

# Practically Married

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Rated G

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Summary: Lois and Clark are practically married but don't realise it.

This is my first LnC submission and it's not the story I was supposed to be working on, but I had one of those moments when a plot jumps out at you and won't quit pulling on your sleeve. It came almost completely written in my head, so I just got on with it. The story that was supposed to be my LnC debut will have to wait. Anyway, this is for the May 2013 WAFFy challenge.

I'd like to say a huge thanks to my beta KenJ who had this dropped on him with no warning at all yet still got back to me in super quick time. Apart from his perfect revisions and comments I've not done any further editing though and it's still pretty much in original raw form. Hopefully you'll still enjoy it.

The change in POV between Lois' narration and the flashbacks in 3rd person are on purpose.

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I don't know when it was that I finally realised it. Maybe when we recorded the answering machine message. Or maybe it was when we took our first vacation together. I sometimes try to work it out. But in the end it all comes back to the proposal. It totally took me by surprise. And it wouldn't have done that if I'd been suspecting in any way.

So, I guess that was when I realised that we were practically married without even knowing it. The only thing we didn't have was the licence.

How did it happen? How did we get to that stage without even realising it? Well, it was a gradual thing. Obviously. Otherwise we wouldn't have missed it.

It all started when we became friends: best friends.

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"So what are we doing tonight, Lois," Clark asked.

"Um, I was thinking you could come over, bring Chinese and we'll look through the notes on the Stamford case," Lois replied casually, not at all concerned by his presumption that he was coming over. He just always did. That was their partnership.

Clark nodded in agreement. "Chinese all right? How about seven?"

Lois murmured, "Mmmm hmmm," as she returned her attention to her computer screen.

Clark came over most nights. It had been a couple of months since Perry had foisted him on her, but somehow she no longer minded. In fact she looked forward to working in the evenings with Clark more than the day work. Possibly the intense research, bouncing off each other, no interruptions lent itself more to the way they fit together.

"Oh, no, Clark," she looked up as she remembered. "I wanted to watch a movie on TV tonight."

"Oh!" Clark looked disappointed. "What time?" he asked quietly.

"Um, I guess it's not till later on. We could work first. Maybe you could even stay to watch. I'm sure it would be your kind of movie." Lois watched his face change from crushed disappointment to delight. Clark really did wear his heart on his sleeve. He was such a good friend and it was clear that he considered her a good and important friend by his initial disappointment.

"What movie?"

"Oh, action, adventure, explosions ... manly hero. You know. Guy's movie."

"Then why are you watching it Lois?" Clark's boyish teasing always got on her nerves. Why he could never let her win in an argument, or pass up an opportunity to make fun of her she had no idea. It annoyed her.

"For your information, Kent, I happen to like action," she spat back out at him. "Plus, I also admire the leading man," she sing-songed in a completely different tone to her previous statement, grinning like a teenage girl.

Clark's eyebrows raised in surprise but he said nothing.

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And that was the start. Or maybe it had *already* started. But that was the point at which we began to spend most of our 'non-work' time together.

It was also the night that Clark became aware of my film star crush: Mel Gibson. We spent many evenings watching Mel Gibson movies while eating pizza, not quite touching, sitting on his couch. Yes, the evenings graduated over to his place rather than mine. Probably due to the homely and inviting atmosphere ... and the comfortable seating.

He was also fully aware of my Superhero crush, but that gradually faded: turning into admiration and friendship. I sometimes suspected that he was jealous of the man in blue, but that would mean he felt something more than friendship, and that thought was just preposterous ... wasn't it.

And so we spent every evening together.

Clark walked me home from work on many occasions. I would hang onto his arm all the way.

We danced together on social occasions, often to the exclusion of all other guests.

Anyone without insider knowledge would have sworn we were a couple.

But we weren't.

We were just good friends. Or so we thought.

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"Lois!" Clark screamed as he shot into her apartment through the open window. He'd heard the tick and click of the bomb just as he was reaching the steps to her building having promised to meet up with her just as she was to return home from her Tai Kwon Do class. The explosion ripped through his heart as well as physically tearing his jacket to shreds. He hadn't even bothered to change into his superhero persona, just sped through the window only to be immediately assaulted when the device exploded before he could get to her.

