

Assignment VI: Graded Assignment

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Summary: Sixth in the author's "Assignment" series. While roaming around the Corn Festival, Lois and Clark try to decide who's made the grade. A response to the First Lines and Labby's One Hour challenges.

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"What in the Sam Hill is wrong with you?"

"Perry," Lois whispered, "I haven't taken more than a couple days off in how many years?"

"Not since the whole Arianna Carlin doppelganger business," he admitted grudgingly.

"And before that when was the last time I took a vacation?"

"Uh..." He struggled to remember.

"Exactly. And the first two days in Hawaii were technically Planet time." Well, sort of. Lois had no intention of telling Perry that she and Clark had spent those two days doing little but eating, sleeping and making love. And mostly the last one. It was, after all, in large part a reaction to the pheromone she'd been exposed to.

"And I told Clark you could have an extra week off if you covered the Corn Festival for the travel section."

"And now I'm asking for another week after that."

"Why?"

Lois gave an exasperated sigh. "Because I'd like to spend some more time with my new in-laws before heading back to Metropolis and we'll still need time to combine households and all that. And I *know*," she continued before he could interrupt, "that Clark has at least six weeks' worth of vacation time built up."

Perry sighed. "True. But once you get back, I won't tolerate you two being late for meetings because you 'overslept' — and no more vacation days for several months."

"Fine."

He sighed again. "Just get me the story on that bridge in Johnson County while you're there."

"What story?"

"There's an old bridge being blown up that I need someone to cover for the historical special edition."

Lois sighed. "Fine."

"Good. Now, Darlin'," he said, his Southern drawl intensifying. "Take care of that husband of yours for me, would you?"

"You know it, Perry," she said with a grin, hanging up the phone. She smiled to herself as she sipped her cup of coffee.

"You look like the cat that swallowed the canary," came a voice right behind her as arms slid around her waist.

"I just got us another week off," she told him, setting her coffee on the counter and turning in his arms.

"Why?" At her look, he backpedaled. "Not that I'm not glad for the extra time with you, but why?"

"So we can stay here for a few more days." Her voice lowered. "Try out that hayloft and anywhere else you think we should try, before we head home. Then another week to get moved and all that stuff." She ran a finger down his bare chest. "Someone will have to check in on my fish, though. I'm sure they're getting lonely."

Clark sighed. "I guess Superman could look in on them for you."

She smiled at him behind long eyelashes. "Would he mind? That would be so sweet of him."

He groaned. "I told you, Superman doesn't like being called 'sweet'."

"And I told you he doesn't mind when it's me doing the calling."

He kissed her gently. "I guess not." He looked out the window. "It looks like the storm's passed."

She kissed him. "Good. That means we can try out the hayloft tonight. But today, we're going to Smallville."

He sighed. "The dance was postponed. And I can't talk you into staying here on the couch with me while Mom and Dad go?"

She looked at him in shock. "The couch? Mr. Kent, what kind of girl do you think I am?"

He leaned in closer and whispered in her ear. "My girl."

They heard footsteps coming down the stairs and Lois rested her head on Clark's chest, glad that his parents weren't like hers and would think it not only acceptable, but a good thing, that the two of them were close together. She thought that short of a heavy make-out session in front of them, Martha and Jonathan would be okay with just about anything. Kissing Clark, subtly teasing Clark, being close to Clark. In fact, it wouldn't surprise her to learn that the two of them still visited the hayloft fairly regularly.

"So what's the plan, you two?" Martha asked, pouring two cups of coffee.

"Perry gave us another week off as long as we cover a bridge explosion story."

"Another story?" Clark asked with a raised brow.

Lois smiled up at him. "Think of it as an extra credit assignment, boy scout. I bet you did all the extra credit you were ever offered."

Clark sighed. "You now know my deepest, darkest secret."

"You mean it wasn't the whole 'I'm a strange visitor from another planet' thing?"

He shook his head. "Nope. I always did my homework. Without being told."

"Goody two-shoes."

"You love me for it."

"That's not why I love you."

"It's because I can fly, isn't it?"

Lois shrugged as she turned to pick up her cup of coffee. "That's part of it."

Martha and Jonathan just shook their heads. "You two..." Jonathan started before sighing. "Aw, hell. I'm happy for you two."

"Thanks, Dad." Clark kissed the top of her head. "Why don't we go get ready and we'll head to town?"

Half an hour later, Lois was sitting next to Martha in the back seat of the car headed towards Smallville.

"So what's the plan for today?"

"Shopping, catching up with friends, husk-off, corn cook-off, popcorn ball, Corn Queen Contest."

"Popcorn ball?" Lois asked with a raised brow.

Clark nodded in the front seat. "Yep. Everyone brings their favorite popcorn and we have a big dance."

Lois glanced at Martha, who was staring out the window, and then Jonathan, who had the beginnings of a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "You're awful, Clark."

