

Once Upon a Dream...

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Rated PG-13, due to dialogue (mostly in the Epilogue)

Submitted February 2012

Summary: Another retelling of Season 2's "Wall of Sound"; this time Clark's a lunkhead and Lois is love-blind. Romantic comedy.

Author's Warning: My apologies in advance for any groans, eye-rolls, and belly-aches this story might produce from too much laughing at a lunkhead and a love-blind woman. Much of this is a collection of rejected scenes tied together to make a coherent story, while trying to come up with a good WAFFY story (I recommend reading my "First Kiss" story first for the WAFF). Another possible title might be: **Once Upon A Cutting Room Floor...** You have been warned.

How was it possible for this man to look any more attractive? In a tweed jacket and a maroon shirt he had stolen Lois's heart, and with this — oh, it had to be Armani — custom-fitted tuxedo, Clark had captured the rest of her as well. His black curls were still damp from an afternoon pre-event shower. With the warm sun drying his hair, he waited, staring at her with those sultry brown eyes that she had fallen in love with first. He smelled clean, unscented.

Time felt funny. Was it not two seconds ago that it had been last week and she had suggested they go to the Kerth Awards together? Yet now he stood before her, hand outstretched, a smile on his lips, beckoning her to join him in the limo. And they sat at a table, eating something delicious at some restaurant and the awards were over. Had he won? Had she? Who had been up for the Kerth, anyway?

None of that mattered, because Clark loved her. Lois could see it in his eyes and feel it in the way he ran his thumb over the back of her hand. He smiled and slid his cheek down hers, his kiss suggesting that they should go somewhere more private. They were on the dance floor surrounded by people, yet alone. Their bodies touched from face to thigh, through the thin layers of their expensive clothing. Clark held her close. His clean scent had been replaced by something saltier, more natural, sweaty. No one had ever smelled so good.

A flash of light. Someone was taking their picture. Clark moved closer, running his fingers over her not-quite-to-the-shoulder brunette bob. This time he kissed her lips.

*They sat in bed. Not making love. Not about to nor having just finished, either. Just talking. Laughing. Clothed in varying amounts of pajamas. He had flannel bottoms and she wore silky satin boxers and top. The morning sun filtered through the blinds of her bedroom, the awards weeks away... or had they already happened? He pulled her closer to him and kissed the nape of her neck, the most pleasure-filled place to touch her. She suddenly felt every nerve in her body scream out for more of him. Let him caress her leg with his. Let him run his fingertips down her spine. Let him pull the covers above their head and plunge them into darkness. Let him touch her anywhere and everywhere. **Please!***

But instead of getting darker, it became brighter — like someone had taken their picture again and the flash had remained on.

Lois blinked her eyes, only to feel the cool morning air and watch the breeze flap her curtains open with a blinding stream of sunlight.

No! her mind screamed, and she buried herself under the

covers again. *NO!*

Don't wake up just yet. This had been the nicest of dreams. And he was about to touch her, *really* touch her, this time. For a moment her mind and body drifted back into slumber and she could feel him holding her again, tighter, afraid she might leave. But only for a moment.

The next time it was worse. A high-pitched beeping noise woke her this time. Her hand reached into the chilly outer realm and slammed down on the alarm clock. She had forgotten to switch it to radio.

It took Lois a while longer to fall asleep this time. She thought of how Clark had looked waiting for her by the limo. Of him gazing at her across the table at the restaurant. And that was where she caught up with him.

They were dancing again, only to have a fire alarm go off. They had to run down a long corridor with a crowd. Had it been a bomb? A gunman? The Toasters? No, a gigantic green Jello-like fist came from behind and grabbed her, retracting back into the dance hall. Clark fought the crowd to go after her, but there were too many people. She could hear him yelling for her, muffled with the echoed sounds of chaos. Suddenly the green fist held her in front of its face. A Jello-like Godzilla.

Godzilla? What in the hell was he doing in this dream?

Lois shook her head and shifted position in bed.

They had returned to the dance floor. Her dress had changed from red to green — Godzilla green — but that was all that remained of him. Everything else was in black and white. Clark held her with more passion, more fear, and kept glancing over his shoulder, looking out for someone trying to steal his lady love again. She felt a tap on her shoulder. Gene Kelly. Oh, to dance with Gene Kelly. To interview him. She glanced at Clark to ask his permission — for just this one dance — but Audrey Hepburn was already tugging on his arm.

*Lois took a stronger grip on Clark's hand. Repeatedly they were being separated. She knew if they let go of each other they would never be able to go back. Yet Gene still pulled on her arm and Audrey pulled on his. **No!** they both shouted. **You won't win!** But the stars of yesteryear were stronger and were able to pull them apart, the crowd flowing between them like cake batter.*

That was when her alarm screamed for a second time. Lois pulled down the covers and turned off the noise before wiping the tears from her eyes. Why couldn't she have gone back to the first dream? It had been so much more pleasant. Like Clark, it had so much potential.

Tears still damp on her cheeks, she saw the time. *Crap!* She was going to be late for the morning meeting. Jumping out of bed, she ran for the shower.

Lois crept through the door, the last of the last for Perry's morning meeting. He had already started handing out assignments, complaining that there were far too many wannabe writers in the room instead of real reporters. He promised to weed out the undedicated. Every day he expected them to turn in at least one story, and he didn't accept bullhockey.

Most of the chairs were filled, so Lois slid into one in the back. Just three over from Clark. Lois smiled at her friend and swallowed as she allowed a second, not so casual, gaze to glide over him.

Lois hadn't seen Clark since right after she had returned from her Caribbean cruise, when they had gotten into an argument over nothing. 'Seen' technically wasn't the correct word, as she had observed him at the coffee machine, sitting at his desk, walking the halls, and through the café window as he drank his coffee and read his paper. But they hadn't spoken, really, for over a week. And the argument had been about something, but she had never told Clark just what.

Frustrated after months of unrequited love for her self-

proclaimed best friend, Lois had blown up over something little — about what she couldn't remember. Oh, yeah. Okay, maybe not so little. *He* had been nominated for the Kerth Award instead of her and had assumed she would be his arm candy.

She had informed Clark that if he was going to keep acting in a certain way she never wanted to have anything more to do with him. He had tried to make up with her — claiming he didn't want to lose her as a friend, as a partner. But she couldn't stand having him so near, yet not close enough to touch. All she could think about was him and it was interfering with her work. Her sleep, too. *He* was the reason her story hadn't been good enough to be nominated for a Kerth.

Lois had told him to his face that she didn't want him as a friend. Clark hadn't understood that she wanted him for *more* than one. The last time she had seen him, right before the weekend, she had been standing at the window and he had saluted her from down below. He hadn't dared to speak with her. Goodness, how she missed him.

The meeting ended. Lois curled her sweaty palms and realized that she had heard almost nothing of Perry's lecture. She looked away from Clark's dark curls to the Chief's slightly weathered, but not old, face in time to hear him announce her writing assignment. The remodeling of the Sewage Reclamation Facility? Ugh. Perry, no! Been there. Don't want to go back.

Lois had to convince her boss to let someone else write it or, better yet, drop it altogether. It was a boring subject. Did anyone really care about that subject? She couldn't go back there, not ever. Too many memories of Clark. Too many mosquitoes. This was punishment for not being nominated for the Kerth. She bet Clark hadn't even been considered for the story about the remodeling of the Sewage Reclamation Facility.

"Ah, well, Lois. Let me let you in on a little secret," she could just hear her boss telling her after such a pronouncement. "This is a newspaper. You're allowed to have fun as long as you stick to the cold, hard facts. I'm sure you could turn the remodeling of the Sewage Reclamation Facility into pure gold. Play around with it. Try it from different angles. You'll be amazed at what you can come up with."

Lois groaned. Imaginary Perry had convinced her not to tackle the real one.

"Lois."

She turned so quickly at the sound of the voice she heard in her dreams that her hair fell over her face and she could only see him through strands of hair. For some reason it reminded her of his half-naked body that she had seen when she had picked him up that one time while he still lived at the Hotel Apollo. "Clark," her voice cracked as she brushed aside the lock to see him clearly.

"Hi." He smiled at her in that way he did which always seemed to melt her kneecaps. He succeeded again. Luckily she hadn't stood up yet.

"Hi," Lois replied. Had she gushed or snapped at him? Oh, God! She was losing control of herself. It was that crazy dream from this morning where he was kissing her and touching...

"Did you have a good weekend? I did. I found Camden. Any luck with Stoke?"

"No," she tried not to let the disappointment seep into her tone. Jimmy's stupid bug pen hadn't worked. It had kept picking up radio stations instead, but she wasn't going to admit that to Clark.

"Right." He nodded, then his head snapped up. He took a step backwards towards the exit and pointed in the same direction.

"I've got to... uh... meet a source. Talk to you later?"

"Ah..." She sought for the perfect nonchalant answer.

"Whatever." That wasn't it, she realized when his smile faded.

"I was just thinking we could pool data..."

"If you don't have enough of a story with the Camden interview alone..."

