The French Connection: Lois Returns

By Mozartmaid <mozartmaid@gmail.com>

Rated: G

Submitted: April 2015

Summary: What would have happened if Lois had really run off with Dr. Deter to the South of France?

Story Size: 13,334 words (73Kb as text)

***

Part 1

Lois remembered flying… her hair caught up in the breeze, and strong arms which held her close. Brown eyes, full of love, gazed into hers.

She remembered danger, too. And that somehow, she was always rescued by Superman.

And his kiss… it reminded her of something else, too. Something…about Clark?

"*I'm here, Lois! I'm here." She recollected that voice as well, the comfort of it.*

"*I remember…" she said vaguely, as images of Superman like wispy ghosts floated in her memory.*

"*What?" Clark had asked cautiously. Almost hopeful.*

"*Superman," Lois smiled. "Saving me. A lot," she added in some alarm.*

Clark grinned back at her, warming her. "It's been known to happen. Anything else?"

She closed her eyes, trying to rein in those elusive memories. "Kissing me. Is he in love with me, too?"

"*Well, it's kind of complicated," Clark hedged, making her uncertain.*

He suddenly looked up, and then down at her with regret. "I have to go."

"*You're always leaving," she commented, as if it were an observation, not a question.*

"*And I always come back," he promised, and she believed him. Clark stood up, waving down Jimmy. "Jimmy! Don't let her out of your sight!"*

***

Lois slowly opened her eyes, looking out of the plane into the clouds, set off by the golden afternoon sun. Her dream had left her with an unsettled feeling. She was making the right decision, right?

Max did say he loved her and she was making progress. This trip would do her memory good… and maybe she could sort out the confusions of her heart.

She glanced over at Max. He was handsome, and he had certainly given her a life raft in this sea of confusion… but her thoughts kept drifting to Clark.

And Superman… those strains of memory were like a song that she almost remembered the melody to, but couldn't quite find the key.

Lois sighed, leaning back in her seat as they were getting ready to land. What did it matter? Spending some time in France with a man who loved her – this had to be it. This had to make all those elusive memories come to the fore and coalesce into a picture she recognized.

She had to believe that.

***

The warm sunshine hit Lois in the face as soon as they stepped out of the train station in Marseille. She could hear the distant cry of seagulls and the sea breeze whirling through the bustling streets. Bright sandstone surrounded her, and she felt calm… calmer than with all the confusing distractions she had dealt with in Metropolis.

The face of Clark Kent popped in her mind, giving her stomach an unsettling lurch, although she didn't know why. He had seemed like a nice guy. There was something niggling in her brain about him, but she just couldn't—

"We're here, Lois," Max Deter said affably, gesturing to a taxi. "We'll be in our villa in a matter of moments, and then you can soak up all the sunshine that your heart desires."

Lois smiled vacuously, and settled herself into the taxi. She stared out the window as they drove through the city. It was beautiful here… and glimpses of the crystalline blue water were like diamonds, glinting in the sun. She sighed as she watched the scenery go by. This place should do it… it would help her get her memories back, she was certain.

"Everything all right?" Max asked solicitously.

"Oh, yes. Everything's fine," she answered brightly, that slightly uncomfortable feeling creeping into her chest again. It was just that she felt so uncertain… oh, not about Max. He genuinely seemed to care for her and he was determined to help her make a full recovery. It was just, she felt so lost, with so many memories simply—gone.

And she couldn't help but be haunted by another pair of brown eyes set behind a pair of glasses that seemed to know more about her than he had been willing to say…

***

"They are *gone*?!" Clark echoed when the secretary told him that Lois and Deter had left.

"Yes, Deter sometimes takes his patients to the South of France. He has a lovely villa—"

Clark spun around on his heel and left the hospital. If there weren't people around, he would be tempted to spin out of his street clothes and into the Suit – and head straight towards the South of France.

As it were, he calmly left the building, trying to wrap his mind around how everything had just gotten so—complicated. He wondered if he should have just gone against Deter's advice and told Lois everything. Then maybe she wouldn't have left, wouldn't have gone so far away…

But he had worried about risking traumatizing her by telling her the full truth. Who knows what he had jeopardized by telling her he loved her…

But still… how could Lois have left with Deter? To another country? Was there really nothing of her life here that she remembered? Nothing that felt familiar enough to make her second- guess leaving her home?

Clark sighed, shoving his hands in his pants pockets. She obviously hadn't remembered him…

He wanted Lois back. But he also wanted her happy and didn't want her back under duress. If her memories were still missing, then him showing up there as Superman to take her home would only stress her out, wouldn't it?

Clark had to believe that maybe a bit of time away *would* help. He had to believe that. Otherwise, the happiness that had been almost theirs would be gone forever.

***

The villa was a warm, yellow sandstone, set off by a cloudless cerulean blue sky. Red roses lined the walls of the villa, a crimson burst of bold color against the soft yellow walls. Lois shielded her eyes as she got out of the car.

"Wow. This place is beautiful."

Deter gave her a warm smile, gently leading her into the house. “This way, Lois. We’ll get you settled in.”

Inside, he led her up the white-washed wooden stairs to a small room. The bed had a cheery cover on it, and fresh yellow roses sat on the bedside table. She stared at the roses, a memory stirring in her brain that was just out of reach…

“What do yellow roses mean?” she asked, feeling like it was an echo to something she had asked a long time ago.

“Friendship, I think,” Deter said uninterestedly, setting her suitcase next to the door. “I’ll let you get settled. Dinner will be served in the garden at six thirty.”

“Okay, thanks,” she said, turning once more to the roses as Deter shut the door. Lois thought someone had given her yellow roses once, but no matter how much she stared at the vase, nothing more came back to her.

She sat on the bed, letting out a sigh of frustration, wondering if she’d ever get her memory back. She rolled over on her side, looking out the window to the sunny day and large oak tree in the yard. Lois supposed she could imagine a sort of life here. It was indeed a beautiful place…

But was there anything to do? She couldn’t be certain, but she felt that sitting around all day in a country house wasn’t exactly her style. She had been a reporter, after all. Maybe she should go exploring.

Lois glanced at the clock on the bed stand. It was still early in the afternoon. She didn’t want to sit here all day and stare at the ceiling, wondering where her memories had gone, did she?

With a sigh, Lois sat up and put on her white Keds tennis shoes. She was in one of the most beautiful places in Europe. She should go see it.

Lois headed down the stairs, looking for Max.

“I’m in here, Lois,” he called. She followed his voice to a small study.

“I was just thinking that maybe I could explore the city a bit,” Lois said, a little irked that she felt like she had to get permission to leave the house.

“But we just got here. Aren’t you tired?” Max asked, his voice full of concern.

“Maybe… but I can always take a nap later. I just need a map and I can find my way back.”

Max shuffled through some papers on his desk and handed her a small map. “It’s just of the city center. I’ll have my driver take you to the port. Just be back by dinner.”

***

Back by dinner? What did he think she was? Sixteen?

Lois tried not to feel irritated as she rode into the city. There was something about this whole thing that seemed strange to her. And more than just being in a foreign country.

She sighed in frustration. Coming here was supposed to help her relax, so that she could remember who she was. Instead she felt irritable and confused. She pulled out the map Max had given her.

“Where would you like to be dropped off, Miss?” asked the driver.

Lois stared at the map, unsure of the French place names. But she recognized the harbor and could surely orient herself around that. “I guess at the old harbor.”

A few minutes later, she was standing on the docks, soaking up the sun and being blinded by the sparkling water. Lois started walking, not choosing any particular direction. Somehow, the docks felt familiar to her… had she ever spent time on a boat?

She sighed. “I guess that is just one more question I may never know the answer to.” Lois looked out across the water. In the distance, she could see an island, covered in sandstone cliffs. There appeared to be a building of some sort out there, and tour boats were coming from it. Lois wondered vaguely what it was, but continued walking lazily along the harbor.

