

# Nowhere To Run

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Rated PG-13

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Summary: The headline in the Daily Planet reads: 'Lois Lane Kidnapped; Clark Kent Prime Suspect.' How did it ever come to this?

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The sky, just above the point where it meets the ocean, was beginning to lighten more with every passing minute, shades of pink and orange lighting up the eastern sky. Night would soon give way to dawn. And when it did... what then?

With a heavy sigh, Clark floated down onto the steps of the cabin and turned towards the door. In an effort to clear his thoughts, he absently read the sign which had hung on this door for as long as he'd known about this place.

'Welcome to our cabin. Feel free to use it, if you're in the neighborhood.'

Of course, Clark wasn't sure who else beside him would be 'in the neighborhood.' After all, the cabin was located on a small island in the Atlantic Ocean. Okay, so maybe the island was big enough to have a freshwater waterfall and a beach that seemed to stretch on forever. But it wasn't as if there were any other signs of human life. Obviously, whoever had put the sign on the door figured that if people were 'in the neighborhood' they were likely to make use of the cabin, with or without permission, and that if they gave consent, they might at least cut down on vandalism.

Clark had been here a few times over the years and was always careful to leave the place in better condition than when he arrived. It had occurred to him on occasion to investigate who the owner or owners were, but it had never been a priority, so he'd never done it.

But when things in Metropolis had gone south the way they had, he'd immediately thought of this place.

He lowered his glasses and allowed the walls to disappear until he was looking into the cabin's single bedroom. She was still asleep.

He'd expected that. After all, she'd been drugged. It was only to be expected that she would have to sleep it off. However, his hearing told him that her heartbeat and breathing were both strong. And besides, he'd never have dared to take a few quick

trips back to Metropolis for supplies if he'd felt there was a danger of her waking.

With thoughts of what would happen when she did wake, Clark cringed. First, she was likely to have a hangover the size of Metropolis, which wasn't likely to improve her mood. But most important, she was going to be furious with him. That was why this place had come to mind for this operation. After all, if he knew Lois Lane — and he did — he could pretty much guarantee that the moment she felt strong enough, she would try to run.

But surely even Lois Lane wouldn't try to swim the ocean just to get away from him.

He sighed. Get away from him. How had they ever come to this point where she would be trying to get away from him? He had to admit that this time he wasn't entirely sure they would survive the firestorm to come.

But that was not important. That wasn't why he'd done it. Oh, he wanted her love. In fact every fiber of his being craved her love. But more than that, he wanted her to be well. And that was why he'd done it. To see to it that she would get well.

Opening the door, he walked inside, placing several bags of groceries on the cabin's wooden table. Once they were safely settled, he lit the lantern he'd found earlier, giving the interior of the cabin a soft glow. It would be an hour or more before it was light enough outside that the lantern wouldn't be necessary.

He glanced around the cabin. Suitcases for both him and Lois sat in one corner. Beside it, a large box filled with albums, stories Lois had written as well as various other items.

Okay, so the cabin wasn't exactly a mansion. But that wasn't important. It was solid, had plush, comfortable furniture, and even had the basic amenities thanks to a generator that provided hot water and allowed for a small fridge. There was even a very functional gas stove. Still, looking at the lantern, he acknowledged that electric lights would be nice. Of course, the lantern did make the place look... cosy. If it weren't for the circumstances... Clark sighed. No point in spinning elaborate romantic fantasies when there was a good chance that Lois would never speak to him again.

Part of him wished he could have taken her back to Kansas. But a quick stop there on his way back from Metropolis informed him that Sheriff Rachel Harris had already, at the request of the Metropolis P.D., talked to his parents to ascertain if they knew his location. Besides, if they were in Kansas, Lois would undoubtedly be on the first flight back to Metropolis the instant she awoke.

Clark turned to the groceries currently cluttering up the cabin's wood kitchen table. He had purchased enough groceries to keep them going for a couple of weeks. After that... Well, he'd have to deal with that when they got to it. Maybe he could just take the odd trip back to civilization to pick up necessities when she was sleeping and she'd never know the difference.

Once he got all the groceries put away, he turned his attention to the rest of the cabin. Judging by the amount of dust on everything, no one had been here for quite a while. Taking a deep breath, he shifted into superspeed to remove the dust and sweep the floors, even going so far as to clean the windows, inside and out, in a matter of seconds. No point in giving Lois any other reasons to be mad at him when she woke.

Letting out a breath, his work finished, Clark shrugged out of his jacket and returned to the table. He picked up the folded copy of the Daily Planet he'd also picked up during his shopping trip and, after taking a breath to steady his nerves, took a seat in the comfortable stuffed chair in the small living room and opened the paper.

He flinched when he saw the headline staring back at him in bold faced letters.

LOIS LANE BELIEVED KIDNAPPED  
CLARK KENT PRIME SUSPECT

Well, they really hadn't tried to sugar coat it, had they? Not that he had expected them to ignore the story. He knew from a quick trip to Kansas that Lois' disappearance had been reported and that, when the state of her room had been examined, the natural conclusion was that she had been kidnapped. It was also of little surprise that he was the prime suspect since he had actually tried to make it look that way. Still... seeing it in black and white, staring back at him from the front page of his own newspaper was a blow.

He checked out the byline. Perry had given the story to Eduardo.

Clark let out a breath. At least Eduardo would handle it fairly — he hoped. Or at least more fairly than someone like Ralph. So maybe things weren't as bad as they seemed at first blush. Still, surely they could have hidden the story somewhere inside the paper... page fifty-three under the obits would have been nice.

Not that he'd exactly expected that kind of coverage considering some of the headlines he'd seen plastering the front pages of the tabloids during his shopping trip.

**JILTED BOYFRIEND ABDUCTS INSANE GIRLFRIEND  
WHICH ONE IS REALLY CRAZY?**

That was the one that stuck in his memory. Although his and Lois' names had been on the front only in smaller print, the picture that had graced the cover had been horrible — a picture someone, probably someone like Joe Lamont, a tabloid photographer that he and Lois encountered occasionally, must have taken during one of the all too frequent arguments he'd had with Lois over the years.

Maybe, Clark thought, if he hadn't kissed Lois and told her that he loved her, things wouldn't have gone the way they had. Or maybe he should have kidnapped Lois and brought her here weeks ago. He had to admit, he was no longer sure of the right answers. Maybe he never really had been. On the other hand, he still couldn't see any other solution to the one he'd finally chosen: kidnapping Lois Lane had been his only remaining option. After all, what else could he have done?

He turned his mind back to the Daily Planet, reading slowly as he tried to view it as an impartial reader might. Still, it wasn't long before his mind was filling in the blanks, recalling all too clearly the events that had led up to this day.

Not that things had exactly been a barrel of monkeys in the proceeding weeks. No, none of the proceeding weeks had been particularly enjoyable to say the least. Still, that final day things had spiraled completely out of his control. Or at least they'd been out of his control until he'd finally had enough — until he'd finally kidnapped Lois.

Still... how had things gone so terribly wrong? His mind drifted back.

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Twelve Hours Earlier

He'd kissed her. And she... she'd kissed him back! She really had. It wasn't his imagination. Of that, he was certain. No, she'd been right there. Her lips probing his. Her heartbeat accelerating to keep pace with his. Yes, she had been right there, in that moment with him. Until, of course, she'd completely panicked and then taken off, muttering that she couldn't love him because she didn't even know him, leaving him standing alone on the sidewalk.

When Dr. Deter had told him that he wasn't to tell Lois anything about her life, that she had to remember things on her own in order to recover from her amnesia, the good doctor — if that was really what he was — hadn't taken into account the persuasive powers of Mad Dog Lane. Clark hadn't stood a chance. So when she'd started pressuring him, picking up on the not-so-carefully hidden animosity between him and the doctor, he'd snapped and told her everything.

That he loved her.

And then, while she'd been staring at him in shocked disbelief...

He'd kissed her.

And she'd felt something, too. He knew she had.

In the stunned silence that followed, he'd told her that they were engaged to be married. For a moment, he'd thought he was getting through to her. Until she'd completely denied his assertion and, in typical Lois Lane fashion when confronting her personal life, she'd run.

To Deter.

Clark's lips turned down. There was something about Deter that Clark didn't trust. He seemed... too personally involved — as if he had his own agenda, his own stake in the results of Lois' treatment.

Or, to put it more succinctly, that he wanted Lois for himself.

The way he looked at her. The way he touched her. His proprietary tone of voice when talking to her. No. There was something very wrong about Deter's involvement with Lois. Just thinking about it set Clark's blood to boiling.

"There is such a thing as bedside manner," Perry said when Clark voiced his concern to his friend and boss.

"This guy's bedside manner includes breakfast in the morning," Jimmy responded.

Clark flinched. That was exactly what he was trying not to think. After all, unlike Clark, Deter had access to Lois twenty-four seven. Clark got a few minutes every other day. Nor was Superman allowed to get close to her. Even Clark's parents had been turned away. The 'good doctor' was controlling every aspect of her life.

Even when Lois returned to work, Deter had been trailing along behind. What was that all about? Didn't the man have any other patients?

"Zip it, Jimmy," Perry demanded. "Now, Clark, listen to me. We all knew this was gonna be hard. Now with the cat outta the bag it might even be harder. I mean who knows what she's thinking? Now with any luck, Dr. Deter is going to help her put some pieces together. But in the meantime, you gotta take it easy. Now do you think you can do that?"

"I don't know," Clark answered honestly.

"Uhh... look... just take your cue from the master of cool here, huh," Perry said. "Slow and easy." He sliced his hand through the air imitating the gradual, easy decent of an airplane coming in to land.

Clark had to concede that Perry was making sense. Besides, what else could he do? After all, he'd researched Deter. The American Medical Association had called Deter's methods both ground breaking and effective. Surely he wouldn't risk his reputation. Not that Clark was convinced of that. After all, Clark would risk anything for Lois.

Still, as much as Clark might hate it, getting all worked up wasn't doing him any good.

The sound of a familiar voice caught the attention of all three gentlemen currently seated in the employees' rest area. Looking up, Clark's heart lifted, as it always did when he saw Lois. His eyes narrowed when he saw the man who was with her.

"Perry, Jimmy, Clark," Lois said, ensuring she had the attention of all three before continuing. "I quit."

Clark stared at her in disbelief, almost missing Jimmy's response. He didn't remember rising to his feet, but since he now found himself standing, he obviously had.

"You what?" Jimmy asked.

Clark felt as if he'd entered the twilight zone. Never had he believed he'd ever hear those words come out of Lois' mouth. He didn't even have to think about it. This wasn't Lois Lane talking, not even as she went on to explain her supposed 'decision.' This had Deter's paw prints all over it.

"I need to get away so I can totally recover," Lois said.

"We're leaving the country," Deter added.

"No. No. You can't," Clark said, amazed when he heard the controlled tone of his own voice. Getting mad right now, even tearing Deter's limbs one by one from his body and piling them in a bloody heap on the floor would only make Lois more determined to follow her proposed course of action. He needed to keep his calm. Besides, this wasn't Lois talking — at least not any Lois he knew.

"We're going to the south of France," Lois continued as if Clark hadn't spoken. "Max has a home there, and he thinks that one-on-one intensive therapy..."

Perry lunged for Deter even before Lois finished speaking. Clark had to jump forward to hold him back from doing exactly what Clark was forcing himself not to do.

"What the Sam Hill are you doing?" Perry yelled. "You conniving little brain sucker."

Lois stepped back, seeming completely caught off guard by Perry's response.

"Lois, listen to me..." Clark said, keeping his voice even as he relinquished his hold on Perry to Jimmy while at the same time taking a step towards Lois.

"No. I know what's best for me," Lois said, interrupting him.

"Hey! What's the deal here?" Perry demanded, still quite obviously out of control.

"Chief, calm down!" Jimmy said, holding on to the Chief for all he was worth.

"No, the gates are up and this cockamamie calamity train is gonna stop!" Perry continued, bringing his hand down as if he were a butcher chopping off the head of a chicken.

"Breath or something," Jimmy said.

Clark felt as if he were reliving one of the dumbest decisions he'd ever made — the day he'd let Lois drive off with Luthor. "Lois, I can't let you go. Not this time," he said, his eyes still locked on hers.

"Clark, you have no choice in the matter," Deter said.

Clark instantly turned to look at Deter. "Deter, trust me on this — you have no idea who you're talking to."

In his peripheral vision, he saw something flash across Lois' face, some recognition, a memory, perhaps. Or maybe it was just disgust with him over his possessive words. But before he could decipher the meaning, the look was gone.

Deter, seeming to decide that the discussion was over, grabbed Lois' arm, turning her back towards the elevator.

Clark saw red. Deter had no right to touch Lois. No right at all. Whether anyone noticed how fast he moved or not, he wasn't sure. In fact, he wasn't entirely sure how fast he had moved. Had he moved at super human speeds or not? At that moment, he didn't exactly care. All that mattered was that he was suddenly standing between Lois and the elevator.

"Get out of our way, Clark," Lois said warningly. "Max and I are going to his villa in the south of France and there's nothing you can do about it."

"No, I don't think you understand," Clark said. He pushed Deter away from Lois and grasped her shoulders, his voice dangerously low. "I said I can't let you do this. I won't let you go again."

Deter lunged forward, fists swinging. Clark, caught by surprise, was unable to move in time. Deter's fist contacted Clark's face. Clark spun with the punch, holding his jaw as if hurt. The sound of Deter's resulting yowl covered for any lack of noise on Clark's part.

Jimmy jumped in, grabbing Deter from behind. Perry, now free, joined in as well, attempting to immobilize Maxwell Deter who was holding his fist and howling like a stray tomcat that had caught its tail in a car door. Whether that would have been the end of it was never known because Lois chose that moment to jump Jimmy and Perry from behind in her attempt to free Deter

from her colleagues. Almost instantly, other people in the newsroom began running to help. Some to help Lois; others to help Perry and Jimmy — depending on how much of the exchange they'd actually witnessed.

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Clark continued to pace, circumspectly watching Lois tenderly tend to Deter's damaged hand as they all waited for the police to arrive. Luckily, Franklin Stern had chosen this afternoon to make an appearance in the newsroom or Deter might have been suffering even more than he currently was. Not that Clark particularly cared how much pain Deter might be in, nor was he particularly enjoying watching Lois pander to Deter's every weasel-like whimper of pain.

Still, Stern, with the help of some security guards, had managed to get control of the deteriorating situation fairly quickly. Now the primary rabble-rousers were settled in the conference room where they were currently awaiting the arrival of Inspector Henderson.

The ding of the elevator had all the current occupants of the conference room looking towards the top of the ramp leading into the newsroom.

"Stay!" Stern ordered in a voice that left no room for argument before leaving the conference room to meet the Inspector.

Clark took one last look at Lois and Deter before turning up his superhearing to listen in on the conversation as Stern greeted Henderson.

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"Thanks for coming, Bill. I know you're off work for the day, but we've got a bit of a situation here."

"No problem. You said something about a brawl in the newsroom?" As he asked the question, he looked around at the unusually quiet newsroom.

"I managed to get the main participants to calm down and now they're waiting for you in the conference room." Stern gestured in the appropriate direction before striding down the ramp, assuming that Henderson would follow.

He did.

"Lois Lane. Now why doesn't that surprise me," Henderson said as he began to focus on the people he could see through the conference room windows. "If there's going to be a brawl at the Daily Planet, she's bound to be..." Suddenly, both his feet and his voice came to an abrupt halt. "Kent? Kent was involved in... Perry White!" He spun towards Stern. "Perry White! What was Perry White doing involved in a brawl?"

"I think I'd better let them tell you. Although, I warn you..." Stern took two steps back up the ramp to where Henderson was still standing. "...I hope you have better luck understanding than I did. All I know is that I stepped off the elevator and all hell had broken loose. I had to call security to bust it up."

"And you put them all together in the same room?"

"I did separate them at first. But Kent refused to stay put. He kept trying to sneak into the room where I'd put Lane — and the others were helping him, distracting the guards, that sort of thing. At the same time, Lane kept trying to get her and her friend out of the building. At one point, they actually managed to get all the way to the lobby before getting caught. It seems Lane knows every back door and escape route in this place.

"Anyway, I didn't have enough security guards available to keep a proper eye on all of them — not and ensure that the building remained secure. So eventually I put them in the same room, with the security guards between them. That way, they could at least be counted on to keep an eye on each other.

"Once they were together, and accepted that no one was going anywhere, they calmed down quite a bit. Just before you got here, I moved the guards out to watch the door." He gestured to the guards as he and Henderson resumed walking. "I figure

they can get back in there quickly enough if necessary."

"Are you saying that Lane and Kent were on different sides in this brawl?"

Stern nodded.

When they reached the door, Henderson placed a hand on Stern's arm, bringing him to a halt. "And you have no idea what it was all about?"

"They all kept talking at once. Finally, I decided to call you — thought you might be able to straighten out this mess without making it into a federal case."

"Well, I'll do my best. But I should warn you that if a crime was committed and someone wants to press charges, I'll have no choice but to do so. I might enjoy our weekly poker games, but I'm still a cop."

"I know that, Bill. But I also know that you're not going to jump in and start charging everyone unless you've got a case. That's all I ask. It wouldn't do the paper's reputation much good if our two top reporters and our editor were arrested for disorderly conduct or something."

Henderson nodded. "Okay, well, let's see if I can make more sense out of it than you could." With that, he reached out and pulled open the conference room door. Taking a deep breath, he stepped inside. "So... someone want to tell me what's going on here?"

It was the wrong thing to say. Instantly, everyone began talking at once.

"Hasn't anyone in this crowd ever heard of the right to remain silent?" Henderson mumbled under his breath before holding up both hands and demanding quiet.

When everyone finally quit talking, he looked around the room. The only person in the room he didn't know was a man who was holding a bag of ice against his hand. A man who appeared to be receiving tender loving care for his injury from... Lois? His eyebrows rose and his gaze flicked over to Clark. Kent was obviously not appreciating his fiancée's Florence Nightingale routine.

Henderson let that question go for the time being. Hopefully, all would be explained in good time. So... where to start? His gaze finally settled on the person he thought most likely to give him a rational answer.

"Perry?" he asked. "Do you want to tell me what's going on?"

"This conniving little brain sucker..." Perry practically spat, pointing to the man with the ice pack on his hand, "...was trying to abduct my best reporter."

Okay, so maybe not exactly rational — but it was a start.

"That's not true!" ice-pack man jumped in.

"He wasn't trying to abduct me!" Lois added.

"Then what do you call it, Lois!" Clark said. "You walk in here and announce that you're running off to France with that scumbag!"

"I said I was going to France to get therapy. Therapy! You do know what therapy is, right?"

"Therapy? Oh, right. Intensive, one on one therapy. In... what was it you said? His 'villa' in the south of France?" Clark responded sarcastically. "Admit it. No one goes to a villa in the south of France for 'therapy.' Do you know anyone who goes to a villa in the south of France for therapy, Bill?"

"So what are you saying?" Lois responded, before Henderson could get a word in edgewise. She rose to her feet, glaring at her partner across the conference room table. "That I'm lying?" As she spoke, her grip tightened around the hand she was holding.

A gasp of pain from the man whose hand was currently serving proxy for Clark's neck caused Lois to release her grip. "Now look what you made me do!" she exclaimed, glaring at Clark.

"Oh, please," Clark said in exasperation. "He's the one who hit me. I'm not complaining about my jaw, am I?"

"Well, that's because... that's because..." Lois' voice trailed off in confusion, almost as if she knew there was a reason Kent's jaw wasn't hurting but couldn't quite figure out what it was.

Still, it gave Henderson a chance to jump in. "Okay, so let's see if I've got this straight. You..." He pointed to Lois. "...came in here and said you were going to the south of France for therapy..."

"That's right," Lois said. "And then these guys go into some kind of nuclear meltdown, tackling us."

"As I recall, no one 'tackled' anyone," Clark said, placing his hands flat on the conference room table as he glared across at Lois. "Not until Deter here starting throwing punches around."

"He wouldn't have started throwing punches around if you hadn't gone all caveman on us, pushing Max and grabbing me to prevent us from leaving," Lois responded, matching his stance. Face to face, with their hands flat on the surface of the table, only a couple of feet separating them.

"Caveman? Trying to prevent you from throwing away your career... throwing away... everything is suddenly caveman?"

"It's my life! Hence, my decision!"

"You're not well enough to be making decisions like that!"

"Says who? You? And what gives you the right to make that determination?"

"When you agreed to marry me, we decided that our decisions would be made together. Together! That gives me the right to say what I think!"

"Oh, really. Agreeing to marry you gave you the right to make my decisions for me!"

"That's not what I said!"

"Sure sounded like it to me!"

"That's not what I meant. I meant that until your memory returns..."

"My memory is just fine!"

"No, it's not! Obviously! You clearly don't remember how much your job means to you. And you don't remember being engaged to me! What else don't you remember? And how can you make decisions like this without having your memory?"

"Maybe I don't remember being engaged to you because I don't want to remember!"

"What are you saying?"

There was a pregnant pause where it seemed everyone in the room held his or her breath.

"I think you know what I'm saying," Lois said, her eyes firmly on Clark.

"Maybe you're going to have to spell it out for me, dumb caveman that I am." Clark's response was controlled, calm. In fact, it seemed almost too calm for Henderson's peace of mind especially given how heated their previous exchange had been. He took a quick look over his shoulder, relieved to see that the guards at the door had stepped back into the room.

"She doesn't want to marry you anymore, Kent," Deter said when Lois didn't respond quickly enough.

"Good to see she can answer for herself," Jimmy muttered.

"Talk about getting a doctor's help. She doesn't even have to speak for herself."

"Can it, Jimmy," Perry growled.

"Cat got your tongue, Lois?" Clark asked. "Can't answer that one for yourself? Maybe you should think about what that means."

"Well, you obviously think it means something, Clark," Lois responded. "So let's hear your brilliant hypothesis."

"Maybe it means this wasn't your decision at all. Maybe, just maybe, you've been letting Deter here make your decisions for you. Maybe that's why you can't say you don't want to marry me for yourself."

Lois' eyebrows rose, as if in answer to the challenge. "You want to hear me say it? Fine. It's over, Clark. If it even ever was

in the first place."

Henderson's eyes darted over to Clark just in time to see the blood drain from his face. It seemed he wasn't the only one who noticed because a moment later, Perry was helping Clark find a chair as his legs seemed to give out beneath him.

"Goodbye, Clark," Lois added, grabbing Deter's damaged hand before cringing when she realized what she'd done. "Sorry," she muttered as she took his other hand and helped him to his feet.

"You're not leaving," Perry said, stepping in for an obviously stunned Clark. Perry positioned himself between Lois and Deter and the door, making it impossible for her to pass.

"You can't keep me here against my will." She turned towards Henderson. "Can he, Henderson?"

"No, he can't," Bill confirmed reluctantly. He agreed that Lois was not acting like herself. But it wasn't as if she was acting crazy, or as if she didn't know her own mind. "That would be unlawful confinement — and it's a crime."

"Move," Lois demanded of her boss when she got the confirmation that she needed from Henderson.

"On the other hand," Henderson continued. "I have the right to detain you to investigate a crime."

"What crime?" Deter demanded. "She just came by to give her resignation. There's no crime in..."

"She quit?" Henderson asked in disbelief. "Lois quit her job at the Planet?" he repeated, just to be sure he'd understood.

"I decided I needed to quit so that I could get better," Lois said defensively. "So... can we go?"

Henderson hesitated a second. Perry and Clark were right. Something was very wrong with this picture. He could almost buy into her breaking up with Kent in the middle of a fight. After all, although he'd never seen a couple more devoted to each other than Lane and Kent, he'd never seen one so able to fight like cats and dogs either. But quitting her job at the Planet... Still, legally, he had no real grounds to detain her. On the other hand, he could try arresting Deter for throwing a punch. But given that Clark's jaw seemed fine and Deter's hand was obviously hurt, the judge was likely to laugh that charge out of court — and Henderson could be looking at a lawsuit for malicious prosecution.

Besides, if Clark had pushed Deter and grabbed Lois to prevent her from leaving, there was not likely a crime there since Deter would undoubtedly argue he was protecting himself and Lois. And given Clark's lack of reaction to her accusation, it seemed that was the case. And so, if he arrested Deter, he would have to arrest Clark, too.

"Okay, you can go..."

"Thanks, Henderson," Lois said.

"...after you get that hand looked at," Henderson said, pointing to Deter's wrapped hand.

"It's fine," Deter said.

"That's my condition," Henderson said, even though he knew he was skating on thin ice. He really didn't have the power to order someone to get medical attention. But maybe he could delay them long enough to figure out what was really going on here.

"Fine," Lois said. "We'll head over to Metropolis General and..."

"One of the security men will take you," Henderson interrupted, looking over at Stern to see the other man nod his agreement. When neither Deter nor Lois responded, Henderson continued. "That's my condition, Lane. Take it or stay here until I can sort this all out. And don't think I'm above charging Deter here with assault for punching Kent." He threw in the last in hopes of strengthening his argument.

"Fine," Lois finally grumbled. "But we're never going to make our flight now."

"We'll just catch one in the morning," Deter said softly in her

ear.

Henderson watched as Clark, who was still sitting in stunned silence, grasped onto the edge of the table at the final words. Was it Henderson's imagination that Kent was actually leaving finger shaped indentations in the wood?

Henderson gave his head a shake. Obviously, he needed a vacation if he thought someone could leave finger indentations in a solid mahogany table just by squeezing — well, other than Superman, of course.

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"How could you let her go?" Clark's words were softly spoken but even he could hear the heartbreak they conveyed to the remaining occupants of the conference room.

"I couldn't keep her here against her will, Kent," Henderson responded. "And neither could you."

"She's not in her right mind," Perry said.

"What makes you so sure of that?" Henderson asked. "Okay, so maybe breaking off her engagement with Kent here was a little... unexpected. But it isn't as if she hasn't broken off an engagement before."

Clark knew he must have flinched at that because Henderson immediately responded by saying, "Sorry, Kent."

"Calling off her engagement to a psychopath like Luthor is not exactly the same thing as what happened here," Perry growled.

"And what about Lois quitting?" Jimmy added. "You've got to admit that was a little nuts."

"Tell that to the majority of the population who hate their jobs," Henderson said. "They'd probably say quitting would be the sane thing to do."

"The majority of the population isn't Lois," Perry said. "And running off to France with that piece of crap? You call that sane?"

"Giving up Metropolis weather to run off with a doctor to live in a villa in the south of France. Come on, Perry. That is the fantasy of ninety-five percent of the women in this city."

When Perry and Jimmy began to object that Lois wasn't like that, Henderson held up his hands in surrender. "Look. I happen to agree with you. Lois isn't exactly acting like herself. And that Florence Nightingale routine was a bit much. But, I couldn't stop her from leaving. I did get you a little time, however."

"Until tomorrow morning," Jimmy said. "Then she's going to be on a plane to France to become Deter's love slave. Sorry, C.K.," he added when he, too, saw Clark flinch.

"What good is a little time going to do?" Stern asked, entering the conversation for the first time.

Seeming relieved to have someone not quite as emotionally invested to talk to, Henderson let out a breath. "You say she's not in her right mind?" Everyone nodded. "Then get a judge to make an order declaring her incompetent. Get Kent, here, appointed as her guardian. Or you do it, Perry. But either way, until that happens, I can't prevent her from leaving just because you don't want her to. You get that order, however, and I'll be more than happy to enforce it for you."

"Right," said Perry. "What we need is a judge..."

"I'll call the lawyers," Stern said, heading towards one of the conference room phones even as he spoke.

"Jimmy, you get on your computer and dig up everything you can about Dr. Maxwell Deter and the Metropolis Neuroscience Center," Perry added. "Clark, we're going to need a doctor to back up our assertions. Also, I want to know the rules about personal relationships between doctors and their patients. Maybe there is something there that we can use to..."

"It's no use," Clark said, rising to his feet and glaring at the others.

"Clark, we won't know that unless..."

"It's no use, Chief. Dr. Maxwell Deter is considered the foremost expert on memory loss. What doctor is going to

contradict him and say she's not competent to make her own decisions if Deter says she is? And he's going to say there is nothing 'personal' about Lois going to France with him. She said it was for 'treatment' after all. And he'll just say it's some new treatment he's working on or something."

"We've got to try," Perry said.

"I'm not going to try," Clark responded, grabbing his jacket and heading for the door. "I'm putting an end to this now."

"Don't do anything stupid, Clark," Henderson said, grabbing the younger man's arm.

Clark glared at the hand for a moment until Henderson released him. "I'm not going to do anything stupid, Henderson. Trust me. I'm going to do the first sane thing I've done in weeks."

With that, Clark turned and strode from the conference room.

"C.K.?" Jimmy yelled after him.

"Let him go, son," Perry said. "He'll be back when he blows off a little steam. In the meantime, we need to..."

As Perry continued speaking, Clark darted into the stairwell and a moment later was airborne. Perry might think he'd be back when he calmed down. Clark knew better. He knew now what he had to do. It was long past time he took matters into his own hands. He gave a small snort. At least he couldn't make things any worse.

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Clark hovered in the evening light over Metropolis General, his eyes and his ears focused completely on the young woman who sat by Maxwell Deter's side in the emergency room. His first thought had been to swoop in and simply snatch Lois.

Fortunately, he'd quelled that impulse. After all, having Superman abduct someone was not the best of ideas. Superman had to be seen as being above taking the law into his own hands.

Clark Kent on the other hand... He had to be careful that if anyone became aware of what had happened that the blame fell squarely on Clark Kent's shoulders. There could be no hint of involvement by Superman.

That limited his options, of course. After all, if Clark Kent were to go into the hospital as himself and try to abduct Lois, he would surely be stopped. No, he had to find a time when she was alone.

However, until he found his opportunity, he wasn't about to lose sight of Lois and take the chance that she and Deter would disappear before he could act.

Of course, there was also the problem of letting even Lois know of Superman's involvement. Normally, that would not be an issue. But this time... he had to admit, he had no idea what she might do with that information. How deep was Deter's control over her? Would letting her know be tantamount to telling Deter?

Not that handling Lois without letting her know of the superhero's involvement was going to be easy. But so far, she hadn't made the connection between him and Superman. He'd seen hints that it had been on the tip of her memory, moments that he thought she almost remembered. But until he was in control of the situation, letting Lois know that he was also Superman was probably not a good idea.

So what could he do? How could he possibly abduct Lois without giving away his secret?

Suddenly, an idea came to him. He used his x-ray vision to look around the building over which he was hovering until he spotted what he required. He continued his search until he spotted the next thing he'd need.

Moving too fast for the human eye to follow, he zipped into the hospital and liberated a bottle of the liquid he required — it was an emergency after all and he'd send them a donation that would more than cover his theft at the earliest opportunity. Maybe Lois' pragmatism was beginning to rub off on him, he thought with a wry grin. But then this wasn't the only crime he planned on committing tonight. Nor was it the most serious.

Next, he darted into one of the doctor's offices where he spent a moment studying one of their medical journals on the proper use of the substance. There was no way he could make a mistake with this.

The entire exercise only took a couple of minutes and when he returned to the skies, he had his plan in place. Now it was just a matter of waiting for his moment.

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Clark was glad to discover that the large, cast-iron gate was well oiled. Sure, he could have simply flown over the fence surrounding the Metropolis Neurological Center. But the more obvious the trail he left, the more likely authorities would attribute his actions to the work of Clark Kent, leaving Superman blameless.

He had to protect Superman's image. Clark Kent was different. His reputation meant nothing if his actions made Lois remember. Surely she would be able to defend him then. Unless... unless Lois still wanted to go to France with Deter.

No. No, Lois loved him. He knew that as surely as he knew the sun would rise tomorrow. And there was no way Lois would leave the Daily Planet. Something else was going on here.

He looked down, stepping heavily on the mucky path. Footprints. Footprints were good, because surely Deter would call the police and this entire area would be gone over with a fine tooth comb. Of course, he and Superman had the same size feet. Okay, so he would just have to make sure he left the muddy dress shoes at his apartment. Surely it wasn't such a stretch to think the police would find them there. After all, he was undoubtedly going to be the number one suspect after Lois' abduction.

And that was good for more than just leaving Superman out of it. If it were obvious that Clark was responsible for Lois' abduction, then their friends at the Planet wouldn't be so concerned about her safety. So although he couldn't make them accessories by telling them what he was about to do, he could give them the reassurance after the fact that Lois was with him and not the victim of foul play by Deter or one of Lois' numerous enemies.

He looked around. The gardens surrounding the center were deserted. Good. He might want to be identified after the fact as Lois' abductor, but the last thing he needed was to be stopped before he accomplished his mission.

He quickly strode across the grounds until he was just outside a door on the side of the building where he knew Lois' room was located. He'd watched her enter it some time before.

His blood boiled as he recalled that scene. Deter had walked with Lois to her room, his hand encased in newly dried plaster — apparently he'd broken a bone when he'd hit Clark.

"I'm sorry I got our trip postponed," Lois had said contritely.

Clark had flinched. Lois apologizing for anything was out of character. But to apologize for something that wasn't her fault... It rankled Clark. And it stiffened his resolve. Lois was not acting like herself — this was definitely something more than just memory loss. And he'd put a year's pay on it having something to do with Deter.

Deter's good hand had come up to her cheek, lightly stroking it with his fingers. Lois' eyes had closed momentarily and Clark had felt a pain slice through his heart.

"It's okay, Lois," Deter had said. "We'll get a flight first thing in the morning. In the meantime, I should really go."

Clark had wholeheartedly agreed.

"Can't you stay?" Lois had pleaded. "Surely..."

"We must be patient. Once we get to France..." he said, letting the obvious implications go unsaid. "The French are more understanding about matters of the heart. They know that when it comes to passion, there is no right or wrong — there is only need."

Did men really talk like that? His mind flashed back to

Deter's comment to Lois earlier in the day: 'All I ask is that you honor the work that we have done and make no rash decisions until we've spoken.' Maybe most people didn't talk that way, but Deter certainly did. Just one more thing for Clark to dislike about the man.

Besides, he wasn't even sure that Deter's assertion that the French would be more understanding of a doctor-patient relationship was true. And that didn't even touch the morality of the sentiment Deter had expressed. Still, Clark didn't have time to ponder the issue further because the next thing he saw was Deter leaning in to kiss Lois. It had taken every ounce of self-control Clark possessed not to sweep in at the moment and intervene.

He tapped down the fury just the memory of that sight evoked in him and concentrated on the door. He took a quick glance through the wall, satisfying himself that there was no one to see his entrance. Then he turned the handle.

Damn. It was locked.

He could, of course, simply twist the handle and break the lock, but far better that there be no evidence of superstrength being used. Still, he'd prepared for this. He pulled Lois' lock-breaking kit from his pocket. He'd never had a need to do this before, but he'd watched Lois do it numerous times. And he understood the principle. So... how hard could it be?

Several minutes, and a number of muttered curses later, the door slowly slid open. Clark quickly disappeared inside.

Finding Lois' room was easy. So too was avoiding detection — although on one occasion he'd been forced to float on the ceiling when someone had come down the corridor he was using. Fortunately, the woman had rushed past without even the slightest hint that she was going to look up. As for the rest, given the time of night, the hallways were basically deserted.

Finally, he arrived at the door to Lois' room. A quick look through the wall told him that she was in bed and, if her heart rate was any indication, on the verge of sleep.

