

Nightfall Honeymoon

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Rated PG-13

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Summary: This is basically an episode rewrite of the episode “All Shook Up.” What if the Nightfall asteroid showed up while Lois and Clark were on their honeymoon? A romantic comedy. This is a continuation of the author's *Green-Eyed Monster* story and is set in that alt-alt-universe.

Set: This is set in my “What if...” alternative universe of *Green-Eyed Monster*. (If you don't want GEM spoilers, I recommend you stop reading and read that story first.) In this universe Clark is a package deliveryman with MDS, who didn't go to college. Lois is a bookseller with Daily Books, who transferred out of journalism school after a nasty run-in with Linda King and the editor of the Met U's student newspaper. Actually all the familiar faces from the Daily Planet (S1) have been working at the bookstore and sometimes contributing to Perry's weekly newspaper *The Planet*, named in honor of the *Daily Planet*, which had been blown up in the 1970s by owner and billionaire Lex Luthor. The Kents raised their son in Metropolis, where they own a restaurant called MJ's Café, while the Lanes raised their daughters in Smallville. Superman officially came on the scene approximately two weeks earlier, although he had been doing anonymous rescues prior to that. At the time of this story the Kents, Perry White, Lois Lane, Sam Lane, and Bill Henderson all know that Clark is Superman.

Author's Note: For those of you familiar with *Green-Eyed Monster*, I have repeated two scenes — one here and one a little later, from GEM. I have changed the POV to keep them fresh. Just in case you were feeling a bit déjà vu-ish.

I have changed Nightfall's position from the solar side of Earth to the dark side; therefore, making it impossible for it to have been visualized as a “solar eclipse.” I do not know the exact location of Jupiter to Earth back in 1994 and whether this eclipse of Jupiter would have been able to happen as I have described. I apologize to those of you with superior scientific and astronomical knowledge.

Thursday — Noon

Clark zipped over the boat pond at New York's Central Park. He caught a glimpse of Lois before landing in a copse of trees and changing out of his blue suit. He wondered why she wanted to meet him here.

“Hi,” Clark said breathlessly, walking up behind her a few moments later. There was something about his girlfriend that always seemed to take his breath away. He didn't know if it was her beauty, her anger, or the fact that she actually seemed to love him. “Am I late?”

Lois's smile grew into a full blown grin as her bag slid from her hand, and she enveloped him into her arms, pressing a kiss onto his lips that felt like the one burning inside him since the night before. Her touch relaxed him as he returned her kiss. He could easily spend the rest of his life kissing this woman. Mayson had said that Lois told her that they were engaged. If only they were...

Her girlfriend then pressed her hands against his chest, dragging her lips from his. “I can't do this anymore,” she breathed more than spoke.

Clark could hear her heart racing and her blood pumping. From these physical changes, he knew she wanted him almost as much as he wanted her.

“Come on. We need to talk,” she said, picking up the bag with the picnic stuff and then taking hold of his hand.

He didn't want to talk. “I'd rather kiss,” he murmured, bringing her back to his lips.

Lois kissed him for another minute before drawing away again.

“I don't want to stop,” Clark whispered.

“We don't have time to keep this up, Clark. Let's eat lunch,” Lois told him, dragging him away from the boat pond and towards the lawns of grass. She spread out the blanket and started to unpack the food.

Clark lay down next to her. Time, huh? What else did she have planned for them? Or did she just mean before he was due back from his lunch break? He plucked a green grape off the bunch she had just unloaded and bit into it. Lois released a moan of desire, causing him to smile. Wow. And all he had done was eat a grape. What else could he do to tempt her to leave the park and find them someplace private where they could be together? He picked another grape with a wicked grin, set it between his teeth, and glanced at her with bouncing eyebrows. Lois attacked him for a bite of grape, pushing him down onto the blanket.

He didn't mind and deepened the kiss. The combined taste of Lois and the grape proved to be his undoing. Clark rolled them over, so that he was lying on top of her. “Let's forget about lunch and go find a room,” he whispered hoarsely.

Lois pushed his chest. “No, Clark. I can't... you can't... Let's eat and talk. I've got some pasta salad.”

Clark groaned. This woman was slowly torturing him. He knew if she kept this up, he was surely going to die from unfulfilled desire. He pushed himself up to a sitting position. “You're killing me. Don't you know what pasta does to me?”

She grinned at him. Evil, evil woman! She did know.

Lois pulled out some paper plates and piled them with sandwiches, pasta salad, chips, and fruit.

Clark started to laugh. He had never seen so much food. Was the food compensating for or replacing something else? “Hungry, Lois?” he asked, taking his plate.

She gave him a desirous, slow burn of a gaze as another moan of longing escaped from deep within her. Yep, she wanted him almost as much as he wanted her. Yet, she couldn't possibly want him as much as he wanted her. No one had wanted to make love more than Clark did at that exact moment. Clark set down his plate and kissed her again. Food forgotten, they laid down on the blanket. His fingers found her leg and the soft skin under her skirt.

Lois pushed Clark's hand off her thigh and scrambled back to a sitting position, moving as far away from him as possible while remaining on the blanket. She straightened her skirt and hair again and picked up her lunch. “I can't do this anymore,” she told him again.

“Neither can I,” Clark agreed, pulling himself up on his elbow. All this unfulfilled sexual tension was killing him. He couldn't think properly. He couldn't concentrate. Reason had deserted him. He couldn't believe he had touched Lois like that out in public. He needed her. He tilted down his glasses, gazing at her without a barrier. Maybe then she would see into his soul. “Which is why we should go find a room.”

Lois smiled at him, scooting farther away. “Stop it.”

He grinned and batted his eyelashes innocently. Oh, she liked him gazing at her without the glasses, huh? Good to know. Next time they were alone...

“Clark.” Lois placed a hand on his shin. Warmth danced up his leg from her touch. “If we start...” She swallowed.

“If?” he inquired. It was too late for an *if* in their relationship.

She cleared her throat. “When we start...” She took a deep breath and then continued. “I won’t be able to stop.”

Clark’s smile grew larger. “Who wants you to stop?” He certainly didn’t.

Her hand grabbed hold of his pants as she closed her eyes. Did her thoughts mirror his? He wondered. Then her eyes flashed open. “No. I mean for hours.”

“Hours?” he stammered. *Hours? Could a human make love for hours?* He guessed he could, Kryptonian stamina and all, but...

Lois’s voice grew deeper as she fixed her gaze on him. “Countless hours.”

Clark gulped. “Oh.” *Guess they can.*

“So we need to talk,” she said, letting go of his pants leg.

Oh, God! Not with the talking again, Lois. We need action in this relationship, not more words.

She closed her eyes again. “You love me, don’t you, Clark?”

Clark didn’t hesitate with his answer. “Since the first moment you looked at me and rolled your eyes at Cat. Yes.” He had told her that he wanted to spend his whole life with her within twenty-four hours of their first real kiss. How could she doubt that he loved her? True, he had been a dense idiot at times, but he was getting better. He hadn’t had a fit of jealousy — real jealousy — all week. He stared at her, all his desire rushing to the forefront of his mind.

Lois opened her eyes and swallowed.

Ooops. A bit much there, Kent.

She stood up and started to pace.

Clark continued to lie on the blanket as his eyes followed her.

“And would you still love me if I came into a lot of money? Lots and lots of money?” She didn’t look at him as she wrung her hands.

What was really going on here? He sat up, his face abruptly serious. “Lois, did you do something illegal?”

“Of course not!” she said, pressing her lips together.

Clark relaxed, yet he still drew his knees to his chest uneasily. Money was never something he would bring to their relationship. “Are you expecting to come into some money?”

“You never know,” Lois replied vaguely. “Would that change the way you feel about me?”

He chuckled. “I don’t think you’d let money change who you are inside. So, no, it wouldn’t stop how I feel about you.” Nothing could do that. He was passed the point of no return with Lois.

She sighed a breath of relief.

“Hhmmm, dating a rich girlfriend,” he teased her, popping another grape into his mouth. “I could get used to that. Would that make me your kept man?” He bounced his eyebrows at her.

Lois rolled her eyes. “And would you still love me if ever I got sick? I mean really, really sick. With hospitals and pills I have to take every day. You’d still love me?”

His snickers disappeared as his mouth suddenly went dry. Was Lois sick? Was that what this crazy day in New York was all about? Had her father discovered something when Clark had taken her there after rescuing her from Luthor? “Lois? Are you all right?”

She nodded nervously, still not looking at him. Something was definitely up. Lois was acting too strangely.

Right. Her question. She wanted him to answer her question. “Of course, Lois. Nothing could stop me from loving you.” Clark shifted to his knees and took hold of her arm, stopping her pacing. “Are you sick?” Please deny it. Please. He had just found her and convinced her to love him, the Fates couldn’t take her away from him now.

Lois waved his question out of the air.

Was that a ‘no’? “Lois?”

She turned and faced him. “Do you age, Clark?”

Clark felt like she had sideswiped him with the suddenness of the change in topic. “Excuse me?”

Lois knelt down next to him, taking his hands in hers and lowering her voice, “I know you’re strong and invulnerable, but does that mean you won’t get older?”

Was *that* what was worrying her? Not her health or their financial instability? But something about him physically? Was that why she kept putting the brakes on moving forward in the intimate side of their relationship? “I don’t know, Lois. I never thought about it. I came here as a baby and I’ve aged regularly since then, but now?” Clark shrugged. “I don’t know what a Kryptonian’s life expectancy would be here on Earth.”

She placed her hands on his face, gazing into his eyes as if she could see into his soul. “Would you still love me when I’m old, grey, and frail, stooped with age, and speckled with liver spots, if you still looked as you do today? Would you want to leave me and be with a younger woman with your liveliness, energy, spirit, and youth?” She swallowed. “Someone still attractive like you?”

How could she ever think that?!

Clark cupped her jaw with his palm. “You say that like you could ever be unattractive, Lois, which is impossible. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever met and I will love you forever. It doesn’t matter how you or I might change with age or even if you or I should die. I will never be able to stop loving you.”

Lois stared straight into his eyes.

He could hear her heart racing. This time he knew it wasn’t desire fueling its beat, but what?

She swallowed. “Then marry me.”

A metaphorical light bulb flashed in front of his eyes as a smile brightened his entire face. Mayson had been right; Lois did want to marry him. He tried to sound casual as excitement and joy filled him like never before. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Lois wanted to marry him. She didn’t care that he had no money. She didn’t care that he wasn’t human. She didn’t care that he had all these extra abilities and that he flew off without a moment’s notice to help people. She didn’t care that he was a complete idiot when it came to her and often said the wrong thing at the wrong time. She loved him and wanted to be with him forever.

Clark closed the small gap between them and took possession of her lips. Kissing Lois had always been the most sensual experience of his life. But with the added knowledge that Lois loved him and wanted to be his wife, her kiss became a completely different experience — as if he were kissing her again for the first time.

Suddenly Lois jumped to her feet and grabbed all the food off the blanket, dumping containers back into the bag and throwing everything else away.

There was that crazy woman again. What was up with her today? He didn’t need to be back to work, yet. They still had time. “Lois?” Clark asked, a startled expression surely covering his face. “What’s wrong?”

Lois shot him a grin. “Nothing. I just have some paperwork for you to fill out.”

Paperwork?

She pushed him off the blanket, folded it up, and stuffed it into the bag as well. She held out her hand to Clark. “Let’s go.”

“Where?” he inquired incredulously.

“To get our marriage license, of course.”

Friday Morning

Lois had just stepped out of the shower when she heard voices in the other room.

“Clark! Forget Lois. Marry me!” gushed Lucy.

The older sister grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her

wet head. Clark must have brought breakfast. As a true Lane, Lucy was also a sucker for any food either made by someone else or not from a box. Some would have thought the daughters of a doctor and nurse would have grown up on freshly cooked, nutritious food. Not at all. Lois had inherited her lack of skills in the kitchen straight from her mom.

“Lois asked for a demonstration of my cooking skills as a prerequisite of moving our relationship forward, so I hope you ladies like omelets,” Clark explained and then added, “The sweet rolls are from my mom.”

Lois didn’t remember making any such demand, except in jest, but he would hear no argument from her if he wanted to be the designated cook in their relationship.

“Where’s Lois?” Clark then asked. “You two haven’t eaten yet, have you?”

Ah, there was his usual nervous streak this confident Clark was missing. For a minute there, she had thought Kal-El had arrived to cook breakfast.

*He did. Don’t tell me we’re going to have **this** argument again,* Lois’s inner voice drawled.

“Shower,” Lucy replied with what sounded like a full mouth.

“Don’t even think about it,” Lois warned under her breath, as she dried her freshly shaved leg and heard a corresponding chuckle from Clark.

You know, since he’s invulnerable, you really have no reason to shave your legs again. Actually, since he’s invulnerable, how does he shave? Does he even need to? Or is his face consistently bare like his chest? Or does he shave his chest too?

Lois swallowed. She couldn’t imagine him shaving his chest. But Clark did shave his face. She remembered feeling a rough cheek against hers one of those mornings after they had spent the night together.

Yes, ‘spent the night together’ blissfully sleeping! groused her inner voice.

Why was she thinking these crazy thoughts?

Because at the end of the day you might be married to a man you really don’t know?

Lois’s heart began to race. What had she been thinking asking Clark to marry her? Today?!

A knock on the bathroom door interrupted these thoughts. “Lois, omelets okay?”

Come on in! Lois is naked and needs a good morning kiss.

Lois coughed and wrapped herself quickly in her fluffy robe. “Sounds wonderful, Clark.”

“What would you like in it?” he asked.

“Surprise me!” she replied, imagining herself opening the bathroom door and pulling him inside the steamy room for a kiss and that his hands would naturally slip inside her robe and... She started fanning herself with a fashion magazine her sister had left on the back of the toilet.

Oh, my! How could Lois even think of marrying a man who didn’t even know how she liked her eggs? What had she been thinking?

You weren’t thinking, so I took over.

Oh, God! What had she done? She couldn’t marry Clark!

Maybe he’ll choose to stay in the Wanda Detroit room.

Lois had made two reservations at the hotel The Niagara LEXOR. She probably shouldn’t have booked it at Lexco’s / Lex Luthor’s hotel, especially after the man had kidnapped her the previous week. Plus, Clark considered the billionaire to be personally responsible for ruining the Kent Family by constantly upping the rent at his parents’ Metropolis restaurant, MJ’s Café. But Luthor had accidentally killed himself, and Lois had gotten a really good deal because she worked at Daily Books, another one of Lexco’s companies. The more they could save on this honeymoon, the more money they would have left to spend on getting a larger, less-basement, less-tabloid-reporter-stalked

apartment. And furniture, especially a bed. Clark had specifically mentioned the night before that the first piece of furniture they should buy was a real bed. He really hated her horribly rundown futon couch.

She had made the non-honeymoon room reservation under the name Clark had suggested the other night for her alias, Wanda Detroit. A reservation for Lois Lane requesting a king sized bed might have garnered too much attention, especially since everyone thought she was dating Superman. The honeymoon suite, of course, was under the name Mr. and Mrs. Kent. She had told him the night before to choose which room he wanted to stay in.

Maybe Clark isn’t ready to buy the cow before tasting the milk.

Lois pressed her lips together at this metaphor. She hadn’t appreciated the reference to her being a cow or the implication of “tasting the milk.”

Soorry!

“Behave,” she mumbled to her naughty thoughts.

“Excuse me?” Clark asked back at the door.

Lois gulped.

Did that man have to have such great hearing?

“Nothing, Clark,” she called to him.

He probably heard you telling yourself he could suck on your toes anytime, too. You know, a few weeks ago, after that steamy dream I planted in your head.

Her eyes widened as her lotion slipped out of her hands. He had heard her. That was when he had dropped the juice.

Superman *doesn’t* drop things! “Clark, I don’t know if I can do this. I’ll never be able to have anything private from you again.”

She heard him laugh softly to himself. “You know, Lucy, your sister really surprised me yesterday.”

“Really? What’d she do?” Lucy asked.

Lois smiled at Clark addressing her worries by talking to her sister.

Sneaky wench. Lucy knows darn well what you did! You confessed everything to her — well, not Clark’s secret — everything else to her before you cried yourself to sleep.

“The picnic lunch in the park. The weekend away. I never saw those coming,” he replied.

Of course, this was a two way street. You could always use that super hearing against him and tell him right now exactly what you are planning on doing to him later.

Lois grinned wickedly. Tempting. So very tempting. She opened the cabinet under the sink to pull out her hairdryer. Only it wasn’t there anymore. That cabinet was full to the brim with boxes of condoms.

Thanks for the wedding present, Daddy.

She tried to remember where she had put her hairdryer as her mind strayed back to Clark. “You keep listening to everything I mumble to myself and I’m going to start describe in detail to you what I’m doing right now.”

You’re looking for your hairdryer. That’s not sexy, Lois. It’s extremely unsexy.

He didn’t know that though. For all Clark knew, she was still rubbing her freshly shaven, naked legs with lotion.

Clark cleared his throat. “Say, Lucy, do you know if Lois has a coffee grinder?”

Now, that’s just cruel, giggled her inner voice.

“How should I know?” blathered Lucy.

Lois opened the bathroom door a crack and waved to her sister. She saw Clark searching her kitchen cabinets.

“What?” asked Lucy.

Clark glanced over his shoulder and saw her. No makeup. Hair unstyled and wet. Big fluffy robe. His smile grew exponentially as if he liked what he saw. He wore jeans and a t-shirt. No blue suit.

No extra layers!

Lois broke eye contact first, knowing what would happen if they kept looking at each other like that, especially with her naked under her robe. Lois waved her sister closer. With a roll of her eyes, Lucy set down her sweet roll and approached.

“Can you bring me my clothes? The ones on top of my travel bag in the closet.”

Lucy groaned with annoyance but did as Lois requested. “I don’t know what you’re acting so strange for. It’s not like you’d be showing him anything he hasn’t seen before,” her sister hissed, pushing the clothes at Lois.

SPLAT went an egg on the floor of the kitchen.

Oh, yeah, you could have lots of fun with his super hearing.

Lois heard Clark cuss under his breath as he went to clean it up. “Tell him it’s in the cabinet above the fridge.”

“What is?” Lucy’s brow furrowed.

“Found it!” Clark called. A few moments later the apartment filled with the scent of coffee and the loud sound of a grinder.

Lois quickly leaned over to her sister and whispered, “No, he hasn’t.”

Lucy’s eyes went wide. “You mean, you haven’t yet?”

Lois shook her head.

“Do you think that’s why Daddy suggested I should drive your car to Metropolis and keep an eye on you?” her sister whispered back.

Oh, yeah.

Lois wanted to hit her head against the wall. “Do me a favor: never repeat that again. Especially in front of Clark. He already thinks Daddy hates him.”

“OK. How could anyone hate Clark? He’s cute. He cooks. He cleans. You said he was working three jobs to help out his folks. He’s a total sweetie! What’s not to love? Does he have a twin brother?” Lucy asked as the grinder stopped.

“Nope. Sorry, Sis,” Lois replied. “He’s one of a kind.” She closed the bathroom door. “And he’s all mine.”

Clark heard you!

Lois sighed contentedly. She had wanted him to.

It was a good fifteen minutes later when Lois finally emerged from the bathroom dressed in a pair of tan slacks and a short sleeve black mock turtleneck that clung to her curves. Hairdryer found, she had been able to style her not-quite-shoulder-length hair just so. Her hint of makeup was perfect. Transformation from the monster he had seen before was complete. Clark still stood at the stove and the most wonderful smells permeated the apartment.

Lucy’s plate was already empty and she was leaning back in her seat, nursing the last of her coffee. “Lois! You’ve got to try this! I never knew food could be an orgasmic experience,” Lucy rambled incoherently.

Please don’t tell me my boyfriend gave you an orgasmic experience, Lucy!

Lois ignored her as she went into the kitchen and wrapped her arms around Clark’s waist from the back, kissing his neck. “You’re hired.”

“But you haven’t tried it yet,” he said.

“My apartment isn’t filled with black smoke and firemen aren’t beating down my door,” Lois told him as he turned around and wrapped his arms around her. “That already makes you a better cook than me.”

“I’m sure you’re not that bad,” he murmured, kissing her. “Good morning.”

We must go standby for an earlier flight. Must have this man, now!

“Go, sit down,” Clark continued before releasing hold of her. Suddenly, she felt bereft without his touch. In a daze, Lois did what she was bid.

What are you going to do if he says for you to cancel the

honeymoon suite? Will you still want to go away with him after such a rejection? Even after telling him you would? Could you still make love to him, knowing he wasn’t ready to make a lifetime commitment to you today? I know I could, but could you?

Lois didn’t know. She loved Clark, but after humiliating herself the night before by announcing she wanted to elope this weekend and having him say that he needed to think about it...

Clark turned around from the counter holding a red rose. He knelt down before Lois on one knee handing her the flower. “Lois Olive Lane, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?”

Her heart stopped.

Um... Yes?

When Lois didn’t respond, he continued, “I know I haven’t been the best boyfriend — a complete dense idiot at times even — but I promise you I will spend the rest of my life proving to you that no one could be more deserving of your precious love than...”

Lois flew into his arms and she knew it was only his super strength that stopped them from toppling over. “Oh, Clark,” she whispered, kissing him. “Thank you.”

“Thank you? Lois! What kind of response is that to a marriage proposal?” scolded her sister.

I’m thinking the same thing.

Clark understood though. He understood that making her wait for his decision had felt like torture for her. “I needed to get this,” he said to her unasked question, pulling out a ring. It wasn’t big or gaudy, but a plain simple band with a small diamond. She held out her shaking hand and let him slip it on her finger.

“How?” she stammered, knowing he couldn’t afford even this ring.

Clark gave a wary smile. “This was my Nana Clark’s ring.”

Lucy clapped. “Ooooh! You’ve got your something old!” She jumped up and ran into the bathroom, returning with an elegant hair clip. “Something borrowed. *Bor-rowed!* You’ve got to give it back.”

Lois chuckled at her sister’s delight, but her eyes drifted back to the man upon whose knee she sat. “Got it.”

“Let’s see,” mumbled Lucy. “Something old, something new...”

“My dress is new,” Lois said, a slight flush coming to her cheeks. Yep, she had splurged and bought a dress on the off-chance that Clark would agree to marry her this weekend. Nothing fancy or meringue like, just simple, billowy and off-white.

“Okay. Old, new, borrowed and blue. Hmmm. Blue?” Lucy’s brow furrowed.

A smile crossed Clark’s lips as he gazed at Lois. “Got it.”

Lois pulled him to her and kissed him again. Holding him in her arms, she whispered in his ear, “You are bringing the suit, right?”

“Don’t fly anywhere without it,” he murmured back against her neck.

The toaster popped and Lois suddenly found herself back in her seat at the table. “Breakfast!” Clark called, rushing into the kitchen.

Oh, you could certainly get used to him around the house. Wonder if there’s a room he isn’t good in? Doubting it.

“You never told me what your father sent us,” Clark said, setting a scrumptious looking plate with an omelet, toast, and sliced strawberries in front of her.

Lois shot him a grin and then quickly looked away, her cheeks red. “You’ll see.”

Clark raised a brow at this vague answer.

Lucy looked between them, her arms crossed, and then her jaw dropped. “Daddy sent those?” She roared with laughter.

Lois took a bite of her food, avoiding his eye contact. “This is really good, Clark.”

Clark stared at Lucy before turning his gaze to his fiancée. “Those?”

“He is a bit over protective,” Lois mumbled. “And he’s a doctor...”

Clark blanched and then disappeared into the bathroom; he returned two bites later. “Lois, there must be twenty...”

“Twenty-one if you count the box you bought,” Lois corrected softly, still avoiding his gaze.

“Things are looking up,” giggled Lucy.

Lois marked her sister for death with her gaze.

She is soooo moving out!

“Ooooh, that reminds me. Mr. White gave me something for you guys,” Lucy said, getting up from the table. “He said since you weren’t going to make it to the all-store meeting on Sunday morning...” She started tossing stuff into the air and eventually returned with a #10 envelope with Lois and Clark’s names on it, handing it to Clark. “It’s probably information on the holiday sales promotions for the store.”

“But I don’t work for Daily Books anymore,” Clark said, staring at the envelope. He turned it over and paused. “What’s this?” He held up the envelope to Lois.

Across the back flap Perry had written, *Do not open until after the wedding.*

“I may have mentioned something of my plans to Perry,” Lois replied with a shrug. “When I went to tell him I wasn’t coming into work this weekend.”

Clark shook his head. “I can’t believe it. Even Perry knew before me.”

Lois reached over and touched his hand. “How about we go to the airport after breakfast and see if we can get an earlier flight?”

He raised a brow and grinned. “Now, there’s an idea.”

Friday — early afternoon

Clark never thought that he would ever fly in a plane. Sure, he had always wanted to. Ever since he was a little boy, he had been obsessed with planes, flying, even the space program, but there had never been a reason for him to get on a plane before.

When he was little, everything he could possibly want to do was within his grasp in Metropolis and there wasn’t anyone anywhere else — no grandparents or uncles or aunts or even cousins — for him to get on a plane to visit. And then at eighteen, he learned he didn’t need a plane to fly to all the great places in the world that interested him. But the little boy inside of him had still always wondered, always dreamed what it would be like to actually sit on an airplane and fly.

It was a lot more cramped than he expected.

He glanced over at his fiancée. Lois was bending down, pulling a magazine out of her carry-on bag she had just kicked under the seat in front of her. She had bought some magazines and chocolate bars at the newsstand at the Metropolis International Airport (MET, he had discovered) for their flight to Buffalo (BUF) and the preceding wait.

When she sat up, Lois noticed him gazing at her and smiled. No, “smiled” was too plain a word for what Lois did when her lips curved upwards like that. When it came to Lois, Clark was at a loss for words. And breath. He had never thought he would meet a woman who could steal his breath away from him with a glance, and then he had met Lois. She had captured his heart with one roll of her eyes at Cat Grant, the auburn-haired woman who had been flirting with him.

Dazzle! No, dazzle didn’t work for her smile either. He would have to concentrate longer to find just the right word. The problem was that Clark had difficulty thinking around Lois lately. When she looked at him, everything else zipped right out of his head.

He was a fool in love.

A horny fool in love.

Lois took hold of his hand and patted it reassuringly. Then she reached over and fastened his seatbelt.

An extremely uncomfortable, horny fool in love.

Clark shifted in his seat. Why, oh why, did she have to touch him like that, right now? Didn’t she know what her slightest touch did to him? He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled it.

He had been doing that a lot lately. He and Lois had been trying to make love for the past two weeks, but something or someone always seemed to interrupt them. He had never thought he would meet a woman so accepting of him to even attempt to make love to him. Well, not since Lana Lang had smashed his heart and ego almost ten years earlier. And then he had met Lois and knew he had to give love a try again.

At first, just the thought of making love to Lois terrified Clark. What if he hurt her in his enthusiasm? What if he lost control? What if he went too fast?

Lois kept patiently reassuring him every step of the way, moving their relationship closer and closer to intimacy, step by gradual step. Until that one night his fear had just dissolved away. They had gotten so far in their — he decided “cuddling” was the appropriate word choice, although “petting” was probably more accurate, but he didn’t like the canine connotation — *cuddling* that they had ended up lying on the ceiling of his tiny bedroom in his folks’ apartment.

If only they hadn’t left the condoms at her place that night.

Clark sighed. He lived in that tiny room, slept on his old twin bed, and shared an apartment with his folks only so that the money saved from having a place of his own could go straight into the lease for their restaurant, MJ’s Café. It hadn’t felt like “his” home since he had moved out to travel the world after graduating from community college seven years earlier. So, it was probably for the best that their first time — his and Lois’s first time and his *very* first time — hadn’t been with his folks in the very next room.

His and Lois’s relationship had been a rocky one from the start, but Clark loved her and Lois loved him, and they were flying off to get married. Eloping to Niagara Falls, NY. They were going to find someone to marry them as soon as they got to the city. They even had the marriage license, which was currently burning a hole in his pocket.

Lois feared that once they started making love, she wasn’t going to be able to stop for days, so they needed to find someone to marry them tonight or the weekend would disappear and the opportunity would be lost. He grinned. For some strange reason, he was okay with that.

Actually, this whole trip was Lois’s idea. She had invited him to the boat pond at New York City’s Central Park, just the day before, and proposed. His brow wrinkled in thought.

No, she hadn’t. She had asked him if he could accept the wedding vows and when he had dumbly — not that he was stupid, just unable to see what she was laying out before him in her round-about way — told her that he would love her in sickness and health, for richer and for poorer, ‘til death did them part, Lois had simply said, “Then marry me.” There had been no proposal, just the command.

He chuckled to himself. How could he have possibly refused? Next thing he knew, Lois had grabbed his hand and rushed him off to get their license.

Technically, Lois and Clark didn’t *have* to get married this weekend. There wasn’t any great need to do so. They hadn’t decided to marry before making love; it had just turned out that way. Lois had told him the night before that while their latest interrupter — Lois’s kid sister Lucy — was off at her new job at Daily Books, that if she and Clark started making love, Lois would not want to — or be able to — stop. Ever.

She had said, and he was quoting from memory, “When I

make love to you, I'm not going to want to stop. And when I need to sleep, I want to do so in your arms. I want your face to be the last thing I see at night and the first thing I see in the morning."

So, once again, they hadn't even started. They knew that sooner or later Lucy would come back to Lois's basement apartment. Lucy had commandeered it when she had shown up unexpectedly and uninvited on Wednesday night.

Clark sighed. He was tempted to hit the armrest of his seat in frustration, but knew it wasn't a good idea. No point in bringing the plane down before they had even taxied to the runway.

Apparently, Lois *had* flown before. Back and forth between Metropolis and Topeka, Kansas, those two years she had attended Metropolis University before transferring to a smaller liberal arts college, which would let her work on their school newspaper hassle-free.

Clark didn't want to think about what Lois told him Linda King and that so-called editor at the Metropolis University student newspaper had done to her. He couldn't believe he had let that witch interview Superman or even that he had given her a lift back to the *Metropolis Star's* newsroom.

Never again! Anyone who befouled the name of Lois Lane would not be getting any preferential treatment from Superman, that was for sure.

Actually, that was another reason Clark Kent and Lois Lane were rushing off to get married this weekend. Because in the beginning Superman had paid so much attention to nobody Lois Lane, former reporter for the *Smallville Post* — how could he not? The woman was his girlfriend for Pete's sake! — that his alter-ego's and his girlfriend's name had been invariably tied together. She had even been the one to give him the moniker Superman. Much better than "The Flying Man," which everyone had been calling him before that. Pictures of Lois and Superman had peppered such noble rags as *Dirt Digger Weekly*, *National Inquisitor*, and *Exposé*.

With Lois and Clark officially married, Superman would be able to honestly say at last, "I am not dating Lois Lane." Or would "Lois Lane is not my girlfriend" be better? He hadn't decided which misdirection to use when he flew back to Metropolis the next day and happened to talk to the press. He didn't want to leave Lois in the middle of their honeymoon either, but this would be Superman's wedding gift to them.

It was also why they were heading to Niagara Falls in an airplane instead of taking Superman Express. Lois and Clark needed to be seen by the press at the airport, taking a plane, and "avoiding" photographers.

To ensure this, Lois had gotten herself a baseball cap and a pair of ridiculously huge Jackie O. type sunglasses. She said it was the disguise most celebrities wore whenever the paparazzi discovered them. She had also made an anonymous phone call to her least favorite stalker, Leo Nunk — reporter for the *National Inquisitor* — informing him that she had overheard Lois Lane at a coffee shop discussing taking an airplane trip with her boyfriend that afternoon. Low and behold, the slime of the journalism world had fallen in line and en masse to photograph them at the Metropolis International Airport.

The plane started to move and Lois took hold of his hand again. "This is it," she said, smiling at him.

He took a deep breath and placed a fake smile to his lips.

"Clark..." She laughed. "You *have* flown before. Remember, it's the safest way to travel."

His fake smile grew bigger. Flying in a tin can and flying on his own, completely different.

"You and I both know this plane will never crash," she reminded him with a twinkle in her eye, giving his hand another squeeze.

The plane eventually got to the front of the line and started racing down the runway. Clark let go of Lois's hand and gripped

the armrests on either side of him.

"Stop it." Lois chuckled under her breath, still flipping through her magazine. "What will the pilots think if we take off early?"

"I'm not..." And then Clark realized he was and he let go of the armrests. "Sorry. Force of habit," he apologized sheepishly.

Lois leaned over and whispered, "I know a much better way to make the plane take off faster." She started kissing him from his ear, slowly working her lips across his cheek until she reached his mouth at the very moment the plane's tires took off from the tarmac. Lois's fingers snaked across his chest caressing his ribs under his shirt. He certainly was floating out of his seat under this barrage of kisses. Good thing she had fastened his seatbelt.

Then her hand and lips disappeared. "There. Now we're up in the air with no help at all from you," she said quietly, returning to her magazine.

Clark opened his eyes and looked at the clouds outside his window. "This is surreal."

Lois laughed. "You're funny. *This is surreal?*" she repeated, shaking her head.

He took hold of her hand, lacing their fingers. "*This is surreal.*"

"This is very real, Clark," she said, shutting her magazine and focusing her attention on him.

"I keep having this feeling that this is all a dream and I'm going to wake up to find you still not acknowledging my existence and mooning over Claude."

"That was the nightmare," she corrected with a slight shiver. "But you're right. This is very dreamlike."

"How can someone as wonderful as you love me?" Clark asked rhetorically.

Lois grinned. "How can someone as wonderful as me *not* love you?"

Clark noticed she was still the wonderful one in her scenario. He didn't mind.

Radiant. That was what Lois's smile was. Radiant like sunshine. He sighed as he gazed at her. "How long is this flight anyway? Five minutes? Ten?" he asked hopefully.

"An hour and a half."

His face fell. "That long? I could circumnavigate the world a thousand times in half as much time," he mumbled.

"In a hurry?" Lois glanced at him through the corner of her eye. "Have some place to be?"

"Minx," he murmured. The hour and half would seem like eternity, especially since he and Lois still had to drive from Buffalo to Niagara Falls, get married, and get checked in to the hotel before they could finally arrive at their honeymoon suite. Then time would fly. He gulped, hoping not everything went too quickly.

"I've got an idea to distract you," Lois said, pulling her carry-on out from under the seat in front of her and pulling out a couple of small notebooks and pens from inside it. "Let's write our marriage vows."

"What about richer and poorer, sickness and health, until death do us part?"

"Nah. Doesn't really work for some of us." She raised her brow. "I've taken the liberty of drafting some of your vows already. Let me know what you think."

Clark opened the notebook she had handed him and started chuckling. "Obey?"

"Yes," she said innocently with a bat of those luscious lashes. "Obey."

"Lois, you need to stop treating me like a dog," he stated, pressing his lips together.

"I do not," she protested.

This time it was his turn to raise an eyebrow. "Who hit me with a rolled up newspaper? Who suggested I do 'tricks'? Who

tells me to fetch dinner? Who wants me to ‘obey’?”

“I do not tell you to ‘fetch’ dinner. You volunteer!” Lois nudged him and then grinned demurely. “Who has a tendency to not stay and listen to what I have to say? Always jumping to the wrong conclusions? I thought ‘obey’ worked to overrule those bad traits of yours.”

Clark leaned back in his seat, his jaw set, and his arms crossed. “Okay. I’ll ‘obey’ if you will.”

“Well, that’s... that’s...” his fiancée sputtered before catching his serious expression. “Fine! Scratch out ‘obey.’”

“I don’t think this is quite fair,” he said, setting his notebook down in his lap.

The ‘Fasten Your Seatbelt’ sign chimed and went out, and Lois lowered her tray table, putting her notebook on it. “What’s not fair?”

“That you get to write my vows, and I don’t get to do yours,” he responded wryly. “I should at least be able to write a rough draft.” A smile peeked out from his pressed lips.

“I’m going to regret this, aren’t I?” she said, tossing her notebook over to him.

Clark grinned naughtily. “Can I make your clothing optional?”

“Clark!” She laughed, nudging him again. “No.” After a moment of looking down at the vows she had written for him again, Lois asked hesitantly, “You don’t like my clothes?”

He leaned over and nuzzled her neck. “Not when they’re on.”

She kissed him again and their vows lay forgotten for the time being.

“I... Clark Jerome Kent...” said the minister.

“I, Clark Jerome Kent,” repeated Clark.

“Take thee, Lois Olive Lane...”

“Take thee, Lois Olive Lane...”

Lois watched as he smiled at saying her name.

He loves you! He’s taking you!

“To be my lawful wedded wife...”

“To be my awful...”

Say what?!

Lois raised an eyebrow as her lips pressed together.

Clark cleared his throat and as a slight flush rose to his cheeks. “LAWFUL, law-ful wedded wife...” He glanced nervously at the minister and exhaled.

Better.

The preacher returned Clark’s smile, reassuring him. “To have and to hold...”

“To. Have. And. To. Hold...” Clark was enunciating every word, slowly and carefully, now.

“From this day forward...”

“From this day forward...” He repeated.

“For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...”

“For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...”

“Until death do us part.”

Clark glanced at the minister and then at Lois, his mouth stretching into a huge grin. “Not even death will part us.”

Lois squeezed his fingers as she smiled.

The minister glanced down at a couple of pieces of paper in his hand. “These are the vows you want to say?” he asked, almost skeptically, to Clark.

“Yes, sir.” Clark nodded.

Lois could see the man of the cloth fighting his inner desire to pass judgment as he handed Clark the vows she had written for him to read. Clark looked deep into her eyes as if searching for her soul.

“Lois, I pledge to love, treasure, and respect you from this day forward. I vow to share my decisions, my life, and the whole world with you. I shall trust everything you tell me, even if it sounds like a blatant lie. I promise to...” He paused and cleared

his throat.

What did you write, Lois?

“I promise to...” Clark swallowed. “... banish the green-eyed monster that has dwelled inside my soul until now.”

You told him to KILL his jealousy? How could you, Lois? Who puts the word “kill” in their marriage vows? And Superman doesn’t kill! Thank the stars that he isn’t above editing your copy.

“I will trust you and that your love for me can only grow stronger.” Clark relaxed into a smile as if he liked the meaning of those words. “There is no other person in the universe for me, which is why I pledge my love to you and no other.”

Okay, great. Kiss Clark and let’s get out of here!

“I, Lois Olive Lane...” started the preacher.

Oh, yeah. I forgot about this part.

“I, Lois Olive Lane...” Lois repeated, staring into Clark’s eyes. Never had they been a richer brown. Deeper brown. So brown they were almost a black hole into which she could fall, never to be seen again.

What are you thinking, woman?! You are marrying the most wonderful man in the universe. Snap out of it!

“Take thee, Clark Jerome Kent...”

“Take thee, Clark Jerome Kent...”

Clark Jerome... Superman... Kal-El... Kent...

“To be my lawful wedded husband...”

“To be my...” Lois slowed down and spoke most clearly. “... lawful wedded husband...”

“To have and to hold...”

“To have and to hold...”

And to make wild, passionate love to...

“From this day forward...” said the minister.

“From this day forward...”

“For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...”

“For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...”

“Until death do us part.”

“Until death do us part,” whispered Lois; although, she didn’t think Clark could die.

Did invulnerable mean that even death couldn’t touch him? So, the only one dying in this relationship was her. The only one growing older was probably her as well. She should have put something in his vows about loving her no matter how old and decrepit she got. Clark did say that he would even love her and stay faithful after death, though. She exhaled.

On the plus side, Clark will never grow a beer belly or jowls or hair out of his ears, ever! He’ll always love you and look like this gorgeous man before you. Plus, plus, plus!

The preacher handed Lois the vows Clark had written for her. Luckily, she knew he hadn’t added anything crazy to her vows as she had to his. That just wasn’t who he was.

“Clark...” Lois swallowed as the words swirled on the page. Oh, gosh. She was doing this. She was actually getting married. After she finished saying this, she would be a married woman. A grown up. An official adult. Was this really what she wanted? She glanced up at Clark, who was blurry behind her unshed tears.

“Breathe, Lois,” he murmured.

Huh? Oh, right. Air into the lungs. In and out. In and out.

Lois blinked and glanced back down to the paper in her hands. “Clark...” She scanned the words quickly. Eloquent as he was, it still didn’t commit her as much to him as her words joined him to her. Was he leaving her an out? Did he still not trust that she loved him as much as he loved her? “I will never look at another, feel for another, or love another man as much as I look at, feel for, and love you. You are my dawn and my sunset and all the hours in between. You are my sunlight and my moonlight, my partner, my best friend, my soul mate.”

Nice touch. Oh, look, Lois, you’ve made Clark weepy. Okay, now you better read what he wrote or you’ll never hear the end of it.

"I agree to always love you, honor you, and respect you. I promise to have patience with my..." Lois smiled, pressing her lips together so that she wouldn't laugh.

He did not write that.

"I promise to have patience with my husband, the lunthead, knowing that with time and my infinite love, he'll become the man I know he can be. I swear to give only true and honest weather reports from this day forward. I pledge to listen to you and not to fight reason. I vow when my safety is at issue... to..." Lois flipped over the paper. "No! Absolutely not! Clar-K! We agreed."

Her tongue crossed her teeth as she dropped her hands from his.

Clark gazed at her innocently. "I agreed to what you wrote, Lois."

"Really not feeling the trust here," she snapped, pointing between them.

Clark waited, and Lois glowered.

"Do we have a problem here?" asked the minister, glancing between them. "Are you saying you don't want to marry Clark after all, Lois?"

Clark blanched.

Serves him right. Putting that word into her vows. Humph.

"No." Lois growled, her eyes in slits and her lips pressed together. "I'll marry him."

And torture him for this, every day of the rest of his soon-to-be short, miserable life. If he can edit your copy, there's nothing in there about you not editing his.

"And when my safety is at issue, I will — on occasion and after much discussion — defer to your better judgment and experience," she finally agreed, pointing a finger at him. "On the condition that you admit that I'm the better person."

Clark grinned. "There was never any doubt in my mind about that."

"No, that's not what I meant!" Lois clarified, tossing up her hands and almost losing hold of her bouquet. "That you admit that you're not better than me and, therefore, cannot dictate my life."

He took hold of her hands again. "I have never thought that I was better than you, Lois. From the very beginning I have felt myself lucky to be allowed the presence of your company."

All he's missing is a 'milady' and a bow.

Lois waited.

"If you will... defer to my wishes regarding your safety, then I will promise not to play dictator to your life," Clark granted, stepping closer to her.

"Share and share alike?" Lois whispered, moving towards him so that only their clasped hands separated their bodies.

"With pleasure," he said, holding out his palm to the preacher, who placed a small gold ring into it. Clark slid the ring onto her finger as he spoke, "With this ring I thee wed, Lois. I pledge my heart and soul to you and to keep solemn my vows."

Lois took the other ring from the clergyman and slipped it onto Clark's finger, "With this ring I thee wed, Clark. I pledge my heart and soul to you and to keep solemn my vows."

"By the powers vested in me by God and the great state of New York..." started the minister. "I pronounce you husband and wife. You may now..."

Lois wrapped her arms around Clark's neck and pressed a kiss onto his lips.

"... kiss the groom," the preacher chuckled with a light shrug as the organist started playing again.

Mr. Kent carried Mrs. Kent over the threshold of one of the honeymoon suites at the Niagara Lexor. The bellhop stood just inside. He had deposited their suitcases on some luggage racks near the dresser and waited.

Clark set Lois down and tipped the man, who saluted in thanks and shut the door after him — moving the "Do Not Disturb — Honeymooners in Love Inside" sign to the outside knob as he left.

Lois kicked off her open-toed slingback sandals and held out her arms. "Clark..."

"Hold on!" Clark told her as he looked around the room.

They had had too many blunders in the past. He needed to make sure no snooping tabloid reporter or crazy billionaire had bugged their honeymoon suite with microphones or cameras. He studied the entire suite with his x-ray vision: from the walls to the large round satin sheet covered bed to the hidden mini-bar to the sunken bathtub to the gas fireplace to the TV beside the bed. Who put a TV inside a honeymoon suite? And next to the bed? Like they would be interested in watching television! Once he knew there were no prying eyes or ears then he could turn his attention to his wife. Clark knew if he kissed her now, this important step would be forgotten.

Satisfied that the room was exactly what it was purported to be — private — Clark then locked the door and even added the chain. He closed the curtains for complete privacy from the outside world. Now, he was ready to make love to his wife. He gazed at her with an expression of smoldering desire. "Hold still," he murmured, remembering a few last second details to create an ambiance of romance.

Clark must have appeared to disappear into a blur as he lit candles and opened the bottle of champagne. He stopped in front of his wife once more and handed her a glass of bubbly. "Hungry?" he asked nervously. After they begun, he didn't want a reason for them to stop. "There are chocolate dipped strawberries with whipped cream."

He watched her glance to a small dining table by the windows that held those exotic morsels.

Lois licked her lips. "Later." She set down her champagne glass on the table next to her and crossed to him.

Goodness, she looked beautiful in that ivory gown. He loved how there were no sleeves to hide her tan, muscular arms. The cowl-neck draped deliciously low both in the front and across her back. The dress moved with her, sliding across her skin like a series of lover's kisses with each gentle step. It was so low in back that Clark had dared not to consider before the wedding what she could possibly be wearing underneath it.

But the wedding was over and they were now alone in the honeymoon suite; his imagination was once again in full bloom about what might or might not be under the dress that flowed down her long legs to her bare feet. Yet, he still didn't feel comfortable about placing his shaking hands on her soft skin to find out. Would he be able to control himself?

Lois reached up and unsnapped Lucy's borrowed hair clip from her hair, causing the pulled lock that had revealed her right ear and the curve of her neck underneath to fall back over and hide them again. He watched as she set down the clip next to her champagne glass.

She removed his flute from his stiff fingers and set it down as well. Then she pulled his glasses from his face and placed them on the table next to his champagne flute. Returning to his face, she kissed one eyelid and then the other. He didn't know how he was still in the shape of a man instead of a big pile of goo on the floor. She took his hands in hers and drew them around to her bare back, pressing her chest against his. Oh, her warm, bare skin.

"Clark..." was all she was able to whisper before he closed the distance between their lips. His warm hands caressed her back, dipping under the edges of her soft dress.

"We're going to wrinkle your gown," he murmured, kissing down her neck to her shoulder, causing one of the straps to slip down her arm.

Lois shrugged her other shoulder causing that strap to slide down, lowering the bodice further.

Clark took a step back to admire her barely covered body. He needed to change out of his clothes. It would take too long for her to undress him, especially since he had on the blue suit under his grey suit. If she continued to kiss him the way he was feeling right now, they might discover another use for the phrase “super speed.” He was torn. Half of him wanted to stay and kiss Lois and the other half was ready to change into something more comfortable. This indecision had him rushing back and forth between his suitcases and Lois at top speed. Finally, he decided.

She gasped as he must have seemed to disappear from right in front of her. “Clark!”

He zipped out of his clothes, took a three second ice-cold shower, jumped into his new silky sleep shorts that his folks had added to his overnight bag, placed the box of condoms on the bedside table, grabbed his flute of champagne and laid down on the bed. He felt better now, less likely to explode with desire. Relaxed enough to playfully yawn, and say the stupid words on the tip of his tongue. “Wow! That was terrific, honey. Was it as good for you as it was for me?”

Lois’s head snapped her gaze to his. “What?!”

A grin slipped onto Clark’s lips, and he flew to her side again. “Just joking.”

His wife glared daggers at him as a growl escaped her throat.

Yep. Stupid lunkhead. Wasn’t one of your vows that you’d stop being one of those?

“Don’t tell me you weren’t fearing that scenario in the least?” he asked softly. He couldn’t resist touching his wife any longer. He ran his finger down her shoulder, accidentally knocking her dress further down her body.

Lois wrapped an arm around his neck and pulled his mouth against hers fiercely, as one dress strap then the other slipped over her hands to drop into a puddle of fabric on the floor by her feet, leaving an almost naked woman in his arms. Clark’s hands caressed the bare skin of her back before he lifted her to his hips, her legs wrapping around him.

Oh, God. He had found his vulnerability. Lois Lane. She would be his undoing.

“Hold that thought,” Lois whispered, sliding her legs down his body to the floor.

Say, what?

Covering her chest as she went, she padded across the room to the table with the strawberries, the hot melted chocolate for dipping, and the whipped cream. She plucked a berry from the bowl and bit into it. Strawberry juice dripped down her chin as she glanced back at him, a coquettish expression in her eyes.

Clark could only stare at his almost naked wife and knew he would never be able to taste strawberries again without thinking of this moment. She then picked up the bowl of whipped cream and sauntered back to her husband. Clark swallowed, unable to move.

Oh, God, what is your wife going to do with you and a bowl of whipped cream?

With a nasty glint her eye, Lois threw the contents of the bowl into his face.

Clark nodded, licking the whipped cream off his lips as he wiped his eyes clean. “Okay. I’m thinking I deserved that one.” He wrapped an arm around her bare waist. “Even?”

“You’re lucky it wasn’t the melted chocolate,” she said between pressed lips, reaching up and getting a finger full of whipped cream for her mouth.

“Later,” he murmured, lowering his messy face towards her.

“Oh, no, you don’t!” Lois shrieked with delight, running off. “Help! Superman!”

Clark threw his hands up in exasperation as he rolled his eyes. “Now? Now, she calls for Superman?” He zipped in front of

her. “If it’s Superman you want...”

She ran off in the other direction. “No fair, Clark!”

“Fair?” he retorted, super quickly grabbing a towel from the bathroom and wiping more whipped cream from his face before he tackled her onto the bed.

Lois continued to laugh, tossing a pillow at him. “No super speed?”

“I promise,” Clark replied, holding up his hand in a Boy Scout pledge, before lowering his face to hers. “Super slow.” He kissed down her neck to her shoulder. At her collarbone, he glanced up at her. “Shall I start with your toes?”

“Later,” she murmured, bringing his lips back to hers. She pressed her almost naked body to his as her hands explored his chest, sending explosions of desire into each of his cells.

Clark paused long enough to gaze into her eyes. “I love you, Mrs. Kent.”

“I love you too, Mr. Kent,” Lois replied as her hand went even lower on his belly.

“Lois!” Clark moaned, as her fingers played with the band of his sleep shorts. His body shuddered with bliss.

So much for that cold shower.

Never had he seen more joy on her face. So beautiful. Lois was radiant. Was she supposed to taste this good or had he discovered another super sense? Taste. Mmmm. Lois. Heaven.

Oh, there was definitely no going back. Clark couldn’t believe what a dense idiot he had been. He had been nervous about *this? This? This* wasn’t something to be nervous about, but to be celebrated, to be... .

Clark couldn’t breathe. Lois had once again taken his breath away. He opened his eyes, realizing he was now lying with his head pillowed against her chest. Garnering energy from somewhere, he lifted himself up and gazed down at her. She had a bit of whipped cream on her nose and he licked it off. Other than that, she seemed to shine with a radiance he had never noticed before.

Had he done all right? If she had felt a quarter of the pleasure that was still zinging around his body, then possibly he would consider himself worthy to be her husband. But he would try his darnedest to double that number in the future.

Lois giggled and opened her eyes. “Oh, Clark! We’ve *got* to do that again.” She kissed him. “And again... and again... and again...”

Saturday Morning

The sounds of a press conference woke Lois. She glanced up to find herself cuddling against her husband’s chest, only now he was dressed in a navy blue athletic jogging suit.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you,” he murmured, kissing the top of her head.

“Morning,” she mumbled with a yawn, stretch, and a rub of her eyes. “Do you always disappear at dawn?”

“I went for a jog,” Clark replied, nodding towards the TV. “To Metropolis.”

Lois’s fingers slipped under his shirt and felt the familiar Superman suit underneath, then turned her focus towards the television. “Something happen?”

“Press conference about the Toasters’ arraignment,” he answered, removing her fingers and kissing them. “With a little wedding gift thrown in for you.”

Realizing he wanted her to watch the conference, Lois turned to the television as Superman thanked the fire and police departments. “And, on a personal note, I would like to offer my congratulations to my friends Clark Kent and Lois Lane on their engagement. May their marriage be joyous and fertile.”

Lois swatted his arm. “Fertile?”

Clark grinned, faux innocently. “Tempus did say something

about children, didn't he?"

Yippee! A baby!

Lois shook off that left-field thought. She didn't want kids yet; she hadn't even been married twenty-four hours. All she wanted was this man.

Okay. Fine. Make passionate love to your husband. I won't stop you. Hey, can you try that floating thing again? You seemed to like that.

"Yes, he did mention Superman's descendents," Lois replied, referring to that crazy man from another future dimension — Tempus — who had tried to convince her not to marry that super fast, super strong, flying alien Superman, of whom she had never heard. By the time she had finally discovered him, she had already been half in love with Clark.

She crawled onto her husband's lap, straddling him, and started unzipping his athletic jacket. "But I didn't marry Superman. I married Clark Kent. So, unless Superman shows up in this bed..." She pulled off his shirt revealing the top of his blue suit. "Looky there, I did marry him. Oops. And here I was trying to defy destiny. Oh, well." She shrugged. "But if I just take this off." She reached behind him to unzip the suit.

"Mrs. Kent, are you trying to seduce me?" Clark asked, his lips brushing hers as he shrugged out of the top of his suit. He rolled them over, so that he was on top and Lois had a full view of the television.

The LNN anchor was now talking to the reporter at the scene. "Well, it looks like Superman is denying rumors that he and Lois Lane are an item. Any information on this Clark Kent fellow she's apparently marrying?"

Lois hit mute on the remote as LNN's talking heads started in on her love life again. The image of Superman from the press conference was reduced to a small box. She watched a man approach Superman as he stepped away from the microphone and hand him a note. Superman then glanced at the note and nodded to the man.

"What was that about?" Lois asked, patting Clark's shoulder and pointing to the television.

Clark dragged his lips off her shoulder, where he had just nudged the strap of her negligee off with his nose, to glance at the screen for a moment. He shrugged. "What?"

"The note."

Her husband pulled out a note from his pocket and handed it to her before starting to kiss down her neck again. Without looking, he picked up the remote and clicked off the TV.

"Professor Daitch from the EPRAD Center wants to meet with you tonight?" Lois asked as Clark reached her collarbone with his lips. She was finding it very hard to concentrate when he did that.

Then toss away the note and return his kisses, Lois. Hello, honeymoon calling.

"Why?" she asked instead. "Is he a big fan or is something wrong?"

Clark kissed her nose and sighed. "The reporters at the press conference were all talking about some eclipse that happened this morning."

"An eclipse? In Metropolis? Don't they announce those in advance?"

"Usually, but this eclipse happened when an asteroid passed between Earth and Jupiter last night, blocking the sun rays and, thereby, making the other planet seem to disappear from view."

"And now EPRAD Control wants to meet secretly with Superman?" She rolled them back over, so that she was on top and Clark grinned. Then she slid off of him.

"Hey! Where are you going?" he asked, sitting up.

Lois padded across the room to her carry-on bag and pulled out an envelope. "We need to call Perry. This might be something."

"Lo-is! We're on our honeymoon. Let's... honeymoon. What happened to hours upon hours of making love? Perry doesn't want us to call him now," Clark informed her as he was suddenly by her side, draping a hotel robe over her shoulders. "Why would you want to call the Chief anyway?"

"I've got some bad news for you, Clark," Lois said, leaning back against his bare chest. "You aren't going back to work delivering packages with MDS next week."

"What?" he replied, confused. "Why not?"

"Your new work schedule is going to conflict with your old one." Lois held up the envelope. "When you went out this morning, I opened this."

His brow furrowed. She grabbed his hand and took him over to the dresser where they could see themselves in the mirror. "You're looking at the newest and hottest reporting couple in Metropolis."

Actually you look like a couple of half-naked honeymooners in need of a shower, a massage, and about a thousand winks... speaking of which, how about you return to bed?

A lock of Lois's hair actually stuck straight up. She felt it and it was sticky. Whipped cream? Was that hot fudge sauce on her cheek? Clark was half-dressed with his athletic pants still on and the top of his Superman suit dangling from his hips. They looked awful. And as far from sexy and hot as they could be.

Lois gasped in dismay. "Who *are* those people?"

Clark turned her away from the mirror and swooped her up into his arms. "You are still the fieriest, most desirable woman I've ever met," he said, carrying her back to bed. He paused as he set a knee on the silky sheets. "What did you say was in Perry's letter?"

"We have been cordially invited to be full-time reporters for *Metropolis Star's* newest competition," Lois replied casually, watching him. "Thanks to Perry White and Franklin Stern, the *Daily Planet* is back in business. The doors open Monday. First paper hopefully will hit stands sometime this week."

Clark swallowed. Then his eyes blinked. And then again. A smile tried to appear at the corner of his mouth. "You mean *you* are the hottest new reporter for the *Daily Planet*?"

Lois's smile broadened as she shook her head. "*We* are. The writing team of Lane and Kent."

He dropped her on the bed and took the envelope out of her hand. "You must have misread that. You're a reporter and I'm a security guard, right?"

Lois shook her head, stood up on the bed, and leaned over his shoulder. "I'm a reporter and you're a reporter."

"But... But... What do I know about reporting? Why would he hire me? I don't have any experience. I never even went to college. I have no idea what I'm doing!" Clark told her, unfolding the papers from inside the envelope and sitting down on the bed.

She gazed at him skeptically and then licked her lips. "Do you really believe that?"

"Of course I..." Clark seemed to freeze as he stared at the paper. "He wants to pay us *how* much? *Each*? I shouldn't be earning this much, Lois. I can understand you earning the big bucks, you nabbed the Superman story of the century, but I don't have any experience, except those few stories I wrote for the weekly *Planet*. I don't know what I'm..."

"You are a fantastic writer, Clark. Plus," she whispered, starting to kiss down his neck. "Perry knows I never would have gotten that Superman exclusive without you."

"I don't know..." he said, still staring at the letter.

"Clark, would Perry have offered you the job if he didn't think you could do it?" Lois asked, nibbling on his ear. Then she shrugged. "If you don't want it..."

"Not want the job! Are you crazy, wife? This is my dream job." He tossed the letter up in the air and turned to pull her into his arms. "Of course you're crazy. You've got voices in your head

telling you to make love to me.”

*Voices? Who said anything about voices? There's just me!
And after last night, crazy would be any woman who wouldn't
want to make love to you.*

Saturday Evening

Superman walked into the EPRAD Command Center in Metropolis. Professor Stephen Daitch was looking through a large telescope into the night's sky.

“I understand you've been looking for me,” said Superman, when the Professor stepped away from the telescope to make notes on his clipboard.

“Yes. Thank you for coming, Superman,” replied Daitch, awe in his voice revealing his opinion of Superman.

“Mind if I take a look?” Superman asked, indicating the telescope.

“Ah...” Daitch held out his arm to the telescope but then remembered something. “I thought you had enhanced visual abilities?” he asked Superman, a slight falter in his voice.

“Yes. But I also have my limits.”

Daitch nodded and stepped away from the telescope to give Superman a glimpse at the approaching Nightfall asteroid.

Clark looked at the bumpy rock hurling — apparently slowly, but in actuality very quickly — through space towards Earth and knew this wasn't a case of something passing them by. Why couldn't Lois have been wrong this one time? There was more to the story here. “Fascinating what kind of surprises the universe can turn up, isn't it?”

“Hmmm,” Daitch nodded in agreement as Superman walked away from the telescope. “Nightfall is approximately seventeen miles across, traveling at close to thirty thousand miles per hour.”

“You told the reporters that much at the news conference. Why am I here?” Clark said, crossing his arms. He didn't want to assume why Daitch had requested Superman's presence at the EPRAD Center, despite having a pretty good idea already formulated in his mind.

Daitch showed Superman a computer screen with an animation of the asteroid. “If my calculations are correct, in little more than four days it's going to hit the Earth.” He typed some keystrokes, and the animation came alive showing the asteroid's clear path towards Earth. Exasperated, he exhaled. “The sky — literally — is falling.”

“What kind of damage could this cause?” Clark asked, knowing that it wouldn't be minimal. But, as his mother told him more than once, there are no stupid questions.

“Superman, it could knock the Earth off of its axis. It could knock us off of our current solar orbit. You see, this one is larger than the meteor that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs. The crater it creates itself will toss enough dust into the air to cause a new ice age.”

As Daitch spoke Clark heard something outside. With a quick glimpse of his x-ray vision, he noticed two men — one in a business suit, one in a military uniform — eavesdropping outside the door. Superman pressed his lips together. “We're not alone.” Daitch didn't appear surprised by this announcement, so Superman continued, “You might as well come out, gentlemen; I know you're there.”

The two men entered the room. The man in the military uniform spoke first. “My apologies, Superman. But we felt that you should hear the news from Professor Daitch first, before we introduced ourselves. I'm General Robert Zeitlin,” he said, reaching out to shake Superman's hand. “This is Secretary John Cosgrove.” The older gentleman in the business suit stepped forward.

“You can't keep this a secret,” Superman told the men.

“The President will tell the people, but he needs to avoid a panic,” Cosgrove told Superman. “Put simply, he needs to have

you on board before he makes an announcement. The country needs your help, Superman. So does the world.”

Superman nodded his agreement. “But you're asking me to fly a million miles into space to stop a piece of rock the size of Metropolis.” Lois would not be happy about this.

“You're our only hope, Superman,” the General informed him.

“I guess we're about to find out what my limits really are,” Superman said, more to himself than to the others. A part of him was not looking forward to flying back to Niagara Falls to tell his new wife that he was cutting their honeymoon short.

Saturday Night

“No!” Lois shouted, her hands on her hips.

Clark loved it when she let her fire show. And yet, he was still surprised. “Excuse me?”

“No. Absolutely not!”

He hadn't thought she could be more emphatic, but she was demonstrating once again new depths of her anger. “There's got to be another way.”

“They're the experts, honey. They've been studying this thing for months,” he explained, wrapping his arms around his new wife.

“I want a second opinion,” she said, resting her head on his shoulder, calming at his touch. “To them you're just a superhero, expendable.”

“Gee, thanks,” Clark mumbled into her hair.

“But to me, you're the man I just pledged my life to...” Lois held him tighter. “The man I love, my husband.”

Those words would never grow old to his ears.

“I just found you,” she continued. “... and they want to send you into space like some kind of all-natural, environmentally-friendly bomb.”

