

Wine and Circumstance

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Rated PG

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Summary: Superman runs afoul of red Kryptonite and somehow ends up marrying Lois in Vegas! Lois doesn't know his identity, though Superman had used Clark Kent's name in the wedding. Will Lois learn the truth? And can their relationship be salvaged in the aftermath?

Some dialogue taken from *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, Season 2, episode 22, "And the Answer is..." written by Tony Blake & Paul Jackson.

Thanks to Deja Vu for being my GE on this story and putting in so much time and effort to make it a smoother read. I appreciate it very much!

"Unbelievable!" Lois cried angrily. Again! It happened again! Just when she was starting to open up to Clark, he got all freaked out and dashed off with another lame excuse.

They were on an actual date, for a change. On a proper Friday night, the official date night, no less. The evening had been lovely. They'd had a beautiful meal at a tiny French bistro tucked into an out-of-the-way neighborhood. Lois had no idea how Clark had found it, but she had relished every moment. The restaurant was intimate, with small round tables all lit by candlelight, and the menu was written in French. Clark had impressed her with his easy fluency with the language. The waiters all spoke English, of course, but she loved hearing Clark's French as he ordered her the duck.

They had talked for almost two hours, eating a perfect three-course meal with a French vintage red wine. And just when Lois was going to tell him those three scary words, "I love you," he left like his seat was on fire.

"I'm sick of it! Why do I let him do this to me?" She felt tears well up in her eyes. She knew why, and she felt pathetic about it. She loved him. It was that simple. Lois loved Clark.

She dried her eyes. Would he even be back to cover the bill? Lois looked around, red faced. How humiliating was it to be left by her date at a gorgeous restaurant and have to face the exorbitant bill alone?

She waved the waiter over, totally embarrassed.

"Oui, mademoiselle?" he asked politely.

"Yeah, oui... um, my date had to... leave. May I have the bill, please?"

"But of course. Un moment, s'il vous plaît."

She didn't even look at the amount. She just handed her emergency credit card over. She wanted to get out of there — to go home and forget this almost-perfect night had ever happened.

Clark couldn't believe he had left Lois in the lurch like that. She would never forgive him. But a train was derailed due to some ice on the tracks. Hundreds of people were on board. He couldn't just let them all die. Superman was absolutely needed.

He managed to save the train from toppling over, though there were bound to be some injured people on board. Clark scanned the cars, looking for any serious injuries. There were

dozens of people hurt. He began the task of helping them out of the cars and flying them to the nearest hospital. Upon his first arrival, the medics called several ambulances to the scene.

It took quite a while to rescue all the injured. The last rescue was an elderly lady with a broken hip. The medics couldn't get to her, but Clark could. He offered to fly her personally to the hospital.

As soon as they were airborne, Clark felt funny. It wasn't Kryptonite funny, but he felt looser, relaxed. He almost didn't care about getting the woman to the hospital. All he could think about was getting back to Lois. His vision became blurry, though his flying wasn't affected. He shook his head to try and clear the odd sensation.

At last, they landed at the hospital. The old woman thanked him, and it was then that he noticed something. She was wearing a ring that had a strange red stone that cast an odd glow. Clark analyzed it and determined that it was Kryptonite. But *red* Kryptonite? He'd never seen it before. At least it didn't really effect him. Did it?

Clark made his way back to the restaurant, but his fears were confirmed. Of course Lois hadn't waited. Why would she? He asked if she had paid for the meal, and the maître d' told him of course, looking down his long French nose at him, obviously despising him for his cad-like behavior of leaving his date. Clark apologized and asked him to cancel her payment and to please let him pay. The maître d' smiled and fixed the payment.

"But I'd be careful if I were you, monsieur. I doubt she'll want to talk to you anytime soon."

She had somehow made it home. Her dignity and her heart were in shreds, but she had made it to her door.

As soon as she shut it, she let herself fall apart; tears would not stop falling. She felt so dejected and humiliated. She knew she was wallowing, but she just couldn't stop.

How many times could he run out on her like that? How many times before it became an insult to their relationship, to her? What was so important or so scary that he couldn't sit through an entire date with her?

All the doubts she ever had about her inadequacies crept up. All the taunting things Dan Scardino had said about Clark's disappearing act came back to her in full force. Was she really not that important to him? Or was she really that awful to be around? That was the scariest thought. That she just wasn't lovable. That she was too hard, too demanding, for anyone to love her.

She shrugged off her coat and unzipped her dress, letting it fall to the floor in a heap of expensive fabric. Lois put on her sweats, telling herself it didn't matter what she looked like. Clark wouldn't dare show his face here, not tonight. And she wouldn't let him in even if he did. She just didn't want to deal with it. Didn't want to deal with the apologies or the cryptic remarks about how she just needed to understand, that it wasn't her. Because she'd give in — she knew she would. She'd see those chocolate brown eyes and melt inevitably. Chocolate was her weakness, after all. And if he touched her... God. It would be over. She'd follow him to the ends of the earth. And a kiss... well, she knew where this was going, and it all would just end in disaster. One way or another. Either he'd break her heart, or she'd eventually screw it up anyway. So... let him be the one to make a mess of it all. Let her stay mad at him. She didn't need him here to break down her walls and make her feel like a fool for just not understanding him.

Lois opened a bottle of wine and prepared to settle in for a pity party, complete with "Ivory Tower" reruns. She climbed into bed and saw the black and white teddy bear, sitting all cute on its pillow, completely innocent to the crimes of its giver.

"I never want to see Clark Kent again!" she screamed at the

teddy bear he had given her at the Smallville festival. “I know it’s not your fault, but it certainly is his!” Then she grabbed the bear and held it tightly, a pathetic replacement for who she really longed for.

Superman was over Lois’ apartment, about to land and change into Clark when he heard her cry of never wanting to see him again. He still felt dizzy from that odd Kryptonite encounter, but he desperately needed to try and make things right with Lois. So he decided to try and be her friend as Superman. Maybe Superman could ease Clark back into her good graces.

He came to her window and gently knocked.

Lois was a little drunk and was almost asleep. She sat up when she heard the familiar knock.

[[Oh, God, not Superman. I look awful.]]

But at the same time, she really could use a friend.

She stumbled her way over to the window.

“Hi,” she managed.

“May I come in?” he asked.

She nodded, feeling the tears start up again.

Clark landed gently, but stumbled just a bit. Lois didn’t notice.

“Are you all right?” Superman asked, concerned.

She was relieved there was no pressing emergency, for he would have mentioned it first. He had simply come to see how a friend was doing. And Lois couldn’t resist his kindness. Even though she had sworn off Superman months ago, he was still a dear friend. And when she couldn’t turn to Clark, Superman always seemed to be there when she needed him.

She came over to him and threw herself in his arms, bawling her eyes out.

“Hey, it’s OK, Lois. Tell me what’s wrong,” he said, feeling like an even worse kind of heel.

“Cl — Clark! He... he doesn’t love me! He... he’s always running off — somewhere! Just when things start to go well between us! I — I don’t understand!” she cried into his shoulder.

Clark felt horrible. And it wasn’t just what Lois was telling him. He had a headache and suddenly wanted to sit down. Lois felt him stumble.

“Superman?” she asked in sudden alarm. “Are *you* OK?”

“I — I just need to sit a second,” he said.

She nodded, her tears dry for the moment out of concern for Superman. She led him to the sofa.

Clark noticed the half-drunk bottle of wine. She really shouldn’t be drinking so much.... Maybe if he had some, it would keep her from getting any more drunk.

“May I have a glass of wine?” he asked.

She looked at him in surprise. “I didn’t know you drank wine.”

“It doesn’t have any effect on me. But I like the way it tastes.”

“Sure.” She poured him a glass, keeping a wary eye on him. Even in her distraught state, she could see that something wasn’t right with him.

“Is there something wrong, Superman?”

He took a sip of the offered glass. “Yes... I... well, it’s strange, really. I was rescuing people from a train derailment just outside of town. And the last woman I rescued had a strange stone on her ring that gave me an odd feeling.”

“Kryptonite?” Lois asked in fear.

“Well, maybe,” Clark said, uncertain. “It had most of the properties of Kryptonite, but it was red. I only flew with her for about fifteen minutes, but whatever it is, it left me feeling odd. I still have all my powers, but I feel... well, maybe how you feel when you’re drunk. Sort of loose and off balance.”

Lois smiled. “Well, join my party, then. Here. Have some more wine.”

About an hour later, they were laughing over nothing.

Lois and Superman were drunk.

“...I mean, how ridiculous! There I was — in that wonderful little bistro — looking around like, ‘Um, yeah, and where’s my date?’” Lois laughed, hysterical.

“I can’t believe he did that to you!” Superman fell to his side, laughing.

They were on their second bottle of wine. Clark had never been drunk, ever. And he didn’t know if it was the red Kryptonite or the wine, but he felt dizzy and warm all over. And he had Lois in stitches over his screwup.

Lois finally caught her breath.

“Wow, I never thought we’d be rolling on the floor, laughing together, Superman! Are you sure you’re OK?”

He put his hand to his forehead, still feeling the room swim, but sort of enjoying the situation at the same time. “Yeah. I don’t think the red Kryptonite effects will be permanent, but I’m enjoying feeling drunk. It gets awfully boring being perfect all the time,” he said, feeling the laughter creep up again.

“I bet! Here, Flyboy. Have another glass. Why not?” Lois said, pouring both her and Superman the rest of the second bottle.

“This is almost as fun as it would be with Clark! He doesn’t really get drunk, though,” Lois said thoughtfully.

“Is Clark a fun guy?” he asked, hiccup-laughing between sips.

“Yeah, he can be. But this habit of his, leaving at random moments... I mean, who *does* that? I don’t want to think he’s loony tunes, but maybe he is.”

“Clark would have to be crazy to run out on you,” he said, and then he sobered a moment as he realized what had just come out of his mouth. He couldn’t think straight. But he knew he had come over to try and put things right with Lois and Clark, not to drive more distance between them.

“I think he’s scared of me. Of us. I don’t know what else it could be,” said Lois. Superman had slipped to the floor by the couch, and she let herself fall down to the floor next to him.

“But it’s great that you’re here. Drinking alone sucks!” she said, clinking Superman’s glass.

“Hey, would you go flying with me?” he asked suddenly.

“Flying drunk? That could be fun. Promise not to drop me?” she said, practically falling in his lap as she tapped his chest.

“I could never drop you,” he said, momentarily sober. He could feel her breath on his neck. He couldn’t take his eyes off her lips. It would be so easy to —

Lois stood up, offering a hand up to Superman.

“Come on. Let’s go flying!” she said brightly.

“At least we know we won’t be pulled over for a DUI,” he laughed, taking her in his arms.

As they headed to the window, Lois grabbed her third bottle of wine. Just in case.

