

Exploring the West with Lois and Clark

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Rated PG

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Summary: On their honeymoon, Lois and Clark make a pinky swear that they will always make time for each other — and they keep that promise in some of the best places on earth. This story features the American West from Lake Tahoe to San Francisco.

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Disclaimer: This is a fanfic based on the television show, Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman. No copyright infringement is intended. I am borrowing these characters for a little fun and not for any profit.

Authors Note: This is the longer version of the Tahoe honeymoon story with a continuation to San Francisco. The time of year is early May. The story is part of M.L. Thompson's World Tour anthology on the Archive. Rated PG. Following LabRat's plea for more Archive material, I realized I had never submitted this longer version to the Archive. This was originally written in 2004 and then posted on the Fanfic Boards as a separate story February 3, 2005. I have made minor revisions to the story for this submission.

On a personal note, I have visited all the places identified in the story and we still own a condo on Lake Tahoe.

Chapter 1. In the Beginning

A person with a very powerful telescope could have seen the bright red figure on the top of Mt. Tallac overlooking Lake Tahoe, but they would not have observed the small additional figure enveloped in the red cape. Clark hugged Lois back to his chest as they watched the sun rise over the Sierra Nevada, the shadow line retreating before the assault of the new May day. As the forest was warmed by the sunlight, the aroma of pine began to ascend to the heights.

Below them, still in darkness, was small and tranquil Fallen Leaf Lake. To their left and north was the vast expanse of the 10th largest lake in the world and the second deepest lake in the United States after Crater Lake. The water was so clear that even Lois could see the lake bottom near the shoreline. Clark, if he chose, could have tracked the large sport fish deep in the lake, or even perhaps the fabled "Tahoe Tessie," their version of the Loch Ness Monster. Right now he chose to nibble gently on his wife's ears, switching conscientiously from right to left and back again. It was cold up here, he reasoned, and he was keeping her ears warm. He could hear her purring softly from his ministrations.

"Happy Anniversary."

Lois giggled. "How many have we had this year?"

"I've lost count," Clark breathed. "You warm enough?"

Lois nodded, then laid her head back on his shoulder, opening the right side of her neck and right shoulder for more attention. He obliged contentedly, then softly stroked her arms under his cape. Her hands were occupied holding it together in front. Clark slid his arms down hers and hugged her more tightly to him. It was so wonderful to feel her here with him, enjoying one of his favorite sights, the wonder magnified with the sharing.

She watched in contentment as the town of South Lake Tahoe was slowly revealed to them, a curtain rising on a new day. On Heavenly Valley, snow still gleamed on the ski runs, just now dormant for the languid summer days to come. Daylight sparkled off the cable lines running up the mountain. The town began to come alive with traffic.

"It's still early," he said softly in her ear, "and I have something I want to show you before the visitors come."

Lois let loose of the cape and turned in his arms, reaching up to his neck and head, presenting her lips for a kiss. "You're the tour director here. Whatever you want."

"And I want a *lot*," he growled before kissing her thoroughly. Lois giggled softly as he scooped her up to fly away. "First, I'm going to change into something a little less... flamboyant." He flew down the mountain to the unpopulated north end of Fallen Leaf Lake, stepped into the cover of the trees and spun into blue jeans, black T-shirt and windbreaker. He stepped back to her to see her transfixed by the perfect sight of the glass smooth lake fringed by rustic cabins and small boats reflected on the water.

"How perfect is that," Lois stated as he resumed his previous posture of hugging her back into him.

He looked out at the view too. "As perfect as the woman watching it with me. And I have something better yet to come."

Lois looked up at him, "You always do."

"Sweet-talking will get you anything, my dear. Come on, there's more. For this, I want you to close your eyes until we get there."

Lois gladly obliged and snuggled her head under his chin as he scooped her up once more. It was a short flight until she felt the ground under her feet again and once more was held with her back against his chest.

"O.K. Open them."

She opened her eyes and gasped. "It's gorgeous." She was standing in small unroofed enclosure looking toward the opening of a small bay. Looking around, she saw they were on a steep island in the center of the bay. The ground on top was smooth and she stepped away from him to take in the full panorama around them. The hillside of the bay was very steep with small boat anchorages along the shore of the emerald colored water. Nestled in the trees at the head of the bay was an imposing but rugged structure.

"A castle!" Lois gasped.

Slipping into tour guide mode, Clark began his explanation, gesturing expansively. "It's a grand summer villa modeled on a Scandinavian castle circa 800 A.D. Vikingsholm, which is *only* accessible by boat, on foot..." Clark looked at her and winked, "or air, was built by Mrs. Lora Knight, a wealthy Chicago widow, in 1928, as a summer home. She moved to San Francisco and then traveled with friends to Lake Tahoe and fell in love with the bay."

Clark continued, "No tree was felled in construction on the site. From its completion in 1929 until 1944 she spent two months of every summer here, inviting notable friends to stay the summer with her. Servants would prepare a sumptuous afternoon tea and row them out to this little island with the teahouse, where they would spend a leisurely afternoon. The teahouse originally had a roof, but it was lost to the elements and never replaced. This island, called Fannette Island, is the only island in Lake Tahoe." Clark then took Lois' right hand in his left and pulled her around the little pergola, gesturing grandly with his right arm as if to present the splendor of their view to her. "This is Emerald Bay, now a state park in Lake Tahoe."

"Oh, Clark, it's wonderful." It was as if he had presented a perfect jewel to her.

She turned to him and laid her hand on his chest in a familiar gesture from their first days together as partners. Enthusiastically, Lois exclaimed, "This whole tour idea has been absolutely

wonderful! I love seeing where you have been, what sights you enjoy, and,” her voice lowered suggestively, “what things you like.”

For his part, beyond sharing things he enjoyed with Lois, Clark loved seeing this side of her, childlike and enthusiastic. The hard-bitten cynical reporter had left the building for the day and he loved it. The light in her eyes and her joyful expression drew him in like a moth to a flame and he kissed her very thoroughly.

