

# The Evening After a Door Slams

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Rated: G

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Summary: There has been great progress in Lois and Clark's relationship after a late night after-date talk and an early-morning Superman encounter gone awry. What will happen when they each plan to share their greatest secrets the next evening? A sequel to "The Morning After a Door Slams."

Story Size: 7,375 words (38Kb as text)

Disclaimer: This is a fanfic based on the television show, Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman. Portions of this work reference scenes from the L&C episode Lucky Leon written by Chris Ruppenthal. I have no claim on the pre-existing characters whatsoever, nor am I profiting by their use. The new story elements are mine. No infringement is intended by this work.

Time frame: Middle Season 2: Lucky Leon. This is the conclusion to my "Door Slams" trilogy. The first two parts, "After a Door Slams" and "The Morning After a Door Slams" pick up in the middle of the episode "Lucky Leon" at the end of the date.

Thanks to Dandello for the BR help and most importantly to the fabulous Beverly for the inspiration and motivation to think so WAFFy.

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"This cake is unbelievable. Did you make it yourself?"

I can't help but smile. Although, I've been smiling so much this evening that Lois isn't likely to notice a change. "No. I wish I could claim responsibility. But this cake is beyond my talents. I got this from a very special bakery that I found. They specialize in chocolate desserts."

Lois's eyes widen a bit at this. "Clark, I'm more than familiar with every chocolate specialty shop in Metropolis. I've never found a cake like this. What's the name of the shop?"

Now we're in dangerous territory. How do I explain that this particular bakery isn't in Metropolis? If this evening goes well, then before she leaves, she'll know the secret. But I don't think this is the way to tell the woman I love that I'm Superman. "I'll tell you what. Let me keep that a secret for now. But I promise you that if you want to see the place, I'll take you there this weekend."

She gives me a questioning look for a moment and then says, "Okay. But that means you'll be treating me to whatever I want from that shop."

"It's a deal," I reply.

As Lois turns her attention back to the cake, I can feel my nervousness growing. We agreed that tonight would be dinner then talk. Once the last of the dessert is gone, it'll be time for those talks. I'm sure she's as nervous as I am. However, I know that what's worrying her is a moot point. She wants to talk about her feelings for Superman. Obviously, I'm not worried about that. As long as she has strong feelings for me as Clark, and I'm sure she does, then I can live with her being attracted to my alter ego.

That attraction certainly did cause a problem this morning. I

must have lit up like a neon sign when I saw her at the scene of that car accident. There's something-electric-I feel when she's near me. I think I've always felt a connection, but since we kissed last night, whatever it is seems a hundred times stronger. I was so excited to see her I forgot myself and let my feelings show. Boy, was that a mistake!

What's worse, I didn't pick up on it at the time. It was only later that I realized that something had happened during that brief meeting when I was dressed as Superman. When I saw Lois at work, she was in full retreat-from-relationship mode. Then, when I tried to ask what was wrong, she actually hit me with the classic, 'it's not about you,' line.

I never knew that an emotional blow could hit like that. She caught me completely unprepared, and that made it so much worse. One moment I'm thinking about how to phrase a marriage proposal, and the next I hear the love of my life dumping me. I'm afraid I didn't react very well. What I should have done was to be understanding. I should have tried to talk things out. What I did was... well, I don't remember exactly what happened. It just hurt *so* much! I remember being very cold and feeling like I had to get away. I vaguely remember saying something about it being her choice but I didn't even finish that. At some point I just turned and walked out of the office.

I found myself on the roof. I guess I was thinking about taking off to the Arctic to brood. I don't really know what I planned to do. I was mostly just standing there feeling lost and... I don't know... so alone. While I was trying to decide what to do, I felt something. Maybe I heard Lois. Maybe our connection really is that strong. I really don't know. All that I know for sure is that all of the sudden I could feel that Lois needed me. I don't know how to describe it, I just had to get back into the office and see her.