Clark shook his head. "Got to go. Bye," he responded and bolted towards the stairs.

If Lois wanted him to hate her, she was doing a pretty good job. Perhaps this would keep Clark away from her and she would be able to forget about this stupid infatuation and get back to work. *Yeah, right.*

She sighed. Only, Lois didn't want to forget Clark. She wanted to get to know him better. Much better. She opened her notebook and placed her notes inside as she started back to her desk.

"Ms. Lane?"

Lois turned to look at her boss. Perry never called her that unless she was in deep doo-doo.

"Hope you're finally over that bug and are feeling better. I imagine only illness would make you stare out in space during one of my pep talks."

A smile crept over Lois's face as she pictured Clark as a bug. "Thanks. But I've felt better."

"Next time you want a better assignment, don't be tardy," Perry informed her. That man could read her like a dime-store novel.

Ugh. Had she really thought that? That sounded like something out of her Wanda Detroit romance. Lois really needed to work on that again. It had been ages. It was about time Wanda decided whether she wanted Clark or Kent.

"Hey, CK!" Jimmy called out to Clark as he passed. For some strange reason, Jimmy had made the fatal mistake of sitting down at Lois's computer. "Have you seen this?"

"If Lois sees you at her desk, she will kill you," Clark warned his friend.

"It's okay, CK. Perry wanted me to check Lois's computer for bugs and re-send her story on the Sewage Reclamation Facility remodeling. The original file was corrupted and wouldn't open. And I stumbled across this," Jimmy told him and pointed to the screen.

Clark didn't want to look at Lois's notes on some story or her personal ramblings or...

"It's about Superman," Jimmy told him. "I think."

"You shouldn't have opened Lois's Superman file..." Clark insisted as something inside of him made him draw nearer. Did Lois have a secret Superman file?

Yet he wondered what 'new' angle Lois had on the Man in Blue? Had she written something about digging the Kryptonite bullet out of his shoulder and then going on the cruise to get rid of the evidence? Had she figured out his secret — that *he*, Clark, was Superman? Was that why she was giving him the cold shoulder, why she was so angry with him?

Or had she fallen back in love with Superman, even after his Superman side had given her the brush-off after her rejection of his Clark side last spring? And she had wanted to let Clark know she was definitely not available because she had her heart set on the Man of Steel — again?

Or was it just jealousy over the Kerth nominations? That he had gotten one and she hadn't?

Or was it simply because he had lied to her about being in love with her? Or, more truthfully, lied to her about *not* being in love with her? If she was angry about *that*, how livid would she be once she learned about his *other* job?

"It's personal," Jimmy coaxed.

A personal document about Superman? Clark wondered again if Lois had found out the truth. Was that why she wasn't speaking with him? He glanced over Jimmy's shoulder at the screen. After the first three words, Clark couldn't look away.

Lying in bed. Nothing to do. No energy. No hunger. No desire to read or watch TV. Only thoughts to keep me company. Thoughts of... him. When I think of him I'm no longer lonely. I

dream of things we could do if he cared for me as I do for him.

Clark swallowed. This certainly did sound like it was about Superman.

When I sleep my imagination goes wild. We are part of a medieval fairy tale where he must capture a unicorn to win my freedom from a sorcerer. I dream of us attending the Kerths, but not caring if we won. Being together is more important.

He blinked. That couldn't be right. Lois *not caring* who won? Lois? Did she really want to take Superman to the Kerths? Jimmy stood up and Clark slipped into Lois's chair. He knew he really should stop reading, but he couldn't look away.

We eat at some expensive restaurant, with the most delicious moment being that he wants to dance cheek-to-cheek. Then we travel to distant planets to watch the sunrise.

'Oh, yeah,' Clark surmised. This was definitely about Superman.

He holds my hand and kisses more than my forehead. The line between nightmare and dream blur. I have nightmares of being chased by monsters and movie stars whose only desire is to keep us apart.

Movie stars? He could see monsters, true, but movie stars?

When I awake, I wonder which is worse, being attacked in a dream where his only goal is to rescue me or not having him love me in real life?

His brow furrowed. That couldn't be right. Lois must have those backwards. Superman rescued her in real life and she had nightmares that he didn't love her, right?

Before Clark could scroll down to the next screen, Perry interrupted, leaning down in front of his view. "Lois is going to kill you if she catches you on her computer, son."

Clark grinned sheepishly. The Chief was right. The reporter had just given that same advice to Jimmy. Quickly Clark closed the document without reading one word more, so Lois wouldn't know anyone had been snooping.

"Do you want to tell me what had you so focused that you knocked Jimmy out of the chair?" his boss asked.

Clark hadn't! He glanced over at Jimmy, who was rubbing his bicep. He gulped. Had he? This obsession with Lois was quickly getting out of hand.

"Just ramblings about some of her dreams," Clark murmured, feeling chagrined as well as warm in the face.

"Dreams?" Perry seemed surprised and glanced over at Jimmy, who nodded his confirmation. "Aspiration dreams like goals, such as winning the Pulitzer? Or dreamy dreams?" The Chief lowered his voice. "Womany dreams?"

Clark cleared his throat, wiped his flushed face, and loosened his extremely tight tie to get air into his lungs. It was really quite warm in the office today. He pointed over his shoulder towards his desk. "I should really be working on that Soundman story before he strikes again."

"Womany dreams? Hmmm. Interesting," concluded Perry and Clark took another step back towards his desk. "And to even the score are you going to leave *your* dream journal out where she can find it — open, so that she can read a page or two?"

This must be a nightmare. Clark couldn't be at the office. He must be at home asleep in bed, because Perry White was sounding a little too much like Martha Kent. Clark took another step back towards his desk and wondered what it would take to wake up from this nightmare.

He sat down in his chair and realized he wasn't at home. He was at the *Daily Planet*. And he — Clark Kent — had just violated Lois's private thoughts. True, they were private thoughts about *him* — well, Superman him. Perry was right. The Chief knew Clark had feelings for Lois. He knew that Clark must have dreams about her. Would he want to share those private thoughts with her? Clark swallowed. No, not really. Was that what he would have to do to even the playing field and assuage his guilt?

Lois sat typing up a rough draft of what she had learned from Stoke. "Stereotypical rock musician scum," she grumbled to herself. She glanced up and over at Clark's desk, hoping to see him there, hoping to get his take on this whole Soundman villain. But — surprise, surprise — he wasn't there.

A metal clanging noise caused the bullpen to quiet. She pushed the disturbance into the background as she tried to focus. Then the giggles started and were joined by more titters and some downright chuckles. All right, what was going...

Lois glanced up to find a man dressed in a suit of armor making his way towards her desk. Well, her way in any case. He couldn't possibly be headed towards her. He was even holding a jousting lance. She spun around in her chair and crossed her arms, waiting for whomever to get to the point of this little interruption.

The knight knelt down beside her on one knee, which in itself was quite an accomplishment. That suit of armor must weigh a ton. "Ms. Lane, I humbly request your presence as my plus one to the Kerth Awards banquet on Saturday night."

Clark! Her eyes narrowed. What kind of gag was this? Did he really think this was funny? Was he trying to say that he needed a suit of armor to talk to her nowadays? 'Is he really saying that about me?' she thundered silently. And then she wondered, 'Why?' Why was she doing all this yelling inside her head?

"Do you really think this is necessary?" she roared, getting to her feet. "Am I as ferocious as a dragon that you have to dress like this to talk to me?"

"No, Lois, no!" Clark stammered, his voice echoing in his helmet.

"Then why are you purposely trying to embarrass me, Kent?" she growled, throwing open the face guard of the suit so she could see his reaction to her words.

Surprise was written all over his face. "No, Lois, I was trying to embarrass myself," he murmured, soft enough for only her to hear since the laughter in the newsroom was now too loud for his gentle tones. "I thought..." He bowed his head. "Never mind."

Lois pressed her lips together and studied him with a raised brow. His initial statement finally sunk into her brain. Clark asked her out on a date? Oh, wait, this was why she had broken up their partnership before the weekend. Because he hadn't wanted a real date; he wanted them to go as friends. "Oh, no, I think I need to hear this explanation, Sir Charles." Sir Charles? Where had that name come from?

Clark took a deep breath and forged ahead. "Lady Loiset, I beseech you. Ease my suffering. Forgive my assumptions of a fortnight ago. Acquiesce to this request and I shall be your humble servant always," he said.

She liked the whole knight fantasy thing he had going on, including his old-timey dialogue, but she needed more. "I don't want a servant, Clark. I want a partner," she retorted.

"But I can never be your equal, Lady Loiset, when everything about you is so much more than I am," Clark replied.

Lois raised a brow. Oh, so now he was trying to sway her with the truth... a truth Clark would never admit. "Uh-huh. You been drinking some funny punch there, Kent?"

Clark sighed and pulled himself to his feet. "No?"

He must be stronger than she thought, being able to move so well in all that heavy armor. What was she thinking? Of course it was a costume.

