

# A (Super) Brief Paws in the Heroic Life of Clark Kent

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Rated PG

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**Description:** During TOGOM, Clark is in for a short but hairy (or, rather, *furry*) adventure.

**Author's Note:** First off, if you read this story, you'll need to suspend your disbelief. That said, the story is a mixture of the unserious and the serious, and I try to make it as "likely" as I can. Secondly, I am shamelessly ripping off my own basic formula for this story (I began a "Brief Paws" series with Star Wars fanfics). Thirdly, my approach to the tree-kangaroo I mention was inspired by a real kangaroo called the Bondegezou (the details I found are here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bondegezou>).

**Author's Thanks:** Thanks to Kitt for her encouragement and suggestions. And many many thanks to Female Hawk for her beta reading! She encouraged me to extend the story, and I think doing that helped bring it to a WAFFy conclusion!

**Disclaimer:** I don't own Lois and Clark, and I'm not making any money off this story.

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Dead.

Clark Kent was dead.

Dead as a doornail. Dead as iron . . . . Dead as steel.

He chuckled bitterly to himself. Well—that wasn't entirely true. The steel part of him was still alive.

But it didn't matter. Not really. Life as he had known it was over. From here on out, it was "do not pass go, do not collect two hundred million kisses from Lois Lane."

Still, he couldn't regret what he had done, even if he regretted what had happened as a result of his actions. He would have given up his life for her in a heartbeat. He didn't regret trying to protect her from scum like Dillinger.

The only question was . . . what now?

What was he going to do now that Clark Kent had ceased to exist?

After helping put Al Capone and his gang behind bars, he could move Superman to another continent and make up a new identity there. But nothing would ever be normal again. Not now that Lois Lane had been taken from his life.

Oh, he could still see her if he really wanted to. She had always seemed more than willing to talk to his superhero persona. But it wouldn't be the same. Superman didn't tag along as Lois picked locks and snooped through files . . . or go on long stakeouts with her and argue whether or not "chumpy" was a real word.

Things could never be the same between them ever again. The word "despair" couldn't begin to cover how he was feeling.

He hadn't even been able to say goodbye to Lois. It had all happened so quickly. He hadn't been given any time to think.

And now he was sitting in his apartment with the lights off, trying to think of his future and what country he should go to next . . . but really only able to think of Lois Lane and that wretched look that had been on her face when she had seen her partner die to the world.

He would have to leave Metropolis. Clark Kent was dead, and he couldn't stand to be around her only as Superman. Every time he saw her, it would be a reminder of what he had lost.

On impulse, he stood up and walked over to a box on the shelf. While traveling in New Guinea, he had visited a tribe and saved the life of the chieftain's son. As thanks, the chieftain had insisted on giving Clark a wooden talisman that he said had mystical powers.

He opened the box and looked down at it. The talisman was made into the shape of a tree-kangaroo the tribe had appeared to view as an ancestor, and the small outlines of different animals had been carefully carved on the kangaroo's wooden body. He slowly picked it up, clenching it in his hand like a lifeline. He closed his eyes and thought of Lois. She must have been hurting. This wasn't just hard on him. It was also hard on her.

He wished he could have said goodbye to her. He wished he could go to her and comfort her. He wished he could be with her. He hated that she was hurting because of him . . . .

Hated that she was grieving his death when *he* wasn't dead at all.

As he stood there with his eyes closed in the darkness and his hand clenched around the talisman, he

felt something strange. It was like a shifting or a stretching or a compressing. It felt as if time and space were suddenly colliding together in an incomprehensible way, pulling him through the blackness and transporting him to something . . . different.

He clenched his eyes tighter as the strange sensation grew, reaching greater heights until he thought he might cry out. And then—suddenly—it stopped.

Panting, he inhaled deeply, and then he opened his eyes.

He was on the floor of an unfamiliar place. As he lifted his head and looked around, he amended that thought. No, it wasn't that the place was unfamiliar. It was just that he hadn't been laid out on the floor there before. Somehow, he had made it to the hallway of Lois's apartment building. And up above him was the golden "105" that signified Lois's apartment number.

Clark looked left and then right, baffled as to how exactly he had ended up there. Had that wooden talisman done this to him? And why?

He looked down to his hands, mystified as to why there were black sticks beneath him. Then his jaw dropped.

Those black things beneath him were *not* sticks or hands . . . They were paws.

In a panic, he twisted his head around, only to find exactly what he had feared: a tail.

What was going on?!

He spun around, trying to capture that tail in hopes that it *didn't* belong to him, but he had no such luck. When he moved, so did it.

And then, not knowing what else to do, he sat down on his doggy haunches and actually *howled* in despair.

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Lois Lane was inside her apartment binging on chocolate ice cream. She was about halfway through the tub and showing no signs of stopping.

After she had left what was formerly Georgie Hairdo's club, she had come home in a daze and immediately gone to her stash of chocolate bars. Amid broken sobs, she'd begun to eat the chocolate bar by bar. When that supply of chocolate had been depleted, she had pulled the ice cream out of the refrigerator. But all the sweets in the world couldn't comfort her even an iota. They couldn't change the fact that her partner was dead.

