

Just a Little Too Much

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Rated PG

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Summary: Clark visits Lois in jail after returning from New Krypton. The story is set after Season 3, replaces the beginning of Season 4. (Titled on the Boards as “Just a Little Too Far — Grim Reality Ending.” The beginning of this story is the same as “Just a Little Too Far.”)

Clark handed the guard his ID and then stood back for a pat down by another guard. The metal detector / body scanner was broken. When he was deemed weapon-free, Clark returned to the window. The first guard handed him back his ID, had him sign the log, and then allowed Clark to pass through to the next checkpoint. He was supposed to cool his heels for five minutes while the prisoner was brought up from the bowels, but he had too much nervous energy. He spent that time pacing.

Finally, another guard took him into a barebones room with a metal table bolted to the floor, a couple of chairs, and bars on both of the windows. It was impossible to forget one was at the prison. But at least this was better than the alternative — the cubicles with Plexiglas windows and the telephone handsets.

The door opened and Lois was led inside. She looked tired and defeated, like the prison had already stolen her drive. It had stolen her hair. Gone was her pretty pixie. She was down to a buzz cut.

As soon as the guard left Clark rushed to hug her, but she held up her hand. “Don’t.”

He nodded and backed away. They both knew he could return within a fraction of a second.

Lois spoke first. “I heard you had returned.”

“I would have been here sooner, but...” Clark started to apologize.

“I know,” she interrupted. “I heard that Nor and the New Kryptonians took over Smallville. You needed to save your parents. I understand.”

“I went to your apartment first, but you never came home,” he told her. She had to know that she had been his first priority.

“This is my home now,” she replied, resigned. He could still hear the defeat in her voice. She sat down at the table.

Clark sat down opposite her and took her hands in his. “I’ve joined your defense team. We’ll get you out of this...”

Lois looked up from their joined hands and into his eyes. Her eyes seemed dead. “I pled guilty, Clark. The trial’s over.”

“What?!” he gasped. Why would she do such a thing? “Lois, no!”

Her voice was eerily calm. “Why not? I am guilty. I did kill him.”

Clark tried to hide the horror from his expression, but he guessed a little must have seeped through from what he saw reflected in her eyes. Lois pulled her hands away from his and sighed. Clark realized he had stopped holding her hands. His hands had become dead weights on hers.

“I have a confession to make, Clark,” Lois told him. “While you were gone I told two people...” She stopped speaking.

“It’s okay, Lois. As I told you, I’m on your defense team.

Anything we say to each other falls under the realm of attorney/client privilege since I work for your lawyer. They aren’t allowed to record us. You told two people... what?” he coaxed her on.

She looked around the room again. She seemed to have picked up that nervous energy he had been plagued with before

she had come into the room. She lowered her voice. “Could you double check?”

He smiled indulgently. “If it would make you feel better...”

“It would,” she admitted.

Clark scanned the room with his x-ray and telescopic vision, but he found no bugs. The guard stood outside the door, but if they spoke softly he wouldn’t hear them. “It’s clean, Lois. Now speak freely. You know you can say anything to me. What really happened?”

Lois flipped up her hand, brushing aside his question. “Clark, I have to tell you... let you know. I told both Jimmy and Perry that you’re Superman.”

He gulped, jumping out of his chair and starting to pace.

“Why? Does this have something to do with...?”

She came to him and rested her hands on his arms. “I *had* to, Clark. Jimmy needed to know. And then I told Perry, when I confessed all to him...” She crumpled to the floor at his feet as her tears choked her. “I finally found the one thing that would stop the Chief from standing by me.”

Clark pulled Lois off the floor and held her in his arms. “I’ll stand by you, Lois. I still love you and I want us to be married.”

Lois made a sobbing noise against his chest. “No. No. No. Clark, you of all people cannot be married to a convicted murderer.” She grabbed tightly onto his shirt and he could feel her tears seeping through to his skin. “You’re too good for me.”

He ran his fingers over what was left of her hair. It felt fuzzy against his palm. How he had missed her embrace. This was not the reunion for which he had hoped. “Lois, good or bad, it doesn’t matter. I am not going to let you raise that baby in here. Marry me and at least let me care for our child until we can get you out of here. Then we’ll discuss the future after that.”

“You don’t understand!” Lois screamed at him, pushing herself out of his arms. “There is no baby, Clark. There never was!”

Clark’s jaw dropped. He could not speak, only to stare at her.

“It was all a big joke,” she said, throwing up her arms.

Finally, he found his voice. “You’re not pregnant?”

“No!” she yelled at him.

He fell into his chair. It felt like the room was tipping. “You and Lex never...” he stammered.

The guard knocked on the door, then stuck his head inside, reminding them of what little privacy they had. “Everything all right in here?”

“Yes, fine. Sorry,” Lois admitted, backing away from the door and the table where Clark sat at the same time.

The guard nodded and shut the door again.

