

# Doodles

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Summary: Lois used to doodle the ‘S’ on her pad ... now she doodles something else.

Acknowledgements and Comments: This takes place somewhere in early Season 2. Lois and Clark are not yet dating. Lois’ feelings for Clark are *seriously* accelerated. The “hinted at” A-plot is all for show. Believe me, this is all about the B-plot. WAFFyness abounds.

Thanks to my two betas for this: Mozartmaid and Morgana. Your encouragement was definitely needed and it was great to know that this story was getting the kind of reactions I was hoping for.

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## Part 1 — The Notepad

The pen twirled round and round in lazy circles. Lois stared past and through the paper, only seeing the unfocused double blur of swirled blue biro on the white lined paper of her notebook.

“So ... uh ... Myerson. You’re on the ‘Mayor may be gambling away the city’s money’ story?”

Lois barely heard the affirmative reply from the guy opposite.

“Peterson. You’d better have that football cheating scandal to me by end of play today or so help me...”

“I will, Chief, I will,” came the desperate reply.

“And Lois ... you and Kent?”

“Hmmm,” she replied while still making hypnotic circles on her pad.

“Where is he anyway?” Perry shook his head and sighed.

“You and Kent are to follow up on the dock fires.”

“Hmmm,” was all Lois could say.

“Lois ... darlin’,” Perry leaned over and rested his elbows on the table. “Dock fires,” he spoke in a gentle, but slightly condescending tone.

“Oh, yes, Chief. Sure.” Lois finally came alive and severed herself from the daydreaming playing out in her notebook. “Clark and I will be straight over there ... just as soon as he’s back from taking his neighbour’s dog to be put down.”

Perry straightened up and then shook his head again. With a pen in hand he began to gesture at other reporters, handing out their assignments, before finally gesturing fiercely at the door and telling them all to get out.

Back at her desk Lois closed her eyes and held her head in her hands in embarrassment. She’d zoned out almost all of the staff meeting while doodling away on her pad. These fantasies, daydreams, hopes ... were taking over her life. Opening her eyes she immediately spied the offending pad. At least today’s doodles were random. She knew if she were to turn back a few pages there would be some pretty damning evidence of her current state of mind.

Not wanting to face that evidence head-on she flipped all the way back to the start of the notebook and revelled in a little nostalgia and true pie-in-the-sky fantasy.

There, in the margins, were copious attempts to draw the

symbol that used to plague her dreams at night, and her daydreams during the day. Flipping over a few more pages and she could see the evidence of months of practice, along with months of carefully studying his chest ... um, the symbol on his chest. The diamond shape was perfectly symmetrical. The ‘S’ curved so gently. It was perfect.

Lois smiled wistfully and traced the ‘S’ with the tip of one finger.

Still resting her cheek on one hand, she flipped over a few more pages and started to see the evidence of her gradual change in heart. It started months ago, and was so subtle she hadn’t really even noticed what she was doing at the time. Of course Superman’s emblem was still evident, although now, in the margin, there were other doodles that couldn’t be ignored during this introspection. Obviously, her conscious mind had not wanted to accept the truth *at the time*. The subtle capital ‘C’ and capital ‘K’ could have meant anything. Clearly, now, they referred to her partner, yet at the time she hadn’t acknowledged that truth. Besides Jimmy called him CK all the time. It was his name. And maybe it didn’t even refer to him. What did it matter if she scribbled those letters? Especially if they were followed by a double ‘L’. For heaven’s sake, the two names were joined together every day on the front page of the Planet in their byline. If she doodled them together on her pad then it meant nothing more ... really ... it meant nothing.

Lois sighed. It meant everything. Now that she looked back over the pages she could recall the denial she’d been going through. It was crystal clear that linking a capital ‘C’ and capital ‘K’ with a double ‘L’ meant everything.

Another few pages on and Lois’ heart skipped a beat. There was no denying what was running through her head, what she was dreaming of at night, when she saw those same two set of initials ... surrounded by a heart. She let her finger trail around the heart and felt the smile on her lips at the same time as the ache hit her chest. She’d no longer been denying her feelings by this point. She’d even begun to revel in them — to allow herself to indulge in them.

Flipping over one more page, she saw the final evidence, the most recent truth. This is what she dreamed of at night, what she longed for every day, what she hoped for, yet feared at the same time.

Lois Kent.

Only last week she’d doodled it for the first time, pretending to be signing her name. It had kind of been an accident, expanding on the LL and CK fully, except ... a couple of words got missed. Accidentally.

The next page had even more examples. Sometimes her doodled signature was hyphenated ... sometimes not.

Another page on and there it was again: Lois Kent.

Staring at the two words which symbolised all her hopes for the future, she felt a tear trail down her cheek and she dashed it away.

“Coffee, Lois?” came a most unexpected voice from behind her. She sat up straight immediately. He’d returned from the errand for his neighbour. A steaming cup was put down directly in front of her and then a pair of soft black trousers perched themselves on the corner of her desk. Lois’ eyes widened in shock, looking up at her partner, and then spread her fingers out to cover her notepad. It would not do at all for her partner to see what she desperately tried to keep to herself. After all, just because she was hopelessly in love with him didn’t mean he felt the same for her. In fact he’d made it clear, once, that he didn’t. That memory pierced her heart whenever she stupidly allowed herself to recall it. Still, she **did** allow herself to fantasise and dream ... but knew it was all in vain.