“If I don't go, they'll send up a nuclear missile to break it up.” He cupped her jaw in his palm, placing a kiss on her lips. “I love this planet too much to risk nuclear fallout.”

“I know,” she murmured, making the kiss deeper.

“I *can* do this,” Clark reassured her. “I'll always come back to you.”

“I know,” Lois whispered softly, but it didn't sound like it to his ears that she believed the words. He didn't know if she said them for him or to try to convince herself. “I know.”

Clark lifted her into his arms and carried her to the bed. There was an urgency behind his desire, as if he only had a limited time to make love to his wife, even though he wasn't expected back at EPRAD Control until the next morning.

“Don't forget the precautions,” Lois said, as both she nibbled his ear and dug her nails into his back.

Clark didn't want to stop, but he paused long enough to look her in the eye. “Are you sure?”

Lois focused on something deep inside him. Whenever she gazed at him like that it felt like they were communicating soul to soul. “You'll be back, Clark. We'll float again.”

Stopping was more difficult when she demonstrated so much faith in him. But he settled her back down on the bed and zipped away for the condoms.

“You're slowing down,” she teased, when he started kissing her neck again. “I almost noticed you were gone that time.”

“Saving my resources for tomorrow,” Clark said between kisses.

“No fair,” Lois murmured as they lifted into the air again. “It's my honeymoon. I'm supposed to drain all of your resources.”

“Clark,” Lois whispered against his chest.

“Hmmm,” he replied, lacing her fingers with his.

“Can we get a second opinion?” she asked again. She had

asked him before they had made love, but she doubted he had taken her seriously. Maybe now she could get him to listen.

"Nightfall will be here in less than four days, Lois. There's not much time," he replied. "This is the plan EPRAD came up with, and they're the experts."

Lois rolled over so that her chest was against his side and she could look him in the eye. "How long have you been around, Clark?"

He raised a brow. "On Earth, just over twenty-eight years."

She shook her head. "No, Superman you. How long have they known about you?"

Clark shrugged. "Couple of weeks, I guess."

"Right. A *couple* of weeks. And how long do you think they've known about this collision course with Nightfall?"

He shrugged again.

"A week? Two? A month? Six months?" Lois shot out lengths of time. "I'm guessing that they've known about this for a while now. Because there really isn't anything the general public could do, I'm betting they weren't planning on telling any of us. You know, the old 'avoid the panic' line."

"Sounds familiar," he admitted, reaching up and running a hand over her hair.

"I'm betting they were planning on nuking the thing when it got close enough and then this flying strong man showed up," she explained.

"Uh-huh," he said. "Go on."

"So, instead of working with *your* strengths and abilities, they continue with their bomb-the-hell-out-of-it plan only now using you as their quite inexpensive missile," she went on. "My bet is they are still gearing up the nuclear option in case you fail."

"Makes sense," he replied, kissing her nose. "Who knew I was marrying a genius?"

Lois's lips pressed together as she slowly raised her hand and he chuckled.

"Love you," he continued, obviously trying to make up points lost for that statement about her intelligence. "What are you suggesting?"

"What if instead of using your speed to blast it to bits, what if you used your strength to push it off its current course? Then at least, I wouldn't be sitting here wondering if my husband would be coming back in pieces," she said this last part softly.

Clark tightened his arm around her. "I will always come back to you, wife." He grinned. "Remember, magnetic?" He pointed between them with a wink. "Wherever you are, I'm probably not far behind."

Lois smiled faintly at the new twist of her old line. "Could you think about it please? Discuss it with the scientific teams you're meeting with tomorrow?"

He pulled her in for a kiss.

"I don't like the idea of you being used as a bomb, Clark," she murmured between kisses, trying to hold back the tears so he didn't know how worried she really was. "I don't really like this test of your invulnerability."

"Okay, I'll ask the experts. If you can promise me something," he asked, stroking her bare back, sending new shivers of delight coursing through her body and causing her press snugly against him.

"Mmmm," she murmured, running her fingers through his hair and pulling his face closer to hers.

"Can you stop being so irresistible so I can get some sleep? I have a big day ahead of me tomorrow," he whispered as she kissed down his throat, causing his voice to break.

"Nope. Sorry. No can do." She shrugged, cuddling closer.

"It's who I am. It's one of the drawbacks to being married to me. You're just going to have to deal."

"Well, if you insist," Clark replied, shifting her on top of him. "I'll sleep when I get back."

"It is *my* honeymoon that the big giant rock is interrupting," she said, wrapping her legs around him as they started floating above the bed.

"Yeah." Clark chuckled. "Now, it's personal!"

"Oh, that's bad." Lois giggled. "You sound like a bad promo for a TV show."

"Sorry." His chuckles turned into laughter. "Can't you just see that tagline on LNN? 'Superman vs. Nightfall: Now, it's personal.'"

"Clark," Lois groaned as she rolled her eyes. "Shhhh!"

"Shutting up," he murmured, his laughter relaxing back into chuckles.

"You always have to have the last word," she responded.

"Do not!" he retorted, flipping them over a moment before they hit the ceiling.

"Do so!"

"Do not!"

Lois stretched out her body so that she pinned him to the ceiling. "Do so!"

"Lois!" Clark moaned as his eyes flew open and stared into hers. "Lois! Oh, God, Lois!"

She grinned, shifting her body just a bit more. "Do so, Claaaaaaark!"

Sunday — Noon

Lois sat alone on the bed in their honeymoon suite, her arms wrapped around a pillow and her eyes glued to the LNN coverage at the EPRAD Center. Clark had woken her up just briefly at dawn to kiss her goodbye before he went out on his morning "jog." No, not goodbye, she corrected herself. He would be back.

He better be back.

Clark had left that early so he could have an extra hour of bathing in sunlight before heading off to the EPRAD Center in Metropolis. He hadn't been kidding when he said that the sunlight recharged his batteries.

Maybe you should have made love without precautions, just in case.

No, Clark would be back, she told her wayward thoughts.

You could be pregnant with his child now, if you had.

There was plenty of time for that, Lois reminded herself. Clark would be back and they would make love again. Their honeymoon wasn't over.

She hated that she would spend their last full day of the honeymoon alone in the hotel room. Clark had said that Nightfall was still far enough away that it would take him hours to fly to it and back. And that she shouldn't expect him back to the hotel until after dark. But that he would definitely be coming back to her, no matter what.

Lois was tempted to call the main desk and extend their stay another day or two to make up for the time lost. Perry would understand if they took a day or two extra, wouldn't he?

Oh, God! What if this is the one thing that he's vulnerable to? What if the asteroid is the one thing — out of this world thing — that could kill him? What if he didn't come back and you had to live with the guilt that you refused to make love with him without precautions, because you're scared about becoming a mother?

He was coming back! Lois wanted to scream at these thoughts. Yes, she wasn't anywhere near ready to become a mother. True. She had just gotten married. She wanted to finish her first honeymoon year before even starting to think about kids. There was still much she and Clark needed to learn about each other.

You hadn't wanted to get married either, if I recall. But you changed your mind when you found out that Clark was your soul mate... your destiny.

That was different, Lois told herself. Getting married, choosing to spend her life with Clark, was not the same as

deciding to create another being. That was not something to rush into.

Unlike marriage.

Marrying Clark was not a mistake!

It wasn't. Marrying Clark was the right thing to do. Just like having his baby is the right thing to do. It would have let him know that he's not leaving you alone... that he would still live on... should something happen to him.

If Lois had agreed to make love with him without precautions, then she would have been telling him that she didn't believe that he could do it. That she didn't believe he would make it back. Or that he could save the Earth from Nightfall. She would have broken his confidence in himself that he needed to get the job done, Lois argued with her inner voice.

But if he doesn't come back, you won't even have that little bit of solace... that little bit of Clark... to always remind you of him. To leave his mark on Earth. To carry on the house of El. You should have given him that! It would have given him peace in those last few moments of life.

Lois buried her head into her knees and cried.

If he doesn't make it, it will be your fault.

Her fault? What had she done? Besides love Clark?

Exactly. You had continued to make love to him after he asked you to let him rest. If Clark fails... if he doesn't return, it will be because you were greedy, wanting to make love to him one last time. He would have been more rested, relaxed, refreshed, and ready for the job, if it wasn't for you.

"Clark! Oh, Clark!" Tears streamed down her face. "Come back to me."

Glancing up at the television screen in front of her, Lois saw Superman walk through a crowd of reporters. She fumbled for the TV remote and turned up the sound.

"Superman has just arrived to the final staging area..." the LNN announcer Frank Madison said.

Linda King was standing just inside the ropes, waiting to talk to Superman.

How had Linda gotten inside the ropes? Why isn't she standing with the rest of the reporters?

Lois sat up with a sneer on her face. She should have gone. She should be the reporter interviewing Clark... Superman before he flew up on his mission. Her! Not Linda King! Lois was a full-time reporter now for the *Daily Planet*. She should have been there. What the in hell was she still doing in Niagara Falls?

Right, like you being there wouldn't have been a big huge distraction to Clark. Like you coming back early from your honeymoon with CLARK to interview SUPERMAN wouldn't have raised a few eyebrows, like Leo Nunk's or Randy Goode's, especially since you didn't bring your husband / reporting partner with you. Like you wouldn't have been tempted to kiss Superman before he flew off. No, it's best that you aren't there.

"How do you feel?" Linda asked Superman.

"This will work," Superman responded, his hands relaxed on his hips. Good, he didn't have his arms crossed. He wasn't anxious.

"That's a relief," Linda said with a sigh of relief. "Why are you so sure?"

"Because it has to," Superman replied, with a slight nod.

Oh, that was just like Clark. A smile came to his wife's lips. "I love you, Clark," Lois whispered, setting her hand on his face on the TV screen.

"The power of positive thinking, huh?" Linda stated more than asked.

Superman nodded again, and Lois could see the tension in his face as he asked Linda, "How are you feeling, Linda?"

Walk away from the tramp, Clark!

"Scared enough for the both of us," Linda replied, gazing deeply into Lois's husband's eyes.

What in the hell? That's your man, not hers!

"I'll be back," Superman told her with another nod. "We'll talk again then."

"I hope so," Linda said, reaching out to touch his arm. "We'll go flying."

BITCH!

"I have to go," Superman said, turning away.

About time! Well, at least he didn't promise to take her flying.

Of course he wouldn't! He loved Lois. He was her husband. Superman would never take Linda flying again. He promised.

"Good luck," Linda told him. As Superman glanced back at her to acknowledge that he had heard her, Linda grabbed his shoulders and pressed a kiss on his lips.

"What the hell!" Lois screamed, standing up on her bed, ready to throw her pillow at the TV. "Those lips don't belong to you!"

Superman moved away from Linda with a look of shock and dismay clearly visible on his face.

Good! He hadn't liked it.

He turned more sharply away from Linda this time and gave a glance over at the TV cameras. Lois placed a hand on his apologetic face, knowing he was feeling guilty for allowing that troll to kiss him.

"I know it wasn't your fault," Lois whispered, touching his TV face. "She ambushed you. I know you love me."

He looked like he wanted to say something to the camera, to her, but wisely instead turned away and walked over to the EPRAD science team.

Lois watched as the science team outfitted Superman with a communication link to ground control and some oxygen tanks. Clark had told Lois he could hold his breath for twenty minutes. Wow! Then he had admitted that when Lois kissed him that the number dwindled down to twenty seconds. Lois smiled. She had the ability to — literally — steal Superman's breath away.

"Superman, I would like to offer you our tactical nuclear option once again," the General said to him.

Lois couldn't believe that the television microphone was able to pick up this private conversation. Of course, this was LNN, Lex Luthor's news station, and it would not surprise her if they used less than honest methods.

"The EPRAD science team has given me clear indication of the asteroid's size and mass. If I hit it at maximum strength, it's their opinion that I'll be able to achieve a fifty megaton explosive force to slow it down and then move it off its current path towards Earth. I think we should try that first and not risk nuclear fallout."

Lois's heart thudded in her chest. *Her idea!* Clark had used *her idea* for solving Nightfall! Never had she loved him more than at that very moment. He had listened to her.

And if it doesn't work and Clark never returns, it will be your fault.

Superman, his red cape flowing gently in the wind, walked away from the General and the EPRAD science team to an open area. He took once last look towards Linda and the other reporters, bent his knees, and then took off into the air.

"Good luck, Clark. I know you can do it," Lois said as her husband's image disappeared from view on the TV screen.

Sunday — Late afternoon

Frank Madison's voice drew Lois's attention back to the television. "Several hours ago, Superman said his final goodbyes to the crowd. He was described as calm but determined. His last words were, and I'm quoting now, 'I'll do my best.' He took off, and this time the entire world was watching."

"Something's happening, Perry," Lois told the man on the phone.

"Thanks for the exclusive interview with Superman, Lois,"

the Chief told her. “That will be a coup for our first edition.” Then her boss cleared his throat. “You know that kiss...”

“It didn’t mean anything. I know,” Lois assured him that she didn’t need reassurance.

“I’m being told that we have a live transmission from Superman...” said Frank on LNN. “We’ll take that live feed from mission control.”

“He only...” Perry couldn’t say the words. Obviously, being at the store, he wouldn’t speak the truth they both knew about Clark and Superman.

“I know Clark loves me, Perry,” she told him, moving the telephone closer to the television, so she could see as well as hear Frank Madison.

“I can see it now. In fact, it’s hard to see anything else. It’s immense,” Superman’s voice radiated over Lois like a calming wave. He had been out in space for hours and he was still okay.

“Roger, Superman. We copy you on the ground,” said Ground Control. “Stand-by for final briefing procedure.”

“I know what I have to do,” said Superman’s voice over the television. “Well, here I go.”

Lois took hold of the pillow again, clutching it tightly against her chest.

“Impact in five, four, three, two...” announced Ground Control.

Static buzzed over the microphones.

“Switching to back-up computers for corroboration. Confirmation. Asteroid velocity is decreasing. The asteroid appears to be changing course,” continued EPRAD Ground Control. “We are stopping the countdown clock at this time.”

Lois could hear cheers over the phone line at the bookstore and in the studio at LNN.

“This is EPRAD Control. We have lost transmission with Superman.”

“Well, his microphone went out,” Lois muttered over the phone to Perry. “I... I... He’s fine.”

“I’m sure he is, darling,” Perry reassured her.

“He has to be.”

“Technical glitches like this happen all the time, Lois. Why back during the lunar landing...”

Lois didn’t say anything to Perry as she slowly hung up the phone.

Clark’s microphone went out. That was all. He was okay. He would be coming back to her. He promised.

See, you should have let him get you pregnant!

“Shut up!” Lois screamed, covering her ears.

Oh, so you can’t even allow yourself to tell you, ‘I told you so.’

“Just shut up!”

Fine! Have it your way. Deal with your loss all on your own then.

The silence of her lack of thoughts was deafening. Lois ran over to the mini-fridge and pulled out the half-gallon of chocolate brownie fudge ripple ice cream she had bought shortly after Clark left EPRAD that afternoon. She had already eaten half of it. Sitting back on the bed, she stared at the television screen, waiting for it to tell her the good news that Superman was okay.

“He’ll come back to me,” she whispered to herself between bites, as her tears mixed with her ice cream. “He’ll come back to me. He has to.”

Sunday — Late

Clark was tired; exhausted really. Slowing down and shifting the direction of an asteroid the size of Metropolis took a lot more effort than he had ever expected it to. More than he had ever used before. But he had done it! His radio had cut out shortly after he heard EPRAD Control scream out with joy. So he knew he was successful. Nightfall was no longer going to hit Earth.

And now Clark could return to Lois and finish their honeymoon. He took another sip of air from the oxygen tank. He was so tired. If only he could close his eyes and rest. Or get some sunshine. Nightfall had been on the far side of the Earth from the sun, so he had had to accomplish everything without an extra solar recharge. Even now, he was still in Earth’s shadow. He pushed himself on, knowing he could relax once he was back in the hotel with Lois. She would have to let him sleep this time, because for the first time in his life, he doubted he would be able to do anything else. Even with Lois.

He was getting closer now. Earth’s blues and greens were appearing less marble-like and more distinct. He could almost make out continents. He took another sip of oxygen. Holding his breath while he was this exhausted was more difficult and he knew he wasn’t lasting twenty minutes between breaths anymore. He blinked his eyes and then forced them open. Almost there. Almost home. A sliver of sunshine blinded him from over the top of the Earth, causing his lids to close once more.

Clark forced his eyes open to look at his home planet.

Almost home. Almost home. Almost home. His brain repeated, relaxing him with its rhythm. Just a minute. He would rest for just a minute as he was almost home. Just one minute of sleep and he would be recharged enough to finish his journey.

Sleep. Sleep. Sleep.

Monday — very, very early morning

The ringing of the telephone jarred Lois awake. She hadn’t meant to fall asleep. She had wanted to be up when Clark returned, but the hours had kept creeping by. Eventually she had turned off LNN, sick of the coverage of the celebrations that had broken out all over the globe at Superman’s successful push of the asteroid. Only Lois hadn’t felt like partying. Until Clark returned to her, she would have no reason to celebrate ever again.

She had been able to get hold of Martha and Jonathan a few hours before midnight. The circuits had all been busy until then. Clark’s parents hadn’t seen nor heard from him since he had stopped by that morning before heading over to EPRAD. He had left his change of clothes, glasses, and wedding ring with them — not wanting to risk losing them in space. They all believed he would stop there first to pick that stuff up before heading to see her in Niagara. So that phone call must be from the Kents telling her that Clark was okay and on his way.

Finally, Lois was able to untangle herself from the sheets and make it to the telephone. She picked it up and, instead of her usual ‘hello,’ Lois gasped, “Martha?”

“No, honey, it’s me,” Clark’s voice filled her with such joy. She figured it must contain helium for she felt as if she were floating.

“Clark! You made it back,” Lois gushed in her excitement. “I was so worried. Are you heading back to Niagara now?”

Her husband paused, before clearing his throat and then paused again. “Lois, I’m already in Niagara,” he finally admitted. *What?!*

“Then why are you calling?” she asked, exasperated. “Come back to the hotel and I’ll show you just how much I love and miss you.”

“I’d love to do nothing more, Lois, but...” He stopped there and after another long pause said, “I can’t.”

Can’t?

Lois’s heart lurched. “Clark? What’s wrong? Are you hurt?”

“No, honey, I’m fine. A little tired and wet but...”

“Wet?” Lois repeated.

“Yeah, well, I kind of fell in the river.”

Lois squeezed her lips together. *Kind of?*

Her heart soared as she heard him chuckle. “Okay. I crashed into the river and went over the Falls.”

Lois covered up the telephone, so Clark wouldn’t hear her

laugh. When she was able to control herself, she asked, “Clark, where are you?”

Another long pause. He was obviously embarrassed, and she felt rightfully chagrined. Of course, *he* had still heard her laugh. But it had felt so good to laugh after the day she had experienced.

“Come on, Clark. I’m sorry I laughed, but please, you just told me you went over the Falls,” she tried to explain.

“Lois, it’s not that,” Clark said softly. “I need your help.”

“What’s wrong, Clark?”

“Promise you won’t laugh?” he asked.

“No,” she replied, giggles overtaking her again.

“Lo-is, please. I don’t want to be found like this,” he pleaded over the phone.

Oh, right, he was in the blue suit and his athletic suit was in Metropolis. “You need a change of clothes?” she inquired.

“Yes! How did...? Never mind that. Yes. And a hat or glasses or something to hide my face when we come back to the hotel,” Clark said. “Thank you.”

“Where are you?” she asked again.

“Oh, God! Is that a security guard? Lois, hold on the line and be quiet...” Clark said before he disappeared. She could hear the Falls roaring the background.

Why didn’t he just tell you where he is, so you could work on getting to him instead of hanging on the line?

A minute passed, then two, before she heard Clark’s whispered voice back on the line. “Lois, do you know that cave tunnel thing that leads to the staircase by the Falls? The one where they have all the rain slickers and boots?”

“Vaguely, from the movie ‘Niagara’ with Marilyn Monroe,” she replied.

“I’ll meet you there. In the cave. You might have to break in or climb a fence or something. Do you think...?”

“I can handle it, Clark. I’ll get there as soon as I can,” she told him.

“Thank you, Lois. You don’t know how much I love you at this moment,” he replied, before hanging up.

Lois sighed with a smile. Yes, she did. She made a quick call to Clark’s parents to let them know that he had returned safely and that she would have him call them in the morning. Then she gathered up some clothes, stuffed them into her carry-on bag, grabbed her hotel key-card, and rushed out the door.

A half-hour earlier...

Clark had no idea how long he had allowed himself to sleep before the bright sunshine of morning had blinded him. All at once, he felt cold and hot and blinded by the sunlight. Hot because in sleep he had unintentionally slowed his descent through the Earth’s atmosphere. Cold, because he was too far North. He had flown completely over Santa’s winter wonderland and the sunlight was from Siberia’s afternoon sun. Superman then shifted direction and headed back over the pole to North America’s middle-of-the-night darkness.

He had never been so embarrassed in his whole life. Here, he had saved Earth from certain doom, only to have ended up flying over Canada... Clark wasn’t quite sure what had happened, but he guessed it had something to do with his slow re-entry though Earth’s atmosphere. All he knew was that he couldn’t fly into heavily populated Metropolis.

Perhaps he should have stayed in Northern Russia a little while longer and soaked up more of those healing rays, but he had retreated to the safety of the darkness of night on the Western side of Earth. If he had thought the photos of Superman and Lois on the cover of the tabloids were bad — and he had — they were nothing to his current predicament.

As it was, with exhaustion and lack of a sunlight reboot, it felt like he was flying drunk. That must have been why he had messed up his landing and had crashed into the Niagara River.

The current was so strong and moments later — POP — over the edge he went. Fortunately, with the descent — the fall from the Falls — he was able to fly to the back side of the waterfalls to regroup and plan his next move. He only hoped he hadn’t been caught on any of the cameras focused on the Falls twenty-four/seven.

He couldn’t go back to the hotel — not like this — it would create too many questions. Nor could he fly to the balcony of his hotel room. What if in his tired state, he ended up on the wrong one? What if Lois forgot to leave the balcony door unlocked for him? What if someone saw him? No, Clark decided to call Lois and have her bring him some clothes, then they could return to the hotel as husband and wife — Lois and Clark — no one the wiser.

As he leaned against the rock wall under the Falls, Clark scanned through the falling water, searching for the next place for him to move. He saw the stairs climbing up the side of the Falls. He remembered seeing a brochure at the Lexor with pictures of happy raincoat-wearing visitors being splashed by the Falls. Scanning down the stairs, he found the cave tunnel where the rain slickers were kept. It seemed like the perfect solution... well, almost like giving chocolate to an angry Lois. He grinned at his analogy. A plan formulated in his muddled mind. Cave, coat, coin, call, clothing, and cuddle.

Coat to cover his... he swallowed. Then find a coin to use in the payphone. Call Lois at the Lexor Niagara and have her bring him some Clark clothes. Then they could return to the hotel and he could finally get some shuteye while cuddling with his wife. He knew Lois wouldn’t be thrilled with his non-honeymoon related exhaustion, but she would understand. Wouldn’t she? They had the rest of their lives to make up for this missing day.

Getting to the cave and putting on the rain slicker was straightforward and easy. He even lucked out and found a quarter on the floor of the cave. Thank you x-ray night vision. Unfortunately, the payphone he found was at the mouth of the cave under a streetlamp.

Hearing Lois’s voice felt like a dose of sunshine. For a minute, he forgot his predicament and to keep an ear out for anyone who might see him. Until he heard the jingling of the security guard’s keys. Clark hid against the ceiling of the cave until the man moved on, thankful the man didn’t check upwards.

Now, Clark waited in the shadows of the rain slicker cave for Lois. He heard a soft pat-pat of footsteps and pressed himself more firmly against the wall as he gazed through the darkness at who it could be.

“Clark?” Lois whispered in the darkness.

His heart exploded with relief and he stepped away from the wall. “Lois.”

She looked so stunningly beautiful, even dressed in those sweats. It was all he could do not to rush to her and gather her up in his embrace.

“Clark!” Lois turned to face him and then squinted in the darkness. “Clark? Where...?” She swallowed and yet he saw a smile slip onto those oh-so-kissable lips. “Where is your blue suit?”

He gathered his rain slicker tighter around his barely covered hips and butt, and cleared his throat. “I think it burned up on re-entry,” he replied softly, feeling the heat of a blush rush to his cheeks.

“All of it?” she asked, moving closer. The smile on her lips grew into a grin. “Boots, cape, shorts, and all?”

Clark rolled his eyes. “Yes!” he announced, exasperated. “Do you have clothing for me?”

Lois dropped the overnight bag off her shoulder and wrapped her arms around him. “I want a kiss first.”

“Lo-is!” He just knew she would try to take advantage of his lack of clothes.

“My new husband has been gone on a dangerous mission all day, and I’ve been worried sick,” she told him, resting her head against his chest. “That’s the man I want to kiss.”

Of course! Clark felt like kicking himself for being a complete heel. “I’m sorry, Lois. It’s been a long, trying day.” He bent down at the same moment she went up onto her tippy-toes.

Her kiss sent an electric current through his body and he wondered how he didn’t kiss her the moment she had entered the cave. Her tongue danced across his lips and her mouth took hold of his bottom lip. Clark groaned and pulled her closer as his body seemed to come alive with revived energy. He opened his mouth to hers and he felt her tighten her grip on his neck, almost as if she were afraid if she let go he would disappear. His hands slid down her back, cupping her bottom and lifting her up. She hooked her ankles around behind him, moaning his name. It was almost his undoing.

Clark still couldn’t believe this woman desired him as much as he desired her.

He heard the snaps as Lois ripped open the rain slicker he wore to climb inside and then she giggled. “Happy to see me, Clark?”

Of course, he was happy to see her. He was always happy ... Oh. Clark chuckled realizing what she meant. “Maybe we should return to the hotel,” he whispered, setting her down.

A little pout of disappointment slipped onto her lips and he pulled her into another embrace. Her body once again pressed against his. His fingers went under her sweatshirt and brushed the bare skin of her tummy. Her eyes opened and focused such a look of desire on him, he stumbled backwards against the clothing cubbies in the cave. Then he laughed and she joined him.

“Maybe it would be best to wait until we got back to our room,” she admitted. “We don’t really need to be caught here.”

Clark gulped and closed the rain jacket over his naked body.

Lois smiled at him as she picked up her bag. First she pulled out her Jackie O. sunglasses and slipped them onto his face. “Your disguise.”

He laughed, realizing he had left his “disguise” in Metropolis with his athletic suit and his wedding ring.

Then Lois took out his jeans and a t-shirt and threw them to him. “Oh, crap, Clark. I didn’t bring you any briefs.”

Clark shrugged. “I’ll deal.”

“I didn’t know you had lost *all* of your clothes,” she exclaimed in her defense and stilled his hand as he went to step into his jeans. “Wear mine.”

Clark froze, his mouth hanging open. “What?”

Lois had already kicked off her shoes and was pulling off her sweatpants.

“Ah. No thank you. That’s okay, Lois,” he was somehow able to mumble, unable to tear his gaze away from his wife standing before him in just her panties and a sweatshirt.

“I don’t need them; I’m wearing sweats. But your jeans have a zipper and I’m not chancing you being out of commission for the rest of our honeymoon due to a zipper error,” she said as she slid her underwear off her body and tossed them at him. He swallowed, easily catching them.

“I’ll be fine, *really*,” he replied, holding her undies back to her.

Lois placed her hands on her hips and raised an eyebrow. “*Really*? And have you tested your invulnerability on *all* parts of your body? Personally, I’m not willing to chance it at this time. Put ‘em on.”

Clark’s head snapped up as he heard the telltale jingle of the security guard’s keys in the distance. Instinctively, he grabbed Lois and pulled her to his chest. *No, you need her closer in case you have to super speed out of view*, he told himself as he lifted her straight up, chests together, cupping his hands under her bottom, his concentration still in the distance with the security

guard’s keys.

Lois wrapped her arms around his neck and shifted her body only a hairline fraction, which was just enough to remind his body that neither of them were wearing bottoms. She gasped and stared at him with such an expression of yearning he realized that she must have been feeling something resembling the sensations that were currently taking over his body. This felt like the difference between sunlight and moonlight. Both were beautiful in their own way. *This* sensation, this feeling of Lois and him joined as one, felt like blinding sunlight.

“Oh, that’s new,” Lois finally whispered, a slight catch in her voice. Could she feel his aura envelop her in its protective shield? She covered his mouth with hers. It was as if she had started a motor he hadn’t known existed inside of him.

A small part of him tried to voice a warning to her about the approaching security guard, but the only sound he could utter was a deep rumbling moan.

Lois gasped his name, “Clark.”

That sound was his undoing as his feet left the ground from the pleasure of their love-making.

Her hot jagged, breath whispered into his ear as they finished, “I love you.”

Clark still couldn’t speak until he heard the jingle of the security guard’s keys echo off the walls of the cave. “Lois,” he murmured softly in a panicked voice, returning them to the floor and pressing them into the shadows.

“I heard it too,” she whispered quieter than he had.

“Sssshhh!” Clark hissed.

“Well, well, well. What do we have here?” said a deep voice before a bright light engulfed them.

They were caught. Escape now would just give away his secret identity and Superman’s intimate relationship with Lois. He continued to hold his wife tightly to his chest, knowing his hands covered her bottom better than wrapping his borrowed rain jacket around her would.

Clark could just picture the next headline on the *National Inquisitor*: “Superman and Lois Lane Arrested in Trespassing Sex Tryst at Niagara Falls.” He gulped, thankful that at least he was still wearing Lois’s ridiculous sunglasses to shield his eyes.

Lois’s soft voice whispered in his ear, not wishing to reveal her well-known face to the guard, “Repeat after me.”

He nodded slightly in agreement. Between his long day, exhaustion from pushing an asteroid the size of Metropolis off its path, his plunge off the Falls, and his current passionate embrace with his wife, Clark’s mind was a complete blank.

“Just a couple of honeymooners celebrating...” she whispered.

Clark said the words out loud to the security guard.

“... having a future now that Superman has saved us from the Nightfall asteroid,” Lois continued into his ear.

He finished the statement, glancing at the portly guard through the bright glaring light.

First, the guard raised a brow at this statement. Then a smile tugged at his scowl. “Well, I’ll make an exception this time due to... um, circumstances. I’ll be passing by here again in twenty minutes. Make sure you and the Mrs. are gone by then. And no going out on the Falls Walk.”

Clark exhaled in relief. “Thank you.”

Then he watched as the security guard walked back the way he came. At the mouth of the cave, the man threw the beam of light back at them. “And leave the rain slicker here when you leave.”

“Yes, sir,” Clark called with a nod. He watched and waited until the sound of the man’s jingling keys had faded under the roar of the Falls.

Without another word, Lois started kissing Clark’s neck once more. When she reached his ear, her hot breath tickled him as she

began sucking on his earlobe.

“Lois, we really should be heading back to the hotel now,” Clark reminded her, his voice husky with desire.

“Uh-huh,” she murmured.

“Lo-is!” his voice cracked.

“You heard the man, we have twenty minutes,” she said, pressing a kiss onto his lips. “Let’s make the most of it.”

“I need to rest,” Clark moaned, as he felt her restarting that uncontrollable passion machine inside him.

“Your body says you’re lying,” she informed him.

Clark’s eyes rolled back in his head as his knees weakened, and he stumbled to the benches along the wall and sat down.

“Clark!” Lois slid to the floor.

The sudden coolness of the cave without his wife’s body heat caused him to shiver. It was almost as if she had taken his aura with her when she stepped away.

“Clark!” Lois gasped again, kneeling before him and running her hand over his hair. “Are you all right?”

He glanced into her eyes before covering her mouth with his. He pulled her to his lap once more, needing her body heat. Clark looked at her long enough to ask her permission with his eyes. A smile graced her lips.

“I’m sorry.”

Lois hugged him. “I’m not.”

“I shouldn’t have made love with you without precautions,” he explained, brushing a lock of her hair off her face.

“It was worth the risk, knowing that you’re safe home with me again,” she said, lifting up the sunglasses so she could look into his eyes. “We’ll think about the consequences later, if there are any. There’s nothing we can do about it now. What’s done is done.”

“I don’t like how I lost control.” He kissed her gently. “Did I hurt you?”

“Do I look like I’m hurting?” Lois asked and then chuckled. “Clark, you have no idea how fantastic a lover you are, do you?”

Clark made a gurgling noise in response.

“Maybe it was I who hurt you,” Lois whispered, running her fingers over his shoulders, pushing off the rain slicker. “Are you all right? I’ve never seen you so…”

He smiled sheepishly. “Well, I *did* have an exhausting day.”

Lois took hold of his face with both of her hands and placed a tender kiss on his lips. “Shall we return…?”

Clark interrupted, deepening the kiss, tugging on her bottom lip, and running his tongue over her teeth. They should go. They shouldn’t remain out in the open, where they could be caught again. But he didn’t have the willpower to resist Lois at this moment. He wanted her. He wanted to feel the sunshine she radiated. He wanted to hear her moan in pleasure again, if he could.

“I was invulnerable until I met you,” he whispered as his hands slipped under her sweatshirt. “But now, I know what heaven feels like.”

“Are you sure you want to head back to…?” Lois couldn’t finish that thought as he took off her sweatshirt, so that she was completely naked in his arms.

For a while, there were no sounds except their muted moans from their love-making and the roar of the Falls.

Finally, Clark collapsed onto the benches again, holding her tightly to him, happy in the knowledge that he made her create that delightful wow-moan three times more. He could survive on that sound alone.

“I love you, Lois,” he whispered, kissing her cheek.

“You may love me like that anytime you want,” she said, resting her head on his shoulder. “But now, I need to sleep.”

“Not yet, Honey. We still need to get dressed and go back to our room,” he reminded her.

“Carry me?” she asked dreamily.

“Lo-is.” He would be lucky if his legs still worked to walk himself back to the Lexor.

“Give me a moment then,” she renegotiated with a sigh of contentment.

Lois and Clark strolled hand in hand back to the Lexor Niagara from the Falls. It was a beautiful night, and neither of them was in a rush. It was late enough that any celebrations from Superman’s rescue of Earth from the Nightfall asteroid had died down to sporadic enclaves here and there. Clark still wore Lois’s Jackie O. sunglasses and now donned her baseball hat as well. (And her panties — backwards for more coverage — not that he would admit *that* ever to another living or dead soul!)

The stars seemed extra twinkly, and Clark was married to the most wonderful and kinky woman in the universe. He didn’t mind that he walked barefoot — Lois had forgotten to grab him a pair of shoes as well as a pair of briefs — or that he had almost been arrested for trespassing. He still counted this as one of the best nights of his life. He had just guaranteed that not only would there be a tomorrow, but also a next week, a next month, and a next year.

He was debating whether or not it equaled or beat the night that included both Lois kissing him for the first real time and his very first official Superman rescue. This day equaled that previous day in pure joy factor alone. He grinned. Tonight he had made love to his wife twice and in a public place. Nothing could ever beat that.

Clark stopped and pulled her in for another kiss. It was just a soft, tender, and short kiss. Despite the temptation to deepen it, he really was ready to return to their room and sleep.

“I love you,” he whispered.

Lois smiled. “So you told me. One block ago. And two blocks before that,” she teased.

Clark liked it when she teased him. He liked everything about this woman. He especially liked that she had suggested that they get married this weekend.

“Did I mention that I love that I’m married to a genius?” he asked, wrapping an arm around her shoulder.

She winked at him. “Me too.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “A humble genius,” he mumbled under his breath sarcastically; not softly enough for Lois to forgo an elbow to his ribs before she wrapped her arm around his waist. He kissed the top of her head as an apology.

Finally, they returned to the Lexor. Clark wanted nothing more than to rush through the lobby to the elevators. The fewer people who saw them out and about, the better.

Lois kissed him just inside the doors and slipped the key-card to their room into his hand. “Go on up. I’ll meet you there.”

He was curious, but too tired to question her at the moment. He gladly moved on to the elevators.

“My husband and I would like to stay for another day or two,” Lois told the man at the front desk. There was no way they would be up on time to catch their mid-afternoon flight the next day — or more accurately, later today. Plus they had a whole day of honeymooning to make up for.

Didn’t you make up for it tonight? asked her inner voice, which had been unusually quiet since the cave.

“Probably for the best, Mrs. Kent,” said the man behind the desk. “The FAA only allowed westbound flights to depart today and no arrivals except from the east in anticipation of Nightfall. You know, get as many people off the coasts as possible. The airport is going to be a mess tomorrow trying to straighten out all those missing flights. And your return flight to Metropolis was probably canceled. I recommend calling the airline first thing in the morning to rebook. We had a bunch of cancellations here at the hotel, since all non-essential travel was canceled as of last

night, so it wouldn't be any trouble to have you and Mr. Kent stay as long as you like."

Lois hadn't thought of the snafus that Nightfall must have caused the travel industry. It almost sounded like a good article for the *Daily Planet*. "I might need to get in touch with the office, if we're stuck here. Where's a good place to get online?"

Perry's letter had included all his new contact information at the new Daily Planet offices, including fax number and e-mail address.

"We have a business center on the second floor, next to the gym. There is a computer there with Internet. It's only thirty dollars an hour."

Ouch!

Maybe Lois would file any stories she and Clark wrote via the telephone instead. She glanced at the bespectacled man again, about to thank him and return to her room, when she focused on that one little detail. "Glasses!" she said, staring at him.

"Excuse me?" the front desk clerk said, confused.

"My husband lost his glasses today while at the Falls. Where would be the best place locally to get him a quick replacement pair?" She couldn't have Clark going around in her Jackie O. sunglasses for too long.

"Oh, Mrs. Kent. I'm so sorry," apologized the clerk, pulling out a phonebook. Quickly, he jotted down a several business names. "I'd check these places first."

Lois smiled at him, sticking the note into her bag. Her stomach grumbled with hunger. Luckily, she had saved the two sandwiches she had ordered from room service for her husband's lunch and dinner in the mini-fridge. She hadn't wanted anyone to guess her husband had been AWOL from their honeymoon during the same time Superman was in space in case the tabloid industry had followed them to Niagara Falls.

Her stomach rumbled a second time in the elevator as she went back up to their room. Had she really burned off all the calories in that half-gallon of ice cream during tonight's love fest with Clark?

Or maybe your metabolism is changing because you're pregnant with Clark's child.

Lois blanched and placed a steadying hand against the wall of the elevator. That was ridiculous. She and Clark had only made love once without precautions.

Twice.

It had only been an hour ago! Lois wanted to scream at her wayward mind. There was no way she would be having any signs or symptoms of pregnancy yet.

Right. Because pregnancies between Earthlings and Kryptonians are well documented and commonplace.

No! No! No! Lois grabbed her head as the elevator dinged, causing her to flatten herself against the side of the box in surprise. What in the hell had she been thinking?

You weren't thinking. You were just feeling. And let me tell you, he sure felt darn-well-tooting good!

Lois stumbled out of the elevator and into the hall, leading to her room. That Clark did feel darn-well-tootin' good, Lois had to concur. Clark was simply the best lover in the history of men.

Yeah. Like your three — or was it four? — previous bouts with men would make you a fair judge in this contest. NOT! You want a good judge, you'd have to lend your husband to someone like Cat Grant, who's been around a man or two — or thirty-seven — in her life... Or possibly, just this year alone.

Not ever happening, Lois growled at herself.

Okay! Okay! Her inner voice backed off defensively. *Just a joke.*

Lois found her room and raised her hand to knock.

Are you going to tell Clark you think you might be pregnant?

Absolutely not! He would think she was nuts thinking such thoughts so soon. What was she thinking? Of course, she was

nuts thinking these thoughts so soon after their unprotected love fest. No, she would not be mentioning these crazy thoughts to Clark.

Clark opened the door before she had gotten around to knocking. "Everything okay?" he asked. "Your heart is racing."

"Fine," she replied a tad too sharply. Then she covered it with the desk clerk's information about the airports being a mess.

Clark seemed to buy this excuse full of malarkey for her elevated heart rate. He pulled her into a hug. "I'm sorry, Lois. I know today couldn't have been easy for you."

How had he known?

Lois had only been five minutes behind him, but in that time he had taken a shower, changed into his sexy sleep shorts and straightened up the room, since Lois hadn't let housekeeping in to clean.

Gone were the dregs of her half-gallon of ice cream and the remnants of the box of tissues she had left scattered around the room. Oh, she hadn't meant for him to see that.

Lois decided not to put up a false front this time as she returned Clark's hug. "I was worried about you."

"I'm okay. I'll always be okay," he reassured her, running his hand over her hair. "One of the great things about me. You never have to worry."

She held him tighter. "Sorry, Clark, but you see that's in my job description as your wife. To have and to hold, love, cherish, and worry. I'm sure I'll get used to the small stuff, eventually, but the big stuff — like today — I'll always worry about. You wouldn't want me to think you were invincible or something, would you?"

Clark kissed her cheek. "No, I guess not."

"I'm starving," Lois announced, stepping out of his embrace. "How about you?"

He shrugged. "Strangely enough, I'm okay. I could eat or not. You'd think I'd be starving after the day I had. I don't think I've eaten all day."

She went to the mini-fridge and pulled out two sandwiches. "I've got your lunch and dinner here."

"Wow!" he said, impressed, and followed her to the table where the strawberries had been when Mr. and Mrs. Kent had arrived into the honeymoon suite.

"And you thought I couldn't cook." She winked at him. "I had to keep up the appearance that you were still here, in case the tabloids tracked us to Niagara," she explained.

"I'm sorry. You shouldn't have to lie for me," he said, sitting down next to her.

Lois shook her head. "What? You *want* me to call Leo Nunk and announce to him that you're Superman and I'm your wife? Ain't happening. I'm not lying for you. I'm protecting you... us."

Clark covered her hand with his. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"Clark! Stop apologizing, please," she demanded.

"I'm..." He grinned and took a bite of a sandwich to keep the word from escaping.

They ate in silence for a few minutes before Clark reached over and took her hand again. "Lois, there is one thing I do need to apologize for."

She raised a brow and waited.

"That kiss with Linda..."

Lois waved off his concern. "Think nothing of it. She ambushed you. I know it wasn't your choice," she said, squeezing his hand. "I know you love me, Clark." A naughty grin slipped onto her face. "You've proved that tonight, twofold."

Hey, great opening to tell him you think you're pregnant.

Clark blushed slightly and swallowed his bite of sandwich. He leaned over and rested his head against hers. "Lois, making love to you is the most amazing feeling. When we're together, I feel whole."

"When we are together, I am whole," she amended.

“But I’m never wearing your panties again,” he informed her with a very serious expression. “Never.”

Lois grinned and slipped into his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck. “Never is an awful long time, Cowboy. And you looked so cute in...”

“Never, Lois,” Clark repeated, his lips pressed together. “I mean never as in forever never.”

She licked her lips. “Didn’t the material feel nice against your skin?”

“Lo-is.” He laughed, rolling his eyes and lightly kissing her smirk. “I plead the Fifth.”

Lois giggled, standing up. “I’m going to hit the showers.” She ran her fingers over his bare chest. “Do you want to join me or...?”

Clark cleared his throat, gazing up at her. “Lois, it’s been a very long day. Would you mind terribly if I just went to sleep?”

She placed a smile on her lips. “I understand,” she replied casually.

Yeah, right.

He was at her side a moment later, kissing her. “I’ll make it up to you tomorrow. Promise.”

“Okay,” she said, kissing him again. “Of course you’re tired.” She ran her fingers through his hair. “I just thought you’d like to know that I’d be wet and naked in the next room, hot water dripping down my body. You know, in case you were wondering where I was or anything.” She walked away slowly and started dropping her clothing onto the floor as she went. She started with her shoes. Next came down her sweatpants with nothing underneath. Then finally her sweatshirt.

“Oh, woman! You are going to be the death of me,” Clark groaned, picking her up into his arms and pressing a deep kiss onto her mouth. “Tell you what. You take your shower and I’ll wait for you in bed.”

Lois bit her bottom lip. “Deal.”

Think he’s going to make it?

She wiggled her hips as she walked into the bathroom and left the door open. Not a chance.

Not if you have anything to do with it.

Bingo! Lois turned on the hot water and stepped inside. She closed her eyes and let the water cascade over her flesh like a lover’s hands. “Mmmm.” She turned and leaned her arms and head against the cool tiled wall of the shower, letting the hot jets massage down her back. “Aaahhh.” Her eyes started to close. It had been a long day. Maybe she was more tired than she thought. Perhaps it would be better if Clark were asleep when she got to bed. “Mmmm.”

Suddenly she felt a man in the shower with her, his hands and lips kissing down her spine.

Or not.

Monday morning

Since Clark had been awake almost twenty-four hours the previous day, Lois didn’t wake him when she got out of bed at nine the next morning. By ten she had ordered room service breakfast, taken a lonely shower, gotten dressed (in lingerie and a robe in case Clark woke up), and opened the curtains to flood the room with brilliant recharging sunlight.

Lois watched the sun’s rays dance along her husband’s back. Clark lay naked on his stomach across the entire bed, save the comforter that Lois eventually had pulled up from his hips and draped over the rest of him, so she wouldn’t be so tempted to wake him up. His hair was disheveled and he looked entirely too delicious.

She was on the phone with Perry when the food arrived, explaining the plane situation with her boss and why she and Clark would not make it into the Daily Planet offices the next day.

The waiter who pushed the cart of breakfast into the room, glanced over at the bed where her husband was still sprawled — and whose face was thankfully turned away — and gave her a knowing look as Lois signed the check.

“Exhausted, huh?” the waiter commented with a nod towards Clark.

Lois smiled innocently. “He had a busy day yesterday,” she explained, shooing the man out and shutting the door.

“Who was that? Clark?” Perry asked over the telephone with a chuckle.

“Room service,” Lois corrected, pouring herself a coffee.

“Clark’s still asleep.”

“Still?” Perry teased.

“You push an asteroid the size of Metropolis off-course and see if you make it into the office the next day,” Lois snapped.

“Right. I guess I can allow the two of you an extra day or two due to the circumstances,” her boss amended.

“It will take them a day or two just to iron out the whole airport mess here in the Northeast. I was on the phone with the airline before I called you. The earliest flight I could get...”

“Is when your husband wakes up?” Perry inquired.

“Wednesday.” Lois pressed her lips together. “Do I need to remind you that I’m married to *Clark*? And Clark does not fly.” She took a sip of her coffee. “Anyway, the suit burned up...” She coughed at her mistake. “... was damaged on re-entry, so no flying until we get back to Metropolis and can get it replaced.”

The Chief cleared his throat. “Really? Was he flying...?”

“No comment,” Lois replied, wishing she hadn’t brought up the subject.

“Let’s hope there aren’t photos of that popping up anytime soon.” He chuckled.

“Let’s hope,” Lois agreed, picturing her naked husband flying through the air. She turned and stared at him again, biting her bottom lip.

Entirely too delicious.

“You want me to write up the story about the airport situation...” Lois said, shifting her gaze elsewhere.

“Honeymoon over already, honey?” Perry teased again.

“Honeymoon’s on hiatus while hubby’s asleep. I could make some phone calls from here. Of course, it’s thirty dollars an hour to use the hotel computer...”

“I’m not expensing your honeymoon, Lois,” Perry told her. “If you have a story, call Doris in copy to type it up for you.”

“Gotcha,” Lois replied. She didn’t want to pay that hotel fee either.

“Do you think Clark will be able to get official confirmation about Superman’s return today?” he asked her. “Should I leave space on the front page?”

“Do you want a story without photos?” she asked. “No suit, remember.”

“Right. Does he have any replacement suits in Metropolis?” Perry inquired.

Lois had no idea and told Perry as much. “I’ll let you know when we can get the interview, okay?”

“Okay. Lois, honey, got to go. Ralph’s beating down my door with some mayoral call-girl hooley. We’re keeping some desks open for you,” Perry said before hanging up.

Lois finished her coffee and a sweet roll as she continued to watch her husband sleep. Laying there on the bed he looked so innocent, so charming, so... Clark. He made sleep look good. She stood up and dropped her robe and slid into bed, next to him, snuggling her face next to his. She definitely could get used to this.

Monday Afternoon

The phone rang once, twice, three times. Clark turned his head and, there, in front of his face laid the most sweet-smelling

pile of hair. Was that lavender?

The phone continued to ring a fourth, fifth, and sixth time. He didn't want to move. He snuggled against her hair. "Mmmm." Lavender and Lois. Soon to be his two favorite scents.

Bright sunlight shimmered on Lois's hair, making it shine in the light. "Mmmm." He continued to bury his head in her warm hair. Sunlight and Lois, the two things in the world that gave him energy, gave him the power to do anything.

The phone finally stopped ringing. Who would be calling them on their honeymoon? he wondered, glancing at the clock. 1:37pm. Really? Had he slept that long? Of course, his resources had been low *before* the third and fourth times he had made love to his wife the night before.

"Mmmmm." Love. Lois. Wife. Possibly his favorite words in the English language.

Had Lois slept all this time as well? Clark saw the remnants of the breakfast tray and knew she had not. He still wasn't hungry... although the other day when they had fed each other chocolate dipped strawberries while in bed... He had never tasted a better combination: strawberries, chocolate, and Lois.

The third time had been the shower. Oh, my! Lois wet and naked. Definitely the favorite tactile experience of his life so far. Just contemplating making love to his wife made Clark's juices simmer. If he kept thinking like this he would be going crazy with desire in no time. His hand caressed her leg and slowly moved up her body as he remembered touching her in the shower. Her body shifted under his hand and quickly that "no time" boundary line had been passed.

He kissed her shoulder and she made a soft meowing sigh. He was reminded of the sound that she had made in the cave the night before. He hadn't been joking when he had thought to himself that he could survive on that sound alone. Just thinking of that sound made it difficult to continue lying on his stomach.

Clark moved closer to his wife and kissed her shoulder again, noticing the strap of a black teddy he hadn't seen before. She turned her head towards him, still half asleep, and smiled at him. That was one of his favorite smiles. The one where she looked at him like she was still dreaming. He returned her smile. *There!* That was his most favorite smile, when her dreaming smile grew larger as she realized he was real and she wasn't asleep.

"G'morning," she murmured, scooting towards him. "Was that the phone?"

"Mmmm," he replied with a kiss to her lips. She tasted faintly like coffee.

Her thigh brushed against him. Skin to skin. He realized he had never gotten into his PJs after they had made love after the shower. Third time had been in the shower. Fourth time last night — this morning — had been *after* the shower when they had finally reached the bed. How had he had the energy to make love to Lois so many times when he could hardly fly straight, returning from space? Of course, truth be told, she had tackled him in the bed and had done all the hard work.

"How are you feeling?" Clark asked. After all their lovemaking, surely "sore" would be her answer.

"Mmmm," she murmured. She slid her leg over him and pulled him closer. "Better."

Clark opened his mouth to speak but couldn't. Finally, after pushing out a guttural, animal sound that brought another smile to his wife's face, he was able to say, "I love you." It sounded rough and hoarse as if he were parched for a drink.

Lois's fingers danced across his chest. "I love you *more*."

His nerve endings sang in joy. He could play that game. Clark kissed down her neck. "No, I love you *more*."

Her arms went around his neck as she pressed her chest against his, murmuring, "I love you *more*." Her voice shook with the words.

His eyes rolled back in his head, as he was unable to contain

the desire she was creating in him. "I love *you* more," he corrected her, running his fingers playfully down her side and "accidentally" caressing the side of her breast as he did so.

Lois whimpered in approval. "You win."

Clark ran a hand over her head, kissing that luxurious hair. "I sure do."

She softly kissed him. "I could get used to this."

Clark doubted he could. Every time she touched him he had a rush of excitement. He could never picture this feeling becoming old. "But maybe we should stop tempting the Fates," Clark suggested. "If I get you pregnant on our honeymoon, I'll never hear the end of it from your father, especially after he sent us all those condoms."

She laughed again and Clark saw beautiful spots of color dancing around the room.

"It's bad enough that you married an alien..."

"Clark, don't," she whispered, kissing him and pressing herself closer.

His voice cracked. "*Me?* Don't?"

"Stop calling yourself an alien. It's such an ugly term. And you are anything but ugly." She took hold of his bottom lip and gently nibbled.

"But... I... Am... Oh, Lois!" he groaned, placing his hands on her waist.

She smiled. "Do you like that?"

"Minx," he gasped.

"Relax and let me do all the work. You're tired," she teased in a whisper as she rolled on top of him.

"*Relax?*" Clark stammered, trying to let her be in control. "Impossible."

"*More?*" Lois inquired, gazing down at him from her position of power.

"Yes!" He was her prisoner. If she kept torturing him like this, he would promise her the moon. And deliver it with a big red bow.

Afterwards, she collapsed on top of him, both of them sated. Clark held Lois to his chest and reveled in this feeling, in the joy of them floating together. He laid them back down on the bed. "I love you, Lois," he whispered, when he found his voice again.

"And I love you, Clark," she repeated, snuggling against his chest, her voice soft. He listened as her heartbeat slowed and her breath became regular. She fell asleep and he continued to hold her, his own eyelids drooping.

Monday — Evening

The room was dark when Lois finally opened her eyes again. She could see the faint touches of the pink and orange to the sky, hinting that they had just missed the sunset.

Clark is way too addicting. Mama Lois.

Lois cringed. It wasn't like her to not to think of the consequences of her actions. What had she been thinking? To make love to Clark *again* without protection while he was in the process of warning her that they were walking the danger line? She placed her hand on her stomach. What if they had already made a baby with their enthusiasm?

Yippee!

A smile slipped onto Lois's lips. She wasn't ready to be a mother, she knew that, but she liked the idea that she and Clark could create something from their love. She sighed. But he was right. They needed to go back to using condoms. She didn't know if she could handle a baby in the same year she moved to her dream city, found her dream husband, and landed her dream job. Too much dreaming and a nightmare was sure to come along and disturb everything.

"You really should come with a warning label," Clark murmured, kissing down her neck.

Isn't that what Cat said of Claude?

Lois stiffened. “That’s not funny, Clark.”
 “I just meant that Superman is invulnerable to everything but you,” he clarified. “You make me vulnerable.”

Suddenly, Lois saw herself holding a dead and bloody Superman with a torn blue suit and a tattered red cape. She pushed away from Clark; all the way away. “So, what you are saying is that making love to me is deadly?” she said sharply, her voice cold. “Even to Superman?”

“Of course not.” He stared at her.
 “Right,” Lois snapped. She was off the bed now, pacing. “Why do you think Linda calls me the Ice Queen?”

“Cause she’s a bitch?”
 Lois pressed her lips together. “You kill one man and suddenly...” Then her hands clenched and her eyes shut, holding the tears at bay. “A man would have to be invulnerable to survive.”

She heard Clark gasp as she turned her back on him. “No!” Her tears came unbidden. She could still picture the cold, dead body of the young man to whom she had first given herself, when she had found him in the forest the morning after the second time they had made love.

“You didn’t kill Pete, Lois. The snake that bit him did.” Clark crawled across the bed and folded her into his embrace. “And you’re so hot you’re the Enchantress of Fire.”

Oooh, I like that nickname. Much better than Ice Queen.
 “Really?” she whispered, turning her head into his bare chest. Did he really believe that about her?

“Steamy hot,” he replied. “I’m not going anywhere.”
 “Ever?” She held onto him tightly. “You’ll never leave me.”
 “Never,” he promised, kissing her forehead. “That’s what I meant earlier, Lois. I love you so much that being without you would kill me. You’ve become a part of me. I don’t know how I’ve survived my life until now without you.”

“Okay,” she said. He always knew what to say to change her mood.

Sometimes for the better, but usually for the worst.
 “You can shut up now,” she recommended.
You mean while he’s ahead?
 “Nope,” he argued. “I’ll never stop telling you I love you.”
Well, okay, if he insists.

What had Lois done that was so wonderful to entitle her to this man? “I don’t deserve you.”

“And yet you’ll never get rid of me.” He chuckled, tilting up her chin and placing a gentle kiss on her lips.

Sounds good to me.
 Her hands covered his bare butt and squeezed.
Man of Steel, my...
 “Lo-is.”

“Clar-k,” she teased him now.
 “Why don’t we get dressed and I take you out to an actual restaurant?” Clark suggested.

“A date? You mean a real date?” Lois asked, her eyelashes batting as she gazed at her husband. “Like where I take out my best perfume, the one I bought after seeing *Love Affair*, the good one not the remake, and put a dab behind my knee, even though I have no idea why?”

He smiled, kissing her again. “Yeah, just like that. I owe you one.”

How many official dates did you two actually go on before you got married?

Lois raised an eyebrow. “One?”
None?

Clark swallowed as his cheeks turning slightly pink. “Okay. I owe you more than one.”

“No can do,” she told him. “We’re not leaving this room.”

He cleared his throat. “Lois, when you told me that you wanted to make love to me for days, did you really mean —

literally — ‘days’? Don’t you want to go out?”

Lois bit her bottom lip, demurely. “Do you?” she challenged. “Ahh...” he stammered, weakening.

“We can’t go out because you left your glasses in Metropolis, silly,” she reminded him with a wink before he believed she was a sex addict.

Ah, Lois... said her inner voice, raising her hand.

“Aw, shucks,” Clark said, lifting her into his arms and pressing another Earth-shattering kiss on her lips. “Have I mentioned how much I like your new teddy?”

Not in so many words. But sometimes words get in the way of actions. Why doesn’t he just show you how much he likes the teddy?

Lois smiled her gratitude at his compliment. “We could order up some pasta. Or would you like a bath first?”

Clark gulped, glancing over at the sunken tub built for two. “Pasta or wet Lois? Pasta or wet Lois?” he debated quietly to himself. “Maybe we should start with pasta and end with...” He cleared his throat. “... the bath.”

“Why don’t you set me down, so I can freshen up while you call room service?” Lois asked as she ran a finger down his bare chest.

He set her down, but didn’t let go of her as he cleared his throat again.

“Call room service, Clark,” she said with a chuckle, knowing exactly where his thoughts were heading as his gaze trailed down to her chest.

“Right. Food,” he said, turning quickly away from her.

“Also, you might want to either cover up or shut the curtains,” Lois reminded him.

A moment later the curtains were drawn and Clark was back to walking to the phone with his sleep shorts on.

“Hey, we have a message,” he told her.

“That phone call we didn’t take earlier,” she called from the bathroom. When she returned a few minutes later, she could hear him on the telephone.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call earlier, Mom, I just got...” He sighed, shooting his wife a weak smile.

“I called them last night and told them you were fine,” Lois interjected.

“Mom!” Clark blushed and turned away from Lois, lowering his voice. “No, we haven’t been working on making you a grandmother.”

Liar! Liar! Pants on fire!

Lois wrapped her arms around Clark’s waist. “Get off the phone and come back to bed, stud,” she moaned.

“Lois!” Clark hissed, turning bright red. “My mom!”

He’s a knucklehead if he doesn’t realize you know that! Why does he think you said it?

Lois grinned. “You’ll be the first to know after Clark, Martha, I promise,” she called over his shoulder and into the phone. She spanked Clark’s butt and sat back down on the bed.

“Mom, I’d rather not ... Hi, Dad. Yes, we’re... Well, most of... Dad, do I really need to discuss *this* with you two? Right now?” Clark stammered. Lois watched as his ears became redder.

“Don’t forget to remind your mother about the blue suit?”

“Right. My blue suit burned up on re-entry, could you ask...? Hi, Mom. Yeah, nothing left. I need another... Ah, yeah.

Completely gone.” He gulped as his face became more tinged in pink. “That’s why I didn’t come back to Metropolis...” he explained. “You have? Thanks, Mom. You’re a lifesaver... ha-ha, very funny. Been hanging out with Perry and his corny Superman jokes, have you?”

He glanced over at Lois and rolled his eyes. But the action was more sarcastic than annoyed. Clark truly loved his parents.

“We’ll see you in a couple of days...” Clark looked at Lois again.

“Wednesday,” she informed him.

“Our new flight is on Wednesday... Right, I know... No, I don’t know what to do about that. We’ll figure something out... I’ll call you if anything changes.”

Does he mean like if you suddenly have a round belly full of baby by tomorrow?

Lois put a hand over her stomach and took a deep breath. Clark said he had aged naturally. If she got pregnant there is no reason to think that she would have a pregnant belly by the next day.

Paranoid much, there, Lois?

“Gee, I wonder why?” Lois retorted to her wayward thoughts. *Soorrrr-rry!*

“I love you guys and I didn’t mean to worry you,” Clark said into the phone. “See you Wednesday.” Then he hung up. “Come back to bed, stud’? Really, Lois, did you have to?”

Of course!

Lois bit her bottom lip and shot him a come-hither expression.

“Pasta! I need to order dinner,” he reminded himself, returning to the phone.

Didn’t Clark say that pasta turns him on?

She grinned at his obvious discomfort, licking her lips when he turned back to glance at her for a second. “Do you really *need* pasta, Clark?”

“No, Lois, I don’t. But you sure get cranky and paranoid when you haven’t eaten,” he teased.

He better be joking!

Lois picked up a pillow and threw it at him.

Tuesday — Mid-day

Lois leaned forward and kissed Clark, whispering, “I thought she’d never leave. Did you check to see if they have video surveillance?”

Clark nodded. He had angled himself just right so neither his face nor his reflection would be seen on the camera.

“Slowly now,” she warned him. “I’ll keep lookout.”

He laughed. “You’d think we were doing something scandalous or clandestine or illegal here,” he said, taking off those hideous Jackie O. sunglasses and putting on a pair like the ones he had left in Metropolis.

“No! Absolutely not.” Lois shook her head. “I married you, not those glasses. Try these.” She handed him a pair with silver rims, a much more modern look.

Clark removed the black frames and slipped on the new metal-framed ones. “How do I look?” he asked, glancing into the mirror.

Superman in glasses gazed back. Just as Clark was about to tear the ineffectual disguise from his face his wife answered, “Hot.”

Clark took another glance in the mirror. “Really?” Hot wasn’t a term he had ever associated with him or his glasses.

Lois snaked her arms over his shoulders from behind and kissed his cheek. “Uh-huh.”

He lowered his voice. “You don’t think I look too much like Kal?”