He took a deep breath. "Here goes nothing," he whispered under his breath as he silently turned the doorknob to her room.

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#### PRESENT

Clark glanced towards the bedroom to see Lois still sound asleep through the crack in the door. Better to let her sleep as long as possible. After all, when she woke up, she was not going to be a happy camper. After all, she was bound to remember what had happened after he'd entered that room at the Metropolis Neurological Center. And what had happened had not been pretty. He had hoped that he could chloroform her while she was still groggy with sleep, before she had a chance to really know what was going on. Unfortunately, it seemed Lois was ready to fight even in her sleep.

It had been a struggle not using his powers to such an extent that it became obvious to her what he was doing. Not only that, but he had to worry about her getting hurt. He had to avoid that at all costs. Still, the state of the room by the time Lois had gone limp in his arms certainly supported the idea that Lois had been abducted by Clark. After all, surely Superman could have done it with a lot less trouble.

Clark almost chuckled on that thought. Didn't people realize by now that even Superman was hard pressed to best Lois Lane?

Clark's almost smile turned to a frown. He figured he was going to soon be learning which one of them had the most determined stubborn streak because it wouldn't likely be much longer before he was on the receiving end of Mad Dog Lane at her very best. And the only real advantage he had was that, unlike him, she had nowhere to run.

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The sun coming between the curtains pulled Lois slowly out of sleep.

She moaned softly and, without opening her eyes, stretched

contentedly. Suddenly, she sat up, completely awake. She looked around at the unfamiliar environment. Where was she? What exactly had happened? She was still struggling to put it all together when she became aware of something else.

She was out of bed immediately, hardly noticing that she was still wearing the light tank top and flannel pajama bottoms she'd worn to bed at the clinic the previous night, and dashed for the door. She threw it open, spiriting outside.

She noticed Clark first, his head snapping up and swiveling in her direction. And suddenly she remembered what had transpired the night before. She might have been tempted to confront him but at the moment, she had more pressing concerns.

"Bathroom!" she demanded.

"Lois..." he began, obviously intending to talk to her.

"Sick!" she exclaimed in frustration, looking around in desperation.

Clark jumped to his feet and pointed, obviously finally understanding the urgency of the situation.

She rushed in the appropriate direction, entering the bathroom and, unable to hold off a moment more, emptied the contents of her stomach into the toilet bowl. Sweat congregated on her forehead, tears escaped to slide down her cheeks and her entire body felt cold and clammy as she continued to heave long after anything was left in her stomach. She was so focused on her immediate misery that she failed to notice Clark enter the room, failed to hear him turn the water on to wet a face cloth, even failed to notice him kneel behind her. What she didn't fail to notice was when he placed the damp face cloth against her neck.

She wanted to push him away, to yell at him not to touch her, to reject his actions all together, but... damn! That cloth felt good, cooling the fever inside her head.

Finished dry heaving, she closed her eyes. The cloth moved and she felt him now slowly wiping the sweat from her face and forehead. She should push him away. She really should. After all, she could still remember the smell of the chloroform soaked cloth he'd held over her face, the way he'd persisted even in the light of her struggles. He'd kidnapped her. She knew that. But she couldn't quite work up the energy required to fight him.

"You're sick because of the chloroform," he whispered as he continued to wipe her face.

Right. Like she didn't already know that.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She cracked her eyes open finally and did her best to glare at him, although she was certain that in her current state it didn't amount to much of a glare. Still, he seemed to understand her intent because his expression suddenly changed and he looked... hurt.

Anger flared inside her. How dare he look hurt? What did he expect? He'd drugged her and kidnapped her.

"I didn't think I had any other choice, Lois," he rushed to explain.

"No other choice," she said, repeating the words hollowly.

"Something... unkosher was going on with Deter. I had to get you away from him."

"Huh... So this is about you getting me away from the only man I love so that..."

"You don't love him, Lois. You might think you do, but..."

"I love only Max, Clark. Only Max," she said with as much force as she could muster. "You mean nothing to me."

She'd added that last line in anger, her need to hurt him like he had hurt her. And it worked. For a moment, she saw the pain she had inflicted on the lines of his face. Then he turned his head away. When he turned back, he wore an impassive expression — a mask, she was sure, to keep her from seeing his emotions.

"Well, no matter," he said flatly. "We'll get you well and then if you want to go back to Deter..." He didn't finish his thought as he finally rose to his feet and backed towards the bathroom door.

"I'll just... let you clean up," he concluded finally stepping out of the bathroom and closing the door behind him.

She closed her eyes and rested her head against the cool side of the toilet bowl for a moment, glad to have him gone. Now, all she had to do was to figure out a way to escape, to get back to Max — after all, he was the expert in memory loss. If he couldn't help her, no one could.

But... but that would have to wait. For now she had something else she needed to do. She turned back to the toilet bowl as the dry heaves started again.

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Lois cracked open the door of the bathroom slowly. Her head was still pounding and her stomach was taking no more than a short break from rebelling against the rest of her body, but that was hardly an excuse to delay. After taking a deep breath, she peaked out through the crack, holding her breath as she looked for the enemy. He was seated on a couch in sunken living room of the cabin, his back to her.

Okay, now was her chance.

Praying the door wouldn't creak, she pushed it open just far enough that, keeping herself pressed tightly against the wall, she was able to slip outside. When she was finally outside the door, she used her foot to push the door closed again. She cringed when it clicked as it closed and held her breath as she waited to see if Kent was going to move.

He didn't.

Still, it took her a moment more before she began creeping along the wall, step by slowly painful step. It seemed to take forever, but eventually she'd managed to snake across the floor of the cabin until she was at the door. She glanced again at the man with his back still to her, seemingly engrossed in a book.

Good.

She turned her attention back to the door, noting that it seemed devoid of any sort of lock. Now, that surprised her. She was fairly certain that her own door had numerous locks. Or maybe that was just a movie or something she had seen once. Whatever. It wasn't as if she'd been back to her own apartment since... well, for as long as she could clearly remember anyway.

She glanced again at the man on the couch. Could it be that she was living with him? Maybe. After all, he had said something about them getting married. Still, when she'd gone to his apartment a week ago, there hadn't been any signs that she... or any other woman for that matter were living there. Come to think of it, if they were getting married, shouldn't there have at least been a picture of them together or something?

She gave her head a shake. There was no point in worrying about such matters at the moment. The important thing right now was to find her way back to Max. And to do that... she focused her attention on the door. Obviously, Kent didn't know her nearly as well as he claimed or he'd have had a number of locks installed on the door — and ones that only opened with a key, no matter what side of the door one was on.

Slowly, carefully, she took hold of the doorknob and turned. She almost sighed in relief when no sound came as a result of the action. Once the knob was fully turned, she held her breath and pushed the door open. When a small creak resulted, her head spun towards Kent. She rolled her eyes at her own fears when she realized that he hadn't moved an inch. Obviously his hearing wasn't that good.

It just proved exactly how little he really knew her if he thought a little stomach ache was enough to keep her prisoner in this place. Maybe she hadn't really been engaged to him at all. In fact, how did she really know that he was her partner at work? What if all of that was just part of his obviously sick fantasy of kidnapping her and whisking her away to... well, wherever she was now?

Once the door had opened far enough for her to squeeze

through the opening, she did exactly that before, taking as much care as she had at opening the door, she closed it, cringing slightly at the faint sound of a click it made when it came fully closed.

Still, this time she didn't wait to see if Kent had heard her. Instead, she turned and, shoeless, ran down the steps, determined to make her escape now while the getting was good and...

...came to an abrupt halt when she finally took in her surroundings.

Sand. Everywhere. Under her feet. Squishing between her toes. Spread out in front of her like an endless ribbon of white. On one side of the ribbon was an ocean of deep blue. On the other, trees as far as the eye could see. And not only that, but...

"Palm trees? Since when do we have palm trees in Metropolis?" she asked herself pointlessly.

She gave her head a quick shake. It didn't matter where she was. This was her chance and she was not about to let it slip through her fingers the way sand was slipping through her toes. She took off. Running as fast as she could through the soft, shifting sands, she began to put distance between herself and the cabin.

She was free. And for now, that was what mattered. It was all that mattered. She'd worry about how to find Max when she was far enough away from Kent to avoid recapture.

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Exhausted, Lois' running had ended sometime earlier, long before she finally came around a bend in the shore and found herself once again spotting the same cabin she'd escaped from earlier. She came to a halt, placing her hands on her knees and breathing heavily in an effort to regain her breath, even as she kept her eyes on the sight before her.

Just her luck. She'd obviously run all the way around what was clearly an island only to end up back where she'd started. Only this time, Kent was sitting on the steps of the cabin watching her. If he tried to chase her now, she wouldn't stand a chance. The cramp in her side and her battered feet were too much of a barrier for her to overcome against the noticeably athletic man sitting on the steps — or at least not when he was rested and she was exhausted.

So... what to do?

Well, if the defensive strategy failed, there was always the offensive. Flight or fight. Wasn't that what they said? She'd tried flight. She'd seen no boats on the island, so that must mean there was a landing pad or a helicopter pad or something further inland. And surely there would be a way there for her to contact someone — unless, of course, he actually had a plane and pilot standing by. That meant that flight might still be available. But she needed a little time to work out her new strategy. Let him think she was defeated. She'd show him just who was defeated by the time she was finished with him.

Straightening up and using all the dignity she could muster, she began walking towards him. She cringed slightly as the pain in her feet caused her to hobble more than she would have liked. The sand, although soft, still had the occasional rock hidden in it — and she figured her feet had become intimately acquainted with everyone during her flight around the perimeter of the island.

"If you want to continue with your exploration of the island," Clark said when she was still at least fifty feet away, "you'll need those."

What? He couldn't really be stupid enough to think that she'd just been out 'exploring,' could he? Still, her eyes followed to where he was pointing.

About thirty yards past where he was seated, she saw a picnic table nestled in the shade. As her eyes adjusted, she spotted a number of items on the table. A pile of clothes, topped off with a large brimmed sun hat. Beside that sat a pair of women's sneakers

and a bottle of what appeared to be a sun screen. But the item that most caught her attention was a large glass of water.

She subconsciously licked her lips, only realizing what she had done when she saw his gaze focus on her mouth and his eyes darken in response to her gesture.

'Eat your heart out, Kent,' she said silently to herself. 'Cause that's as close as you're ever going to get.'

Still, she didn't take long to focus on that issue since her mind was already occupied with the items on the table. It was a trap. It had to be. Still, those items were not only useful, but necessary if she were to continue her search.

She eyed the beach in front of him. If she were to attempt to get them, she would have to pass by where he was seated, giving him a chance to grab her.

"Suit yourself," he said when she continued to stand there. He slowly rose to his feet and she prepared herself to run back down the beach. "But I just think they may help."

He turned back towards the cabin, confusing her slightly. When he reached the door, his hand still on the knob, he looked back at her. "Or if you change your mind, I've got some cold ice tea waiting for you inside."

Before she could respond, he turned the knob on the door and reentered the cabin, leaving the door slightly open behind him.

She stood there for a moment more, waiting to see if he would reemerge. When he didn't, she looked at the picnic table again. She really needed those items. Still, it was a trap. It had to be. Problem was, she didn't know what exactly the trap could be — unless it was that he would come flying out of the cabin the instant she crossed in front of it on her way to the table.

That must be it. That meant she had to be faster. Gathering all her remaining strength, she put all of her energy into running the distance to the table faster than she thought was even possible. She quickly glanced behind her as she neared the table. He hadn't come out.

What?

She stopped next to the table and looked cautiously at the items. Was there some sort of trap that would be set off if she picked something up — like a bear pulling on a chunk of meat that would release a net to fall on him.

She didn't see anything like that. No carefully concealed wires. No net or cage hanging above her. No snare carefully set out on the ground below her. Still... She glanced at the water, her hand going out to grab it, when she stopped. No. That was the most likely... in fact, it was the only trap she could see. He could easily have put something in the water. So, in spite of her thirst screaming at her about her body's need for liquid, she ignored the water, grabbing the most important item first — the sneakers. When she appeared to have time for more, she grabbed the sunhat, placing it on her head. That was when she noticed the socks. They would certainly make it easier on her feet. She snatched them up, along with the long sleeved cotton shirt and the sun screen before darting further away.

He still hadn't come.

Okay, then. The water must have been the thing that was meant to trap her. She quickly sat down on a nearby log, keeping her eyes on the door, waiting for him to realize that his plan hadn't worked as she strove to pull on the socks and shoes as quickly as possible.

She took one final glance behind her as she took off into the trees, surprised to see that he wasn't hot on her heels. In fact, although her last sight of the cabin showed him standing in the doorway, it seemed obvious he wasn't even attempting to follow.

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Clark didn't take his eyes off her. He followed her path with both his x-ray and telescopic vision, ready to rush to the rescue if she got herself in any real trouble. After all, no one could get herself in trouble faster than Lois Lane — even on a deserted

island.

His body tensed several times, but his assistance had not been necessary. She was Lois Lane after all — even if she couldn't remember it.

He knew she needed to do this. Needed to prove to herself that there was no way off the island. That she would never settle down to work on figuring out who she was until she realized that it was her only way out of here.

He did worry slightly that she might try to do something stupid, like trying to swim the ocean in hopes of crossing a shipping lane to get picked up by a passing ship. He could only hope that whatever Deter had done to make her fall in love with him didn't make her do something that idiotic. Of course, he had an advantage on the average man. No matter what she did, he could get to her faster than she would currently believe possible.

He sighed in relief when he saw Lois finally stumble across the freshwater falls close to the middle of the island. He'd been concerned when she'd left without drinking the water. And as she fell to her knees at the side of the pool next to the falls and begin to cup water up with her hands to drink, his concern was validated. With all the exercise she'd been doing in the hot sun, it was only to be expected that she'd need water. If she hadn't found the waterfalls soon, he'd have had to go out, maybe make noises in the forest that might direct her towards it. Fortunately, that hadn't been necessary.

He was so lost in thought, he was unaware at first of exactly what she was doing after taking a long drink of water. When he did become aware, he couldn't bring himself to look away as first her top and then her pajama bottoms were tossed aside, followed by what little she was wearing underneath.

Suddenly, she disappeared into the water, snapping him out of his trance. Realizing that he'd seen more than she would be comfortable with, he looked away. Not that the images of what he'd seen would vanish as quickly.

The image invoked other feelings. Primary among them was the realization that they should have been married by now, that the brief glimpse he had been given today completely by accident should have been a daily occurrence. The anguish that thought brought was almost as difficult as anything else had been over the course of the past month.

He glanced back at her through the cabin walls and the surrounding trees. She'd emerged from the pool of water at the base of the waterfalls and was standing, her back to him, on the rocks at the foot of the falls, allowing the fresh water to pour down over her already slick body. He groaned again but didn't look away, following the curves and lines of her back, down to her feet and then back up again until she turned around and then, quickly, he forced himself to look away. By the time he looked again, she was dressed in her pajama bottoms and tank top with the long sleeved shirt hanging loosely over her shoulders, protecting her from the sun. She was sitting by the side of the pool, dragging her still bare feet through the water distractedly. He couldn't help thinking she looked so sad and his heart broke for her.

Still, there was no time left to sit around. He rose to his feet. It was getting late. Time for him to try again.

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She almost wasn't surprised when he appeared through the thick foliage. This time, she didn't even bother to move — although she was surprised when he stopped some distance from her and, without saying a word, removed his own shoes and socks and sat down, dangling his feet in the same pond as her.

There was something almost intimate about seeing his bare feet and she forced herself to look away, to stare, without seeing, at the water as it plunged over the rocks and into the waiting pond below.

"Supper's ready if you'd care to join me," he said softly.

"I'm not hungry," she answered flatly. The instant growling of her stomach lay proof to the lie. But if he had heard, he gave no indication. Instead he simply nodded and continued to sit in silence.

"There's no way off this island, is there?" she finally asked. She wasn't certain why she was bothering to ask — it wasn't as if she was about to believe anything he said anyway.

As if he read her thoughts, he almost smiled. The smile disappeared when he saw her glare at him.

"You've spent the day covering every square inch of it," he responded instead of answering her directly. "What do you think?"

She shrugged, not quite willing to concede the point. "That you have an invisible helicopter pad around here somewhere."

This time he really did smile and for some bizarre reason she found herself smiling back — although once she realized what she was doing, she immediately regained control of her facial features and glared at him again. His smile instantly faded and she found herself missing it.

'Stockholm syndrome,' she told herself firmly. 'Identifying with, even developing feelings for, one's captors. It's normal. Doesn't mean anything.'

"Look, Lois," he began again after another long pause. "We're stuck on this island. I guess what happens now is up to you. You can stay here or you can use this time to try to get your memory back. I've brought copies of all your old stories and your photo albums. I even found a couple of your old diaries to look through from when you were a kid. I can't give you anything more recent, but I thought even the earlier ones might help."

She glanced over at him in the fading light. She got the feeling that he felt uncomfortable with the last admission, as if something about it wasn't quite true. Maybe not an outright lie — but not quite the truth either. Or maybe he was just feeling guilty about reading her diaries himself. Maybe that was what had him so captivated earlier when he'd let her leave the cabin.

Let her leave. Was that what he had done? Had he known that she would concentrate all her energy on escaping for so long as she believed it was a possibility and had simply let her do it?

Or maybe she was misreading him. Maybe he wasn't feeling guilty about reading her diaries. Maybe he was uncomfortable because something about what he'd said wasn't true. So what could... Not being able to give her more recent diaries? Could that be what he was lying about? He hadn't said she didn't have more recent diaries — or that he'd been unable to find any. He'd said he 'couldn't give her' more recent diaries. Maybe he had found her more recent diaries, assuming she kept any, but didn't want her to see them for some reason. For example, if he had been lying about the nature of their relationship, he would naturally not want her to see them.

Suddenly, she was itching to get back to the cabin and scour it until she found those diaries. Because, surely, he would have at least brought them with him. So what was it that he was so determined to keep her from knowing? And could she use it to make him perform whatever voodoo was necessary to get her off this island and back to the only man she truly loved.

Besides, those diaries could help her get her memory back. And that was something she was all for. Still, the best way, by far, to work on getting her memory back was to find her way back to Max. After all, he was the country's foremost expert in memory loss. And he had promised her some intensive one on one therapy when they got to the south of France. Kent had compromised all that by kidnapping her and bringing her here.

"Well, anyway," Clark said, interrupting her thoughts, "if you want supper, it's ready. Just follow the path. It will take you right back to the cabin." With that he rose to his feet. For a moment he paused and she thought he might say something more, but then he simply turned and began walking in the direction of the cabin.

Lois sat there for a long time after he left. Then she leaned back, lying on the soft bed of moss and looked up at the emerging stars. Without all the light pollution she was used to seeing, they were certainly beautiful. She almost felt as if she were floating among them. She wondered briefly where that fanciful thought had come from.

It irked her to think that she might actually be considering his suggestion that she return to the cabin. On the other hand, it seemed obvious from her exploration of the island that there was no way off — at least at this point. Kent must have some way to get them back, but he was not about to tell her at present.

If Kent cared for her at all, surely he'd see that the best way to help her was for her to get back to Max. He was the one who could help her regain her memory. From what little she knew of Kent, he was a reporter. He knew nothing about memory loss. So what could he do for her that Max couldn't? Maybe she could make Kent see that. Probably not. He seemed completely irrational on the subject of Max, after all.

She supposed she could stay out here just to spite him, or she could return, see what he might let slip, what she could learn that might help her escape. And then there was always the diaries

Before she could reach any conclusions, she felt herself being summoned to the land of nod and a moment after that, she was fast asleep under the clearest night sky she could ever remember seeing — although, given the current state of her memory, that wasn't exactly saying a lot.

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Clark floated silently above her, watching her sleep for a long time, before drifting away. He waited until he was certain he was far enough away to ensure she didn't hear the sonic boom before taking off at top speed towards Metropolis. He needed to do a patrol, maybe stop a would-be mugger or thwart the plans of a bad guy or two — just enough to be seen. It wouldn't do for Superman to disappear at the same time as Lois had been abducted.

Still, he didn't want to leave Lois alone too long. So he'd have to find some trouble to interrupt fairly quickly. And although Lois' breathing and heart rate told Clark that Lois was sound asleep, it couldn't be overly comfortable sleeping on the hard ground. That meant he couldn't count on her staying asleep long. Besides, there were some animals on the island that might grow a little curious about a woman sleeping in their domain.

He briefly considered seeing if he could relocate her to the more comfortable resting place of the bed in the cabin, but just as quickly abandoned the idea. Although his special powers might allow him to move her without waking her, it had to be her decision to return to the cabin. Nothing could be accomplished otherwise. So it was with a sigh, that Clark left her where she was.

The lights of the city approached quickly and Clark set aside thoughts of Lois long enough to get to work, putting out a small fire and making a trip to the police station to hand a couple of teenage vandals over to the police.

He was just about to leave the police station when the sound of a familiar voice calling his name stopped him in his tracks.

"Damn," he whispered under his breath before fixing his expression into something neutral and turning towards the intruder. He had really hoped to avoid seeing this particular gentleman during his visit to the station. "What can I do for you, Inspector Henderson?" he asked, although he had a pretty good idea what the policeman wanted to talk to him about.

"I assume you're aware of the Lane situation."

"Yes," he replied cautiously.

"Know anything more than the rest of us?"

Clark fought to keep his expression neutral in the face of Henderson's probing look. "Inspector, as I understand it, the police believe that Clark Kent abducted Lois Lane. If I knew

something more, do you really think I would hold it back?"

Henderson didn't respond. Instead he just studied Clark for a moment or two more. "I guess not," he finally admitted. "But just in case you do find out where Kent took her... if he turns himself in, I'll do everything in my power to help him out. If not..." He let the sentence go uncompleted, although Clark could most certainly fill in the blanks for himself.

"Is that all you needed, Inspector?" Clark asked instead of responding to the officer's comment. He mentally cursed himself for being so abrupt when he saw Henderson's eyebrows rise. But Clark just wanted so badly for this conversation to be over. So far, he'd managed not to lie. But any further probing could well have different results.

Henderson stepped closer. "Look, Superman, I know that both Lane and Kent are your friends. But if you really want to be a friend to them, you'll be sure Kent brings her back."

"So that Deter can continue his... whatever he was planning to do with her?" The biting words were out of Clark's mouth before he could stop them.

Henderson's eyes flicked down to Clark's hands, making Clark realize that somewhere during the conversation he'd balled them into fists. He forced himself to relax.

"Sorry, Inspector," he said. "I guess I'm just as worried about this whole situation as anyone else. And if I do see Clark, I'll make sure he knows what you said."

"If you do see Clark, I expect you to do a lot more than that. Superman, no matter how you feel about this whole situation, Clark took the law into his own hands. No matter his reasons, he doesn't have that right. Neither do you."

Clark felt as if he'd just been slapped. Whether Henderson knew, or just suspected, Superman's involvement, Clark wasn't sure. But he did know that he was not helping keep the superhero separate from this whole situation right now. "I know, Inspector. Believe me, I know."

"And you're sure you don't have anything to tell me?"

"I'm sure."

Henderson studied him for a moment or two more before nodding. "Okay, well, thanks for taking the time to answer my questions."

Relieved that the conversation now appeared to be over, Clark nodded before striding towards the front entrance to the police station, his cape flowing out majestically behind him. He had just taken off when he heard Henderson's parting comment, whispered so that, Clark was certain, only super-ears could hear him.

"Just keep her safe, would you? I might actually miss her if anything happened."

Clark wasn't sure whether to smile or frown. Henderson obviously knew — at least unofficially — that Superman's hands weren't as clean as he'd tried to pretend. On the other hand, Henderson was obviously more concerned with Lois' well-being than he was prepared to admit. Maybe he even understood Clark's decision to take matters into his own hands — even if, officially, he couldn't condone it. At least he hadn't tried to hold him for 'further questioning' — regardless of his suspicions.

Clark angled his flight towards the east and took off again at superspeed. His job was done for tonight in Metropolis. He had to get back to Lois. But he had one final stop to make first. And it was probably about time for the shop he was thinking of in France to open.

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Lois woke from the most wonderful dream — about food. In fact, even coming out of sleep, she was almost certain she could still smell fresh coffee and pastries.

She sat up abruptly. This was no dream! She could smell fresh coffee and pastries!

Almost immediately upon realizing that the aromas hitting

her nostrils were real, her stomach growled.

She looked around and her eyes widened in surprise. Sitting on a stump nearby was a steaming cup of coffee, a glass of milk and a plate with two, wonderful looking croissants, a jar of honey and an apple. She was next to the stump before even realizing that she'd made the decision to move. Next to the offered gift was a note. She looked around but saw no sign of the author. Satisfied that she was alone, she picked up the note and read it quickly.

'Surely by now you realize I'm not going to poison you. At least, I assume that's why you didn't drink the water yesterday. But please eat. You need to keep up your strength if you're going to escape, after all.'

She almost burst out laughing before turning the laugh into a growl. He was definitely the most infuriating man she'd ever met. Using her desire to escape to convince her to eat.

Still, he was right. And, no, she no longer worried he would try to poison or drug her. After all, if he wanted to force her back to the cabin, he certainly would have been able to do so when he'd delivered breakfast while she'd been sleeping. She wasn't about to forgive him, but for now... These simply smelled too delicious to resist. She broke off a piece of croissant and moaned in pleasure when it practically melted in her mouth. It was only then that she sat down next to the stump and took the time to open a jar of honey and slather some of it on the croissant.

As she ate the first food she'd had for more than twenty-four hours, she directed her mind to what to do next. Part of her still didn't want to go back to the cabin. It felt in some ways that she would be allowing Kent to win some sort of victory over her if she did so. But it really didn't make any sense to stay here.

What she needed was more information. The diaries came to mind again. As did the idea of looking through some of her old stories. She'd looked at some before she'd unceremoniously been issued Kent's irresistible invitation to this tropical prison. But the more information she could get, the better her chances of escape. So maybe that was worth letting Kent gloat over whatever imagined victory her return to the cabin gave him.

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Clark took one final look at the two diaries in his hands. He hadn't read them. It wouldn't have been right. But he did know by the dates that these were Lois' most recent diaries. And although they might be helpful in allowing Lois to regain her memory, he wasn't yet prepared to take the risk of her finding out that he was Superman.

Maybe later. Maybe if nothing else was working. But he couldn't get over the idea that Deter had some sort of unnatural hold on her. And if he did... and if he obtained the information that Clark was Superman, he'd have a hold over Clark for the rest of his life.

No. For now, these more recent diaries would have to remain hidden.

He moved over to a corner of the living room and carefully pulled up a couple of floorboards. Then he carved out a small space below them and placed the diaries inside before putting the floorboards back in place and tapping the nails in to hold them.

While he did so, his eyes returned to Lois. He was relieved to see that she was eating her breakfast. He wasn't sure what he would have done if she refused to eat. He was glad that she didn't realize that was probably the one way she could force him to take her back to Metropolis. He could not risk her life, after all, regardless of what that did to his chance to help her regain her memory. He'd much rather see her with Deter and not in her right mind than dead. That was a no brainer.

Still, she obviously didn't know that. So eating... eating was good. He only hoped that she'd decide to return to the cabin soon. He was fairly confident that his patience could last longer than her stubbornness. It had when it came to getting her to fall in love with him, after all. But it was still such a waste of time when they

should have been working on getting her memory back.

He sat down on the couch and picked up one of the books he'd borrowed from the library regarding amnesia and other forms of memory loss and began reading again while still being careful to keep both an ear and an eye on Lois lest she find some way to get herself in trouble.

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Lois finally finished her coffee and rose to her feet as she surveyed the empty tray. Only the apple was left — and she intended to devour that on her way back to the cabin. She couldn't believe how hungry she'd been. Maybe it had come from sleeping under the stars. Or from all the exercise she'd gotten the day before. Or maybe it was simply that she hadn't eaten at all yesterday.

Regardless, she felt much better now that she had a little food in her stomach. Kent had better watch out.

She had just gathered the remaining items on the stump onto the now empty plate when she noticed something in her peripheral vision.

Why hadn't she noticed that earlier? Through the trees she could see a tree with clump of bananas hanging from it.

She'd had bananas all this time and hadn't realized it! How could...

Her thought trailed off as an image suddenly forced its way into her mind, so vivid she felt as if she was actually there, standing next to a body of water very similar to this one, Kent carrying a clump of bananas over his shoulder. He was dressed in a blue shirt and white shorts. And he looked good. He really did look good in blue.

Her eyebrows furrowed momentarily as she wondered what it was about Kent in blue that seemed familiar to her. She pushed that thought aside — obviously she'd seen him in blue, or any other color for that matter, during their acquaintance — to focus on the banana memory. She seemed to recall asking him where he'd been. That was when he'd responded that he'd been looking for food and that they were lucky because he'd found bananas.

She smiled when her response came back to her. 'Great. By the way, I hate bananas.' Then she could remember something that didn't quite make sense. Something about complaining about Camembert from France. 'It's like those words came from another woman. A clean woman. A dope.'

Lois' eyebrows crinkled together. Why had she been complaining about Camembert from France? Still, before she could process the question future, her mind flashed back once again.

She didn't exactly remember why, but Kent had suddenly started talking about his father. 'My pop used to take me fishing all the time when I was a kid. I got pretty good. He's just an ordinary guy, you know... and he loved doing this ordinary thing. Fishing. And I guess I loved it because he did. Maybe I wanna get married and have kids because they made it look like so much fun.'

She flinched even now as she remembered her response to the words — a feeling deep in her gut. A knowledge that she would never be much of a mother, or wife. That, whereas, his parents had made marriage look fun, hers had made it look like having a root canal. 'I didn't want a family. I ran as far away from it as I could.'

She suddenly had an image of him crouching down in front of her, taking her hands in his. 'Okay, your parents made a mistake,' he'd said. 'That doesn't mean you're going to.'

'How do you know?'

'Because I hear the guy who wants to marry you is really, really terrific.'

She quickly pushed the memory away when she was bombarded with the feelings of love and tenderness that had flooded her heart at his words and the soft smile in his eyes and

on his lips when he'd said them.

She rose to her feet abruptly. Okay, so maybe they had discussed marriage — even children from the sounds of things — not that she intended to tell Kent that. But, to herself she'd concede that maybe he'd wanted to marry her. But it was clear from that memory that she hadn't been nearly as sure as he wanted her to believe. So if that was the case, maybe she was right when she said that she didn't remember her relationship with Kent because she didn't want to.

Besides, all of that had changed. Regardless of what she might — and she emphasized might — have felt for Kent before, she now knew only one truth — she loved only Max. Her thoughts about Kent meant nothing.

Keeping hold of that thought, she picked up the plate and glasses in one hand, and used the other to eat the apple as she began walking down the path to the cabin.

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Clark didn't dare move. Didn't dare do anything that might cause her to flee the cabin. He just continued to sit in the living room, not even rising from his seat and watched as she stood, a silhouette in the still open doorway. A phantom, surrounded by light. A vision to match, in Clark's opinion, none other.

She stood, strong and proud. No hint in the curve of her shoulders or tilt of her head that she had lost this battle.

"This doesn't mean I like you, you know," she said.

"I know."

"Or that I'm not going to do whatever it takes to get back to Max."

He simply nodded.

"And you're still a schmuck."

He forced himself not to smile. "I know."

She made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a snort of laughter, although it was so quickly turned to a cough that he was never sure.

She stepped further into the room, allowing him to finally see the lines of her face. "And the bedroom belongs to me. Under no circumstances are you to set foot inside without my direct authorization."

He nodded once again.

"Good! Now that that's settled, I'm going to go have a shower. The dirty dishes are sitting outside on the picnic table. I assume you'll be taking care of them."

And with that, Lois Lane moved into the cabin.

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"Okay, so what's all this?" Lois asked as Clark proceeded to set two boxes containing paper on the kitchen table.

"This box has articles you've written at the Planet."

"And this one?"

"The notes you made when writing the articles." Clark didn't add that he'd had to sneak into the Daily Planet and break into her computer to get those — although he had to admit, he did like her current password system. 'Clarklovesme', followed by 'Hereallydoes' and finally, for the highest level of security, 'Andiloveclark.' Gone were the days of using 'Superman' for her password. "But this is just the beginning. The remainder of the articles and your notes are in a storage shed out back. I'll bring them in when you're ready for them. I started with the most recent ones, but I could bring in the older ones first if you prefer."

"Is there a story in here about us being stranded on a tropical island?" Lois asked.

"You remember that?"

Lois shrugged.

"Uhh... yeah," he flipped through the articles before pulling out the one she was looking for.

Lois' eyebrows rose. "Spenser Spenser's Headless Plot Decapitated," she read aloud. She glanced at Clark. "Are you serious?"

Clark nodded.

After giving him a disbelieving look, she took the proffered paper and, without acknowledging him further, began to read.

Clark turned away, walking into the kitchen where he removed the chicken breasts from the icebox began to coat them with the cumin, pepper, rosemary and honey mix he'd prepared earlier. From his reading, cumin, pepper and rosemary, mixed with honey were good for amnesia.

It hurt to realize that she was merely tolerating him because she had no choice in the matter. But at least it was a beginning. She'd already demanded, and read the diaries he'd provided to her and although he had heard various snorts of disgust and periodic laughter coming from her while reading them, she'd not seen fit to inform him if they had done anything to jog her memories.

Instead, when she'd finished that task, she'd insisted on knowing what was next. It was then that he had produced the boxes containing both her stories and her notes on the various stories.

As he pattered around the kitchen, making supper, he glanced periodically at her. She seemed to be hard at work. But then, that was Lois. She threw herself into any task she did with all of her being. And regardless of her dislike of him, and her determination to get back to Max, she also seemed bound to do what it took to get her memory back.

Still, she was studiously refusing to acknowledge his presence any more than absolutely necessary to accomplish her task, but he could often hear her heart rate speed up when she became aware that he was watching her.

He sighed, concentrating on his task once again. In addition to providing her with information to peruse, he had a few other ideas resulting from his reading that he still hadn't shared with her. As he waited for the meal to cook, he pulled out a bag and put some fruit on a dish and set it over on the table next to Lois.

"What's this?" Lois asked, looking up at him.

"Dates."

Lois' eyebrows rose. "What? Am I a big date fan or something?"

"No. It's just that dates are rich in phosphorus which helps invigorate brain cells."

Lois eyed the dates suspiciously for a moment before looking back at Clark. "And apples, milk and croissants?"

Clark shrugged sheepishly. "Well, there is nothing particularly helpful to the brain in croissants. Or at least, not that I know of."

"And the other things?"

"Apples contain Vitamin B1 and Potassium in addition to Phosphorus. Potassium helps in the synthesis of glutamic acid which controls wear and tear of nerve cells. Eating an apple a day with some honey and milk is thought to be beneficial in the treatment of memory loss."

Lois clicked her tongue on the roof of her mouth and Clark waited nervously to hear her response. Knowing Lois, she could decide not to eat anything else he made if she thought he was handling her.

"So what other treatments do you have in mind for me, Kent?" she asked sarcastically. "I assume you know you aren't a doctor. Or is this something else I've managed to forget?"

"I'm not a doctor, Lois. But it's not as if eating healthy is a bad thing — even if it doesn't do anything to really help."

She studied him for a moment more. "So anything else I should know about? Any voodoo you plan to do or maybe you could do acupuncture on me later."

"Well, you know, Lois, acupuncture has actually begun to be recognized by..."

"Kent!" she said, cutting him off.