They headed west. Both were swimming in alcohol. Lois couldn’t stop giggling, and Clark just tried to fly straight. He took the third bottle of wine out of her hands and popped the cork with one hand.

“Another sip, m’lady?” he asked, taking a swig himself.

“Sure, why not?”

They headed out of the city. About ten minutes into the flight, Clark realized he was on autopilot, heading for Smallville. But he knew he couldn’t stop there. There would be too many questions about Superman’s easy access to Clark’s parents’ house, not to mention the embarrassment that would ensue if he faced his parents in his current state. No, he’d keep flying past Kansas.

Lois dozed in his arms; meanwhile, Clark kept drinking the wine. His thoughts were fuzzy. All he could think was how nice it was to hold Lois. How nice it was to be drunk! To be loose for a

change! He felt so free! He wanted to do a loop-the-loop, but he thought better of it due to his state and the fact that he was holding Lois. He might get more than he bargained for.

About forty-five minutes later, they came to a city in the middle of the desert.

Clark nudged Lois awake. "We're here."

She groaned as she opened her eyes. "Where are we?"

"I think Las Vegas," he said in some surprise.

She giggled. "We should get married. That would really show Clark," she said, reaching for the bottle of wine. There was about a glassful left...

"Yeah? Why not? Let's do it. Lois Lane, will you marry me?"

Clark grinned. He wasn't thinking straight. All he knew was he loved Lois Lane. Here she was in his arms, and they were in Vegas!

She drank the last bit of wine and then wrapped her arms around his neck. "You betcha!"

It was too easy. The chapel attendant didn't even look twice at Superman marrying Lois. They got all kinds coming through there. And every now and then someone would come dressed up as something. So big deal. The guy thought he was Superman.

There was just one moment of truth, when the registrar asked for his name. Superman had looked directly at Lois and had said, sober, "Clark Kent."

Lois laughed out loud. "Good one!" And then he had joined in on her laughter, completely terrified to do anything else.

"Joke's on Clark!" she giggled.

The ceremony was short. Lois had a moment's hesitation before the vows, but she couldn't focus on why. They used Clark's name in the ceremony, and all Lois could do was giggle.

"I take thee, Clark, to be my lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold till death us do part," she said, surprised the words came so easily for her in her state. She couldn't help giggling at the end. This was all a game, a joke. One that would get Clark back for all the hurt he put her through. Married to Superman, ha!

Take that, Clark!

Clark knew he should say something to stop this madness. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. He was marrying Lois, as Clark Kent, no less. Though, of course, she didn't know she was really marrying Clark Kent. He should be bothered by it. But she looked so beautiful saying those vows.

They leaned in for the kiss at the end. They mostly tasted wine, but Lois felt her knees give way just the same. She didn't know what had affected her more. Clark scooped her up, and they headed out of the chapel to the hotel that had been prearranged for them.

"You can pay me back later, Superman. I got this one." Lois still had her emergency credit card. It was probably at its limit, but she didn't care.

"And what name are you registered under?" asked the clerk.

Lois, hanging onto Superman out of the fear that she'd fall, giggled. "Kent. Mr. and Mrs. Clark Kent!"

They got to the suite, still in a fit of laughter.

"Mrs. Superman!" she giggled. She circled her arms around him. Then she whispered, "I'm Mrs... you. Wh — what's your name, anyway?"

Both of their heads were swimming. They were forehead to forehead. "I told you my name," he whispered. Then he leaned in to kiss her. She gave herself into the kiss. [[He feels so like Clark when he kisses me,]] she thought to herself, hoping the tears that threatened didn't overflow. Who'd have ever thought that she'd feel like Superman was the consolation prize?

"I love you, Lois," he said, and they fell onto the bed.

The room spun. They laid there, holding each other. And then fell promptly asleep.

Clark woke up with a splitting headache. He had never *ever* been hungover, and he was certain it was the worst feeling in the world. He stood up to go to the bathroom and thought he'd fall over from being so dizzy. [[Maybe it's the red Kryptonite still?]] he wondered. Then he remembered all the wine they had drunk the night before. Maybe the Kryptonite had allowed him to be affected by wine, and this was just a pure hangover.

He stumbled into the bathroom, surprising himself to see he was still dressed as Superman. "Oh, no... no... no, no, no! We didn't...?" He came back into the room. He saw Lois, still in her sweats from last night, completely crashed out and looking like she would be for hours yet.

Clark saw a certificate on the nightstand. There it was. The evidence of their foolhardiness. A certificate of marriage between Clark Kent and Lois Lane, granted by the State of Nevada. A joke gone horribly wrong. He snatched the offending certificate off the nightstand, threw it in a drawer. Maybe it would be better if Lois didn't see it first thing when she woke up...

Clark sat down on a nearby chair, sighing. [[What did I do to us now?]] He knew he'd have to tell her the truth, that was for sure. But, *where* to begin?

He was married to Lois Lane. As Superman. And as Clark Kent. It should be perfect, but it was a mockery of everything. It was a mockery of how he really felt about her. "Pretending" to be Clark? Ridiculous!

It was only about seven in the morning. It was too early to call his parents for advice. Besides, he was pretty sure he knew what they'd say. Tell Lois the truth. He scoffed at the imaginary conversation. "Where would I even start?" he mumbled.

He sighed. First, he'd get a shower, clear his head. Then, he'd order breakfast and try to tell Lois the truth. And pray that he wouldn't lose her when she found out.

Lois felt the room spin as she sat up. [[I haven't been this hungover... ever,]] she thought.

She looked around the room. She was in a hotel room? Where...? She felt panicked. She remembered Superman... and getting drunk... and... something...

She groaned, the room still spinning as her head hit the pillow again. Her thoughts wouldn't pool together properly. [[Where am I? What happened...?]]

"Hey," a voice whispered beside her.

She opened one bleary eye. Superman was standing over her, looking very concerned. He had a tablet and water in his hand.

"Take this," he offered her quietly.

One eye still locked shut in half sleep, Lois reached for the medicine. She accidentally slammed the water on the nightstand, making it slosh onto the wood.

"Oops," she said halfheartedly, her eyes closing again.

"Are you OK?" he asked gently.

She looked up at him again.

"Superman!" she cried, it registering that something wasn't right here. But she wished she hadn't spoken so loud. Her head pounded, and her throat was sore. "What ha — happened last night?" she croaked.

"Get some sleep, Lois. I'll... tell you later."

She nodded, too dizzy and sleepy to argue.

She mumbled something into her pillow and then was asleep again.

"You did *what*?" asked Martha over breakfast that morning.

Clark had flown to Smallville while Lois slept to talk to his parents. He knew they'd be angry, but he also hoped they'd have a solution for him.

"It was the red Kryptonite, Mom," whined Clark, hating the sound in his own ears.

"Kryptonite or not, *wine* or not, you lied to Lois and married

her! Clark! I can't believe you did that!"

"Me neither... and I can't believe Lois did it either! I thought... I thought she loved me."

"She does love you, honey. She was upset. You both are so foolish!" She shook her head in dismay. "I keep telling you that you need to tell her the truth! You've been dating a while now..." She looked up at him, remembering something. "And you said you married her under your real name? How did that work?"

Clark felt redder than his cape under his mother's scrutiny. "I was attempting to tell her the truth. I gave my real name to the registrar, and Lois thought it was a joke! But the good news is she's married to the real me. If I can get her to forgive me..." He waved the rest away hopefully. "I know... I'm hoping for too much."

"You better believe you are. Honey, you need to get back to that hotel and tell Lois who you are. I don't know what you'll do about the marriage. That's a whole can of worms you'll have to deal with on your own, Clark."

Lois awoke to an empty room.

Her mouth felt like cotton. She struggled to get up to reach for the glass of water on the stand. After a few gulps, she dared to open her eyes wider. She was relieved the curtains were closed. She didn't think she could face sunshine just yet.

She attempted to sit up, dizzy but in control. Well, maybe. She wobbled a bit but got herself to the bathroom.

When she came back in, she sat on the bed, trying to remember... There was something niggling in the back of her mind about last night. [[Where *am* I?!]]

She remembered flying with Superman and bright lights... but where to...?

Cautiously, she made her way to the curtain. She wasn't sure if she was more frightened of discovering where they had landed or of the potential for facing blinding sun on top of the worst hangover ever.

It turned out both became her worst enemy. Only one city in the world had a fantasy make-believe skyline like that. And it wasn't Metropolis. It was Las Vegas.

"What the heck am I doing in Las Vegas?" Then she remembered her partner in crime... Her *other* partner in crime... "And where is Superman?"

As if on cue, he came in the door, wearing full Superman regalia and carrying orange juice and bagels.

"Good morning," he offered shyly. "Um, I brought you breakfast."

She nodded, her mind confused. "Why — why are we here?" she asked, panic rising in her.

"What do you remember about last night?" he asked cautiously.

If she wasn't so tired, so ridiculously hungover, she might have noticed a few things. First, Superman was being overly solicitous and was very nervous. He had dropped his super-persona entirely. He literally was Clark in spandex, and she just didn't see it. She only knew that something was wrong with the whole situation, but she had no idea what it was. And second, he held a suspicious piece of paper that he seemed to not know what to do with.

She sat down at the lovely breakfast table, which was topped with fresh roses.

That clued her in to one memory. "I remember... dinner with Clark last night."

He nodded. "Good. That's a start."

"And... you came over..." She suddenly remembered something. "Are you OK? I mean that red Kryptonite stuff..."

"Yeah, I'm fine... though it did cloud my judgment a bit," he said wryly. [[That was an understatement.]]

"Oh, and the wine... so much wine..." she said, putting her

hand on her head. "Two bottles, I think?"

"Um, three. We drank three bottles..."

"Oh, God." She fell into her arms on the table. "How did we end up here?" she spoke into the table.

"Well, it's my fault we're here." He decided to admit that right off the bat. He would take as much blame as possible to start. "I decided to take us flying, and, well, I just ended up a lot farther west than I meant to."

She managed to look at him before burying her nose in the coffee cup he had offered her. "Did anything happen, though?" she asked cautiously.

Superman was shifting uncomfortably. She had never seen Superman so discomfited. It kept reminding her of something, something just out of reach...

"We... we did do something a bit foolish last night," he began.

"What?" she asked, terrified. "Please, please, tell me we didn't —" She gestured with her hand.

[[Well, that could mean any number of things,]] thought Clark. "We didn't — do anything — physically," he got out.

She sighed. "Well, thank goodness for that."

"But —"

"But? There's a but? Oh, God, this can't be good..."

He reached for her hand. "Remember when I tell you this, that we did this together and that we'll find our way together?"

"OK..." she said, wary of his cryptic statement.

"We... got married."

She laughed. She honestly *laughed*.