I hurried back downstairs and found her in a conference room. When I heard her crying, my only thought was that it was my fault for leaving her here alone. In that instant I knew not to waste time knocking on the door and asking to come in. I barely rapped on the door before just barging into the room and... well, my day got a whole lot better.

As soon as I was in the room, I was engulfed in the most wonderful embrace imaginable. Lois was holding me! Me, her 'hack from nowhere' partner that just a few minutes before had been given a dump line. Then, the magic really happened. She said *those* words. I've been longing to hear that one particular phrase for over a year and suddenly there it was! 'I love you.' Lois Lane loves Clark Kent. Not Superman, world famous hero. Not Lex Luthor, third richest man in the world. She loves Clark Kent, reporter from Kansas.

Once she said that, I knew that it was time for her to hear the rest of the story. I could justify to myself that it had been okay not to tell her I'm Superman before, but not now. I knew right then that I had to tell her my secret as soon as possible.

When we left the conference room, the feeling was almost eerie. Every person in the newsroom was watching us intently while being oh-so-careful *not* to be caught looking in our direction.

Lois picked up on this immediately. She paused for only a second before turning toward me and, almost in slow motion, drawing me down to a kiss. For just an instant I was too much in shock to think at all. Then I was overcome by the flash realization that 'Lois was kissing me in the middle of the office!' Finally, I just settled in to enjoying the feeling of Lois's lips pressing against mine. For just those few seconds the universe ceased to exist beyond the soft, warm, wonderful woman in my arms.

When she finally pulled back I could see in her eyes that, whatever her motivation may have been for initiating the kiss, she thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"That was wonderful, but why now?"

“Clark, we’re already the main topic of gossip for the office. Everyone saw our ‘disagreement’ earlier. If they’re going to be talking about us anyway, I’d rather they were talking about how well we’re getting along than talking about how bad things have gotten between us.”

“Well, I don’t think that anyone that was in the office in the past minute or so is likely to believe that we aren’t getting along just fine.”

It was a few minutes later that Jimmy came up to me and asked, “What happened to Mayson Drake?”

“What do you mean?”

“I was down in the lobby when she got off the elevator crying. She looked pretty broken up.”

“Mayson was here?”

“Yeah. I saw her come into the building about ten minutes ago. From what I could tell she must have taken the elevator up here and then gone right back down. It’s like she saw something that really upset her.”

Lois and I looked at each other. Mayson must have seen our kiss in front of the conference room. After a few seconds Jimmy broke the silence. “What? C’mon guys, what happened?”

Lois didn’t even look up. “Clark! Conference room!” And she started off, leaving Jimmy and I standing there.

I turned to Jimmy. “Ask around. I’m sure you can get enough from the rest of the office to put the pieces together.” Then I followed Lois to the conference room and closed the door behind me.

Lois was glaring at me. “So?”

“What?”

“You know what I mean. What’s going on between you and Mayson?”

“Well, nothing is going on, certainly not now. As for what was...” I step over to a chair and slump down. “Lois, I was beginning to think there was no hope for us. She seemed... interested. I guess I was trying to... I don’t know, move on. But there just wasn’t any spark. I’ve known for some time that there would never be anything serious between Mayson and me.”

Lois is looking dubious. “So why didn’t you break it off with her?”

“I know how this will probably sound but I didn’t realize that there was anything to break off. I guess Mayson and I had very different views on our relationship. Please believe me when I say that had I realized what she was thinking, I would have told her that I wanted to pursue a relationship with you before asking you for a date. I may be that dense about relationships, but I’m not that callous. She’s a friend, but that’s all it was and that’s all it was ever going to be.”

She came over and took my hand. “Well, after the last 24 hours, I’m willing to believe you. But you need to talk to Mayson at least long enough to give her the chance to call you some choice names. You deserve that for being clueless.”

I was really happy that she was holding my hand and smiling while delivering this directive. Then she released my hand and headed for the door. “We need to do some real work. As it is, we won’t be able to use the conference room again today without triggering more gossip.” And with that she went out the door.

