

Snowbound

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: When a blizzard slams Metropolis and takes the city's power with it, Lois decides that it might be wiser (or at least more fun) to weather the storm with Clark. Will things heat up as the temperature plummets?

Disclaimer: I own nothing and I make nothing. This story is just a little not-for-profit-fun. All Superman characters, lines of dialogue, and plot points belong to DC comics, Warner Brothers, December 3rd Productions, and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise.

Author's Note: This story was inspired by a freak October snowfall that knocked out my power for four days. Special thanks go to AntiKryptonite for her encouragement to use the circumstance as the set-up for a story, and for giving me the idea of how to shape the story.

This story takes place during season one of "Lois and Clark". I'm setting it just after Lois and Clark's first Christmas/New Year's Eve knowing each other. Also, Lois is not with Lex for the purposes of this story because Lois and Lex is just icky. I have also altered a few other minor little details, like Lois knowing early on that Kryptonite really can hurt Superman, a plot point that doesn't occur until later in the series. Also, this Lois is a lot more in tune with her feelings regarding her partner.

Not a whole lot of A-plot here. Just a lot of WAFFiness.

You know, I really hate the winter sometimes. Oh sure, it has its good points. I've always enjoyed the special holiday brews that the local coffee shops offer once the weather turns cold and the leaves fall from the trees. And, I guess, I used to enjoy Christmas when I was very young. Back when it still held magic. Back before my parents started fighting constantly. Before they divorced. Before I was forced to raise my younger sister while my dad lost himself to his work and my mother lost herself to alcohol.

But one thing that I've always hated is snow. Even as a school girl, I despised the white, powdery stuff. I know. I was always the weird kid. But I hated snow days. Snow days meant that I'd be forced to stay home, oftentimes having to witness yet another verbal brawl between my parents. Snow days meant that I'd be holed up in either my room or Lucy's room, while she cried and I tried to comfort her. While all of the other kids were out lobbing snowballs at one another, sledding down hills in the park, or building their very own Frosty the Snowman, I would spend the day in misery, hoping against hope that school would be open the next day. School was always my safe haven, the place where I could shine, the place where I didn't have to listen to yelling and accusations all day long. School was where I constantly strove to be the best that I could, hoping to find a way to force my father into noticing me. It was the one venue that I had to try and make my parents be proud of me. I always knew that daddy regretted not having a son. On some level, I always imagined that he felt that having daughters was an inconvenience. So I became the model student, graduating from all of my schools with top honors.

As a professional career woman, snow still irritates me. I

mean, really, what good is it when it closes down roads and makes it only more difficult to track down and nail a story? Who needs the bitter cold bite of the wind? Who needs the treacherously icy roadways and sidewalks? Tracking down sources and leads can be difficult enough in even the most cooperative weather. Forget trying to do the same thing when a snowstorm is in full swing. Not only does my job slow to a grinding halt in bad weather like that, but forget trying to get anything else accomplished. The last time it snowed, I tried to pick up a couple of cans of soup at the local grocery store. It was like people were stocking up for the apocalypse. You couldn't get down the aisles, and if you did, the shelves were wiped clean of a lot of the products. There wasn't a canned good or bottle of water to be found. And the lines! Even if I had found something to buy, I would have been standing on line to check out for at least an hour. I wound up leaving the store empty handed and with a bruise on my arm from being knocked into a shelf as another woman pushed past me, trying to get the last package of pretzels from the shelf. We wound up getting a whole three inches of snow that night, and most of it melted the following afternoon.

Like I said, who needs snow?

"At this time, we are expecting the snow to start after midnight and continue through tomorrow. Current meteorological data indicates that we'll be getting two or more feet of snow. This much snow *could* break the record for the most snowfall in twenty four hours, a record that has stood since 1962. We advise all residents of Metropolis to stay indoors, as winds *are* gusting up to forty miles per hour. There have already been several reports of downed trees and scattered power outages throughout the area. Stay with us here on LNN for all of the breaking news. Back to you, Roseanne."

With a grunt of disgust, I turn the television off. I can't take the loop of the same information anymore. Plus, it just isn't fair. Those anchors get to cover the news and I'm stuck here in my apartment. If it weren't for the danger of the falling trees, I would be out chasing stories instead of climbing the walls of my apartment in boredom. I know that I've done some pretty reckless things in my time. But I'm not stupid. Trees have already crashed through two houses in the area and have smashed at least three dozen cars, including five just across the street from me. I'm not going to risk going out in this weather. At least the snow hasn't started yet. Or maybe it would be better if it did. Then we could get it over and done with. And I could get back to work.

For lack of anything better to do, I take a nice, long, hot bath then climb into bed with one of my new books. I've actually stuck to my New Year's resolution this year — to read more fiction books. Of course, the new year is less than two weeks old. Still, I've always liked the musical of the Phantom of the Opera, so that's what I am reading now. Pretty soon though, I feel my eyes growing tired and I close them, just to rest them for a moment. I drift into a dream, where I suddenly find myself in the role of Christine Daae. I'm pretty certain that Lex is the phantom, and he steals me away to his underground lair. Only brave and true Raoul can save me. No, wait, not Raoul. Clark? Yes. Clark. Clark is saving me from Lex, and once he does, we run off together to our happily ever after.

I awaken what has to be several hours later to a completely pitch-black apartment, trying to shake off the dream. But I can't. It lingers there, in the back of my mind, haunting me. I don't see why it should. After all, it was only born out of the fact that I was reading the book before I feel asleep... and the fact that Clark saved my life oh so recently, when Mr. Make-Up tried to kill me. There. A perfectly rational explanation. No subliminal messages from my brain or heart or anything like that. I finally notice how dark it is in my bedroom, which seems odd to me. I'm pretty sure that I left the light on my nightstand on. I hadn't meant to fall asleep, only to give my eyes a rest for a couple of minutes.

Fumbling in the inky blackness, I find the lamp and click the switch. Nothing happens. In my sleep-fogged brain, I wonder for a moment if the light bulb blew and for some reason (though I suspect autopilot mode) I try clicking the switch again. It's no real surprise when nothing happens this time either. Yawning, I glance at the digital clock that I keep by my bedside, fully expecting the red digits to inform me how long I was asleep. But the face of the clock is dark and lifeless. At first, I can't understand why that is. And then it dawns on me. The storm. It must have knocked out the power to my building.

Slowly, I push the blankets to one side and shuffle off to the kitchen. I think I have a couple of flashlights stashed in there. With the loss of the blankets around me comes a second revelation. It is freezing in my apartment. All of the thermostats are wired into the electric. No power means no heat. Great. I forage through the kitchen as quickly as I can, but it's hard in the darkness. Twice, I jam my fingers into who knows what as I blindly search the drawers. A couple of colorful words escape my lips both times. At last, my fingers close around one of the flashlights. I click the button and a faint ray of light spills out of it. Great. I couldn't have changed the batteries in this thing in preparation for a power outage? Nice going, Lois.

I use the dying flashlight to locate two others that I had stashed in a different drawer, all the while silently promising myself that once I can see in my kitchen again, I am going to organize this place better. I find a couple of batteries and set them on the countertop, then quickly change out the dead ones in my backup flashlights for ones that work. There. Now I can finally see better. I make a quick trip to the bathroom and nearly scream when my bare feet leave the carpeting and hit the brutally frigid tiles of the bathroom floor. I begin to shiver in the cold air of my apartment. I make my little side trip the fastest bathroom break in the history of the world, then race back to the bedroom and dive under my covers. I shiver for a while longer, waiting for my body heat to once again warm the blankets around me. I could kick myself for not picking up a set of flannel sheets last week when the local home goods store was running a sale. After what seems like an eternity of listening to the windows rattle in the fierce wind outside, I finally warm up enough to fall asleep.

