

Fireworks (2012 Summer Ficathon)

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Lois and Clark meet by accident while visiting Walt Disney World nine years before Clark's fateful interview at the Daily Planet.

Homespun

Lois was hot, so hot she felt like she was melting. She scoffed. *And she had thought it was hot in Metropolis in the summer.* That heat had nothing on the 98 percent humidity that was Florida in mid-June with one hundred percent teenage hormones on rampage.

She couldn't believe her mother, dumping her and Lucy with Daddy for the first two weeks of summer break. Actually, she could. Almost as much as she could believe her father double-booking himself at a medical conference during the same time.

Oh, how Lois could feel the parental love overfloweth.

At least the medical conference was being held at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, so their father had no other option than to buy his daughters week-long passes to the park while he was busy conferencing.

It was the best family vacation yet, one where she didn't have to spend more than an hour a day — if that — with her family. Well, save Lucy, but her baby sister was okay, since she was in the same boat as Lois.

Lucy and Lois had latched onto a group of other teenage girls whose parents had dragged them to the conference. Unfortunately, they were all *young* teenage girls like Lucy. Fourteen was the median age, Lois being on the high end of that at almost seventeen.

She just had to suffer through one more year of high school and living at home with alchy mom, and then off to Met U.'s prestigious journalism school. She should be a shoe-in, what with her internship at the Daily Planet starting when she returned to Metropolis, and next fall not only would she be Senior Class President, but as the only member of the Bulletin staff that had been writing articles for three years, she had already been appointed Editor. Not to mention being valedictorian since... well, birth.

Lucy and the five other thirteen and fourteen year olds had gone off with a mother of one of the girls. After days of being the seventh wheel on rides she was ready for a taste of freedom and being alone. If she was going to end up on rides by herself, she'd much rather they were rides *she* chose.

All this freedom finally gave Lois a chance to people watch. She had been watching the couple in line behind her for almost ten minutes now. She actually felt sorry for the guy. He was kind of cute in that homespun sort of way — dark brown hair and bespectacled. His blonde — enough said — girlfriend was piling on the sugary sweet-talk that Lois could tell was fake from a mile away; from here it was giving her a stomach ache.

Blondie was pouting at him and batting her eyelashes. "Come on, Scout. This line is *for-ev-er*. We'll be here all afternoon. Why don't we go on another ride? Pete, Rachel, and Joe went to Pirates of the Caribbean. I bet if we hurried we could join them in line."

Lois wished they would. All Blondie's whining was making her head throb.

"Lana, it wouldn't be very fair to cut ahead of all those other

people who had been waiting in line," he countered, clearly not planning on giving up his spot. Good for him! Bad for Lois.

Blondie harrumphed into another pout, crossing her arms. "You're no fun."

Lois rolled her eyes, and she could've sworn the boyfriend caught her because a flash of amusement zipped across his features before disappearing. Wow! Homespun was quite handsome when he smiled.

Blondie thankfully didn't speak again as the line moved forward. Then she splayed her hands across his broad chest. "Scout, you haven't kissed me all day," she nagged.

"It's too hot," he replied vaguely, not responding in-kind to her overly affectionate PDA.

It *was* hot, but Lois hadn't met a teenage boy yet who would turn down a chance to press himself closer to a willing girlfriend — no matter the weather. Homespun was angry as Blondie, that was clear, but why? Lois wondered if she could figure it out before they got to the front of the line. There were so many annoying things about Blondie; narrowing it down would be difficult, but Lois was up to the challenge.

Blondie kissed Homespun's neck and along his jaw to his mouth, and he seemed to stiffen in discomfort at the action. When he didn't join in the kiss, Blondie gave up. She dropped the cutesy act, pouting and overly sweet affection, and spoke to her boyfriend in what Lois assumed was her normal voice, "I'm going to get soaked, Clark."

Well, *duh!* That was the whole point of the ride.

"And?" Homespun replied, thinking along the same lines as Lois.

"This humidity has already done a number on my hair; if I get soaked I'm going to look like a drowned rat," Blondie went on.

And? Lois wanted to say. Wasn't the saying 'drowned cat', anyway? Rat fit Blondie better though. Why did Blondie come to the amusement park in that dress? Winds, water, dizziness, and long waits were to be expected and should be planned for. Blondie appeared ready more for a barn dance.

"I like the fifty foot drop. It makes me feel like I'm flying," Homespun responded softly.

"Flying?" Blondie scoffed with a shake of her hair. "Just what you need on top of everything else."

"*Lana!*" Homespun gasped, glancing at Lois who was trying to fade into the faux mountain façade of the line.

"Come off it, Clark, you're too uptight," Blondie hissed back. "Nobody here cares if you're different. It's not like they'll ever see you again. Relax."

Lois waited a full minute, counting to sixty and all, before glancing back at Homespun. He didn't look all that different to her. She had no idea what Blondie was talking about.

The line moved forward and around a curve. From this vantage spot, Lois could see that the line continued on at least the same length they had already waited before disappearing inside. She bet that they had only gone through a third of the actual line. Suddenly, that lemonade she had drunk an hour before seemed to hit her bladder. She gazed at the seemingly endless line. She would never make it. If she left the line to hunt down a restroom, she'd have to start back at the end of the line again. She groaned.

"Are you okay?" Homespun asked, and Lois realized he was addressing her.

She smiled in embarrassment.

"Of course she's fine, Clark. Even when nobody's in trouble you insist on offering help," Blondie grumbled.

Lois ground her teeth together and fought the impulse to shoot out her hand and give ol' Blondie a good karate chop. Her sensei had taught her better than that; to only use her skills in defense, not to start an offense... no matter how offensive the person was.

"Actually," Lois countered, disliking that Blondie had spoken for her. "I was thinking how they should have restrooms along the line if they were going to make us wait so long to get on a ride."

"We would be more than happy to hold your place if you wanted to run off," Homespun volunteered.

Lois's bladder rejoiced. "Would you?" she asked.

"Oh, so it's okay to hold a stranger's place in line, but going and joining our friends wouldn't be fair?" Blondie snapped.

Homespun ignored his girlfriend and said to Lois, "Go on. Your place will be here when you get back. I promise." He was so nice. What in the world was he doing with a witch like Blondie?

One good deed deserved another. "You know, I think I saw a shop over near the restrooms. I bet you could get a hat or poncho so you didn't get wet," Lois suggested.

"No, I don't..." Blondie started saying as if she wouldn't want to go anywhere with Lois.

Lois couldn't understand why. It wasn't like she was going to dunk Blondie in the river, no matter how much she deserved it.

"Yes!" Blondie changed her mind, even to Lois's surprise. "That's a great idea." She wrapped her arms around her boyfriend's neck and kissed him. "Wait right here."

Homespun raised a brow, and responded dryly, "With bells on." Guess he didn't appreciate being spoken to like a dog.

Lois wished she hadn't made the suggestion. She wanted to spend *less* time with Blondie, not more, but it wouldn't be a good deed if she wasn't giving Homespun a few minutes of peace. She ducked under the ropes and Blondie paused as if she didn't know what to do. Well, she shouldn't have worn a dress to an amusement park. It was as smart as wearing high heels on a hike.

Homespun got an annoyed expression on his face and scooped Blondie up into his arms, like she weighed nothing, only to set her down on the other side of the rope.

"Thanks, Scout," Blondie purred.

Lois rolled her eyes. "The ropes do have latches on each end if you can't duck under," she said.

"I know," the girl responded. "Clark just likes any excuse to help people."

It didn't look that way to Lois. She pointed out the gift shop to Blondie and called, "I'll meet you here when I get out."

A few minutes later, feeling much refreshed, Lois returned to the gift shop. She looked all around, but didn't see Blondie anywhere. She guessed Blondie wanted to be with Lois as much as Lois wanted to be her.