Lois ran her shaking hands over her head. “I don’t know, Clark,” she continued their conversation as if it hadn’t been interrupted. Her voice was calmer, not so loud. “That whole time I was with Lex as Wanda Detroit is a blur. I’m not sure what happened. I have all my memories back except for those. He might have been drugging me for all I know.”

“But the blood test? From the hospital?” Clark asked, his eyes wide with disbelief. “It was proof positive that you were pregnant. Why did you lie to me about that? Was it a ploy to stop me from going to New Krypton?” His heart ached at the thought that Lois would deceive him so.

She stopped pacing. “I never lied to you, Clark. *They* lied to me!”

He gulped. “*Who?* Who would do that to you?”

Lois started pacing again. “It was all a joke. A TV show where they scare people for other people’s entertainment.”

Clark’s chair scraped against the floor as he stood. “A TV show?”

“Isn’t it funny? Ha-ha. They aren’t laughing now,” she scoffed.

He wrapped his arms around her. “Lois, what are you

saying?”

“Jimmy set it up. I told him once that nothing scared me, and he was trying to prove me wrong. He told them what had happened to me — the kidnapping, the clone, Wanda Detroit, and the amnesia, and the producers came up with this brilliant idea.”

“Oh, Lois,” he sympathized. It sounded along the lines of the type of joke Jimmy would pull.

“They didn’t know that I had missed a period due to all the stress. That I’d fall for it... hook, line, and sinker.” Lois scoffed again. “Jimmy even said, he thought it would be the catalyst that would finally get us to the altar.”

Clark winced as he pulled her tighter. “Jimmy knew I would never abandon you.”

“That’s why I *had* to tell him, Clark. After you left with Zara and Ching. I had to tell him that you were Superman and that you might never return.”

“Lois, did you doubt me?” The words killed him. She didn’t trust in him, in his love?

She tried to push her way out of his embrace, but he would not let her go. “You thought I was carrying the devil’s spawn, Clark. Of course, I would have understood if you consummated your marriage to Zara and never looked back.”

“I made a promise to you, Lois. And I won’t back out of it, even now,” he told her. “I love you.”

Lois sighed. “You didn’t see your face when I told you I was pregnant with Lex’s child, Clark. I could see it was a promise you no longer wanted to keep.”

“Maybe for a second, Lois. But then I knew that I would love that child as my own because it was a part of you. That’s why I told you that I would still come back for you.” Clark pulled the chain with her wedding ring on it out from around his neck. “Why I still wear this close to my heart.”

“I love you, too, Clark. But I can’t hold you to your promise. Not now. Not after what I’ve done. You need to move on with your life.” He could hear the catch in her voice. “Forget about me.”

“That’s not going to happen, Lois. We’ll be together again, someday. Until then, we’ll get married. At least that will get us conjugal visits.”

Lois slapped his arm with a chortle. “Still trying to get in my pants, Kent?”

“I can wait,” he lied. “I’ve waited this long. What’s another five...” He groaned again; only this time he could not hide it. “...or ten years?” He placed a weak smile on his lips.

“It isn’t fair to you. I did the crime. You don’t deserve to serve my sentence with me.”

He caressed her cheek. “There is no other place I’d rather be.”

Lois melted into his palm. “There will be no Utopia if you marry me. Superman and his convict bride won’t change the world for the better.”

“Frankly, I don’t care about Utopia,” he told her. “That ship has sailed, anyway. Wells will be disappointed and Tempus will be thrilled. Maybe it will mean that we won’t be plagued by them again.”

“Ah. A bright spot in our dismal future.” She sighed and pulled out of his arms, far enough to look him in the eye. “Are you sure you can forgive me, Clark? If you can’t, you should be honest and tell me now. I don’t want any false hopes.”

“It was an accident, right?” he asked her, knowing it was the only answer.

Lois looked down. “No.”

“No?” Clark’s heart was beating fast now. “No?” he repeated. That couldn’t be the correct answer.

“I was really mad,” she admitted. “You were gone. And in my heart-of-hearts I knew it was forever. I had just given you a get-out-of-jail-free card — no pun intended — and each day you

were gone was a day closer to the realization that you were never coming back to be a father to Lex’s child. And that’s when Jimmy confessed about the TV show thing. I saw red and I slugged him. He fell and crashed into my glass coffee table.”

Clark’s brow furrowed. “I thought he fell from your living room window.”

“The coffee table didn’t *kill him* kill him. But it was the fatal blow. Jimmy got up and called for you.” She looked away from him. Clark knew Lois didn’t want to think about the events that landed her in jail, but she knew he deserved the truth — if they were ever going to move past this.

“Superman?” he whispered.

“No, Clark. He had asked that we both meet with him. You and I. After I told him you weren’t there, that you weren’t coming back, he staggered to my windows threw them open and called, ‘Help, Superman!’”

Clark winced. His friend’s final words had been a plea for him to help. When he was no longer around.

