

# Our Little Dilemma

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Rated PG

Summary: Everyone knows Clark Kent is Superman. Everyone knows Lois Lane has left town. What Lois and Clark *wish* they knew is a way for them to be together... without everyone knowing. Fifth in the “My” series.

Author’s Note: This is the fifth story of a series. The prior stories, in order, are: My Interview with Superman, My Date with Lyn, My Television Debut, and My Big Goodbye. You should probably have read those before reading this.

It took two years to start this story and almost a year to finish it. This is a continuation of “My” series, and ever since finishing “My Big Goodbye” I’ve wanted to write this to wrap things up, but I couldn’t figure out how. I had fragments of scenes and ideas, but no narrative to tie them together and no way to resolve my biggest plot problem. I also got a job and was therefore too busy to even think about it most of the time, but it refused to go away. In early February, I started to see how I could do this. Scenes were written, rewritten, cut and rearranged. Now all I needed was a beta reader.

I got several beta readers, and I appreciate all of them. Carol Moncado, TJ, Lara, smileyd, and woody said they loved it and gave me great feedback, but I still wasn’t satisfied with what I had, and the story went dormant for another three months. Late in May, I started realizing what I was missing. Once I added that, the whole thing worked much better for me. It felt complete; I can’t describe it better than that. I also came up with a title that “fit” the story and even a blurb that I liked. Then I sent it to the Archive and ... frustrated my GE Larissa by not doing my edits for another four months. Sorry ‘bout that. But anyway... I’ve tweaked it a bit, and feel good about it, so here it is.

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Our Little Dilemma

by Joe Spencer and Lyn Drozny

It’s not easy, being constantly in the public eye. When I’m being Superman I expect people to be watching me and snapping pictures. That’s fine, it’s part of the job. The problem is that they won’t leave me alone when I want to be just Clark. Sometimes they stake out my apartment, and I hear there are newsgroups that report sightings and analyze my movements. It gets old.

I didn’t mind so much when it was just me. For the first time in my life, I didn’t have any interesting secrets. But then Lois came along and vastly complicated everything. I smile at the thought. I love her so much it almost hurts, sometimes. When I’m with her, I can stop being Superman or Clark, and just be an ordinary Joe. Joe Spencer, according to my fake ID.

Now if only I could find time to use it, without anyone making the connection. They’ve already noticed a few times when they couldn’t find me. Speculation is probably running rampant. Again.

I love being able to help, really. But I can’t be Superman all the time; it’s exhausting. I used to be able to have a little downtime at my apartment. But since Lois is officially out of town and not dating me anymore, I can’t exactly have her over to dinner.

She says she’s going to think of something, some way to get

me out of the public eye all the time. I’m not sure she has any ideas, yet, but I have faith in her. She’ll rescue me.

In the meantime, I do get to use my new name a little. That’s the byline I have at her website, the Drozny Report. I love getting back to writing the news instead of being the news. Speaking of which... The opening lines of an article about the mudslide I just helped with, in California, flash through my mind. The sentences and paragraphs begin to flow, and I fly faster, impatient to get to my computer.

As I near Metropolis, though, I hear sirens, and automatically change course to home in on them. My personal life will have to wait. Just like always.

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“It’s not easy being famous, is it?”

My heart jumps into my throat. I didn’t think I’d be recognized. I don’t look much like Lois Lane anymore — different hair, for one thing. I didn’t think I’d like short red curls but I’m starting to. But I can’t do much to change my face. The key is misdirection.

Slowly, I turn towards the young woman behind me in the grocery check out lane. Being sure to use my Bulgarian/Russian/not-from-around-here accent, I say, brilliantly, “What?”

She flashes a quick smile at me, but doesn’t act as if she knows who I am. She gestures towards the tabloids. “I was just thinking what a pain it must be, being famous. I mean, look at that.” The headline on the Inquisitor screamed SUPERMAN’S SECRET LOVE NEST. She shakes her head disapprovingly. “The poor guy.”

Yeah, he wasn’t real happy about that one.

“Why can’t they just leave him alone?” she asks. “For all he does for us, doesn’t he deserve a little privacy?”

My heart rate is returning to normal. “Yes, you think so, and I think so.” And I’m working on it. Just haven’t got all the details ironed out yet. “But obviously they don’t.” I turn back towards my groceries, putting a few more things on the conveyor belt as the cashier oh-so-slowly rings up the old man in front of me.

“It’s ridiculous,” she declares. “They ruin his life, with no penalty. He ought to sue.”

I know I shouldn’t say anything. Dangerous topic. But I am curious to hear her version of the story. I glance at her and casually ask, “Ruined his life?”

“Didn’t you hear all about it?”

“I try not to pay attention to gossip.” It doesn’t work so well, but I do try.

“He used to have a normal life, job, a fiancée... then he gets exposed as an alien and that’s all gone. Then he went looking for this woman who’d gone missing in Africa — and after a year of searching, *she* found him.” She grins, obviously enjoying the idea. I was fond of it, myself. “He looked so happy.”

Yeah, he was. I will always remember the moment in his office, when he realized who I was. Of course, she’s talking about our public meeting on TV, and he looked pretty happy then, too. We both were.