She exhaled. “Have I ever mentioned how sexy I think Kal is? Those deep brown eyes can turn a woman to mush.”

No. No, she hadn’t mentioned *that*.

Then Lois looked at him in the mirror. “But you’re right. These disappear on your face, making them pointless. How about these?” she said, handing him another pair with a slight tortoiseshell pattern.

Lois shook her head and handed him another pair with blue frames. “Ugh. No!” She gave him another and another and another. Finally, she stopped at a simple pair of metal frames with a brown tortoiseshell top.

Clark wasn’t sure he liked this look. He did like it better than the black plastic 1960’s Buddy Holly type frames and these certainly didn’t make him look like Superman. “They make me look a bit nerdy,” he told her, unconvinced.

Lois reached over his shoulders and kissed his lips. “So.”

“So?” Clark echoed in surprise.

“You’re talking to a member of the Math Club and the former Chess Club President of Smallville High,” she breathed into his ear. “I’m not turned off by ‘nerdy,’ Clark.”

He turned a perplexed expression her direction, but her words seemed genuine. Huh? Really?

“So if I let out my inner geek...?” he teased.

“Trying to scare me off, Kent? It won’t work.” She raised a brow and bit her bottom lip in the way that she did, which he could always feel deep in his gut... low down in his gut.

“No?”

Lois winked at him. “You show me your inner geek and I’ll show you mine,” she challenged.

Clark flashed back to Lois standing outside the church in her wedding gown. It did remind him of a sleeveless version of that white dress Princess Leia had worn at the end of *Star Wars*, during the medal ceremony. He had had many an eleven-year old fantasy about Princess Leia, the year *Star Wars* had been released. At first, he pretended *he* had been the one to rescue her from the Death Star. By twelve-years old, Jedi Clark not only rescued the Princess, he also received a kiss. And at thirteen... well... Clark smiled. By then he and Princess Leia had become old friends.

He may have dated his share of blondes, but there was always something more exciting about a spunky brunette. Suddenly an image of Lois in a gold *Revenge of the Jedi* bikini shot through his mind, then through his body. He swallowed, glancing up at the optician’s assistant. “We’ll take these.”

“Good choice, sir,” the woman replied as if she probably said the same phrase to all her customers.

The couple had lunch at the deli next door as the store made negative one lenses to fit his new frames.

Lois leaned across the table and whispered, “I have a confession.”

If she admitted to owning a Princess Leia bikini back in Smallville...

“The first time I realized I might be falling for you...” She paused to take a bite of her pastrami sandwich.

Okay, a different kind of confession than the fantasy he was imagining, but just as nice.

“Was that first night. You know, when I stole a peek at you without your glasses.”

Clark took a sip of his ice tea and lowered his voice, trying to understand. “So, you realized you loved Kal first?”

“There was no Kal at that point, only Clark,” she corrected. “And Clark is one sexy man without his glasses.”

Clark pressed his lips together. “There has always been Kal — technically, I was *him* before I was Clark.”

“But the night I stole your glasses, Clark, I hadn’t known that... actually, neither did *you*. That was before the globe started glowing.”

His brow furrowed. “Wait a minute. That was the night of our non-date date. A whole *week* before we kissed, you realized you were falling for me?”

Lois shrugged. “Why do you think I got so mad at you? And why do you think I refused to give up on you when your green-eyed monster raged out of control? I knew that man who charmed my socks off was hiding deep inside you, waiting to reemerge.”

Clark took another sip of his drink. “He’s gone, you know,” he admitted hesitantly. “My jealousy.”

“Gone?” she gasped in faux dismay. “Your inner idiot?”

“Well, I don’t know about *that*.” He pinched his lips together to try and hide the sheepish smile that snuck onto his lips anyway. “But that nagging voice inside my head that kept telling me I wasn’t good enough for you. That you were going to leave me. And that I should jump your bones before you did dump me because I wasn’t going to find another woman like you and end up dying a virgin. *That* voice is gone.”

“Wow! My inner voice isn’t nasty like that. She just brings deep inner feelings I’d rather not acknowledge to the surface.” Lois squeezed his hand. “So, when did you lose your monster?”

Clark didn’t look like he wanted to answer, but then lowered his voice, “Friday, while we made love. It was just gone.” He bit into his sandwich. “It’s like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders.”

She appeared skeptical by his analogy. “A weight... off *your* shoulders?”

A really heavy weight. “I feel like I can accomplish anything now,” he replied.

Lois grinned. “And all because you made love with me?” She laughed in amusement. “Well, if I had known *that* was the cure for your denseness, I’d have made love to you *that* first night.”

Clark choked on his sandwich and then tried to cover it up by giving Lois what he hoped was a scandalized look. What would he have done if she had attacked him that night? “I’m glad we waited.” His hand slid up her arm to her shoulder. “I’ve really enjoyed this weekend.”

She bit her bottom lip and bounced her eyebrows. “And we have the rest of our lives to make up for that one missing day.” She leaned over and kissed him. “Speaking of which, we should probably earn our keep and give Perry a call about Nightfall. You know, an interview with Superman.”

He nodded. “Yeah, I hear nobody has seen that guy since he left EPRAD Control to battle Nightfall.” He grinned. “Thank God!” Naked flying Superman photos would make his life hell.

Lois kissed his cheek over to his ear. “Better make it after we return to Metropolis. We don’t want anyone to suspect the man went on the honeymoon with us or anything. Or are you going to go pick up your new suit after we get the new glasses? Martha did say that she had made you another suit, right?”

“A few, in fact,” he told her, sitting back. “But if we’re going to work on Thursday, there’s another kind of suit I need to buy. And I promised my new wife a date.”

“A date? A real date? You weren’t kidding?”

Clark shook his head.

There was an effervescent quality to her smile. “Loving this new you. Loving him very much.”

Wednesday Mid-Day

Lois took hold of Clark’s hand as they strolled into the line for the ticket counter at the Buffalo airport. She was sad that their honeymoon was coming to an end. But now they got to start joining their lives together and that would never end.

How are you feeling? Any morning sickness?

Lois rolled her eyes at her inner thoughts. Why hadn’t her crazy thoughts gone away with Clark’s green-eyed monster? It wasn’t fair to be tormented so.

The line finally meandered them around to the counter. Clark set their suitcases on the scale as Lois handed their tickets to the agent.

“Mr. and Mrs. Kent.” Clark smiled as he announced who they were as if he would never tire of telling people they were married.

Super sweetie!

“Clark Kent and Lois Lane,” she corrected. “The tickets are under those names.”

“Lois Lane?” he repeated back to her.

They hadn’t discussed whether or not she would take his

name. “I didn’t marry you to go into hiding, Clark. I like my name and I’m proud of who I am and what I’ve...”

Clark’s smile grew instead of diminish. “I love Lois Lane, too. She’s the woman I fell in love with. What makes you think I’d want you to change anything about yourself? Even your name?”

Lois nudged him. “You’re picking up my bad habits, Clark. Interrupting, rambling...”

“Lois Lane?” the ticketing agent inquired. “*The* Lois Lane?”

Both of them turned and faced the agent, their silly smiles wiped off their faces. Back to reality.

The agent’s eyes were wide as she lowered her voice, “Can you contact Superman?”

This didn’t sound like the usual fan or groupie request. Not the usual ‘Superman’s girlfriend’ inquiry either. “Why?” Lois asked cautiously.

The agent swallowed. “I’m not supposed to say anything to panic the passengers, but all the flights have been grounded for the next hour.”

Clark’s hand tightened around Lois’s waist. “Go on.”

“You didn’t hear?” the agent asked, glancing between the two of them in disbelief. “About Nightfall?”

“Nightfall?” Lois gulped, her throat dry and clogged by her heart.

No! Superman has already taken care of that problem. That’s history! No!!!

“What message do you need us to get to Superman?” Clark spoke the words Lois could not.

“It’s heading for the moon now. The military just sent the Asgard rocket with a nuclear bomb to destroy it. That’s why all the flights are grounded. Just in case...” The agent’s stiff fingers were turning white from holding them above the keyboard.

“I’m sure he knows, but...” The words stumbled out of Lois’s mouth as her knees turned to jelly.

Nightfall. Moon. Nuclear bomb.

Only Clark’s strong arm kept her standing.

Lois cleared her throat, trying to get confidence to emerge. “I could try...”

“No, Lois. I’ll contact Superman. You fly to Metropolis and I’ll meet you there. I’ll catch a later flight or something.” Clark kissed her cheek and whispered only loud enough for her to hear, “I’ll *always* come back to you, Lois. I love you.”

Lois nodded dumbly, unable to speak, tears blurring her vision.

Clark smiled at her, brushing a lock of hair off her face. “I’m sure he’s already on it, Lois. Don’t worry.” Then he turned his reassuring smile to the ticketing agent. “But I’ll see if I can contact him.”

Lois forced the muscles in her legs to work. “Good luck.” She smiled at him, knowing it must have appeared as fake as it felt, as if her face was frozen like hard plastic.

He started backing up with a wink. “Call Perry. Tell him to hold Page One for me.” Then Clark jogged out the automatic doors and was gone.

The agent sighed with relief, then started stamping Lois’s ticket. “Gate 3C,” she finally told Lois. The agent’s voice was back up to its normal level as she handed Lois the boarding pass. “As I mentioned before, all flights are still running behind schedule. The two o’clock flight to Metropolis has been delayed an hour.”

Lois exchanged a knowing look with the agent and wandered towards security.

“Miss. Miss!” the man behind her in line called.

She turned and faced him. “I am *Mrs.* Clark Kent,” she corrected. “*Mrs.*”

“Well, *Mrs.* Kent, is this your bag?” he asked, holding up her carry-on she had left at the counter.

“Sorry. Yes. Thank you,” Lois said, taking her bag and trying to look something other than numb.

Somehow she made it through security and over to her gate.

Nightfall was still coming. It was going to hit the moon. Her idea about pushing it off course had failed. Now a nuclear missile was headed to explode the asteroid. That was exactly what Clark wanted to avoid in the first place. She knew Clark wouldn’t let the missile hit its target. Not this close to the moon. Not this close to Earth. It was all her fault. She had distracted Clark from his Superman duties. Now he had to deal with both an asteroid and a nuclear bomb. If one of them didn’t kill him, the other one surely would.

She made it over to a bank of payphones, dropped in her quarters, and pushed the buttons. “Lois Lane for Perry White.”

“Lois!” her boss exclaimed into the phone. “Where’s Clark? I’ve been trying to reach you...”

“He asked me to call you to hold Page One for a new Superman story,” Lois repeated Clark’s message into the phone, unable to feel anything other than stunned.

It was her fault. All her fault.

Bet you’re glad you made love with him without precautions now.

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” she demanded of her inner voice.

“Lois?” Perry asked softly. “Are you all right?”

Her hands began to shake as she realized she had spoken out loud. “No.”

“Talk to me, honey. What’s wrong?” Perry’s voice coaxed into her ear.

“My husband has gone to find Superman to see if he can stop both a nuclear missile and an asteroid the size of Metropolis from hitting the moon and it’s all my fault,” she gasped as the tears she had been holding at bay finally crashed around her in sobs.

“Great shades of Elvis!” Then her boss asked, “Your fault?”

Your fault for suggesting he push it out of the way. Your fault for not letting him get enough sleep the night before. Your fault from distracting him from the news for the last twenty-four hours, so he couldn’t have taken care of this problem sooner. Your fault for making love to him one last time before checking out of the hotel, so he didn’t have the energy to tackle this problem with a clear mind. If he fails, if he dies, it will all be your fault.

“It doesn’t really matter, does it?” Lois was finally able to say into the phone.

“So Superman is going after Nightfall again and the Asgard rocket? Is that your story?” Perry said, focusing on the facts.

“Uh-huh. Superman really hates nuclear weapons and I cannot see him allowing it to continue on a collision course with Nightfall, especially this close to Earth,” Lois explained, her shaking hands brushing her hair out of her face. “All flights have been grounded in the meantime. I’m stuck at the airport with nothing to do but wait and think.”

It’s your fault. All your fault. Clark is going to die because of you.

“Lois, sweetie, I need you contact airport personnel and get me a story on the grounding of flights. Can you do that for me and then call it in to Doris?” the Chief asked her.

Story. Focus on the story, not on Clark. “Yes, I think so,” she told him.

“By the time you’ve done that, I’ll have an update on the Asgard rocket for you,” he said.

“Thank you, Perry,” was all she could say before hanging up.

Focus on the story. Not on Clark. Story. Airport. Story. Flights — canceled or delayed. Story.

Lois took a deep breath and marched off.

Clark stopped by his folks’ apartment just long enough to drop off his clothes and new glasses, and grab his replacement

Superman suit. His folks were downstairs in the café, finishing up the lunch rush, and he didn’t have time for even a hug. Less than five minutes after he had left the Buffalo airport, he was flying through the stratosphere.

Superman could see the missile ahead of him and the Nightfall asteroid advancing towards the moon. It was much closer than it was when he pushed it off-course three days earlier, but it was still headed their way, still on the far side of the moon. And the damage to the moon would be catastrophic if Nightfall hit it. It would affect ocean currents and tides on Earth at the very least. Depending on where it hit, either the asteroid or the moon could break apart and the fragments could head towards Earth. Satellites could be struck and possibly the Space Station Prometheus with all those scientists and colonists. It could knock the moon off its axis or out of its orbit around the Earth. Not to mention the moon dust ejected onto his planet.

Superman sped up. With a carefully deliberate swipe of his arm, he knocked the Asgard rocket off course. Then, with concentrated focus, he aimed himself at his top speed directly for the weakest spot on the asteroid, which the EPRAD scientists had told him about on Sunday. The impact careened Superman through the air back towards Earth.

He slowed himself down to make sure that Nightfall had indeed broken up into small pieces. Using his super-breath, he blew the fragments away, making sure they would avoid Earth entirely. He swooped around to shepherd the few remaining fragments he had missed. One large shard tumbled out of reach.

Clark narrowed his eyes, focusing closely on it. Alarm crossed his face as some more asteroid pieces flew unexpectedly past his head. He zapped these smaller fragments with his heat vision, not wanting to use too much of his air reserves. But that one chunk, out of reach, mocked him as it spun slowly, inevitably, onto a collision course with the Asgard rocket. He focused again on that last shard of asteroid, hoping to destroy it before it crashed into the nuclear missile.

Whether the asteroid impact detonated the rocket or whether the engineers had planned for Asgard to fire at this point in its trajectory, or even if it had to do with his heat vision, Clark never knew. In a fury of nuclear fire, the rocket exploded. A temporary second sun appeared in the sky, blinding him.

The blast shot the remains of that asteroid chunk at Superman and the force of the explosion hurled him back towards Earth.

Wednesday — Late afternoon

Lois sat on the plane and wrung her hands together, unable to relax. The delay hadn’t been too terribly long for everyone else. An hour, possibly two. For her, it seemed to stretch into an eternity. Then someone from the airline had announced that the Asgard rocket had hit Nightfall as planned and had broken it up before the asteroid had been able to strike the moon. No reference to Superman or his involvement had been mentioned.

She had tried to contact the Daily Planet, Doris or Perry, but all the circuits were busy. Lois kept hoping that Clark would return to the Buffalo airport and join her on the last leg of the journey home, but he never showed. She understood that once again, he must be exhausted. But to have no mention of him at all in the announcement had made her worry. Had no one realized that he had gone to help? Had he been too late and been blown to bits when the bomb had impacted with the asteroid? Where was Clark?

Trying to concentrate on happy memories from their honeymoon to tide her over until she made it back to her apartment, where Clark must surely be waiting for her, Lois closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

They had spent all the previous afternoon walking along the trails around and in front of the Falls. Everything had been wonderful: the weather, Clark holding her hand, the walk, the

view, and the ease of their conversation. Although happy to be out again in the sunshine, Clark had kept teasing her that they needed to return to the cave and walk along the stairs to the mists. Lois hadn't wanted to chance running into that security guard again.

As she thought again about the night in the cave, she remembered catching that first sight of him in that yellow rain slicker that hardly covered his bare hips. Of his embarrassment until she had kissed him. No matter how hard he tugged on the hem of the slicker, it never had completely covered him. She was surprised he hadn't tied the jacket around his hips, but she guessed that it would have been quite obvious with his bare chest and bare legs. He had never been sexier than that night in the cave.

The mortification on Clark's face when Lois had suggested he wear her underwear quickly disappeared when he had pulled her into his arms. Just thinking about the wildness of that night caused her to flush. Her husband had made her feel like that. She knew that being with a man could be pleasurable; there was too much documented proof and too many first person accounts to discount it as urban myth, but until Clark she had never known true intimacy or pure ecstasy.

Even when they had made love in the honeymoon suite using precautions, Lois had felt more bliss than she had ever felt with any other man. She knew that she could make love to Clark quite easily for the rest of her life and never be disappointed. He was tender and giving and patient and curious and grateful and pleasing and loving, and all those components made Clark an amazing lover.

But that night in the cave, when they had... gone without precautions... there was something else. Something more than the urgency and the fear of being discovered out in public. Some other quality. Something indescribable.

Lois had been trying over the last few days to find the words to explain how Clark had made her feel, and there just weren't any that fit perfectly. It had been like their bodies had been fused together, yet still separate, still pliable, still themselves. Only *more* so.

It was like endorphins had rushed through her body, but there had been no pain, no numbness, only ... "endorphins" was the wrong word. Like their pheromones had merged into one and everything about him had made Clark extra desirable. He had shot her body full of contentment and satisfaction. Lois clenched her fists in frustration. Only *more* so.

Just being with him had made Clark sexier, extra attractive, additionally loving, especially caring, and particularly pleasing. Only *more* so.

And that sensation that had danced through her entire body had been so strong, so powerful, so addicting... it took only a brief thought of that moment to make her ready to make love to him again. Lois crossed her legs and exhaled slowly.

That was why when they had woken up from that long afternoon nap, the day after he had returned from space, her body had craved his. It had only taken him running his hand over her body to make Lois want him again. It was if her body had become aligned with his. They were magnets attracted to just each other. Only *more* so.

After their walk the previous afternoon, they had returned to their room and made love again before getting ready to go out on their "date." They had showered together and couldn't help themselves. Clark had claimed that there was something extra special about the combination of his wife and water. That would explain their amorous night of pasta and bathing two nights earlier as well.

Clark had fed her. Normally, she wasn't one who liked a man to do anything that made her feel like a helpless infant. But Clark feeding her and her feeding him... Lois wanted to groan at the

thought of it. Maybe it had been the way that she had sat in his lap as he fed her. Or the way he had touched her as they ate. Or perhaps it was the memory of Clark in the bath afterwards. Bubbles and scented bath oils and Clark. She could live a lifetime on the memories from the past five days.

Lois sat up and her eyes opened. Four days. Friday and today had mostly been traveling. Sunday, Clark had been in space all day. So technically there really had only been Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday. Three days! Oh, definitely too short of a honeymoon.

Knowing that she had been making Clark happy was almost as exciting to Lois as him giving her blissful enjoyment. She had found herself doing little things that she knew would bring out that charming smile of his. Whether it had been actually placing perfume behind her knee and ear as she said she would before their date the night before. Or remembering how he liked his coffee. Or wording things just so that he would find something funny or delightful or reminiscent of some tactile memory. Clark liked anything that had to do with his senses. Super vision, super hearing, super smell... she wondered if he had super taste and super touch...

Oh, he definitely has super touch, Lois, moaned her inner voice.

"Excuse me, Miss? Are you all right? You seem quite flushed," said the flight attendant, causing Lois's eyes to flash open.

"Fine," she croaked out, wishing she didn't have to wait to see her husband again.

"Seat upright then. We're coming into Metropolis," the flight attendant informed her.

Lois couldn't believe that she had spent the past hour and half fantasizing about Clark and their honeymoon. Thankfully, there hadn't been anyone sitting in the seat next to hers.

Wednesday Evening

Lois grabbed her suitcase and Clark's suit bag off the baggage carousel. She was back to feeling numb. Clark hadn't met her plane at the airport. She lugged the suitcases to the bus stop to take the shuttle back into the heart of the city.

Approximately an hour and a half later, given all the traffic interruptions due to the celebrations of the destruction of Nightfall, she dragged her suitcase and Clark's suit bag up the front steps of her building. Leaning against her door was Leo Nunk.

Great. Just what you need. A headache.

"Hi-ya, Lane. How was your extended weekend in Niagara Falls?" he asked, reaching forward with his tape recorder.

Really? After your engagement announcement and Nightfall, Leo Nunk still is interested in your sex life?

"I'm not in the mood, Leo," she groaned, plopping down her bags to pull out her keys.

"Is that what you told your boyfriend? Is that why you're coming home alone?"

Lois rolled her eyes, unlocked her front entry door, shoved her suitcases inside, pushed past Nunk, and slammed the door in his face as he tried to follow. Then she picked up the suitcases again and headed towards her basement apartment, hoping against hope her husband was there with a hot home-cooked meal, a bottle of wine, a warm hug, and a great excuse.

Instead the apartment was dark when she opened the door. She sighed.

And a mess.

Not a she-had-been-robbed-again mess, but a Lucy-hadn't-cleaned-the-whole-time-nor-moved-her-stuff-to-the-Kent's mess.

Lois shut her front door, tripped over a few pieces of clothing sprawled over her floor and sat down at her desk to cry. She buried her head in her arms but she was too exhausted for the

tears to start.

Where was Clark?

She picked up the phone, then set it back down. Walking into the kitchen, she washed her hands and returned to the telephone with a wet dishrag to wipe down her telephone. Then she tossed the rag onto her dining room table, which she could tell probably hadn't been cleaned properly since Clark had made them breakfast the previous Friday.

Lois picked up the receiver again and dialed. She wondered where the Kents were. Then she realized it was almost eight o'clock on a Wednesday night. Her in-laws were most likely in the middle of dinner rush at the café.

She dug the phonebook out of her bottom drawer and flipped to the dog-eared page.

"MJ's Café. How can I help you?" Maisie's voice sang into the Lois's ear.

"Hi, Maisie. It's Lois..." she began.

"Lois! Jonathan, the kids are back from their honeymoon," gushed Maisie as Lois's stomach sank down into her toes. If Maisie thought Clark was with her, it meant he couldn't be helping out with the café.

"Lois!" Jonathan said cheerfully into the phone. "So, are you back in Metropolis? I heard something on the radio about planes being grounded during the Asgard rocket mission."

She closed her eyes. How could she tell Jonathan that Clark was missing? She took a deep breath. "I'm home, but Clark ran off before our flight to find Superman and tell him about the new Nightfall threat."

"Lois?" she heard Jonathan's hesitancy. "Where's Clark?"

Lois swallowed. "I don't know. He hasn't been here. I hoped you might have seen him."

"Hold on, honey. Let me check with Martha," Jonathan replied before silence filled the phone line. They both knew that if Martha had heard from her son, she certainly would have told Jonathan.

A minute later Martha picked up. Lois could hear the familiar noise of the café's busy kitchen. "Lois?" Martha's voice felt like a ray of sunshine on Lois's otherwise dreary day. She hated to be this woman's thundercloud.

"Please tell me you saw Clark about half-past noon today," Lois pleaded, wanting some kind of good news. "Or better yet, anytime since."

"No. Sorry, Lois. I haven't seen him since he stopped by on Sunday," Martha answered. "We were in the middle of the lunch rush at half-past noon today."

"Right. Of course," Lois replied flatly. "I thought he might've stopped by for his blue suit before..." Her voice went out on her.

"I can send Jonathan upstairs and check, if you like?" Martha suggested. Lois heard her cover the mouthpiece and speak with her husband. "Go up and check if he stopped earlier." She uncovered the receiver again. "Maybe he's not back yet, since... since he had to take a later flight from Buffalo? Did you check your messages?"

"The thieves stole my answering machine," Lois informed her, regarding the break-in that had happened while Lois had been off interviewing Superman the day after he had made his debut.

"My goodness, Lois. They got everything you own, didn't they?"

Lois sighed. "Pretty much." Her TV, VCR, computer, answering machine, purse, keys, and Clark's globe. At least they had recovered *that*. She still was waiting on a check from the insurance company to replace her stuff.

"Is there any reason to worry, dear?" Martha asked.

"He went up about the same time as the Asgard rocket," Lois told her. She refused to sugar-coat the news. She hoped they would do the same for her.

Martha gulped. "Jonathan and I didn't hear anything..."

"I am hoping it was because EPRAD didn't know he was going. But if he got caught between the asteroid and the missile..." A sob wrenched through Lois's chest.

"He's pretty tough, Lois," Martha assured her, but Lois heard a wary crack in her voice. "Jonathan?"

Clark's father must have returned from the apartment upstairs. "He took a suit and left his clothes, Lois."

Tears welled up in her eyes, despite Jonathan not telling her anything she hadn't already suspected to be true. "You'll have him call me if he stops by there first?" she asked.

"Sure thing, Lois. And you?"

Lois reassured him she would have Clark call them if... should he show up at the apartment first. But she knew he wouldn't. It had been Clark's idea to ban Superman from visiting her place. They didn't need any more tabloid photos of Superman outside her front door, especially since her engagement to Clark had been announced. Lois said goodbye and hung up, burying her face in her arms once more. This time she didn't have any trouble finding her tears.

Do you think Clark went down to the Daily Planet to write up his story? asked Lois's inner thoughts.

Lois's head snapped up off her desk.

He did say to tell Perry to hold Page One for him.

Her heart began to beat again as she dialed the Daily Planet's number she had memorized over the last few days. "Lois Lane for Perry White."

"Lois?" Perry's gruff voice was a salve for her wounded soul. He would have her answers. "Where's your story about the grounded planes?" he demanded.

Or not.

"Is Clark there, Chief?" she asked softly, ignoring his question.

"No, Clark isn't here," he retorted. "Do you have his Page One story?"

"He left Buffalo, grabbed his new blue suit, and no one has seen him since," she said, the tears pouring down her face again. "He's missing."

Perry's tone changed at her tears. "Calm down, honey. This is Clark we're talking about here. He'll be okay."

"What have you heard about the Asgard? All I've heard was that *it* destroyed Nightfall," she tried to make her words coherent through her sobs.

"Yeah, that's the line of bull we've been fed as well. Sounds like a story worth investigating," he told her.

"Per-ry! My husband's missing."

"Well, you could stay home and cry into your cappuccino. *Or* you could get off your derriere and go and look for what happened to him," Perry suggested. "I'd start at EPRAD Control and find out what the real story was and not that official malarkey they handed out. You and I both know that wasn't the truth."

Lois took a deep breath. "What if Clark comes home and I'm not here?"

"Leave him a note. He'll find you."

A hint of a smile tried to make an appearance on her lips, but failed. Clark had always been pretty good at tracking her down. "Thanks, Chief."

"Now, do you have that story I assigned you about the planes?" he asked.

"Hold on." Lois dumped the contents of her carry-on bag onto her desk. The first notebook she opened had her vows to Clark that he had written for her. She pushed it off the side. The next notebook had the vows she wrote for Clark. She pushed that book to the side as well. She couldn't think about that now or she would start crying again. The third notebook had her story about the grounding of flights due to the Asgard mission out of fear of an electromagnetic pulse. "Here it is. Can you transfer me to

Doris?”

“Doris left hours ago, Lois. Give it to me.” Perry sighed, resigned.

“I’m sorry, Chief. The circuits were down and I couldn’t phone it in from Buffalo.”

“No excuses, Lane, just the story,” he told her.

As Lois read her story to him, her eyes gravitated to a large brown envelope she had dumped out of her bag. She slipped her fingers under the flap and pulled out an eight by twelve photo of her and Clark moments after their wedding. He looked so handsome. So happy.

He’ll always come back to you, Lois.

Her voice caught in her throat.

“Lois? Is that all?” Perry asked.

She sniffled. “I love him so much.”

“I know that, honey. I can hold the front page until ten, but not any later. Go out and find your super man.”

She tried to smile through her tears but didn’t. “Yes, sir.” And then hung up the phone.

Keys in the lock caused Lois to spin around. “Clark!” She rushed to the door and pulled it open.

There stood a very giggly Lucy and a Jimmy with his arms wrapped loosely around her waist. Jimmy dropped his embrace at the sight of Lois and Lucy wrapped her arms around her big sister.

“Lois! How was Niagara? The wedding?” She bounced her eyebrows. “The honeymoon?”

“Wedding?” stammered Jimmy. “You and CK got married?” His jaw hung open and he remained in the doorway. “The Chief said you two went away for the weekend and then couldn’t return because of Nightfall.”

Lois blanched at the asteroid’s name. But she knew she was going to have to fake her way through this conversation because neither of them knew Clark was Superman. Lois forced a smile to her face. “Wonderful.”

“Details! Details!” said Lucy, dumping her purse on the coffee table and plopping down on the couch.

“Lu-cy!” gasped Jimmy, glancing around. “Where’s CK?”

Well, isn’t that the question to beat all questions?

What was Lois going to tell them?

The best lie is thinly veiled truth.

“We got separated in Buffalo. He went to contact Superman about the return of ...” She swallowed. “... Nightfall and missed our flight back to Metropolis. He’s probably been trying to get another flight home, or contact me, but either the lines are still down or because I don’t have an answering machine anymore...” Lois clamped her mouth shut to stop herself from rambling further.

Jimmy cleared his throat, glancing around again. “Where’s Lucy supposed to sleep?”

Not here! That’s for sure.

“She was supposed to move her stuff over to the Kents’ place two days ago,” Lois replied with a sharp look at her sister, who sneered her response and then stuck out her tongue. Jimmy — on the other hand — seemed relieved by this development.

Dirty mind much there, Jimbo?

Lois put her hands on her hips and refocused her sharp gaze to her husband’s friend. “Where did you *think* she was going to sleep, Jimmy?”

“Yeah, Jimmy. Where?” Lucy retorted, her gaze mirroring her sister’s.

The photographer rubbed a hand down his face, grumbling, “Man, am I glad CK isn’t here.” He raised his voice. “So CK thinks Superman is still around? He hasn’t been seen since he left EPRAD four days ago.”

Lois broke her eye contact with Jimmy. “I’m sure he was just resting. Pushing an asteroid that big must have been exhausting,

even for someone as strong and invulnerable as Superman.”

Or he was in Niagara boinking his new wife? One of the two. “Clark knows Superman?” Lucy stammered. “Do you think he can introduce me? Maybe we could double date?”

“Hey!” Jimmy snapped.

Poor Jimmy. Lois’s inner voice sighed. *You did warn him about Lucy.*

“Superman doesn’t date, Lucy,” Lois said quietly.

Not anymore, he doesn’t.

“He doesn’t? Poor dude,” Jimmy said gleefully.

Lois grabbed her carry-on bag and started throwing her stuff back inside. “Jimmy, can you take Lucy to MJ’s?”

“Sure.” Actually, he seemed quite delighted with the assignment.

Poor Jimmy. He’s got it bad.

“Lucy, give me my car keys,” Lois said as she finished gathering her stuff and turned to her sister. “Clean up before you go. You’ve been here a week and it’s turned into a sty.” She pulled the wedding photo off the desk and handed it to Jimmy. “Can you give this to Martha?”

“Wow! Lois, you look...” Jimmy stumbled over his words to find the right one. “Amazing!”

You’ll accept amazing.

Lucy scrambled over to them. “Wow! Lois! You look hot! That’s some dress.”

Jimmy nodded, not wanting to voice his approval too strongly.

The Lucy whistled. “And that man of yours. He’s... He’s... “*Super?*

“Gorgeous!”

There’s an understatement.

Lois cleared her throat and dragged her eyes away from her husband’s photo, pointing over her shoulder. “I’m going to EPRAD. See if I can get them to tell me the truth about Nightfall.”

“First night back from your honeymoon and already on the job,” said Jimmy with a shake of his head.

Well, this isn’t how you planned to spend the evening either.

Lois returned to her desk and wrote a vague note to Clark. *Went to EPRAD, looking for Superman and the real Nightfall story. Love you, LL*

She stared down at the note and a cold chill crept down her spine.

*You never told Clark you loved him when he left. He told **you** he loved you, but you never told **him**.*

A new set of tears threatened to descend. She would have plenty of times to tell Clark she loved him, Lois told her inner voice. But she didn’t convince either one of them.

Lois arrived at EPRAD Control, having gotten directions from Jimmy, and then got the run-around with security. Finally, she convinced the guard to contact Professor Daitch on her behalf as she only had one question for him. The guard explained the situation to the scientist who agreed to listen to Lois’s one question. Then the guard passed the phone to Lois.

“Good evening, Professor Daitch. Lois Lane, Daily Planet. Thank you for your time,” she told him. She didn’t scream at the man; that fiery part of her died when Clark disappeared. The Professor would know better than anyone what really happened in space. She needed his help in finding Clark.

“What’s your question, Ms. Lane?” The Professor was exasperated, obviously tired from his long day.

She was going out on a limb with her guess. If she was wrong, she wouldn’t learn anything. But she knew Clark. Knew he wouldn’t let that bomb detonate so close to Earth, if he could help it. “Why did EPRAD tell everyone that the Asgard rocket destroyed the Nightfall asteroid when it didn’t?”

“Are you suggesting that Nightfall hasn’t been destroyed and the government is lying to the American people?” he asked in disbelief. “Because I guarantee you, Ms. Lane, Nightfall is no more.”

“No, I’m asking why EPRAD said it was the Asgard that destroyed Nightfall when it wasn’t?” Lois replied, vague enough that if she were right the Professor would understand but the guard might not. The guard looked at her as if she were crazy.

“Why are you contacting me and not General Zeitlin, who was in charge of the Asgard rocket?” Daitch asked tentatively.

“Truthfully, I trust scientists more than generals. And secondly, my...” Lois bit her tongue from saying ‘husband’. “My friend who spoke with you on Saturday night seemed to find you an honest fellow. I trust his judgment.”

“Your friend in blue?”

“Yep, that’s the one.”

“And when did you last speak with Superman, Ms. Lane?” the scientist asked.

Lois glanced at the guard, glad he could only hear her half of the conversation. “This morning.”

Well, technically that’s true. He wasn’t in his blue suit though. Is Clark still Superman when he’s out of the suit? Or does the suit make the super man into Superman?

“Pass the phone back to the guard, Ms. Lane,” said Professor Daitch. She handed the phone to the guard with a heavy heart. She failed. Professor Daitch hadn’t told her anything. And she was no closer to finding out what had happened to Clark.

Lois watched as the guard spoke to the Professor for a moment and then hung up the phone. Her heart constricted at the thought of failing Clark one more time. Tears started to fill her eyes and she turned away from the security gate to return to her car.

“Ms. Lane?” called the guard.

Quickly, Lois wiped her eyes. “Yes?”

“Professor Daitch would like to meet with you in his office. Turn right at this gate...” The guard gave her directions as he handed her both a visitor’s pass and parking pass. Lois could only nod, unable to speak.

You did it!

Lois clipped the visitor’s pass to her lapel of her jacket and climbed back into her Cherokee, tossing the parking pass onto the dash. She was going to learn about Clark’s final moments. Finally learn the truth about what happened to her husband. She took a deep breath and willed the tears from her eyes as she drove through the gate.

Wednesday — Night — Late

Lois pulled her car to the side of the road and jumped out. There, on the corner, was a telephone booth. She dropped in her quarter and dialed.

“Daily Planet.”

“Lois Lane for Perry White,” she stammered.

“Hold please.”

Lois bit her bottom lip as she waited for the call to be connected.

“Lois, it’s ten thirty. I can’t...” Perry said with a sigh.

“I just left EPRAD Control. I was right. It was Superman who destroyed Nightfall...” she said breathlessly.

“Slow down, honey. You’ve got proof?” her editor asked warily.

“I saw the unreleased footage from EPRAD’s own computers. The Asgard rocket veered off-course a full minute before Nightfall exploded.” She pressed her eyes shut as the tears she had been holding in for the past hour started to fall. “One of the asteroid pieces must have struck the rocket, because the Asgard actually detonated about thirty seconds after the asteroid exploded.”

“Oh, Lois. Clark’s tough...”

“Nuclear bomb tough, Chief?” she sobbed. “Bullets and C4 bombs are one thing. We’re talking nuclear warhead.” Her knees turned to jelly and she collapsed on the sidewalk, still holding on to the receiver. “How could he ever survive that? The radiation alone...”

“Lois, honey. Do you have anyone to be with you tonight?” Perry asked softly.

She shook her head. There was only Lucy, and she had sent her to the Kents.

Oh, God! The Kents! How are you ever going to tell Martha and Jonathan that their son is dead?

“Do you want me...? You don’t really want to be alone, do you?”

Lois continued to sob.

Of course, you don’t want to be alone! That’s why you married a man who was virtually indestructible.

“Lois, we don’t have any proof that Superman is dead, do we?” her boss said calmly.

She gasped for breath. “No.”

“Then we’ll keep that out of the story, shall we?” Perry suggested. “And keep our hopes alive.”

“Okay,” she murmured.

Clark said he will always come back to you, Lois. You have to believe him.

“Why don’t you come down to the offices and type this up, darlin’?”

“Okay,” she repeated. Lois really didn’t want to return to her empty apartment. Actually, she didn’t want to do anything.

Concentrate on the story, Lois. You can become a vegetable later. Write your story. Tell the world what a wonderful man your husband is... how he saved them all.

“Great. I’ll call down and stop the presses. You hurry over. You know where the offices are?” he asked.

“Yeah, downtown somewhere,” she mumbled.

Perry gave her directions from the bookstore to the new Daily Planet offices. “You can’t miss it, honey. There’s a big globe out front.”

“Okay,” she said and dropped the phone, curling herself up into a ball.

Get on your feet, missy! You’ve got to write your Superman story, and you need to be strong enough to call the Kents. You can’t let them find out when they open their Daily Planet in the morning that their son was caught in a nuclear explosion.

Lois continued to sit on the sidewalk and rock herself back and forth.

GET UP! her inner voice yelled at her. Clark will never forgive you if you give up on him. Now, get off your butt, and get down to the Daily Planet. Write your story, and call the Kents. GO!

“I was supposed to die first,” she murmured. “I’m the vulnerable one. I was supposed to die first. He wasn’t supposed to...”

UP! Remember Clark vowed that ‘Not even death will part us.’ GET UP!

Suddenly, from deep inside her she felt something take over her body. It felt like it stretched down her arms to her fingers, down her legs to her toes, and it pulled Lois to her feet. It made her pick up the dangling receiver and hang it up. Then it opened her car door and threw Lois behind the wheel.

DRIVE!

Lois rubbed her nose with the back of her hand and then wiped her eyes. She pulled her keys out of her pocket and stuck them into the ignition.

Thursday — Very early morning

“Hey!” he heard someone call. Then something struck him.

He thought it might be a pebble.

He opened his eyes. It was dark, but he could still see. He was lying in a hole... a big hole, almost the size of a small crater. He glanced up and looked at the man standing at the top of his hole, looking down at him. The man looked dirty, like he hadn't bathed in weeks. He was probably homeless. And he was holding a handful of small rocks.

"Hey, Supes! Whatcha doing down in a hole?" the man asked him.

Huh? What? Who? He put a hand to his head, feeling the disorientation of sleep. Behind the man was a line of trees. Was he in the forest? "What did you call me?" he asked the man.

"Excuse me, *Superman*. Is that where you live?" the man asked him, impressed. "Are you one of us?"

Superman? "No, I don't live in this hole," he responded, looking around him. He didn't know much, but he knew *that* at least.

He shifted his position, but something caught behind him was making it difficult to sit upright. A cape? He shook his head as he moved slightly so he was no longer sitting on his cape. He ran his hands over his head and then patted the dust from his clothes. He was definitely dusty, but he wasn't dirty like the man with whom he was speaking. He himself must have had a bath sometime recently, so he doubted he was homeless.

The man reached down to him. "Do you need a hand up, Superman?"

Why did that man keep addressing him like that? Was it his name? Like Bob Superman? No, that couldn't be right. He looked down at his clothes again.

A blue suit with a red cape and boots. Red shorts with a yellow belt... *Red shorts*? He shook his head. And some kind of red and yellow emblem on his chest. It looked a little bit like an 'S' in a upside-down triangle. Maybe it was an 'S' for Superman? Hmm? These didn't seem like regular clothes. Maybe he was part of the circus?

He pulled himself to his feet and accepted the man's hand. "Thank you... um..."

"Derek." The man beamed at the thought of someone asking his name.

"Derek," he repeated. Then he looked around. They seemed to be in some type of forest. "Where am I?"

"Man, I've had days like that," the homeless man Derek said, nodding his head. "We're just outside Echo Canyon."

"Oh," he responded, not any more knowledgeable about his location than before.

"A State Park, just outside of Metropolis," clarified Derek. "We're not supposed to be here. No camping, you know. But I won't tell on you, if you don't tell on me." The man gave him a knowing look.

"Wouldn't dream of it," he replied. Who would he tell, anyway?

Derek visibly relaxed at his words. "So, you going to fly back to Metropolis?" the man asked him. "Man, I wish I had your powers."

"Fly?" He *flew*? "No," he said hesitantly. "It's a beautiful night; I believe I'll walk. Thank you, Derek, for your assistance."

"No problem, Superman," replied Derek with a grin.

He nodded at the man and started walking.

"Uh, Superman?" Derek said cautiously.

He glanced at the homeless man behind him. "Yes?"

"Metropolis is that way." Derek pointed in the opposite direction than he — Superman — had started walking.

"Thank you." Superman nodded at the man and changed direction.

Superman had been walking a good fifteen minutes down a long dirt road, when the idea of flying became very appealing. This walking thing was taking far too long. He wondered how he

flew? Did he need something to catapult him into the air, such as a cannon? Was it part of his circus act? Or could he just lift his hand into the air and think 'fly'? Well, since he was all out of cannons at the moment... Superman stopped and took a look around. He was still surrounded by trees and was very much alone.

Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes. He thought about the blueness of the morning sky and the shimmering of night's stars. He lifted one hand into the air and thought 'sky'. The next moment the air felt colder and he opened his eyes. He was hovering above the forest. He flew! Oh, God! *He flew!* Now he knew why he was called Superman!

Then, he fell.

He landed in a heap on the dirt road, entirely too grateful that there wasn't anyone around to witness what had just happened. Superman stood up and dusted himself off again. He was amazed that he hadn't killed himself with that fall. So, he could fly. Good to know. Being able to control it, though, would have been better. He started down the road again on his feet.

Wow! He could fly. Not everyone could fly, right?

Derek had said something about powers. What kind of powers? Superman wondered. He seemed pretty unbreakable, falling from the sky with nary a scratch, bruise, or death. Since he could fly, apparently, would any of his other powers help him get off of this boring dirt road any time soon? What if he ran?

Superman focused on the switch from dirt road to paved road a good five football stadiums down the road. Taking another calming breath, he started running. Next thing he knew, the beginning of dirt road was behind him a good five football fields. Okay, he could run. Fast. He decided to stop there with the self-exploration for the moment — like how he knew how long a football stadium was when he couldn't remember ever attending a game — and started running towards Metropolis. He was running so fast, it felt like the world beside him disappeared in a blur.

As Superman got to the edge of a town, he slowed down. Did he really want to go into a city like this? Not knowing his past? Not knowing his life? What he was known for? That homeless man from the woods — Derek — seemed to know who he was, but not him personally. So he must be well-known, if a homeless man living in the woods knew who he was.

"Superman" must be a nickname of sorts and not who he really was. He couldn't imagine *that* actually being his name. He must have a real name, and once he discovered what it was, he would be able to track down his address and possibly people who knew him personally. People who would be able to fill in the blanks — and, at the moment, he felt like he had more blanks than answers. He wasn't quite sure where to start looking for those answers though.

No, he needed to get some information before he went into the city. It wasn't as if he was dressed like the mannequins in the window of the clothing store. He *would* stand out.

A newspaper delivery truck drove by. It was still early in the morning. The sun had not even peeked her head over the horizon. Newspaper truck — newspaper — News! Superman followed the truck to a newsstand where the driver was delivering a pile of new papers.

Hesitantly Superman approached the man at the back of the truck. He didn't want to beg. He didn't want a handout. He didn't want to steal. He only wanted information.

"Good morning," he said softly, but the deliveryman still jumped as if spooked.

The man grabbed his chest. Seeing who he was seemed even more of a shock.

"My apologies. I did not mean to startle you," Superman continued.

The deliveryman snapped his jaw shut and found his voice,

“No, that’s okay, Superman.”

So, he *was* well-known. Two out of two very different people had called him that.

“May I have one of your old newspapers?” Superman asked. He didn’t want to presume to ask the man for today’s news, especially since he had no funds with which to pay for it, but hopefully he would be able to learn something from the previous day’s paper.

The man just stared. “You read the newspaper?” That thought seemed to boggle the man’s mind. “*Our* newspaper?”

Superman glanced at the side of the man’s truck. The Daily Planet. He didn’t know why reading the *Daily Planet* would be different than reading any other newspaper. “Should I be reading another paper?” he asked. “Doesn’t the *Daily Planet* deal with truth and justice in its reporting? Does it not report the news of the day in a fair and just manner?”

“Of course. Of course.” The man nodded enthusiastically. “Of course, you may have a copy of yesterday’s paper. Actually, I have a copy of every paper this week in the truck. Here, take today’s as well.”

Superman raised a brow at the man’s generosity, but he wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth. “Thank you,” he said as the man handed him the small pile of papers.

“No, Superman, thank *you*.”

He just nodded at that. For what was he being thanked? Taking the man’s old newspapers? He thought not. Superman decided to leave while the man had his back turned to close his truck. He didn’t really want to have too long a conversation with anyone without some hard facts in his head.

“Perry White is *not* going to believe this,” he heard the man mumble.

Superman furrowed his brow, wondering who this Perry White person was? Perhaps Superman would know better after he had a chance to peruse the week’s news. He stopped in a small copse of trees to read the papers in private. He didn’t really want to be caught sitting on a bench in town.

It must be hard for him to always go around in this outfit. He must stick out like a sore thumb. Did he ever go around in everyday clothes, just so he could blend in? He hoped so. Otherwise, life would be difficult always in the spotlight. Always having people watching him. Having no privacy. And if he didn’t, perhaps he would start the tradition now.

The deliveryman had only handed him four newspapers. Monday’s, Tuesday’s, Wednesday’s, and Thursday’s. So today was Thursday, September 29, 1994. He looked down at the photo on the front page of Monday’s extremely thin paper, only a couple of sheets of paper thick; the entirety of which seemed to deal only about him. The photo was of Superman flying into the air with some kind of grey metal cylinders attached to his chest and a headset hooked on his ear. The headline above the photo read *Superman Saves Earth from Nightfall asteroid*.

He did *what*? No wonder the deliveryman was thanking him. He saved the planet. Superman sighed. It would have been nice to be able to remember that. He wondered about the bottles and the headset, because if those were part of the Superman package, he must have lost them along the way.

He quickly skimmed the article written by Lois Lane, Clark Kent, and Perry White. They had quotes in their article from him. They must have met him. Obviously they knew him, but did they know him personally? Did they know his real name? It wasn’t mentioned in the article. He put the reporters’ names down on an internal list of people to check out and continued to read the newspaper.

By the time he had finished Monday’s paper, he knew a few more things. The Daily Planet was a new newspaper. Monday’s brief edition had been its first in almost twenty years. That was why the deliveryman was surprised Superman had wanted *his*

newspaper.

Secondly, Perry White was the editor-in-chief of the Daily Planet, not just a beat reporter. The article about Superman and Nightfall was so big that the editor had helped to write it.

Thirdly, in the photo he was wearing air canisters because he could only hold his breath for twenty minutes at a time. The headset was to communicate with EPRAD Control.

Fourthly, Superman had only been around publicly for the past — well, now since it was technically Thursday — two and half weeks. Had he only just arrived on this planet?

Fifthly, he — himself — was a pretty impressive guy. No wonder they called him “Superman.” Had he really flown a million miles into space and pushed an asteroid thirteen miles in diameter off its path to Earth? Wow. He was in awe with himself as well.

Superman wondered if that was why he had no memory. Did it have something to do with the Nightfall asteroid? That seemed logical, except for the fact that the Nightfall mission had taken place on Sunday and it was now Thursday. He couldn’t imagine he had been lying in that dusty hole for four days. Something must have happened more recently.

He added Professor Daitch, General Zeitlin, and John Cosgrove to his internal list of people he might want to contact to learn more about himself. But then he added a star next to their names. He couldn’t see them knowing too much if they had just contacted him for this one mission. Especially if he had only been around for a couple of weeks before Nightfall appeared.

Actually, he had learned quite a bit from Monday’s newspaper as it was entirely about him. There were some older stories, reprinted from other newspapers on the inside of this paper. In one, it announced that he — “the Flying Man” as they had called him at first — rescued a colossal plane and returned it to the Metropolis International Airport safely. Apparently, the rescue of that plane was the first time anyone had actually seen Superman.

No, that wasn’t quite true. In another article, he had been interviewed one-on-one by Lois Lane, the same reporter who had quoted him on that front-page article. Only this older article was more personal and more intimate. It was entitled *Learning about Superman* and was co-written with Clark Kent.

Apparently, Superman had rescued Lois when she had fallen into the street several weeks previously. So Superman wasn’t brand-new to Earth when he had saved the plane. The main gist of the article was about how he had flown Lois down to a deserted beach in Costa Rica, so that they could talk in private, and how he had told her all about himself and his powers. He had come from another planet called Krypton, but that was all he had told her about his home planet — its name.

He had then melted the sand on the beach with his *heat vision*? Okay. He should be careful about that or someone could get hurt. Then he had used his *invulnerability* — he already knew from his fall that he was unbreakable — to form a glass fish with his bare hands, which he then cooled with his *super cooling breath*. There was a picture of the crude fish next to the article. Superman would rather have had a photograph of Lois Lane as he was curious what this woman looked like.

Why would he have chosen her out of all the other reporters in the world to interview him? Was it because she already knew about him from that earlier rescue? They must have remained on friendly terms after that first interview if she was able to still get quotes from him for her front page article. He quickly scanned the photos on the other newspapers, but there weren’t any photos of her in any of those papers either.

A small snippet in Tuesday’s paper caught his eye. Lois Lane and Clark Kent — these two seemed to be a team of some sort as their names were consistently mentioned together — surmised that Superman had returned to Earth safely after his ordeal with

Nightfall, because Superman had actually contacted Clark Kent briefly. According to the article, Superman had not been seen on Earth since he pushed the asteroid off course on Sunday. The reporters didn't seem worried by his lack of rescues nor had catalogued him as "missing." So, Superman gathered, he had contacted Clark Kent.

Superman was glad to know that he hadn't been sleeping in that hole for four days. He exhaled a breath of relief, accidentally blowing the papers into the air with a burst of wind. Oops. He caught the papers and tried to piece them back together in order. Wednesday's paper didn't have much information about him but focused more on the stock markets and the continued celebrations around the world on his behalf. Perhaps he had been resting after battling Nightfall after all. He couldn't believe moving a rock that large could have been easy.

Suddenly, he caught sight of the front page of today's newspaper. *Superman Saves Moon from Nightfall*. What? Hadn't he dealt with Nightfall back on Sunday? He skimmed the article. He hadn't pushed the asteroid far enough off course the first time. According to Lois Lane — he had to find this woman — Superman had gone into space to save the Earth from nuclear fallout from the Asgard rocket, which the military had sent to destroy the asteroid.

He was glad Superman was anti-nuclear weapons, but he was sure that he hadn't earned any friends in the military for interrupting their mission.

Lois wrote that she had a source from within EPRAD who had conclusively demonstrated that the Asgard rocket had veered off-course a minute before impact and did not detonate until *after* Nightfall had been destroyed. This evidence led her to believe that it was Superman, not the Asgard rocket, who blew up Nightfall.

Well, Superman thought, leaning back against a tree. *That could do it*. That might cause his memory loss. Speeding into a huge rock at top speed and then being exposed to a nuclear explosion. He only hoped he wasn't radioactive. He shrugged. He needed to find this Lois Lane or her partner Clark Kent. Maybe these reporters knew more about him than they had printed in the paper. Something off-the-record... like his name.

Thursday — Morning

Superman looked down at the paper in his hand. The *Metropolis Star's* articles he had found in a recycling bin gave him a slightly different viewpoint to Superman, but he still felt that Lois Lane and Clark Kent knew more about him than that other reporter — what was her name? Linda King — despite the photo of him carrying her into her newsroom. The *Met Star* had seemed almost tabloid in its attention to their 'close relationship.'

He lifted up the receiver on the payphone and dialed. He had done a quick search of the town of Vernon before finding a couple of quarters. He wanted to make this call quick before anyone saw Superman standing in a phone booth.

"James Olsen, Daily Planet."

"Hello. May I speak with Lois Lane?" Superman asked warily.

"CK, my main man. Where are you?" James asked enthusiastically.

"Excuse me, no. This isn't... CK?" Superman stammered uncomfortably.

"No? I'm so sorry. Lois was out late on a story and isn't in yet today," James replied.

Oh. Superman hadn't thought of the possibility that she wouldn't be in the office. What about her writing partner? "Ah. How about Clark Kent? Is he in?"

"No. He's... No. He's not in." The man sounded almost sad when he spoke this.

"Is there a way I could contact them at home?" Superman

asked, knowing the man's answer before he spoke it. "This is a private matter."

"I'm sorry, we don't give out personal information."

"Right. Of course." Superman sighed, resigned.

"I could take a message and pass it along," James suggested. "What's your name?"

Superman froze. If he knew his name...? He glanced down to the copy of the *Metropolis Star* in his hand. "Charlie. Charlie King," he replied.

James chuckled. "And you said you weren't a CK. Hope you aren't related to Linda; Lois might not call you back if you were. Hey, what's your number, Charlie?"

Huh? Oh, yeah, Charlie King did have the initials CK... Just like Clark Kent. Did this man think he was Clark Kent at first? He shouldn't have used Linda's last name. That had been a mistake. "No number. I'll try back later," Superman responded, hanging up.

He didn't want to go into the city, but he didn't think hanging out here in the suburbs was going to help him discover his true identity. He picked up the receiver again and dialed information.

"LexComm Information. What name are you looking for, please?" the operator answered.

"Last name, Lane. First name, Lois. In Metropolis," he said and could hear the woman typing.

"Sorry, she has an unlisted number," she replied and then after a pause she added. "And I would, too, if I were Superman's girlfriend."

"Excuse me?" he sputtered. He had a girlfriend?

"Lois Lane is Superman's girlfriend. Where have you been? Living in a hole?" cracked the operator.

"No, I..." Superman caught himself. "How about an address?"

"Look, mister, if we can't give you her number, there's no way we could give you her address. Anyway, that's not how our system works. Unlisted numbers don't show up at all. Just come back as 'U-N-L,'" she explained.

"Oh, right. Thank you," Superman said, hanging up. His feet seemed to lift off the ground. He had a girlfriend. *Lois Lane is his girlfriend!* Who knew a call to information would actually *give* him the information he sought?!

Superman has a girlfriend! There was someone who knew him personally. Someone with whom he probably shared his secrets. Someone who would know where he lived and if he had another name. He needed to find Lois Lane. He wondered what she looked like.

Okay. What now?

Metropolis Star had written something about an investigation into a Lex Luthor. It had mentioned something about Superman working with a detective. Superman closed his eyes and reviewed his mental 'people to contact list.' William Henderson. It was another long shot, but if nothing else, maybe *he* knew Lois's phone number.

Superman put his last quarter into the payphone and dialed the police headquarters. "Hello, I would like to speak with Detective William Henderson... Yes, I'll hold."

Lois sat on her bed. Actually, it was still a couch as she hadn't pushed her futon into a bed. She had somehow gotten to the office the night before, wrote her story about Nightfall and Superman, called the Kents, came home, and sat down. She hadn't eaten. She hadn't showered. She hadn't changed her clothes. She hadn't talked to anyone. She hadn't cried. She hadn't slept. She hadn't moved. She had just sat there and stared at the white wall, behind where she used to have her TV. She hadn't wanted to look anywhere else, somewhere she might have a memory of Clark. She had just sat and wondered how she was going to live her life without him.

If she had looked at the front door, she would have thought of him changing her locks after the break-in. Or one of the many times his smiling face had been on the other side of her door. Or that time he had brought her a big pile of snow as an apology for not trusting her. Or that first night she had pressed him against her front door and kissed him, not letting him escape.

If she had looked at the desk, she would have been reminded of that one time Clark had been so angry, thinking she had cheated on him, that he had forgotten to put his glasses back on when he had come to yell at her.

The dining room table had so many memories. The first morning after Clark had stayed the night, cuddling with her on the couch — the night her globe had first glowed — when he had gone out and bought her Danishes. She had always meant to ask him where he had gotten those. Now she never could. Or the night of the break-in when he had brought her pizza from Chicago. Or the big pile of snow night, when he had brought spaghetti and meatballs. Or the time he had come over as Kal because he had needed her comfort and her quiet reassurance that he had still done good, even though he hadn't been able to save everyone after an earthquake. Or when he had proposed to her with Nana Clark's ring.

The bathroom didn't have any memories of them, but only of her thinking of him. Her paranoid fear of not knowing how she had come home that first night when he had rescued her. Or when she had remembered her erotic dream of him and then heard him drop the orange juice and the dishes because he had heard her mumbling how much she wished he would suck her toes like he had in the dream. Or when she had gone and cried after he accused her of lying to him about the missing condoms the robbers had stolen. Or when she had found his glasses after he had run to hide in the bathroom after accidentally admitting to her he was still a virgin. Or last Thursday night, when she had piled the twenty boxes of condoms her father had sent under the sink. Condoms that would now never be used... not by her.

The kitchen didn't hold too many memories, because they hadn't really spent much time there. There was that big pile of snow night when she had tried to cook herself ramen. And then last Friday morning, when he had come over to cook her omelets before asking her to marry him.

Lois didn't even look over at her bookshelf, where she had kept the globe before it had been stolen. Memories of Clark's crushed heart showing in his expression when he learned it was gone after only just having found out about his origin. The glass fish he had made her when he took her away to that beach in Costa Rica — that first day he had revealed his secret and powers to her — now sat in the globe's old spot. Not that he had told her that Kal-El — Superman — and Clark were the same person... *oh, no!* Not that! But she had known nonetheless.

She didn't even want to think of the futon. They had never made love on that bed. They were supposed to. He was supposed to come and live with her, starting yesterday. They had slept together several times though. They had cuddled together while the futon was still a couch, falling asleep watching *Lethal Weapon* movies. Or that night — had it been that same night? — when Lois had stolen his glasses while he slept and saw what an incredibly sexy man Clark was without them on. Or the night Clark — dressed as Superman — had burst into her apartment and hauled her away to his parents' apartment because he discovered someone — it turned out to be Lex Luthor — had bugged her apartment. Or the night they had snuggled together, instead of making love, because she was punishing him for calling her a streetwalker when she agreed to have dinner with Lex Luthor. But in her dreams... Lois sighed. In her dreams, they had made love over and over and over again on this futon bed. Who knew that, in reality, he would be a better lover than in her dreams?

Lois didn't want to think about how it felt when Clark's hands caressed her body. Or how he cupped her chin in his palm when he gazed at her or wanted to kiss her. Or how he had set his hand at the curve of her back whenever they walked into or out of a room. Any room. Any time. She had always been assured to feel that gentle touch. Her eyes slowly blinked. Or how muscular his body had been, but how he had never hurt her physically. How firm and steady and graceful he had been... well, unless she had done something to surprise him. Or how Clark's lips had curved up just so when he smiled at her, unsure, almost sheepishly, when he had said or done something he knew he shouldn't have.

Or how he had brushed her lips with his thumb when he wanted to kiss her, but also hadn't wanted to stop looking at her. Or how it had felt when she finally had kissed him, like her toes curled and she was floating on air. Or how when he...

The jingling of the telephone knocked her out of her reverie. Her head turned and stared at the phone.

Answer it, Lois! What if it's Clark?

Two seconds later, the phone was gripped in her hand, "Clark?"

Superman's fingers tapped nervously on the shelf in the phone booth as he waited.

"Twelfth precinct. Detective Henderson. How can I help you?" said the voice that finally answered the phone.

"Detective Henderson, how well do you know Superman?" Superman asked the policeman faster than he meant to.

"We've met... on occasion," replied Henderson slowly, vaguely. "He's a good guy."

Superman liked this man and his wry humor immediately. "Do you know Lois Lane?" he asked.

"We've met."

Again with the vague answer. Then again, Henderson didn't know with whom he spoke. Superman wasn't sure if this man would be able to help him or not. "How is she?"

The detective paused without answering for a moment. "You would have to ask her."

"I'm having difficulty reaching her," Superman admitted. "She may have something I lost."

"Ah," Henderson replied. "I'm not her social secretary."

"No. Of course not. I didn't mean to imply..." Superman pressed his lips together. How did one pass a message to one's girlfriend without saying his 'title' or knowing any of the players or his own real name?

"Have you tried the Daily Planet?" suggested Henderson.

Superman heard the man's chair squeak like he was leaning back and relaxing in it.

"Yes. She's not in."

"Perhaps she will be in later today. Is it urgent?"

Superman couldn't hang out in this phone booth all day. "Somewhat."

"Why contact me?" Henderson asked.

"I'm hoping you might be able to help me find what I've lost," Superman replied vaguely. He could do subtle as well.

"Is it of a sensitive nature?"

"I believe so," stated Superman.

"Do you think that Ms. Lane stole your missing item? Is that why you're calling me?"

"No. No." Superman wanted to groan. This conversation was going nowhere. "I'm hoping she has it. Or knows who might," Superman said, getting more frustrated by the moment.

"I still don't understand why you are contacting me," Henderson told him.

Superman winced. He was afraid of that. "Does Superman trust you?"

"I hope so, but he holds his cards close to the vest."

I do? “If he did, it would be a good recommendation for me to trust you. But if he didn’t, you’d probably lie about it anyway,” Superman said, stating his thoughts out loud.

“True,” Henderson replied with a hint of a chuckle, but his heart rate didn’t increase. The policeman wasn’t nervous. “Perhaps you should ask him.”

“I wish I could,” Superman mumbled, wiping a hand down his face. If he could, he wouldn’t be making this call in the first place.

“Ah. That’s the crux, isn’t it? No one has seen Superman since last Sunday when he left EPRAD control,” Henderson said.