At some point during her sugar-seeking craze, she managed to put the phone off the hook and turn off her beeper. She didn't want contact with anybody. The only person in the world she wanted to see right then was the one person she could never see again.

How could he have died? Why had he tried to protect her like that? If the gangsters had taken her away, she could have escaped from them. But instead, Clark had tried to keep her from getting hurt. He had given his life for her.

The scene had played in her head a thousand times. If only she'd done this . . . If only that had happened instead . . . If only Clark wasn't dead.

She flung her spoon to the floor. It wasn't fair! Clark Kent had been the nicest man on the face of the planet. Why had he had to die?

She was closing her eyes, about to let out a frustrated sob, when a howling sound came from outside her door. She froze, utterly confused as to why there would be such a noise in the first place, much less at this early hour. And then she rose shakily to her feet, wondering if she was about to see a ghost. She set her tub of ice cream on the counter and tightened her robe, and then she slowly unlocked her door. As she cracked it open, her eyes fell to the floor. Sitting there was a black Labrador that looked just as confused as she felt.

"What are you doing?" she wondered aloud as she stared down at it in puzzlement.

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Clark hadn't meant to let the noise escape him—but he had been feeling all out of sorts (admittedly, with good reason), and the sound had just come out. So when Lois heard him and opened the door and asked him a question, he didn't know what to do.

His first instinct was to turn tail—literally—and run. His second instinct was to remain seated. Even in the body of a dog (no! he couldn't really be in a dog's body, could he?), he could tell that Lois had been crying. And that was enough to anchor him where he was.

He stared up at her sadly, his heart aching for her. Then he tilted his head and opened his mouth. But all that came out was a whimper.

"I don't like dogs," Lois said in a small voice as she wiped her still-wet eyes. "They shed. And besides, this apartment building doesn't let anyone have dogs. So, go away." She moved her arms in a shooing motion, though there wasn't much effort put into the movement.

Clark stayed right where he was. He might not have been able to say anything to her in the body of a dog, but there was a chance he could comfort her nevertheless. He got to all four of his feet and gave a hopeful look into her apartment. Then, for good measure, he let out another whimper.

“I’m not letting you in,” she told him. But he could tell she was close to giving in, and he let loose one more whine. “Fine,” she sighed. “But only for a little while.”

Glad that was out of the way, he trotted past her into the room. Still, his ears perked up when he heard her mutter, “I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

She shut the door and locked it, and the noise somehow reminded him of just how strange a predicament he was in. What in the world was he going to do? Somehow, he didn’t think biting down on a pencil and laboriously writing out, “Sorry, Lois, I’m not dead. I just got reincarnated into the body of a dog. Love, Clark” was going to be his best option.

Why had this happened to him? Was this development permanent? Was he going to literally become Lois’s lapdog?

*One step at a time*, he told himself. *You’ll figure something out.*

At least, he *hoped* he would be able to figure something out.

His eyes moved to the spoon on the floor and then up to the counter where an open tub of ice cream sat. He felt a stab of guilt. He’d done this to her.

He turned his head up toward her and felt his long ears flop. Lois was looking at him with a puzzled expression, and then she walked over and placed a hand on his back and started to bend over. “Are you a boy or a girl?” she was saying, and he let out a yelp and scurried off to hide in the kitchen.

But he didn’t make it before she determined, “A boy, I see.”

Clark felt utterly abashed. Lois Lane had just checked him out—only it wasn’t *his* body, it was the body of a *dog*, and he thought he was going to die of embarrassment. Had that *really* just happened? He pressed his fur-covered forehead against the ground. This was something else he had *not* planned for. His fantasies of being violated by Lois Lane had gone nothing like this.

“What are you doing?” she asked him, and he couldn’t have answered even if he’d been in the body of a dog who could actually talk.

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Lois stared at the strange creature in her apartment.

The dog was acting really oddly. She wasn’t sure why he was touching his forehead to her kitchen floor, and she was beginning to wonder if she’d brought in a stray with a few screws loose. But when she had asked him what he was doing for the second time, he had slowly brought his head up and looked at her with dark brown eyes, and a chill had traveled down her spine. There was something about those eyes . . . something almost . . . human.

She looked away from him, feeling uncomfortable. “Maybe you should go,” she said softly, but he let out a whine like he knew what she was saying, and she found her gaze drawn back to him. What was it about this dog? Why had she let him inside in the first place? She’d never even liked dogs. And he was probably shedding all over her floor even now.

Lois sat down on the couch, and the dog came over and stood in front of her. If she hadn’t known better, she would have said he looked concerned. But that was ridiculous.

They sat there in utter silence for what seemed like forever. Though she wanted to bring her thoughts back to the death of her partner, there was something about that dog which held her to the spot. He looked like he wanted something from her, but what that could be, she had no idea.