"Okay, well, I was hoping to convince you to take ginkgo."

"And what exactly is ginkgo?"

"It's a seed used in some Chinese medicines."

"Kent!" she said warningly.

"Look, before you reject the idea, you should know that ginkgo has been the subject of extensive clinical research in Europe. Apparently, it helps dilate blood vessels and improve circulation — which can help with memory loss."

Without giving him her answer, she continued. "What else?"

"Regular exercise. Maybe some memory exercises as well to exercise your brain."

"And...?"

"Meditation."

Her eyebrows rose but she didn't respond. "Anything else?"

He shrugged. "That's about it, other than getting regular sleep."

Without responding, she went back to studying the story in front of her. He wanted to ask, but he didn't dare push her until she'd had time to consider his suggestions. Not right now. Not when refusing to do something might be a mere knee-jerk reaction to him suggesting it.

Still, he kept his head down, refusing to let her see any hint of a grin when, after looking at him, she reached over and picked up one of the dates and took a wary bite.

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Lois sat at the picnic table and looked up at the stars. In the cabin, she knew Kent was still working on cleaning up after supper. That thought brought a wry grin to her face. Ever since she'd moved into the cabin five days ago, he'd been bending over backwards to make sure she was comfortable. All she had to do was say that she wished she had something, and somehow he always found a way to make it appear.

In fact, earlier today, she'd come out of the bathroom and announced that she needed tampons. Not that she really had, of course. Her period was still weeks away. Hopefully she would be back with Max and on her way to France with him long before then.

She was distracted momentarily by thoughts of Max. She loved only him. And he loved her. Her eyebrows crinkled together in confusion for a moment. How did she know that he loved her? She couldn't actually remember him ever saying the words. So why... No. He loved her. She knew that the same way she knew that Clark meant nothing to her and that she loved only Max. She just did.

She shook her head. Thoughts of Max weren't going to get her off this island. On the other hand, annoying Clark might. And she had figured that telling him she needed tampons might annoy him. She'd been quite surprised when he'd simply disappeared out to the supply shed and returned a few minutes later with a box. Not her brand, but it had still been impressive. Apparently, he'd thought of everything.

It might be childish of her to make what were, at least in her mind, sometimes impossible demands, but then he'd kidnapped her! And since she hadn't yet found a way to get off this island, these little 'demands' were the only way she could maintain at least a little bit of her power.

Damn.

Who was she kidding? He was giving into her demands because they made her feel more in control. But until she discovered his means of transportation off the island, he was the one really in control.

She looked up at the stars and sighed, not even bothering to turn when she heard the cabin door open.

"I thought you might want this," Kent said, setting a steaming cup of liquid on the table in front of her.

"What is it this time?" she asked, eyeing the liquid skeptically.

"Herbal tea made with rosemary. I put a bit of honey in it for sweetener."

"And rosemary does...?" she asked, not because she particularly cared. She wouldn't know if he was telling the truth anyway. But she still asked because his answers tended to amuse her.

"It was used in ancient Rome in order to, as they put it, 'destroy the evils from the mind and ensure that the memory no longer played tricks.'"

"Uhh... I should have guessed. Couldn't have Nero forgetting which notes to play on his fiddle while Rome burned."

"Or which Christians to throw to the lions," he added.

She picked up the cup and took a sip. She knew he was waiting for that. Once she did, he turned and reentered the cabin.

And actually, this tea wasn't bad. Certainly a lot better than that stuff made of sage the previous night.

She suspected that all of these herbal remedies Clark was giving her had little effect on her regaining her memory. What she really needed was to get back to Max. He was the expert. He could help her regain her memory far better than these herbal concoctions Clark insisted on administering. They weren't helping at all. Well, unless one counted the occasional memory flash she had related to food. For example, the first time he'd given her herbal tea, she'd had a flash of storming into his apartment. She had been furious with him about something, although try as she might, she couldn't quite remember what. Although the words coming out of her mouth had certainly attested to her anger.

'You rotten, back stabbing piece of slime. You know, some people might be fooled by that innocent, boyish exterior, but not me, not anymore.'

He'd been standing there holding a cup of tea. And instead of responding, she could recall him saying, 'Tea, Lois? It's a calming herbal blend. I learned it from a medicine man in Fiji. The secret is the fresh mint.'

And this was the man she was supposedly engaged to marry? A rotten, back-stabbing piece of slime with an herbal tea obsession?

The only real argument they'd had since she'd moved into the cabin concerned her coffee. After that second morning, when he'd used it to bribe her into eating breakfast, he'd refused to give her coffee. According to Kent, coffee was to be avoided when one had amnesia. She'd pointed out, very logically she thought, that it wouldn't matter if she had amnesia if she completely lost her mind. He had not been persuaded. She'd had to resort to a strike, refusing to do or eat anything before he'd been willing to compromise. Now she was allowed one coffee in the morning in exchange for which she would drink herbal teas for the rest of the day.

Still, the food had been good. Actually, if she was completely honest, it had been remarkable. So even if he seemed to insist on cooking with ingredients that supposedly helped with memory loss, who really cared? And she had to admit that watching him cook had seemed familiar — as did the delicious aromas he managed to create. In fact, that was another memory she'd gotten over the past few days — a memory of him cooking and her watching.

'We'll be like this forever,' she had apparently told him — although, as yet she couldn't imagine why. He was, after all, the single most annoying person she had ever met. 'You cooking; me watching.' Probably she'd just offered him a job as her full-time cook. She could see that might be a good thing.

'You're never cooking?' he'd asked.

'It's not really something I do.'

'I thought it was lack of time.'

'No. No. Lack of talent.'

So although she wasn't sure the food had any particular medicinal value, when it was as good as Kent seemed able to make it, she wasn't particularly complaining.

The mind exercises, on the other hand, had at times been infuriating. That first evening, for example, when he'd brought out the cabinet drawer containing a number of cooking utensils and told her to study it for a minute before, with her back turned, removing two of the items and telling her to identify what was missing... How could he not understand that her failure to do so had nothing to do with her memory and everything to do with the fact that they were kitchen utensils! She didn't recognize most of them in the first place — so how was she to know what was missing?

The cross-word puzzles had been a little bit more her style. And coming up with words which she knew weren't real, and would frustrate Kent to no end, well, that was simply fun. In fact, she was pretty sure she had done that before. At least, she seemed to recall an argument they'd had about some word. Chumpy, maybe? If a person was a chump, he was, therefore, chumpy.

And the jumbo puzzles he produced from old copies of the Daily Planet were certainly challenging. Although she had thought the jumbo puzzle had been replaced to make room for some touchy-feely column by some pop psychologist or something.

Of course, the frustration she felt at having to give up time to research her life in order to do mind exercises was nothing compared to the waste of time that was meditating. But Kent could be so annoyingly insistent. The man never yelled. Never carried on. He would just continue to peck away at her until it was less annoying to give in. To sit in a quiet place with no distractions. To find a comfortable position — although how anyone could think the lotus position was in the least bit comfortable was beyond her. And then to meditate, concentrate on her breathing. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. To imagine herself sitting in warm sunlight or bathed in still, clear water. Inhale. Exhale. To feel her body sinking deeper into the chair, her muscles relaxing. Inhale. Exhale.

She remembered clearly the first time he'd suggested it.

'Come on, Lois. It will clear your mind, allow you to concentrate better.'

'There's nothing wrong with my concentration,' she'd spouted back, one of her hands curling into a fist as an overwhelming urge to hit him had welled up inside her.

'It will help you relax.'

'I am relaxed,' she'd snapped back.

'It only takes three to ten minutes,' he'd insisted. 'Although, in your case, I suggest we start with three.'

'Are you saying you don't think I can do ten minutes, Kent?'

'Well...'

'Fine!' She'd slammed the article she'd been reading down on the table. 'Okay, let's get this over with! You've got ten minutes. Make me relax!'

The amused grin he'd given her in response had been infuriating.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Please! She did that all the time without even having to think about it.

The physical exercise, on the other hand, was something she did find useful. Not that stupid exercise regime Clark had originally come up with. That had been scrapped on the first day. They'd been in the cabin doing jumping jacks. And... she still wasn't entirely certain what had happened. But she'd suddenly been over-come with a powerful feeling, as if she were in jeopardy. She'd found herself subconsciously speeding up her pace, as though she thought a bomb might go off if she tried to stop.

It was then that she'd announced that his exercise regime was not going to work.

'You need to exercise, Lois. It helps keep the mind sharp.'

'I know that, Kent. But this isn't exercise. It's torture.'

'Then what do you suggest?'

She'd thought for a moment before sitting down and putting on her sneakers.

'Where are we going?' Clark asked, pulling on his runners as well.

'To exercise,' she responded, heading out the door at a jog.

He'd followed, falling into pace beside her. And since then, that was how they'd started every morning. He let her choose the path and set the pace, and then would jog next to her. They never talked during these times. And he never seemed to have any problems keeping up. In fact, on one occasion, she'd actually increased the pace, hoping to throw him off. But he never seemed out of breath, never even seemed to sweat. Obviously, he was in much better shape than she had thought.

In addition to the jogging, she'd come up with the idea of sparring with him. He'd been skeptical at first, until she managed to throw him over her shoulder. Then, laying on the ground on his back, looking up at her, he'd commented that he could see that this might have some value.

And he'd been a good sparring partner. Since that initial throw, catching him off guard had been much more difficult. But sparring had come naturally to her. She seemed to know the moves, the techniques. And it was a great way to get her frustrations out on him. It helped her relax much more than those stupid meditation techniques. She wanted to ask him if she knew some form of martial arts, but she hadn't.

That was one of the problems, she realized. She never asked him. Never let him know when she had a memory flash. She wasn't entirely sure why. But it seemed too personal, somehow, to share with him. But the problem was that because she never asked, she wasn't able to get his feedback, maybe put these memories into perspective.

And as a result, she was not getting her memory back quickly enough to satisfy her. At this rate, it could take years before she had her memory back. What she really needed was Max. He could help her so much more than Kent was. Still...

In some senses, wasn't she shooting herself in the foot by holding back when she had a flash of memory, not allowing him to help her put the memory into perspective?

On the other hand, could she trust that he would really do so honestly? But then, did she really need him to do so honestly?

At that thought, Lois sat up a little straighter. Maybe she was going about this all wrong. She didn't really need to get her memory back. Oh, she wanted to get her memory back. In fact, it was currently driving her nuts that she couldn't remember. But since Max was the one who could truly help her, she needed to find her way back to him. And that meant, she only needed Kent to think she had her memory back to get him to take her off this island, and back to the one person who could help her. The man who had thrown her a lifeline when she hadn't even remembered her own name. The only man she loved.

A slow smile began to curl at the corners of her mouth as a plan began to take shape. Operation Fool Kent was about to go into effect.

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As they came to a split in the path, Lois knew that Kent was surprised when she veered to the left. He had obviously thought she would go to the right, taking them back to the cabin. Well, for this morning's jog, she had other ideas.

She'd been thinking about her plan long into the night, working it through in her mind. Her first step had to be not let him know of her continued hostility towards him. The snide comments had to stop. So did her calling him Kent. Obviously, they had been on a first name basis before she'd lost her memory. So calling him Kent was a clear sign that she still didn't really remember.

And to that end, she had to quit calling him Kent in her mind, too. It still felt weird, though. Hopefully it would get easier with

time and practice. She'd repeated the name Clark in her mind for quite a while last night and it still felt funny.

And, as much as she might despise him for taking her away from the only man she loved and the one man who could truly help her regain her memory, she had to make him think that they were friends.

The one thing she had to be careful about was not to go too fast, not to let him suspect her true motives. That would put him on his guard, making it more difficult to get him to give her the information she needed in order to convince him that her memory had returned.

She slowed her pace until she was finally walking when she rounded the next turn in the bend and came upon the waterfalls.

"What are we doing here?" Clark asked. "I thought you wanted to get back to work on those articles this morning."

"Oh, come on, Kk...lark! Lighten up. Working too hard can't be good for people with amnesia either."

When he looked skeptical, she laughed and spun away from him to jog over to the pool at the foot of the falls. Ignoring the way her heart was pounding and the dryness in her mouth, she took off her shoes and socks before she began stripping off her sweaty tank top.

"What are you doing?" Clark asked in a slightly strangled voice.

She smiled, getting her own nerves under control when she realized that this was affecting him the way she'd hoped.

"Haven't you ever gone swimming before?" she asked over her shoulder as she continued on her mission, stripping off her sweat pants. After one final look over her shoulder to see Clark's slack jaw, she giggled and dove into the pool wearing nothing but her underwear.

When she came back up, she pushed her hair out of her face and turned to look at Clark, still on shore and looking slightly suspicious.

She let out a sigh, swimming closer. "Okay, so you're wondering why I'm not giving you the cold shoulder today," she said, deciding that her best strategy was to confront the issue that was undoubtedly going through his mind directly.

"The thought had crossed my mind."

"Well, I haven't been completely honest with you." She ducked her head slightly, trying to look sheepish.

"How so?"

"I've been having... I don't know. I guess you'd call them flashes of memory." Best to couch a lie in the truth, after all.

"You have?" He stepped closer, obviously hanging on her every word. "Why didn't you say something?"

"I was still annoyed with you for kidnapping me. Childish, huh?"

"No. I guess I can understand that. So... what do you remember?"

"Not what you want me to remember," she said, figuring if she confessed her undying love for him now, he'd know she was lying. No. She had to take it slow. "I mean, I don't remember our engagement. And I still love only Max. But I do remember that we were friends."

"Best friends," he automatically added, but she noticed that he visibly stiffened at the mention of Max.

"Best friends," she repeated. She'd been taking a bit of a risk saying that they were friends. After all, a lot of couples wouldn't exactly describe their relationship as friends when they got together. Still, it had been a calculated risk. After all, her research told her that she and Clark had been partners for almost three years. Surely that meant they'd become friends before they'd started dating.

And she was pleased that the risk had paid off. Not only did he not balk at her description of them as friends, he'd given her some additional information. Apparently, they had been best

friends — or at least they referred to each other in that fashion.

As for the mention of Max... That, too, had been a calculated risk. But the mention of him would allay any suspicions Clark might have that she was lying about remembering their friendship. After all, what possible motive could she have for lying about their friendship when she still was espousing her love for another man? The important thing here was to take each step slowly.

"So what made you remember our friendship?"

She took a deep breath. She'd spent the night working on her answer to this question. "It was a bunch of little flashes, really. I can remember you cooking supper for me at your apartment. And I remembered the times you made me some ridiculous blend of tea." At least she assumed it was probably more than once — especially given all the herb teas he prepared for her now. "And I can remember dancing with you." She couldn't — but she had seen a photo taken of them at the White Orchid Ball — so she knew they had danced at least once. "I remember that I really like dancing with you," she added, figuring that was a safe thing to say. She'd flirted with the idea of saying that he was a good dancer, but had rejected that. After all, he might be a terrible dancer — and he might know that she thought so. But surely he would accept that she liked dancing with him.

"I like dancing with you, too," he said with a soft smile that made her look away.

"Anyway, I guess it was just a bunch of little things — and the feelings I felt when I remembered them — that made me remember our friendship. And although I'm still sort of ticked off at you for kidnapping me, I guess I now believe that you wouldn't have done it unless you thought it was necessary." She glanced at him through her eyelashes. "So are we going to continue gabbing or are you going to strip out of those clothes and join me?"

"Lo-is..."

"Come on, Clark," she interrupted, keeping her tone light and teasing. "It's not as if I'm asking for the full monty here."

"Lo-is," he groaned.

She laughed. "Come on. Live dangerously. I'm sure whatever you've got on under those sweats isn't any more revealing than your swimsuit would be."

Clark stared at her for a moment more before reaching over his head to grab the collar of his shirt. Suddenly, Lois' silly side got the best of her and she started to chant:

"I'm too sexy for my shirt; too sexy for my shirt; so sexy it hurts."

Clark's movement stopped. "Lo-is," he warned playfully, his hands dropping back to his sides.

"What? I'm just providing you with a little inspiration. Don't stop on my account."

He looked at her a moment more before again reaching for his shirt.

"I'm too sexy for my shirt; too sexy for... What?" she asked when he stopped again.

"Okay, that's it," he said, turning his back towards her before grabbing his shirt and pulling it over his head.

"Hey, no fair!" she objected.

He glanced at her over his shoulder as he knelt down to remove his shoes. "As I recall, this is the view you gave me."

"Yeah. But that's different," she said, even as she couldn't help but notice the way his back muscles rippled as he undid and then pulled off his shoes and socks.

"How is it different?"

"Well... because you're... you and I'm... me."

His socks and shoes finally off, he glanced at her again over his shoulder, his eyebrows raised, telling her without words what he thought of that explanation. A moment later, her breath caught in her throat when he pulled off his sweat pants and she caught sight of his muscular legs as well as the tight, black briefs

stretched across the muscles of his posterior. He had to have the all time cutest butt. In fact, if there were a contest for world's cutest butt, he'd undoubtedly win first, second and third prize.

She felt a stab of guilt. Max was waiting for her back in Metropolis. How could she be admiring another man's buttocks? On the other hand, she was doing this to get back to Max. Besides, she was in love, not dead. And a woman would have to be dead not to appreciate Kent's assets.

She felt heat creep up her face when he turned towards her, wondering if her final thoughts were written in big bold letters across her face. And then another thought came crashing down around her when she took in his chest for the first time.

"It's nine o'clock. I thought you'd be naked." The words passed her lips before she could stop them.

He was instantly next to the pond, crouching down to look more fully into her face. "You remember that?"

She nodded dumbly, forcing her eyes to crawl up his chest and fix resolutely on his face. "You answered the door wearing nothing but a towel."

"Right. It was while we were working on the story about the Messenger — our first story together; my first story at the Planet."

She felt the color begin to cool in her cheeks as her mind was distracted from the magnificent specimen of male flesh in front of her. She wondered if he realized how much information he'd just given her. Maybe she could get a little more. "I can't believe I would have been that forward when I didn't even know you."

"You weren't," Clark was quick to assure her. "You corrected yourself immediately. You meant to say 'ready.'" When she just stared at him blankly, he continued. "It's nine o'clock. I thought you'd be ready."

Her mind cleared. "Uhh... so... a Freudian slip then?"

Clark smiled. "I like to think so."

She smiled back. "So what are you still doing out there?" she asked, more because she hoped her equilibrium would return when she couldn't see quite so much of him than in order to get him in the pool.

Almost instantly, he jumped, landing like a cannonball in the water next to her. Water went flying everywhere, completely drenching her.

"Clark! You're going to regret that!" she exclaimed before attacking.

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Clark smiled as he glanced over at Lois. She didn't seem to notice, so focused was she on drying the dishes as quickly as he could wash them. His smile widened. She was so competitive in everything she did.

When she'd first jumped into the pool this morning, he'd wondered exactly what she had been up to. It had even crossed through his mind that she was attempting to seduce him. He almost laughed now at the thought. Sure, she'd flirted with him — but she'd always done that. Or almost always. But when they were in the water, although she'd been physical with him — again, something she'd always done — she'd never pushed the boundaries.

She'd been acting like his best friend.

Okay, so maybe part of him wished that she remembered being in love with him. But after the agony of the past month and his fears that she'd never forgive him, best friends wasn't bad. It wasn't bad at all.

"Hey, Pokey, concentrate on what you're doing?" Lois demanded, giving him a flick of her towel.

He glanced at the drain board and smiled. She'd caught up to him — again.

"Nag, nag, nag. That's all you ever do," Clark responded playfully even if he pulled another plate up to wash it.

Even now, he would be tempted to believe that she was just

pretending to remember their friendship. But her memory, 'it's nine o'clock; I thought you'd be naked,' proved that she was telling the truth about her memory flashes. That memory was simply too specific to be anything but genuine. And since they were the only two people who had known about it, it had to have been real.

Besides, why would she pretend to remember that they were friends, and yet not remember that they were engaged? It made no sense. And then there was her comment about Max. 'I love only Max.' Why would she tell him that if she were lying about the rest? She had to know how he would react to that.

But certainly, the day had been much more productive as a result of their working together. After swimming, they'd returned to the cabin where, this time, she'd asked for his help in reviewing various stories. He'd been thrilled. Together, they'd always been better than either of them was alone. He thought she had probably realized that, too, because, as a result, she'd had a few other flashes of memory that went beyond the information provided on the page.

For example, when they had been going through their article on the children who had gotten smart by taking a potentially lethal chemical compound called Mentamide 5, Lois had remembered that he'd taken advantage of a privileged interview situation to grab potentially incriminating evidence from an unsuspecting subject. She'd also remembered loving that.

On the other hand, there were times when her memories got slightly mixed up, sometimes to humorous effect. For example, it had taken all of his powers of persuasion to convince her that when the Prankster had come after her the first time, neither Clark nor Lois had stripped down to their underwear in order to show each other their various battle scars — that what she was remembering was from Lethal Weapon 3, which they had watched one evening while working on that story.

Even after she'd claimed to be convinced, he'd caught her looking at him on several occasions, as if trying to see if he had any scars that she might not have noticed while they'd been swimming.

Still, they had made progress today. Their friendship, which he had feared would be damaged forever, had been restored and she was beginning to remember things. As a result, for the first time since Lois had announced that she was going with Deter to the south of France, Clark felt hopeful.

Besides, one thing he couldn't complain about was Lois' determination to get her memory back. She might have balked at some of his suggestions. But she was eating the food he prepared, taking ginkgo every morning, drinking his teas, even participating in things he knew she thought were a waste of time — like meditation. And when she wasn't doing that, she was devouring the information he'd brought her, making notes and now, sharing with him when some piece of information was causing her to have a flash of memory.

"So what do you say that we take our tea into the living room?" Lois asked, as they finished cleaning up the remainder of the dishes.

"Sounds like a plan," Clark said with a grin, giving the sink a final rinse before turning to join her.

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Lois lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. Operation Fool Kent was going well. For the past two days, she'd manage to swallow her anger at him and fall into the role of friend. In fact, it felt somewhat natural to do so. And to tell the truth, she'd had a number of memory flashes that indicated that they had been more than partners at work — they had been friends. She, of course, had played up all of these to Clark, and had him fill in details that she hadn't remembered. Sometimes these conversations even provoked further memories for her.

Other memories, however, she hadn't shared with him

because they didn't fit quite right into the 'friend' category or for other reasons — some of which were because she wasn't sure if he knew about those. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she wasn't sure he knew about one memory she had in particular.

This memory had come to her when they'd been studying the stories about the Prankster. She knew it wasn't the Prankster in her memory. But they had the same general build, similar hair styles — although their hair, if she recalled correctly, was parted on different sides. Still, they'd had the same facial shape and were of similar height. The man in her memory had been wearing a brown suit, done up to the collar, with a blue blazer. She'd been standing in front of him and could still clearly remember her words to his query about her decision.

'All right. You win. I'll keep my promise. Tonight, my body is yours. But my heart... my heart beats only for one man.'

So... had she and Clark been dating when she'd said those words to another man? She wasn't sure. And she didn't dare ask. After all, if they had been dating, it almost sounded as if she'd cheated on him. But it also sounded as if she'd felt she didn't have much choice. Had it been something she had done to save his life... or her own?

Her mind wanted to reject the very idea that she would have done something like that. That she wouldn't have found another way. But the words were so perfectly crystal clear. She had to accept the fact that she had slept with one man when she was in love with another. Even if it were for the best of intentions, she felt dirty just remembering it. She hadn't even been attracted to the man. In fact, if she recalled correctly, he had made her skin crawl.

Not quite the way Clark made her feel. In fact, all it had taken that first morning was seeing his bare feet to get her all hot and bothered.

That thought seemed to jump at her out of nowhere, stunning her slightly. She pushed it away quickly. It didn't matter what she felt for Clark, she knew only one truth — she loved only Max. Her thoughts of Clark didn't matter.

Another of her recent memories suddenly popped into her mind. Another one she hadn't shared with Clark. This one had come when they'd been studying the investigation into the death of Mason Drake. Standing on the street corner. Clark making some nonsensical comment about it being fortunate that there were no doors there. And then... his eyes flicking down to her lips. His moving towards her, as if in slow motion. The look of longing in his eyes before her own eyes had drifted closed. Their lips lightly touching. And then, before she was ready, him pulling back. His hands cradling her head. His lips coming down upon hers a second time, this time with more confidence, more intent. The feeling of her toes curling.

She gave her head a shake to try to clear it. This was pointless. Okay, so she was attracted to Clark. But that was irrelevant.

What was relevant was getting out of this place. What was relevant was getting back to Max who would help her regain her memory in more than just confusing flashes.

And to that end, could she pretend to remember everything? Was she reasonably certain she could convince him that she remembered it all? After all, she was only going to get one chance at this.

Her mind flashed back to her words of some time ago. 'Tonight my body's yours. But my heart beats only for one man.' She found herself subconsciously licking her lips. When she realized what she was doing, she instantly stopped.

Okay, so what did she know now about her relationship with Clark prior to her amnesia? He said they were engaged to be married. And she now was willing to believe that he was telling the truth. Not that it particularly mattered — except in the sense

that she had to be certain not to mess this up. And if she acknowledged the engagement and he had been lying to her, then all bets were off. Her only hope of getting out of here was gone.

Well, she might not remember their engagement, but she knew with absolute certainty that they had been lovers. Perhaps her memory of them stripping down to show each other their battle scars was faulty, but her memory of them making love was not.

This memory had come to her this evening. She wasn't entirely sure what had triggered it. Okay, so they had been going through her photo album and she'd seen a picture of her apartment for the first time since she'd lost her memory. And she had been feeling Clark's breath lightly against her hair as he'd stood, looking over her shoulder pointing at something in the picture. That was when she'd remembered.

She couldn't say for certain that it was the first time they'd been together. But the desires and nerves that she remembered having at the time had certainly been intense enough.

Entangled, they'd burst through the door to her bedroom, falling together onto her bed. Lips had barely broken contact before finding each other again. Heat had flowed through her veins like molten lava. His body pressing hers into the mattress as his tongue dueled with hers. His lips running over her throat, pulling a moan of longing up from deep in her belly. Her hands, desperately pulling at his clothing, undoing his shirt buttons, pulling the back of it out of his trousers. His lips again finding hers. Rolling them over so that her body was on top of his. Throwing her suit jacket to the side. Hands roaming over sensitive places. Her discovery that his feelings of arousal were as intense as hers. Heavy breathing. Desperate moans. The smell of sweat and musk. The feeling deep in her gut that she'd die if she couldn't get closer.

She suddenly sat up, pushing back the memory once again, just as she had the first time. She didn't need to pursue that memory to know what came next. For only one thing could.

She discovered that she was again licking her lips and instantly stopped. She needed to get out of here, to clear her mind.

As soon as that thought came, she was out of bed. She wrapped her robe around her and strode, barefoot, out of the room. She was halfway across the cabin when she heard a sleepy voice come from the direction of the couch.

"Lois?"

She closed her eyes for a moment. This was exactly what she didn't need right now. His husky, sleep-filled voice shot a spark of desire through her body, causing her feelings from her current memory flash to flood through her again. "I just need to get out of here for a while," she said, her voice slightly strangled, before practically bolting for the door.

'I love only Max. I love only Max,' she silently repeated to herself in time with the soft padding of her bare feet hitting the smooth trail as she jogged towards the waterfalls.

When she reached the edge of the water, she stripped off her robe and the light cotton t-shirt and instantly dove into the water. She came up out of the water again, almost surprised that there wasn't steam rising from the surface of the pond as the water desperately tried to cool the fire in her body. She'd needed that. Badly. In fact, only an hour or two more in this cold water, and her body temperature might almost be back to normal.

"Lois?"

Lois looked up to see Clark standing near the edge of the pool. She watched his eyes widen as he saw what she was wearing — or, more accurately, not wearing. Almost instantly, Clark turned his back towards her.

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize you'd be... I mean, I guess I didn't think that you..."

Lois laughed. He obviously didn't think she'd be comfortable

with him seeing her when, to the best of his knowledge, she didn't remember them as anything more than friends. It was kinda sweet, actually.

And in point of fact, she was slightly uncomfortable — not that she had any intention of letting him realize that. After all, if she really had her memories back, she wouldn't be self-conscious.

"It's okay, Clark," she said, even as she stepped out of the water and casually, she hoped, reached for her robe. "I remember."

Clark snuck a quick peek at her over her shoulder. When he saw that she was tying her robe, he turned back around. "Remember?" he asked.

"You," she said, taking a step towards him. "Me," she added as she took another one. "Us," she ended as she stopped directly in front of him.

She might not have planned it all out. But she suddenly knew what she needed to do to convince him that she had her memory back, at least enough for him to agree to return them to Metropolis. She refused to think too deeply about why this suddenly seemed like a good idea, or why she'd chosen this moment to tell him that she remembered them. Or even whether or not she could really pull this off with what little she had pieced together. All she knew at the moment was the blood pounding in her veins — the thrill of a plan coming together, no doubt. After all, what else could be causing her heart to beat this quickly?

"Us?" he asked. In his tone, she could hear a kind of desperate hopefulness.

"Us," she responded, her voice coming out unexpectedly husky as the images from her earlier memory flash cascaded to the forefront of her mind. His response was almost instantaneous. She could feel the longing coming off him in waves. She took another step towards him and could tell that he was fighting the desire to take her in his arms. She could only marvel at his control. "Us," she repeated, her hands coming to rest on his chest before sliding up and around his neck to play with the hair on the back of his neck. "I remember... us." With that, she stood up on her tiptoes and kissed him softly on the lips.

He gave an odd sort of moan, before pulling her tightly against his body. "Oh, Lois, honey," Clark said, burying his face in her hair.

"Your little tornado," Lois added in response to a sudden memory flash. The first time he'd called her honey, she'd asked what other names he had for her. And she clearly remembered the one that had amused her most.

Clark pulled back far enough to look in her eyes. "You do remember."

"I remember," she said, her eyes on his. Then she broke eye contact to pull him closer, burying her face in his neck. "Oh, Clark. I can't believe I almost lost you."

"You could never lose me, Lois," Clark responded as he held her close, cradling the back of her head, kissing her hair.

After a moment, he pulled back far enough to reach into his pocket. He pulled out what was quite obviously a diamond engagement ring. "And do you remember this?"

She didn't, of course. She barely remembered anything about their relationship. Only that they were co-workers, referred to each other as best friends... and that they were lovers, of course. But she didn't remember anything about their being engaged. Still, with the engagement ring clearly in front of her, she finally was fairly certain that he was telling the truth about being engaged.

A slight grin quirked at the corner of her mouth when she realized that for him to have that on him at precisely this moment, both having just got out of bed. Him clad only in a pair of jeans. Her in a robe. For him to have that now meant that he must have been carrying it everywhere.

So... how should she respond? Suddenly, the perfect response

came to his query about whether she remembered their engagement came to her. "I do," she said, raising her hand to allow him to slip the ring onto her finger.

The heat she felt from the following kiss caught her by surprise. Electricity shot through her entire body, leaving him catching her when her legs gave out beneath her.

"Lois, are you okay?" Clark instantly asked.

Her finger went up to trace his lips as she responded. "Take me back to the cabin, Clark," she said, surprised at how husky her voice sounded.

He needed no further encouragement. With one quick motion, he had her in his arms and, even as his lips descended to hers, he began carrying her towards the cabin.

'Tonight, my body is yours,' she silently told him as her arms wrapped themselves around his neck and she kissed him with a passion of which she hadn't known herself capable. Her mind didn't even register that she'd completely forgotten to add the remaining disclaimer.

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After not being able to kiss her or hold her for so long, Clark found he couldn't get enough of her. The taste of her lips. The feel of her body pressed tightly against his. The smell that was uniquely her surrounding him, drowning him, making him incapable of remembering his own name. His entire being was lost in everything that was Lois. And it seemed she felt the same. Ever since they'd arrived back at the cabin and tumbled together onto the couch, they had barely come up for air.

He knew he should slow things down, take a moment to catch his breath. After all, they had so much to talk about. But then he'd break away, only to have her look at him through passion glazed eyes, her lips swollen from his kisses, or touch him again and all the resolve he'd had to muster just to break away in the first place would dissolve and he would be swept away again on a wave of burning desire.

Finally, she seemed to regain some control, pulling away from him, breathing heavily. She stared at him silently for a long minute, even as her fingers came up to trace the outline of his lips. She seemed as overwhelmed as he by what was happening between them tonight. He captured her hand, kissing the pads of her fingers one at a time. She watched, seemingly fascinated by his actions.

"Lois, we need to..." He wasn't entirely sure what he'd been about to say. A number of things could have followed. 'We need to talk.' 'We need to slow things down a bit.' But he never had a chance to find out what he'd been about to say, because her fingers broke away from his, coming to rest on his lips as she shook her head.

"Not tonight," she whispered. "Not tonight." With that, she swept back in with a kiss that made him glad he was lying down. But when he reached for her, intending to pull her back to him, she evaded his grasp.

She crawled over his body to get to the outside of the couch, causing him to recite prime numbers in his head. When she finally rose to sit next to him, she looked at him for a minute more. Finally, taking hold of his hand, she rose to her feet. "Let's go to bed, Clark," she said, her voice sending electricity through his already sensitized body.

"Lois, you've just got your memory back. We really should..."

"We've wasted too much time already, Clark. Come to bed with me."

He was powerless to resist as she tugged on his hand, pulling him to his feet before leading the way to the bedroom door. Once there, she turned to face him again and for a moment he thought she had changed her mind and he prepared himself for her words telling him that they should... He wasn't sure what. Talk. Wait. Not get swept away in the moment.

On the other hand, if things had not gone so terribly wrong,

she would be his wife by now. He'd already made his oath to love and honor her for the rest of his life in front of their friends and family. The fact that he had actually said the words to her clone was irrelevant — at least as far as his heart was concerned. He'd taken them in oath to her.

"I could take you back to Metropolis. Maybe I should do that before..." he started, only to be cut off when she pulled his head down to claim his mouth, running her hands through his hair.

"Later," she objected when she came up for air. "Much later." With that, she kissed him again, her hands leaving his hair to wrap tightly around his neck. And then she jumped slightly to encircle his waist with her legs. He caught her without thought and they tumbled into the bedroom where they landed, fully entangled, onto the bed.

And suddenly, nothing existed in Clark's world except the woman in his arms. Thinking, talking, waiting were all for another time. For now, there was only feeling. As for what her lips and hands were doing to him as they ran over his chest and down to the button on his jeans... at the moment, he couldn't find the words. He gave up and, as his hands slipped beneath her robe, allowed himself to surrender words for a much more primal method of communication.

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The beams of sunlight falling across the bed brought Clark out of slumber. A slow smile spread across his face as the woman, asleep and tangled in his arms, caused the wonder of the previous night to flood through his mind.

It might not have happened as they'd planned. But he couldn't regret it. They would be married as soon as possible and, alright, maybe they had jumped the gun a bit, but after everything that had happened, who could blame them? Besides, making love to Lois, had been... He searched his internal thesauruses, scouring it for the appropriate word. He gave up. No words could possibly describe what had happened between them last night. They'd been insatiable, neither seeming able to get enough the other. Just when he'd think the passion between them was spent, it would flare again until finally, exhausted, they'd succumbed to their need for sleep.

He felt Lois stir against his chest.

"Morning," he said softly.

She looked around, seeming to try to figure out exactly what was going on. Then he saw a blush begin to creep up her cheeks. "Morning," she responded, ducking her head and lifting a hand to brush a strand of hair off her face.

