

What Tangled Webs We Weave

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Clark creates yet another fine mess with Lois when he learns how practicing to deceive affects his life as man and Superman.

My 2008 holiday ficathon story for Queen of the Capes. Her requirements for the challenge are listed at the end of this story, and a challenge it was!

Words in denote emphasis

My thanks to Jeanne for final editing.

Clark slowed his speed as he approached Lois' apartment from the sky, his cape fluttering gently in the chill October air. He and Lois had a date, and he didn't want to be late. It was pretty hard to be late, however, when you could move as fast as he could. He figured lateness for him was probably more a state of mind, but as they'd only been going out for a couple weeks, he didn't want Lois to wait.

He landed and then sped into the hallway of her apartment faster than anyone could see, and lightly knocked on the door to Lois' apartment. Almost immediately she flung it open and threw her arms around Clark to smother him with an incredible kiss.

Clark came up for air when Lois finally broke free, exclaiming, "I'm so glad to see you, Kal! Tonight let's fly somewhere quiet and watch the stars."

Inside, a part of Clark Kent shrivelled at her words.

"You really have only yourself to blame," stated Martha Kent. Clark slouched dejectedly in a sturdy kitchen chair in the Kent's kitchen, a plate of untouched cookies in front of him. Normally, Martha would scold Clark to watch his posture, but he was in such a glum mood she decided to let that go and focus on the matter at hand.

"How was I supposed to know Lois would fall for some weird flying guy wearing tights in bright primary colors?" whined Clark. "The suit was supposed to be eye-catching, just a disguise so no one would recognize me."

"Well, you did catch her eye and the disguise does work, Clark."

"I'll say. She doesn't see me as anything but a friend and co-worker. It's Superman that interests Lois. All Superman, all the time. I never saw this happening, or even considered the possibility. I *never* should have created Superman."

Jonathan spoke up. "No, son. I was wrong before when I tried to talk you out of using your talents. Superman *is* needed, because he has abilities that no one else possesses, can help people in trouble that no one else can. He saves lives and prevents horrible disasters. Clark, think about it: Superman destroyed the Nightfall asteroid and saved the world. The whole world, Clark, and every single living thing on it! Clark Kent can't do those things and still have any hope of living a normal life."

"I know, Dad, but Lois is so infatuated with Superman that she never pays attention to plain old Clark Kent with his normal life." He held up his hand as Martha opened her

mouth to speak. "Oh, I know, Mom. I can be honest with myself. I'm pretty sure that I'm a nice guy, a good son, dependable friend, and competent newspaperman. I really am an okay person for being plain old Clark Kent. It just kills me that I can't be with Lois as plain old Clark Kent. How can I compete with myself?"

Jonathan cleared his throat and spoke quietly. "Then perhaps you shouldn't have agreed when she asked Superman if the two of you could go out sometime, or maybe you should have told her that you *are* Superman."

Clark slumped down further in his chair. He had to think, to do something, and do it quickly, before things slipped completely away from his fingertips.

"Kal, I can't believe this happened! I thought he knew better, but he had to go and make an idiot of himself. Can you believe this?"

Clark kept quiet. He knew where Lois was heading, and he didn't want to betray his thoughts. He looked toward the floor and slowly scuffed one bright red boot as Lois launched into one of her patented rants.

"I told him weeks ago there is 'you,' there is 'I'; there is no 'we.'" No "we" implies singly-arranged people. A non-pair. One person and another one person. Persons who are not attached to one another, persons who are apart. Apart, I mean, from one another romantically. They can be together in the same office or staff meeting, but not together as a couple. Together being chewed out by Perry, or together as in sharing a byline. Just not together, together. He's a newsman, for heaven's sake! He should be able to understand the differences between three tiny pronouns! Why in the world did he have to spoil things by asking me — "she broke off as she noticed Clark's face turning red.

"Oh, Kal, you don't have to be jealous! Sure, Clark asked me out, but he's nothing. You're the only man for me. He's a good guy, a really nice guy, but I turned him down."

Clark felt the need to bash his head repeatedly against something, but nothing on Earth would be able to withstand the frustration he needed to release. His decision to belatedly ask Lois out might have been answered differently if Clark had done so weeks ago, but not now. He should have asked her out before she asked him out, before she started dating him, which now made it impossible for him to date her. His head started to hurt, even without bashing it against anything. Lois logic was running rampant through his brain.