"What in Sam Hill is going on out...?" Perry shouted, coming out of his office and freezing upon seeing the knight next to Lois's desk. "Kent?" Their boss shook his head in disappointment. "When I said you needed to prostrate yourself at her feet, this wasn't what I meant, son."

"Lois?" Clark's voice pulled her from her daydream. "Can I

talk to you?”

“Huh?” Lois glanced up and realized the man of her dreams was standing next to her desk. Not in a suit of armor, though. Pity. She had enjoyed him as her errant Sir Charles.

“In the conference room,” he murmured uncomfortably. “I really don’t want...” He cleared his throat as he glanced around the newsroom. “Please.”

Her eyebrows came together in confusion. He wanted to say something to her, but in *private*? Why was he being so fidgety? “What is it, Clark? I’m busy,” she replied, pretending that she had actually been working on something. Actually, she *had* been working on something before her thoughts had run away with her, though for the life of her she couldn’t remember what it was.

Clark knelt down beside her desk as he had done in her daydream. “Humor me, Lois. I would appreciate it if you would allow me to apologize in private. Please.”

Apologize? Okay, now he had her full attention. The temptation to hear him prostrate himself — wasn’t that what Perry had said in her daydream? — was too strong. With an overabundance of exasperation, Lois got up from her desk and marched into the conference room. Clark silently followed her. He shut the door and then closed all the blinds. With her arms crossed, Lois watched him do this without comment.

When he was done, Clark turned to her and smiled sheepishly. It was her favorite smile. She wondered why it was her favorite smile. Was it because she saw it most often, this smile admitting that he knew he had once again done something to tick her off? Yet there was something irresistible about Clark when his lips curled upwards like that with a slight coloring of his cheeks. She could feel her faux animosity melting as she succumbed once again to his charm. Luckily she was able to keep this hidden from her partner. He opened his mouth, but then closed it again. She watched as he nervously began pacing the room.

“You wanted to apologize for something, Clark?” she reminded him. She had meant for that to sound more gentle than it had.

He gulped. “This would be easier if you were sitting down.” O-kay. Lois made a big deal out of pulling a chair out from the table and plopping down into it.

“I did something that I’m not proud of, Lois,” he began as he continued to pace.

Wait. This didn’t have to do with their whole fight thing about his nomination of a Kerth and his assumption that she’d be his non-date, just because she had asked him to be her plus one?

“You had a bug on your computer...”

Ew! She grimaced. “A cockroach?”

“Computer virus bug,” Clark clarified uneasily. “And, while removing it, Jimmy came across a file on your hard drive and...”

“Jimmy was snooping on my computer!” she growled, her hands in fists. “Then why are *you* the one confessing?” She rose to her feet and put her hands on her hips.

Clark seemed honestly chagrined. “I’m sorry, but I...”

“You *looked* at my files!” she roared, before a little voice inside her head asked, “Which one?” “Did you look at my Soundman file? My interview with Stoke? My...” The blood ran out of her face as she realized what Clark would surmise if he had read. “... *novel*?” The word came out of her mouth in a snakelike hiss.

“No. No. Nothing like...” Clark started, his hands raised, and then stopped with a wince. “I...” He blushed. “It was something you had written about Superman. I’m sorry, but it was intriguing and I don’t know why I kept reading when I saw that it was your private and very personal thoughts...” His voice faded away.

“Superman?” Lois echoed, searching her mind for something personal and private she had written on her computer about her favorite man in blue. Nothing came to mind.

“And I thought that since I had invaded your privacy it was only right that I tell you my biggest secret,” he said as if it were the very last thing in the world he wanted to do.

“Superman?” she repeated, confused. Sure, she had *thoughts* about Superman. Lots and lots of thoughts, daydreams, fantasies, and ideas, but she was quite positive that she had never written any of them down. True, there was that one story she had written for his fan club, but she had deleted it right away instead of sending it in. She sat down and looked up at Clark, who seemed to be practically hovering beside her.

Clark took a deep breath. “Lois, I’m...”

“Superman?” She was starting to sound like a broken record and decided to try a different tactic instead. “Clark, what did you read?”

Her question took him aback. Actually, she hadn’t seen him look so floored since she had announced that Lex had proposed.

“What?” he finally forced out of his mouth.

“What exactly did you read on my computer?” she asked again, clarifying.

Clark blushed. “Uh... something about dreams and...”

Lois’s eyes went wide. “Dreams? About Superman? I didn’t write down any of my...” She laughed as if he were mistaken. Then she realized she *had* written about some dreams. “Oh, my God, Clark! That wasn’t about...!” She gasped, flushing and covering her mouth before she told Clark that those dreams hadn’t been about Superman. Those were her Clark dreams. “That was *private*!” She was on her feet and yelling again. “How could read about...?” She covered her face in humiliation. *You’re safe. He doesn’t know how much you like him*, she told herself. *Clark thought they were about Superman*. She stuck her face in his, then poked his chest with her finger. “How could you?”

“As I said, Lois, I’m sorry. It was wrong and I’ve been plagued with guilt ever since I realized what I had inadvertently done.”

“Inadvertently?” Lois asked with skepticism.

“You rarely let anyone see the real you. There was something vulnerable and sweet and...”

“Are you quite done analyzing my dreams, there, Mr. Kent?”

“Yes, sorry. That’s why I thought it only fair that I tell you my biggest secret in exchange...” He placed a hand on each of her shoulders and took another deep breath. “Lois, I’m...”

“Wait! Wait! You invade my privacy, which we both agree was completely wrong...”

“Completely.”

“... and you’re telling me your biggest secret...” Her head was spinning from the news that Clark had any secrets. “... out of *guilt*?” There it was, her favorite smile again. Only instead of making her knees melt, her eyes narrowed and she growled, pushing his hands away. “And you call me your best friend?” she scoffed.

“What?” he sputtered. “I thought...”

“You thought because I’m Lois Lane, nosy Investigative Reporter extraordinaire, that I would want to know your deepest secret about stealing bubble gum when you were nine? Or knocking bedposts with Cat back at her bungalow while we were hiding out from Bureau 39? That I had to know, not because you *wanted* to tell me because we were best friends, but because you felt guilty about something?”

Clark’s mouth fell open.

“Just as I thought.” She looked him up and down with disgust. “And I thought you knew me. I thought you knew me better than anyone. I guess you don’t know me at all.” She stormed out of the conference room and screamed, “Olsen!”

“Mom,” Clark said, trying to keep the whine out of his voice and failing miserably, “I was seconds away from telling Lois that I’m Superman and she basically told me that she didn’t want to

know.”

“Did she know that that was what you were going to tell her?” His mom glanced up from where she was pouring him a glass of lemonade at the counter.

“No,” he said slowly. For a second there he’d thought she had. But then he had realized she hadn’t been listening to him. “Of course not.”

“Then I bet that’s not what she said.” She handed him the glass.

He sighed. “She said she didn’t want to hear any secrets I wanted to tell her out of guilt for breaking her trust,” Clark explained before taking a sip.

“You didn’t tell me you were ready to tell Lois your secret,” she said, taking her own glass and sitting next to him at the kitchen table.

“Well,” he murmured, looking away. “The timing wasn’t ideal...”

“Ah. Then I’m going to have to agree with Lois there, Clark. You told her, your father, and me that you love her. Then you decided to let guilt, and not love, tell you when to finally confess all to her. I’d say your timing wasn’t ideal.” His mom shot him a sour expression, which he doubted came from her lemonade.

“What should I do, Mom? I can’t believe I invaded her privacy like that. I cannot go back in time and undo it,” he said. Honestly, he didn’t want to undo it. It thrilled him to no end that Lois still thought and dreamed about him, even if it was the Superman side of him. At this point, he was so frustrated he would take even that. “I was trying to make amends.”

His mom patted his hand. “Your intentions were sound, Clark, but your execution smelled like the compost heap on an afternoon in August.”

Tell me something I don’t already know, Mom! “What should I do?” he pleaded.

Martha took a sip of her lemonade. “Why is she mad at you?”

“Lois Lane doesn’t need a reason to be mad. She just is.”

His mother raised an eyebrow. “Aren’t you an investigative reporter?”

“I don’t know why she’s mad at me, Mom,” Clark admitted. “She just always is.”

Martha exhaled in annoyance.

His mom was right. He wasn’t trying. He needed to think. He reviewed what had happened during the previous couple of weeks. Lois had returned from her cruise, excited to be back at work. She asked him to be her non-date date for the Kerths. Clark had more than happily agreed. She got was caught in the bank robbery by the Soundman and had passed out. He got had been nominated for a Kerth and she didn’t hadn’t. He then suggested that, since he had already agreed to be her date for the awards and she already had a dress, she should go with him. She blew up in his face. They went to investigate Stoke and Camden, but he had heard got a Superman call and had to before bolting and had suggested that they split up the interviews. She accused him of trying to hijack the story for himself. That that if he didn’t need her, she didn’t need him. And it had just went gone downhill from there. Every time he had opened his mouth, she had yelled at him, until now she no longer was speaking to him. “I don’t know, Mom. I really don’t know this time.”