Thereafter, Lois and I spent some time just working. Then again, that’s not exactly accurate. Whatever we were doing, it was not *just* working. I’ve never spent a morning in the office with Lois like this one. We seemed to keep finding excuses to touch each other. Nothing particularly overt or provocative, but it was wonderful nevertheless. The first time it happened, I wasn’t sure that it was deliberate. Lois handed me some papers and her hand brushed against mine. I wondered if that casual touch was more than an accident, so a little later, I went to her desk to talk about our Lucky Leon investigation. While I was there, I stood extra close and put my hand on her arm a bit more intimately

than I normally would. She seemed to welcome my touch.

I finally was convinced that there was something special happening right after that. She came over to talk, and when she sat on the corner of my desk, she quite deliberately put her hand on mine. All I did was to lift my thumb and gently stroke her fingers while we talked. When I felt her fingers tighten around mine in response to my action, it hit me how much our relationship had changed in the past day. I would never have believed how intimate just that simple act could be.

Right after that was one of the more memorable sequences of events that I can remember. We were at Lois’s desk when I heard an emergency call. I was trying to figure out how to get away, but now the closeness that Lois and I had been sharing all morning presented a problem. I finally turned to Lois only to find her staring at me. My opening line was an eloquent, “Um...”

Lois cut me off. “Cheese of the month?”

“What?”

“Don’t you think by this time I can recognize when you need to make one of your mysterious exits?”

“Lois, I...”

“Just go. But listen, farmboy, this is one of the things that I expect to talk about tonight.”

As I went to stand up I realized that Lois was holding my hand. I froze for just a second and gazed into the depths of her eyes. “I promise that this will be a key part of our discussions this evening.”

She actually managed to smile at this. “It better be. So, go. But first...” She used that convenient hand she was holding to pull me back. Almost before I knew what was happening, I was being treated to a goodbye kiss. It was short but oh-so-sweet.

As we separated she said, “Now try not to take too long with your-cheese or whatever, we have work to do.” And for the first time that I could remember, she was actually smiling at me as I made my exit.

While I was on that call, Jimmy got a tip about something happening on Route 128. Lois and Jimmy took off to chase the story and found what seemed like a nuclear shipment that had supposedly been hijacked. The soldiers asked Lois to get hold of Superman to get the warheads back. I was back at the office and took the call. When I found the supposed terrorists, something didn’t feel right. When I confronted them they seemed too calm and professional.

Instead of taking the warheads away, I simply flew the van, soldiers and all, to the nearest army base. I verified their credentials and was able to convince the army to provide some dummy warheads. We replaced the real warheads with these and I took them to the fake soldiers that Lois had found. I was then able to follow them to Lucky Leon with the army and police right behind us. Then, the whole group, including what appeared to be an Intergang contact, was arrested. Later, back at the office, Lois and I found a hidden camera in the Desk Friend and all the parts fell into place.

It really didn’t seem like a very good plan. From what I could tell it all depended on Superman being dumb enough to blindly take a nuclear shipment away from one group of men in a truck and give them to another without checking. I guess it shows why Leon had been an electronic gadgets specialist and not in operations planning.

While Lois and I were writing up this story, I took a moment to try to call Mayson. After all, she had been involved in the Lucky Leon investigation. I also still owed her the chance to yell at me for this morning. When I reached her office I learned that she had taken a few days off.

I need to find a way to at least apologize. I feel like a jerk but I really didn’t know how she apparently felt.

A distinctive ‘tink’ brings me back to the present. Lois has finished her cake. I guess it’s time to get to the hard part of the

evening.

“Let’s have coffee on the sofa,” I suggest.

Once we’re seated, I try to take the initiative. “Lois, I think I should go first.”

“Clark, last time you went first, it ended up costing us both. Please let me go first this time.”

“I’m pretty sure that what I need to tell you will have an impact on what you want to talk to me about.”