“Clark.” She gulped then moistened her lips. “Thanks,” came her gravelly expression of gratitude.

“Are we off to the docks next?” he asked with a smile.

Lois looked away while nodding in agreement. His smile was the very thing that undid her most days. It set her heart pounding, her pulse racing. She'd been trying to find some kind of protection, defence against it for weeks. Either that, or an equal response. Something she could do which would have the same reaction in him. Something to set his heart pounding, maybe start him on the road to thinking of her differently.

So far she hadn't found it.

She picked up her pen and made to start writing, hoping that Clark would notice her wanting to work and then move away, then she could close her notepad and slide it into her bag with Clark never having to see the name scrawled across the top. Unfortunately it had the opposite effect. He leaned over. "What are you working on?"

Lois whipped around, pen out. "Kent, you may be my partner but—" she began forcefully, then stopped short as her pen met resistance. Her jaw dropped in mortification as she realized how close he was. He brought up his hand to his neck and winced momentarily before recovering from the shock and grinning down at her.

"Lois!" he laughed in surprise.

"Oh, Clark, I'm sorry." She stood up from her seat, apologising profusely. Her pen dropped from her fingers to clatter back onto the desk. She pulled at Clark's hand, removing it from his neck. Her mouth created a perfect 'o' when this revealed the long stripe of blue she had left across his neck, up under his jaw.

"It's all right, Lois," he smiled, staring at their joined hands.

Lois licked her thumb and then began to swipe at the blue mark. Pressing as hard as she dared, and rubbing, had no effect. "Grrr," she growled and wet her finger even more, to try again.

"Lois, it's all right." He took that hand in his and brought it down. For a long moment he just held her still and looked at her. Lois felt another apology on the verge of escaping when Clark smiled that smile again. "I'll just go to the ... uh ... restroom. Back in a minute." She found herself unable to keep from smiling back. He slid off the corner of her desk as he stood, and then casually walked away.

Lois lowered herself down into the chair and let out a deep breath while closing her eyes. A pounding heart was most unwelcome, but it always seemed to happen whenever *he* was around.

It didn't used to be so. It was Superman that set her heart pounding a year ago, even just a few months ago. But now ...

Opening her eyes, she looked once more at the evidence in front of her in black and white. Well, actually in blue and white.

Lois Kent.

She flipped her notebook closed and reached for her coat and bag, swinging around just in time to see Clark returning from the restroom.

"Ready?" he asked, as he pulled his jacket from the back of his chair.

Lois looked up and frowned in confusion. She shook her head and let out a tiny laugh as she replied. "Ready." Either the pen wouldn't come off, or Clark had forgotten what he was visiting the restroom for by the time he got there.

As they both approached the steps up to the elevator, a little snippet of a scene played out in her head. She saw Clark pushing open the door to the men's room, striding in then stopping in confusion. 'What am I doing in here?' came the softly mumbled thought. She saw Clark shrug and then turn into a stall. 'May as well take the opportunity,' was his next comment.

Unable to suppress a giggle, she lifted her hand to her mouth and bit the inside of her cheek. Clark still seemed to notice. He turned and reached out a hand to catch her elbow.

"Everything all right, Lois?"

"Mmm hmm," she nodded, now finding it harder to contain herself as the line of blue ink was right at eye level.

Clark held her arm until they made it to the elevator. Standing

waiting for the doors to open, Lois warred with herself over whether to tell him. When she recalled the accident which caused the mark on his neck she felt herself blushing in humiliation, though. He so very nearly saw her scribbled signature of Lois Kent. Heart beating wildly, she dared a quick glance back up to view Clark's neck. No. She wouldn't tell him. He could suffer embarrassment all day as penance for nearly finding out her deepest secret. He could stay like that, and every time Lois saw that pen strike she would be able to find a little strength to counter the insane attraction she felt for him.

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## Part 2 — The Docks

Standing waiting for the elevator Clark cast a surreptitious glance down at his partner. Leading her up the steps while gently holding her elbow was one of the ways he attempted to demonstrate his love to Lois. Day by day he tried to let his feelings show, but subtly — carefully — never pushing too much, never being more than just a caring best friend.

Yet he still hoped that she'd notice, that she'd figure it out. He wanted her to know how much he was in love with her, but if she figured it out herself then the 'embarrassment' factor would be eliminated. He wouldn't feel embarrassed during his confession, she wouldn't feel embarrassed by her lack of reciprocation. In fact, as he'd never openly declared his feelings, he could always convince himself that she might not actually know, or might not be 100% sure of her interpretation, so she'd never call him on it, she'd never approach him — in case she was wrong — once again saving his embarrassment at being found out, or her embarrassment in case she'd overinflated his feelings for her.

He wanted her to know. He just didn't want to risk his heart openly again. That day was still a scar, deep inside, which ached on metaphorical rainy days.

As the elevator doors opened, and he ushered Lois in ahead of him, she gave a little cough and covered her mouth. "Are you all right, Lois?" he asked. She looked up at him, pausing at his jaw for a moment and then moving up to meet his eyes. She drew down her hand.