She looked so adorable that he couldn't resist leaning closer to plant a light kiss on the tip of her nose. She seemed to blush even more at his actions.

"God, I love you," he breathed, overwhelmed by the sudden tenderness that swept through him.

She met his eyes then. "And I love you," she responded.

Then, after a moment's hesitation, she settled back against his chest. "So what time is it?" she finally asked.

"Who cares?" he responded.

He could feel her smile against him. "Well, as much as I'd like nothing better than to stay in this bed all day," she began playfully, her finger running suggestively down his chest, "I think we need to talk."

He sighed. She was right. They probably should have talked last night. Not that he could regret that they hadn't. After all, last night had been... He was still searching for the word. "You're right. We do need to talk." He could feel her again smile against him as she seemed to register the resigned tone in his voice.

"Well, I've been thinking," she began, somewhat hesitantly. She didn't continue then, causing him to reach down to tilt her face up so that he could look into her eyes.

"You've been thinking," he repeated encouragingly.

"I think you're right. We should go back to Metropolis."

He cocked his head slightly so that he could see her face. "You do?"

She nodded her head, shifting slightly so that she was looking at him more fully from her position against his chest. "Yeah. I mean, I remembered us being lovers..." She kissed his bare chest. "...from studying those pictures taken in my apartment." She gave him a sexy smile. "Now, that was a great memory. Anyway..." She snuggled in next to him again, laying her head back on his shoulder. "...I think I'll remember more around people and places I know. So I think that when we get out of this bed... eventually..."

She continued talking, but Clark was no longer listening. He was attempting to keep his breathing and heart rate calm even as the blood began pounding in his ears. "...remembered us being lovers..." Okay, so there was no real reason to panic here. After all, just because she'd gotten one small — or maybe not so small — detail about their relationship wrong, it didn't mean there was anything sinister going on here. It didn't mean that she was making all of this up in order to convince him to take her back to Metropolis. No, it could be nothing more than a simple misunderstanding about something she really had remembered. All he had to do was recall the incident where she thought the scene from *Lethal Weapon* had been them to know that.

"Clark?" her inquiring voice brought him back from his thoughts.

"Humm?" he asked, as she turned once again in his arms so that she could see his face.

"Clark, you weren't listening to a word I said, were you?" Lois asked, looking at him in amused exasperation.

"Sorry," he responded. "I guess I sort of got distracted by the word 'lovers.'" It was true — though not quite in the way he knew she would take it.

A smile suddenly tugged at the corners of her mouth. "You did, did you?"

"Most definitely. And that got me thinking about the day I asked you to marry me."

"Mmm, there's a great memory." The words came out somewhat sultry.

"Mmm..." Clark said neutrally, his mind working overtime. He wouldn't exactly say that the day he proposed was a 'great memory.' Okay, so it had got things out in the open between them — and that was most definitely good. But she'd turned down his proposal and he'd spent the rest of the night and most of the following day sulking. Still, it didn't exactly mean she was lying about remembering it. She might just not remember that she'd turned him down. His mind rushed as he sought for a way to figure this out. "I was so nervous," he said after a moment.

"You were?"

He nodded. "I think that's why I booked that sunset cruise for us on Hobbs Bay and then waited until the sun was going down over the ocean and the entire area was lit up by the red sunset before getting down on my knee and asking you to marry me. I guess I figured you wouldn't be able to say no in such a romantic setting. I was so relieved when you said yes." He held his breath then, hoping that she would correct him, or admit that she didn't remember that part or... or anything that wouldn't prove that she was lying to him.

"Mmm..." She began to trace complicated patterns on his chest with her finger. "And all I could think about was that I wished we weren't on that damn boat so that I could get you home and show you exactly how emphatic my yes was." She paused slightly. "I don't think I ever told you that before."

Clark instantly moved, pushing himself upright and away from Lois, needing the distance so that he could, hopefully, think straight.

"What's going on here, Lois?" he demanded when he finally slipped far enough away to get her hands off his body.

He saw her give a start and heard her heart rate jump even as a guarded look entered her eyes. "What do you mean?" she responded, her voice quivering slightly on the words even as her hand, almost involuntarily, pulled the sheet up further around her body. It seemed almost an instinctive reaction, as if she was suddenly vulnerable and trying to protect herself.

Clark felt his heart clench in response. He wanted so badly to go back to just moments before when he had been in blissful ignorance of the fact that she was lying to him, to pull her back into his arms and just pretend that was how he'd really proposed.

"That wasn't how I proposed," he said instead. "We weren't on a boat. And the sun wasn't setting."

"Okay, so maybe I got a few of the details wrong, but I definitely remember saying yes."

"But you didn't say yes!" Clark exclaimed.

"But then..." Lois pulled the sheet tighter around her even as she glanced at the ring on her left hand in confusion.

"I said yes when you asked me to marry you," Clark said. "So what is this? You don't remember us at all, do you? You just made... had sex with me to convince me to take you back to Metropolis." Even though he knew she wouldn't care how much she'd hurt him, he couldn't keep the heartbreak out of his voice on his words.

"Okay, fine. Yes! You're right, Clark! But you kidnapped me and even though I've looked everywhere I can think of, I haven't been able to find out where you put the radio or satellite phone or whatever you're going to use to get us off this damn island! And you say you love me, but if you cared about me at all, you'd take me back to Max so that he can help me recover my memory!" As she spoke, she crawled backwards out of bed.

For a moment, Clark was distracted by wondering how she was managing to get the sheet wrapped around her as she did so. Was it some ancient ritual passed down to women through the generations — in hygiene class, perhaps? But a moment later, she was standing next to the bed without having let him see anything.

He shook the thought from his mind. "So you... what? Seduce me? Let me think that you remember that you're in love with me?"

"Newsflash, Clark! I'm not in love with you. And no matter what you make me 'remember,' that's never going to change. I love only Max. You mean nothing to me."

Clark blinked. "What?" he asked, his mind whirling following her last words.

"You mean nothing to me," she repeated.

"And you... love only Max."

"Yes."

"Really?" His voice now was soft.

"Yes," she repeated sounding vaguely suspicious.

"Did you hear yourself?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Your words. Every time you tell me how you feel about Deter, you use the exact same words."

"Well, there are only so many ways you can say you love someone," she said defensively.

"But you don't say you love him. You say you love 'only' him."

"Well, I do."

"And you've said the same thing about your feelings for me in exactly the same way, too. That I mean nothing to you."

"I don't see what that has..."

"It's as if those aren't really your words."

"Don't be ridiculous," she said even as she began backing from the bed. "I'm the one who said them, aren't I?"

"As if they were given to you by someone else."

She flinched. He was onto something here. Something important. He could feel it. "Did Deter tell you you love only him?"

"He didn't have to tell me that, Clark. I knew it all on my own."

Clark sat up on the side of the bed, unlike her not trying to hide himself. He watched her eyes flick down his body before, immediately, returning to his face, a blush creeping up her cheeks.

"Why did you really sleep with me last night, Lois?" he asked.

"You know why — to convince you to get me the hell off this island," she said, taking another backward step towards the door, obviously not comfortable with the direction this conversation was taking.

"How many times did we make love last night?" He was right. He knew he was. Deter had somehow put the idea that she loved him in her mind. But last night had been about more than convincing him that she remembered. It had been far too intense, far too passionate, and frankly, far too long a session of love-making for it to have been about nothing more than convincing him to get her off this island. And it hadn't been all him. She'd been as insatiable as he had. Her mind might not be willing to recognize her feelings for him, but her body most certainly had. "And if you recall correctly, I offered to take you back to Metropolis before we even slept together. You were the one who insisted on not waiting."

"Look, I don't see what this has to do with anything," Lois said defensively. "Now, if you don't mind, I need a shower." And without another word, she turned, fleeing for the safety of the bathroom.

Clark was already lost in thought by the time the door slammed. Hypnosis. It was the only thing that made sense. After all, he himself knew how powerful a post hypnotic suggestion could be. Or... was he just looking for an excuse to dismiss her claims of love for another man?

'I love only Max.'

'You mean nothing to me.'

No. He wasn't wrong. Lois didn't talk like that. Those weren't her words. So what did he do now? Identifying the problem was one thing. But what did he do about it?

Dr. Novak! The hypnotist who had helped them when Daren Rodnick's assistant, Constance, had started using hypnosis to kidnap children to hold for ransom. In fact, she had even managed to hypnotize Superman, making him believe that wrong was right. He'd even gone so far as to put both Lois and a child in jeopardy as a result.

No. Dr. Novak had been killed during that investigation. And Clark wasn't about to break Constance out of prison so that he could make use of her dubious talents.

What about Dr. Friskin? She had the advantage of having given Lois counseling in the past. And she probably knew how to use hypnosis in her counseling — or would she? Was that a standard tool used by all psychologists?

No. Dr. Friskin, even if she knew hypnosis, would undoubtedly feel it was her obligation to report that Superman knew where Lois had been taken to the police. He needed someone outside the system. But who did he know who...

Star! She knew hypnosis!

"I'm going out," he yelled towards the bathroom door before using a burst of superspeed to get dressed. He was just flying out the door when he heard Lois' muttered response.

"Don't hurry back on my account."

Clark grinned as he disappeared into the sky. Maybe it would be a good idea to do a quick Superman patrol while he was out. After all, he hadn't done one last night. And Lois' parting comment was permission — of a sort — to take his time getting back.

Suddenly feeling a little more hopeful, he put on an extra burst of speed as he streaked across the ocean on his way to

Metropolis.

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Lois heard the sonic boom of a plane flying over. For a moment, she stopped and considered whether that had any potential for getting her out off the island. No. If it was going faster than the speed of sound, it wasn't as if it were landing. And by the time she got outside to wave her arms in the air, it would be long gone. Not that its occupants would see her anyway.

Still, if she was on some sort of flight path... No. This was the first time she'd heard a sonic boom since she'd arrived on the island. And she'd never seen an airplane of any sort flying over when she'd been out and about. No. What she needed was to get Clark to tell her where to find whatever it was he was planning to use when it was time to go home.

Not that there was much chance of that at the moment.

She turned off the hot water and stepped out of the shower. Pulling a towel off the rack, she began drying off.

Clark Kent was the most infuriating man she had ever known. Okay, so maybe things had been a bit... intense last night. And maybe she'd surprised even herself by how she hadn't been able to get enough of him. But that didn't mean anything. It certainly didn't mean she was in love with him or anything.

Of course, that didn't explain why she had insisted on dragging him into the bedroom even after he'd offered to take her back to Metropolis. At that moment, she'd been free. And she'd known it, too. She'd known if she stopped right then, told him he was right, he'd have kept his promise to take her back to Metropolis — or at least revealed his means of getting them off this island. So why hadn't she done that?

Because she had wanted to sleep with him.

That thought gave her pause.

Now she was being ridiculous. She'd just been a little bit out of control by then. Nothing to be concerned about. After all, it wasn't as if she loved Clark. She loved only Max.

Her drying came to a sudden stop. She loved only Max.

Could Clark be right? After all, whenever she thought about her feelings for Max, that was how she always thought of them — like words running through her mind.

She resumed scrubbing herself dry ferociously. What was she thinking? Damn that man. Putting these ridiculous notions in her head. She loved only... She loved Max! What did it matter how she thought or said it? It didn't change her feelings.

What did Clark think? That Max had somehow brainwashed her? The very idea was... ludicrous. That was the only word to describe it.

After all, she could describe her feelings for Max anyway she wanted. In fact, she could list everything that she loved about Max if she wanted to. For example she loved that... She loved that...

Oh, for goodness sake, what was she even doing? It wasn't as if she had anything to prove to anyone. Her feelings were her feelings. And her feelings were that she loved only...

"Ahhh!" she yelled, throwing her towel across the room and grabbing her clothes.

That settled it. Clark Kent was the most annoyingly annoying man she had ever met! Now there was someone she could easily describe her feelings for. He was...

"Annoying," she said. "Infuriating. Maddening. Loathsome. Despicable. Arrogant. Presumptuous. Overbearing. Sexy..."

Her words suddenly trailed off as her mind flashed back to the previous night. Clark looming over her. Looking up at him, seeing all the love he had for her in his eyes. The touch of his hands. The feel of his body moving in time with hers.

The look of pain in his eyes when he'd realized that last night didn't mean anything. She felt a twinge of guilt. No. She had nothing to feel guilty about! Even if she hadn't exactly had to sleep with him, they had been lovers. So it wasn't as if she'd done

anything that she undoubtedly hadn't done many times before.

Again she found herself lost in images from the previous night, even as her breathing subconsciously deepened.

She shook her head abruptly. She shouldn't be thinking about last night. It was disloyal to Max and, after all, she loved only...

"Damn!" she exclaimed. Why was she doing this to herself? No matter what Clark said, it made no difference how she thought about her feelings for Max.

So rather than worrying about last night or Clark's insane theories, she should be doing something productive with her time. Okay, so her plan to convince Clark to take her off this island hadn't worked. But Lois Lane was not a quitter. She'd just have to come up with a new plan.

And that plan... She faltered momentarily as she tried to think of a new plan.

Okay, so she didn't exactly have a new plan at the moment. But that was hardly going to stop her. She pulled on her shirt and opened the bathroom door. Kent wasn't here at the moment and she had no idea when he would return. So maybe it was time for her to scour the cabin again. See if there was anything she'd missed the first few times she'd tried to discover the hiding place for his satellite phone or radio.

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After a quick trip back to his apartment to shower and change into a new Superman suit at superspeed, Clark headed towards his first destination.

He silently rebuked himself for not making this particular trip earlier. It had been about a week since Lois and Clark had disappeared from Metropolis. And even though he'd left enough evidence behind to let Perry and Jimmy and everyone else know that Clark was responsible, he knew Perry would be worried.

Problem was he didn't want to put Perry in an awkward position either. After all, he was certain that Henderson had been here at least once, and might well return — especially if word got back to him that Superman had been to the Planet to talk to Perry.

Superman's arrival in the newsroom attracted a lot of attention, but Clark ignored the looks of his colleagues as he strode across the newsroom floor towards the door to Perry White's office. Damn. He should have come later, when most of the staff would have gone home.

Well, it was too late now to do anything about it.

Perry looked up when Superman arrived.

"What can I do for you, Superman?" Perry asked, even as he rose to his feet while gesturing Superman farther into the office. Then, for reasons known only to Perry, he came around his desk, stepping over to the door and closing it.

Clark shifted nervously, suddenly wondering why he hadn't taken more time to prepare his speech before coming. "I'm not quite certain where to start." Perry didn't respond, seeming content to allow Superman to find his own way to what he had to tell him. Still, Clark saw Perry's posture tighten slightly, as if he were preparing himself for bad news. That realization spurred Clark to speak. "I'm sure a man in your position knows things... unofficially... that you keep to yourself for the greater good. I mean, if you didn't know things that were... worth knowing, well, you wouldn't be a man in your position."

"True enough," Perry said cautiously.

"Well, I, too, sometimes know things... unofficially... that..."

"Are they okay?" Perry said, suddenly breaking into Superman's speech.

Clark blinked. "Uhh..."

"Lois' fish. Are they okay?" Perry asked.

Clark gave a relieved smile. Perry didn't care about Lois' fish. He was giving Superman a way to tell him about Lois and himself without making Superman say he knew anything.

"They're fine, Perry," Clark said. Now if Henderson asked Perry if Superman had admitted to knowing anything about Lois

and Clark, Perry could honestly say that he hadn't. And if Perry really was asking about Lois' fish, which Clark doubted, he knew that Star was taking care of them for her — had been since the day they were supposed to get married.

"Are you sure?" Perry asked.

Clark nodded. "One of them seems a little... confused. But they're safe. It still might be a while before..." Clark hesitated, not quite sure how to say that it could be a while before Lois and Clark returned — especially after what had happened this morning.

"Their owner returns?"

Clark let out a breath, grateful for the older man's quick thinking once again. He nodded.

"So you're keeping an eye on them?" Perry asked.

"I think Lois would want that."

"I'm sure she would. Just make sure they stay safe, would you?"

"You know I will, Perry," Clark responded and was rewarded by a genuine smile from the older man.

"By the way, after Clark left here the other night, Jimmy and I did a little digging on the good doctor."

"Deter?"

Perry nodded. "Can't find any indication of foul play in his medical practice. But there is something strange."

"What?"

"It seems our good doctor is filthy rich. And considering that at the same time he was amassing his fortune, the clinic was going broke, making Mendenhall resort to creating assassins to keep the clinic afloat..."

"You think he's been skimming money from the clinic?"

"There's no reason that clinic should be having money problems. They are the foremost experts in dealing with memory loss. The Planet was paying Lois' medical tab while she was there. And considering the cost of that place, there is no way they should have been short of money."

Clark nodded thoughtfully. Didn't really help him with getting Lois' memory back, but afterwards... it was definitely worth following up on.

"Just thought it was interesting," Perry added, as if following Superman train of thought. "I've still got Jimmy working his magic on the computer, trying to find any solid proof, but... so far, we don't have anything conclusive enough to take to the police. But if we do get something, getting Deter charged with embezzlement might slow him down a bit."

Now, that was true. "Thanks, Perry."

"Oh, hey. No need to thank me. That girl's like a daughter to me." Suddenly, he looked a little embarrassed. "But don't tell her I said that. Anyway, if there is anything else I can do to help..."

"I'll let you know."

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"Superman!" Star exclaimed when she noticed Superman floating outside her window. She rushed over, throwing the window open. "I didn't expect to see you today. I was sort of expecting to hear something from Clark, though." She knocked her head with her fist. "Gotta get this thing fixed."

"Do you know about Lois and Clark?" Clark asked, pushing aside how right she actually was as he landed in her apartment.

"I always know."

"Through... your psychic abilities?"

"No. It was all over the news. Everywhere you'd go. Big pictures. 'Have you seen this couple?' You'd have had to be blind and deaf not to know. Or I guess even then, if you could read Braille, you'd probably still know. I wonder how they do pictures in Braille? I guess it wouldn't matter in this case. It's not as if a blind person is going to walk up to a complete stranger and start feeling his face and say, 'hey, I know you — you're the person who's face I felt in the paper this morning.' Can I do something

for you, Superman?"

As always, when confronted by Star, Clark felt a little off balance. He took a deep breath and forced himself to focus. "If you could do something that would help Lois and Clark, would you?"

Star suddenly looked a little suspicious. "If Clark kidnapped Lois, like the police say, then he had good reason. So even though I know you're one of the good guys, Superman, I'm not going to help you find Lois and Clark so they can turn themselves in — even if you think it's in their best interests."

Clark almost smiled. "I'm not going to ask you to. In fact, I'm going to be asking the opposite."

The expression on Star's face suddenly cleared. "You already know where they are, don't you?"

Clark cringed. He knew there would be no way to get Star's help without telling her this, but he still didn't particularly like it.

"Don't answer that," Star suddenly said. "Just tell me what you want me to do."

Clark smiled. Lois might not think she had friends, but in that she was completely mistaken.

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"Damn it!" Lois exclaimed, hopping on one foot while trying to grab the other one. She supposed that was what she got for wandering around on wood floors without her slippers.

Collapsing onto a nearby chair, she rubbed her sore toe even as she looked back at the place where she'd caught it on something.

But what? There was nothing there.

The pain in her toe forgotten, she rose to her feet and retraced her steps, spotting for the first time what she'd failed to see before. One of the nails holding the floor boards in place had not been pounded in all the way. In fact, looking at it now, she could see slight scraping where this board joined the one next to it, as if it had been pulled up after the floor had been put in.

She glanced around her. None of the other boards nearby seemed to show this type of wear and tear. Nor were any other nails coming out of the floor. So...

Quickly, she scurried to the kitchen. Opening one of the drawers, she pulled out a butter knife before returning to her spot on the floor. It took quite some time, especially as she was trying not to leave marks, but she finally managed to jimmy the nail enough to get it out. Then, sticking the butter knife in between the boards, she flipped the loose board out easily. Maybe kitchen utensils did have their uses.

'Bingo,' she thought as she stared into the small area that had been carved out beneath the floor — and the two leather bound books it seemed to hold. She was about to reach in when she heard a commotion on the front steps.

Damn.

Moving quickly, she managed to get the board back into place, but the nail she stuck in her pocket. Hopefully, Clark wouldn't have reason to know it was gone. But if she wanted to get at those books again, she needed to be able to get them out more quickly than she had done this time. She would give ten to one odds that those were her non-existent diaries. Besides, if she started hammering a nail into the floor now, Clark was bound to hear her. She'd just have to hope that he didn't check on the diaries and discover the nail was missing before she had a chance to read them.

So... the plan to escape wasn't dead. If she could look at the diaries, read them, and figure out why he'd hidden them from her, she might be able to find a new way off this island. Besides, the very fact that he'd hidden them from her told her this was something she needed to see.

She quickly rushed over to the couch, bouncing as she landed squarely in the center. Touchdown. And then she waited for Clark to enter the cabin.

An unexpected knock on the door confused her. There were

no locks. So why would Clark not just walk in? He'd certainly never knocked before.

Unless... maybe after what had happened between them last night, and her attempt to seduce him into taking her off this island, he was afraid of walking in and finding her lying on a bed of rose petals wearing nothing more than a... She shook her head to dispel that thought. Well, fat chance of that happening! If he thought she was going to sleep with him again, he had another thing coming. She'd been a little out of control, that was all. It wasn't as if she'd even particularly enjoyed it.

'Liar,' her mind screamed at her. 'He wasn't the only insatiable one in this cabin last night.'

She pushed the thought away with a growl, refusing to dwell on that aspect of last night. Whether or not she had enjoyed herself was irrelevant. It wasn't as if it were going to happen ever again.

So why exactly did that thought leave her feeling vaguely depressed?

Knocking on the door a second time pulled her out of her unproductive thoughts.

"Come in, Clark," she yelled in exasperation. "Don't worry. I'm not about to jump you when you walk through the door. Trust me, last night was quite enough. I have no desire for a repeat performance. It wasn't even that good." There. She'd told him. He didn't have to know what he seemed capable of accomplishing just by touching her — in fact, it was better if he didn't.

The door crept open and a head poked inside. Although with the bright sunlight coming through the open door, Lois was unable to see the person now apparently staring at her, that was definitely not a silhouette of Clark's hair.

"I'm not Clark," an enthusiastic woman said, confirming Lois' thoughts. "And I wasn't exactly concerned about you jumping me. But I've got to admit that I'm suddenly very curious about what happened last night!"

Lois scrambled off the couch. Help had arrived!

"Come in. Come in," Lois said as she rushed towards the door and then around the visitor to look outside, intently scanning the beach.

"Good to see you, too," the woman behind her said even as Lois ignored her to search the beach. The woman joined her in the doorway, as if looking to see what had Lois so captivated.

"Your boat," Lois said, turning to the woman. "Where's your boat?"

"Don't have a boat. No. Not me. Never could stand the way they rock back and forth. Too scary. Don't swim either."

"Then how did you get here?" Lois asked.

"Superman brought me. I was surprised when he showed up this morning. Had been expecting Clark, actually. Mr. Schaffenberger was supposed to meet with me today, too. Ever since he was hit by lightning, he thinks he's Ben Franklin. I'm helping him reach Thomas Jefferson. They're almost finished their revision of the Declaration of Independence. I wonder if it took them this long to write the first draft?"

"Oh, sorry that you had to miss your appointment," Lois said, not quite certain how to respond to the rest of what the woman had said.

"Oh, don't worry about it," Star said dismissively. "It probably wouldn't hurt them to take a bit of a break anyway. All they've done the last few weeks is argue about whether or not to change their list of grievances to include the idea that they don't want their descendants to some day have to swear allegiance to the current heir to the throne, Prince Charles. Jefferson maintains that it's irrelevant because King George is nuttier than Charles will ever be. Franklin insists that Charles is nuttier. So I'd much rather be here. Besides, Superman said it was important that I come now and he's a hard man to say no to. And... woo. Flying with Superman. Now that was quite a rush. But then, you've

flown with him a lot more than I have. This was my first ride."

"Do we know each other?" Lois asked, feeling as if she was unsuccessfully trying to tread water. Keeping up with this woman was a challenge to her intellectual capacities.

"Yeah. Don't worry if you don't remember. I'm your neighbor — Star. I'm the one looking after your fish. Nice little guys. Not very good listeners though. I'm thinking about getting some fish of my own when you come back. The little striped one has something off about her aura, though. Are we going to stand out here all day or go inside?"

"So... Superman brought you? Is he still here?" Lois began searching the sky instead of the beach. She momentarily considered yelling, 'Help, Superman,' but something held her back.

"No. Said he'd come back for me later. Superman is concerned about you — thought I could help. Are you okay?"

"Superman asked you to help me?" When Star nodded, Lois continued. "Are you a doctor?" Lois backed, confused, into the cabin. The woman named Star followed. If Superman knew where she was, why hadn't he just rescued her, taken her back to Metropolis? Or at least sent her someone with a way off this island? Maybe he didn't know she was here against her will.

"No. No. Don't trust doctors, actually. Doctors do so much violence to the body — disturbs a person's aura. Dated a doctor once — boy was he a quack. Mostly, I do psychic counseling and channeling. Never any dark stuff, though — too scary." Star shivered. "Occasionally I do crystal healing. But the reason Superman asked me to come is that I do hypnosis."

"Hypnosis? I don't believe in hypnosis. It never works on me." Or did it? Suddenly, she wasn't entirely sure as she had a flash of Max sitting in front of her, telling her to concentrate on his voice. In fact, she was so caught up in her flash of... something, that she missed Star's next words. "I'm sorry. What did you say?" she asked as Star dropped her jacket on a kitchen chair and started to put water into the kettle, quite clearly making herself at home. Something about that seemed familiar to Lois, so she followed Star into the kitchen and took a seat at the table, content to let Star do whatever she was currently doing.

After putting the water on to boil, Star turned back to Lois, walking over to the kitchen table and slinging a large purse off her shoulder. "Now, let's see..." She opened the purse and began rifling through it. "When you first lost your memory, I cast your horoscope to determine the best crystals to use for the treatment of your amnesia. But when I took them to the clinic, they refused to let me give them to you. Like I said, doctors are nothing but over-paid quacks."

Lois stared in disbelief as Star pulled three small cloth bags from her purse. What exactly had Superman been thinking? This was almost as bad as Clark and his herb obsession. "Let me guess — you don't have health insurance," Lois said.

"Here, put this on," Star said, ignoring Lois' comment as she picked up one of the bags and handed it to Lois. At the end of the bag was a gold chain, long enough to go around Lois' neck. "It should go over the heart."

"It doesn't go with my outfit," Lois said, even as she acceded to Star's request. It seemed easier than arguing.

"It has a number of crystals in it amethyst, emerald, iron pyrite, lodestone, rhodonite, even some forget-me-not. Oh, and take this one, too. It's for putting under your pillow at night. It has some dream crystal in it and will help you find solutions, focus your thoughts and remember things while you're dreaming. I've made you an extra as well. You can leave the crystals from this one in the sun to recharge their energy while you wear the other one. Change them every day to keep their energy at their best."

A moment later, the kettle came to a boil. Lois started to rise when Star jumped to her feet. "No. That's okay. I've got it." She removed the kettle from the heat before looking through the

cupboards. "Now, I'm sure Clark must have some herbal... Oh, great! Perfect choice. Rosemary. Now, back to your comment about hypnosis."

Lois stared at the other woman blankly for a moment before remembering that they had been talking about hypnosis. It seemed that Star's temporary trip to deal with other matters had been just that — temporary.

Star finally finished setting the tea to steep and took a seat at the table. "Now, you said that hypnosis doesn't work on you, but I know for a fact that it does."

"How do you know that?"

"Because..."

The door suddenly opened and Lois tensed when she saw who was standing in the doorway. Clark! Her breath caught as the air in the cabin seemed to solidify and suddenly Lois found herself lost in a lusty haze. It seemed last night had changed things between them and she found herself even more aware of him on a primitive level than she had been before. Lois felt a blush rise in her cheeks even as heat began to coil in her belly. She knew that her breathing had become deeper, but seemed unable to do anything about it. In fact, even though she desperately wanted to, she seemed unable to break eye contact with Clark, whose own eyes had darkened as he'd watched her.

"Uhh... Clark," Star said, rising to her feet and walking over to him. She took his arm, directing him back to the door. "Superman asked me to help Lois. Do you think you could wait outside?"

Clark finally tore his eyes away from Lois as he allowed himself to be ushered outside.

When Star finally returned to the table and sat down, she looked directly at Lois. "Whoa. Talk about your powerful sexual energy. If that had been any hotter, the entire cabin would have burst into flames. Normally, love it. But it's sort of counter productive to the reason I'm here. So much for your comment about last night not being good. If that was any indication, I'm not sure I would have lived through it — but what a way to go."

A blush rose in Lois' cheeks even as she studied the wood grain on the table while reaching up to push a strand of hair behind her ear. But if Star thought Lois had any intention of elaborating, she was very much mistaken. She'd already obviously given away too much when she thought it had been Clark knocking on the door.

"Why are you wearing your engagement ring?" Star asked, trying to sound casual as she poured the tea into mugs and passed one over to Lois.

"Uhh... yeah," Lois said, realizing immediately that Star was prying for more information about last night. Well, time to put an end to that discussion. "I guess I should take this off. It doesn't mean anything, anyway. Just... It's a long story." She shrugged, raising her hand to remove the ring.

"No! No! Leave it on. Diamonds are an energy amplifier. They will enhance the power of the other crystals. So back to hypnosis."

Lois almost let out a sigh of relief, as her hands fell back to the table, the diamond untouched. As much as she might consider talking about hypnosis a waste of time, it had at least distracted Star from asking more questions about the previous night. And as for the engagement ring... she'd take it off later.

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Clark paced on the beach outside the cabin. He'd not returned to the cabin immediately after dropping Star off lest either Lois or Star made the connection between him and Superman. Still, he had expected to be present when Star hypnotized Lois. After all, what if Star asked something that made Lois remember that he was Superman? When, on one occasion, Star had hypnotized him in order to help him remember a piece of critical information during one of their investigations, he'd said his name was Kal-El.

Fortunately, Lois had been there to cover for him. What if Lois said something this time and he wasn't there to cover?

He liked Star. He trusted Star not to do anything that might hurt Lois. But did he trust Star enough to let her know his secret?

No. Maybe. He wasn't sure.

Still, Star had been right about one thing. The tension in that room between him and Lois was not exactly conducive to the easy going atmosphere necessary for hypnosis.

And the important thing was to get Lois well. Even if that meant Star found out the secret. Still, it wouldn't hurt for him to listen in, know if anything was said that shouldn't be, and maybe have a chance to help Lois and protect his secret at the same time.

Satisfied that this was the best compromise he was going to reach, he sat down at the picnic table and watched and listened to the discussion happening inside the cabin.

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"So you're saying I've been hypnotized before?" Lois asked skeptically.

Star nodded. "A big software owner named Bob Fences hypnotized you and then gave you post hypnotic suggestions to put yourself in jeopardy every time he wanted to commit a crime so that Superman would be too busy saving you to stop him. Then I hypnotized you and removed the suggestions."

"I think I remember something about this. This is the story where I thought I was abducted by aliens, right?"

"That's right."

"So why would I need your help this time? I haven't been putting myself in jeopardy."

"Superman told me that Clark thinks that Dr. Deter gave you some sort of post hypnotic suggestion that makes you think you're in love with him."

"Max didn't give me any post hypnotic suggestions," Lois said, trying to quell her doubts. Why hadn't she been able to find any other words for her feelings for Max? Still, she wasn't about to express her concerns. "Clark's just mad that I love only Max, and..."

"He also said you always say the word 'only' when you say you love Max," Star interrupted. "Just like you did right now. And when you say you love only him, where does that leave Clark?"

"He means nothing to me," she said, even knowing as she said it that she was saying it only by rote.

Star's eyebrows rose. "I wouldn't call the heat I felt when you two were together in this cabin a few minutes ago 'nothing.'"

Lois shifted uncomfortably. "Okay, so maybe he makes me hot. But that doesn't mean anything."

"So... you no longer love Clark?"

"What does that have to do with anything? Why does everyone keep harping on my feelings for Clark?" She knew she was refusing to answer the question directly, although she couldn't say exactly why. She just wished Star would quit pushing.

"Maybe because most of us have never seen a couple more in love than the two of you were."

That took the wind out of Lois' sails. "Really?" She looked down quickly when she registered the wistfulness in her voice.

Star nodded. "Don't get me wrong. You two could fight like cats and dogs. In fact, I'm not sure I've ever seen any couple fight like you could..."

"And this is what I should want to remember?" Lois asked, trying to inject some sarcasm into her voice and failing miserably.

"...but you must have noticed the way he looks at you?"

Lois looked down at the way he'd looked at her the previous night flashed through her mind.

"That boy's got it as bad for you as any man has ever had it for a woman. And you looked at him the same way."

Lois was momentarily lost for words. Then she gave her head

a shake. "Well, I can't help that. He's just going to have to get over it. And I don't need hypnosis either." Or did she? Maybe it would prove to herself, one way or another, what her real feelings were — because she suddenly wasn't entirely sure. Oh, her mind was still telling her she loved only Max. It was her heart she couldn't seem to get a read on.

Star let out a breath. "Look, Lois, I think part of the problem here is that you think hypnosis is something to be feared. And I guess it can be used to do unethical things. But really, it's just an altered state of consciousness. A more relaxed state, one where your mind can recall things that you might not be able to recall if you weren't as relaxed."

"So you're saying it could help me with my amnesia?" Maybe this was the way. Something was preventing her from admitting her doubts. But if she did this just to see if it would help with her amnesia...

"It might. And I can make sure that no one has been messing with your brain, and fix it if they have."

"And how would you do that?"

"By helping you remember. Once you remember, any post-hypnotic suggestion will no longer work because it will have to compete against your conscious mind."

Lois hesitated for a moment, torn. Maybe Clark was right. Maybe the reason she couldn't expound on her feelings for Max, or on what exactly she meant when she said that Clark meant nothing to her, was the result of something other than her feelings. She just wasn't sure any more. "Look, what I really want is a way off this island. Will this help me with that?"

"I think if you really remembered Clark, you'd know how to get off this island."

"You really think so? How do you know?"

"Sometimes I just know," she said, giving her head a tap.

Lois stared at Star for a long moment. This woman was a bit of a flake, but still... there was something about her, something that Lois trusted. Besides, there was something in the back of Lois' mind that agreed with Star's assertion that if she could really remember Clark, she'd know how to get off the island. That's why she'd been so bound and determined to read those diaries, after all. And then there was the nagging question about Max. Maybe this would put that to rest one way or another. "Okay, so how do we do this?"

"Do you want Clark in here for this?"

"Is there any reason that he has to be?" She didn't want him to know that he'd put doubts in her mind about her feelings for Max. And if he was here...

"If you don't want him here, he won't be allowed to be here."

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Lois snapped out of her session with sudden clarity, remembering her entire time in hypnosis from the first moment she'd stared at the black and white disk as it had spun around, through Star's somewhat crazy questions to get her to relax and her instructions that any time she felt uncomfortable, she could emerge from the session and remember everything. And she most certainly remembered what had happened then.

"That bastard!" Lois exclaimed to a somewhat surprised Star.

"Who?"

"Max! Max! He hypnotized me and gave me one of those..." She snapped her fingers several times, trying to find the phrase she was looking for.

"Post hypnotic suggestions?"