Lois gets an exasperated look on her face. I guess I need to just let this go, so I continue quickly. “But you’re right. My going first sure didn’t work last time. So, the floor is yours.”

I see the look of irritation morph to one of thoughtfulness.

“What do you know about the history between me and Superman?”

I hope this isn’t a sign of things to come. Could we have started on more dangerous ground?

“I... I really think you should let me go first.”

Her reaction tells me that this is *not* an option. I take a deep breath. “It’s complicated. Please don’t react too badly to this but you should assume that I know everything that’s happened between you and Superman. At least, I know his side of things.”

She looks shocked. “I knew you were friends but he told you everything?”

“Like I said, it’s complicated.”

She looks flustered for a few seconds so I try again.

“It would really be better if I went first.”

“No! I need to go first on this. Just give me a second.”

“Okay. But later on please remember that I wanted to go first.”

She shoots me another questioning look before continuing. “So, you know that right from the first time he appeared, I’ve had sort of a well-‘special’ relationship with him.”

“Yes.”

“It always seemed to me that he and I were always right on the edge of something more. That all seemed to come to an end the night... Well, the night after you first told me how you feel.”

At this she looks a bit defensive. She reaches over and takes my hand. “I know this must be difficult. But Clark, I think we’ve worked past our misunderstandings and I need to talk through these things. I don’t have anyone else that I can talk to.”

I squeeze her hand. “It’s fine. I’m here to listen as long as you want to talk.”

“You said that you know his perspective these things. Did he tell you what happened in my apartment that night?”

How do I say this so that it doesn’t sound too harsh? “I have a pretty good idea. You asked Superman if a relationship was possible, and he told you that you really didn’t know him.”

“It was more than that! I opened myself to him and he was... well... rude in a way that I’d never seen before. I couldn’t believe the way he acted. I’ve never felt the same toward him since that night. Well, at least I didn’t think I felt anything like that any more.”

She pauses for a moment. I can see how hard this is for her. I wish I could find a way to get her to let me go first. Finally, she continues. “I saw him at an accident this morning and... Well, he seemed really happy to see me.”

“Lois, I’m sure he was.”

“Clark! I mean he was *really* glad to see me. Like seeing me was something special. Anyway, the real problem is that when he looked at me, I felt something. There was a rush of emotions that I haven’t felt toward him since that night.” She looks up at me with an expression that seems fearful or possibly embarrassed. “With all that’s going on with us, I... Well, my reaction scared me.”

I can’t let this continue. However mad she’ll be for me cutting her off will be less than if I let her continue like this.

I raise my voice. “Lois, please stop!”

“What...”

“Don’t say anything more until I can tell you something.”

“Clark, you promised that you would let me go first. It’s very important...”

Lois is still talking but my super hearing has kicked in, and now I’m picking up an emergency call. There’s an apartment fire on the other side of the city. From the reports I’m picking up, it sounds very serious with many people trapped in the upper floors of the burning building. I can’t ignore this call. As I tune out the emergency call, I become aware of Lois again.

“Clark? What’s wrong?”

I’m still sitting next to her, but we aren’t holding hands anymore. I stand up and take a step back from the sofa.

“This isn’t how I wanted to do this but I don’t have any choice.” I was going to just spin into the suit immediately, but now that it’s time I find I’m terrified again. I have to do one last thing. “Lois, do you believe me when I say that I love you?”

I’m grateful that the pause before her answer is very short. “Yes, Clark, I do.”

“This is what I was going to tell you tonight.” And at that I took one more step back and spun into the suit.

She’s just staring now.

“I had hoped to tell you and then spend the evening trying to work through this. But there is an apartment fire and if I don’t go right now people could die.”

She’s still not saying anything. I wish this had happened differently but I need to get going. That fire sounds bad.

“Lois, I...” I’m at a loss as to what I can possibly say right now. I move toward her, wanting to kiss her before I go. Unfortunately, as soon as she sees what I’m intending, she pulls back just enough to signal that she’s not interested.