"Just forget all about Clark, Kal. I've got an idea, but I have to ask you a personal question first."

His head spinning and glad for a change of topic, Clark sat down quickly. "Sure, Lois. Questions are great. They promote honesty. Questions can help us get to know each other really, really well, even the parts of us that we might try to hide. Things that might at first seem bad or wrong to hide, but could turn out to be great if we could only take the time to realize why those wonderful things had been hidden, or kept unanswered because the right question hadn't been asked of the right person yet."

Lois looked at him strangely. He seemed to be babbling. Weird.

Shrugging, she asked, "Does the suit come off?" Lois hurried on as his eyebrows rose instantly to his hairline. "Not that, Kal! Keep your shirt — no, your suit, I guess, keep your suit on. When we go out, we've had to date in secret and go places where no one could see us. If it became known we're an item, it'd probably make my life even

more dangerous than usual. So, here's my idea: I think maybe you could leave the suit behind and wear regular clothing. Then we could go out in public, because no one would recognize you without your suit. Does that sound crazy to you?"

Clark sat numbly.

"Maybe you could even put on some sort of disguise if you thought someone might recognize you, like a fake beard, or maybe glasses-"

Clark leaped up. He hated to lie to Lois, but now he simply had to. "I hear a cry for help! I need to go. I need to go now. I mean really, really right now. To go. And help."

Lois patted him on the back. "Of course you do, Kal. It's all right. It's what you do, and one of the many reasons I love you. Hurry back if you can."

Clark flew out of Lois' window as quickly as he could without knocking Lois backward with a sonic boom. Several hundred spins around the planet seemed like a good way to burn off the embarrassment of that beyond-his-control conversation. Several thousand trips around the Earth later, though, he still couldn't ease the burn from his face or clear the fog from his brain. How had things veered so badly out of control? Somehow the creation of his alter-ego had taken over his real life. Superman didn't really exist! Should he, now that Lois loved of him *as* Superman, and what did that mean for Clark Kent? Clark had to think. Think of how to unweave this web of deception.

Lois walked quickly back to her apartment the next evening. She'd spent a very long day at the Planet, and was not looking forward to an even longer and boring evening at home. Kal had called her by telephone that afternoon to apologize because he needed to cancel their planned date for the evening. Her inquisitive nature had her check the caller ID number. A quick internet search revealed the call was made from a pay phone in Metropolis — didn't he own a phone? Maybe he just listened with his Super-ears for calls of distress, and had never needed a phone himself to call anyone. Kal was, after all, the last son of Krypton. He probably had a pretty empty address book.

She'd been looking forward to the promise of some great Chinese food, but not in China as usual; Kal knew a place here in Metropolis. He must have rescued the owners or something. Anyhow, the two of them could go out on a date as regular people and have a terrific time doing normal things. He didn't have to dazzle her with a spectacular show of powers; he just had to be himself. She wondered what Kal would wear on a date. Black would look good on him.

Lois knew this sort of thing would happen, that Kal would often be needed and have to leave at a moment's notice, and she was surprised to find their first broken date bothered her far less than she'd expected. In her short life, Lois had dealt with gun runners in the Congo and car theft rings in Metropolis, been held at gunpoint twelve times, saved Jimmy from alligators, been arrested twice, kidnapped four times, fired Perry after he'd fired her, been thrown out of an airplane, tackled crazy invisible men and wackos with flamethrowers, won three Kerth Awards *and* managed to snag the only interview ever granted by the mysterious billionaire Lex Luthor. With all that had happened in her life, she had never been more nervous than that evening a couple weeks ago when, while interviewing Superman, she'd asked if they might go out on a date.

And he'd said yes!

Now she was dating the most famous man in the world,

a man who was more powerful than a locomotive, faster than a speeding bullet. A man who could do anything he could imagine, anything at all. But a man so noble he chose not to use those incredible abilities for personal gain, but instead to help where and when he could. She sighed. And Superman, this amazing man, would soon take time off from asteroid-crunching, bullet-catching and criminal-capturing to take her out for some great Chinese. Almost in a daze with the happiness that only comes with new love, Lois slowed her hurried stride and instead strolled toward her apartment, lost in romantic thought.