"Exactly! I remember it all. Every word. He told me that my memories, my thoughts of Clark, the story I was working on, it meant nothing. He told me to forget all of it. He even told me that I knew only one truth — that I loved only him." She drew in a deep breath. "Damn it. He told me that I was done with the Daily Planet. That it was time to move on to a new life with him. That's why I quit my job to run away with him to the south of France.

And then that fraud went on to tell me he loved me. Loved me. Boy, is that a joke! He didn't even have the decency to tell me when I could remember it. He told me when I was under hypnosis so that I'd never even question it! Then he told me to forget being hypnotized!"

"Other than Max, do you remember anything else?"

Lois looked back at Star from where she was furiously pacing the room. When she'd suggested to Star that maybe it would be okay to start with her memories of Deter, she really hadn't expected Clark to be proven right! Or had she? "What?" she asked, realizing she hadn't heard Star's question.

"Anything else come back to you?"

"Uhh... no. I guess the stuff with Max sort of had me preoccupied. But surely we can do it again, see what else it can help me remember?" She felt her heart lift with the idea that she finally had a real chance at getting her memories back.

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Lois stared up at the ceiling in her room as she lay in bed the next night, feeling melancholy. She and Star had spent much of the previous day and then again most of today trying to use hypnosis to probe her memory. But other than a few small bits and pieces, it seemed it was just not possible to use hypnosis to solve this problem.

Star maintained that there was a trigger somewhere, something that once Lois remembered it, everything else would fall into place. Problem was finding that trigger.

Since she'd been made aware of Max's post hypnotic suggestions, she'd been consciously fighting them. It wasn't always easy. But the longer she fought, the easier it seemed to get. There were still moments when she thought she loved only Max and others when she believed Clark meant nothing to her. But these moments were getting fewer and further between. And as she fought those insidious suggestions that Max had placed in her mind, she found that her memory had begun to improve with more and longer flashes — although it was still not nearly quickly enough to satisfy Lois.

Superman had finally taken Star home today. Lois had mixed feelings about that. Star's enthusiasm was a bit overwhelming at times, but she had a good heart. And overall, Lois had enjoyed her company.

But it didn't make a lot of sense to have her continue hanging around. Star had a business of her own to run. And then there was Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin and their revision of the Declaration of Independence... Lois still wasn't entirely sure what that was about.

Lois shifted uncomfortably in her bed. In addition to losing a friend with the departure of Star, there was now the whole Clark problem to deal with. Star had served as a buffer between them over the past couple of days. Lois didn't think that they had said more than a dozen words to each other the entire time that Star had been there.

Clark had spent most of the past couple of days taking long walks on the beach. In fact, he'd left for another one of his walks just before Superman had showed up to take Star home — how had Superman known when to return, anyway?

She shook off the question, turning her mind back to Clark who was still out, wandering around the island, no doubt. Perhaps sitting and pouting at the waterfalls. After all, he seemed to be doing a lot of pouting in the last couple of days.

"Damn!" Lois suddenly exclaimed. Why hadn't she even thought to ask Superman to take her home when he'd been here to pick up Star?

'Maybe you don't want to go home,' came a small voice from inside her.

'That's ridiculous,' she argued back. 'Why wouldn't I want to go home?'

'Perhaps some unfinished business with Clark,' the voice

responded before she could stop it.

She gave a very unladylike snort. Right!

No, Clark wasn't the reason that she'd not asked Superman to take her home. Not at all. After all, why would she want to hang around with someone capable of moping the way Clark was? Ever since they'd spent the night together, he'd been acting as if she'd broken his heart.

She didn't remember him. Or... not really. What did he expect of her? She quickly pushed away a little stab of guilt that immediately assaulted her. Okay, so maybe she shouldn't have slept with him. But that was no reason for him to go around pouting all the time. After all, they'd been lovers — hadn't they? So the only thing that he could be pouting about was that she didn't remember him. And that wasn't something she could help.

No, her reasons for forgetting to ask Superman to take her home had nothing to do with Clark. Nothing whatsoever. Absolutely not.

She immediately told the little voice in the back of her mind that was screaming to be heard to shut up. Not now. Not yet. She wasn't ready to plunge into that particular minefield yet.

No, the reason she hadn't been able to ask Superman to take her back was that every rational thought in her mind seemed to go right out the window whenever the superhero was around. She'd felt tongue tied in the presence of the hero both times she'd met him at the clinic before her kidnapping, and then again when he'd come to pick up Star this evening. People kept telling her that they were friends, even Superman had told her that. But she couldn't help but feel like a schoolgirl experiencing her first crush whenever he was around. It was annoying.

It was no wonder she was so confused. She was tongue-tied in the presence of Superman. She had the hots for Clark. And she'd been hypnotized by her doctor to believe she loved him.

And it wasn't just the fact that Max had hypnotized her that made her mad. Even before that, instead of, as her doctor, discouraging her from developing feelings for him, he'd been doing the opposite. She could see that now — now that the little voice in the back of her mind telling her she loved only Max had been exposed. For example, what did Max think he was doing giving her forget-me-nots? A doctor should not be giving his patient flowers.

Lois suddenly had a memory flash.

Clark sitting at her desk, asking her if she believed in magic. She hadn't, of course. So he had told her to close her eyes. When she'd opened them again mere seconds later, there had been a dozen long stemmed roses in a vase on her desk.

'How did you...' she began.

'If I told you, it wouldn't be magic,' Clark responded, giving her a smile before rising and returning to his desk.

Another image came next: one of her coworkers handing her a bunch of yellow roses.

'These just came for you,' the woman said.

'Ooo... Kathy, what do yellow roses mean?' Lois asked, taking the flowers.

'Who knows. The only thing men ever give me is directions to their house,' Kathy responded.

'Yellow is for friendship,' Clark said, approaching her desk.

Lois reached over, opening the card. 'From a special friend,' she read, and instantly she knew who they were from. 'One more sick joke from the Prankster,' she said with certainty before dropping the flowers into her wastebasket and soaking them with her cold coffee.

In the corner of her mind, she heard Clark try to stop her, but it wasn't until after the flowers were thoroughly drenched that she realized what it meant.

'Those flowers cost me fifty bucks,' he said morosely.

Instantly, Lois found herself lost in another memory. Arriving at the Daily Planet one morning and spotting a bouquet of

flowers sitting on her desk. She fished out the card and sat down to read it. 'Love, Clark,' was all it said.

She felt a smile settle on her face as she remembered and quickly wiped it off as she forced herself to return to the moment.

'Morning,' Clark said, setting a cup of coffee down next to her.

'Thank you for the flowers,' she said. 'And the coffee. What's the occasion?'

'The occasion is I'm in love and getting married,' he responded with a grin.

This time she couldn't quite keep the smile off her lips. He really was a romantic dolt — well, when he wasn't moping.

Suddenly, Lois sat bolt upright in bed as the memory faded and a new thought occurred to her. Why would Max give her forget-me-nots? Damn! Why hadn't she seen that before? Those flowers hadn't been from Max, at all. After all, Max didn't want her to remember — so forget-me-nots would be exactly the wrong flowers. Lois would give ten to one odds that those flowers had been from Clark.

"Why that little weasel... when I get well..."

The anger suddenly deflated and she collapsed back onto the bed. When she got well. When would she get well? She just wanted this all to be over. She wanted to be herself, but how was she supposed to do that when she didn't remember herself?

And... she admitted silently... she wanted to remember Clark. Now that she was no longer under the influence of Maxwell's post hypnotic suggestion that her memories of Clark meant nothing, she found she wanted to remember him so badly that it felt almost like an ache inside her. Even if her memories weren't what she hoped, she needed to know, one way or another what it was about him that... made sense to her — even when he was moping.

Star had said there would be some sort of trigger, but how was she supposed to find this trigger when she didn't even know where to look?

Suddenly, she sat up again. The diaries! How could she have forgotten about the diaries?

Immediately, she was scrambling out of bed. She still hadn't heard Clark return to the cabin, so now was her chance to get the diaries.

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"Well, at least she no longer thinks she's in love with Dr. Deter," Martha said, placing a piece of apple pie in front of her son. She mussed his hair before moving back over to the counter to get another piece for her husband.

"No. In fact, given some of the comments she's been making, I'd hate to be him when Lois gets finished with him," Clark responded. At first, he'd been skeptical, wondering if she were just pretending to dislike Deter. But some of her comments, not made for his benefit, but to Star, were all too explicit and scathing to be anything but Lois Lane when she was on a rampage. And then, last night, he'd overheard her bashing Deter under her breath when she was alone — no one at all to influence then. So, yeah, at least he knew that she no longer believed she was in love with Deter.

"Well then, that's good news," Jonathan said before digging into his piece of pie.

"I guess," Clark said, pushing his pie around on his plate.

Martha shared a look with her husband. "What is it, honey?" she finally asked.

"Well, I guess now that Deter is no longer an issue, it doesn't make any sense to keep her on the island. She'd likely recover her memory quicker, if she does recover at all, surrounded by things that are familiar. Metropolis. Her apartment. The Daily Planet."

"But what about you? If you return to Metropolis, won't the police press charges against you for her kidnapping?" Martha asked.

"I don't know, Mom. I think Lois probably understands now why I kidnapped her, and will probably go to bat for me with the police."

"Oh, honey. I'm sure she will."

"I guess," Clark answered, plunging his fork into the pie, breaking a piece off and then plunging his fork into the pie again.

Martha's hand came up and covered Clark's. "This isn't about you worrying about kidnapping charges, is it?"

Clark sighed, finally setting his fork aside. "She still doesn't remember us. I thought when she finally realized that she didn't love Deter..."

"She'd realize she loves you?"

"Well..."

"Clark, she'll come around," Jonathan said.

"Yeah? And how long before that happens? I finally had it all. Dad. She loved me. She really did. And now..." He gestured helplessly with his hands. "How can I stand to wait another two years for her to fall in love with me all over again?"

"I'm sure it won't be that long, honey," Martha said.

"Yeah, you're right," Clark responded, obviously not believing it. "Anyway, I should go do a patrol of Metropolis before heading back to the island." He rose to his feet, quickly hugged his parents and took to the air, almost before they could say goodbye.

He couldn't tell his parents the rest. Making love to Lois had been a defining moment in his life. And yet, it had meant nothing to her. He'd heard her dismiss the whole thing to Star several times over the past couple of days.

And with every dismissal by Lois, he'd plunged deeper into depression. In fact, after the first day, he hadn't been able even to listen in on their sessions. Not even for the sake of his secret. In fact, much of the time, he'd buried himself in his Superman duties back in Metropolis, telling himself he was just making judicial use of his time while Star worked with Lois. Not that that was exactly true. Mostly, he'd just needed distance to deal with his broken heart.

Still, he'd continued to hold out hope that maybe Star's sessions with Lois would bring back Lois' memory. The final blow had come when he'd flown Star home without Lois having regained her memory.

And now, knowing that there was no reason to keep Lois on the island...

What would happen when they returned to Metropolis? Right now, at least he could see her whenever he wanted. Yet with her not even remembering their friendship, would she want to spend time with him outside of work? And how could he go back to being simply her partner when he'd known the ecstasy of being closer to her than he'd ever been to anyone in his life?

He looked down, realizing suddenly that he was flying north, towards Canada. Forcing himself to concentrate, he adjusted course and sped towards Metropolis.

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Lois pulled the blankets up around her and fluffed the pillow before settling against the headboard of the bed. Then, her heart pounding wildly, she picked up the first of the two leather bound books she'd discovered. A brief glance through the first book told her that, just like the diaries she'd read from her formative years, she didn't write every day — but only when the spirit seemed to move her. Sometimes weeks, or months would go by without an entry. Still... she flipped to the front page and began to read.

September 1, 1993

Dear Diary,

Today I learned an interesting lesson, namely that people see what they expect to see. Cover the hair, put on a fake moustache, hide the body under baggy clothes, use a cloth to bind the chest, then walk and talk a little differently and act stupid and everyone you meet will mistake you for a man. It's taught me to always

look beyond the external to discover the person hidden beneath. As you may have guessed from my intro, I finally got the okay from Perry to go undercover for my investigation into the sudden rise in car thefts in the city. I had Jimmy teach me how to boost a car and...

Something about that struck a cord with Lois, as if there was something almost ironic about it. But when, try as she might, she couldn't think what that might be, she flipped over to the next page.

September 12, 1993

Dear Diary,

I can't believe how absolutely furious I am with Perry. Of all the stupid, crazy, idiotic, absurd things he's ever done, this one takes the cake! So what did our fearless leader do, you ask? Well, he partnered me, his best reporter, with this rookie, hack from Nowheresville named Clark Kent!

Lois felt a snort of amusement slip past her lips. It was hard to believe, given such an auspicious beginning, that they had apparently been partnered together now for the better part of three years.

Even more baffling was how they had gone from there to engaged to be married. So what had happened during that time to change things?

With renewed curiosity, she continued reading.

October 5, 1993

Dear Diary,

I was going to write you yesterday, tell you what I'd done, but I was just too ashamed. But then something happened today that... Maybe I should just start at the beginning. First, the confession. I stole a story the other day — from Clark Kent of all people. I can hardly believe I did that. As someone who has had stories stolen from me, I know how it feels. But that isn't the end of the story. The end of the story is that I learned that Clark Kent is not a man to be messed with because he got his revenge: he got the first one-on-one Superman interview and he took me down a peg or two in the process. Don't tell him I said this, but I think I could actually come to xxx tolerate Clark Kent.

Lois actually smiled when she made out the word covered by 'x's. It seemed she'd originally written that she could come to like Clark and then chosen to cross out the word 'like' and substitute 'tolerate' in its place.

'You've got a crush on your partner, Lois Lane,' Lois thought in amusement. No, that wasn't possible. She loved only... She closed her eyes for a moment and silently screamed in frustration. When she opened them again, she was even more determined to follow her previous train of thought.

Had she had a crush on Clark? Was she, even that early, developing feelings for Clark Kent? What was it about that entry that screamed at Lois the belief that there had been something more than simple tolerance going on inside her when she'd written that entry?

After a moment, when nothing came to her, she returned to her reading. The next entry few entries actually made her uncomfortable. It seemed she'd begun to have something of a celebrity crush on Superman. Lois actually found herself blushing as she read the what could only be called purple prose as she'd described Superman's attributes in glowing detail, actually referring to him as some sort of Greek god.

Funny. Although she still found that she got tongue tied around the hero, something had changed. Maybe it was just that while her respect for him seemed to have increased, her belief that he was some kind of demigod had abated.

November 22, 1993

Clark resigned.

Lois didn't read any further because she was suddenly submerged in memories. She'd been asleep at her desk when a gentle voice in her ear woke her up. She was hot and sticky as

she looked around to see Clark standing there.

'It's late, Lois. You should go home.'

But there was no time. Superman was in trouble. And she had much work to do if she was going to save him. She told Clark that, only then noticing that his desk was devoid of personal items and a cardboard box was sitting on top. When she questioned him about it, she was stunned by his claim that he was leaving Metropolis to work for the Smallville Post.

'I just wanted to say goodbye,' he said.

'Goodbye! We're partners.'

'You don't need a partner, Lois. You never did.'

'Well maybe not. But I was starting to like having one.'

Her heart was breaking. How could he be leaving? She'd finally learned to trust someone, to rely on someone and he was walking out on her? She argued with him and yet, big, stubborn ox that he was, she was unable to stop him from picking up his box of things and walking back to her desk. Holding his box with one hand, he reached for her face, cupping her cheek with exquisite tenderness even as she fought back tears.

Then he was leaning down, his lips lightly brushing over hers. 'Goodbye, Lois,' he said softly before straightening up again and walking away as tears began to pool in her eyes. She watched him all the way to the elevators but he never once looked back. He was gone. And she instantly felt the loss of her best friend.

Lois yanked herself out of the depressing memory. Well, obviously he'd returned. So it wasn't as if there was anything to feel depressed about now. Still, the memory had revealed much about her relationship with Clark. He'd been telling the truth. She had no doubt about it now. It was not just a figure of speech. They really had been best friends. Hastily wiping away the tear that had leaked from her eye, she returned to her reading.

A couple of entries down, she found herself reading about time spent in the honeymoon suite with Clark while they'd investigated a story. In the middle of reading the entry she found herself flashing back to them lying on the bed, Clark on top of her as she kissed him with a passion that was almost frightening.

'More towels, yeah. Oops. Sorry.'

Clark had slowly backed off when the maid had left the room. It had been a cover. She could still remember the frustration she'd felt with herself for ever believing it had been real, and more so for responding to him as she had. She'd covered it up by some nonsensical comment, hoping he hadn't noticed how much that kiss had affected her.

Still, for a moment there, she'd actually found herself, even in her memory, believing it had been real. That thought stopped her cold. If she'd misunderstood that memory, what about the one of them tumbling together onto her bed, struggling to shuck their clothing? But surely they wouldn't have been undressing each other as some sort of cover.

She closed her eyes, fighting to remember. She growled in frustration when her mind insisted on taking her in a completely different direction. In this memory, she and Clark were at the Daily Planet, Clark standing next to her desk while she rambled on about buying a bed.

'How come I get the feeling that this is not all about beds?' Clark asked.

'Well, it did occur to me that there's one or two things that we've never talked about.'

'One or two things?'

'One thing.'

'One thing?'

'The thing,' she said intently.

It seemed to take him a moment to clue into what she was talking about. 'Oh. That thing,' he finally said with understanding.

'We haven't had any experience together... or much... well, with each other.' She stopped for a moment. 'Oh, god, what am I doing?'

He moved closer. 'Lois, it's okay.'  
'I'm sucking the romance out of this like a vacuum. It's just... we've waited and I'm glad and...'

Lois was abruptly pulled from the memory. She knew what they had been talking about. And for some reason, she knew they had been engaged at the time. In fact, it almost felt to her as if this conversation was connected to the one where he'd given her flowers just because he was in love and getting married. So... they'd waited. It had been a conscious decision. So what had they been waiting for? Their wedding night, no doubt.

But then...

The thought trailed off as she was suddenly lost in another memory. It felt as if it had taken place later that same day. They were sitting at an outdoor caf.

'Actually, you bring up a good point,' Clark was saying, 'because we've never really talked about... our pasts.'

'Right. Exactly. And I just wanted you to know why I've always been a little skittish about crossing the intimacy threshold and you've been so understanding that I thought maybe you were a little skittish, too.'

Clark looked uncomfortable. 'Well, my experience is a little different.'

'Mmm hmm.'

'I'm a little different.'

'Sure.'

'I mean, I've had girlfriends. I've dated. But... that thing? The intimacy threshold? The big threshold? I've never really... crossed it. I've stepped up, taken a good look but...'

'Oh my god,' Lois gasped, coming suddenly out of her memory. Clark was... had been a virgin. And she'd taken that from him. No wonder he'd been moping around here for the past two days. He'd finally taken that step into intimacy, thinking that she was right there with him, only to have the entire thing thrown back in his face the next morning. "What have I done?" she groaned even as tears again clouded her vision.

But wait. Maybe she was wrong — please let her be wrong. Maybe, even though they had been waiting for marriage, they hadn't actually made it. After all, that memory she'd had of them in her room had been pretty explicit. Maybe they'd already taken that step. They wouldn't be the first couple in the world who'd slipped up in the months before their wedding.

She tossed the diary she was reading on the bed and picked up the other one. If they had crossed that threshold, it would surely be in here. After all, it was big step and she couldn't imagine that she would have taken it without writing something down.

As she began flipping through the beginning of the second book, she took quick glances at various entries. It would have been sometime after they were engaged. So that was what she needed to find first.

She suddenly came to the end of the book and her eyebrows knit together in confusion. That was it? She glanced forward in the book, but it was nothing but empty pages.

Finally, she returned to the last entry.

September 17, 1995

That was over six months ago! How was it that she had written nothing over the past six months? Confused, she directed her attention to the contents of her last entry, hoping it would provide her with some insight.

Dear Diary.

Something happened today that I can't tell even you about. So, after years of asking you to act as my confident and friend, I'm going to have to say goodbye for it would be far too dangerous to continue writing considering what I now know. Besides, I've found another friend, one who has already replaced you in many ways — if only he will quit acting like an idiot and acknowledge that I need time to process everything. So, goodbye,

dear friend. Maybe someday I'll be able to tell you all about my reasons for discontinuing our regular gossip sessions. However, I trust you'll understand if I say that I hope that day will only come at some point in the distant, distant future.

What the heck did that mean? Well, that was completely useless. She tossed the diary away. It landed on the foot of the bed. From what she'd seen while skimming the diary, they had still not been engaged when the final entry was made. That meant there would be nothing in there that would tell her if they had become lovers at some point before she'd lost her memory.

So how was she supposed to know the truth?

She flinched. She did know the truth. She wasn't entirely sure what the memory of them on the bed in her room was about, but she was almost certain it hadn't ended the way she had assumed. And that meant, Clark had been a virgin until two days ago — when she'd stolen that from him.

She felt a dull ache in her heart at the knowledge of how she must have hurt him. She'd figured that sleeping with him would be no big deal for him because they were engaged, and undoubtedly had been making love on a regular basis for months, if not longer. What was one more time? But that wasn't the case. How could she have been so wrong?

She suddenly heard the cabin door open and, a moment later, close again. Silently, she slid out of bed and slipped across the floor to the bedroom door before stopping. She pressed her ear against the door, listening to his heavy steps across the wooden floor. Her heart rate sped up and she found herself taking a step back when she heard his footfall stop right outside her door. She held her breath, waiting. Inside, she could feel instinct driving her to open the door, but she held back.

She wasn't ready to face him. Not yet. Not until she'd sorted through some of tonight's revelations. She felt... something for him. She could no longer deny that. But there was another part of her that wasn't entirely sure what she felt. Okay, so she must have loved him at some point if they were engaged. But she couldn't remember that. Might never remember. And she wasn't about to fake her feelings. That wouldn't be fair to her and, even more importantly, it wouldn't be fair to him. Could at least part of what she now felt be due to gratitude to him for getting her away from Max? And given how she'd misinterpreted memories in the past, how much could she trust these new ones?

Would he knock? What would she do if he did?

She held her breath and waited.

A moment later, and to her relief... and disappointment, she heard him walking away. Taking a deep breath, she walked slowly towards the bed. Gathering up the diaries, she slipped them between the mattress and the box spring.

Then she straightened her bed before picking up the small pouch containing the crystals Star had told her to put under her pillow. Once it was safely tucked away, she went to climb into bed before hesitating.

Was she supposed to take off the crystals she was currently wearing before going to bed or leave them on?

"Oh, for crying out loud," Lois said before slipping the pouch from around her neck and placing it on the night stand. She didn't believe in any of this stuff anyway, so what did it matter?

Climbing into bed, she turned the knob on her lantern until the fire went out. She refused to let her mind dwell on Clark. There would be plenty of time tomorrow to sort out everything she'd learned tonight. Right now what she needed most was sleep. Still, it felt like an eternity before her mind would stop long enough for her to fall asleep.

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The fire was almost hypnotizing as she stared into it, her head on Clark's chest, his arms around her.

"You know, I dreamed of this," she said softly while tracing patterns on the hand he had lying across her stomach. "Spending

the night in your arms. First it was Superman I dreamed of. Then it was Clark." She turned her head slightly to see his soft smile and warm eyes.

"And what happened?" he asked softly.

She could feel a blush in her cheeks and kept her eyes focused on their hands as she answered his question. "First, you held me in your arms." She pulled his arms tighter around her. "And then, we kissed." She turned against him so that they could do just that. "And then..." Her voice had gone slightly sultry.

"And then...?" he asked in response.

For just a moment she flirted with telling him what really had come next, but she backed off, still feeling slightly skittish. "And then I asked you how you felt about me." She was just a touch embarrassed by the question. After all, she knew how he felt about her. So she wasn't prepared for his answer.

"I don't know how I feel about you," he responded. Before she could feel hurt, he continued, demanding her full attention by the depth of emotion she could hear in his words. "There is no one way. I feel... so many things, and all at once. Happy. Kinda scared, too. Excited. Calm. Lost. Found. I feel safe in a way I've never known, but in danger, too. This thing between us — whatever it is. It's stronger than me. Being with you is stronger than me alone. That's new to me."

Her heart had never felt more full. There was only one way to respond and she leaned in to kiss him.

She pulled back eventually, but didn't remove her arms from where they were wrapped around Superman's neck.

"It's not the 'm' word that makes it forever for me, Lois," Superman said. "My love is forever because it just... is."

With that, he moved in again, kissing her sweetly. When the kiss ended, she allowed her hands to slide down his spandex covered chest until he was finally free. He stepped up onto the windowsill and a moment later she heard a whoosh as he finally left.

"Wow," she said softly, staring out into the night sky after him.

Lois blinked awake to the warmth generated by the rays of sunlight coming in between the curtains to pour across the bed. That had to be the most vivid dream she'd ever had.

She stretched. In the process, her hand came to rest between the pillow and the bed. Her eyebrows furrowed in confusion for a moment as she discovered something there. Pulling it out, she stared in disbelief at the small cloth bag that Star had told her to put under her pillow to focus her dreams. Could it be...

"Nah," she said aloud, placing the bag on the night stand. Besides, that had been one strange dream. Not much of a memory at all. Unless... maybe it had been a mixture of two memories. But... it wasn't as if the dream had focused her thoughts. It had fractured them even further. After all, in her dream, she'd been kissing Clark, listening to his profession of love only to, in the next instance, find herself kissing Superman and listening to his profession of love.

To confuse things even more, she had to say that she'd felt the exact same emotions when she was with Clark as she had with Superman. So which man did she really love? And was any of this a memory, or was it just a dream? Or was her subconscious trying to tell her that she loved both men? And if that were so, where did it leave her and Clark?

She gave her head a shake. It was just a dream. A weird dream, maybe, but just a dream.

More frustrated than ever, Lois climbed out of bed and grabbed her robe. After all, she wasn't going to solve anything in here. So first a shower. Then it was time to take the bull by the horns. She owed Clark an apology. After that... Well, she honestly had no idea where to go from there, but she desperately wanted her memories back and would do whatever was necessary to make that happen.

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The smell of coffee was the first thing Lois noticed when she exited the bathroom. Her eyes flicked in the direction of the kitchen to see Clark working at the counter, his flannel shirt hanging open over his jeans.

For a moment, she hesitated. This was the first time she and Clark had been alone since they'd woken in the morning after their night together — and certainly since she had realized that he'd been a virgin until that night.

She instantly forced herself to calm down. She didn't know for certain that he'd been a virgin. She couldn't say for certain that they hadn't made love before then. After all, her diary seemed to end before they'd even become engaged. They might well have gotten carried away some evening after the events she remembered had taken place. After all, there was still the memory of them fumbling around on her bed.

Besides, he hadn't acted like a blushing virgin — or whatever term applied to a man in this situation.

So maybe there was no reason for her to apologize. After all, Clark meant nothing to her. No! No, that wasn't true. That was Max's lie. Clark meant something to her. She knew that. She still wasn't entirely sure what he meant to her, but he did mean something.

She closed her eyes. As tempting as it was to pretend she hadn't had these latest memories, she couldn't. She had to know for certain what their relationship had been. If in his late twenties, he was still a virgin, it had to be because he had chosen to be, that he was waiting for that one special woman and that one special moment. And she had taken that away from him through an act of deception and for her own purposes. Her actions were unforgivable, especially after he'd done what he'd done for her: risking kidnapping charges to get her away from a man who had brainwashed her into believing she loved only him.

And when she thought now about the way things had gone down the night they had... well, that night... When they'd returned to the cabin, he hadn't taken her directly to the bedroom — which seemed the logical choice if they had been lovers prior to her amnesia. No, he'd taken her to the couch. And he'd seemed quite content to remain there, had even tried to slow things down. She was the one who had taken them into the bedroom. And, as she thought about it now, she'd pretty much taken the lead with... everything that the first time.

"Breakfast's ready," Clark said from the kitchen, pulling Lois out of her thoughts.

"Just give me a moment to get dressed," Lois said softly, unable to meet his eyes.

"I'll just leave it here and..." He gestured towards the door. "...get out of your hair."

"No!" She seemed to startle both of them with the vehemence of her response. "I mean," she corrected quickly, "I'd like you to stay." She finally met his eyes. "I think we need to talk." She cursed the slight tremor in her voice.

He nodded.

"Good," she said. "Okay... well..." She padded across the cabin to the bedroom door. "I'll just..." She didn't finish her thought even as she arrived at the door and ducked inside, quickly closing it before leaning against it and taking a deep breath.

Well, that was awkward. She gave herself a moment to pull herself together before turning her attention to getting dressed. She might not be looking forward to this talk, but she owed it to Clark not to keep him waiting.

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'Well, that was awkward,' Clark thought despondently. Still, she was right. They did need to talk. She needed to be back in Metropolis; and he needed to face the music for his actions. He thought Lois would probably back him up on his reasons for

kidnapping her. And to tell the truth, he couldn't regret his decision to do it even if she didn't. After all, it had gotten her away from Deter and allowed her to realize the truth about him. And that was all that Clark had really wanted.

Still...

He sighed. He'd lain on the couch last night, all of this circling in his head. He didn't need to do it anymore today.

Today was for owning up to his actions.

He was so lost in his thoughts that he jumped slightly when the door to Lois' room opened and she stepped outside. She seemed to hesitate for a moment before coming over and taking a seat at the table. Without a word, he set her coffee in front of her along with a bowl of fresh cut fruit, whole grain toast and honey.

"Thanks," she said softly before picking up her spoon and beginning to push the fruit around in the bowl.

He took a seat at the table with his own bowl of fruit and began doing pretty much the same thing.

The silence that fell between them as they sat there not eating their breakfasts seemed to fill the room, penetrating every corner and making the atmosphere almost suffocating. And if he who could hold his breath for twenty minutes was having difficulty breathing, what was this doing to her?

He snuck a quick peek at her out of the corner of his eye only to discover that she had chosen that exact same moment to do the same to him. Their eyes met for the briefest of instances before she snatched her gaze away and a faint blush rose in her cheeks.

"I'm not really very hungry," Lois finally said, putting down her spoon.

"Me either," he responded, following suit.

They both sat in silence for another moment.

"Lois..."

"Clark..."

They had both chosen the same moment to speak. They smiled awkwardly at each other.

"You first," Clark said.

"I was just going to suggest we go for a walk," Lois responded. "It's a little..."

"...stifling?" Clark supplied when she hesitated.

"Yeah... in here."

Clark nodded and together, they both rose from the table and, ignoring the dishes, headed for the door.

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By tacit consent, they walked together on the trodden path towards the waterfalls. Side by side. Neither talking. Irrelevantly, it occurred to Lois that her feet had really toughened up during her time on the island. As a city girl, she'd rarely gone without shoes. But there was something about this place... As a result, other than their early morning jogs, she had rarely worn shoes and her feet were now becoming tough enough that, for the most part, she didn't notice.

She glanced at Clark's feet to see that he, too, was shoeless. She guessed the same thing must be true for him. Growing up in the country, this had probably been a yearly occurrence for him. She quickly diverted her eyes, fixing her gaze on the path in front of her. There was something almost too intimate about looking at his bare feet.

When they arrived at the waterfalls, they both stopped, staring at the water as it left the cliff above to plunge down into the pool beneath, as if it by doing so all the mysteries of the universe would be revealed. She wondered if Clark was thinking about the water as little as she was.

"I really like it here," Clark said.

She took in his words even as she looked around at the serene atmosphere. "So do I," she said after a moment. Then she took a step closer to the pond, stepping carefully over the rocks until her bare feet were once again in the water. With a sigh, she sat down on a nearby rock.

Glancing over, she watched as Clark settled himself cross-legged a little further from the shore.

"So..." she finally said.

"So..." he responded.

In the silence that followed, Lois pulled all her courage together and then, once she was ready, opened her mouth, determined to address the big pink elephant that seemed to be at the pool with them.

"Lois," Clark began. "I'm sorry that..."

"No, Clark, please. Let me go first?" She had no idea what he was apologizing for; after all he wasn't the one who had done anything wrong. But if she didn't get this off her chest now, she was afraid her nerve would fail her.

Like the polite country gentleman that he was, Clark shut his mouth and nodded.

"Clark, I had a few flashes of memory last night."

She saw him tense and couldn't blame him. After all, the last time she'd told him about her memory flashes, she'd seduced him. Still, she forced herself to continue.

"Well, a couple anyway. In one we were having a conversation about..." Her voice faltered for a moment. "...beds and I got the distinct impression that we had... Well, that we had decided to wait until we were married to... you know."

Clark nodded briefly but otherwise didn't respond as he kept his eyes focused on the waterfalls.

Okay, that was the easy part. "The other flash was about a conversation where you told me that you were a v... a v..." Why was that word so difficult to say? "A very patient man," she finished lamely, shooting a look at him to see if he understood. He finally looked down and sighed.

Satisfied that he'd understood, she continued. "Now, I still can't quite figure out what the memory of us on my bed was about. The one that convinced me that we had... crossed that particular intimacy threshold. I mean, I guess maybe one night we... A lot of couples who are trying to hold out until they're married don't quite make it, after all. So it's not as if we would be the first couple who didn't exactly... make it to our wedding night, but..." She quickly shut her mouth on the flood of words she could feel threatening to fall from her lips to cover her nervousness. 'Focus, girl,' she told herself silently. "Clark, was the other night..." Her voice trailed off and she swallowed hard, trying to find a way to ask the question. If only Clark weren't acting quite so distant.

"Yes."

His soft reply startled her.

"Yes?" she asked, wondering exactly what he was saying yes to.

"It was our first time."

"The other night when we...?" Her voice trailed off.

"Yes."

"So then it was... your very first time."

When he didn't respond, she looked over at him. He was staring at the waterfalls, but he must have seen her out of the corner of his eye because he nodded.

"Oh god," she whispered, as all the little pangs of guilt she'd had since sleeping with him collided together in her heart. "I'm so sorry."

He did look at her then, his eyebrows knit together in confusion. "Sorry?" he asked.

"I mean, if you were still... You're a good looking guy. I'm sure you've had plenty of opportunities. So if you were still... You must have been waiting for that perfect time and that perfect woman. And I took that from you. I'm so sorry."

He was silent for a long moment, his eyes leaving her to fix again on the water as it flowed over the edge of the cliff. "I was with the perfect woman," he finally said softly.

Her breath caught in her throat and tears instantly sprang to

her eyes. "Still..."

"Lois, the only thing I regret about the other night is that you say you didn't mean it. Otherwise... I wouldn't change a single thing that happened between us." His voice dropped until she had to strain to hear his final thought. "It was the most incredible night of my life."

Damn him. How dare he be so sweet and understanding? No wonder she had fallen in love with him. How could she not? Suddenly, she stilled. Was that what was happening between them? Even without her memories, was she falling in love with him all over again? After all, it had been the most incredible night of her life, too. And she definitely didn't need her memories to know that.

She glanced at him through her eye lashes. He was still sitting silently, staring up at the waterfalls, yet suddenly he looked different to her somehow. She wasn't entirely sure what had changed, but something had.

But how could this wonderful man love her? It made no sense. Especially after...

"Did you really love me, Clark?" she asked abruptly.

That got his attention. Instantly, intense eyes were riveted on her. She couldn't have looked away if she wanted to — and she couldn't say that she wanted to. In fact, she unexpectedly found herself wanting nothing more than to drown in those eyes.

"There's no 'did' about it, Lois. I do love you. More than I thought it was possible to love anyone."