“You told us last weekend that she was so furious she terminated your partnership. You need to figure out *why*,” recommended his mom.

“Well, it started about the time I was nominated over her for a Kerth. Do you think it’s just petty jealousy?” he threw out hopefully. Not hoping it was, but hoping he made a hole-in-one on the reason.

“This doesn’t sound like petty anger to me,” rebutted his mom. “What happened next?”

“I said that since she already had a dress that she should

come as my...” Clark stopped speaking because his mother had dropped her face into the palm of her hand. “What?”

“You said ‘since she already had a dress?’” repeated Martha. “Yeah. So?” He shrugged.

“Oh, Clark.” His mom shook her head. “So what was in this dream journal you read?”

“Mom! I’ve violated her trust already. I don’t think gossiping about what I read will win me any favors,” he replied. “She went ballistic when she found out I told you about her romance novel and then you told Maisie...”

“Ah.” Martha nodded. “Yes, that probably wasn’t sound. Sorry, Clark, but I just wanted to brag about the girl my son had fallen for.”

He gave her a deadpan stare.

“How was I to know that Maisie would remember and ask her about it?” She smiled sheepishly and took another sip of her lemonade.

“Anyway,” Clark said, going back to his original topic of conversation, of pain. “I won’t go to the Kerth Awards without Lois.” That wasn’t exactly true. “Well, I will, but I don’t want to. She’s the reason I’m such a good reporter. She stretches me and pushes me in directions I wouldn’t have thought of going on my own. She accused me of wanting to use her as arm candy. She asked me to go with her first! When she thought — we both assumed — that she would be the one nominated...” He harrumphed. “I wasn’t mad about being *her* arm candy.”

“Did you tell her what you just told me? Or did you just say that thing about the dress?” his mom inquired innocently.

When she shone her flashlight on the pothole like that, of course he could see his misstep clearly. But he decided to idiot-check his answer first. “You think she wants me to *ask* her to be my date?”

“No, Clark. I’m sure she wants to be taken for granted,” replied his mom.

“That couldn’t possibly be it, Mom,” he corrected her. “One moment she was saying how we were best friends and partners and in the next that she didn’t want me for a friend anymore. I don’t know, Mom. It must be something more.”

Martha stared at him with dismay. She patted his hand and stood up. She went to a drawer, took out a piece of paper and a pencil, and set them down in front of her son. “I want you to write down everything you remember from your dreams until you’ve filled up the entire paper, both sides.”

“Really?” Clark said skeptically. “Everything?”

She pointed at the paper. “Write.”

Clark started to write. A minute later he flipped over the paper and finished.

“Okay, let’s see what you have,” she said, reaching for the paper.

He snatched it away. “Mom! These are my dreams!”

“Feeling violated yet?” she asked, holding out her hand.

Clark winced.

“Either I help you edit them or you hand them to Lois as is.”

He glanced down at the paper and then, with a sigh, handed it over.

“You dream of Lois a lot,” she said, stating the obvious.

He shrugged and smiled with embarrassment. “I love her. She’s all I can think about, even when I don’t have control over my thoughts.”

His mother nodded. “Do you want her to know how specifically you love her?”

“Mom!” Clark blushed. “The most intimate dream I wrote down was about Lois and me sitting on my bed, kissing.” Of course, he had left out the part where they had been in pajamas and that the kissing had progressed to more than kissing, but he doubted that would be anything he would ever describe in detail on paper.

Martha set the paper with his dreams back down in front of him. “Cross out Lois’s name every place on the paper and replace it with ‘she’ or ‘her.’”

“Oh.” That’s what she had meant by *specifically*. “Right. Yeah.” He decided it was probably best to vague up the references of him as Superman as well. Clark could have flying dreams though, couldn’t he?

She handed him another sheet of paper and had him transcribe it onto the other paper. Then she handed him an envelope. “Seal it up and hand it to Lois. Tit for tat, Clark. This should square you away for invading her trust.” Clark took one last look at the one-page description of his dreams and chuckled. “You know, Mom, these dreams could be about anyone.” They didn’t seem so violating without all the details. “They could almost be a printout of what I read on Lois’s computer.”

His mom took a sip of her lemonade. “What do you mean?”

“She didn’t say in particular that her dreams were about Superman any more than I wrote that my dreams were about her. It was just kind of obvious with the rescuing, flying to distant planets, and being chased by monsters.”

“Those were Lois’s intimate dreams that you read? I would have expected more for the amount of guilt you carried,” she replied.

“Well,” Clark admitted, glancing down so that the rosiness of his cheeks wasn’t so apparent, “she also mentioned just sitting around and talking, going to the Kerths, dancing, going out to dinner... Mom! You made me gossip about Lois’s dreams,” he scolded.

“She wanted to go to the Kerth Awards with Superman?” His mom picked out that same strange point he had noticed.

“Yeah.” He shrugged.

“I wonder how Superman looks in a tux?” murmured his mom into her lemonade.

Clark chuckled. “A lot like me, only with slicked back hair and no glasses...”

Did Lois dream of Superman in other clothes? Or just in the blue suit? What would she see if she pictured Superman in other clothes? Would she still see Superman? Or would she see Clark without his glasses? He gulped.

Clark looked down at his list of dreams and saw there was a little space left at the end. He wrote a personal note to Lois and then sealed it up into the envelope. “Thanks, Mom.”

There was a slight tap on Lois’s window. She glanced up from reviewing her research on sound waves and saw Superman hovering outside. She hadn’t seen Superman — well, at least not up front and personal like this — since she had dug the bullet out of his shoulder. And not at her apartment since that fatal day he had broken her heart. Reluctantly, she walked to the window and opened it up.

“I apologize for the lateness of the hour...”

Lois smiled. There were no late hours where he and Clark were involved. “To what do I owe the pleasure?” she asked, since there was no obvious emergency at her apartment. She wished she weren’t breathless every time she spoke to Superman, but there were some things she simply couldn’t control. “How is your shoulder?” She reached out to touch it, but stopped herself. She remembered how his uniform had been torn by the Kryptonite bullet, yet now there wasn’t even a seam. “Wow. Did your suit heal itself, too?” She glanced up at his startled expression.

“My shoulder is fine, Lois. Thank you. And, no, this is a different uniform,” he answered.

“Oh.” She stepped away from the window. Of course he had more than one suit. She hadn’t thought about it specifically before, but that made perfect sense.

“I’m just a messenger tonight,” Superman confessed, holding out an envelope. “Clark asked me if I could deliver this to you.

He was afraid you wouldn’t take it from him.”

“Afraid, huh?” Raising a brow, she cracked open the seal and noticed that Superman was still there. “Was there something else?”

Superman shifted from one foot to the other. “Clark asked that I destroy that after you read it,” he replied uncomfortably.

“Really?” She fanned the note in front of her face. “Do you know what’s in it? Poison pen note, perhaps? A love letter?” she scoffed. “Yeah. Right. I’d be so lucky.” Then she realized she had said that out loud and flushed. “Not that I don’t get love letters. I do. Usually from inmates at the New Troy State Pen. It would be terrific to get one from a friend, though. Well, a friend I genuinely like. Not like Ralph or Jimmy or someone like that. Not that Ralph and Jimmy are anywhere near the same level in that regard. Or Clark for that matter. Completely different league. It’s not that I like Clark that way. He’s been more than clear that we are ‘just friends.’ Clark doesn’t like me that way nor would he ever send me a love letter. It’s more likely the former — a poison pen letter — after the way I’ve been treating Clark lately. Of course, he was the one who read my personal journal. Did he tell you about that?”

At Superman’s stunned expression, Lois decided to railroad right past that and hope she could make him forget what she had been saying by laying the blame thickly at Clark’s feet. “He and Jimmy broke into my computer at work under the guise of clearing up some computer virus and read a personal and very private file I had there. I have been having some strange dreams lately about... well, that’s not important, but what is important is I was trying to organize my thoughts about them. Clark had thought... well, never mind what Clark thought. He was completely one hundred percent wrong. Well, that’s not important either. I hadn’t realized I had left it on my computer, much less left it open on my computer, and those guys read it and...” She buried her face in her hands. “How about I hand this note back to you and you fly out the window and fly back in thirty seconds and we just forget everything I’ve said since ‘hello?’”

“You didn’t say ‘hello,’ Lois,” Superman reminded her.

She looked at the open note in her hand. “Probably best not to give this back to you as I’ve already opened it and it’s probably private.” Her eyes opened wide. “Not that *you* would ever read anything private of mine, Superman. Or that Clark would ever ask you to deliver anything too private. Not that he would anyway...”

“Lois, how about I go answer a call for help and come back afterwards?” Superman suggested.

“You know when you told me that you couldn’t see how it would be possible for us to have a relationship? I’m beginning to see why.” She moved forward as he stepped onto her windowsill. “I’m sorry.”

Superman cupped her jaw in the palm of his hand. “Don’t be. I enjoy your company,” he told her, and disappeared out the window.

