

The Keys to Clark Kent

By Mouserocks <mouserocksnerd@gmail.com>

Rated: PG

Submitted: November 2013

Summary: Clark finds out the hard way why driving Lois around when she's hot on the scent of a story isn't always the best idea.

A/N: Clark finds out the hard way why driving Lois around when she's hot on the scent of a story isn't always the best idea. In response to HappyGirl's First Line Challenge, in which a story begins with the line as seen below.

"You take the keys."

Clark seemed stunned as he caught the keys flying towards him. "Uh, Lois?"

"What?" she snapped as she flung open the passenger door and ducked into her newly-designated seat.

"Hi?" he hinted as he slid slowly behind the wheel.

Lois rolled her eyes at his constant need for proper etiquette. "Hi, how are you, let's get going. Now can you drive?"

Clark frowned and closed the door behind him. "O-kay," he dragged the two syllables out, trying to read his partner as best he could while turning the key in the ignition. "So what's really going on?"

She shot him an innocent look. "Whatever do you mean, Clark?"

He laughed slightly as he began to pull out into traffic. "Lois, I know you. We've been partners for nearly a year now. You call me up at eleven o'clock at night, say you might have found something big and to wait on the curb outside my apartment for you. Now you get here and you pretend like nothing's wrong? What is it? What did you find?"

He watched out of the corner of his eye as she shifted slightly in her seat. "Found might not be the most accurate term..."

Clark's brow immediately furrowed as he considered her highly suspect words. "Lois. What did you do?"

"Don't you trust me, Clark?" she asked in a faux-sweet tone of voice, batting her lashes once, twice, three times at him.

He leveled her with a dubious stare.

"Clark!"

He chuckled to himself slightly and turned his attention fully back on the road ahead. "I'm kidding. Of course I trust you. We're partners remember?"

"Right. Partners. Good." Lois nodded, putting a piece of hair back in place behind her ear. "We're partners. And that means we're in this together. No matter what. Till the wheels fall off. You're the only person I can imagine telling this to anyway."

A spike of concern went through him. "What kind of trouble did you get yourself into this time?"

She grinned broadly at him. "Us, Clark."

He scowled, letting her know how he felt about the terms of their suddenly equal partnership. "Fine. What kind of trouble did you get *us* into then, Lois?"

"Okay, don't be mad at me for this."

Clark couldn't help but roll his eyes. This was sure to be nothing but bad news, then. Normally, she didn't really care whether or not she made him mad. In fact, sometimes Clark got the distinct impression that she actually enjoyed getting a rise out of him. "I could never be mad at you, Lois."

She sat in silence for a few moments, staring out the window ahead of her as Clark aimlessly drove in what seemed to be the

direction of the Daily Planet. Maybe she shouldn't have done it – but it was newsworthy! More than newsworthy – though she knew she could never print it. But curiosity would not let her rest until she had her answers. Her mind started arguing with herself over the ethics of it all, and Lois was suddenly quite glad she had come to Clark with her problem. He would definitely know what to do. He always did. She just didn't listen all the time.

Somewhere in the distance, Clark heard alarm bells going off, somewhere in the vicinity of S.T.A.R. Labs. It didn't sound like anything dangerous had happened, but just to be safe, he would try to speed things up with Lois. He cleared his throat pointedly. "You know, as much as I appreciate your company, Lois, I am rather tired. If you don't have anything to—"

"No! I do. It's just... I'm working on how to phrase it." Lois took a deep breath before turning in her seatbelt to face her partner more fully.

"Okay. So, first of all, this is strictly off the record, Clark, understand? Anything I tell you right now is not going to be printed, ever."

He chuckled nervously, wondering where she was going with this. "Lois, you're making me nervous."

"No, don't be nervous. It's nothing bad. Okay, well it's kind of bad, but only for like one person. Anyway, my curiosity just wouldn't rest so... I did something. Something... questionable."