Lois was about to give up and head back to the ride, when she heard a familiar giggle. She couldn't believe it! Homespun had promised to save her place in line. She came around the corner to confront him, only to find Blondie's arms around a completely different man with sandy blond hair.

"Oh, Joe," Blondie giggled again as 'Joe' kissed up her neck. "I couldn't get away fast enough."

Lois's jaw dropped. Blondie was cheating on Homespun! Did he suspect? He must. No wonder he was mad at her. Why didn't he stand up to her? Or dump her sorry butt?

"I can't believe you! Your boyfriend is so nice. How can you cheat on him?" she roared.

Blondie paled and glanced over her shoulder back towards where they had left Homespun.

"Do you know her, Lana?" Joe asked nervously.

"Just some nosy kid next to us in line, Joe," Blondie answered, before facing Lois. "Why don't you say that a little louder, kid? I bet they didn't hear you in Metropolis. You wouldn't understand."

Lois placed her hands on her hips and glared. She knew all about cheating and the aftermath of its destruction. "Why don't you explain it to me then?" This should be good.

Blondie lowered her voice. "Scout isn't like other guys."

"He's not?" Joe asked, surprised.

Blondie's eyes widened as if she had forgotten about him. She pressed her lips together and turned back to Joe, hissing, "Clark wants to wait until marriage."

Lois's jaw dropped. What a witch! How could she disclose such a secret about her boyfriend to another man?

Joe roared with laughter.

Blondie pointed at him. "If you say one word..."

"I doubt anyone would be all that surprised. He is a Kent after all, and you know how upstanding *they* are," Joe said this as if it was a bad trait. He wrapped his arms around Blondie's waist and pulled her against his chest, running a hand up her leg and under her skirt. "Is that why you let me hit all those home runs?"

Blondie giggled and swatted away his hand.

Ugh. Lois had seen and heard enough. She started marching back towards the ride, but was having serious doubts about it. Did she want to be the one to inform Homespun that Blondie was stepping out on him?

Blondie chased after her and grabbed her arm. "Don't tell Clark."

Lois hadn't been planning on it, but she didn't want to be party to this deception if it wasn't her decision. By telling her 'not to tell' Blondie had made up her mind for her. "Why didn't you just break up with him, if you wanted to date Joe?"

"Look, I'm planning on telling him as soon as we return to Smallville tomorrow. I just didn't want to ruin our senior class trip," Blondie explained.

"Ruin it for who?" Lois retorted. She bet Homespun would have been much happier not to spend his whole senior trip with his unfaithful girlfriend.

"He's such a straight arrow. Always having to do the right thing. Always insisting on helping everyone. It's like he can't help himself. I want a boyfriend not a boy scout. This will crush him."

So far everything Lois had heard improved her image of Homespun, and worsened her opinion of Blondie.

"You don't know Clark. He's... *different*," Blondie said again as her excuse.

Lois pressed her lips together. "How?"

Blondie paled, and lowered her voice. "Let's just say he's not like everyone else. He's..." She stopped herself from saying too much.

"A virgin?" Lois filled in the blank. "You should try it sometime. It's not as bad as being a cheating skank." She marched back to the ride, planning on telling Homespun what a 'ho' his girlfriend was. She jumped the rope, and said, "Excuse me. Just heading back to my space," to all the people between her and her spot.

Homespun was standing another ten feet further along than when they had left. He had his face buried in his hand.

Blondie's words echoed in Lois's ears. *He would be crushed*. Lois couldn't bear to be the one to cause Homespun any more pain. With a sigh, she pushed her way along the line back to her spot.

"Thanks," she mumbled.

"Lana's not coming back, is she?" Homespun asked softly after a minute.

"No."

"Joe?"

Lois nodded. Well, now she knew why he was so mad at Blondie. She wished she didn't though. "I'm sorry," she said, reaching out to touch his arm in comfort.

"Me, too, but it wasn't wholly unexpected," he replied, glancing down at her hand, which was still on his arm.

Flushing, she removed it. Luckily the line moved, and the faux pas was forgotten.

Maybe not entirely forgotten as she couldn't erase from her mind how strong and muscular and warm his arm had been. Blondie was stupid. If Lois was ever so lucky to have such a man interested in her, she would jump at the chance.

She blushed, her heart racing; she was embarrassed at where her thoughts had gone after one innocent touch. The last thing Homespun needed at this moment was to have the messenger of his break-up — a kid, no less — crushing on him.

"I'm not blind, you know, or stupid," Homespun said, still speaking softly so the others in line couldn't hear.

Lois didn't have a response to that. She didn't really want to talk about Blondie anymore.

"I've known about it for a while," he said, chuckling with a shake

of his head. “There are no secrets in Smallville.”

“Why didn’t you tell her you knew?” She couldn’t stop herself from asking.

He shrugged. “I don’t know. Ever since I told her something about myself I’d never told anyone else, she’s been acting odd. I kept hoping that all the clues she kept dropping was just my paranoia... I wanted to believe she wouldn’t do this to me. Maybe I am blind and stupid,” he groaned. “Do you know what she told me last month?” He shook his head. “She told me that she couldn’t go to prom with me, the guy she’s been dating all year, because her mom was making her go with Joe.”

“And you bought that?” Lois asked in disbelief.

Homespun laughed. “Well, yes... but you’ve got to know that her mom has always hated me. I’m from the wrong class.”

“There’s a class system in Smallville?” Lois asked incredulously. She had thought that Smallville was in America, not turn of the century England.

“Apparently. So, I went with Rachel Harris instead. Boy, did that ever tick Lana off.” He chuckled. “She wanted to have her cake *and* eat it too.”

“Putting aside your melodrama for a moment. What is with *that* saying?” Lois asked, moving forward with the line. “Don’t most people want to eat their cake? I mean if you don’t want to eat it, why not give it to someone who does? Why hoard it? It’s *my* cake, and I’m not going to eat it or share it with anyone!” Lois said with her best impression of an evil laugh.

Homespun roared with laughter at her joke, and his whole face lit up, making him twice as handsome. “Let me guess: philosophy major?”

Lois blushed. *He thinks I’m in college.* She decided not to correct this mistake. “Journalism.”

“Really? Me, too. I start Midwest U. in the fall,” Homespun said, almost gushing with excitement. “How about you?”

“Met U.,” Lois said, glancing away. She figured he must be eighteen, and she was almost seventeen. She *wasn’t* a kid, and he didn’t think so either.

“That’s a good school.”

“Yeah,” Lois said. She didn’t want to talk about colleges anymore. “I’m doing a summer internship at the Daily Planet.”

“Wow! That’s impressive. I’d give my eyeteeth to work at the Daily Planet,” he said. “I’m just working on the farm. Summer’s kind of our busy time.”

So, Homespun was a farm boy from a town so small they actually called it Smallville. No wonder his t-shirt clung to his chest and biceps. Lois had never really thought about all those people from small towns or from farming communities. She had just assumed they were all hicks. She realized she herself would’ve put Homespun into a class too, just as Blondie’s mom had. She looked down, ashamed to be lumped into such company.

“Do you live in Metropolis?” he asked after a few moments of silence.

“Yeah.” She didn’t want to talk of home, even though this had been probably the longest and best conversation Lois had been a part of, with anyone outside of Lucy, since she arrived in Florida.

“How can you stand it? All those people! All that noise! This place drives me nuts. I guess when my folks signed me up they didn’t think about the screaming,” he said.

“You didn’t sign up for your own senior class trip?” she asked in amazement. She’d probably be the first one, just as an excuse to get away from her mom.

He blushed and looked down at his foot drawing crescents with his sneaker. “Money’s tight. I’m going to Midwest on a football scholarship.”

“Wait. You’re going on a football scholarship to *study*? Wow! You *are* full of surprises,” Lois said, wishing this guy would start saying something to make him less attractive. “Gee, when Blondie said you weren’t like everybody else, she wasn’t kidding.”

He blanched. “Lana said *what* about me?”