Lois wasn’t sure how long she tarried along the docks, lost in thoughts as she shuffled vague memories around with tidbits she had learned during her few days back at the Planet. She had read through dozens of her old stories that Jimmy had labeled ‘BCK’ and ‘WCK’ – Before Clark Kent and With Clark Kent. Lois had been impressed by how her writing had improved with the stories she had worked on with Clark – and how so many of them had involved Superman. Those stories had intrigued her the most… she seemed to be friends with Superman, and she wondered what had made her put so much implicit trust in a man from another planet…

As Lois came towards the end of the docks, she noticed that this side of the harbor wasn’t as pretty as where she had started. No sailboats or yachts here… just simple fishing boats. She was about to turn around and head back when something caught her eye.

A rough-looking sailor was carrying a box that was covered with a canvas cloth. He set the box in the boat and called to another guy at the front of the boat.

“C’est la dernière. Nous avons jusqu’au demain soir… et puis, Monsieur Hernot nous rencontrerons au Château d’Îf… à minuit. ”

“D’accord. Demain à minuit.”

Lois somehow recognized a few words, and she wondered if she had ever taken French in her life. She knew ‘minuit’ meant midnight and ‘demain’ meant tomorrow. She also recognized Château D’Îf as the name of that fortress-like place across the harbor. Whatever latent reporter instincts she had, they suddenly kicked into high gear with this interesting information. Having a rendezvous at midnight didn’t sound like normal business…

There was something fishy going on, and Lois wanted to know what it was.

But how would she convince Max to let her chase down a story? He had seemed reluctant to let her do it while back in Metropolis. He’d be even less likely to approve of her doing it now that she was in a foreign country.

Lois glanced at her watch. She was already expected back at the villa in less than an hour… But that still left her some time to try and get a little more information on what these guys were up to…

Lois took a seat on a bench, four boats down from where she had heard the men talking. They tucked whatever they were preparing under a couple of tarps and then walked away, mumbling something inaudible in French.

Perfect, thought Lois. She waited until they were out of sight and then casually started walking towards their boat. Her heart was pounding, and yet, this felt right – like she nosed around like this all the time.

I must be crazy, she mused. Lois glanced around once more before stepping onto the boat. It was a rather small vessel, which wobbled with a swishing sound in the water. She only had to peek under that tarp…

There were at least five wooden boxes, all labeled as various rifles and guns.

Lois gasped, dropping the tarp. She stepped back onto the dock, just in time to see the two guys reappear on the other end of the dock. They started running towards her, shouting , “Que-est ce que vous faites là? Que-est ce que vous avez vu?”

She didn’t understand them, but she didn’t wait around to pull out her tourist dictionary. She started running up the port steps, right into a crowded market square. Lois only had to lose those guys, and she’d be in the clear. She dived under a stand, and then between a clothes rack and a wall of leather goods. She tossed a glance over her shoulder, still seeing the guys in pursuit behind her. As Lois ran, she had a strange urge to call out for Superman, though she knew it was laughable at this distance. There was no way he’d hear her, right?

She dived through the market, suddenly finding herself on a busy thoroughfare, full of cars and street trolleys. The guys were still chasing her, and despite her earlier reluctance, she cried out, "Superman, help!" but kept running, barely avoiding being swiped by a small car.

Lois was starting to run out of breath, but she was determined that they wouldn't catch her. She followed the street, heading back into the market, knowing a crowd was better than an open street. Once more she dodged under various tables and stalls, eventually seeing a WC sign. The guys were out of her sight for the moment, so she ducked in to the public toilets. There was a dirty glass window that she could sort of see through, and she kept an eye out for the two men. After a few moments, she saw them dash past her hiding spot, and she ducked out of the way of the little window.

One of the patrons of the facilities pushed past her to open the door, and she felt her heart lurch, afraid they'd spot her. But she didn't see either of them on the path.

Lois counted 'twenty Mississippis' and then decided she had lost them… at least, she hoped so.

She glanced at her watch, seeing it was time to meet her taxi and head back home to the villa.

Lois took one more glance around, and then made a beeline to the rendezvous point for her ride. She was more than relieved when she slipped into the backseat and headed back to the villa.

***

Clark stared at his computer screen blankly. He couldn't concentrate… in fact, he hadn't gotten much work done since he learned that Lois had followed Dr. Deter to the South of France.

As he was finding himself doing a lot lately, Clark mulled over how everything had gotten so turned upside down. He felt sick inside, wondering if it had been his fault. Had kissing Lois and telling her his feelings pushed her towards Deter? Surely she couldn't love her psychiatrist…

No, Clark knew that what he had with Lois was something special…and rare. Which is why it killed him that he had let her go… but he had always believed that when you loved someone, you let them make their own choices. *Even if they make the wrong choice?* His inner voice taunted him.

Clark sighed again, staring across the room at a chair that shouldn't be empty, feeling even more irritated – and deserted.

Suddenly, Clark heard a cry for help. But the cry gave him pause, because it wasn't his super-hearing kicking in. He heard it internally – and it sounded like Lois.

But, he knew, even with his super-hearing, he wouldn't be able to hear Lois call for help all the way in France. And while that thought sent a chill through him, he mulled over the sensation that he had—*felt* her somehow cry out for him.

Clark stood up, worried that Lois was indeed in trouble.

Would it hurt to fly to France and just check on her? If she wasn't in trouble, she never needed to know he was there…

Before Clark knew it, he was running out into the Daily Planet alley, spinning into the Suit and up into the sky. He wasn't able to work anyway and especially not while he worried over what was happening with Lois…

***

Gunrunners, mused Lois on the ride back, safely ensconced in the taxi. Those guys she had seen must be gunrunners.

Something about that felt oddly familiar – and very dangerous. But it only sent a thrill of excitement through her, something she hadn't really felt since she had lost her memory.

She knew it would be dangerous to investigate it, but she wanted desperately to confirm her suspicions by following those guys tomorrow night… Max didn't even need to know about it. But perhaps she could tell Perry. She bet the Planet would be interested in a gunrunning story…

The more Lois thought about it, the more excited she got. She'd even call Perry tonight, if she could manage it out of Max's earshot.

A part of her brain prodded at the fact that if Max was in love with her, then he should be supportive of her work as a reporter. But Lois brushed that aside. Once he saw how good she was at her job, surely he'd understand, right?

***

Max Deter climbed the steps to the villa, having picked up some last minute supplies for dinner tonight. He wanted Lois to enjoy life here, to experience all the beauty and deliciousness the South of France had to offer. He wanted her comfortable with him, too.

And he wanted her to forget her old life in Metropolis.

She was so much more interesting than many of his other patients had been. Feisty, yet intelligent. Beautiful, but not vain. He almost convinced himself that she loved him, too.

Of course he knew it was simple transference of her feelings from that annoying fiancé of hers, Clark Kent. But Lois hadn't figured it out yet, and he had gotten her out of Metropolis before she could. His whole plan had been right clever when you thought about it.

Deter paused before opening the front door, hearing Lois speaking.

"…yes, Perry, of course I'll be careful! But a gunrunning story could be just what I need to get my juices flowing again, you know? …oh, he did? Why would Clark miss me?"

Deter purposefully opened the door loudly so that Lois would end her conversation quickly. Inside, he was fuming. She wasn't supposed to be calling the Daily Planet, nor working on a story, and certainly not talking to Perry about Clark Kent!

He schooled his features, smiling pleasantly just as Lois hung up the phone.

"Lois, I thought I explained to you that you needed a complete fresh start. And talking to Perry isn't helping," he said in smooth tones.

"Well, I don't know… I mean, I was a reporter. Shouldn't I do some reporting to get those proverbial juices flowing again?"