I can feel my face fall. What I’m seeing on her face is more than anger. There’s something else there. Simple anger I think I could handle. But this-I don’t know. I want to make it better, but I have to go. Without another word I turn away and speed out the window.

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I should go to bed. It’s been over three hours. Maybe he’s not coming.

I’ve been sitting here almost since I got back to my apartment. When Clark... Superman... whoever he is... left me alone, I just couldn’t stay at his place. I don’t think I was there more than a minute before I bolted. It was all that I could do to drive home.

I feel myself about to start crying again. What is it about some men that can turn Mad Dog Lane into an emotional wreck?

Who is he that he could do this to me? I thought I’d found a partner to share my life. Instead of finding Mr. Perfect, I’ve managed to get involved with another man who’s leading a double life and hiding a huge part of himself from me. Somehow I’ve managed to land another Lex!

At least, that’s what I was thinking while I was still in Clark’s apartment. I’m glad I had this time alone to think tonight. Of course Clark isn’t like Lex. Lex led a double life to enrich himself and hurt others. Clark leads a double life to help people. I know enough to not to judge based on simple appearances. It’s all about motivation and results.

For Lex, the only motivation that I ever saw was power and greed. The result was his personal enrichment and a mix of suffering and death to those that stood in his way. For Clark, while I’m no longer sure that I understand the motivation, at least I can be pretty sure of the results. As Superman, I know better than most about all the good that he does. While as Clark, he’s done about as much as a journalist can do to make Metropolis a better city. So the outcome of his activities seems to be positive. It’s the motivation that I have to wonder about. Why does he do what he does? That’s just one of the questions I want to ask.

I've been listening to reports on the fire and it sounds like a mess. Any other night, I would be down there covering it for the paper. But with all that's happened I know that I'm not on my game this evening. I did verify with the night editor that we have a reporter on the scene so the Planet will be covered. There were a lot of people in that apartment house. Whatever else happens, I see an expose on safe housing standards.

Superman was very prominent the first two hours, making rescues and helping to put out the fire. This was a very big old building and there was so much fire and so many families that it was hard for even Superman to solve the problem quickly. The reporter on the radio said that there were four known dead. From what the reports say, without Superman the death count could have easily been ten times as high.

But this isn't about whether or not he helps people as Superman. This is about the fact that he has been lying to me the entire time we've known each other. But there's something even more...

Before I can complete the thought, I hear the phone. I was wondering if he might call instead of just coming by. I reach over and pick up the phone.

"Hi, Clark."

"Lois. Um, how did you know it was me?"

"It's 1:00 am. Under the circumstances, it wasn't hard to figure out."

"I'd like to talk to you. May I come over?"

He sounds really shaken up. "Yes. Come on over and we'll talk."

"Thanks, Lois. I'll be right there."

As I hang up the phone I make sure I'm ready for what's to come. Part of me still wants to just tell him to get out of my life and stay out. I think I've mostly gotten past those feelings over the past several hours, but I'm not sure where my feelings are.

I'm watching the window. I wouldn't think it would take him more than a few seconds to get here. Unexpectedly, I hear a knock on the door. I go over and glance through the peep hole just long enough to verify that it really is Clark.

I open the door and there he is. He's perfectly in character as Clark right down to the glasses. He's wearing the same clothes as he had on for dinner earlier. He holds out a single red rose.

He's clearly nervous and scared. His expression reminds me of the Clark that I saw last night after I let him into my apartment. Then I remember that he's also the second biggest liar that I've ever met. And right now I'm wondering if I should award him first place. He needs to understand how I feel. I understand the symbolism of the red rose and there's no way I'm going to accept it. The way I feel now, I may never be ready to accept that particular gift from him. I ignore his offering of the rose and simply step aside.

In a cold, flat tone of voice, I say, "Come in."