Good going there, Lane. It doesn’t matter how attracted you are to this guy, he’ll never be interested in you. “Nothing. Nothing.”

Homespun looked at her incredulously.

“Okay. Fine. She was trying to get me to understand why she’d cheat on a great guy like you, and she said you weren’t like everybody else,” Lois explained sticking her foot further into her mouth as he winced and leaned against the faux mountain wall in humiliation.

“I can’t believe she told you. I can’t believe I trusted her to keep my secret,” he mumbled.

Lois wrapped her arm around his shoulders. “Please, don’t feel bad. It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” she whispered.

He stood up straight, causing her arm to fall free. “I’m not ashamed. I’m proud of who I am,” he said, nodding. “Line’s moved.” They moved forward.

“But then...” Lois shut her mouth. It was none of her business.

“I was just imagining what you thought of me,” he murmured. “That crazy guy from the line, who can’t even make his girlfriend happy.”

She cracked a smile. “Not *that* crazy. I came back, didn’t I?”

He looked her in the eye and said with utmost seriousness, “It’s a good ride. You didn’t want to lose your spot.”

“Damn straight!” she said, and then covered her mouth. Homespun was probably pretty religious to make a vow to wait until marriage in this day and age. Midwest farmer’s son and all. “Sorry.”

He raised an eyebrow. “A journalism major who apologies for her choice of words?” he teased.

She laughed. “First Amendment.”

“All the way, baby!” he agreed.

“Don’t call me ‘baby,’” Lois insisted.

“Right. Sorry, women’s lib. You know everything about me, and I don’t even know your name,” Homespun said.

“No names,” she said, not wanting to think of him as anything more than Homespun.

“Just two strangers who cross in the night?”

That sounded awfully romantic, Lois thought, but she was only sixteen and not interested in going all the way with a guy yet. She smiled. The nice thing about Homespun was she knew he would never pressure her to. “Something like that,” Lois murmured, her voice rough. “Except that it’s the middle of the afternoon.”

“Right.”

“Blondie was right about one thing, though,” she said, and his eyes widened in anticipation of what that could be. “This line is taking forever!”

He laughed. “I hadn’t noticed.”

Lois blushed.

“So, everybody here knows why I’m by myself. How about you?”

Lois told him her story as the line continued to meander back and forth until before they knew it, she was next.

“How many?” the attendant asked.

“Two,” Homespun answered for her.

“Four and five,” said the attendant, pointing to their seat assignments.

“Ladies first,” Homespun said, taking lane five.

They climbed into their boat and they were off. The boat went under an overhang and a sudden waterfall splashed Lois.

She squealed in surprise and could hear Homespun chuckling behind her. “That wasn’t funny,” she said, glancing back at him.

He grinned. “Yes, it was.”

Oh, so he thought it was funny when someone got wet, huh? She’d show him!

The ride went over a small dip and around the bend, through the darkness, and the singing diorama.

Lois started to sing along with “Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah”. It was a catchy tune, and like “It’s a Small World” one that stuck with her. Homespun whispered in her ear. “You have a beautiful voice.”

His breath on her damp neck sent shivers down her spine. The way they set up seating in these boats, it almost felt like she was sitting in

his lap.

“Cold?” he asked against her neck again.

Cold? Hello? Florida. Mid-June! Lois shook her head and her ponytail flapped in the darkness. She took her hand off the bar in front of her as she turned back to look at him, and smiled. As she turned forward again, her hand dropped down and came in contact with his shin. She pulled her hand away quickly, not wanting him to think she had caressed his leg on purpose. She wasn't that kind of girl, but with Homespun she might make an exception.

The boat went around another bend and climbed started to climb.

“This is it,” she heard him murmur.

The boat reached the top of the fifty foot drop and Lois's eyes widened. She hadn't remembered how big of a drop it really was. Instead of screaming, she bent forward and tucked herself up into a ball as the boat seemed to hover there for a moment before it fell.

SPLASH!

Everyone was laughing about how wet they were, everyone but Lois; she was bone dry. She glanced back at Homespun and *he* wasn't wet; he was drenched. She started to laugh.

“I'm soaked!” he said, laughing. He shook the water off his arms. “How am I wet from head to toe and you're hardly damp?”

Lois winked at him. “Trade secret.”

The boats stopped, and they disembarked.

She grabbed his glasses off his face. “Here, let me get those,” she said, drying the lenses on her dry cotton shirt.

His blue t-shirt clung to chest even more tightly than before, she noticed. He ran his fingers through his hair, slicking it back.

“Wow. I wouldn't even recognize you without your glasses. You look so different, like another guy entirely.”

“I do?” He seemed surprised by this revelation. “Better?”

She shrugged. “Different.” Better without the glasses and without the slicked back hair, but she knew better than to try to change something about someone they couldn't help. If he needed the glasses to see, it wasn't her place to tell him he'd look better without them. Either she liked someone for all of who they were, or none of it; it wasn't right to pick and choose. She'd keep the wet t-shirt look though.

As they walked on, she handed back his glasses. They saw a bunch of people stopped in front of some video monitors.

“What?” Homespun asked, glancing at the pictures. He turned and pointed at her. “You ducked!”

Lois grinned, skipping back into the sunlight. “All's fair in love and war!”

Firecracker

Clark watched the lithe nymph skip out of sight and felt he must be the luckiest man in the universe.

When he had laid eyes on her a mere hour before, he had thought his entire world was over. It was love at first sight and lying, cheating Lana was draped over him like a bad toupee.

Clark knew that Lana was having difficulty with the knowledge that he wasn't like other guys, and she had sought comfort in Joe's arms. He just hadn't realized how *much* comfort. Why hadn't he just confronted Lana at the hotel two nights before when he could hear them going at it from three floors away? Sure, he could have punched Joe for stealing his girlfriend, but Clark knew that Joe was taking an opportunity where he could. Joe was just that sort of guy; stab a guy in the back just to steal the coins from his front pocket. Anyway, Joe hadn't seduced Lana away from Clark. She had gone willingly.

And Clark had let her go just as willingly.

He had spent the entire previous day with Pete and Rachel; Lana had said that all she wanted to do was lie by the pool. Fine by him. His friends knew something was up between them, but Clark knew this wasn't the place to have a fight, especially when — knowing Lana — yelling would be involved, and things that he really didn't want said could be screamed for everyone to hear. So, he had tried to put off the inevitable until they got back to Smallville, and Lana could scream at

him until the cows came home... literally.

Lana must have realized he knew something was up by his cool behavior. Not that their relationship had been very hot lately, especially after he told her that he thought he should wait until marriage. That was when the whole conversation about his abilities had come out. He had been gaining these different abilities for the past few years, and he wanted to wait until he was more mature and had more control over his new powers. Clark hadn't meant for them to come out then, or like that, but she had demanded to know why. Instead of being understanding and willing to wait, Lana had gone in the other direction.

His folks hadn't agreed with his choice about telling Lana, but they had told him that he was eighteen now and had to face the consequences for his own actions. The decision about whom he could trust and who would have him turned over to a lab to be dissected like a frog, now lay solely with him.

This morning, for some reason, Lana had insisted on playing the part of the dutiful girlfriend, not that anyone had bought the act. Clark had actually separated them from the group to tell her to cut it out and stop acting all fake, when he suddenly had become sidetracked. He hadn't really meant to follow the pretty brunette into line at Splash Mountain, especially with Lana on his arm. There was just something about how this girl's heart beat that had hooked him around the neck like a leash and dragged him along.

Now, she was alone, and he was alone, and Clark wanted nothing more than to be alone together with this girl... woman. He had to stop thinking of women as girls. He wasn't in high school anymore. He was a man, and that person, who had gotten him soaked on the log ride, was most certainly a woman. A woman who wanted to be a reporter, just like him. It was kismet.

He couldn't believe he met the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with already, and, he laughed, in line at Disney World. She was going to think he was rebounding from Lana's deception.