"Lois, we've made so much progress together. Please, honor that work. Drop the story… besides, it's too dangerous for you to pursue a story here, in a foreign country."

Lois sighed, though she didn't look convinced. "I guess you're right. I'll drop it… for now."

Deter smiled, though he wasn't sure she was telling the truth. It didn't matter though. He'd have another hypnotizing session with her tomorrow, and he was certain that all her reporter notions would be shoved back into the recesses of her memory – where they belonged.

***

Part 2

When Clark got within thirty miles of the southern coast of France, he honed in his hearing, searching for a sound he knew better than any on Earth – Lois' heartbeat.

He glided silently over the dark expanse of sky, listening… he heard it faintly, distant, somewhere near the port city of Marseille.

It sounded steady and sure—relaxed. She couldn't be in danger then. Still, would it hurt to see her?

Once Clark found her location, he dived across the sky, slowing down as he came nearer to where he heard her heartbeat.

Clark floated above the trees, hidden by darkness and the thick foliage. Lois and Deter were sitting outside, sipping wine and eating dinner.

Clark heard her laugh, and it cut him to the core. He had thought that laugh – that free, sparkling sound—had been for him alone. It tore at him that through her hazy memory, she had found more comfort in Deter than she had in either of his personas.

Deter was telling her a story, something about his travels

around France. Lois seemed enraptured, smiling…

Clark couldn't stand it anymore. She had obviously moved on… and didn't need him any longer.

He whooshed away, leaving a swish of wind in his wake.

***

Lois shivered. It had suddenly gotten colder.

She had almost forgotten that Max didn't want her to pursue the gunrunning story. He had been so charming during dinner… but now it was getting late. She let out a yawn and stood up to head inside.

"Thank you, Max, for a wonderful dinner. I had no idea there were so many amazing cheeses in the world either," she said, gathering some plates to take in.

"Here, let me help you," Max said easily, taking a few utensils and a plate out of her hand.

"Thanks," she smiled, heading back in the house.

Lois sat the dishes in the sink, noticing suddenly that there wasn't a dishwasher. "Oh my… I never liked washing dishes. At least, I don't think I did…" she admitted a little wryly.

"Don't worry. I'll take care of them later."

Lois turned to go, suddenly uncomfortable with Max's nearness. He stood just behind her, a hand resting casually on her shoulder. "Well, I guess it's bedtime. It's been a long day," she said, about to move past him.

Deter gently reached for her hand. "Lois—"

She turned to him, seeing an unmistakable invitation in his eyes. But something didn't feel right about it… even though she had kissed him in Metropolis. Here… things felt different. More personal.

"I—I just want to go bed. We had such a long flight, and it's late—"

Max nodded, pulling her in just a bit closer. He cupped her cheek, his eyes full of promise. "Okay, Lois. Sleep well," he said, and leaned down to chastely kiss her cheek.

She smiled shyly, and then headed out of the kitchen, up the stairs. She paused on the landing, turning to him once more. "Good night."

Lois headed up the stairs, wondering why she suddenly felt like running. This wasn't the cozy intimacy of their therapy sessions. There was something more here. And while she had declared that she loved him and wanted to come here, Lois suddenly wasn't very sure.

She got to her room and changed for bed. Lois washed her face and brushed her teeth, wondering why she suddenly felt so uncomfortable. Hadn't she wanted this?

With a sigh, Lois got under the covers. She thought of Max and how charming he had been tonight. But as she tried to conjure the man she supposedly loved – why did the image of her reporter partner with glasses and loud ties keep appearing?

***

Perry White put down the phone after talking to Lois, thinking.

For days now, Clark has been moping around the newsroom, barely able to bring in a story on a garden party, let alone a headline. Perry knew he missed Lois terribly, and he was just as shocked that Lois had actually gone off with that Doctor Deter as he was.

Perry rubbed his chin, thinking. He was thinking of meddling, to tell the truth. Clark was too much of a gentleman to go up to that Deter and tell him what's what.

And Perry feared both members of his top team would suffer for it.

He loved those two kids.

And would it be so bad if he used the Planet to help get them back together?

"Clark! Get in here," Perry called through the open door, before he could change his mind.

Clark shuffled over to Perry's office door, his hands shoved in his pants' pockets, looking decidedly dejected.

"Have a seat, son," Perry said warmly. "I hate seeing you like this."

"I just don't know what to do, Chief. I can't even talk to her now… How can I just trust that this Doctor Deter will even help her?" he said, clearly frustrated.

Perry nodded. "Yeah, I understand your doubts. Especially now… It was some slick move to convince Lois to go to the South of France with him. Certainly doesn't seem ethical."

Clark shrugged. "Am I kidding myself? Just hoping and waiting for her to come back to me?"

"Clark, I'd like to help, if you'll let me."

"Anything, Chief. What are you thinking?" said Clark, a spark of interest lighting his eyes.

"Well, the damnedest thing just happened. Lois called," Perry said, enjoying reeling Clark into his idea. He knew those two were destined to be together, and if he could help the process along, he was happy to do it.

Clark looked hopeful. "She did? What did she say?"

Perry laughed, "Well, you know Lois. Amnesia didn't chase the reporter out of her. She's already onto a story down there."

"Oh? And what does Doctor Doom have to say about it?" Clark asked morosely.

"Now, that I don't know. But what I do know, is our Lois. Clark, she's onto a gunrunning story. Those thugs can be very dangerous – and she doesn't have Superman around to rescue her if things get rough. But I also suspect that this could be a good story for our international page. So, I am partnering you with her – all expenses paid. All you gotta do is show up and help her with the story."

"Are you sure that's a good idea, Chief?" Clark had appeared to warm to Perry's idea, but he knew Clark was hesitant to do anything that might jeopardize Lois' progress.

"Kent, listen. You are the best thing that has ever happened to Lois." Perry leaned in, making sure that Clark looked him in the eye. "Now take the assignment and find a way to bring Lois back home."

Clark slowly nodded. "I don't like the idea of her on a dangerous story all by herself."

"I know you don't," Perry confirmed.

"And I can't sit around here much longer wishing that she'd return. I've barely written a word since she left."

"You don't have to tell me."

Clark gave Perry a half smile, appearing grateful. "Thanks, Chief." Clark turned to leave, but stopped at the door. "Oh, and Perry? Don't worry about booking me a flight. Superman wants to see Lois back as much of the rest of us. I'm sure he won't mind flying me down there."

"I'm sure the bean counters down in Accounting will be grateful. Now, go home and pack."

"On it, Chief!"

***

Lois stood at the door to Max's office full of trepidation. They were supposed to do another therapy session, but something just didn't feel right.

She stared at Max's back, as he was facing his desk, and she tried to summon the love she had thought she had felt for him in Metropolis… but all she felt was insecurity.

Her hand gripped the doorframe, poised to almost pivot and run. But Deter turned to her, giving her a warm smile, and she found herself smiling back.

This was her doctor, her friend…and maybe she was just feeling apprehensive being with him in a foreign land.

"Lois, have a seat," said Max gently, offering her a comfortable chair. "Are you ready to work on that memory of yours?"

The nervous feeling wouldn't leave her. She felt her heart racing in her chest, and yet, she sat down. She did want to find her old memories… and if sitting through another hypnosis session would help – she needed to be game to try.

Lois nodded, feeling slightly comforted by Max's calm demeanor. She was in capable hands. Everything would be fine…

***

Max did not like the streak of independence he had seen in Lois yesterday. He had let her go to the city center, but his driver had kept tabs on her. She was investigating again, and had even called Perry! That would never do…

He spoke in hushed tones as he asked Lois to close her eyes. Max intended to wipe out any inclination Lois had for returning to her old life. He had managed to come this far, bringing her to his villa. If she could just forget the rest, so much the better.