Okay, now he knew something was definitely up. Lois Lane, admit to doing something questionable? "What?"

She inhaled deeply before spewing all her words out at once. "Ibrokeintostarlabs."

Clark blinked, trying to process the information. "Come again?"

Lois huffed irritably. "I broke into S.T.A.R. Labs, okay?"

Look, after the whole thing with Trask when he attacked you and your family, I got worried. And when you told me about what he thought about that... that Kryptonite, I had to find out for myself. So, I did some research for a while, secretly looked up who might have access to some, spent the last two weeks learning the ins and outs of the building and getting familiar with the people there. And about a half hour ago, I broke in and took some. Look – this has got to be it! It is real!"

Without pretence, she fished a small silver box out of her bag and easily popped the latch on the side of it, swinging the lid open with an almost practiced ease.

Clark felt the familiar feeling of pain wash over him suddenly, and with a grunt he found himself losing control of his actions. The Jeep started to swerve as Clark listed to the left and struggled to keep his eyes open. Lois' scream sounded somewhat dull to his ears, and he managed to try to hit the brakes. The effect slowed the car down a little from its forty mile per hour cruise, but ultimately crashed into a fire hydrant on the sidewalk across the three lanes.

"Clark!!" Lois' voice was practically raw from screaming with fear and she had dropped the lead box holding the Kryptonite in favor of gripping the armrests for her life. She had no idea what had just come over her partner, but it was officially the scariest thing she had ever witnessed in her life, and she'd seen some pretty rough stuff. When the car crashed into the hydrant and water started gushing out of it, Lois finally came to her senses. Quickly, she undid her seatbelt and scrambled over the console to reach her partner. "Clark," she repeated his name, working herself into a panic as she grabbed him by the chin and tried to get him to look at her. "Clark! Say something! Come on!" She smacked his cheek a few times lightly as he groaned.

"Lo... the... box..."

He couldn't seem to form any more words, and somehow, Lois was losing him. Panic ran through her blood, seeping into her actions and mannerisms. The box? The one with the Kryptonite in it? Suddenly, she was in action, looking for the box

and where it had fallen. Her hands got a hold of cold metal and she pulled them back in victory. “A-ha! Okay, I got the box. Clark?” she turned to look back at him and alarmingly found his form even more hunched and his head lolled off to the side slightly.

She peered at the box in her hand and gasped. “The Kryptonite!” Lois yanked on the lever that pulled her chair back and started searching, dragging her fingers along the carpeted surface of the floor until she found the small green rock. Eventually, after a few moments which to Lois felt like an eternity, her questing fingers found their purchase. “Yes!” She pulled the chunk of rock out with a victorious smile and turned to look back at her partner.

Her face fell quickly at the sight of his ashen features. “Clark!!”

He couldn’t even manage a groan in response. Lois gaped at him. She couldn’t figure out what just happened to him, why he had passed out so suddenly. It was like he’d had some kind of seizure or reaction—

Then it hit her. “Clark?!” Remembering herself, Lois quickly sheathed the poisonous crystal in its lead casing again, sealing it shut and locking it. She shoved the box deep in her purse and turned to face the man she thought she knew once again. “Clark? Come on, Clark. Wake up. I need you to be okay. Clark?”

Lois felt tears streaming down her cheeks and she heard sirens approaching in the distance. Quickly she swung out her door and stumbled over to Clark’s side of the car, not caring that her clothes were quickly becoming soaked from the stupid fire hydrant. She flung open his door and reached over him to unbuckle his seatbelt. “Clark,” she murmured grabbing his face with both hands and looking intensely at his closed eyes. Those eyes that she’d give anything to see one more time. She needed to see for herself, to prove for herself that what she thought was true.

Though, she supposed, you didn’t get much better confirmation of Superman than if he passes out when exposed to Kryptonite.

Surprisingly, Lois found herself not really caring about what happened to Superman, the hero. All that mattered was that Clark Kent, her best friend and partner was going to be okay. Maybe it was just selfish on her part, but Superman could come second to that.