“Clark, we just did that. We just left home a short time ago,” Lois mock protested.

Clark broke off the kiss, grinning, “Ah, but I can never get enough of my beautiful wife. God, I *love* calling you my wife.”

In reward for the comment, Lois reached up and placed both hands on the sides of his face and pulled his head down for another kiss. Suddenly her stomach let out a loud growl and she began to giggle. “I think we forgot breakfast in the excitement of getting out of Metropolis.”

“Never let it be said I starved my wife for anything,” he winked again, “even food. How about a visit to Pancake House?”

Lois’ eyes got large, “They have a Pancake House here?”

“And hotels and casinos on the Nevada side, and stores and businesses of all kind. And people who live here year round,” he teased.

Lois turned and looked at the view again. “Imagine living and looking at this beauty every day.”

“I *am* looking at it,” Clark said as he stared directly at her.

“Oh, you, you *honeymooner*, you.” She kissed him again lightly. “But don’t ever quit.”

“No chance of that.” Clark looked around to spot any early morning, early season sightseers, and seeing no one, picked up Lois and flew back toward the town of South Lake Tahoe. Businesses were along Highway 50 for the most part, framed by tall pine trees on one side and the lake on the other. He landed amidst the trees behind the restaurant and Lois and Clark casually strolled hand in hand onto the parking lot and to the front door of the Pancake House.

Clark was in absolute heaven and a silly grin seemed permanently etched onto his face. He loved sitting here across from Lois, so he could watch her, in an ordinary restaurant in an ordinary town doing what ordinary, normal people do. It was his dream and Lois had fulfilled it for him. She was hungry, he noted, as he watched her tuck into a big plate of waffles enthusiastically. Traveling gave her an appetite, it seemed.

She caught him watching her. “What?”

“I just enjoy watching you enjoy your meal.”

She blushed at the attention. “You seem to enjoy everything I do. I never had that before.” She smiled and then gestured at his plate now empty of the three egg California omelet, hash browns and sourdough toast. “And I notice you are up to your usual standards.”

“Well, traveling takes a lot out of me.”

Lois just kept herself from spraying a mouthful of waffle onto her plate as she erupted in helpless giggles. He just made her feel so wonderful with everything he did and said. She *felt* like a honeymooner.

After several sips of water, when she could finally talk, she asked, “So where next?”

“Well,” he said mock somberly, “we will *drive* up Highway 89, the west side of the Lake, and then go on over to San Francisco. How’s that?”

“That sounds great.” Lois looked over Clark’s shoulder through the windows to the lakeshore. “Oh, look, Clark, it’s a hot air balloon.”

Clark turned and looked at the multi-colored balloon rising gracefully from the beach, then turned back, a glint in his eye. “So, do you like to fly, Mrs. Kent?”

Lois’ eyes twinkled with their shared secret. “Oh, I *love* it

very much, Mr. Kent. Especially *on* something so colorful.”

It was Clark’s turn to be caught off guard and he almost choked on his coffee. He muttered softly, “I think the term is ‘in’ a hot air balloon, Lois, not ‘on.’” His eyebrow arched.

Softly, Lois replied “Oh, I think ‘on’ is more appropriate.” Then she threw him a mischievous grin.

Clark could only shake his head at her, enjoying every second of the byplay.

They left the tip on the table and rose to leave. The tip had been substantial because the service from the young female waitress was outstanding. Somehow, Clark always got attentive service. As Lois watched Clark pay their bill at the cash register, she felt a sudden wave of pride and of possessiveness. He was hers, and he loved her. Going out like this just seemed so right for them, so ordinary. That was why these weekend vacations were so wonderful. They had time to themselves. She never in her life imagined she would feel this way, wanting a life over her job. Well, now she had both, with him.

Hand-in-hand Lois and Clark strolled out into the now bright morning sunshine. Lois inhaled deeply. “Smell that pine. It’s wonderful.”

“Yes, it is, but I thought you couldn’t live without smog.”

“I’ve smelled pine before.” Lois defended herself. “At Girl Scout camp in the Berkshires.”

“Ah, yes. Where you learned how to start a fire.”

She bumped her hip against his. “It came in pretty handy on Spencer Spencer’s island. You know, let’s walk a little. I need to work off those calories. Unlike you.”

“Well, I could suggest a more pleasant way to work off calories.”

“Here? Now? You are incorrigible!”

“Yep. And proud of it. But I have a special treat waiting in San Francisco for us, so why don’t we walk along the shoreline a little and then find a handy stand of trees and be on our way?”

“Sounds like a plan. At least there *are* trees to hide in. Unlike Death Valley.”

“Didn’t you like Death Valley?”

“Oh, it was pretty and interesting and unusual and we did... something unusual, but it was hard to find cover for take off and landing, you must admit!”

“I do admit it was a challenge.”

They walked a little way and came upon a historical park. Lois, ever the fiend for information, started reading the plaques. “The Donner Party! That was here?”

“Well, up north just a ways. Donner Pass, named for the ill-fated first party, became the main emigrant pass from the east to the west. It’s a pretty place; you just don’t want to get snowed in with no food. It’s not a cheerful story.”

“But it is history, Clark. A lot of history is not pleasant.”

“Lois, you continue to amaze me. I thought I’d never get you out of Metropolis and here you are devouring the history of the rugged west.”

“It’s not *that* surprising, Clark. It’s like a story, only it happened in the past. But do you know that a lot of the real stories didn’t get told?”

“Well, we can go to the park and see the historical displays if you want. Donner Pass is now off of the main road from Reno to San Francisco, so it’s on our way. Let’s go find our ‘transportation’ and get on our way.”

Lois paused and looked at Clark. “You know, I just had this strange thought. It almost *might* be more fun to drive. To drive the route, you know?” Lois looked apologetic, like she was afraid of hurting his feelings.

“Honey, that’s really not a bad idea. It gives you more of a sense of what the pioneers saw and experienced. I’ve done it some, just to do it.”

“Really?”