Lois stood at the window, trying to slow her racing heart. “He must think I’m a fool. A silly, rambling fool,” she muttered to herself and pulled Clark’s note out of the envelope. What was it that Clark wanted her to know that he was afraid to tell her himself? Or did Superman mean that he was afraid of Lois herself, and not giving the note to Lois? She shook her head and began reading.

I have dreamed recently that I hold her in my arms and we fly up to the moon and look out over the stars. She caresses my cheek and tells me that she likes me just the way I am. Everything.

Walking. We walk a lot in my dreams. Walking with her is pure joy, because when we walk she holds my hand and talks. She says the most interesting things. I doubt my dreams do her justice in that regard.

Lois swallowed, her cheeks hot. These were Clark's dreams. His dreams about some woman with which he was obviously enamored. *Who is she?* It sounded like her, but would Clark give her a note with his dreams about her in it? And then have Superman deliver it? No. Clark must like someone else. Her heart shattered as she tried to take a deep breath, but she was unable to catch it. Sobs formed in her chest and begged to be released. She took another look at Clark's dreams. It was only fair after he had read hers.

I picture us sitting on a white sandy beach, lying in the sun. She chases me into the water, daring me to race. I let her win this time. She loves winning. It makes her face glow to beat me. I don't mind losing to her.

She choked back another sob. This woman sounded so much like her, she wished it could be her.

I sometimes have nightmares where I lose and cannot find her. It's the not knowing that scares me the most, the not knowing if she's hurt or dead or missing or just talking to a source.

Lois gasped. He hadn't written that, had he? Who else talked to sources? Her heart began to pound in her chest.

But mostly I dream of talking with her. We argue a lot. I don't mind. I like that she has firm opinions about everything. I like that she's willing to listen to my side and my opinions. And I even get a little rush on those rare occasions I can change her mind.

She started to read about Clark's dreams through this new prism. What if she herself was the illustrious 'she' of Clark's dreams? Lois sighed. Did he really love her as much as she loved him? Had he lied to her about lying to her the day Stern had announced the reopening of the *Daily Planet*? Her heart began to beat a mile a minute and she wiped her cheeks dry. She turned over the paper.

Often I picture us kissing. Sometimes it's a simple peck 'hello' and sometimes — often — it is more. We are walking, dancing, talking, eating, and I just turn to her and kiss her like it's the simplest thing in the world.

Lois had never realized how romantic Clark was. She knew that he was a kind, generous and thoughtful gentleman. But his dreams reminded Lois of her own.

Sitting on my bed, we discuss what she wants for breakfast. I long to fulfill her every little whim. Croissants from Paris — done. Chocolates from Belgium — back in an instant. Fresh coffee and fruit from South America — no problemo. Farm fresh eggs — let me just swing by home. She rests her hand on my chest and says all she wants is me. She doesn't need Superman. All she needs is me. I am the ice cream in her hot fudge sundae. While the other ingredients are good, without me they are just toppings. I am what truly makes her life special. Then she leans in and kisses me. Her lips are soft and taste like honey. I could kiss her forever and it would never get old.

She sighed. Lois couldn't believe that Clark would write about these dreams unless she were the woman in his dreams. She could never see Clark finding pleasure in writing about how wonderful a woman was and be describing someone other than her. It *had* to be her! It had to.

She glanced back down at the paper and saw her name. Her heart caught in her throat when she realized that Clark had written her a note at the bottom of his list of dreams.

Lois,

I'm sorry I ever invaded your privacy. I hope that, by sharing with you my recent dreams, I can start to rebuild your trust in me. If you can find it in your heart to forgive me, please agree to accompany me to the Kerth Awards ceremony and banquet Saturday night. I cannot think of anyone else with whom I would rather share this honor and night than the woman who has made me the man you see before you.

Clark

'The man she saw before her'? Had Clark originally tried to

deliver this note himself? She glanced up and saw Superman once more hovering outside her windows. Quickly she dried her cheeks and let him inside.

"Is everything okay, Lois?" he asked in that concerned way he had.

Lois just stared at him. Poor Clark. She had never realized how jealous he was of Superman. And she had spurned his love the past spring and asked him to send Superman to her. Oh, she would never forgive herself for doing that to Clark. For being so cruel. "You know Clark well, right, Superman?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Do you know who...?" No, she couldn't ask Superman to reveal Clark's secrets to her. Superman wasn't a spy. She wiped the question from the air. "Never mind."

"So, Lois, was it a love letter or a poison pen letter?" Superman teased.

Lois looked down at the folded paper in her hands. "That depends, Superman." If she were the 'she' from Clark's dreams, then it was a love letter to beat all love letters. If she wasn't — and her heart ached at that possibility — then it was most certainly a poison pen letter.

She sighed. What she really wanted to do was keep the letter, reread it before she went to bed, and hope somehow to enter into his dreams... No. Clark had asked Superman to destroy the note and she wouldn't ask him to lie about it on her behalf. She placed a smile on her lips. "He just asked me again to go with him to the Kerth Awards ceremony." She held out the letter. "I'm sorry, Superman."

His face fell so fast she thought she had imagined it before he stilled his features once more. "Sorry?" He reached out for the letter.

"To put you between us," she explained vaguely. "There are much better uses of your time."

"Ah." Superman exhaled and took hold of the letter. He pulled at it, but Lois's fingers would not let go. "Lois?"

"You don't have to destroy it, you know," she suggested carelessly. "You could hold on to it and..." Her voice faded.

"To blackmail Clark later on?" Superman teased.

Her eyes shot to Superman's and she let go of the note. "You did read it."

She saw a moment of panic before he responded. "From what you said earlier about him reading your private thoughts, I figured he must have decided to share his with you."

"Oh. Right. Yes," she replied.

He returned to the window and then paused, looking at her over his shoulder. "Have you forgiven him?"

She smiled and rolled her eyes. "I always forgive Clark." She shrugged. "For some reason I can never stay mad at the man."

Superman grinned and, with a salute, dived out the window. He was a good friend to Clark.

"Am I losing my edge?" Lois asked, pacing back and forth next to Clark's desk. These were the first words she had spoken to him today. No, 'Hi, Clark. How are you?' No, 'Yes, I'll go to the Kerth Awards with you.' Just manic Lois.

"Your edge?" he echoed. It was always best to know exactly what Lois was rambling about before one gave an opinion. The response clearly should be 'no,' but one never knew if the obvious answer was the one she was looking for.

"When did it happen? Is it gone forever? You know, like socks. They go into the dryer but they never come out," she said, emphasizing every point with a wave of her hands.

"Lois," he said calmly as he shifted in his chair to see her better. "You're kind of babbling."

"I know!" she screeched. "See, I *never* babble!"

"Are you kidding? You're a brook," he mumbled to himself.

"A what? I'm a what?" she gasped.

Thankfully, he didn't think she had heard him. "The point being that you are the same reporter you've always been. Hard-working, dedicated, maybe a little over the top sometimes..." Manic Lois disappeared at these words, so he continued. "You could use a few more vacations, maybe a semblance of a life..." Now who was rambling?

"Is this leading anywhere?"

"Lois," Clark said with a smile at her annoyed words. "You are the best reporter in the city. You always have been. And you always will be."

"Oh, Clark," Lois said, sitting on the edge of his desk and actually looking a bit weepy. "You're such a good friend."

Oh, boy. Friend. Lucky him. Well, it was a step up from computer-hacking imbecile.

"I'm sorry I got all wound up about that stupid award," she apologized.

"Not even the award," he clarified. "Just a nomination."

"Exactly! How ridiculous?!" She stood up and started heading back to her desk. "So, are we still on for the awards?"

"We?" Clark asked with a heavy dose of skepticism. He didn't recall her ever accepting his invitation. "Wait. Wait. Wait. What's all this 'we' stuff all of a sudden?"

"Well, you said I was the best," she retorted coyly as she returned to his desk. Lois really knew how to soften him up, didn't she?

"Yeah," he admitted that that was what he had said. He added a silent, 'So what?'

"So, who do you want for a partner? The worst?" she said, turning his words back on him.

He scoffed. "No, but..."

"So, are we going to quibble about this or are we going to go together to this award thing or not?" She crossed her arms and stared at him. Had she just accepted his invitation or had she just told him they were going together? Did it really matter?

"Are you going as my partner or my date?" he inquired softly.

Lois shifted her weight from one foot to the other as she contemplated answering his question. He hoped she didn't toss his question back into his face, seeking out his preference. She put her palms on his desk and leaned towards him.

Clark swallowed, guessing that she had completely forgotten that she was wearing that undercover rocker babe outfit which didn't cover her bosom adequately in the slightest. He was tempted to tell her he liked her red bra, but thankfully the words got caught in his throat.

"Let's just say that I'm going as your partner undercover as your date," she replied.

He cleared his throat. *Undercover?* "So, you're going to be a pretend date?" Why, oh why had he asked that?

She licked her lips. "I'm going to be the best awards ceremony date you've ever had," she told him.

He resisted the impulse to let her know that she would be the only awards ceremony date he had ever had. "Oh." Either it was going to be the best night of his life or the worst.