“That long? No, that’s not right. Lois Lane and Clark Kent spoke with him yesterday. Or at least a few days ago,” Superman corrected. “There was that little blurb in the *Daily Planet* that said that he had contacted the reporters and told them he had returned safely from space.”

“Is that what this is about? Do you want Ms. Lane to contact Superman?” Henderson asked.

Desperately! He sighed. “Unfortunately, I don’t think that’s possible...” *Without me*, Superman wanted to add. But, if he admitted that to the detective, he would no longer be holding his cards to his chest. He took a deep breath. “Without me,” he murmured, hoping he was doing the right thing.

He heard Henderson’s chair scrape the floor as if he suddenly sat up. “This thing of yours that Ms. Lane has, what is it?”

“I cannot tell you.” Superman could not admit to just anyone about his missing memories.

“Do you know where Superman is?” Henderson asked.

“I’ve said too much already. Just tell her that he’s fine. I’ll contact...”

“What’s your name?” Henderson demanded.

“I don’t... I’m going by the name of Charlie King.”

Superman told him and hung up. That went badly. Very badly. Now Detective Henderson thought Charlie King was holding Superman hostage.

Superman pushed open the door of the phone booth and walked in the direction of the island of New Troy. Staying in the suburbs wasn’t going to solve his problems. The people who knew him personally were in Metropolis. Probably. Whether he wanted the exposure or not, Metropolis was the place to go.

He groaned as he wiped his hand down his face again. He could feel the rough stubble of a morning beard shadowing his face. He sighed. This was going to be a long day.

Thursday — Mid-Morning

There was a slight pause on the other end of the line. “Sorry, Ms. Lane, Detective Henderson here.”

Lois’s heart slammed back onto the ground. “What do you want?” she snapped.

Wow! Testy much? Maybe he has news on Clark.

Lois snarled at her inner voice. She wasn’t interested in niceties.

“Do you know the name Charlie King?” he asked.

“No,” Lois said tersely. “Look, Henderson, this is really a bad...”

“Where’s Clark?” he asked, cutting her off.

Lois choked back a sob. “Missing. We got separated when he went to go searching for Superman yesterday morning and...”

“And you haven’t heard from Superman? Today?”

“Not since Clark went to...”

“And you don’t know a Charlie King?” he asked again.

“No! Should I?” her angry voice shook like thunder.

“A man who called himself Charlie King phoned me this morning because he couldn’t reach you,” Henderson explained.

“Probably another sicko fan,” Lois shook her head.

“He told me to tell you...” the policeman paused.

“What?!”

“That Superman is fine,” he answered softly.

Lois gasped as a chill drizzled down her entire body before she stiffened. “No, he’s not.”

“No?”

“If he was ‘fine,’ *he* would have tried to contact me or Clark...” her voice trailed off. “He’s Clark’s best...” She had no more energy to lie.

“If I see Clark, I’ll let him know you’re worried,” Henderson told her.

Lois sighed. “No offense, Detective, but if you see Clark before I do, it will be because you found his body.”

Her phone rang again. Lois didn’t want to answer it, but her inner voice told her again, ‘it might be Clark.’

“Hi, Darlin’. Want to tell me why you aren’t at your desk? Are you working on a hot lead from home?” Perry’s voice asked in the phone.

Oh, God. Your boss. You don’t want to talk to him.

“Clark’s still missing,” she finally squeaked out.

“*What?!* He hasn’t made it home yet?” Perry seemed surprised. But, then again, the Chief had known about Clark’s invulnerability longer than she had.

“No.” Lois lacked the energy to say more.

“You want me to send Jimmy over there? You two could search for him together. It isn’t like Clark to disappear like that,” Perry told her, but he seemed distracted. She could hear another voice in the background.

“Perry, you and I both know there isn’t anything to find.” She sighed.

“What’s this?” Her boss was obviously talking to that other person in his office. “Jimmy thinks I’m your assistant and has given me your messages.”

Lois groaned. She didn’t want her messages. She wanted to go back to thinking about Clark.

“Nunk... Jimmy, you don’t have to take messages from snake oil salesmen...” Lois could hear Perry crinkling up that message. “Charlie King? No number... Henderson. Hey, Lois, that’s the detective from the Lex Luthor case, isn’t it? You should definitely call him back. See if there’s a follow-up...”

“My. Husband. Is. Missing. And. Probably. Dead!” Lois growled. “You and the Daily Planet can just wait until I process that.”

“Clark’s not dead, honey,” her boss reassured her. “You’ve got to have some faith in him. Lots of people went missing during the Nightfall confusion. Hell, LexComm isn’t one hundred percent yet. It’s still a mess out there, which is why I need all hands on deck. If I know Clark, and I do, he’s working his way back to you. Give him some time and...”

“He was exploded by a nuclear bomb!” she screamed. “The man I love is dead! He’s not coming back! He’s not working his way back to me! Let me grieve!”

Lois slammed the phone back in its base and slunk down to the floor in a pool of tears.

Thursday — Mid-Day

Superman set down the latest issue of *Earth News* with him on the cover. This one showed four very frozen looking men with flamethrowers. *Frosty End to The Toasters: Superman Cleans up Crime in Metropolis*. He had been worried at first that he had killed those men, but the article claimed they got nothing worse than a mild case of frostbite.

His eyes gravitated back to the photos gracing the cover of *Dirt Digger Weekly*. Half the frame showed him flying with Lois in his arms, her head resting against his chest. A very tender photo. The other half of the cover showed her in a baseball hat and ridiculously huge sunglasses. Her hand was raised to block the photographer from taking her photo, her other hand gripping

the arm of a brown-haired man in the dark suit and glasses. The headline above both photos read: *The Two Lives of Lois Lane*.

Seeing that cover seemed to squash the little hope he had. Lois Lane obviously was with that *other* man now. Photos did not lie. Since arriving at this newsstand he had seen photo after photo of himself with Lois Lane. She was beautiful. Stunning, really. He had actually been excited about meeting her.

And then the newsstand owner had unpacked a couple of bundles of new tabloids. There was this one and then the *National Inquisitor* screamed: *Lois Dumped Superman for Him?* And it showed a photo of Superman side by side another photo of that other man. Neither photo had been very good. Clark Kent, Superman soon discovered, was the man's name. Her writing partner.

Superman's heart actually hurt at the thought of this woman's love slipping through his fingers. Maybe it hadn't been the asteroid that had taken away his memories. Perhaps it had been Lois's betrayal. He looked at her picture and at once he felt like flying to the heavens while also hurtling himself off the nearest building. Like *that* would do any good, he scoffed. Sometimes it sucked being unbreakable.

He loved Lois Lane. He knew he did. His heart did a tap dance when he first saw her picture. How thrilled he had been that *this* woman — with doe eyes and a haunting smile — had chosen him instead of a man from her home planet. *How naïve!*

A tall, thin man with salt and pepper hair, wearing an ill-fitting blue business suit, approached the newsstand. "Hi, Mike."

"Hi, Bill," replied the man who worked the booth.

"Did you save me a *Daily Planet*?" Bill asked.

"Good thing I did. They've been flying off the shelf with Lois Lane's article that Superman's still around. People are excited about that," Mike replied, handing the paper to Bill.

Superman scoffed out loud. *Back. Ha!*

Both men glanced over at him, but then returned to their conversation.

"I see they've realized the error of their ways and promoted you again," said Mike.

"Thanks, Mike, for always believing they would," Bill replied, tapping him lightly with the folded newspaper. Then he nodded towards Superman, who had opened another magazine. And Bill lowered his voice — as if *that* would stop Superman from overhearing them. "He giving you any trouble?"

"Nah. I think he's waiting for someone. He's been reading anything and everything to do with Superman," Mike told him.

"How long has he been here?" Bill asked.

"Over an hour. But he keeps to himself. Doesn't bother the other customers. And they..." Mike sighed. "A few of them tried speaking with him, but he just nods a greeting and returns his attention to whatever he's reading."

"Uh-huh."

"He seems upset about something, so the other customers have mostly been giving him a wide berth."

Gee, discovering that the love of his life dumped him for some bespectacled newsman upset him? Imagine that. Superman shook his head in disgust.

"Thanks again for the paper, Mike," Bill replied and started to walk away.

Superman was happy that Bill had decided to leave. He would rather wallow alone.

"Hi, Superman," Bill said casually, suddenly by his side.

Great. Another one. Why wouldn't they just leave him alone? Superman acknowledged him with a nod and returned to the magazine in his hand, ignoring the man.

There wasn't really anything new in that one. As he put it back on the rack, his eyes drifted back to the *Dirty Digger Weekly* tabloid he had propped up in front of him. He closed his eyes to block the pain that overwhelmed him whenever he looked

at that photo of Lois with that other man.

"You know you can't always believe what you read, don't you, Superman?" Bill said gently, still by his side. "Tabloids are notorious for their lies."

A glimmer of hope sparked in Superman's chest but then died again. "Photos don't lie."

Oh, God! Had he said that out loud? He stepped away from the man... from Bill and from that photo of Clark Kent.

"She didn't dump you, Superman," Bill said quietly.

What?! Superman turned to face the man next to him, his heart making up for all the beats it lost since he saw that photo. "Excuse me?"

"It's a lie, because Lois Lane never dated Superman," Bill explained. "She's been dating Clark since before you showed up."

"She has?" he sputtered. Then why the photos? Why did he feel this way about her?

"And you'd never try to steal your best friend's girl? Now, would you, Superman?" Bill prodded.

Superman stared at Bill. Clark Kent was his *best* friend? He had fallen in love with his best friend's *girlfriend*? And this man knew about it? "I... I have no idea what you're talking about..." he stammered. No, of course he wouldn't try to steal away Clark Kent's girl. No matter how tempting the idea was.

The man — Bill — reached inside his jacket and pulled out his wallet, flipping it open. Only it wasn't a wallet; it was an ID badge. "Detective Henderson," Bill said, introducing himself. "Are you Charlie?"

Thursday — Early Afternoon

The phone rang. Lois didn't know how long it had been since she had hung up on Perry. It could have been five minutes. It could have been two hours. Or a day. Her body felt numb.

Come on, honey. Third time's a charm, coaxed her inner voice, who strangely enough still had hope left for Clark.

Lois herself could not move. "He's dead," she whispered. What was the point of answering the phone? More torture? More torment from good-natured friends? No thank you.

She felt that floating sensation through her body again, tingling down her arms and legs. Suddenly the phone was in her hand; she didn't recall picking it up. "Hello?" Lois said, although she didn't think she had actually spoken.

"Hey, Lane, Detective Henderson again..."

"I'm sorry, Lois Lane is comatose right now, please leave a message and I'll try to pound it through her thick skull until she hears it. Beep."

Lois knew she hadn't said those words. It sounded like her voice, but it didn't sound like *her*: She was deep inside her mind lingering, listening to this dream, wondering why she was saying these strange things.

Henderson didn't reply right away. "Okay."

"Do you have any news on Clark?" she heard herself ask the Detective. *Detective?* When had Henderson been promoted from street cop?

"No... No..." Henderson answered slowly. "But I found Charlie King."

"Big deal. Another sicko behind bars, just to be released to torment me another day," the person with her voice replied.

Henderson ignored her statement as he continued, "Charlie wants to help you find Clark..."

"Unless he can fly..." her voice interrupted.

"Funny that you should say that, Lane. Charlie's dressed as Superman."

Lois gasped like a drowning victim after getting mouth-to-mouth. A little bile came up from her stomach as the air reached her lungs. She coughed a couple of times as she continued to gasp for air. And then she spoke; this time she knew she was in

control, though her voice was hoarse, “You have Superman down at your office?”

“Looking right at him. Just needs verification of his identity to be released,” Henderson explained.

“Do. Not. Let. Him. Leave! I’ll be right there.” Lois dropped the phone and grabbed her purse and car keys, running out the door.

Superman sat in an interrogation room. He knew it was an interrogation room, but he wasn’t quite sure how he knew. He recognized the window that acted like a mirror. He could see others standing on the other side of it, even though he wasn’t supposed to. There was that psychiatrist who had just interviewed him. Must be one of his powers — super x-ray sight — even though he didn’t remember it mentioned in any of the articles.

First, Henderson had taken him to visit a friend of his at a place called S.T.A.R. Labs. The scientist’s name had been Bernard Klein, PhD. A strange man. Odd. Nice. Of course, everything and everyone seemed odd today. Perhaps he himself had been the oddest of the group. Dr. Klein had checked out Superman’s radioactivity levels and had found them slightly higher than norm, but not any more dangerous than if he had given dose of radiotherapy once or twice. Been human and had had a dose of radiotherapy, that was.

Next, the detective had returned with him to the police station and had asked that Superman speak with Dr. Teri McCorkle, the department’s police psychiatrist, about his missing memories. Per Henderson’s request on their drive back to Precinct Twelve — or was it Twelfth Precinct? — Superman didn’t demonstrate any of his super powers to anyone at the police station. They both thought it wiser if nobody realized that he was the real McCoy.

Superman watched as Henderson, that psychiatrist, and some other blonde lady discussed him.

“Henderson, I heard from a source that you brought Superman in...” said the blonde woman, whom, now that she had turned toward the window to ogle him, Superman recognized. Linda King. That woman from the *Metropolis Star*. “What’s he doing here?”

“He doesn’t know. We picked him up at the Fifth Street Mission,” Henderson said to her, obviously lying. Why would Henderson tell her that?

“Superman!” she called to him as she knocked on the window.

“He can’t see you. It’s a one-way,” Henderson explained.

Only Superman could see and hear her — all of them — just fine.

“It doesn’t matter anyway; he can’t remember a thing,” the detective continued. “Where he works, who he is, me, you. Doc? Dr. Teri McCorkle, this is Linda King. Dr. McCorkle is our department shrink.”

“What could have caused this?” Linda asked, turning her attention to the psychiatrist.

“Several possibilities. I guess anxiety caused by this asteroid could be a factor. On the other hand...” stared the doctor.

“Hold on a minute. Superman, anxious? I don’t think so. What other theories do you have?” Linda said.

What? He couldn’t be anxious? Why not? Actually, he felt pretty darn worried at this exact minute, because he felt like Detective Henderson was throwing him under a bus to the press.

“These cases are often triggered by some kind of physical trauma,” continued the doctor.

“Well,” Linda rolled her eyes. “There are rumors that he crashed into Nightfall, blowing it up, yesterday... pure speculation and drivel, mind you,” stated the reporter, clearly not a fan of Lois Lane’s work. “But he did push Nightfall off course... maybe colliding with the asteroid. Perhaps when he lost his microphone, it was because he banged his head... but that

was on Sunday.”

“Or maybe he was hit by a car,” suggested Henderson. “And knocked into some garbage.”

What was Henderson up to? Car? Garbage? Neither of those things would bang Superman up or give him amnesia.

“It could be delayed reaction,” Dr. McCorkle agreed, nodding her head.

Linda rolled her eyes at the detective and then ignored his interjection. “Will he be okay?” she asked, staring at Superman again.

Superman didn’t want to catch the reporter’s eye or she would know he could see her.

“Physically, he’s fine,” replied the psychiatrist.

“Well, duh?! He’s Superman,” Linda scoffed.

Superman stood up and walked toward the mirror. He had just realized that he was starting to develop a bit of visible stubble along his jaw. He wondered if his beard was invulnerable, too. Great! Just what he needed. How did one shave invulnerable stubble?

“Whether or not he’ll regain his memory immediately, I don’t know. Based on the battery of questions we asked him, it seems like he’s suffering from what we call the Superman complex,” said Dr. McCorkle.

“Of course *he* does.” Linda chuckled. “Don’t we all?”

Superman looked at his teeth in the mirror. His mouth felt like it was as dry as three-day-old bread. He could use a shower and a bed. He wanted to go home, wherever that was. He rubbed his teeth with his finger, hoping the fuzzy feeling that was developing would be relieved.

“What I mean is that he’s a chronic do-gooder, who thinks he can handle anything. This kind of setback can be very frustrating.”

Really? It took a trained psychiatrist to realize that he felt frustrated? Please! He could have told her that. He *did* tell her that.

“Tell me what I should do,” Linda asked.

Her? Superman didn’t want Linda to do anything. Thank you very much. He wanted Lois Lane to take charge of his mental health. Actually, he wanted Lois Lane to be in charge of more than his mental health, but he would settle for that. Maybe between her and Clark Kent, he would be able to recover some of his missing memories. Hadn’t he heard Henderson telephone the Daily Planet reporter?

“Charlie needs to be surrounded by familiar people, do familiar things. It will come back to him in time. Just be patient with him,” said the doctor.

“Charlie?” Linda inquired, confused. “Who’s Charlie?”

“He is,” said Henderson, nodding towards Superman on the other side of the window, not able to hide his smile any longer. “That’s Charlie King. He’s a professional Superman impersonator. Witnesses reported someone dressed as Superman getting hit by car yesterday during the celebrations and knocked into some garbage cans. His family called him in missing last night. They’re on their way now.”

“Wait? You aren’t Charlie King’s wife?” exclaimed Dr. McCorkle, glancing between Linda King and Detective Henderson. “With the same last name, I just assumed...”

Superman shook his head as he walked over to another window and played with the blinds. Charlie King was *really* his name? He thought he had made it up. If he was just a Superman impersonator, how could he fly?

Linda sneered at Henderson. “Very funny. Very funny.” Then she turned her almost leering gaze back to Superman. “King? Huh? Are you sure he’s not my long lost husband?”

“Positive. He’s got a wife, Lola, and a kid on the way,” Henderson told her.

Superman gulped. He was married and going to be a father?

His heart ached as he looked down at the floor. He honestly felt chagrined for lusting after Lois Lane. Why hadn't Henderson told him about his wife? Or was Henderson lying to Linda King again?

A few minutes later, Henderson led Superman out to the chair next to his desk. Superman sat down, completely confused. Was he Superman? Or was he just a Superman impersonator, like the detective told Linda King? No, an impersonator wouldn't be able to fly, even for the five seconds he had. An impersonator would have been able to hear them talking about him or seen them through the one-way mirror. No, Henderson wouldn't have called Lois Lane if he had been an impersonator married to a woman named Lola, especially if Clark Kent was his best friend.

Of course, Henderson may only have wanted to play a joke on Lois like he had with Linda King. And Henderson was the one who told Superman that Clark Kent was his best friend...

The din in the police station was louder out here in the pits than in the interrogation room, where everything had been blissfully muted. Superman had only heard what he had wanted to hear — what he had concentrated on hearing. Out here he could hear every little noise as it slammed into his head. It wasn't a painful experience, and he probably wouldn't end up with a headache, but it sure was annoying.

Through the sea of sounds, Superman heard a gasp and a feminine voice whisper, "Is that really him?"

What differentiated this gasp and those words from all the other ones he had heard today, he wasn't sure. Superman suspected it had to do with the elevated heartbeat he also heard. He looked around the room, wondering if he could find the source of that voice.

"You tell me, Lane. You're the expert," he heard Henderson reply.

Lane! Lois Lane was here? Superman didn't want to appear too excited but he was. Someone who knew him. Who could fill in the missing details of his life. Who could take him home. To his wife? Did he even have a wife? Or was that part of the practical joke on Ms. King?

"He's alive?" Ms. Lane choked out.

She had thought he had died? Invulnerable, little ol' Superman? Dead? No, Henderson wouldn't play such a practical joke on Lois Lane, like he had with Linda King. That would be just cruel.

Superman had convinced himself that he was head-over-heels in love with Lois Lane. He didn't know how it had happened, it just had. But there was something in Lois's tone of voice that said his death had affected her deeply. His heart skipped a beat. Was there a part of her that actually loved Superman?

No matter how many times he argued with himself about loving her, Superman still couldn't change his own mind. But if there was a part of her that loved him, would he fight for her love? Encourage it to grow? Or would finally meeting her in person, seeing her face-to-face, slap him back to reality on how one-sided his love was? Of how much she loved her boyfriend Clark? He continued to look around for Lois. He stood up and gazed squarely in to the eyes of Linda King.

"Honey, it's me. Linda!" At his dazed expression, she continued, "How could you not remember what we meant to each other?" There was a slight pout to these words.

"Linda King, right?" Superman asked, his brow furrowing. "I guess you've interviewed me once or twice."

"We do a lot more than that," Linda said, a slight smile brushing her lips

"We do?" Superman replied skeptically. Personally, he couldn't believe he would ever be attracted to Linda, not with Lois Lane in the world.

"We've kept it a secret. You're so worried about what people think." Linda glanced over her shoulder at a glowering brunette.

"Especially her."

Superman leaned over and took a look at the brunette to whom Linda was referring. She seemed a bit familiar, but he couldn't place her face.

He shook his head as Linda continued speaking. "You don't even remember *us*?" Then she started weeping into her hands.

"Um..." Superman wasn't quite sure what to do. Had they had a relationship? If they had, he really felt bad about not remembering. He patted her shoulders kindly, uncomfortably.

Linda took that as a cue to pull him into a tight embrace. "Does this refresh your memory?"

Superman could tell that Linda was really enjoying the hug as she rubbed her body against his. From over Linda's shoulder he realized at second glance that the brunette was actually Lois Lane. She stood in the doorway to the squad room and stared at him. *Them.* And there was fire in her eyes. He shrugged apologetically. What else could he do? He didn't want to be in Linda's embrace any more than Lois wanted him to be there.

Gently, he pushed the blonde woman out of his arms. "I'm sorry... Miss King. I truly don't remember you. You are making me feel uncomfortable."

Linda seemed perturbed by this development and glared at him. "Kiss me!" she demanded. "I know how Superman kisses and I'll be able to tell the difference between an imposter and the real thing."

Superman took another step back, almost in horror. Disbelief streaked across his face. "Excuse me?" He had kissed this woman? Why? Had he been rebounding from Lois's rejection? Or was Linda lying? Either way, he was certainly not going to kiss her.

Linda grabbed his head and pulled his face towards hers, planting a kiss on his lips. Superman took several steps away from her, tripped over a chair, and landed on his butt. He fixed his eyes on the *Metropolis Star* reporter in shock. She pressed her lips together and looked down at him with sneering disdain. "You *aren't* Superman," she told him flippantly and stormed out of the squad room amongst a flurry of titters and guffaws. "He's *all* yours, Tiny Town," scoffed Linda as she passed Lois Lane and Detective Henderson.

Superman felt completely humiliated as his eyes connected with those of the dark-haired beauty across the room again. Maybe Linda King was right. Maybe he wasn't who he had thought he was. Right now, he felt anything but super under the scrutiny of those dark brown eyes that penetrated deep inside him.

Lois broke eye contact and, as she turned to leave, mumbled, "I can't do this..."

Henderson took hold of her arm and spoke softly. Superman doubted anyone but the three of them could hear. "He's a blank slate."

She froze. Her back, which still faced Superman, stiffened. "Wh... what?" she stammered.

"He's lost his memory. He doesn't remember himself, let alone Clark or..."

"*Me?*" Lois squeaked, looking at the detective. "He doesn't remember Clark?" She gulped. She turned and faced Superman for a moment, fear in her eyes. "But... But... Superman... was the last person to see Clark before he disappeared..." She was almost pleading with Henderson to tell her he was joking.

Clark Kent was missing? Superman was the last person Clark spoke to before disappearing? Had he done something to Clark Kent? Had he threatened or... Superman swallowed as he pulled himself to his feet... killed that mild-mannered reporter out of jealousy? Was that why he had amnesia? Oh, God! He hoped not. He had to help that woman find her boyfriend, no matter the end results.

"He needs your help," coaxed the detective.

Lois held up her hands. “No... No... No... We just started to clean up that mess. You know what Clark and I went through with all the rumors between us.” She flung her hand out towards Superman.

These words — despite being spoken in a hushed whisper — still punctured him. It was *his* fault? Had it been his attentions towards Lois that had ruined her reputation in the eyes of the tabloids? Of course it did! What had he done to this woman? She would never help him now. Not that he deserved it.

Superman could hear her heart beating a mile a minute. Her hands were shaking as she gestured to Henderson. “I can’t... What can I...? Where can I...? No! Not without Clark. I can’t help him without Clark.” Her body was positively shaking now. Tears started pooling in those doe eyes as she turned and stared at Superman. What was the emotion that he saw in them? Pity? Sadness? Fear? A combination of all of the above. “I *need* Clark.”

“Ms. Lane? Lo-is,” Henderson said sternly. “*He* needs you.”

Lois was shaking her head. “I know. Don’t you think I *want* to help him?” she hissed. Superman watched as the tears rolled down her cheeks. “If Kal gets his memory back in two hours... I’ll have ruined everything by... No. Clark will kill me. Especially after...”

Who was Kal? Was *he* Kal? Superman wondered. Lois Lane *did* know him. He started walking across the squad room.

She grabbed Henderson’s lapels. “We’re married!” she pleaded. “I can’t!”

Superman stopped in his tracks. Lois Lane married Clark Kent? Had they gotten married to stop the rumors about Superman and Lois? Suddenly, it felt like the air had been sucked out of his lungs. He wanted nothing more than to hold Lois in his arms and comfort her. But if she was married... to another man... and with all the rumors in the tabloids still swirling around the two of them. She was right. He *needed* to find Clark Kent... her husband.

Those words caused a sharp pain in his gut. They needed Clark’s buffer between them. He couldn’t be seen alone with Ms. Lane or it would be ruinous to more than her reputation. No one would want an adulterous hero. He nodded in determination. It was the least he could do after all he had done to this woman. He continued walking towards Lois and Henderson.

Lois stared at him with panic in her eyes, taking a step back. “I’m so sorry... Ka... Su... Superman. I’m so... sorry... I...”

Superman held out his hand. “Ms. Lane?”

She nodded vigorously. “Forgive me,” she whispered, before she hesitantly allowed him to take her hand.

The electricity that jolted through his body at her touch told him that his love for her was no delusion. Superman would do anything for this woman. Anything. Even it meant he would never be with her. Her happiness meant more to him than his own. “We’ll find your partner and bring him back to you,” he stated matter-of-factly, hating every word. “I promise.”

Lois pulled her eyes away from his and to their joined hands, then her eyes rolled back in her head and she sunk to the floor. Superman scooped her up into his arms. “She’s distraught about Clark,” he told Henderson as they walked through the squad room to the interrogation rooms.

Henderson sighed and mumbled under his breath. “You have no idea.”

Thursday — Mid-Afternoon

Superman sat quietly in Detective Henderson’s unmarked police car. He had so many questions buzzing around in his head, but he had no idea if the policeman would be able to answer any of them. He finally chose one.

“Am I really Charlie King, husband to Lola King?”

Henderson smirked. “Lola Dane, actually.”

Superman’s heart plummeted. He felt awful. “I am?”

The detective shook his head as a chuckle escaped. “Sorry, too tempting. No, Superman, your name is not really Charlie King. And your wife... and you don’t have a wife named Lola.” He sighed. “Linda King had it coming to her the way she kept throwing herself at you. Sometimes I just can’t resist knocking her down a peg or two. I apologize for the confusion. I forgot you could hear us. Obviously, you’re no impersonator.”

Superman exhaled, reassured that at least there wasn’t some woman out there pining away for him. Someone wondering where he was while he had been freely and easily tossing his heart to Lois Lane. He felt nothing for Linda King, except possibly nausea.

Lois Lane — on the other hand — was all he could think about. He felt almost embarrassed about the depth of his feelings for this woman to whom he had technically only spoken for a minute. He didn’t know if he would still love her as much as he did at this moment when his memories returned; he hoped not. She was another man’s wife. He still had no idea why that bespectacled nerd appealed to Lois much more than he, Superman, did.

“Why Clark Kent?” Oh, God, he had spoken his thoughts out loud. Again. Superman turned to look out the window, hoping Henderson hadn’t heard him. He really needed more self-control.

He saw Henderson glance at him out of the corner of his eye. “Because anyone you date might as well paint a giant target on themselves. Besides having her apartment trashed, burglarized, and bugged, Lois was also threatened by the Toasters and kidnapped by a psychopathic billionaire, who wanted her to reveal your secrets to him.”

Superman flinched. Yeah, that would kind of diminish his allure in any woman’s eyes. He now knew why she and Clark had rushed off... Had they *rushed* off? Maybe their engagement was one of long standing. Superman had no idea.

Then he realized that Superman would never be able to have a relationship with any woman. He was destined to be alone for the rest of his life. No wife. No children. No family. He would never chance putting them in danger. He would always be apart from the others on this planet. That thought saddened him.

Of course, Superman reminded himself that he would be pining away for Lois Lane for the rest of his life, so it didn’t matter anyway. He wondered why he had chosen to come to Earth in the first place. He sighed.

“Clark’s the rock in Lois’s life. He takes good care of her,” Henderson assured him.

“He wouldn’t hurt her, would he?” Superman asked softly.

“Not intentionally.”

“She said that Clark would kill her if she...” What? Rescued Superman from the police station? Claimed him like a lost puppy? Took him home? Oh, goodness, he wanted nothing more than for Lois to take him home with her. To be her lost puppy. He *was* pathetic.

Henderson chuckled. “Kill her with his annoyance maybe, but not with death.” He pulled the car over in front of a closed restaurant. MJ’s Café. “Here we are. MJ stands for Martha and Jonathan; those are Clark’s parents. They live in the apartment upstairs.”

A note on the door announced that the restaurant was closed due to a family emergency. Superman surmised the emergency to be Clark’s disappearance. They must love their son very much to close down their restaurant when he had been missing less than twenty-four hours.

Superman didn’t want to get out of the car. He wasn’t sure the type of reception he would get from these people after what he had done to their family. He decided on a delaying tactic instead. “How do you know Lois and Clark?”

“I was the officer who responded after Lois’s apartment was burglarized. You and I met when you brought me another burglar

and told me that if I... or the police... ever needed you that I was to tell Clark Kent, because he knew how to contact you,” the detective explained.

Superman nodded. “That’s how you knew that Clark was my best friend?” It was more of a statement than a question. “How does he contact me?” he asked.

Henderson shrugged and then nodded to the restaurant. “Maybe the Kents know.”

“I guess I should go find out,” Superman mumbled to himself.

The policeman pointed to the door next to the café’s entrance. “You can buzz their apartment there.”

“You aren’t coming?” Superman inquired, pushing open the car door.

“Nah. You can handle it from here. I’ve got lots to do down at the station. Clark isn’t the only missing person in Metropolis right now,” Henderson told him.

“Thank you.” Superman nodded to him and climbed out. He shut the car door and raised his hand in a slight wave. After walking to the building, he pressed the buzzer next to the Kents’ name.

“Hello?” said a woman’s voice.

“It’s Superman,” he told her and the door clicked open for him. Superman glanced over his shoulder to Henderson, but the man had already driven off. He pushed open the door and walked up the stairs.

An older, petite, strawberry-blonde woman ran down the stairs and threw herself into his arms with a huge embrace. “We’ve been so worried,” she told him. Unlike the hug that Linda King had given him, this one was as far from uncomfortable as possible. It must have been the best hug in the history of hugs, because Superman was sure he had never felt so loved. No matter what else he might discover, he would always consider this woman his home.

Lois awoke on a couch in one of the interrogation rooms.

“Here,” said a portly policeman, handing her a donut. “Bill was worried you hadn’t eaten all day. Low blood sugar.” Then he handed her a cup of coffee. “Hope black is okay.”

“Fine,” she whispered and took the offered food.

Clark’s alive! Clark’s alive! Lois’s inner voice hadn’t stopped chanting that since she first spotted him across the crowded squad room.

“Where’s Superman?” she finally asked, after a few bites of donut and a sip of probably the worst coffee she had tried in her life. It tasted burnt. Her head was really throbbing. She couldn’t believe she had passed out. But Bill — did the policeman mean Henderson? — was right. She hadn’t eaten since the peanuts on the plane yesterday afternoon.

“You mean Charlie King? The Superman impersonator?” the policeman asked.

Superman impersonator? No, that had definitely been her husband. Lois may have been out of it, but she knew her husband. And her body had zinged at his touch; that couldn’t be faked.

Charlie King? Wasn’t that the name Henderson said Clark was using?

She took another bite of donut. “Yes, him.”

“Henderson offered to drive him to his parents.”

Lois nodded. If they were going to look for Clark, the Kents’ place was the best place to start. She couldn’t believe she had sent Clark on such a fool’s errand. She hoped he would forgive her for refusing to take responsibility for Superman at such a public locale. When Clark got his memory back, he would... maybe.

The Kents! You should warn them.

“Can I borrow your phone? I should check in with my in-

laws and see if they’ve heard from Clark,” she asked to the policeman. “Thanks for the donut.”

He nodded. “Why don’t we give you a few moments to rest first?” he suggested. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

A good ten minutes later, the portly policeman returned and waved her out of the interrogation room. Lois grabbed what was left of the half-box of donuts to take with her.

“I’m sure Bill won’t mind if you borrow his telephone,” said the policeman, leading her to the visitor’s chair at an empty desk and handing over the phone. Lois told him the phone number to dial and it rang several times before someone picked it up.

“Hello?” Clark’s sultry voice said into her ear.

“Clark?” she gasped. “It’s Lois.”

“No, I’m sorry, Ms. Lane. It’s Superman, not Clark,” he replied.

Lois winced. Her husband’s mind was still missing, but at least his body was somewhere safe.

“I... uh... was just wondering if the Kents could stand a little company,” she mumbled through her excuse for calling. Even to her it sounded flimsy at best.

“I’ve just arrived here to interview the Kents about their son,” Superman told her.

“Your... *his* parents. How... how... That’s great!” Lois tried to push enthusiasm into her voice.

“I’m sure they’d love for you to come over, Ms. Lane. Shall I ask them?” Superman inquired.

“Oh. No. No... uh... I wouldn’t want to intrude at a... you know... a family time,” she said. Lois wanted nothing more than to be with Clark. But Clark wasn’t Clark. He was Superman. She didn’t know if she could be around him and pretend he wasn’t the man she loved with her entire being. She didn’t have enough self-control for that kind of act at the moment. She didn’t feel like going back to that time in her life, when she knew he was both but had to pretend otherwise.

“Family time? Are you sure, Ms. Lane? You *are* part of this family,” he reminded her.

“Oh, no. No. I have a lot to do. I’ll see you later,” she whispered, as she closed her eyes with a wince, her heart breaking with every lie she told Clark.

“Bye, Ms. Lane,” he replied aloofly before hanging up the phone.

“Bye,” she whispered to dead air. Superman had finally mastered the art of being detached around her, just at the moment she wanted nothing more than to be attached to him.

“Did they hear from your husband?” asked the portly policeman.

“Yeah,” Lois said with a nod. “He...” She swallowed. “He just got there. I should go.” She stood up and pointed over her shoulder. “He’ll probably need me to let him in at our apartment.”

“You okay to drive, Ms. Lane?” the policeman asked her, eyeing her warily.

She smiled weakly. “Yeah. Sure. I’m taking these, though, just in case,” she said, tucking the box of donuts under her arm. “Wouldn’t want me to cause any accidents.” Her joke fell flat, but at least he let her go on her own recognizance.

Where are you going? inquired her inner voice as Lois went down the stairs.

Home, she replied. She was exhausted. She hadn’t slept all night and was still wearing the clothes she had put on the day before. She could use a nap and shower.

Like that matters. Go to the Kents. Get your husband. Take him home.

Lois paused her step. Could she? Would he accept her? Would he want her after she had rejected him so soundly upstairs?

Who cares what he thinks? The man has amnesia. He doesn’t

know what he wants. He's probably very confused and scared and, being Superman, unwilling to admit it. Clark needs you, Lois, and you need him. But do whatever you want! As long as what you want is to be with your husband.

The man on the phone hadn't known her though. Hadn't wanted her. Hadn't been Clark. Hadn't been her husband.

And whose fault was that? Of course, he's still your husband. If you can't convince Superman that he's your husband, then you'll never be able to convince anyone of anything. You'll have no right calling yourself a reporter.

Besides, Lois would have Clark's parents to help her.

Are you going to let a little bump on his head stop you? In sickness and in health ...

"For better or for worse..." she mumbled as her feet started down the steps again.

"Who was that?" Martha Kent called from the kitchen in the Kent's small apartment. As they had walked into the apartment, the phone had rung and the timer had gone off. Mrs. Kent had asked Superman to answer the phone, so she could pull the brownies out of the oven.

He hadn't known if Clark's family would accept him. If Superman truly had been the cause of the rumors that Lois Lane was cheating on their son, so much so that Clark had felt impelled to marry his girlfriend all of sudden just to squash said rumors... Or at least that was why he thought Clark and Lois had gotten married. Wasn't that what Ms. Lane had implied?

Jonathan Kent returned from the bathroom and patted him on the back as he sat down at the table.

"Lois Lane," Superman told them matter-of-factly, who had been on the phone.

Or is she Lois Kent now? the hero wondered. Superman cringed. He had forgotten to ask Lois how she was feeling. He felt like a total heel. No wonder she had chosen Clark over him. No, she had been dating Clark before he even arrived, Henderson had told him. He was sure Superman had never been an option in her mind. His heart sunk lower into his stomach. He sat down at the dining table next to Mr. Kent.

Superman felt that he should be completely honest with the Kents about his current mental disability. Especially after that hug Mrs. Kent gave him when he came in, Superman knew he would never be able to lie to the woman. Anyway, didn't Lois write that part of his credo was truth? And he would do anything to make Lois happy and if what Ms. Lane wanted was her husband...

"I don't know if she's more upset that Clark is missing or that my brain is on the fritz and it's going to make it even more difficult to find him." That sounded horrible. Of course, she would be more worried about her husband than Superman!

Mr. and Mrs. Kent exchanged a perplexed look as Martha Kent gave them each a glass of milk.

Mr. Kent informed Superman, "Clark isn't missing."

Superman was confused. "Sure he is. Ms. Lane told Detective Henderson that he never came home last night. She hasn't heard from him. Didn't she tell you?" Or was that why she called just now to warn them that he was on his way over to ask them about their son?

Standing behind him, Martha Kent set her hands on Superman's shoulders as she looked over at her husband. "Jonathan, I don't think he knows."

Superman glanced between Clark's parents. There was something else going on here. It was very possible he didn't know. There was a lot at the moment he didn't know. "Knows what?" he asked, taking a sip of his milk.

The Kents had him follow them into their bedroom. Martha Kent opened her closet and pulled a Superman suit with cape out of the back with an exasperated sigh. "I sewed them for you," she

told him, handing it over to him.

Superman walked over to the closet and saw that there were several more suits inside. "Why would you want Superman costumes?" he asked her.

Jonathan Kent stared at him. "Because our son Clark is Superman."

"What?" Superman replied, baffled. That didn't make any sense. *He* was Superman. Not Clark.

Jonathan nodded. Superman looked over at Martha. She nodded emphatically as well.

"That's crazy," Superman said, handing the suit back to Mrs. Kent. Oh! They meant *he* was also their son? "I may not be able to remember much, but everything I've heard about your son so far is..." Clark Kent was married to Lois Lane. Allowed to kiss her. Touch her. Make love to her. "Unreal," he finished as his heart started to pound against his chest. He walked back into the living room. How could he be their son? "They say I'm not even from this planet," he told them.

"Then what are all these costumes doing in there?" Martha Kent asked, following him.

"I... I don't know," Superman stammered. Was Mrs. Kent his seamstress? Or was it something more wicked. Superman thought Detective Henderson had answered all of his questions. Perhaps this was another practical joke? Like the one the policeman had played on Linda King? Why would the Kents play along? "Maybe you aren't really Clark's parents!" he shouted at them. "Maybe this is just some weird game that I don't know the rules to... but... but..." He shook his head. "This certainly does not prove that I am your son Clark Kent."

Mr. Kent squatted on the floor and reached under the bed.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Kent asked him.

"He needs proof," he said, pulling a box from under the bed. From inside the box he pulled a navy blue blanket with a Superman crest on it. "When we found you as a baby, you were wrapped in this blanket."

"What?" Superman said, reaching out and touching the blanket. It was soft and felt good against his skin. He shook his head in disbelief.

"I've got an idea, Jonathan. Go get that picture Lois gave us..." Martha Kent suggested, grabbing a pair of black-rimmed glasses off her dresser. She handed the glasses to Superman. "Mess up your hair and put these on."

Superman rolled his eyes and did as she requested, just to prove to her that their theory was preposterous. If he was their son that would mean he was married to Lois Lane and he wouldn't let himself even dream that. That would be...

"Ready, Jonathan?" Martha asked her husband. He nodded. Both of them held up their items at the same time. Martha held a mirror and Jonathan a wedding photo of Clark and Lois.

Except for the blue suit, Superman was the spitting image of Clark Kent. He pulled off the glasses and stumbled backwards to the couch in shock. "I'm Clark Kent?" He shook his head. "I'm married to Lois Lane? I can't be married to *her!*" If he were married to Lois, then that meant that they... His eyes went wide. "There must be some mistake."

"No mistake, son. Superman is really Clark Kent," Jonathan told him, grabbing a chair and sitting in front of Superman.

"I may look like him but I don't know how to *be* Clark Kent," Superman said, looking up from his hands into Jonathan's eyes.

"Martha," Jonathan said to his wife with a hint of a smile and wink. "I think I know what's going on here. Can you get us some brownies?"

Martha nodded and went into the kitchen.

Jonathan lowered his voice, handing Superman the wedding photo. "Son, does this doubt have something to do with Lois?"

Superman stared at the photo. Lois looked so beautiful and

she was holding on to *his* arm. No, not *his* arm. Clark Kent's arm. That man — that Clark Kent — seemed so happy. Of course, Clark was happy that the stunning woman next to him just pledged that she would love him forever. Would let him talk to her. Laugh with her. Kiss her. Touch her. Make love to her. Superman's hands began to shake and he set down the photograph. "Ms. Lane married Clark and I'm not him. I'm... I don't know who I am."

"You are both Clark Kent and Superman. And you are our son," Jonathan told him, softly. "And we love you."

Superman gazed into Jonathan's eyes. There was no humor there, just love. He had a family who loved him and a wife... "But I don't have Clark's memories and I don't have Superman's memories." He closed his eyes with a wince. "If she was *my* wife, why didn't she say so at the police station? Why did she kept blathering on about having to find Clark Kent if he was standing right in front of her?" Superman's eyes flashed open. "She knows, right?"

Jonathan nodded.

"Then why?" Superman asked this man who claimed to be his father.

"I bet she was scared," said Martha, entering the room with a plate of brownies.

"Why? Because she was married to an alien?" he asked, taking a brownie off the top of the stack and stuck it in his mouth. Heavenly.

Martha smiled reassuringly. "Of course not, sweetie. She was scared about revealing your secret identity."

Oh. "When did they get married?" he asked.

"Last Friday in Niagara Falls," said his father.

"*Last Friday? A week ago?*" Superman said falteringly, taking another brownie.

Mrs. Kent nodded.

O-K. He would set aside the information that Superman had had to deal with the Nightfall asteroid during what was essentially his honeymoon until later. He didn't want to think about Lois and a honeymoon together in front of these people... any people, really. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. But he had to know if it were a real marriage, not just a faux marriage to get the tabloids off Lois's back. He swallowed and lowered his voice, "And Lois and Clark... they're friends, right?" He cleared his throat, lowering his voice and hoping it didn't sound like he was gossiping about their son.

"Sure, you're friends, son," replied Clark's father, confused.

"Are they... more than friends?" he asked, hoping he was getting his meaning across to Clark's parents without having to be explicit.

"More than...?" Clark's mother gaped at him.

"You'll be partners at the new Daily Planet. You'll work closely together," explained Mr. Kent, wrapping an arm around his wife's waist.

"How close?" Superman asked warily.

"Close," replied Mr. Kent.

"Close, close," Mrs. Kent said with a nod.

"Did Lois and Clark..." Superman pressed his lips together. This question would have to be asked directly as his previous ones seemed too vague. "Consummate this marriage?"

Martha laughed a full belly chortle, finally understanding. "Most certainly. She could hardly keep her hands off you before you were married."

Superman gulped, taking another brownie. The deep, rich flavor was really soothing. "She married Clark for love?" he finally asked, a part of him thrilled and a part of him in disbelief. Dismayed, because he still couldn't believe that Lois loved Clark. And *he* was Clark! Lois Lane loved *him*? He was getting dizzy from this revelation and its natural consequences.

Martha's reassuring smile broadened into a grin. "Oh, yeah."

He looked between the large grins these people who claimed to be his folks displayed.

Jonathan nodded to his wife again and she returned to the kitchen. "What's really bothering you, son?"

"Is she expecting me to return?" He zipped over the table and swallowed his milk in one sip, before returning to the couch two seconds later. He took another brownie. "Am I supposed to live with Lois Lane?"

"She *is* your wife, son."

"I can't go to her," he whispered to Jonathan Kent as he started to wring his hands. "I feel more comfortable as the hero than the man and she's going to expect... well... her husband... not me." He wasn't explaining this well.

"Are you afraid that she's going to expect you to share her bed? To make love to her?"

"Can I stay with you until my memories return?" Superman asked hopefully.

Jonathan raised a curious eyebrow. "Don't you want to sleep with your wife?"

He wasn't describing his reasoning well at all, Superman realized. "I woke up in a hole in the ground this morning to someone calling me Superman. All day I was secure in the knowledge of who I am, just without my past... my memories. I spent all day researching myself, Superman me, with this nagging feeling — a hope really — that there was more to me than that hero everyone kept talking about... Then I learned that Lois Lane was Superman's girlfriend and I was ecstatic. Finally, there was someone with whom I had shared my secrets. Who would know about me. And then when I saw that first photo of us, just standing and talking, I... I know this will sound crazy, but I sort of fell in love with her." He looked down. "There was something about her that I... she..."

Mr. Kent smiled. "It's plain that the memories are gone but the love is still there."

"But I don't know her! How can you expect me to..."

Superman brought his eyes up to Jonathan Kent's.

"There is more to a marriage than sharing a bed, Clark," Mr. Kent told him.

Superman swallowed. *Clark?* That was the thing. He *wasn't* Clark. She fell in love with Clark, not this superhero. What would Lois do, when she saw Superman dressed up like Clark? Would she think that her husband had returned from the dead? And he hadn't. He had only been replaced by someone else. Would she kick him out? Would she ask him to stay? Would she want to make love to him? Maybe. Probably not.

Even if he looked like Clark, without Clark's memories Superman wasn't Clark. He couldn't play make-believe with the woman of his dreams. Well, he *could*, but he shouldn't. Did he want to make love to Lois?

Stupidest inquiry in the history of questions! Of course! Just thinking about the possibility of *seeing* her again was making his hands shake. But as her husband — especially a new husband — would she expect more than just him looking at her, right? She would expect some touching. A kiss perhaps? Hand holding? Caress of her cheek? And if she wanted to make love with him...?

She was fresh off her honeymoon, maybe she was sated already. Of course, Lois had thought he had died, so maybe she would want more from him. What would he do if the most beautiful woman he had ever seen asked him to make love to her? He had told himself earlier that he would do anything to make Lois happy... but... but could he make love to her while pretending that he was the man whom she loved? That just seemed sneaky, somehow. Underhanded. Creepy.

And, yet, tempting. Oh, so tempting. He was the worst man ever to even consider doing such a thing to Lois. Would he have the willpower to say 'no'? Superman buried his head in his

hands.

“And how would that look? If a young man fresh off his honeymoon returns to his parents’ apartment instead of moving in with his wife?” Martha Kent had returned and sat down next to him.

“I don’t care how it looks,” Superman told them. “It isn’t fair for Lois to share her home, her life...” Her bed. “... with a stranger.”

“Isn’t fair to her or to you?” Martha Kent raised a curious eyebrow at him. “You aren’t a stranger to her. For better or worse, you are her husband,” she said, patting his knee. “Anyway, Lois’s sister Lucy is staying in your old room right now, so you can’t stay here. And if she moves back in with your wife, the tabloid reporters stalking Lois are surely to notice.”

Superman’s jaw dropped. Once again he would be guilty of spreading lies in the tabloids about her. There was no winning. He only wanted what was best for Lois and there seemed to be no right answer.

Jonathan stood up. “That reminds me, son. Superman can’t go to Lois’s apartment without garnering attention, so we’ll have to get you changed.”

Martha stood up as well. “I’ve been packing your stuff into your father’s old army duffel bag for the move.” She picked up the empty brownie plate.

“Oh, sorry, Mrs. Kent. I seemed to have eaten up all of your brownies. They were delicious.” Superman blushed. He would be needing some extra large tights if he kept pigging out like that.

Martha glanced back at him. “Feel free to call me ‘Mom,’ Clark. And I’ll fix you up another plate to take home to Lois.” She smiled at him with a wink. “She’s a bit of a chocoholic herself.”

Superman ran a hand down his face. What could he do to delay his inevitable meeting with Clark’s wife? “Would you mind if I borrowed your shower and a razor?” he asked Mr. Kent.

Jonathan chuckled, holding out his arm. “A razor isn’t going to cut it, son. Come on, I’ll show you how you shave.”

Superman nodded. These people were too wonderful for words. Clark was one lucky man.

Thursday — Late Afternoon

Jonathan pulled up the truck in front of an apartment building and looked up at the number. “I think this is it, son. Does it look familiar?”

Martha had called Lucy at work for the address because Lois hadn’t answered the phone when they had tried her number, and neither of the Kents had ever been to Lois’s apartment.

Superman shook his head. As far as he knew, he had never been here before. “No, sir.”

He had gotten into the habit of calling Mr. Kent ‘sir,’ which seemed more comfortable for him than ‘Dad.’ Although he was dressed for the part, he still felt more like Superman than Clark Kent.

He looked up at the front stoop, hesitant on this next step on finding out about his life. “Do you think Ms. Lane will be at home?”

“A couple of things, son,” Mr. Kent told him, handing him the keys Clark had left when he went to battle Nightfall the first time. This had all been explained to him back at the Kents’ apartment. “You call your wife ‘Lois,’ not ‘Ms. Lane.’”

Superman nodded. Right. *His* wife. Lois. He swallowed. He was both excited and terrified all at the same time.

“Just because she has all the memories doesn’t give her more power in your relationship. And having all the strength doesn’t give it to you either. Just talk to Lois about anything that makes you uncomfortable, Clark,” his ‘father’ reminded him. “Communication is the key to any good marriage.”

Superman nodded again.

“And, son...” Mr. Kent touched Superman’s arm gently for a moment. “If you ever feel that this isn’t working, give me a call, and I’ll come and get you.”

Superman turned and looked up at the front stoop again; this time with a sigh. He would make this work. If he failed with Lois... “Thank you, sir, for all your assistance this afternoon.”

Mr. Kent pressed a little smile onto his face and nodded. “Anytime, son,” he choked out. “Go on.”

Superman opened the door to the truck and grabbed the olive green duffel and a small picnic basket out of the back of the truck. Mom had made them dinner, figuring they had enough on their plate without having to worry about cooking as well. Calling Martha Kent ‘Mom’ had felt right, natural.

He nodded towards Mr. Kent again and then went up the front stoop. Setting down the duffel, he pulled out his keys. He tried two keys before he found the right one and got the door open. He turned and waved at Mr. Kent, who had been waiting as Superman somehow knew he would be. Clark Kent — AKA Superman — picked up the duffel and went inside.

“Through the main building, out past the pool to the back building,” Lucy had told his mother. He swung the duffel bag over his right shoulder and carried the picnic basket with his left. He was lucky that Lucy had given such good directions. This would be a bad time to get lost.

As he passed into a courtyard, a thin, silver haired man accosted him. “Clark Kent, isn’t it?”

Superman raised a brow at the man and slowed his pace. “Do I know you?” he asked warily, hoping he did not.

“We haven’t been formally introduced,” the man said, extending his hand. “Leo Nunk, *National Inquisitor*.”

Superman’s eyes turned into slits as he remembered the negative publicity garnered from that man’s ‘newspaper.’ “You’re the man who’s been harassing Lois.”

“Harassing seems like such a strong term...” Leo tried to correct him as Superman continued towards the basement apartment in the back building. “Mr. Kent, please. Just one quote. That’s all I’m asking. One reporter to another. We all have deadlines.”

Superman stopped and stared at the man. “Do you live in this building?” He shook his head to clarify. “This complex?” At Leo Nunk’s slightly embarrassed grin, he continued, “How did you get in here?”

“We all have to protect our sources,” Nunk told him.

“If I see you in this courtyard again or hear that you’ve been bothering my wife, I’ll have a restraining order placed against you,” Superman told him.

Nunk’s eyes lit up. “*Wife?* You and Lois got married!” The slime practically did a little dance and he skipped backward to keep up with Superman. “When? Where? Was Superman there? What was Lois like on ...”

“Stay away from my wife!” Superman growled. With one slight nudge with the heel of his hand, Nunk went flying into the swimming pool with a huge splash. Oh, dear. Superman hoped he hadn’t exerted any of his extra strength to swat that fly. He watched as Nunk splashed around in the pool for a moment, glaring at him.

“Clark!” a beautiful feminine voice called to him, gleefully. Suddenly, a pair of arms surrounded his neck and a pair of lips covered his as she jumped into his full arms. “Oh, Clark.”

Superman’s felt his nerve endings explode with joyous fireworks at this barrage of kisses. With his free hand, he surrounded the waist of this beautiful woman who attacked him and then slid it down her curves to under her bottom to hold her better. He felt like he could kiss her forever.

An image of making love to this woman in a cave flashed across his mind, causing his body to respond more vibrantly to her stimuli. He carried her inside their apartment, their lips never

parting.

Thursday — Afternoon

Lois returned from the police station to her empty apartment. Okay, technically, it wasn't empty. It just felt that way without Clark. And she hadn't returned straight from the police station. She sighed as she dropped her keys and purse on the coffee table. She tossed the box of donuts on the dining table and limped over to sit on the couch. Oh, right, probably not a good idea.

She had gotten lost. Again. Lois hadn't driven much in Metropolis since Lucy brought the Jeep Cherokee to her a week and a half ago. For some strange reason, the streets looked different from the street than the sidewalk. And she hadn't gotten all that familiar with this part of the city when she went to Met U. freshman and sophomore year. Anyway, that was years ago — years before she had moved back this summer.

So, she had ended up getting lost on the way to the Twelfth Precinct and then she had gotten lost again on the way to MJ's Café. She had known where her husband was and like a magnet she had headed to him. And also — probably having something to do with their magnetism — her compass was all off.

Correction. It hadn't been her fault that she had gotten lost. She laid the blame squarely at the feet of one Leo Nunk, tabloid reporter. He had run into her — literally — outside the Twelfth Precinct, which was probably her fault. She had been the one who told Nunk that Superman had friends at the Twelfth Precinct and that he should stalk Superman there instead of at her place. Nunk had missed Clark and Henderson leaving twenty minutes before, but — lucky her — Nunk had found Lois instead. Thank goodness for little miracles.

And Nunk had stuck to her like glue. She was thrilled to have her Jeep Cherokee. She had jumped into it, threw her half-box of donuts she had stolen from the police into the co-pilot's seat, stuffed the parking ticket into the glove box, and driven off in the direction of MJ's Café. Then she had spotted Nunk jumping into a Metro cab and she had practically heard him use the words "Follow that car!"

She had made a series of quick turns to try and shake the Metro cabbie. But he must have been a former Indy 500 racer or something because he had stuck to her tail like a... well, like paparazzi. When she had finally shaken him, she had no idea where she was. She had driven on looking for a familiar street or building or anything. Eventually, she had found what she was looking for. Edge Boulevard cut Metropolis in half; it went from one end of Metropolis to the other. It was the biggest, most familiar street in the entire city.

And Lois had driven on it for a half-hour *in the wrong direction*. A half-hour in non-moving traffic *in the wrong direction*. A half-hour of her honking her horn with the other drivers. A half-hour of her wishing she had been traveling in the *other* direction, where there was no traffic. *In the wrong direction!* Then she had spent another half-hour, it had felt like, trying to turn off of Edge Boulevard, so she could turn in the correct direction and finally meet up with her husband at his parents' apartment.

She had spent that second half-hour of sitting in traffic thinking about what an idiot she had been. Lois still couldn't believe her meltdown at the Twelfth Precinct.

You'll be lucky if Clark ever talks to you again. Rejecting him like that, her inner voice had scolded her.

Lois had had her husband in her grasp and she had let him slip through her fingers. The first test in their marriage and she had failed miserably. Who cared about what the tabloids wrote anyway!? She had wanted her man back from the dead and she had been granted her wish, only to send him packing to his mom and dad.

Eventually, she had made it off Edge Boulevard, only to get

herself lost again. She had ended up on a street that had looked more like a warzone than Metropolis. The potholes had been so big, she wondered if they were really sinkholes. She could just hear Perry saying, "That sounds like a story!" It had been in one of those potholes that she popped a tire. Luckily for Lois, Lucy had made sure that there actually was a viable spare tire in her car.

So, there Lois had been changing her tire, on that broken street in Metropolis's warzone...

... with one foot in a mud puddle, you might recall...

... when some meathead decided that she looked ripe for the picking. Boy, had *he* picked the wrong victim. After the day she had had, Lois could have brought down... well, her husband in a fist fight. That creep was also lucky Clark wasn't at one hundred percent, because if she had called her husband's name and Clark had seen that man attacking her...

Shall we just say, it wouldn't have been pretty?

Needless to say, Lois had been really glad she had taken that self-defense course at the women's center in Smallville last year. And the year before. She really needed to find a new hobby.

After Lois had convinced the thug that he had tangled with the wrong woman, that was when she had slipped on the edge of one of those potholes and landed with a splash into the mud puddle. So, now she was covered with muddy water and had knocked the heel off one of her shoes.

Another half-hour later, she had finally found a familiar landmark and made it back to her apartment. She couldn't show up at the Kent's looking like this. Well, she could, but that familiar landmark had been closer to her apartment than the café.

With a sigh, Lois turned away from the couch and limped over to her desk. She needed to call Perry to tell him that Superman was back from the dead.

"Ready to write it up?" he asked.

"We can't write it up, Perry," Lois told him with a groan.

She could hear her boss's teeth grind together. "What now?"

"He has amnesia and can't remember anything," she murmured with another sigh.

"Great shades of Elvis! Don't you ever get a break?"

Apparently not.

"Let me talk to him, honey," Perry continued.

"He's not here. He went home," Lois told him.

Perry didn't say anything for a moment. "Lois, aren't you two married?"

"Yes."

"Then home should be with you."

Lois's bottom lip began to shake. She would not cry — not to Perry. Not again. "I know. He doesn't though."

"Oh, darlin', I'm sorry. You want to come in and I'll assign you something else?" Perry asked hopefully. "To keep your mind off things?"

Lois groaned. The very last thing she wanted to do was get back into her car. "Truthfully, Perry, I didn't get a wink of sleep last night. I'm so tired, I actually passed out at the police station earlier when I ran into Clark."

"The police station?"

"That detective... Henderson found him. He's been telling everyone that Clark's a Superman impersonator to protect his identity." Lois lay her head down on her desk. "Linda King actually kissed him to test that theory. And she proclaimed him to be a bona fide imposter."

"*Metropolis Star!*" said her boss. Lois could practically hear Perry rolling his eyes and shaking his head at their rival paper. "Wait a minute, honey? He was there... at the police station... in the suit? *Superman* has amnesia?" She had been wondering when those dots would get connected.

"Uh-huh. Perry, please..." Lois squeezed her eyes shut, holding her tears at bay.

“Got it. Off the record,” her boss said with a hitch in his voice that sounded like a broken record. Here he was *finally* editing a daily newspaper and the biggest story of the century practically fell into his lap as one of his reporters. Yet, once again, there was more he couldn’t write about the story than what he could write. “I don’t want the *Daily Planet* to start sounding like the *Dirt Digger* anyway.”

“Thank you. I’ll definitely be in on Monday, rain or shine, Perry. Let me just have the weekend to convince Clark who he really is. Please.” Lois hoped she would even be allowed to see her husband. She couldn’t see the Kents being happy with her behavior at the police station, once Clark told them about it. “As soon as we can get it, you’ll have the exclusive.”

“Probably best not to leave him unattended. Good luck, honey,” he told her.

“Thank you, Perry,” she replied. “And I’m sorry. About earlier...”

“Don’t worry about it. You needed time and space and I wasn’t giving it to you. Go! Be with your husband,” Perry said, hanging up.

Lois sighed and hung up the phone. All she had the energy to do was crawl into bed, but she smelled and looked like a Metropolis pothole and had a husband to retrieve. She looked at her futon couch with an exasperated sigh. It was hardly bedtime, not even late enough to be counted as dinnertime, but she hadn’t slept all night in worry over Clark.

Or the night before that because Clark kept you up in other ways.

Instead Lois went into the bathroom and peeled off her clothes for a long hot, and hopefully, reinvigorating shower. Closing her eyes, she could almost picture herself in the shower at the Lexor. She ran the bar of soap over her body, lathering herself up. Her body craved for *his* touch. Lois rubbed more soap on her hands and continued to wash herself.

She pictured showering with Clark the previous morning before checking out of the hotel. How his hands had caressed her body as they had moved down to her bottom and picked her up. Her legs had snaked around him, unable to wait any longer.

Lois leaned against the wall of her shower and sobbed, missing Clark with every fiber of her being. Her body remained stiff from tension. She had been tied in a knot for the past twenty-four hours and, try as she might, she could not untie herself. Eventually the water became cold and, instead of turning up the hot water as her body demanded, she turned it off. She had things to do.

Lois toweled herself dry and slipped into big fluffy robe. She needed to call Martha and find out how Clark was doing. Let her mother-in-law know that Lois hadn’t abandoned her husband.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Martha. It’s Lois.”

“Lois! Where have you been? We’ve been trying to reach you. Clark...” Martha started before Lois interrupted her.

“Yes, I know. Clark’s safe at your place. I tried to drive over there, after bumping into him at the police station, but...” She exhaled. “I got lost. There was a tabloid reporter following me and I got off my known routes and...”

“Are you okay?” Martha interjected.

Lois smiled. Martha wasn’t angry. Thank God! “Yes. I’m sorry, Martha. But I had to come home to change. Could you explain to Clark that I still love him and that I’ll be on my way...?”

“Lois, he and Jonathan just left,” Martha told her.

“Left? Left for where? Is Clark hurt?” Lois asked, grabbing her car keys.

“He’s fine, dear. They’re on their way there. Jonathan is bringing Clark home to you.”