When I next awaken, there is once again light in my apartment. I push aside my blankets and instantly regret my decision. It seems colder in my apartment than it did last night. I break another world record as I shed my pajamas and throw on some of the thickest clothes that I own. It helps a little, but the temperature seems to have plummeted to Arctic levels. I pull open my curtains in the living room, half expecting to see penguins waddling down the streets. I'm greeted by a wall of white, swirling snow. The weather forecasters weren't kidding when they said that this was going to be one heck of a storm. Stomach growling, I make a heaping bowl of oatmeal, all the while thinking that gas stoves are wonderful. The food comes out closer to wallpaper paste, but I throw on a generous helping of cinnamon and choke the oatmeal down anyway. It helps to warm me up some, and I'm thankful for at least that much. But... already, I am bored. I wash my spoon, bowl, and pot that I used to make my breakfast in, just to give myself something to do. And then I start to pace. I suppose that I could settle down on the couch and read. Or climb back into bed and read. But I just don't feel like doing so.

Too bad Clark isn't here. We always seem to have a good time together. Like a while back when we posed as a married couple and occupied the honeymoon suite of the Lexor while on an undercover assignment. Going into it, I was sure that the whole thing was going to royally suck. I mean, cooped up in the *honeymoon* suite with *Kent*? But strangely, I had a good time. And the hours flew by. Who'd have thought that my mild mannered partner could be such...well, fun to hang out with? I

guess I should have known better. After all, I *did* get a sneak peek at the man behind my partner when we were in Smallville together, weeks before we were holed up in the honeymoon suite. And what I saw, I liked. What I saw put him into a whole new light. The hack from Nowheresville vanished, leaving behind a friend. He really is a sweet guy, if a little strange sometimes.

Wonderful. Thinking about Clark has me suddenly feeling lonely.

Biting my lower lip in thought, I look out of my living room windows again. The snow is still coming down pretty heavily, but at least the wind seems to have died down. It looks like at least a foot of snow has fallen over night. Still...a foot isn't so bad. The streets haven't been plowed yet, so I can't drive anywhere. But... I can still walk. And if I don't get out of this apartment pretty soon, I'm going to explode. I'm sure that Clark won't mind having some company. And it won't be the first time I've showed up at his door unannounced. Although, this time, I *would* call, if only I could. Stupid power outage. Okay. My mind is made up. I'm going to visit with Clark. Dashing back into my bedroom, I begin to dig through the back of my closet. After what feels like a long search, I finally find my favorite old pair of snow boots and my ski pants and jacket, worn only once. I gave up on trying to ski after I broke my ankle a couple of years ago while on a ski trip with some people from the Planet. Normally, I wouldn't go out dressed in my sweats, but I think it's far too cold to go out in my jeans. I find my old backpack and toss a few items inside, in case I wind up getting stuck at Clark's overnight. Mostly, I take a few extra under garments and socks, my hairbrush, and extra pants and shirts. A couple of essential toiletries get added to the bag. Finally, it's so full that I can barely zipper it shut. Now, where did I leave my hat and gloves? I think for a moment, then finally remember that I left them in the living room on the table near the door. I slip into the ski gear and hoist the backpack onto my back.

The hallway of my building is quiet as I leave my apartment and lock the door behind me. I make a beeline for the steps, putting on my hat and gloves as I make my way down to the ground floor. When I reach the door to the outside, I instantly regret not putting on a second layer of clothing. As cold as my apartment is, it feels worse out here. But, they don't call me Mad Dog Lane for nothing. I'm determined to make it to Clark's apartment, because I refuse to spend the next who knows how many days stuck in my apartment with nothing to do. Nothing is going to stop me from getting across town to Clark's place. Coming down the steps to the sidewalks, the snow is already almost up to my knees. Okay. So I guess we got more than a foot of snow so far.

The walk to Clark's is tougher than I thought it was going to be. Twenty minutes in, I'm huffing and puffing as I push my way through the snow. I'm sweating beneath my ski gear, but the rest of my body is freezing. My jacket and hat are crusted in a fine layer of snow. I feel like icicles are hanging from my nose and my eyelashes have long since crystallized. Every once in a while, the wind picks up and gusts for a couple of minutes, threatening to freeze me in my tracks. On a normal day, I would already be at Clark's place by now, sipping a cup of coffee. Instead, it takes me closer to an hour to get to his place. I'm never so glad in all my life to see his building as I am today when I finally make it there. I walk up to his door and knock as loudly as I can manage through my gloves. I refuse to take them off for a second. My fingers feel stiff and frozen. After a small lifetime, Clark opens the door, clad in a thick fleece and sweatpants. His jaw drops when he sees me.

"Lois?" he asks, disbelieving, as though I were some sort of mirage.

"The power's out at my place and I have no heat," I say as he steps aside to allow me into his home. Really? I couldn't have

started with a hello?

He shakes his head. “The power’s been out here since about eight o’clock last night. But you’re welcome to come on in. I just can’t believe that you’re here. It’s pretty nasty out there. And pretty dangerous.” He gives me a pointed look that I choose to ignore.

“Tell me about it,” I say, stepping onto his landing and starting to unzip my jacket.

Gentleman that Clark is, he helps me out of my backpack and sets it on the floor. Then he helps me out of my coat, shakes off the excess snow outside of the door, and hangs it up for me. I kick off my boots and slip out of my ski pants. Clark takes those from me as well after shutting the door firmly, and hangs them so that they can dry. My hat and gloves join the rest.

It’s cold here in his apartment, but after being out in the snow and wind, it seems like the subtropics by comparison. Or maybe it’s just because his place has always felt so warm and inviting. I’ve always felt so at home here, sometimes even more than I do at my own place. I really can’t place my finger on why that is. Maybe it’s the company. Not that I’d ever admit that out loud.

“You don’t mind if I hang out here, right?” I ask, knowing that he would never ask me to leave in weather like this. Or at any other time, to be honest. “I was climbing the walls at home trying to figure out what to do.”

“I’m actually really glad that you came over,” Clark says, smiling at me. How is it that this man’s smile can make me feel so special?

“Me too,” I say as I enter into the heart of his living room and plop down on his couch. “I figured that you’re the type of man to be fully stocked with things to do. Board games or something of the sort. You probably have a closet full of them.”

Clark smiles at me again as he sits next to me. “Well, it just so happens that you’re right.”

“I’m always right,” I reply playfully.

Clark chuckles and I meet his eyes for the first time since arriving. I’m horrified at what I see, though outwardly, I remain neutral. Dark shadows and heavy bags ring my partner’s eyes, like he hasn’t slept in a week or something. There is a weariness in him that I don’t think I’ve ever seen before. Even the sparkle in his eyes is subdued, and I suspect that what is there is only there because I showed up. Concern floods me and I take his hands in my own. Unbelievably, though he isn’t wearing gloves, his hands are warm. The contact sends little shockwaves of warmth shooting through my own body.

“You don’t look so good,” I say, and then mentally kick myself for my lack of tact.

“It’s nothing,” Clark says. “I just didn’t really sleep at all last night.”

“Too cold for you?” I ask. “I had a hard time sleeping once the heat shut off too. And listening to the wind didn’t help either.”

“Uh, something like that,” he says, and I catch the slightest hesitation in his voice.

I’m not an award winning investigative reporter because I whistle, you know. I know that Clark isn’t telling me the whole story. I wonder briefly if I should press the issue or not. I mean, if there is something I can do to help, shouldn’t I be doing it? On the other hand, it could be a completely private matter. Maybe he ate too many snacks and was sick during the night. I’ve seen the kind of food he keeps around his place. I ate less junk food as a five year old. So, for now, I decide to drop the subject.