"No... no, we didn't. We —" Then, all of a sudden, her face froze in memory. "Ohmygod. We *did*. We got married!"

She sat staring at him a moment, shocked. Then she stood up, suddenly angry. "How could you have let this happen, Superman? I trusted you! How did you let us do something so —"

But she gave up almost a moment later. She realized she was partly to blame as well, and besides, she just didn't have the energy or the focus to argue yet; the room was still a bit spinny. So she sat back down on the bed, not looking at him. "And what will I tell Clark?" she whispered.

Clark watched her carefully. He sat next to her on the bed and tried taking her hand.

"Don't — touch me!" she cried. She was too confused with him near. Superman had always done that to her, but now it was just too much. "What are we going to do? Can we get an annulment?" she asked.

He sighed. "Yeah, I think so. But, um, well, there's something else I have to tell you first."

"Something *else*?" She couldn't believe this. She couldn't believe she was in *this* situation with Superman! It was so laughable! A year ago, she would have been thrilled to find herself accidentally married to Superman. But now — things were moving ahead for her and Clark. They still had their bumps, but — how could he ever forgive her for marrying his old rival for her heart, even if it wasn't entirely on purpose?

"Just tell me quick. Like a band-aid. Rip it off," she said, determined to hear the worst.

Clark sat there a moment. What exactly should he tell her first?

"Lois — I — I mean we —" Then he heard it. Several cries for help. This would have to wait. "I have to go, Lois. Just stay here!"

With a whoosh, he was gone. [[Well, that almost felt familiar,]] she thought, but then she was distracted by the paper sitting on the chair that Superman had just vacated.

She reached over for it and then stared, horrified. "Clark Kent married to Lois Lane," she read aloud. "What?" she cried in disbelief. "Oh, no..." she moaned, remembering bits of the ceremony. "This — this *can't* be!" She had begun to imagine

those words someday printed on a certificate, but like this, married to a superhero, using the name of the man she loved? It was horrible and terribly, terribly wrong.

She felt tears well up, and her head hurt; she collapsed onto her pillow. Not only had she married Superman, Clark's old rival for her affections, but they had made Clark the butt of a joke, using his name. She would have to tell him everything in order to get the marriage annulled! It would be so humiliating for both of them, and she wasn't sure she could face him. Sure, Clark had his mess-ups and odd behavior, but he had never done anything so sinister to her before, so mocking of their relationship. He was never going to forgive her for this — could and should never forgive her! Of that she was certain.

Lois' head pounded as the tears came down. "How did this happen? How?" she asked herself over and over again.

She cried herself back to sleep.

Clark found her sleeping, lying in the fetal position. The certificate of marriage was lying under her hand.

He wondered what she had thought when she saw it. Had she laughed, still mad at Clark for leaving her last night? Or was she mad at Superman? Either way, she wouldn't be happy with *him*. They were in a complicated situation in Clark's estimation. But were they? Really? If he could just tell her the truth... but she had been lied to for two years. And this last betrayal... did their relationship have a chance of surviving it, even if he told her everything? Hadn't he done everything in his power to drive the wedge between himself and Lois, intentionally or not?

He thought of changing into Clark and then waking her. It might make her realize a very crucial detail in this whole situation... but it might also humiliate her to the point that she would never speak to him again. He had to tread lightly. That was for sure.

He was really exhausted. There had been some fires in California, and two families had been trapped in a forest. It had been a harrowing rescue, complete with a missing four-year-old that he had found clinging to a tree almost a mile away from his family. How he had sympathized with that little boy. He felt like a lost child himself, clinging to anything that might keep him safe from the fires that raged around him. Only, Clark knew that it was he who had started the fires in his life; the boy had simply been a victim of circumstance.

He sat gently on the bed, watching Lois sleep. How had their world spun so out of control? Along with thinking about asking her to marry him, he'd been working up the courage for weeks to tell her the truth. But he never could quite bring himself to do either. He was never certain which should come first. He wanted her to know about Superman, but he also had wanted to know that she'd marry plain old Clark. And now, with the cart before the horse, so to speak, he had a revelation to deal with and had to somehow convince her to stay married to him. Because that was just it, wasn't it? He did love her, more than anything, and he wanted to marry her. But he had messed up everything last night... and yet she had also been complicit in it!

She had enjoyed making fun of Clark. She had laughed like crazy at the idea of marrying "Clark." But... he had also seen something in her eyes as she had said those vows. She hadn't really been looking at Superman. He had simply been the convenient man in the room. He thought she had really wanted to say those words to Clark. And maybe, after all, that was why he had let her.

He decided he'd take her back to Metropolis. It was here, in this fake, overblown town, that he felt more like a clown than ever. Superman in Vegas was a joke. Just this morning, he had seen at least three other grooms in Superman get-up. One guy had even asked where he had rented his costume, because it looked so "authentic." He shook his head with a laugh in memory.

[[Authentic-looking because it *is* authentic.]] And that had jarred him enough to realize they had to get out of this fantasy land. He just couldn't take any more sick jokes about their situation. Maybe if they went home, he'd be able to think and work out a way to sort through this.

Clark didn't hesitate further. He scooped up Lois and headed for the window. He was careful not to wake her, wanting to let her sleep for as long as absolutely possible.... Partly because he wasn't ready to face her again, but also because she'd need her strength to deal with what he would have to eventually tell her.

Lois felt cold. Was there a window open?

She could feel arms around her, though. Solid arms. Warm arms. She snuggled closer. Clark? Hmm... yeah...

Clark was amazed that she slept nearly the whole flight back to Metropolis. Her implicit trust in him always floored him. It also made him feel even guiltier because of how he repeatedly betrayed that trust. How was it the one woman in the world that he wanted to protect above all was the one woman he kept managing to hurt?

They arrived back at her apartment. She opened her eyes as he landed inside, the window still open from their midnight flight into disaster.

"We're back?" she asked, looking around, still feeling a bit dazed. "Thank goodness. Vegas was just a little too much..." she said.

"Tell me about it," murmured Clark.

She wandered into the kitchen in the search for some coffee.

Clark just watched her, not certain what his next move should be.

"Are you OK?" he finally ventured, worry written on his face.

"My head still hurts a little. And I feel groggy from sleeping, too — " She caught his look. "I'm OK. I just... don't know what to do. I saw the certificate of — I saw it, Superman. With Clark's name on it! How could we have done that!? How could you have let them — *us* — do that to him? Aren't you his friend? Aren't I — " She stopped speaking, not looking at him. She was just ranting, still tired, still half drunk.

Clark stood there, motionless in his tracks. He couldn't get words to form. [[Just tell her the truth!]]

She got a glass of water and then finally turned to Superman. "I'm going to lose him, you know?" she said, tears coming to her eyes.

He was by her side in two strides and finally found his voice. "You could never lose Clark, Lois. Surely you know that."

But he could suddenly see, by the frightened look in her eyes, that she didn't know that.

[[Have I been so careless with my love for you?]] he asked her silently.

He knew it was now or never. He had to tell her everything.

"Lois, you could never lose Clark because — " He stopped. He couldn't get the words out. He wanted to say it. [[Just say it, dammit!]] But would the truth be earnest enough coming from Superman? Would she believe him? Maybe he did need to do this as Clark. Maybe it would just have to wait a little longer.

She was waiting expectantly. "Because...?"

He sighed, resigned. "Because he loves you, Lois. You could never lose Clark because he loves you."

"But you don't understand, Superman. I've betrayed him in the worst possible way! By putting his name on that certificate and marrying you — it will break his heart! He'll never speak to me again!"

She was crying. He wanted to take her in his arms, but he dared not do it.

"He will, Lois. He *is* speaking to you," he tried, putting a

hand on her shoulder to comfort her. He found himself in between personae; he couldn't be impersonal as Superman, yet he couldn't entirely be Clark either. His gesture and subtle hint at the truth simply weren't enough to get her attention. Lois was sobbing.

"I love him! Don't you see? And I used to love you. I mean, you are very, very special to me, Superman, and always will be. But, Clark — I was so close to trusting him with my whole heart. Yet I've held back just this little bit because —"

[[Sirens and multiple cries for help.]] He sighed in frustration. "Lois, I will be right back. I have to go! Please. Please don't cry. It will be all right."

And then he was gone.

"Because he keeps disappearing," she said to the empty room.

She sat with that thought for a long time. Was this what it would be like to be married to Superman? Him dashing off to save the world at any moment, even when she needed him?

Lois mulled that over. This pattern felt so familiar. So like Clark. [[At least Superman has legitimate excuses. Clark —]] She paused. [[No, no... it couldn't be. Could it?]] She poured herself a cup of coffee, thinking. She wasn't liking where this was going. [[Clark's excuses were always so lame... but if he were Superman, and no one knew, of course they'd be lame, because they were all lies!]] Clark had been lying to her! *He* was Superman! And he'd been lying in the worst possible way! It all came together in her mind, all those things that she'd been trying to understand — it all made a horrible kind of sense.

She felt sick. Nauseous, even. She had been so afraid that if Clark found out what had happened, she'd lose him. She had felt so sorry for him! And yet, here he had played her for a fool! This was worse than the disappearing act. This betrayed everything they could've been! So what if they were drunk when it happened. It should *not* have happened! Period!

"Just wait till you get back here, Clark Kent!"

Clark decided to not go back to Lois' as Superman, but as himself. He realized it was too easy to hide behind his alter-ego. He just needed to tell her. Get it over with, like she said, rip off the band-aid.

When he came to her door, he didn't hear anything. He was tempted to x-ray it, but then he thought about it and decided that he'd face whatever was behind that door, no matter what. He knocked.

She came to the door, her face grim. She had figured it out, he realized. She reached out and slapped him; he had just enough time to soften his face so she didn't hurt herself.

"Don't pretend like that hurt, Superman," she said, her voice icy.

It was time to face the music. He didn't even try to pretend he didn't know what she meant. The lies had gone far enough. "Lois. Please, let me explain," he tried.

"Go ahead, Clark, explain! I've been going in circles trying to figure out why you would lie to me — *on so many levels!* First, *when* were you going to tell me you were Superman? Were you *ever* going to tell me? Were you ever going to stop playing me for a fool?"

"Lois, you've never been a fool," he tried, moving them into her apartment and praying the neighbors didn't hear her tirade.

He noticed her eyes were blotchy from crying earlier, and they looked glassy again with tears.

"I realize we were both — insanely drunk last night. It was a stupid idea to begin with. But — to not tell me truth — ! To not stop us from creating a joke out of what could be — " Words died on her lips. She simply shook her head, unable to understand how he could betray her. "How could you let this happen, Clark?"

"Lois, I *tried* to tell you. I gave my real name. I had hoped you would —"

"Giving Clark Kent's name on a registry isn't exactly telling me you *are* Clark Kent!" she cried angrily.