Lois’s heart pounded against her chest as she dropped her

keys again. Her hands started to shake. Clark was on his way there? He was coming home?

Yippee! Best news of the day!

“Thanks, Martha,” Lois choked out, tears dotting her eyes. “You and Jonathan are the best. I’ll take good care of him. Don’t you worry.” She heard something outside. “Gotta go, Martha. I think they’re here.”

Lois dropped the phone and ran to the door; she opened it far enough to see Leo Nunk harassing some woman crossing the courtyard. No! She closed the door with a grimace.

Not Nunk! That good for nothing...

Clark was on his way home, Lois reminded herself. She didn’t have to get dressed again for the day, so she slipped into her lavender and teal pajamas. With a shiver she grabbed her comforter out of her closet and plopped herself down on her couch to wait. Clark would buzz her apartment when they arrived. She would protect him from Nunk then. Clark would be there any minute.

Lois wrapped herself in her comforter and waited. And waited. Her eyes began to droop.

The door to the apartment flew open and Superman hovered just outside.

“Lois!” he called to her. “I’m home.”

“Clark!” She sprung to her feet and was in his arms. “Oh, Clark!”

His gentle hand caressed her hair as he corrected her. “It’s Kal, honey. Just Kal. Clark is no more.”

“No!” she screamed, letting go of him and running back inside.

“No?” He landed in front of her, his arms crossed, and his eyebrow raised. “So, did you give your wedding vows just to my Clark side? For better or worse, for example. Am I worse?”

Lois continued to stare at him, not sure what to say. She loved Clark — she knew that. Heart and soul. But this man in blue? Did she really even know him? ‘Do you?’ she wondered. ‘Do you know Kal at all?’ She knew about his abilities, true, but did she know the man? Was this Kal-El part of him so different from the Clark side with whom she had fallen in love? Would she — could she — reject him if he was only this man? From now onwards? Was he even a bunch of parts that made up a whole man? Or was he a multifaceted man?

No. She realized. He was still Clark. Clark was still there — somewhere — he was just lost.

Lois held out her hands to the man still floating in front of her with a stern expression. “I love you, Kal. All of you.”

Superman’s face lit with a hint of hope. “Are you sure?”

“I was surprised, that’s all,” she explained to him. “For better or worse. In sickness and in health, until death do us part.”

He set himself down in front of her and cupped her jaw in his palm, running his thumb over her lips. “Death will never part us, Lois. I won’t let it.”

Lois relaxed into his hand. “I thought you had died, Kal. I thought I’d never see you again.”

“I’m indestructible, Baby,” he whispered, pulling her into his embrace.

***Baby?** “But a nuclear bomb blew you up!” she said, tightening her arms around him.*

Superman chuckled lightly as if humoring her. “I’ll always come back to you, Lois.” He tilted her chin up and pressed his lips to hers. Fire engulfed her from inside.

“Clark,” Lois moaned, opening her mouth to him.

Superman pulled back so suddenly she felt a cold draft. “No, Lois. Look at me.”

Lois opened her eyes. She felt bereft at the loss of his lips. What was wrong?

“Do you want me?” he asked.

She nodded, dumbly. Wasn't it obvious? Couldn't he sense her desire? Pathetic that it was.

"There is no more Clark. You call me Kal or Superman... or I'm gone. Do you understand?"

No more Clark? Her heart ached at that thought. But she craved this man. She needed him to love her. To make love to her. She nodded.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked softly as he kissed her again.

"Make love to me," she whispered. She groaned with anticipation as his hands found her skin of her stomach, causing a flock of butterflies to escape.

"Say my name," he demanded, running his hands over her.

"Kal," she pleaded. "I want you, Kal." She tried to put her hands under the band of his shorts, but it was too tight. "Kal?"

"New belt." With a flick of his wrist, he unsnapped his yellow belt and then continued removing her clothing.

Lois stepped out of her shorts. "You wear too many layers," she teased, resting her hands on his shorts again.

"First this," he murmured and moved her hands up to his cape.

She was naked now and he was definitely too clothed. She unsnapped the cape from where it attached to his blue suit and was about to drop it on the floor.

"Hang it up. Respect me. Respect my uniform," he told her.

*Lois nodded dumbly. She didn't like how he was bossing her around, but she **needed** him. She needed her Clar... Kal fix. She wrapped the cape around her neck and tied it there. "All hung up."*

Kal stood there in just his blue suit and red boots and stared at her with a hunger that made her body shiver. Or maybe it was because he had taken a step back away from her. Five seconds later, they were making love. Oh, God! That was fast. What was going on here? Was all the romance part of the Clark side? Was the Kal side just need, just desire, no love?

But her thoughts fell away as the pleasure increased. She was there... so close to being there. "Clark," she moaned. "Oh, Clark, yes!"

When Lois went to wrap herself tighter around him, she discovered he was gone. She had nothing to hold onto but a draft of cool air. The cape was missing from around her shoulders. She heard the door open and shut. Clark was gone. Kal-El was gone. Lois was alone on her futon couch. Naked and uncomfortable and unsatisfied. Her body still craving the man who had just left her forever.

"Stay away from my wife!"

SPLASH!

Lois's eyes flew open. "Clark!" She jumped off her couch, ran to her door, and pulled it open.

Clark stood next to the pool, glaring at it.

"Clark!" Lois couldn't believe her eyes. It was really him. Glasses. No slicked-back hair. Slacks. Button-down shirt. She jumped into his arms and pressed her lips to his. "Oh, Clark!"

The real man was better than any dream. And this real man was kissing her back. He wasn't angry about the police station. He wasn't mad at her for refusing to take responsibility of a superhero with no memories. Her husband was back, and he loved her.

Clark carried her into her apartment... *their* apartment and shut the door. He set down his duffel bag and the basket. He hadn't stopped kissing her. She wanted him. She *needed* him. Desired him more than she ever had. And she could tell he desired her as well.

A little bit.

Actually, after all they had been through, he should desire her more than this. So, the only explanations could be was that *this*

wasn't Clark *or* this was Clark and something else was coming between them. Something like... Lois broke off the kiss and leaned back to study her husband... something like the blue suit.

Why was Clark still wearing the blue suit? Hadn't he known he was coming straight to her and she would want ...? Lois continued to stare at him. Something was off... wrong.

She could feel his desire disappearing as the color drained from her face. He was wearing the *black* frames. The *old* black glasses, not the *new* frames they had bought in Niagara.

Lois swallowed. "Hi," she said simply.

"Hi," he said, just as simply.

Lois sighed and stuck out her hand. "I'm Lois, your wife."

Something was wrong. Superman didn't know what he did wrong, but Lois stopped kissing him and just stared at him. It wasn't an angry stare. She wasn't mad. It was a curious, inquisitive stare like she knew he wasn't her husband, knew he wasn't Clark, but didn't know how she knew she knew.

It had been wrong to impersonate her husband. Superman knew this. So very wrong on too many levels. But when the Kents kept trying to convince him that *he* was also Clark and that *he* had to go 'home' to his wife — back to Lois, the rational side of himself had turned off and the irrational side — that wanted more than anything to make Lois happy — turned on.

For a moment there, he had thought it had worked. He had thought they would come through this door and she would want to make love to him. It wouldn't matter to her that he wasn't *really* her husband, because she loved him and she knew that he loved her. He thought he had convinced her that they were one and the same person. But he should have known better. If he didn't believe it, how could she? He should have known she didn't want this carbon copy of her husband; she wanted the real thing.

As Superman observed the color drain from her face with whatever clue it was she found, it was like she jabbed him into the deep freeze. He didn't know if the pain he felt was from her realization that he — of all people — had lied to her or because it felt like she had poured liquid nitrogen onto his pants.

He watched her neck move as she swallowed. It was as if he were watching it in slow motion. And like a ripple in a pond as soon as she finished swallowing, he swallowed.

"Hi."

It was a simple greeting. He felt no animosity or malice. No indication of her emotional state, so he echoed her word back to her. "Hi."

Lois stuck out her hand and said, "I'm Lois, your wife."

Yep. She knew he wasn't Clark. On the other hand, she still considered herself his wife. His heart started beating again as if she had jumpstarted his heart with a defibrillator. He needed to answer. What should he say? The truth! Of course, *you're Superman!* He stood for "truth" and "justice", and that really should start with the woman he loved, his wife.

There was another quick jolt in his heart at the thought of the words "your wife." A part of him had hoped Lois hadn't noticed his physical reaction to her words. He didn't want to explain to this woman about his love and desire for her.

Right, answer. He needed to say something, but it was really hard to concentrate with her legs wrapped around his hips. He had thought the extra layer of the suit would be enough of a buffer between them, but if she squeezed her legs one more time, he was liable to tear off her clothes and make love to her on the couch within the minute.

Actually, that option was sounding more tempting by the moment. That wouldn't be making love though, ravishing would probably be a more accurate term. And he couldn't do that to Lois. Well... he shouldn't. *Wouldn't.*

Superman cleared his throat, knowing he still needed to

answer her. He removed his glasses, setting them down, and then took hold of her offered hand. “Lois, I’m Superman.”

A huge grin overtook her countenance. Then she did something he least expected. She leaned her head back and laughed. And laughed. And laughed.

Superman released the hold that he had of her bottom and let her feet drop to the floor. He really couldn’t have her so close at the same time as she laughed at him.

Lois held up her palm as if to tell him to stop as she gained control of her voice again. “I’m not laughing at you, Kal. It’s only...” She took a deep breath to try and stop the giggles from overtaking her again. “It was the first time you’ve ever said those words to me. It took a giant meteor hurtling towards Earth and you getting your mind wiped for you to finally admit that to me.”

He froze, his eyes bugging. She hadn’t known? The Kents were sure that she knew. Clark married her without telling her that...

Lois leaned and kissed his lips gently, leaving her hand on his chest. “I’ve always known, Kal,” she informed him and he exhaled. “But it’s good to finally hear you divulge it.”

“Who’s Kal?” he asked the question that had been burning at the forefront of his mind since she had first called him that at the police station.

“You are. Kal-El is the name your birth parents — Lara and Jor-El of Krypton — gave you before sending you to Earth.” She spelt his name for him.

“Kal-El,” he repeated back to her, bliss filling him. He *did* have a name other than Superman. *Kal-El*. He wrapped his arms around Lois and kissed her. His happiness was so great, he needed to share it with someone. He liked that Lois knew this about him and even felt comfortable enough with him to call him ‘Kal.’

Superman — Kal — stiffened as she deepened the kiss, wrapping her arms around his neck. Her tongue asked permission to enter his mouth. He really shouldn’t allow those kinds of liberties between himself and Clark’s wife. It had been wrong for him to want them before. It wasn’t fair to Lois for Kal-El to expect the same kind of benefits that Clark had enjoyed as her husband. No matter how tempting they might be.

Carefully, he set his hands on her shoulders and drew his lips away. “No, Lois. Sorry. This isn’t right. I am essentially a stranger to you.”

Lois nodded slowly. He didn’t know if she was being hesitant in agreeing with him or if the ramifications of his words were dripping into her understanding.

Some of the tension he had sensed in her since their handshake seemed to melt from her body. Was it relief in the knowledge that intimacy was off the table for them or something else?

Lois moved to her bookshelf and picked up the glass fish that he recognized from the photo in the *Daily Planet*. “Does this look familiar?” she asked him, holding it up.

Kal took the fish and glanced at it, felt the weight of it in his hand, knew instinctively that he should recognize it, but he did not. “I’m sorry. No.”

She placed the fish back on the bookshelf and then she went the dining room table. “I left you some donuts.” She opened the box on the table and pulled one out. “You usually like these cake things. Eh, this is a little stale. Are you hungry?”

Kal followed her to the table and took the donut out of her hand, gazing at it. He liked these kind of donuts? “I can’t remember much of anything,” he told her. Not even the type of donut he liked. “I’m not hungry. I’m fine. Martha fed me brownies.” He handed the donut back to her.

Lois dropped the donut back into the box and dusted off her hands. “Oh.”

Kal retrieved the picnic basket from by the front door. “She

made us dinner.”

Her eyes lit up with joy. “I love Martha.”

“Yeah.” He smiled. He was in total agreement there. “Me, too.”

He followed her into the kitchen.

“We should probably put the food away until then,” Lois said, turning and taking the basket away from him.

“Are *you* hungry?” Kal asked. Bill had said something about guessing that Lois had passed out at the police station due to lack of food and stress over Clark being missing.

“Kind of. I’ve only eaten donuts and a few peanuts since I left Niagara,” Lois admitted, opening the basket. She removed a plate of brownies. “Did I mention how much I love your mom?” Then she pulled out some sort of casserole and set it on the stove.

Kal sighed. He wasn’t Clark. He didn’t feel like Clark. Martha wasn’t technically *his* mom. He should really say something to Lois about that.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” she asked.

“I was just wondering how we met?” he said, which wasn’t exactly the reason he had been gazing at her like he had.

Lois was looking at a note from Martha that had come with the casserole, explaining how to reheat it. “Huh?”

“How did you and I meet?” he repeated.

She folded the note again and dropped it back into the basket. “Do you mind if I reheat this now? Just the thought of tortellini in tomato sauce is making me hungry.”

Kal shrugged. She turned on the oven. He watched as she bent over and removed shoes from inside of it. She kept shoes in her oven? Then she set the casserole dish straight into the oven and turned on the timer.

When she had finished, Lois faced him. “You — Kal — and I? Or Clark and I?”

He swallowed. She wasn’t budging on the assumption that he was her husband Clark.

Lois rested a hand gently on his arm. “I’ve got an idea. How about I only talk about you and me for the time being? Superman — Kal — you.”

Kal breathed a sigh of relief.

“That way,” she continued. “You won’t be confusing any of my Clark stories as memories.” Lois kissed his cheek. “When those memories start coming back, I want you to know that they’re real. No confusion. Is that okay?”

Kal’s cheek tingled where she kissed him and that combined with the warmth of her hand still resting on his arm had made his clothing feel smaller. Maybe Clark never wore the blue suit under his clothes. Yes, that must be it, he lied to himself. What he really should suggest was that they sleep apart, especially if just casual touches gave him such a strong reaction. He cleared his throat. “Fine by me.”

Lois took two plastic cups out of the cabinet and opened the fridge, sneered, and then closed it again. “Water, okay? Lucy — my sister — cleared me out of cream soda and, well, everything else worth drinking.” She indicated that he should sit down at the dining table and she brought two cups of water to the table. “It’s from the tap. Maybe you should sterilize the water with your heat vision first.”

Kal raised a brow but then did as she asked. He thought “heat” as he looked at her cup and promptly melted it. He gazed at the mess and jumped back. What had he done?

Lois grabbed a dishtowel and started mopping up the remaining water. “I’m sorry, Kal.” She laughed. “That was just a joke.”

“I didn’t know,” he replied calmly, but inside he was mortified. What must she think of him? After she finished mopping up the water, he sat back down and passed her his glass. “Take mine.”

She threw the towel into the kitchen sink and set her hand on

his, giving it a little squeeze. “It’s okay. I have more.” A minute later she sat down opposite him with a new cup.

He loved her more at that moment than he had all day. She had taken his “accident” in stride and moved on. No harm, no foul.

Lois rested her hand on his as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Kal could feel the electricity travel from her hand to his, up his arm, and straight into his heart, causing it to increase its rhythm and spread that electricity all over his body.

“About five... maybe six weeks ago, I went on a date with a real creep by the name of Claude,” Lois said.

Kal didn’t have any idea to what this story referred, but he did learn one very important thing from this sentence. Six weeks ago — five weeks before she married Clark — Lois and Clark either weren’t dating or weren’t serious enough to be exclusive or had broken up for some reason. He wondered what had changed.

“Claude took me to a fancy restaurant... a very expensive restaurant. I was thrilled because I had hardly two pennies to rub together until I got my first paycheck from Daily Books. That’s where Claude and I worked. He was fired a week later — but that’s *another* story.” She smiled.

Kal had no idea what the smile was for, but he readily accepted it and returned it with one of his own. Was she happy that Claude was fired? Probably, because she had referred to Claude as a creep. Or was she smiling, because it was another tale Kal would want to hear and she couldn’t wait to share it with him? Or was she just smiling because she was happy Kal was there and she got to spend time with him?

“Needless to say, Claude made reference to me ‘repaying’ him for dinner in no uncertain terms and when I told him ‘no way’ I’d rather...” Lois blushed and took a gulp of her water. “He excused himself to the men’s room. Instead he left the restaurant, leaving me with the hefty bill.”

Kal wondered what Lois had told Claude that she would rather do, but clearly it made her uncomfortable, so he decided not to press the point. How exactly did he fit into this story? Did he fit into this story? Where was this story going? He really didn’t care as long as she kept her hand on his.

“I ended up being forced to wash dishes.” Lois chuckled softly. “I don’t *ever* want to do that again. How I looked when Claude had picked me up and how I looked by the time I left the restaurant...” She shook her head. “Night and day. Cinderella and the pumpkin... a smashed pumpkin.” She squeezed his hand and smiled at him again, and he felt like floating. “Why you ever chose to rescue a mess like that...?”

His smile grew larger. He had rescued Lois? *That* was how they had met? Because of *him*, not because of Clark?

“It was pouring down rain. And I was drenched. I got on a bus to come home and then discovered it was the wrong one. When I got off, I was in a strange part of town.” She scoffed at her own words. “I’d been in Metropolis less than two weeks. The whole city felt strange.”

Less than two weeks? How long had she and Clark known each other before they had decided to get married? How could this woman who knew him for such a short period still know him better than anyone else? Well... anyone else besides the Kents?

“A dog attacked me, knocking me to the ground and my head against the sidewalk.” She took another sip of her water. “I must have smelled god-awful. All that stuff that I had spilled down the front of me while washing dishes, plus falling down on a wet Metropolis sidewalk.” She smiled weakly at him again.

Could this story possibly be true? Why would she lie? Could it get any worse? Could it get any better? Oh, yeah, he was in it. It was sure to get better.

“I got away from the dog — somehow — and ran down the street. At the corner, I slipped, twisted my ankle, and fell into traffic.”

It got worse.

Lois smiled at him. It was a dazzling smile that sent his racing heart rocketing off to the moon. No, “dazzling” wasn’t the right word, but it sure was close to the right word.

“Suddenly, I had the wind in my face and a pair of strong arms held me.” She squeezed his hand. “And I looked up and saw this face.” She let go of his hand and cupped his jaw.

Kal swallowed, relishing at this new touch. *This* was the story of how they met? It was no wonder their romance had been a whirlwind.

“Did we like each other right away? Me and you?” he asked softly, leaning towards her.

Lois paused as if the question seemed a surprise. “Well, we didn’t *not* like each other,” she responded, moving towards him.

“Was it love at first sight?” he asked timidly.

Her more-than-dazzling smile grew larger as she placed a light kiss on his lips that radiated through his body.

“Yep. You fell for me. Head over heels,” Lois told Kal with a wink as his jaw dropped.

“Seriously? You’re kidding me, right? *I* fell for *you*? That night?” Kal’s brow furrowed. Was Lois teasing him? Surely that was the night *she* fell for *him*. A man like himself had women — such as Linda King — practically throwing themselves at him. And he had fallen in love with a soaking-wet woman who smelled so badly she attracted dogs? That couldn’t be right.

The smile fell from Lois’s face. Kal watched as her eyes focused sharply on him and her tongue crossed her front teeth. There was something so extremely sexy in this current expression. If Kal had been listening to any other part of his body instead of his brain, he would have already been making love to her seconds later. As it was, Kal scooped her into his arms and pressed a kiss to her lips.

Lois pushed away from him. “What? What do you think you’re doing?” she stammered.

“Kissing Clark Kent’s incredibly sexy wife...” he responded, going in for another kiss when it sunk in exactly what he had said. Quickly, he set her down and backed away. “I’m *so* sorry, Ms. Lane. I should never have presumed to... but when you licked your teeth like that, my animal instincts took over and I *had* to kiss you.” He was across the room now. It felt better having the entire room between them. “I know that’s no excuse for my behavior and...” Kal decided to shut his mouth at that point as he felt speaking was just digging himself into a deeper hole. He needed this woman to help him remember his past. He couldn’t believe how stupid he had been to listen to his base instincts.

Lois put her hands on hips and glowered at him. Slowly a smile crept onto her lips, and she laughed.

Kal watched as her as she laughed. God, she was a beautiful woman. He looked away. *Clark Kent’s wife*, he reminded himself again.

“And yet, you somehow find it inconceivable that *you* would fall in love with *me* at first sight?”

Kal smiled weakly, almost sheepishly at her. Her logic was astounding. Of course, he fell in love with her at first sight. He had today, why not before?

“And you find it sexy when I pass my tongue over my teeth, like this?” she asked, demonstrating.

Kal swallowed and gave her a quick nod, sliding to the floor. Wasn’t it obvious what she was doing to him? He tucked his knees up to his chest in an attempt to hide true feelings for this woman.

Lois smiled at him. Not dazzling him, but definitely indulging him. “Well, *that* explains a lot.”

Kal waited to hear her reasoning — what exactly that meant — but she didn’t go on. Instead she walked towards him.

“I’m sorry that I yelled at you.” Lois knelt down in front of

him. “I was surprised by your reaction, that was all. A woman doesn’t expect a man to kiss her... so... thoroughly after he insults her.”

Kal gulped. He had insulted her? “I... I didn’t mean... Of course, I fell in love with *you* at first sight. Why wouldn’t I? You’re the most...” He swallowed. *Clark Kent’s wife*, he reminded himself again as he glanced away.

“Go on,” she coaxed him from entirely too close. “You’re allowed to compliment me.”

“You’re *his* wife. I’m... I shouldn’t... It isn’t right that I...”

Lois touched his cheek and turned his face so he was looking at her again. “I’m *your* wife as well, Kal. I married you as well as him.”

“My wife?” he whispered, not wanting to think about the possibilities that came with those two words.

She nodded. “No secrets, okay? You can trust me. Tell me whatever is on your mind.”

Oh, no! He wouldn’t tell her *that!* “I love you,” Kal told her instead and then realized what words he *had* chosen and looked away again. He couldn’t think straight around this woman. He must be under some kind of spell... but... but he didn’t seem to mind in the least.

Lois turned his head so he was gazing at her again. She had to stop doing that. Under those doe eyes, she turned this Superman into Silly Putty. “And I love you, too, Kal.”

How come he couldn’t breathe? Something about this woman made him lose control. No. She loved Clark. She couldn’t love them both. “But you’re so beautiful... stunning, really... and smart. And poised and thoughtful and such a good listener and patient... I bet that’s why you’re such a great reporter.”

She grinned under his tidal wave of praise. “Well, see... your memory is already starting to come back.”

What?! No, those weren’t memories... Oh.

Lois smiled at him. She was just teasing him.

Kal exhaled and wondering why he couldn’t relax. Right. He was leaning against the door with his legs tucked to his chest with this incredibly sexy woman resting her chin on his knees.

“Kal?”

“Hhhmmmm.” Coherent speech was impossible at the moment.

“Would you still like to kiss me?”

That was the least of the things he wanted to do to this woman. “Yes.”

“I won’t stop you this time,” she whispered, and he watched as she closed her eyes.

Kal gulped and turned his head away from this evil seductress. “I can’t.”

“Yes, you may, Kal. I’m giving you permission,” she told him, leaning towards him.

He could feel her chest pressed against his shins. His fingers itched to touch her, but he knew it would be his undoing. “What about your husband?” he asked warily, knowing she was breaking through his barriers.

“You *are* my husband,” she replied.

“I mean Clark,” he whispered, his resistance faltering.

“Kal, you *are* Clark. And *he* is you. When you make love to me, I’ll be making love to him.”

Kal’s spine stiffened.

“All I’m asking for is a kiss,” she said, clarifying.

He cleared his throat. “I know to you we are the same person, Lois. But, to me, Clark might as well be someone else. How would it make you feel if Clark told you that you would be making love to him, but he would be thinking of someone else — I don’t know...” He picked a name at random, someone he knew they both knew. “Like Linda King?”

Kal knew the instant he said Linda’s name he had picked the wrong example. Lois back not only went stiff as a board, but that

day-dreamy expression that had been in her eyes changed to something that could not be disguised. He knew it wasn’t anything but fury. Lois stood up and returned to the dining table.

“Do you want to make love to Linda?” she spat at him.

“No. I just chose a name we both...”

“Kal, whether or not you believe it, you *are* my husband Clark. You and Clark share the same body. Linda and I don’t,” she spoke slowly, enunciating each word.

He bent his head in shame. Lois was right. The comparison wasn’t quite the same, even if it felt the same to him. “To me... I’m sorry... I...”

“I’ll give you a pass this one time only, Kal.” Her voice was cold and sharp like a biting January wind. “*Never* say her name in my presence again.”

Kal gulped. Yep. Definitely the wrong name.

He stood up and wrapped his arms around her, knowing he *had* to comfort her. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had a history. Do you want to tell me about it?”

Lois was still stiff in his arms as she shook her head against his chest. “No. It’s ancient history, and it’s not important in the big picture.”

“Okay.” He accepted that. Linda and Lois had an ancient feud. He could understand that.

“Most recently though, she’s been trying to steal you away from me,” Lois whispered, finally allowing herself to relax in his arms.

“Clark?” he asked softly. That would explain her sudden anger at the mention of Linda’s name.

“No, *you*, Superman,” she replied.

Lois was upset that Linda had tried to take *him* from her? Lois loved all of him, not just the Clark part? So this feud with Linda wasn’t so ancient. He remembered Linda kissing him at the police station and mentally kicked himself again. He definitely was *not* going to mention that woman again. Linda who?

“Would you like to tell me another memory? Another Kal memory?” he clarified, not wanting to let go of her but wanting to change the subject.

Lois tightened her arms around his waist. “What would you like to hear? The first time I saw you in the blue suit? The time you kidnapped me because someone bugged my apartment? The time you took me to that beach in Costa Rica and made me that glass fish? The first time Superman and I kissed? Or the time you came to me in the middle of the night after a difficult rescue?”

Kal’s jaw dropped. He had to choose? Those all sounded like good stories to him, especially the one where he visited her in the middle of the night. But that one sounded a bit risqué. Had they made love after he had come to her? No! He wouldn’t ask about that story. The first time they kissed had potential and the first time she saw him in the blue suit.

“I wasn’t wearing my suit when I rescued you that first time?” he asked.

“Nope.” Then he heard her chuckle. “Well, you were wearing your birthday suit...”

“What?!” he backed out of her arms to look at her in the eyes.

“Under your navy blue athletic suit,” she explained.

He pulled her into his arms once more because he felt better with her there. “Minx.”

She giggled.

“Ha-ha. Make fun of the man with no memories,” he replied with pressed lips.

“I’m sorry. You’ve been through a lot,” Lois said as she caressed his cheek. “I know you must be scared.”

“To have the clock wiped clean and not know what you missed...” Kal murmured. Her touch felt too good.

“Well... you’ve traveled the world, and you have a wife and family that love you. You haven’t missed anything important.”

But it felt like he was missing everything that was important.

Every memory of Lois. He wanted to know what his heart had done the first time he had laid eyes on her. True, it nearly exploded out of his chest when he saw that photo of them on the tabloid. He would love to know how it felt when he and Lois kissed for the very first time. Of course, he knew what it felt like when she jumped into his arms by the pool and kissed him. That could double as a first kiss for him.

“And thanks to you... saving us all from Nightfall,” Lois continued. “You’ll have time to recreate any really important memories that don’t come back to you.”

Like seeing Lois naked for the first time. Running his fingers over her soft skin for the first time. Making love to her for the first time. Oh, God! He needed to stop thinking about being intimate with Lois while he was holding her in his arms, or she would feel these thoughts on his body.

Kal pulled out of her embrace to gaze at her face. He cupped her jaw in his palm and ran his fingers over her lips. She was too beautiful for words. And she loved him.

Lois swallowed. “Or I could tell you about the night I first learned about the man from another planet. Or the time I discovered that Clark and Superman — or technically the man who rescued me that rainy night — were one and the same. Or the first time you and I made love...”

Somehow Kal’s lips found hers and claimed them for his own. She deepened the kiss, and this time he let her. Lois tasted sweet like milk and honey.

The microwave chimed once. Then twice. Reluctantly, Lois stepped back out of his embrace. “I should...” Her breath was ragged as she stared at him. She wanted him.

Everything about Lois told Kal that she wanted to make love to him. The way she fixed her gaze on him, the race of her heartbeat and her catch of breath, the way her hands had gripped his shirt while they kissed, and how her tongue had caressed his. He could even smell her desire. He didn’t know how he knew that scent was desire, except every time he breathed he had to fight himself from pulling her back into his arms. He swallowed.

Lois finally blinked. “I better get that casserole out of the oven before it burns...” she murmured, not moving, her hands still resting on his arms.

“I can...” Kal said, forcing himself away from Clark’s wife. *Clark’s wife!* he reminded himself again. He should never have kissed her like that. He opened the oven door and pulled out the casserole with his bare hands, setting it on top of the stove. “Where do you keep your plates?” he asked, not wanting to even look at Clark’s wife.

Yes, he shouldn’t refer to that beautiful woman as Lois anymore. Kal needed to keep it at the forefront of his mind that she wasn’t *his*; Lois was Clark’s wife. She might think that he was Clark Kent, but he knew the truth. He shouldn’t make love to Clark’s wife. “It would probably be best if you take the bed and I slept on the couch tonight,” Kal continued with a quick glance over to Clark’s wife to gauge her reaction.

Lois looked for a moment as if she were going to say something in protest, but those words — whatever they might have been — died on her lips as a smile replaced them. “You’re right, Kal. That’s a good idea.”

She seemed happier than he hoped she would be by this suggestion. He liked that he had made Lois happy, but he would be dishonest if he didn’t acknowledge that a part of him — about 89.6 percent to be precise — had wished she might balk at this recommendation and, therefore, felt disappointed that she readily accepted it.

Clark was one lucky man.

Lois licked her lips as she watched Clark scoop pasta onto the plates, her fingers drumming on her biceps. She didn’t understand why he was being so stubborn about acknowledging his true

identity to himself. Was it an amnesiac thing? This obstinate attachment to right and wrong. Or was it paranoia, self-preservation, or just innate Kal-El?

If Kal had accepted that one fact — that Kal-El was also Clark Kent — they could be making love at this very moment instead of eating dinner. But in her note, Martha had recommended giving Clark time. And, at the moment, Lois was nearing the end of her patience. She wanted her husband and knew that he wanted her. She did not understand his reluctance.

Clark’s mother wrote that Clark... Superman was actually afraid of Lois... afraid that she would expect intimacy from him. Hadn’t she and Clark already dealt with that?

Oh, come on, Martha! They’re supposed to be on their honeymoon!

“Give him time,” Martha had written in her note with the cooking instructions for the casserole. “Give him space, but not too much space...”

Lois had given Kal time. How long was she supposed to be patient anyway? She hadn’t forced him to do anything. She had given him so much rope he was going to hang one of them soon. And she had the strange feeling it was her.

Oooh, bondage!

Lois hated that her physical desire for her husband was ruling her brain. She couldn’t think properly. He was her drug, and she needed her fix. She couldn’t believe how quickly she had become addicted to him and wondered when she would get her brain back.

You want it back?

She needed some form of release from her desires, but she refused to beg any man to make love to her.

I’m not above begging. Heeere, Kal. Heeere, boy. Her inner voice whistled. *I’ve got a treat for you.*

“That’s not begging,” explained Lois to her inner thoughts. And it wasn’t like she could go into the shower and get it herself. Been there, failed that.

Tonight. Bedtime. Patience, Lois.

Lois stifled the urge to groan as she studied her husband’s backside. He turned and brought the plates to the table. Then he did a double take. “What?”

She quickly grabbed the silverware and napkins, wiping the drool from her mouth. She cleared her throat, hoping her thoughts hadn’t been written all over her face. “I was just wondering if you wanted to zip out and get us some wine and bread to go with dinner?” she lied.

“Zip?”

Right. No memories. Kal not Clark.

“Fly,” she clarified along with the hand motion.

His eyes widened and then scrutinized his plate of pasta as he started to eat. “No. I’m fine with water.”

Okay. That was weird. She set a hand on his sleeve. “Kal?”

Clark glanced at her and then returned his eyes to his plate. “Do you really need wine? This is really good. You should...”

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing’s wrong,” he stated, clearly lying.

Lois wished he would stop lying to her. She knew every one of his tells. “Kal.” She set both hands on his, stopping him from eating. “Are you worried about getting lost?”

He gulped and then sighed. “A bit,” he whispered, still not looking at her. “I just found you; I don’t want to lose you again.”

She smiled, letting go. “I don’t want to lose you either. You’re welcome to stay home as long as you like. I’m okay with water.” She raised her glass. “To us!”

Clark picked up his glass and said, “To new beginnings.”

Lois nodded. It was kind of like that. “New beginnings,” she repeated and tapped her cup to his.

To naked beginnings and happy endings.

She dug into her tortellini and actually moaned out loud as it

touched her tongue. Martha was the best cook in the world, and *now* she was her mother-in-law.

Loving the Kents!

Lois really wanted to savor every bite, but as soon as she started eating she realized exactly how hungry she had been. She moaned with pleasure again, and her eyes closed. Lois remembered the other night how Clark had fed her pasta by hand. And whenever the sauce had dripped, he had leaned over and licked it off her. Wherever it had landed. Down her chin. Onto her chest. Her thigh. Then she would suck his fingers clean after every bite.

She stretched her arms above her head as yearning crept over her. The mutual bath afterwards had been a necessity.

Lois took another bite and tried to keep the moan from her throat by speaking. “You know, Kal. I knew I wanted to be a part of your family the moment I met Martha. I just didn’t realize I’d…” She glanced over at Clark and what she saw interrupted her. He was staring at her. His fork held mid-way to his lips and his mouth hanging open. His eyes were glazed over.

She raised a brow at his curious expression and brought another forkful to her lips with a shrug. A bit of sauce dripped down her chin and before she could wipe it away with her napkin, Clark leaned over and licked it off.

If Lois had thought his eyes had been big before, they were nothing compared to what they were now. Had Clark remembered their pasta and bath night? Had Martha been wrong? Maybe what Clark needed to get back his memory were some sensory memories.

Can I volunteer?

Kal jumped up out of his chair and ran into the bathroom. Lois was reminded of the time he accidentally admitted to her that he was still a virgin.

Lois went to the door and softly knocked. “Are you all right?” She was guessing “humiliated,” but she wanted to repeat what had happened the other time and hopefully knock a few memories loose.

“Fine,” he called to her in a garbled voice.

“Clark?” she whispered, laying her hand and head on the door.

Lois! Remember your dream. Don’t scare this man off.

“Can I come in?”

“Occupied,” he choked out.

Lois pressed her lips together. She sat down and continued eating her dinner.

Patience. Hating it.

Eventually Clark came out and, after a quick glance around the apartment, sat back down at the table.

Don’t say anything about him licking your face. Act like it was a normal, everyday occurrence.

Lois set her hand on his and gave it a little squeeze. “Are you okay?”

Clark closed his eyes and winced. He took a deep breath before apologizing. “I’m sorry, Lois. I don’t know what came over me.”

She flashed him a brief smile at him. She really wanted to tell him the truth, but she had promised to tell him only Superman memories. And that was definitely a *Clark* memory. “Ya think your mom would share her sauce recipe with me? You seem to really like it.”

He laughed softly to himself with a shake of his head. “I really don’t know her well enough to know whether or not she shares recipes.” He sighed and then mumbled to himself, yet loud enough for her to hear, “A man would have to be Superman to survive being married to this woman.”

Lois closed her eyes and pushed her plate away, no longer hungry. How could he say *that* about her?

Amnesia, Lois. He doesn’t remember about Pete.

She knew that but, even so, his words hurt. Every time she thought she had worked her way past it, there it was hanging in front of her again. Like she was being haunted by former best friend’s ghost.

Pete’s not haunting you. You’re imagining things. And anyway doesn’t he deserve a title bump to at least “lover”?

“Lois, is something wrong?” Clark asked.

“No. I’m just tired. I didn’t get much sleep last night. And I fell asleep earlier while waiting for you but…”

Go ahead. Tell Kal about your Superman nightmare. I dare you, her inner voice taunted her, knowing Lois would do nothing of the kind.

“No luck, huh? Too wound up worrying about Clark?”

I know a cure for that!

Kal cleared his throat. “I noticed the blanket on the couch…”

Uh-oh! Here it comes.

“Yeah,” Lois said, moving her dishes into the kitchen.

Clark followed her with his dishes.

Lois grabbed the brownies, knowing she was going to need them, and went to sit on the couch.

“Where’s your bedroom?”

She sighed and took a bite of brownie. The deep richness of the chocolate was just what she needed.

Ah, Lois, I’m guessing Kal’s going to want an answer to his question.

Personally, Lois was tired and not at all in the mood for this argument.

“Lois?” Kal asked, standing next to her as she ate brownies on the couch.

She pressed her lips together and gave him a look of annoyance. “Where do you think it is?” she snapped, setting the plate down on the coffee table.

Kal crossed his arms and took another thorough look around the apartment. He even used his x-ray vision. Still no bedroom. “I don’t know why you’re so upset at me. Does it have to do with…”

Why did he bring that up? he scolded himself. Kal had no idea why he suddenly licked Lois’s face. Well… okay, he had some idea. A vision really. Of her sitting in his lap as he hand-fed her pasta. He didn’t know where that idea came from, except when she took a bite of her food and moaned: Poof! that image popped into his head. He thought about what it would be like if Lois were to take off her shirt and sauce dripped down her chest and he happened to lean over…

He hadn’t been able to move. Then she had moaned again and sauce dripped down from her lips. It seemed so natural that when he actually did it, the shock and surprise on Lois’s face seemed out of place.

Ever since he met Lois he had been having elaborate fantasies about her. There was that one where he made love to her while standing up in a cave. He couldn’t remember having fantasies before — obviously — but these visions were more than just pictures. His body felt whatever was happening in these daydreams. He could feel the taste of her lips. Actually feel the pressure of her body against his. So, when he had licked the sauce off her face… he *had* to run into the bathroom because he could no longer sit there in front of her.

He couldn’t just go jump into the shower. Lois would have found that odd. So, he had locked the door and filled up the sink with cold water. He had just splashed some on his face when she knocked on the door and asked if he were okay. He told her he was fine and hoped she would go away.

With a couple of controlled short bursts of freezing breath, he had a thin level of ice covering the water in the sink. He had grabbed one of her hand towels and had stuffed into his mouth, finally allowing himself that moan of frustration inside of him to

escape. As he untucked his shirt, Lois had knocked again, asking if she could come in. He had groaned into the towel and mumbled something to her about the bathroom being occupied. Truth was, he was doing all this because he wanted Clark's wife... the woman he loved.

He had no longer been able to sit there while she spouted double entendres at him. He had unbuckled his cape, dropping it to the floor, and pulled down the top of his blue suit, leaving his chest bare. He had wanted to do so much more while dreaming his Lois fantasies. It would have been easy, but with her having been just on the other side of the door, that had neither been the time nor the place. So, with a flick of his finger to break the ice and the towel shoved into his mouth, he had dunked his face into the icy water.

Then he had heard her whisper, "Clark." Hearing her speak her husband's name instead of Kal's had done more to deflate his current problem than the ice water. After another minute, he had removed his head from the icy waters at the sink, dried himself off, and sat down on the closed toilet. He wished he had someone he could speak to about these feelings he was having for his... Clark's wife.

Kal had buried his face in his hands. He loved her. He loved Lois, heart and soul. He also desired that woman. He had wanted nothing more at that moment than to forget propriety and make love to the woman he loved. But he couldn't do that to her. Lois deserved better than that. She loved and missed her husband. And, without his memories, Kal wasn't Clark. He was still essentially a stranger. And she shouldn't make love to a stranger, even if she loved the man who normally occupied this body. It would be wrong to do that to her. If she made love to him like that, it would be like making love to the shell and not the man inside. And since Kal was the man inside, he couldn't do that to himself.

As Kal pulled himself out of this reverie and bent over to take a brownie off the plate, he realized that Lois had grabbed the back of her couch with her hands and the base of it with her feet. From this angle he could see up the bottom of her short shorts without the help of his x-ray vision. She wasn't wearing any underwear. *What* she was doing took second precedence over *how* she was doing it. His mind could only focus on the *how*. Her butt wiggling and her breasts jiggling in the air as she pushed against her couch for some unknown reason. She wasn't wearing a bra or underwear? Were these her pajamas?

Suddenly, her couch collapsed flat with Lois sprawled across it. Kal gulped as the ramifications of what she had been doing sunk in. Lois didn't have a couch *and* a bed, but a couch *or* a bed. He took a step back. "No." He did not have the self-control to sleep in the same bed as Clark's wife.

Lois peered at him over her shoulder with a raised brow. She crawled to the edge of the newly formed bed. "As my husband you are welcome to share my bed, but suit yourself," she told him.

"Clark is your husband," he whispered with his last remaining bits of his willpower. His hands had formed tight fists by his side.

Kal listened as she drew in a long breath and slowly exhaled it. "Fine, Kal. If you don't want to admit to yourself that you share a body with my husband Clark, that's your choice." She went to the desk, pulled off a manila envelope and Frisbee tossed it to him. "Here's the proof that I'm right and you're wrong." Then she marched into the bathroom and slammed the door.

Kal was still staring at the wedding photograph of her and Clark, when she emerged a few minutes later. "I don't see how..." he told her.

"Do you know the saying 'something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue?'" she asked him.

That sounded familiar, but only vaguely, so Kal shook his

head.

"When a couple gets married, it is considered good luck to have each of those items," she explained.

Okay, he nodded. He was with her so far.

Lois held out her hand. "See this engagement ring? This was your grandmother's... your Nana Clark, you called her. This was our something old."

He nodded.

Then Lois pointed at the photo. "My dress was our something new."

"You look beautiful," he told her with a quick glance to those chestnut eyes of hers.

She smiled briefly at the compliment and moved her finger up the picture to her hair. "I borrowed that barrette from my sister Lucy."

Kal nodded again.

Lois pulled the photo out of his hands and put it back on her desk. Then she returned to him. With a sigh, she sat down. "Do you trust me?" she asked him.

He had put his whole life in her hands by coming here. Of course he trusted her. "Yes."

She reached up to his chest and started to unbutton his shirt.

Kal covered her hands with his, stopping her. "Lois, please," he begged.

"Trust me," Lois told him, and she continued unbuttoning his shirt. When she had finished, she flung it open so that the Superman shield and blue suit seemed to visually pop out. "You are Superman, correct?"

"Yes." That was the one fact he knew for certain.

"The man I married wore this exact suit..." she said, resting her hands on his chest. "Well, not this *exact* suit, because that suit burned up on reentry during the first Nightfall mission — but a suit exactly like this one, under the grey suit he wore when we got married. It was our 'something blue.'"

Kal gazed at her, still not knowing where she was going with this argument. His brow furrowed as he guessed, "I'm your good luck?"

"No, Kal," she stated and then smiled. "Well, yes. You have always been my good luck charm." She caressed his cheek. "I wouldn't be alive if weren't for you. What I meant was, when I married Clark, because he was wearing this suit, I also married Superman. You are my husband as much as he is."

His eyes bugged. *He was?*

"So, you may share this bed with me — sleep with me — with a clear conscience. We won't be cheating on my husband, because you are my husband. Now, will you please stop beating yourself up about coveting me?" Her smile grew larger. "It's okay to want to make love to your wife." Then she winked and with a soft nudge, told him, "Besides, I'm pretty irresistible."

Kal blinked. *Irresistible?* That was an understatement. It was okay to want to make love to Lois because he was *married* to Lois? He gulped. What should he do now?

"No pressure, Kal," Lois said, removing her hand from his chest. "Your suit bag from the honeymoon is in the closet. I haven't had a chance to do laundry; so, no guarantees on cleanliness. I'll clear a couple of my drawers out for you tomorrow. I'm sure everything in your duffel is clean."

Duffel? Oh, right. Jonathan Kent's old army bag. Kal turned his head and saw it still sitting where he had dropped it when he came in.

"I'm finished in the bathroom, so why don't you go get changed?" Lois continued as she got up and went to the closet, where she removed sheets and pillows.

Kal really didn't want to wear anything of Clark's from the honeymoon, so he retrieved his duffel bag and took it with him into the bathroom. He felt it was a little early to be getting ready for bed; he would much rather stay up and talk to Lois. Hear

more of her memories of him.

Well... maybe the phrase ‘much rather’ wasn’t entirely correct — not by a long shot. But even though she had convinced him that they were essentially married, Kal still did not feel right making love to her so soon. He wanted to, obviously, but he had just met her several hours before. And he shouldn’t let his cravings rule their relationship. As Jonathan had said, “There is more to a marriage than sharing a bed.”

Kal went through the clothes in the bag. T-shirts, jeans, slacks, button-down shirts — both long and short sleeve — sweatpants, sweatshirts, underwear — briefs, hmmm? — and socks. He had also found a few pairs of silky boxer shorts. Were *these* his pajamas? But there weren’t any matching shirts. Did he sleep only in shorts? No, that would never do. He picked out a pair of sweatpants and t-shirt instead. Not as romantic, but he wasn’t looking to seduce Lois. Dreaming of it? Fantasizing about making love to her? Most definitely. But he wasn’t expecting it.

It wouldn’t be fair to Lois.

He packed the rest of his clothes back into the duffel bag. Kal shrugged out of the button down shirt, which he had never re-buttoned after Lois had opened it, folded it neatly, and added it to the rest of the clothes in the duffel bag. Or should he drop it into Lois’s dirty clothes hamper? He did live here now. He sighed. He still felt like a guest though. The shirt was basically clean, as he had only worn it for a few hours, so he put it into the duffel bag with his tan pants.

Kal stood before the mirror in his blue suit now. He almost wished he could sleep in this. It was comfortable, nearly a security blanket for him. He had woken up in a suit like this one — he had changed into one of the clean ones hanging in Martha’s closet. Taking it off... he gulped. Would it make him feel seem less super?

No, even he knew the blue suit had to come off. He unfastened the cape, folded it, and set it in the duffel bag with the red shorts. Would it be too weird, if he slept in just the blue suit? Yes, he told himself and finally took it off. He stood in front of the mirror naked. Like this, he could almost be Clark Kent... well, except for the missing memories. He reached for the blue suit again but stopped himself, forcing his hand to move on to the sweatpants.

He could do this.

Jonathan had given him a new toothbrush, which he used to clean the taste of tomato sauce out of his mouth. Plus, if he did end up kissing Lois — just kissing — it would probably be best not to taste of garlic. He had washed the gel out of his hair when he showered at the Kents’, but he combed his hair again, making sure he had dried it thoroughly when he had heat visioned it after his head dunking. Then he looked to see if he needed to shave again. Okay, that was just a stalling technique, he admitted. He had shaved right before coming over to Lois’s.

Kal took a deep breath and picked up his duffel. He could do this. He would just tell Lois he was tired. After all, it *had* been a long, emotionally-draining day. Maybe she would understand. He hoped she would understand. Because if she touched him... Kal exhaled. His body wasn’t as well hidden under these sweatpants as it was under the blue suit, the red shorts, *and* a pair of slacks. If she — who was he kidding? — *when* she turned him on, she would know it. He opened the bathroom door.

“Lois, I...” he didn’t finish. There was no point.

Lois was sound asleep, curled up in a ball in the center of the bed. How long had he been in the bathroom? It didn’t matter. He exhaled in relief. He now knew he could survive the night. He set his duffel down next to the closet and walked to the bed. He gently lifted Lois up and tucked her under the comforter, facing the edge of the bed. He figured he would get more sleep himself if he didn’t have look into her serene, beautiful face all night.

Maybe he should put a wall between them. For Lois’s safety.

He glanced around and decided his duffel was probably the best choice. He placed it up against Lois’s back and realized that this bed was smaller than he expected. With the duffel in the bed, it left him barely a foot of space in which to sleep. He nodded. That would be okay. He was Superman. If he fell out of bed, he wouldn’t suffer more than a cold floor. Maybe he should sleep on the floor anyway? He glanced at the floor and then back at Lois in bed. He would much rather sleep on the bed. And with the duffel bag there... Yes, that would work.

Kal returned the brownies to the kitchen and washed the dishes. He covered up the left-over casserole and stuck it into the fridge before turning off the light. He wiped down the dining table. Found a broom and swept the floor.

He looked at Lois asleep in the bed again with yearning. He was exhausted. He really wanted to go to bed, cuddle up next to her, and sleep. No, he mentally kicked himself. The duffel bag would remain between them. For Lois’s safety. He swallowed and sat down on the bed in the small sliver of space afforded him between the duffel bag and the side of the bed. He glanced back at Lois and his heart filled with love.

Tomorrow would be a better day. At least, he would wake up to Lois’s company instead of a dirt hole. He laid down and let his thoughts drift off to dreams of his incredibly sexy wife.

Friday — Early morning

A tingling feeling woke Lois up. For the brief moment she opened her eyes, she could tell it was still dark, very dark. Middle of the night dark. She felt that tingling sensation again and realized there was a hand caressing her. Under her shirt, caressing her. Was Clark awake? Did he know what he was doing to her? She exhaled as his fingers continued to touch her.

Oh, God! That feels good.

Lois could feel his hot breath blowing over her neck. Clark’s body was warmly snuggled up against her back. She sighed. He felt so good. She shifted her bottom and bumped into him. She smiled.

Hello, husband.

Clark’s hand was so warm against her chest. She pressed her back more firmly against him and she heard him murmur the groan she had stifled. She decided not to chance waking him — if he was truly still asleep — and just savored cuddling with him.

Soon, even that wasn’t enough. She needed more. Lois wanted to turn over and kiss him, but she was still afraid what would happen if he woke up and realized exactly what was going on. She took the hand that was caressing her chest and slowly glided it down her body. Lois smiled as Clark moaned again.

Chancing discovery, Lois reached back and gently tugged on the soft material of Clark’s pants. He moaned again with approval. She felt his lips kissing her neck as his body tucked itself against hers.

Oh, God! She wanted this man. Her hand went back to his against her stomach as he pulled her more tightly to him. Lois gasped with surprise. Clark seemed to take over as he kissed her neck.

Lois could no longer hold in the moan of desire that radiated through her. And before the noise had hardly left her throat, he disappeared. Clark’s warmth, his kisses, his hand, and the rest of his body were gone, leaving her cold and alone. Lois flopped onto the bed in frustration as she heard the bathroom door shut.

Oh, no, he didn’t!

Lois sat up. Oh, yes, he did!

Are you going to let him get away with that?

Absolutely not! Lois thought, jumping to her feet. No more games. This was war!

Clark stood in the bathroom, leaning against the bathroom sink, trying to catch his breath and get a grip of the guilt that was

overtaking him. He couldn't believe that he had done that to Lois. What happened to his duffel bag? How had he ended up pressed up against his wife?

Oh, God! He was out of control. He had to leave. Where he would go? He didn't know. But he *had* to leave. She wasn't safe with him around. But before he left he needed to take a shower... a very hot shower and relieve this ache that was as close to pain as he could remember feeling. Of course, since he had no memory that wasn't saying much. He hoped that Lois hadn't woken up. Perhaps she would never know what he had almost done to her in his sleep.

He heard the doorknob rattle and was glad he had thought to lock it when he had come in.

"Kal!" Lois demanded. "Open up this door. Now!"

Oh, crap, she knew. And she was angry as hell about it.

"I'm sorry, Lois. It won't happen again," he murmured, not knowing if he spoke loud enough for her to hear him. He quickly stripped out of his clothes and turned on the shower.

"Kal, if you get into that shower without unlocking this door, I swear..." She pounded on the door with a sob.

He stopped with one hand on the shower door, his foot about to step inside.

"Please," she pleaded softly.

X-raying the door, he watched her wince and heard her cry before sliding down the doorframe in misery.

"Open the door, Kal, please. Don't do this to me."

Maybe she just needed to use the toilet. Against his better judgment, he quickly — super quickly — unlocked the door and jumped into the shower with his back to the rest of the bathroom.

He couldn't concentrate as he heard the door open and then, a few moments later, the toilet flush. The water went from hot to scalding, surprising him, but luckily not burning his tough skin.

Then the door to the shower opened and there stood Lois, glowering at him. "What do you think you're doing?!"

Kal was about to ask her the same question, but swallowed it, figuring he didn't deserve a rebuttal. He kept his back to her as he watched her over his shoulder, trying to hide as best he could from her gaze.

"Do you think it's fair to turn me on like that and then leave?" she snapped, her hands on her hips.

He gulped. *That's* what she was angry about? "I should never have..."

"Don't give me that self-pity crap!" Lois said, stepping into the shower and slapping him across the face. "You know I want you as much as you want me."

Kal just stared at her as the water from the shower soaked through her pajamas, causing them to cling to her body as a second skin. He gulped. He was a goner. There was no way he could escape.

"There's no need to turn away from me. I know what your body looks like; I've seen it all before," she continued to holler at him. "Do you think it's as easy for me to ...?" Her voice caught with emotion. "Because I can guarantee you that I've never been... never..." Lois's voice dropped off as a brief expression of embarrassment crossed her face.

He decided that it was his time to speak as he turned to face her. "So, you want me to give you pleasure?"

"Yes!" she insisted with relief.

Kal nodded, determined to fulfill his promise to himself to do whatever he needed to make her happy. And if this was what she wanted, so be it. He turned and faced her. "Well, okay. Pleasure it is then." He pressed his lips together.

"What's the matter?" she asked as they continued to stand there without touching.

"I'm figuring out the best way to give you pleasure," he admitted. "I'm sorry. Did you want to ask twice?" He started to panic, but then pushed that emotion aside. He could do this. True,

he couldn't remember the first thing about giving pleasure to a woman. Well, except for what that article had said. And, although Lois said that he could tell her the truth, he wasn't sure he wanted to share *that* with her.

Her jaw dropped open, but she didn't speak. When she still didn't respond after another moment, Kal shrugged and knelt in front of her, pulling her shorts down. He accomplished that in the span of approximately two seconds. Then he stood there a full minute, trying to remember what he had read in that magazine on the best ways to pleasure a woman.

Lois's voice shook as she asked in a higher pitch, "What are you doing?"

"Well, I read in *Love Fortress International* this morning..."

he told her, sitting down on his feet and gazing up at her face. "That the best partner for a man is a happy woman..." He tried to remember exactly what the article had said. "And the best way to keep a woman happy... was to give her ..." Remembering the details of the article actually turned out to be more difficult with her standing there half naked. He cleared his throat. His gaze moved from her eyes down to the wet, t-shirt clinging to her chest. And the focus of his thoughts went away.

"Kal," she said, her voice a hoarse whisper. "What... What are you doing?"

He glanced up at her again and saw surprise written all over her face. "I am going to give you pleasure." His brow furrowed in confusion. "Why? Am I doing it wrong?"

Lois smiled weakly down at him, her hands gripping his shoulders tightly. "Frankly, Kal, I have no idea."

"Huh?"

"No one has..." She swallowed, blushing. "Ever..."

"Never?"

She shook her head.

His eyes opened widely as he realized 'never' included Clark. "Ever?"

"Stand up," Lois requested.

"I *was* going about it all wrong, wasn't I? Oh, I'm so sorry..." Humiliation flooded him.

"Kal. Stand up," she repeated, bending down and tugging him up to his feet.

"I just wanted to make you happy, give you pleasure, and I failed..." he said, standing.

"Kal!" Lois snapped. "Shut up!"

He closed his mouth and looked at her.

Lois took a breath. "I think for our first time — the first time that you can remember — you should just kiss me and see what happens naturally. Okay?" She glanced up at him.

He liked that idea. He could handle that. "Can I do something else first?"

"What?" she asked warily.

"You said that you know my body. Well, I don't remember yours. Can I have a minute to just look at you?" he inquired hopefully. "Before I kiss you and get distracted?"

Lois smiled with a wink. "I think I might be able to handle a minute of pure voyeurism."

Kal grinned as he pulled the hem of Lois's soaking wet sleep shirt up and over her head. He dropped her shirt on the shower stall floor on top of her shorts. She now stood in front of him completely nude. His gaze focused in on the perfection of her chest. He didn't know if he had seen other naked women before he lost his memory, but he knew this body was sure to distract him from any others that might pass by him. He reached out and caressed her arm down to her hand. Lois leaned against the shower wall, closing her eyes with a groan.

"Are you done?" she asked hoarsely.

He smiled. "Just getting started," he replied, raising his other hand to touch her stomach. Her smooth, wet skin was almost his undoing. He almost pulled her to him and kissed her lips, but then

his voyeurism minute would be gone and he really did want to see her entire body. He knelt down beside her and kissed her belly-button.

Lois made a little noise like a sigh, but didn't speak. He sat back on his heels and let his hands glide down over her hips and down her legs to her feet. Her sweet little unpainted toes practically begged for him to kiss them. He lifted up one of her feet and brought it to his mouth.

Lois whimpered. "Kal." Her breath was ragged now. "Not while I'm standing, please," she begged.

Kal smiled. Not a 'not ever,' just a 'not now.' A promise of future gratification and bliss brought him nearly as much happiness in the present. He set down her foot and she sighed. He turned her around, so her back faced him.

This time, he glided his hands up her legs to her bottom. As he stood back up, Kal couldn't resist and started to kiss up her back.

She moaned and Kal gently turned her around so that they were facing each other once more.

Lois wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her naked body to his. "Time's up," she announced before kissing him.

This kiss was unlike any other kiss he could remember. Naked, wet Lois made a wonderful kissing partner. The way her skin glided against his in the water made his body sing with joy. Her hand slid down his chest and over his stomach leaving a trail of tingles. He sucked in a mouthful of air and it was full of the fragrance and taste of her.

"Lois!" This woman was driving him wild. "Lois?" Kal knew he was going to ruin the mood by speaking these words, but they had to be said. "Lois, are you using any precautions?"

She leaned her head against his chest. "No," she admitted with a sigh. "My father wanted me to start on the pill, but I'm always forgetting to take it and... if you don't take it daily, what's the point, right?"

"I don't know if it's even possible..." he began.

"It's possible," she told him.

Kal gazed into her eyes. "How do you know that? Do I...?" He gulped. Was he already a father? Were there others out there like him? Was she already pregnant with his child? Was that why they had gotten married so quickly?

"Well," she said with a slight chuckle. "You aren't going to believe me when I tell you this, because really you had to have been there, but..." She laughed again with a shake of her head. "You really aren't going to believe me."

"Try me," he implored, hating that there was another mystery out there he didn't know about.

"About a month ago, I was visited by two men from the future..." Lois said, pausing with a glance up at him.

She was right, he wasn't going to believe her. This was crazy. He raised a brow.

"One of the men tried to convince me to marry him — in the psycho's defense, he had been drugged by pheromones. Anyway, he wanted me to marry him because he said I was destined to fall in love and marry..." She pressed her lips together and he waited anxiously. "A super strong, super fast, flying alien called Superman." She shot him a grin.

Great. Lois was insane. "Why didn't he want you to marry me?" he asked skeptically.

Lois bit her bottom lip in a way that instantly reminded him that they were standing naked in a shower. He was tempted to press his lips to that slightly pouting bottom lip and hear about this so-called time-traveler another time, but he really wanted to know why this man didn't want them to get married and how she knew he could father children with an Earth woman. Darn his curiosity.

"Because our love is so great and pure that together with our

children, we create a utopian society that is so boring he had to come back into the past and break us up." Lois shot him another huge and nervous grin.

"So, what you're saying is that precautions are a good idea?"

She looked at him with a stunned expression. "You believe me?"

"Absolutely not. Do you need me to run out and get some?" he asked, dropping the subject of the time-traveling men altogether. "Or did you want to go?"

"I thought he was crazy too, Kal. But you've got to remember that this was before I knew you existed. Back when I thought that the man who saved me from falling into the street was a figment of my imagination. This was before you saved the colossus plane... Do you know about that?"

He nodded. They were getting way off track from the reason for this conversation in the first place. "Do you still want to make love? Or do you want to convince me that you're right?"

Lois crossed her arms and took a step back, her jaw tense and her lips pressed together. "You *really* don't remember me at all, do you?"

Uh-oh. He said the absolutely wrongest thing to say to this woman at this juncture, didn't he? He gulped, knowing Lois wasn't going to want him to give her pleasure after all. "I'm sorry, Lois." He smiled helplessly at her.

"I'm not making love to you until you believe me. It's snowing outside, *remember?*" she snapped with a flick of her wrist gesturing the great wide world outside their apartment. Then she grimaced with a sigh. "No, I guess you wouldn't." She set her head on his chest in defeat.

His brow furrowed as he gently caressed her hair. "It's snowing? In late September? Really? It didn't seem that cold outside today, either, huh? Wow! Strange they didn't say anything in the paper about a snowstorm. Does it always snow this early in Metropolis? Are you cold, Lois? I don't want you to catch a chill. Should I turn up the hot water?" He was rambling, so he turned towards the shower knobs, only to be pulled back into her embrace.

Lois's entire face was lit up with so much happiness. She pressed her lips to his and thoroughly kissed him. "*This!* This is why I love you," she told him. "Why I married you."

Kal wasn't quite sure what he had said or done to cause this turnaround, but he wasn't going to mess it up by speaking again. He had learned his lesson. ***Do not talk while making love to Lois!*** He even put it on his internal notepad in permanent ink, bold letters, and, for added emphasis, underlined it twice. If he ever lost his memory again, this was the one thing Kal hoped he would remember.

Friday — A little later, but still very early in the morning

Lois woke up to find Clark still lying asleep on top of her. It was a good feeling and she wondered what it was that woke her up. Then she realized she could hear the shower running in the background.

Oops!

"Honey," she whispered, kissing his cheek. "Cl... Kal?"

He gave a soft, contented murmured of a moan and shifted his position slightly, but otherwise remained asleep.

Lois swallowed. That movement was just enough of a motion for her to realize that he was floating just above her on the bed.

My, oh, my. You two were a bit tired, weren't you?

She nudged her husband on the shoulder a little stronger. "You need to get up."

"Huh?" he mumbled half-asleep as they slowly descended back to the bed. "I like where I am."

She smiled. She liked where he was too. "We left the shower running."

"Oh." Clark sighed. "I better get that."

“Would you?”