Clark shrugged. “I like to try different things. Anyway, the short of it is that while it’s fun, it’s also sometimes very long time-wise. And there are many boring places to go through to get where ever.” He checked his surroundings for any eavesdroppers and then said to her confidentially, “I actually picked the car up and carried it further down the road several times out here in the west just to save myself time.”

Lois just stared at him in amazement. “The things I learn about you!”

Clark held out his hand. “Your chariot awaits, madam.” Lois put her hand in his, they strolled into the trees and he spun into the Suit.

Once they were at a comfortable altitude, Clark resumed the tour guide duties that he took very seriously. His fund of trivia was deep and wide and he enjoyed sharing it with Lois. “The name Tahoe comes from white man’s mispronunciation of the original Indian name. Signs of Washoe Indian habitation have been dated to 10,000 years ago right here on the south shore.”

Clark turned them around to the south. “In 1844 as America was expanding westward, John C. Fremont discovered Carson Pass to the south of us and saw Lake Tahoe. The pass is 10,651 feet high, but you can’t really see it from where we are because it’s behind this whole ridge. As you remember from our little journey to Death Valley, the Sierra Nevada range, which runs from up ahead, the north end of Lake Tahoe, to Walker Pass near Lake Isabella, was a formidable barrier to people trying to get to California. So discovery of the pass was a big deal. They were trying to find a better life than they had then in the Midwest and east, and were actually fleeing to foreign countries, since California was ruled by Mexico and Oregon was British at the time.”

“Imagine how history would have been different if you’d been around.”

The thought startled Clark so much that he stopped in mid-air and looked at Lois. “I never thought of that. But people needed to strive for themselves. The same thing could have been said if the expansion happened after the Wright Brothers discovered how to build an aircraft that would fly. History is what it is, I guess.” His gaze raised up over her head and he exclaimed, “Whoops!”

“What, whoops?”

“The people in the balloon are waving at us.” He turned them slightly so she could see.

“Do you ever wave back?”

“Sometimes, when I’m not in a hurry.”

“Do we wave back now?”

“What the hey. We’re on our honeymoon. Although we may have to pay the price later if they recognize you. I’ll just give them a brief salute and we’ll get on our way.” Clark did so and they resumed their flight up the west side of Lake Tahoe.

“I wondered why you spun into the Suit.”

“I think it’s a good idea if I’m going to be up a long time and might be seen by aircraft. If I fly around in jeans and a T-shirt, the public might think there is another flying man around and start looking for him.”

Lois smiled at him, “Another of your Rules?”

Clark got the connection. “Yeah, just like in the jail on Spencer Spencer’s island. We learned a lot about each other that trip.”

Lois kissed Clark’s jaw after they were out of sight of the balloon. “You’re a much better ride than in a hot air balloon, Clark.” She returned to admiring both the breathtaking sight of the lake itself and the magnificent homes dotting the lakeshore and clinging to the mountainside. If someone in the balloon had just taken their photograph together, they would deal with it later. Life was too short to worry about everything.

“Would you *look* at those homes, Clark. Who can afford those?

“Very rich people, I imagine, Lois. Although some of the older homes were quite cheap to build but now are worth a fortune. To continue my tour, in 1852 Tahoe was officially named Lake Bigler after John Bigler, California’s third Governor, who lead a rescue party into the Sierra to save a group of immigrants.

“The Donner Party?”

Clark shook his head. “No, they were in 1847. So I guess they weren’t the last group to need rescuing. By the way, California became the 31st state September 9, 1850, but the California bear flag was first raised at the gold town of Sonoma June 14, 1846. And Oregon became the 33rd state February 14, 1859.”

“Dang, you’re better than the Daily Planet search engine.”

Clark threw her a smirk. “Well, I studied up to impress you.”

“How about I ask a question. Maybe stump you?”

“Oh, yeah, Ms. Lane, intrepid reporter. Go for it.”

“Well, apparently the western US map changed rapidly in a few years time. Why were all these Americans risking death to get to California?”

Clark laughed. “Give me a hard one!”

Lois quirked her eye at him.

“Two words: Sutter’s Mill.”

“Gold!” Lois announced triumphantly.

“Yes. January, 1848, at Coloma on the American River near Sacramento, not far from here. So a lot of people came to California in search of gold and they had to eat. They stocked Lake Tahoe with trout and a large fishing industry was born. Then gold was found in the Comstock Lode in 1859 at Virginia City.”

Clark again stopped in the air and pointed northeast. “See, beyond the mountains on the far side of the lake, the valley with houses and trees? That’s Carson City down there, the state capitol of Nevada. The next set of hills is where Virginia City is located. It’s now a tourist site.”

Clark again flew at a leisurely pace and continued. He gestured to the forest below them. “These mountains were practically denuded of trees by need for wood for bracing in the mine tunnels. The fish in Lake Tahoe fed the miners and the fish were totally depleted by 1904. Right below us is Tahoe City, a nice artists’ community now, but it was once the hub of the commercial fishing industry. And up ahead of us, to get us more into this century, is Squaw Valley, the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics.”

“Clark, I’m getting a headache.”

“Actually, I’m getting tired of my own voice, too. How about we head for Donner Park, if you still want to see it?”

Chapter 2. Looking to the Past

Lois followed Clark, once again in his jeans and T-shirt, through The Emigrant Trail Museum at Donner Memorial State Park. She had been impressed at the 22-foot high monument outside. It was the height of the snowdrifts that terrible winter. The valley itself was very pretty with another perfect little lake.

Clark was thoroughly absorbed in the displays showing the whole emigrant story. Emigrant was the correct word, she mused, because they were leaving their home country, the US, for foreign lands: Mexican California and British Oregon Territory. The US government had a role in this, too.

Lois learned from the displays that in 1818, the United States and the United Kingdom (controlling British Canada) had established a joint claim over the Oregon Territory which was defined as the region west of the Rocky Mountains and between latitudes 42 degrees North and 54 degrees, 40 minutes North, which was the southern boundary of Russia’s Alaska territory. Joint control worked for over a decade and a half but ultimately, the parties decided that joint occupancy wasn’t working well so they set about to divide Oregon.