He sighed. "I have tried to tell you the truth, Lois. Many times. You've got to believe me."

"Believe you? *Believe* you?" she spat the words back at him. "Have you told me the truth about anything, Clark? You've been lying to me since I've known you!"

"Lois, being Superman is the *only* thing I've ever lied to you about. And I always meant to tell you. I was just waiting for the right moment," he finished lamely.

"The right moment! Come on, Clark! The right moment would have been any number of times, but definitely before we got to the altar to say 'I do!'"

"I'm sorry things got this far, Lois, without you knowing."

"Clark, just leave! I can't — Just — *go!*" she said, not looking at him, waving her arms in the general direction of the door.

He sighed. He knew he couldn't reason with her while she was so upset. "I won't run from you, Lois. I'll leave now, but I want to talk to you later, when you've calmed down a bit."

"I don't want to talk to you again, ever! Just leave! I never want to see you again! Go!" she cried.

"OK, Lois... I'll go." As he went to the door, he turned back to say something. "I honestly never meant to hurt you, Lois. I hope you eventually realize that."

She slammed the door in his face.

As he walked away, he was actually secretly relieved. At least she knew. He was mad at himself for not telling her last night, but at least the whole truth was now out. Clark left her apartment and took off to the skies, with no destination in mind. He laughed bitterly to himself. [[That's how I got in trouble last night, not watching where I was going.]] He hoped that once she calmed down, she'd see everything he had been trying to tell her. That she would realize he loved her. But Clark also knew he might be hoping for too much. He may have ruined everything by being rash and impulsive. He beat himself up over it, not even letting himself lay blame on the red Kryptonite or even on Lois. He had been the only one who knew what had been really going on. And he had deceived her. It was that simple.

Could Lois ever forgive him?

She couldn't believe what a fool she had been. What a fool to not see that Superman and Clark were the same person! To not to see that Clark could so easily play with her mind and with her heart. He should have stopped that madness last night!

She sank to the floor, pulling her knees up to her chest. "And why didn't I stop it?" she whispered aloud. Barring the fact that they were one and the same man, why had she gone along with Superman? [[Was it more than the wine?]] she wondered. Was it the safety that Superman had represented that she had run to? Because he had seemed a distant hero, therefore untouchable and unable to break her heart? And yet, now... now it was a horrible joke — on her. She was the one with egg on her face. She thought she could marry Superman, make Clark jealous — and then what, Lois? Now, completely sober, she couldn't find the reasons why she had done such a foolish thing. Which was exactly why Clark should have told her the truth! Well, he should have told her weeks ago, if not months ago! But especially after they started dating! And *absolutely* he should have said something last night!

[[Had he tried to tell me?]] she wondered in a moment of trying to be fair. She tried to think of times when he might have been close to doing so. If he had, then it had been subtle going, because she couldn't think of one moment when it had seemed Clark was about to confess something as big as being Superman.

“How dare he!” she cried. She had thought Clark and Superman were the most honest people on Earth. And to discover that they — *he* had lied to her for two whole years — it completely shattered her belief in his integrity. And marrying him under false pretenses? She still felt sick over that as well as her own behavior. Why had she agreed in the first place? Besides being drunk... She had no good answer.

Lois sighed. Thank God it was the weekend. She still had a whole day before she had to face Clark at work. Maybe by then she would know how to face him. Or maybe by then she would have vanished into thin air, so she wouldn't have to face any of it. But at least it bought her time.

An hour later, there was a knock at her door.

“Already?” she scoffed. “Go away, Clark!” she shouted at the door.

But an unexpected voice answered, “Hey, Lois. Don't bring out the guns. It's just me.”

Dan Scardino.

She sighed. She wasn't sure she had the energy for him either.

Slowly, she got up from her place of wallowing on the floor. She took a quick peek at herself in the mirror and did her best to at least smooth out her hair. She looked like a wreck, but part of her really didn't care.

“Just a sec.”

“Take your time.”

She opened the door and resisted the urge not to laugh as she saw he was wearing another one of those hideous Hawaiian shirts that he loved so much.

“Come in.” She gestured.

He strode in like he owned the place. His confidence always seemed forced to her, not easy like — [[I'm not going to think about him. Not even going to think his name...]]

“Are you OK, Lois?” he asked, noticing Lois' tired eyes.

“Yeah... no... I don't want to talk about it, Dan.”

He smiled smugly. “Well, I guess that means Clark is out of your good graces. Which is good news for me.”

“It's more complicated than that,” she said defensively.

Dan shook his head. “How many chances are you going to give that guy? Is he really worth all the heartache, Lois?”

She felt tears threaten again, knowing in her heart what the answer was. But she refused to cry in front of Dan. She didn't want his sympathy.

“Why are you here, Dan?” she asked irritably.

“Oh, well, you keep dodging me for a date. So I thought maybe if I came and asked you here, you might actually accept.” He grinned. “And I'm pretty sure I'm looking a helluva lot better than Mr. Kent right now. Am I right?”

She really didn't want anything to do with him. But a date with Scardino might be a desirable distraction. Just to clear her head. To get away from the mess that was her heart.

“All right, Dan, you win. You can take me on a date tonight.”

“Great. I'll be back at eight to pick you up.”

Everything was all wrong.

It was the worst date ever.

The restaurant was too crowded, she nearly choked on a fish bone, and the wine was too sweet. No matter what Dan did, it didn't help. She was miserable for a whole host of reasons and wished desperately that she had just turned him down.

She wanted to leave and go home. But she made herself try to stick it through. She would feel bad about leaving him mid-date anyway. She knew all about how much *that* hurt.

“Lois?” he asked. “You seem distracted.”

“Yeah, I am. Sorry, Dan. This... maybe this was a bad idea.”

He nodded, resigned. “You need to talk to him.”

“Excuse me?” she queried defensively.

“You've got it bad, Lois. And I can tell no matter how much I wine and dine you, I don't stand a chance. Go. It's OK.”

She sighed, giving up any pretense of enjoying herself. “Dan, I'm sorry. It's just — ”

“I know. I just — I just hope he realizes what a prize you are.”

“Wait. What a *prize* I am?” she said aloud to herself as she walked away from the restaurant, her fury growing with every step. “How dare he talk to me like that! This is not the eighteenth century!”

She was sick of men. Sick of their games and their platitudes. She should have never gotten involved with Clark, that much was clear! First thing Monday morning, she was going to have Jimmy research divorce lawyers. And then she'd go to the most successful one in town. Surely this sham of a marriage could be easily annulled, and she would never let Clark or any other man manipulate her again! She was *not* a victim! And she would never act like one again!

“So, why do you need this list, Lois?” asked Jimmy in confusion.

“Just do it,” she said through her teeth. “And *don't* tell Clark!”

Jimmy nodded as he walked away from her desk.

“Don't tell Clark what?” said the man in question, coming down the ramp. He had decided to be jovial, friendly. He'd win Lois back with charm. He'd —

“None of your business. And I'm not speaking to you,” Lois said, swiveling her chair away from him.

“Well, you can't hide from me forever, you know,” he chided. She glared at him.

He leaned in over her desk. She tried not to be affected by him, not to feel his presence or look in his eyes. “We are still married, you know,” he said in a husky whisper, knowing he was galling her but unable to stop himself.

“Don't, Clark. I am *not* talking about this here. Now. Just get to work!” She crossed her arms, trying to put distance between them.

He lifted his hands in mock surrender. “OK, OK. I'll drop it. For now.”

Lois glued her eyes to her computer screen. “You better drop it, buddy,” she murmured furiously.

Clark was trying to remain cool, but inside he was scared. When Lois was angry, she might do all sorts of foolish things. Maybe it was better if he did just keep his distance for now. He couldn't afford any more animosity from her.

His phone rang. “Clark Kent,” he said, relieved to have a distraction.

“We know everything about you, Mr. Kent. Or should I say... Superman,” said the voice on the phone. “If you don't want the world to know your secret, go to a dumpster behind the Planet. You'll find an envelope with your name on it.”

The phone clicked, and Clark slowly hung up. Maybe things *could* get worse....

Lois glanced up and saw the look of panic on Clark's face. [[Ha, I'll just bet you're panicked! Panicked you'll lose me! So suffer, Clark! Suffer!]]

He stood up, adjusting his tie. “I gotta — um...” He thought a second. And then his face twisted into a half smile. At least the lame excuses could stop. “I gotta go,” he said simply to Lois, heading for the elevator.

“Like I care,” she murmured, her focus back on her screen.

Moments later, Jimmy came back over.

“Here's the divorce lawyer list you asked for. The guy at the top is real sleaze. He'd rake his mother over the coals to make a

buck.”

“And who on this list is known for... discretion?” she asked, her cheeks flaming.

Jimmy pretended not to notice, though he had to struggle to hide a shocked smile. [[Is Lois *married*?]]

“Uh, this woman here. Mrs. Jane Prescott. She handles a lot of celebrity cases and stuff like that.”

“Thanks, Jimmy,” she said.

“No problem.”

“And Jimmy?” she said, gesturing for him to lean in to hear her. “Not a word to anybody. Especially Clark. But not to Perry either, OK?”

“OK. You got it. Sure you don’t want to tell me — ?” he tried.

She shook her head. A cold “no!”

“OK, OK. You have my word. My lips are sealed!”

Lois made an appointment to see Jane Prescott during her lunch break. She couldn’t believe she got an appointment so easily! Clark had never returned from his “errand,” but she figured it was just as well. She wanted to get everything laid out first, and then she’d face him with papers.

“Ms. Lois Lane?” The secretary nodded for her to go in.

Jane Prescott was everything you’d imagine a successful divorce lawyer to be. Blond, beautiful, impeccable taste in clothes. Lois noticed a wedding picture behind her desk. She even appeared happily married. [[How ever did she manage that?]] Lois asked herself.

“Ms. Lane? Have a seat.” She gestured, and Lois took a plush burgundy chair by the window. “How may I help you today?”

Lois began telling her story. Leaving out Superman, of course.

“It was an impulsive move to go to Vegas. You know? Partners, needing to let loose.” Lois knew it sounded false, even to her ears. And Mrs. Prescott wasn’t buying it either.

“Ms. Lane, people don’t ‘accidentally’ go to Vegas. It sounds like a planned trip. Surely you knew the risks, and two bottles of wine — ”

“Three,” Lois chimed in. “It was three bottles of wine.”

“OK, so even with three bottles of wine... you can’t exactly plead insanity... Um, was the marriage — consummated?” asked Mrs. Prescott delicately.

Lois was silent a moment. The phrase conjured up images of fantasies she had had but tried to keep buried about Superman. And Clark. Superman *as* Clark. The room felt warm...

“It could be important to the case.”

