you tell Superman about Lex's proposal?"

"I did no such thing!" Clark bristled and stood straight before taking a step closer to Lois. "But I guess your date with your caped fantasy didn't work out the way you'd hoped for?"

"Oh, you smug-faced, cow-kissing, dirt-digging, bottom-feeding excuse for a slimy piece of worm-ridden pocket lint!" Lois intoned, stepping closer to the object of her anger. "You know *exactly* what you did. Just because I turned you down did *not* give you the right to prejudice Superman against me." Clark's eyebrow's rose with each word rolling from her tongue, but Lois kept going. "After all, why else would he have told me in no uncertain terms that he wasn't interested?"

"Not interested?" Clark shot back. "Not interested? Lois, you basically tried to strong-arm Superman into a relationship as the only means of keeping you out of Luthor's vile clutches. Do you *really* think he'd want a relationship with you on such terms?"

Lois faltered for a moment. There it was again, this unhealthy jealousy of Clark's for her almost-fiancé. "Don't you dare bring Lex into this mix, Clark!" Lois spat back at him, her arms folding defensively over her chest. "And am I not entitled to finding a man who loves me?"

"Luthor doesn't *love* you, Lois," Clark droned on in a condescending tone. "He only wants to possess you."

"Possess me?" she snorted. "Clark, you have *no* idea what you're talking about." Lois drew a step closer still; now she was only two feet away of him.

"Oh yeah? But you do?"

"What are you talking about, Clark?"

"What I'm talking about is that you're willing to jump into bed with the devil." He held up a hand to stop her retort. "And if that weren't bad enough on its own, let's just *suppose* for the sake of this argument that Luthor really does love you—" Clark drew in a breath before going on, "—then this would mean that you'd marry him just because you couldn't have your heart's desire." Clark looked at her as if he considered her to be a woman without morals. "So, why again do you believe that Superman should

have chosen you?”

“So what if I don’t love Lex?” Lois answered defensively even as an eruption began to boil inside her. “I never told him that I love him and I’m sure he knows it. So what’s so bad about it?”

Clark quirked his eyebrow. “Let me get this straight. First you tell *me*, your best friend, that you only love me as a brother. Then you tell *Superman* that you’d love him, powers or no powers. And when he turns you down, you decide to marry Luthor, a man you’re only... what? Friends with?” Clark raised his second eyebrow to follow the first. “Is that about right?”

Lois stood flummoxed. “How did you...? When...? It’s not even been an *hour* and you...? What is *wrong* with you? With both of you?” Lois shook her head and took several small steps forward, pushing herself past Clark’s left shoulder.

“What?” Clark asked her in a confused voice.

At the top of the stairs, Lois turned around, looking down at a thunderstruck Clark. “You! You and Superman! Is this some sort of sick game you two are playing?” she accused him angrily.

Clark’s eyes widened in confusion but he kept silent, his lips pressed into a thin line.

“First you tell Superman just how much I depend on his decision for deciding on my future. And then, when he has done his very best to humiliate me, he comes straight back to you and tells you all the gory details? And *you still* try to convince me that *Lex* is the bad guy in all of this?” Lois shook her head, an angry tear threatening to drop down to her cheek.

Clark stumbled back in the face of her accusations. “Lois, I... Superman... We... I didn’t talk with Superman about you. You asked me to pass a message along to him, and I made sure he showed up in your apartment. That’s it.”

Lois moved back down a step, glaring at him. “Then how did Superman know, and how did you know what I told him?”

Clark swallowed and lost a lot of the color in his face. “There... Lois, there is... an explanation... It’s just...”

“Just what, Clark?” Lois snarled, her arms crossed over her chest as she barely held back her rage at this horrendous betrayal of her trust.

Clark began to turn away from her. “Nothing, Lois. Just... forget it. You have obviously made up your mind and your bed, and nothing I can say will change that. So, if you do want to marry Luthor, fine! It’s your life you’re throwing away,” Clark closed in a forbidding sneer.

Lois was about to turn her back to Clark as well, the confession from her former best friend’s mouth too much to bear, when something stopped her. There was something. A... feeling — for the lack of a better word — that told her that something was off. Clark never caved this easily. Especially not when he thought he was right about something. And even if everything else had been a pretense, this constant need for being right was too much alpha-male behavior to be only a part of the act. No, if Clark *hadn’t* done what she’d just accused him off doing, he would certainly not feel guilty about it, and therefore he would never just willingly accept his guilt and slump his shoulders in defeat.