He strode through the debris and the dust cloud activating his hearing and vision. A faint beating and laboured breathing directed him out of the blast hole which had once been her door. "Lois," he called again in panic. A quick breath from his steel lungs dissipated the dust in the corridor and revealed a mangled door collapsed against the far corridor wall and a leg showing from underneath.

"Lois, no," he shouted and one stride had him in place to bend down and grab the door. It was lifted in one smooth move and pitched away. Clark knelt down and reached out with his hand. His fingers traced her cheek. "Lois." Now his voice was quiet ... tentative.

She moaned and attempted to move.

"No, Lois. Stay still." He activated his x-ray vision and

checked for broken bones and internal bleeding. The relief, when he found none, was total. "I'll get you to the hospital. Hold on."

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Clark was willing to share his secret with me that night. His concern for my safety was greater than his fear of discovery. But I never opened my eyes. I had no idea that he'd flown me to Met Gen in his tattered suit and tie. Thankfully no-one else knew either. He wasn't noticed landing and when he strode into the lobby carrying me in his tattered jacket it just looked like he had also been involved in the explosion.

When I was released from hospital, with a minor concussion, multiple sprains and major bruising, Clark took me to his place to watch over me. He tended to my sprains and bruises, kept checking the dilation of my eyes and brought me chicken soup. I loved it; being the centre of his attention. And it was good attention.

Of course, after a day I got cabin fever and started to grouch at him. When he wouldn't let me out of his bed I exploded in a rage. Clark just reassured me of his concern, and now that he'd seen my energy levels — evidenced by my tantrum — he was happy for me to return to work.

As my apartment was reconstructed and redecorated we worked on solving the mystery of the bomber. We discovered that, unfortunately for the bomber, yet fortunate for myself, the timer hadn't counted down its ten second wait giving me a chance to get into the apartment, it had just exploded immediately. The door shielded me from the blast but threw me against the corridor wall and pinned me there. The culprit was also caught and jailed on the very same day as my apartment was habitable once more.

I felt a little sad to return home, in fact, home was now an apartment on Clinton Ave. As I approached the Supervisor something pulled at me most drastically ... yet I steadfastly pushed it aside.

But I was refused entry. The Supervisor told me I was a danger to the block and my tenancy had been terminated. I had some choice words to say, I can tell you. Thankfully Clark was by my side, ready to help me move back in. Instead he took my arms in his hands and calmed me down then proceeded to open his heart and his life to me, saying that I could stay with him as long as it took to find another apartment.

I never left.

I hadn't intended it that way. I really hadn't. I just never found anywhere, then gradually stopped looking. Clark never once asked me how my apartment hunting was going. I thought that strange; that such a great friend would not be interested in something so important. Looking back now I can see exactly why he never asked.

After a few weeks Clark bought a pull out sofa bed and seemed to formalise the idea that I got the bedroom and he got the couch. At least it was a proper bed for him seeing as this arrangement seemed to be going long term.

After a few months we recorded an answer machine message together. This too was only supposed to be temporary. We've never changed it.

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"Hi this is Clark and Lois. We're not able to answer your call at the moment. But we'll call you back as soon as we are able."

"Clark, that is so ... " Lois couldn't think of the appropriate word, which wasn't good considering words were an important part of her career.

"Cool, awesome, exciting," Clark offered with a grin.

"Dumb," she dead-panned.

"Well then, you do better, Miss Four Kerth Awards."

"I shall." She paused and tapped her finger on her mouth as she considered her attempt. "All right. Set it recording," she nodded to the machine and Clark pushed the button.

"This is Lois and Clark, also known as the Daily Planet's best reporting team: Lane and Kent. Leave your message and we'll get back to you if it's important enough."

"Lois! You can't say that. Not all of our calls will be work related. Not to mention it being rude." Clark frowned and gestured.

"Grrrr," she mumbled. "Ok, one last shot then." Clark deleted the last message and then pressed record once more. "Hi, this is the home of Lois and Clark. We're sorry we can't take your call but if you leave a message someone will get back to you when he can."

Clark clicked off the recording and Lois nodded to him. "So, how was that?"