“I wonder how long this will last,” I say instead. “And how much snow we’ll wind up getting. Although, with the way that the wind was blowing last night, I’m surprised that I didn’t see more tree carnage on the way over here.”

“Actually, I spoke with Superman earlier today,” Clark says. “He said that he was out most of the night clearing the downed trees that were blocking the roadways.”

“That couldn’t have been easy with the wind,” I say, slightly envious that Superman went to Clark with this information and not me.

Clark nods. “He mentioned that it made it a little more difficult than usual.”

“I wonder where he is now?” I wonder aloud.

“He said he needed to recharge a bit, but that he’d be fine.”

“Speaking of recharging, what about you? You look like you could use a nap.”

“I’ll be fine,” he says, waving away my concern. “How about a cup of tea? You look like you could use something hot to drink.”

That’s Clark for you. Always looking out for everyone except himself.

“Sure,” I say, looking wistfully at the coffeemaker. I could really use a coffee right now, but no power means no coffeemaker, and I refuse to drink the instant stuff.

“Great,” Clark says, hopping from the couch with a speed that belies his exhausted look.

I watch as he moves to the kitchen. He fumbles around in his cabinets for a few moments. Two mugs appear in his hands and he sets them on the counter.

“Oh, hey,” he says brightly, clearly pleased with himself. “I found a box of hot chocolate. Would you prefer that instead?”

“Sure,” I say. Superman’s weakness is Kryptonite. Mine is chocolate.

“One hot chocolate, coming right up,” he says, as he turns on the gas stove and heats the water.

A few minutes later, he comes back to the living room with two steaming mugs. I giggle a little when he hands me mine. A small army of marshmallows is floating in my mug. Just the way that I like it. When did he learn that? Or was it just a good guess? I mean, it only took him about a day and a half to learn exactly how I like my coffee made, and how to make it even better than I do. So it’s possible that I might have mentioned it once and he then filed the knowledge away in the vast library of random, useless trivia that seems to make up half of his memory.

“Thanks,” I say, rewarding his efforts with a smile. I take a sip and savor it as it warms my entire body. “It’s perfect.”

“I’m glad,” he says, putting his mug down on the coffee table. He moves off to his bedroom and returns with a small radio.

“No power,” I remind him.

“I know,” he says, grinning like he knows something that I don’t. I hate when he gives me that triumphant look. Okay, maybe not hate. But I prefer when I’m right instead of him. “I don’t need electricity for this one. See? It has a crank in the back here. All I have to do is crank the handle once in a while to keep it powered up.”

“Oh,” I say.

“Comes in handy in a situation like this.”

Clark grabs the handle and cranks it around and around, until I lose count of the revolutions. Then he flicks the switch to the on position and fiddles with the tuner. At first, he finds nothing more than a burst of static, but he finally finds the local classic rock station. He looks questioningly at me.

“Any preferences?” he asks. Again, putting my wants above his own.

“This is fine,” I reply honestly.

He grins and sits back on the couch. He sips his hot chocolate almost thoughtfully, or perhaps he’s just enjoying the music. He finishes his faster than I do, then he leans back into the cushions. We sit in silence, just enjoying each other’s company and the music. After a while, I look over at him. His eyes are closed and his breathing is deep and even. I can’t help but smile at him. In sleep, I can see a peace on his face that is more profound than any look I’ve seen on his face before. Part of me wants to make

him as comfortable as possible by removing his glasses. The other part of me struggles to not push back the rebel lock of ebony hair that is curled on his forehead. But I squash both urges. It's not my place to do these things. If we were dating or something, then sure. But Clark is a friend and colleague, and nothing more. Instead, I stand, pick up his empty mug, and take both to the kitchen to wash. When I come back, I carefully situate myself on the other end of the couch, not wanting to wake Clark up. I settle onto the cushions, curling up into a ball with my legs tucked under me and I listen to the radio as one song ends and another begins. I stay like this for about an hour when Clark suddenly stretches, yawns, and wakes. I realize that I had been drifting off as well. But with Clark's movement, I am suddenly fully awake again.

"Sorry," he says, blushing a little as he runs a hand through his hair. "I'm so embarrassed."

"Don't be," I say, giving him a warm smile. "You look like you really needed that." It's true. He looks a thousand times better for his brief nap.

"Yeah," he admits. "I guess I did."

The familiar twinkle is back in his eyes now that he is rested. It makes me feel a whole lot better to see my friend looking well again. Clark gives the radio another series of cranks so that we don't lose the charge in mid-song. Then he stands and stretches.

"So, how about a game?"

"Sure," I say.

"What would you like to play first?" he asks with a boyish grin on his face. I have a feeling that he's going to give me a run for my money, no matter what we play.

"I don't know," I say. "What do you have?"

Clark moves off to his coat closet and starts to pull out boxes from the top shelf. He rattles off the titles as he stacks them on a chair.

"Monopoly, Risk, Trivial Pursuit, Scrabble, Chess, Jenga, Checkers, Pictionary. I have some decks of cards around here someplace too."

"Monopoly sounds good," I offer. "But I'll warn you. I'm a bit of a shark."

Clark chuckles and shakes his head. "Is there any game that you *aren't* ruthless about?"

I laugh. "Nope."

"Good. Because *I happen* to be the reigning Monopoly Champ of the Kent family. Eight years running now."

"Oh yeah? Bring it, Farm Boy."

"Okay, but don't think I'm going to go easy on you at all."

"You'd better not," I say, feigning hurt that he would even consider doing so.

We set the game up on the coffee table. I unfold the game board and choose the figure of the car. Clark picks the man on the horse token. He quickly doles out the starting cash to both of us. I stifle a smile when I realize that the bank money is already organized into their individual slots and denominations, and that all of the real estate cards are organized in the order that they appear on the board. I'm not surprised in the least. Clark's the neatest, most organized person that I know. Sometimes, it drives me crazy that he's such a neat freak. I mean really, would it kill him to leave a file on his desk overnight, just for once? We roll to see who goes first and Clark wins the honor.

I don't know how long we play this game for. We stop only once, around noon, and Clark whips us up a couple of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. He apologizes profusely for not being able to offer anything better for lunch. I tell him, honestly, that he shouldn't worry. I'm really not that high a maintenance girl. At least, not food-wise. But he still seems to be worried over not being able to offer some kind of gourmet meal, no matter how many assurances I give him. I offer to clean up after lunch, but he refuses to hear it. Once the dishes are washed and put away, we

go back to our game. Before I know what has happened, Clark owns the entire block just after the Go square, and has built a hotel on each property. And I seem to land on one of those squares every single time I pass Go. Owning Boardwalk and Park Place has done almost nothing for me. Clark seems quite adept at rolling the dice just enough to allow him to squeak by, except for two or three times when the dice fail him. I quickly run out of money and properties to mortgage.

"I guess you can keep your title of Champ," I say, throwing in the metaphorical towel. "You win."

"Did... did *Lois Lane*... just admit *defeat*?" he asks, feigning the ultimate shock.

I laugh. "Yeah, well, you'd better enjoy it. Because it will *never* happen again."

He flashes me another brilliant, triumphant smile as we clean up the game. Clark carefully arranges the money and real estate cards once more. By now, the light is fading into the early evening of the winter months. I've never liked that it gets so dark so early. Give me the long days of summer. Clark sets the box aside and goes to the kitchen. I see him check several of his cabinets. When he returns to the living room, he has a bunch of candles in his arms, two flashlights, and a book of matches. He sets them all on the coffee table, then moves to look out the window. I join him and stand at his left side.