The 1844 Democratic presidential candidate James K. Polk ran on a platform of taking control over the entire Oregon Territory and used the famous campaign slogan, “Fifty-four Forty or Fight!” Polk’s plan was to claim and go to war over the entire territory for the United States. But the public was more interested in getting good farmland than in fighting another war with the British.

The Oregon Treaty of 1846 established the boundary at 49 degrees North latitude. The exception to the 49th parallel boundary is that it turns south in the channel separating Vancouver Island with the mainland and then turns south again through the Juan de Fuca Strait. This maritime portion of the boundary wasn’t officially demarcated until 1872.

During the 1840’s American policy was to encourage emigration to California and the Oregon Territory to secure the land from “Sea to Shining Sea.” The powers in Washington wanted control both over the Pacific Ocean and ports on the West Coast. So the government offered financial incentives for those willing to undertake the trek west. Added impetus was given by the influenza epidemic of 1847 in the US and Canada. Whole families were decimated, often leaving one or two orphaned children. Neighbors going on the emigration welcomed these children to come with them. The West was the final frontier of the 1850’s and 60’s.

Suddenly Lois became aware that Clark was getting a little too absorbed in the story. He had such empathy that he was worrying about people dead a century before he came to this planet. She needed to get him out of there. She came up behind his almost hunched shoulders and put a hand on his back. “Clark? Clark, I think I’m ready to move on, how about you?”

Clark turned to her, a look of tight intensity on his face, but his expression cleared immediately and he smiled one of his wonderful dazzling smiles. “Sounds good. What kind of food are you up to for lunch?”

“Lunch? I’m still full from breakfast! But I guess it is getting that time.” She knew he didn’t need to eat, but he certainly loved to, especially if it wasn’t her cooking.

They walked out of the museum with hands swinging together in rhythm. “How about Mexican food? There’s this nice little cantina down on the American River in Sacramento where they have this really good hot salsa.”

“If it’s so hot you like it, am I likely to survive it?” she grinned up at him.

“Hey, they have regular stuff too. Besides, you like Thai and that is hot. Just a different hot.”

They had reached a stand of trees in the campground and Clark was looking around to make sure the coast was clear.

“So which way are we going?” Lois asked with a twinkle in her eye. Clark looked confused. “Undercover,” she gestured at his current outfit, “or full colors with all flags flying?”

“For you, my lovely wife, all flags flying.”

Superman landed with his wife on a small rock outcropping on an island in San Francisco Bay. He quickly spun into Clark clothes and tugged Lois up the hill with him.

“Where are we, Clark?”

“Alcatraz.”

Lois rounded on him, startled beyond measure. “Alcatraz? Are you kidding me? This is romantic?” She was incredulous.

“Hang on a moment and all will be clear. Crystal clear.” He tugged her out from behind the ruins of the Post Exchange and Officers club and pointed. “Look at the view.”

Lois inhaled sharply. Laid out before her was San Francisco, illuminated in all its glory by the westering sun. Right in front of them was Fisherman’s Wharf with a large white cruise ship docked in port. The ship dwarfed the terminals along the Embarcadero.

“Come on. We’ll miss the ferryboat.” Clark tugged her forward and started walking rapidly through the sally port and past the 1844 howitzer canon left over from when Alcatraz was an army camp before it became a prison. Tied up at the floating dock was a Blue and Red ferryboat about to depart for Fisherman’s Wharf.

Lois gave up questioning and simply followed Clark. They were just hopping on this ferryboat? But didn’t such ferryboats charge to take tourists to and from the island? Lois knew Alcatraz had closed a long time ago as a prison and was now a state park, letting tourists roam past the cells of Al Capone, “Machine Gun” Kelly and “The Birdman of Alcatraz.” Lois shivered at the memory of a resurrected Al Capone and what that whole incident had meant to her.

Clark guided her onto the ferryboat and they quickly made their way up the stairways to the top level and to the front. “Just look, Lois. Isn’t it magnificent!”

The view was breathtaking. The crew for the return trip was quickly buttoning up the boat. It pulled out and shortly Lois could see from the Oakland Bay Bridge to the Golden Gate Bridge. By luck, the sky was clear and the sun was reflecting off the tall buildings downtown. She identified the Transamerica Tower by its unique shape. But she was stunned by something else. She had never known Clark to simply take — in this case a ferryboat ride — something he hadn’t paid for. He was meticulous in that matter.

Clark looked over at Lois and saw something was bothering her. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“Don’t they charge for riding these boats?”

“Yes, they do. But since this is the only way off the Island of Alcatraz, they only take tickets coming out. You hop on any available ferryboat to leave. They’re here every half hour.”

Lois turned large eyes on him. “But we didn’t buy tickets.”

Clark saw her problem immediately. This from a woman who merrily did breaking and entering at a moment’s notice for her job? His mouth quirked into a smile and he leaned closer. “Relax, Lois and enjoy.” He mouthed the word “Superman” and then said aloud, “has a lifetime pass. He helped a sinking ferry from the same company sometime back and it was a gift from the owner. I just didn’t want to use it publicly. Besides, like I said, they don’t check on the return trip.”

“Oh,” Lois breathed a relieved sigh and turned to enjoy the view and the ride. Clark hugged her to him because the wind was biting as they moved into high speed.

Clark pointed back to the lighthouse on top of the island. “That lighthouse was built in 1854 and is the first lighthouse on the west coast. It’s been updated of course, but it is still key to the safety of the ships coming in and out of San Francisco Bay. It and the foghorn,” he chuckled. “When we get to our room tonight, you’ll be able to see what I mean.”

“Our room? We’re not going home tonight?”

“Nope. This is an overnighter. Like Las Vegas.”

“Ohhh.” Lois smiled appreciatively. It was a wonderful, clear afternoon and Lois relaxed and enjoyed the sights and smells of the water as they headed to Pier 43. As they followed the large crowd off the boat, Lois began to hear this loud sound. “It sounds like barking. Lots of dogs running around?”