Superman. Her best friend, her partner, the man she’d spent the past year working with and more often than not making fun of was Metropolis’ resident superhero. If that didn’t blow her mind, she didn’t know what would.

She snapped herself out of it and bent closer to focus on Clark. There didn’t appear to be any noticeable bleeding – of course there wasn’t, though. Superman didn’t bleed. Then again, she distinctly recalled Clark getting a paper cut on his finger a month ago in Smallville, so evidently he could bleed. She didn’t know which outcome she preferred. “Come on, Clark. You’ve gotta come back to me. The world needs you. I... I need you. Please.”

He needed to wake up. The sirens were getting closer, and as good a secret-keeper as she thought she was, Lois knew that if asked, she couldn’t come up with an excuse good enough for this. She’d end up babbling and then probably crying, with the eventual spilling of the guts. She needed Clark to be the one making the excuses. That was his field of expertise... although come to think of it, now everything sounded thin and hollow to her ears. Cheese of the Month Club? When he came out of this, they were definitely going to have to work out a few of the kinks.

Her attention was dragged back to Clark when he started coughing and groaning. Her heart fluttered with relief. “Clark?”

He answered on a groan, croaking out her name roughly, still not opening his eyes. He shifted slightly in his seat, obviously in

pain.

“Thank goodness,” Lois breathed on a sigh, stroking his cheek gently, trying to keep him awake. “I can’t be responsible for a double manslaughter charge.”

At that, Clark’s eyes fluttered open and slightly dulled, frightened brown eyes stared back at her from under the frames of his glasses. She tried to smile at him, but it came out more as a grimace, she knew. Lois swallowed thickly, trying to think of a way to reassure him. “Don’t worry. Your secret’s safe with me.”

His eyes drifted shut once more, too drained to make any sort of comment to her. Just then, the police pulled up, followed closely by an ambulance. Lois was surprised they had been able to show up so fast – there weren’t many people on the street to report the accident and it was rather late. Then again, Clark didn’t live in the best of neighborhoods, so she supposed it was likely they were somewhere nearby.

“Is everything all right here?” an older officer approached her and saw that Clark was practically passed out in the driver’s seat and signaled for the EMT to get over there. “What happened?”

Lois’ mind ran a mile a minute, trying to come up with something plausible as she stammered out an excuse. “He... he just... I don’t know quite what happened. One minute he was fine and then the next thing I know he’s having a seizure or something and passed out and then the car crashes, and I don’t know what to do!”

“Ma’am, was there any drinking involved tonight?”

“No!” she protested firmly. “We were on our way to work. We had an idea about... this story we’re working on, maybe a breakthrough, and I drove by to pick him up—”

“This is your car?”

“Well, yeah,” she conceded, watching as the EMTs carefully moved Clark onto a gurney and checked his vitals. “I told him to drive because I wanted to focus on telling him... my breakthrough on the story.” A wave of guilt washed over Lois suddenly. She was responsible for all of this. If only she hadn’t done what she always did and checked the water level before jumping in head first...

“I’m sorry. Where do you work?”

The officer’s words drew her attention back out of her introspection. He sounded slightly skeptical of her story. “The *Daily Planet*. I’m Lois Lane, he’s—”

“You mean you’re Lane and Kent?” He spoke with obvious awe in his tone.

This would be too easy, Lois suddenly realized. They had a fan – not something too common within the police force. Reporters and cops didn’t exactly always get along too well. “The hottest team in town.”

“I read your article on a drug ring you guys busted a few months ago. It was quite impressive.”

She smiled falsely and brushed at his arm. “Oh, it was nothing, really.”

The officer suddenly seemed to remember himself and turned back to his paperwork. “So... Mr. Kent was driving?”

Lois turned back to look at her partner, now struggling awake and trying to brush off the hands of his helpers, incoherently muttering something about hospitals and needles. She needed to wrap this up quick. “Yes.”