"Fine, Kent. Absolutely fine," came her not quite unwavering reply. She dropped her gaze and then reached out to push the button for the parking garage.

Clark frowned, wondering what the matter was. Clearly something was wrong even though Lois claimed the opposite. Suddenly he remembered. He was supposed to have washed his neck. Lois had paused at his jaw, obviously seeing the pen mark she'd left there.

What was she thinking now? It would still be there, yet he'd claimed to be going to wash it off. A shout for help from a nearby alley had called him away to prevent a mugging. Returning less than a minute later, he had fallen into his usual routine whenever a 'bathroom break' was used as an excuse. He'd never stepped foot inside the restroom and had clear forgotten about the pen on his neck and that his 'bathroom break' was not supposed to have been an excuse this time.

Considering that she had noticed, but said nothing, and was clearly trying to hide some kind of emotional reaction, she was happy to leave him sporting a blue mark all day. Her respect for him knew no bounds! He shook his head in defeat. Today was a 'rainy day'. He'd have to remember to wash it off pretty soon, and he could no longer rely on Lois to remind him.

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All through the journey to the docks Clark fought against despair. His long-held hope, that Lois would — ever so gradually — fall deeply and passionately in love with him, seemed even more unrealistic than usual. He often allowed himself to dream that her friendly manner was concealing a changing heart, but her lack of respect for him was clearer than usual today.

Climbing out of the car the moment it stopped he raced

around to the other side, but Lois was already emerging. He took the door anyway and held out his hand to her elbow. She deftly moved past, not allowing contact, and continued on towards the dock office. Clark closed the door and then sprinted to catch up. He raised his hand to guide her along, reaching out for that spot at the bottom of her spine. A moment before touching he drew it back, remembering her avoidance at the car, and dropped it, his heart dropping in tandem.

Lois pushed open the door to the dock office and Clark followed. He immediately noticed a sign for the restrooms and indicated to Lois.

“Didn’t you go back at the office before we set off?” she whispered incredulously.

He shrugged and avoided answering her question directly. She groaned, rolled her eyes and then turned to approach the man behind the desk.

Clark pushed open the door and entered the tiny space designated as the restroom. He closed and locked the door then looked around for a mirror. The tiny sink, in one corner, had what could only be described as a hand mirror hanging above it. He attempted to look under his chin, tilting his head at all angles to catch sight of the pen mark in the minute mirror. He sighed and smiled when he finally saw the blue line starting below his chin, travelling along his neck and then disappearing behind his ear. Keeping his eyes on it he reached down and fumbled with the tap, letting the water begin to run. A quick glance down and he squeezed some soap onto his hands then brought it up to his chin.

He stopped, unable to continue. He stared at the line. The mark. Lois’ mark.

He opened his mouth in a silent cry then, after a moment, his forehead creased in a wistful frown. She’d marked him long ago. Branded her name on his heart, in his soul. And that brand was much deeper, more permanent, than this. Yet he couldn’t bring himself to wash it off. He closed his eyes and took a shuddering breath. “Lois,” he whispered then breathed deeply again. Opening his eyes he pushed away his emotions and began to rub at the blue line.

Superman couldn’t afford to be seen with a pen mark on his neck. Although only Lois would know that ‘Clark’ had been the recipient of her *wild gesticulations*, the general public would easily have *wild speculations* about Superman if he was seen in this manner. Of course, he could already be too late. The mugging he had stopped straight after the pen incident was already in the past. Clark reasoned with himself that there was little chance of the muggers seeing the pen mark. They’d run at the first opportunity. And the victim hadn’t really looked up at him. Tears and shock had kept her staring at the ground, mostly. Plus, it had all been dealt with in only one minute.

Inspecting his face once more in the tiny mirror Clark took a paper towel and wiped off the soap and water then returned out to the office, and the lady whose mark was still figuratively present on his heart, if no longer literally present on his body.

“C’mon, Kent,” came Lois’ immediate order. “Apparently we have free reign to talk to whoever we meet.” She turned to look back at the skinny, balding guy behind the main desk. “Thanks,” she called out.

Clark was hustled out of the door before he could say a word. Lois’ tone led him to suspect that this interviewing freedom had been steamrollered out of the poor man.

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“Well, what a waste of time that was,” Lois growled as she forcefully tossed her handbag down onto the table. Striding into her kitchen, she yanked open the refrigerator door and reached for a carton of milk.

“Ugh.” She let out another frustrated sound once she was done, returning the milk to its home and closing the door. Striding back over to the table she dropped into the chair despondently. She rummaged around in her bag then drew out her

notepad and began to systematically look through her notes for the afternoon.

Wandering the docks, looking for witnesses, supervisors, managers — anyone who could help Clark and her to move along this investigation — had resulted in the sum total of two pages of useless notes. She flipped back to the beginning of her notes and the first dockworker they had found. As Clark gently coaxed out of the frightened man the truth that he **had** been on the docks for one of the fires, but down at the other end, Lois had scribbled the important facts down. When there was nothing more to gain she had found herself doodling again.

Lois glanced down at the evidence of her wandering mind. At least she’d managed to check her romantic wanderings at ‘Lois’ this time, rather than ending up scribbling ‘Lois Lane-Kent’, or worse ‘Lois Kent’, all over the page — right when Clark was there to see it.