“But then within months, the stupid jerks from the tabloids scare her off.”

Well, I don’t think “scared off” is quite accurate. I prefer to think of it as a daring escape. “Can you blame her?” Okay, that came out a little sharper than I intended. To cover, I add, “I remember now; the press was quite... intense.”

Insane, actually. There were photographers everywhere, requests for interviews, interruptions while we were trying to work. We thought it would ease off sooner or later, but it just kept on — including one enterprising young genius Clark found hiding under his bed. God knows how he expected to pull that off, and I try not to think about what he hoped to overhear. The crowning touch, however, was when someone broke into my

apartment.

We never knew who had done it; he was gone by the time I'd gotten there. Good thing, too; I'd have killed the little creep. Even mild-mannered Clark came close to losing his temper, looking around at my ransacked living room. It wasn't as bad as it seemed, actually. But in cleaning up, I found my way out.

See, in a box at the back of my closet, I'd stored away the details of Lyn Drozny's life in Europe. Passport, drivers license... not to mention the green card. All in Lyn's name. I didn't plan to ever use them again — technically, they're illegal — but it was an important secret to keep. Besides, those papers had been difficult and expensive to get, so I wasn't just going to throw them away. It also contained a few years worth of stories and contacts, capped off by her interview with Superman. I'd packed it all away after I'd officially become Lois Lane again (which is probably why it was buried in my closet so deep that it was untouched when the guy was tossing my apartment) and I'd almost forgotten about it.

That day, though, faced with evidence that Lois Lane was not likely to ever have a normal life again, inspiration had struck.

Clark hadn't really liked the idea at first, but I just knew that it was my only hope. Several weeks and lots of strategizing later, I made a break for it, which is what Miss Grocery-Store-line was still talking about.

She's shaking her head. "Nope, can't blame her a bit. I probably wouldn't have lasted as long as she did. It was really sad, though, watching her announce she was leaving."

Wasn't much fun doing it, either, but Lois Lane officially disappeared (again), and Lyn Drozny popped back into existence with a nice new apartment in a quiet part of New Jersey. Superman's Secret Love Nest — or it would be, if we could get certain details of *his* secret life worked out.

Which we will do, somehow. We have to. I love him too much to give up on this, no matter what it takes. I guess some people would say it's too much trouble. But they don't know Clark the way I know him. They don't know that we "clicked" almost immediately and have just gotten closer since. They don't know he's the man I want to spend my life with, who I can't live without.

When I'm with him, I'm home. That's worth almost anything.

The conveyor belt moves about a foot and I get most of my groceries on it. But then it stops, and the cashier calls for a price check. Arrgh. This is a nice quiet neighborhood — a must, since I want Clark to be able to relax when he's here — but it's full of old people and they don't move very fast. I guess that fits in with the whole "relaxation" idea, but I've never done too well with that concept.

The woman behind me pages through one of the tabloids, then snorts and puts it back. "Oh my Lord — do you know what prompted this whole love nest story?" I'm not at all sure I want to know. But she keeps talking, apparently not needing input from me. "He spent a night outside of his apartment, and they don't know where he was."

Ah. That must have been the night we fell asleep on my couch. "It's none of their damn business," I reply, with a little more heat than I'd intended. They used to monitor him at the Daily Planet, but since he quit, they've focused in on his apartment. I've been trying to persuade Clark to go on strike until the city does something about the situation — starts enforcing the loitering and trespassing laws, maybe. But he doesn't think it fits the Superman image.

I sigh. Being Superman and Clark Kent leaves him precious little time to relax as Joe Spencer. We've been talking about getting married, but I don't know yet how that's supposed to work. We can hardly even date.

The conveyor belt jolts to life, moving ahead all of five

inches as the old guy's groceries are finally rung up. I might yet get out of here with unmelted ice cream.

Or not. The old guy starts slowly thumbing through his wallet, searching for cash. I mutter under my breath. In Russian. It's a very satisfying language to be angry in.

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I hover in mid-air, staring down at the burned-out building. It wasn't that big of a fire; the firemen could probably have handled it themselves. Nobody was hurt. Just property damage. The news crews have arrived. I should go down there and answer questions.

But I just can't.

My apartment is destroyed. Burned out. Gone.

Countless memories wash over me. That's where I first put on the Superman suit. Where the other Lois transformed me and Lana broke up with me. My retreat from the world, especially after *my* Lois had arrived in my life. We'd spent many happy hours on that couch, but now it's just a few burnt remnants.

Gone.

I saved a few things. They're on the roof, which should be safe enough for the time being. The building's not entirely destroyed. A few more things might be recoverable, but... I just don't care.

Gone.

I want Lois. I need her. But they're calling my name, and I float downwards. I can handle a few questions.

They want to know the usual things. Was anyone hurt? No. Was the fire set? Ask the fire chief, he's the expert. He steps forward to speak. The look of sympathy in his eyes makes mine sting with tears.

I force them back. Superheroes don't cry. Even when their lives are destroyed.