With all of the traded teasing while we've been playing games, I've all but forgotten the storm raging outside. Silently, we both appraise the falling snow. It's still coming down heavy, and the tiny little flakes bear a promise that the storm is nowhere near over. As I gaze out, I realize that I'm not going to make it home tonight after all. Somehow, that sends a little thrill through my body. I really don't want to leave. I've been having such a great time with Clark, that the thought of going back to my empty place is kind of depressing.

"You're staying here tonight," Clark says, as though he can read my thoughts. It is not a question and his tone tells me that he will brook no argument.

"If you insist," I say, clicking my tongue and sighing as though I'd rather do anything but stay the night.

Why do I always give him such a hard time? It is some perverse form of flirting? Flirting? With *Clark*? Can't be. Can it? I can't deny that I was all over him when that pheromone spray hit the newsroom several weeks ago. And I can't deny even now that my sometimes geeky partner is a rather handsome man. I don't think I'll ever forget the image of him clad only in his glasses and a too-small white towel the first day that I picked him up for work at his hotel room. I'll never admit it out loud of course. But Clark has a great body. I'd have to be dead to not be affected by it.

"I'll make it worth your while," Clark says, teasing me. "I cook a mean plate of spaghetti."

"Well, in that case," I say, giving him a smile, "count me in."

"Excellent!" he says back, a hint of victory coloring the edges of his words.

"I'd help," I offer, "but I'm pretty much useless in the kitchen."

"I could teach you," he says, shoving his hands deep into his pockets like a shy schoolboy.

"I think... I think I'd like that," I say slowly, for some reason unable to resist.

What is wrong with me? Why does Clark affect me like this? I'd normally go screaming in the opposite direction from a cooking lesson.

Together, we gather the necessary materials for dinner. The last shafts of gray light begin to fade and Clark lights some candles for us to see by. He puts me in charge of stirring the pasta sauce, once he shows me how to prepare it. He can see that I am nervous about messing it up. So he stands behind me, lightly

threading his arms around my body and guiding my hands as I create the sauce. Confidence begins to sprout in my mind while my heart starts to thump faster and harder at Clark's light touch. Thank God he can't hear what effect he is having on me. I think I'd die of embarrassment if he could. When Clark moves away from me to measure out the pasta and dump it into a pot of boiling water, I instantly feel cold and alone again, though he's only a foot away. I miss the warmth of his body against my own.

It doesn't take long for dinner to be ready. Clark lights a couple of tapered candles and sets the dining room table. With a flashlight, he peruses the wines that he has stored on the wall rack and chooses a bottle of red after what appears to be some internal debate. He expertly uncorks the bottle and pours each of us a glass. He fixes two plates of food and brings them to the table. I swirl my glass of wine and inhale the rich, heady scent. It smells wonderful. I raise my glass in a toast.

"To the worst storm in Metropolis' history," I say. "And to you, Clark. I couldn't imagine being snowed in with anyone else."

Clark raises his glass also, and I see a flicker of surprise cross his features at my toast. "I wouldn't want to be snowed in with anyone else but you too," he admits.

We clink our glasses together and then take a sip. The wine is amazing. Clark must have spent a small fortune on this bottle. I take a bite of my pasta and close my eyes as I savor it. How is it that Clark can make even the simplest pasta dish so delicious? Mine always comes out too al dente or like a wet sponge. Again, I can't help but wonder if it's not the food itself, but the company that makes it so much better. I take another sip of wine and silently gaze across the table at my friend. In the light of the candles, the whole effect is pretty romantic. I feel a fluttering of butterflies in my stomach and I try to squash them down. Clark is my friend and my partner. No. Not just my friend. My *best* friend. Clark's always been there for me when I've needed him, and even when I've insisted that I *didn't* need or want him. How many of my other so-called best friends can I truly say the same about? Even showing up unannounced on his doorstep today, he only ever looked glad to see me and earnestly welcomed me in. How many others would have done the same? I mentally sigh to myself. Even if I wanted to explore the possibility of a relationship with Clark, it would be both extremely inappropriate and terrifying to cross the line into anything further than what we now have. Wouldn't it?

"Lois?" Clark says, his brow furrowed in concern. "You okay?"

I smile at him. "Fine," I say. "Just realizing something."

"Oh?"

I nod. "I just realized what it truly means to have a best friend. And that, well, you're it."

His face brightens across the table from me, and his smile seems to light up the entire apartment.

"Well, that's a lucky thing. Because *you* are *my* best friend, Lois."

I feel heat rising in my cheeks as I blush, and I'm suddenly thankful for the relative darkness of the apartment. My heart does a little flip-flop at Clark's admission, though I think that I've suspected as much for a while now. To give myself a reason not to say anything, I take another bite of my food. Clark seems to understand my loss for words, so he changes the subject. For the next half an hour, we find ourselves talking about our childhoods, all the way through our college lives. We devour the spaghetti with gusto as we chat, both of us going back for seconds, and I can't help but to be amazed at how much I'm willing to tell him as we talk; things that I've never told anyone else, Lucy included. As he tells me about his own childhood, I also can't help but to feel a little jealous. I wish I had had a family like his. His boyhood sounds picture perfect. And having met his parents, I

wish my own could have been like them.

Together, we clean up once we are done eating. Clark tops off our wine glasses again and we head to the couch. He lights a few more candles for us to see by. Outside, we can hear the wind picking back up again as it howls between the buildings and trees. The temperature seems to have fallen again, and I shiver a little, despite the warm clothes that I am wearing. Clark goes to his closet once more and comes back with a couple of fleece throw blankets. He gently covers me with one, but I feel so cold now that it only helps a little. I scoot over on the couch so that I can snuggle into his side. Part of me craves the shared body heat. The greater part of me craves contact with Clark. He allows me to cuddle up to him and puts his arm around my body, drawing me ever closer to his solid, sturdy frame. I feel a jolt of electricity run through my body at the gesture. Is it my imagination, or does this feel more than friendly, and oh so right?

"So," I say, as I lean my head onto his shoulder. "What about after college?"

Clark shrugs slightly, though not enough to rock my head from his shoulder. He leans his cheek against my head. "What about it?"

"I know that you traveled a lot. I mean, you have a ton of articles in papers all over the world," I prompt him.

"You read those?" He sounds genuinely surprised.

I nod. "When Perry decided to make you my partner, I thought it might be best if I checked out some of your work. Just to see what kind of a writer you were."

"And?"

"Well, I can't say that I thought that all of them were award-worthy. I mean, 'The Mating Habits of the Knob-Tailed Gecko'?" Did you lose a bet or something?"

Clark chuckles and I feel it reverberate through his body. "I needed work. I would have done an article on what brand of paint dries the fastest."

"But why all of the traveling?" I ask, curious.

Clark grows quiet and sad. I can tell from the way that he sighs. His whole body seems to tense up. "I...was searching for...my place in this world," he says haltingly, as though he's struggling for the appropriate words.

"What do you mean? You and your parents are so close and all. It's surprising that you bounced around to countries all over the world. Now if your parents were like mine, I could understand the need to get as far away as humanly possible."

"We *are* close," he says, still searching for words. "But I always knew that I was...different. That I wanted a life outside of Smallville. Like I was destined for something...bigger. So I searched for where that life might be."

"But so many places..."

"None of them were the right place for me. I was always an outsider, no matter where I went. Until I came to Metropolis. When I got here, I knew that I was home. Getting to know Jimmy and Perry and especially you, Lois, just solidified it for me. I'm where I belong now."