Max easily brought Lois under hypnosis… she was now putty in his hands. He could mold her into whatever he wanted.

"You will drop the gunrunning story. You will forget all about your friends in Metropolis, all about your old life, all about Superman," he said softly. "You will stay here in Marseille, with me… You will fall deeper in love with me… you will want to marry me…"

***

Clark felt better than he had since this whole debacle began in the first place.

He was on his way, flying to the woman he loved!

Clark had been certain that Lois had been close to remembering him before she had left with Dr. Deter. In fact, the more he thought about it, the more Clark was convinced that Lois needed to get away from Dr. Deter as soon as possible.

He had trusted everyone around him, when they'd insisted that Dr. Deter was the best, but from the get-go, Clark had sensed something not quite right with the psychiatrist. And now that he had taken Lois all the way to France and after Perry encouraging him to go after her, Clark was convinced. Dr. Deter had to go.

Clark pressed on, his desire to see Lois kicking him into high speed, creating a sonic boom across the sky.

***

Lois sat in the garden, enjoying the afternoon sun. She felt so relaxed after that last session with Max…

She sighed. There was something so comforting about him. He was helping her after all, and she felt thankful that he had come into her life…

Wait. Wasn't there something she was supposed to do this afternoon?

Lois wracked her brain, but couldn't come up with anything. Oh, well. It must not have been that important.

Suddenly, the trees rustled around her like there was a sudden breeze. The sensation felt oddly familiar, but she didn't understand why.

A man approached the low, wooden gate. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and very good-looking. He paused when he saw her, and she wondered if he was a neighbor.

"Bonjour!" she waved, wanting to be friendly. She couldn't think of any more French, so she just continued to smile, wondering what he wanted.

The man approached slowly, a sad look on his face. "Lois? It's me. Clark."

"You're American? Wait. How do you know my name?" she asked, apprehensive.

Clark sighed heavily, his expression looking even more forlorn. "You don't remember me? I thought Dr. Deter was supposed to be helping you…." he said despondently.

Lois sat up in her chair, unsure of this stranger. "How do you know about me? How do you know Max?"

"Max?" Clark asked with some derision. "You're on a first name basis with him now?"

"Who are you?" Lois asked forcefully, glancing towards the villa, wondering where Max was.

"I'm Clark Kent," he answered her patiently, taking the chair opposite hers, wondering what had happened to cause her to regress. "I work at the Daily Planet, with—"

"Clark! What are you doing here?" Deter asked, making his way towards them.

Clark stood up. "What have you done to her?" he asked angrily, gesturing towards Lois. "She doesn't even know who I am!"

Deter lifted his hands in what looked like a calming gesture. "Now, just relax. We had a bit of regression, but I believe it is only temporary. But Clark, I thought you understood that Lois wants to work with me on a personal level. Why are you here?"

Clark seemed angry at Max's words, and Lois watched on, entirely uncertain as to what was going on.

"The Daily Planet sent me here to work on a story with Lois."

Deter shook his head emphatically. "She is in no condition to work, Clark. Besides, I know what she was looking into, and it is far too dangerous."

"She'll be with me. She'll be fine," Clark said decisively, wanting more than anything to get Lois away from Deter.

"I'm sorry. I just cannot allow you to interrupt our work like this, Clark."

Clark turned to Lois. "Lois, you have to remember. You and I are partners. You're a reporter—"

"You're just confusing her," Deter said, stepping in between Clark and Lois.

Lois stood up. "Wait! I've had just about enough of this! Clark? What do you mean, we're partners? How can I be a reporter for an American newspaper? I live here!"

Clark looked struck, unsure of how to combat her uncertainty. "Lois—" Then he turned to Deter, his patience worn thin. "I don't know what you've done to her, but I promise you that you won't get away with it."

"Clark, I'm afraid you're the one treading on thin ice. Lois has much more work to do here, with me, without you interfering," Deter stated calmly.

"Lois and I also have work to do. Without *you* interfering!"

Deter raised his palm towards Clark, trying to calm him. "Now Clark, I suggest you cool off. Lois is in my care, and we are making progress."

Clark stood there, tempted to turn into Superman right in front of Deter and wipe that smug smile off his face. The man really had no idea who he was dealing with…

"Deter, I'm warning you," Clark threatened, but then looked over at Lois, who was eyeing Clark with fear in her eyes. The last thing he wanted to do was scare her. Clark sighed, feeling defeated once more. "I still have a job to do," he told Deter. "Perry expects Lois and me to work together. So I will be back. Count on it," he said, turning to leave.

Clark had to get out of there, and think… if Lois' memory was still so lost, he couldn't just fly in there and take her away. He'd terrify her… but still, Deter obviously hadn't made progress, and didn't seem very keen on wanting Lois to get better.

At least Clark was nearby, though. He didn't have a plan yet, but one way or another, he was going to get his Lois back.

***

Lois tried to press Deter to answer her questions about the man who had visited them that afternoon. She couldn't understand why he had been so angry, and she had no idea she supposedly worked for a newspaper. But Deter insisted that the man she had met was just a little confused, and he kept maintaining that her life had been there in Marseille, for years—though he remained vague on exactly how many years…

Something didn't seem right to Lois about what Max was telling her. He kept saying her life had been here, in France for

years—but with him? They weren't married, though he was awfully proprietary with her. Max wouldn't answer any of her questions directly, and it just made her that much more frustrated.

She claimed a headache after dinner and went up to her room to lie down. Even her room seemed strange… the style was like a bed and breakfast, not like a home. If she had been living here for years, as Max insisted, Lois knew she wouldn't have put up those chintz curtains, and certainly not the banana colored quilt. All of it seemed wrong somehow…

And that man…. Clark? There had been something about him… more than just his anger at Max, and frustration with her lack of memory. There had been something in his eyes that had tugged at her…

Lois flipped over on her side, groaning in frustration. She wasn't going to sleep, and she didn't feel like getting into another question-dodge with Max. She wanted to find that Clark guy and ask *him* some questions.

The more she thought about it, the more motivated she felt. Yes, she would find him. Perhaps call the Daily Planet and find out which hotel he was staying at…

Lois knew she couldn't do it from here. She needed to go back into town. Why wasn't the city just outside her door? In Metropolis everything was just a walk or a taxi ride away.

Metropolis! She just remembered something!

Lois glanced at herself in the mirror, feeling like a tiny puzzle piece of herself had slid back into place. She knew that she had lived in Metropolis! But the longer she stared, the more her smile felt empty. Was there nothing else? When had she been in Metropolis? How long had she worked with that Clark Kent guy?

She sighed with frustration. She had to get out of there… she had to find Clark!

Lois ran down the stairs, hating that she'd have to ask Max to get her a taxi or a driver or whatever to take her into the city. But she had no choice. She knew that the center was at least ten miles away—definitely too far to walk.

"Max?" she asked, finding him reading in the study.

"Yes, dear? Feeling better?" he responded, not looking at her, as his nose was buried in a book.

"Yes, but I'd like to take a walk… maybe by the harbor? Could you ask your driver to take me?"

Max put down his book and came over to her. "I'll join you. The sunset should be lovely on the water this evening."

Lois tamped down a feeling of disappointment. She wouldn't be able to look for Clark with Max at her side. She looked up at him as he took her hand, and wondered why her brain told her that she loved this man, yet everything in her body and spirit rebelled against the idea.

It was a very uncomfortable feeling. Lois suddenly wanted to do anything other than go with Deter into town… But still, if she could get away, even for a bit—perhaps she'd manage her mission?

Besides, it was only six thirty. She certainly couldn't sit in this house and stare at the walls for the rest of the night.