Was he?

No, what he was feeling for this girl... *woman* — geez, he wished he knew her name — was so different from anything he had ever felt before. He had gazed into her eyes and, not only did he feel like he could do anything, he had felt as if he could literally float.

His dad had once told Clark that he had to be careful around firecrackers. Get too close, and he could get burned; put one in his hand, and he'd have a life-changing experience. That was what this girl reminded him of — something that required that kind of warning label. She had exploded into his life like a firecracker, so he had been calling her that in his mind: his little life-altering firecracker.

Clark turned the corner into the sunshine and realized she was gone. Please tell him that wasn't it! His heart froze in his throat.

Then, her words echoed in his mind: *All's fair in love and war.*

Well, if that was the case...

He closed his eyes and listened. There she was, over to the right. He opened his eyes and scanned in that direction. He found her leaning against a railing, looking straight at him. Was she wondering “what's next?” too? He didn't care as long as whatever came next included her.

He made a beeline directly to her and hoped he didn't use any extra speed to do so. Was she testing him? How much about his abilities had Lana told her? Was Firecracker seeing if it was true? Or was she trying to lose him: that weird recently-dumped guy who had latched on to her at Splash Mountain? Her smile that greeted him told him he was welcome.

“Hi,” Clark said, somewhat breathlessly, not because he was breathless from rushing over to her — *hardly!* — but because she simply took his breath away.

“Hi,” she replied, almost shyly. In line they had had an excuse to talk. Now, if they stayed together, it was a choice. He had made his, had she?

“I bet you want to go find your friends, now. You don't *have* to stay with me. I'm used to being alone,” she said, and his heart ached for her.

Was Firecracker giving him the big brush off? Or was she just giving him an 'out' in case he wanted to leave?

"Nah!" Clark said, trying — he hoped — for casual nonchalance as he leaned against the railing next to her. "I can be with them anytime." He only had this one day to be with Firecracker and he planned on making the most of it.

He heard her stomach rumble, surprised that he was so attuned to her. It had taken weeks of practice to recognize Lana's heartbeat, but with Firecracker it had been the first thing he had noticed. It was as if all the extra noises that had pounded his head upon coming to this place faded away. Oxymoronic as it might sound, but being with Firecracker was like finally finding his peace and quiet.

"Do you want to get something to eat?" he asked. "I think one of the cafes over in Fantasyland has fruit and salads?"

Terrific; for a moment there, she had looked at him like he was nuts. "Do you have a special diet that you need to follow? Because I, myself, have a hankering for a hotdog."

"I thought..." Clark shook his head. He thought because Lana ate like a bird to try to keep her figure just so, that every woman did, especially one as beautiful as this one. "Hotdogs sound perfect."

Would it be wrong to ask Firecracker to marry him at this moment?

She hopped off the railing with the grace of a gazelle and started heading off, and he slid right in step with her. He liked the way Firecracker walked. She walked fast as if she knew where she was going and wanted to get there as quickly as possible. He smiled. He was a fan of speed himself.

Firecracker didn't stop, never slowing down, weaving in and out of the crowds like an expert, until they had reached the snack bar line. He wondered what she was like behind the wheel of a car.

"Why don't I get this? Do you want to... uh... dry off?" she suggested, reaching out and placing her hand briefly on his chest. He had forgotten that he was soaking wet.

Had Lana told her about his heat-vision?

"Sure. Thanks," he said hesitantly. He could hear his dad's voice in his head, reminding him that a guy *always* paid for meals. He reached into his back pocket for his wallet. "Let me..."

Firecracker pushed against his chest. "Go already!" She grinned at him. "My treat."

Clark wanted to protest, but he knew Firecracker was a modern woman from the big city. Would she interpret his being a gentleman as him being a chauvinistic pig? Did he really want to waste precious minutes arguing with her over this? "I'll get the next one," he insisted, if for no other reason but for them to still be together at supertime.

When he came out a few minutes later, Firecracker was leaning against the snack bar counter, tapping her foot to a tune playing through the speakers overhead. He had never seen anyone look more alluring doing nothing. He swallowed.

"Great! You're back," she said as he walked up. She picked up two hotdogs in one hand and a drink. "Your lunch is on the counter."

Clark found two more hotdogs and a lemonade. He cracked a grin. If she kept this up, Smallville might never see him again. He sat down next to her at the small table she had chosen and accidentally bumped her leg with his. "Sorry," he mumbled, but didn't move his leg away.

Firecracker polished off one of her hotdogs and then pulled out her map of the park from her back pocket. She spread it out on the table between them. Picking up her lemonade and taking a long sip, she asked, "Where would you like to go?"

He wanted to say, 'anywhere she went', but he figured that sounded more corny than the Smallville Corn Festival. "Let's see..." he said, leaning forward and scanning the map. One name popped out at him: *Spaceship Earth*. "Have you checked out Epcot Center yet?" he asked. Lana had refused to go to that section of the park for obvious reasons.

"Nope. It was packed our first day. The girls preferred to get their inner princess on, so we mostly hung out around Magic Kingdom, and we never made it back," she said, leaning back. "I was planning on

hitting it today, but Splash Mountain had called out to me." Her leg slid along his until her ankle hooked around his.

Clark closed his eyes, and held his breath. *Ignore it. Ignore it. Ignore it, or she'll move it away.* But he couldn't ignore it as her touch made his heart race. He must have stiffened in the process of trying to act natural and she, misinterpreting, moved her foot away. He could breathe again, but felt bereft from the loss.

Firecracker nudged his shoulder with hers and kick-started his heart again. "So, where do you see yourself in ten years?" she asked.

With you, was the obvious answer, but he didn't want to scare her off. "I'd like to travel the world, and learn some languages. This is really my first big trip out of Smallville."

"Do you have a passport?" she asked, taking another bite of her hotdog, leaving a bit of mustard on the edge of her top lip. She licked it away with her tongue, and he took off his glasses to wipe away the steam.

"Uh... no," he said.

"First thing you need to do when you return home is to get one. A good reporter needs to be ready to go where the action is at a moment's notice. I've been building up a briefcase with anything a reporter might need to have at a moment's notice," she said. "You're a boy scout, what do you suggest should be in there?"

Clark flushed. How had Firecracker known he'd been a boy scout? Then he remembered that Lana had used her 'Scout' nickname, while they had stood in line.

Firecracker put her hand on his arm for a moment. "I'm putting you on the spot. Sorry," she said with a smile. "If I get too intense, just let me know; it's one of my flaws. I've never met anyone my age who already knows they want to be a journalist, like me. That's why I'm so excited about my internship at the Daily Planet, to see an actual working daily newspaper in action. I'm hoping to follow around real journalists, but I'll probably be nothing more than a gofer: fetching coffee, making copies, sorting mail, taking messages, and that sort of thing." She stopped to take a sip of her lemonade.

He brushed passed her error that she had flaws. She had never met anyone *her age* who wanted to be a journalist? His brow furrowed. She couldn't already be at Met. U. without having met other Journalism majors, therefore, she hadn't started college. If she was just about to start college, she probably would have visited Met U.'s journalism department, being that she lived in the city, or at least stopped by the offices of the university newspaper, so he concluded she hadn't graduated high school yet. How *old* was Firecracker? Or, more correctly, how *young* was she? His eyes widened. He accidentally on purpose dropped his napkin. When he got out of his chair to pick it up, he scooted his chair an inch further away before sitting back down.

Clark picked up his second hotdog and thought this through as he took a bite.

Firecracker was an intern at the largest and most important newspaper in the country, if not the world. By law they couldn't hire anyone under the age of sixteen, ipso facto, Firecracker had to be at least sixteen. That wasn't *so* bad. He was eighteen. Pete had a girlfriend back home who was sixteen; perfectly legal as long as they didn't do anything.

He sighed in relief. Well, marriage was certainly off the table. He chuckled. Had he really wanted to get married at eighteen anyway?