High above her, atop the roof of an adjacent building, a figure dressed entirely in black watched her progress through masked eyes. The dark form watched until she entered her apartment complex, and then dropped silently from the rooftop fifty feet to the alleyway below. Within seconds, the figure became one with the night.

The next morning as Lois was doing her hair in preparation for work, she heard a LNN news bulletin report a new superhero in Metropolis. Without a second thought she dropped her curling iron and threw baggy clothes on over her pajamas to grab a taxi to the Daily Planet office. The story was big. Not as big as Superman (*her* Superman, she thought with a sigh), but big.

LNN had reported that late in the night a young couple walking home from a nightclub had been accosted by a group of teens in a robbery attempt. The attempt was foiled by someone in dark clothing, a black cape and mask who appeared from nowhere and knocked out the assailants in a flurry of martial art techniques. The man had quickly tied the would-be robbers' wrists together with thin rope and disappeared into the night, leaving behind the thankful couple. An hour later, the same man had rushed into a burning house fire and run out carrying not only a young child, but her pet kitten as well. While the grateful parents held their daughter tight the masked man faded into the darkness. He emerged from the night over and over again to help those in need or distress but then disappeared back into the shadows when finished.

Running into the Pit of the Daily Planet, Lois grabbed her notebook, planner and rolodex from her desk in one swift motion and was out the door again, never even looking at the steaming mug of coffee Clark had placed on her desk. His greeting of "good morning" was met with a muttered comment even his superhuman ears could not discern.

Clark had seen Lois in a leather outfit that Cat Grant would find scandalous, worn for undercover work in the worst parts of town. Lois, dirty and soiled in some daring escape from a master criminal's lair, soaked with mud and reeking of sewage? That was almost a weekly event for Lois. Wearing a nun's habit, investigating theft from a church offering plate? Sure. This was Lois, after all. But Lois Lane wearing sweats and curlers in her hair? Clark looked with a quizzical raise of his eyebrows toward the Chief, who had seen the flash that was Lois come and go.

"Clark, that girl can grab hold of a story and not let go until it sits up, begs, and then writes itself for her. Sure as I can yodel better than any newspaperman east of the Pacific, I know she's out pounding the streets for any information about the Cat."

"Cat? Cat Grant?"

"No, son. *The* Cat. That's what they're calling this new hero of the night. He's the biggest story in town; the

appearance of this Cat character overshadowed a Superman rescue yesterday. Hit the pavement yourself, Clark, although you might already be too late. He may be silent and stealthy, but don't be surprised if Lois ends up belling the Cat."

Clark leaned back in his chair, his expression unreadable.

One week later, Lois sat crosslegged in her apartment, surrounded by notes, maps, markers, cassette tapes of interviews and two empty cartons of Triple Choco-Fudge ice cream. She had talked to hundreds of people since the appearance of the Cat. She followed every lead from people who had an idea of who the Cat might be or why he was in Metropolis. One man even claimed to *be* the Cat; Lois ran from his apartment as he introduced his twelve cats and offered to don his costume for her. She followed every tip, clawed her way to the front of each police briefing and used every dirty trick she knew to stay ahead of every other reporter in Metropolis, all of whom were vying for the first interview or even substantive story about the Cat. Lois called in all markers and favors owed. She milked her stoolies, snitches and contacts for any tidbit of information. She lied, bribed and extracted information in every unsavory method possible, without any hint of guilt.

Lois had avoided Clark for most of the week — she was uncomfortable around him after his disastrous suggestion of a date. She tried to convince herself that for a story this big, she worked best alone. Plus, Clark didn't really appear to be much help lately; he seemed befuddled, bumping into walls and other stationary objects, and was constantly staring off into space as if in search of divine guidance. Maybe he wasn't getting enough sleep.

Among her interviews, she'd spoken with three of the gang members disarmed by the Cat in his first appearance. They talked to her at length after she gained Henderson's permission to visit their cells. Their stories, along with other eyewitnesses, agreed: the Cat was well-named. Like his feline namesake, he moved quickly with effortless grace and struck suddenly in a series of moves that sounded to Lois like a combination of several martial arts techniques. He was fast and strong, but silent. None of the many he'd helped heard him speak, but his actions in fighting crime spoke for him.