***

Part 3

Max had been right. The sunset was pretty…

Walking along the harbor with him, Lois almost forgot about her earlier urgency to hunt down Clark and what he knew about her memory. The golden hues swirled with magenta and indigo in the sky above them, reflecting a moving canvas of color in the harbor below.

The quiet swish of water lapping against the boats was lulling to Lois. She felt she could lose herself in the sights and sounds of Marseille…

"Lois, there is something I've been meaning to ask you," Max said softly, sounding a bit nervous. "We've been together a long while now, and even though I'd never want to push you into anything…" He stopped and turned to her, fishing something out of his pocket.

It was a small velvet box.

Lois knew where this was headed, and yet it all felt so wrong. Despite the gorgeous scenery and the idea that she loved Max — which seemed to be like a recording on a loop in her head — it all felt incredibly wrong.

Max held up the little box, not even opening it. Lois put her hand over it, almost to cover it like she hadn't seen it. "Max, please don't," she said awkwardly.

"Lois, I love you," responded Max, undeterred.

Suddenly, three thugs jumped out from behind some boxes, each wielding a knife, startling them. "Max!" Lois cried, instinctively drawing herself closer to him for protection.

"The girl… she's coming with us," said one of the thugs in a heavy French accent. "Elle en a trop vu."

Two of the guys approached Lois and Deter, looking ready to grab Lois. The walkway was narrow, and there was no place to run past the thugs, not without risking injury. Deter held Lois close to him, backing up slowly as the thugs closed in on them.

"Give us the girl," said one of the men, almost within reach of Lois.

Deter kept backing up, until he precipitously floundered, losing his balance on the edge of the dock. His arms flailed wildly, reaching for Lois. But as she turned at his cry, the thugs grabbed her.

Deter fell into the water with a large splash, giving the ruffians a chance to carry Lois away. Lois kicked as a guy threw her over his back, while his friend gagged her and tied her hands.

She wasn't carried far, though, as the thug set her roughly down inside a boat. The third guy sat down next to her, keeping his knife near her throat. "Si tu bouges—" said the thug, making a slicing motion across her throat.

She nodded fearfully, getting the gist of what he said, if not understanding the words.

They were in a small motor boat. The sun had set, giving them the cover of darkness to set across the harbor.

Lois watched helplessly as they moved further from the dock. She couldn't see if Max had made it out of the water or not.

She couldn't even speak, with the gag in her mouth, to ask what they wanted with her. Why had they taken her and not Max?

The motor was quiet enough that it wouldn't draw attention from any passersby. And Lois was sitting down in the boat, so that her head likely didn't show above the sides. If anyone saw it, they would probably think it was someone going for a late boat ride.

Lois tried not to panic, but she had the strangest feeling that she had been in situations like this before. Why she sensed that, she had no idea, but she thought she must be crazy to think getting kidnapped was in any way a normal occurrence.

After about ten minutes, the motor was turned off. Lois didn't dare move until they told her to, but she could see that they weren't that far from the harbor. She realized they must have taken her to the island where the Château was.

The thugs made her stand up and get out of the boat. With her hands tied behind her back, she had difficulty standing. Eventually they got her out of the boat, and they were standing in front of the imposing Château, which wasn't a castle at all, as the name implied. It had been a prison for years, and had inspired Alexandre Dumas to write *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Lois remembered reading a bit about it in a book Max had at the villa. As the sky was getting darker, she felt uneasy about entering the shadowy fortress, suddenly wondering if she believed in ghosts.

The men took her inside, making her walk up a winding staircase. They came to the center of the fort, which was an open format, so that one could look at the level above and below. Then they took her into a large, dark room. They sat her in a corner,

leaving her sitting in an uncomfortable position, with her hands tied behind her back. Then, one of the brutes threw a newspaper up in her face, shining a flashlight on the page.

"Lois Lane," said the guy in a heavy French accent. "C'est toi. Qu'est-ce que tu fiches ici?"

Lois stared at the photo of the smiling woman. She had enough French to understand that they wanted to know why she was there. But the irony was that she had no real idea. The woman in that picture looked like a stranger to her. She was smiling and happy, her byline in bold under the photo, proudly declaring another story written by an intrepid reporter.

She noticed another name, and another picture on the page they showed her as well. Clark Kent. He too was smiling… he seemed much more affable in this photo than the man she had encountered that afternoon. And he had said that they worked together?

Lois was getting lost in her thoughts. The thug shook the newspaper in front of her, demanding an answer.

"Oui, je suis Lois Lane," she answered, the French feeling just about as odd on her tongue as her own name. "Pourquoi je suis ici?" *Why am I here?* she asked, but when she didn't get an answer, she realized they assumed she meant it rhetorically. "Je n'ai pas de… memory?" she said, tapping herself on the head, hoping they'd understand what she meant.

The thug looked skeptical. He glanced at his comrades and leaned to whisper something to them in French. "You stay here," he finally said in English. "Jusqu'à notre rendez-vous…. Et après, c'est Mr Hernot qui en décidera."

Lois thought 'décidera' sounded like the verb for decide, and she wondered if that meant whoever Mr. Hernot was, they would wait for him to decide her fate.

The thug clicked the flashlight off and stood up. The other two thugs sat watching her. The moon was coming out, bright and silver across the sky. A sliver of light shone down through a nearby window, casting light on the newspaper they had carelessly left by her side.

The light shone on the picture of Clark Kent. Lois stared at the photo, desperate to remember anything about the man besides his strange display in the villa garden earlier. The longer she looked, the more certain she grew that there was something important that she should know about him, something that would reassure her.

But all her memories were blank…

For some reason these thugs wanted her because she was a reporter. Somehow, they must be connected to the story Clark had mentioned earlier. Gunrunners, was it?

Lois felt tears slip down her cheeks. She couldn't even remember who she was, let alone recall chasing down any criminals… And her French wasn't good enough to try to convince these guys that she didn't know anything.

Her gaze once more fell on the picture of Clark Kent. She didn't know why or how – but she thought that somehow, he was her only hope in getting out of there alive.

***

Clark was flying lazily over Marseille, trying to come up with a plan to get Lois back. He kicked himself for letting his emotions get in the way this afternoon, possibly confusing Lois by his behavior, or worse, making her scared of him. That hadn't been his intention whatsoever. It was only that the situation frustrated him…

Clark neared the harbor, marveling as the full moon rose, its light glistening in dancing ripples across the water. He wished, not for the first time, that they could be there on their honeymoon. Marseille was a beautiful city, filled with the elegance of France and the earthiness of the Mediterranean. He could imagine walking along the beach or having dinner on the harbor, with Lois at his side. But his longings felt like wishful dreams that might never happen. Things had just gone so wrong.

Clark suddenly heard a splash in the harbor. He zoomed in his vision, and saw that a person was struggling in the water. Clark realized that while the cover of night might make a Superman spotting less likely, a rescue might easily garner some attention. As he flew down to where the man was struggling, he changed into his Clark clothes, landing on the dock with a thud.

Clark reached into the water and grabbed a hand, as a man desperately flailed for safety. As Clark pulled him out, he realized that he had just rescued Dr. Deter. And while he wasn't his favorite person, it only sent Clark into a panic about how this had happened to Deter and whether something worse could have happened to Lois.

"Where is she?" Clark asked impatiently, as soon as Deter coughed out some water and started breathing again, albeit irregularly.

Deter struggled to speak. "Some —thugs —-took her," he managed to get out between gasps for air.

"Where?" demanded Clark.

Deter continued taking in gasping gulps of air, and shook his head. "I don't know… I heard a boat. I think they must work these docks often… and Lois was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Clark released his breath in frustration, torn between wanting to fly off to find Lois and knowing he should get Deter some help. "Should I call an ambulance?" he asked, sounding just a little bit annoyed.

Deter shook his head. "No, I'll be fine… I wasn't in there long. I just—" he continued breathing heavily. "I'm not a very good swimmer."