She glanced over at him with curiosity. She had such a maturity about her both in looks and personality that he had naturally assumed she was as old, if not older, than him. That was girls for him, always keeping him on, or knocked off, his toes. She hadn't corrected his assumption, though. Was she telling him the truth about the Daily Planet? He figured with her rambling on about the internship, she was.

Firecracker popped the last bite of her hotdog into her mouth, picked up the map, and grabbed his hand. "Come on, Farm Boy, let me show you the world," she said.

Well, if she insists, Clark thought, allowing her to drag him to the nearest monorail station.

While Spaceship Earth wasn't exactly what he had hoped, a planetarium type show, it was still an interesting time-travel look at Earth's history.

"You're awfully quiet," Firecracker said, after they had walked out of the exhibit.

"Just thinking," he said.

She had stood next to him on the moving sidewalk, and his arm had naturally gone around her waist, so they wouldn't get separated. They were a perfect fit, her and him. When they stepped back into the light, his arm had fallen off, and he was thinking of a way to get it back there. Maybe somehow move it to her shoulders. Something more subtle than the yawn and stretch move, which he had seen other guys use.

"I'd like to go there someday," Firecracker said.

"Where?" Clark asked, as they hadn't been talking about any place in particular.

"Space. I'd love to be the first journalist to travel into space."

"Me, too," he murmured in agreement.

She elbowed him in the gut. "Well, you can't; I've called dibs."

He laughed. "Fine. The first *male* journalist in space."

"What a story that'd be, huh?" she said, almost wistfully.

"Woman reporter tops man in space?" Clark teased, showing her the future headline.

"What?" she gasped, giving him a sharp look.

"*Beats!* Beats man into space," he hastily corrected.

Her lips were still pressed together as she raised an eyebrow. "Uh-huh. Don't get smart with me," Firecracker said, folding her arms.

Not possible, apparently.

"I'm perfectly serious. I'm going into space someday, and it's going to be the story of the century. You'll see," she said, pointing at him. She hadn't been joking about her intensity.

"Then you'll have to take me with you," he responded, tweaking her nose. "Because I've always wanted to float."

"Learn to swim."

They were standing at the edge of the lake. He wrapped his arm around her shoulder in perfect timing. "If you throw me in there, I'm bringing you with me."

Firecracker laughed. "Trust me, big boy, you don't want to see me wet."

Clark grinned, doubting her statement. "We'll see about that."

"Don't challenge me, or you'll know what it's like to get soaked twice in one day," she replied.

That warning he decided not to discount.

She took hold of his hand and started leading him through the crowds again, and around the lake, where they came to the Mexican pavilion, or the first nation in the World Showcase. "Told you, I'd show the world."

"I'll never doubt you again," he said, having a sudden urge to kiss her. So, he did. On the cheek.

"Wise policy," she responded, pointing to a ride. "Ready to get on another boat?"

Clark patted his chest. "Yep. I'm dry."

Unlike their previous experience, this boat ride was more like the tunnel of love: a dark, romantic, gentle cruise through Mexico's history. Although, in all fairness to Splash Mountain, that *had* been where Clark had met Firecracker. So, in a sense, it had been the tunnel of love, too.

Firecracker leaned her head against Clark's chest after he wrapped his arm around her shoulder once more. If just holding her in his arms made his body tingle with excitement, what would a kiss do? He needed to plan the right moment. He didn't want to rush things or he would scare her off. He was older, and probably more experienced in these matters, but he was so nervous about timing it just right. It would be their first kiss, but hopefully not their last. He was moving faster than he ever had before, because he only had this one day. If he never had the chance to see his true love again, at least they would have this one perfect day.

His opportunity approached as the boat entered a plaza with fireworks projected overhead. She pointed at them and glanced over at him with a smile. This was it. His big moment.

"Isn't this romantic?" she asked, and then her eyes went wide with shock. "Not that I'm asking you to kiss me or anything." Her eyes went wider. "You don't even know me. I don't know you. We haven't even exchanged names. Probably best if you don't kiss me. Forget that I even brought it up." Then she hunched into a ball of obvious embarrassment. The moment was lost, and the ride ended.

Firecracker was quiet, which was strange for her. She talked like she walked, at a hundred miles per hour with direction and a purpose.

There was a little shaded notch in a wall, and Clark pulled her into it. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Fine," she said with enough force that he didn't believe her.

A lock of her hair had fallen out of her ponytail, and he brushed it back. "*Would* you like me to kiss you?" Because he would, if she did, just to be a gentleman and all.

She glanced down at their feet, and murmured, "I've never really been kissed."

"A beautiful girl like you?" Clark said in surprise. "Are all the guys in Metropolis idiots?"

Firecracker's eyes flashed into his. "I said 'really'. Of course, I've been kissed. Just not 'really'. Not by a guy *I* really wanted to kiss me. Not by a guy who really wanted to kiss *me*. Scratch that. They all wanted to kiss me, but they were really bad at it. You know what I mean?"

He smiled. He could guess. "Shall I wait for another romantic moment, or shall we just get it over with now?"

Clark was hoping for now, because if he kissed her now, then he'd probably be able to kiss her again later as well. But after that review of the other kisses she had received, he got a little self-conscious. What if she didn't like his kiss either? He had only kissed three, no four girls. He hadn't received any complaints, but *this* kiss was more important than all those other girls combined. Because this kiss would be with her.

"Do you want to kiss me?" Firecracker asked softly as if unsure of his answer. "This isn't some rebound jealousy-inducing thing for Blondie, is it?"

"Who?" he asked, being purposely obtuse.

"Blondie. Your girlfriend," she said with emphasis.

"There's no one besides you," Clark whispered, meaning every word.

"Eeep!" she squealed, her eyes widening probably because he was close enough to kiss her at that very second. "Then you better wait until you find a romantic moment and then kiss me until my toes curl."

His brow furrowed. "Until your toes *what*?"

"I heard once that a really good kiss will make a girl's toes curl."

"Wouldn't that hurt?" he inquired.

She shrugged. "I wouldn't know."

"No pressure or anything," he grumbled, placing his lips on her forehead, because after all this talk of kissing he needed to reward his mouth.

"Oh!"

"Oh?"

"That felt nice," she murmured. "You have soft lips."

He smiled. There was more where that came from. He leaned forward to kiss her cheek.

"Oh!"

Clark moved towards her mouth, but she put up her hand and stopped him.

"No?"

"I thought we agreed on later, during a romantic moment," she said.

"We had. This is later, and I thought it was romantic," he said.

"It was? Oh, and I just ruined it again," she groaned. "What made it romantic?"

The moment was over anyway now. He took her arm and led her

back into the sunshine.

“Well?” Firecracker asked.

There was just no getting away from the question, was there?

“There was all that talk of kissing, and you said my lips were soft,” he replied, not really wanting to discuss it. If he had to explain *why* it was romantic, it must not have been very romantic for *her*. “And it was you.”

“What was me?” she asked.

“I was kissing you, and that’s what made it romantic... for me,” he explained.

“Oh. Oh!” Firecracker stopped. They were out in the open, walking into another land’s pavilion. The bright early evening sun washed out the color, and the humidity tempted even him to perspire. “And I stopped you. Sorry. Kiss me now.”

He grinned and slid his hand into hers. “Nope.” He started walking, and she had to follow.

“Why not?”

“Not romantic enough,” he said with a wink.

“I’m still me. You’re still you. We’re still us. What’s not romantic?” Firecracker pressed on. She’d make a fine reporter someday, in that she never gave up.

“I like the sound of that,” he said, squeezing her hand.

“What?”

“Us.” He smiled.

“What if I kissed you?” she asked.

“I wouldn’t stop you,” Clark said with a grin. That was a true statement.

“But it wouldn’t count,” Firecracker said with a nod.

“Why not?” It would count for him.