Lois shook off her momentary wandering into dangerous waters. “Um, no. No, it wasn’t.” She cleared her throat. “The marriage wasn’t c — consummated.”

“Well, good. That helps your case somewhat. But neither of you live in Nevada. You see, one of you would have to live there for at least six weeks to even qualify for the annulment.”

“Six weeks?” Lois gulped. Neither of them could take off work that long to work out this “problem.” She could have Superman commute, though... But that idea wouldn’t work either. It might get awfully suspicious if Clark Kent took up residence in Nevada while maintaining a job in Metropolis and showing no airline flights on record...

“I’m afraid so. It’s very easy to tie the knot in Las Vegas,” Mrs. Prescott started.

“No kidding.”

“But a little trickier to *undo* the knot... If you can’t qualify for the annulment, then you’ll have to file for divorce.”

Lois nodded. “Thank you for your time.”

So, “for better or for worse” it might be then. At least for now.

She walked back to the Planet, numb. What could she do?

She felt exhausted with even the idea of filing for divorce.

And if word got out to the press when they went to court about this fiasco, Superman could easily be recognized publicly as Clark Kent. How could they explain the truth otherwise, especially how they even *got* to Vegas or the fact that she was seen with *Superman* there? She didn’t think she could put them through that — put *him* through that, even if she was tempted... So that left one other option... she could try and reconcile things with Clark. But she just wasn’t ready to go there yet either. She wasn’t ready to forgive the lies. And besides, if he really did love her, wouldn’t he have told her the truth before, on his own? Wouldn’t he have stopped the madness in Vegas before it even happened? Granted, she knew he’d been affected by some form of Kryptonite, but had it really pushed him to act so rashly? She didn’t know. It was an unknown quantity in the equation of who was to blame and for what. And if he was affected by the Kryptonite and wine combo, then the blame would fall squarely on her shoulders.

But the truth was she depended on him, as Superman or Clark, Kryptonite or none, to be upstanding. And there was the rub.

When she got back to the newsroom, Clark was nowhere to be found. She thought it odd, but he could be off being Superman. She asked around to see what the scoop on her partner was.

“CK? Well, he was here earlier. But he said he had a lead to follow up on...” Jimmy offered.

She nodded. It was just as well. She needed some time to think.

Spinning in her head all day, Lois decided that she just needed to face Clark. Talk to him and see what was what. She still felt betrayed, but she also knew that she did care about him. Whether she’d admit that to him or not was another story. He had seemed annoyingly flippant about their situation today, but maybe he was just covering up his own fear? Did his attitude mean that he did want to stay married to her? She wasn’t certain what either of them really wanted, but she knew she couldn’t get any answers keeping her thoughts to herself. At the very least, they were stuck in this marriage for the foreseeable future, and so she needed to find out where he stood.

He never came back to the Planet, and she was annoyed with herself for caring so much about what he was up to. After much debate and finally swallowing an ounce of pride, she decided to go to his place. [[If nothing else, then I need to snoop around and find out what he’s doing!]] she justified to herself.

It was after dark, and she was surprised to find he wasn’t home either. [[Is he in Smallville?]] she wondered, knowing how much he relied on his parents to sort him out when things went wrong. For one panicked moment, she thought maybe he had left Metropolis for good. She strained to see into his apartment, and though she couldn’t make out much, she could see shadows of furniture still there. So he hadn’t moved or anything. Yet.

She decided to wait on his stoop, and she sat there for almost an hour. She had thought of letting herself in to his place, but she figured it would distract her, being on his turf, from sorting through her muddled heart properly. Sitting on the stoop wasn’t much better, though, as she still found herself thinking in circles, overanalyzing everything, and worrying. [[Why all the lies, Clark?]] she asked her absent partner. She was about to give up and go home when she saw him walking up, all dressed in black. She wasn’t expecting that. What had he been doing?

She strived for a cool tone, but even she could hear the bitterness in it. “You look good dressed in black. Perfect for your skin tone. Perfect for a funeral — maybe yours,” she said, tempted to pick a fight.

“Lois, please.”

She sighed wearily, her thoughts from the last hour still heavy on her heart. “I thought I knew you. I thought you were decent and straight-up and good. I thought you were the last honest man. I thought you were... you were... Clark Kent.”

He stared at her a moment, thinking how to answer her. He couldn’t deal with the guilt of their situation right now. But he could sure use his partner. He decided to tell her exactly what was going on. No more lies, no more secrets. “Mom and Dad have been kidnapped.”

“What?” Lois said in surprise, her own problems momentarily forgotten.

“This guy, he knows my secret and wants to tell the world. So he threatened to kill — to kill my parents. I had to — I had to rob a jewelry store, Lois,” he said, looking her in the eyes, begging her to understand, to help him.

“But you’re — but you’re Superman,” she said, not fully understanding.

“It’s not that easy, Lois.” He shook his head ruefully. “I can’t risk this maniac killing my parents if I don’t do what he says.”

“And so you can’t call the police or the FBI,” she said slowly, beginning to see his predicament.

“No, I can’t take that chance.” He sat next to her on the stoop, running his hands through his hair in frustration. His whole world was falling around down around his ears.

“But he’s letting them go now?” she asked. “You said you robbed a jewelry store. So he got what he wanted, right?”

“I don’t think so. I think he wants more,” he said.

They both sat quiet a moment. Lois wouldn’t forgive him everything yet, but she did feel for him. Despite everything, this was serious. She knew what his parents meant to him, meant to her! They were sweet people and didn’t deserve this.

“Clark, I’m so sorry,” she said finally.

He looked at her, so many emotions flowing through him. If she would only forgive him, maybe they could move on. Have a real life together. But first, they had to rescue his parents. “Thank you.”

“And do you know where they are?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I searched the city. But I think they’re somewhere lead-lined. I heard my dad — “ he choked on this last. She hesitantly reached over and took his hand. He gently squeezed it in acknowledgment.

“I heard Dad say so on the phone. I have no idea what to do, Lois. I have never felt so helpless in my life!” He turned to her. “And I’m sorry, Lois. So sorry about — us.”

She sighed. “Look, you and I do have a lot to sort through, it’s true. But let’s call a truce for now — your parents are most important. I’ll do whatever I can to help.”

“Thanks,” he said, genuinely touched that Lois would put aside their problems to help his parents. “Would you... would you like to come in a moment?” he asked, hesitant, but not wanting to be alone.

“OK.” She nodded, following him inside. Ever the problem solver, her mind was ticking ahead about his predicament.

“Clark? Do you think there is anything we can do tonight?”

He sighed, though he smiled a little that she had said “we.” “No, I don’t think so. I left the jewels where he asked me. I’ll... I’ll probably get a phone call tomorrow. I’m just so worried, Lois.”

He sat down heavily on the sofa. “I’m the fastest, strongest man on the planet, yet I don’t know what to do to help my own parents.”

She sat down next to him, though she kept her distance. “You’ll figure something out. You always do.”

He laughed bitterly. “I don’t know how you have such faith in me, Lois.” He moved so he could see her face. “I’ve screwed up so many times. Have I... have I ruined it for us as well?”

She could see the pain it cost him to ask those words. Part of her wanted to be stubborn and petty. But at the same time, she knew she would never really be happy if she actually lost Clark.

“I saw a divorce lawyer today, Clark,” she began, making herself more comfortable on the couch.

He froze at her statement. “So, you... you were able to get the annulment?” he asked, trying to sound casual.

She shook her head and smiled ruefully, “Nope, not a chance. Not unless one of us can live in Nevada for at least six weeks.”

He digested that a moment. But she went ahead and answered what he was bound to come up with next. “It wouldn’t do for Clark Kent to be living in Nevada and New Troy without a trace of frequent flier miles, Clark. I know that. We’d have to file for divorce.”

“Oh, no,” he said under his breath, seeing much as Lois had earlier how that could unravel everything about Superman in front of the world.

She sighed. “I guess we have to face what this — marriage means to us. Sooner or later.”

He looked at her, feeling relieved that she didn’t want to push a divorce. Maybe things would be all right between them after all. “Lois, I have to tell you something.”

She rolled her eyes. “Please. Not another revelation about something! I can’t take any more surprises!”

He laughed warmly. “No, I promise the secrets are over.” He turned to her, serious. “But, Lois, I want you to know that I had been thinking about asking you to marry me for a while.”

She looked surprised at that. “You had?”

He sighed. He had held so much back from her — he felt now she deserved the whole truth. With all his cards out on the table, maybe he could still come up a winner. “Yeah, I had been torn between what should come first, my telling you about Superman or asking you to marry me.” He hesitated, but then he reached for her hand, to give himself courage to tell her the rest. “The thing is, Lois, I knew you had had feelings for Superman.”

She started to say something, but he squeezed her hand. “Please. Let me finish. This is hard enough as it is.”

She nodded.

“And I wanted — no, I *needed* to know that you could love me, Clark, and not the Suit.” His eyes searched hers, willing her to understand him.

“You’d been waiting for *me* to see the man beneath the suit, is that it?” she asked slowly.

“Yeah, sort of. But to be fair, I know I hadn’t always led you in the right direction to do so. I had become jealous of my own creation! It’s funny, really. But then when we started dating...” He moved closer to her, daring to cup her cheek. “It meant the world to me. It meant that you were finally allowing the real me in.”

She touched his hand on her cheek and then turned slightly away. “I don’t know what to say exactly, Clark. Part of me wants to pummel you for lying to me for so long, but part of me — “ She looked at him, her eyes going to his lips. Her heart was thudding in her ears.

He felt his body go warm, seeing her look.

” — wants to do this,” she said breathlessly, leaning in to kiss him.

He met her halfway. She kissed him with all the passion and love in her heart, and he answered her in equal measure. All the hurt they had done to each other was erased in a meeting of lips as their hearts finally answered one another.

Clark pulled her closer to him. As long as he had her, everything would be all right. They’d make it through this mess, get his parents back. There was hope left in the world if Lois Lane could forgive him.

He pulled back in surprise when he tasted the salt of her tears. “Lois? What’s the matter?” he whispered, brushing her hair out of her face.

“The thing is... I was marrying *you* in Vegas. I said those words to Clark, though I didn’t realize you were standing right there.”

“I know, Lois.” He smiled gently, glad to know he was at least right about that. “I think that’s why I went along with it. It’s not how I imagined marrying you, but I’m glad we did it.”

She took a shaky breath. “So, you forgive me for marrying Superman?”

He smiled. “As long as you forgive me for not telling you I *am* Superman.”

“Well, I may still have a bone to pick with you still on that one... but I think I forgive you.” She grinned happily.

Clark glanced at the clock. “It’s past midnight. Do you... want to go home?”

Lois laughed warmly. “Clark, you really can be so naive sometimes, you know that? We’re married, aren’t we? I mean... you said you were going to ask me to marry you anyway. So you *do* want to be married, right?” she asked, babbling, suddenly nervous she had misread him.