“That’s when I told him you were Superman and that you weren’t coming back because you thought I had been knocked up by Lex. That you had gone off with the New Kryptonians and married Zara.” Lois closed her eyes painfully as if she was picturing the moment again. “Then he called to Superman again and did a swan dive out the window.”

Clark’s jaw fell open once more.

“So you see, Clark, I killed him. I might not have given him that final push out the window, but I might as well have. I wanted to. I was tempted to. But I did the crime, so now I’m doing the time.”

“Lois, there is a lot of wiggle room there. Maybe Jimmy committed suicide with the guilt,” Clark suggested, not believing one word of it.

“He had a concussion. He was not responsible for his actions, Clark. I’m still guilty.”

“It was accidental, Lois. You did not mean to kill him!” he argued.

“Not like that, no. I was trying to kill him with my fist. But if he had continued to stand there by the open window, I probably would have pushed him out. I was that angry.”

“Lo-is!”

“What? You want me to lie to you, Smallville? Tell you I wasn’t distraught with grief over your leaving to New Krypton with another woman and the fact I had inadvertently cheated on you with Lex? And that if you ever did come back, you’d feel pressured into marrying me because of your promise? So, yes, I did want to kill him in that instant that he confessed about lying about the baby and the show. He’s dead and I did it. I’m not going to change my plea.”

“And I’m not going to change my promise, Lois. I loved you then. And I still love you now. I only wish...” Clark gulped. A pipe dream. “I wish I had been man enough to stay and marry you then instead of going off with them. I shouldn’t have left you with any doubts about me... about us.”

“This isn’t about what you did or didn’t do, Clark. It’s about what I did.” Lois had tears dotting her eyelashes. He knew she was going to try and break his heart. For his own good. “I can’t marry you, Clark.”

He knew what she was doing because he had done it to her too many times. “Because you’re too small?” he asked.

“Huh?”

He had accomplished in throwing her off-course. “Or is it because I’m a jinx.”

“Clark.”

He thought she might be catching on. “Or is it because I might be hurt by association? People will come after me because of you?”

“Clark,” her warning voice seemed harsher now.

“You might never forgive yourself for what you did to Jimmy, honey. But I know, *I know*, you didn’t really mean to kill him. And even if you refuse to marry me today or tomorrow or next week or next year, I will still be here for you because I love you and I’m not going anywhere.”

Lois pulled his face to hers and rested her head against his. “Oh, Clark. What am I going to do with you?”

“Personally, I’d prefer some conjugal visits, but if you want to wait until you’ve served your time...” He swallowed. “I understand. Just remember, we both know you’re not getting time off for good behavior.”

“I can be good,” she tried to debate him. But they both knew the truth. Mad Dog Lane would do whatever it took to survive her time in prison and that would have nothing to do with being good.

Clark ran his hand over Lois’s new cropped style again. “What happened to your hair?”

She sighed. “Lice outbreak.”

He gulped. Glancing at the door, Clark wished, hoped that Jimmy would run in and with a laugh, tell them it was all a joke. That he wasn’t really dead. That Lois hadn’t killed him. That it had all been part of the show. That he had landed on one of those air mattresses that stuntmen use or that he had been grabbed out of the air by another New Kryptonian — a blonde woman in her own version of the Super suit. Or that Perry would drag Jimmy in by his ear, his head bandaged. Confess that Jimmy had gotten amnesia and had been lost on the streets of Metropolis, which was why he hadn’t come forward sooner.

This wasn’t a joke. Clark had visited his grave. Seen his body inside the casket. Jimmy was actually dead. This was their life now. For better or worse. He tilted his head and moved his lips towards hers.

“No, Clark,” she whispered with a slight snuffle.

“No?” That one word winded him.

“I can’t.”

“I love you, Lois.” He kissed her cheek.

“And I love you, Clark, but I promised myself the next time you kissed me, I’d never let you go.” Her eyes closed with pain. “So unless you plan on breaking me out of here...” Her voice held a note of hope that he hated to dash.

Clark sighed. “I’m sorry, honey. Superman only breaks the innocent out of jail and...” Oh, why had he phrased it like that?

“And I’m guilty,” she groaned. “That’s okay. I deserve this. It’s a better fate than Jimmy got.”

He agreed with her, but refused to say so out loud.

There was a knock on the door. “Two minutes,” called the guard.

“No,” exclaimed Lois softly against his chest. “Don’t go.”

“I can’t stay, Lois. This is a women’s prison,” he replied, trying to lighten the mood.

“I’m sure the others wouldn’t mind,” she whispered.

“Don’t tell me you’re willing to share,” he said with one of his charming smiles so she knew he was jesting.

Lois pressed her lips together and raised a brow. “You keep saying things like that and I may have to put you out of your misery.”

His face brightened. “Conjugal visits?” he asked optimistically.

She laughed with a shake of her head. “Yes, Clark, that’s exactly what I meant.” He wasn’t sure if she was being serious or sarcastic.