“Nope. Seals. Want to see them?” Clark took Lois’ hand in his and headed to their left toward Pier 39. They reached the rail of the pier and Clark pointed to large rafts of wood chained together on top of which was a large herd of California sea lions.

Clark gestured at the massed bodies. Large brown bodies glided sleekly through the water, several very large males slept contentedly with heads up, necks back seeking the sun, smaller females slept together in large entangled masses.

“These are Harbor seals, which are a class of California sea lion. See, they have visible ears. True seals have no visible ears.

They are very friendly and intelligent and are the ones trained as entertainers in aquatic shows.”

Lois inhaled sharply. “Oh, my god. What is that smell?”

Clark smiled. “Well, they live 24/7 on these floats. Basically it is the smell of seal poop.

“Oy. This is when you *don't* want smell-o-vision. Doesn't it bother you?”

Clark cocked an eyebrow at her. “I can tell it smells bad, but it doesn't bother me on the same visceral level it does you. Let's go on to Pier 39. They have restaurants...”

Lois rolled her eyes. More food?

“...an aquarium, a carousel, shops, and other stuff.”

Hand in hand they wandered over and strolled the pier.

In due time they made their way westward on Embarcadero, looking at an endless procession of shops and souvenir stands selling nearly everything imaginable that could be labeled with the name “San Francisco.”

The ding ding of a trolley bell announced the stop of a rail trolley along the street. Throngs of people moved all directions along the sidewalk, across the street and in and out of stores. Cars and a proliferation of taxis drove through the street. The smell of fresh cooked fish and fresh bread permeated the area.

Suddenly Lois stopped and pointed across the street at a storefront with a loud neon sign. “Clark, look, ‘Ripley's Believe It or Not.’ Don't they have a wax statue of Superman in there?”

Clark turned to Lois, mouth open, about ready to protest that he, in no way, was going in to stand next to a wax replica of his alter ego. Then he saw the twinkle in Lois' eyes and his mouth stretched to a rueful grin. “You, you, minx, you!” He leaned down and whispered in her ear. “I'm going to get you for that... later.”

She laughed. “Oh, I'm counting on it.”

They continued to marvel at the sights as they strolled contentedly toward Hyde Street Pier, the Maritime National Historical Park and Ft. Mason beyond it. The further west they went the more the wind increased and Lois began to shiver with the cold.

Clark noticed and hugged her to him, but the wind was more than even his proximity could compensate for. “You need a coat, Lois. Let's go get our room and I'll go back for our suitcases.”

Lois could do little more than nod her agreement. They turned up Hyde Street and Lois forgot the cold enough to exclaim, “Cable cars!! Here's the cable car turnaround!!”

“We'll get some warmer clothes and then we'll ride the cable car into the city tonight.”

Lois arched her brow at him, “We need warmer clothes?”

“All right, you need warmer clothes. And I think I'll get something fancier than I have on for tonight. Come on, it's just a block more.”

Suddenly the sidewalk turned markedly steeper. “Whoa, I'm glad I did my workout on the stair climber this week! This is steep.”

Clark moved his hand lower onto her outside buttock and gave her a subtle super assist.

“Thanks,” she whispered softly.

“My pleasure, I assure you. From this point on,” Clark said as they reached the next cross street, “it is much easier.”

They turned right on North Point and walked along the level street until they were near the western end of the block. “Here we are,” Clark gestured at a gray and white classic three-story San Francisco home dating from the early 1900's.

In the window was a small discrete sign saying “Bed and Breakfast.” They walked up the three steps of the stoop and entered the front door. A bell jingled as they entered. A short wiry dark-haired man rose from a desk in the converted living room and greeted them enthusiastically.

“Senor Clark! It is so good to see you again. It's been —

what? — over a year since you dropped by to visit us.”

“Arratsaldeon, Eztebe. Zer moduz? (Good Afternoon, Steven. How are you?) I'd like to present my *wife*, Lois. Lois, may I present Steve Penagarikano.”

The man turned and smiled at Lois, executing a small bow over her hand in an old world gesture. Pleased to meet you, Lois. And even more pleased Clark has married such a lovely woman!” He then turned back to Clark and prattled on in the melodious language they were both using fluently.

Lois could only stand by and follow the facial expressions. Whatever Steve said to Clark caused him to blush.

Clark cleared his throat. “So, Steve, is our room ready?”

“Bai. Zenbakiak bost. (Yes, Number 5.)” Steve returned to his desk and brought out a metal key with the number 5 on the tag. “Bi giltz? (Two keys?)”

Clark shook his head. “Ez, eskerrik asko. (No, thanks a lot)”

“Ez horregatik, (You're welcome),” replied Steve with a wink. “You know where it is.”

Clark then led Lois to the top floor where they walked to room number 5. Clark let them in and went on through the room to open the drapes.

Upon entering, Lois was immediately charmed by the room. They were on the west side of the building and the north side of the street, so the room had commanding views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz.

In reporter mode, Lois was on a mission to get more information. She never wanted to be left out of a conversation, especially one that made her husband blush.

“So, Clark. What was that language? I got lost after Senor. Well, except for the English parts, of course.”

“That is Basque. A totally unique language unconnected to any other language on earth. I, er, asked if the room was ready and he asked if we wanted two keys and I said no. I always get this room if I can. I called him Monday and found out it was available this weekend.”

Lois made a curt dismissive gesture, a twinkle in her eye. “No, not *that* part. The part where you wound up blushing.”

Clark blushed again with the memory. “Well, Steve's sister Arantxa was always trying to set me up with her friends. Steve said she would be very sad that I was now taken.”

Lois looked Clark in the eye. “Yeah, but your expression tells me there was a little more to it than you're sharing. Maybe I will torture the information from you later.” Lois poked a finger into his chest, then began moving it around softly, seductively. “So are you off to get our stuff?”

When they had started their weekend journeys, the routine had been to pack a small suitcase of clothes and toiletries for Clark to pick up if they decided to stay overnight.

“Yes, but first you have to see why this room is special.”