Finally, she jumped up, deciding she would stall for some time to think. “I feel grimy. I’m going to take a shower. Will you be fine by yourself?” She paused, as if waiting for an answer, and then she shook her head. “You’re going crazy, Lois,” she muttered. “Like a dog is going to answer you back. I just hope he doesn’t chew up my apartment.”

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Clark watched as Lois left the room looking frazzled. Great. Just great. He’d scared her off.

Unfortunately, he didn’t know how to act like a dog. That was definitely not a skill set he’d picked up on his travels.

Exhaling, he lifted a paw and stared at it, trying to wiggle his toes without much success. He was still in shock as to how exactly this had happened. If he’d known that was *really* a magical talisman, he would have never touched it. This was ridiculous.

But as he began to think about it more, he realized that he had been given a chance. Here was the

opportunity to comfort Lois. Superman didn't make a good figure for that sort of thing, but a dog . . . a dog was perfect.

Filled with new purpose, he gave a brief nod of his head to himself. It was settled. He was going to try to be a good—if furry—friend to Lois.

Now, he just had to occupy himself until she returned. Surely, that wouldn't be too hard.

He looked around. All right. Maybe it would be harder than he had thought. He couldn't exactly pick up a book and read it. So, what was he going to do?

Feeling like a snoop but unable to stave off his curiosity, he padded quietly into Lois's bedroom and sat down in the doorway. This was a place that was generally off-limits to him, so he hadn't really been able to give it a long look. The room was pleasant enough, but it lacked a certain something. It didn't really feel like *home*.

He took several steps forward, looking around. His gaze moved upward, and he saw the black-and-white bear he had won for Lois in Smallville up on her dresser by a pile of laundry. His heart began to throb anew, and he left the room in sorrow. He wouldn't be able to win her any more stuffed animals.

Something came to him in the air, and he began to sniff. His canine nose appeared to be just as strong as his superhuman one had been. He licked his lips—well, his jowls . . . or whatever it was dogs had. It couldn't hurt to get a little snack, could it? Lois usually kept on hand a supply of Twinkies and Dingdongs for him, knowing his penchant for junk food. Chocolate was bad for dogs, so he needed to lay off the latter, but surely a Twinkie or two couldn't hurt him.

But as he walked into the kitchen, he realized there was a problem. How was he going to get *to* the Twinkies?

As a human, all he had to do was reach up and grab them. Unfortunately, right now he lacked both height and opposable thumbs.

Glancing around, he spotted a wooden chair that he should be able to move without any difficulty. But after trying to push it across the floor with one of his front legs, he gritted his teeth briefly and then clamped his jaw around a chair leg. This was ridiculous. No Twinkie was worth this.

He brought the chair forward, trying not to think about the fact that it was a chair leg his mouth was currently enveloping. Finally, he was done dragging it.

After thinking for a second, he crouched down and then leaped up into the chair.

Clark opened his mouth in a canine grin, but he closed it when he heard something thumping. Turning his head, he realized his tail had been hitting the chair, and he swallowed. He had *not* just wagged his tail . . . had he?

He cocked his head and listened to the sound of running water. Lois was still in the shower. That was good. He still had some time.

He turned his gaze toward the kitchen counter. Another crouch and leap later, and he had made it up onto the countertop. He carefully sat up, bracing a leg against a cabinet close to the one that was his goal. Then he reluctantly bit down on the Twinkie-containing cabinet door's handle. He pulled, and—

—the cabinet door went flying across the room and crashed into a lamp.

Clark cowered down in mortification, the phrase “uh oh” shooting through his head like thunder. This wasn't good.

He hadn't realized that he still had his super powers. He'd thought the super sniffer and the super hearing had all been a result of his being in dog form. It was hard enough to have special abilities in a body he was comfortable with—how in the world he was going to handle them as a *dog* was beyond him.

He swallowed, his eyes moving to the unopened box of Twinkies. Well, in for a penny, in for a pound . . .

He reached out a paw and knocked the Twinkies box to the ground. Then, he carefully hovered down off the countertop and on to the ground.

*This Twinkie had better be worth it*, he thought to himself.

And then he realized he had another problem. How was he supposed to *open* the box?

He tried pawing at it, attempting to get a claw beneath the top of the flap on the side, but it was no use. His paws were too clunky for this. It looked like it was back to using the teeth again.

Clark pressed a paw against the box to hold it down, and he began gnawing at the side of the box. This was humiliating, but he really wanted that darn Twinkie!

Finally, there was a pile of bits of the box beside him, and he could reach a paw inside and bring out a Twinkie. Now, he had to figure out how to open the wrapper . . .

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Lois had hoped the hot water would make her feel better, but it didn't. She just kept thinking about Clark.

He had meant so much to her. Just by bringing her coffee in the morning, he could brighten her day. There was no one in the world like him.

Amid the roaring of a gangster's gun, she had lost her partner and best friend . . . and someone who could have been even more.

As she thought of him lying there—of the residual warmth of his body against her body—her chest constricted. He had died without ever knowing how she had felt about him. After the Lex Luthor fiasco, she had been about to reveal her feelings to him, but then he had retracted his declaration, and she had left the words unsaid.