Clark rested his head against hers once more. “Let me have a kiss to replay in my head until I can see you again.” He didn’t want to leave her either. He had just gotten back to her.

Lois kissed his cheek. “Tell you what, Smallville, I’ll let you have a kiss on our wedding day.”

Whenever that might be. Clark smiled weakly. “Deal.”

“See you Sunday?” she asked, stepping away.

“Unless I can find a way to see...” He coughed. “... visit you sooner.”

A natural smile came to her face as she caught his slip. “If you think Big Blue can spy on a women’s prison without consequences, you’re deluding yourself.”

Clark blushed and glanced away. He hadn’t planned on letting her know that Superman would be keeping an eye on her. He couldn’t protect her here like he could in the outside world. She was on her own.

Lois bit her bottom lip and glanced over at the closed door, knowing like he did they were going to take her away at any moment. “Tell you what...” She took another step back. “I’ll let you have a peek for free.”

Clark’s eyes widened as what she was telling him sunk in. He gulped. “I would rather wait for our honeymoon,” he confessed, wishing he had the guts to admit he had snuck a peek once before by accident. “But I’ll take that kiss now.”

She wet her lips, walking back to him, pressing her chest to his. “You sure?”

He nodded.

“OK. Close your eyes,” she whispered into his ear. He did as he was bid.

Instead of the kiss, he felt her take his glasses. He opened his eyes with a cautious glance at the door. “Lois!” he hissed.

“*Look at me!*” she demanded.

Clark hadn’t meant to. He really hadn’t, but suddenly she was standing before him — twirling his glasses in her fingers — in the buff. He shivered. “Lois, please,” he begged, holding out his hand as he felt a flush crawl up his face. He really wanted that kiss now.

“You can’t stop thinking about it, can you?” naked Lois asked as she slowly walked towards him.

“Lo-is.” His voice cracked.

She handed him his glasses.

Clark had barely gotten them back on when the door opened and the guard entered.

“Just something to think about, Clark, until we meet again.” She smiled sweetly at him, squeezing his fingers with one last goodbye.

The door shut and Clark realized that Lois had distracted him from her leaving. She had taken control of the situation and made him forget, if even for a moment, that they were standing in a prison and that they wouldn’t be together — free — for a long time to come.

Clark didn’t want to let her go. He wanted to take Lois away from the guard and fly her away from the prison, away from Metropolis, away from New Troy, away from the USA even. He still loved her, but he knew he couldn’t break her out of prison. Lois had pled guilty of killing Jimmy, even if it had been an accident. He felt quite strongly that no jury would have convicted her of the murder. She would have to pay for her crime until he could change the conviction.

With one last sigh, Clark left the room.

He hated what Jimmy had done to Lois, to both of them. But this wasn’t the solution he would have chosen for the young man. His heart ached. He had lost his two best friends that night. Jail would change Lois. He didn’t know how and when, but it would. He thought of her new buzz cut and realized it already had.

For the first time in his life, Clark wished H.G. Wells would arrive to put their lives right and stop this heinous act from happening. But he also knew he couldn’t rely on miracles.

Clark knew he would continue to fight on her behalf, even if Lois considered herself guilty of the crime. He would try to get her sentence lowered and try to get her into a minimum security prison. Anything to make Lois’s life for the next years more comfortable. He also knew changing a conviction, especially one

where someone confessed to the crime and pled guilty, was close to impossible. It would be a long, hard battle.

He would try to get Perry to allow Lois to still work with him on stories. And even if their editor flat out refused, Clark would still consult with his partner. He needed to give her something to wrap her mind around and keep her busy, keep her Lois.

He was buzzed through a series of locked gates before he arrived back to the visitor's window. He collected his personal items and signed out of the visitor's log.

Clark would find a way to honor Jimmy's memory as he mourned the loss of his friend. Working at the Daily Planet with both Lois and Jimmy missing would be more difficult and heart wrenching on a daily basis. He wondered how Perry was surviving the loss of his substitute son and adoptive daughter in one foul swoop. The four of them had fought many battles together.

With a sigh, Clark stepped outside and took another look back at the tall, imposing walls behind him. He had been fighting walls to get to Lois since they first met. Her walls of insecurity. His walls of privacy. Walls of duty and of space. And now these concrete walls.

A light drizzle of rain cried tears down his glasses. Even the sunlight was failing him when he needed it most. He walked back to Metropolis, unable to find the joy to fly.

Lois felt the bright sunlight on her face and it woke her up. She was lying in bed. Her bed. There were fluffy pillows under her head and a warm comforter covered her body. She wasn't in prison garb, but in her own little nightie. Her head throbbed with pain. Had she drunk too much last night? That wasn't like her.

Had it all been a nightmare? A horrible, horrible nightmare?

A warm body shifted next to her in bed. In as much as she wanted to cuddle with Clark, she needed to process this whole dream.