She rolled her eyes. “If *I* kissed you, instead of *you* kissing me, how in the world would my toes curl? Therefore, it wouldn’t count.”

“You might make *my* toes curl,” he teased with a wink.

“In your dreams.”

Guaranteed.

“Anyway, I want to experience my toes curling, so if I make *your* toes curl, I’m not experiencing it, you are,” Firecracker explained. “I need to experience life to the fullest, how else will I ever be able to write about it?”

Clark tugged her into a gift shop, found the silliest pair of Minnie ears and stuck them on her head.

“What are you doing?” she asked, her hands on her hips.

“Changing the subject.”

She laughed, and ducked around the other side of the display, pulling out a pair of equally silly Goofy ears, attached to a Mad Hatter’s hat and plopped it down on his head.

“No, no. This won’t do,” Clark said, shaking his head, making his Goofy ears wave.

“Why not?” she giggled.

“Because Goofy would never make Minnie’s toes curl,” he said, leaning forward and kissing her nose.

Her eyes twinkled. “So, true!” She pulled the hat off his head and stuck it back on the display and set down her Minnie ears. “I’ve got an idea.”

She tugged his hand and pulled him to the other side of the store. There was a hideous selection of ties, most of which had silhouettes of Mickey Mouse on them. Out of the group, she pulled one that looked like it had been splattered by cartoonist paint, and one that looked like a rain of fireworks. She looped the cartoon splotch tie around his neck and proceeded to tie it.

“What are you doing?” Clark asked.

“You’re going to be a professional soon. You’ll need to start wearing ties,” she said.

“Not *that* tie,” he corrected.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because it looks like a mistake,” he said, with his hands on his hips.

“It has style,” Firecracker said.

“Not *my* style,” Clark informed her.

“Then what’s *your* style?” she asked.

“Not that!” he said, laughing.

“Fine! Pick your own ties,” she snapped, pulling it over his head and dumping it back on the display. “I just wanted you to have something to remember me by,” she whispered.

He cupped her jaw in his palm. “Who says I won’t remember you?” He would never forget her.

Firecracker looked around and plucked something off a display and took it to the cashier.

“No. You don’t need... Please, don’t waste your money,” he said, as she completely ignored him.

She turned around and pinned a black feather on his t-shirt.

“What is this for?”

“So you can fly.”

Clark flushed. “You listened to every word of our conversation, didn’t you?” he murmured.

She shrugged. “It’s what I do.”

He glanced around the shop. “I should get you something.”

Firecracker set her hand on his shoulder, and leaned close, whispering, “Make me curl my toes, and I promise you I’ll never forget you.”

Clark cleared his throat. “Challenge accepted. I’ll make your toes curl, if it takes all night.”

She blushed demurely. “I’m meeting my sister on Main Street by ten.”

He slid his hand into hers and ran from the store. “Then we best start waiting in the next line.”

They went on a couple more rides, then ate dinner — his treat — over at the Chinese pavilion. Firecracker hadn’t stopped talking the entire time. She had an opinion on everything and wasn’t shy about expressing it, but she didn’t discount his ideas and opinions either. They talked about politics, art, movies, and music. She had told him why she hated her family, and he had told her why he loved his. By the time they hopped back on the monorail to return to the Magic Kingdom, Clark knew he could spend the rest of his life talking with her.

Firecracker had suggested that for their final ride of the evening, they do another round on Splash Mountain. The line wasn’t as long as it had been when the sun was overhead, but it was still long enough that they missed watching the sunset, or maybe it was because he couldn’t take his eyes off her.

It was dark outside by the time they got their seat assignments for the boat.

“You’re going to get soaked,” Firecracker warned him.

“I’m waterproof,” Clark replied with a grin.

The next boat pulled forward, but before the gates opened, Firecracker waved her index finger at him.

“What?” he asked.

She pressed a quick kiss onto his lips that he felt down to his toes.

The gates opened and she stepped forward, but he still stood there in a daze.

“Come on,” she coaxed.

“I don’t think I should go,” Clark murmured.

Her brow furrowed. “Why not?”

“Electricity and water don’t mix,” he replied.

Firecracker pulled him towards the boat. “Get in!”

Oh, how could she tease him at that very moment with a kiss? He felt like he was going to float into the air, he was so happy. If he felt like this from a little peck, what would happen when he finally kissed her? He had it all planned out; it would happen when...

Firecracker set her hand on his leg, and not only left it there, started caressing it. She shouldn’t do things like that. Someone could get hurt.

The ride seemed to move faster, and yet slower at the same time. Faster since Clark knew it was the last ride that they had time for. Slower, because he knew he would kiss her when it was over. Before

he knew it they were teetering over the edge of the fifty foot drop again.

Firecracker screamed and then ducked. As the water came towards him in a torrential rush, he exhaled, pushing some of the water forward and over the seat in front of him, drenching his hot little Firecracker.

“Ooh! I’m soaked!” she growled, and then laughed with a shake of her head, spraying off the water. “How did that happen?”

Clark shrugged sheepishly.

“Great,” she grumbled. “I warned you that you didn’t want to see me wet,” she said, stepping out of the boat and turning towards him. Through her pastel lavender t-shirt he could see a hot pink bra.

He gulped.

“Your glasses are fogged again,” Firecracker laughed, removing them. “Only this time, I don’t have a dry shirt.”

Why else would his glasses be steamed?

Clark let the group from their run pass them out the exits; he took her hand and led her over to the side. “Spread your arms and close your eyes,” he whispered.

Her brow furrowed. “What?”

“Trust me.”

She shrugged and complied.

Scanning down the front of her, he dried her shirt to barely damp, and no longer see-through.

“Whoa,” she said with a shiver. “They’ve got heat lamps! Mmmm. That felt good.”

Clark grabbed her arm and led her outside. “Only at night,” he mumbled.

“Oh,” she said, patting her shirt. “They’re amazing. I’m practically dry, and you’re still soaked.”

A loud explosion thundered overhead. “What the...?”

“Fireworks!” she gasped.

Then Clark remembered that they had always returned to the hotel before the fireworks show, due to the noise upsetting his sensitive hearing. Now, he was caught right under it. He winced as another loud explosion rocketed the air.

“You okay?” she asked, looking at him and not the fireworks.

“Fine,” he lied as another bang made him tense.

Firecracker set her hands over his ears, trying to deafen the sound. He gazed down at her big doe eyes staring up at him.

Another, and another, and another explosion of color and thunder boomed overhead. With each one Clark sank lower to the ground. They were mostly alone here in this section of the park with everyone else at the lagoon for best fireworks viewing. He was thankful for that, at least.

Firecracker still had her hands over his ears, and he was holding his hands over hers. She gazed at him with worry. “It’s just fireworks, Clark. You’ll be okay,” she reassured him. He could barely hear her over the ringing in his ears.

“It’s so loud,” he mumbled. Even Kansas thunderstorms weren’t this loud. Well, at least not for this long.

She pulled his head to her, so that one ear pressed against her chest and the other one was covered by her arms surrounding it. His strange reaction to the fireworks didn’t scare her, but instead brought out a nurturing side she had never shown.

“You’ll be all right soon,” she murmured, over and over.

Before long, all he could hear was her soft voice and the beat of her heart with the occasional thunderous boom, which didn’t seem so bad now. He could feel her fingers running through his hair. It felt wonderful.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured, knowing he had ruined the last romantic moment of the day.

She shrugged. “My sister used to react the same way whenever our parents fought.”

“I’m not used to loud noises,” he said feebly, by way of an excuse.

“Really? Hadn’t noticed,” she teased.

Clark knew that he couldn’t let this be her final impression of him. He still owed her a souvenir.

He stood up. The noise of the fireworks, still exploding overhead, no longer bothered him as long as he concentrated on her heartbeat. Glancing around he found an even more secluded spot on a pathway shaded by trees. He grabbed her hand, and pulled her into the alcove.