But she had loved him. She really had. And she still did. Somehow, she knew she always would.

There was something special about him. His kindness and honesty had marked him as different from the very beginning. He really had been the world's last Boy Scout.

She began to cry again as she rubbed her loofah across her arms, and the water washed her bitter tears down the drain. But they kept coming, and she pounded a feeble fist against the shower, the loofah showering the wall in a fountain of soap. He couldn't *really* be gone!

A sudden crashing noise from the other room came to her ears, and she froze, her train of thought grinding to a complete halt. *What* was that dog getting into?

She quickly finished cleaning herself off, and she stepped out of the shower and into a robe. After wringing out her hair, she hurried outside the bathroom.

She found the dog in front of a box of Twinkies, his snout utterly covered in cream. A doorless cabinet revealed the clue of what had made that loud sound.

On seeing her, the dog licked his chops and stared at her.

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Lois was in a robe.

Clark licked his lips—jowls—and swallowed. It was obvious she had rushed out of the shower without taking time to towel off first. The robe absolutely clung to her. But her words to him utterly shattered whatever juvenile fantasy his brain was about to cook up:

“*Bad dog!*”

He cowered down. That was certainly something he hadn't heard every day. And now that he was on the

receiving end, he realized just how a dog felt when getting caught doing something he felt he had every right to do.

And what was worse was that he couldn't plead his case and say he was hungry. He couldn't say a word to her.

So he inhaled and gave her his best pair of puppy dog eyes, hoping it would work.

She stared back at him without flinching . . . and then, unexpectedly, she melted. “Oh, fine. I guess you're hungry. But how about I give you something more appropriate for a dog?” She picked up the Twinkie box and put it on the counter; then she moved toward the refrigerator.

Clark looked down at the bits and pieces of the side of the Twinkie box on the floor. Then he took a paw and pushed the pieces into a neater pile. He couldn't help throw the pile away, but maybe he could help make it easier to pick up.

Lois got out a hot dog and put it on a small plate, which she then set down on the floor in front of him. “Eat that,” she told him.

Clark stared down at it. He'd been acting more like an animal by the minute, and he was starting to worry maybe he was forgetting what it was like to be human. He placed first one paw and then the other on the plate, squeezing the hot dog between his two front feet. Then, sitting up, he brought the hot dog up to his mouth and began eating it.

“You are so strange,” Lois muttered. “And how you got into that cabinet is really beyond me . . . .” Shaking her head to herself, she left the room.

He finished up his hot dog and was beginning to wonder if he might be able to coax her to give him another one when he heard her footsteps. He turned his head hopefully, only to drop his jaw in surprise.

Lois was wearing nothing but a white bra and underwear, and she was walking toward him. “I guess you probably want some water, too, huh?” she was saying.

His heart thumping and the words “peeping Tom” flashing through his brain, he turned his head away from her. Temptation. He needed to get rid of temptation.

He rested his chin on the floor and placed his paws over his eyes. Then, he began to recite in his head the names of the U.S. states in alphabetical order. Alabama . . . Alaska . . . Arizona . . . Arkansas . . .

He heard her pause beside him and then move to a cabinet. There was a noise as she brought out a bowl and then another noise as she began filling the bowl with water. “You are the strangest dog I’ve ever met. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were a human trapped in a dog’s body.” She chuckled, but it was weak. She was obviously having a hard time holding herself together.

Clark listened as she walked away from him after setting down the bowl, and a few seconds later, he slowly removed his paws from on top of his head. A quick glance revealed she had left the room. Exhaling, he stepped toward the bowl of water. He obviously couldn’t pick it up and drink it. Releasing another sigh, he stuck out his tongue and began to lap up the water. Fortunately, the motion seemed instinctual.

When Lois came back to the living room, she was wearing a tank-top and a pair of shorts. The urge immediately hit him to stare at her long and shapely legs, but he fought it and brought his eyes to her face.

She sat on the couch and buried her face in her hands. He saw the slight movement of her shoulders before he heard the sound of her sobs.

*Lois*, he thought, his heart breaking for her. He wanted to do something for her—wanted to comfort her, to wipe away all her pain.

An idea hitting him, he trotted into her bedroom. He looked up at her dresser and the bear sitting there. He flew up to the top of the dresser and sat on the pile of clothes. Carefully, he took the bear in his mouth. But as he moved to get into a better position for flying to the floor, his paws slipped on the clothes on the dresser, and he went tumbling toward the ground, the bear dropping from his mouth.

Fortunately, he stopped in the air right before he hit the floor. Unfortunately, a lacey black pair of Lois’s underwear fell on his head.

He floated there for a moment in shock and confusion. Then he touched his feet to the ground. Then he began jerking his head about in a manic fashion to get the underwear off.

Lois’s panties finally went flying across the room like a lacey missile, and it took all of Clark’s mental willpower not to start imagining Lois wearing them. He was on a mission, and he had to remember that. His being transformed and brought to Lois’s apartment was not about animal lust. He needed to stop thinking like a dog and start thinking more like Clark.