Superman ran towards Stoke and Lois, but hit some kind of invisible wall and bounced backwards.

"As you can see, this glove is not just an affectation, Superman," Lenny Stoke said, his arm wrapped tightly around Lois's shoulders, a gun stuck into her gut. "This is a little something I dreamt up called the 'Wall of Sound' — a sonic barrier so dense that nothing can get through it, not even you."

Superman tried to penetrate the barrier again and once more bounced back.

"No plug to pull. Independent power supply," Stoke informed him.

He stared at Lois, seeing the fear streaking across her face.

She was so close, yet he was unable to reach her.

"Oh, that's wonderful. That lantern-jawed look of concern for human life. How Superman of you," Stoke taunted him.

Clark looked Lois in the eyes, apologizing for not being able to do more for her. She gazed back at him, accepting his apology and forgiving him. He didn't deserve her.

Stoke caught this little non-verbal exchange. "Am I missing something? Is there something going on that I'm not aware of?" he asked.

Clark focused on Lois's terrified face again for a split second.

"She's your girl, isn't she?" Stoke nodded with a chuckle.

"Huh? That's very romantic. It is unfortunate, however, because she only has five seconds to live." He pulled Lois closer and jabbed her with the gun. "Four... Three... Two..."

Lois gasped with pain, but there was nothing Superman could do but leave as Stoke wanted him to do.

"No," Lois cried out as he left, tearing Clark's heart in two.

"No!" she screamed out, tearing those two parts into four. With each scream his heart shredded even more and his anger grew.

"I know, darling, but you'll see, I'm much more fun," Stoke told Lois as he pulled her away.

That was the last thing Clark heard before he was out of range. He went faster and faster — faster than he had ever gone before. Soon he crashed through the wall of Stoke's basement lair and took away the man's 'Wall of Sound' glove and his gun. Superman gave Lenny Stoke one of his intense stares and pulverized the gun, tossing it away. He did the same with the glove. Then he turned off the power to Stoke's Soundman device.

Lois crossed her arms and walked towards Superman with a satisfied grin on her face. She turned back to Stoke. "Like I was trying to tell you, this was a bad idea, because you don't want to make him mad."

Stoke was still in awe of Superman. "How did you do that?"

"Simple. I broke the sound barrier. Let's go for a little ride, Lenny," Superman suggested.

"You see, I have this problem. It's kind of a Rain Man thing. I hate flying," Stoke admitted, quivering.

"You'd hate it more if I dropped you, so you'd better hold still," Superman suggested, picking Stoke up and flying off.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw a flash of Lois standing there with a knowing smile on her face. Terrific. She knew that Superman was in love with her. How would Clark ever have a chance now?

Perry chuckled as he, Lois, and Clark walked out of the Awards banquet. Clark held the Kerth award for his story on the nursing home scandal.

"Oh, boy, what an evening," their boss gushed. "I tell ya, now I know exactly how the Colonel felt when Elvis brought home that first gold record. Clark! I'm so proud of you, I can't see straight."

Lois tucked her arm in Clark's. "Not as proud as I am. That was a great speech."

Clark smiled. He was at a loss for words whenever she looked at him like that. Actually, he had been at a loss for words much of the evening — since the moment he had picked Lois up and seen her with her hair swept up off her neck and that black-as-the-night-sky evening gown with that pendant hanging down her chest. His eyes had been fixed on her all evening and his tongue tied. Luckily for him, Lois was good at filling silences.

"Now, that's quite an attitude change. What brought that about?" Perry asked Lois as she returned Clark's smile.

"I'm just glad to have such a good partner," she responded, looking deep into Clark's eyes. He didn't know if she was being honest or if this was the undercover part as his date she was playing. Her words seemed almost tongue-in-cheek. At the moment he hoped for the former, but predicted the latter to

surface soon.

A car horn honked and their boss waved his fingers at the waiting car. The Chief lowered his voice conspiratorially as he leaned towards Lois. "Every time Alice sees me in one of these monkey suits, she says she can't wait to get me home and tear it off." He wagged his eyebrows at his reporters. "I'll see you two later."

Lois and Clark laughed as they watched him head towards his car. Lois tucked her hand around Clark's arm again as they headed across the street.

"Where to now?" he inquired. Clark was having too good a time to end the night so soon. He had an award for his reporting (and not for being a hero) and he had Lois on his arm. He wished the night would never end.

A cab pulled up and she turned to him, her face close to his as she whispered, "Take me home, Clark."

"Okay," Clark replied, following her into the cab. Who was he to argue if she wanted to spend more time with him? He could ride in the cab with her to her apartment and then float on home.

Lois placed her hand around his arm again after giving the driver her address.

"Are you cold?" he asked, lifting his arm and wrapping it around her shoulders. It was still warm for an early autumn evening, but she hadn't brought a wrap.

She shook her head and then rested it on his shoulder.

"Tired?"

"Not so much," she said quietly. "I had a good time."

They talked about the food, the speeches, and other reporters they had met — filling the silence, but not really saying anything of importance. Clark still had his glass award tucked into the curve of his arm. It felt good there, but not as good as having Lois tucked against his other side.

He wondered when Lois would come out of her undercover assignment, as she had called their date, and begin to tell him what she had really thought of the evening. He knew it was going to happen sooner or later. He kept hoping that it would be later, much later... as in never. The suspense was killing him.

"So, how did I rate as a date?" Lois asked as the cab pulled up outside her building.

"Oh, A-plus," Clark commended her.

"I hung on your arm decoratively?"

"You did."

"Fawned appropriately?" she inquired.

"Absolutely." This was beginning to sound like the end of her undercover assignment. Was his best friend and partner about to make an appearance?

"And just faded into the background during your big moment?" she continued.

"You were beautiful, yet invisible," he agreed with another smile. He didn't want to push his luck and compliment her on her appearance once again. "Thank you, Lois."

She raised a brow as her hand touched the door handle. "Did your mother teach you to drop a woman off on her doorstep after a date?"

Clark flushed. "No," he admitted. "Shall I walk you up?"

Lois stepped out of the cab. "If you want..."

He wanted. So he handed the cabbie the fare and followed Lois up her front stoop.

Clark watched as she fumbled with her keys and finally got the door to her building open. This was it. Time for the end-of-the-date kiss. He leaned in and kissed her cheek goodnight. It was at that moment he realized that she was holding the door open for him.

Right. Door-to-door service. It had been so long since he had been on a proper date. Even though he knew this wasn't a real date, just a non-date between work partners, he should at least conform to the rules of dating etiquette. *Anyway, Kent, he*

admonished himself, *you usually walk her to her apartment door.* A part of him still feared the wrath of Lois Lane soon to emerge and he wanted to avoid it at all costs.

"Thank you," was all he could think to say as he stepped into her building. She had been keeping up her end of the talking all night. Now that it was just the two of them, his silence almost seemed deafening. They took the elevator up to the fifth floor.

Clark searched his mind for something trivial to say. He lifted up his award. "It's smaller than I thought."

"Not quite as shiny, close-up," Lois nodded, glancing at the award. "You know, you win a few of these and you find out that they don't mean as much. A quick rush. A few pats on the back. Then you're back on the beat, only as good as your next story," she warned, letting some of the shine of the evening fade.

"Where do you think I should keep it?" he asked as he wondered where she kept hers.

"I'm the wrong person to ask. I keep mine at the back of a closet," she told him too casually as they walked down the hall to her door.

Like hell! Clark thought. He wondered if she would invite him in so he could take a quick peek around for their true location of prominence. Instantly he felt chagrined for hoping that Lois would invite him into her apartment so he could spy on her. Some date he was. Instead, he decided that Superman could visit Lois after he left. She was sure to show *him* where her awards were. First bitterness, then guilt, and then anticipation washed over him.

Bitterness that Lois liked Superman more than she liked Clark.

Guilt for being bitter at Lois, being jealous of himself, for still deceiving Lois in this manner, and for using his Superman persona as a way to spend more time with Lois in a way Clark himself couldn't.

Anticipation at seeing Lois look at him the way she did when he was Superman. There was still a thrill that shot through him when she looked at Superman with adoration. Excitement in her eyes whenever he showed up. Gratitude. Okay, most times when he showed up as Superman he was saving her life, which is why she looked at him with gratitude.

Would she be excited to see Superman, especially after learning from Stoke that the Man of Steel loved her in spite of his confession from the past spring that he could never picture them in a relationship? Would knowing Superman's true feelings change their relationship? Should he let anything come of it?

He realized that they were standing at Lois's door. She watched him as he just stood there holding his award, his thoughts a million miles away. Or more actually ten minutes into the future, when he would fly to her window and hope for a chance to be invited in. It felt like more of a chance than Clark being invited in. He filled with regret. It was wrong to be there as Clark and daydreaming of being with her as Superman. He didn't want her to want that other side of him. He wanted her to want this side of him. The real side. Who he truly was. Why couldn't she love Clark instead? But he would take what he could get.

Lois reached up and caressed his face. It was an intimate gesture, too intimate.