She flipped over the page and scanned her notes once more. “We’re missing something,” she mused out loud. That feeling, of the vital piece of evidence being just out of reach, was washing over her.

Making a snap decision, she raced into her bedroom and changed into a dark, comfortable outfit.

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Keeping an eye on Lois Lane was a major part of every day for Clark Kent. It was also a major part of every ‘patrol’ period for Superman. Tonight was no exception. He’d noticed her about ten minutes ago. Apparently some part of his subconscious was tuned into her. Most days some sound, some movement at the corner of his eyes ... something ... would catch his attention — in either guise — and then there was nothing he could do except follow her, to make sure that she wasn’t getting herself into trouble.

Watching from above, he saw her slipping through the fence at the southern end of the docks. She was dressed in black. A cap covered her hair. Hissing her name through his teeth in frustration he let himself drift lower ... nearer. He watched as she made her way in among the barrels, boxes and small store houses which filled up the south part. Knowing what he did about the investigation and where their visit had led them this afternoon, he presumed that Lois would be heading for the northern end. That’s where the two fires had taken place, on two consecutive early mornings.

Thankfully it was late evening, not early morning, or Clark would have been having a panic attack thinking that Lois was hoping to put herself at the heart of a third fire, looking for the front-page exclusive. As it was, she just slowly made her way north ... in a very cautious manner. The dock was not completely empty overnight. High tide dictated the best time for docking, and although most ships arrived or left during daylight hours, some ships did arrive overnight. This could even be due to the distance it was travelling, or unexpected delays on a journey originally expected to end in the daytime. Tonight was one of those nights.

A quick x-ray revealed a hold full of pineapples in wooden crates.

Clark immediately returned his focus to the black shadow creeping round a darkened warehouse and still ever northward. After ten minutes of watching her he began to feel the tension in his muscles. Because he was hovering in one position, his muscles were not getting any movement and his shoulders had gradually stiffened, as if in anticipation of having to speed off in the blink of an eye. Readiness was all around him. He felt his heart pounding, strong and slightly elevated.

When Lois reached the site of the first fire she stopped, crouched down behind a large crate next to the opposite warehouse. Clark watched as she lifted her head, took a look around and then headed for the ocean end of the warehouse. At that point she peered around the corner, then looked up and down

the docks. The ship of pineapples was being unloaded in a more central pier and the few workers would be too far away to see her, especially as she had dressed suitably for this ... exploration.

Lois jogged over to the charred building and began to search around the perimeter. Crouching down and shuffling along she pulled a pen torch out of her pocket and began shining it over the ground. Clark sighed, remembering her theories from earlier in the day. They included 'abandoned cigarette', 'sun shining through a broken glass bottle' and 'arson'. Possibly she was looking for the cigarette or the broken bottle. He shook his head in amusement and smiled.

Continuing to watch both her and the pineapple workers, he drifted a little higher again. She wasn't really in that much trouble, and he should just leave her to it. He was sure to find out exactly what happened in the morning. She'd appear on his doorstep at 7 a.m. and hold out some vital piece of evidence. He'd look up to see that 'got 'em' grin on her face. Then, as always, they'd write up the story and go back to looking for their next big scoop.

He gazed back down at her one last time then told himself that it was time to move on.

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Lois brushed away that shiver down her spine once more. She'd felt as if she were being watched ever since entering the docks. That's why she'd taken it so slow, getting to the north warehouses. She'd carefully checked every corner, before moving from warehouse to warehouse; from barrel to crate. She'd even taken a slight detour inwards, rather than follow the piers directly, when she'd seen the ship being unloaded. But, so far, no one had clamped her on the shoulder and hauled her off site.

Now, she was shining her pen-torch into the debris near the warehouse door. Behind her was the pier which would have been used whenever unloading into this warehouse. Crouching down she saw black, charred ash marks on the concrete ground. She didn't really know what she was searching for any longer, just that something must be here ... She stood and twirled around, still shining the light down. A spot of something yellow reflected back at her. She wrinkled her brow and crouched back down. On closer inspection it looked like a paint splash. She shined her light around a little and found another. After another moment she found more. Following the trail she ended up on the wooden pier.

Half way down she finally listened to the voice in her head, telling her that it was just a leaked can of paint. Probably weeks old by the look of some of the drips, obviously worn off by dock workers' boots striding back and forth. She turned back to view the warehouse from this angle and a new thought crossed her mind. What if it **was** arson, as one of her theories went? And why set fire to the warehouse? What did it gain the arsonist?

The fire looked to have started at the warehouse loading doors. What if someone had arrived from the pier, walked down, set off the fire then come back up the pier to escape on a boat, or a ship? Lois began to back up, slowly making her way to the very end of the pier.

If her theory was correct, then would the boat come back again tonight ... or early morning? A third fire? Maybe there would be some place she could hide out. She turned to find herself only a step away from the edge. Kneeling down she grabbed hold of the wooden slats and leaned over to see if there was any chance of a hiding place directly underneath the pier.

It was much too dark to see. Letting go with one hand she tried to reach out into the dark with the other, shining her torch.

The one hand still holding onto the deck went numb. It slipped. She pitched forward. Closing her eyes she readied herself for the bitter cold of the ocean.

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### Part 3 — The Flight

Lois expected the splash as she hit the water at any moment.