Recovering the bear from where it had fallen, he went into the living room and gently placed his front paws on Lois’s legs. The bear fell onto Lois’s lap. Then he brought his paws back down to the floor.

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Lois opened her water-filled eyes to look down at her lap in confusion. Sitting there was the bear Clark had won for her in Smallville.

It didn’t look like anything special. It was just a black bear with bits of white on it. But when she had been given the choice between a Superman doll and the bear, she had known which one she wanted to take.

To have chosen the Superman doll would have been to taint the moment, to bring another man into the relationship. And the bear was so much like Clark that it had only seemed appropriate to take it. It wasn’t flashy; it was simple and honest and comforting. Like Clark.

She smiled and kissed the top of the bear’s head, squeezing it against her chest. “Thank you,” she whispered graciously to the dog. He had probably simply wanted her to use the bear for a game of fetch, but the action touched her nonetheless.

The dog seemed happy to be spoken to, and he wagged his tail enthusiastically. In the process, however, he knocked over an old glass of water with his long black tail. His brow almost seemed to furrow as he turned to look at the spilled water. He seemed surprised, like he hadn’t known his tail was wagging.

Jumping up, she quickly got a dish towel and cleaned up the mess. The dog looked at her so sorrowfully that she laughed, unable to be mad at him.

She set the towel down and sat on the couch, patting the spot beside her. “Come on. Get up.”

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Clark had *not* realized his tail was wagging, and he was embarrassed to have caused yet another mess for Lois to clean. But fortunately, she didn’t seem upset, and when she motioned for him to get on the couch, he complied.

What he hadn’t expected was the hug she gave him next. Even more unexpected was the fact that she was pressing him up against the cleavage which her tank-top didn’t hide. He’d dreamed of being in a position like this—well, something like this—but he did *not* want his doggy self to get more action with Lois Lane than his human self ever had.

When Lois finally pulled back, he felt both relieved and bereft, and he stared up at her, waiting for her to say something.

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“My partner died,” she began in a voice that was barely more than a whisper. “He was killed by someone, and it’s all my fault. He died trying to protect me.” She took in a deep breath and then let the air out shakily. “And I keep thinking about him lying there on the ground, his eyes closing for the very last time . . . .”

The dog whimpered, and she gave him a tight smile, her eyes filling with moisture once again. “He was so important to me. He was my best friend.”

She gave a bitter laugh. “I used to think Lois Lane needed no one. But I was wrong. What I needed was Clark. But he’s gone now. I never could have asked for a better partner . . . or a better friend.”

The Lab placed a paw on her leg, and as she looked over at him through blurry eyes, she felt he was trying to communicate with her. As an animal, he couldn’t really understand what she was feeling, but she nonetheless sensed that somehow he *did* know something about what she was saying.

“I never told him how I felt,” she whispered. “I never . . . told him I love him.”

And then she buried her face in the dog’s fur and let herself cry. She cried long and hard, and he simply sat there, unmoving, a pillar of strength when she was at her most vulnerable. She finally managed between sobs, “I would give anything to have him back.”

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Clark hadn’t thought he could feel any worse, but he was wrong.

To see Lois reduced to such a state dropped him even deeper into the pits of misery. He felt so helpless, so useless. And he was beginning to hate those gangsters even more by the second.

He couldn’t understand how people could have such a disregard for life. Didn’t they see how precious a life of love could be?

The revelation of Lois’s love for him had struck him like lightning. He hadn’t known she felt that way. And now that he did know, it was too late. He couldn’t give her a life with Clark Kent—that man no longer existed to the world.

His fur was soaked with Lois’s tears, each one of which pierced straight to his heart. He had to at least

give Lois the closure of seeing Capone and his gang behind bars. He owed her that much.

He whimpered and placed a paw on her shoulder, staring at her in concern.

She slowly started to wind down, her sobs growing further and further apart until at last she was silent. She pulled back and stared at him, and he tilted his head. When she gave him a smile that seemed real, his heart lifted a little.

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“Thank you,” Lois told the dog. She was genuinely glad for the company. She had never been much of an animal person, but this dog had somehow given her great comfort, and for that, she was grateful.

She reached out and gently pushed him onto his side. He looked at her in confusion, but that confusion turned to pleasure as she scratched his stomach, and his leg began to shake.

She chuckled. “Guess you like that, huh?”

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When Lois had pushed him over, Clark had been startled, to say the least. But the belly rub she had then given him had wiped away all traces of surprise. He would take a belly rub from Lois any day, that was for sure.

She finally stopped, however, and he looked up at her hopefully. “I bet you probably need to go outside before I leave for work. I’m going to go get dressed. Can you stay out of trouble for five minutes?”

He lowered his head guiltily. He hadn’t meant to cause trouble. He had just wanted a Twinkie.

She rubbed his head with a smile and then left the room.

He watched the spot where she had disappeared for a few seconds, and then he turned his gaze to the stuffed bear on the sofa. He pressed his nose against it and inhaled the scent of Lois. It was a smell he would remember for the rest of his life.