He had been smiling a bit nervously. My refusal to accept his rose hits him hard. The smile, such as it was, is gone and now he just looks tired. Either he really is the world's best liar or the truth is going to turn out to be very complicated.

I close the door and return to my chair. Since I've been expecting him for some time, I have this part already set up. There's a chair for him so we can talk facing each other. I'm not watching him. I'm just staring at that chair. He'll get the message. After only a few seconds he comes into view and sits down. He still has the rose in his hand. After only a second or two he sets it carefully on the table beside the chair.

Someone has to break the ice on this so I speak up. "You wanted to come over and talk. So talk." This came out sounding angrier than I really intended. But then again, I'm pretty angry.

"Lois... Maybe this isn't the right time. Maybe I can come back when you aren't so angry."

He's not getting it. "Clark, my anger isn't the problem." My

voice is flat.

"You sure sound angry."

"I am angry! But my being angry isn't the real problem. Clark, I'm hurt. I... You... You've hurt me more than I thought possible."

I'm near tears, but so far I'm holding that in check. He looks devastated at hearing me say those words. He sure doesn't feel like someone who's been lying to me.

He shifts uncomfortably in the chair. "Lois, now that I'm here, all that I can think to say is that I'm sorry. Well, that and the other thing. But it doesn't sound like you want to hear that right now."

"Other thing?"

His response is barely audible. "I love you."

"Oh." I'm not sharp tonight. I would normally have gotten that without asking. Before I can think of more to say, he's speaking again.

"You've had some time to think. You must have some questions that you want to ask. I promise I'll give you the most honest and complete answers that I have."

This is what I wanted. We might as well cut right to the core of the matter.

In as challenging a voice as I can muster, I fire my first shot. "Who are you?"

He looks confused at this. "I'm Clark."

"Then who is Superman?"

I see comprehension on his face. "Now I understand. Lois, that's always been the problem. Superman is nobody."

I feel a flash of anger. "Clark, if you're going to play games then..."

He cuts me off. "No. Please let me finish. To your question, I am Clark Kent. Everything you've ever seen about 'Clark' is real. My parents are real. Smallville is real. Being your partner at the Daily Planet is real. You've been to Smallville. You've met people that knew Clark growing up. 'Clark' is as real as anybody."

The emotion in his voice is very convincing and he's not done yet. "Superman is... Well, he's heroic and helps out a lot, but whatever he may be, he's not real. He's... He's a set of brightly-colored clothes that allow me, Clark, to use my abilities to help others. He's nothing more than a made-up character. You actually invented him."

"What!"

"You probably don't remember, but it was during our first assignment together. I rescued a man in the sewer and my clothes got all dirty. You told me..."

I cut him off. "...to bring a change of clothes to work. I remember that day. The man said that you had rescued him."

I'm stunned. It must show because I see a hint at a smile appear before he continues. "That was the moment when Superman was born. Like I said, he's not a real person at all. He's just other clothes I wear... the character I play."

He pauses for a second to collect himself. How can Superman be fake? He does so much. He represents so much of what's right in the world.

Clark takes advantage of my stunned silence to continue. "In the time since I left for the fire, you must have spent some time wondering why I haven't told you the truth sooner."

"Yes. I was going to get to that."

"Think about it this way. If you were an actor, and someone that you were very attracted to was more interested in the character you play than in you for yourself. How would you feel?"

"Do I seem that shallow?"

"No, Lois. But you were that infatuated. Think back to that night in your apartment before you got engaged to Lex. Imagine how I felt when you told me as Superman that you would love

me if I were an ordinary person, when the ordinary person inside that suit had just... well, you know what happened. I'm sorry that I got angry that night, but I can't describe how much that hurt."

Wow. Somehow I had managed to avoid thinking about that particular night. I'm beginning to think there's more to his side of all this than I thought. I've been focusing on how much he's hurt me by lying about his identity. Now it occurs to me that there's been pain-enough to go around.