It never came. Instead, a pair of strong arms plucked her from the air only millimetres from the ocean. Her arms immediately went round his neck. It was such a familiar and well-practiced position.

"Lois!" came his deep, husky, yet reprimanding voice. "What was it this time?"

As they rose higher, the chill creeping into her bones quickly, she rested her head on his shoulder and tried to gather in the heat from his body. "Clark and I are investigating the dock fires. I'm sure we're missing something. Something out of place. Some piece of evidence."

"And you decided to go looking ..." Superman's tone was full of humour mixed with long-suffering worry. Lois had long since accepted that she made too much out of that tone. Her fantasies had been driven by that tone of worry for so long, but it didn't mean what she'd always hoped it meant. The 'S' doodles in her pad had often been accompanied by daydreams of Superman gently chastising her as he placed her down in her apartment. The chastising would then morph into gentle pleading. Pleas that she be more careful or his heart would break. At that point she would realise that he'd never removed his arms from around her waist. "Didn't you?" came his reminder that they were actually engaged in a conversation.

"Well ..." she began explaining in a quiet tone, but then faded in embarrassment.

"And what made you think that this story-breaking find would be dangling off the end of the pier?"

Lois lifted her head to look at Superman when she heard the unexpected, and rare, teasing tone, but instead of meeting his eyes she focussed on his neck, directly in her line of sight.

Her mouth dropped open and she completely forgot to answer.

Blue pen.

A short stripe of blue pen, just behind his ear.

Out of sight to anyone.

Except if a person happened to be held cradled in his arms. Out of sight, even, to the man himself, Lois guessed, were he to look in a mirror. She cast her mind back to various points during the day. Why had Clark returned from the restroom *without* washing this off, originally? And then at the dock office, he had visited the restroom again, this time returning with the pen mark washed away. Except, the mark travelled behind his ear ...

"Lois?" he asked carefully, changing teasing into concern.

"Just ... um ... just take me home please ... Superman." That final word escaped her lips in a croak. It almost felt a lie, to call him that. In fact it was a lie. It was no more his name than ... the name she currently doodled when lost in her dreams.

She groaned in dismay and dropped her head back to his shoulder. The doodles in her pad. Even going all the way back to page one of her notebook. They were all this man. The man currently flying her back home. The man who'd saved her more times than she could count. She'd spent the last year of her life fantasising about this man, in one form or another. And the written proof could be seen on every page of her notepad.

"Lois," came his voice again. "Are you sure you're okay?" He genuinely sounded worried and she realised that she'd groaned out loud.

"I ..." She swallowed in nervousness. "Superman ..." There was that name again. "Home."

She closed her eyes, mortified with herself. Her grasp of the English language, rules of grammar, literary ability, had all been reduced to single words.

"All right, Lois," Superman spoke gently.

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Clark was so relieved that he hadn't actually been able to tear himself away from watching over her. When he'd seen her leaning over the end of the pier he'd frowned, slightly concerned. When she'd slipped he'd almost screamed in horror. Reaching her 'just in time' was another thing that seemed to have become a

habit for him, just like ‘checking up’ on her.

She slipped so easily into his arms. The crook of his elbow cradled the back of her knees. His other arm supported her back. She slid her arms around his neck. It was all so familiar. It was the feeling he liked to recall at night, when alone in his apartment. Being allowed to hold her close was such a gift. He cherished every time. Oh, he held her as Clark. They hugged often. But there was something about this particular position. It meant so much more. It meant that he was her hero. It meant that she trusted him. It meant that her mouth was only inches from his. If he turned his head ...

He took a deep breath to clear away those, currently, unhelpful thoughts, and continued to fly in the direction of her apartment.

But for all that he cherished these moments, there seemed to be something different this time. What it was, he couldn’t tell.

He tightened his hold carefully. Nope, it didn’t feel like she was in danger of slipping. He listened to her breathing. It was a little ragged. He listened to her heart. It was beating a wild rhythm. Both of these could be attributed to the near miss.

Clark shook his head in confusion and sped up slightly.

A quiet sniff beside his ear had him slowing again. Was she crying? His pulse increased in concern. Was she hurt? Maybe a ragged piece of wood had slashed her on the way down. Panic began to overtake him. Surely she would have said something if this was the case. Then again, Lois Lane was never one to admit she was a mortal human. Getting her to hospital was a skill all in itself.

Indecision overtook him for a moment. Lois’ safety was the most important thing in the world to him. Well, second actually — her happiness being the first. He needed to take her to the hospital. But he was probably blowing this all out of proportion. All he had heard was one, barely audible, sniff.

Possibly he should just get her home. He would be able to quickly x-ray her, once there, and then he’d know what to do.

Satisfied with that conclusion, he continued on.

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Lois tried to fight off the chill from the night air just as she tried to fight against the feelings crowding her thoughts. She was flying in the arms of every woman’s unattainable fantasy, while now also knowing that it was the real man she ached for every day. She’d loved him for so long. Loved, not hero-worshiped. For every other woman it was hero-worship. For every other women, they could only claim to have superficial knowledge of this man. For her, it was love. She’d loved him so fiercely when she’d imagined he was Superman and only Superman. Even then she could truthfully claim to have known him better than all those other women out there. But even that love for Superman paled in comparison to the depth of her love for Clark. Being in Clark’s arms always felt like heaven to her. Spending time with him made every day seem complete. She knew him better than she’d ever known ... anyone.