Clark possessively grabbed her hand from the front of his chest and tugged her toward the north window, which turned out to be a sliding glass door. Beyond it was a small balcony of white low fencing. Clark and Lois stepped out onto the balcony.

“Wow, this view is even more spectacular outside,” Lois breathed. The sounds washed up and over them. The Hyde Street Cable Car clanged its way up the hill.

“There's more.” Clark showed her the spiral staircase leading to the roof.

“On the roof?”

Clark nodded assent. “Just wait. You first.”

Lois climbed the staircase. “You know,” she said in a normal voice, knowing that Clark could hear her, “if I lived here, I'd never need to use the gym again.” She emerged onto the roof and beheld a small seemingly magical garden. “Ohh, how beautiful!”

Clark was beside her. “And even better, it is private and perfect cover for quick departures and arrivals.” Gesturing to the bench in the garden, he said, “Have a seat. I'll be back in a jiffy.

Which coat do you want?”

Lois told him, but then added, “Were you serious about painting the town red tonight?”

At his nod, she asked him to pick up the hang-up bag with the evening dress, coat and shoes too, then sat on the bench and watched. Her super man stepped back and spun into the Suit. “All flags flying,” she murmured to herself as he whooshed out of sight.

Sitting in the little garden in a spot of sunlight, Lois was protected from the wind she had felt so chillingly near the Maritim Park and was quite comfortable. After only a few moments she felt a tickle of cool air on her neck and a voice rumbled in her ear, “I’m back.”

“So soon? Get everything?”

Clark moved to sit next to her and tugged her close to him. “Of course. I left the door open, so took them straight to the closet.”

“I’m enjoying the sun here. It’s so pleasant. Stop and recharge a little.” Lois lay back against Clark and closed her eyes.

Refreshed after their little sojourn on the roof they returned to their room. Lois walked over to the west window, attracted by the sight of a large tower and what was obviously a shopping complex. “What is this?” Somehow with the height of the garden on the roof, she had not seen it from there.

“That, my dear, is Ghirardelli Square.”

“Ohhh,” she breathed. “Does it have anything to do with the chocolate of the same name?”

“Oh, does it ever. You ready for the tale?”

Lois plopped down on the plush bed. “Ohh, this is soft,” she said admiringly. “O.K., my super tour guide. Inform me.”

Clark made himself comfortable on the little sofa across from the bed and began the tale. “Domenico “Domingo” Ghirardelli was born in Rapallo, Italy, that’s near Genoa, in 1817, and learned about the confectionery and chocolate trade from his father by the time he was 20.”

“Like so many of that time, he needed to leave his beloved Italy to make his fortune. The first places he set up shop were Uruguay and Peru — but tales of the California gold rush were irresistible. Doesn’t this sound like a familiar theme from today?”

“To continue,” Clark said, “in 1848, Domingo’s neighbor, James Lick, packed up \$25,000, a huge sum at the time, and 600 pounds of Ghirardelli chocolate and sailed for the San Francisco Bay. A year later, Domingo followed him through the Golden Gate. He set up shop in San Francisco and like many soon to be wealthy entrepreneurs, he made money by grubstaking claims in the gold fields of California.”

Clark waved a scholarly finger at his wife, now seductively reclining on the bed.

“Grubstaking, you remember, oh lady from the east, is the word for providing supplies for miners to go off to the gold fields and hunt for gold. They pay you back for the supplies and give you a part of the gold. Well, Domingo was grubstaking so many miners he thought it more profitable to open a little store in the boomtown of Hornitos so they could buy more supplies from him with gold nuggets. He bought his supplies from the only general merchandise store in Stockton — a town on the water near Sacramento, remember — and brought them by wagon to Hornitos.”

“Finally he decided to give the store a run for its money by opening his own store in Stockton and did a thriving business. Soon Domingo was operating a fleet of his own river sloops to keep the Stockton store supplied from his base supply store on Battery Street in San Francisco.”

“He saw so many people pouring into San Francisco to reach the gold fields that he next decided to build a hotel. Building one of the first hotels in Old San Francisco, the Europa Hotel, was Domingo’s next business. But in The Great Fire of 1851,

everything Domingo owned in San Francisco was destroyed.”

“Just four days later, another fire burned his Stockton properties to the ground. Undaunted, Domingo used his remaining resources to open a coffee shop in San Francisco, on Commercial Street, but it lost money and he sold the store.”

“Domingo needed a lucky break and the confection connection supplied it. Using his old trade, he managed to rebuild and open a store on Kearny at Washington with a partner named Girard. At long last, his wife — who had remained in Peru — joined him in San Francisco and soon replaced Girard as Domingo’s business partner. Soon the store’s name was Mrs. Ghirardelli & Company.”

“After operating stores in several locations, the store that firmly fixed Ghirardelli fame was established on Jackson Street around 1856 where it flourished for the next 40 years. From this factory, Domingo shipped chocolate products not only throughout the United States, but also to Mexico, Hawaii and British Columbia. The factory was among the largest in the western half of North America at that time. It’s still standing in Jackson Square near the new ferry building and is an antique gallery now. And somehow it survived the 1906 earthquake.”

Clark got up from the sofa and casually strolled to the bed where Lois was laying, entranced by his tale.

“Domingo’s business was growing and he needed a bigger factory. He and his sons purchased an entire block of property for their headquarters in 1893. Here, on North Point Street, Domingo and his sons began a spectacular building program that extended over 11 years. Ghirardelli Square was the result. There are actually nine buildings there. In 1894 Domingo Ghirardelli died during a visit to his hometown.”

Clark put his hands on the bed, then his knees, crawling toward Lois who began to giggle. Clark lowered his voice in pitch and volume, turning the pedantic words into something very sexy that belied their content.

“The Broma Process was his patented method for making dry, powdered chocolate which could be easily shipped and that’s what made his fortune. The buildings were used as a chocolate factory until the early 1960’s when the Golden Grain Macaroni Company bought the chocolate business and moved the factory across the bay to San Leandro.”