Lois moved forward another two steps. “Clark, why are you lying to me?”

“What?” he asked with a slightly trembling voice. It sounded so completely, heart-wrenchingly dejected. Almost as if he were a little puppy that had gotten bitten multiple times by the big, bad bitch.

“You’re lying to me, Clark. You’re protecting Superman, aren’t you?”

He flinched, but kept his back to her.

“Clark, it’s okay,” she told him softly, having made the final steps down to his living room. “I already know Superman’s not all that super. You don’t need to protect my feelings any longer.

And I certainly don’t want you to shoulder the blame that should rest on his.”

Clark turned around, staring at her wide-eyed. “What?” he croaked.

“Clark, I’m a big girl. Sure, it was nice to have a shining hero to look up to. And of course it hurts like hell to see him jump straight down and into the gutter. But I can deal with that. It’s my own fault for not seeing the pig hiding underneath the cape. What I can’t deal with is you protecting him.”

“I don’t... Lois, you really...” Clark looked more and more uncomfortable; it was almost as if he was vibrating in place.

“No, Clark. It’s *not* your fault that Superman seeks you out and tells you all about his dirty, little tricks. I mean, it’s not like you can send him away and...”

“Lois!” Clark interrupted her with a short bark. “Superman doesn’t... Well, he doesn’t exactly *tell* me what’s going on between you and him. It’s just... I can’t help but be privy to it.” Clark afforded her an apologetic smile before his face darkened. “And that remark about you needing a lead-lined robe?”

Lois shot him a glare and snorted in derision.

“That was uncalled for and rude in the extreme. I’m really sorry.”

“Why are you making excuses for Superman again?” Lois’ head was spinning. Why did Clark keep doing everything he could to protect Superman? And just what was Clark talking about him being unable to not know about her private conversations with the Pig of Steel.

“I’m not,” he whispered. “I’m just telling you the truth.” Clark looked down. “Or at least, I’m trying to.”

Lois stepped closer to Clark again but kept outside his personal space and folded her arms as she urged him to continue with a hint of angry wariness in her voice. “And what truth would that be?”

“Lois, this is really hard for me, okay?” Clark pleaded softly with her, his head still bowed. “And it’s not like I’ve done this before, so I’m pretty new at this.” Clark looked back up at her, his eyes searching. “And actually, I need to know some things first. I don’t want to make this quid pro quo, but all things considered, I hope you will understand after you know the truth.”

Lois narrowed her brows. “And what would that be, Clark? Because I’m not going to be pressured into anything here. You either tell me because it’s what you want to do, or you don’t.”

“I just want some answers first, okay?” Clark’s voice had taken on a very worried tone. “You told Superman that you would consider him above Luthor, powers or no powers.”

Lois nodded before interjecting, “Well, yeah, but now that I know the real man...”

“Believe me, Lois, you don’t. Neither Superman nor Luthor; you don’t really know either one,” he answered with a heavy sigh.

“Clark, if this is another attempt to discredit Lex, then I’m—”

“No! No, it’s not.” Clark blurted defensively. “It’s just, you told Superman you’d love him even if he had no powers at all; that you’d love him the same even if he were just an ordinary man.”

Lois nodded carefully as she bit her lip to stop herself from interrupting Clark and telling him that that had been before she’d glimpsed the ape underneath the cape.

“But why?” he asked her earnestly. “What’s so special about him that would make you fall madly in love with him?”

Lois’ left eyebrow rose. What sort of question was that? “You want me to quantify *love*?”

“Sort of, yeah,” Clark responded sheepishly. “Or, at least, explain to me Superman’s qualities. Why *is* he your first priority? Why *did* you fall in love with him?”

Lois sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and nibbled on it before she started to answer, thinking back to why she had

allowed herself to develop her... feelings for the hero. “Well, he is a hero.” She caught herself when Clark shook his head. “I mean, it’s that he always helps...” Lois drew in a breath. “Dammit, Clark! Superman... He’s this wonderful guy, this beacon for everything that’s right in our world. He’s a symbol. He’s just a good person with a wonderful heart and a body to die for, and I feel this special connection with him, and he noticed me above all others, and I knew that he’d never hurt me, and...” Lois trailed off at the sight of Clark’s smile. “What?”