He kissed her gently, his voice soft and husky when he answered, “Yeah, I do.”

She smiled, relieved. “Well, then, what if... what if I stayed the night?” She looked up at him coyly.

“You realize this — would make things official. No turning back,” he said, his warm chocolate eyes sparkling with love.

“Yeah, I know,” she answered, her voice breathy. “I want to stay.”

“Then I can’t think of any reason why you shouldn’t.” He grinned. She stood up, but he suddenly pulled her back down on to his lap. He tenderly stroked her jaw, moving her face so he could look in her eyes. “I love you, Lois. As Superman or as me, Clark. I love you. I always have, always will.”

“Oh, Clark!” She threw her arms around his neck. “I love you, too.”

They kissed, each an anchor for the other in the storm going on around them. They were lost in a moment, in each other.

“Take me to bed,” Lois whispered, nibbling at his ear.

Clark swooped her up in his arms, kissing her as he made his way to his bedroom.

For tonight, the world could wait.

Lois awoke in the middle of the night to an empty bed.

“Clark?” she cried out.

She slowly got up, her limbs languid from their earlier lovemaking.

She padded softly into the living room and found Clark sitting on the sofa with his head in his hands, the moonlight making his dark hair almost appear silver.

“Hey,” she said quietly, noticing his distress.

He turned to her, and his eyes were glassed over, not recognizing her for a second in his grief. Then, all at once, he reached for her, and she took him in her arms.

“God, Lois. What am I doing? Here I’ve been making love to you while my parents are trapped somewhere!”

She felt him tremble, and she realized he was crying. Superman was crying.

“Clark, it’s OK.” She held onto him, stroking his back like a child. “We’ll figure something out.”

“How can you love someone so selfish, Lois?” He looked into her eyes.

She was shocked at this statement. “Selfish? You? Clark! Are you kidding? You are the most giving, self-sacrificing person I know!” she said, tears welling up in her own eyes.

“So you had a moment of weakness, Clark. It just proves that you’re more human than you know,” she said gently, kissing him on the cheek.

“I’ve had more than a moment of weakness in the last few

days, Lois,” he said sadly. “But what if this one costs my parents their lives?”

She gently took his head in her hands, stroking his hair back. “Clark, listen to me. I asked you before — “ She hesitated, gesturing vaguely toward the bedroom. “I asked if there was anything we could do at that moment. And you said no. There’s nothing to be done tonight. We’ll just have to get to the Planet early tomorrow and pull together our resources and do what we always do. Clark, we’ll beat this guy, one way or another! Now, come on, let’s get some sleep.”

He pulled her to him, kissing her gently. “I’m glad I married you, Lois Lane.”

She laughed softly. “Me, too.”

She took his hand and led him back to the bedroom. As they got under the covers, Clark pulled her into his arms.

“I don’t know what I’d do without you, honey,” he said, pulling her in tighter to him.

That endearment meant more to her than all the world.

“Love you,” she breathed before drifting off to sleep in her husband’s arms.

At the Planet the next morning, Lois and Clark were inseparable. Lois was determined to help Clark get his parents back, safe and sound. He gave her all the leads he had on the case, the strongest being a particular orchid scent he had picked up at his apartment when his parents had been kidnapped. As it turned out, it was a rare orchid only ordered by Zurich Air. Lois did what she could over the phone to see who had flown with them recently.

“I need to talk to somebody who can authorize the release of passenger lists....” She touched Clark’s arm, trying to reassure him that she’d make some progress.

Perry and Jimmy were eying them from Perry’s office.

“Jimmy, that dress Lois has on, didn’t she wear that yesterday?”

Jimmy looked over. “I don’t know, Chief.”

Perry tapped Jimmy lightly on the shoulder. “You want to be a newspaperman, you gotta be observant. Does Clark look a little haggard to you?”

Jimmy had sensed something was up with Clark. He nodded.

“Like he hasn’t had much sleep lately. Like he’s got something worrying him?” Perry continued. “Like a tiger trapped in a cage?”

“Yeah, I guess,” said Jimmy.

“You know what I think Jimmy?” Perry said. Jimmy looked at Perry expectantly. “I think they eloped.”

It all suddenly made sense to Jimmy. He was bursting to say something to Perry. He had suspected something was up, but the last thing he wanted was Lois on his tail for letting anything slip about her request yesterday. He did a double take. [[Was Lois married to *Clark*?]]

“I don’t think this is going to work. We don’t have any leverage,” said Lois, looking up at Clark apologetically.

Just then, a cop came down the ramp, heading right towards them.

“Could I talk to you, Kent?”

Clark stepped away from Lois a moment to greet the cop. She nodded and gestured that she’d still try to get through to someone at Zurich Air.

“Sure, Sergeant,” Clark said.

The cop looked at Clark warily, holding a photo in his hand. “You know that Mazik’s jewelry store that got hit last night? They’ve got a hidden security camera.”

Lois met Clark’s eyes, and they both schooled their features not to reveal anything.

The Sergeant handed the photo to Clark. Clark was momentarily stunned; there it was, his crimes for the world to

see.

“That could be anybody, Zymak,” Lois chimed in very convincingly, making Clark thankful Lois was so good at thinking on her feet.

Zymak held up the photo to Clark, still a little suspicious. “Same nose, same chin, same glasses.” He let the photo drop but still kept his scrutiny on Clark. “Where were you last night from, say, nine o’clock on?”

Clark was still freaking out, but again, Lois jumped in to rescue him.

“He was with me,” she said, looking the cop in the eyes.

“Yeah?”

She moved to grab Clark’s arm again, protectively. “Yeah.”

“All night?”

She smiled and felt her cheeks go a little red. “All night.”

Clark finally found his voice, “Sergeant, you *know* us. Do you really think I’d commit a burglary? Do you really think Lois would lie about it?”

Clark had him there. Kent and Lane were the most trusted reporters he knew. He finally relented. “No. No, I don’t. But you’ve got a double out there somewhere, Kent.”

Zymak started to leave, but Clark got an idea and spoke up before he got too far. “Ah, Sergeant? If I ask Superman to help you find this thief, could you do me a favor? We need some information from Zurich Air, uh, for something we’re working on....”

The cop took the phone, and Lois and Clark exchanged looks of relief.

A little time later, and they had another piece of the puzzle. Apparently, the guy who owned the jewelry store had also been the one who had flown on Zurich Air along with an alias for Nigel St. John, who had worked for Lex Luthor.

“What would Nigel St. John want with your parents, Clark?” she asked naively.

“Lois, I tried to tell you that Luthor was after Superman. I don’t see why St. John wouldn’t have it out for me as well.”

She quietly digested that. She didn’t like to dwell on thoughts about Lex, and as she realized that he had been after Superman, it came together why Clark had been so adamant about her not marrying Lex last year.

“I’m sorry, Clark,” she said, touching his shoulder.

“What for?”

“I know it’s in the past and all, but I’m sorry for not listening to you about Luthor last year. I just didn’t —”

“You didn’t know. You couldn’t have known. Lois, it’s OK. We’re together now. That’s all that matters to me,” he said, patting her hand on his shoulder.

She smiled sadly. “We could’ve been together a lot sooner, I think, if I’d have listened to you.”

“Oh, really?” he asked, smugly. “You think you would have paid attention to plain old Clark last year, the hack from Nowheresville?”

Lois had the grace to look abashed. “Touché... but I’m glad we’re together now.”

“Me, too.” He grinned. “Hey, I just had an idea. I’m going to call the airline back.”

Clark cleared his throat as he prepared to sound like Zymak. “This is Sergeant Zymak again, M.P.D. You had a passenger, S. Janacek, Flight 697, two days ago. Can you tell me how the fare was paid?”

He heard the answer on the other end and looked at Lois with a “get a load of this” look. “Mazik? Jason T. Mazik?”

“As in Mazik Jewelers?” she asked.

“Thank you,” he said and then slammed the phone down, irritated. “Yes, as in Mazik Jewelers.”

He moved to get his coat. He was going to face this Janacek guy and get to the bottom of this.

“You wait here.”

She laughed, grabbing her coat in one motion as she followed him, “When pigs fly!”

They had spoken to Janacek, who didn’t give them any helpful information. Clark was certain it was the same guy who had threatened him on the phone. Back at the Planet, they were trying to strategize their next move.

Clark was so thankful Lois was on the same page with him. He wasn’t sure he deserved it, but he definitely appreciated it.

As she was pouring herself a cup of coffee, he came up beside her and gently squeezed her arm. They had decided not to tell anyone about their, um, accidental elopement yet. And with this mess going on with his parents, Lois didn’t need to be made a target either.

“Hey,” he said softly.

She smiled. “How you holding up?”

“Better. Thanks to you.” He smiled warmly. “Lois, I’m so relieved to have you by my side. I was really worried that you’d never forgive me and —”

She nodded, sighing. “I thought about not forgiving you, but the truth is — we need each other,” she said simply.

“We do. Lois, I —”

Jimmy waved over at them. “CK, phone for you. You can take it at Stanley’s desk.”

Clark nodded and turned back to Lois. “Guess now is not the time to bare our souls,” he said wryly.

She laughed. “Go on.”

Clark grabbed the phone. Lois watched him carefully. It was the kidnapper, Janecek! She was certain. She walked over to him.

“Just tell me what you want,” said Clark tersely.

Clark listened a moment and then looked right at Lois, his eyes eloquent with love, but his jaw tight. “Yes.”

He suddenly turned away from her, a frown forming on his face. “Bring what?”

All the color drained from Clark’s face. He slowly put down the phone and turned to Lois. His eyes looked torn between horror and disbelief.

“That was him, wasn’t it?” she asked.

“Lois, don’t —” Clark started, panicked.

She reached to touch his arm, concerned. Clark looked extremely worried. “What did he say to you? What did he say, Clark?” she asked, her own voice rising with worry at Clark’s continued silence and look of shock.

He turned to her, his eyes pained with fear. His voice was strangled as he got out, “He wants you dead... in thirty minutes... or he’s going to kill my parents.”

Lois shook her head. “It’s Nigel... we got too close.”

He reached for her hand, desperate. “I want you to get out of town. Get on a plane, go far...”

She leaned up to him, touching his face. “No, I have an idea. Meet me at my place.” She reached up and kissed him fiercely and then whispered in his ear, “As Superman.”

She stepped back from him but still held his hand, squeezing it reassuringly as she said, “Everything’s going to be all right.”

And then she was gone, leaving him to wonder what crazy idea she had now.

“Freeze you?” Clark asked in disbelief.