No. My life hasn't been destroyed. Only part of it had. I haven't spent much time there lately, anyway. It was just a place I went to sleep, so they would know where I was and not look for Lois or make up crazy stories. So they would know where I was...

The fire chief is directing questions back to me, and I force myself to pay attention. But at the back of my mind, the thought echoes.

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Finally, I escaped the grocery store and now I'm home. It's small, but it'll do. The main attraction of this place, besides the quiet neighborhood, is the location. It's across the bay from Suicide Slum. Far enough away that we don't have a good view, and it's upwind, but it's a straight shot from there to here. We wanted a way to confuse all the Superman-watchers. It might look weird if he was always headed toward upstate New Troy, for instance, but nobody thinks twice if he goes to Suicide Slum. He flies there, then goes low and fast across the bay to the stand of trees at the end of the street. If he can find the time. I turn on the TV to see if I'll have company for dinner. LNN's talking about the stock market, so I tune them out and put my groceries away.

Commercial break. Maybe I should skip the freezer and just eat the ice cream. Seeing as it's soft already. I limit myself to one spoonful straight from the carton, then head into the other room to check my site stats. The Drozny Report isn't very well-known yet, but it will be.

My attention goes back to the TV when I hear his name. "... Superman's apartment building has been bombed. Superman has extinguished the fire, and is holding a joint press conference with the fire chief."

What? I camp in front of the TV. No, no, no, no... the news crawl says Clark's apartment has been torched. How? Why? Poor Clark...

"And now we go to the scene, live." The picture changes and I gasp. The fire chief is beckoning Clark to the mic. He's looking grim, his S-suit is dirty, and behind him is a smoldering building

that I barely recognize. Clark says he'll take questions, which are shouted at him. I've never seen such a bleak look in his eyes, and I ache to hold him.

Yes, the fire seems to have been started deliberately, possibly with an explosive of some kind. No, they don't have a suspect. Yes, people had been in the building when the fire started, but they all got out with only minor injuries. No, not much is likely to be salvageable.

I feel tears well up as I think of what he's lost. Pictures of his parents, mementos, all that comfortable furniture... that tie-dye shirt I bought him on the day we met. He loved that shirt. It's so damn unfair, and I'm so angry that I'm shaking.

LNN does a split-screen thing for a bit, with a box showing earlier footage of Superman fighting the fire and pulling people out. At least he saved them; he'd hate himself if he hadn't.

Clark says the landlord is going to rebuild, and the Superman Foundation will provide temporary shelter for the residents. And that he is going to find out who did this.

I'll help. And they'd better hope he finds them first.

His voice falters, and for a moment it's quiet. He looks absolutely stunned, defeated, almost devastated. But as I watch, something changes. He looks down, his eyes narrow, his head tilts slightly. He straightens up and it's all gone; his expression is back to being bleak but I think he's lost the defeated slump of the shoulders.

He looks straight at the LNN camera. Straight at me. "This crime was almost certainly aimed at me. Unfortunately, there are people who want to hurt me." And it worked. Dammit. "But what affects me more is the realization that, as a target, I've endangered my neighbors. This runs directly contrary to my commitment to protect the good citizens of Metropolis — and of the world. Therefore..." He pauses. "I hereby announce that I will not be returning to this building."

I sit up straighter, a coil of uneasy excitement in my gut. What is he saying?

"It is obviously unsafe for me to have a known residence. I've maintained this apartment as a link to my earlier life as Clark Kent. That link has now been severed, and cannot be replaced."

Several of the reporters ask where he'll stay. He shakes his head. "I have no need to sleep, and as you see, I haven't any possessions left. I will remain in Metropolis, but only as Superman. There is no place in my life for any longer trying to function as Clark Kent."

I'm holding my breath. If he hasn't got an apartment, that means no one will know where to find him, which means...

"Thank you. That's all for now. The fire department will continue investigating, and I'll assist as needed. Thank you all." He steps back from the crowd and rises into the air.

I flick off the TV and stand on shaky legs. It's awful, all he's lost. But it's breathtaking what he's gained.

There's a knock on the door, and I run for it. I open it to find — not Superman in spandex, or Clark in a business suit, but ordinary Joe Spencer in blue jeans and t-shirt. I pull him in for a hug.

"I guess you saw that, huh?" He holds me tight.

A minute later, I pull back, still within the circle of his arms. "I'm sorry you lost all your stuff..." My voice trails off as I recognize that tie-dye shirt he's wearing.

He shrugs. "I had time to grab a few things."

"But most of it's still gone; I'm so sorry."

He quirks a smile at me, shaking his head. "Small price to pay to be free." He spins me around and kisses me 'til I'm dizzy. He smiles. "Besides, all I need is you. Lyn Drozny, will you marry me?"

I giggle from the unexpectedness of it. "Joe Spencer, that's a silly question. Of course I will." I kiss him softly. "But I'm warning you right now, I'm not changing my name."

He laughs. "Fair enough." His smile fades as he gets serious. "Hey, you know what?"

"What?"

"There's something I've always wanted to say. My whole life. I never could before."

I'm intrigued. "Okay, say it."

He smiles down at me, a shimmer of tears in his eyes, and says softly, "Honey, I'm home."

THE END