Yeah, you're a bit trapped under a superhero at the moment.

Slowly, reluctantly, he peeled himself off her. Then he paused, kissed her, and lifted himself up so that he was looking down at her. He smiled. “This brings back memories.”

Lois gasped. Did it work? She gazed at him hopefully.

He bent his arms and placed another gentle kiss on her lips. “Tell me again why I didn’t make love to you the instant I got here yesterday afternoon?”

Because he's a stubborn, self-pitying, foolish, and amnesiac Boy Scout.

Lois kept the smile on her face, but she knew in her heart-of-hearts that this was still Kal, and not Clark with all his memories. “The water,” she reminded him.

“Right,” he said, groaning and pulling himself entirely off the bed.

She listened to him plod over to the bathroom before the water turned off and he returned. “Wow! That’s some cold water,” he said, and she could see his body glimmer in a sliver of moonlight that pierced the darkness. All of his body. She swallowed, feeling desire rise in her again. She heard him kick his duffel bag from next to the bed. The bag flew across the room, hit the closet door, and fell to the floor.

Lois opened her arms. “Would you like me to warm you up?”

He grinned. “I don’t mind if you do. Thank you, madam.” Kal slipped into her arms.

Good morning, Kal!

And he wasn’t wearing precautions, Lois realized as the blissful feeling of oneness overtook her.

Suddenly, Kal’s eyes bugged out. He flew off her and hit the cinderblock wall, sliding to the floor. “What?! *What* was that?!” he stammered.

Lois drew her knees up to her chest, her heartbeat racing and her breathing rough. “That’s why we can’t make love without precautions, Kal.”

“But... But that was... So...” He stood up, his expression intense. “I need to feel that again.”

“Kal!” She held up her hand. “No.”

His face crumpled like he was a little boy and she had just taken away his favorite toy. “No?”

“If we start... we can’t stop.” She swallowed, the sensation of longing still holding her captive as well. “It feels too good to stop.”

He sat down on the edge of the bed. “You felt it as well?”

“Yes.”

“Lois!” A female voice called to her as someone started pounding on her front door.

Who in the hell?

Kal stared at the front door and covered his lap with a corner of the comforter. Lois tugged it over herself as well, essentially uncovering him. He turned his gaze away from the door and gave her a sharp look. She shrugged innocently with a smile. He grabbed a pillow off the floor and covered himself again.

“Lois! I heard a couple of crashes that shook the building. Are you all right?” Lois now recognized that voice as her blonde, boyfriend-stealing neighbor Mayson Drake.

“I’m fine, Mayson,” Lois called back sweetly and without moving from the bed. “Clark tripped and hit the wall.”

“Oh, God! Clark? *Clark!* What’s he...?” Mayson’s voice broke. “Are you okay, Clark? Should I call an ambulance?”

Lois rolled her eyes.

Thanks for the interruption, Mayson. We're fine now. Go on home now. Nothing to see here. Bye-bye!

Kal turned and gave his wife another, even sharper look. “Clark?” he mouthed.

“Tell her you’re okay,” Lois hissed back at him. “Her name is Mayson. She lives upstairs. You two went to high school together.

She’ll be more worried about you than me. She doesn’t trust me, so tell her you’re okay or she’ll call the cops.”

“Mayson?” Kal called to the door unsurely. He glanced back at Lois, who encouraged him to go on. “Thanks for worrying, but I’m fine. Just bumped my head.”

Lois gave him two thumbs up.

“Oh,” Mayson’s voice softened, almost in defeat.

That's right, Mayson. Clark sleeps here now.

“I’m sorry if I woke you,” Kal continued. “I’m not really dressed to come to the door at the moment...”

Lois’s eyes went wide as she started to giggle.

“Oh!” Mayson replied. “Well, glad to hear that you guys are okay. Could you keep it down?”

Lois’s giggles started to overflow and she covered her mouth to mute them.

“Okay. Sure. Sorry about that, Mayson. See you around,” said Kal with another perplexed shrug to Lois, who was now rolling on the bed in a fit of laughter. He lay down next to her and kissed her, shutting off her giggles. “Am I missing something?”

Nothing important.

Lois waved the question out of the air. “Mayson tried to steal you away from me when we first started dating. It doesn’t matter.”

“But you won?”

She grinned. “I always win.”

He raised a brow. “Do you now?”

“I do.”

Kal shifted his position, so that his body caressed hers. “Is that so?”

“Uh-huh,” she breathed. He was too close and her willpower was nil. “We’ve got to get another apartment with less nosy neighbors.”

He smiled in agreement. “Where were we before we were so rudely interrupted?” he asked, his eyes darkening with passion. She could tell he was recalling what had brought about his journey into the wall.

Her mind went blank as he kissed her.

Yeah. Sure. That's where you were.

His hand coasted down her body. “I need to feel that again...” he said, shifting his body closer to hers. “What was it again? That it felt too good to stop?”

“You once described it as...” Lois thought for a moment for the exact words as she scooted back up the bed further away from him. She had no resistance to him or that feeling of oneness. “You bringing me within your aura.”

Kal stopped and appeared dumbfounded by this statement. “My *what?*?”

“Aura.” How was she going to explain it to him? How had he explained it to her? “It’s like your protective candy coating. Your hard shell.”

Clark did not say that to you!

Kal raised a brow, crawling to her. “Candy coating?”

Lois flushed, biting her bottom lip. “Can I help it if you taste good?”

He kissed her. “You’re the one who tastes good,” he murmured, running his hand down her body once more. “But I don’t think that’s what you meant.”

It was very distracting to have her naked husband lying next to her. “Hmmm,” she replied as her hand gravitated to his chest.

He took hold of her hand as it started to move down his body. “Lois.”

“Right. Aura,” she reminded herself, looking away from him. “You described it like your own personal force field. Anything that touches you within a millimeter or two also becomes protected. Which is why your blue suit doesn’t get damaged when you get shot or blown up. Why I can fly in your arms with no ill effects. And, when we make love, you wrap me in your

aura, like you wrap me in your red cape sometimes.”

“And without precautions...?” he asked, kissing down her neck.

Lois voice cracked as she tried to concentrate on the subject at hand. “Something extra happens. It’s like we become one. It’s a very powerful feeling. Irresistible. Unstoppable. Indescribable, really. Believe me, I’ve tried.”

Kal’s lips moved from her neck down her chest. “Sounds like something worth trying.”

“This really isn’t the best time to tease Mother Nature. With your memories missing, you aren’t at one hundred percent right now. Probably not the best time to try and make a baby,” she reminded him.

“We’ve must have tried it before...” His lips were now nibbling at her earlobe.

“Uh-huh,” she groaned.

He kissed down her neck, past her chest to her belly. “So, there may be a baby growing right here now?”

“Uh-huh,” she admitted, not really wanting to dwell on the subject.

“Really?” He glanced up at her, surprised. “You might be pregnant with my child at this moment?”

Lois smiled weakly and shrugged.

“How many times were we careless?” he asked, starting to kiss her stomach again. “Or did we do it on purpose?”

“Three. Maybe four times. The first time was accidental. We were celebrating your successful return from the first Nightfall mission,” she confessed. “The other times were right after that. We just couldn’t stop ourselves. It felt so good.”

“So, when I bring you within my aura, does that make you bulletproof?” Kal’s lips returned to her shoulder. Her defenses were crumbling.

“Not a theory I really want to put to the test,” she told him, her voice hoarse.

He glanced at her. “Neither do I.”

Glad to hear it. Can we stop all this incessant talking now?

“Lois, where are the condoms?” he asked, looking deep into her eyes.

“Bathroom. Under the sink.”

Suddenly, he was back or maybe he hadn’t left. And at that moment, she didn’t care. He was done torturing her and was finally back where he belonged.

A while later, while they relaxed in the afterglow, Lois realized it felt like it was snowing in her apartment. Lois opened her eyes and saw that it looked like it was snowing as well. She exhaled and one of the ‘snowflakes’ blew back into the air.

“Kal?”

“Hmmm?” he replied, his head resting on her chest.

“I think we broke the bed,” she told him, blowing more feathers up into the air.

He chuckled. “It was worth it.”

Lois couldn’t agree more.

Friday morning

Kal woke up the next morning in a small stream of sunlight that sneaked through the one small window in the living room. He had no idea what time it was. He didn’t care. He was tangled in a mess of sheets and feathers with the most beautiful woman in the world who made love to him like a wildcat. And if all those boxes of condoms in the bathroom were anything to go by, they could stay in this apartment blissfully making love for a long, long time without ever needing to leave.

Well, he might need to go out and get some sunshine every once...

Sunshine!

Was that a memory?

Yes, sunshine recharged his batteries.

He smiled. Lois and sunshine.

Maybe he should fly her to a deserted island in the south Pacific and...

Kal’s smile faded with a sigh. Right. Flying. He couldn’t remember how to do that properly yet. He wouldn’t want to risk hurting Lois.

He ran his fingers over her hair. It was dotted with little white feathers. She hadn’t been joking about busting the bed. He glanced around. The feathers were from the pillows. But it looked like he had torn the sheets and the mattress as well. Goodness! How were they ever going to survive, if he destroyed their bed every time they made love? Had this happened on their honeymoon as well?

Lois stirred and her eyes opened. She looked at him with one of those dazzling smiles of hers. He returned it. It was all he could do; when she smiled, he wanted to smile too. He was so in love with her. She batted her eyelashes a couple more times and that smile became even more dazzling... radiant! Her smile was like a big dose of sunshine. He could feel himself becoming rejuvenated just by looking at her.

“Good morning,” she said to him, giving him a kiss. “How are you feeling this morning?”

“Feeling like I need another dose of your radiant sunshine, beautiful,” Kal replied, deepening the kiss.

“We’re going to have to replace this mattress today. I knew it needed to be replaced after the break-in, but...” She pulled back and looked at him. “Did you say sunshine?”

He smiled and then it faltered. “You mean I didn’t tear up your futon?”

Lois shook her head. “No...” She smiled weakly. “Well, maybe a little bit. But the burglars cut it up when they trashed the place, looking for information on you. We flipped it over, but it was only a matter of time...” She sat up, focused on his face. “Did you have a memory?”

Kal gazed at her hesitantly. “I like sunshine?”

Her entire face lit up. “Yes! Yes! What is it about sunshine?” she coaxed.

She looked so excited, he hated to disappoint her. “I don’t know, like it recharges my batteries or something?”

Suddenly, Lois wrapped her arms around him, pressing her mouth to his. “Oh, this is so wonderful. What else? What else do you remember?”

Kal swallowed. “You’re very distracting.”

“Oh, sorry,” she apologized, letting go of him. “You’ve got your memories back. What else? What else?”

He looked at her blankly. Sunshine, that had been it.

“Come on, Clark. I know you’re in there. What else do you remember? The first time we made love? The first time we kissed? The second time? When you introduced me to your parents? The first time you took me flying? The big pile of snow? What else?” Lois was practically begging him now. “Anything?”

Kal frowned; it pained him to let her down so. “Just that bit about sunshine, Lois. That was all.”

Her face fell for a moment, but then she placed a smile on her face that he instantly recognized as fake. “That’s okay. A little at a time. That’s okay. At least, you’re remembering something,” she said, patting his arm and crawling off the futon. He recognized the disappointment in her eyes.

“You hoped I’d be better this morning,” he murmured as his eyes stayed fixed on her.

She retrieved her robe from the closet. “Well, of course, I hoped with familiar sights, sounds, and feelings something would come back.” After she had her robe on, she grabbed the broom to start sweeping up the feathers. “I hoped after a good night’s rest...”

A new insight hit him in the chest, wounding him. “You don’t love me at all...”

Her brow furrowed. “Of course I love you.” She dropped the broom and came over to the bed, sitting down next to him. “Why would you say that? We made love all night long.” Lois wrapped him in her arms, but he remained there stiff with this new knowledge.

“You weren’t making love to me. You were making love to *him*. To Clark,” he growled.

“What? That’s ridiculous.” She held him tighter. “There is no *him*. There’s only *you*.”

“You only made love to me because you hoped that it would trigger some kind of wave of memories,” he told her. He could feel her stiffen as if he had hit a nerve. “Well, I’ve got news for you, reporter lady. I’m not Clark. I’m *Kal-El*.” Kal pulled out of her arms and stood up. “The last son of Krypton.”

Lois’s jaw dropped as she stared at him as if he had slapped her across the face. He spun into his blue suit, red shorts, cape, and boots.

Slowly, carefully, she stepped off the bed and approached him. “Think about what you’re saying. There aren’t two of you. Only *you*, the man I love.”

Kal’s heart melted. Maybe she did love him after all. He caressed her cheek. He loved her so much. Then he winced at the memory of her begging for him to remember Clark’s memories. He crossed his arms. “Tell me that again. Only say *my* name.”

“Your name?” She swallowed.

He raised a brow. “Say, ‘Kal, I love you.’”

Her eyes hardened. “No.”

“What?!” Kal gasped. Was she admitting that she really didn’t love him?

“I’ve humored you long enough. I shouldn’t have let this go on as long as it has,” Lois told him. “There is no Kal-El. He doesn’t exist.”

Kal held out his arms, showing her his entire ensemble. “Then who am I?”

“Clark Kent,” she replied.

He took a step backwards away from her, spinning into a pair of jeans, a flannel shirt, and Clark’s glasses. “So you’d rather tell Clark that you love him?”

Lois’s jaw tensed. “It doesn’t matter how you’re dressed. There is only *you*. I love all of you. Not just the parts.”

He looked at her defiantly. “So, you don’t love Clark?”

“Of course, I love you, Clark.” She reached to hug him, but he stepped away.

Kal saw how naturally she said that she loved Clark. How easily it slipped off her tongue.

“I know you are frustrated by the lack of progress with your memories,” Lois went on. “But we’ll work through this together. Okay?”

He pinched his lips together. “Actually, I had stopped being frustrated by my lack of memories, until you told me you couldn’t accept me without them.”

“I never...” she snapped, her tongue running over her teeth.

His eyes formed slits. “It’s not going to work this time,” he interrupted, trying to ignore the way his blood had rushed when she had licked her teeth.

Lois flung up her hands. “What?! What’s not going to work?”

“Trying to seduce me back into your bed.” Kal glanced over at the futon. “What’s left of your bed.”

She glared at him. “I’ve never seduced you to do anything...”

“You’re right. I love you so much that I looked past the fact that you don’t love me - me, only *him* - me. I wanted to make love to you. Me! Kal-El. I loved making love to you, but now... even those memories are tainted. Because you weren’t loving *me*, only *him*.”

Lois closed her eyes and he could see the tears dotting her eyelashes. “There is no *him*!” she yelled. “There is only *you*!”

“Right,” he stated sarcastically, marching towards the door.

“Tell me this much, if you’re not *him*, how come you keep acting like the dense idiot I married?” she retorted, throwing the last intact pillow at him.

Kal took a deep breath and exhaled out the anger from her cruel words. “Goodbye, Lois.” He opened the door and left.

Two blocks away, he found an alley and spun into his Superman suit. Then he ran — super-ran — off, hoping to outrun the sound of her sobs. A minute later, when he reached the wharf and the water, he stopped, unable to go any further. He could still hear her crying.

Lois wiped the tears from her eyes. “Enough!” she told herself. Then she called up to the heavens, “He banished you, you green-eyed monster. You aren’t welcome here anymore.”

No! gasped her inner voice. *He wouldn’t dare.*

Stomping into the bathroom, Lois took a quick shower. Afterwards, she got dressed and tidied up her apartment. She had hoped that within that time whatever paranoia Superman had about his true self would have faded, and he would return home to apologize.

When half an hour had passed... then forty-five minutes since he had stormed out, Lois decided there was no point in waiting around for him, wallowing any longer. Time to be proactive. There was a superhero in Metropolis without a memory, and she needed to protect him — whether he wanted her to or not.

Idiot! Dolt! Blockhead! Oaf! Fool! Nitwit!

She had been calling that man she married a lot worse names.

Lois needed to find her husband. She started by telephoning the Kents. They weren’t at the apartment, so she called the café.

“Howdy-Ho, MJ’s Café. How may I help you?”

“Maisie, it’s Lois. I need to talk to Martha,” she told the café’s hostess.

“Lois?” Martha’s voice instantly calmed her. She loved that woman. “Is everything all right?”

“Clark’s run off. We had a big fight this morning because he thought I made love to him just to get his memories back,” Lois explained. It felt good to get this off her chest.

“Did you?”

“No,” Lois snapped a tad too defensively.

Just a little bit.

“Not entirely,” she continued.

“Did it work?” Martha asked hopefully.

“If it had worked do you think he would have run off?” Lois exclaimed wryly. “No, he still thinks he’s ‘Superman’ or ‘Kal-El’ or whomever. For some cockamamie reason he’s still in denial about being Clark. I’ve tried to be patient, Martha. Really, I have. I didn’t pressure him or anything. I was able to convince him that he and Clark were the same person... I think. That I was married to both of them. That he really, truly was my husband. But without his old memories, he says Clark might as well be another man.” She sighed. “I just want my husband back.”

“You made love to him?”

“Well, he started it!” Lois retorted.

“Uh-huh,” Martha didn’t sound like she believed her.

Lois wasn’t feeling the sympathy she had hoped for from Clark’s mom. She started pacing. “Well, he *is* my husband. And I *had* thought he had died. Excuse me for being in love with your son and wanting to express that love...”

“Lois!” Martha interrupted her. “I’m not judging you. If he made love to you that means he still loves you.”

“I know he loves me! Whoever he is, he always loves me,” she practically shouted at Martha before despair washed over her. “I just don’t know if that’s enough anymore. I don’t know what else to give him. Other than a good clobbering.”

“I find a good ear-tug and a slap to the back of the head work well with Clark,” responded Martha with some much needed

humor. “But then again, I am his mother.”

“Anyway, I just wanted you and Jonathan to know, in case Mr. High-n-Mighty-Boots decides to stoop to our level and comes to you for help,” Lois said snippily.

“Lo-is,” Martha warned. “Time. Patience. Love. That’s what Clark needs right now. If I know my son, he’ll blow off some steam, realize what a lunkhead he’s been, and then he’ll want to apologize to you.”

How could I have forgotten ‘lunkhead’? Duh!

Lois sighed. Did she still want to be married to a lunkhead?

You know you do, her inner voice reminded her. You love that lunkhead. You’ll always love him.

“Thanks, Martha. I think I may need some time, too,” Lois told her and then hung up. She had wanted to add that she needed some ‘space’ as well, but it was ‘space’ that had caused all these problems in the first place.

Damn asteroids.

It wasn’t until he reached Central Park in New York City that Superman could no longer hear Lois crying. Maybe he hadn’t been hearing her at all. Perhaps it had just been the echo of the memory of hearing her cry. Either way, it wrenched his heart.

He had done that. He had hurt the woman he loved. Kal had promised himself, only yesterday, to do whatever needed to be done to make Lois happy. Why had he stopped doing that? He had tried to be mad at her, even tried to hate her, but he couldn’t. His initial anger had faded and he realized that he still loved her. And he knew he always would.

If Kal had just let her mourn the loss of her husband, he could be right there, right now, with her. But, oh no! He had to be selfish. Want her to love him for himself. She was right; he was a dense idiot. Kal sighed. But it felt like a lie, somehow, letting her make love to him... when it was really Clark she wanted.

Everything was busier in this city than Metropolis. In a cove of trees, he switched back into his Clark clothes, glad to have a way to blend in... disappear. He found a patch of lawn by the mini boat pond and sat down to figure out what to do with his mess of a life. The sunshine felt good on his face, healing.

It was serene here. Kal could almost block out the sounds of the city from his mind. He could imagine coming here with Lois and having a picnic with pasta salad, chips, lemonade, and grapes.

He leaned back into the grass staring up into the blue sky streaked with wispy clouds. Being the end of September it was sunny, but not hot. Cool, yet not cold.

They could eat grapes. He could hold one in his teeth and Lois could try to steal it away from him with a kiss.

“Do you age, Clark?” He could hear Lois talking to him. He looked around, but didn’t see her anywhere. He closed his eyes and pictured that picnic again. She had called him ‘Clark’, but he knew she was actually talking to Kal.

Lois could kneel down next to him, take his hands in hers, and lower her voice, “*I know you’re strong and invulnerable, but does that mean you won’t get older?*”

“*I don’t know, Lois. I never thought about it. I came here as a baby and I’ve aged regularly since then, but now?*” he could reply with a shrug. “*I don’t know what a Kryptonian’s life expectancy would be here on Earth.*”

She could place her hands on his face, gazing deep into his eyes. “*Would you still love me when I’m old, grey, and frail, stooped with age, and speckled with liver spots, if you still looked as you do today? Would you want to leave me and be with a younger woman with your liveliness, energy, spirit, and youth?*” He could even picture her swallowing nervously. “*Someone still attractive like you?*”

He could then cup her jaw with his palm. “*You say that like you could ever be unattractive, Lois, which is impossible. You are*

the most beautiful woman I have ever met and I will love you forever. It doesn’t matter how you or I might change with age or even if you or I should die. I will never be able to stop loving you.”

Lois could stare at him that way she does, as if she could see his very soul. Kal could almost hear her heart racing. He even remembered the way her throat moved as she swallowed again, “*Then marry me.*”

Suddenly, this peaceful image with replaced with a Lois in lingerie, feeding him chocolate dipped strawberries while straddling him. Oh, God! ... some chocolate dripped down on her shoulder. He moved the strap of her negligee away from her shoulder and licked off the chocolate. Chocolate and strawberry and Lois...

Kal sat up, pulling his knees to his chest. He dropped his head into his hands and tried to calm his racing heart and ragged breath. What was wrong with him? Why was he having all these torrid fantasies about his wife?

He winced. *His wife!*

Lois Lane really was his wife, and he had just pushed her away.

Idiot! Dolt! Blockhead! Oaf! Fool! Nitwit!

He could just hear her voice, echoing inside his head, calling him those names. And he deserved it. He agreed with her completely.

Kal looked around. That picnic wasn’t a fantasy.

It was a memory.

And it had happened here.

In this park.

At this spot.

The grapes.

The picnic.

The proposal.

She had been talking to Clark, but it was to *him* she had proposed.

Oh, God! Lois really did love him.

Friday — Morning

Kal opened the door of the apartment. “Lois?” he called, although he knew she wasn’t there. It was entirely too quiet.

His shoulders fell as he sighed. Had he really thought she would be here waiting for him? Especially after all those horrible things he had said. He saw that she had cleaned up the feathers from the popped pillows and felt another pang of guilt in his chest. She was right. He was a dense idiot.

First, he had made love to her. Then he claimed *she* didn’t love him enough. On top of all that, he had left a huge mess for her to clean up. He would be lucky if she accepted him back. He would be lucky if she spoke to him again.

The phone rang, and he froze. Should he answer it? It could be Lois. Or it could be someone else that he was supposed to know but didn’t remember, like Lois’s neighbor, Mayson.

Or it could be Lois, he repeated to himself and picked up the receiver. “Hello?”

“Hello. I was told I could reach Clark Kent at this number. Is he there?” the man on the other end of the line asked.

Good question. Lois said that he was also Clark. Kal swallowed his pride. “Speaking?” He really shouldn’t be so unsure of himself, should he?

“Kent! It’s Joe at MDS. I didn’t recognize your voice at first. Man, where have you been?”

Another good question. Only this one he didn’t have an answer to. MDS? He had no idea who Joe was. Kal decided to try to fake his way through the conversation. “Around.”

“Around? Around? Want to be a little more specific there, Kent?” the man — Joe, was it? — sounded quite angry.

Guess faking his way wasn’t going to work. Where had Kal

been? He had no idea. He woke up yesterday in Echo Canyon. Then he came into Metropolis. Before that? Space. He battled an asteroid. No, he couldn't tell Joe that. Before Nightfall?

"Niagara Falls," he replied, confident that his answer was at least honest.

"Niagara Falls? Oh, my God, Kent! Did you marry Lois Lane?" The man laughed as if he couldn't believe his own words.

"As a matter of fact, I did, Joe," Kal replied. *Not that I remember any of the ceremony or the honeymoon*, he thought to himself unhappily. Why couldn't those have been the first memories he recovered? Oh, no. *Sunshine!* Pah!

"You? And Lois Lane?" Joe seemed surprised by this news. "You married Superman's girlfriend? Are you nuts?"

Well, yes, yes, yes, and it seemed more than likely, yes.

"He's going to kill you!" Joe chortled.

Very possible, Kal agreed. His own stupidity would probably cause him to die of a broken heart. Instead he said, "Superman doesn't kill people, Joe." He sighed. What had Henderson told him? "Anyway, Lois never dated K... Superman." The words constricted his heart. *What have you done?* he thought as the stupidity of his words to Lois were once again brought to the forefront of his mind.

"Sorry, Kent. Everyone's probably ribbing you. Congratulations," Joe backed off.

"Thank you."

"So, when are you coming back to work?" Joe asked.

Work? He — Clark Kent — worked at MDS? Joe was his boss? Or his supervisor or something? *Crap!* He thought the Kents had said that Clark was a reporter. He was going to have to tell Joe the truth about his memories.

"It's been a nightmare here since Nightfall with the grounding of flights on Sunday..." Joe continued. "And then all over again on Wednesday. Everything's behind schedule. We could use our best driver behind the wheel."

Clark Kent was a driver for MDS? "Joe, I'm going to have to be honest with you. I haven't been the same since Nightfall..."

"You and me both, Kent," Joe agreed. "But we need you, man. The higher ups wanted to fire you when you didn't show on Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday. You didn't even call. That's not like you, Kent. I told them, 'He's the best deliveryman we've got. Let me track him down.' If you don't come in today, we're going to have to replace you."

Kal choked. What should he do? He couldn't go to MDS. He didn't know *what* MDS was, let alone *where* it was. And he certainly was in no condition to ... what had Joe said? ... 'make deliveries.' "I can't, Joe," he finally admitted, hating that those words were even a part of his vocabulary. "I've lost my mind."

"Excuse me?" Joe replied curtly.

"My memories. They're all gone. I have no idea who you are or what MDS is. Or even what MDS stands for. It's gone. All of it." He hated to admit this weakness to a stranger, but if Joe was being honest with him — and Kal suspected he was — the man deserved the truth. "I've had no memories for the last day or two. Maybe longer."

Suddenly Joe was laughing, really laughing. "Man, Kent, Lois Lane must be some lay to wipe your memories like that."

Kal growled. "Excuse me!" That was *his* wife the man was insulting. His hand was in a fist, and Joe was extremely lucky that Kal had no idea where MDS was.

"Look, Kent, if you had wanted a longer honeymoon, you should have said so, but I can't accept such a phony baloney excuse. I can't believe you. You're usually such a stand-up and reliable guy." Gone was the friendly co-worker. Joe was now all business. "But your performance has been slipping over the past few weeks. Trucks coming in late. Hours unaccounted for. I know she's hot, but I hope she's worth it. You've got enough vacation accrued, how about we call it a draw, okay? We'll count this

week and next week as your two weeks' notice. I hate to lose a good driver like you, Kent, but we really cannot condone this kind of behavior. Sorry, but that's the way it's going to have to be."

"I understand," Kal stated, more than happy to part ways with this Joe fellow and MDS, whoever they might be. Superman might not kill people, but after that comment about Lois, Kal was seriously considering making an exception. "Just send my paycheck to the old address. I'll have my folks forward it on to me."

"Kent. You've got direct deposit," Joe reminded him.

"Do I? Good. Any idea which bank? No, never mind. I'll figure it out for myself," Kal replied tersely, slamming down the phone. He looked down at Lois's broken phone. Great. "Well, I don't condone *this* kind of behavior either, Joe," Kal grumbled to himself. "...but that doesn't bring the memories back any faster."

He took another look around the apartment. Where was Lois? He was feeling more and more lost without her. She would know what to do. She could have stopped him from being fired. He winced, plopping himself down in her desk chair. He never realized how much he needed her and, like an idiot, *he had walked out on her!*

Sitting on the desk, next to the now-broken telephone, was an open phonebook. Kal glanced down at it. Restaurants. MJ's Café! Of course, Clark's parents. They would know where Lois... Kal glanced at the broken phone again with a shake of his head and sigh. He tore the page out of the phonebook and stuck it in his pocket. He would find another phone somewhere.

Suddenly, Kal heard something. What was that ringing in his ears?

Meanwhile...

Lois marched into the offices of the Daily Planet past Jimmy, to whom she just flicked her hand in greeting, and straight into Perry White's office.

"What in blue blazes?" Perry stammered with a growl as he stood up. "Are you forgetting who works for whom, Ms. Lane?"

"Clark's missing," she announced, slamming his office door. "He doesn't see himself as Clark, only as..." She lowered her voice and gave him a pointed glance. "...you-know-who."

"Great shades of Elvis!" Perry exclaimed before dropping back into his chair. "So, he's out in Metropolis... as you-know-who? Saving people? Without his memory?"

"Possibly. Probably. I don't know." Lois threw up her hands and sat down. "I shouldn't have let him go on thinking that Clark and Kal were different personalities within the same man. I should have just told him that he was Clark with..." She glanced out at the bullpen and lowered her voice. "Extra features and an extra fancy work outfit."

"We've got to find him," Perry told her. "He's vulnerable without his memories. If he should believe the wrong person or talk to the *Metropolis Star*..."

"I know that. That's why I'm here. If he does make a move as... you-know-who... I figure the Daily Planet will hear about it. Maybe I can get to him before he talks to anyone, before it gets out that even you-know-how can get hurt, and convince him to come home..." She sighed.

Then what, Lois? He thinks you seduced him. He thinks you used him to try to get Clark back.

"What would draw Superman out?" Perry asked.

Lois shook her head. "I don't know. A fire? A train accident? A drive-by shooting? A cat stuck in a tree? Who knows what?"

Jimmy knocked on the glass door and stuck his head inside. "Chief! Robbery in progress at a jewelry store downtown."

Perry exchanged a look with Lois. They were both thinking the same thing. "Jimmy, take Lois. And your camera."

Jimmy grinned. "On it, Chief."

Lois gave her boss a grateful smile, then marched to the door. “I’ll drive,” she told the photographer. “You navigate.”

Kal stood outside the perimeter of the police tape. He had arrived too late to help, but luckily the police hadn’t needed him to get everyone out safely and capture the bad guys. He knew he should just leave, run off, but there was something about this jewelry shop that seemed familiar. He hoped that the longer he stood here, the more likely the memory would make itself known.

Someone came up next to him and nudged him. “Superman, what are you doing here?”

Kal glanced over and saw Linda King. Great. Just what he needed on top of everything else. He pressed his lips together. “I thought they might need my help. It looks like I was mistaken.” If he could have flown here...

Linda King focused on his face for a moment, then ran her fingers up and down his arm. “I bought some champagne the other day, when I thought the world was going to end. Shall I put it on ice for us?”

He really didn’t want to. He wanted to be with Lois, but if his wife kicked him out for good, he would need a place to go. “Can I think about it?”

“I don’t want to be alone. Nightfall made me realize that life is... whatever it is...”

“But we don’t really have a relationship, do we?” Kal asked her.

“We’re friends,” she said hesitantly. “That’s a relationship.”

“I need to find my own memories, Ms. King. I can’t fake them with somebody else. I’m sorry,” he told her.

Linda pressed her lips together and exhaled. “Hi, Charlie.”

“Hello, Ms. King,” he replied. He was okay with her thinking he was the impersonator. Actually, he felt more like an impersonator than a hero at the moment. A nagging question presented itself to the forefront of his mind. “How do you know Lois Lane?”

“We went to college together,” she answered nonchalantly. “Lois was willing to sell her first big investigative article to me for one night with my boyfriend.” Linda sneered. “No journalistic integrity at all.”

Kal’s jaw dropped. Lois *sold* her article for one night with this woman’s boyfriend? No, that couldn’t be right. “Why would she do that?” he asked skeptically.

Linda grinned. “Because the first boy with whom she ever slept died. She wanted to prove to herself and others that sex with her wasn’t deadly.”

No. No, that couldn’t be right. Lois wouldn’t have to sell anything to get a man to sleep with her. He knew that sounded worse than he had meant. But had Lois offered herself for sex — not that she ever would — men would have lined up for the chance to prove she wasn’t deadly.

He winced. That was why Lois had reacted the way she did when he had said that a man would have to be Superman to survive being married to her. Her first boyfriend had died. He felt awful. Why hadn’t Lois just told him the truth? Maybe she already had and he just couldn’t remember.

“Which is worse, Ms. King: selling one’s article for some peace of mind or selling one’s boyfriend for an article?”

Linda King got an expression of sucking lemons on her face. “How’s life with the Mrs., Charlie?” she retorted.

“Fine,” he replied, crossing his arms and looking back at the jewelry store. He didn’t want to share his problems with this woman.

She raised a brow. “Is it now? How fine can it be if you’re considering drinking champagne with me?”

Linda was correct. He wished the earth would open up and swallow him whole, so he could just escape this conversation and the torment of remembering his stupid words to his wife.

“How does — Lola, wasn’t it? — feel about you parading around in this suit, thinking that you’re Superman? Giving people a sense of false hope?”

Kal gulped. Was that what he was doing? “False hope?”

“How do you think people feel when they see you? They think that Superman made it back from Nightfall alive. They think he’s still here to help. I know that’s what I keep thinking every time I bump into you.”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“No, not necessarily. Until you run into a burning building and don’t come out again, when you can’t fly up to help the crashing plane, or when the bullets don’t bounce off your chest. People aren’t going to want to see the Man of Steel being taken to the morgue, especially Lola,” she informed him. “Go home to your wife, Charlie. Appreciate what you have, not what you lost.”

“What if I can do those things?” he asked her, knowing that it was the wrong thing to say, but wanting so desperately to have someone, anyone — even Ms. King — need him, acknowledge his existence, Superman him, not Clark him. The hero, not the man.

Linda shook her head. “Now, who’s deluding themselves?” she asked him, kissing his cheek. “Look, Charlie, I’m sure it’s the man under the suit Lola loves. That suit — it’s just something you put on when you go to work. It wasn’t the suit that made Superman super.” A contemplative look came over her face. “I wonder if it came off...” She rubbed her hand up and down his arm again. “I guess I’ll never find out now.” She sighed.

Superman glanced at Linda with apprehension and took a step away.

Linda glanced past him. “Oh, look, it’s Lois’s lap puppy.”

Kal glanced at the young man with the camera to whom Linda had indicated with her head. *Lap puppy?*

“Superman!” the photographer called to him, raising his hand in greeting.

Great. Did he know this kid?

“Have fun playing Superman, Charlie. Give me a call if Lola gives you the boot. My number is in the book,” Linda said with a wave of her hand as she walked away. “Don’t run into any burning buildings.”

My God! Did that woman think Charlie doubled as a gigolo? He shook his head and turned to the young man who had stopped next to him.

“Hi, Superman.” The young man seemed almost nervous to be talking to him.

“Hello,” Kal replied casually to the man whose name he did not know.

“CK’s missing,” the young man told him.

Who? Wait. CK? As in Clark Kent? Was this guy Kal had spoke to on the telephone yesterday about Lois? What had been his name? James? “Clark Kent?” Kal asked unsurely, hoping he was on the right track.

“Yes! I’m sorry, Superman. I’m Jimmy Olsen. I work with Lois and Clark at the Daily Planet. Lois is going out of her mind with worry. Apparently, CK got hit in the head and lost his memory. He made it back to Metropolis yesterday, but wandered off again today,” Jimmy explained.

Lois was worried about him? Joy poured into his heart. Was their love salvageable? Kal looked around. “Is Lois here?” he asked, full of hope, but not seeing her in the small crowd of people milling around.

“She was, but she left,” Jimmy replied with a shake of his head. “She was pretty upset. She took off like a bat out of hell, once I got out of the car and said I was going to ask your help in finding CK.”

Vaguely Kal remembered hearing a screech of tires a few minutes before. Had that been Lois? “Is she still angry at me?” Superman asked Jimmy, his heart sinking back into his red boots.

“Angry? Nah... Well, maybe a little bit, but her emotions are all over the place because of CK. I’ve seen Mad Dog angrier. Like the morning after you took her to CK’s without her permission because you found out someone had bugged her apartment... Whew! She could have cracked concrete with her fist that day.”

Superman gulped. He had done that? Why had she married him again?... Did Jimmy just call his wife ‘Mad Dog’? “Jimmy, do you recall what Lois’s exact words were? Just now, before she drove off.”

“Yeah,” Jimmy said, his brow furrowing in confusion. “She said she couldn’t get out of the car. I asked her, ‘why?’ She had been staring straight at the store. Apparently this was where they had bought their wedding rings.”

Kal glanced down at his bare hand, then back up at the store in front of him. Wedding rings? Was that why this store was so familiar? How come he didn’t have Clark’s wedding ring? Jonathan Kent had given him Clark’s glasses, his wallet, and his apartment keys, but not his wedding ring.

“But I’m thinking she was more upset about seeing you and Linda talking,” Jimmy went on. “Because when I asked Lois if she was going to get out and talk to you, you know to get the story, she said she thought she could see the whole story from where she was. Lois told me once that Linda would steal anything not nailed down. So, I told her that I’d ask you to help find CK for her. She said, ‘good luck with that’ and then took off. I guess you’re right. Lois is mad at you for some reason, Superman. Wonder why?” Jimmy asked.

Superman winced. Lois had seen him talking to Linda King, the woman from whom she bought a night of sex with her... He shook his head. That still didn’t make any sense. Why would Lois be so venomously enraged by Linda King if that had been the case? No, Linda hadn’t told him the whole true story.

“Or...” Jimmy continued when Superman didn’t speak. “Maybe Lois had warned you about Linda and seeing you two talking and not taking her advice infuriated her. I can see that.”

Oh, yeah. Lois definitely wasn’t happy about that. Oh, God! Hadn’t Lois said that Linda had been trying to steal Superman from her? And then she drove up and saw... what? Linda kissing his cheek? Caressing his arm? Idiot! Dense idiot. What was the matter with him? Oh. Right. Amnesia.

Should Kal run after his wife? And confess his innocence? No, he decided. Who knew where she could be by now? And without his flying ability, it would take twice as long to check the neighboring streets. Superman tried to smile reassuringly at Jimmy. “Lois is right though. There isn’t much of a story here. Robbers came in to Mazik’s Jewelers at gunpoint, the silent alarm went off, and they were stopped shortly thereafter by the police. If you want more details, check in with Sergeant Zymak over there. If you see Lois, tell her I will find Clark and have him call her...” His voice faltered. Except that he had killed Lois’s home telephone. “At the Daily Planet. Do you have their phone number?”

“Ah, sure. The Chief only gave me a hundred of these, but...” Jimmy blushed and pulled out his wallet, removing a business card. He flipped over the card and wrote a couple of numbers on the back. “This top number is my home number.” Jimmy looked even more embarrassed. “For CK, if he needs to reach me.”

Superman nodded.

“The second number is Lois’s home number, in case CK forgot it,” Jimmy explained.

“You know Lois’s home number by heart?” Superman asked the young photographer suspiciously. Maybe there was more to that *lap puppy* nickname of Linda’s than he had thought. “I didn’t realize that you two were so close.”

Jimmy’s face was bright red now with obvious guilt. “With

her sister Lucy. I’m kind of, sort of, hopefully dating Lucy.”

“Ah.” Superman nodded, feeling better about this young man and worse about that Metropolis Star reporter. “Congratulations.”

“Thanks, Superman, do you mind if I snap a few photos?” Jimmy asked, holding up his camera.

Photos! No, thank you, Jimmy. Kal wouldn’t be surprised if he still had feathers in his hair. No, the super running had probably taken care of that. “I should start looking for Lois’s husband. The police took care of this crime and it would be wrong to give me credit for it by photographing me here. Once I find Clark, I promise to give you first exclusive on any Superman photos.” Superman nodded to him.

“Wow! Thanks, Superman. I would really appreciate that. But you’re right. CK comes first,” Jimmy replied.

Kal looked around and tried to figure out in which direction he had come. Spotting the street, he nodded again to Jimmy and jogged down to the corner, waiting to use his super speed until he was out of sight of the young man and Ms. King.

Superman spun back into his Clark clothes in that alley two blocks from Lois’s apartment and then jogged back home, hoping to find his wife there. Maybe he had beaten her home. Or maybe she had gone to a bar to drown her sorrows. No, doubtful. Kal realized with his memories gone, he didn’t even know Lois’s vices... if she had any.

He wrote Lois a note, in case she did return home, apologizing for destroying her phone and telling her he would try to reach her at the Daily Planet, if she didn’t want to wait for him at home. Then he rolled up the torn and musky smelling futon mattress — perhaps he should have heat zapped out the dampness from it before he stormed out this morning.

Of course, after the mishap with the glass the previous afternoon, Kal might have set the mattress on fire. He sat down on Lois’s desk chair and buried his face in his hands.

His mind naturally drifted back to making love to his wife early this morning. That she was so willing to share herself, give up that control that she seemed to hold on to so tightly, and trust him... Trust him to touch her. Trust him enough to allow herself to lose control to practically... who was he kidding? She *did* beg him. He smiled. She had begged him to take her right that moment — without precautions — because she *wanted* him, *needed* him. He couldn’t deny her. Tempting though it had been, Kal had wanted her to know that he would use precautions because *she* had said she wanted to use them. And he was glad he had gone to grab a condom. After seeing the number of boxes of condoms, he knew Lois and Clark were nowhere near ready to become parents.

He mentally kicked himself again. She had been willing to share her body with him completely. Willing to allow herself to become impregnated by him — an alien at that! — and he had still told her that he didn’t believe that she loved him.

He gasped. What if Lois was pregnant already? From those couple of times she and Clark had joined auras or whatever Lois had said they had done. What if there was a part of him already growing inside of her? That thought brought him peace, happiness, and so much joy. And not only because they could make love for almost nine months without precautions — and he could feel that oneness with Lois every time. But to know he would not be alone in the world.

Kal grimaced. He hadn’t been alone. He had had Lois. What if he had lost her with his foolish words that morning? What if she was pregnant and he still lost her? What if she was pregnant and never allowed him to see his child? Watch it grow up? See if it was like him or more like her? What if she no longer trusted him completely because he had been so cruel to her this morning?

His chest began to ache. He missed Lois. He missed all the

different ways she smiled at him. She missed the way she enfolded him into her arms, like she would protect his vulnerable heart from pain.

He sat up. That was another memory. He couldn't remember the details, only that he had been despondent and that Lois had held him. Not Clark. Him. Kal. Superman. He jumped out of the seat and picked up the damaged futon mattress under one arm and walked out of the apartment and went to find his wife. He would deposit the mattress in the dumpster on his way out of the complex. He needed his wife. Lois. Her.

Lois's heart was aching. She had done it again. Abandoned Clark again. Left him vulnerable and alone... well, not quite alone. Linda King was keeping him company. And he had let her. Even after Lois had told him that Linda was persona non grata in their lives.

She banged her head against her apartment door. Why hadn't she just gotten out of the car and punched Linda in the nose? It would have made her feel better.

Because Lois Lane isn't in a relationship with Superman. She's married to Clark Kent.

She was beginning to think that Clark's green-eyed monster had come to live inside her.

Sorry, no occupancy.

Except for the fact that her idiot of a husband was acting just as much of muttonhead as he had before she had told him that Tempus told her she and Superman were destined to be together. Had his green-eye monster just gone on vacation and had come back with a vengeance?

That sounds very likely.

She opened her front door and instantly saw that Clark had come home. Who else would take their damaged mattress?

"Clark?" Lois called, hoping he would answer. She refused to call him Kal anymore. She should never have done that in the first place. It had only made him more confused.

But Kal is one heck of a lover, Lois.

She shut the door behind her and sighed. Yep, that he was. A shot of lightning flashed through her inner core — a memory of their lovemaking from this morning. She shifted her position and pushed herself off the door. She was just too addicted to that man of hers.

Kal certainly seemed more open to experimentation than Clark... Lois didn't know that. She and Clark hadn't had enough time together as a couple to know if he liked trying new things. He had certainly liked all that foreplay with food.

At least when Clark recovers his memories, he'll still retain Kal's new skills.

She moaned in anticipation. A man with the memories of Clark and the sex-drive of Superman. Wow, she was one lucky woman. Unless he was off banging Linda at this very moment.

Kal would never cheat on you. He has Superman's morals. He hadn't even wanted to sleep with you even though you were his wife.

Some morals! He wasn't above insulting her when his ego was damaged.

Gee, I don't know anyone else like that. Oh, right. Clark.

Whoever her husband was, he wasn't there. He had come home and then left. Why?

Like you, waiting isn't one of his favorite pastimes.

At the desk she found Clark's note to her.

Lois, Sorry about breaking your phone. I'll call you at the Daily Planet. S.

Lois pressed her lips together. "S" not "C", but at least not "K".

She winced. The Daily Planet. Perry was going to kill her. She had been sent out on the story and hadn't even gotten out of the car. What was the matter with her? She had finally gotten her

dream job, and she was going to mess it up before she even started.

Or maybe her husband hadn't stuck around the apartment because he hadn't wanted to see her. She glanced over and saw the duffel bag still sat next to the closet where she had left it this morning. So, he hadn't taken his clothes. If he had planned on staying, why did he take that old mattress? Unless... unless he was planning on camping out somewhere with it, knowing she was planning on getting rid of it? Her heart ached.

Why had he smashed the phone? Who did he call? And why had it made him angry? Why hadn't he suggested that she call to him without a telephone? Did he not want to see her face to face? Or was it simply he didn't remember that he could?

Maybe Lois should just call out to him and see if he came back. To whom should she call? Clark or Superman? Certainly not Kal. But would he come if she called to Clark? Not if this morning's fight was anything to go by. After this morning's performance she refused to call him Kal! What if he didn't come? What if — like Clark — he thought she was treating him like a dog?

Lois sighed. Glancing down at the note in her hand. He was planning on calling her at the Daily Planet. He apologized for breaking her phone, but not for breaking her heart. She stuffed the note into her pocket and headed back to her car.

A part of her felt bad for leaving Jimmy at the crime scene she was supposed to be covering.

Friday — Mid-day

Clark wasn't sure where he should go. He wanted to call Lois and meet up with her and apologize, but he had to give her time to get his messages. Either the one from Jimmy or the one he had left at the apartment. He hit his head with his hand. Why hadn't he just waited for Lois at the apartment? He could have unloaded his clothes into the dresser. *Her* dresser. He sighed.

It was obvious that the apartment wasn't *theirs*. Superman wasn't even welcome there because of the tabloid reporters — like Nunk — stalking out the place. Anyway, Kal didn't know if she would forgive him for all his blunders.

If you're not him, how come you keep acting like the dense idiot I married? Lois had yelled at him as he had walked out the door.

Obviously Lois liked dense idiots, otherwise why would she marry one? He was curious what sort of dense idiot Clark had been... Kal shook his head. He had been when he was Clark. Kal winced. He really wasn't sure *who* he was. He *wasn't* Clark. But he was feeling less and less like a superman.

Kal needed to talk to someone about the best way to get Lois to forgive him. He passed a newsstand and noticed the headline on Friday's Daily Planet: "*Superman Came Home: Where Is He Now?*" Good question.

He pulled out Clark's wallet and saw that he had paper money. If he was going to make phone calls, he would need coins. And he was curious what the Daily Planet was saying about him.

Kal closed the paper. They were taking the word of the deliveryman from whom he had gotten the newspapers the previous morning. No hard facts, only a quote from the driver saying, "He was there one moment. Gone the next. It *had* to be him." Well, they got that right. It had been him. There were quotes from other people who had seen him in the blue suit around Metropolis. If he was guilty of giving people false hope, so was the Daily Planet.

Only it wasn't really false hope. Superman was "home". He was alive. Did Perry White know this? Had Lois told her boss that Superman had returned? That she had seen him, spoken with him? Of course, she did. She must have talked to Mr. White about

Clark, and according to the Kents, Perry White knew Clark was Superman. Was that the best thing for the paper to do, given his current mental weakness? Especially since Kal couldn't even remember how to fly?

On the back of the paper was a list of want ads and lonely heart ads. Kal wondered if enough time had passed and he could call Lois at the paper. He browsed the ads trying to kill more time. He didn't want to wait any longer. He had had a dull ache in his chest since he had walked out on her this morning. Frankly, he missed her.

There was a telephone not far from the bench on which he sat. He pulled a quarter out of his pocket and dialed the number on the card Jimmy had given him.

"Daily Planet. How may I direct your call?"

"Lois Lane, please. She should be..."

"Connecting..."

Oh, good. Kal exhaled.

"Hello?"

Lois! Oh, her voice sounded so sweet to his ears. He could hear her heart racing. Did she know it was him? Was she as nervous as he was?

"Hi, Lois. It's Kal," he said with an attempt to sound casual.

"I'm sorry. I don't know anyone with that name." Click. Dial tone.

Kal stared at the receiver in his hand. What had just happened? He hung up. He stood there a full minute, kicking his heart around with his feet and trying to figure out what he should do next. He wondered if he should try again, only this time not use names. He picked up the receiver, dropped in another quarter, and redialed.

"Daily Planet. Cat Grant, speaking," said a woman. A different person than the man who had answered before.

"May I speak with Lois Lane?"

"I don't think she's here. She hasn't been in the office all week."

Kal's jaw just hung there. What? "No, that can't be right. I just spoke to her a minute ago."

"Actually, I can see her desk right now and it's bare, like she hasn't even taken possession of it yet. I bet she's still out chasing Superman. Is there something I can help you with? Or do you want to leave a message?"

"I was just on the phone with her. We got disconnected," he tried to convince Cat Grant. "Can you double check?"

Ms. Grant sighed heavily, and he heard her chair scoot out as she stood up. "Nope. Don't see her. Who should I tell her called?"

"Ah..." A good question indeed. "Her husband." Yes, that, at least, was correct with no sticky issues of names to mess anyone up.

"*Husband?*" Ms. Grant choked on the word. "Lois is married?"

"Yes." Kal felt hesitant about saying the word, but he knew it was the truth. Lois was his wife.

"I can't believe she would do that to..." He could hear the shock in this woman's voice. "Lois has a secret life. Wow! Who would have thunk it? You wouldn't happen to know anything about Ian Harrington, would you?"

"Who?" He drew a complete blank.

"Never mind. There's my other line. I'm expecting this call. I'll let her know you phoned. Bye."

"Could you...?" Click.

Kal threw his hands up. The Daily Planet had a serious problem with phone etiquette.

What now? Calling back a third time seemed pointless. Maybe Lois really *didn't* want to talk to him. Maybe she had left. He had been rude this morning.

He stuck his hand in his pocket and felt a piece of paper. Oh,

right. The page of the phone book. He remembered Jonathan Kent offering to come get him if he had any problems with Lois. Kal scoffed, remembering what he had thought in response. No matter what, he would make it work with Lois. *That hadn't lasted long, Kal, my boy*, he said to himself.

He still had one quarter left, jingling in his pocket. Maybe Jonathan Kent would be able to give him some advice.

Lois stared at her hand sitting on the telephone.

What did you do?

She picked up the receiver again. "Hello?" Oh, please still be there. He wasn't.

"What in Sam Hill was that?" snapped Perry, in whose office she stood.

"I don't know what came over me. When he didn't say he was Clark, memories of our fight this morning flooded through me..." Lois admitted, ashamed by her anger.

"And what was your fight about? If I may be so bold?" asked her boss.

Lois sat down in a chair. "He accused me of not loving him. Only loving Clark."

Perry blinked once, then again. "Come again?"

She sighed. "He refuses to admit that he's Clark, because he doesn't have Clark's memories. He says that Clark might as well be another person."

The Chief raised a brow.

"Okay. I admit, I allowed him to continue down that path instead of steering him onto the correct one," Lois conceded, feeling honestly chagrined under her boss's gaze. "But I didn't want to upset him or scare him off. I just hoped his memories — his Clark memories, his memories of us — would return before I had to explain my actions. When he recalled the fact that sunshine recharged him this morning, I got too excited and assumed that all his memories were back. He got angry, saying that I didn't love him, that I only wanted my husband back, and then he stormed out."

Perry shook his head. "You need to fix this, Lois."

"I know." She ran a hand across her forehead. "Do you think he'll call back?" she asked hopefully.

"Can't say, darling. You have something he wants, so he might."

Lois's heart beat against her ribs. "What? What could I possibly have that he wants?"

"You." And then her boss smiled. "I've never seen a man more in love."

"That was Clark. We're talking about... you-know-who, now," she contested.

"Right. And what alias was he hiding under at the police station? Charlie King, wasn't it? And who called here looking for Lois Lane yesterday morning, before Henderson picked him up? Charlie King. He loves you, honey."

There was a light rap on Perry's office door. It was Jimmy. Perry waved him inside.

Lois jumped to her feet. "Is it Clark? What line is he on?"

"Um... Lois, didn't I just transfer CK to you?" said a perplexed Jimmy.

"No," Lois growled. "It wasn't him."

A red flush crept up Jimmy's neck to his cheeks. "Geez, Lois. I'm sorry. I was sure that was CK. Um... Chief, Alice on line two."

Perry double finger pointed at the young photographer. "You got those Superman photos I asked for?"

Jimmy gulped. "You asked for Superman photos?"

"Great shades of Elvis! Weren't you listening at the meeting this morning? Everyone was supposed to get me anything and everything on Superman? He's still our top story. You ran into him at Mazik's. Where are the photos?"

Lois turned and shot her boss a glare. He knew as well as she did that Superman wasn't up for interviews. How could he sic his bloodhounds on him?

Yes, but Perry's not supposed to know that Clark is Superman. He's just covering for Clark by acting like the editor of this newspaper would.

Right.

"Um... Chief. I asked if I could take his picture, but he said that CK was his top priority. And since he hadn't helped out at the jewelry store, he said it wouldn't be fair to the MPD if I took his picture." Jimmy shot his boss a nervous grin. "Then he ran off to look for CK."

"You *asked* to take his picture?" Perry threw up his hands. "You are a *news* photographer now, Jimmy. You don't ask! Next time you get the chance just take the photo." Their boss growled in frustration and kicked them both out of his office. "Lois, get me the piece on the robbery."

"Yes, Chief," Lois replied, shutting the door behind her. She glanced at the desk that Perry had given her the other night when she had typed up her story about Superman, Nightfall, and the nuclear bomb. She saw Cat Grant at the neighboring desk grab her purse and hightail it to the elevators. At least Lois wouldn't have to talk to *her*.

I wonder why Superman didn't fly off.

Lois touched Jimmy's shoulder.

"The Chief's right, you know, Lois. I should have just taken Superman's picture. It's just — I was in awe of him — you know, talking to Superman. I was in fan mode, not news mode." He shook his head. "It was a stupid mistake. Amateurish."

"I understand, Jimmy. That blue suit has a tendency to distract one," she told him.

Mission accomplished.

"What's this about Superman running off?" she continued.

"Ah, yeah. We talked about you and Clark for a minute and then he jogged to the corner..."

Superman jogged?

"He didn't fly off?" Lois inquired more specifically.

"Well, I didn't hear that familiar swoosh, now that you mention it. No, I think he just ran off. Huh?" Jimmy thought about that. "Do you think he's injured? Not able to fly?"

Was that why he wouldn't go get wine last night?

"Good question. And it's something I plan on asking him the next time we meet up," Lois told her friend. "Why don't we keep this between us for the moment until we have more information?"

Jimmy coughed. "Um... About that, Lois. Why didn't you talk to Superman this morning?"

Lois glanced away. "I told you, Jimmy. Mazik's is where Clark and I bought our wedding rings."

"And it didn't have anything to do with Linda King?" Jimmy inquired.

Yes, it had everything to do with bitch from hell.

"Maybe. A little bit. That woman just pushes my buttons," Lois admitted. "I should write up that robbery article while I wait for Clark's call."

If he decides you're worth calling back after you hung up on him.

"MJ's Café. How can I help you?" said a sweet and friendly feminine voice.

Was this his mom? Kal didn't think so. In as much as Kal fell in love at first hug with Martha Kent, it was her husband with whom he wanted to speak.

"Is Jonathan Kent available?" he asked tentatively.

"Hold on, sweetie. Jonathan! Your son is on the phone," she called to Clark's father.

So much for discretion. So much for Superman ever calling anyone Clark knew on the phone.

"I'll take it in my office," he heard Clark's father respond. At least one person understood privacy.

"Hold on, deary," the woman said to him.

There were a few moments of silence before Jonathan picked up. "Hello?"

Was Jonathan Kent having as much difficulty knowing how to address him as he was having addressing Mr. Kent?

"Hello, Sir. You told me that if ever I needed to, I could contact you," Kal said much more confidently than he felt.

"Clark," Jonathan said with a slight catch in his throat. "Do you need me to come pick you up?"

"I'm not quite sure where I am," Kal admitted. He was in a small park across the street from a large bookstore. Mr. Kent would probably know if he described it, but that wasn't why he had called.

"What can I do for you, son?" Mr. Kent asked Kal.

Kal really wanted to ask Clark's father about MDS, but instead blurted out, "What kind of idiot was Clark?"

"My son *is* not an idiot," replied Jonathan forcefully. "Did someone say he... you are?"

"Well..." Kal cleared his throat, wishing he hadn't brought up the subject in the way he had. "Lois said something about me acting just like Clark..."

"You *are* Clark," Jonathan reminded him and then he chuckled. "You have always had a bit of a stubborn streak."

Stubborn? Kal thought they were talking intelligence. He shook his head. "Why would Lois call me a dense idiot then?" he asked. Technically, she had said that *Clark* was one, but he felt he had insulted this man's son enough.

"Ah," said Jonathan as if he knew to what Kal was referring. Kal could hear the man's chair squeak as if he leaned back in it.

"Son, Lois wasn't calling you an idiot as in someone who is stupid — well, not stupid, per se..."

"Huh?" Kal was completely lost.

"A dense idiot is women-talk for a man who is stupid when it comes to women," Jonathan explained.

"Oh." Kal considered this information for a moment. "But we made love and..." Oh, God! Did he just admit to Clark's father that he had made love to his daughter-in-law? What was wrong with him? Some Superman! "What I meant to say is that she asked me to..." He winced, thinking that wasn't much better. "I mean..." What did he mean?

"And?" Jonathan inquired.

"And?" Kal repeated back weakly and most certainly with embarrassment. "And what?"

"I'm confused, son. You mentioned that you and Lois made love — all well and good. She's your wife and it's allowed. What else did you want to say?"

Kal cleared his throat and spoke more softly. "She seemed to like it?" he stated unsurely.

"She did or she didn't?"

"Oh, no. She liked it," Kal pushed through his embarrassment. "Very much so, Sir."

Jonathan laughed. "Glad to hear it, son. What seems to be the problem?"

"Why would she call me a dense idiot then?" If he could give Lois pleasure, he couldn't possibly be stupid about women. Right?

"Son, a dense idiot is a man who doesn't understand women. A man can be good in bed and still not comprehend one iota about how to treat a woman."

"Oh." Kal thought about this clarification. "There are men who understand women?"

He heard Jonathan slap the table while he laughed. When he could speak again, Clark's dad said, "No, son. None of us do. Some of us are better at faking it than others."

Kal smiled. At least he wasn't alone with this affliction.

“What in particular did Clark do to earn him this title with Lois?” He wondered if Clark had used to speak to his dad about these topics. Or was it only with amnesia that he had suddenly felt comfortable enough with their relationship to delve in.

Jonathan had stopped laughing, but his voice seemed to indicate that he was still enjoying this conversation. “Son,” Clark’s father said with seriousness. “You need to stop referring to yourself in the third person. You *are* Clark.”

“Right.” Kal sighed. Another true believer. *Was* he being stubborn?

“Well, there was the time that *you* were upset with something that Lois did and *you* called her a streetwalker,” Jonathan told him.

Kal winced. Clark had called Lois a whore? She had been right; he was a dense idiot. “Why would she marry him... me then? And so quickly? They... we had dated for such a short amount of time before rushing off and getting married.”

“Love.”

“Love?” Kal couldn’t believe it would be that simple. “That’s it? How did they... we know it was forever-and-ever love?”

“How does anyone?” replied Jonathan.

“You weren’t surprised when Clark... I announced we were getting married? After dating for only... only...” Kal did some math in his head from the stories that Lois had told him the night before. “Two or three weeks?”

“We figured something was up when Lois stopped by to get your birth certificate,” Jonathan told him. “Maybe it was a little faster than normal, but we knew how much you loved Lois. Your mother was convinced that Lois was also in love with you. Plus there was all that stuff about you and her being preordained to be together and...”

“What?” Kal hadn’t expected this. “Preordained?”

“Well, back before you and Lois started dating, a couple of men from the future stopped by the store and told Lois that she was destined to marry her true love, who happened to a super fast, super strong, flying alien in a blue suit.”

Kal gulped. That did sound an awful lot like him. Were these the same men that Lois had mentioned the night before? Must be. He just couldn’t believe they were real. He was a super fast, super strong alien in a blue suit, and to some people that must be pretty unbelievable too. And supposedly he could fly. He sighed. He was good at going up, but even better at coming down.

“We knew it had to be true, because we heard about it on the very day that your mother had put the finishing touches on your blue suit. You hadn’t even seen it yet. It was obvious to me that you had fallen in love with Lois already.” Jonathan chuckled. “You were so happy just being around her, you couldn’t keep your feet on the ground. Literally.”

“I floated?” Kal was suddenly twice as interested in this conversation. Maybe his father knew the answer to his flying problems.

“Think happy thoughts! Isn’t that what Peter Pan says is the only way to fly?”

“Who?” Did he know someone else who could fly? Happy thoughts? “Really?”

“Sorry, son. I forgot there for a second. Peter Pan is a character in a children’s book you used to love as a child. Martha must have read it to you a hundred times,” his father explained.

Kal glanced over to the bookstore across the street. Maybe he should check it out. “Thanks, Dad, you’ve been a lot of help.”

Jonathan Kent seemed almost choked up as he replied, “Anytime, son. Would you like me to come pick you up and take you home?”

“Oh, no. I can figure out my way back to the apartment, but... but after the way I treated Lois this morning, I don’t think she wants me back,” Kal told him. So much for ‘happy thoughts.’

“Son, Lois loves you. She called here earlier looking for you.

She wants you to come home,” said his father.

“She does?” Kal was perplexed. “Then why did she hang up on me when I called her at the Daily Planet?”