When Lois returned, she had on dark gray pants and a bulky gray sweatshirt over a white long-sleeved shirt. He guessed it was her way of mourning his death—black would be too much of a call for attention for Lois Lane to use it as her mourning color.

He tilted his head as he looked at her, and he could hear a thumping behind him that must have been a large mouse or something because he could *not* have been wagging his tail again.

Even while mourning—even while she looked sadder than he had ever seen her before—Lois Lane was still the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

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Lois didn't have a leash, so she simply trusted the dog to stick beside her as they went outside. If they got separated, she would be sad to lose the companionship, but he wasn't her dog. He was so sweet . . . he had to have an owner somewhere who was desperately missing him. She hated to keep him from his real home.

The dog trotted beside her, looking happy, if a bit overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the city. He definitely didn't seem like he was accustomed to being outside.

But though the dog had cheered her, her thoughts kept returning to Clark's lifeless body. And it would all day, she knew.

What she needed to do was go in to work. Perry wouldn't expect her to be there, but she couldn't simply sit around and continue thinking about Clark. Her heart was already on the floor, bleeding. There was no sense in flinging it to the ground time and time again.

Now, she just needed to figure out what to do with the dog.

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Clark had never seen Metropolis while so close to the ground, and everything seemed new to him.

The sights, the smells, the sounds . . . everything was changed by a simple decrease in height. Even though it was still dark out, he didn't feel impaired by the dimness.

But though Lois kept giving him expectant looks, he was *not* going to do his business in front of her. He'd already done a lot of humiliating things in dog form, but peeing in front of Lois Lane was *not* going to be one of them!

A sudden flash of movement in the corner of his eye drew his gaze, and he whipped his head around to take in the appearance of a tabby cat. And then his canine instincts were taking over, and he was chasing it around a corner and into an alley.

As the cat jumped up onto a dumpster, he skidded to a stop, suddenly comprehending the ridiculousness of his actions. He wasn't feeling any better about himself when his nose started sniffing wildly at the myriad of smells like that of an excited terrier.

He turned around and heard Lois whistling for him. Then he sat down and sadly gazed into nothingness.

Even his short time as a dog in Lois's household had been better than the prospect of a life without Lois.

He *had* to figure out a way to get out of his dog body and bring Clark Kent back. No matter what it took, he needed to accomplish that. A life without Lois wasn't a life at all. If he had learned anything from his time as a dog, it was that. He loved her, and she loved him, and that had to be recoverable. There had to be something he could do about it.

He closed his eyes and sighed, and then he felt that strange shifting and twisting. The simultaneous compressing and stretching came, and then with a burst of energy, the sensation released him from its grip. Opening his eyes, he found himself back in his apartment.

Clark exhaled in relief. Though he missed parting with Lois already, he was glad that he was no longer helpless. Somehow, he was going to figure out how to entrap Al Capone's gang. Then, he would figure out a way to bring Clark Kent back into the world.

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As Lois jogged into the alley where the dog must have disappeared to, she frowned. He was gone.

The thought made her sad, as he'd been a great comfort to her, but now her mind was pulled back to Clark.

It was too early to go in to the Planet, but she knew she would never be able to go back to sleep. So she returned to her apartment and sat on her couch and hugged her stuffed bear to herself for hours.

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Clark went to Smallville to talk to his parents. The more he thought about how much he loved Lois, the more determined he became to repair the damage Capone's gang had caused. And suddenly, a glimmer of an idea came to him. If Capone and his gang could be resurrected, couldn't Clark Kent somehow be as well?

A quick conversation with his parents revealed a clue as to Dillinger's whereabouts—apparently, he had been caught sixty years previously coming out of a movie theater. Clark quickly changed into his Superman outfit and flew to Metropolis. After that, finding Dillinger was easy.

Dropping the man from a tall building wasn't exactly the most ethical move he could have made, but it got Clark the information he needed. One quick trip to the authorities to drop off Dillinger, and then he was flying to Professor Hamilton's hideout.

He located Hamilton's manuscripts and perused its contents at super speed. Then he found just what he had hoped he would: an excuse for how Clark Kent could return to life. He felt so happy he wanted to start singing. Now, he just had to find Lois.

He flew to the Daily Planet, expecting Lois to be there, but all he found was a morose Jimmy.

"Superman," he said in surprise. "I, uh, I guess you heard the news about C.K.?"

"Yes," Clark acknowledged somberly. "But I have some news on that front for Lois. Do you know where I can find her?"

Jimmy shrugged. "She left in a hurry a little while ago. I tried paging her, but she's not answering her beeper."

Clark took in a small breath. She was probably out finding trouble. Nobody had a penchant for that quite like Lois Lane. "Could you do me a favor? Do it again, and keep doing it."

He left before Jimmy could reply.

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Following the sound of Lois's beeper, Clark came to a construction site where Capone and his thugs were starting to lower cement down into a hole containing Lois and Professor Hamilton. Clark zipped away and retrieved some rope, and then he snatched all the gangsters' guns (placing them in a neat pile off to the side) and tied up the gangsters themselves.