"Honey," she whispered, knowing if he was awake he could hear her. And probably if he was asleep as well. "I had the worst nightmare. I was in jail. Prison, actually. I had killed someone and then pled guilty for it. You had gone away to New Krypton thinking that I was pregnant with Lex's baby."

He made some kind of grunting of confusion noise next her and she knew he was listening.

"Someone had told me that I had gotten pregnant by Luthor during that whole clone-wedding-kidnapping-Wanda-Detroit debacle. But it hadn't been true. It was just a lie. All lies. Actually this whole nightmare was about lies. You lying to everyone about being undercover with Intergang instead of heading off planet as Superman. Me thinking that you lied about coming back to me. Me pleading guilty just because I felt guilty, even though I technically didn't do it. I had wanted to kill him, but I hadn't, really. I had felt so alone because I didn't think you'd ever come home to me." She sighed.

It had felt so real. She ran her hands up and down her arms. "Look, I even have goose pimples. I cannot believe our lives got so out of control. I was going to be in jail for years. They had even given me a buzz cut because of lice." She shivered and then ran her fingers over her hair. It was still there in that cute pixie cut. "And worst of all, you and I couldn't be together because I was in prison. You came to visit me and all you wanted to do was marry me, so we could have conjugal visits." She chuckled and nudged him with her elbow. "I think you were desperate; afraid that you would have to spend the next five to ten years still a virgin." She ran her hand over the back of his t-shirt. "Well, at least *that* didn't happen." She exhaled. "I can't believe that I dreamed I killed Jimmy."

Lois's brow furrowed. If prison was a dream and this was reality, why couldn't she remember it? She couldn't remember Clark returning from New Krypton. She couldn't remember

making love to him. How could she forget making love to Clark? Impossible! She must have done it, if he was lying in bed with her, right? Or had he just slept over? And what were they doing at her apartment anyway? Weren't they going to live at the Clinton Street apartment until they could find something bigger?

"Who?" he mumbled.

"Jimmy." She shook her head, sitting up and pulling her knees to her chest. Why couldn't she remember?

A hand with a gold band on its fourth finger rubbed up and down her arm. "It's okay, honey. I'm fine."

A cold sweat gripped Lois as she turned and looked not into Clark's, but Jimmy's sleepy face. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and then leaned over to kiss her. "Good morning."

Lois screamed and pushed him out of her bed. She herself leapt out of the other side.

Jimmy knelt by the side of bed. "Calm down, Lois. I'm alive. It was just a dream. Just a dream."

"What in the hell do you think you're doing in *my* bed?!" she hollered, throwing a pillow at his head. He ducked, but she got him when he popped back up.

"Our bed, Lois! *Our* bed. We were married last month. Don't you remember? Dr. Deter said that you might have relapses of amnesia. Maybe when you hit your head on the kitchen cabinet last night," Jimmy suggested, disappearing beside the bed again.

"There is no way I'd *marry* you if you were the last man on Earth!" Lois screamed, continuing to throw things at him. She had run out of pillows and she reached for a framed picture beside to her bed to lob at him next.

It was a wedding photo of her and Jimmy Olsen. She fell onto the bed, but slipped off the edge and landed on the floor with a thud. Slowly, she pulled her shaking left hand out from behind the picture frame. She indeed had both an engagement ring and a wedding band on her finger. "No. No! NO!" she shouted.

It couldn't be true. She would never have married Jimmy. NEVER. Ewww. Anyway, she would never have done that to Clark. What could she possibly have been thinking?

Jimmy inched around the edge of the bed to sit next to her and wrap an arm around her shoulder. "It's true. We're married."

Lois pulled out of his embrace. "No. I didn't... wouldn't have married you. What about Clark?"

"Clark?" Jimmy looked confused. "Who's that?"

"What?!" Lois snapped. "Only one of your best friends. My writing partner at the Daily Planet."

"I'm your partner at the Daily Planet, Lois. You write the words. I take the photos. Lane and Olsen! The hottest team in town," he said, quoting her and Clark's catchphrase.

"But... But... But... What about Superman?" she asked, her eyes wide.

"Yeah. You mentioned him before. Who is that? Superman? And where is New Krypton? Is that like outside of New York someplace?" Jimmy inquired.

Lois's jaw dropped and she backed farther away from Jimmy. "No. No. No, this isn't right. This isn't my life."

"Sweet-ums, honey. Of course, this is our life. You love me. I love you. We're married and..." He reached towards her stomach. "You're expecting our first child."

She dropped the framed photo and screamed in horror. "*NO!*" Then just as suddenly she stopped screaming. "Wait. 'Sweet-ums'? Okay. Enough." Her jaw tensed and she started looking around her bedroom. "Where's the hidden camera?"

"Hidden camera?" Jimmy blanched, backing up. "Why... why would you think there would be a hidden camera in our bedroom, honey?"

Lois glowered at him with a raised brow. "Because no matter what I may or may not remember, I would *never* let anyone ever call me 'sweet-ums'. Not even Clark. This life isn't real. This is a lie. This is another practical joke for that stupid TV show, isn't

it?"