She nodded, seemingly trying to reassure herself that it was possible and a good idea. “Like cryogenics... people who fall in frozen lakes but get revived? You freeze me with your breath, fast — I’ve seen you do it a hundred times — then it looks like I’m dead, you bring the body, and —”

He shook his head. “Lois, do you have any idea how dangerous that is? There could be arterial ruptures, permanent brain damage....” He looked at her, his heart in his eyes. “You

could die.”

She was pacing now, fear growing in her, but she was determined to do this. “Yes, I could die. But your parents *will* die unless we do something. Clark, I can do this. Let me do this.”

She had tears in her eyes as she turned to him. Their eyes held for a moment, and then he suddenly reached for her, pulling her into his arms. “Why, Lois? Why are you willing to risk so much for me?” he said, his voice cracking.

“Because I love you. Don’t you know that? Despite everything.” She wiped her eyes. “I don’t know what I’d be without you, Clark. And if this is the only way to save your parents, then so be it. I trust you.”

Those last words just about broke his heart. He felt tears in his own eyes, and he pulled her to his chest again. “It’s your trust that scares me, Lois. I — I hope I can live up to it.”

She pulled back from him enough just to be able to reach up and kiss him. “You do every day. You’re the best man I’ve ever known, Clark.”

“Even when I fly you off to Vegas and marry you and not tell you who I really am?” he couldn’t resist adding, laughing through the tears.

It wasn’t the time for jokes, but her lips curled up in a small smile. “Yeah, even then,” she said quietly, both knowing in that moment all was truly forgiven.

He looked at her a moment, unable to believe the woman before him was his wife. He moved to kiss her. He meant it to be a gentle kiss, but suddenly they were kissing passionately, fiercely, hungrily — as if it was their last.

Finally, they pulled away. “We don’t have much time,” Lois said weakly.

He nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

“I love you,” she mouthed, her voice stifled by tears.

“I love you, too, Lois,” he whispered hoarsely. He took a steadying breath. He knew he had to do this. Logically, it made sense; she had come up with a brilliant idea. But his heart squeezed in the pain of her sacrifice. He just hoped it would all work out. That she’d be fine.

“Clark, just do it,” she squeaked, trying to be brave.

He nodded, pulling his thoughts back to the moment.

“Close your eyes.”

He reached out to cup her face; it was their touch. One they had shared so many times, both with him as Superman and as Clark. She looked up at him in surprise. [[He *had* tried to tell me. He just could never find the words...]]

Clark stepped back, distancing himself physically and emotionally as best he could. He had to just be the hero, even if it ripped out his heart in the process.

His breath came like a kiss. It loved her and froze her at once. She stilled her breath, her mind reaching for one thought only.

[[I love you.]]

She heard his voice first. “Fight, Lois! Don’t go! You are not dying on me, you are not giving up! Breathe!”

His voice called her back from the abyss, from the darkness, from the cold. [[Clark!?!]] her mind called for him, reaching for her anchor. Suddenly, she felt her lungs fill with a painful puff of air, warm compared to the still-cool tissues inside of her. She coughed and then opened her eyes.

The first thing she saw was his face. Her husband’s face, a look there between terror and hope as he saw she was finally breathing.

“I heard you... “ she managed shakily. “I heard you calling.”

He pulled her to him. She was trembling, but alive. “I thought I lost you,” he whispered.

“They’re all right? Are your parents all right?” she asked between gasps as her lungs struggled to work normally.

His heart squeezed with love for her, touched that her first

thoughts would be for his parents. He was also relieved — she remembered. His throat felt tight as he answered, “Yes, thanks to you. They’re fine.”

Martha and Jonathan came over. “We’re right here, Lois,” Martha said, her eyes moist and watching the scene before her.

“I’m so... cold,” Lois managed.

Clark looked helplessly at her and then back up at his parents. “Get her to a hospital, son. We’ll be fine,” Jonathan offered, seeing Clark’s lost look.

Clark nodded and gently swung her up to cradle her in his arms.

She feebly tried to wrap her arms around his neck, but she didn’t have the strength to hold on to him.

“Don’t worry, Lois. I’ve got you,” he said, his heart in his throat.

They took off to the skies, Clark holding her close to his chest. He gently used a bit of his heat vision on her to warm her, but he worried it wouldn’t be enough.

“Lois? Are you OK? We’ll be at the hospital shortly.”

She nodded, sleep pulling at her limbs.

“So... tired, Clark,” she murmured.

He gently shook her. He was pretty sure she had hypothermia, making it dangerous for her to fall asleep.

[[I caused this! I did this to her! Wasn’t there any other way to save them?]]

“Lois, I need you to stay awake. Focus on my voice. Just listen to me. Stay with me, now...”

He continued talking nonsense, keeping his voice calm despite the turmoil he felt inside. He needed to keep her conscious on the way to the hospital.

It was less than a five minute flight, but it felt like an eternity to Clark until they arrived at Metropolis Medical Center. The orderlies were used to Superman dropping off victims of crimes and accidents, so they didn’t look askance at him. He wanted to follow her inside but knew he couldn’t as Superman. He didn’t even know if he’d be allowed to see her as Clark later either.

“Lois Lane... Kent,” he heard her tell the nurse filling out her preliminary paperwork before they admitted her.

Clark smiled in relief. He touched her hand. “I’ll send Clark to you just as soon as I can.”

She smiled weakly and then turned back to the nurse, who was ready with a wheelchair to take her inside. She was in good hands.

He could leave her for a moment. He had one detail of unfinished business to attend to.

Clark headed off to do a little intimidation demonstration at Janecek’s.

He flew in through the window, his cape swishing impressively behind him. Superman crossed his arms across his chest and gave Janecek his best “don’t mess with me” glare.

The man had the gall to taunt him with Tempus’ diary right in his face.

“It’s all written down here in this little book. Superman is Clark Kent,” Janecek said arrogantly, tossing the book to land on a tiny marble stand.

Clark smirked at the perfect placement of the book on the stand. [[How convenient,]] he thought as he used his heat vision to set the book aflame.

[[You’ve proven that if the world knows too much about me, people I care about can get hurt.]]

“Unfortunately for you, we live in skeptical times, where people demand proof,” he said, taunting as he finished. “And you don’t have any.”

Clark took off to the skies, glad to have that problem solved.

He brought Lois flowers. Tulips from Holland, actually, but

he didn't tell her that. He could barely say anything anyway, seeing her lay so helpless in that hospital bed. She was asleep, and he simply sat by her side, happy that he had that privilege as her husband.

Clark gently touched her hand, and she opened her eyes.

"Told you everything would be OK," she murmured.

He felt tears well up in his eyes. Would everything be OK? If villains could use those closest to him to break him like this, put those he loved at risk, would everything ever be OK?

She reached up to touch his face but couldn't quite make it. He took her fingers in his hand instead and reached down to kiss them. "The doctor said you'll be able to go home in a day or so, Lois. I'll stay with you, if you want."

"I'd love for you to stay, but it's not fair to you."

"I don't mind, Lois," he said quietly, stroking her forehead.

"OK." She smiled back.

The nurse came in with a tray. Clark helped her sit up. Lois looked at her dinner disdainfully. "I may be sick, but I'm not dying. Can't Metropolis Medical do any better than this garbage? I swear — I should write an op-ed on this...."

Clark laughed. "Well, at least you sound like you're back to your old self?"

She looked at him sweetly. "Could you maybe — get some of that Chinese food that I really like?"

He smiled, her spirit warming his heart. "Sure, I'll be back before you can say — Superman." He winked at her.

As promised, he was back in a flash, and Lois couldn't be happier. "This is *so* much better. Thanks, Clark."

"I'd do anything for you, you know that," he said quietly.

"And I'd do anything for you," she said, serious a moment as she looked in his eyes. She had proven that she would indeed, and it made him want to protect her all the more.

He was quiet as he ate, thinking. He loved Lois with all of his heart, but he was terrified of losing her because being close to Superman was dangerous. She was a target, and it scared him.

Lois sensed his moodiness. "What is it, Clark?"

"I nearly lost everyone I hold dear today, Lois," he began slowly. "All because someone got too close to my secret."

"But you didn't lose anyone. I'm here. Your parents are fine. Why are you upset?"

He sighed. "I'm scared that those who are close to me will always be in danger. I'm scared that one day — I won't be able to protect you."

He looked her in the eyes, willing her to understand him.

"Clark, I'm a big girl. And I was always able to get out of scrapes before I met you. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you're around, but don't feel like you have to constantly protect me. That's — exhausting."

"Tell me about it," he said wryly. Then he leaned in to try to explain his fears. "I'm delighted — over-the-moon happy that we're married, don't get me wrong. But it terrifies me, too, Lois. It scares me that I'd do anything to protect you and that criminals can do anything to you to get me to do their will."

She looked down at her Chinese food, thinking. "What are you proposing, Clark? That we keep our marriage a secret? You know, it's not like they know I'm married to Superman," she whispered. "I'm married to my partner, Clark Kent."

"I guess you're right. As long as my identity stays protected, everything should be OK," he said, though he still sounded unconvinced.

Lois hesitated a moment but then told herself to just ask what was on her heart. "Clark? When *are* we going to tell people we're married?"

She wouldn't look at him, afraid of what she might see in his eyes.

"I don't know, Lois. And it's not because I don't want the world to know about us, 'cause I do." He smiled and reached to

touch her hand reassuringly. "It's just... how would we explain it without Superman? I mean, do we mention going to Vegas at all? People will ask questions, where and when, you know? We need to have ready answers for that."

She understood, but her womanly pride was still a bit hurt. She absently looked at her hand, realizing that she didn't even have a proper ring. All she had was a cheap ring that the chapel had given them and that she had taken off yesterday simply because it was leaving a green imprint on her finger. She surreptitiously looked at Clark's hand — he didn't have one on either.

She sighed. Lois wanted to feel convinced that he loved her and wanted to be with her, but she needed the stuff that went along with it! A proper wedding ring would be nice!

"Lois, what is it?" he asked, sensing her mood.

She looked over at him. [[He'll think I'm being petty,]] she thought. "Nothing, Clark. I guess I'm just tired, that's all."

He reached to clear away the Chinese boxes and leaned in to kiss her forehead. "What am I? A child?" she asked, still smarting.

He laughed warmly. "That you are definitely not," he said, leaning in to give her a proper kiss. "Now, get some sleep."

After Lois fell asleep, he left the hospital for a quick flight around the city. He hoped he would be back before she noticed he was gone, but he desperately needed to clear his head. He was terrified of the lengths Lois had been willing to go to help him. [[And would I do any less for her?]] He knew the answer; he would do all that and more for her. So why did it bother him that Lois would risk so much for him? [[Because she's not invulnerable. I could lose her.]]

Clark slowed his flight as he headed over Metropolis Harbor. He was lost in his thoughts, watching the iridescent waves below him, now and then catching a glimpse of his reflection.