His voice has grown so soft that it is barely above a whisper. And there are traces of sadness in it. Like some remembered pain still lingers there in his past that still has the power to wound him deeply. I feel like there has to be more to his story, but it seems clear that whatever it might be, it hurts him too much to think about. And that makes me angry. Clark is one of the sweetest, gentlest, most giving people that I have ever met. How could anyone or anything cause him pain?

"Tell me about some of the things that you saw on your travels?" I ask, hoping to steer his mind to happier memories.

I look up just in time to see a small smile curve the corners of his lips. Encouraged, I snuggle even deeper into his body, grab the spare throw blanket from the back of the couch, and cover us both. Clark's strong arms cradle my body ever so reverently.

“Well,” he says after a moment. “I went up to Canada first. It seemed like a good place to start. Not too far away, but a fresh place to search for my place. I was only there about a month and a half before I moved on. But I met some interesting people there. Bill was a park ranger that I met at a bar one weekend. He and I went hiking two or three times out in this remote little area that was just beautiful. He taught me how to identify different animal tracks.

“During the three months I was in France, I practically lived on coffee and pastries once I found the best little cafe. I was there so often that Marie, the owner, used to see me coming and get my usual order ready before I could even ask for it. She was a very sweet old lady. I kept in touch with her son and was sad to hear of her passing in August.

“Italy was great. I was there for about six months. I almost felt like I could have stayed there forever. I found a paper there that took me on full time. That was the first time that I didn’t have to do freelance work. It was nice to have a steady income for a change. But...well...things just didn’t work out and I had to move on.

“Let’s see...I loved New Zealand. I used to spend every free day I had hiking around the countryside. And the people were just fantastic. Really lovely. I’d love to get the chance to go back there someday and visit some of the places that I fell in love with.

“Hmm...Egypt was fascinating. The very first thing I did there was take one of those tours of the pyramids and the Valley of the Kings. And I loved the Cairo museum. I was there just about every weekend and became friends with one of the curators. I couldn’t get a full time position at a paper there, only freelance work, so I supplemented my income by being a night guard at the museum three nights a week. It was a pretty unique experience, to say the least, but it was lonely work.”

Clark’s voice is so soothing and almost husky, but bright and peppy as he relives these moments in his mind. I lose myself to his words and allow him to paint the images that my mind sees. I don’t stop him. I don’t ask questions. I just enjoy his stories, letting him tell me whatever he wants to. And I enjoy the sensation of his body against mine, making me not only much warmer than I was, but also feeling safe and secure and...cherished. I lose all sense of time as Clark weaves his stories. But hours must pass. I’m startled to see how low the candles have burned when Clark finally grows quiet again. It must be late indeed. I’m starting to feel myself getting tired and I yawn despite a heroic effort to hold it in.

“Tired?” Clark asks.

“A bit,” I admit.

“Come on. You can take the bed.” He starts to move to get up but I stop him.

“What about you?”

“I’ll take the couch.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive,” he assures me. “It’s pretty comfortable. I’ve fallen asleep on it plenty of times.”

“You’ll be cold out here,” I protest. The throw blankets might be warm, but I can’t imagine them being enough to keep Clark comfortable all night long.

“I’ll be fine,” he says, brushing off my concerns.

“You will not,” I say, letting him know by my tone of voice that the subject is not up for debate. “We’re both adults. We can share the bed. At the very least, we’ll be warmer with shared body heat. Like we are right now.”

“I don’t know, Lois,” he says, rubbing the back of his neck like a shy teenager. “Won’t that make you feel...I don’t know...awkward?”

“It’ll make me feel warm,” I say decisively. “It’s a known fact that shared body heat is the best way to stay warm.”

“Lo-is.”

I soften my tone. “Please?”

Clark looks slightly panicked.

“Oh for Pete’s sake. I don’t bite!” I say.

“All right,” he relents after a long moment of indecision. “I’ll go and straighten the sheets. I’m afraid that I never made the bed today. You can use the bathroom first and get yourself ready for bed. Need anything? There’s an extra toothbrush in the medicine cabinet if you need it. If you want a shower, there are some extra towels in the linen closet in the hall. Feel free to use whatever you need.”

I shake my head. “I’m all set,” I say, jabbing my thumb in the direction of my backpack.

“Okay,” he says simply.

He extracts himself from me and from the blankets on the couch, hands me a flashlight so that I can see where I am going, then heads off to his bedroom. I instantly start to shiver as I get up from the couch and my body makes contact with the frigid night air. In Clark’s arms, I had forgotten just how cold it truly is tonight. I make a mad dash for my bag, then race into Clark’s bathroom. I brush my teeth, give myself a quick wash, and get changed for bed with a speed that even Superman would be envious of. When I emerge, Clark has already fixed the bed up and has even taken the two throw blankets from the couch and added them to the pile of blankets on the bed. I dive into his bed while he goes to get himself ready for sleep, shutting off my flashlight and leaving it on the night table as I do so.

As I snuggle down into the soft blue flannel sheets, I sigh contentedly. The whole bed smells of Clark; that musky, wonderful scent of him that has become so endearing to me. He smells like no other man that I’ve ever met. Paul used to reek of cigarettes and cheap cologne. And I’m pretty sure that Claude used to marinate himself in inexpensive liquor and only shower every few days. But Clark...Clark smells like...rose scented soap and wind and safety and home. To be surrounded by that scent now, here in his bed, it’s almost overwhelming. And it’s incredibly sexy.

After a few minutes, I hear Clark moving about the living room again. I hear the little puffs of his breath as he extinguishes the myriad candles that we’ve been burning all night long. Finally, the bright beam of his flashlight cuts through the blackness of the bedroom. My back is to him, so I feel, rather than see, him climb into bed behind me. I hear the click of his flashlight as he shuts it off, allowing the darkness to cover us completely. I tremble beneath the sheets as I struggle to get warm.

“Lois? You’re shaking,” he says, concern rich in his voice.

“It’s nothing. I’m just a little cold,” I admit.

“Here,” he says, flipping to his side to face my back.

In the next instant, his large hand comes to rest on my arm and he begins to methodically rub it up and down, generating friction and heat. I sigh a little at the contact and the resulting heat. Without really thinking about it, I inch my way backwards, so that my back connects with his chest. I hear him suck in a little shocked breath and I allow myself to smile. He can’t see it of course, but I can’t help but feel a little, well, wicked. After a few minutes, he seems to get the hint that I am not going to move. Maybe he relaxes a little too, because he finally envelops me in his strong arms. Soon enough, I feel his breaths even out and grow deeper, and I know that he has fallen asleep. As for me, I remain awake a little while longer, not because I want to, but because my brain is racing at a thousand miles an hour.

It feels magnificent being here in Clark’s bed, with his arms wrapped around my body. I can feel the hot tickle of his breath on the back of my neck. With Paul or Claude, that would have driven me crazy. But not tonight. Just knowing that it is Clark is enough to turn the otherwise annoying puffs of air into a kind of caress. I sigh contentedly and close my eyes, savoring the

sensation of laying in Clark's arms. I am no longer shivering and I eventually drift off to sleep, where I have the most wonderful dream. In it, I'm dancing in Clark's arms all night long.

When morning comes, Clark's spot on the bed is empty and cold. Disappointment shoots through me. After getting to know what it is like to fall asleep in Clark's arms, I had hoped to learn what it would be like to wake up in them as well. The rattling of pots and pans in the kitchen tells me that he's not far away. I get up and instantly learn that today is impossibly colder than yesterday was. I'm already wearing the warmest clothes that I brought with me. But it doesn't seem to be nearly enough. Still, I shuffle off to the kitchen, where Clark greets me with a huge smile.

"Morning, Lois," he says brightly. "I hope I didn't wake you."