“So, this special connection you feel, this knowledge that he’d never hurt you, the fact that he made you feel like you’re the center of his world...”

Lois blushed. “I... I... I only said he noticed me, okay?” she corrected him defensively, consciously ignoring the fact that the object of her adoration had only recently removed himself from the pedestal she had put him on. But, at least, now she knew that Superman *did* think of her *that* way.

“Fine,” Clark told her with a mischievous grin. “So, anyway. Those are the qualities a man needs to have to make you fall for him?”

“What are you implying, Clark?” she asked him suspiciously. If that, that... *dolt* told her she was shallow, she was going to *kick* him!

“Nothing, really,” he acquiesced. “I’m just wondering what makes me so different from Superman in your eyes.”

“What?” Lois asked him, stunned after his curveball had hit her right between the eyes.

“Well, you just described the reasons why you fancy yourself in love with Superman,” Clark explained with a sad smile. “And I’d like to know what you think about me in regard to those particular qualities.”

Lois shook her head. What was Clark trying to do? Was he really so desperate for her to love him that he would stoop to begging for her affection? “Clark, please, I already made my decision—”

“And you only love me like a brother, I know,” he replied, sounding only slightly dejected. “And you love Superman like a woman loves a man.” He sighed. “And I really want you to answer my question.”

Lois relaxed back against the banister and folded her arms. “Okay...” She thought back to her earlier words, trying to juxtapose both men in her mind. “Superman has always made me feel special, like he knows I’m there and he cares for me as a person.” <When he’s not spilling his guts to my best friend.>

“And I don’t?” Clark interjected surprised.

“You’re my best friend,” Lois rallied on, unperturbed. “It’s sort of implied.”

A low chuckle emanated from him. “So, you’re saying that Superman’s attention is more precious because he *isn’t* your best friend.”

Lois squirmed a little as she fought the impression that Clark really did consider her being ‘special’. “Don’t try twisting my words, Clark,” she warned him with a dangerous edge to her voice.

“I’m not, Lois. I’m just pointing out the holes in your logic.”

“I... My logic... It...” Lois threw her arms up and exhaled in annoyance. “It’s different, okay?”

“If you say so, Lois. If you say so...” he acquiesced, although she had the distinct impression that he was merely humoring her for the moment.

“It doesn’t matter anyway, because there’s still the way my heart calls out to him,” she rushed on to the next item in the hopes of throwing him off balance.

“It does?” Clark responded without missing a beat. “And how exactly does this work?”

Lois’ mind raced for an explanation. Who would have guessed that Clark would ask her to explain? That wasn’t how the

game was to be played. “I... It’s just... Haven’t you ever heard of love at first sight?”

Clark raised an eyebrow at that.

“This feeling you get when you’re close to the person you’re meant to be with?” Lois continued.

“Sure I know it,” Clark agreed and took a step closer to her. “It’s just... I can sense my love even when I don’t look at her.”

“See, that’s exactly it,” Lois jumped at Clark’s obvious understanding of her feelings, even as she ignored certain implications in his statement.

“Then why don’t *you*?” he asked her with an expressionless face and took another step closer to her.

“What are you talking about, Clark?” she deflected his accusation. “Of course, I can feel him even if I don’t see him.”

“Are you sure?” Clark moved further in her direction and was now only an arm’s length away.

This forced Lois to slightly raise her head if she wanted look into his eyes instead of at the broad shoulders and the solid chest outlined underneath his t-shirt, which wasn’t what she wanted to look at. Ugh uh. “And what if I told you that Superman was very close by?”

Lois immediately spun her head around, searching for the superhero whose presence she was suddenly aware of. When she couldn’t see even a hint of electric blue despite the tingle in her back, Lois warily turned around to Clark. “What sort of joke is this?” she snapped back at him.

“So, you *do* sense his presence?” Clark asked her with this annoyingly amused tone of voice.

“What do you think?” she snarled, getting more and more agitated because of his toying with her.

“And you only started to feel it once you knew he was here?”