"Better." He grinned, remembering her refer to the apartment as their 'home'. But then his smile dropped when they listened back to it and Clark realised that the 'someone' that would get back to everyone was him. Lois was never one to do the menial tasks in their partnership. He smiled again and shook his head letting out a breath that was half sigh, half laugh.

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Yes, I really should have noticed then. I mean, I called the apartment our home: mine and Clark's. But in my defence, we were close friends and everything had flowed just naturally. It's not like I 'suddenly' moved in.

So, if I can be forgiven for missing it at that point, how come I never saw it when we took our first vacation ... together?

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"You ready Clark? We need to be leaving soon or we won't make check in time." Lois called out to Clark, still packing in the bedroom. She thought it strange that the always prepared, boy scout, farm boy still left far too many things to the last minute. She actually suspected him of being one of those 'night before the exam' studiers. Still it worked for him, and he never seemed to be late for anything. At least, not without a specific reason. His lateness was never 'laziness'.

"All right, all right. I'm done now, Lois." He emerged with his bag in hand, grin lighting up his face. "Plus, you know ... us being late ... it's not really possible."

"Hmm," she sniffed. "I guess not. But that's no excuse. Let's get a move on, farm boy."

"Yes, ma'am," he saluted and picked up her bags in his other hand. He was about to climb the stairs to the door when Lois placed a palm on his chest, preventing him from moving any further.

"Just ... to be absolutely sure, Clark. This is a quaint country inn ... roaring fire, authentic Scottish accents from the staff, breakfast ..." She widened her eyes in question. Clark didn't know what to say in reply. He shrugged and nodded. "The uh ... breakfast is not gonna be porridge, is it, Kent?" Her eyes narrowed in accusation.

Clark let out a laugh and dropped his head to his chest for a moment. "No, Lois. I'm sure there will be traditional American food available too."

She pursed her lips. "There better be. If there's one thing I can't stand eating, it's porridge. I mean, what sort of impression is it supposed to give guests? Sloppy, water, bland oats. It's as if they found the plainest food they could, and then made it plainer. You know, I think there should be a ban on all porridge. I might even look into if there is a medically proven reason to avoid the stuff. It could make an article. You know, wake up the whole Scottish population to the dangers inherent in their morning repeat." She took a quick breath and was about to continue when she saw the heaving chest of her partner. "What?" she demanded to know.

"I'm sorry, Lois, but ..." he stifled any further laughter, but his mouth was unable to keep from showing his mirth. "Did you hear yourself? You're trying to take away one of their basic

traditions and most popular foods. And the English are more likely to use the phrase ‘morning repast’ than the Scots.”

“Stop editing me, Clark. You do that enough at work. When we’re at home I should be free to say whatever I want.” Clark’s grin grew even wider and he glanced over at Lois through lowered lashes. “What now?” she queried.

“It’s just ... you referred to this place as home again.”

Her anger dissipated immediately and a smile appeared on her face. “I guess I did.” She glanced down to the floor and reached up to tuck a stray hair behind her ear. “Well, it is. And if we don’t get going on our vacation I won’t be able to look forward to coming back ‘home’.”

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It was a wonderful vacation. Just perfect. And Clark was the perfect friend and companion, as always. He was full of interesting facts about the local area, the ancient Celtic stories, the origin of clan tartans. I pretended to find it all boring; teasing him, but it was quite fascinating. I loved that weekend. I often find myself thinking about it, wondering if he’ll arrange a surprise weekend back there. Of course, we wouldn’t have two rooms on this visit.

I suppose the next clue that I missed was the biggest so far. The bed. And who slept in it.

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“No, no. Don’t.” Lois thrashed around in the covers, reaching for something desperately. Something that was being taken from her. “Stop,” she called out. Clark began to rouse from his sleep on the pull out couch, Lois’ mumbled distress breaking into his consciousness. “Help!” came another cry. Clark pushed back his covers and slipped quietly into the bedroom.

“Lois, honey, shh. It’s all right. I’m here.” Clark knew she was asleep. He’d never have dared to call her honey otherwise, but somehow it always soothed her when she was in this semi-conscious state. He hoped that was a good psychological sign. Her mumbled screams calmed a little and he sat himself down on the mattress and reached to comfort her. His hand on her shoulder gently kept her from thrashing. He stretched out his other hand and stroked across her cheek. “Lois, I’m here now. Everything is fine.”