He was her best friend. He was her dream. He was her fantasy.

The doodles in her notebook were a testament to that.

She used to weave fantastic stories about Superman declaring his love. She’d briefly relived one when he caught her at the dock. But that was shot down not so very long ago. Instead, she now weaved fantasies that ended in cosy, romantic embraces on a comfy couch. She loved him so much that, sometimes, all that got her through the day was a desperate hope that Clark would offer to see her home and then kiss her goodnight. **Really** kiss her.

He walked her home often enough. But there was never a goodnight kiss.

Now she knew why.

She’d suspected, many times, that Clark was not interested in her ... romantically. Sometimes, something would happen and she’d question that belief. Maybe he did hope for more with her.

But then she’d return to that conversation, outside the Daily Planet, where he told her that all he wanted was friendship. Adding into the equation the fact that her best friend had chosen to keep this secret from her ... plus that particular evening when Superman rejected her ...

The chill began to creep in, even as she held tighter to the warm body flying her safely home. She tried to banish the thoughts of unrequited love by choosing to focus on the majestic beauty of the Metropolis skyline. Dark skyscrapers loomed out of the night, sometimes blending into the background if abandoned till morning work-time, other times brightly lit with people living their evening routines at home. Looking directly below she saw that the streets were a constant stop-go of vehicles, red tail lights and white headlights moving up and down. The view from up here, in Superman’s arms, always took her breath away. She’d seen it in the bright daytime, at night-time, in fog, in rain. It had always been incredibly moving.

But it was all different now. When she’d imagined that this was Superman’s realm, that this was where he lived, where he belonged, then her viewpoint had been similar. Superman was looking down on us, looking after us, yet set apart, not really understanding life. As some ancient Greek god, who knew everything, who could cope with any situation. Although, thinking about it, there **had** been major flaws in those mythical characters.

Superman was absolutely without flaw. In fact, the idea that he was apart from humanity, yet he chose to spend time with her, was one of the things which gave rise to her fantasies, and kept them running long-term.

How glorious would it be, to be the one female in the whole human race who could capture the heart of the Man of Steel? It was poetic, it was fantastic, it was the thing of dreams, she would tell herself. But Greek mythology actually had boundless examples of gods being overcome with love for humans. If Superman was to be likened to a Greek god, then ... he already chose to favour her, in many ways ... so, it was possible that her fantasies were not ... so very ... impossible. This thought had kept her hope alive for so long ... until a greater hope had come along.

Now, looking down from this height, knowing what that pen mark had revealed, she saw the beauty below her in a completely different light.

Superman wasn’t looking down on us, he lived among us. When he looked down from up here, it was as someone who understood life, lived it, struggled through it, wanted to make life better for everyone, wanted to make the world better. But he was still set apart, she knew that; she felt it in the way he acted emotionless, aloof, when in the costume. He was separate. He was distant. Flying up here in his arms she knew that he felt ... alone. He hadn’t chosen to set himself apart, as a god. He was **forced** to be apart. Forced by his own self-image, his morals, his beliefs and his abilities. They separated him from the very people he lived among. And it explained why he’d never told her his identity.

And now, the idea of being the one female to capture the heart of the Man of Steel ... strangely enough, it seemed even more impossible now. He had no romantic feelings for her. He didn’t even want her to know who he was.

Now ... knowing who he really was, knowing that he only considered her a ‘friend’, knowing the number of women in his ‘human’ life who would gladly fall at his feet at only one word from him, never mind the rest of the world’s desire for his famous alter ego ... she had zero chance.

A tear trailed down her cheek and she buried her head even more into his shoulder.

Lois Kent.

Never gonna happen.

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#### Part 4 — The Apartment

Lois knew the moment she was home. Even with her eyes closed she felt the way that Superman slowed for a moment and then she was being gently lowered. She lifted her head from his shoulder and stepped away. Turning as quickly as she could she swiped at her cheeks before he could see the tracks of her tears. It hurt so much. Knowing that he didn't want her. Knowing that he didn't want her to know.

"Lois, something is wrong. Please tell me." His voice pierced her heart.

She headed for the kitchen, to create distance between them, and called out over her shoulder, "No, why would anything be wrong?"

"I can tell, Lois. I can hear your heart. I can hear you crying."

She stopped as she reached the centre worktop in the kitchen and placed her hands on it to steady herself. "You ... you can hear?" she whispered. Of course he could. He was Superman. But she'd never thought so deeply about it. All this time he'd been able to hear her every word, her every heartbeat. Did he listen in on her heart often? Did he listen when she was mumbling about something? Complaining about his overprotectiveness? Did he use that super-hearing to listen in on her rants to Perry? What about when she fibbed to him, or even worse ... when he smiled at her? Could he tell that her heart raced, or skipped a beat whenever he entered the room?

"What is it? Please?" His voice was warm, comforting. She loved that voice. Clark's voice.

Turning back she approached the living area again.

"Superman. Thank you for saving me, as always. It was a cold night tonight, and I am really appreciative of the fact that I didn't have to try and make my way home soaking wet." She turned to face him and tried to smile. She just needed him to go. "Thank you." She needed to be alone, to grieve the true end of all her fantasies.