“No... I... It’s just...” Lois wasn’t about to concede defeat and tried to remember just when exactly she’d started to feel Superman’s presence. “Fine. Sometimes my radar goes off even when I’m quite certain that Superman isn’t around. I guess it’s just an echo, or he’s flying by outside the building, or something.”

Clark closed the distance until there was barely a foot left between them, his understated, earthy scent slowly drifting into her awareness. “Did you ever consider that it might be because you’re always close to me when your ‘radar’ goes off?”

“What?” she croaked. “No! No, of course that’s not it,” she defended herself, slightly panicky at the implications. “I’m in love with Superman, and it’s not like I’m going to... to...” She wasn’t feeling the same things for Clark that she felt for Superman. She wasn’t going to be cheating on Superman. Not even with Clark. Not even in her fantasy.

“But you did react to me quite decisively when you’d been doused with the pheromones,” Clark supplied.

“That was just a coincidence,” Lois defended herself.

Clark snorted as he answered, “Sure it was, Lois.” He edged closer still, looming half a head above her. She really should have chosen to wear heels. Or maybe she could just climb one step on the stairs to gain some height...?

“You know what’s really sad, Lois? You’re so focused on Superman’s superficial qualities, you wouldn’t even recognize him if he bared his soul to you while dressed in a business suit.”

Clark continued to look down at her, and Lois felt as if she had somehow failed in a test of some sort. Which was ridiculous! Lois Lane didn’t fail at anything, the least a challenge voiced by a farm boy. “And how would you know?” she spat back.

“Because I just tried it,” Clark informed her with a resigned tone. “I told you exactly what I felt for you and you just—”

Lois interrupted Clark as she reached forward to pull his glasses down with her right hand before her left smoothed the hair back from his face. “Superman?” she squeaked.

“No, Lois. Clark,” he replied, shaking his head a little.

“What?” she asked him, confused at his denial.

“I’m Clark, Lois. Superman... Superman is just what I do,” he explained slowly with a sad smile on his lips. “Not that you ever cared to look behind the façade.”

Lois felt her head spin, but she wasn’t going to cry, or faint, or run screaming from his apartment. That would be too easy. “And why should I have done that?” she defended herself. “It’s not as if you went around telling people to look for what you obviously did your best to hide.” Lois brushed past him, needing the space to pace. “You accuse me of being a hypocrite, and yet your own double standard for dealing with me is probably the worst case of schizophrenia ever diagnosed outside of psychiatric care.” Lois’ voice rose steadily to a shrill screech as she spun around and spread her arms to underscore the point.

Clark kept silent but eyed her warily before he stepped closer to take his glasses from her right hand.

Lois drew in a sharp breath as their fingers touched, the electricity of knowing that this was both Clark and Superman leaving her slightly stunned. When her mind restarted a fraction of a second later, she pushed back against him. “No wonder you knew what I and Superman talked about,” she mused distractedly.

Clark gave her a little affirmative nod.

“But why haven’t you *told* me before, you... you... *dolt!*” Lois’ formerly soft voice had taken on a sharper edge, and she drove her point home with a hard push against his chest.

“Because I don’t want a moon-eyed groupie as my girlfriend.”

Clark’s defensive tone did little to nothing to appease Lois. “I see,” she surmised icily. “So, it’s okay to kiss the moon-eyed groupie, to flaunt yourself in front of your biggest fan and supporter, and from what you told me tonight—” Her brows drew together and she shot daggers at him. “—to undress me with your eyes.”

Clark’s eyes grew wide. “Lois, I... I... didn’t... I mean...”

“You didn’t what, Clark?” she challenged him, stemming her fists against her waist.

“I never did x-ray your clothes, or anyone else’s for that matter.”

Her eyebrows rose in surprise. “Why?”

Clark choked “Why?” He raised his right hand in a conciliatory gesture. “How can you even... Lois, Superman doesn’t go around abusing his powers!”

“No? Then why did you tell me that you did?” Lois could wager a fairly accurate guess, but after everything Clark had put her through this past hour, payback was going to be a bitch. “Unless you have a death wish or something, of course,” she supplied helpfully with a sly grin playing over her lips.

“Fine. You really want to know, Lois?” Clark planted himself in front of her. “Because I wanted to find out just how far your starry-eyed hypocrisy would go.”