It was then that Clark spotted it… a small velvet box, lying on the dock near Deter. Clark reached for it, unable to believe the conclusion he was coming to.

He looked at Deter, and seeing his expression, Clark knew instantly what Deter had done. Or tried to do. "Is this—-were you proposing?" Clark sputtered.

Deter had the grace to look ashamed. "I—I thought—"

Clark stood up, anger boiling inside him. "You didn't think!" Without caring about the consequences, he took the small velvet box and crushed it in his palm. As Clark let the velvety dust scatter out of his hand, he relished the dumbfounded look that appeared on Deter's face at such a feat. "I told you that you had no idea who you're dealing with," Clark ground out, his heart hammering. He had never done anything so foolish, but he was driven past sanity. This was the last straw. "Stay away from Lois!"

Clark spun into the suit, and shot up into the sky, not even staying long enough to see Deter's astounded reaction. Clark knew he was acting recklessly, revealing his identity to Deter like that, but he was so frustrated and so angry at how Deter had manipulated Lois. The man deserved a shock…

Clark kept going upwards, until he was almost to the edge of Earth's atmosphere. Then he slowed down, and let himself drift slowly back to Earth, as he tried to regain his calm. Who knew what Deter would do with the knowledge that he was Superman? But did it even matter? If he never got Lois back, what did any of it matter anymore?

Ah, but it did matter. Lois needed him, no matter what Deter did with his new-found knowledge. Besides, he had no proof of what he had seen, and the remnants of the box had scattered into the water. Any doctor could say Deter was delusional.

Clark forced his worries about Deter to the back of his mind. He needed to find Lois. He would deal with Deter later.

As Clark neared Marseille, he scanned the docks where he had left Deter. There was no sign of him. Then Clark turned his focus on Lois, and concentrated, searching for her heartbeat, a sound he had memorized long ago.

His own heart leapt in response as he honed in on the sound, coming from the mysterious Château D'Îf, which sat across the harbor like a stone monster, bobbing on the horizon. He flew across the harbor, wondering if he should appear as Clark or Superman. But then recalling his behavior as Clark last time he had seen her, he thought Superman might have a better chance of reaching her.

Clark scanned the building. Despite the array of lead pipes and lead bars, he easily spotted her through the mortared walls. He also saw a handful of men nearby, most likely the thugs that had captured her. Clark almost smiled, knowing that at least the rescue would be fairly easy. He swept in quickly, rounding up the three men. He then flew across to the mainland and deposited them in front of a police station, tied up with some rope lying around the harbor.

Clark flew back to Lois, creating a sonic boom in the air. When he landed in front of her, she stared back at him with a shocked look on her face, still handcuffed. "You—you—how did—you—" she sputtered.

While Lois' shocked expression at his speed in dispatching her captors was endearing, reminding him of their early times together, it also brought him sadness. What he and Lois had built before the clone disaster had been so much more special. He longed for her to look into his eyes and know that her rescuer was Clark, and that she was safe – and loved.

He approached her slowly, not wanting to scare her. "Care for a rescue, Miss Lane?" he asked flippantly, hiding the depths of his true emotions.

She nodded, turning slightly so he could reach her handcuffs. Clark easily broke them off her wrists and helped her to a standing position. "Superman," was all she said, her brow knotted together. It was like she was trying to solve a puzzle, and Clark longed to help her put the pieces together.

"Fly with me?" he asked instead, hoping their closeness would help her.

Lois nodded, though she still looked uncertain as she stepped into his arms. Clark lifted her gently, relishing holding her again, her long limbs cradled close to his body, her arms wrapped around his neck. They took off from the middle of Château D'Îf, shooting up into the moon-filled sky. Clark floated them along the coast, not wanting to take her back to the city just yet – if at all. He certainly didn't want to take her back to Deter.

Clark glanced down at her, Lois' eyes round as saucers, though more with curiosity than fear. "Thank you," she whispered. "I know it sounds strange, but I feel like I know you somehow, though I don't have any memory of seeing you before."

Her words pierced his heart, and Clark had to fight past the lump in his throat at her words. "Lois, we do know each other. Very well, in fact," he answered huskily.

"Oh? So you've rescued me before?" she asked, intrigued.

"Yes. Many times, actually."

"Am I so careless?" Her question sounded self-incriminating.

Clark fought the urge to hug her closer. "Not careless, really. Just—passionate. Dedicated to finding the truth."

"The truth, huh?" was her rhetorical answer. "I wish I knew the truth about myself. I'm so lost… all of my memories are—-scattered, into the wind," she said, tossing her hand out into the air. The gesture threw off her balance a bit, making her turn in towards Clark a little closer. "Sorry."

He shifted his hold, so she was more secure in his grasp. "It's okay, Lois," he said softly. "Maybe you shouldn't talk… and just enjoy the view."

She smiled, making Clark smile in return. He wasn't sure how, but he knew that somehow she'd come back to him. For now, though, he was happy to just hold her.

***

Lois couldn't believe the view. For miles, sandy beaches and rugged coastlines stretched below them. Under the full moon, it was like a dream, like flying in a Van Gogh painting, a swirling sea of a diamond studded sky.

But what was more extraordinary was how easily she had accepted her rescuer's amazing abilities. As soon as he had whisked those thugs away and had returned, setting her free, she knew everything would be all right. And flying with him, while amazing, seemed almost—natural, habitual even.

Lois closed her eyes for a moment, thinking. None of this made sense. She knew Deter's proposal had felt out of place, and yet, in Superman's arms, she somehow felt like she belonged. Even the astonishing view, while gorgeous, didn't seem right. For some reason, she longed for a city skyline instead of a rugged cliff, and a river rather than an endless sea.

She sighed and opened her eyes once more. Superman was carefully observing her, and she had the feeling that he was hiding something from her. But looking into his eyes, she saw something there that made her think he had all the answers she had been searching for.

"Could we land somewhere? And maybe talk?" she asked.

"Sure," he responded, immediately slowing their speed. "There's a nice cliff just over there." Superman nodded to a spot a few hundred feet ahead.

Lois savored the last few moments of the flight, closing her eyes once more as she snuggled closer into his embrace. She breathed in his scent, a mix of laundry soap and his own clean musk, which smelled so familiar. She couldn't explain why she felt so comfortable with him, but the feeling without knowledge as to why almost made her want to cry. She felt so incredibly lost…

They landed softly on the hill, a large white cliff covered with sandy grass. The surf splashed some hundred feet below them. Lois gently stepped out of Superman's embrace, yet she didn't look away from him. She wrapped her arms defensively around herself as she tried to conjure a memory with him—or any memory she might have had before Max.

"How do we know each other?" she asked eventually.

Superman sighed, his hands sitting loosely on his hips. "I'm not sure how much to tell you, Lois. I was told to let you find your memories on your own."

She nodded, glancing away. "I wish people would stop saying that. I wish *Max* would quit saying that. Look, I just—feel there is something between us," she blurted, gesturing between the two of them. "Am I crazy?"

Superman stepped towards her, a soft yet anguished look on his face. "No, Lois. You're not crazy," he replied tenderly.

Tears were in her eyes as she met his again. "I'm tired of feeling so—lost. And I just don't trust Max anymore… he—proposed, and it just felt so *wrong*, but I don't know why." She laughed a little self-deprecatingly. "It's like my head tells me I love him, but my heart isn't so sure—isn't it supposed to be the other way around?"

"Lois, I—" he started, but then held himself back.

"What? What is it you were going to say, Superman? I'm so tired of everyone being careful about what they say to me… and I just wish—" Lois turned to Superman, an idea starting to form. She watched him carefully, observing his handsome features and sinewy body, clad in spandex. She realized she was attracted to him, but there was something else there, just below the surface, that she suddenly wanted to explore.