Clark was now even with Lois’ lips and began kissing her neck as he continued. “The buildings went up for sale in 1962 and, fearing they would be torn down, two prominent San Franciscan’s bought the property and converted it into a shopping center. The huge sign saying Ghirardelli — 25 feet tall and 125 feet long — has been lit up at night since electricity came to San Francisco.” For a conclusion to his tale, Clark captured Lois’ lips in a deep kiss.

Lois returned the kiss in kind. When she needed to breathe, she broke off the kiss and purred. “I would say that’s an electrifying delivery, my tour guide.”

Clark rolled to his side, propped his head on his right hand and began making circles on Lois’ stomach with his left hand. “Well, that’s the story of what’s outside the room, but you have missed something important on the inside.”

Lois looked at him questioningly. “What do you mean, the inside?”

Clark waved his left hand around. “Of the room.”

Lois was still puzzled. “I see the room.”

Clark smiled and a certain glint came into his eyes. “Look at the bathroom.”

Lois couldn’t read his expression. So she swung her legs off the bed and made her way to the bathroom, which had clearly been a modern addition to the interior of the large bedroom.

“OH, MY GOD!” She could hear Clark’s pleased laugh behind her. Marveling, she walked in and looked at the enormous clear glass enclosed shower with a bench. A small west facing

window lit the bathroom with a beautiful light. “You could throw a party in here!”

“Exactly my idea, Mrs. Kent. Well, a party for two, anyway.”

Chapter 3. No Rest for a Hero

“This is marvelous, Clark,” Lois exclaimed as she sampled her sea bass. Their adventures in the shower at the B&B had sprung her appetite into high gear. They had decided on a casual restaurant on the wharf for dinner, followed by a change of clothes into evening wear at their handy room and cable car ride up Hyde Street. After it turned onto Washington Street, they could get off at Mason Street and walk the three blocks to the famed elegant Mark Hopkins Hotel. At the Top of the Mark they planned to do some dancing to soft jazz.

First they had started with a shared appetizer of fried calamari, Clark declaring that Cozzi’s at the Wharf was known far and wide for its preparation of fresh calamari. Clark was now digging with gusto into a bowl of the house specialty, cioppino. He had mastered the crab legs with great ease and without flinging bits of crab all over Lois. Lois noticed that some tables were not that lucky as one of the members of the party wrestled with their crab legs. Of course, Clark could forgo the awkward metal crab crackers and simply open the crab with his fingernails.

All of a sudden many in the room began digging their cell phones out of their pockets or purses. Most were set on vibrate mode, but Clark could still hear them. Several phones simply rang. Something alerted him that this was very unusual. The bartender answered his phone and turned the bar TV to the local news. The sound was muted, but Clark turned and read the closed captioning. It was a little far for Lois to read it clearly, but certainly something big was going on. Clark could also overhear some of the cell phone conversations. Most were calling emergency personnel back to their duties.

Lois could sense something, too. “What is it, Clark? What’s happening?”

“There’s a major fire at AT&T Park that’s broken out during the last inning of the ball game. People are evacuating and all the access roads are jammed now and no one is going anywhere.” He gave her a cross between a pleading and an apologetic look. He whispered loud enough to hear over the chairs scraping against the floor as one or two members of a table or sometimes whole parties left their dinners. Those leaving their tables flung money down on the table to cover the dinner and rushed out of the restaurant.

“Go,” Lois said simply and firmly. “You have to help. You could have heard about it on LNN at home and rushed to help. There are some things only you can do with traffic jams and fires.” Clark still looked torn and Lois continued. “I’ll be fine. I’ll go back to the room and wait. Oh, and give me the *one* room key.”

Clark pulled the key out of his pocket and put it into her hand, rising and coming over to kiss her. “I love you,” he whispered. He rushed toward the restrooms at the back of the restaurant. Shortly Lois heard a sonic boom over San Francisco Bay. She looked over at her package of Ghiradelli chocolate they had picked up on the way to the restaurant and said aloud. “It’s just you and me tonight, kid.”

Lois calmly continued eating her dinner. No longer having anyone to talk with, she looked around the restaurant and noticed several other women and some men now alone at their tables doing the same thing. Lois reached over for Clark’s cioppino. “Can’t let this go to waste, either.”

After paying for their dinner, Lois made her way back to their B&B. As she passed by the open door of the Buena Vista historic bar and restaurant she looked in the open doorway. The patrons were almost to a person staring intently at the television.

“There’s Superman,” one person called out. Another

remarked, “Boy, it really must be bad down there to bring him out.” Lois hurried on up the hill so that she could watch in private.

Opening the outside door with her key, Lois stepped into the living room. Steve came out from the kitchen, drying a skillet with a towel. He simply said, “Hi, Lois. Have a good evening,” and returned to the kitchen.

Lois entered her room, immediately turning on the television and searching for signs of Clark. The game had been televised up to the point it was stopped by the tragedy, so there was no lack of cameras to cover the action. And the stadium lights had remained on through the fire.

Predictably, Clark’s activities were the focus of many of the cameras. He was flying high, blowing freezing super breath on the flames in the grandstand. The flames seemed stubbornly resistant to his efforts, though. The announcers were doing a play by play of him, just as they had been of the game itself. Lois turned the sound down, finding the hysterical tone rather annoying. Clark had found one of the large trash dumpsters prevalent in the ball park and ripped the lid off with one tear. He then lifted it up and flew to the bay only feet away. He carried the dumpster down into the water and emerged with it full, returning to the fire and dumping out the water. He repeated this five times before the foam trucks arrived and began spraying foam. Finally the fire succumbed to the combined efforts.

The cameras switched to the traffic jam outside the stadium. The fleeing fans stuck in the jam had gotten out of their cars and were watching Superman in action, some wielding large binoculars. When Superman was high in the air, he was still bathed in sunlight from the setting sun. They observed Superman flying toward the line of traffic and then up to where the jam began. Complicating matters, several accidents had happened when the panicked drivers started to leave in haste.