Jimmy sighed. "Can't get anything past you, Lois. But admit it, I had you going a minute though, didn't I?" He grinned.

"The photo was a nice touch, Jimmy," she scowled at him. "You drugged me, didn't you? That why I had this throbbing headache when I woke up?"

"Yeah. Well, we had to move my stuff in here and get the rings on your fingers, so yeah. But we had the camera rolling the entire time, so you can check the footage and know nothing happened. Perry would tan my hide if I had ever done anything to my partner. Miss Senior Investigative Reporter." He nudged her in the arm.

"I'm not *your* partner, Jimmy. Never have been. Never will be. At worst you're my researcher. At best my photographer. Clark is my writing partner and my fiancé." She handed Jimmy the fake wedding photo. "Where's the photo of me and Clark from the Kerths that's supposed to be on my bedside table?"

"Who?" Jimmy repeated slowly. "Lois, you aren't engaged. And never have been. Well, I mean, you went undercover against Luthor a couple of years ago and almost married him. But that doesn't count. You knew he was scum and you dumped him at the altar. He was so broken hearted about it, he jumped off his balcony. Okay, I guess he does count."

"Ha-ha, very funny, Olsen. I want my photo of Clark back, now." Lois pressed her lips together and held out her hand. "The one from last year, when he won the Kerth and we went on our first date. Although, it wasn't really a date-date. It was more of a non-date date."

Jimmy was looking at her warily. "Ah. Lois. Last year, *you* won the Kerth for the Bolivian Drug Cartel series."

"No. Clark won for the Retirement Home Scandal series," Lois told him with a definite air of 'duh' to her voice.

"A Retirement Home Scandal beat out your Bolivian Drug Cartel? I don't think so, Lois." Jimmy shook his head.

Lois rolled her eyes. "I know. I know. I couldn't believe it either. But Clark's a good writer. He deserved it."

"No, Lois. *You* won and *I* went as your non-date date," Jimmy stated matter-of-factly. "Come on, I'll show you." He walked out of her bedroom.

Lois pulled on her fluffy robe and followed. He was standing by her glass cabinet that held her three Kerth awards. There were four on the shelf. Had Jimmy moved Clark's award to her shelf?

He then crossed the room to an end table that had a framed photo. There was her and Clark's photo from the Kerth Awards Ceremony. Ha!

"Here's you, black dress, Kerth in hand. There's me, monkey suit, camera in hand."

Lois stared at the photo. It wasn't her and Clark. Jimmy was right. It was her and him. That seemed like a real picture. "This isn't funny, Jimmy. If anyone can dummy up a picture, you can. Where's Clark's photo?"

Jimmy carefully took hold of her shoulders and stared her in the eyes. "Lois, there is no Clark. There's just you and me."

She pressed her lips together and knocked his hands away. "This joke is already old, Jimmy. Enough. There is no *us*." She pointed between the two of them. "There's me and Clark. Soon, there'll be Miss Jimma Olsen if you don't give me back my favorite photo with Clark."

Jimmy swallowed. "Lois, I don't know what you're talking about. Who's this Clark fellow?"

Fine. She would play along. She crossed her arms. "Clark. He's about 6'1". Brown hair. Brown eyes. Glasses. A farm boy from Kansas. He's been my partner since the Messenger explosion."

Jimmy started snickering. "Mad Dog Lane is engaged to be married to a glasses-wearing Kansas farm boy? Yeah, right. Now, who's pulling whose leg?" He brushed away the idea of Clark out

of the air with his hand. "Anyway, *I* became your partner during the Messenger mess."

Lois pouted slightly. She didn't like having to defend Clark to Jimmy. "He's a wonderful man. Kindest man I've ever met. Sweet. Loved by all. And hot as all get out. You could even call him super."

"You mean like that Superman guy you mentioned?" Jimmy laughed, wiping tears from his eyes. "Your Kansas farm boy has a side gig as a superhero, per chance, Lois? Wow, you've got an active fantasy life."

"Clark is *not* a fantasy." Superman may have been at one time, now she knew he was just Clark's way to help out and not be recognized. Had she just blown his cover? "And Superman is too real." She dragged a chair from her dining room to her kitchen cabinet. Standing on the chair, Lois removed a scrapbook from her topmost shelf. "Ha!" The production company hadn't found her Superman story book. She hopped down and slid it across the dining room table to Jimmy. "What do you think of that?"

Jimmy flipped open the book. "Hey, look at that. A scrapbook of all of our stories."

"What?" Lois stepped up next to him. Gone were all the clippings of all her Superman stories, instead...

"Hey, look, here's where you and I brought down both The Toasters and the Metros. You're one hell of a singer, Lois."