“She did?” Even Jonathan seemed confused. “What exactly did you say?”

“I said, ‘Hi, Lois, it’s Kal.’ And she said, ‘I don’t know anyone by that name’ and hung up,” he explained.

“And do you think she would have done the same thing if you had said, ‘Hi, Lois, it’s Clark?’” asked Jonathan slowly.

Kal sighed. “No, I guess not. Since it’s *Clark* she really wants.” He rolled his eyes; still not understanding *why* Lois preferred that bespectacled idiot over him. “But when I called back, Lois had already left.”

“Son. You. *Are*. Clark,” Jonathan told him once more.

“Yes, I understand that in theory, but without my Clark memories I feel like an imposter.”

“That’s just the amnesia talking, son. In essentials, you are still our son. Kind and generous. Caring and loving. Helpful and courteous. Curious and loyal.”

He forgot in love with Lois. “Stubborn and a dense idiot?” Kal suggested with a laugh.

Jonathan joined in with his laughter. “Nobody’s perfect. Not even you, son.”

Lois turned in her story to Perry. It wasn’t great. It wouldn’t earn her any prizes. Actually, she would be surprised if it didn’t end up buried on page three of the city section. She had done her job — not to the best of her ability, but she had done it nonetheless.

“Any word from Clark?” her boss asked her as he looked over the paper she had handed to him.

Lois shook her head. “I’m heading out to see if I can find him,” she lied. Honestly, she had no idea where to look for him. She just didn’t want to sit around the office waiting for a call that might never come. And she still needed to buy a new futon mattress to replace the other one if she wanted to sleep that night. Well, go to bed. Sleep would be debatable.

“Tell you what,” Perry said, reaching into a drawer in his desk and pulling out a beeper. “If Clark calls in or another big story happens where Superman might show up, we’ll beep you.”

Lois looked down at the small electronic device in her hand. “Thank you, Perry. I really appreciate...”

“We need that Nightfall interview before someone else realizes he’s back. You find him, call in, and have him pose for pictures. You owe me one. Got it?”

Lois nodded and then reminded her boss, “I can’t interview him about Nightfall until he’s remembers it.”

“Then hit him in the head until he remembers it!” hollered Perry.

Like that would do a whole heck of a lot of good.

Lois raised a skeptical eyebrow at this suggestion.

“Between your exclusive that Superman actually destroyed Nightfall and that mood piece we did interviewing people who had seen him walking around town in his blue suit, we’re looking more like a gossip rag than a newspaper. We need proof that Superman is back. We need him to verify your story. And we need Superman protecting Metropolis again to knock Metropolis Star off its axis for suggesting that Superman died in space. Those are the cold hard facts.”

“I just need my husband back,” Lois responded. “Everything else would be gravy.”

“And we need Clark back so I’m not down two reporters!” yelled Perry. “Now, get out of here and find Clark! And know that neither of you are getting a day off for at least six months.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Lois, backing out of her boss’s office. If she got Clark back, they wouldn’t need to leave town to make her life feel like a vacation.

Kal went inside the bookstore and after a quick glance around, he hopped onto the up escalator. Another quick glance around the mezzanine level and he headed upstairs again. As he stood on the escalator, he realized he forgot to ask Clark's father what MDS was and if the man had his wedding ring.

"Yo, Kent!" called some guy going down the escalator opposite him. "Daily Planet send you back to the minors already?" Then the guy chortled.

Kal had no idea what that guy was talking about. The Daily Planet was a newspaper, not a baseball team. Had the newspaper hired him for his skills at sports? That seemed strange and unprofessional. But, knowing his strength, not unlikely.

He stepped off the escalator and took a look around the top level of the store. Bookcases to the right of him. Bookcases to the left of him. How could he find one book in this sea? He saw a sign for the Children's section against the far wall and headed towards it.

"Clark?" he heard a voice call out. Kal ignored it, hoping the person would think they were wrong.

"Clark Kent!" she called out again.

Kal winced. He wasn't going to escape her was he? He slowed his gait and turned around to smile politely at the pretty brunette woman who was approaching him.

"I thought that was you," she said.

Darn! She hadn't been positive on his identity, he could have ignored her.

"Hello," he said, hoping he could fake a short enough conversation with her and escape without her discovering that he had no idea who she was.

"But, then again, a girl doesn't forget the first man who made her orgasm during breakfast."

Kal's eyes bugged. He had done *what* with this woman? "Excuse me?"

She laughed and patted him on the arm, reassuringly. "What are you doing out and about without your memories, Clark?"

His jaw fell open this time. "Who *are* you?"

She gave him a saucy smile and extended her hand. "Lucy Lane, your sister-in-law."

Now that she had said that, he could see the familial traits in this woman's face. Kal tentatively shook her hand, before lowering his voice, "Are you saying that I cheated on Lois with you?"

Lucy gave a full-throated laugh. "Like either of us would be alive after such a scenario. Lois would have filleted us alive and hung our entrails on a staff as a warning to others."

He blanched and gulped at her description. "So, you are saying that Lois gets jealous then?"

"She's just a bit possessive of her belongings," Lucy clarified.

Belongings? Kal liked the idea that he belonged with Lois. "Then that comment about breakfast...?"

She was laughing again. "Martha's taught you a thing or two in the kitchen, Clark. You're an amazing cook."

Kal exhaled in relief. Lucy had been teasing the amnesiac. That seemed to be quite the hobby. He was relieved, but not at all amused. "I understand you are kind of, sort of dating Jimmy." He might not have any memories, but he did remember everything since he had lost them.

Lucy shrugged. "He's a sweet puppy."

Poor Jimmy. He had liked the kid. But two very different women had described him as a puppy. Not good.

"So, Clark," Lucy said, changing the subject. "What are you doing back at your old stomping grounds?"

His brow furrowed. "Huh?"

"Daily Books. This is where you and Lois met. She told me all about it the other night. She said that she worked the

newsstand and you delivered books and magazines with MDS."

Kal must have given her a blank look, because she went on. "Metropolis Delivery Service."

"Ah." Finally, he knew for what MDS stood. But this wasn't exactly the same story Lois had told him the night before. "We met here?"

"Yeah, Jimmy introduced you two in the back room," she replied with a jab of her thumb towards a door with a pushbutton lock on it. "Lois told me all about it."

He felt bad that he hadn't recognized Jimmy at all. Although, Jimmy hadn't recognized him as Superman either, which was good. It had probably been for the best since Superman hadn't officially met Jimmy until this morning. Could it be just a coincidence that Kal ended up at the same bookstore where Clark met Lois? Was his subconscious mind taking him to places familiar to him, hoping to nudge a memory or two free?

"Did she tell you why we got married so quickly?" he asked her. That little fact was driving him insane.

Lucy lowered her voice. "This probably isn't the best place to be discussing your relationship with my sister." She threw him a pointed look.

Did Lucy Lane know that he was Superman? Clark's parents had said that most people didn't know. As far as they knew only Lois, themselves, and Perry White knew. Had Lois told her sister? Had Clark's folks told Lucy?

"Tell you what," she went on. "I'll help you find whatever it is you're looking for and then I'll clock out. We'll go across the street and share this amazing lunch your mom packed for me. There is way too much food for just one person anyway. And I'll tell you everything I know about your relationship with my sister. Okay?"

Kal was so ecstatic that he reached over and hugged her. "Thank you!"

"Okay. Okay," Lucy said, pushing out of his embrace. "I've only met you the one time and... What the hell! You're family." She grabbed him again and hugged him. "Mmmm-mmmm. I definitely know why Lois married you."

He stepped back away from her. He might not have known much at the moment, but he knew what she meant by that.

Lucy smiled innocently at him. "You hug divinely."

Yeah, right, sure, *that's* what she meant. He wasn't buying it.

Her smile turned mischievous. "And Lois has always had a soft spot for men who could hug."

Kal raised an eyebrow at this woman, not knowing whether or not he should trust her. Or was she just teasing the amnesiac again?

"What are you looking for? Let me guess? A map book of Metropolis? I recommend the Thomas Guide. They're the best," Lucy said, actually skipping backwards and yet not breaking eye contact with him.

How did Lucy do that? Without hitting anything? Did she have eyes on the back on her head? Kal cautiously followed this strange woman.

As far as he knew Clark was an only child; certainly Kal was an only Kryptonian child. He could hear himself telling Lois, "*I always wanted a brother or a sister.*"

Then he could hear Lois's voice inside his head, responding, "*You can have mine.*"

A small smile hinted at the side of his mouth at this thought, this memory. He guessed Lucy was kind-of *his* sister now too. He would be more careful what he wished for in the future.

Lucy stopped in the Local section and pulled said map book off the shelf, holding it up for him. "So you can't get lost."

He hadn't been planning on buying a map book, but now that she had mentioned it, it sounded like a pretty good idea. At least for the short term. Long term, he could leave it in Lois's car... if she had a car. She had been driving a car when she left Mazik's

Jewelry, so she must have a car.

So, he would leave the map book in Lois's car, if she gave him another chance, that is. He wondered how much of a dense idiot he could be and still be forgiven by his wife? It wasn't a theory he wanted to test. He smiled politely at Lucy and said, "Sold. But I actually came in to find a book my father mentioned was one of my favorites as a child... Peter Pan. Ever heard of it?" He glanced at her hopefully.

Lucy patted his cheek. "You are so adorable, I could just eat you up."

Kal swallowed and took a step back away from her reach. "Never mind. I'm sure I'll find it myself."

"Wait!" Lucy told him. "I'm sorry, Clark. This whole brother/sister-in-law thing is all new to me. I'm not quite sure how to act. I don't have much experience interacting with Lois's beaux, you know. No, I guess you wouldn't know. Well, she didn't have very many of them." Lucy returned to the main aisle and headed directly to the Children's section. "Did you want a picture book, story book, movie tie-in, Disney version, or the play?" she asked.

"Huh?"

Lucy's speed talking had him reeling. Kal hadn't known anyone could talk that fast.

"Everyone knows who Peter Pan is, Clark." Lucy smiled indulgently at him. "He's the little boy who never grew up." They had reached the Children's section now. "Picture books, I think, would be best. It was written by J. M. Barrie, and he gave all his proceeds from his play to a children's hospital in London. I played Tiger Lily in the Smallville High School production." She winked at him.

Lucy had completely lost him again and he tried to keep his polite smile on his face. He had only been listening with half an ear. His mind stuck on the fact that Lois hadn't had many boyfriends. His sister-in-law scanned the large bookshelf and he found himself in awe at the selection of stories for children.

Finally, Lucy pulled out a book and held it up to him. "I think you'll like this one. The pictures seem the most fantastic."

Kal shifted the map book under his arm so he could look at the picture book with both hands. It seemed almost ridiculous to be researching his own trouble with flying by reading a children's book, but as soon as he opened the book he was mesmerized. Fairies and pirates and Indians and mermaids and lost boys and the Darling children. He closed the book with a satisfied sigh.

"Happy thoughts and fairy dust," he murmured to himself with a chuckle and a shake of his head. Then he realized that Lucy was still standing next to him, watching him. He cleared his throat. "I can see why I liked this story as a child."

"Are you sure you don't have a brother?" she asked him.

"I don't think so. The Kents said that I was adopted. That I had been abandoned." In a spaceship, but no need to harp on the details. "Why? Do I remind you of someone?" he asked as he handed the book back to her.

"Why don't you buy it?" she suggested. "I'd buy it for you, but I'm flat broke."

"I'm afraid I'm not much better off," he admitted with a sigh. "I was fired from MDS this morning."

"MDS?" Lucy seemed confused. "So what? Don't you work at that newspaper of Mr. White's... The Daily Planet?... now?"

"Do I? That's what Cl... my father said, too. But... But..." He felt so lost. How could he be a newspaper reporter when he couldn't even remember a world-famous children's book? It would be like being a deliveryman without knowing the streets of Metropolis. Or a superhero who could not fly. Useless.

Lucy put the book back on the shelf and grabbed the crook of his arm, leading him from the Children's section. "Come on. You can buy that book another time. Let's get you the map book for today. I think it will be most helpful."

After he had purchased the map book, with Lucy's employee discount — thank you, new sister — Kal waited at the railing overlooking the ground floor as Lucy went to clock-out. As he stared downstairs at the newsstand — or what of it he could see from the third floor without using his x-ray vision — Kal imagined seeing Lois down there, wearing a white, lacy dress. He could see other men coming up and speaking with her, but for the most part she gave them the brush-off. Then Lois had looked up at him. There had been something in her expression that told him how much she loved him — and it wasn't a little. And how if she could fly she would float right up to him and...

"Hi!" Lucy's voice knocked him out of his daydream. "Ready?"

Kal swallowed, wishing Lucy had given him just a moment longer with his thoughts. As it was, the image drained away like water through his fingers. "Yes."

Soon, they were sitting on the bench in the park across the street. Lucy pulled out a chicken sandwich from a cooler. "Would you like half?" she asked with a chuckle. "It's way too much for me. I think Martha's used to making your lunch, because..." She flipped open the cooler and showed him the Gatorade, huge bag of chips, and Ding Dong that had accompanied the sandwich.

It didn't seem too large of a lunch to him. "Thank you," Kal said as she handed him half the sandwich.

"Here. Take these too. After that breakfast this morning, I'm really not that hungry," she said, tossing him the chips.

"Thank you," he repeated, realizing that he hadn't had breakfast this morning. "You're too generous."

Lucy winked at him. "You're the only brother I've got. I'd like to keep you around for a while. I mean, Lois is great and everything, but I've always wanted a big brother." She grinned. "And trust me, I've tried to trade Lois in, numerous times, but I've had no takers."

Kal raised a brow, not knowing whether Lucy was joking or serious. He opened the bag of chips.

"I don't have to tell you, right? I mean, you aren't thinking of walking out on Lois, right?"

He blanched. He had already done that, hadn't he? Walked out on Lois? All he wanted to do was walk back in. He didn't know if he was going to be able to do that though.

"Because you're the best thing that happened to Lois since..." Lucy paused in thought and then sighed. "Ever. She's had a pretty rotten streak when it comes to guys."

Kal couldn't understand that. He envisioned men lined up for the chance to go out with Lois. Those big doe eyes. That killer body. Her smile. Her laugh. Her lightning fast wit and mind. Her refusing to take 'no' for an answer attitude. Not to mention the way words sounded together when she wrote. "You said you'd tell me why Lois married me," he said, directing his sister-in-law from going down the wrong conversational path.

Lucy took a bite of her sandwich. "Because she loves you, of course."

It wasn't the answer he had expected, especially after her warning inside the store. He dipped his hand into the bag of chips and brought a couple of pieces of salty goodness to his lips. The next moment he felt his heart race as Lois replaced her sister on the bench next to him. He could feel the warmth of the sunshine and saw how it made Lois's skin radiate beauty as it caressed her face.

As soon as he swallowed down the chips the image of Lois was gone. He reached his hand back into the bag as Lucy continued speaking, entirely unaware what was happening to the man next to her.

"I mean, if you were Superman, why Lois married you would be a completely different story, but since you're not..." She shrugged. "There's no other reason except love. I mean, it's not like Lois is pregnant." Lucy laughed and then covered her mouth

as her eyes went big. “Ooops. I wasn’t supposed to know that.” She tossed him a huge, pleading grin. “Don’t tell Lois I told you.”

Kal raised an eyebrow. Those potato chips in his hand were on the verge of bringing that sexy picture of Lois back to the forefront of his mind. But he wouldn’t let himself be distracted, and he dropped the chips back into the bag. Lucy had brought up two topics that needed further evaluation. “Excuse me?”

Lucy leaned closer to him and whispered, “The first time you and my sister made love was on your wedding night.”

Kal gulped and felt a flush crawl up his neck to his face. “Oh.” Nope, he hadn’t known that.

Lucy certainly knew the details of his and Lois’s relationship he was missing. But he wasn’t sure he should be picking them up third-hand. His curiosity won out as he lowered his voice conspiratorially. “Why? Were we saving ourselves for marriage?”

Lucy seemed thrilled to fill in the missing pieces. “No, I don’t think so. I mean, I know Lois hadn’t and you?...” She looked him over from head to toes, then shook her head. “Nope. Impossible. You’re too cute not to have had some woman jump your bones at some point.”

He knew his cheeks must have reddened at this examination. If Linda King was anything to go by, Superman didn’t do so badly with the ladies... *only* Superman hadn’t shown up until after Clark and Lois were already dating. The other little thing that Lucy had said about Superman was nagging to be asked, but Kal wasn’t quite sure how to phrase it without Lucy connecting him to the man in blue. Finally, he just said, “I’m loveable, but Superman isn’t?”

“No. No. No. I didn’t mean it like that. And this is all conjecture, mind you, because Lois loves you. Head-over-heels in love...”

Every time someone said those words to him he felt the rug being pulled out from under him again. Lois loved him, and he accused her of not doing just that this very morning. He felt guiltier by the moment.

“What I meant was she’d marry Superman just because of his not being able to get hurt thing,” Lucy went on with a wave of her hand to wipe the idea out of the air.

“Invulnerability?” Kal’s jaw dropped. That didn’t make any sense, and he told Lucy so.

“Well, it’s not important. She didn’t marry him, she married you. I was just saying if he were sitting on this bench at this moment instead of you...”

“Why do think Lois would want to marry a man who couldn’t be hurt? Is she violent? A deranged killer or something?” he asked, pulling the Gatorade out of the cooler and taking a large gulp. He knew his words couldn’t be true, but he had to know what Lucy had meant by saying Lois wouldn’t have married Superman for love.

“No. Of course not. But Lois... You see Lois...” Lucy pressed her lips together with a pained expression. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything, Clark. I don’t want you blaming Lois for...” His sister-in-law truly looked sick.

“What? Please, tell me. I love your sister more than anything. Please,” he was practically begging. Who was he kidding? He was begging. “I only want to understand her better.”

Lucy sighed. “Okay. But promise me you won’t blame Lois for your memory problems.”

“My memory? That has nothing to do with Lois.” Kal had no idea where Lucy was headed.

“I told you that Lois hasn’t had a lot of experience with guys, right? Well, there’s a reason for this. She’s jinxed.”

“Jinxed?” Okay. That wasn’t what he expected either.

“You know, bad luck. Lois has dated three, maybe four, guys... well, dated is the wrong word. Slept with. The first one died.”

“Died?” he gasped. Wasn’t that what Linda had said? “Did

she...?” He couldn’t believe the words had even formed in his head. Of course, Lois hadn’t killed him.

“Lois had nothing to do with it,” Lucy reassured him. “The guy got bitten by a snake while camping. Lois was devastated by the whole event. She blamed herself for some reason. The next guy was in college, the student editor of the university paper. Lois had gone to him when one of her so-called ‘friends’ stole an article she had been working on. The next day, he threw her off the school paper, accusing her of trying to sleep her way onto the front-page.”

Kal winced. Not quite the same story Linda had told him. He knew that there had been something off with Linda’s version of the events. Lucy’s third-hand account made much more sense. No wonder Lois didn’t want him speaking of Linda, to Linda, or — and he winced again — suggesting that Linda was the person he apparently pictured while making love to Lois. Not that he ever would. He set down his sandwich. Now he knew why Lois had gotten so upset with him the previous afternoon when he had made that comparison.

“I’m not sure Lois ever really dated the next guy. I mean, she told Mom they were dating and, well, that might have been just to shut Mom up. All of us at the high school had assumed Mr. Blank wasn’t interested in women, if you know what I mean.”

Kal did and nodded for her to continue.

“Anyway, they were like this...” She put two fingers next to each other. “They ate out, watched videos in together, went to high school plays together, and even sporting events. That sort of thing. At the end of the school year, he got an offer to teach at a private school in Kansas City. Lois told me that they had just been friends, but...” Lucy shrugged. “Lois might have just been covering the heartache in discovering her boyfriend wasn’t really her boyfriend after all. Or worse, that she had sent him off to bat for the other team. A woman’s worst nightmare.”

He realized when Lucy said that Lois had ‘bad luck’ with men, she really meant ‘horrible luck.’ These were the men with whom Lois had shared herself? Opened up to? Made herself vulnerable to? He was beginning to think he fit along with this group just nicely. And it wasn’t a feeling he liked.

“Well, the last guy was some roving salesman that came into Smallville a couple of times a month. They started dating and one thing led to another... It turned out the guy was married. Lois only found out about it when he told her afterward. She was livid, as you can well imagine. Anyway, his wife left him. Lois blamed herself for the break-up of the guy’s marriage.”

“That wasn’t her fault. He sounds like a real creep to me,” Kal told her.

“You and me both,” Lucy agreed with a scowl.

“I still don’t understand why you’d think Lois would have married...” Kal wanted to say ‘me,’ but there was a reason they hadn’t told Lucy he was Superman, even if he didn’t know what it was. He was suspecting it had to do with her tendency towards gossip. “Why would she have been attracted to his invulnerability?”

“This is totally my theory, mind you. But, in her mind, Lois killed that first guy — literally. Killed her aspirations and a man’s integrity with the second. Killed a man’s desires for women with the third. And killed a man’s marriage with the fourth.” Lucy sighed. “And, right about now, she’s probably thinking she killed your memories.”

“That’s not true!” Kal defended his wife.

“See why I could have seen her rush into a marriage with the Man of Steel, because every man she touches seems to die in some way or another.”

“And Superman is invulnerable and can’t get hurt,” Kal stated. That was a load of crock. An ache burned in the pit of his stomach. “What can I do, Lucy? To reassure Lois?” He was at a loss on how to be forgiven by a woman who had been hurt so

badly in the past.

Lucy grabbed the Ding Dongs out of the cooler, tore open the package, and handed one to Kal. “A grand gesture. Lois needs to see that you see a future for the two of you, even if you can’t see the past.”

Kal bit into the chocolaty cupcake, savoring the whipped cream center. A grand gesture, huh? He needed to tell Lois that no matter what, he wanted them to be together. For better or worse. In sickness and in health. That he loved her with or without his memories. He nodded. That was something he could do. How? That was another dilemma.

Lucy dusted off her hands. “I’ve got to head back to work. Do you want me to call Lois to come pick you up? Or Jimmy? Or the Kents?” she asked.

He patted the bag with his new map book inside. “I think I can find my way home now. Lois is probably busy at the Daily Planet anyway. I wouldn’t want to bother her.” Truthfully, he wanted to consider how to show Lois his ‘big gesture’ first.

“Okay. Good luck,” Lucy said with a wave. She dashed quickly across the street to the store. She turned and waved at him once more from the door before disappearing inside.

Lucy may have taken the cooler with her but she had left him with the Gatorade, chips, and the last few bites of his half of the sandwich. Without thinking, Kal pulled a handful of potato chips out of the bag and started to nibble on them.

Suddenly, that image of Lois sitting next to him in the sunshine was back. They were both sitting on this bench, having lunch. She had been eating potato chips too. He watched as her hand had dipped into the bag and the chips were brought to her lips. Then her tongue had come out of her mouth and licked her lips. He hadn’t blamed it in the least. He had wanted to lick those lips as well.

Lois had sighed. “There’s something about the rain — heavy rain — like we had the other night...” She had shivered.

Kal had continued to watch her, wondering if it had been him that had scared her when he had rescued her that night in the rain.

“But the sun,” Lois had continued. “The sun, like this, recharges my batteries. Makes me feel like I can take on the world. Do you know what I mean?”

He knew exactly what she had meant. He had felt an impulse to pull Lois into his arms and kiss her, but he had resisted. “Yeah,” he had finally replied, leaning his back against the bench. “I know exactly what you mean.”

Then one after another of her fingers had disappeared into her mouth to suck off the salt.

Kal moaned to himself as he remembered making love to his wife the previous night. He couldn’t think of anything else as he slowly, painstakingly ate chip after chip just to keep that memory of Lois at the forefront of his mind. Him in the present and Lois — all those weeks earlier — ate that entire bag of chips together.

Friday — Mid-Afternoon

Lois handed the cashier her credit card with her lips pressed together. So much for having paid down her bill last month. If this kept up, she would start seriously considering accepting that settlement offer from Lexco for Lex kidnapping her a couple of weeks ago. But she didn’t want Lexco to think she owed them — or that they owned her as a journalist — by accepting said offer. As it was there was only about a grand left from the wedding money her father had given her. She heard a strange beeping noise emerge from her purse.

“Sounds like your beeper,” said the salesman, and Lois’s heart jumped into her throat.

Clark!

“May I borrow your phone?” she asked, pulling out the beeper and glancing at the number. She showed the salesman the number and he dialed. He owed her that much after the purchase

she had just made.

“Daily Planet. James Olsen speaking,” said Jimmy on the other end of the line.

“Jimmy! Did Clark call?”

“Yeah. That was quick, Lois. Yeah. It was really funny. When I said that you weren’t here he asked to speak to me or Perry. Do you think he’s gotten his memory back?” Jimmy asked.

“I can only hope so,” Lois replied. “What did he say?” She pulled out a notepad and a pen and wrote down the address Clark had left for her.

Lois climbed up the last flight of stairs and paused outside the double set of glass doors. As much as she wanted to run inside, she took a deep breath. Her husband owed her an explanation before she ran into his arms.

Don’t you mean an apology?

She opened the door. Clark and some portly man stood in the middle of a very dusty, extremely dirty, run-down room cluttered with debris. She had been expecting Clark to be alone and the addition of this other man threw her.

“What is this place?” she asked with disgust.

Weren’t you going to stay quiet until he apologized?

Clark ignored her question and introduced her to the man next to him. “Floyd, this is my wife, Lois.”

Floyd looked back and forth between them. “How about I give you a few minutes?” the man said with a jingle of old fashioned keys.

Lois passed him on the steps that led from the front door down to the room where Clark stood.

At the door, Floyd sighed and said in a mock-optimistic tone, “Take all the time you need, even the weekend. My wife’s cousin is getting married on Sunday and we’ll be busy with that.” Then he rolled his eyes like it was the last thing in the world he wanted to be doing during the last weekend of September.

Take all the time to do what? Leave?

“Thank you, Floyd,” Clark said, resting his hand on the decorative end of the banister. It came off in his hand. “Would you mind if we made a few repairs?”

Floyd looked at the knob. “I guess not,” he said before shutting the door behind him.

Repairs? Can’t we just condemn the place and go home?

Clark set down the knob and spread out his arms in a ta-da manner, a big grin stretched from one ear to the other. “So, what do you think?”

Lois crossed her arms, pressed her lips together, and raised an eyebrow.

What did you think of what?

Clark dropped his hands — apparently in defeat — but then he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and guided her around the room. “Lois, you need to look past the dust, past the stacks of old newspapers, the empty paint cans, and cobwebs.”

She rolled her eyes.

And see what? The cabinet door lying on the floor? The pool of black sludge in the sink?

Clark lowered his voice. “Superman could have this place cleaned and fixed up in a matter of minutes. Look at the bone structure, not its current clothes.”

Lois turned and found herself pressed against her husband’s chest. It felt warm and inviting. Steeling her nerves, she took a couple of steps back. “What’s going on here?”

“You mentioned this morning that we needed a new apartment. It has a bedroom, semi-private.” He led her into the adjoining room. “More private if we sleep upstairs in the loft.” Clark pointed to a small room that one accessed via a spiral staircase. “Or... it could also double as a baby’s room.” He placed a hand on her stomach. “Just in case.”

She gulped, glancing down at his hand.

"It's larger than your current apartment, but not so large that guests could stay here if they visited." He winked at her and then turned her towards the huge wall of windows facing a brick wall. "Plus, look at that private patio. We can look out, but no one can look in. I could..." He cleared his throat. "We'd finally have some privacy and some natural light."

She turned his face towards hers. He looked so lost and helpless as he tried hard to impress her. It took every ounce of her determination not to give in to this charm, but she didn't want to set a precedent. He had insulted her and walked out this morning. Lois didn't want him to think he could get away with that kind of behavior without an apology. Clark would know better than to treat her that way...

Actually, the old Clark was an apology junkie.

Kal — this new Clark — needed to be taught.

The façade fell from his face and he snapped, "You hung up on me."

Lois tightened the muscle in her jaw. Her gaze became sharper as she refused to rise to the bait of an argument. He owed her an apology, and until she got it, she would wait.

Clark crossed his arms and apparently had decided to wait as well.

Lois flipped up her hand.

Forget it. If he refuses to be man enough to apologize...

She turned towards the door.

Suddenly, Clark was in front of her again. "Lois, please..."

Hope came to her eyes.

This is more like it. We accept apologies in the form of begging, pleading, and chocolate.

Clark leaned his head against hers, accepting anything she had to offer him. "I'm so sorry about this morning, Lois. Please forgive me. I know you must be extremely angry at me because of how I treated you."

Angry? Try livid.irate. Furious.

"I'm not mad, Clark," Lois told him, emphasizing the use of his name.

Not angry? Who are you? asked her inner voice.

"You should be. I acted like a total jerk ..." he went on.

"I was angry, Clark. But mostly, I was hurt," she admitted.

Oh, yes. Hurt. Hurt is much better than mad.

He winced. "I never..."

"Yes, you did," Lois corrected him, and he looked away. "I hurt you and you lashed out." She cupped his cheek in the palm of her hand and turned his face back to hers. "Somehow, I made you feel like I couldn't love you without your memories. And that isn't true."

Clark swallowed and appeared uncomfortable that she knew him better than he knew himself. He turned towards the room again. "I know this isn't the best place. But I talked Floyd down to nine hundred a month. We could have a fresh start. No tabloid reporters stalking us. This place could be ours instead of just..."

Lois set her hand on his chest, cutting him off. "For the time being, though, I think we should refrain from being intimate until your memories come back."

Clark's mouth opened, but before he could say anything she went on, holding up her hand.

"I realize that's what you were trying to tell me yesterday. I know I'm the one who walked into your shower." She stepped away from him and wandered around the room, pretending she was actually looking at the space instead of giving them more space.

What? You're not going to mention that it was his fault that you were turned on in the first place?

"So you're essentially holding your intimacy hostage and ransoming it with my memories?" he inquired with a raised brow. "I don't think that kind of pressure is going to make them come back any faster."

His tone was light and teasing, but Lois sighed in frustration anyway. "I cannot do this again, Clark. I cannot make love to you one moment and have you walk out on me the next. I can't."

Clark held out his hands. "That's why I wanted you to meet me here, Lois. I just wanted to show you I wasn't going anywhere. I'm never leaving you. That I'm looking forward, towards our future. I may say and do stupid things every once in a while, but nothing will stop me from loving you. If I had to choose between breathing and loving you, I'd hold my..."

"Don't worry, Clark." She smiled as she interrupted him. "Breathing is required. It's not optional."

"Neither is loving you," he replied, wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her against his chest. "If I have to spend the rest of my life proving to you that I'm worthy of your love..."

Lois's heart pounded.

Isn't that what he said on that beach in Costa Rica, the day Superman made you the glass fish?

"You've already said 'I do,'" she reminded him.

"I know, but I wanted you to know that this new me — this me, without memories — would love you forever, too, if I had to," he tried to clarify.

"Had to?" Lois teased, knowing what he had meant.

"If the memories never return..." She heard him gulp, fearful of that future.

"Clark, the memories are already returning. Give them some time," she whispered, caressing his cheek. Lois glanced around the room for a way to distract him from these thoughts. Then she remembered the loft. "Okay, husband. Fly me up the loft and show it to me. That staircase looks a bit wobbly."

"It's perfectly sound. I've already used it. You should try it for..."

Lois stepped back and crossed her arms. "Fly me!"

"Lo-is!" He glanced around cautiously.

Nervous about something there, Clark?

She raised a brow. "If this place is so private, nobody should see us. Fly me!"

"I think you should try..." he replied, walking to the staircase.

She stood her ground. "What's wrong, Clark?"

He cleared his throat. "I don't want to hurt you."

Isn't he sweet? To lie to you like that?

Lois stepped back into his embrace. "You would never intentionally hurt me."

"Never. Intentionally," he agreed, kissing her forehead. "It's the unintentionally I'm worried about."

She kissed his cheek and headed for the spiral staircase.

"Okay. Fly yourself and meet me up there."

Clark blanched. Yep, she had hit the nail on the head. Superman couldn't fly.

Kal gulped. No, not flying. Not now. Not after she finally forgave him for being a dense idiot. Again. She couldn't see him fail like that.

Lois returned from the spiral staircase and hugged him. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Tell her? Tell her what? That he couldn't fly? What's a Superman who can't fly? It was like a man who couldn't... No, he wouldn't jinx himself and even think *that* analogy. Sure, he could still be a hero, but he wouldn't feel like a hero... His shoulders slumped as he tightened their embrace before whispering in her ear, "What's a superhero who can't fly?"

She leaned back and smiled. "Batman?"

Who? Kal's confusion must have been obvious across his face, because she wiped the response out of the air.

"I know you can fly, Clark," she said and lowered her voice. "When I woke up this morning because we had left the shower on, we were floating above the bed."

His eyes opened wide. Really? “But... I ... you...”

“It’s normal.” Her smile grew into a semi-embarrassed grin, and she licked her lips. Was it in anticipation of something? “We’ve even been known to make love midair.”

Making love, huh? Maybe he just needed more exposure to happiness and making love to Lois ... “Happy thoughts and fairy dust,” he murmured, kissing down her neck.

“Pixie dust,” Lois corrected him.

Kal froze. She had heard him.

“Well, we *could* experiment and see what happens,” said Lois, grabbing his hand and walking over to the windows.

Experimenting? Ooooh. That sounded good. Kal smiled as that fantasy of strawberries, chocolate sauce, and Lois flashed across his mind. He definitely had ideas about that. Kal had a couple of new memories from that afternoon that he was willing to barter for intimacy. He wondered if they would be enough collateral for that fantasy.

“Or we could tackle the problem head on,” Lois continued, opening the door next to them and pushing him out onto the patio. She leaned over the railing and viewed what was below them. “An alley, good.”

“Good?” He gulped. “Was that ‘good’ as in nobody will see me fly? Or ‘good’ as in nobody will see me fall?”

“You won’t fall, Clark,” she said, patting him on the back. “You know you’re Superman, right?”

He nodded.

Lois patted the cement railing. “Up, up and away, cowboy.”

Kal raised an eyebrow. “Cowboy?”

She waved the name out of the air. “An old nickname.”

“Do I even know how to ride a horse, Lois?” he asked.

“No idea, but something we can easily remedy.” She grinned.

Lois was definitely a ‘brush the dirt off your pants and get back on the bicycle’ type of woman. It would be incredibly sexy if she wasn’t trying to make him fall off of this balcony.

She grabbed his biceps, looked him straight in the eyes, and told him, “You can do this.”

And he believed her. If she believed he could fly, he could do it. He *had* done it once before.

Kal handed her his glasses and started to pull open his shirt; her hand stopped him.

“You don’t need the suit to fly. Come on. Up on the railing with you.”

He cleared his throat as he stepped up. Nervously he looked down to the alley below. “I don’t know about this, Lois...”

She grabbed his wrist and asked one last question. “Still invulnerable?”

He winked. “I’m not allowed to die, Lois.”

She smiled at him and let go of his wrist. “You’ve got that right, buster.”

Kal took a deep breath and looked up into the blue, cloud streaked sky. He raised a fist into the air, as he had seen in those photos of himself in the paper, and thought, *Sky*. A moment later he was above the city. Kal pumped his fist in triumph. He had done it!

Wait! Had Lois said that he wasn’t allowed to die? She *had* married him for his invulnerability, just like Lucy had suspected. With this realization, he started to fall straight down.

“Nooooooooooooo!” he called, his arms and legs flailing before he hit the garbage cans in the alley with a crash.

“Clark!” he heard her call from above him.

He waved feebly from a pile of dented cans. Kal didn’t want to move. He didn’t want to get up. He still couldn’t fly. He was pathetic.

With a sigh, he pushed himself to his feet. Today had been one complete failure. His memories still weren’t returning as he hoped. He had insulted his wife and walked out on her. He had gotten to the robbery too late. He had made Lois angry by talking

to Linda King. And then again when he had called Lois at the office as Kal. He had learned that he had once called Lois a whore. He had picked the worst apartment in all of Metropolis to show to his wife. He had messed up while trying to fly. And to top it all off, he had discovered that Lois had married him because he couldn’t die. This had been the worst day ever.

Lois rounded the corner of the alley breathless as if she had run all the way from the apartment. “Clark! Are you all right?” she asked, flinging herself against his chest.

“I’m fine,” Kal replied tersely, wanting to step out of her embrace. “Invulnerable, remember?” He didn’t like the coldness in his tone, but all of his happy thoughts were gone.

“I’m so sorry, Clark. I shouldn’t have pushed you. It was way too soon. Please, forgive me.” Lois held tightly on to him and the ice in his veins soon melted into mush.

“Why did you want to marry me, Lois?” he asked. “What is so wonderful about Clark that after all the horrible things I’ve said and done, you can still want this wretched, disgraceful man?”

“Don’t say that!” she scolded. “I love you. When you aren’t the biggest, most pigheaded jealous fool in the universe, Clark, you can be gentle and funny and loving. You are so sweet that you care to take my thoughts and wishes into account when making decisions. So thoughtful that you reheat my morning coffee without me asking after it’s gone cold because you distracted me with hot kisses,” she said, turning his face towards her to place a soft kiss on his lips.

It felt like coming home.

“You are so forgiving, it could almost be considered a fault,” Lois went on with a wink, so he knew she didn’t. She placed his glasses back on his face. “When Claude was spouting lies about me, you refused to believe them. You love me more than anyone has ever loved me in my life. You make me feel that I’m worth loving. You always look for the good in people...”

As Lois continued gushing about Clark’s virtues, pictures of the two of them filled his head. All of them memories. Sweet, wonderful, emotional, sensory-filled memories, but the speed of their recovery made them as clear as pea soup. A smile on Clark’s face grew and grew as she continued to list all the things she loved about him.

Lois stopped speaking and stared at him. “Are you remembering something?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah. I’m remembering how long it’s been since I properly kissed my wife,” he replied, dipping her for intense kiss. He was going to make her regret putting intimacy on hold for his memories.

Eventually, he pulled her back up and set her fully on her feet. Her knees weakened, and he had to grab her again so she wouldn’t fall.

“Whoa, Clark,” she said, wrapping her arms around his neck. “Where did that come from?”

He smiled mischievously, shrugged, and then pulled her back for another kiss. “So, how many memories do I need to trade you for a night of passion?” He bounced his eyebrows.

Lois swatted his chest. “You know that’s not what I meant.”

“No?” He pouted before nuzzling her neck. “Because I was thinking we could stop by the store. I’ve been craving sundaes all day.”

“Sundaes?” she repeated, and then her smile exploded in size as if she knew what he was talking about. “You mean like strawberries, melted chocolate, and whipped cream?” She licked her lips.

Had that been a mutual fantasy that they had discussed?

“Yeah? How did...?”

“Honey, that’s not a fantasy...” Lois beamed. “That is definitely a memory.”

His jaw dropped. “You mean, you and I...?” He swallowed as

the image... the memory flashed across his mind again. “That was real?”

She nodded. “The pasta, also a memory.”

Clark kissed her again, his tongue dancing with hers. Oh, how in the world had he forgotten how delirious this woman’s kisses made him? “What about the bath? And the shower?” he asked between kisses.

“Yes and yes,” she also said between kisses.

If all those fantasies had been real? Had been memories? “How about the cave?” he dared. That *couldn’t* have been a memory.

“Oh, yeah. Completely unforgettable.” Lois moaned just from the thought of it. “That was the night you returned to Niagara from your first Nightfall mission.”

Clark swallowed. Nightfall? As in the first time he had fully joined her in his aura? No wonder it was such a strong memory. No surprise it had been that memory that popped into his head when he had kissed Lois by the pool yesterday afternoon. He kissed her again. The more he kissed her, the more the mess of memories in his head straightened into coherent thoughts.

He now knew what heaven felt like. Kissing this woman and remembering all the other kisses at the same time.

“Clark, I love you...” Lois murmured. He could feel her body reacting positively to his stimuli. She didn’t seem to be heeding her earlier request to refrain from intimacy as he kissed down her neck.

“I love you, too, Lois,” he replied. He knew for certain that she loved him. How could he have forgotten that?

“... But I don’t want to join the mile-high club,” she finished. “At least, not over Metropolis.”

The *what?* Her words slapped him across the face. Huh? Clark opened his eyes and realized — as she must have already — that they were floating over the city. He laughed.

“Happy thoughts and pixie dust?” Lois asked with a twinkle in her eye.

He grinned. “Happy thoughts and memories.” The way his memories were floating around in his head at the moment they might as well be fairy dust.

Lois smiled along with him.

“I’m so sorry, Lois. I can’t believe what an idiot I’ve been. I’ve done nothing but torture you for last twenty-four hours. Please know that I never meant...” he started rambling before her mouth covered his.

“Welcome back, Clark,” Lois said with bubbling merriment, kissing all over his face.

“Welcome...? How did you...?”

“No one apologizes just like you,” she replied. “You want to get out of here before we get spotted by a passing plane?”

“Yeah. I need to make love to... oh, darn!” Clark groaned.

“What? Someone calling to your super side?” Lois sounded as dejected as he felt.

“No.” He sighed as he landed them quickly and quietly onto the Clinton Street apartment’s patio. “We have to replace the futon mattress I threw out.”

Lois ran a finger down his chest in a zigzag pattern. She bit her bottom lip and smiled seductively at him. “What would you say if I said I have a surprise for you?”

“Surprise?” Clark led her back into the debris-filled apartment. “What? As in reminding me we can make love anywhere? That we don’t need a mattress?” he asked as he wrapped his arm around her waist.

Her pulse and breathing quickened as their mouths joined again. He took that as a ‘yes’ and started to unbutton her blouse.

“Clark!” she gasped. Again, he took this as a ‘yes.’

He lifted her bottom up so that their hips met and leaned her against the wall.

“Clark!” Lois’s voice cracked this time. Her hands

unbuttoned his flannel shirt only to find his suit underneath. “Too many layers... let’s go home,” she murmured as her fingers danced across his ‘S’.

“How about a quickie first?” Clark suggested as his self-control diminished with every movement of her hand. “I can undress in less than a second, if that’s worrying you.”

Lois glanced around the room with thinly veiled disgust. “Here?”

“Wait here.”

Tentatively, Lois held her blouse together with one hand as she tried to control her raging ardor by catching her breath.

Wait? Why is this man always making you wait?

A cloud of dust descended from the loft.

What is he doing?

A moment later, Clark dropped in front of her. “May I give you a lift?”

Lois smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Are you sure, Clark? Floyd could walk in any minute.”

He grinned. “I locked the door. And I’ll hear him if he uses the key.” They floated upwards to the loft.

He had removed the piles of newspapers, empty paint cans, and dust. The small room seemed to sparkle in comparison to the rest of the apartment. Clark leaned her against the wall and started kissing her again.

“Clark!” she moaned more than spoke. She had to get this word out. “Condom?”

He held up a little square foil wrapped package.

“Where?”

“After that night at my folks’ apartment when we had forgotten to bring the condoms along, I started keeping one in my wallet,” he replied. “I found it this morning, when I bought a copy of the *Daily Planet*.”

“Clark,” Lois whispered between kisses. She really didn’t want to lie down on this hard floor. “I’ve got a mattress in the car.”

He moved his head back far enough to grin roguishly at her. “Later.”

Here they were making love in public. Again. They could be caught at any moment. It was dangerous. It was thrilling. Her body hummed with excitement.

Thank God he found his memories.

They panted in silence, trying to catch their breaths.

“Clark?”

“Hmmm,” he replied, his head resting against hers, but his brain probably unable to form words yet.

“How did we ever survive without this?” she asked rhetorically. Her fingers straightened his locks. “If I knew what you could do to my body... that I could ever feel like this... I would have knocked down those boxes and pushed you into that freight elevator the first moment you smiled at me the day we met.”

“That would have been surprising.” He chuckled. “And probably not unwelcome.”

“How are we going to work together? Side by side? Day in and day out? With me not able to go an hour without making love to you?”

“We’ll manage,” he murmured with a slight break in his voice.

“I’ll have to wear skirts more often,” she determined aloud with a nod of her head.

“Skirts?”

I don’t think Clark’s brain is at one hundred percent yet.

“This is much easier if I’m not wearing pants,” she explained the obvious. “Especially if someone could walk in at any moment. I could just pull the skirt back down...”

Clark gulped. “Better make that every half-hour, then.”

“Clark?”

“Yes, Lois?”

“You are going to want us to move in here, aren’t you? Now that we’ve christened the place?” she asked softly.

He smiled. “I must admit the apartment is growing on me. I did get my memories back here.”

“Actually...” Lois giggled. “If you want to live where you got your memories back, I’m sure we could get a nice cardboard box for the alley.”

Say what?

Clark pressed his lips together with a raised brow. “Ha-ha.”

Lois looked over his shoulder at the loft. “You know, Clark, this area would make the worst baby room ever, don’t you? The spiral staircase. Please! That big drop to the floor down below. And if we put the crib down there and we slept up here, you’d be in charge of getting the baby in the middle of the night so I don’t fall off the edge to my death in my sleep.”

Lois, shut up!

Her husband swallowed, but didn’t say anything.

“And if I’m pregnant, there is no way I could navigate that stairwell, especially with a huge belly,” Lois continued with a kiss to his cheek. “But, on the other hand, it would either make a great guest room, storage room, or office.”

“I love you.” Clark pressed a kiss to her lips. “No matter what.”

Great. You’ve succeeded in ruining the mood, Lois’s inner voice grumbled. *Thanks.*

Lois caressed her husband’s face. “And I love you. Let’s go home.”

He nodded.

“So, we’ll think about the apartment?” he asked her. “I could put down the security deposit. I got... Darn!”

Lois raised a brow and waited.

“When I withdrew the money from my checking account this afternoon for the security deposit, I didn’t have my memory. I completely forgot that I need to help my folks pay for the rent on the café,” he told her. His shoulders slouched.

She fastened her pants. “Do you want it that badly? Floyd said we could have the weekend to think about it.”

He rolled his eyes. “We’ll be lucky if this place isn’t gone by the morning.”

Lois took another look around the dump. *This place* could be gone by morning? True, the bone structure of the apartment might make it a place worth living in, once it was cleaned up, but the neighborhood didn’t look that great. She cupped his jaw with her palm. “We’ll take the weekend to think about it. If it’s gone on Monday, it wasn’t meant to be. If it’s still available, we’ll find the funds somehow. I’ve got a little left from the wedding money my father gave me.”

She dusted off her pants as he flew off the loft and returned less than a minute later, a plastic Daily Books bag hooked over his wrist. She gazed at him questioningly.

“I put the suit back on,” he murmured. “I didn’t want to carry it out or leave it in the car when we stopped for groceries.”

She nodded and slipped on her shoes.

What was he doing at Daily Books?

Clark scooped her up into his arms. As he flew them back downstairs to the main room of the apartment, he started howling with laughter.

Her brow furrowed.

What’s so funny?

Clark waved his laughter out of the air. “Batman.” He shook his head as tears of amusement came to his eyes. “A superhero who doesn’t fly.” He continued to chuckle.

Saturday — Mid-day

Lois pulled the Jeep Cherokee into a spot down the street from MJ’s Café.

“You *so* lost,” she told her husband.

“It was a draw,” Clark argued back. He dropped his voice when she met him on the sidewalk. “We finished at the same time.”

“You folded first,” she reminded him, nuzzling his neck.

“I did no such thing,” he retorted.

Lois knew he was arguing for argument’s sake and grinned. *You so won.*

“You *begged* me to join you,” she said.

“That’s not true. I didn’t ‘beg.’” He pressed his lips together in a line. “I humbly requested your participation in the mutually agreed upon completion of said act,” Clark responded and then shot her one his best sheepish smiles.

He totally begged.

Lois raised a skeptical eyebrow at him. “You lost. You’re paying for lunch,” she informed him, her hand on the door handle of the café.

Clark stopped her from pulling it open by pressing a kiss to her lips. “If I admit defeat...”

A-ha!

“It’s only because you had a head start. Next time, we start the bet from when we’re fully clothed and *not*...” He lowered his voice. “... when I’m blissfully...”

She smiled curiously. “Blissfully?”

“Always,” he said, finally allowing her to open the door.

They were immediately enveloped in one of Maisie’s huge hugs. “Jonathan! Martha!” she called so the whole restaurant could hear. You could take Maisie away from the Smallville Diner, but you couldn’t take the Smallville Diner out of Maisie. “The kids are here.”

Lois turned to Clark and mouthed, *Kids?*

He shrugged.

“Where have you been all week?” Maisie asked, and then answered her own question with a little extra rosiness to her cheeks. “Never mind. You two are still on your honeymoon.”

Lois received a grin from Clark.

Well, if he didn’t say it all in that one look.

Jonathan came out of the office and Clark — closing the gap in three large steps — hugged him. “Thanks, Dad.”

“Clark?” Jonathan choked out.

“Yeah,” Clark responded as his dad tightened the hug.

Maisie laughed and elbowed Lois. “You’d think that they hadn’t seen each other in a year.”

Lois winked back. “That must have been some premarital advice speech.”

Clark glanced over his shoulder and shook his head at her. “Minx.”

Martha skipped past the men. “Lois!” And suddenly, Lois found herself in one of her mother-in-law’s all-encompassing hugs. “Welcome to the family, sweetie.”

Not one to want her emotions to get the better of her, Lois found she could not hold back the tears while in Martha’s embrace. That was what the Kents were now — her family.

More so than your own flesh and blood.

“Thank you so much, Martha,” Lois said, wiping away the tears from her cheeks.

“For what?” Martha asked.

For allowing you to seduce her son and become part of the Kent family?

“Raising such a wonderful man,” Lois replied and saw Clark and his father both turn and smile at her.

You’ve redeemed yourself from that earlier snarky comment.

“And the pasta. That tortellini casserole was delicious. You *must* give us the recipe for the sauce,” Lois insisted.

Oh, yes. It’s already a family favorite. Pasta and sauce. If

they hadn't run out of it, they would still be in the apartment now.

Clark shot his wife a 'shut up' look, and Lois wondered if he was reading her thoughts.

Martha smiled. "Clark has the recipe," she informed Lois with a tap to her head.

Oooh-la-la. Many nights of pasta in your future.

The men walked up to them. Martha hugged her son. "Welcome back, honey. Do you want to sit out here or at the Chef's table?"

At Lois's perplexed expression, Clark explained, "In the kitchen." He caught her eye. "Out here, if you don't mind, Mom. We have some things to discuss."

Right. Terms for the next winner-takes-all bet.

Lois covered up her grin with her hand.

Hmmm. What do you think we should have Clark do for you next?

The phone rang and Jonathan grabbed it with a wave at Clark. Martha kissed each of their cheeks and returned to the kitchen.

"What would you kids like?" Maisie asked, walking them over to a table.

They sat on opposite sides of a small booth. Lois didn't even open her menu. "You know what's good here, Clark. You order for me."

He smiled at her.

"We've got pasta on special," suggested Maisie.

"No!" both Lois and Clark barked at the same time and then laughed at their hostess's shocked expression.

Clark cleared his throat. "We had pasta for dinner last night, Maisie. How about a couple of my mom's famous chicken sandwiches, home fries, and some iced tea?"

"Sounds great. Hey, Clark, isn't that what you were eating that first day we shared lunch outside of Daily Books?" Lois asked him after Maisie had walked off.

His smile grew with his nod and he leaned towards her, whispering, "You're too far away. I need to kiss you."

She leaned forward so he could reach her lips.

"Maybe I should move next to you," he suggested, his hand caressing her arm.

"Do you want to make-out during lunch?" Lois teased him.

His eyes smiled a definite *yes!*

"We have things to discuss, remember?" she went on, reaching into her purse and pulling out a small notebook. She lowered her voice to under a whisper, "I need to interview you about Nightfall."

"Not here," he mumbled back. "Home. Later."

Lois closed her notebook and tucked it away. "I wish that reimbursement check from my insurance company would get here already. I'm going crazy without a computer. How are we going to type up our article at home? I guess we'll have to go into the office..."

"Or..." Clark reached across the table and took hold of her hands.

I like how he can't keep his hands off you. You are so going to win the next bet.

"Or?" Lois raised a brow.

"I could pick up my old typewriter while we're here and take that home with us," he said and then bounced his eyebrows behind those dark-rimmed glasses.

Sigh. He has such gorgeous eyes. Where did his new glasses disappear off to?

She pressed her lips together as she kicked off one of her shoes. "I think you like that new futon mattress too much. What will you do when we move into a new apartment and that new bed I ordered arrives?" She took a sip from her glass of ice water Maisie had left on the table when she had seated them.

Clark's jaw dropped. She loved his surprised face.

Lois pouted. "Are you upset? Did you want to help me pick it out?" She raised her shoeless foot to his leg and slowly glided it along his calf to his knee.

Surprised him again!

"Lo-is!"

"What? Did you think I was going to order something too soft or too... *uncomfortable?*" Lois lowered her voice as her foot reached his thigh, "Was I wrong when I figured that invulnerable meant that it didn't matter what kind of mattress I bought? I figured that all you'd care about was how much clothing I wore or didn't wear while lying on it." She batted her eyelashes demurely at him. She slid her foot farther up his leg and smiled. "Was I wrong?"

Maisie brought their iced teas and Clark swallowed half of his in one gulp.

"Thanks, Maisie," Lois responded for him.

The older woman spoke softly, "Cut it out, Lois, you're killing the poor man."

Clark started coughing as Lois rolled her eyes and lowered her foot.

"Are you okay?" Lois asked her husband innocently.

"Yep," he said with a shake of his head. "Going to have to keep my shorts in the freezer."

She laughed, slipping her shoe back on her foot.

Clark couldn't believe that Maisie had said that to Lois. Didn't she know about Pete? He thought Maisie knew everything about everyone in Smallville. Maybe it wasn't common knowledge how close the two of them had become? Clark took hold of his wife's hand. "I'm not going to die on you."

Lois's brow furrowed. "I know that."

"Do you?" He gazed at her seriously. "I know you love me, Lois, but..."

"But, *what?*" she sounded positively terse.

Clark glanced down at their clasped hands. "Lucy told me about your bad luck with men..."

"Lucy told you *what?*" Lois spit the words at him.

"You didn't marry me because of..." He tapped her hand against his arm. "My candy coating, did you?" His eyes met hers questioningly.

She pressed her lips together and tried to pull her hands from his, but he wouldn't let go. "Is that what you think, *Kal?*"

Clark stiffened. "Are you going to call me by ... my birth name every time you think I'm acting a dense idiot?"

She shrugged. "If the shoe fits..."

"If you are suggesting that it's my background that makes me a dense idiot, we've got a serious problem," he told her. "I cannot help my background nor would I change it if I could."

Lois pulled her hands free and moved over to his side of the booth. She caressed his face. "Nor would I."

He relaxed at her loving expression.

"You're right and I'm sorry, Clark," she murmured, placing a soft kiss on his lips. "I love all of you... candy coating and all." She placed her hands on his chest. "Do I like that it takes a huge asteroid to give you a bump on the head? Sure. But I married you for all of you, not just one part of you, you silly goose." Then a wicked expression came to her eyes. "Well..."

"Well, *what?*" Was there a something Super about him that pushed her from a maybe to a yes?

Lois's hands glided up his chest and over his shoulders until she was hugging him. Her lips whispered into his ear, "If I had known what you were hiding under those red shorts of yours before we were married..." She moaned.

Clark gulped as he felt a flush crawl up his face. Oh, *that*.

She licked his ear. "Should we get lunch to go?" Her hand slid down his chest to his stomach.

He cleared his throat. "No..."

“Okay!” she said happily and a rush of cold air replaced her body as she returned to the other side of the table.

Maisie was right. All this teasing was killing him. Oh, but what a pleasant death it would be.

He took a deep breath and exhaled. “Besides my typewriter, there are some things I need to pick up from my folks.” He saw that his father was off the telephone. “Speaking of which...” Clark stood up and walked over to his dad. Thank goodness the extra layers from his Superman suit made the results of his wife’s machinations less noticeable.

His dad glanced up at Clark’s approach and smiled. “Something up, son?”

Clark tried, with some difficulty, to keep his face its normal skin tone.

Clearly, Clark hadn’t faked his non-discomfort well as his dad pressed his lips together in attempt to keep a laugh from escaping. His father failed miserably. Jonathan lowered his voice, “Ah. The tortures of young love. Do you need me to make excuses while you visit your summer home in the Arctic?”

Unable to hide his beet-red face any longer, Clark glanced down at the floor. “No, that’s okay, Dad. I need to learn to control...” He gulped.

“Your wife? Yeah. Good luck with that,” replied his dad with what sounded like years of experience.

“Myself.”

“Oh, yes. Much easier to control. I agree. I went that route myself in my younger days...” Jonathan reminisced.

“Dad!” Clark snapped a bit more harshly than he meant.

“Sorry. I... Do you have a minute to speak in private?”

“Always.” His dad led the way to his office.

Once inside, Clark shut the door behind them and handed to his father the stack of hundred dollar bills he removed from his checking account the previous day to use as a security deposit on the Clinton Street apartment. “For the café’s rent.”

Jonathan held up his hand as he sat down behind his desk. “Keep it, son. You’re a married man now. You have your own expenses. Your mother and I will figure something out.”

“Dad, today’s the first. You need October’s rent. Please. Lois and I will make do.” He cleared his throat. “I’ll have the Daily Planet’s salary soon and MDS promised to pay me all my back vacation pay.” Clark failed to mention it was in lieu of severance. He still felt bad about failing to contact his former employer after getting Perry’s job offer. “Please. It would help me sleep at night.”

His father looked like he was fighting another burst of chortles. “Yeah, right. Like you’re doing any of that now.”

“Dad!” Clark groaned.

The man grinned. “Nothing wrong with that, Clark. Enjoy the honeymoon while it lasts, because it doesn’t last forever. Or so I’ve heard.”

Clark knew enough about his parents’ relationship to know that they were still as very much in love as they were when they were first married, if not more so.

“You need the funds to get yourself a new apartment. *You* can’t live in a basement,” his dad reminded him.

And Clark’s parents were probably ready for Lucy to head home. Not that they would ever admit it.

“Lois and I looked at a place over on Clinton yesterday,” Clark told him. “A real dump with potential. I could fix it up like...” He snapped his fingers. “But Lois...” He shrugged.

“Hated it?” asked his father, glancing up from where he was bent down to set the safe’s timer.

“It’s growing on her.” The son smiled, remembering the afternoon delight from the day before. “It’s on the top floor and has a patio that faces a brick wall. Perfect really.”

“But...?”

How could Clark explain to his father that it wasn’t a good

apartment for children? They didn’t have children, but after their carelessness on the honeymoon, one could be on its way. Should this be something to even mention to his folks? Especially without discussing it with Lois first? No. That would be a bad idea. “Let’s just say, it’s not a place with growth potential.”

Jonathan’s eyebrows shot up. “Are you looking for a place that is? Already?”

Clark shrugged.

“Is Lois?”

Clark had assumed his father’s use of ‘you’ in his previous sentence had included Lois. He didn’t know quite how to answer that inquiry. Was Lois actively trying to be a mom? Absolutely not. But that sparkle in her eye when Kal had kissed her tummy and asked if she could be pregnant had told him she wasn’t completely adverse to the idea if the event had already occurred.

Jonathan sent him a reassuring smile at Clark’s lack of an answer. “You’re both young, son. No need to rush. Plenty of time before you need to worry about growing your new family. You need to get to know yourselves as a couple first.”

Clark placed a smile on his face. “Right.” He completely agreed, but the choice may have been taken out of their hands. He gulped. Was *he* ready for such a step? He knew he wanted children, but so soon? He and Lois needed to discuss this topic sometime when they were out of bed and not so easily distracted.

He decided to change the topic. “Dad, have you seen my wedding ring? I left it here with my glasses and wallet when I went to battle Nightfall the first time.”

Jonathan smiled sheepishly. “I locked it in the safe for you, Clark.”

“Why didn’t you give it to me the other day?”

“I didn’t think of it, actually,” admitted his father. “What with the wedding, Nightfall, and you losing your Clark memories and all. I forgot I put it in here for safe keeping.”

Clark nodded. “Dad, I didn’t just lose my memories of being your son; I lost all of my memories.”

“You didn’t seem to want that part of your life back,” his father said softly.

Clark winced. Maybe Lois was right. His Kal side was an idiot. “Dad, I love you and Mom. I wouldn’t lose you for the world. Truthfully, and I know this will sound crazy, but I was just scared of Lois. Frightened that she wouldn’t love me. Terrified she wouldn’t want me or even like me, if I was just...” He lowered his voice. “Superman.” He shook his head. “Ridiculous, I know. I knew as Superman nothing could hurt me, physically. But losing the love of a wife I couldn’t remember but knew I loved with all my heart scared me stiff. It was nothing personal against you and Mom. I’m afraid I wasn’t really thinking with my head.”

Jonathan sat back in his chair and raised an eyebrow. “Is *that* what Superman thinks with, son?”

“Dad!” Clark admonished him. “I meant my heart.”

“Right,” his dad replied, clearly not believing him. Then he winked at his son to let Clark know he was only teasing. They both laughed.

The safe beeped. His father typed in the code and reached in to retrieve the ring. Before Jonathan could shut the safe again, Clark super sped the rent money inside. Jonathan might not want to take the funds on principle, but as his father had reminded him recently, Clark could be quite stubborn. Where did Jonathan Kent think his son had learned it?

Jonathan handed him the ring and Clark slipped it on his finger, happy to have it back.

“Lois is probably wondering what happened to you,” said his dad, standing up. “Unless there was something else?”

Clark cleared his throat and glanced back at the closed door of the office. “You didn’t tell Mom about our little talk before I left for Niagara, did you?”

His father winked at him. “What talk?”

Clark exhaled with relief. Lois’s teasing remark about a premarital conversation between father and son had actually occurred. His father had given him some good advice about women, marriage, and how best to treat his wife. Clark wished he hadn’t forgotten some of that advice over the last few days. But he never wanted to admit that the conversation took place — that he had actually *needed* that advice — until it was time to have the same talk with his own son. Clark smiled. *Son*. He liked the sound of that.

He wrapped an arm around his father’s shoulders and gave a gentle squeeze. “Thanks, Dad. You’re the greatest, and I love you.”