He made to move towards her, concern written all over his face. Instead she stepped backward and he stopped, remaining at the window, when it was clear she didn't want to be near him.

"Uh, Superman? Before you leave ..." she faltered for a moment, wondering whether she should continue. It would reveal too much, open up the situation to things she couldn't deal with. "You should probably wash behind your ear before you save anyone else." She *needed* him to leave, but she *couldn't* let him go around with a pen mark on his neck. Especially not one that her partner had been sporting earlier in the day.

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"Wash behind my ear?" the internal voice queried. Clark looked at Lois. Whatever was making this rescue different had made her hold closer while they flew, yet move away once back home. Clark's heart ached at the loss of contact with her, at the distance she was consciously putting between them. Lois sometimes acted this way with Clark. When dressed as Superman it was unheard of.

Following the evening where she offered herself to Superman, Lois had been more careful with the hero. But she still made it clear how much she felt for him. To see her distancing herself from the only part of him that usually got her affection was like a final blow to his heart.

The figurative 'ownership' pen mark on his heart had finally turned into a slice with a sword, cutting him in half.

Pen mark.

Wash behind your ear.

Suddenly it all made sense. Lois was not distancing herself from Superman, she was distancing herself from Clark. She knew.

"Lois, I—" he began.

"Just go," she pleaded before he could continue. His heart crumbled. She'd never forgive him. She'd never love him now. But he had to, at least, salvage their friendship.

"No," he shook his head and strode further into the apartment, firmly leaving the window behind him. "There's too much to say. Too much we need to talk about."

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Lois gulped as he came close. Stopping only an arm's length away, she looked directly into his pleading eyes. He no longer looked like Superman. He no longer acted aloof or emotionless.

"Then talk," she replied, more calmly than she would have ever thought possible, even though her heart was beating erratically. Was he still listening, did he know? She gazed into his face, the face that had graced her dreams on so many occasions. Boy did she love that face. Why couldn't he love her? Neither Clark nor Superman had ever shown any romantic interest in her. Friendship, yes. Care and affection, yes. Even mild attraction. Love, no. The pavement outside the Daily Planet proved that.

"I," he faltered. He raised an arm in gesture then dropped it. "I don't know what to say." His voice was soft and full of sorrow.

Although he was dressed as Superman, she immediately recognised the look on his face. It was the exact look that Clark, having just seemingly bared his heart to her, had tried to hide when he turned away from her at that park bench. He'd claimed to love her.

But then he'd taken it away. It hadn't been real. He'd been pretending.

Hadn't he?

She'd offered herself to Superman the same evening and he hadn't believed her declaration. No wonder.

Her heart dropped, then flipped over, in fear and hope.

This man had claimed to love her, and then not. She'd told him she didn't love him, then told him she did.

Possibly he did care for her. Possibly his very first declaration **was** the truthful one. His retraction was an attempt to protect his heart when she'd played with it. When she'd given him conflicting signals. He was her best friend, her hero, her partner. He was the man she loved more than anything.

Possibly she should take a chance ... aim for the fantasy, hope for the dream. She began to construct a scenario where he'd claimed not to love her, because ... because she'd not loved him back.

"I don't know where to start. I don't know—" he continued. Lois raised a hand and stepped towards him. Reaching up she put a finger on his lips. He paused. She twisted her wrist slightly and dragged her thumb slowly across his bottom lip.

"Then start here." Her voice was so slight and husky. Her eyes, fixated on her thumb until now, moved up to crash with his gaze. She saw — looking back at her — terror, confusion, hope. Pushing up on her tiptoes she returned her gaze to his lips, slid the hand round his neck and then they touched as her eyes drifted closed.

His lips were soft; soft and warm. She pushed deeper, parting her lips, but there was no response from him. She stilled in mortification, opening her eyes, and was about to pull away when a hand came around her waist and pulled her closer. His lips parted and she tasted heaven. He groaned, deep in his throat, and then he was nibbling her bottom lip. A hand threaded into her hair. All thought spiralled away as she closed her eyes again, her mind floating on a sea of bright sparkles.

She felt his tongue tentatively seek hers. The hand at her waist tightened and pulled her in further. When her chest touched his she felt a heat, inside, desperate to escape. Wrapping both her arms around his body she allowed him to plunder her mouth. The heat grew stronger, her heart beat harder. She felt Clark's hands roaming over her back. Their lower bodies touched and her heart stopped. She broke the kiss to drag in a desperately needed breath.

Looking up into Clark's eyes she watched as he closed his and then rested his head on her forehead.

"Are we kissing only because I'm Superman?" came his

tremulous voice. Instantly Lois knew what he meant. She'd never shown any interest in Clark. She'd been too scared to, so he would only have knowledge of her year-long super-crush.

"No." Lois knew she needed to tell him the truth and risk her heart. "We're kissing because you're Clark."

He immediately dived down again, his arms holding her tight to his chest. Being so close, held so tightly, yet so gently, Lois could almost feel the embroidery of the 'S' on Clark's chest against hers. She was reminded of all her night-time fantasies from a year ago. Superman was holding her. Superman was kissing her. Superman was rapidly seducing her mind and her body.