Clark ran his fingers over her cheek. “Thank you,” he said.

Firecracker looked up at him, and he could hear her heartbeat increase, which made him smile. She knew what was coming *and* she was excited by the prospect. So was he.

His hand curved around to the back of her head as his mouth moved towards hers. Softly, gently he applied pressure, but not too much. After the first few feather light kisses, he opened his mouth to deepen it. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and his hands moved down her back to her waist. They both pulled the other closer.

Clark didn’t know about her but, while his toes weren’t curling, he felt as if they were floating. Up above the trees, the air felt fresher, less humid, more smoky from the fireworks, more electrically charged. The thunder from the fireworks seemed louder, but not as loud as Firecracker’s heart beating. He tightened his grip around her waist.

He knew he couldn’t fly; that this was just an illusion of the kiss. He neither opened his eyes nor removed his lips from hers, not wanting this beautiful weightless feeling, this moment, this kiss, to end.

Firecracker moaned and pressed her body more against his. He hadn’t thought that they could get closer without him breaking his vow. He had been wrong. He could feel every point where their bodies joined. It became unexpectedly quiet. A cool breeze reminding him of the dampness of his clothes with only the faint echo of distant fireworks.

Suddenly, it was very important that she knew his name; between kisses, he whispered, “I’m...”

“Clark Kent, I know,” Firecracker murmured, breathlessly. She was going to make one hell of a reporter. “I’m...”

Her name got lost in another crack of fireworks, louder now for some reason. Their kiss deepened again, and he went back to concentrating on the beat of her heart. Eventually, Clark felt the ground under his feet return, and as the fireworks had stopped, he knew their time together had come to an end.

He let go just enough to gaze into her eyes, smiling.

Firecracker returned his smile and licked her lips. “Now I’ve been kissed,” she said and her smile broadened into a grin. “No way I’ll forget you now, Clark Kent.”

Clark bent to kiss her again, but they were interrupted by a crowd of people leaving the lagoon and headed past them.

Her eyes widened. “The fireworks! They started at nine thirty! I’m supposed to meet Lucy at ten. I’m so late!” And before Clark could ask her name, she melted into the crowd and disappeared.

“Wait!” he called, but she was gone.

Clark closed his eyes to listen for her heartbeat again, but there was too much noise now that she was gone from his side. What had she said earlier? She had to meet her sister on Main Street, wasn’t it? He took off faster than he should, careful that he neither touched anyone nor was seen going too fast. When he reached Main Street a few minutes later, he still couldn’t find her. Even with his abilities, had he gotten there too late?

A hand clasped his shoulder. “There you are, man. We haven’t seen you all day. Rachel headed back to the hotel an hour ago to look for you,” his friend Pete said, suddenly beside him. “Where’s Lana? You guys kiss and make up?”

“She’s with Joe,” Clark mumbled, still scanning the crowd filing past them searching, hoping that Firecracker was among them.

“Sorry, man, I know...”

“I’m not,” Clark replied.

Pete chuckled. “Finally! Does this mean I can stop being nice to her?”

Clark glanced at his best friend. “That was being nice?”

As Pete shrugged, Clark continued to look for the brown-haired girl with the big brown eyes.

“Man, what *have* you’ve been doing, Clark? You’re soaking wet and you’ve got leaves in your hair,” his friend chortled, picking them out.

Clark had no idea how those got there.

“Lois!” screamed a girl. “We’ve been waiting forever. Where have you been?”

Clark heard a familiar heartbeat, turned his head and saw a group of young teenage girls, one of who launched herself into Firecracker’s arms. He smiled. *Lois*. It was a name as unique as Firecracker herself.

“Ew,” Lois’s sister said, plugging her nose and her eyes widened. “Lois Lori Lane, have you been smoking? Daddy is so going to kill you!”

“No, I haven’t been smoking, Lucy. I’d never do that!” Lois made a face.

“Well, you totally reek of smoke. We’ll tell Daddy you went to a bonfire. Were you hanging with some smokers?”

“Smoking hot,” Lois mumbled, causing Clark to grin. He’d accept that answer. He watched as her brow furrowed, and she lifted her shoulder to her nose, sneering. “How did that happen?”

Clark watched as she froze, her hand coming to her lips, and then her head tilted up to gaze at the sky, entirely oblivious to Lucy’s yammering on about her own day. Lois smiled, and whispered, “He really *is* like nobody else.” She didn’t seem to think that was a drawback.

“Hello? Earth to Clark? Whatcha been doing?” Pete said. “Leaving me and Rach high and dry without our best bud on our last day here.”

Clark nodded towards Lois. “I met someone.”

Pete turned and followed his gaze. “Who? What? Where?”

“The brunette with that bunch of kids,” Clark murmured, unable to take his eyes off Lois.

“That mousey girl with the pigtail? Oh, man, she’s so rebound material.”

Clark glared at him. How could he think Lois was mousey? She was ravishing.

Lois glanced over and caught him staring.

Clark grinned and waved.

Her face lit with a smile, before her sister grabbed her arm. “Come on, Lois! Dad’s going to kill us; we’re so late.”

“Chill, Lucy,” Lois said absently. “He probably won’t even notice.” She broke eye contact with Clark as she turned to leave. She glanced over her shoulder one more time and whispered a husky, “Thanks for curling my toes, Farm Boy.” Then she was gone.

Clark grinned. Oh, he definitely was going to marry that woman someday.

Pete elbowed him. “Really? *Her*?”

“She’s a firecracker.”

“Really? *Her*?”

Clark shrugged as they started moving towards the exit themselves. “Hey, have you ever heard of ‘curling a girl’s toes’?”

Pete looked at him as if he was nuts. “Is that a good thing?”

“Apparently.”

“Who knew?” Pete said, in disbelief. Then groaned. “Great. One more thing we don’t know about girls. We’re never going to understand them, are we?”

Clark chuckled. “That’s the game, man. The trying.” And what a game it was.

Epilogue

Daily Planet...

“That’s right, Professor Carlton called me about you. I haven’t seen him in...” Perry White looked over Clark’s resume. “Let’s see here. Editor, Smallville Press. Where’s that?”

“Kansas, Mr. White,” Clark explained. He couldn’t believe he was here: The Daily Planet. The best newspaper in the world, interviewing with the Editor-in-Chief, and somewhere wandering about was a brunette Firecracker.

Mr. White’s phone rang, and he held up a finger to Clark before

answering it. “Oh, tell him to keep his pants on...” he shouted. “If Carlini’s can’t deliver on time, find a place that can!” Mr. White started to take his pulse, glancing over at Clark. “Can you believe I had to buy a blood pressure monitor last week?”

Clark nodded. “Paava leaves.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The Yolngu tribe in New Guinea eat paava leaves to relieve stress. It puts them in a meditative state. Maybe you should try it,” Clark suggested, hoping to impress this man with his vast knowledge.

“Oh, well, I see you’ve done some traveling.”

“Well...” Clark said with a smile and shrug. “A bit.” He opened his briefcase to pull out his writing samples. “I have some samples of my work.”

“Oh, good,” replied Mr. White, taking the papers from Clark.

“Good. Let’s take a look.” He paused at the first one. “The Borneo Gazette: ‘*Mating Rituals of the Knob-Tailed Gecko*?’” He swallowed. “Kent, I’m sure these are fascinating stories, but you see, son, this is the Daily Planet...” he started to say, when a woman with a brunette bob burst into his office. “Lois! Can’t you see I’m in the middle of something here?” He indicated Clark, who was rising out of his seat.

Lois Lane. She was even more beautiful than she had been all those years ago. All those memories and feelings rushed back over him. He still loved her on second sight.

She nodded to Clark, immediately dismissing him. “I think there’s a story here. I think we should have this guy checked out- you know the crazy one from this morning. He was an engineer at EPRAD...”