“Does he drive frequently?”

Lois’ brow furrowed suddenly. “Come to think of it, no. Not really. He doesn’t really ask to. And he doesn’t have a car, but neither do a lot of people in the city.”

“And you say he’s never had something like this happen to him before?”

Lois suddenly hesitated. This was drifting into uncomfortable territory. “Well, I don’t think so. Not in my presence anyway.” Her eyes lit up as one of his excuses rose to mind. “But he is always running off to doctor’s appointments of some kind or

another. Maybe that has something to do with it?”

The officer nodded, seeming to accept that answer for now. “All right. I’ll call a tow truck over and you can accompany Mr. Kent to the hospital to get checked out.” He walked away to make his calls and Lois immediately went to Clark’s side as he called out.

“Clark? What’s the matter?”

“No! No hospitals. No.”

He seemed like he was babbling, and the EMTs insisted on taking him to get checked out. Lois knew his concern of course, but she couldn’t exactly agree with his less-than-irrational behavior right now.

“Clark,” she soothed, rubbing her hand on his arm. The effect almost immediately calmed him down. “Listen to me. You don’t have to stay there, and you probably won’t have to do much of anything. They just need to check you out and make sure everything’s okay. The story can wait for a few hours.”

His eyes turned to her in slight confusion, but she gave him a quick wink and some of the tension fled from his features.

“I mean, what if there’s something these EMTs missed? You don’t want to risk having another seizure just because they goofed up and didn’t check you out completely right? Then we’d have to write a whole other article about how the emergency teams are poorly staffed and undertrained, and then it’d be a whole thing. You don’t want to do all that work, do you?”

Recognition flashed through his eyes, followed closely by a look of utter awe at her genius. She really was brilliant.

“Although, it would make a great follow-up to our article on the police force’s incompetence at catching burglaries at major facilities such as S.T.A.R. Labs.” She grinned, unable to resist that last jab.

“Excuse me,” the younger man of the two spoke up, his tone defensive. “But I think you’re writing us off a little too quickly there, miss. We are good at our jobs.”

“Oh, no. I’m sure you are,” Lois laid it on really thick. “It’s not that I don’t trust you to do your jobs or anything like that. I do. I just know how important it is for the professionals at the emergency room to do a more *thorough* check.”

She could see the two stewing at her comments, but astutely decided to pretend she didn’t notice.

Clark finally spoke, his voice rough and gravelly. “Lois, I’m fine. It’s not like they don’t know what they’re doing. I’m sure they could do a better job than the overworked staff at the emergency room.”

“He’s right, ma’am,” the older EMT spoke up this time, trying to maintain his cool. “Technically speaking, we have a better chance of identifying the problem here and now than some doctor on his third shift can three hours from now.”

“Yeah,” chimed in the younger man once again, a little too happy to jump on the bandwagon. “And we can’t force him to undergo medical treatment. It’s against medical advice, but if he signs a waiver and gets someone else to sign him out, he can be free to go at any time.”

The older man shot the eager medic a disapproving glare, and his shoulders slumped quickly. “We’d have to do a more thorough check before we could be allowed to do that, though,” he added.

Lois looked Clark in the eyes briefly, surveying them. He looked extremely tired and in pain – putting on a brave face and pretending all was okay was taking more out of him than even she knew. He should just go to a hospital to get checked out. Then again, she knew exactly why they couldn’t do that now, why Clark outright refused to. He couldn’t risk it. Sure, maybe a needle would pierce his skin *now*, when he’d just been exposed to the Kryptonite, but in the next few hours? Who could tell what would happen then?

Clark nodded and grimaced. “Yeah. Do that.”

Lois nodded to the medics and they got to work, checking his pulse, his pupils, running every sort of test they could to make sure there wasn’t any lasting damage. Lois sat by his side the whole time, loosely holding his hand in her grip.