Then she remembered. It was Clark.

Clark was holding her, kissing her, seducing her ... and she held on tighter, kissed deeper, and surrendered her heart. Being kissed by the man she loved more than anything swept away all thought, all reality, again. This time she let her hands roam: under his cape, over his back, down his spine.

Eventually Clark pulled away. His breathing was ragged. Something she never thought to see from Superman. "We need to calm down," he whispered out. "My heart can't cope."

Lois frowned. "I thought you were ..."

Clark shook his head to stop her from saying any more. "My physical heart is fine. It's my emotional heart I'm worried about." He gulped and looked reluctantly up into her eyes. "I'm so in love with you. I have hoped for this, wished... You've no idea how many shooting stars I've wished on. And I get to see a lot when I'm up above the clouds." He slowly brought a hand up to cup her cheek and then dropped it again. "I've dreamed of this for so long, but you've broken my heart so many times ..." Lois opened her mouth to protest. "And I know I've broken it myself with my own stupid actions sometimes," he countered. Lois drew her hand round from his back and lifted it to his cheek. His eyes were bright with moisture. "Now ... my heart is so full of joy it's nearly bursting, yet there is a part that is trembling on the edge, waiting for the crash — the disappointment — of finding out it's not real." He closed his eyes and leaned in, re-touching his forehead to hers. She heard his voice tremble and felt his body shake. "And if it isn't real, then my heart will not just break this time ..." He opened his eyes and took a deep breath. "It will crumble into dust." She watched his expectant face flicker from hope to fear. "What if this is a dream?" He spoke out his fear.

She smiled and traced her fingers over his cheek then up into his hair. "It's not a dream. It can't be." She shook her head.

"How do you know?" he pleaded, desperate to be reassured.

"Because if it were then you wouldn't be wearing that suit."

He glanced down to his blue and red attire. "Clark, I've dreamed about this every night for months, but you are never dressed this way. You are Clark. I don't want Superman ..." Lois stopped her heartfelt encouragement to realise the non sequitur she'd just made. "Well, actually I guess I do now, but up to five minutes ago I didn't. I'd given up on him. I'd recognised my feelings for what they actually were. A superstar crush, coupled with some healthy attraction because, face it, you have the sexiest body on the whole planet. So if this were a dream, you'd be Clark." She finally stopped and took a break from her babbling. She smiled up at Clark and he smiled back. "That's who I want. Clark."

He smiled again and the relief she saw in his face was echoed in the tension she felt leave his body.

"I used to consider giving you your fantasy." Clark released her waist and brought up a hand. He cupped her cheek and tangled his fingers in her hair. "I wanted you so much I used to think about coming to you ... letting you have Superman." Lois felt her jaw work, trying to let out an expression of surprise, or excitement, but all she could do was look into his eyes, trapped in their deep emotions. "I tell you, the internal struggles I battled with some nights ... you very nearly had a nocturnal visit from Superman on a few occasions." Lois' heart skipped a beat,

knowing that her one-time fantasy had been so close to being fulfilled. Knowing that, even though she had given it up, she could have it again, was exhilarating. "Well. I guess I **can** give you your fantasy," Clark finished and then stepped away from her.

Lois watched in surprise as he began to spin. The familiar blue and red began to blur into one swirling grey and, as it slowed, it revealed her partner, dressed in the black suit he'd been wearing earlier. Although, his tie was missing and top buttons were undone giving him a casual, hint of rogue, look.

Lois immediately grinned, full of joy. "Clark!" she called in relief, as if finally able to truly be with him, even though she had just spent the last ten minutes conversing with him anyway.

He stepped back up to her. She reached out and took the glasses from his face. It was the only part of Clark Kent that she now no longer wanted. They represented the hidden side to her partner. But he was no longer hidden from her. Dropping them to the floor at her feet she returned her hand up to his face and dragged it through his thick, wavy hair. His mouth descended and their lips met once more.

This time the passion overtook her almost immediately. Her mouth parted and she tasted his lips. Searching for whatever would quench the heat inside she began to roam with her hands. Clark's arms encircled her and she reached further round his neck, pulling his mouth down, deeper into the kiss.

Suddenly they were no longer touching. Clark had moved away. "I ... I should get going." He licked his lips and glanced down to hers.

"Why?" she asked, feeling bereft without his arms around her.

"Because I want to stay." His voice was so low and husky she barely heard his reply.

"What's wrong with that?" she breathed out.

"Because I want to stay ... forever." Clark's eyes met hers and locked. Eternity passed as she breathed in and out.

"Okay." Her one word reply hung in the air between them.

Slowly she grinned. Stepping forward she pulled him in for another kiss. Clark's arms surrounded her, held her close. She inched her hands up, passing the open collar of his shirt. It felt so different to the kiss with him dressed as Superman. Warm, soft cotton rather than cool, smooth spandex. It perfectly represented the difference between the two men.

As her lips began to tingle with the intense pressure she felt herself surrendering to the passion rising between them. Just before she was finally swept away the last few words they had spoken to each other came back to her.

*"Forever."*

*"Okay."*

She was pretty sure that Clark had just ... in a roundabout sort of way ... subtly, kind of, proposed. And she was pretty sure that she'd accepted.

All that practicing of her signature in the notepad was going to pay off.

THE END