"No," I say, shaking my head. "You didn't. How long have you been awake?" I say as I look around. I notice his wet coat and boots over by my own.

"A couple of hours," he says with a shrug. "Look!" He points to the window. "The snow finally stopped. There must be close to three feet out there. I went out to shovel the walk and figured that I'd dig out Mrs. Yang's walk too."

Mrs. Yang is his elderly neighbor. I've meet her a couple of times. She's a sweet woman and I know that Clark looks out for her.

"What's cooking?" I ask.

"French toast and scrambled eggs," Clark says. "I stuck some of my perishables out in the snow after the power went out the other day." He points to his terrace where he's dug out a small footpath.

"Sounds good," I say and take a seat at the table.

Clark brings me a heaping plate of food and a cup of hot chocolate before tending to his own food. He sits across from me and begins to cut into his eggs.

"Superman stopped by this morning," he says, keeping his eyes downcast.

"Oh?"

He nods. "He said he was out doing a patrol, checking on the snow and power situations."

"And?" My heart has deflated a little knowing that once again, Superman went to talk to Clark and not to me.

Clark swallows a bite of his French toast before speaking. "The power has been restored to most of the high priority cases. Hospitals, nursing homes, police and fire stations and the like. But we're at least a day, if not more, from getting residential homes and apartment buildings back on line. I let him know that you were staying here. He was glad to hear it. He said that he felt better knowing that you were okay."

I nod but say nothing. It's nice to know that Superman is concerned for me, but I have more pressing things on my mind. I just don't know how to go about voicing them. So I don't. Instead, I insist on clearing the dishes when we are finished. The hot food has helped, but I'm still cold. Clark notices and brings me his bathrobe. He won't take no for an answer, so I slip into the robe. It's badly oversized for me, but somehow, that makes it feel so much cozier than it otherwise should. Or maybe it feels this way because it is Clark's. He ushers me over to the couch and we sit for a while, listening to the hand cranked radio. We listen to the news, but there's not much going on in Metropolis. No one is venturing out in the accumulated snow, other than to start the sluggish process of digging out. And it seems that the city's plows are making slow progress at best. Looks like I'm not going anywhere today either. Once again, that's just fine by me.

After a while, we switch back to one of the stations playing music. I notice a book of crossword puzzles on one of Clark's bookshelves and go to get it. He produces a pencil and goes to retrieve the throw blankets on his bed.

"Wait," I say, following him with the book and pencil. "Why don't we just work on these in here?"

When did I get this bold and...almost aggressive with Clark?

He considers it though, and finally nods. After all, we did share the bed last night to sleep. I slip out of his robe and bury myself in his blankets. When he gets himself comfortable, I snuggle into him, leaning against his broad chest. His arms encircle me, as though we were old lovers. Lovers. The thought is intriguing. I let Clark pick one of the puzzles and we get to work. Between the two of us, we easily fill in the entire puzzle, laughing the whole time. Granted, Clark is better with the more obscure clues. But for the first time in my life, I don't have to cheat in order to finish the puzzle. Feeling like we're on a roll, I urge him to pick another puzzle. Next thing I know, we've completed four of them and it has somehow become the afternoon.

"Did you want to do another one?" Clark asks.

I shake my head. "Maybe later. I think I'm all puzzled out right now."

"No problem." He puts the book aside.

"Clark," I say, taking comfort from having his arms around me, "about last night..."

I can almost hear the color draining from his face. "I'm so sorry, Lois. I *knew* that I should have stayed on the couch."

"No, Clark," I say, cutting him off. "I actually wanted to thank you. And to...talk...about," I swallow hard.

"About?" He sounds nervous.

"Us," I finally force myself to say. This is it. I've crossed the point of no return. There's nothing left to do except to push onward. "Look, Clark, you're my best friend. But, and I can't be sure, but I feel like there's a deeper connection here. And it scares me because I don't know what to make of it."

I turn to face him, just in time to see a flash of relief cross his features, only to be replaced with a fresh sense of trepidation. He tries to hide it though and clears his throat.

"What do you mean?" It's like he's afraid of misinterpreting me.

"I think you know, Clark," I challenge him.

He sighs. "I think so. But I'm afraid that I could be wrong." "And?"

"And...I'm not going to lie to you, Lois. I've wanted since the moment I met you to be more than just a colleague to you. I've been honored by your friendship. I've been blessed to call you my best friend. But...nothing would make me happier than if...we became more than that. I've been anxious of bringing it up with you. There just never seemed to be an appropriate time to do so and I was afraid that it might make you uncomfortable. And I didn't want anything to ruin our friendship."

Again, his voice has sunk to a quiet whisper, as though speaking too loudly will upset me or something. My hand takes on a life of his own and caresses his cheek.

"I'm starting to realize...that I want the same thing," I admit as my cheeks bloom into a heated blush.

"So...you wouldn't kill me if I asked you out then?" He grins timidly, crookedly at me.

"Only if you keep me waiting," I say, grinning.

"Well then. Lois Lane, will you go out with me?" His voice is so playful and yet so serious.

"I'd love to," I reply. "But maybe we can get a head start on our new relationship. We can consider this snowstorm as a sort of...trial run."

"What'd you have in mind?" He grins wolfishly at me and his eyes fairly smolder. He wiggles his eyebrows at me, suggesting that he's already got a pretty good idea of what I mean.

I don't answer him with words. Instead, I stretch my body and capture his lips with my own. He needs no further encouragement. He responds, eagerly returning my kiss as his

arms pull me closer and his fingers boldly rake through my hair. We both moan, and I can feel it vibrating in his chest as I lay half atop him. The thought crosses my mind that this is *Clark*, of all people. But that's what makes it so wonderful, so right, so comfortable. It's almost like we were meant to be doing this the whole time that we've known each other. Maybe we were. But it doesn't matter. We're doing it *now*. If anything, it only means that we have lost time to make up for.

"Wow," he says, when we finally break our kiss.

"Yeah," I say.

We're both a little breathless from the intensity of the kiss. And we both let loose a little nervous laugh. I think we're both a little fearful of what happens next, now that we've crossed this scary new threshold.

"That was incredible," I finally say after calming my lungs and heart. "That made your kiss in the Lexor feel like I was kissing my brother."

Clark waggles his eyebrows at me again. "Ah, so you've been thinking about that, huh?" I playfully slap his right pectoral and he laughs. "You have!"

"A little," I say, though the real truth of the matter is that I've thought about that kiss every single day since it happened. And until this last kiss, it was the most amazing kiss I'd ever experienced.

My tiny admission is enough for Clark. He smiles broadly at me. You know, that smile really ought to come with a warning label.

"So... what now?" he asks.

"Now... I think we have some lost time to make up for," I say with a wicked gleam in my eye.

He answers by pulling me closer and kissing me deeply. I could almost swear that I'm floating in my ecstasy. I moan his name against his lips and he moans mine. My heart is beating wildly. It's a small miracle that it doesn't leap right out of my chest. Clark's kisses whisk me away to some fairytale land where true love's kiss sets off fireworks and a happily ever after. I abandon the last of my self-restraint and utterly surrender myself to him.

We spend the better portion of the afternoon exploring this strange new aspect of our relationship. Sometimes I lay atop him. Other times, he's the one on top and I am comfortably wedged between his body and his mattress. And I have to say, any fears that I might have once had vanish like shadows at noon. When we're finally forced to take a break, we're both flushed and breathless and I can no longer remember why I was ever afraid to cross the intimacy line with Clark. This is every secret hope and dream that I've ever had come true, even if I hadn't really realized it before now. I only hope that I don't manage to screw this up for myself.