Clark’s heart, which had rose with anticipation of this meeting, thudded into his shoes. She didn’t remember him. Why would she? He knew her for less than a day all those years ago. For him, not one day went by without him checking the *Daily Planet* for her byline and thinking of her. Before that, he had gotten copies of the Metropolis University newspaper sent to Midwest U’s library so he could read her stories. He had been building up his experience, trying to find a place where he fit, but in reality he was working his way here, to her. He always knew she was what he wanted.

“Lois, can’t you see I’m in the middle of something here?” Mr. White said, indicating Clark.

Her gaze returned to him as Mr. White introduced them. “Lois Lane... Clark Kent.”

Lois’s eyes widened as a grin appeared, and she grabbed Clark’s hand, shaking it with enthusiasm. “Clark Kent? *The* Clark Kent? Of course, you are. What an honor to finally meet you.”

She knew who he was? As a reporter? “Um... yeah. You too, Ms. Lane.”

“*The* Clark Kent?” Mr. White questioned with a brow raised with disbelief.

Uh-oh. That wasn’t a good sign.

“Yes, *the* Clark Kent. I’ve been following his career for years,” Lois said, grabbing his portfolio out of Mr. White’s hands.

She had? Why? Did she remember him?

Lois started flipping through the portfolio, and rolled her eyes at his first article. “The Knob-Tailed Gecko story is first? I mean, it’s a cute science piece, but really, first? Oh, please, Perry; don’t tell me you dismissed Mr. Kent here because he had put his stories in chronological order, instead of order of importance? You really should put that story about catching those Jamaican gunrunners towards the top. It was amazing, even though it was one of your early stories. Oh, the human interest piece on the Nigerian Princess before her wedding to...” She waved her hand, searching but coming up short. “What’s his name? I loved the bit when she taught you how to waltz. Then there’s that story about following the smuggled Chinese indentured servants to Gotham City. Top rate. You should really translate it into English though.” She flipped through the stories in his portfolio and bringing those to the forefront. “And, of course, Mr. Kent is the one who scooped me on the Congolese gun runners. I arrived two days after he left.” She shot him a scowl.

Clark’s jaw hung open. His portfolio, she was completely

disorganizing it.

“What?” stammered Mr. White, grabbing the file out of her hand, and going through it again.

Lois smiled at Clark and winked.

Did she remember him?

Mr. White glanced up and then between the two of them, his eyes narrowing. He pointed both his middle and index finger at Lois and then moved it to Clark. “How long have you two known each other?”

“You just introduced us, Perry,” Lois said innocently.

Clark smiled, remembering why he had fallen in love with her at first sight.

Mr. White pointed at Lois again. “You, out.”

“You should give him that theatre piece, on trial. He’ll prove himself to you,” Lois said, not budging.

“I assigned *you* the theatre piece,” Mr. White reminded her, pointing towards the door again.

“And? That mushy stuff is his forte, anyway,” Lois said, heading for the door.

Mushy stuff?

“Lois, I expect my reporters to do the assignments assigned to *them!*” Mr. White barked.

“Just give him the job already; I need him to help me with the Messenger story,” Lois said, not backing down.

“You *want* to partner with him?” Mr. White said.

Lois smiled at Clark again. “A reporter of his caliber, definitely. My tenacity. His tact. My cutting the red tape; his following the rules. Metropolis won’t know what hit it.” She shut the door after passing through it.

Mr. White looked at Clark suspiciously, placing his hand on his pulse again. “If she wasn’t the best damn reporter I’ve ever worked with... How long have you known Lois?”

Nope, the editor hadn’t bought Lois’s innocent act.

“One day,” Clark answered truthfully.

Mr. White raised a disbelieving eyebrow. “Think you can handle her?” he asked.

“Honestly, no, sir, but I’d die for the chance,” Clark replied, figuring what a pleasant death it would be. Thank goodness he hadn’t found anything that could harm him.

Mr. White chuckled, and handed Clark back his portfolio. “Couldn’t have asked for a better recommendation than that. She’s tough, but if she’s right...” He grinned. “Okay, I’ll give you a trial run. Ask Lois about the particulars on the theatre piece. We’ll see how you do on that before we go about assigning you a desk.”

Clark smiled and held out his hand. “Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. White.”

“Scoot, before I change my mind,” the editor replied with a shake of his head.

Clark picked up his briefcase and dropped in his portfolio.

As he passed Mr. White, he heard him mumble, “It’ll be like Norcross and Judd again, I swear.”

Clark shut the door to the editor’s office and fixed his eyes on Lois, who was standing next to the conference room. She waved him over.

“Mr. White said you’d give me the particulars on the theatre piece he assigned you,” he said, following her inside.

Lois shut the door and backed him into the table, her body pressed against his and her finger pointed in his face. “It’s taken you long enough to arrive in Metropolis. Nine years, Farm Boy! Nine *long* years, I’ve waited for you! Give your eyeteeth to work at the Daily Planet. Ha! Do you know why I’m the reporter I am? Keeping track of you! That’s why. You jump countries faster than a flea infestation, and you’re more invisible than a stealth bomber. I had hoped you’d come to Metropolis upon graduation from Midwest, but, NO, you went and traveled the world, freelance! Do you know how hard it is to track a freelance reporter? I don’t want you to think that I’ve been waiting around for you. I have kissed other guys...”

She had?

“Oh, don’t give me that look. You’ve kissed other women.”

Clark shrugged sheepishly. He may have.

“But none of them lived up to that kiss you gave me. You not only made my toes curl, it was like you floated me up into the stars,” she said as a dreamy quality came to her voice.

He smiled. Yes, he remembered it well.

“Anyway, after waiting all those years for you to come to me, I started trying to chase you down. I got two Kerth awards because of you, Homespun, trying to find stories to investigate in the countries where you were. I almost caught you in the Congo, too. You couldn’t have stayed there two more lousy days!?” She slapped his arm with her hand. “Finally, I had to use my secret weapon.”

She remembered. Oh, boy, had she remembered. His brow furrowed. “Homespun?”

Lois blushed with a shrug. “Homespun Goodness.”

Oh, *really?* Clark smiled, liking that description. Wait. “Secret weapon?”

She grinned. “By the way, tell your mom I just finished all the jam she sent me for Christmas.”

“You contacted my *mom?*”

“First things first,” Lois said, her finger pointing at him again. “You still a virgin?”

The color drained from his face. “*What?!*” How did Firecracker know about *that?*

She pressed her lips together. “Blondie said you wanted to wait until marriage.”

Clark’s eyes widened as he gulped. He would kill Lana! Okay, he wouldn’t, but it was very tempting. Was *that* how Lois thought he was different from other guys? So, *what* exactly was she asking?

Lois lifted up his left hand and threaded her fingers with his.

Oh. He smiled. “The position’s still open if you want it.”

She leaned forward and set her lips on his, murmuring before her kiss, “How about we see if you can curl them twice?”

THE END

Disclaimer: This story is inspired by the characters created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. The characters do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros, DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). Many thanks to all the writers on the above-referenced show, especially Deborah Joy LeVine, from whose wonderful Pilot I borrow dialogue directly.

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The Splash Mountain ride described in my story did not exist at any Disney park in the early 1980s. Because the Splash Mountain ride from Disneyland inspired this particular story, the single file boat was the one described in the story, and not the double-seater boat that is currently in use at Disney World’s Splash Mountain. Since the main characters both lived in the Eastern section of the USA, it made more sense for them to visit Disney World than Disneyland.

“Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah” music by Allie Wrubel, lyrics by Ray Gilbert from the Disney movie “Song of the South” sung by James Baskett.

“It’s a Small World” music and lyrics by Robert B. Sherman and Richard M. Sherman.

Author’s Note: This story was part of the 2012 Summer Ficathon Challenge by Mrs. Mosley. The story needed to: 1) Use the pre-assigned prompt (here = The Art of Fireworks). 2) Theme: Summer, and 3) Post by 9/1/2012.

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