"Okay, Lois, you're taking this joke too far," Clark finally said after the initial tingling sensation faded.

She froze. "Excuse me?"

"I can't take it anymore." He set his award down next to the door, causing her hand to fall from his face. "When are you going to chastise me for bringing you as my date to this thing? Forcing you to sit idly by as someone other than yourself was honored for excellence in Investigative Reporting? When are you going to scream at me and tell me that you might do this for me once, but you'll rip out my spleen if I make you live through another night like this again?" He threw up both his hands in frustration. "I

can't wait any longer. Can we just get that part of the evening over with already?"

"Wow! Have I been that transparent?" she asked softly. "And here I thought I was being the perfect date. I laughed at your jokes. I talked to your friends and told them funny stories about working with you, not once turning the conversation to myself and my accomplishments. I cheered and clapped the loudest when you got your award. And still it wasn't enough."

Her words stabbed him. Had she been acting this way so that *he* could have the ideal night? And he had gone and yelled at her for it, accusing her of what exactly? Putting on an act? Being phony? "Enough?"

Lois focused on the keys in her hand, not looking him in the eye. "I'm not her, am I?"

Her? "Who?" Clark whispered. He wondered if Lois could hear his question over the pounding of his heart.

"The woman of your dreams," Lois replied, bringing her keys up to her first lock.

Lois wanted to be the woman from his dreams? This fact stunned him. Of course she was the woman of his dreams. Who else could there be?

She moved down to the next lock. "The woman with whom you want to talk, dance, walk, kiss... basically share your life in your dreams." Lois turned the key in the third lock as her voice rose. "The woman you were thinking about just now, instead of me. *That* woman!" Her keys dropped from her hand as she pounded his chest. "Why can't I be that woman? Why, Clark? Why can't you love me?"

Clark pulled her into his arms and held her tight, not only because it stopped her from beating his chest, but because he needed to feel her in his embrace. He kissed the top of her head. Eventually her fists stopped hitting him and he could hear her crying.

Oh, no, what had he done? He had been so caught up in daydreaming about being with Lois as Superman that he had forgotten to be there as Clark. He had to set the record straight. "You are the woman of my dreams," he said into her hair, wondering if she could hear him above her tears. "I have loved you so long, I can't remember what life was like before I loved you."

"You're just saying that," he heard her murmur against his chest. "Then who were thinking of just now?"

"You," he replied honestly. "The real you. The one who would have teased me insistently about being nominated for a nursing home scandal article. About how the judges were morons if they couldn't see that your drug cartel story was two hundred times better. The one who would have stolen my dessert while I was making my acceptance speech and then claimed I had eaten it myself beforehand. The one who would have invited me inside for a coffee so I could scope out where you really keep your awards, because I know you well enough to know that they aren't in the back of any closet."

"Really?" she scoffed with a nudge. "You weren't thinking about kissing me? This perfect date of a woman? Thanks, Mr. Romance."

He chuckled as his heart soared. She thought of him as romantic? She thought about kissing him? "I've learned it's best not to think about kissing you when you're nearby because then I can't think of anything else." He brushed a lock of hair out of her eyes. "Anyway, you are in love with Superman. Why should I torture myself by daydreaming of kisses you would rather be giving to him?"

"Oh, you stupid, stupid man. I love you."

This couldn't be real. He was in bed, asleep. He was sure of that now. There was no way the real Lois would tell Clark that she loved *him* over Superman. "But your dreams..."

"Oh, Clark," Lois murmured, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Superman isn't the man of my dreams. He isn't the one who knows how I like my coffee. He isn't the man who holds me when I cry. He isn't the man who stays around as I go off on one of my rants. He isn't the man who stands up to me and sends me off to plod through muck because my ego has gotten too big. He isn't the man who offers me his jacket when it's cold, or buys me a snow cone when it's hot. He isn't the man I wanted to be with when I was scared of my own shadow. He isn't the man I play games with, nor would he let me win just to make me happy. And he definitely wouldn't lie about doing so, either." A slightly pouty smile graced her lips and her gaze turned scolding for a moment. "He isn't the man who's there with me when the building isn't on fire or bullets aren't whizzing past my head or there isn't a bomb to defuse. He doesn't know that I need chocolate to think straight. And he isn't the man I pictured in my head when I realized I was walking down the aisle to the wrong man. Superman may save my body, but you, Clark — you have saved my heart, more times than I can count."

Her eyes stared into his as she spoke these words and Clark could see a few remaining dots of moisture on her eyelashes from her tears. He wanted nothing more than to kiss them away. So he did. He could hear her heart beginning to beat faster as his lips moved to her cheek. Then, since it was his dream and he might as well make it perfect, he touched his lips to hers.

Her hands slid up his chest from where she had been holding on to his lapels, then up to his shoulders and around his neck. She pulled him to her tighter as if she herself were dreaming and was afraid that if she let go one or the other of them would wake up. He felt the same way.

Clark wanted to memorize the dampness of her soft lips against his.

The way she tasted of salt from her tears, with a hint of chocolate and coffee from dessert and a dab of Chardonnay.

He could smell the cleanliness of the soap from the restroom at the Press Club, but that was overpowered by some flowery scent — a new perfume? — that she had applied behind her ear. That, if he could move his lips away from her mouth, would make him kiss down her bare neck.

He wanted to remember how the noise of the city faded into the background and, for once in his life, all he could hear was the beat of her heart and the slight moan of contentment she tried to stifle. Once she had allowed it to emerge, Lois deepened the kiss, opening her mouth wider and running her tongue over his dry lips, causing a slight sucking sound between kisses.

Reluctantly, she retreated, pulling her lips from his. They stood there in the hall, their foreheads touching, breathless from the passion of that kiss.

Lois bent down, retrieving her keys from the floor and opening her final lock. She opened the door and turned back to him, placing her hand on his cheek. "Thank you for a memorable night, Clark."

"But if I try kissing you like that again, you'll rip out my spleen?" he asked, doubting the sincerity of her words. He still couldn't believe that she liked him.

An evil smile came to her kiss-swollen lips. "If you ever try not to kiss me again, Clark, if you pretend that this night didn't happen, then goodbye spleen," Lois warned.

"So this isn't a dream?" he replied.

"What would it take for you to believe that this isn't a dream?" she countered.

"You could invite me in and we could see if that kiss thing was beginner's luck?" Clark suggested.

Lois laughed. "Didn't your father teach you that you shouldn't expect more than a goodnight kiss on a first date?"

"Well, yes, but..." But... But... he wanted more! If that was her goodnight kiss, what would a kiss without a goodnight be like?

“Goodnight, Clark,” Lois said, giving him a slight push towards the elevators.

He decided not to push his already better-than-a-pot-of-gold luck. “Goodnight, Lois.”

Clark got was about halfway down the hall when she called to him, “Forget something there, Partner?”

He ran back and swooped her into his arms, bumping the door open with his hip as he carried her inside, his mouth never leaving hers.

Lois threw back her head and let a bubble of giggles escape. “Clark, your award!” He noticed she still had her arms around his neck.

“Eh. I can win one of those every year; true love comes but once a lifetime,” he replied, kissing her again.

She pressed her lips into a line and crossed her arms, so reluctantly Clark set her feet back on the ground.

“Too much?”

“Goodnight, Clark.”

Unable to resist, he kissed her nose. “Goodnight, Lois.” He went out the door, picking up his award on his way.

He practically floated down the hall to the elevator, then he heard her call out to him once more. “Clark, didn’t you have a secret you wanted to tell me?”

Clark turned, seeing her resting against her doorframe, and grinned. “Nope,” he said, stepping into the elevator with a wave goodbye.

*** The Over the Top Epilogue ***

Lois awoke with a yawn and stretched. She lay back against her pillows and traced her mouth with her fingers. Had that happened? Had she really told Clark that she loved him? Had he really said that he loved her? Had he kissed her so powerfully that she could no longer feel her feet on the ground? Or had it all been one wonderful, fantastic dream? Like that dream she had just experienced about making love with Clark?

Sighing, she determined that there was only one way to find out. She lifted up the phone and dialed his number.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Clark,” Lois said. So far, so good. She hadn’t lost her nerve.

“Good morning, Lois,” he replied. He seemed happy to hear from her.

“I had the strangest dream,” she said with a mischievous smile.

“Did you now? Do you want to tell me about it?”

“I dreamed that we went to the Kerth Awards last night and you won a shiny glass teardrop.”

“All true, Lois,” he reassured her. “I can see the award here next to my bed.”

“Then I dreamed you brought me home and gave me a kiss that would make Superman jealous,” she said, laughter in her voice, but wishing she hadn’t brought up the Man in Blue.

“Really? Did it work? Was he jealous?” Clark teased back. She sighed with relief.

“I don’t know.” She covered up the mouthpiece of the phone and called out, “Superman, sweetie, were you jealous of Clark sweeping me off of my feet with his kisses last night?” She paused a minute. “He said he’s willing to share.”

“Ha-ha, very funny,” Clark retorted without a hint of laughter.