Eventually, we are forced to vacate the bed and eat. We never stopped to have lunch today, so we are both fairly starving by the time the sun begins to set. We decide on canned soup and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. It doesn't take long to make, and the hot soup is more than welcome against the Arctic air that has made the apartment feel more like the inside of a meat locker. We talk idly but easily as we eat, jumping from topic to topic as we go. We don't discuss our budding romance at all. I've learned that sometimes, it is best not to over-think things and let them play out as they will. By the time we are finished, Clark has relit the candles so that we can see. He takes a few into the bedroom, while I take a hot shower to warm up even further and to get myself ready for bed. I'm nowhere near ready for sleep, but knowing that I'll be curled up in Clark's arms again, I suddenly feel in need of a good freshening up. I don't know why. It's not like I was trekking through mud all day.

I easily slide into Clark's waiting embrace when I enter his bedroom. He's strategically placed candles all around the room.

The effect is both inviting and romantic, yet cautiously neutral. I feel weirdly underdressed in my beat up sweatpants and baggy sweatshirt; like I've wandered into a black tie affair wearing this stuff. Clark doesn't seem to notice. He only brightens when I enter the room and pulls me close to his body. We stay this way all night long, talking. He tells me some more stories from his travels around the world, and of the interesting people he met and things that he saw. I tell him about my secret novel and admit that I don't think that I'll ever finish it. It even bores *me* to tears sometimes. I can't imagine anyone else ever wanting to read it. Of course, he offers to read what I've written, but I don't think I'm ready to take that step just yet. Maybe in the future.

Leaning against Clark's chest, I sigh in contentment.

"Lois?" he says.

"Clark... if... if I told you something... would it scare you off?"

"I guess that would depend on what it is. But I'm pretty tough, Lois. I think I can handle anything that you might want to say. Unless it's that you suddenly hate me for kissing you all afternoon."

I twist in his arms to look him in the eyes and catch the wry grin on his face. "Nothing like that," I assure him, tenderly brushing that stray lock of hair from his forehead. It feels *so* good to do that! "It's just... I think... I think I'm falling in love with you."

"Lois," Clark says, his voice seeming to choke up. "I love you too. I've *been* in love with you since I first laid eyes on you. I just never in my life thought that this could actually happen for me."

"I didn't make it easy for you, huh?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "Not really. But, it's more than that, Lois."

"What then?"

He shakes his head again as if he's said too much — things that he didn't intend on saying. "Never mind."

"No. Really. I want to know."

He sighs. "I can't. I don't want to jeopardize our relationship before we've even gone out on an official first date."

"Is this about Superman?" The words are out of my mouth before I can stop myself. I know that he's always been a little jealous of my fascination with the superhero. "Because, if it is, let me assure you that, yes, I have a little crush on him. What woman doesn't? But he's not someone... well... like you."

"What do you mean?" There's a weird glimmer of hope in his eyes.

"Well," I say, groping for words to express what I mean.

"You're a real man. Someone that I can laugh with and watch movies with. Someone who can cook and keeps an impossibly neat apartment. Someone that is shy and insecure and vulnerable. Someone who, with the simplest gestures, like bringing me coffee or making me laugh when you see that I'm having a bad day, makes me feel special and loved. Superman might be a good friend and a dashing hero, but you're down to Earth and... real. Someone who loves me and that I love too."

Clark swallows hard but his eyes shine in the dancing light cast by the flickering flames of the candles. "You... would choose me? Over him?"

"In a heartbeat," I say.

"Lois, you have *no* idea how happy that makes me."

"Why? Did you think that you were in some competition with him or something?"

"In a way, yes," he says. He runs a hand through his hair, a sure sign that he is ill at ease.

Concern blossoms in my heart. "Clark, what is it?"

"There's something that I think you should probably know about me. Something that I've kept secret. But hearing the things that you've said just now, I'm finally confident enough to know

that I can tell you this thing. Because now I know that it really is the real me that you've chosen. And before we take this new relationship of ours any further, it's only right that you should know...everything."

"I'm afraid that I'm not following," I say, a cold knot of fear twisting my stomach.

"Lois, there's a reason why I moved from country to country so often. There's a reason why I've always resented your adoration of Superman. There's a reason why I felt like I was in competition against him. And that's because he's not real. He's a disguise. *My* disguise. *I am* Superman."

"Clark, be serious," I start to say. "There's no way on God's green Earth that..."

I break off my sentence when we start to float — actually float! — above his mattress. We hover only for a second or two before he sets us back down. With a trembling hand, I reach up to his glasses and he allows me to remove them. I realize that I've never seen him without them before, not as Clark. And as the frames come away from his face, I once more see the face of Superman. He takes the glasses from my hands and gently sets them aside.

"I'm sorry," he says as I gape and fail to speak.

"Sorry?" I repeat. Somehow, his apology sounds like the most ridiculous thing in all the world. "For what?"

"For deceiving you these past several months. For making you believe that I'm something that I'm not. And if you're mad, I'll understand that."

"I'm not mad," I say, giving him a reassuring smile. "Yes, you made me think that you were two different people. But — and correct me if I'm wrong — I'm guessing that that's the whole point of the suit. As for the rest, Clark, you never deceived me. Because in the suit or out of it, you've only ever showed your true self; a guy with a heart as big as a mountain who offers so much of himself without ever asking for anything in return. It's one of the many reasons why I've fallen for you."

He timidly smiles at me. "So...I can still be your boyfriend?"

I smile back and lightly jab my forefinger into his chest. "You'd better be. Or there will be hell to pay, mister," I say, seriously yet teasingly.

I give him another deep kiss to prove to him that I mean every word of what I have said to him this night. I feel all of the tension in his body melt away as I caress his lips with my own. He returns my kiss, deepening it more than I ever thought possible. In that moment, I know that he's finally lost that last shred of fear, that last shard of withheld affection. All of his love is poured out in that single kiss and my head swims from the overpowering emotions surging through my heart, brain, and body. And I know that he believes all of the things that I have told him this night. As he well should. I've already promised myself that I will never do a single thing to hurt him. His heart is safe with me. And I know that mine is safe with him.

Eventually, we both need air. And as much as I wish that this kiss could last forever, we reluctantly break apart. The thought flashes through my brain that we're...*I'm*...moving incredibly fast here. A few days ago and I would have hung up my press pass for good before I'd ever look at Clark as more than a friend. I wonder if I am crazy. But in the last day, everything has changed. For some reason, being cooped up here in his apartment with him has allowed me to confront my secret feelings. And I know that I want this, more than anything I've ever wanted anything in my life. More than I've ever even wanted the Pulitzer.

I don't move out of his arms and he seems to appreciate that fact. We say nothing. We only bask in the comfort of one another; my arms around Clark's chest and his right arm cradling me while the left one strokes my hair soothingly, lovingly. I wish that I could stay awake all night, just like this. But eventually I grow

tired and drift into dreamland. And dream I do. Tonight, I'm flying through the air, safe in Superman's muscular arms. I've dreamt of this a hundred times before. Only this time, the thrill of the flight is heightened to astronomical levels, because this time, I know that I'm flying with Clark.

When morning breaks, I'm once again alone in the bed and I mourn the fact that Clark isn't there beside me. The apartment is completely quiet. I hear only my own heartbeat and the breaths that I am taking. Gathering my courage to face the cold, I disentangle myself from the heavy blankets. Mercifully, today is warmer than the previous two days — if you can call forty degrees warm. Still, it's better than last night when it plummeted into the teens. Rubbing the last of the sleep out of my eyes, I wander into the living room and frown when I don't see Clark.

"Clark?" I call out. "Clark?"