The officer strode back over to her and spoke. “Miss Lane? The tow truck will be here in a few minutes. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

Lois tore her eyes away from Clark’s pain-contorted face and back to the man who addressed her. “Not that I can think of, Officer.”

“Oh, please,” he brushed off the term quickly. “You can call me Adam.”

“All right. Thank you Adam. And it’s Lois.”

He grinned at her and Lois grinned back. At the very least, she’d made a new friend on the police force tonight. Maybe he’d help her sneak under some yellow tape every once in a while. Henderson would sure *love* that.

He started to walk away, and as Lois looked back at the EMTs finishing up with Clark she had another thought. “Actually, Adam?”

He turned back with a smile. “Yes, Lois?”

“Would you mind terribly if you called us a cab?”

Lois groaned under the weight of the man half-slumped over her shoulder. Good lord, he was built like an oak tree. She supposed it made sense, considering all of the new light that had been shed on her slightly geeky partner this evening, but who knew he was so heavy? Even Superman seemed lighter than air despite all those muscles... and then she seriously had to clamp down on her brain to stay focused, because the thought of the man leaning against her having all those wonderful muscles was all sorts of distracting.

She huffed in frustration as she struggled with the key to his apartment. “Clark,” she bit out a little harsher than she’d intended, “Maybe you can help us both out a bit and lean up against the wall until I get the door open?”

He groaned loudly as he pushed himself off her shoulders and landed with a slight thud on the opposite wall.

“Thank you,” she murmured under her breath. It was now easy to get the key in the lock and turn it, and within a few moments, they were inside his apartment.

She breathed a sigh of relief as she deposited her friend and hero onto his sofa. He landed heavily in the cushions, letting out a sigh of his own.

Lois turned to his kitchen, looking to make something to drink. The thought of a stiff liquor was tempting, but she immediately quelled that thought. She needed all of her mental faculties available to her if she was gonna get through this and keep an eye on her partner. Maybe tea would do them both some good – calm her nerves, soothe his system. Yeah. Where did he keep that Oolong he was always going on about?

She found the packet of tea leaves, but found herself at a loss when looking for a kettle. Where would he keep it? She couldn’t find it in any of the cabinets or drawers. Was it possible he didn’t have one? How could that be when he drank tea more frequently than she ate chocolate?

Oh.

It suddenly struck her that Clark Kent, her partner and best friend in the world, the man who knew more about her than anyone else, was *Superman*. Somehow, the weight of it all hadn’t hit home until just now, going about a seemingly normal task and realizing that, more than she’d even thought upon discovering the fact, Superman was really Clark Kent.

How often did he use his powers in non-rescue situations? Did he always heat his drinks that way? His food? Her food? Little things came flooding through her mind, things that didn’t add up over the past several months. How her once-cold coffee

had gotten warm again, how he'd maybe responded to something she said that she hadn't thought he could hear. All those times when he ran off to go "call the police" or some other nonsense like that and then turn around two seconds later and fly to the rescue as Superman. She couldn't believe it. Her partner was Superman. Clark Kent, the man she sat less than ten feet away from every day at work and argued and bantered with. The man who wore ridiculous ties and took three sugars in his full fat latte and went back for two donuts in the bullpen. The man who single-handedly lifted a rocket into outer space and who saved her innumerable times.

The man who enjoyed a good corn festival as much as a flight around the world.

Oh, God.

And she'd almost killed him.

Part of her wanted to laugh at the incongruity of it all. She had broken into one of the most important places in Metropolis to steal the one thing that could kill her partner and the first thing she'd thought of was to show him her prize. The irony of it all... Lois did start laughing at the thought, found she couldn't stop. She clutched at her side, near tears, and leaned heavily against the counter behind her.

"Lois?" a weak, confused-sounding voice called out to her ears, prompting more peals of laughter.