Those at the front of the line saw Superman begin to clear the accidents, so they returned to their cars and trucks. Once they started their vehicles, the action flowed like a river down the long lines of cars as people got back in and started up again, realizing they were going to be able to leave. Traffic slowly started to clear.

The cameras switched to covering the fire chief directing the efforts. Suddenly Superman landed beside him. Lois turned the volume up.

“Superman has just landed next to Chief Davis. We’ll try to get a few words.”

The reporter was beside himself with excitement. He thrust the microphone toward Clark’s face, but Clark held up a hand. “Just a minute.” He and the Chief faced away from the camera and conferred for a while, Clark gesturing to various areas of the park and the Chief gesturing to others. The S on the cape stood out prominently in the additional camera lights. Finally the two nodded at each other and they both turned to the massed reporters from all the local stations.

“Superman, Superman. How did you hear about the fire?”

Clark was in his crossed arms and planted feet Superman stance. He answered in his authoritative Superman voice. “I was watching the game on TV when it became obvious something was wrong.”

A susurrant of revelation went through the group of reporters. Superman had a television and was watching a San Francisco baseball game! Was he a Giants fan? Looking at their expressions, Clark had to suppress an urge to laugh. He would have first asked if anyone was injured.

That suddenly seemed to occur to one of the reporters. “Were there any people injured?”

“There were several injuries in the various car accidents, but none fatal. I transported those victims to emergency personnel for care. As for the stadium and the fire, Chief Davis can answer that

better than I can.” He stepped back slightly to let the Chief take the question.

“Fortunately, I have no words of anyone being critically injured here,” the Chief responded. “There were injuries in the car accidents that are being assessed by the emergency personnel. And there are some burn victims. The City of San Francisco mobilized all their emergency personnel and I wish to thank everyone for their quick response. The origin of the fire will be determined as soon as the fire is completely extinguished. Clean up crews are there now.” He turned to face Superman. “I wish to publicly thank Superman for his very timely help. His quick response minimized the injuries. It would have taken us a *lot* longer to clear out the evacuating traffic without his help. And his urban water bombing technique with the dumpster was particularly effective.” The Chief extended his hand and Clark took it and they shook hands.

“A front page photo if I ever saw it,” Lois muttered in her room. She got up from the couch and opened the balcony door. Clark would be back soon.

Sure enough, Clark dropped the Chief’s hand and began to lift off. Anxious reporters started peppering him with more questions. He stopped and turned in the air to address the reporters again. “Your emergency people are heroes too. You should thank them. I imagine some of them left their dinners to respond to the call.” He gave a wave and vanished into the sky.

Lois’ head turned toward the door at the sound of Clark’s boots hitting the deck.

“Good interview,” she said, gesturing at the TV. She got up and walked over to her husband. “How are *you* doing?”

“Pretty good. It wasn’t as bad as I first feared. But I’m pretty stinky from the fire. I need to go shower.”

Seeing that the evening had turned out well for him, she said coyly, “Again?”

“Later, Mrs. Kent. Why don’t you get ready for dancing?”

“We’re still going to the Top of the Mark?”

Clark held up one finger and spun out of the Suit. He spun into nothing and was holding the dirty Suit in front of him when he stopped.

A sound between a growl and a whimper emerged from Lois’ throat.

“Later, Lois. Bet on it.” Clark walked into the bathroom, tossing the dirty Suit into a corner.

Lois and Clark danced slowly to the soft strains of Cole Porter. The lights of San Francisco spread out before them. Lois was nestled into Clark’s shoulder and his head lay against hers. Lois moved slowly away and looked up. “It’s been quite an anniversary day today. Breakfast in Tahoe, lunch in Sacramento and dinner and dancing in San Francisco.”

“Did you enjoy it?” Clark asked softly.

“Oh, yes. I want to come back here. Often.”

“Your wish is my command, my lady.” Clark noticed the hesitant look on Lois’ face. “What is it?”

“Can I ask you something about Steve?”

Clark nodded. “Sure, anything.”

“When I came back from dinner alone, he came out of the kitchen and saw me. He seemed totally unfazed that I was alone and just told me to have a nice evening. He didn’t ask a single question. I thought that was unusual behavior.” Lois raised her eyebrow, asking Clark the silent question, ‘Does he know?’

“Well, I don’t think he knows anything definite about me, but I’ve stayed with him off and on over the years. He’s a Basque, an Amerikano and they are a very pragmatic people and accept unusual happenings without much comment. They speak one of the most ancient languages on Earth and their culture formed about 7,000 years ago. It’s their drawings in the caves in the Pyrenees in Europe.”

“Ah, the last tour of the day! Tell me more Clark.” Lois returned her head to his shoulder and listened as his soft voice continued the story.

“There are genetic studies that suggest that the Scots, Irish, Welsh and Basques all derive from the same, possibly very homogeneous, population that inhabited Europe in Paleolithic times.”

“An Amerikano is a Basque who has emigrated to North or South America, or one who has returned to the Basque Country to retire after a life spent in the New World.

After the Spanish discovery of America, huge numbers of Basques flocked to the New World and most of them remained here. From the Mexican city of Durango to the largely Basque-named vineyards of Chile, the frequency of Basque surnames and place names in Spanish America shows the effort of those Basque settlers who left their homeland forever to build a life in a new land. In the 19th century, a large number of Basques also emigrated to the western United States, where their legendary shepherding skills were in great demand.

Many of these shepherders eventually came into conflict with cattlemen in the range wars of the late 19th century. Basque sheep flocks still roam much of the Bureau of Land Management land in Eastern Kern County, California to this day. The University of Nevada at Reno is the major Basque study center in the US. It has links with the Basque Country and sends its students there.”

Clark noticed Lois was nearly asleep on her feet. “Time to go back to our room, Mrs. Kent. Come on, I’ll take you home.”

Sleepily, Lois nodded. Home was where ever he was.

THE END

Footnote: Basque language and information is from the website of Larry Trask (not all Trasks are bad!) at the University of Sussex, U.K. (<http://www.cogs.susx.ac.uk/users/larryt/>) and from the University of Nevada at Reno.