He seemed to sense she was planning something. "What is it?" he asked, sounding intrigued.

She shook her head, feeling ridiculous. "It's nothing."

He stepped a little nearer to her. "It's not nothing. Whatever it is, just ask. I'll do it. I promise."

She contemplated that offer for a moment. "Well, what do I

have to lose, right?" She started pacing, playing with her hands as she spoke. "I just had this silly notion—I don't know, you know how in stories the princess is cured or whatever with a—a kiss?" she said, glancing shyly at him. "I just wonder, with this connection between us, whatever it is—what if I remembered everything if you kissed me. Silly right?"

Superman stood right before her, his hand gently taking hers. "It's not silly, Lois," he said softly. "In fact, I'd be honored if you let me kiss you."

"Oh?" she said, a little breathless at the thought. "Well, I'm kinda out of any other ideas… so, what could it hurt?" she whispered, slowly moving in closer to him.

"Indeed," he spoke softly, his breath on her cheek.

A cool wind whipped around them, Superman's cape fluttering around her legs, beckoning her to stand ever closer in his embrace. At last, his lips touched hers. The kiss did feel familiar, but she couldn't focus on why, too distracted by what the kiss was doing to her senses. As his lips moved over hers, gently yet unobtrusively, she felt her whole body come to life. She pulled him closer to her, his cape practically cocooning them against the wind as his spandex clad body molded to hers.

The kiss was all at once extraordinary—and somehow familiar.

When at last the kiss broke, he looked down at her almost expectantly, with hope shining in his eyes.

"Well, princess? Did it work?" he teased.

She unconsciously pulled her lips inward, as if she could hold onto the taste of him and somehow find herself in the remnants of his kiss. Eventually she shook her head. "But we've kissed before, haven't we?"

His fingers gently reached for her face, lightly stroking her hair back as the wind kept obstructing her vision. "Yes," he answered huskily.

He stared down at her a moment, seeming to get lost in his own thoughts.

"What is it, Superman?" she asked.

He stepped away from her, turning to face the sea, which was starting to grow more turbulent as a storm rolled in. "I can't do this anymore… I can't hide from you who I am or what we are to each other." He turned around to face her again, his cape fluttering ever more fiercely as the wind began to pick up. "I've stood by and watched too many times… I've let you slip out of my life, even though it killed me every time. I even let Dr. Deter bring you here – in the vain hope that you'd come back to me somehow… but passively hoping isn't enough anymore. I miss you, Lois. I miss *us*," he said with a heavy sigh.

"Us?" she asked, intrigued.

Superman nodded his head. "And there's something else, Lois. You know me by another name… and I miss hearing you say it, especially when I'm dressed like this," he said gesturing towards his costume. "Because when I hear my real name on your lips, and I'm dressed as Superman, I know that you see the real me. And I think I miss that most of all."

"The real you?" she queried, eyeing him carefully.

The wind was growing ever more intense and Superman looked around, frustrated. "It seems every time we need to have a serious talk, we get interrupted by the weather. Lois, just tell me. Have you had enough of Dr. Deter? Can I take you home? To your real home?"

He waited patiently as she weighed her options. Lois knew she felt something for this strange, passionate man who could fly… and Dr. Deter? Well, he had put her in a box, expecting her to be happy in the little life he had constructed for her. And Superman—he offered the expanse of the sky and the safety of his arms—and she thought, possibly even the love in his heart.

She stepped closer to him, just as it started to rain. "Take me home, Superman."

***

Part 4

Clark worried about how to tell Lois the truth about himself all the way back to Metropolis. He had pretty much told her the truth about them, and she must have remembered something with that kiss to trust him enough to fly with him back home. But would discovering he was Clark set her back? Would it confuse her even more?

He didn't know, but he was tired of worrying. She was done with Deter, and that was a start. A good start. The rest would sort itself out in time. He had to believe that.

To get them home faster, Clark would superspeed at intervals, and then slow down for a while so Lois could enjoy the view. During their slower flights, she questioned him thoroughly and relentlessly about his powers and his origins. He didn't mind sharing with her what he'd already told her in the past, and hoped that each little piece of information would eventually help her put her memory back together. But she certainly hadn't forgotten how to be a reporter. Her follow-up questions were exhaustive and kept him on his toes. He felt a bit like the old days with Lois… but he needed more. He wanted his fiancée back, the woman who knew him better than anybody else in the world.

Eventually they entered Metropolis airspace. Lois smiled at the view. "This…it's definitely home, Superman. I could almost imagine it in Marseille… but this, is definitely a memory I remember."

He felt encouraged by that, and hoped that returning to his apartment would have a similar effect on her.

They landed on his terrace, and she glanced at him in surprise. "This is a rather unassuming apartment for a superhero," she commented.

Clark shrugged a bit modestly. "That's the point."

"So… you have two identities? Is that what you meant earlier? One mild-mannered, unobtrusive guy, and the other—Superman?"

He nodded. "That's pretty much the gist of it… But Superman… Lois, you have to understand. Superman is what I can do, not who I am."

He opened the door, and let Lois step inside ahead of him. She looked around, her eyes skimming over his knickknacks and pictures on the shelves… Clark had to stop himself from rushing around to remove the ones that obviously pointed to the truth. She needed to see them, discover who they were together.

Lois stopped in front of a photo of her and Clark, taken right after their first Kerth Awards Ceremony. "Clark Kent," she said, and he thought his heart would hammer right out of his chest, filling with hope, hearing her say his name.

"You know who I—who he is?" he stammered, uncertain.

"I saw his picture in the paper that the thugs taunted me with," she said wryly. "I knew we worked together… but why would you have our picture?" she asked, walking around his apartment.

Clark sighed, trying to remain calm. He hoped she'd put the puzzle together herself. Though, she had taken two years to figure it out the first time. But he had faith in her. And besides, he *wanted* her to figure it out this time.

He watched as she scanned his apartment. Clark Kent's presence was clearly there in many of his souvenirs… from his high school football, to his Kerth Award. As her fingers danced lightly over his possessions, Clark felt like she was touching small corners of his own memories.

She turned to him, having scanned his whole bookshelf, with a curious look on her face. "Why are there so many things of Clark's here?" she asked, picking up the photo of them once again.

"Lois, isn't it obvious?" Clark said slowly, realizing he was still dressed as Superman. Surely there was one way to make the

truth clear to her. “Lois,” he said, getting her attention. She looked up, still looking unsure. Then, he sighed and spun out of the suit, into a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt. “Do you get it now?” he asked softly.

The picture slipped out of her hand, and Clark caught it just before it hit the floor.

“You’re—Superman…and Clark?” she got out, sitting herself down on the sofa. “Wait… I’m remembering something…”

“Really?” Clark said hopefully.

She nodded. “It was you that came to the garden the other day… we work together, that much I knew… but—when Superm—you kissed me…”

He waited patiently for the penny to drop. Clark longed to reach for her, but he knew she had to find her own way.

“Wait… I need to—” she stopped and looked at him, this time a little unsure. “Would it be ridiculously rude if I asked you to kiss me again? As Clark?”

He smiled warmly, scooting closer to her. “Lois, I’m happy to kiss you however much you want.”

“I just—I know it’s silly, but—”

He gently cupped her cheek. “Lois, you don’t have to explain. I’m happy to help you get your memory back, however you want to go about it.” Then he laughed, amused. “But I got to admit, I am enjoying your method.”

“Good,” she said and then leaned in for a kiss without further preamble.

They moved in closer to each other, and Clark noted how much warmer and welcoming this kiss was than the one on the cliff. She was surer of herself and surer of him—at least he hoped so. Clark dared to deepen the kiss, pouring in how much he loved her and had missed her.