“I love you, too, son.” Jonathan seemed to glow from inner happiness at hearing these words from Clark. “I don’t need to tell you you’re the greatest, do I?”

Clark chuckled as they returned to the dining room. “Between you and Lois, I’m going to have to start buying bigger hats.”

Lois glanced up at their approach. The sandwiches and fries were already on the table.

Her husband slid into the booth and took Lois’s hand in his as a greeting. “Miss me?”

She smiled. “Every second. Clear everything up with your dad?”

Clark sprinkled his food with salt and popped a fry into his mouth. “He didn’t want to take the money. He said we needed it for our own place. Gave me the ‘you’ve got a wife now’ speech.”

“I’m such the ‘little woman,’ and I can’t possibly take care of myself,” Lois drawled in a Southern Belle voice as she rolled her eyes in agreement with her husband. “I’d much rather keep living in my basement apartment than have your folks lose this place.”

He squeezed her hand and smiled. She always said the right thing to make him double his love for her.

She pulled her hand free and picked up her sandwich.

“But I can’t, Lois,” Clark told her and then rushed on to explain. “I love you, but personally, I hate your apartment.”

“Oh, really,” Lois inquired.

“I hate that I can’t come and go as I please.” He lowered his voice. “As I *need* to.”

She nodded. “I know that, Clark. I told your mom after that first night I spent here — upstairs in their apartment...” She stared him in the eye as she licked her lips. “You know, in your bed — that we’d have to find another place soon. You need to be closer to heaven.” Lois picked up a fry, dipped in ketchup, and nibbled it down to her fingers.

Clark gaped at her, his sandwich hanging in front of his open mouth. Eventually he remembered to chew. He did so slowly as he thought about her words. He wondered if she realized what she had admitted to him and whether or not he should respond. Finally, he couldn’t resist. He swallowed down his bite of sandwich and said, “You told my mom *what? When?*”

Lois sucked her lips into her mouth as if hesitant to respond and then, leaning towards him, she blurted out, “I had said it in jest, Clark.”

For some reason, he didn’t believe her. Clark thought it had something to do with the sparkle in her eye when she had lied to him. “You told my mom, less than two days after our first real kiss, that you wanted to move in with me?”

She shot him an embarrassed grin, then shrugged. “I was in love at first kiss. So sue me.”

“First kiss? Like that first kiss in Receiving when you were trying to show Cat and Claude that you knew what a real man was?” He took a sip of his iced tea. “I never thanked you for that bit of confidence in me, by the way. Thank you.”

“Anytime.” Lois sipped her drink as well. “And let’s just say, that first kiss released hidden desires inside of me that I didn’t

know existed.”

Clark raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

“What? You want to break up with me, because I saw a future with you from the beginning?” she mocked him.

“Never.” He lifted up her hand and kissed the back of it. He really wanted to kiss her lips, but they were too far away. “I could have done without all the torture though.”

“*You* could have done without the torture? Clark, you were lying to me!” She shook her head in disgust. “Don’t do that again.”

It was a command and not a question, so Clark decided not to answer it and move the topic back to where they should live. “So, have you thought any more about the Clinton Street apartment? Or...” He gulped, before lowering his voice. “Do you think we should look for something more family friendly?”

“Well...” Lois thought about his question, dipping another fry into ketchup and putting it into her mouth. “You could zap-me with your vision gizmo and see if you see anything...”

“Vision gizmo?” he asked incredulously.

Lois shrugged.

“I don’t know if I would recognize what we’re looking for at this early date,” he whispered across the table.

“Then we’ll wait and see. Either we stay at my place — and be extra careful — for the next month or so and look at moving in November when we know for sure...”

Clark did not want to stay in the basement apartment for another month.

“*Or* we move on with our life and if something...” She took a sip of her drink. “... develops, we deal with the repercussions then. We’re probably stressing over nothing.” She waved a hand. “I once had a doctor who said because of my backwards-facing uterus it would be more difficult for me to get pregnant.”

His jaw dropped as he stared at her. He snapped his mouth shut and took a quick glance around to make sure no one had overheard her. Then, in a soft voice, he said, “It’s possible that it wouldn’t matter, because I might have Super swimmers.”

Lois pressed her lips together for a moment and focused her gaze on his. She took a bite of her sandwich and continued to bore her eyes into his.

He was dying to know what she was thinking.

Finally, she said, “Honey, if your swimmers were all that Super, wouldn’t I be full of holes from where they escaped?”

Clark felt all the blood drain from his face. “I... I... Oh, God!... No!” That scenario had never crossed his mind. They would never be able to make love again with that fear buzzing around in his imagination.

Lois took hold of his hand. “I’m okay. We’re compatible. Your aura protects me, remember?” She smiled. “Maybe your swimmers are Super in another way we didn’t think of. Like they have an innate sense of direction.”

He couldn’t help but laugh as he relaxed. “You know, we’re never going to make love without precautions again now, don’t you?”

She licked her lips. “Sure we will.” She closed her eyes and Clark could almost sense the feeling of oneness she was remembering from their night in the cave. Her eyes flashed open and Lois looked at him with such an intense expression of passion. He could hear her heartbeat quicken. Her skin was flushed. Her eyes were dilated. She wanted him. Then she blinked and focused on her sandwich and the expression was gone. “Someday, when we’re ready,” she murmured.

After that look, he was ready to push the table aside and take her at that exact moment. Clark took a cleansing breath and tried to concentrate on the conversation and lunch and not on making love with his wife. Not think of her mouth on his. Her hot and sweaty body. That little meowing noise she made. *Failing miserably here, Kent.*

He closed his eyes and thought about jumping into the freezing waters of the Arctic. Conversation. Right. What had they been talking about? “So, you do want kids?”

Lois’s eyes flicked back up to his. “Truthfully, yes. I always pictured an idealized future where I met a man with whom I would want to experience everything in life, including motherhood.” She squeezed their joined hands. “But, to be perfectly honest, Clark, I won’t make a good mother. Between my lack of patience and my role model...” He watched as she let that train of thought fade away with sadness. “Personally, I never thought I’d find... you.”

Clark picked up his sandwich and said, with nonchalance, “No matter how hard you try, Lois, you’ll never convince me that you’re the lucky one in this relationship. Sorry, I’ve got you beat, hands down.”

The sadness from her eyes disappeared and was replaced with love. His father, a genius. It helped that Clark hadn’t lied one bit with that statement.

“Can I ask you a question?” she said.

“Ask away.” He took another bite of his sandwich.

Lois giggled, embarrassed. Then she plunged ahead, keeping her voice low, “Why did Superman read *Love Fortress International*?”

He laughed, wiping his mouth with his napkin. “I had taken some newspapers from inside a few recycle bins,” he said, deciding not to mention that it had been a Met Star he had been stealing. “You know, to learn more about the wonder that is Superman.” He threw her a fake arrogant smile.

She rolled her eyes.

Clark continued on, “Tucked inside one of the newspapers was the copy of *Love Fortress International*. Curious, I skimmed through it. That article had detailed photos. I got quite an education.” He smiled naturally this time. He would always be thankful for that article. “You didn’t seem to mind.”

Lois blushed and looked down at her plate. “Did anyone see him...” She coughed. “... you reading it?”

“Sure. All the bugs, birds, and squirrels in the forest.”

She lifted her gaze back to his and smiled.

See, wife, he wasn’t a complete lunkhead even without his memories.

“So...” Lois said, taking another fry, dipping it in ketchup, and sticking it into her mouth. “I was thinking about the stakes for our next round...”

Clark grinned. He liked where her mind was going. “Really?”

“The loser cleans house for the week.”

He would probably be in charge of that anyway, since he could accomplish that task in seconds. “Not enough motivation for you to try and win. How about the winner makes dinner tomorrow night?”

“Dinner?” Lois gulped. “Clark, you *really* don’t want to eat my cooking.”

Clark pretended to revel in her discomfort. “You know you’re going to lose, don’t you?” he teased.

“Why don’t you make me dinner tonight, instead?” Lois batted her eyelashes modestly.

She really thought she was going to win, did she? Ha! He knew he could make her beg for it. He already had. “No, tonight’s no good. I’ve got plans. Dinner tomorrow night?”

“Plans?” Lois inquired.

“Yes, I know this great restaurant where they serve grilled fish...” he explained.

“Oh?”

“The restaurant is on the beach... Just off of Langosta,” Clark continued, wondering if she would recognize the name.

Her brow furrowed. “Isn’t that...” Her face lit up with bliss. “Clothing optional?”

Clark bit into a fry. This time, he wore the innocent

expression. “Only if we decide to go swimming.”

Saturday Night

Lois leaned back against the log and let the lukewarm sand shift between her toes. It was dark out here on the beach. Too dark. She sighed and pulled her legs up to her chest. Finally, she heard the familiar swoosh of her husband returning from whatever emergency had pulled him away from their date.

“Hi,” Clark said softly, yet not apologetically.

“Hi.” Her tone was more curt and to the point. She was ticked off. Standing up, she dusted the sand from her skirt. “Let’s go home.”

He wrapped his arms around her and hugged her. She could feel, more than see, that he had already changed from Superman into Clark. She didn’t feel like having his arms around her and pushed out of his embrace.

“Lois?” Clark sounded confused.

He shows up without an apology and he doesn’t know why you’re mad? Please!

Lois marched off down the beach, her sandals dangling from her fingers.

“I’m sorry. Is that what you want me to say?” Clark asked, following her. “You knew when you married me who I am.”

Men!

“I want you to actually be sorry,” she retorted.

“Am I sorry for locating that little boy who wandered away from his folks in the woods? No. Am I sorry for stopping that bullet during that mugging that went wrong? No. Am I sorry for digging through the debris after that mudslide and rescuing forty-two people, who would have otherwise died? Absolutely not.” He threw his hands into the air. “Am I sorry I came back here to spend a romantic evening with a woman who can’t cool her heels for an hour while I help other people... Hmmm. Let me think about that one.”

Gee, he sounds annoyed. Too bad he can’t tell time.

She turned around and faced him, fire in her eyes. “Three hours,” she corrected.

He stopped. “Excuse me?”

Lois threw one of her sandals at him and missed. “Three hours! I’ve been sitting here, ‘cooling my heels,’ for *three hours!*”

“I’m sorry, honey,” he said quietly. This time he actually sounded like he meant it. But the apology still didn’t wipe out her anger.

“Three hours, Clark. You left me in a small town, in a strange country, where I don’t speak the language with no identification and no money,” she growled, throwing the other shoe. That one missed him as well. “I didn’t even know if you were going to make it back tonight or if I was going to have to sleep out here on the beach.”

“I left you my wallet. You weren’t without cash,” he reminded her.

Buzz. Wrong answer.

“Yes. Thank you,” she replied tersely. She proceeded to pull said object out of her little date purse and threw that at him as well. “At least, I could pay for dinner. Yes, thanks for not dining and dashing on me.”

Clark continued to follow her down the beach. “You could have gotten a room at the hotel.”

Lois rolled her eyes.

Buzz. Strike two.

“Like that wouldn’t have been suspicious, Clark. My credit card being used to pay for a hotel room in a town not fifty miles from the beach where Superman had taken me during our first interview. Wonder what she’s doing there? Having an affair with a man in tights perhaps?” She shook her head. “No, thank you. I would have slept out on the sand.”

“You’re being paranoid,” he told her.
Buzz. Third time’s a wrecking ball there, Clarkie boy. Sorry, but you do get a parting gift. A lifetime supply of guilt.

“Paranoid? After what we’ve been through? I don’t think so,” she grumbled. “Anyway, I didn’t bring a credit card and the money in your wallet barely covered dinner.”

“I said I was sorry, Lois. What more do you want from me?” he asked.

If you have to tell him that, this relationship has a serious problem.

Clark zipped around to the front of her, blocking her path. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

“For starters, we’re supposed to be a team,” she said, hitting his chest with her fists. “I’ve been sitting here wondering why you didn’t bring me along with you.”

He raised an incredulous eyebrow and lowered his voice further, “You just told me why, Lois. Clark and Lois are a team. Superman works alone.”

“It should really be ‘Lois and Clark’. That sounds better. And why?” she snapped at him. “Why can’t he work with Lois and Clark?”

“You’re kidding me, right?” he asked, setting his hands gently on her shoulders.

She sighed. “I just want to be a part of your life, Clark. All of it. I could write about what you’re doing for the Daily Planet. I don’t want to be left on some shelf somewhere collecting dust while you get to go and have all the fun.”

“Fun?” Clark shook his head. “Lois, I rescued forty-two people out of the mud alive. Forty-two out of fifty-four. There are twelve people who lost their lives tonight because of me.”

“Clark! There are forty-two people thanking their lucky stars you were there. It could have been much worse. It *would* have been catastrophic if you hadn’t been there,” she whispered, enfolding him into her arms and brushing her lips across his cheek. “I’m sor...”

Her apology was swallowed by his deepening their kiss. “I’d rather not talk about it. I need...” She could tell instantly from his stillness and his intense gaze she could sense more than see what he needed. Then he glanced away. “I’ll ... I’ll take you home.”

No, that’s not what he needs.

Lois turned his face towards him. “Take me wherever you want. I’ll do anything to help. Just tell me, what do you *need*?”

“Distraction from my thoughts,” he murmured, running his hand through her hair and tucking it behind her ear.

Ooooh. You can do distraction, Lois. You’ve got that so covered.

She kissed him. More words would just get in the way. She didn’t start the kiss soft and gentle. She slammed her lips onto his and darted her tongue into his mouth. He accepted her suggestion with flourish and embellished on it.

They had reached the big rocks at the far end of the beach and Clark leaned her back against one of them. His hand slid under her dress to her bare behind. “Lois!” he gasped, pulling far enough away to look her in the eye. Well, *he* could see her. “Where are your undergarments, wife?”

You had been expecting a clothing optional swim, not an evening of sitting in the sand.

Lois shrugged and Clark pressed his mouth back onto hers.

Soft hands, no calluses. Another invulnerable bonus!

She couldn’t believe at how quickly she had changed from anger to passion to waves of ecstasy. Her hands moved up his bare chest under his shirt.

Wonder where the suit is? Oh, well. You’ll ask him later.

Lois pushed his t-shirt up and over his head, dropping it on the sand. It caught on his glasses and knocked them to the ground. He scooped her up and she wrapped her legs around his waist. He propped her against the rock and shifted his position so

that he leaned slightly back. Suddenly, Lois’s chest felt sultry and warm.

“What did you do?” she whispered, almost panting. She wanted to tear off her own dress and expose her chest to the cool night air.

Clark’s mouth found hers again, his tongue darting into her mouth. “Experimenting,” he said between kisses. “Did you like it?”

Lois nodded and pulled his mouth back to hers.

“Would you like more?” he murmured.

Most definitely!

As they lay on the sand, the waves of water lapping at their naked bodies, Lois finally allowed herself a critique. “Wow.”

Clark kissed her cheek. “I like chicken.”

Huh?

Lois opened her eyes and lifted her head off his chest. She still couldn’t see him in the darkness. She really should eat more carrots.

How exactly did you end up on top of him, again?

“I like chicken, too,” she told him with some confusion.

What’s that got to do with the price of beans?

“For dinner tomorrow night, honey. You *so* lost.”

Lois wanted to be angry at him for bringing up their silly bet at this juncture. She wanted to cry ‘foul,’ but instead she started to laugh.

Suc-ker! This isn’t losing! This is so totally winning. He spun you around three, if not more, times on the merry-go-round and he has to eat your awful cooking! How exactly did you lose again?

“What?” Clark asked with disbelief. “Are you challenging me?”

“Nope.” Lois calmed her giggles enough to respond. “But if this is losing, Clark, I’ll cook for you every night.”

Sunday Morning

Lois lifted her head from where she had been writing in her notebook and looked at Clark, lying next to her. “And what happened after you crashed into the Nightfall asteroid, Superman?”

Clark grinned and kissed her bare shoulder. “I pushed the larger stray pieces of asteroid heading towards Earth and the moon away with my breath. And burned up as many of the little ones with my heat vision. Shall I demonstrate other uses for my heat vision, Mrs. Kent?”

“Okay, Clark. Stop it. I’m trying to be serious here. Perry has been waiting all week for this article. No more delays,” she said, pointing to the dining room. “Go over there and put on your suit.”

He shot her a faux-pout and then got off the bed slow enough for Lois to spank his bare bottom with her notebook. He removed his blue suit from the closet and spun into it with a ta-da gesture at the end. “Is this better, Ms. Lane?”

“Much,” she said, pulling the covers up and over her.

“Wouldn’t your husband prefer that you were dressed when we met, Ms. Lane?”

Lois smiled at him with a couple bats of those luscious lashes of hers. “Actually, my husband prefers me naked as much as possible.”

Superman crossed his arms and gazed at her with a raised eyebrow.

His wife rolled her eyes. “Fine. I guess if you’re going to be professional about this...” She pulled herself off the bed and put on her fluffy robe that had fallen off the end of the bed during the night. “Is this good enough for you? That way you can type it up while I shower.”

He tilted his head lower. Was she punishing him for making her get out of bed? Minx. Of course, once the rough draft was

written it would take him less than a minute to type it up. Plenty of time to join his wife in the shower and make sure she cleaned between her shoulder blades.

“So, you remember shooting off pieces of the asteroid after it broke up; therefore, it wasn’t the collision with Nightfall that caused your amnesia?” she asked.

“I thought we were keeping my amnesia need-to-know? As in the public doesn’t need-to-know,” he said.

Lois set down her pen. “Off the record then, Superman.”

Clark smiled. They could have years of fun with this ‘superhero and the reporter game.’ “Yes, I was still conscious after my collision with Nightfall, Ms. Lane.”

“Okay, go on,” she said, picking up her pen again. “Do you want it known by the general public that your heat vision is powerful enough to blow up rocks?”

“The general public already knows that I can heat up weapons with my heat vision and melt sand into liquid glass.” He gave her a naughty grin and shot off a burst of heat vision towards her. “Let’s keep the *other* uses of my heat vision...”

“Clark!” Lois snapped and started fanning herself. “Low blow, buster.”

He shrugged and blew a gust of cool breeze at the same spot.

His wife jumped into the air. “Stop it! Or you’ll know exactly how frigid I can be.”

Clark tried to feel chagrined but a smile still crept onto his lips. “My apologies, Ms. Lane.”

“We’ve got to practice being non-sexual acquaintances in public, Superman,” she reminded him. “Otherwise, Superman will be on the cover of *Dirt Digger Weekly* accused of having an affair with a married woman. A much worse sin than visiting an unmarried woman in her apartment in the middle of the night.”

This time, he truly felt guilty at her words. She was absolutely right. With her a full-time reporter now, the chance that Lois Lane Kent and Superman would bump into each other on the “job,” and on a daily basis at that, was more than likely. “I’m sorry, honey. I’ll stay in character.”

“Thank you,” said Lois, sitting back down. “Superman, you have said before that you can hold your breath for only twenty minutes at a time. Were you worried that using all that Super breath to push around asteroid bits would deplete your oxygen levels?”

He thought about that. “Actually, I didn’t consider it. I was thinking more about saving the moon and the Earth.”

Lois pressed her lips together and didn’t write down his answer. “Can we rephrase that to sound more positive?” she suggested.

He nodded. “I was more concerned about saving the Earth and moon from the Nightfall asteroid than with my own safety. I used my Super breath sparingly and concentrated on using my heat vision, which doesn’t deplete my oxygen levels.”

“We’ll work on that in the rough draft,” she told him, obviously not satisfied with that answer either. Nevertheless, she wrote it down. “Was that when the Asgard rocket exploded?”

“I discovered a large segment of asteroid spinning off towards the Asgard rocket about the time I decided not to use up the reserves of my breath. I was about to hit it with my heat vision when I was distracted by some smaller pieces of asteroid that crossed directly in front of my face. By the time I was able to refocus on the shard ... it...” He lowered his gaze, guilt filling his entire being. “It must have been too close to the rocket, so when I zapped it with the heat vision, I must have ... Oh, God! I blew up the Asgard rocket with my heat vision. It’s my fault if we have nuclear fallout here on Earth.” He sat down in one of the dining room chairs, his face dropping into his hands. “What have I done?”

Instantly, Lois was at his side, her arms surrounding him. “Do you know that for sure?”

He shook his head. “What other reason could there be? I was focusing on the asteroid chunk, but I was low on oxygen so maybe my aim was off just enough to hit the rocket? Or maybe the asteroid hit the rocket before I could destroy it? Either way, I’m the cause for the nuclear fallout that may rain upon the Earth.”

“Or maybe it was set to go off at impact? Or perhaps it was set to go off at a certain distance? Or possibly it was a combination of all of the above?” she suggested. “Or it was — *I don’t know* — the fault of the people who sent the Asgard rocket in the first place? If you hadn’t flown up there to divert it, the Asgard rocket would have still gone off and probably closer to the Earth than it did. And there wouldn’t have been anyone up there to get rid of all those radioactive remnants before they had rained down on us. Try as you might, husband, this world is a lot better off with you doing what you can than it would be without you in it.”

Clark lifted his eyes to hers and drank in the love he saw there, bolstering himself in her radiant sunshine. He pulled her into his lap. “And I think the world is a lot better off with you in it as well.” He pressed a kiss to her lips.

Lois responded with a growl of frustration. But not the kind of frustration he knew how to remedy. “How are we going to do this, Clark? We can’t keep our hands off each other for two minutes.” She patted him on the shoulder and pushed herself out of his lap. “Now, let’s try the question again. This time, don’t break down. You are Superman. Nothing scares you. Nothing upsets you. And nothing *turns you on* or I’ll make you Super freeze those shorts and put them back on.”

He chuckled, not because he didn’t think she would do it... he knew she would. But because Superman, as Lois painted him, was one bland fellow. “On the contrary, Ms. Lane,” he retorted, standing up and crossing his arms. “There are a lot of things that upset me: corruption, violence, greed, pollution, abuse of power, just to name a few. And there are things that scare me: a world without checks and balances for one, lawlessness, without good people like yourself who stand up and fight for the little guys in the world. And, Ms. Lane, I’m sure Clark has told you...” He winked at her. “My favorite turn-on is a bright sunny day.”

“Clark told me this?” Lois inquired, her lips pressed together so she wouldn’t laugh. “And how, pray-tell, would my husband know of *your* turn-ons, Superman? Is there something I should know about the two of you? Huh?”

He gulped. Failed that question as well. “Perhaps ‘turn-on’ wasn’t the correct term.”

She grinned. “Perhaps not.”

Superman took a deep breath and asked her, “I’m sorry, Ms. Lane, what was the question again?”

“Was that when the Asgard rocket exploded?”

He nodded, remembering. “Yes. There are many factors that may have caused the Asgard rocket to detonate. I had hoped to avoid nuclear fallout by not having the Asgard rocket to explode in the first place.”

“Will there be nuclear fallout due to the explosion of the Asgard rocket?” she asked, referring back to her notepad.

“That would be a question for the scientists,” he responded. “They’re better equipped to answer that question than I.”

Lois nodded, sitting down at the dining room table. “Are you radioactive?”

“As soon as I was able after returning to Earth, I was tested by Bernard Klein, PhD., over at S.T.A.R. Labs, and given a clean bill of health,” he replied.

“Really?” She glanced up from her notepad, not as Ms. Lane, reporter for the Daily Planet, but as Lois, his wife. “Are you?”

“Off the record. Honey, I would never have made love to you, never come within a hundred miles of you, if I had been radioactive,” he reassured her.

She tapped her pen against her pad. “Are you sure? I’m pretty irresistible.”

“True. It’s those darn magnets again, pulling us together.”

Lois smiled. “On the record...”

Clark nodded and went back into character.

“Where have you been since Wednesday?”

“Around.” He smiled innocently.

“Around anywhere in particular?” she hounded him.

“Let’s see, in the past week, I’ve been to outer space, Russia, Canada, Metropolis, Costa Rica...” Clark winked at her.

“Mexico, France, Denmark, Columbia...” He couldn’t resist.

“And my own private Utopia.”

Lois pressed her lips together. She was not amused. “So what happened after the rocket exploded?”

Superman closed his eyes. He vaguely remembered a bright light and a tremendous wave of energy. He pressed his mind, searching for what he had done, where he had gone, or if anything had struck him. Finally, he shook his head and sat down opposite her. “Off the record. I remember nothing.”

She gaped at him. “*Nothing?*”

“Zilch.”

“Did you get thrown off into space by the blast?” she inquired. “And the lack of oxygen to your brain caused your memory loss?”

Clark shrugged. “Sounds good to me.”

“Did you try to fly home to beat the explosive force of the bomb?” she suggested. “That might explain the lack of radiation.”

“I don’t remember doing that, but it sounds possible,” he answered.

“Did you get blasted towards the sun, where the radiation was pulled from your body like a giant magnet and you had to stop by Mars on the way back to Earth for oxygen so that you could make it home?” Lois asked desperately. He wasn’t the only one who wanted to know what had caused his amnesia. “But the oxygen level on Mars was so low that it caused brain damage to some of your memories?”

Brain damage? He smiled at his wife. Clark really didn’t know, but brain damage would explain a lot. “If I say that one is correct — even though Mars is on the other side of us from the Sun — can I use the same excuse every time I do or say something you consider dense?”

Lois shot him a sour expression.

Clark sighed. He had thought not. It was a tempting excuse though. *Honey, you can’t blame me for forgetting your birthday. I’ve got Martian brain damage.* His eyes went wide as another thought occurred to him. He scratched his jaw, going for casual nonchalance. “Ah... By the way, Lois, when is your birthday?”

“You didn’t take a peek at my birth certificate?” Lois did casual much better than he did.

“I was little distracted because the most beautiful woman in the world was begging me to marry her,” he replied, taking hold of her hand across the dining table.

She tapped her pen against her notepad. “You do realize that you canceled out the ‘beautiful’ in that sentence by adding the ‘begging,’ right?”

He shot her a grin. “Martian brain damage?”

She rolled her eyes. “I’ll give you a hint. I’m a Libra.”

The blood drained from his face. They were already ten days into Libra. He gulped. “Lois?”

Lois looked down at her fingernails. “What would you do if I told you my birthday was on September 23rd?”

That was the day they got married. “Then I’d say you had yourself one terrific birthday. But that’s *not* your birthday.”

“No?” She batted her eyelashes at him.

Clark stood up and walked over to the desk. One quick x-ray scan and he located the document they had just discussed. He

sighed with relief before turning back around. “October 6th?”

“Cheater,” she accurately accused him.

He crossed his arms and pressed his lips together. “Your birthday is this coming Thursday and you weren’t planning on mentioning it to me, were you? You were just going to let it come and then get all pissy when I didn’t remember or hadn’t thought to ask... Lo-is! Do we really need to play these sorts of games?”

She looked down at the floor and at her foot rocking back and forth. “No. You’re right. I should have told you it was coming up.”

“Thank you.” Then he flashed her a grin. “When is *my* birthday, by the way?”

Lois threw up her hands, standing up. “How in the hell should I know? Krypton doesn’t have the same calendar as us.”

“Touché. How about, on which day do my parents celebrate Clark’s birth?”

She walked up to him, wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head on his chest. “Every single day of the year. Just like me.”

“Nice save,” he responded, kissing the top of her head.

“Thank you. I thought so too.”

Clark tilted her chin up and lightly kissed her lips. “Why don’t you go take a shower and I’ll dash out and get us some breakfast?”

Lois threw him a big pout and batted her eyelashes. “All by myself?”

“Take a long shower and I’ll be back before you get out,” he replied with another kiss to her lips. “Trust me, I’ll be back.”

She smiled, unfastening her robe and letting slide down her arms to her hands, so that she walked to the bathroom naked. “Don’t worry, I know that.”

Inside the bathroom, Lois hung up her robe on the hook on the back of the door and reached inside her shower stall to turn on the water. When the water was at the correct temperature, she stepped inside and shut the door. She had been standing in the water just long enough to get herself and her hair wet when a pair of muscular arms snaked around her waist.

“That was fast,” she told him, turning around to give him a kiss. “Even for you.”

“That’s because I didn’t go for breakfast,” he admitted.

Lois grinned to herself.

Yep, totally irresistible. Lois — 1395, Clark — 5.

“Honey,” he murmured, deepening their kiss. “Do you remember me having my glasses on when we returned from the beach last night?”

Oh, darn. Stuck at home without his secret identity disguise. What shall you do?

Sunday — Late Afternoon

Clark watched as Lois opened the front door to the apartment and left it open as she carried a bowl of marinated chicken pieces out to the grill. He took one last x-ray glance around the whole courtyard. Clear.

Using his super speed, he blasted himself out of the apartment and into the sky. He zipped down to Langosta to see if he could find his old dark-framed glasses on the beach.

Between Nunk and a poolful of kids, he had been trapped inside all day. Lois had accused him of being paranoid. Actually, she had said “chicken,” but then claimed to be talking about dinner.

Maybe he was. She was right; he could have just put on a baseball cap and averted his face until he reached that alley two blocks away. But what if there had been a tabloid photographer *outside* the front door of the building who got a shot of him without his glasses? His new life with Lois was too important to risk it.

Clark hadn't realized how dependent he had become on those frames since becoming Superman. Since before then, in fact. He sighed.

Superman landed on the beach, happy that it was still as deserted as it had been the previous night. It looked completely different in the light of day. He almost couldn't believe he and Lois had made love on the sand.

It was almost laughable. He would take risks to make love with his wife, but he wouldn't take any about being seen without his glasses. Only, he wasn't laughing. It had been twice now he had been caught without his "disguise." He was glad his wife had thought enough ahead to convince him to get a new pair while they were in Niagara.

Clark took one look and then another, trying to remember where on the beach they had been when Lois had pulled off his shirt. Over by the big rocks. He x-rayed the area and finally found the glasses, half-buried in the wet sand. One of the lenses broken. Terrific. He only hoped Lucy hadn't forgotten to bring his new pair.

Superman picked up the glasses and took off into the air. The frames still looked okay. If he just replaced the lenses, these could work as his backup pair. He was thinking that if he made it through a whole pay cycle at the Daily Planet, he would treat himself to several more backups. *If* they had any funds left after paying the first and last month's rent, plus a security deposit, on a new apartment.

He hovered above the courtyard and with a smile watched as his wife fumbled about trying to light the charcoal barbecue by the pool.

"Do you need a hand?" he asked, landing softly behind her.

Lois jumped, spilling her box of matches.

"Thank you, Superman," she replied.

To Lucy and Jimmy — sitting nearby — her remark might have seemed sincere. But Clark caught her hint of sarcasm.

Lois stepped away from the grill and started to pick up the fallen matches.

Superman rearranged the charcoal to the correct position and had it started two seconds later. Thank you, heat vision.

His wife glanced up from where she was on her hands and knees picking up matchsticks. "Did you just stop by to rescue a damsel in distress, Superman, or did you come for chicken?"

"I understand Clark had some follow-up questions about Nightfall," Superman explained, sticking to the script he and Lois had come up with for this farce in front of her sister and their friend. It was true, he did have more questions about Nightfall. Unfortunately, he still didn't have any answers.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Superman, Clark stepped out to pick up the fixings for s'mores. He should be back soon." Lois picked up the last match and stuck it back in the box. "You're welcome to wait." She stood up. "You've met Jimmy, of course."

Superman nodded at him. And Jimmy grinned at being remembered.

"And this is my sister Lucy," Lois said, indicating the slack-jawed brunette standing next to Jimmy. He remembered her well from their lunch in the park the other day.

"Nice to meet you," replied Superman with another nod. He avoided shaking hands as Superman whenever possible.

"So, you took Lois on a date to Costa Rica, huh?" said Lucy, her awe suddenly disappearing. "She must have been putty in your hands."

Superman tried hard not to change his facial expression, but he couldn't avoid the discomfort flashing across his face. How could Lois have told her sister about last night?

"It wasn't a date," Lois jumped in, correcting her sister. "It was an interview."

Oh, right. The *first* time they had gone to the beach. "I don't date," was all Superman could think to say. "I don't want to make

any woman a target for criminals." So, he married her instead.

"Pity," mumbled Lucy.

Jimmy shot his possible girlfriend a disturbed look. "And you wouldn't do that to CK," he defended Superman, even though Clark heard a hint of uncertainty to his friend's tone.

"Clark knew where we were the entire time," Lois told him.

"I'm sure Lois would prefer an hour on the beach with her husband to an hour with me," Superman said innocently.

Lois started coughing on her sip of lemonade just the same. When she got herself under control, his wife avoided his eye and said, "That sounds nice. Maybe for our first anniversary, Perry will give Clark and me a few days off for a trip south."

Oooh. A whole weekend at the beach with Lois. Superman raised a hand to his mouth to cover his smile.

"Oh, Lois! Clark's glasses!" Lucy remembered out of the blue before taking them from of her purse and handing them to Lois. "Gosh, I hope he doesn't have any trouble driving without his glasses."

"He has his old pair," Lois explained with a glance at Superman. "But they were giving him headaches."

His wife, more like it, thought Clark. She never liked the black frames. Or, maybe she meant that losing them was causing him headaches. That was certainly true. "Clark is near-sighted, so I'm sure I won't be cleaning up any extra traffic accidents. But I can take those over to him at the store, if it would make you feel better," Superman suggested and, on cue, Lois handed him the glasses.

Just having a usable disguise in his hand again untied the knot in his stomach he had been fighting all day. As he was about to take to the air he heard the sound of a fire alarm.

"Jimmy, do you have your camera with you?" Superman inquired, hovering above the courtyard.

"Right here," Jimmy said, pulling up his camera bag from beside his chair. "I almost forgot. I should get those action shots you promised me. Thanks, Superman. Perry would can me if I missed the opportunity twice."

"I'm heading to a fire, would you like a lift?"

"Would I ever!" gushed Jimmy as Superman swooped him up in the cradle-hold he used for Lois.

They hadn't been gone from the courtyard but a few seconds when Jimmy spoke up. "Do you always carry people like this, Superman?"

"Usually, Jimmy. Why?" the man in blue responded.

"Even Clark?" Jimmy tentatively probed, the discomfort in his voice shining through.

"Would you rather I didn't carry you like this?" Superman set Jimmy down half a block from the smoking building. Clark could understand Jimmy's point. He probably wouldn't want to be carried in this manner by another man either. Next time, he would use the hold he used for his father, in which he stood behind and to the side of him and held onto him across the chest.

"Never mind. It's not important," Jimmy stated, wiping the issue from the sky. He pulled his camera out and jogged towards the fire as Superman disappeared in front of him in a blur.

Superman rescued the five people from inside the burning building and then went to stand outside with the crowd. He didn't want the fire department to feel like he was usurping their duties. He had told the Fire Chief that when he had officially helped at his first fire. He would do search and rescue and only help with putting out fires when it became too dangerous for regular firefighters or when asked. That way the firefighters could concentrate on the fires without being distracted by searching for possible victims.

A blonde woman pushed through the crowd and came to a stop next to him as they watched the firefighters working. She slid her hand over his shoulder and pressed a kiss to his lips. "For old time's sake."

Superman took a step away from her, removing her hand from his chest. “There were no old times, Ms. King.”

“Can’t blame a girl for trying,” Linda said with a giggle.

“I would appreciate it if you would please refrain from taking such liberties with me, Ms. King. I am not interested in you in that way,” he told her in no uncertain terms.

Linda pressed her lips together. “Patched things up with the Missus then, Charlie?”

He raised a brow, but was interrupted from responding by a hysterical woman who approached him. “Superman! Please! Fluffy! Fluffy is still inside. Please, Superman. Please!”

He nodded to her and jogged back into the building.

Superman could hear Linda outside as he searched for the missing pet. The reporter had gasped and then started screaming, “Charlie! No! That’s a burning building! You’ll be killed. You stupid numbskull! You’re *not* Superman!”

He found the missing puffy white miniature poodle “Fluffy” scratching on a door to an apartment and set the dog outside, where he watched it run to its owner. He hovered above the apartment house and observed Linda with interest from within the smoke.

“See, your dog was outside the whole time! And now... Charlie...” Linda yelled at the dog’s owner. “Oh, God, Charlie!”

The reporter, who had humiliated his wife, was quickly becoming a frantic mess. If he was ever allowed to mention Linda King’s name in his wife’s presence, he hoped it would be during another debate about everyone having a little good inside them. Even Linda had a soft spot for the poor, delusional Charlie King. But it was probably best not to mention Charlie’s friendship with the *Metropolis Star* reporter to his wife.

Linda ran to a fireman and grabbed his arm. “Superman ran into the building. He’s going to be killed. You must save him!”

Clark chuckled. He watched as the fireman shrugged Linda off his arm and looked at the reporter with concern. “Superman can handle himself, Miss,” the fireman told her.

“But he thinks he’s invulnerable,” she wailed at him.

“Ms. King,” said Jimmy from beside her, where he had been talking to witness. “Superman *is* invulnerable.”

“But that wasn’t Superman, you stupid pup. Superman’s dead. That was an impersonator who thinks he’s Superman,” Linda shrieked at the photographer.

Clark decided he better intercede before Linda told Jimmy about the amnesiac Superman she met a few days previously. He landed nearby and jogged up, dressed as Clark Kent. “Hi, Jimmy. Superman said he brought you here. Did you get a shot of him flying up through the smoke?”

“Hey, CK. No, I missed that shot. That sounds cool though,” replied Jimmy.

Linda King stood stiffly next to them, her eyes large with shell shock. “That couldn’t... it wasn’t Superman,” she stammered.

“It was,” Jimmy informed her, lifting up his camera. “And the Daily Planet has the photos to prove it.”

“But that couldn’t be...” Linda argued. “The *real* Superman wouldn’t...”

Clark resisted smiling as he watched Linda realize that it was the *real* Superman — not the married Superman impersonator — who had rebuffed her advances. “I don’t believe we’ve met. I’m Clark Kent, reporter for the Daily Planet,” he said, holding out his hand. “I understand you went to college with Lois.”

Linda’s jaw fell open, ignoring his hand. “No way! *You’re* Lois’s boyfriend? *You?* And the Ice Queen? Never!”

“Thank you, I think.” He smiled sheepishly. “And I would appreciate it if you would not speak about my wife in that manner, Ms. King.” He turned away from her and back to Jimmy.

Before he could suggest to his friend that they head back to the barbecue, Linda started ranting again. “*Wife!* You *married*

Lois Lane? Are you nuts? The woman is a deadly killer! She murdered her first boyfriend!”

Jimmy’s looked at Linda with concern.

“Stop throwing around false accusations about my wife, Ms. King.” Clark gazed at the blonde reporter intensely and then his expression softened to pity with a shake of his head. “Come on, Jimmy. I’ve got everything I need here.”

“Me, too,” agreed Jimmy and they walked off.

Linda continued to yell at them.

“What’s the matter with her?” murmured Jimmy. “She’s psycho. No wonder Lois hates her so much.”

“Probably best not to mention this to Lois,” said Clark. His wife would not be happy to hear of him bumping into her old foe. Especially with his lips. Again.

Jimmy nodded in agreement.

“Wait here. I’ll run and get the car,” suggested Clark, jogging off as he realized that the Jeep Cherokee was back at the apartment.

“No need, CK. I’ll walk with you,” shouted Jimmy, but the man was already gone.

“Chicken’s ready!” Lois announced as Jimmy walked in.

“My, Lois,” Jimmy said, looking at the charred black pieces of meat being removed from the grill by Clark’s wife.

“Blackened chicken. Yum.” His words didn’t seem to match his tone.

Lois shot him a glare. “The skin burned because of the sauce. It happens. Did you get any good photos of Superman?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Jimmy answered. “I ran into CK. He gave me a lift back and then remembered he forgot to pick up chocolate bars for the s’mores and went back out.”

Lois handed Jimmy and Lucy each a plate with black chicken and a scoop of pasta salad. Out of the corner of her eye Lois caught her sister grimace at Jimmy.

Jimmy smiled weakly at Lucy and broadened the smile when he turned to Lois.

Wow, Jimbo! That’s some great fake smile he has there.

“You know, Lois, thanks a lot for the...” He cleared his throat. “... food, but I should really get these negatives back to the newsroom and develop them. Scoop the Met Star for the morning edition.” He set his untouched plate down on the table.

Lois watched as Lucy gratefully followed suit. “That’s so true!” she agreed with him too enthusiastically.

“You don’t need to go,” Lois suggested to her sister. “Since Jimmy’s going to be working...”

Did your sister actually just blanch at the idea of staying?

“He’s my ride,” Lucy said, picking up her purse and backing away from Lois and the charbroiled food. “Anyway, I don’t want to be a third wheel.”

Lois pressed her lips together.

Your sister never let that stop her before.

“I’ll get you some paper plates and you can take it to go!”

Lois said, running into her apartment. By the time she returned to the courtyard, her dinner guests had mysteriously vanished. “Humph!”

A tall, thin grey-haired man turned the corner of the courtyard. “Lois! There you are! You gave me the slip earlier, but I knew you’d have to return home sometime.”

The biggest non-sex-with-her-husband-induced grin that ever graced Lois’s face now appeared.

Clark arrived back at the courtyard from the parking garage with a bag of groceries just as Lucy and Jimmy were beating a hasty retreat. “Are you guys leaving already?”

Lucy gazed at him sadly and sighed. “It’s been really nice having you as my brother-in-law, Clark. A real adventure.”

“What are you talking about?” he asked. Had he done something to upset Lois? Although, for the life of him, he couldn’t think what. Had she wanted him to take *her* to the fire instead of Jimmy? She couldn’t be that mad, otherwise he’d be hearing her swearing up a storm.

Jimmy patted Clark’s arm and shook his head. “Have you been immunized against Typhoid?”

Clark still had no idea to what Jimmy was referring.

Lucy giggled. “Good one. Pizza?”

“Definitely!” Jimmy chorused. “Sorry, CK, we’d love to invite you to join us...”

“I don’t need pizza. Lois made dinner,” he explained the obvious.

Jimmy sighed. “If you say so, CK. I recommend you plead the need to go into the Daily Planet to write up the Superman story instead.” He lowered his voice with a glance back towards the courtyard. “I did.”

Clark’s brow furrowed. “You *lied* to Lois?”

“It’s not quite a lie, CK. I do have to develop those photos...”

Yet for some reason Clark heard an unspoken “but” at the end of Jimmy’s statement.

Lucy and Jimmy each shot him another big grin.

What in the world was going on with them?

“If you want to survive into tomorrow, I recommend you do the same,” Lucy told him. “Perhaps you could convince your parents to invite you two to dinner?”

They were backing towards the exit now.

“Lois *made* dinner!” he repeated, exasperated. “Come on! It can’t be *that* bad.”

Lucy and Jimmy exchanged a look that Clark didn’t need to be telepathic to understand.

Jimmy shook his head. “We’re sorry to abandon you, CK, but... well... *we’re* not married to her. We don’t *have* to eat her food.”

Clark pressed his lips together as his so-called friend and sister-in-law left in a cloud of giggles.

“Fine!” he called to them. “More s’mores for us!”

Clark turned back towards the courtyard and literally bumped into a quickly departing Leo Nunk, who was mumbling, “No story is worth this!” He glanced up at Clark and shook his head. “Any last words?”

Not him too! Lois’s husband rolled his eyes and pushed past the man.

“Hey, it’s your own funeral, Kent!” called Nunk as he left.

Lois was sitting by the grill, her arms crossed, her lips pressed together, and her thoughts a million miles away.

Clark leaned over and kissed her cheek. “Hi, honey.”

“Hi, Clark,” Lois responded morosely. Then her tone became chipper. “Good news! I discovered a way to get rid of unwanted pests!”

Clark raised a brow, unpacking the s’more fixings from the bag. “Pests?”

“Never mind. Dinner’s ready!” she announced, handing him one of the plates from the table and a handful of silverware.

“Great! I’ve been looking forward to this all day.” He smiled at her and she basked in the glow of his words. Then he looked down at the plate. It took all his Super strength to keep his lips turned up. Sitting on his plate was an unknown cut of chicken — reportedly — blackened beyond recognition and yet, at the same time, still gelatinous. “Wow! Lois. This looks...” He couldn’t think of a single positive sounding word. *Why, oh why had Superman chosen truth as part of his credo?*

“Awful? Gut-wrenching? Or perhaps just a simple ‘burnt’?” Lois suggested.

“I was leaning closer to interesting. I’ve never seen chicken quite like this before,” he told his wife honestly.

“Really?”

Wow, Lois must be grasping for straws if she actually took that as a compliment. She had warned him that she hadn’t born with the cooking gene. *Okay, Kent, you’ve got to eat this. As her husband you can’t be the last nail in this coffin. A burial! Yes, that was exactly what this meal needed,* Clark told himself.

He gazed at his wife lovingly and looked back down at the plate in his hand. He tilted down his glasses and x-rayed his food. Yep, still raw on the inside. Quickly, he heat zapped both of their plates so the food at least it wouldn’t be bloody or even pink.

“The pasta salad looks delicious,” he said as Lois sat down after bringing him a glass of lemonade.

Lois glanced at him and winked. “Perhaps we should save it for last.”

He winked back, picking up his chicken. “We’ve got s’mores for dessert.”

“Ooooh. Chocolate.” His wife grinned and then it faltered, as she watched his chicken go up to his lips.

Clark did a silent prayer thanking God for his invulnerability and took a bite. “Not bad.” Bad was too nice a word for how this chicken tasted. Horrible was a more accurate description. Horrendous and nauseating would work as well.

Lois glowed in his ‘praise’ and actually brought her own chicken up to her own lips. A second later she was spitting it back onto her plate. “Not bad?” she growled at him. “How in the world is this not the worst chicken ever cooked?”

“Well, technically...” Clark’s voice faded as he stopped himself from telling her that he had actually finished the cooking of the chicken with his heat vision.

“Have you ever had worse chicken?” Lois crossed her arms.

Clark thought about that, searching his memory for a nastier meal and coming up short. “No, but I might not have all my memories back yet,” he answered hopefully.

Lois slapped his arm and then started laughing. “Try the pasta salad. It’s edible. I’ve made it before.”

He took a bite and his taste buds danced for joy. He didn’t know if it was because the pasta salad was actually good or if it was just that, in comparison to the chicken, anything would taste good. “Tasty!”

His wife kissed his lips. “No tiptoeing around that word.”

“I...” Well, okay, he had to admit he had tiptoed around the truth when describing the chicken. “... love you.”

She smiled and grabbed the chicken off his plate, dumping it onto a third uneaten plate of food, which she carried to the trash. “Of course, you do, Clark.” She returned and wrapped her arms around his neck from behind, kissing his cheek. “Everyone else bolted. You remained to face the wrath of Lois.” She added an eerie waver to her voice as she described her anger. “I don’t know why everyone else thought that I’d get mad because they didn’t like my chicken.”

Clark didn’t think it had anything to do with her anger, but more they wanted to put as much distance between themselves and the chicken as they could. He refrained from saying so. He *had* learned a thing or two since meeting Lois Lane... actually, being with Lois had been the best crash course on women he could ever take. And he had finally found something worse tasting than his feet to stick in his mouth.

Monday Morning

Lois handed Clark her coffee as they stepped into the elevator at the Daily Planet. Then she used both hands to straighten his tie. It was a crazy tie. Creative. Wacky. Colorful. Unique.

Just like your husband.

She wouldn’t change it, if he let her. He looked good in a suit.

“Nervous?” Lois whispered, kissing his lips lightly. Clark tasted a bit like the cake donut he was eating. They had gotten a late start and had grabbed breakfast on the go.

Well, it hadn't been me who had suggested an early morning romp through the tulips.

"No. I can do this. If I can save the world, I can piece together a couple of words to create a readable story," he replied, returning her kiss.

Oh, wait. Maybe it was me. Sorry.

Lois licked the powdered sugar off his lips and let her briefcase strap slide off her shoulder to the floor of the elevator. "I liked your final take on the Nightfall story. I just hope Perry won't kill us for not turning it in sooner."

Actually, it was definitely me. And I'm not sorry. Not sorry in the least.

"I *did* lose my memory for a couple of days," he reminded Lois, leaning her against the wall of the elevator and kissing down her neck. "He can't fault me for that, can he?"

Perry can do whatever he damn well pleases. He's your boss. Now, is this what you two want to be doing during what could well be the last minute of privacy you get until you go home this evening?

Lois moaned and ran her fingers through Clark's hair. Suddenly, his hands were empty and she was being thoroughly kissed as he lifted her against the side of the elevator. Her legs wrapped around him and she could feel him pressed against her. It was as if time were standing still as she felt him explore every inch of her body. The parts that were covered with clothing were caressed by his hands. The parts that weren't, by his tongue.

The parts above the waist, you mean, Lois. It's not like Clark licked your legs in the elevator. Much.

His hands glided up her legs, under her skirt, and up...

Up... up... and away...

Clark's mouth came back to hers as the elevator finally chimed that they had reached the correct floor. Lois felt her feet return to the ground as a whirlwind straightened her clothing and hair, hung her briefcase back on her shoulder, and placed another light kiss on her lips.

Lois smiled at Clark and straightened his tie again. He held up her coffee cup, which now had what remained of his donut resting on top. The doors to the elevator opened and their first full day as reporters for the Daily Planet began.

The Epilogue

Several days before Halloween — Evening

"So," Lois said, peering into the bedroom where Clark was lying on the bed still dressed in his business suit, staring up at the ceiling. "Let me get this straight, Mr. Glass-Half-Empty. You think that you *only* have bad luck?"

Clark sighed. "Yes, sometimes it seems the Fates have deemed it so."

She pressed her lips together and leaned against the doorway. "And *this* counted as good luck?"

He was by her side holding her hands a moment later. "No. Never, Lois. That's not what I meant at all."

"So, it was bad luck?"

"I shouldn't have said anything. What I think about it really doesn't matter, now does it? It doesn't change the facts about what happened... or didn't happen, as the case may be," he said, kissing her cheek. "Let's forget about it."

Clark had been in a mood for the last two weeks. Depressed. Dejected. And in total denial of those feelings.

"No, I don't think so. This is something we need to discuss. Firstly, let's review your life... in terms of your good luck versus bad luck," she said, as he slumped back to the bed. "In the past two months, you have become accepted and beloved for who you are by the entire world..."

"Lo-is!" he groaned.

"Good luck or bad luck, Clark?" she pressed on.

"Not the *entire* world," he stated with a roll of his eyes.

Lois crossed her arms.

"Good luck, I guess."

"You got and excel at your dream job at the Daily Planet. Good luck or bad luck?" she asked.

"Good luck. But Lois..." Clark started to whine and changed his tone to a retort. "I got fired from two jobs! Bad luck!"

"You and your parents are no longer under the thumb of Lex Luthor and Lexco." Lois raised an inquiring brow.

He sighed. "Bad luck that Luthor kidnapped you and then died. Otherwise, good luck. But my parents will be living back in Smallville. It's so far away..." His voice went soft.

Lois sat down next to him on the bed. She knew he would miss his parents on a daily basis now that they would no longer be living in the same city as him. Martha and Jonathan were more than ready, and actually thrilled, to consider Metropolis in their rearview mirror. MJ's Café in Smallville was scheduled to open in the New Year.

Two points, Lois, for calling it like you saw it!

"Honey, it takes you two seconds to fly out to Smallville. Granted, my folks live there too, so luck-wise, it might be a wash."

Clark gave her a half-hearted smile. "I bet your father was thrilled by the news."

"There wasn't any *news* to report to them, Clark. And stop thinking that my father hates you. He doesn't. In fact, he's happy to still be alive and not living on a charcoal briquette. So, you earned some bonus points with him during that whole Nightfall incident." Lois nudged his arm. "Good luck?"

"It took me *two* tries to save the planet, Lois. Bad luck!"

He still saved the planet!

Lois harrumphed. "You met and married your fantasy woman. Good luck or bad luck, Clark?"

"Good luck. But then again, I was a total jealous idiot for the entire time we dated, so bad luck as well." She saw him look at her out of the corner of his eye. "And you aren't my fantasy woman, Lois. Dream woman perhaps, but you're not quite kinky enough for my fantasies." He shot her a grin to show her he was teasing.

We'll just have to see about that, Clark Kent.

Lois glowered at him as her tongue crossed her front teeth. "Not funny, Clark."

He reached up, cupped her jaw in his palm, and kissed her. "Just joking."

Humph!

"And you got rid of that green-eyed monster by making love to a beautiful woman." Lois shrugged. "Good luck or bad luck?"

"Losing my virginity to said beautiful woman — who also happened to be my wife — made me the luckiest man in the world." He kissed her again. "Losing my memories and becoming re-infected by said monster, horrible insane luck."

Lois licked her lips. "I don't know about that. Losing your memories *did* gain you some new skills. I've been considering that very lucky indeed." She wiggled her eyebrows.

"You picked up some new skills as well, wife," he said, moving closer to her. His hand coasted down her neck to her shoulder and then down her arm to her hand, which was sitting on her lap. Then he snaked his arm around her waist and pulled her to him. "You weren't the only lucky one in that scenario."

"We moved out of my basement apartment that you hated into this one. You turned this trash heap into a home. The paparazzi don't follow us anymore." She laughed, thinking back to her barbecue fiasco. "Not after I offered Nunk some of my delicious chicken."

Now, you only cook using your fingers on the telephone keypad. Excellent luck!

He joined her laughter. "Who knew your cooking skills were actually good for something?"

She slapped him playfully on the arm. Then her arm stayed on his as she felt his muscles.

Mmmm. Lois, how about we get this husband of yours undressed a bit? He's wearing too many clothes.

"So, in the grand scheme of things, you see there is no such thing as good luck or bad luck," she said, getting to the heart of her argument. "Things happen. Sometimes good. Sometimes bad. It wasn't the right time for us anyway. The one thing I can say for certain about you... when you fail at something, you try and try again until you get it right."

"*Oh?* It was my sperm's fault for not making you pregnant after we made love... what? Four times?... without precautions on our honeymoon?" This time the annoyed expression was on his face.

So, his sperm have no sense of direction. Big deal. There are worse things in life. Next time, I'll be better prepared.

Lois gasped. Did her inner thoughts just say what she thought they did?

Me? No. Me say nothing! How about we get that husband into that costume of his?

"What?" Clark asked her with a perplexed expression.

She shook her head. "Nothing. Just a strange thought crossed my mind." Lois's hands moved to his tie, loosening the knot.

"Maybe it had to do with you being out in space, lowering your sperm count or something. Next time..." Oh, God! Had she really said that?

Yep!

"When we're ready," she amended. "I'm sure you'll have no trouble whatsoever, but until then..." She tugged on his tie, bringing his lips to hers. "We can keep in shape by practicing."

"Practicing, huh?" A genuine smile graced his lips before she pushed him away.

"But first get undressed," Lois commanded, jumping off the bed.

"Isn't that how it's usually done, Lois?" Clark inquired about his wife's shift in priorities as he watched her open a cabinet in their wardrobe.

"I want you to try on the Halloween costume I got for you and make sure it fits," she said, tossing him a white clothing box.

Clark rolled his eyes. What happened to making love? He spun out of his business suit and hung it on a hanger. "Lois, do we *have* to go? Perry would understand. I could say I had an emergency or something," he suggested hopefully. "You know how much I hate wearing costumes."

Lois stood up, holding a second white clothing box in her arms, and looked him up and down. "Right. No costumes for you."

He glanced down at his blue suit he was still wearing. He crossed his arms and shot her a pressed lipped glare. "This isn't a 'costume', Lois. It's a 'uniform'."

"To-mah-to. To-may-to. Anyway, the Daily Planet party is *mandatory*. Perry said so. So..." Lois pointed up to the loft. "Why don't you change up there?"

Clark looked with interest at her and then down at her box. "Why?" he asked slowly.

She hugged her box to her chest. "It's a surprise. Go! And no peeking!" Lois practically ran into the bathroom.

Clark laughed, more curious than ever at what might be inside *her* box. But he could use his well-honed skill of patience to wait a few minutes.

"You don't need to put it on over your blue suit, if you don't want to..." Lois called from behind the bathroom door.

He raised a brow at that suggestion. With a shrug, Clark spun out of his blue suit and down to his briefs, hanging his suit up in the closet. Then he floated up to the loft to change into his costume. Why he needed to be up in the loft to change when he

could just spin into the costume...? He shrugged. Lois hadn't mentioned ordering costumes for them. He had just hoped if he had ignored the memo, they could get out of the party. Obviously not.

Clark flipped open the white box with dread. With relief, he looked at the contents. "What am I supposed to be?" he called down to his wife.

"You're a smart man, Clark. You figure it out." Her heard her titter and then start to swear. "Dammit, Clark! They gave me the wrong costume." She sighed. "They promised me that this..." The laughter returned to her voice. "Oh, well, Wells had said... I guess fate is fate."

"*What?*" Clark asked, his inquisitiveness was burning now. He had heard some kind of tinkling noise downstairs, but couldn't place the sound.

"Don't peek, cowboy."

He glanced back down at the box. Cowboy? Black vest, beige shirt. Oh, yeah, that made sense. Sort-of. Was Lois dressing up at a cowgirl? Some sort of animal? Clark's imagination was going wild with possibilities. He pulled on the shirt and vest and then pulled out the dark navy pants with maroon trim down the side. Didn't cowboys wear jeans? At the bottom of a box was a pair of knee high black boots. Definitely not the cowboy boots he expected, more like English riding boots. Maybe he wasn't a cowboy after all. Maybe it was more like post Civil War cowboy? A ranger?

He leapt down to their bedroom. "Okay. I'm dressed."

Reluctantly, the bathroom door opened and Lois wearing... her calf-length Macintosh raincoat. So, she was embarrassed by her costume. Well, she *had* said they had made a mistake. She had tied up her hair so that her neck was exposed. So far, he liked it. She should show off that beautiful neck of hers more often.

Lois looked him up and down and a huge smile appeared on her lips. "Nice."

He gazed down at the costume with skepticism, still not sure what exactly he was supposed to be. "Lois, are you sure this is a cowboy costume?" he asked.

She chuckled and walked up to him. "Let's just fix a few things." She bit her lip as she removed his glasses, setting them on the table next to their bed. Then she went back to the cabinet where she had removed the costume boxes and brought out a holster.

Okay, that would make him more of a cowboy... but...

Lois fastened the belt around his hips and then his thigh. "Oh, yes, that's better."

Clark took the gun out of his holster and looked at it. "Lois, this isn't a pistol. It's a..." His eyes went wide as he turned and looked at himself in the bedroom mirror. "A... blaster!"

"Uh-huh." She wrapped her arms around him. "My very own space cowboy."

If he was... Clark's heart began to race. "Lois, do I get to see your costume now?"

Lois stepped away and a pout emerged. "No."

"Lo-is?"

"Well, okay, but they messed up and gave me the wrong costume, so it doesn't match yours..." she warned him.

"You were going to be Han Solo, too?" He winked. "Let me guess! C-3PO?"

She swatted at him. "Ha-ha."

He tilted his head and saw her bare ankles. "No fuzzy legs, so we can scratch Chewbacca off the list."

She crossed her arms over her chest and he heard the tinkling noise again.

"Lois, if you don't open that coat, I'm going to peek..."

"Fine!" Lois pressed her lips together. "Cheater." She opened her coat and exposed... Clark swallowed. Well, there was still a gold bikini, but that was where the similarities ended. Instead of

maroon scarves, Lois was draped in teal blue scarves. She dumped her coat over a chair. “It was supposed to be Princess Leia’s gold bikini, but... *no!* they had to go and mess...”

Clark cleared his throat. “No, this is fine.”

Lois looked down at herself and then at their full-length mirror. “Really? It’s a harem costume. And when I walk or move my hips...” She demonstrated and there was that tinkling noise again as the hanging coins and gold chains on her costume jostled together. She turned back to Clark and wiggled her hips. “I could always do the dance of the seven veils.”

He nodded enthusiastically.

She laughed. “Honestly?”

Clark nodded again as she pulled off one of the scarves and exposed most of her chest, except for the little bit still covered by the gold bikini.

She started to dance, jingling her hips and swaying her shoulders. She walked over to him, looking at him through the blue scarf.

“Lois, remember when I said that you were only my dream woman, not my fantasy woman?” Clark asked her, his voice sounding husky even to his own ears.

She batted her eyelashes innocently through a slit cut in the scarf. “Uh-huh.”

“I lied.”

Lois threw the scarf up into the air and he caught it. Then she turned around slowly, gyrating her hips as her hands and arms moved gracefully through the air. A smile grew on her lips. “Me, too,” she admitted.

She too, what? *Lied?* About what?

“These aren’t our Halloween costumes.”

Clark gulped as he fell into the chair. Did she really expect him to concentrate on what she was saying as she danced like that?

She bounced her eyebrows at him with delight, pulling another scarf off from her costume. Lois wrapped the scarf around his neck as she bent over to kiss him. “I hear that green is the new blue.”

What?! Clark had no idea what she was talking about.

Lois winked at him. “Peter.”

THE END

Disclaimer: I do not own these wonderful, sexy, and funny characters. I borrowed them from Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. I do not own Lois’s inner voice, whom I’ve nick-named Ivy, Nymph of Mischief; I borrowed Lynn S.M.’s muse from *With Apologies to Female Hawk* and she just won’t leave. (I mean, would you if you knew you could go on a honeymoon with Lois and Clark and could see and feel everything Lois does?) I borrow many lines of dialogue and many plot points from Bryce Zabel’s beautifully written and very entertaining episode: “All Shook Up” from the above-referenced television show. I do not claim to own them, but I have taken them and put them into a blender and come up with my own concoction. I would like to thank all the above-referenced writers, including Tony Blake and Paul Jackson whom I quote directly, for their inspiration.

I also borrowed a theme or two from Larry Niven’s article: *Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex. Niagara* (1953) is a film directed by Henry Hathaway, starring Marilyn Monroe and Joseph Cotton. The image Lois has of the dead Superman comes from Dan Jurkens’s artwork in *Death of Superman* (1992). Jedi Knights, Han Solo, Chewbacca, C-3PO, and Princess Leia are all borrowed from George Lucas’s *Star Wars* films. Princess Leia’s gold bikini is from *Return of the Jedi* (1983), a movie written by George Lucas and Lawrence Kasdan. The “Silly Putty” name is a

trademark of Crayola, LLC. Peter Pan is a character created by J.M. Barrie from the play of the same name. “Thomas Guide” is a street atlas published by Thomas Bros. Maps.

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