He's not in the bathroom either, so I take the opportunity to throw on my last clean outfit and get freshened up. I still can't find him when I reemerge. I settle down on the couch to wait. Maybe he had to go to an emergency? I crank up the radio and find a national news station. There I find my answer. Clark's in Detroit, battling an oil fire. An hour later, the fire is out and Superman leaves the scene. There are reports of many, many injuries, but no deaths, thanks to Clark's efforts. I hear the familiar whoosh that signals his arrival and jump right off the couch. He enters by way of his terrace, looking for all the world like he's just been through a warzone. His suit is besmirched with smoke and blood and other foul looking things that I am sure that I don't want to know about. Every inch of his exposed skin is streaked with soot and smoke. A nasty odor follows him in and I struggle not to gag. But his eyes light up when he sees me. His smile is genuine and tells me just how glad he is to see me.

"Hi," I say.

"Hi," he replies. "You have no idea how good it is to see you."

"Nice work on the oil fire," I say. "You're right. This little radio *does* come in pretty handy."

"Thanks," he says. "Sorry that I couldn't be here when you got up. Let me go shower and then we can figure out what to do for the day."

I nod and he zips to his bedroom, then across the apartment to the bathroom. I hear the water start splashing. It lasts no more than two minutes. Seconds after the water stops, Clark reappears, dressed comfortably in jeans and a sweater. He plops down on the couch next to me and captures my lips in a powerful kiss. I'm instantly wrapped in the heady sensation, and the scent of his aftershave, which, I suspect, he's only wearing for me.

"So...what should we do today?" We can go anywhere, do anything, that you want," he says.

I notice that he's not wearing his glasses, a sure sign of how comfortable he is with me knowing his secret. I pat his knee affectionately.

"That's a kind offer. But, there's nowhere in the world I'd rather be today than right here," I say. "How about lunch and a board game? And maybe some more making out." I wink at him, letting him know that I *definitely* intend on kissing him some more.

"Sounds like heaven," he says, grinning from ear to ear. "I'll go get us a pizza. You can pick a game."

"Clark, it's eleven-thirty in the morning!" I can't help but to grin. Still, a pizza sounds good. "Make it a pepperoni and you've got a deal."

"I'll be back before you know it."

He steps away from me and starts to spin until he'd nothing but a blur. The faded blue of his jeans and the light gray sweater suddenly become the vibrant blue and red of his suit. When he stops, he is fully outfitted in his disguise and I can't help but suck in an amazed breath.

“Wow,” I say, breathlessly.

“I’ve always wanted to do that in front of you,” he says. “I promise, you won’t even know that I’m gone.”

In a heartbeat, he’s placed a chaste kiss on my lips before disappearing out of the apartment. A sonic boom rings out overhead, the only evidence of his passing. I’m profoundly lonely as I wait for him to return. To give myself something to do, I look again at the pile of games that he’s left out from the other day. Risk looks good, so I take it out and set up the game board on the coffee table. It takes forty five minutes for Clark to return, but at least the pizza is piping hot.

“Sorry,” he says. “I had a car accident to attend to. Both drivers had to be brought to the hospital. Since I was already in New York, I went to one of my favorite pizza places in Times Square. I would have gone to Italy, but I figured that would take me away from you for too long.”

“That’s fine,” I say. “There’s nothing like a New York pizza. You know,” I say, biting into a slice. “Wow, that’s good. Anyway, you know, I like these extra perks of dating you. And now I finally understand why you would never tell me where you’d buy our Chinese takeout. I’m guessing someplace actually *in* China?”

Clark blushes and nods.

We eat as we play our game. In the beginning, we seem to be pretty evenly matched. But the balance soon tips in my favor. I’m crushing Clark’s poor plastic armies. And more and more of the world is falling under my dominion. Pretty soon, the board is split between my armies and his, with a few hotly contested territories. We’ve moved onto good natured teasing and insults as we continue to cast the dice.

“Clark Kent - ruler of Australia,” he says after finally winning the last portion of the continent. “Has a nice ring to it, don’t you think?”

“It does, but it’s not as good as Lois Lane — *supreme* ruler of North America,” I say back, sipping from my second bottle of cream soda.

Clark tries to overtake one of my countries in Asia and fails miserably. His strategy seems to be pretty much non-existent.

“Geez, Kent, let’s hope you’re never in charge of organizing troops,” I tease him. “We’d be in big trouble.”

He chuckles. “Well, if I ever do find myself in that unlikely position, I’ll gladly hand over my authority to you...supreme ruler, was it?”

“That’s right. And don’t you forget it.”

We continue playing the game and Clark’s armies grow smaller and smaller. It takes much longer than it usually does to play this game. Clark and I keep stopping to trade kisses, and even the most innocent ones turn into soul-shattering ones. And once we start, it’s nearly impossible for us to stop. Still, we somehow manage to move forward with our world domination. I’m in the midst of taking over South America when suddenly the television blares to life. The sudden intrusion of the sound makes us both jump. I don’t know about Clark, but I’d all but forgotten the power outage while we’ve been playing. We both laugh at our mild fright and then cheer over the returned power.

“I guess...you’ll probably be able to go back to your apartment tonight,” Clark says regretfully.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

My heart breaks a little at the thought. I’d secretly hoped to have a reason to spend a few more nights here, even though I’ve since run out of clean clothes. In the last forty-eight hours, or close enough, my apartment has become just a place. Home has become the place where Clark is — where ever that may be. Leaving here tonight is going to be torture. But I do know that with the return of the power, we’ll have to go to work in the morning. And if I stay here, I’m afraid that neither one of us will get enough sleep, if this afternoon’s random make out sessions are anything to go by. So I reluctantly agree that, if my apartment

has power, I will go back to my place.

A few hours later, I’m deemed Dictator of Earth after squashing the last of Clark’s soldiers. He offers to take me home via Superman Express after he flies us in some of that Chinese food that I’m so crazy about. He knows only too well how much I love flying with him. But I decline. He can take me home, but I want to walk. That way, I get even more time with him. When it is time to leave, he helps me into my coat and shoulders my backpack for me. We’re in luck. The city has finally gotten the roads and the sidewalks clear. We walk arm in arm together, quietly enjoying each other’s company. Still, it’s kind of depressing when we make it back to my building. Since it’s now dark outside, I can see that the building does indeed have the electricity back. Most of the windows are lit up, the light filtering through naked panes of glass or through the fabric of curtains.

“Thank you, Clark.” I smile at him. “For everything.”

He slides the backpack from his shoulder and helps me into the straps. “No. Thank *you*, Lois. You’ve made me the happiest man on Earth. You’ve accepted me for who I really am, and you’ve given me your love. I can’t find the words to tell you just how much that means to me.”

“I have a pretty good idea,” I say. “Because I feel the same way knowing that you love me.”

“I love you, Lois. With everything that I have.”

“I love you too, Clark.”

“See you tomorrow, bright and early,” he promises, then smirks as some thought crosses his mind.

“What?” I ask.

“Just wondering what Perry will have to say about this once he realizes.”

He chuckles and I join in. He’s got a good point. Either Perry is going to blow a gasket or throw us a ticker-tape parade. I’m not quite sure which. Instead of thinking about it though, I move in to kiss Clark. Time fairly stands still as our lips crash together, unable to get enough of one another. When we break, I giggle a little and Clark raises his eyebrows at me.

“Have we gotten to the point already where it’s funny to kiss me?” he teases.

I shake my head. “I was just thinking. When this whole storm started, I was sitting in my apartment thinking to myself that snow is one of the most pointless, obnoxious weather-related things, and about how much I hate it.”

“And now?”

I give him a brilliant smile. “Now, I think that snow might just be good for something after all.”

THE END