Clark dragged himself off the couch and made his way over to the kitchen. He found his partner sitting on the floor, in tears over her laughter. A spike of concern ran through him at her behavior, and he carefully eased himself down next to her on the tile of his kitchen. "Lois," he started, touching her arm slightly. It felt heavier than normal, making lifting his arm that much harder.

"Lois," he tried again, voice a little stronger this time.

Lois shook her head, trying to snap herself out of it. She knew it was the combination of worry, confusion and the lateness of the hour that was making her so giddy. Brushing away her tears and slowly coming down off her hilarity, she sighed. "I'm okay, Clark. You don't need to worry."

"I always worry about you."

Lois turned to look into his eyes, and the most honest, hopeful, sorry expression she'd ever seen on his face stared back at her. Immediately, her giddiness was gone, and there was an unresolved tension in the room. She couldn't turn her eyes away, as much as she wanted to escape from the unwanted intensity of it all. "I—" she tried, but suddenly found her words stuck behind a lump in her throat.

Finally, Clark broke his gaze, his head thumping back to rest against the cabinet door behind him. He couldn't keep holding it up on his own any longer.

There was a silence between them, heavy with the weight of unspoken words. Lois looked at her hands intently, unsure of what to say, sure that she wouldn't end up saying the right thing if she tried. She wished she could go back to not knowing, she thought to herself. Just rewind the whole night, maybe even back up to before she thought to steal the Kryptonite to find proof of its existence. Then things wouldn't be so awkward between the two of them, Clark wouldn't have been hurt and her car wouldn't be the wreck it was currently.

"I'm sorry," Clark's hoarse voice suddenly broke the silence, surprising Lois. She turned to look at his expression, relaxed into a state of what looked like defeat with his eyes gently closed as his head lolled back against the wood panel behind him. She had a hard time keeping her mouth from hanging open.

"You're sorry? Clark, I almost killed you tonight!"

He managed a small chuckle at her words. "Well, there's that." At her fallen expression, he nudged her with his elbow. "Hey, don't worry about it. If that was true, then technically my dad tried to kill me too."

Lois' eyes went wide. "What??"

"Yeah. When we first went out to Smallville, before Trask... Wayne Irig gave my dad a chunk of Kryptonite, not knowing what it was. Dad wanted me to take a look at it. I felt sick and that's all I remember after that. I guess I passed out in the barn, they had to drag me back into the house. You know when you came downstairs, and saw that I wasn't feeling good?"

Lois was quiet for a minute. "It wasn't allergies," she spoke slowly.

Clark hesitated briefly, then nodded. "Yeah. But that's what I'm saying. Don't beat yourself up about it. You didn't know."

Those last three words sunk in slowly. "You're right. I didn't know."

Her tone suddenly changed, and Clark got nervous. He ran a hand over his face, trying to relax his features from the worry he knew to be etched in them. "You *are* mad. I knew you would be. I'm sorry. I should have... told you, I guess. I just..."

"No, I'm... I'm not mad. I mean, I am mad. I should be. I just," Lois was struggling with this as much as Clark was. How should she feel? On the one hand, she felt cheated that he hadn't told her his secret. On the other hand, could she blame him? "I guess I'm just mad you didn't trust me enough to tell me."

"Lois, that's not true at all," Clark spoke emphatically, wincing in pain as he turned his body to face hers more fully. "I trust you. I trust you with my life." She snorted at him. "It's true! Do you know how many times I've moved around, wandering the world just to escape people? Do you know how many people know who I really am?"

Lois rolled her eyes. "Well, I'm guessing your parents. And obviously Trask, and whoever else you might have run into."

Clark shook his head firmly at her words in spite of the ache it gave him. "No. That's not what I'm saying. Yes, very few people know I'm Superman. You're the first person I've ever really told about that – and even now, you figured it out on your own. Unfortunately, there have been some in the past who have figured out what I can do. Because of this, though, I'm a very private person, Lois.