"But..." Her mind was a swirl. She suddenly felt the need to look away. Her eyes focused on her nervously fiddling hands as she said her next words. "...maybe you just thought you loved me because... maybe you didn't really know me."

He didn't argue. Didn't say anything, in fact. Instead, he just looked at her for a long moment, as if instinctively understanding that she had more to say.

"I remembered this before we... anyway... I think I cheated on you, Clark," she finally said, finding one of her cuticles suddenly fascinating. Why had she said that? She hadn't meant to. After all, the illusion of them as the happy couple was so appealing. What had compelled her to destroy the fantasy?

Still, he had to know. And she had to know, too. Because if he were going to walk away from her, she'd rather that he do it now when she had a chance of recovering. Because if things kept going as they were... No. She didn't even want to speculate about what he could do to her heart if she allowed these newly realized feelings to grow and then she lost him when the truth came out, because the truth always had a way of coming out.

"Cheated on me?"

His tone of voice told her that he didn't believe her.

She shifted uncomfortably. "I remembered it a little while ago and... I'm not quite sure how it all fits, but I can remember that I cheated on you."

"You didn't."

"Clark, please. I know what I did."

Suddenly he appeared next to her, lowering himself to the rock to sit beside her. "Look at me," he said softly, his hand coming up to her chin so that he could gently move her face around to look at him. Although he exerted almost no pressure, she couldn't seem to prevent him from his task. When their eyes met, she instinctively tried to look away but he wouldn't let her. "I don't know what you're remembering, but you never cheated on me, Lois."

Finally, their closeness was too much for her. The temptation to just forget about her memory and believe him was too great when he was this close.

She moved quickly, rising from the rock and stepping out further into the water, glad she'd chosen a sun dress when getting dressed this morning. After all, he couldn't follow her into the deeper water without getting his jeans wet. And she desperately

needed the distance if she was going to be able to tell him this.

"I don't know the exact circumstances, but it happened a while ago. I think I must have been kidnapped or maybe you were held hostage. Or... I don't know. Maybe I was being blackmailed or something. He had a slight build and short dark hair. He looked a little bit like Kyle Griffin, I guess, but I know it wasn't Griffin. I can remember what he was wearing, but I don't remember his name. What I do remember is what I said to him."

"What did you say to him?" Clark asked when she didn't continue.

"I told him that I'd keep my promise. That for that night my body belonged to him, but that my heart beat only for one man. Who else could that have been but you?" She could hear the tremor in her voice, but couldn't seem to control it.

Clark rose to his feet. "So what happened then?"

"I don't remember. But come on, Clark. What else could have happened?"

"Assuming you were being held hostage, and this is really a memory of something you said, lots of things could have happened then. You could have found a way to escape. Superman could have saved you. You could have given him a kick to the unmentionables and left him walking funny for the rest of his natural life. But, Lois, one thing I know is that you didn't cheat on me with this phantom man."

"You don't know that."

"I do."

The conviction in his voice was unmistakable. But...

"Clark, I slept with you in my effort to get back to Max so..."

She hesitated slightly as the import of what she'd just said finally sank into her consciousness. "God, what type of woman am I, anyway?" she exclaimed, wondering why that question had never occurred to her before. "I cheated on Max with you. Or well, not technically maybe, but... What does that make me, Clark? And if I could do that... How can you know I didn't cheat on you?"

He ignored the water, instantly walking through it to where she was standing. He reached out, gently taking hold of her shoulders and forcing her to look at him again. "That was different."

"Really? And how exactly was it any different than what I did to you?"

He sighed. "Lois, on some level, I think there is a part of you that remembers you love me. What happened between us the other night... Can you honestly tell me that the only thing on your mind was getting back to Deter? You were already free. I'd already offered to take you back to Metropolis. So can you still honestly tell me that what happened was all about Deter?"

She broke eye contact. "No," she said softly, her mind flashing back to that night. Honestly, she couldn't say that she'd thought about Max even once. The only thought in her mind had been Clark, and the burning need to get as close to him as she possibly could. "I guess not. But... what does that have to do with anything? How does that prove I never cheated on you?"

"Because if you had cheated on me, you would have told me."

Her eyebrows rose in disbelief.

"Lois, long before we fell in love... or rather, before you fell in love with me because I think I fell in love with you about two minutes after we first met ...we were best friends. And after we got involved... romantically... we decided that no matter what, we would always tell each other the truth. Sometimes it's hard.

Sometimes it takes us some time. So although I don't know for certain that something like what you've described could never happen... although I sincerely doubt it could... that you might sleep with someone to save your own life... or mine... I do know that you'd never be able to look me in the eye afterwards until you confessed what happened. The guilt of it would eat you alive until you did."

"But I didn't feel guilty about sleeping with you when I thought I loved Max. So why would I feel guilty if I cheated on you?" she asked skeptically, knowing that she had to be brutally honest about this, but still terrified about what it said about her.

"You didn't feel guilty about 'cheating on Max' because, deep down, in your heart, you knew that you hadn't cheated on him. If you had cheated on me... it would have torn you apart. I know you, Lois. And I know that without any doubt whatsoever." He paused, gently stroking her cheek with the backs of his fingers.

"It never happened," he repeated, keeping his eyes firmly locked on hers.

And she believed him. How could she not when he was so certain? And when he was looking at her like that — as if he was seeing into the very depths of her soul. She was lost in his eyes and felt herself subconsciously leaning closer when...

Clark suddenly backed away. "Uhh... listen..." Clark said, as he began walking quickly towards the shore.

Lois' heart dropped. In spite of his claim that he still loved her, he obviously only truly loved the woman with the memories of his beloved Lois. And that wasn't her.

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"Look," Clark said when he finally got to shore, "I've been doing some thinking." He'd almost kissed her. What exactly had possessed him to even think about doing such a thing? She was still vulnerable. She'd just confessed something that had to be hard for her, looking for reassurance, and he'd almost used it to make a pass at her.

Maybe realizing what Deter had done to her had killed her feelings for Deter, but he knew with certainty that it hadn't brought back her feelings for him. He'd heard her dismissals to Star more than enough over the past couple of days.

It would be all too easy to just let himself pretend. To let himself kiss her. To let himself make love to her. To let himself believe that she loved him back and wasn't just grateful to him for reassuring her that she was not the woman she'd come to believe she was.

It was definitely time for them to go home, where she could heal and reestablish her life. And where she might possibly come to him because she loved him and not because she was grateful for his assistance. He didn't want her gratitude, no matter how tempting it might be, he wanted her love.

"Maybe it's time for us to go back to Metropolis," he told her before he could change his mind and sweep her up in his arms and carry her back to the cabin.

Lois looked slightly crestfallen. "Back to Metropolis," she repeated.

He swallowed hard. This was for the best — for both of them. "Lois, you were right that the chances of you getting your memories back is more likely if you're surrounded by places and people you know. I only brought you here because I believed that Deter was a danger to you..."

"I know that, Clark."

"Well, since that doesn't seem to be a problem anymore..." He took a step further back. "...I'll contact Superman and see if he can... come and pick you up."

Having finished his speech, he turned and practically fled back to the cabin, not daring to look back at Lois lest he lose his self control and give in to the desire to kiss her, touch her and spend the rest of his life making love to her. He would have to wait a little while before going back to get her as Superman. After all, in theory he still had to contact the superhero and then the man had to fly out from Metropolis. Maybe that would be enough time for him to beat his raging libido back into submission.

Who was he kidding?

Still, all he really needed was time to compose himself enough to make her believe he was the stoic superhero.

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Lois stared in stunned disbelief at the last place she had seen Clark. What had just happened? One minute, it had seemed as if he was about to kiss her and the next... he'd hardly been able to get out of there fast enough.

It hurt. There was no denying that — this realization that he'd needed to get away from her. Still, maybe it was better that she'd realized now that he wasn't interested in a repeat of the other night, before she committed any more of her heart to the man. Or maybe she would understand his actions, if only she had her memories. Maybe she would know him the way he seemed to know her. Besides, there was something almost... familiar about him running off on her.

She tried to probe that memory for a moment before giving up. No. She didn't understand. So maybe, instead of worrying about what hadn't happened in that pool... Maybe she should reserve judgement, at least for now, about the motivation behind Clark's action.

In the meantime... she directed her mind to other matters as she slowly stepped from the water and took a seat on the shore.

Clark had certainly been convincing in his reassurance... not only about her not cheating on him and about what had happened between them the other night, but about why she it hadn't even occurred to her to feel guilty about cheating on Max. And now that she wasn't desperately trying to convince herself that she loved only Max, she knew he was right. The other night, her conscious mind might have given her permission to make love to Clark by telling her that she was trying to get back to Max, but her heart... her heart had been making love to Clark.

And if he was right about that... It still didn't explain her memory of the man she could remember telling that for the night her body belonged to him. But maybe she had jumped to conclusions about that, too. After all, she'd jumped to a lot of other conclusions in the past few days that had turned out to be wrong. Maybe she should give herself a break, reserve judgement, at least until she had a better grip on her memories.

Not that that was exactly easy. The desire to berate herself was all too tempting. But she trusted Clark. So until she knew more, maybe, just maybe, she should trust him on this. There would be time enough for recriminations if it turned out that he hadn't known her as well as he thought he did. So she forcibly pushed what doubts still remained to the back of her mind — to be brought out and dealt with again should the time come where her fears turned out to be justified.

So... she was going back to Metropolis. Funny. Given how determined she'd been a week ago to do exactly that, she wasn't entirely sure how she felt about it now.

And Superman. Now that had been a surprise. So that was Clark's secret way off this island. He had to have some means to contact the superhero, however. Maybe he just yelled, 'Help, Superman.' Maybe the superhero's ears were that good. Which brought up another point. Superman must have been the one who brought them to the island.

Shaking off the water still clinging to her legs, she slowly rose and began her walk back to the cabin, still lost in thought.

Would the superhero really have participated in her kidnapping? It seemed a little out of character for a man who stood for truth and justice. On the other hand, she knew that he was friends with her and Clark. And since Clark had been certain that Max was somehow controlling her actions... Maybe Superman had been convinced of that, too. And they had been right. She was grateful to both of them actually, since if they hadn't done what they did, she would probably be in a villa in the south of France right now with Max where he would no doubt continue his deception for as long as it amused him.

Which brought up another point. Had Max fallen so in love with her that he'd leave Metropolis and jeopardize his

professional career to be with her? That made no sense. Did it? Or maybe he was just a psychopath who liked the challenge of convincing a happily engaged woman that she loved only him. Either way, the very thought of how close she'd come to life as his mistress caused her to break out in a cold sweat. Even now, even knowing what he'd done, there was still, in the back of her mind the niggling little concern about how she would react the next time she saw him. Was the post hypnotic suggestion truly broken just because she remembered what he had done?

She had just stepped off the path from the waterfalls and onto the sand in front of the cabin when something in the corner of her eye caught her notice. She looked out towards the ocean and gasped. A boat! In fact, it appeared a luxury yacht was anchored in the harbor.

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Had Superman sent a yacht to pick her up? But why would he do that when he could just fly her back in his arms? Or had she somehow misunderstood Clark's intentions?

Before she could probe the mystery further, a strong arm wrapped itself around her from behind as a hand clamped over her mouth to prevent the scream rising in her throat. She fought back instinctively.

"Lois, it's okay. Calm down. It's me. I've come to rescue you."

The voice sounded vaguely familiar and she looked towards the man skirting around so that he was standing in front of her. Max? Where the hell had he come from?

"It's okay. You can let her go."

The man holding her in a vice-like grip loosened his arm cautiously while at the same time removing his hand from her mouth.

"Max?" Lois asked, completely baffled by this turn of events.

"Yes, it's me, my love," Max said, stepping forward to sweep her up in his arms.

"Max?" she asked again, still not completely certain this was

happening. "How did..."

"I find you?"

She nodded dumbly.

"Not here. Let's..." He hurried her over to the edge of the woods, making sure that they were out of sight of the cabin before continuing. "Elias... Uhh... Dr. Mendenhall apparently put GPS chips in all of his would-be assassins so that he could keep track of them. I was able to make use of it to find you."

"How long have you known about this?"

"Since his unfortunate arrest. I was going through his things at the clinic..."

"And you didn't tell me? Didn't take it out?"

"And it's a good thing, too. Or, alas, I would never have found you."

Lois looked at him in disbelief. He really didn't believe he had done anything wrong. How was that even possible?

"I'm only sorry it took so long for me to get here. But I had to hire a crew I could trust, get the necessary provisions and then sail out here. But don't worry. I made sure to get good men, men who would be sufficient to the task."

It was then that Lois really took notice of the four other men with Max. Big, rugged men, a little rough around the edges. And all of them wearing fatigues and carrying guns.

"Mercenaries?" Lois asked before she could stop herself.

Deter laughed. "No. Just men I knew I could trust — for the right price, of course. But I had to get you away from that madman."

"We're all set, sir. I see you've got the woman out of there," another man said as two more men joined them.

"Yes," Max said. "Just give me a moment here and then we can set it off."

"Set what off?" asked Lois, taking in the final two men who

seemed to make up Max's team, bringing the number of thugs with him to six.

"Lois, we have to be sure he doesn't come after you again," Max said soothingly, running his hands up and down her arms.

"Who? Clark? What are you going to do, Max?" she asked, panic rising in her belly.

"We're going to take care of the problem. We've put explosives in..."

"What? No, Max! You can't. You can't kill..." As she spoke, she began to move, only to find herself suddenly grasped from behind. "Clar..." Her scream was cut off by a hand over her mouth even as she watched in horror as one of the men withdrew a small metal box from his pocket and, at Max's nod, depressed a button. She struggled for all she was worth but it was no use.

The explosion rocked the ground and a moment later, Lois could feel heat hitting her from the direction of the cabin.

No. Oh, god, no. Clark. Please. Not Clark. She collapsed to the ground as the arms holding her disappeared. If Clark was dead, her life was over.

"What have you done?" she screamed at Max, her vision blurred by grief and rage. Gone was any fear that his post hypnotic suggestions might still have some sort of hold over her. She wasn't entirely sure she had ever known that she could hate someone so fiercely. "Superman. When Superman gets here..."

"Don't worry about Superman, Lois. I've calculated for all possible contingencies." He held up his good hand — the other still encased in plaster — showing off a ring containing a glowing, green crystal. "Cost me more than the yacht. Harder to find, too. But rather than taking a risk that the big boy scout with a soft spot for you might interfere, I thought... Better safe than sorry. So now that we've taken care of Kent, what do you say..."

"Lois!"

Lois almost thought she was hearing things at first. Clark! Clark calling her name, sounding panicky. "Clark!" she yelled back, relief and joy flooding through her system. She didn't know how... and, frankly, she didn't care. Clark was alive. That was all that mattered.

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Clark had been so lost in his thoughts that the explosion had caught him off guard. He'd watched helplessly as the living room and kitchen completely disappeared into a pile of kindling and flames leapt into the air, intent on destroying the rear of the cabin where the bedroom and bathroom were located. A quick blast of cooling breath took care of that problem and Clark did it without thinking even as his mind focused on Lois.

Had she been near the cabin? Was she hurt?

He didn't know what had caused the explosion. A fault in the generator maybe. It didn't matter. What mattered was Lois.

"Lois!" he'd yelled, even as he'd run through the remains of the living room and out onto the beach.

"Clark!" he heard and instantly looked in the direction of her voice. What he saw caused fury to rise inside him. Deter. Lois on the ground at his feet. He didn't need to see more. Without further thought, he ran towards them, intent on getting Lois away from that man.

The pain when it hit him was almost unbearable. The shirt tail on his flannel shirt was still on fire from the explosion, but suddenly he felt the pain of it. He struggled to get the shirt off, even as he felt the fire rush up his arm. Collapsing onto the ground, he rolled, relieved when the fire finally went out. But the pain in his damaged arm was nothing compared to the other pain he was feeling. Kryptonite — it had to be.

How had he missed the arrival of these men? He closed his eyes. He knew how it had happened. He'd shut down his super senses to avoid hearing Lois, her heartbeat, the smell of her, in his effort to get control of his hormones. And as a result, he'd missed the danger.

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"Clark!" Lois gasped, scrambling to her feet and rushing over. The fire was out by the time she arrived but his pain continued, even increased. She could see it on every line of his face and movement of his body. Her eyes crinkled together in confusion. She'd seen that kind of pain on Clark's face before — but where?

And suddenly, as she knelt in the sand next to Clark, she was lost in a memory. Spenser Spenser. A hidden refuge. Sitting in a chair, surrounded by cross bows, each set with an arrow aimed directly at her. Clark claiming to be Superman — and her fervently denying it.

In attempting to prove who he was, his powers had failed. At which point, he'd joined her in denying his identity.

'Enough!' Spenser Spenser had yelled. 'I don't know what's going on here, but something is. Pescado,' he yelled, 'bring in the you know what!'

A short man in a suit entered the room pushing a trolley on which sat a large lead-lined box. He opened it immediately. At first, Clark cringed, obviously trying to keep Spenser Spenser from seeing the pain the rock was inflicting. Then, unable to fight it, he collapsed onto the couch, holding his head and grimacing as the pain took over.

Clark was Superman.

And almost as soon as she thought it, it was as if she'd never forgotten. Memories flashed past almost too fast for her to follow, one after another until she knew it all. From the moment she'd interrupted Clark's interview at the Planet until her kidnapping at their wedding. Oh, god. When Clark had said they were engaged, she'd had no idea. She had been kidnapped from her wedding ceremony, with Clark waiting for her in the next room. How had he been able to bear it?

Seeing them rolling around on her bed in the virtual world. Getting a little more carried away than they had intended. Being interrupted by Jaxon Xavier's computer persona. Knowing that in that moment, if they hadn't been interrupted, they both could have easily completed the act.

Watching Clark stand on the side of the road while she drove off with Lex. No wonder he'd felt he had no choice but to kidnap her when she'd announced that she was going to the south of France with Max. It was a wonder that...

"What's wrong with him?" Max asked, snapping Lois out of her memories.

Kryptonite! Max was wearing a kryptonite ring. She had to get the kryptonite away from Clark as fast as possible.

"He was just in a building that blew up, and he was on fire," she said thinking frantically, even as she scrambled to her feet. "What do you think is wrong with him?" The fact that his clothing was torn and burned and he was entirely caked with ash and dirt certainly supported her hypothesis. Reassuring herself that since he hadn't come into contact with the kryptonite until he came out of the cabin and the fire was now out, the most pressing problem now was the kryptonite, she grabbed Max's arm, trying to pull him away from Clark without looking as if that was what she was doing. "But forget about him. He's not a threat to us now."

When she finally had Max some distance away from Clark, she turned, snaking her arms up around his neck. "He doesn't matter."

He grinned and she tried to keep her abhorrence for him off her face even as she let him gather her into his arms. When his arms were secure around her, he looked at one of his men. "Kill him," he instructed.

"No!" she exclaimed.

His eyes narrowed as his gaze returned to hers. "What exactly happened between you two on this island?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nothing, Max. I mean, he tried to convince me that I loved him, but I love only you."

He smiled, seeming to catch that she was still saying she loved him the way he'd told her.

"I just... don't want to him to die. I don't like seeing anyone die. And he's no danger to us, after all." She ran her hands down from his shoulders to play with the buttons on his shirt. She kept her eyes focused there, as if more interested in his buttons than what she was saying, but secretly afraid he'd see the lie in her eyes if she looked at him. "Can't we just leave? Sail off in your yacht? He doesn't have a way to follow, after all."

"I suppose so," Max said before reaching down to tilt her face up to his. "I've missed you, Lois," he said softly.

"Not nearly as much as I've missed you..." you bastard, she added silently. Then he was leaning towards her. Closing her eyes and forcing herself to swallow her revulsion, she made herself respond when his lips finally touched hers. Clark's life was at stake, after all.

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The pain abated somewhat and Clark was finally able to open his eyes. No one seemed to be paying him much attention at the moment, but that was hardly surprising. He could barely move.

He twisted his head slightly, trying to see what was happening. His heart sank when he saw Lois in Deter's arms, sharing a passionate kiss. He closed his eyes. Obviously, she really did love Deter, no matter what the man had done to her. But wasn't that the very thing she had told him long before Deter had hypnotized her?

'I think I'm in love,' Lois had told him.

'I know you're in love,' he'd responded.

'Well, don't say anything. I haven't told him yet.'

'Him?'

'The man who threw me a lifeline and pulled me back into the world of reality... Dr. Maxwell Deter.'

Clark saw that Deter had noticed the engagement ring on Lois' hand — why hadn't he realized she was still wearing it? And what exactly did it mean — assuming it meant anything at all. Still, Deter seemed to think it meant something because after what appeared to be a small disagreement, Deter removed the ring and tossed it away. Lois watched the ring land, but made no move to retrieve it. Clark had lost her. What did anything else matter after that?

No. No matter Lois' feelings, no matter his own feelings, Deter had to be stopped. Lois might hate him for it, but that man was no better than Luthor.

'I love Lois. I do. I really do. But she's just a little too independent, don't you think? Well, I'll take care of that.'

It had been those words as much as anything that had given him the strength he'd needed to escape Luthor. And it would give him the strength he needed now.

But unlike Luthor, Lois knew what Deter was. She had to. So why...? Was it possible this was all an act so she could protect him... and herself... until a better moment came to make her move? Knowing Lois that could very well be, given what Deter had already done to her, given what he'd tried to do to him. Still, with the pain still coursing through his system, it was hard to think straight, to rationalize things out.

So where was the kryptonite? It was a little farther away now than when he'd first collapsed, but he still felt it's debilitating effects. His strength was leaving him, more all the time.

He realized immediately that Deter must have it when Deter released Lois and approached the man with the gun standing near him. Closing his eyes, he attempted unsuccessfully to shut out the increased pain.

But he didn't need to see to hear the men's whispered conversation..

"Do we shoot him or not?" the thug asked.

"Lois and I are going to head back to the yacht, Erik. Wait until we're gone and then kill him. But no guns. I don't want her to know about it. So do this quietly. I told her you were going to see if any of her things survived the explosion, so be sure to take a look before you join us."

And then the pain again abated. He heard talking in the distance as Deter took the kryptonite farther and farther away. Once it was gone, Clark cracked open his eyes. So they were going to kill him, were they? He just hoped they waited long enough, allowed him to regain enough strength to fight back. Because if they attacked now... He left the thought unfinished. No. He couldn't die — not with Lois still in danger.

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Lois really didn't want to go out to the yacht, but it was the best way to take the kryptonite away from Clark. Besides, she didn't know of any way to refuse that wouldn't make Max suspect her true feelings. She'd tried suggesting that they go back to the cabin, see if any of her stuff had survived. But he'd been insistent that he needed to get her out of danger — and besides, his men could do that.

Still, she felt as if she was leaving her heart behind on that beach as she stepped into one of the two small motor boats that had been used to transport Max and his men to the island. She suspected that Max had left orders for his men to kill Clark. She hoped not, but... Still, there was no way she could take on Max and six armed men. So her only hope was that by getting the kryptonite away from Clark, he would recover enough to escape.

How long would it take him to recover from the kryptonite poisoning? It seemed to take different amounts of time every time he was exposed. Would he recover more slowly if he were hurt physically then if he were healthy physically? Did that mean the burn to his shoulder would slow down his recovery? How far away did the kryptonite have to be before he started to recover? She wished she had more answers and not so many questions.

Without those answers, she needed to give him as much time as she could, so she was slow crossing the beach and slow getting aboard the boat. Then she watched Clark as the boat pushed off of the shore, watching him as long as possible as the boat powered its way across the smooth waters to the luxury yacht that awaited her. She could only hope that the men on shore would not try anything while she could still see them. After all, Max had told her Clark would not be further harmed. Surely he would have told his men to wait.

She had mixed feelings when two of the men got into the boat with them. There had been a small thought in the back of her mind that once she got out a way from shore, she might be able to overpower Max, steal the ring and then get back to the island, free to help Clark. On the other hand, their escort left two less men for Clark to deal with.

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Erik watched as the small motor boat disappeared around the far side of the yacht before directing his mind again to the task ahead. In order to maintain the illusion that they were staying longer simply to check out the cabin, he'd sent his remaining three men over to sort through the remains while he continued to keep an eye on the poor sap practically unconscious on the ground.

He momentarily considered calling his men back to help, but really what was the point? Setting down his gun, he pulled a kusari from his pocket, a short wire with handles at each end. The guys might be mad that he had decided to have all the fun on his own, but those were the perks of being in charge.

Stepping up to his victim, he was almost casual as he reached forward to wrap the wire around the man's neck. This was almost too easy. What joy was there in killing, really, when your victim was already half dead? Still, a job was a job and Erik liked getting paid.

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Just where was Deter getting his money, Lois thought as she boarded the yacht. It couldn't be the clinic. After all, when Mendenhall was being arrested, he'd said that he'd had no choice but to use his skills to create assassins because the clinic was losing money.

Unless... Unless the reason the clinic was losing money had been because Max had been skimming the accounts. And somehow Lois was suddenly certain that was exactly what had happened. No wonder he'd been willing to walk away from everything in order to take her to his villa — there was nothing left to walk away from. The clinic would go under and Max would live off his ill-gained fortune without anyone being the wiser.

He was as much of a psychopath as Lex had been.

'Boy, I really know how to attract them, don't I?' Lois thought as she silently glanced around, trying not to look as if she was paying too much attention to how the landing boat was being secured to the deck.

What was it with her and psychopaths, anyway? If she hadn't also managed to attract the most decent man she'd ever known, she might get a complex. She was just lucky that Clark had stuck around long enough for her to realize what a catch he actually was.

Her hand subconsciously played with her now empty ring finger. She had so wanted to rescue that ring after Deter had tossed it away. But she didn't dare. The important thing was to get rid of the kryptonite — and if that meant sacrificing her engagement ring, then that was what it meant. A ring could be replaced — Clark could not.

With thoughts of Clark, she took a step towards the other side of the yacht, from which she hoped to get a look at the island. When one of the goons stepped in front of her, she stopped. It might be killing her not to know if Clark had managed to escape, but there was nothing she could do from this distance to help him. Besides, right now her focus had to be on getting rid of the kryptonite ring.

"What's this?" Deter suddenly asked, fingering the bag hanging around Lois' neck.

Lois looked down, confused. Then her expression cleared. "Just some crystals that are believed to help with memory loss."

Deter snorted, reaching over to remove the bag from around her neck. "Sounds like something Kent would believe in," he said scathingly. "Well, you won't be needing this any more." Without asking her opinion, he tossed the bag over the side of the ship. "Nothing but quacks believe in this stuff."

'Dated a doctor once — boy was he a quack.' Star's words from the other day suddenly came back to Lois, and quickly she covered up a resulting smile. Which one of them was the real quack? Lois was currently laying odds on Star being the sane one.

"This way, my love," Deter said, forcing Lois to refocus her thoughts.

"Is this your yacht, Max?" she asked, trying to sound impressed while she fell into pace next to him.

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Clark looked down at his blood soaked hands in dismay. He'd managed to best his attacker, but at a price. He'd barely managed to get his hands between the thin wire and his neck in time. Using it then to throw his attacker over his head had caused the wire to cut deep into his palms. Still, something of Lois' martial arts skills must have rubbed off on him during their daily sparring matches because he'd flipped the man over his body with surprising ease.

He'd awkwardly scrambled to his feet, bracing himself for a renewed attack — only to discover that the man was out cold. A quick check had assured Clark that he was still alive. The only

explanation Clark could find for the man's incapacitation was that he must have hit his head when he landed.

Knowing he was in no shape at the moment to confront the remaining three men, especially men with guns, he'd retrieved the glittering diamond from where he could see it still sticking out of the sand and stuck it deep in his pocket before staggering into the forest in the opposite direction to the cabin. He'd barely entered the woods when he went sprawling, face first, over an old log. In spite of the fact that the side of his face was scraped up and his raw hands infected with sand and mud, the fall had still been a piece of luck since, from his position on the ground, he'd been able to see a hiding place. Using what was left of his strength, he squeezed his body into the tight enclosure between the log and the ground, hoping he would not be found until he'd had time to recover his strength.

He kept his movements to a minimum, even attempting to regulate his breathing, given how close he was to where he'd escaped his attacker moments before. It was, after all, only a matter of time before his buddies found him.

"Erik!" a man yelled, seeming in answer to Clark's prediction. He heard a slight groan in answer.

"What happened?" a third man asked, rushing over.

"I don't know, Ryan. I just came out here and... Kent must have gotten away. Well, just don't stand there. Find him!"

Clark closed his eyes and tried to think invisible thoughts, waiting for the moment when the men were all over this forest. Just a little more time. All he needed was a little more time.

"No," Erik responded. There was a moment of silence during which Clark heard scuffling. Perhaps the other men were helping Erik to his feet. "Forget about Kent."

"But..."

"He's got no way off this island. He'll have to wait for another boat. So it's not like he can follow us. He knows this island better than we do. And I don't want to be bothered searching under every rock and stump."

"But what about Deter?"

"What about him? By the time he finds out Kent is alive, we'll have collected our pay and..."

There was further discussion but Clark wasn't listening. Instead his mind was working overtime. He had survived. All he had to do was wait on this island until his powers returned.

But he couldn't do that. Lois was on that yacht and if he didn't go after her now, he might never get another chance. The world was a big place, after all. And Deter could be taking her anywhere. But the only boat on this island was in full view of the men now discussing his future.

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"So what do you think?"

"It's..." Claustrophobic was the first word that came to mind when describing the cabin with its impossibly small windows, but she quickly rejected that word. "...wonderful." She turned slightly to give Max a quick smile before turning back to the room. "Is this your room?"

"Our room," he corrected, brushing past her to move over to the closets.

That's what she'd feared. Still, she kept her face neutral. She had to succeed in her mission of ridding him of the ring and getting off this damn boat. Otherwise... No. No, there was no 'otherwise.'

"And like I said..." He opened one of the closet doors, showing her the clothing inside. Women's clothing. "...you don't need your stuff. I made sure you'd have clothes."

She walked over to the closet, examining the clothing more carefully, wondering if he'd taken her clothes from her apartment. But no. She didn't recognize any of these things. Checking inside one of the blazers, she stilled. Designer label and in her size, but definitely not her style. Everything was a little too soft, too

revealing. He was dressing her up as his own personal Barbie doll. "You bought all these?" she asked, trying to keep her voice neutral.

"Nothing but first class for us from here on out." He came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and began nuzzling at her neck.

"Mmm..." she said, trying to make up for the fact that her body had instinctively tensed at his touch.

"What's wrong?"

Damn. She thought furiously. "Nothing. It's just..." What?

"What?" he asked, seeming to echo her own thoughts.

"You smell like gunpowder," she said on sudden inspiration, brought on by the fact that he actually did smell of gunpowder.

He laughed. "Well then," he said releasing her, "what if I go get freshened up? Maybe you'd like to do the same. After all, living in that primitive cabin, you've picked up something of a camp smell. Does that sound good?"

She turned to face him, planting a firm smile on her lips. "Sounds perfect."

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Lois very carefully cracked open the door to the small bathroom. She hoped the sound of the shower running would keep him from hearing any noise the door might make. It occurred to her briefly that she'd done much the same thing only days before with Clark, trying to sneak past him out of the cabin. She rolled her eyes at the thought now. He must have heard her and had simply allowed her to escape.

But there was a difference this time. With Clark, she had somehow instinctively known she wasn't in any danger. The worst that was going to happen was that she would fail to get away. The same could not be said for this situation. If she was caught now, she knew she was most definitely in danger.

Still, she had to take the risk. When she'd mentioned that he smelled like gunpowder, she'd hoped to convince him to shower — not because she couldn't stomach the smell, although it wasn't exactly pleasant, but in hopes that he would remove the kryptonite ring while showering.

And so she now found herself trying to search the bathroom while he showered in a stall only inches away. Given the size of the bathroom, it only took her a matter of seconds to realize that it was not there. His watch was lying on the vanity so surely if he took the ring off, it would be there, too.

Damn.

She stepped backwards, out of the bathroom and again grabbed the doorhandle, intent on closing the door.

"Lois, is that you?"

Double damn.

"Yeah."

"What are you doing? Come to join me?" The water switched off and the frosted door on the shower opened a crack so that Max could look out at her.

"No, I was just... looking for a brush for my hair."

"Oh, try the drawers under the bed."

She didn't have to fake the embarrassment in her smile as she nodded.

"Why don't you join me?" he suddenly asked.

She felt the smile freeze on her face.

"What's wrong?" he asked in response.

"Nothing. Nothing." She shook her head in support of her denial.

"Lois, it's unhealthy to bottle up your feelings. Tell me what's bothering you."

He sounded so concerned, so caring, so... doctor-like. But there was no denying the order in his words.

"I just want our first time to be... special," she said.

"It will be special. Because it's our first time. So why don't you join me?"

Heat rose in Lois' cheeks. "Max..."

"Come on," he coaxed.

Lois felt a panic rising in her belly. He wasn't letting this go so how... A flash of inspiration struck. "Max, you know I don't have my memory back. I don't remember ever..." She gestured towards the shower stall with one hand while the other pushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "I know it's probably not my first time — but it sort of feels as if it is. Can't we just... take this slow? I mean, you showed up so unexpectedly and I just want..."

"...to be seduced," Max completed when she didn't continue.

No. But he didn't need to know that. "Sounds crazy, doesn't it?"

Without warning, Max suddenly pulled the shower door open and stepped out.

Lois quickly diverted her gaze. For a brief moment, she contemplated giving him a kick to the groin and pulling the ring off his hand while he was rolling around on the floor in agony. But she knew from experience that getting a ring off a hand was not always a simple task. And if she tried and failed... No. She'd have to be more creative.

It suddenly occurred to her that even when she'd believed herself to be in love with Max, she wouldn't have been nearly as quick to look away if the man in the shower had been Clark. Max's nakedness left her feeling vaguely disgusted whereas just seeing Clark's bare feet had the power to send heat coiling through her belly.

For a moment, she was lost in thoughts of Clark, of spending the night exploring much more than just his feet. She quickly brought her thoughts back to the present, feeling the blush in her cheeks deepen.

He picked up a towel and, given that his one hand was encumbered, awkwardly wrapped it around his waist. He gave her a knowing smile, as if he thought her current blush was in response to his nakedness. "I think it sounds like Lois," he said, leaning close to give her a kiss on the cheek.

It took her a moment to remember what he was answering to, and determine no response was required on her part. "Well, I guess..." She backed out of the bathroom, closing the door behind her, and leaned against it, letting out a frustrated breath.

Damn it. He didn't take that damn ring off even when he showered. She'd clearly seen it on his hand when she'd been contemplating kneeling him in the groin. So how did she get it? She needed a new plan.

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In spite of the pain, Clark panted, relieved, when he was finally able to wrap his hands around the heavy chain which secured the ship to its anchor. He never would have believed that swimming could be so difficult. Between the exertion in his weakened state and the pain of the salt water on his injured hands and burned arm and shoulder, he was completely exhausted.

Still, there wasn't much time to rest. He needed to get around to the far side of the yacht and hope that the boat's ladder was still down. He looked back towards the shore. The men there were piling into the boat. That meant, there wasn't much more time. Otherwise, his only choice would be to climb up this chain with his damaged hands. And he'd really rather avoid that if possible.

Taking one last moment to prepare for the task ahead, he plunged back into the water, swimming for all he was worth, conscious with each passing second of the progress of the men in the boat.