"*We* didn't bring down the Toasters, Superman did," Lois said, stopping him from turning the page and looking down at the article. She had written it, but the photo now showed The Toasters handcuffed together. Not a glimmer of a man in blue tights. Photo by James Olsen. She swallowed. "No. That's not right. Clark and I went undercover at the Metro Club. I was Lola Dane, lounge singer. He was Charlie King, bartender."

"Oh, I remember now. *I* went undercover with you at the Metro Club, Lois," said Jimmy. "And *my* undercover name was Clark Kent. I was finally able to put my bartending skills to use."

Lois glared at him and turned the page. Ha! "Miranda! And the pheromones. You were chasing some fashion model named..." She snapped her fingers and pointed at him. "April Stephens. I was infatuated with Clark." She rolled her eyes. "I even danced him the Dance of the Seven Veils. Superman stopped Miranda from spraying her perfume over Metropolis instead of that fruit fly spray." But the photo of Superman bringing in Miranda's plane was missing. Just a handcuffed blonde perfumer calling out to Lex Luthor.

Jimmy turned away and cleared his throat, blushing. "Ah, Lois. You danced the seven veils for me."

She put her hands on her hips. "I most certainly did not!"

He nodded. "We slept together that night. You promised me we'd never have to speak of it again and that you wouldn't hold it against me, since I was drugged as well."

Lois pulled back her fist and Jimmy jumped out of the way. "It made it really difficult, when the Chief put us undercover at the Lexor to investigate Ian Harrington the next week..."

"Oh, so it was *us* at the Lexor, not Clark and I? Right." Her words dripped with sarcasm. "So, if Superman doesn't exist, who saved us from the Nightfall asteroid then? Who brought down Bill Church and Intergang? Who defeated that cyborg boyfriend of Lucy's, who was powered by Kryptonite?"

"And what is Kryptonite?" Jimmy asked.

"It's kind-of a green glowing rock... A meteorite. A fragment of Superman's home planet of Krypton. It's the only thing that can hurt Superman," she explained and poorly at that from Jimmy's expression. "Superman also captured that man who tried to bomb Uncle Mike's café. And saved you when your Mustang's brakes were cut," Lois went on. "And stopped you from becoming a preprogrammed killer. And saved me when Patrick, when my old Irish friend tried to sacrifice me to the Druid gods.

And stopped that man who kidnapped Perry and Alice and tried to build a modern day Ark.”

Jimmy’s eyebrows had gone up on his forehead with each of these statements until they practically disappeared under his hairline. “And if he’s real, where is this Clark character now? This Superman?”

“Uh... um...” Lois stammered. “Clark went undercover with Intergang this spring when Superman flew off with some Kryptonians to help save their colony from an evil dictator.” She didn’t like how unsure of her words she sounded.

The photographer’s skeptical expression was back. “Listen to yourself, Lois. Asteroids set out to destroy us? Cyborgs? Druids? Psychos rebuilding Noah’s Ark? Hypnotized killers? Bill Church of Cost Mart running some world crime syndicate? And aliens from outer space? Please! That sounds like *National Whisper* stuff not the *Daily Planet*.” He opened her apartment door and pulled in a man from the hall. “What did you put in those knock-out drugs? You’ve turned my partner loopy and crazy.”

Lois fell onto her hard sofa. When Jimmy put it that way, she did sound delusional. But she knew Clark. She knew he was real. Jimmy was pulling another practical joke on her. She ran to the producer. “You know who Superman is, don’t you?”

The man shrugged. “A wrestler?”

“No, not a wrestler. He’s about yea tall, wears a bright blue suit, with a red cape, shorts, and boots. And across his chest he has this yellow crest thingy in the shape of an ‘S’.” Why was she describing Superman to this man? Everyone knew who Superman was.

“Sounds like a professional wrestler to me.”

Lois shoved the man down the hall towards her bedroom. “Go remove all your hidden cameras.” She sat back down on her hard sofa.

Jimmy sat down next to her and took her hand. “Lois. I know you’re confused and everything right now, but think about this logically. Would you really fall for a glasses-wearing hick from Kansas? Could all those strange things you said happened really have happened?”

She gazed at Jimmy, dumbfounded. “But... But... The glasses were just a disguise...” she stammered.

“That’s right, I almost forgot. He’s the superhero. And this Superman guy fell in love with you at first sight, I bet.” Jimmy pointed at her with a wink. “And pair of glasses hid him from the world, right? Fooled even you, huh? His best friend? His girlfriend? The great Mad Dog Lane? Come on, Lois. Does this sound even remotely possible? Please!”

“No,” she admitted. “But Clark *is* as real as you or me. Superman exists! Why don’t you remember, Jimmy?” Lois grabbed Jimmy’s by the biceps and shook him. “Please, remember.”

Jimmy caressed her face, ending up cupping her jaw in his palm. “Calm down, Lois.”

“Don’t touch me like that!” Lois shouted, jumping up. “That’s how Clark touches me.” She stumbled backwards away from him.