"You know the real Clark Kent. You know the guy who likes to watch sports and who plays poker with his coworkers at the office. You know the me who will stay up late watching movies with you, who will break into buildings with you, all to get the latest scoop on the next big story. You know the me who..."

His voice suddenly trails off and he looks very insecure. Lois eyes him nervously. Everything had been going so well until now. "Who what, Clark?"

Clark swallowed, taking courage from her gaze. She knew the truth about his origins already. It was only fair to tell her the whole truth. For once, he could be the one to jump in head first without checking the water level. "You know the Clark Kent who would do anything for you, who would be at your beck and call day or night. You know the man who cracks jokes, or brings you your coffee at work every morning, just to see you smile. You know *me*, Lois. Because I'm the guy who's spent every minute of my waking hours – even some of my dreaming ones – thinking about you. Because I've been in love with you practically since the moment I saw you."

Lois was stunned into silence by his confession. It was much more than she was expecting, certainly. He didn't mean that, did he? And yet he stared back at her with such openness and honesty... and if she were frank, it made sense. All those lingering stares, some of his flirty banter. But still. "You... you couldn't possibly mean that, Clark," she croaked out.

"I do, Lois."

Her heartbeat started thundering in her ears, and she quickly jumped to her feet and began to pace his kitchen. Clark simply stared up at her, watching her lithe movements as she attempted to trudge a hole in his floor.

"No, you can't mean that. I mean, I'm a wreck!"

“You are not,” Clark jumped in. He was determined to make her see from his perspective, and maybe it was just the Kryptonite talking, but he couldn’t just give up. He could be as stubborn as she was.

“I don’t have a nice little happy family like you do.”

He shrugs. “Most people don’t. And my family isn’t exactly normal. I’m an alien, remember?”

“I focus on my work purposely so that I leave no time for anything else.”

“You’re tenacious. I like that.”

“I routinely commit felonies if they’re all that stand between me and my story.”

Clark couldn’t help a wry grin at that one. “You definitely keep me on my toes.”

She shot him a look, and he closed his mouth, but refused to wipe his smile away. “I’ve been horrible to you. When you first started working at the Planet... I can’t say I’ve ever treated someone as horribly as I have you. Not without reason.”

That did hurt a bit, Clark had to admit to himself. “I’m not going to lie and say that it was pleasant,” he started slowly. “But you were guarded. I was new. And we’ve long since put that kind of behavior behind us.”

“But... but...” Lois bit her lip hard, not sure how else she can make him understand. He just single-handedly dismantled every one of her arguments as to why he shouldn’t like her, and he wasn’t even at the top of his game right now.

He cocked his head slightly to the side as he looked up at her. “But what?”

“You’re Superman!” she spluttered out.

Clark felt his eyes widen as it struck him what she was saying. That stung. He hung his head in defeat finally. “I understand,” he spoke in a monotone voice.

Lois stopped at the sudden change in his behavior. “You do?” she asked uncertainly. Had she really talked him out of it so quickly? What did that say about his affections for her?

“Sure,” he nodded. “I don’t know of many people out there that would want to be with an alien. I can’t blame you if you want a human relationship. Maybe I’d feel the same in your shoes.”

Her heart sunk at his words, and before she could think twice about her words, Lois found herself kneeling in front of him on the floor and grasping his chin firmly. “Clark, no!” His eyes had a hard time meeting hers. “That’s not what I meant at all! Look at me, Clark.”

Finally his chocolate brown gaze met her own, filled with a different sort of pain. She’d had no idea that he’d felt so insecure about himself.

“Then what?” he asked on a whisper.

He seemed so broken, and suddenly Lois couldn’t help but kiss him. She leaned forward and pressed her lips tightly to his. When she broke the kiss, the look of bewilderment and excitement in his eyes was exactly what she was hoping to find. “Clark, I love that you’re Superman. It makes you that much more heroic. The fact that you have a life, friends and family that you could be putting at risk every day and yet you still put it aside to do what’s best for the world – that’s incredible. I don’t care if you crawled out of a sewer, much less if you’re an alien. You’re the most human person I know.” She paused in thought a moment before continuing. “I just don’t know what on earth you could see in me.”