The Kents gave in to their urge to laugh.
 “You almost had me, but popcorn ball? Seriously?”
 Clark stopped laughed. “We have had one before. Seriously.”
 “You’re still pulling my leg.”
 Martha patted her hand. “No, he’s not. We have had popcorn balls a few times in the past.”
 Lois shook her head. “Wow.” She leaned forward to whisper to Clark. “Were you ever the Corn King or just the king of corny?”
 Clark rolled his eyes. “I was not the Corn King.”
 “You were, too,” Martha reminded him.
 “No. I was not. Lana was Corn Princess one year and I was her date. If anything, that made me a Corn Prince, but there were no official Corn Princes. Only a Corn King.”
 “That’s right. You refused to enter the Corn King Contest, didn’t you?”
 He sighed. “No, I didn’t refuse. I wasn’t elected to be in the Corn King Contest because Lana was mad and managed to get her boyfriend and two other guys who had no chance against him selected.”
 “Uh huh.”
 “So you were Corn Prince instead?” Lois asked, trying to keep the smile off her face.
 Clark sighed. “Well, the Scarecrow Contest is this afternoon, too.”
 “Scarecrow Contest?”
 He nodded seriously as Jonathan pulled into a parking spot. “The kids dress up scarecrows and the best one wins.”
 “And who judges these?”
 Clark grinned as he pulled her to him after she climbed out of the car. “We do.”
 She looked at him in disbelief. “Excuse me?”
 “Yep. Mayor Pete asked me yesterday if the world-famous Daily Planet reporting team would deign to judge the Scarecrow Contest.”
 “And you said yes?”
 “I couldn’t say no.”
 Lois sighed. “Fine.”
 Several hours later, they were walking slowly through the gym of Smallville High School with clipboards.
 Clark took his judging responsibilities much more seriously than Lois would have expected. But then she rethought her expectations. Of course Clark would take this seriously.
 “Did you ever enter the Scarecrow Contest as a kid?” Lois whispered.
 He nodded as he stared at a scarecrow that looked suspiciously like the one from the Wizard of Oz. “Won five years straight.”
 Lois looked at him appreciatively. “I’m impressed.”
 “Shh. The judges aren’t supposed to talk while they judge.”
 Lois smirked as she returned to judging.
 An hour later, they stood in front of the small crowd gathered in the gym. “Third place this year goes to Joey Ross,” Clark announced.
 There was a round of applause as the ten-year-old son of Mayor Pete Ross came up to the stage to get a small plaque and a bag of candy corn.
 “Second place,” Lois said into the microphone, “goes to Jenny Irig.”
 There was more applause and Wayne’s granddaughter followed in Joey’s footsteps to get her second place trophy and a stuffed scarecrow.
 “And this year’s first place winner of the Scarecrow Contest is...” Clark paused dramatically for effect.
 Lois rolled her eyes. “Donny Harris!”
 Rachel Harris’ eight-year-old nephew grinned as he headed up to the stage. He took his trophy and the popcorn popper and

ten-pound bag of popcorn.
 A few minutes later, Lois and Clark were wandering around the gym, visiting the other events.
 “What are they playing?” Lois whispered.
 “It’s the Corn-o-poly tournament,” he whispered back.
 “The what?”
 “It’s like Monopoly but with Smallville history.”
 “You landed on Nathaniel Kent’s corn field,” said Wayne Irig. “That’s 83 bushels, Sheriff.”
 Rachel sighed. “That’s what happens when you have three scarecrows on a property,” she mumbled, handing over several bushel certificates.
 “Are they really playing for pieces of paper representing bushels of corn?” Lois whispered.
 He nodded. “If you have four scarecrows, you can build a silo on a property. And instead of jail, you go to drought.”
 “You’re kidding.”
 “Nope.”
 They watched for a few more minutes until Rachel hit a famine — or was out of bushels. Bankrupt was what Lois called it.
 They left the gym and watched the CornHole game for a while. Maisie’s son was winning that.
 They watched Jonathan win the Individual Husk-Off. It was his eighth straight title. Clark whispered as they watched, “Dad and I won the father and son husk-off when I was a kid.”
 “There is so much I still don’t know about you,” Lois said, getting a caramel apple from one of the booths. “Are you going to win me another bear this year?”
 “Lo-is,” he groaned. “I can’t do that.”
 “Then why did you last year?” she asked, taking a big bite.
 “Last year I didn’t have my powers,” he whispered.
 She stopped, her eyes wide. “Trask had already exposed you?”
 He shook his head. “Dad did.”
 “What?!”
 “We didn’t know what it was. He opened the box. I fell over. We told you I had allergies...”
 “And then you got a paper cut,” she said, the light slowly dawning. She turned and wrapped her arms around him. “I’m so glad you’re okay.”
 “Me, too.” He whispered in her ear, “If I hadn’t been, I couldn’t show you the hay loft tonight.”
 She pulled back to look at him. “How long do we have to stay here, exactly?”
 “A while. The dance doesn’t start for another hour.”
 She bit her bottom lip. “Can’t we go home for a while and then come back?”
 He grinned at her. “I suppose we could sneak home for a bit and then come back for the dance.”
 She looked around. “Where, exactly, is the closest alleyway?”
 “Come on.” He grabbed her hand and a few minutes later, they landed in front of the barn. He pushed open the door and gestured towards the ladder. “After you.”
 “You’re not going to fly us up there?”
 He shook his head. “Nope. You can’t fly into a hayloft the first time.”
 “Is that one of the rules according to Clark?”
 “It is this time,” he said with a grin. She started up the ladder and he whistled. “Nice view.”
 She turned and glared, before grinning and adding a bit of an extra swing to her hips as she climbed the rest of the ladder.
 He floated behind her and spread a blanket out on the hay.
 “I thought you couldn’t fly up the first time.”
 He waggled his eyebrows at her. “It’s not my first time in a hayloft.”
 She raised her brow at him. “Excuse me?” she said, crossing

her arms.

He laughed. “Not like that. But I’ve been up here lots of times.”

She moved to sit by him on the blanket. “Well, your assignment, then, is to make this your first official initiation of the hayloft.”

“That’s one assignment I’m going to enjoy,” he said, kissing her softly.

“Good,” she told him before kissing him again.

Suddenly, they didn’t care if they were a bit late for the dance.

THE END