Then he turned off the cement mixer and pulled Lois and Professor Hamilton out.

"What's going on here?" Capone demanded. He looked surprised to be suddenly on the losing side.

"What's going on is that you are going to jail for murder, attempted murder, and a number of other crimes," Clark told him in a steely voice. He turned to Lois and Professor Hamilton. "Are you two okay?"

"We'll be fine, Superman," Lois said softly. "Thank you for saving us."

Clark turned and looked at the gangsters. "Do you think you can hold on to them until the authorities get here? I have something I need to do."

Professor Hamilton picked up a gun, looking at it like he'd never seen one before. Then he held it up where Capone and his gang could see it. "We sure can, Superman."

With a smile, Clark sped off and called the police. Next, he called Jimmy and told him he could stop

paging Lois. Finally, he changed into suit pants, a shirt, and a tie, and he put on his glasses.

Then, in the darkness, his heart pounding with excitement, he walked toward Lois.

She stared at him for a few moments as if she thought he was a ghost, and then she suddenly began to run toward him. "Clark!"

He hastened his step and met her, embracing her just as happily as she embraced him.

"Clark!" she said again. "Is it really you?"

He placed a kiss on her hair, unable to help himself. "Yes. Superman found my body and froze it so there would be no permanent damage to my tissue—he was able to resurrect me by following the procedures in Professor Hamilton's manuscript."

"I hoped this day would come somehow, but I never dreamed it really would," Lois exclaimed, still squeezing him tightly.

"Me too, Lois," Clark agreed. "Me too."

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After the police came and took Al Capone and his gang away, Lois said, "Clark, I don't want to let you out of my sight, but I need to change—would you . . . do you think you could come to my apartment with me?"

Clark smiled. "Of course." While hugging Lois, he'd also gotten cement on his shirt and tie, but he didn't mind. He would ruin a thousand shirts and ties for this amazing woman.

They took a cab to Lois's apartment, and as they got out, a black Lab went running by. It could have been a coincidence—after all, Labs were a beloved species—but it nonetheless caused both of them to pause.

"You know," Lois said, frowning as she stared after the dog, "I had a really strange experience while you were . . . well, you know."

"Oh?"

Lois began moving up the stairs to her apartment building. "Yeah. I'll tell you about it after we get inside and I change."

After they entered her apartment and Lois disappeared to change clothes, Clark wandered into the kitchen. He stared at the doorless cabinet with a mixture of guilt and amusement. For him, it might as well have said in plain letters, "A super dog was here." He had almost begun to wonder if it had all been a dream, but there was the proof right in front of him. Smiling to himself, he got out a Twinkie from the box—with his hands, not paws—and unwrapped it. As he took a bite,

he began to wonder if maybe it had tasted just a tiny bit better as a dog.

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When Lois came back out of her bedroom, she found Clark staring at her door-free cabinet and munching on a Twinkie. “That’s part of my story,” she told him, and he turned around.

“How so?” he asked. She wasn’t sure, but it looked like his eyes were brimming with amusement.

“I was feeling pretty down about your death . . . . And then, this dog came to my apartment. It was strange—like he’d been sent to comfort me.” She looked down at the Twinkie in his hand and gestured toward it. “That’s exactly what he went for, too. You know, it’s kind of strange . . . . I mean, I know I was missing you a lot, so it wouldn’t have been surprising if I thought I saw your face in a piece of toast or in some paint on a wall, but there was something about that dog that reminded me of you. I don’t know if it was his eyes . . . or his sensitivity . . . or what, but . . .”

She couldn’t put her finger on it, but the more she thought of that dog, the more she thought of Clark.

Lois brought her eyes up to Clark’s face. He was staring at her with a strange expression.

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It was reckless. It was foolhardy. It was impulsive. But Clark wanted to tell Lois the truth about him—all of it. Clark Kent had nearly died to the world, and Lois Lane had admitted her love for him to a dog. Maybe she’d been confused—maybe she hadn’t really meant it. But who knew what would happen from day to day—all he had was the present, and he wanted to live his life. But what was more—he wanted to live his life with Lois Lane.

“Lois,” he began, “I have a confession. Well—a few confessions. You should—um—probably sit down.”

As Lois sat on the couch, she looked up at him in confusion. “What is it, Clark?”

He started pacing; then he abruptly sat next to her. “I wasn’t dead, Lois. I mean—I was dead to the world. But I wasn’t dead.”

She frowned. “Clark, you’re not making any sense.”

“The man people know as Clark Kent was dead . . . but that’s not all I am.” He took in a deep breath. It was time for plunge number one. “Lois, I’m Superman.”

“What?” she whispered in confusion.