“Clark?” she whispered, suddenly breaking from the kiss. He saw tears in her eyes, and a wonder there that gave him pause.

“Are you okay, Lois?” he asked gently.

She nodded, suddenly tossing herself into his arms. “Oh, Clark! I remember! Not everything—but enough. I know we love each other and I know that it must have killed you when I left! Oh, Clark! I’m so sorry!”

He pulled her in for a closer hug. “Are you really back, Lois? Could it be that easy?”

She pulled out of the hug, just enough to look at him, even though tears streamed down her face. “I remember enough to know that I belong here, with you… that it was a mistake to go to France with Max. I must have been out of my mind!” she laughed, then grew serious again. “And it must have been hell for you to let me go. Oh, Clark, can you forgive me?”

“Forgive you? Lois, I’m just thrilled beyond words that you are back! I’ve missed my partner.”

“Just your partner, Clark?” asked Lois shyly. “I sorta remember something else as well… unless it was just a fantasy. But I thought—Clark, are we um, getting married?” Her question was so adorably uncertain, and Clark kissed her again before fishing the ring out of his pocket that he’d held onto since this whole disaster got started.

“Yes, we are, honey. Here, I have something that belongs to you.” Clark slipped the ring onto Lois’ finger and gave her another kiss. “Welcome back, Lois. Welcome home.”

***

After a short visit to the hospital, Max Deter made his way back to his villa, mulling over what he had learned last night.

Clark Kent was Superman.

The people of Marseille might not care so much, but Deter knew that this information could be very valuable in Metropolis. He could use his knowledge as leverage to get Lois back. Because there wasn’t a doubt in Deter’s mind that Clark had flown off to rescue Lois, and had undoubtedly succeeded as Superman.

Those thugs wouldn’t have a chance against Superman.

But it made Deter wonder why Clark had had so much patience with him in the first place. He had naively let Deter take Lois and really hadn’t done much to stop him.

Deter shook his head, laughing. What did it matter? He had enough leverage against Superman that he could force him to bring Lois Lane back to Marseille, surely.

Max bounded up the steps to his office, thinking of how he would word a phone call to Clark Kent, when he met an imposing figure in his office.

Superman stood there with his arms crossed, looking rather smug.

Deter peered behind him and noticed that his shelves had been emptied. All his notes were gone. He had written down everything, fearing putting them on a computer would make them more vulnerable for discovery. He never thought anyone would even care to look in his binders.

“I have secured your library, Dr. Deter. The authorities are on their way to arrest you for fraud. Your copious notes of your conquests and manipulations of your patients will be your downfall. I hope you enjoy the ride.”

***

Epilogue

Lois Lane was back. Mostly.

Throughout her first day back at work, every step felt more and more familiar. Then the people she saw slid a few more memories in place. Jimmy, running around doing various errands. And Perry, giving her a warm teddy bear hug and then blustering about getting the details right on her rescue from the gunrunners for their next lead story.

Her desk was its own field of memories… her Rolodex, which she thumbed through, recalling a handful of sources and locations. Her dead plant reminded her that she didn’t have a green thumb. Her computer had files of stories on it that she perused with interest, recalling other various little moments.

And then, Clark Kent had brought her a cup of coffee and even more memories slid into place. She recalled that he knew exactly how she liked her coffee. His smile warmed her to her toes, a feeling that she had delicious memories of experiencing. His voice reminded her of how considerate he was and how dear to her.

Even halfway through the morning, when Clark got a deer-in-the-headlights look in his eye and started tugging on his tie, she had smiled at the familiarity. She had nodded to him, “Go,” and then had covered for him when Perry asked where he had gone.

All of it felt familiar, and clicked dozens of other memories back into place.

But the memory most dear to her was on her finger, in the form of a ring. As Clark had slipped that ring on her last night, she had recalled how he had first proposed… and how a torrential downpour had almost interrupted his proposal. And how she had discovered the secret that would change her life—not just that Clark was Superman. But how much he loved her.

And that had reminded her of how much she loved him. And how *she* had proposed to him, some months later, having learned what it was like to be him. And how extraordinary he was as a man, not just a superhero.

Clark was sitting at his desk, trying to work. Lois knew he was only trying, because he kept glancing up at her and smiling. Finally, she got up and walked over to him. “Can’t work either, huh?”

He shook his head. “It’s just I’m so happy that you’re back. I can’t keep my eyes off you,” he said softly.

She grinned, and then took his hand. “Come on,” she said, tugging him to the conference room.

He grinned in return, following close on her heels.

Lois pulled him inside and closed the blinds, not caring that it

would look suspicious to their colleagues.

"Lois, what are you doing?" he asked, though he didn't seem to mind.

She turned him so he leaned against the door. "You may not be able to keep your eyes off me, but I can't keep my hands off you."

She leaned in for a quick passionate kiss, and then Clark conceded. "Same here."

She smiled, a brilliant Lois Lane smile, the likes of which Clark hadn't seen in a long time. Too long.

"I've missed you," he whispered huskily, leaning in to kiss her cheek, and then her chin, and back to her lips…

"Me too… though I may not have realized it. But you brought me back, Clark," she said, cupping his face with her hands to look at him. "You and Superman. Not just the flight home, but *us*. This," she sighed, leaning into him for another kiss, wrapping her arms around him. "Maybe I did need my prince to kiss me to help me remember, after all."

"Happy to oblige, Miss Lane. Whenever you need rescuing," he said, and pulled her in for a deep, slow, memory-returning kiss.

"Mmm… I could do this all day," she said, luxuriating in the feel of him. "How did you live without me?"

She had meant it in a teasing way, but Clark leaned his forehead against hers and sighed. "It was torture, Lois. I thought I was doing the right thing staying away… but when you left for France—it devastated me."

She leaned into his embrace, setting her head on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Clark. For whatever I put you through."

"It wasn't your fault, Lois."

"But it was… I should never have left Metropolis… and I should have seen Max for what he is. Well, at least we'll have the last laugh on that one."

Clark nodded. "Superman paid him a visit while you were sleeping. He won't be able to manipulate any patients like that ever again."

"Good. I'll be sure to add his downfall to my article," she said, holding Clark tighter. "Great," Lois groaned, peering past Clark through the blinds. "Perry's on his way. We'd better get back to work."

Lois sighed, stepping out of Clark's arms to head out of the conference room.

"Lois! Clark! In my office now," called Perry, waving them over.

Lois and Clark stepped inside, and Perry closed the door. "Look you two, I know it's been a helluva few weeks. And you still have to finish your article on the whole ordeal," he started sternly. But then he smiled, and leaned back on his heels. "But I'm so happy to see you two together again. Knock off for the rest of the day, all right? Send me your article this weekend, Lois. I don't want to see you two until Tuesday, you got that?"

Lois grinned at Clark. "Yes, Chief," they answered nearly in unison.

"All right you kids, get on out of here," Perry said with a friendly wave of his hand. "Go on. Get!"

Lois took Clark's hand and headed towards their desks to collect their things. "Everybody's looking at us, Lois."

She slipped her jacket on and then grabbed Clark's hand again. "I don't care. They didn't try to get married only to be replaced by a clone, abducted by a formerly dead criminal mastermind, and manipulated by a quack psychiatrist, now did they?"

Clark smiled back at her. "No, I guess you're right. I guess we better enjoy our good fortune then, huh?"

"Yes, indeed," she said, tucking her arm through Clark's as they headed toward the elevator. "Besides, I'm still in need of a bit of therapy. And I much prefer your methods to that awful Dr. Dreadful."

"Oh, really?" asked Clark playfully as he pressed the elevator button.

The doors opened with a chime, and they both stepped in. "Yes, absolutely," Lois smiled.

"Well then, Miss Lane. Come on over here, because the doctor is in," Clark said, pulling Lois into his arms just as the elevator doors closed.

THE END