“What?” She hadn’t expected that explanation.

“Think about it. If Clark Kent had told you not to bother with a robe, you would have slapped me and thrown me out your door. At least, when you’re not high on pheromones,” he added with annoyed amusement written on his face. “But Superman tells you he might as well be x-raying your clothes and all you do is blush a little and apply yourself even harder.”

“You’re right,” Lois supplied with extra emphasis on sounding downcast. “If I’d known it was Clark standing in front of me as well as Superman, I’d never have quietly conceded the point.” She looked up at him from underneath her long, black lashes, noting how Clark’s stance spoke of his low esteem of her right this moment. “You see, it’s very easy to love Superman. He’s perfect. He would never hurt me.” <Except for tonight,> a little voice supplied unhelpfully, but she pushed the thought away as she watched Clark cringing visibly. “Clark on the other hand, he is... *human*,” she told him expectantly. <Just like Superman

was tonight.>

“Lo-is...,” Clark tried to interject.

Lois ranted on, pushing herself past Clark’s attempt to interrupt her. “And I don’t do human relationships very well. I—” Lois shook aside the notion of her past relationships. This was Clark. And unless she was willing to give up her feelings for Superman and continue to ignore her feelings for Clark, she’d better plow through this now.

Clark simply continued to stand there, his eyes flicking about and his Adam’s apple bobbing.

“No, actually, what I would have done would have been something like this,” she proclaimed as she gripped the purple cotton of his shirt and pulled him down to her before snaking her other arm around his neck. A moment later, their lips touched, and she opened hers a little to let her tongue dart out. Clark started to respond, his lips slowly parting to let her tongue slip inside while his arms wrapped around her body, holding her tightly against him.

She could feel her breathing become heavier, her senses getting lost in the heady trance that was the sensation of their breaths mingling, their bodies touching, Clark responding to her like she responded to him. She relaxed herself against him, felt herself grow weak until—

Clark pushed her away, holding her at arm’s length with his hands firmly clasped on her shoulders. “Lois, what—?” he stammered, looking flustered and quite nervous. He took a deep breath and released her before running his right hand through his hair.

“Clark...?” Lois mumbled, still panting as she busied her fingers by straightening out her shirt. Had she really just kissed Clark like that? Hadn’t they just been fighting? She could answer both questions with a yes. But hadn’t she merely tried to prove her point? Another affirmative. Then why had it affected her so much? And more importantly, where would they go from here?

When Clark continued to look at her like she had just grown a second head, she suddenly knew. Taking a deep breath, Lois schooled her lips into a seductive smile and purred, “Clarrk?” as she stepped closer to him again. Her right hand trailed over his chest, gently tracing his strong, hard pecs, before she lifted her chin to look into his eyes. “Have you suddenly decided that you’re no longer interested in me?” she pouted, batting her lashes in the process.

“Lois, that’s not the point,” he muttered defensively. “And I already told you that I don’t want a groupie.”

She blinked and stiffened, immediately losing her seductive persona. “Do you really think I’m only doing this because I now know where Superman is hiding when he’s not flying around?”

Clark simply stared at her regretfully, his hands stuck in his jeans’ pockets.

She scowled, and her voice took on an angry edge. “Are you really this dense, or are you just trying to punish me?”

When Clark still refused to answer, she drew in a heavy breath, took half a step backward, and folded her arms over her chest. “Well, I guess I should take your silence as an attempt to punish me, then. Which means you’re an *idiot!*” She shot him a glare.

“Why am I an idiot for wanting you to love me for who I am instead of what I can do?” Clark replied defensively even as his eyes kept their hard stare.

“Because I already do,” she snapped, not really considering the implications.

“You... You do?” Clark stammered, his eyes wide in shock.

“I do?” Lois asked confused. “What do I do?” Then her words from a moment ago came back to her. “Oh...” She smiled sheepishly. “Yeah. I guess, I do.” She fixed him with a glare. “Of course, now the question is, do you believe me?”

Clark looked at her for a long minute, his brows furrowed

while Lois nervously nibbled on her lower lip. Then he suddenly took a step towards her, both his hands cupping her face as he lowered his lips to hers again and whispered, “I guess, I do.”

THE END

(of Luthor's chances with Lois)