He wanted to go in for plunge number two, but he figured he needed to give her time to process the first

one. Still, he wanted to get in a few things before she got angry. As fast as he could while maintaining coherency, he told her, “When I got shot in that club, I didn’t know what to do. If I didn’t do anything, people would realize Clark Kent was bulletproof, and then they would make the connection to Superman. So, I had to pretend I was dead. And then I was depressed—I wouldn’t be able to come in to the Planet again, wouldn’t be able to see you or Jimmy or Perry. Not as Clark Kent anyway. I wouldn’t be able to have a real life here as Superman—Superman can’t be seen going to ballgames with Jimmy or cooking meals for Lois Lane. Superman is a symbol, a figure.” He paused to take a breath. “He’s not a person.”

She put her hand on her chest, obviously still trying to wrap her head around this revelation. Then, as if on instinct, she slipped a pair of fingers through the holes between the buttoned fabric, feeling the Superman suit beneath. Moving slowly, she unbuttoned part of his shirt and stared down at the “S” shield on his chest. “You were alive this whole time?”

Clark swallowed. “Lois, I felt terrible. There aren’t any words for how bad I felt. I was hurting for you so much. . . and then I picked up this talisman I had gotten on one of my travels. I had been told it was magical—but I hadn’t believed it. But then I was wishing I could comfort you, and suddenly, I appeared outside your apartment.”

Lois furrowed her brow. “What do you mean?”

What he meant was plunge number two. “Lois . . . that dog was me.”

She recoiled from him and stood up. “That isn’t funny, Clark.”

“I’m telling the truth,” he insisted, getting to his feet. “I was the one who ripped off that cabinet door—which I’m sorry about, by the way—and I was the one who got into that box of Twinkies. The dog who brought you that bear I won for you in Smallville was me. Lois, I don’t know how, but I promise . . . that was all me.”

Lois stared at him, and he could practically sense the protests lining up in her mind. It was impossible—yes, he knew it was impossible. But somehow, it had happened.

And now it was time for plunge number three. “Lois, there was something else I wanted to tell you—I love you, too.”

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Stall.

The word thundered through Lois's mind as she turned away from Clark. This was so much to take in. She needed time to figure out how to react—it was like her brain was about to go into information overload.

So, she began thinking out loud. "It makes a weird kind of sense in a way," she mused. "I mean, why would a dog go after a box of Twinkies in a cabinet? How would a dog know how to get it? How would he be able to rip off a cabinet door? And those eyes . . . somehow, I knew they were *your* eyes." She moved to look at him finally. And then something hit her, and she flushed. "That means you saw me in my underwear!"

And now it was Clark who was averting his eyes from her. She could practically touch the embarrassment dripping from his pores—but she wasn't quite sure it had reached the level of her own. Hers was tsunami sized.

"I covered my eyes," he offered weakly.

She stared at him, accusations and reprimands on her lips, but then she tilted her head and smiled as she thought of that poor black Lab in her kitchen with his paws over his eyes. "You did, didn't you?"

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Lois was taking this better than Clark had thought she would. He could try to remind her how she had checked out his canine . . . erm, assets . . . but he had the feeling that would just make the situation worse. Not to mention make both their levels of embarrassment skyrocket to the moon.

He cleared his throat. "I just wanted to help you, Lois. I wanted to be there for you . . . I love you."

There—he'd said it again. She hadn't reacted to his declaration the first time, and he was beginning to think maybe what she had said to his canine self had been spouted off in the sorrow of the moment. Still, he was hopeful he hadn't been—he was risking everything on that.

What she said next caused his mouth to drop: "Did you like seeing me in my underwear?"

"What?" he managed after several seconds, his mouth dry.

"Did you like seeing me in my underwear?"

"Lois—"

She crossed her arms. "Answer the question, Clark."

He looked down at his hands. He'd already confessed that he was Superman, that he had briefly existed as a dog, and that he was in love with her. What was one more confession to add to the list?

Licking his lips to moisten them, he told her, "Yes."

She stared at him, bringing a hand up to touch his face. As he moved his eyes to hers, she asked him in a serious voice, "Will you bark for me?"

"Lois!" he growled. Now she was just jerking his chain around.

She laughed. "I don't know why I believe you after you've been lying all this time about Superman, but I do." She shook her head. "Maybe I'm crazy. But somehow, despite all the craziness of these past few days, I'm still in love with you."

As she brought her head closer to his, he met her mouth with his own. Fireworks and swelling music couldn't have made the moment any better. It was just her lips and his, velvet and moisture and passion and love.

As he kissed her, he thanked his lucky stars for the courage and determination his brief stint as a dog had brought him. And while he had once been cursing those gangsters for killing him, now he was blessing them for bringing him closer to this wonderful woman. Sometimes, things happened in mysterious ways. Finding the logic was like looking for a needle in a haystack—it might have been there, but a person could waste his entire life looking for it.

And why would Clark try to waste his life looking for a needle in a haystack when he could be kissing Lois Lane?

"You *are* going to fix my cabinet, right?" Lois murmured against his lips.

"Only if you continue stocking Twinkies in it," he returned, smiling against her mouth.

"Done."

He pulled her closer to him, mentally saluting that wooden kangaroo talisman lying in his apartment.

THE END