[[It's dangerous for her to love me. Criminals will use her against me. Can I be so selfish to want to keep her in my life even so?]]

He felt torn. In his lowest moments, he had thought of breaking it off with Lois — thought that it was too dangerous for her to be associated with him, even as Clark. But he knew he could never entirely let Lois go, and it wouldn't be fair to keep her attached to him by continually watching over her and yet keep his distance from her emotionally. He knew he could never do that entirely either. Therefore, this relationship was an all-or-nothing situation.

[[So, what's it going to be, Flyboy?]] he asked himself, though he heard Lois' voice.

He spun upwards, thinking about Lois. How much he loved her, and how much she loved him. Love was their true vulnerability, and in that, they were equals.

All or nothing? That was easy.

[[All. It was always all.]]

Lois was feeling better the next day and was entirely relieved to be going home. She hated feeling like an invalid and was glad she wasn't taking up a bed at the hospital any longer; real sick people needed it much more than she did.

"I'm so glad to be out of there!" she exclaimed as they headed to her Jeep. "I'll even drive!"

He smirked, "OK... you're the top banana."

"You bet!" She smiled.

Her heady exuberance over her freedom dissipated a little as they started towards her place. Her apartment, not his, not *theirs*; they still had separate living arrangements. They hadn't discussed the details of their marriage yet. When would they make it official? Would they always have a "his" and "hers" place? He had seemed nervous about it all the other night. Was he having

doubts because of Superman?

She started to feel her palms sweat. She hated feeling vulnerable and stupid. [[Get a hold of yourself, Lois! This is Clark! Just talk to him!]]

“Clark?”

“Yeah?”

“Um, so, are we going to keep our apartments? Or should we look for a house? I don’t want to sell my apartment unless you want to sell yours. And, well, should we at least tell Perry about us now? I mean, since no one knows about us yet and —”

He stopped her before she could babble further. “Lois, one thing at a time. Can you give us a few days? You just got out of the hospital. I promise we’ll come up with a plan.”

“Oh, a few days?” she asked quietly. [[What do they need a few days for? Is he still worried about protecting me? I told him I could take care of myself. And no one needs to know anything about Su —]]

He sighed. “Lois, calm down. I can practically hear your thoughts.”

“You can?” she said.

“I mean, I can sense you’re worrying. There’s nothing to worry about, Lois. I love you. Things will be fine, OK?” He reached over and squeezed her free hand.

“And we are going to tell people about us, aren’t we? I mean, it’s not like we’re wearing wedding rings that people could obviously notice.” She felt her cheeks flush red. She hadn’t wanted to mention the rings.

“Lois, do you trust me?” he asked suddenly.

“With my life,” she answered, not missing a beat.

He smiled a quirky half-smile at that. “I mean, do you trust that I love you and that I want to be married to you?”

She glanced over at him, seeing his earnest look. [[What a fool you are for worrying, Lois,]] she chided herself.

She sighed. “Of course I do.”

“I just need two days. Can you give me two days? You’ll be back at work by then, and — it’ll give me time to sort some details.”

She didn’t understand that cryptic remark. What did he need two days for? It sounded like he was having doubts and just wouldn’t admit it. But it was just two days. Surely, she could survive not knowing whatever it was for that long. [[Yeah, right. I have to know everything.]]

“Why two days, Clark? What details? Superman? Surely it’s not such a —”

He didn’t want to do this, but he played his trump card.

“Lois, I never ask you for anything. I am just asking to let the question of the details of our marriage ride for two days. That’s it. I want to be your husband, I promise. More than anything. Just give me two days.”

“OK. You got it. Two days. But this better be good.”

She didn’t see him smile.

Lois did not want to stay home. But the doctor insisted she take at least the next two days off, so she did.

[[What’s with this whole two days nonsense, anyway?]]

“I want you to let me know about everything that goes on, Clark! Just bring me your notes from the day, and I can work on them at home.”

“Fine, Lois. Don’t worry. It’s only two days. It won’t kill you.” He laughed. He was glad she seemed ready to conquer the world again, but she still had a cough that needed some care.

He cupped her cheek. “Be good.”

“Ha! Like I have a choice,” she said, gesturing to her sofa, which was set up with a blanket and pillow, a few novels, and a couple of movies to occupy her day. “I really think I could go into work...”

“Lois. Just take the time off. You’ll be fine. I’ll let you know

what’s going on, OK?”

He leaned in to kiss her.

“I’ll be by after work.” he whispered.

She slid her arms around his neck and kissed him back. “You better.”

Three hours later, Lois was freaking out. Was Clark up to something? What was with this mysterious two days? What details did he need to sort out without her? He hadn’t stayed over last night, claiming she needed rest. She had agreed, but still. He was her husband! What was going on?

She decided to call the Planet and see if anything was going on there. She told herself it was just to check up on things in the newsroom, but really, she wanted to know if Clark was up to something.

“Jimmy? It’s Lois.”

“Hey, Lois! Are you feeling better?”

“Yeah, I am, thanks,” she said. She and Clark had decided to just say she had gotten sick. There was no need to give details.

“Well, we can’t wait to have you back!”

She smiled. “Thanks, Jimmy. Hey, so, is there anything... interesting going on today?”

“No, not really. There was a robbery downtown. Superman took care of that. But otherwise, it’s been a slow news day. You aren’t missing much.”

“Has Clark... has Clark mentioned me?” she asked.

“Uh, not really. Just to say you’re doing better and that you’ll be out of the office for the next two days.”

“And Perry is OK with that?” she said in some surprise.

“Yeah, CK and him were talking this morning. Hey, there’s CK now. You want to talk to him?”

“Sure,” she said, but she already heard Jimmy passing the phone.

“Hey,” came Clark’s warm voice over the phone.

“Hey, yourself. Just calling...”

“...to check up on me?” he asked, and she could hear his smile.

“No,” she said, a little defensive. “Just to see what was going on in the newsroom.”

“Uh-huh,” Clark answered, unconvinced. “There’s not much to tell you, Lois. I’ll bring you some notes on that Senator I mentioned to you last week.” He paused. Last week was a lifetime ago. “But I’ll do the write-up on the robbery this morning. It wasn’t a big deal. And, uh, I got a few quotes from Superman to go on.”

“You crack me up,” she said in slight awe.

“What do you mean?”

“When I think how causally you mention your ‘quotes from Superman’ that you ‘somehow’ managed to get — Clark, you’re too much, is all!”

He sounded sheepish. “Well, it’s just that, uh — I guess I’m in the habit —”

“You don’t have to defend yourself. I think now I find it sort of — cute.”

“Cute?” he said in surprise.

“Yeah, cute. So sue me.”

“Hey, Lois. I’ve got to go. Perry needs to see me. I’ll see you later, OK?”

How she wished she was there in the newsroom with him.

[[I’m so addicted to my job... and my partner.]]

“OK. Love you.”

“You, too.”

And then he hung up.

[[He didn’t say he loved me, didn’t use that word, “love.” Is it because he doesn’t want people at work to hear? Am I fooling myself?]]

Lois was glad to be back at the Planet, even if she had only missed three days of work. Still. She barely even took weekends off. Three days off of work for Lois was like two weeks to most normal people.

“OK, kids, time for the morning meeting. Everyone in the conference room!” Perry shouted, gesturing to get the party started.

After roll call came the assignments, always Lois’ favorite part.

“I’m ready to go, Chief. What have you got?” she asked.

“Uh, Lois, I have a special assignment for you and Clark. I told him to not mention it until you came back to the office. He actually got a head start on it while you were recovering, but I’m sure you’ll catch up quick,” Perry said.

“What?” asked Lois, getting a little angry. She thought Clark had told her *all* the stories they were supposed to be working on. Why would he hold one back from her, even if Perry told him to?

Perry reached for a paper nearby. “Yeah, you see, we need to do a follow-up article on this front-page story Clark did while you were ill. Here, Clark, why don’t you tell her about it?” Perry winked and handed the paper to Clark.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, but you were recovering, and we wanted to wait ‘cause it’s going to take a lot to make it happen the way it should,” Clark said, a serious tone to his voice that came across as patronizing to Lois.

“I am perfectly capable of handling big stories even when I’m sick. You know that, Clark! Besides, I was only gone for three days!” she said defensively.

“Well, this is a story we have to do together, or it won’t work. And Perry and I thought it would be best to ask you about it now, in front of the whole staff.”

Suddenly, Clark kneeled before her, looked in her eyes, and then turned the paper around so she could read the headline.

It read: “Lois & Clark: The Planet’s Own Tie the Knot.”

“Will you marry me... again?” he asked, giving her a wink.

He took in her surprised smile and then put the paper aside as he pulled out the real deal. A small black box. She squealed with excitement. Even before he could open it, she threw herself into his arms. “Oh, Clark! Of course! Over and over again!”

They looked in each other’s eyes. “I thought...” she breathed, recriminating herself for all the doubts that had snuck into the back of her mind.

“I know. I didn’t want to deceive you, just surprise you. And I needed some time to prepare this.”

She hugged him and then looked around at the small conference room. People were expecting something.

“I think they want us to kiss,” Lois said, her voice sultry.

“Then what are we waiting for?”

He lowered his head to hers, giving her a kiss full of promise. The whole office cheered.

“I *knew* something was up with you two!” said Jimmy. Then, remembering the divorce lawyer list, he gave a questioning glance at Lois, who looked up from Clark when she heard his remark.

She saw his look and firmly shook her head. Jimmy lifted his hands in a “whatever” gesture.

“Congratulations!” Perry cried, bringing out a bottle of champagne. “You kids have the rest of the week off. Clark said you needed some time to sort out looking for a new place. We can hold down the fort for a few days unless something big comes up.”

Lois leaned in to kiss Clark again and then whispered so only he could hear, “Thank you.”

“I told you I wanted the world to know,” he said softly. “This means we can plan a proper wedding, however you want to do it.”

“Well, my mother will be thrilled,” she said, laughing

through some tears. “But all I care about is that I’m with you.”

He smiled warmly. “That’s all I want, too. Hey, don’t you want to see the ring?” he suddenly asked. “I’ve been dying to give it to you. I needed the two days to have it engraved....”

“Oooh! Yes!” she squealed girlishly.

He opened the box for her, and there was a beautiful silver ring with a simple yet stunning diamond.

“Oh, Clark,” she sighed.

“Superman found the diamond himself,” he whispered with some pride.

He took it out of its satin cushion. “Read the inscription.”

She took the ring from his hand but didn’t let go of him. “‘I’ve loved you since the beginning,’” she read, tears welling up in her eyes again.

He took the ring from her and slipped it on her finger. They leaned in for another kiss, and then Lois pulled back just enough to look in his eyes and said, “...And I’ll love you till the end.”

This time, when they kissed again, the world fell away.

THE END