An almighty scream suddenly ripped from her mouth and she bolted straight up, eyes wide open. Clark jumped back and then quickly returned, grasping her arms gently.

“Lois? Lois are you awake? Are you all right?” She had never screamed like that before, and most definitely not once he had turned up to be close by. She turned her head and her black eyes met his. “Lois,” he tentatively spoke.

“Clark?” she mumbled and then blinked, her eyes coming gradually to life. “Clark. Oh Clark, it was awful. They were taking you away. And then they chained me up, but I had to watch as they ... as they ...” her face crumbled and her lips trembled. He reached out and enfolded her in his arms. They rocked silently on the bed for a while then Lois tried to pull away. “It’s fine. I’m okay now Clark.” She looked up to him, her mouth still quivering. When Clark saw the tears building in the corner of her eyes, almost ready to spill and the bobbing of her throat as she swallowed he knew that she was trying to be brave. But that was not necessary. That was his job. Clark would be brave enough for the both of them.

“Is this because of what we found today?” She flicked her gaze away and then nodded. “The nightmares have been bad since The Prankster took you last week. Since he tied you up.” She nodded once more. “But tonight ...”

“It was the files we found. The government files about ... Superman. And the chunk of ... you know.” She didn’t want to look him in the eyes.

“Lois.” He put his hand to her chin and applied gentle pressure to bring her back. “Lois. There’s nothing to worry

about.” He smiled at her, trying to portray all his confidence in his face.

“Yes there is,” she whimpered and Clark sighed, gathering her into his arms again. “Stay with me,” she whispered. “Just hold me until morning. You can keep the nightmares away Clark.” He nodded into her shoulder, not trusting his voice.

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And, as before, with all the other changes that should have been large sign posts to me, this also became permanent. Clark slept every night in the bed with me. It just seemed so natural to get ready for bed separately; one using the bathroom while the other dressed, and then climb in together. The pull out bed was never pulled out again.

Now ...

Now we come to the final clue. To the moment when everything fell into place. To the revelation that rocked me to the core. To the screaming, blinking, fanfare of a glowing neon sign that finally made me look around at the apartment I lived in, at the man I lived with, at the life I’d fallen into without even realising.

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“Lois?” Clark’s voice came tentatively across the table.

“Yes,” she replied as she spooned some more of her dessert into her waiting mouth.

“I had a really nice time tonight.”

Lois stopped with the spoon half way out of her lips and looked up at Clark. Swallowing as she removed the spoon she spoke. “Are you angling for a compliment Kent, because this is no different to most of our meals together at home?”

“No,” he looked away embarrassed. “I just wanted to make tonight special.”

“Oh,” Lois nibbled her lips and dropped her spoon into the bowl. “Well, you have, Clark. The meal was wonderful, as always. I noticed the more relaxed atmosphere with the lights and music. And this dessert is to die for.” She moaned and picked up her spoon again.

“Well it is Death by Chocolate, so I guess you could be right Lois.” He grinned.

“So, what’s the occasion? Why did you want tonight to be special?” She peered over, curious. Clark’s face dropped. “Oh. Oh no. I’ve forgotten something, haven’t I. What? What did I forget? It’s not your birthday. That’s still two months off. And I certainly know it’s not mine. Were we celebrating something. Um, cracking the Stewart case? No, that’s not it.”

“Our anniversary,” he mumbled hardly loud enough for her to hear. She stopped her babbling and dropped her spoon once more.

“Our anniversary!” Lois whispered. Her mouth dropped open in shock as she realised that it was two years since she’d moved in. Two years since the bombing of her apartment. “Oh my. I can’t believe it’s been so long. Goodness, Clark. I’ve been here for two years.” She controlled her shock and returned to normal. “How have you managed to put up with me?” she teased.

“With great difficulty,” he projected back, a superior tone in his face. “In fact I think I should apply to the Pope to be Sainted.”

“Can they make some who is still alive into a Saint?” Lois continued with the banter.

“Oh well,” Clark sighed dramatically. “I guess I will just have to continue this humble and sacrificial life all the way up until my inevitable death and hope for recognition at that time.”