“Actually, what I dreamed was that, after you left, Superman stopped by my apartment,” she continued, almost breathless with nerves. Should she tell him what happened with Superman? If they were going to be more than best friends, more than partners, she should be more than honest with him.

“Did he, now?” Clark sounded curious.

“And I dreamed I...” She swallowed. It was the now-or-never kind of moment. “I kissed him goodbye... on the cheek of

course,” she clarified, in case Clark was unsure.

“Is that what that was?” he murmured.

“Huh?” What had he said?

“Go on. What else did you dream?” Clark asked.

“Then I dreamed I went to sleep, dreaming of what would have happened if I hadn’t kicked you out last night,” she whispered as she felt her cheeks flush with the truth of that statement.

“Oh, really? I had a similar dream myself.” She could hear the smile in his voice again. “Shall I tell you about it?”

“In a minute, let me finish recounting my dream,” Lois insisted.

“Of course. My apologies.”

“Then I dreamed that, in the morning, you and I went out for brunch,” she suggested. She hoped she wasn’t been too forward with her idea. With her luck, she’d chase Clark away before he was barely hers.

“Hmmm. An appealing twist. Shall I tell you what I dreamed?” he inquired.

“Oh, I guess so,” Lois said, in a slightly bored voice that hid her interest.

“I also dreamed we went to the Kerth ceremony and I brought home a nice new dust collector,” he said.

“I thought we had already established that the portion of the evening where you won the award wasn’t a dream,” she reminded him.

“Right. It still has that dreamlike quality to it,” he replied. “Probably because of that perfect woman who attended the awards with me as my date. Then I dreamed I took you home and that you told me that you loved this ordinary man more than Superman.”

“Did I, now?” Lois could feel her heart beating against her ribcage. It was just a coincidence that Clark used those words, wasn’t it?

“Then I dreamed that, as I left, you asked me to tell you my biggest secret,” he said.

“Oh, and did you?”

“No. Not then. I then dreamed that Superman came to visit you and you gave him not only a kiss but a white rosebud,” he informed her. “I realize now it was that kiss goodbye you mentioned.”

“Uh-huh?” Lois leaned forward, the blood rushing from her head. Oh, God! Had Superman told Clark about visiting her apartment? This was quickly turning into her nightmare.

“Then I dreamed that you called me to wish me goodnight again.”

Lois gulped. Had she done that? It seemed oddly familiar. She and Clark often spoke before going to bed. “Yeah?”

“Yes, you did. And that I confessed to you that I am, in fact, Superman.”

Her eyes went wide. “You told me *what?*!”

“Let me see, how exactly had that gone? Oh, yes. You asked me again what my secret was and I told you that I was Superman. You didn’t believe me, of course.”

“Of course,” Lois breathed. She drew her knees up to her chest so that she’d have someplace to put her head.

“So I told you that you’d have known that for sure if you hadn’t kicked me out of your apartment,” he joked with an air of flirtation.

“Is that so?”

“Uh-huh. So, in my dream, you invited me back to your place to prove it to you...” Clark cleared his throat, nervousness coming through the phone line for the first time.

“And did you? Come back to my place?”

“Yep. I came back and visited you in my dreams. We kissed... and...” He coughed. “Well, you know... you were there.”

“Refresh my memory, Clark. *How* did you prove to me that you were Superman?” Lois whispered. She had no breath left.

He chuckled warily. “Uh... one thing led to another, and... well, you insisted that I stay the night.”

“Did I?” A scoffing smile appeared onto her face. Was that the kind of dream Clark was recounting to her? Really? After one date?

“Yep. Well, the long and the short of it is...”

“Well, was it long or short, Clark?” Lois retorted, her voice finally back.

“Excuse me?” his voice squeaked.

“Never mind. Go on.”

“After we made love you told me in no uncertain terms that I must be Superman,” he finished in a rush. She could picture his face turning red with embarrassment. “I believe your exact words were, ‘Wow, Clark, you’re one super man.’”

“That good, were you?” she replied with a giggle, enjoying this dirty little tell-all phone call.

“Well, I don’t know about that, being that it was my first time and all. Being Superman I’m not the type of guy who sleeps around. And you, of course, being the woman of my dreams I couldn’t say no. Well, I mean, I tried to convince you that we should wait. It had been only our first date and all. But you insisted. And you know I can never say ‘no’ to you.”

“Of course not,” Lois said, another burst of giggles emerging. Was Clark really going to try to convince her he was a virgin? In this day and age? Please! “So what precisely did you do to convince me you were Superman?”

Clark’s voice was hardly a whisper. “You want me to describe it to you in detail?”

“Yes, please, Clark. Don’t skim on the details.”

“I think it was the floating...”

“The *what?*!”

“Floating. Or maybe it was because we ended up on the ceiling...” Clark really seemed unsure which it was.

“Ceiling?” Lois sputtered.

“Well, you see, I have tendency to float when I’m happy. And making love to you, Lois, well... to be honest, it was the most wonderful, amazing... I’ve never been happier.”

“Uh-huh.” She didn’t know what to say about that. “And then what happened?”

“We floated back to your bed, where you slept in my arms until a three-alarm fire woke me about five-thirty this morning. So I had to go, and although you wanted me to stay, you understood that this was why I was always disappearing and making crazy excuses all the time.”

Lois’s scoffing laughter was gone as she started to cough.

“Lois, are you all right? I knew the air was too cold last night. I’m sorry, I should have offered you my jacket,” Clark sounded honestly chagrined.

She took a deep breath. “I’m fine, Clark. What happened next?” She was at the edge of her seat with this fable he had concocted.

“The fire took longer than I thought. And then there was plane with engine trouble in Brazil. And they’re having another farmers’ strike in France, so people were setting cars on fire and they were exploding. People were getting hurt, so I had to go.”

“Uh-huh, I understand.”

“Thank you, Lois. I really appreciate that. I knew you would.” As he said these words, Lois realized it didn’t sound like Clark speaking to her anymore, but Superman. The lower timbre of his voice. Her hands began to shake. He was pulling her into his fantasy.

“I had just finished showering when you called,” he continued, sounding like Clark again. “I bought croissants from that boulangerie that you love while I was in France. I thought I could pick us up some coffees and I could come to your place and

we could read the Sunday *Planet* and do the crossword together. But if you want to go out...” His voice faded.

“That’s some dream. Are you sure it wasn’t a fantasy?” she asked, her racing heart slowing to crawl.

Clark chuckled. “Well, parts of it might have been. It sure felt real, but it was so wonderful it must have been a dream.”

“And so what you’re telling me is that you’re Superman?” she said with skepticism.

“No, Lois. What I’m saying is that, without you, I’m just a farm boy from Smallville, Kansas. With you, because of you, I’m Superman,” he told her.

“Well, now...” Lois took a moment to organize her thoughts. “Clark, I’ve got to shower and get dressed. Do you think you could be here in, say... a half-hour?”

“I could be there in three seconds,” he teased and she smiled. “But, sure. I’ll see you in a half-hour. I’ll have to reheat the croissants.”

“Good thing you’ve got heat-vision then, eh, Superman?” Lois laughed.

Clark didn’t respond right away. “Uh... Lois? You do remember last night, don’t you?”

“Sure, Clark. I told you I loved you. You told me you loved me. We kissed...” She paused, getting out of bed as the kiss replayed in her head. It was an amazing kiss. Her best first-date kiss ever! She had been tempted to tell him it was better than kissing Superman, but his dream note had made it seem that Clark was a bit envious of the Man of Steel, so she had swallowed those words. “Hold on...”

She put on her slippers and looked around for her robe, which she usually kept at the foot of her bed. For some reason she had thrown it on that chair by her dresser. She picked it up, swinging it around so as not to get tangled in her phone cord. As she swung the robe around, she knocked something off of her dresser. “That was some kiss, Clar...”

Lois bent down to pick up what had fallen. The phone slipped out of her fingers and hit the floor. She could hear Clark’s echoing voice calling to her over the receiver, but she could not move. A bolt of lightning seemed to consume her in its blue flames as the realization that her dream — the one where she had made love to both Clark and Superman — hadn’t been a dream after all. She heard a swoosh of wind and suddenly Superman stood in front of her, wearing her favorite Clark Kent sheepish smile. She pulled her gaze away from his eyes. In the palm of her hand Lois held Clark’s glasses.

THE END

Disclaimer: The characters in this story were created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster as they portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. Many thanks to John McNamara, whose wonderful dialogue I have borrowed from *Wall of Sound*. These characters do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros, DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). These characters have invaded my psyche and forced me to write the following reenactment of their lives; although if you asked them, they might tell you that the plot is all my own, because they would NEVER have done any of the stuff I included in this story. Many thanks to my hard-working GE Teresa, whose knowledge of comma-placement is much better than my own.

Jell-O is a brand name of Kraft Foods gelatin desserts. *Godzilla* is a Japanese monster who made his debut in Ishiro Honda’s 1954 film of the same name. Gene Kelly and Audrey Hepburn — though real people — only appear in my story as images in a dream, not as themselves.