He shrugged his shoulders loosely. “You’re perfect.”

Her heart fluttered wildly at that. Could he really mean that? She swallowed as she thought over his words and sat down beside him once again. She leaned her head back against the cabinet as well, matching his posture unconsciously. Finally, after a few moments of silence, she spoke once more. “You’re sick. You’re probably really tired.”

Clark didn’t respond for a while, and for a few minutes, Lois

began to wonder what he was thinking. She could practically feel the wheels in his head turning. When he did speak, though, it was not the words that she had expected.

“You’re right. I don’t feel well. I’m tired, I’m fairly dizzy from the pain. I feel faintly sick. I’m having trouble lifting myself off the floor. So maybe it doesn’t mean much coming from me right now.” He looked at her once more, making sure she understood every word coming from him was absolutely sincere. “But Lois, I’m not just saying this now. I really have felt this way since the moment I met you. You stormed into Perry’s office in the middle of my interview, and I couldn’t take my eyes off you. And ever since then, I’ve done my best to get you to see me for who I really am.”

“I do, Clark,” she insisted, but he held up his hand to stop her.

“I know that. It’s just... for so long, I’ve kept this secret about myself. And I knew that one day I would have to tell you. I wanted to. But, at first, I was worried about how you’d accept me, or if you’d hear what I had to say and think Pulitzer. And then... then we were friends, partners. I didn’t want to jeopardize that relationship. I was hoping for more. And the longer I waited, the worse it got, and then you were all moony-eyed over Superman, and,” he threw his hands up helplessly in the air. “And I guess it just got away from me. I got... jealous, I suppose.”

Lois couldn’t suppress a slight grin at that. “Jealous of yourself?”

“I didn’t say it was rational,” he frowned at her, making her laugh.

The atmosphere was somewhat more relaxed once they had cleared the air. Lois turned to face him. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Ask me anything. I want you to know everything about me, Lois. There’s so much I’ve been wanting to tell you.”

She shot him a quick grin. “I’m gonna take you up on that.”

“I knew you would,” he shot right back.

She returned with a small smile before dropping her expression and staring at their feet in front of them. “The Kryptonite. Why... why didn’t you tell me about it? As Superman, as Clark, anything? I was never so afraid in my life as I was when Trask pointed that gun at you, Clark. I never want to see you get hurt like that. You could have died – and I wouldn’t have even known... The Kryptonite would have killed you.”

A wave of guilt washed over him. “I’m... I’m sorry. I just—”

“No, I get it that you didn’t want to tell me your secret. That’s fine. It’s just... afterwards or something, I mean. I’ve been working on this Kryptonite idea for almost two months, I’ve asked you questions about it – both you and Superman. And you always just shrugged it off.”

Clark hesitated a moment, thinking over her words. “I guess... I just was worried that if I said anything, you’d make the jump that Clark Kent could be Superman.”

“You could have just said that you asked Superman the same thing and he said yeah, it’s real.”

Clark was amazed by how easy his partner made everything seem. “Sorry,” he replied once more, fighting off a slight grin.

Lois looked at him suspiciously. “What?”

“Nothing.”

She crossed her arms and turned to level him with a glare. “What is it?”

“I’m just realizing how much better you are at coming up with excuses than I am.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “God, I know. If I never heard another late video rental or cheese of the month excuse in my life, I’d be happy.”

Clark laughed, glad she was able to take it with good humor. He bit his lip. “So... are we okay?”

Lois thought about it for a moment – a moment too long for Clark’s liking. He was about to open his mouth and start

apologizing some more when she cut him off with a hard, passionate kiss to his lips.

When the kiss broke apart, and they were both quite breathless, Lois finally smiled and gave him the response he was looking for.

“Yeah. We’re okay.”

THE END