“All set, Mr. Olsen. All the microphones and cameras removed,” the producer said leaving the apartment with a wave, holding a bunch of cords he hadn’t had when he walked in. “We’ve got enough for a great show.”

“That’s not going on TV, Jimmy!” Lois told him. “You can’t broadcast what I said about Clark and Superman and...” She gasped. Oh, God! She had told Jimmy that Clark was a virgin. Her fiancé was going to kill her! “They can’t use that tape, Jimmy. It will ruin Clark’s life. My life.”

“Lois, honey. There is no Clark Kent; he’s a figment of your imagination. A sweet, country virgin with a secret life as a superhero, who just happens to fall in love with you? He’s sounds more like some elaborate fantasy character to me. His life won’t

be ruined. Your life, on the other hand...” Jimmy tilted his head with a shrug. “Why don’t you go lie back down. Maybe if you got some more sleep, you’d wake up and that drug will have worked its way through your system. All these delusions about farm boy fiancés and superheroes will be gone and you’ll be yourself again.”

Sleep! Yes! This was a dream. If she went back to sleep, she might wake up back in jail. True, she might have killed Jimmy... right at this moment that option was looking tempting all over again... but at least Clark and Superman would still be real. And if she woke up and there was no Clark, no Superman? Lois shook her head to this idea. No, she would rather never wake up again than live in a life where Clark never existed.

“You’re right, Jimmy. I think I’ll go lie back down,” she said. She took one last look at her friend. “Goodbye.”

He grinned at her with a wink. “You want me to come lie down with you, Sweet-ums?”

Lois pointed at him with a snarl. “You take one step towards my bedroom, buster...”

Jimmy threw up his hands with a chuckle. “Okay! Okay! I’ll stay out here.”

She went into her bedroom, dumped her fluffy robe on a chair, and crawled back into bed, pulling the covers up to her neck. She closed her eyes. Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Her mind drifted away and sleep overtook her.

Lois felt the bright beam of light from a flashlight hit her face, blinding her and causing her to blink. She was lying in bed. More of a cot with a thin mattress than a real bed though. There were no fluffy pillows under her head and only a bare blanket covered her body. She wasn’t wearing a little nightie, but her prison garb. Her head still throbbed with pain. But it was the most beautiful pain the world. She was home. *Thank God! I’m back in prison.*

The guard moved on banging against the bars of her cell as she did so.

Had it all been a nightmare? A horrible, horrible nightmare? It had felt so real.

Lois crawled out of bed and over to the little eighteen inch by one foot window that let a sliver of light into her cell each morning. She had left her window open by force of habit.

“Clark, honey,” she called out to him, knowing that if he was awake and in the city of Metropolis, Superman could hear her. And probably in his sleep as well. “I had the worst dream. I had traded in this nightmare of being in prison and having killed Jimmy for freedom. But the cost of my freedom was that I had to live in a world where you never existed. I love you, Clark. And I would never trade my freedom for your life. So, why doesn’t Superman break me out of here already!”

In the distance, the spotlight briefly caught a glimpse of a red cape and she smiled. It was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen.

Soon a hand at the end of bright blue sleeve knocked lightly on the bars on her window. “You know I can’t do that,” Superman whispered to her.

“I know. I just needed to hear and see you, know that you were actually real,” she told him.

“I’m real.” She couldn’t see his face, because he was lying against the wall outside her window keeping an eye on the spotlight.

“Get me the hell out of here! I’m ready to go home now,” she announced in a hushed whisper.

“Good. We found a judge to throw out your guilty plea and all the charges that went along with it. Jimmy’s death was ruled an accident. Perry says you’ve been on vacation long enough and to get your butt back to the Planet.” Superman’s face appeared at the window for a moment and he smiled at her. “And Clark is

miserable without you. He wanted me to tell you that he loves you, Lois, and that he's sorry that this has taken so long. He wants nothing more than to take you in his arms and hold you."

"I love you, too," she whispered under her breath, holding her hand up to the window and wishing she could actually touch him. "You'll always be my hero."

"Go back to sleep, Lois. When you wake up, Clark will be there to pick you up," he told her floating away. A moment later, he was gone from view.

"The next time I fall asleep, Clark, it's going to be in your arms," she told him, catching one last glimpse of red cape in the distance.

Lois would rather remain in prison than bet her life on the chance of waking up in that hell dimension where Clark didn't exist and she had slept with Jimmy.

THE END

Gratitude: This story is in response to Tank's "Scare Tactics" Halloween challenge in which Jimmy put Lois on a TV Show and tried to scare her. I would like to thank Darth Michael for inspiring me with his idea of scaring Lois by telling her she was pregnant. The 'dream sequence' was inspired by Joss Whedon's *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, Season 6 episode "Normal Again" written by Diego Gutierrez. I would also like to thank IolantheAlias for her Beta corrections and advice.

Disclaimer: Inspired by the characters created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster and portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. Many thanks to the writers on the show. This story is entirely my own (with a little inspiration from Darth Michael and Tank).