“Hmm, I do think you probably also have to be a Roman Catholic.”

Clark dropped his pious look and grinned over at Lois. “You know. These last two years have been the best of my life. Working at the Planet with you, Jimmy and Perry. Growing closer. Gaining a best friend.” He paused and took a deep breath. “Living with you.” Lois smiled and she felt her cheeks redden.

“They’ve been great for me too, Clark. I’ve never had a best

friend before, but you fit the position perfectly.”

Clark seemed to let out a breath and his shoulders relaxed. “I’m glad you feel that way Lois because ... I’ve been thinking about our ... arrangement here.”

“Yes?” She frowned. A feeling of foreboding came over her. Clark was about to do ... or say ... something, and it was going to be huge, going to affect their lives from this day forward. Somehow she knew, and fear clamped round her heart.

“I wanted to ... I was hoping that we could ...” He paused and coughed. “Lois, I want to tell you ... you see I’ve been ... oh bother, this is not going well at all.”

“Clark, what is it?” Her heart was beating rapidly now. Clark’s obvious nervousness was especially worrying.

“I want to change our arrangement.”

“What?” Lois almost jumped out of her chair. He couldn’t change it. She couldn’t live any other way now. This was life. Here ... with Clark.

“Well, actually, I don’t want to change it, I just want to ... formalise it.”

Lois crinkled her brow. “I don’t understand.” When Clark began to fidget again, stumbling over his words, not managing a complete phrase never mind a full sentence, she called out. “Oh for heaven’s sake, Clark. What is it?”

He took a deep breath in at her outburst, stood and then stepped to the side. Their cosy table for two was now no longer between them. Lois turned ever so slightly to stay facing him. He knelt on the floor in front of her and then reached into his pocket.

“Lois, we have lived together for two years. We spend all our time together, we vacation together. We even sleep in the same bed together. You know everything there is to know about me. Well, everything except my biggest secret and I’ll let you in on that in just a moment.” He paused and breathed again. “We are practically married. The only thing missing is the license. And so ... I think we should rectify that.” Lois stared in shock as Clark opened his hand to reveal a small square box on his palm. He reached out and flipped open the top. “Lois Lane ... will you marry me?”

Utter astonishment rippled through Lois’s body giving her a feeling of floating in a sea of mist. The only thing she could grab onto was the comment about a secret. “Wha ... what’s your biggest secret, Clark?” she asked in a far off, disconnected voice.

“I ... Lois, I’m in love with you.”

She blinked and the fuzziness of the world around vanished. Clark came into crystal clear vision in front of her. He was on his knees holding out the most exquisite, yet simple solitaire diamond ring and suddenly all of the last three years came into true focus. Lois recalled the time when they were just partners, then friends, then room-mates, then bed-mates in quick succession. Everything made sense. Everything fit perfectly and she knew her answer.

“Yes. Yes, Clark. I will marry you.”

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And there it was. It’s pretty obvious that Clark did know, way before I did, that we’d become a married couple, all except for the licence. Well, ‘what about the intimate relationship’ I hear you say. Surely that was also missing. Intimate relationships don’t make a marriage, in fact these days, they happen more often outside the marriage. But of course, once I realised my love for Clark, those ... intimate times ... soon followed.

You know, I’ve lost count of the times over the years that people have said, “I was sure you were already married, or at least together but wanting to hide it.” It makes me wonder what was the sign post for them. Was it the friendship, or when I moved in and never left? Maybe it was the answering machine message where I call Clark’s apartment ‘my’ home. Perhaps it was when we began to vacation together.

I don’t think anyone could know about the sleeping

arrangements, but ... who’s to say?

All I can say is ... at least I’m oblivious no longer. I know where I stand with Clark ... and it’s right by his side.

Oh. I forgot to mention Superman. When did I discover that little secret? It’s not actually important to the story, but you don’t really think he managed to keep it more than a few days once I was living in his apartment, do you? How did I find out? I’m not telling, but I’ll just leave you with this thought.

Why would a guy with lovely, fluffy, bouncy, thick hair need shiny, slick hair gel in his medicine cabinet? And why would he use up a tub a week?

THE END