He was panting hard as he slipped over the side of the boat, landing in a heap on the deck. Before he even had a chance to recover, he heard voices from below. The men from shore had arrived.

Quickly, he scrambled to his feet and began searching for a place to hide, to give himself some time to recover.

Although what exactly the plan was now, Clark didn't have

the foggiest idea. Deter had kryptonite, after all. That would certainly complicate any plan he might try to implement. He only wished that he knew whether Lois was on his side — or Deter's. The Lois he knew would never willingly stay with a psychopath like Deter. But without her memories...

He pushed the thought aside. No. Regardless of her memories, the Lois he'd gotten to know on the island was decent. The guilt she felt about what she believed she'd done in the past was more than enough evidence of that.

Still, it was time to quit worrying about what came next and to start looking for that hiding place. Otherwise, there'd be no need to worry about what came next.

He spotted the boat which Lois and Deter must have brought out here earlier, now back in its spot on the deck and covered with a tarp. He dove for it, slipped beneath the cover on the boat and froze. Surely this would be safe. After all, he could think of no reason Deter would be returning to the island.

There was the sound of movement as at least two men worked together on the deck, interspersed with brief snippets of conversation or instructions. They were soon joined by others as the men from the island joined those on the yacht. These newcomers appeared to be working to get the other boat from the island safely on board and secured.

The smell of gas grew stronger. The other boat must have some sort of leak in its gas line. After all, secured, as it was, close to the one Clark was hiding out in, the smell was hard to ignore.

Sometime after that, he didn't know how long, he heard the command given to raise anchor and then the sound of a machine purring as it did just that.

Things finally fell silent. Clark let out a breath of relief as he finally allowed himself to move into a more comfortable position, one where his burned shoulder wasn't pressed against the bottom of the boat and his hands were free. Once that was done, he cautiously removed the dirty, blood and water soaked rags from his hands, cringing when he had to remove the cloth from where the blood had caked it into his hand, to appraise the damage.

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Lois shivered as a cool breeze hit her when she and Max stepped out onto the front deck of the boat just as the sun was beginning to set across the ocean.

She'd managed to rid herself of Max shortly after they'd showered by claiming that the whole ordeal on the island had made her tired and that she'd be much more refreshed if she had a nap. In truth, she'd wanted to avoid any advances he might make until she came up with a new plan to get rid of the kryptonite.

Because that was the first step — getting rid of the kryptonite. Then she'd find a way to swipe one of the landing boats and hightail it back to the island.

The temptation to simply swipe one of the boats and head back immediately was almost overwhelming. After all, what if Clark was injured and required help? Still, it wouldn't do much good if she were to get back there and help Clark only to have Max show up and expose him to kryptonite again. And if she were to do that, they'd be in a worse position than they had been when Max had first appeared on this island. He'd still have six men with guns and a kryptonite ring, but this time he'd know that she was not on his side.

It had actually surprised her when, after she'd finished her shower, she'd noticed the time. It had already been mid-afternoon. She and Clark must have gotten up much later than she'd thought.

Still, she'd not been prepared for Max to stay away for the rest of the afternoon. And since she'd come up with a new plan quite quickly to get the kryptonite — one that was counting on the fact that Max didn't know her nearly as well as Clark did — it had been sheer torture waiting out the remainder of the afternoon. At one point, she'd decided to go find him, planning to claim that

she'd woken up without him and missed him, but the door to their cabin had been locked.

So she'd waited... through the return of the men from the island as she'd looked out the cabin window, wondering if their return meant Clark was dead... through the hoisting of the anchor, and the knowledge that she was about to be leaving Clark behind. Was he in pain? Was he calling her name? ...and through the moments where the yacht had begun to move. After that, each minute had been pure torture as the yacht took her farther and farther away from the man she loved. She kept watching the sun though, noting in her mind that they were going south. If this took too long, would she be able to find her way back? Either way, she knew she had to try.

The sun had started to set before Max returned, with instructions for her to 'dress for dinner.'

Instructions, ha! Demand was more like it. A quick search of the closet had revealed a single dinner dress. A black dress that was just a little too short and plunged just a little too low. It almost reminded her of a negligee, leaving little to the imagination. And a pair of matching shoes that were just a little too high. She'd briefly considered simply wearing a pair of jeans and a t-shirt in response. But, no, for this plan to work, Max had to trust her — at least a little bit.

With that in mind, she reached up and slipped her arm through Max's, snuggling closer, even as in her mind she tried to pretend he was Clark.

"Cold?" he asked.

"A little. Where are we going?"

He stopped, shrugging out of his jacket to slip it courteously around her shoulders. She gave him what she hoped was a shy smile in return, even as she slipped her arms into the jacket.

"I've got a little surprise for you," he said, offering her his arm once again.

They rounded the corner of the cabin and Lois gave what she hoped sounded like a gasp of delight.

"I hope you like it," he said, leading her over to where a table had been set up, lit only by candles, on the forward deck. "I thought it might be more romantic than the main dining room."

"It is. Thank you, Max," she said, stretching up to give him a kiss on the cheek, ignoring how that simple action made her skin crawl.

"I want tonight to be perfect," Max responded. He stopped their forward action, pulling her around to take her into his arms. His lips lightly touched hers. "And you're going to love dessert," he said as he pulled back.

She didn't need to ask to know what he was saying. Apparently, this was her seduction. And afterwards... she suspected they had very different ideas as to how this date would end.

It was funny in a way. When she'd been trying to escape Clark, her first impulse had been to sleep with him — yet he'd never even suspected her motives. She'd even gone out of her way to move things in that direction. With Max, he simply assumed her compliance. And yet, she didn't even have to think about it to know that she'd find another way to deal with Max. It wasn't even a question. Clark had been right. Even without her memories, her heart and body had known, at an instinctive level, that it belonged to Clark — just as his heart and body belonged to her. And that right was reserved only for each other.

And so Lois knew, without a doubt, that this 'date' was not about to end the way Max was anticipating.

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She'd hung on his every word, laughed at his jokes and reached over to touch him as often as possible. She wondered if he even noticed that he had spent the whole evening talking about himself. Probably not.

"That ring is really pretty," she said during a lull in

conversation. "I've never seen a crystal like that. It almost seems to have its own power source. It's hard to imagine something that small could really hurt Superman."

"It doesn't bring back any memories? You're the one who first wrote about it."

Lois' eyebrows rose. "Really?"

Max nodded. "Although, if I recall correctly, you thought it was fictional."

"Huh. Unless..."

"What?"

"Are you sure it isn't fictional? I mean, from what I've learned about Superman, he's invulnerable. Do you really think a rock that small can hurt him? Are you sure that you haven't been sold a bill of goods, so to speak?"

He smiled indulgently at her. "I'm sure. Lex Luthor almost managed to kill him in a cage coated with this stuff."

It took a great deal of effort for her not to flinch as she remembered her horror when Clark had told her about that incident. "Really?" Suddenly, she pushed her chair back away from him. "If it's that dangerous to Superman, what's to say it isn't dangerous to us?"

He laughed, as if amused by a precocious child. "What an imagination you have. It's perfectly harmless to us."

She looked at him skeptically. "I don't know, Max. What if it just takes longer to hurt us? What is it about it that hurts Superman?"

"It's radioactive."

She instantly pushed her chair even further away, trying to imagine how she would act if she really was afraid of the substance.

"Lois, come back here," Max said, sounding a little annoyed now.

"No, Max. I mean, you're probably right, but I just can't..." She bit down on the inside of her lip, bringing tears to her eyes.

He got up from the table and began walking towards her.

She scrambled from her chair, eyes wide and began scampering away from him. "Please, no, Max." She hoped her voice was trembling as if she was truly afraid. And in a way she was. If he figured out what she was doing, she had no doubt he would kill her, probably following... dessert. But this had to work. It simply had to.

She only just managed to prevent her relief from showing when he finally stopped. "I'm sorry. I just..." She pulled in a ragged breath.

"It's okay, Lois," he said softly, taking one final step towards her before stopping when she stumbled back again.

He stood there for a moment more and she could almost see his thought processes, as if he were suddenly realizing that his chances of getting lucky tonight were decreasing more with every second he continued to frighten her. A decision suddenly made, he turned away from her, walking back over to the table and...

She breathed a very heartfelt sigh of relief when he took the ring off and placed it on the table before returning to take her in his arms. She clung to him for a moment, as if accepting his comfort, relieved that he didn't know her as well as Clark did, didn't know that there was very little that could truly frighten Lois Lane — and fear over whether a rock could hurt her was simply not one of the things she would ever worry about.

She waited for her moment, waited until he pulled her closer, changing his hold from one of comfort to what was obviously a prelude to something else and then...

Max cried out in pain, stumbling backwards and collapsing onto the deck when she brought her knee up hard and fast and buried it in his groin.

Without taking time to enjoy her victory, she rushed to the table, grabbing the ring and throwing it as hard as she could, allowing herself a very small moment of satisfaction when the

ring disappeared over the side of the ship.

Taking one last glance at the man still wreathing on the deck, she tossed off her shoes and began running, grateful for all the time she'd spent barefoot on the island. As she disappeared around the corner, she heard Max begin yelling for help.

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Clark stepped back into the shadows when he heard the sound of running feet approaching. His powers had not yet returned, but there had been some signs in the last couple of hours that they were coming back. His hearing had improved, as had his vision. If only he'd been able to get some sun during the day. But he hadn't dared risk it.

Still, it wasn't his powers that informed him of the identity of the person now rounding the corner towards him.

Lois. He'd know her anywhere.

He stepped out, grabbing her around the waste in an effort to pull her back into the shadows. She instantly lashed back, striking at him even as she attempted to drop to the deck, out of the circle of his arms.

"Lois," he whispered.

And instantly the struggle stopped.

"Clark," she gasped, turning and throwing her arms around him instantly.

"What's going..."

He never got time to complete the question.

"We've got to go. They're after me," she gasped even as she squirmed out of his arms and continued running towards the boats secured to the deck.

Clark knew better than to question her. The time for questions would come later. Besides, if she was wanting to leave this yacht, he was all for it.

"Come on," he said, rushing over to help her as she struggled to get the tarp off the boat that had previously been his hiding place. "They're coming," he added when he heard the sounds of the others closing in on them.

They threw the tarp off the boat, before working quickly, and in near perfect silent unity, to get the ropes undone so that they could get the boat into the water, each having almost a sixth sense of what the other was doing and moving to help. His heart warmed. It almost felt like old times.

The sound of an automatic weapon spewing bullets all over the deck around them shattered the peace that had settled over Clark while working in harmony with Lois. These were not old times. And he did not have his powers.

"Look, out!" he yelled, grabbing Lois around the waist and yanking her back so that he could put his body between her and the gunfire. He heard a bullet wiz past his ear and felt the bite of another in his shoulder. However, with the adrenalin pumping through his system, he didn't feel the pain of his wound. Besides, there wasn't time.

The bullets continued for a moment, hitting the deck, the railing, the boat they were trying to free. The flying shrapnel that was spewed up by the bullets made the number of shots fired seem greater than they were. In the corner of his eye, he noticed a small fire start where one of the bullets hit a small puddle of gas, lighting the area up in an eerie glow.

"Stop shooting, you idiot! I want her alive!"

The instant the bullets stopped, both Lois and Clark frantically returned to their task of freeing the boat, ignoring the men converging on their position. Each knot that came undone was a small victory. Each rope that was unleashed was a step closer to freedom.

The men had stopped now, forming a semi circle around them. Clark glanced desperately at the ocean behind them, contemplating grabbing Lois and jumping overboard. But then what? The ocean was only a few degrees above freezing. And without a boat, and without his powers, they had no chance of

swimming back to the island. Even if he could survive, Lois would suffer from hypothermia long before they reached the shore.

It seemed Lois realized the problem at the same time because both came to an unexpected halt in activity. They turned towards the men encircling them even as the fire continued to race across the deck.

"Well, well, well," Deter said, stepping between his men. "I see you have a visitor, Lois. Mr. Kent, I didn't expect to be seeing you again. Now..." He glanced over at Erik. "...how exactly is it that you are not dead?"

"Look, Dr. Deter..." Erik began, only to be cut off by Deter.

"I'll deal with you later," Deter snapped.

"The fire..." one of the men on the outside of the group said.

"Quiet!" Deter snapped, stepping up closer to Lois. "You disappoint me, my dear. All the work we've done together. All I asked was that you honor it. And what do you do? Do you have any idea how much that ring cost me? But no matter. We'll put you on an intensive drug therapy program and you'll be better in no time. I had the foresight to bring the necessary drugs in case something like this occurred. But I have to say I am disappointed. And you..."

However, by this point, no one was listening to Deter wax eloquent. All eyes except Deter's were watching the fire, jump and rush its way across the deck and towards the large gas tanks secured to the deck.

"Get down!" Clark yelled, grabbing Lois and throwing the two of them behind the landing boat. Deter's men also scrambled for cover.

Only Deter seemed oblivious to the danger. The resulting explosion rocked the boat, sending fire howling up into the sky. Deter's screams as the fire consumed him seemed to echo eerily through the night sky.

"We've got to..." Lois began, trying to scramble out of Clark's arms.

For a moment, he helped her but then a secondary explosion, coming from the gas tank in the other boat made that impossible.

"It's too late, Lois," Clark said, pulling Lois back once again.

"But..." Lois' voice trailed off when she realized Clark was right. Deter was a ball of flame and nothing they could do would save him now.

Clark immediately turned his attention to the boat they were still crouched behind as the fire began racing towards it. If the fire reached its gas tank, a third explosion would follow — one that, given their position, would most certainly kill both him and Lois. Using every ounce of strength he possessed, Clark pushed the boat over the side of the yacht and into the water below.

Deter's men were moving now, more concerned with fighting the fire than with their prisoners. By the light from the fire, Clark grabbed Lois. Her eyes were still on Deter as Clark threw himself and Lois over the edge of the yacht and into the dark water below.

"They're escaping," he heard one of the men yell just before they hit the water.

"Forget about them!" Erik yelled. "Fight the fire. We have to save the yacht!"

"But Dr. Deter..."

"He's dead, you fool. The only thing you need to concern yourself with is saving this yacht."

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Lois was shivering badly by the time she pulled her body over the edge and into the relative safety of the landing boat. A moment later, Clark collapsed into the boat, next to her. She shivered again.

"Come here," Clark said, holding out his arms.

She quickly scooted into the protection of his arms, finding warmth there. She closed her eyes momentarily. That had been

close. She opened her eyes when another explosion came from the direction of the yacht. She wasn't entirely certain what had caused this explosion. Not that it particularly mattered.

Still, from the safety of Clark's arms, she could do nothing but watch as the men on the yacht continued to fight the fire. As the two boats continued to drift further apart, it was obvious that the men were finally getting the fire under control.

Finally, Clark released her. She looked at him in confusion until she realized what he was doing — trying to get the boat's engine started. It took a few tries, but it seemed the boat was made of stern stuff because the engine eventually purred into existence. Lois watched as Clark looked up at the sky for a moment before turning the boat around.

"What are you doing?" she asked quietly.

He pointed up at the sky. "The North Star," he said. "We were sailing due south all day so if we follow the North Star..."

"...it should take us right back to the island."

Clark nodded.

For a time the quiet purr of the motor was almost hypnotizing as the sounds from the yacht grew increasingly distant.

"I'm still not entirely sure why Deter would have been heading south," Clark finally said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I would have expected him to be taking you to France — west... northwest from here."

"France has an extradition treaty with the States," Lois responded, shivering again.

"So you think he was taking you somewhere without an extradition treaty."

"Makes sense," Lois answered. "Going to France might have been fine when I was going willingly. But after he locked me in the cabin earlier today, I realized he had to be having some doubts about my loyalty."

"He locked you in the cabin? How did he explain that?"

"That it was the only way he could be assured that none of the men might harass me. Door had a deadbolt so he couldn't lock them out without locking me in."

They fell silent again, both simply too exhausted to speak. For a time, Lois watched the approaching horizon, praying for any sign of the island. An unidentified noise from behind caused her to look over her shoulder just as Clark collapsed over the boat's steering wheel.

"Clark!" she yelled, scrambling back towards him.

Only then did she notice his blood soaked shoulder. "You were hit," she gasped.

"It's not bad, Lois. The bullet went straight through."

"Not bad, my eye!" She glanced desperately around, spotting the large wooden box secured to the floor of the boat. She scrambled over, her fingers fumbling as she struggled to get it open. She fished around in it for a moment before finding the first-aid kit. She grabbed the kit and a couple of blankets she located inside before shuffling back over to Clark. "We've got to stop the bleeding," she said as she shucked off Max's jacket before pulling her little black dress over her head.

"It's too cold. You'll freeze to death," Clark mumbled before breaking off with a fit of coughing.

"Great! I take off my dress and the only thing he can think about is the weather," Lois returned, trying to get both their minds off the seriousness of the situation. "I must be losing my touch."

"Lois, you know that's not what..."

"I know that, Clark," she interrupted, realizing that Clark was obviously not in the mood to joke back. But who could blame him? By the look of him, he'd lost a lot of blood.

The first aid kit contained a pair of scissors which she used to cut her dress into bandages. Once she'd wrapped Clark's shoulder as best she could, and got him settled comfortably in the bottom

of the boat, she wrapped in one of the blankets around him and pulled the second blanket around herself, ignoring the dinner jacket lying on the bottom of the boat. She wanted nothing more to do with anything connected with Max.

Clark was looking groggy, as if hardly able to keep his eyes open. "Lois, I've got to..."

"The only thing you've got to do is stay alive," Lois said, leaning over and gently touching her lips to his. "I'll take care of the rest, okay?"

He gave her a weak smile that faded almost at once as his eyes drifted closed.

'Stay with me, Clark,' she silently begged, even as she looked up into the night sky. The North Star, hey? Yes. There it was. She could do this. Taking over Clark's position at the controls, Lois turned the boat again towards the North Star and prayed for land.

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Lois was completely exhausted when she finally pulled the small boat up onto the shore. Barely able to keep her eyes open, she moved over to the side of the boat where Clark was lying.

"Clark?" she said softly, shaking his shoulder gently.

"Is eko andemer," Clark mumbled.

"Clark?" she asked again. When his next remark made as much sense as the first, she gave his shoulder another shake, noting as she did the cold sweat covering his face and arms. This time he did not respond at all.

Suddenly, the blood pumping through her veins had Lois wide awake. No. No, she was not doing this. She was not losing him now.

"Clark!" she said again, this time louder, more insistent. Still, other than an incomprehensible mumble, there was no response.

Reaching over, she touched his face. His skin was cold and clammy, the sweat beading on it. His respiration was fast and shallow. She touched his throat, looking for his pulse, only to discover that his heart was pounding like a jack hammer.

What was wrong with him?

Damn it. Why hadn't she paid more attention over the years when her father had rambled on about medicine?

He'd lost a lot of blood. So maybe... Was it possible he was still bleeding? She felt his back, but when she pulled her hand away, she didn't see any fresh blood. Okay, so what now?

She took a deep breath, trying to calm down enough to think. Before she did anything, could she get him up to the cabin? Or what remained of it? Maybe the couch or bed had survived.

No. There was no way she'd be able to carry him. Well then, she should make sure she had everything she might need before thinking about removing bandages and looking at his wounds.

Without thinking further, she took off at a run in the direction of the cabin. Her breath caught in her throat when she got her first sight of it. She hadn't seen it until now. The entire kitchen and living room area were no more. The bedroom and washroom were still standing, but the one side of the bedroom was blown mostly off. On the other hand, it appeared that the bed was still in tact and the roof still looked fairly solid above it. And that was where Clark had been when Max had blown up the cabin.

Without allowing herself to contemplate that further, she turned her mind to what she might need. Sheets. She dashed over to the bed, pushing rubble from the surface before tearing the sheets off. Water. She had to walk carefully to make it to the door of the bathroom. It took a moment to get the door open. When she finally got inside, she tried the taps.

Nothing. Damn it. In the back of her mind, she didn't find that surprising, given the damage to the cabin. Obviously, the electricity was no longer working. Okay, so where... The waterfall. Still, she checked the cabinets in the bathroom, locating a number of other items she might need. She tossed them on top of the bed and then turned her mind to the question of water. A bucket. What she needed was a bucket.

It took a moment before she located a bucket that had survived the explosion. The instant she did, she was running down the path to the waterfall.

Finally, having what she needed, she rushed back to where Clark was still lying in the boat, her arms burdened with her finds, relieved to discover that he was still breathing.

Okay, so where to start?

She climbed back into the boat, lifting the bucket of water in with her. She knew how parched she was. And with his loss of blood and fever, he must be practically dehydrated by now.

She slipped her arm beneath his back as she whispered his name.

His response was nonsense, but at least he was responding.

"I need you to drink," she said, as she levered him into a seated position. Then, reaching into the bucket, she removed the cup she'd tossed in and brought the water to Clark's lips. "Please, you have to drink," she said.

She was relieved when he took a sip. "Good. That's good." She took a quick sip herself before returning the cup to Clark's lips. "Can you take another sip?"

She took a deep breath when his hands actually came up to the cup as he took another drink.

It was then that she noticed his hands. They were wrapped in dirty rags of some sort, but it was the skin she could see around the rags that caused her heart to leap into her throat. His hands were dark red, swollen practically beyond recognition, with red streaks making their way up one of his arms.

Blood poisoning.

Okay, so what did she know about blood poisoning? Antibiotics or... her breath caught in her throat as another alternative for dealing with blood poisoning rushed to the forefront of her mind.

She pushed that thought away as she concentrated on helping Clark take another drink.

"Good?" she asked as she moved the cup away from his lips.

"Mego."

"Okay," she said, not even bothering to try to decipher his response as she helped him move back into a reclined position once again. When he was as comfortable as he could be in the bottom of the boat, she took a closer look at his bandaged shoulder, probing slightly beneath the edges of the torn dress she'd used to bind it, but it didn't look as if it was still bleeding. So...

She turned her attention back to his hands, gently taking them, one after the other, in her hands and working to get them unwrapped. She cringed when the blood caked rags coming free of his hands caused Clark to flinch and groan in obvious pain. Still, this had to be done.

She had no idea how he'd managed to get two almost identical cuts slicing into the palms of his hands. But she felt tears begin to cloud her vision when she got the first look at the angry wounds. Still, she refused to take time to focus on that, pushing the tears back where they belonged, and scrambled from the boat to grab the items she'd brought down from the cabin, sorting through it, looking for one item in particular. She felt herself begin to panic when she couldn't immediately locate it.

She breathed a sign of relief when it fell out onto the ground from where it was tangled between the sheets. Quickly grabbing the tube of antibiotic ointment, she directed her mind to reading the instructions. "Prevents infection to help speed healing." "Sort of like closing the barn door after the horses have already escaped," she mumbled to herself even as she continued to read. "Clean affected area thoroughly. Apply ointment two to five times daily. Leave uncovered or apply bandage or gauze if desired."

She climbed back into the boat, only noticing then that the tide must have gone out — fortunately. If it hadn't, she'd have to worry about pulling the boat up further onto the shore again. She

hoped that was a sign that luck was finally going her and Clark's way.

"Can you handle some more water?" she asked, laying down the ointment to slip her arm under his back.

Once he had taken in some more water, she turned her attention to tending to his hands.

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Lois breathed a sigh of relief when she finally got Clark tucked into the bed in the cabin. After she'd finished treating his hands and changing the bandage on his shoulder, he'd revived slightly. She wasn't certain if that meant the sun was helping him recover, or if it was the water, or if it was something else she'd done, but she'd been relieved.

Judging by the movement of the sun, it was almost noon. And although she knew the sun helped with his rejuvenating powers, she was concerned that without his powers, he'd get even more dehydrated if he remained outside. After all, she was already seriously sweating as a result of the sun's hot rays beating down on them.

So when he'd first whispered her name, indicating that he was at least cognizant of her presence, she'd managed to badger him enough that he was able help her move him into what remained of the cabin. She was relieved to realize that the movement hadn't made shoulder bleed again and his burn didn't look too bad, although she'd put some antibiotic ointment on it to ensure it didn't get an infection as well.

The main problem seemed to be his hands. They looked even more swollen and the red streaks were still prominent. If the infection continued to spread... No. She didn't even want to think about that. He was strong. He was Superman. He'd fight off this infection. And there would be no need to ever think about the alternative.

As she pulled the sheet up over Clark, she noticed the sweat on his face. Maybe she could do something to help with his fever.

Grabbing the bucket, she headed back to the waterfall for fresh water.

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Lois wasn't entirely certain when she'd fallen asleep. But she woke up, her head on Clark's good shoulder, the instant Clark began thrashing about. She scampered out of bed and fumbled around to find the lantern, for the first time glad that the lighting in the cabin was not based on electricity. When she located the lantern and the matches, she quickly lit it before bringing it over to sit on the night table beside the bed.

Clark was still thrashing and mumbling incoherently. She grabbed a washcloth from the bucket sitting nearby and began using the cool water to sooth his fever.

It was then that she caught sight of his right hand. Her breath caught in her throat. In the darkness of the cabin, it looked almost black.

Dropping the washcloth into the bucket, she picked up the hand as if it were made of spun china and carefully turned it over.

"Clark?" she asked softly, trying to get some sort of response. But, although his mumbling continued, it didn't seem to be directed towards her, as if he was completely oblivious as to her presence.

She looked back at his hand. She could see that the red streaks went further up his arm than they had earlier. She carefully placed the one hand down and looked at the other. If possible, it looked even worse than the first.

Tears came to her eyes as the idea that had come to her when she'd first examined his hands pushed its way to the forefront of her mind. No. She couldn't do it. She couldn't make this decision for him. She'd run out of antibiotic cream shortly before she'd fallen asleep. And she knew only one other way to prevent the infection from killing him. But how could she do that to him? How could she even think about cutting off his hands?

She didn't even know how to do it. Surely he would bleed to death. How did she prevent that? And when he did recover... would he ever be able to forgive her? He might be Superman, but even Superman was unlikely to grow back severed hands.

She pushed the tears from her eyes. This wasn't about her. This was about saving his life. And, even if it cost her his love, she would do whatever it took to ensure that he lived.

Refusing to think further about what she was doing, she directed her mind to the question of how. Picking up the lantern, she began making her way through the rubble of the cabin. Rifling through the kitchen, she located the drawer that had contained the kitchen utensils. As she sorted through it, trying to find what she was looking for, her mind flashed back to Clark's crazy memory exercises. Kitchen utensils.

A small sob rose in the back of her throat as she fervently wished she could travel back in time to those simple days of arguing with him that there was nothing wrong with her memory, only her knowledge about kitchen utensils.

She pushed the depression that threatened to the back of her mind. A knife. A butcher knife, if possible. Finally finding the biggest knife she could, she rose to her feet and made her way back to Clark's bedside.

No. No, this wouldn't work. She simply didn't have enough strength to cut through, not only flesh, but bone with this knife. No, what she needed was...

The cabin had had a fireplace. And a fireplace necessitated that there also be a woodpile. And a woodpile meant... an axe.

Refusing to allow the revulsion rising in her stomach to distract her, she headed out towards the storage shed, looking for where the woodpile might be located.

It took some time, but finally, she returned, carrying both a small axe and a large one. The smaller one was sharper, but the bigger one was... bigger. And since she wasn't certain which one would be better, she'd brought both. Now, how to sterilize them?

Alcohol. Maybe a bottle of... something could be found in the rubble of the cabin. Or maybe she'd find something in the storage shed.

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Her plans were complete — or at least as complete as she could make them considering she had no idea what she was doing. She'd built a fire and sterilized both the small axe and the knife, first in a fire she'd built and then by pouring some vodka she'd found in the storage shed over the instruments. She'd cut sheets and blankets into strips for use to bind his resulting wounds. She'd even managed to make him drink some of the alcohol, hoping that it would keep him from feeling the pain of what she was planning to do — and yet knowing that was impossible.

And then, all too soon, everything was ready. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, she picked up his right hand, turning it gently in her hands. His beautiful hands. Hands that had the strength to lift shuttles into space or caress her cheek with such exquisite tenderness.

And almost instantly, she was lost in memories of the ways these hands had touched her. The way his hand came out, resting lightly on the small of her back when they walked together. The way their hands hand lingered, sending heat through her body when they'd shaken hands in the elevator of the Planet while planning their first date. The way his hands often slipped beneath her hair to cup her cheeks when he kissed her. It had been the touch of his hand on her cheek that had told her that he was Superman. She raised his bruised hand to her lips, gently kissing it as tears fell unheeded from her eyes.

She couldn't do it. God help her... God help them both, but she couldn't do it. The tears fell faster now. It was the right thing to do. It could save his life, but... she couldn't do it. Not now. Not yet. Maybe later if he continued to get worse, but not now. Not

yet.

But she had to do something. She'd run out of antibiotic ointment earlier. So what... Taking the bottle of vodka, she poured some of it over his hands, desperately hoping it might have some medicinal value. When he flinched in response, she thought that just maybe it did.

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Even opening his eyes was painful. Clark blinked a couple of times, trying to figure out where he was. But between the darkness that surrounded him and the unfamiliarity of his environment, he had problems putting things together.

He remembered an explosion lighting up the night sky. Grabbing Lois and jumping overboard. He even remembered the soft purr of the engine as he'd directed their small boat towards the North Star.

But what had happened then? And where was he now?

The surface beneath him was soft and he could reach out and brush his hand over the hard surface of a wall next to him. But if he looked towards the foot of his bed, he was certain he could see trees. He could hear the soft patter of rain and yet he wasn't getting wet.

As he lay there, trying to put things together, he began to remember other things. Small flashes that seemed almost like dreams. His arm across Lois' shoulders as she assisted him over uneven ground. Her gentle pleas, telling him he was almost there. Stumbling slightly over rubble as he'd caught his first sight of their destination — the still standing bedroom of the cabin, its side completely blown off. The relief he'd felt as she lowered him gently onto the bed.

In another flash, he could see Lois sitting next to him, gently wiping the sweat from his face and chest. The feeling that every fiber of his being was on fire. The sound of her softly singing to him as she worked to sooth his raging fever. Her pleas with him to drink.

Her body next to him in bed, curled up against his good side. The sweet smell of her hair and the light touch of her hand on his chest.

But there was no Lois here now.

A muttered curse near the foot of the bed caused him to look in that direction in time to see Lois slip beneath the what remained of the roof of the cabin, carrying a lit lantern and a bucket. Her hair was damp and she was wearing an oversized pair of sweat pants and his old Smallville High t-shirt. And he didn't think he'd ever seen anything quite as beautiful.

"Lois." His voice croaked out the single word causing her head to snap up.

Her face broke into a smile. "Hey, look who's awake," she said softly, setting down the bucket and quickly approaching the bed. She set the lantern on the night stand and picked up a mug before taking a seat next to him. "Do you think you can handle some water?"

He nodded slightly and her arm slipped, with practiced ease, under his back to assist him as he moved carefully into a seated position, before passing him the mug.

"Thank you," he managed before, his trembling and bandaged hands steadied by her confident ones, raising the mug to his lips. He wasn't entirely sure he'd ever tasted anything quite as wonderful as the cool water slid down his parched throat.

"You gave me quite a scare," she said softly, taking the mug from him to return it to the night stand before turning on the bed so that she was facing him.

"What happened? How long have I been out of it?"

"Two days."

"What?" He began to rise, but her gentle hand on his chest stopped him and he allowed himself to relax back into the mattress. "Did they come after us?"

Lois shook her head, even as she picked up his hands and

seemed to study them for a moment, gently moving his fingers as if assuring herself of something, although he wasn't entirely sure what she was looking for. "They must have decided it made more sense to get the hell out of here," she said, sounding somewhat relieved, as if she was satisfied with whatever his hands had told her.

"So what happened?"

"Well, I nearly missed the island all together — but I guess Lane luck works both ways because I spotted it off to my left at the last minute. If the sun hadn't chosen that moment to pop up above the horizon, I would have missed it completely. You were pretty out of it when we came ashore, so I came up here to look for supplies.

"I managed to clean out your hands and treat your other injuries, but I think you'd already picked up an infection because you kept mumbling nonsense and you seemed to have a pretty high fever. And your hands... even after I cleaned them, they looked horrible, almost black, and there were these red streaks running up your arms..." Her voice broke slightly and it took her a moment to continue. "I eventually got you up here. Then I spent most of the past day or so working to get your temperature down and, during your more lucid periods, trying to get you to drink.

"It was so hard, watching you thrashing around in a cold sweat. Your fever finally seemed to break a few hours ago and you've been sleeping soundly ever since." She reached up to brush some slick strands of hair off his face before touching his face and forehead, he was certain, to check his temperature. "I thought you were going to die," she said softly. "I had no idea what to do. I had no antibiotics and no way to get you help and for a time I even thought that maybe I'd have to cut your hands off to keep the infection from spreading..."

When her voice broke again, he reached for her. She quickly scampered into his arms, burying her face in his throat as her breathing became ragged.

"It's okay, Lois. Everything will be okay," he said softly, rocking her gently.

As he held her trembling body against him, he found himself asking what would have happened to Lois if he had died. She'd have been stuck on this island, with no way off and no one knowing where she was other than a yacht full of brigands who she'd likely be hoping would never return. What would she have done when the food ran out? Would there be enough to sustain her on this island until she could be rescued? And how could he, who claimed to love her, have ever put her in such a precarious position?

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Lois woke up and stretched contentedly before realizing that Clark was not sleeping beside her in bed. Sitting up abruptly, she looked around. Everything was as it had been when she'd fallen asleep in his arms except no Clark. And... she noticed a moment later... no water bucket.

She sank back against the pillows, deducing that he'd gone to get water.

He was going to live.

She closed her eyes and soaked in that simple fact, allowing the terror of the past couple of days to bleed from her system. She hadn't lost him. And he hadn't lost his hands.

When a few minutes later, he still hadn't returned, she rose from the bed and collected a few things. Since Max's men had taken much of her stuff to the yacht, her only choice in clothing were things belonging to Clark that had survived the explosion.

In only a few moments, she was heading down the path to the waterfall. Clark must have decided to get cleaned up, and since the cabin's demise had left them with no electricity for running water, he'd probably, as she had the past few days, decided to clean up at the waterfall.

The thought that maybe she'd catch him bathing brought a

smile to her face and sent a delicious heat coiling through her belly.

It was amazing how much brighter and more colorful the world looked this morning compared to the previous morning. Whereas yesterday everything had appeared dull and dreary, this morning everything seemed alive with possibilities. Still, with every step she took, she felt worry creeping back in, blurring the corners of her vision. What if the reason he hadn't come back was that he'd gotten worse again? What if he needed her help and she wasn't there?

She stopped, breathing a deep sigh of relief, when she emerged from the path to see Clark, his back to her, pulling on his jeans. A fresh shirt was hanging over the limb of a nearby tree. Damn. A minute earlier and she'd have been looking at the full Monty, she was certain. She took a moment to admire his cloth-covered posterior before it disappeared beneath blue denim. Still, she stood there, enjoying the view of his bare back. It seemed he'd removed his bandages, and although the burn marks and the bullet wound on his arm and shoulder were still clearly visible, his rejuvenating powers must have returned because the injuries now looked well healed over. And his hands looked normal. She sighed in relief.

She watched as he picked up his shirt. She was about to go to him when he surprised her by suddenly sitting down on a rock, his shirt still in his hands, his posture changing. He looked for all the world like a man who had just lost his best friend.