I realize that the larger part of the anger that I've been feeling seems to be mostly gone. But some of the hurt is still there. "Clark, with all we've been through, didn't you feel that you could trust me?"

He takes a deep breath. "At first, of course I didn't feel that I could trust you with my secret. Then, last year, I got to know you and I first got to thinking about telling you the secret. But before I was able to work up the nerve, you got involved with Lex. I'm sorry if you don't think this was fair, but I wasn't about to share my identity with someone that might end up married to Luthor."

"I understand that. But... well, what about since then?"

I notice a change in his expression. Up until now he's been pleading. Now, he looks scared or defensive. "Since then it hasn't been about trust."

"What! Then why?"

"Well, there are two parts. First, it may seem childish but I wanted you to like me for myself. I've always been worried that if you knew I was Superman, I would never know if you liked me or... well... him."

"That doesn't make sense. You are him."

"Lois, like I said. I'm trying to be as honest about what I've done and why as I possibly can. I'll be the first to admit that not everything that I've felt or done in the whole you, me, and Superman thing makes perfect sense. I can tell you the truth about how I've felt. I can't guarantee that it will all seem reasonable. But think about what I said a moment ago. From my perspective, he's not me!"

He pauses again and then continues. "Anyway, the second part is easy. I've been afraid of how you would react. Lois, think about last night. You know how I feel about you. I... Whenever I started working up the courage to tell you, I'd get worried about how you'd react. I've wanted to tell you, but I've just been too scared of the possible consequences."

He goes silent for a second then he practically jumps out of his chair and heads away from me. After a few steps he stops and turns to face me. "There's no one in the world that I want so much to think well of me. I've been scared that..."

He's struggling to say something. He's looking at me with such intensity that I feel like I should be worried about his heat vision firing off. "Lois, I have lied to you! Don't you think I understand that? It's been eating away at me since... ever since we got to be close. I've desperately wanted to tell you. I've known that if our relationship was ever to go anywhere, I would have to tell you and face up to the lie. Whatever happens, I'll have to live with the fact that I've spent over a year lying to... to the most important person in the world to me."

I can hardly believe that just a few hours ago I was thinking that he was just like Lex. When Clark walked in my door tonight, I didn't think there was anything he could say that I would believe. I guess one thing that I didn't expect was a flat-out admission that he has been lying to me. Lex would have equivocated and justified, but he would never have owned up to something like this, and I certainly can't imagine him being worried about having to live with himself for having done it.

But there's at least one more thing. "Clark, when Dillinger shot you, you let everyone think you were dead. You let me think you were dead! How could you do that to me?"

For a second he's struck dumb. Very quickly he recovers and takes a step toward me. After only that one step he drops to his

knees. "Lois-if there was any one thing I could change, that would be it. Of all the times tonight that I've said I'm sorry, that is what I am truly most sorry about. When I was shot, I panicked. I had to protect you, but once I was shot in front of all those witnesses, I didn't know what else to do."

With that last phrase he drops his gaze to the floor. Now it's my turn. "I can understand why you pretended to be dead. But, do you know what that did to me? How could you let me go through that?"

He lifts his head to look up at me. He looks miserable. "Right then I didn't know what else to do, so I went to Smallville. I knew my friends here would feel bad, but I was trying to think of a way to come back. I... I wasn't thinking straight. It was only after I 'came back' that I found out how you'd reacted to my supposed death. I swear that I would have told you my secret in a second if I would have known what you were going through."

He shuffles forward on his knees and reaches for my hand. I reach out and meet him halfway. He has an amazingly gentle touch for the strongest man in the world. "When I came in you asked me who I am. I'm Clark Kent. In all the ways that matter, I'm just like the next guy. Sometimes I do the right thing and sometimes I really screw up. That night, I really screwed up. After that night, I didn't know if I would ever be able to get up the courage to tell you the truth. For almost everything else I could try to explain or possibly even justify. For the error of not coming to you that night and telling you who I was, and that I was alive, all I can do is to beg for your forgiveness."