With some regret, Lois had been forced to put off a few evenings with Kal in order to plan stakeouts in the parts of town where the Cat showed most often. Colored push pins dotted a map of Metropolis which showed sightings of the mysterious hero. Heavily-clustered in a several block radius, the pins gave Lois a fair idea where to look for him. Dressed all in black and operating only at night, Lois figured he wouldn't exactly be easy to spot, unlike Superman, so other tactics were needed. Lois slipped on a bright bubblegum-pink jacket which fairly screamed out "victim." Grabbing her camera, notepad and pen, she strode out the door and into the night, straight into Suicide Slum. Trouble always managed to find her, but tonight Lois would go looking for trouble.

And find it she did. After ten minutes of trying to attract attention, Lois found it in the form of three leering creeps. Backed into an alley, she wondered whether a yell would attract the Cat. Kal could help, but for once she didn't want Superman around. She was trying to catch a Cat, with these human rats as bait. She knew she could take out these losers easily herself, but strong-willed Lois wanted for once to be

rescued. Feigning fear, she decided to yell for help.

Almost at once after her cry broke the night, a dark shape dropped from above to land between her and the three men. It was the Cat at last, who crouched down from the leap, then sprang forward. Lashing like a tiger, the silent superhero swung his leg and tripped up the closest man. A pivoted spin with the same leg thrust upward knocked the wind and senses from the second, and the Cat gave a series of blows to the sides of the last man's head before striking palm downward and rendering the first man, still fallen from the initial attack, unconscious as well. It was all over in a matter of seconds.

The Cat rose up and faced Lois. He said nothing. She started to activate her voice recorder but with a sudden insight and speed like a panther herself, Lois grabbed out and pulled the mask from his face.

"Clark?! What do you think you're doing? What are you doing in this stupid costume? And how can you even see without your glasses?"

Clark squared his chin and the Cat spoke at last. "You've discovered my secret, Lois. I, Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, lead a secret double life as a superhero. I've decided to fight crime and protect the City of Metropolis."

Lois stared at him. "Are you out of your mind, Clark? Do you want to get yourself killed? A few fancy kung fu moves won't protect you if you keep up this foolishness! You're not Superman, okay? Just leave the crime fighting to the police and stick to reporting the news, not trying to make it. Go home, take off that ridiculous costume and burn it, and I'll see you at work in the morning. We'll forget this whole thing ever happened. Your alter-ego should play tomcat and slink away forever."

With that, Lois walked out of the alleyway toward home, grumbling about the loss of a great story. She left behind a very confused and dazed Clark Kent. His plan to create a second secret identity and allow Lois to discover it so she would fall in love with heroic Clark hadn't worked at all! He'd thought it was the crime fighting Lois liked. He'd been sure it was the crime fighting. Fight crime, interest Lois, reveal himself as a hero, somehow work Superman out of his life, or at least out of Lois', and things would be great. Hmmm. Maybe for Lois it was the colorful costume? She'd said the black costume was stupid. Perhaps he should go with that crazy green and yellow suit his Mom made before the final choice of red, blue and yellow. Sure! He'd stop by to visit Lois as Superman, then fly out to Kansas for a family visit as Clark Kent and while there pick up the wildly-colored costume. Then he would begin his third superhero career as the mighty... Spark. This time Clark would pick his name as a crime fighter, not let someone else decide who he would be. That decision would be his and his alone, so sooner or later Lois would see Clark for who he really was.

Whoever that turned out to be.

THE END

Queen of the Capes requested a nice mix of material which had me tearing out my hair when you combine number one in the "want" requests with numbers two and three in the "do not want."

Three things I want in my fic:

1. Superman and Lois Lane in a relationship
2. Another Superhero (brief mention, crossover, cameo, whichever)
3. An awkward or embarrassing moment/conversation

Three things I do not want in my fic:

1. Mayson, Lana or Dan *grrr*
2. Lois finding out Superman is Clark
3. Lois finding out Superman is somebody else

I hope this silly piece met those requirements and provided some entertainment!