Was he still in pain?

She immediately walked over to him, mussing his damp hair. He looked up at her, startled.

"Feeling okay?" she asked softly. "Your shoulder and hands look better."

"Uhh... yeah. Thanks," he responded, giving her a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

For a moment, she froze. Was there something about his physical condition he didn't want her to know? In order to collect her thoughts and determine how to probe the information she needed out of him, she continued walking past him, down to the water's edge. As she reached the shore, she heard Clark rise behind her.

"Do you want some privacy because I can always..."

"It's okay, Clark," she responded, glancing back at him. "I'd rather have you where I can see you." She gave him a self-effacing smile. "It's just... when I can't see you, I sort of worry."

"Oh. Of course," he said. "Then what if I just..." He sat down again on the shore, this time with his back to her.

"Thanks," she said, pulling off her shirt and sweats and tending to the task before her. Her eyes came back to Clark again and again as she washed her hair and brushed her teeth. Even when she was finally finished and slipping into some clean clothes, she could barely stand to take her eyes off him for more than seconds at a time.

Once she was ready, she forced her pounding heart into submission and, in an effort to keep her tone light, walked over to him. "So," she said, "you going to tell me what's bothering you or am I going to have to throw you into the pond to get you to talk?"

He gave her the semblance of a smile before reaching up and tugging gently at her hand. Following his unspoken request, she took a seat across from him, reaching out immediately to push a strand of unruly hair off his forehead. He ducked his head, as if uncomfortable with the intimate gesture. She quickly withdrew her hand, settling both of them in her lap as she waited for him to speak.

"I'm so sorry," he said in a rush. "I never should have brought you here. It was wrong of me and I promise that I'll take you home as soon as I can."

She opened her mouth to respond, but he rushed on.

"I haven't been completely honest with you and... well, I'd

take you home right now if I could but I can't because..." He took a deep breath. "...well, the truth is that I'm Superman. And I know you probably think I'm crazy because..." He gestured to his shoulder. "But I swear it's true. I don't know how long it will be before I get my powers back, but then I'll take you home and if you want to press kidnapping charges against me or tell the world that I'm Superman, I won't..."

"Clark!" she exclaimed holding up a hand and halting the flow of words. In the resulting silence, she could finally think. She focused on his first statement — she'd deal with the rest later. "What did you mean when you said you never should have brought me here?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

When she merely raised her eyebrows, he continued.

"If I'd died, you'd have been stuck on this island. No one would have known where you were. You'd have had no way to get back home. It was completely irresponsible of me..."

"Clark!" she said again. When he fell silent a second time, she continued. "Bringing me to this island was exactly the right thing to do."

"But..."

"No, but. Clark, if I'd stayed in Metropolis, I'd still be under Maxwell's influence. You knew that and that's why you brought me here."

"But if I'd died..."

"If you'd died, I'd have other things on my mind at the moment rather than worrying about getting off this island. Okay," she conceded when she could see that he was about to object, "eventually it would have been a problem. But someone has a cabin here... or did. So that means someone would have found me eventually. It was worth the risk. After all..." She reached out, taking his hands in hers, pausing long enough to run her thumbs over the now scabbed over cuts on his normal looking hands. Then, finally, she looked up into his eyes. "...taking a risk is what the two of us together is all about."

His eyes widened as he took in her words. "You remember," he whispered in part question and in part revelation. Suddenly, he seemed to have second thoughts. "Or... is this just another memory flash?"

"I remember," she said. "I remember it all. I remember my life before I met you, when being alone was what I thought I wanted. And I remember my life with you, when I realized that being with you is what I really want." She let out a breath, knowing he needed more than that. "It happened when I saw you react to the kryptonite. It was as if the floodgates opened and I remembered everything — from the moment I burst in on your interview with Perry, through our rolling around on what appeared to be the bed in my apartment in the virtual world, until the moment when you stood on the side of the road, watching me drive off with Lex. I'm so sorry I put you through all that."

"It's not your fault, Lois," he said, raising her hand so that he could kiss her palm, her eyes never leaving hers.

"I even remember what you said after 'I' asked 'you' to marry me. 'Who's asking? Lois or Ultra Woman?'"

He gave his first genuine smile. "Who's answering? Clark or Superman?" he responded.

Her smile matched his. "I love you, Clark. And even though I think I was already half in love with you, even without my memories, the last time I said it, this time I really mean it — from the bottom of my heart. I just wish... Well, Max threw my ring away and although I looked for it while you were recovering..."

Her voice trailed off when Clark reached into the pocket of his jeans and withdrew the most precious piece of jewelry Lois had ever owned.

"This ring?" he asked.

Her eyes lit up in a smile. "You really do carry it with you everywhere, don't you?" she said, provoking a bark of laughter

out of Clark before he reverently slipped it back on her finger. He raised her hand to his lips and, with a gesture so Clark-like it took her breath away, he kissed her finger just below the ring.

For a moment, both just sat there, staring into each other's eyes. Suddenly, another thought occurred to her — one that Clark needed to know as soon as possible.

"Oh, and, Clark, I never cheated on you."

"I already know that, Lois. But I take it you remember what happened after you said that line about your body belonging to... whomever, but your heart beating for only one man."

She nodded. "Gwendoline slept with Sean."

"Huh?"

"It was a story line on the Ivory Tower. Sean was blackmailing Gwendoline and..."

"The Ivory Tower? Your soap opera? You mistakenly thought the life experience of the heroine in your favorite soap opera was your experience?"

She shrugged sheepishly.

She wasn't entirely sure his resulting laughter was completely necessary. Oh, but it did her heart good to hear him laugh.

"So I guess there was no need to tell you that I'm Superman or that we're stranded here until my powers return."

"Nope. Still, I am wondering about one thing."

"What?"

"Well, the piece of kryptonite you were exposed to wasn't very large and you weren't exposed to it for very long, so why is it taking you so long to get your powers back?"

"I'm not sure. I was thinking about it this morning. When we were on the yacht, my powers were starting to return. But because I couldn't get any sun, it was taking a lot longer than normal. Then, after I was shot, they were gone again. I think when I'm injured after being exposed to kryptonite, it's as if my body has to fight to get back just to human normal before it can give me back my powers. So they disappeared again when I got shot and then, before I had a chance to recover from that and the resulting blood loss, I got the infection and had to fight it off first. I'm sure my regenerative powers helped with that, but it still takes time."

Lois nodded slowly. "I guess that makes sense. And without antibiotics, I think an ordinary man would have died from that infection. At least, it sure scared the hell out of me."

She leaned towards him, touching her lips to his in an effort to assure herself he was really alive.

Still the moment their lips met, the atmosphere changed. When she moved back in for a second kiss, Clark's arms pulled her closer. She opened her mouth slightly beneath his and he instantly deepened the kiss. Her hands ran through his thick, dark hair as his ran over her back. Before she knew it, she was lying beneath Clark on the ground as he planted kisses down the side of her neck.

Suddenly another thought occurred to her. Here they were on the hard ground, when back at what remained of the cabin was a big, comfortable bed — sitting empty. As soon as the thought entered her mind, she was pushing Clark off her and scampering to her feet.

"Lois?" Clark asked.

She didn't answer, but merely smiled and held out her hand to him.

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Clark wasn't entirely certain what was going on inside Lois' head as she practically dragged him back to the cabin. On the other hand, he often didn't know what was going on in Lois' head.

So when they arrived at the side of the bed and she turned towards him, running her hands seductively down his chest until she was playing with the button on his jeans, he was caught off guard.

"Lois?" he asked as her fingers slipped under the waistband

of his jeans to tug him closer.

"Yes?" she asked in return.

He swallowed hard at her sultry tone of voice. Standing up on her tiptoes, she leaned forward and softly kissed him.

"Uhh..." he said, trying to keep his mind from skittering over to the bed they were standing beside. Half dressed, the smell of Lois' shampoo wafting around him, Lois' hands... No. He was probably misinterpreting the situation.

"Yes?" she asked again as her lips left his to begin nibbling at his neck.

"Uhh... what exactly are we..." His voice trailed off as her tongue circled around his Adam's apple. "...doing here?" he finished when he could think again, even as his arms, of their own volition, enfolded her, drawing her closer.

She leaned back in his arms then, her face splitting into a smile. "Come on, Clark. I know you know how this works," she practically giggled. "I mean, maybe before... when you could claim to be a virgin..."

He couldn't help the growl that rose in his throat as he moved in, seizing her lips with his. When she teased him like that... He couldn't be held responsible for his actions.

Her hands slid up his body to circle his neck as she met his hungry kiss with her own. And for long minutes there was no sound except those associated with two tongues dueling, soft moans and groans, lips touching and moving over each other, of bodies pressed tightly together and hands roaming wildly.

When the kiss finally broke, both were breathing heavily. He leaned forward, touching his forehead to Lois', needing that contact to regain his equilibrium. He just about felt in control again when Lois suddenly pulled away, taking hold of his hands as she slowly backed towards the bed.

"Uhh... Lois..." he began, following her lead. "Are you sure you want to... I mean, we were waiting for marriage and I know we jumped the gun a bit, but we can still..."

Her light kiss on his lips cut him off.

"I don't want to wait. For some reason, I'm not feeling skittish about making love to you anymore," she said, giving him a wink. "How about you? Maybe you want to wait." Her gaze slid down his body. "Or not," she completed with a knowing grin.

He growled, sweeping her up in his arms in answer. Her giggle died when his lips again settled on hers as he gently lowered her to the bed. And, just like the first time, the entire world suddenly shrunk so that soon it consisted of only two people, trapped on a tropical island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, once again discovering the secrets known only to young lovers.

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#### Epilogue

Lois snuggled lazily in Clark's arms. For some reason, he'd decided to take the long way back from the island, concluding that a trip over the Eiffel Tower, the Pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China was what was called for in this situation. Lois didn't mind. She was enjoying being in his arm, after all. On the other hand, she was so completely satiated after two days of lovemaking that she couldn't think about much other than the way Clark smelled and tasted and she found herself unable to keep from taking distracted little nips at his neck, which certainly seemed to have an interesting effect on his tour-guide routine.

She had to say that she still didn't completely understand why Max had done what he'd done. She and Clark had talked about it several times over the past few days. Clark didn't seem nearly as baffled. But then, he was biased. He seemed to believe that no man in his right... or wrong mind could resist her. She wasn't nearly as convinced that it was that simple. She supposed if Max had been skimming money from the clinic, a clinic which was now failing financially as a result, he might have been planning to leave the States long before she ever came along. And then,

maybe the challenge of convincing a strong woman, a self-proclaimed feminist with a reputation for bringing about the fall of powerful men, one who had even, in the past, been linked romantically to Superman, might have been too much of temptation to resist — some sort of private proof that he really was the foremost expert on controlling the human mind.

She supposed, however, that his motivation wasn't important, anymore. He was dead. And she was right where she was supposed to be — in Clark Kent's arms. She snuggled closer, allowing her mind to drift to more pleasant thoughts.

She was fairly certain she now understood the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam's line: 'A loaf of bread, a jug of wine and thou.' Or at least she thought it went something like that. Still, although they had managed to scrounge some food from the storage shed that had been undamaged by the explosion, she had to admit that they'd subsisted the past couple days on mostly the 'thou' part of that equation — and not from a lack of available food.

She no longer had any guilt about her and Clark's first time together, either — not since she'd realized something that she found very cool. Just like it had been Clark's first time, it had felt like her first time, too. Since she hadn't had her memories, she'd just been free to be herself. And as herself, with no horrible memories to haunt her, she had discovered something she'd never known. She could actually enjoy intimacy, crave it even — as she'd proven to herself more than once over the preceding couple of days.

Her face creased into a smile as her mind drifted back to this morning when Clark had announced the return of his superpowers.

"Do we have to go back?" she'd asked, reaching out as he stood next to the bed to run her bare foot down his denim covered leg.

He'd smiled a smile that told her he was following her train of thought. "What happened to my workaholic fiancée?" he'd asked, placing his knee on the bed so that he could lean down to give her a kiss. "Aren't you champing at the bit to get back to the Planet so you can snag the next big scoop or something?"

"Oh, don't worry. I plan on snagging something this morning," she said saucily, reaching up and toppling him so that he landed next to her.

She smiled as she thought about what had happened after that. She wasn't entirely sure how it had come about, but at some point, she'd been lying on the bed, playing with his feet.

"God, I love your feet," she said, coloring slightly when she realized she'd voiced that thought aloud.

"Is this some kind of fetish I should know about?" Clark asked with a grin, propping his head up on his hand so that he could look at her.

She pushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "No. It's just... well, since we've been here... I don't know what it was, but every time I'd see your bare feet... It had a tendency to get me all hot and bothered, I guess. Stupid, isn't it?"

"It wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that I wear size eleven shoes would it?"

Air going down Lois' throat hit the laughter coming up and it took her a moment to stop the resulting coughing fit. She gave his feet a swat as punishment for that remark.

"So let's see if I've got this straight," Clark continued, obviously fascinated by this topic. "Even before you had your memories back, my feet got you all hot and bothered?"

She shrugged sheepishly.

"Huh," he said. "So what does this do to you?" he asked, wiggling his toes.

She rolled her eyes at his silliness. "Oh, baby, baby," she finally said in a monotone voice when he continued to wiggle his toes. "Take me now."

He laughed that full belly laugh that she loved so much

before removing his feet from her grip so that he could change positions. "Your wish... is my command." And with that, he kissed her. It was a long time before she thought again about feet.

Still, the time had soon come for them to leave the island. He'd flown back to Metropolis to get a fresh Superman suit for himself and some suitable clothing for her as well as some other things, including their identification, while she'd gathered together their surviving possessions, relieved when she found her diaries still safely tucked between the mattress and the box spring of the bed. One final trip to take back their things and he'd returned for her.

She looked out over the ocean, seeing the fast approach of the west coast of the United States. When they reached it, Clark slowed down, once again beginning his tour-guide routine by telling her all about the Golden Gate Bridge. And then they were off again.

But it was when they were flying over Las Vegas that Lois suddenly had an idea. When she mentioned it to Clark, his eyebrows went up and he asked if she was sure.

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life," she said, giving him a lingering kiss.

"Okay," he responded with a grin before dropping them down into a secluded area behind The Marriott Hotel. "Why don't you get us checked in? I'll take a quick trip back to Metropolis for a laptop and you can start writing up the story of our latest adventure for Perry. I'll join you as soon as I can. But there are a couple things I need to do first."

Her eyebrows rose in question.

"Trust me, Lois. I've got an idea. I'm going to stop by J.C. Wooloughan. It is an authentic Irish pub right here at The Marriott. I was in a position once, when I was touring the world, to do a favor for the man who runs it and he said that if there was anything he could ever do in return, just to let him know. I think he might be able to help us out. And I'd like to do a quick patrol of Metropolis since it has been a few days since Superman made an appearance there," he said, leaning forward to give her a kiss on the tip of her nose. He was just about to take off when suddenly he stopped. "Oh, but before I go. There's one thing you should probably know. When I went back to Metropolis to get us some clothes, I looked up something on my laptop."

"What?"

"Well, I figured we needed to find out whose cabin we were staying at. I thought maybe if Superman offered to rebuild it for them..." He shrugged.

"So who owns... owned it?" Lois asked.

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Egan Fitzgerald, who liked to be called Mac, was a big barrel of a man in his late fifties with a touch of grey in his fiery red beard. Clark couldn't quite remember why he went by the name Mac. Had something to do with the Gaelic origin of his name, if Clark recalled correctly. Still, Mac was the type of man who would be terrifying to meet in a dark alley, late at night.

But Mac was the picture one might find in the dictionary beside the phrase, 'don't judge a book by its cover.' He had none of the temper normally associated with the red beard. In fact, upon getting to know him, one was left with an impression of a large, cuddly teddy bear.

"Why, bless my heart, if it isn't Clark Kent!" the man roared upon seeing Clark walk into the J.C. Wooloughan. A moment later, Clark found himself lost in a bear-hug that would have threatened to crack the ribs of an ordinary man. "So what brings you to this neck of the woods?" Mac asked after the necessary formalities had been completed and Mac and Clark were settled at an empty table.

As Clark spoke, explaining the situation, Mac's smile continued to grow.

"Well, now, lad. I think I just may be able to help you with

that. Leave everything to me."

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A knock on the hotel room door surprised Lois. She hadn't expected Clark to return this early. After all, she'd barely started work on their story.

She was even more surprised when she opened the door to find a chubby woman in her mid-fifties standing outside. The lines on the woman's face spoke of much laughter over the course of a very full life.

"Can I help you?" Lois asked.

"My name's Breena Fitzgerald," the woman said. "I'm Mac's wife."

When Lois just continued to stare at her blankly, she continued.

"Clark Kent's friend."

"Right. Sorry. What can I do for you?"

"Well, when Mac told me what was going on, I thought I'd offer you my services. I suspect you're already aware of the beauty parlor downstairs, but I thought you might need some help in case you were interested in doing a spot of shopping."

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Five hours later, Bill Henderson stepped through the door of the darkened bar, stopping momentarily when he heard the sonic boom that announced Superman's departure. When Superman had arrived at the precinct and announced that Lois Lane would like to meet with him, he hadn't expected to be flown to the other side of the country. He had also sort of expected the hero to wait for him.

Maybe the superhero had heard a call for help. Hopefully he'd return later. Whatever. Since Henderson was here now, he might as well follow up on this apparent lead.

A large, slightly intimidating man approached him almost immediately. "Are you here for the Lane/Kent wedding?" the man asked.

"Uhh..." Wedding? Yet the names were right. "I guess so."

"Right this way," the man said, standing up straighter as he led him to a private alcove.

Henderson's eyebrows rose when he spotted Lois, sitting alone, nursing a glass of wine. What she was wearing didn't appear to be a wedding dress. It was much too casual for that. Still, it was white. And although not exactly an expert on fashion, he could appreciate that she looked beautiful. Her hair was swept up and she was practically glowing.

"Thanks for coming, Bill," Lois said, her eyes sparkling as she gestured him to a seat. "I asked Superman to bring you first since I suspected you'd want to talk to me alone before everyone else arrived."

"So, Lane, what is this?"

"I'm getting married this evening and... well, I guess you could consider this your invitation to the wedding."

Henderson's eyebrows rose. "And do you want to talk to me about the kidnapping?"

"Kidnapping?" she asked innocently.

"Why do I get the feeling that if I try to press kidnapping charges against Kent, you're not going to be exactly cooperative?"

"You want to press kidnapping charges against my future husband?" Lois asked. "Who is he supposed to have kidnapped? Do you mean me? You thought I was kidnapped?" She attempted to inject some disbelief into her voice.

"Very smart, Lane. So far you haven't committed the offence of lying to the police by saying you weren't kidnapped. Instead, you've answered every question with a question of your own. Kind of reminds me of a recent talk I had with Superman."

"Are you saying I'm like Superman?"

Henderson broke out laughing, surprising Lois. She wasn't entirely certain she'd ever heard the Inspector laugh before.

"Okay, message received," he said. "It appears you're free..." He glanced around, looking for Kent. "You are free, aren't you? I mean, he isn't around here somewhere forcing you to say these things to me. Say the word and I can get the Vegas Police here before he can stop me. We can get you somewhere safe."

Lois rolled her eyes. "Bill, do you really think Clark is a threat to me? That he would force me to marry him against my will? Or that I would do it? Or that we would invite you here to watch if that was what he was planning?"

"No, I guess not. So do I take this wedding to mean that you've got your memory back?"

"A hundred percent. I even remember how grumpy you used to be when we first met."

"Used to be? Maybe I'm losing my touch." Henderson looked at her thoughtfully for a long moment. Finally, he spoke. "Okay, so then what do we do about all of this?"

"Clark did nothing wrong, Bill. Maxwell Deter was the one who was a danger to me, not Clark."

"So if I were to conclude that this was all a big misunderstanding and no kidnapping took place, that the mess left in your room at the clinic was all your doing, nothing to do with a struggle between you and Kent, and that you left Metropolis of your own free will... I take it you would find that acceptable."

"Absolutely."

"And if I were to further conclude that if you were subpoenaed to give evidence in this case you would say be pretty much what I outlined above, would that also be correct?"

"Yes."

Henderson clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, deep in thought. Finally, he let out a breath. "Okay. I'll see what I can do to close the investigation."

"Why?"

He chuckled. "You trying to talk me out of this?"

"Absolutely not! I'm just curious."

"Because you didn't lie to me. Besides, I think that, in this case, justice would not be served by pursuing this."

"Thanks, Bill," Lois responded with a smile. "I'd hate to spend my honeymoon posting bail for my husband. I'm just sorry we wasted the city's resources by having you investigate this."

The corner of Henderson's lips quirked slightly. "Well, don't tell anyone, but I've been really busy the past couple of weeks and... well, I'm afraid I didn't put as much time into this investigation as I probably should have."

Lois' eyebrows rose and then a smile spread across her face. "My lips are sealed. By the way, I think the story that's going to appear in the Daily Planet tomorrow morning that might help with that whole 'closing the investigation' thing."

"Thanks for the tip. I take it there's nothing in there that will contradict anything you've told me today?"

"Nothing at all." She smiled as she thought about how carefully they'd worded that part of the story — even going so far as to ask Perry to run it past the lawyers before sending it to printing. Besides, she hadn't exactly told him anything — as he was well aware.

"Then I guess I'll have to buy a copy. Usually, I read the Metropolis Star."

"You don't!" Lois exclaimed, horrified, causing Henderson to laugh again.

"You're too easy, Lane," he said, looking up as an older woman approached and asked if he'd like a drink. "Well, since my ride to Metropolis has vanished and I have no official jurisdiction in Nevada, I guess that means I'm off duty. Besides, it seems I've just closed a major investigation and now I've got a wedding to attend. So..." He thought for a moment before ordering.

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As usual, the newsroom fell silent when Superman made an appearance, but today Clark hardly noticed. His sole focus was on keeping the sloppy grin off his face. After all, why would Superman have a sloppy grin on his face?

He walked over to Jimmy's desk, touching the young man on the arm.

"I'm busy," Jimmy muttered, not looking up from his task as he stared intently at the monitor in front of him.

"Jimmy," Clark said using his best superhero voice.

Jimmy glanced up, annoyed — until he saw who was addressing him. He jolted up out of his chair. "Sorry, Superman, I was just..." He gestured helplessly at his monitor.

"No need to apologize, Jimmy. If you're busy..."

"No, Superman. It's no problem. I was just sort of..." His voice trailed off helplessly, as he glanced again at his screen.

Taking pity on the young man, Superman clasped him on the shoulder. "Why don't you finish up what you're working on and I'll come back for you in a little bit. I need to talk to Perry, anyway."

"Uhh..." Jimmy glanced at his monitor, obviously conflicted. "Good. Good. That would be good."

Superman gave what he hoped was a brisk nod before striding towards Perry's office.

"Superman, what can I do for you?" Perry asked when Clark entered his office.

"Have you received Lois and Clark's story yet?" Clark asked, knowing full well that he himself had sent it to Perry about an hour earlier.

"Just got it back from legal. I sent it to printing just before you walked in here. Quite a story. Is that why you're here?"

Superman shook his head. "Not exactly. But... Well, I'm hoping your offer to do whatever you could to help Lois and Clark still stands."

"Of course it does," Perry responded. "What can I do to help?"

Superman smiled. "I need you and Jimmy to come with me. Can you find someone else to put the paper to bed for you?"

"Can you give us about half an hour? Jimmy and I are just finishing up a sidebar to Lois and Clark's story."

Superman smiled. "No problem. I have a few more people to visit. And I suspect they'll want some time, too."

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"What the Sam Hill is going on here?" Perry demanded when Superman dropped them off at the front doors of a bar in Las Vegas and then disappeared in a rush of wind.

"Who cares?" Jimmy responded, opening the bar door and ushering his boss inside. "This beats work any day."

"Hmph." Perry looked around the Irish styled pub, spotting the giant of a man approaching almost immediately. "Well, whatever is going on here, I think we're about to find out."

"Two for the Lane/Kent wedding?" the man asked.

Jimmy and Perry shared a look of incredulity before nodding. The man smiled. "This way, please."

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Lois looked up in relief when she saw Martha and Jonathan entering the small alcove where everyone was gathering. Perry and Jimmy had joined her and Henderson, soon to be followed by Lois' folks and sister.

When Perry and Jimmy had arrived, they had informed her that her suspicions about the origin of Deter's fortunes were well founded. Apparently, the two of them had put together a story to that effect that would make a great side-bar for her and Clark's story.

On the other hand, her mother was currently driving her nuts.

"What were you thinking? You can't arrange a wedding in an afternoon." I didn't even have anything appropriate to wear and only half an hour to get ready — I look like someone's poor aunt

from... oh, one of those pitiful third world countries.' 'Where is Clark, anyway? Least he could do is be here to help you greet your guests.' 'How can Clark expect you to get married without a proper wedding dress? Well, at least let me do something to fix your hair.'

She was starting to think that instead of her spending her honeymoon trying to bail Clark out on kidnapping charges, he was going to spend their honeymoon bailing her out on murder charges.

"Are you a sight for sore eyes," Lois said, coming over to greet her future in-laws.

"Oh, honey, when Cl... Superman told us what was going on, I can't tell you how thrilled we were," Martha said, giving Lois a hug.

When released, Lois smiled, but it was a somewhat strained affair.

"What's wrong, honey?" Martha asked in response.

"Nothing. Just... well, Mother is sort of driving me nuts," Lois whispered.

Martha laughed. "That's the fun of weddings. Years from now you'll look back on it and laugh."

"Only if I avoid those murder charges," Lois responded.

Martha patted Lois' arm. "How about I see what I can do?" she whispered to the younger woman.

"Please," Lois begged, knowing that she would live in a state of perpetual gratitude to this woman.

As Martha moved passed Lois, Lois could hear her words. "Ellen, what a lovely dress. Makes me feel like a farmer's wife."

Lois couldn't help but smile. When she turned back around, she was sort of surprised to realize that Jonathan hadn't followed his wife.

"I just wanted to thank you, Lois," he said softly. "You've made my boy so happy."

Tears sprang to Lois' eyes. "He's the one who makes me happy, Jonathan."

"Make sure he keeps doing so," Jonathan responded.

"Anyway, welcome to the family." With that he gave Lois a bear-hug which spoke volumes to the sincerity of his words.

\*\*\*

Star threw open the window the instant Superman arrived at her apartment.

"You're late," Star said as Superman touched down inside.

"Uhh..."

"I've been ready for the past half hour," Star continued.

Superman's eyebrows rose as he noticed that Star did seem to be dressed for a formal affair.

"Well... are we going?"

"Where?" Superman asked.

"Lois and Clark's wedding, of course," Star responded as if shocked that Superman didn't know where they were going.

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Lois' eyes lit up and all the chatter around her faded into the background when she saw Clark enter the alcove. He looked gorgeous in his sharp, black suit. Even his tie was subdued — for him, anyway. Mostly black, there was a trace of red running through it, as if begging to be let out to be bright and bold, but being held back to make its wearer look dignified.

She was on her feet and walking in his direction before anyone else had even noticed his arrival. Not bothering to stop at a respectable distance, she walked up to him, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him down for the long, slow kiss she so desperately needed.

The laughter of the crowd and cat calls from Jimmy, Star and her sister notified her that Clark's arrival had finally been noticed. Reluctantly, she pulled back.

"Did he come?" she asked softly, certain to keep her voice low enough that the crowd behind her wouldn't be able to

overhear.

"Both he and his wife. They seemed thrilled when Superman said we'd like them here."

"His wife, too?"

Clark nodded. "I figured he wouldn't be able to fire us on our wedding day if his wife was standing next to him."

Lois smiled. "You are a crafty one, Clark Kent."

"And here they come now," Clark said, pulling back from Lois as Franklin and Beth Stern stepped up next to them. "We're so glad you could make it," Clark said, offering Franklin his hand.

"We wouldn't miss it," Franklin responded. "Glad to see things are finally back to normal for you two."

"And it's not every woman who can say she had her guests flown to her wedding by Superman Express," Beth added. "That was quite a thrill."

Lois slipped her arm around Clark's waist. "Well, I guess he figured we'd been through enough and he knew how important this was to us."

"Yes, I heard about your story," Franklin said. "Haven't had a chance to read it yet. But Perry called me when it came in, let me know the gist of it. I've already put the boys on notice that a second print run might be necessary. Good work, you two."

"Well..." Clark said. "...glad you appreciate it. Because..." He glanced helplessly at Lois.

"I'm not sure if Perry mentioned this part, but... the cabin we were at... Well, Maxwell Deter sort of blew up the cabin in an effort to kill Clark..." Lois said, taking over for an obviously tongue-tied Clark.

"He said something about that. Why?"

"Well," Clark said, taking over the story once again, "turns out it was your cabin."

When Franklin and Beth stared at him in shock, Lois rushed to continue.

"Second print run. Great story. You've going to make oodles of money."

"And Superman, when he realized what had happened, offered to rebuild it for you."

"And it would be very bad form to fire two people on their wedding day," Lois completed.

"This is the cabin on a small island in the Atlantic," Franklin asked for clarification. "My cabin. You got my cabin blown up."

Lois and Clark nodded guiltily as Franklin continued to stare at them, a frown creasing his forehead. Lois swallowed hard.

"The cabin where Beth and I spent our honeymoon," Franklin continued. "That's the cabin you destroyed?"

Lois and Clark shared a helpless look. This was not going well at all.

Beth suddenly laughed, causing Lois and Clark to practically jump at the unexpected sound. "Oh, Franklin, don't torture them so. Lois, Clark, we haven't used that cabin in years. Franklin never seems to have time to go there anymore. And the kids have never been particularly interested in it — I suppose because it's so small. We were thinking of selling it, actually. And I'm sure the insurance will cover any damage."

Now it was Lois and Clark's turn to stare in shock, their gaze darting between the two people standing in front of them as Franklin's features transformed into a smile.

"Who knew you had a sense of humor?" Lois asked in wonder provoking a laugh from the owner of the Daily Planet.

"So are we ready to get this show on the road?" Mac asked, joining them in the small alcove.

"Only if you and your wife will join us," Lois said to which the older man smiled.

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The wedding was a small, dignified affair in a garden gazebo on the grounds of The Marriott. Lois and Clark shared their own,

heart felt vows. The minister's address was short and sweet. The only thing that the guests found a little unusual was that when Clark had come out to take his place on the gazebo, he had been shoeless. And then, when Lois had noticed, during her walk towards him, she'd instantly stopped and, with a cheeky grin at her soon-to-be husband, removed her shoes, as well. Still, since neither had been willing to talk about it afterwards, the guests were left slightly baffled.

In spite of that small mystery, Lois and Clark were soon being introduced to the small crowd of friends and family as husband and wife while Ellen and Martha dabbed happily at their eyes to keep their make-up from running.

Then everyone retired back to the bar where Mac and his wife ensured that there was plenty of good food and spirits. The small group danced to the music of a live band and laughed and ate wedding cake, which had miraculously appeared, complements of The Marriott, much to the surprise of both Lois and Clark.

Jimmy, to his own embarrassment, caught the wedding bouquet which he quickly passed over to Lucy. And Ellen Lane gushed on to anyone who would listen about what a wonderful wedding it had been.

All too soon the night began to wind down. The looks and touches by Lois and Clark grew longer and more heated.

"Well," Martha finally said, "I think it's time for Jonathan and I to say goodnight. Morning comes early on a farm."

"That's great," Franklin said, "but how are we supposed to get back? Our ride seems to have vanished."

"While you all figure that out," Lois said, rising quickly. "If you don't mind, we have a suite here at The Marriott for the night. And given how much it cost, I have no intention of letting it go to waste."

The crowd of revelers laughed as Lois took Clark's hand, escorting him out of there as if in a rush to get him alone so that she could finally ravish him.

"So what do we do now?" Sam Lane asked when Lois and Clark disappeared around the corner, oblivious to the fact that his daughter was currently kissing her new husband goodbye, with a promise that she'd be waiting for him when he returned.

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Lois had just finished getting ready when she heard a knock at the door to the suite. Clark must have forgotten his key. For a moment, she was tempted to answer the door wearing only the small, black teddy she'd bought that afternoon, at the same time as she'd bought the white dress she'd worn to her wedding. However, at the last moment, her nerves got the best of her.

Although the past few days had made the words 'clothing optional' more than just a phrase to Lois, there was something about knowing that this was their wedding night, and that they were about to engage in the age-old, time-honored tradition of consummating their marriage, that made Lois shy all over again.

Grabbing one of the fluffy, terry-cloth robes provided by the hotel, she wrapped it around herself before opening the door...

...and stared in shock at the short, dark haired man wearing an old-fashioned suit and bowler hat standing on the other side.

"Oh, good. I see I'm not too late," H.G. Wells said, looking around the room as he stepped into the room past a very stunned young woman. "I take it Clark has not returned yet from flying your guests home."

"Uhh..."

"I'm right here," Clark said, stepping into the room and closing the door behind him. "And you are?"

"I'm..."

"H.G. Wells," Lois said before briefly explaining to Clark who the man was, given that Clark had not accompanied her a couple of months ago to the alternate universe. "So what brings you here?" she finally asked.

"Well, it seems we have a bit of a problem." He handed them a copy of the next day's afternoon edition of the Daily Planet.

Over a picture of Lois, the headline blazed out at them:  
MYSTERY ILLNESS CLAIMS LOIS LANE  
CLARK KENT MOURNS HIS BRIDE

"What?"

"How?"

"It seems a curse was cast by an evil villain in the middle ages that would cause Lois to die in every subsequent lifetime every time you two..." He stumbled for a moment over the word. "...consummate your marriage. I'm here to help you reverse it."

"But..." Lois glanced over at Clark in confusion. "...there must be some mistake. I mean, we've... That is to say we're not..."

"I think what Lois is trying to say is we didn't exactly wait for..."

"Oh! Oh!" Wells said embarrassedly as he finally seemed to clue into what he was being told. "Well, that... I mean..." He seemed at a loss for words at the moment. "Well, I guess all I really can say is that it must be that since you weren't... when you were previously... I mean, of course, that since you weren't actually consummating your marriage, the curse didn't come into effect."

"So how do you know that it will come into effect now?"

He pointed at the headline again. "So you must come with me. We must set this matter to rights before you can... consummate your marriage."

Lois looked over at the handsome man she'd been about to seduce and did what any self-respecting woman would do in that situation.

"Aaaaaaaa!" she screamed in frustration.

THE END

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

While watching the episode Oedipus Wrecks, I found myself wondering what exactly Clark meant when he said: "I'm not going to let you go. Not this time." Was he having a flashback to when he'd let Lois go off with Luthor? And what would have happened next if Herkimer Johnson had never been born and the Vibro Whammy had never been invented? Hence, this story was born.

I relied heavily on a number of website, sometimes even using the actual words used in these websites, to help me with natural and home remedies and crystals for treating amnesia because half the time I really didn't have a clue what they were talking about. I don't, however, know if any of these remedies actually work. The following websites were particularly helpful:

<http://www.medindia.net/AlternativeMedicine/Amnesia.asp>

<http://health.howstuffworks.com/ginkgo-herbal-remedies.htm>

<http://www.learningmeditation.com>

<http://www.health.howstuffworks.com/home-remedies-for-memory-problems1.htm>

<http://www.charmsoflight.com/diamond-healing-properties.html>

The directions for the antibiotic ointment were quoted directly from a tube of Polysporin I had in my medicine cabinet.