Now he's waiting for me. I guess the question to me now is "What do I believe?" I'm amazed at how reasonable it all sounds now. I guess a lot of that has to do with the person. Either he's telling me the truth or he can lie so well that Lex is a child in comparison. I guess I need to decide what I want.

As I feel his hand on mine and look into his eyes, I find that I already know the answer to that. I smile at him for the first time since dinner. "Clark, you brought me a gift. I think I'd like it now." I shift my eyes to the rose he left beside the chair.

I don't know if it's the smile or my glance at the rose but Clark has never been slow on the uptake. He scrambles to his feet and in an instant has retrieved the rose. I was wondering if he was going to get back on his knees. Instead, when he returns he's holding the rose in one hand and beckoning me to stand with the other.

As I stand, he offers me the rose again. This time I take it and quite deliberately smell its fragrance.

"Lois, I wish I could promise that things would be perfect from here on out. I don't think I can make that pledge. What I can do is promise that from this point forward, there will be no more evasions about who I am and there will be no more 'cheese of the month' excuses when I'm needed as Superman." He seems to think about this for a second and I see the first flash of joy since he arrived. Then he continues. "At least, there won't be any directed at you."

I'm gazing up into his eyes that now look so warm and inviting. I can't help but reach out and take his open hand in mine. As our fingers intertwine, I feel it. His touch is-magic! I guess it always has been. A year ago, I felt it when Superman would hold me. Since last night, I've felt it when Clark touched me. Now I swear that it's stronger than ever. I wonder if it's my imagination or if it's related to him no longer hiding his real self from me. Whatever the reason, it feels marvelous.

Clark shifts a bit closer and I see the arm I'm not holding moving toward what will certainly be a hug. Two hours ago I would have been appalled at this act. An hour ago I would have been angry. But now, after all I've heard tonight, and with the electricity of Clark's touch filling me with energy, I find that I welcome the embrace.

His face draws close to mine. "Thank you."

“For...?”

“...for being more forgiving and understanding than I have any right to hope or expect. I swear I’ll do my best to never give you cause to regret it. Lois, I...” He pauses. I see another look that I remember from last night. Enough words... I pull his face down to mine. He seems happy to cooperate.

I love the feel of his lips as they press against mine. How he can be invulnerable to knives, guns, and pretty much everything else but still have lips that feel like this? It only takes a second or two for me to realize that he’s reluctant to deepen the kiss. He needs to understand that if I hadn’t forgiven him, I wouldn’t be kissing him at all. I pull more tightly into his embrace and at the same time I part my lips and dance my tongue over those soft lips of his. He responds quickly, and I find that last night was no fluke. Kissing Clark is a whole-body affair and I find myself completely absorbed in the experience. Every part of my being is screaming that this is the man that I want to be with.

Some long time later, still holding him in a deliciously intimate embrace, I ask, “What next?”

“We need to go to Smallville. My mom always told me that when I finally got around to telling you the secret, I needed to bring you home for dinner.” His expression suddenly turns playful. “I think she plans to pull out the baby pictures.”

Leave it to Martha to know we would work things out. “That sounds nice.”

Then he continues. “And we have a trip to Paris this weekend.”

“Paris?”

“I wanted dinner to be extra special. That cake didn’t come from the best chocolate specialty bakery in Metropolis. It came from the best in the world. At least, it’s the best that I’ve ever found.”

“Clark, I can see that being in a relationship with you is not going to be boring.”

His reply is accompanied by a half-laugh. “I’ve been thinking that about you since the first day we met.”

Sometimes I feel like I could spend eternity looking into his eyes. I feel a warm wave wash over me. I just have to say it. “I love you, Clark Kent.”

His responding smile is filled with more of that magic. “Love is the only feeling I’ve ever known for you, Lois Lane.”

As I feel myself being drawn into another kiss, the future feels dazzling.

THE END