

# In Time, Somewhere

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Summary: Lois Lane is drawn back in time to the year 1912 after becoming infatuated with a picture of a local hero, Clark Kent, who has been haunting her for her entire life.

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“Are you sure there’s no way I can get out of this?” Lois asked. “There are real stories I could be chasing, not chasing ghosts in the boonies.”

She listened to the telephone for a moment.

“It’s not like I actually died or anything,” she said again, weakly.

This was punishment, she was sure. She’d heal just like she always had, on the job. It wasn’t like she actually had a death wish or anything.

She sighed. She was already in Michigan, sitting in the cab as the driver loaded her luggage into the trunk. She might as well go through with the story.

Sliding her telephone into her pocket, she grimaced. Moving still hurt. This was the best Perry had been able to come up with to slow her down. He’d known that even if he’d enforced vacation time she’d have simply kept on working, ready to turn stories in when the time was done.

Exiling her halfway across the United States had been his way of getting her away from it all, an enforced vacation. Without access to any of her sources, or her city, she would be forced to do everything on the Internet.

Better to accept it and just chase the story, even if she knew nothing was there.

At least the Grand Hotel was supposed to be something to see. Maybe she could write a travel piece. It’d at least be better than some ghost hunting drivel.

The rain was hitting the glass outside her window harder now, and she shuddered.

She’d almost died.

Perry didn’t seem to understand how work was the only thing she had to keep the thoughts away, the certainty that death had only been a hair’s breadth away.

The thought hung in the back of her mind, and no matter how hard she tried it was always there.

It was better to work; at least then she was able to banish it to the back corner of her mind.

Only when she had nothing to do did it all come rushing back.

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The Grand Hotel certainly lived up to its name. Riding the ferry across the lake, Lois had felt her mood lighten a little as she’d seen an isolated lighthouse situated on an outcropping of rock.

Everything was so green here, with vast swathes of deeply green grass and vibrant trees. It had been a long time since Lois had paid the least attention to nature, but there was a fresh scent

now.

In Metropolis, it usually smelled of old petroleum and gas fumes after it rained, but this was fresh and different.

The lobby was vast, and while it wasn’t as modern as hotels like the Lexor, there was a certain timeless charm about it that caught her attention.

“Can I help you with your bags, Miss?”

The man in front of her looked like he was older than the hotel itself. He had to be in his nineties at least, if not older.

Lois was horrified. He looked as if a good breeze would knock him over.

He grabbed her bags before she was able to answer, loading them onto a cart. He turned and looked up at her for the first time, and the smile froze on his face.

“Are you all right?”

The last thing she needed was for her bellhop to collapse of a heart attack because she’d decided to pack a few extra outfits.

The man shook his head, and his smile resumed. “You just reminded me of someone I knew, a long time ago.”

Lois forced herself to smile.

“Let’s get you checked in.”

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Hotels loved ghosts.

Ghosts intrigued guests, brought them to stay for curiosity value. Every time there was a cold spot because of a flaw in the air conditioning system, or a rattling of pipes somewhere in the building, a hotel was happy to proclaim a ghost.

The fact that people tended to die in hotels, for any number of reasons, only made it easier to make that kind of claim.

Older men with something to prove having sex with mistresses who were decades younger, and having heart attacks. Husbands angry at straying wives and coming with guns. People slipping in unfamiliar bathtubs; there were any number of reasons people might die early.

Although the place was beautiful, it wasn’t exactly the kind of place a single woman would stay. If she’d had someone in her life, she could see herself having a very pleasant weekend away here, but there was no story.

Hotels loved ghosts, but they didn’t have any proof.

Even if ghosts existed, which Lois didn’t believe, there would be no way she’d be able to prove it.

She couldn’t afford to believe in ghosts; that was a lesson she’d learned long before she’d gotten into journalism.

Photographic or video evidence could be easily faked, more easily now than at any time in history. Eyewitness testimony had never been reliable. There was no way that Lois would be able to spin this that wouldn’t have her either looking like a kook, or a spoilsport for debunking a pleasant little legend.

In any case, ghosts were even harder to disprove than they were to prove. At least with the Loch Ness monster it was possible to use sonar to look beneath the empty waves. Ghosts were intangible, unprovable.

If it was Ralph or Cat, or any of the other reporters at the Planet, really, they’d have done the minimum work possible, written a puff piece and taken the trip in the spirit it was intended, as a paid vacation.

Lois, though, needed to keep working.

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“Well, there are several ghosts, really,” the man behind the desk said. “But there’s only one that really gets people’s pulses racing.”

“Go on,” Lois said, trying not to look bored. This had the feeling of something the man had said many times before.

“The others are mostly just eerie sounds and cold spots, but the Ghost... he’s actually been seen by guests and staff alike.”

Lois perked up. Maybe there was someone hiding on the premises; a homeless man or something. She’d read about a

Japanese man who'd discovered a woman hiding in his cupboard. She'd been living in his house for months, hiding and only coming out when he left to work.

"How long has this been going on?"

"More than ninety years," the man said. He smiled.

Lois forced herself not to grimace. So much for that idea. "I don't suppose you've seen this ghost yourself?"

The man shook his head. "I keep hoping."

These stories were always that way. Someone knew someone who'd known someone else who'd seen something. It was like every other urban legend. Hokum.

"I don't suppose you know who the ghost was?" she asked.

He nodded eagerly.

"He was a stage actor who played our theater in 1912. He disappeared on the night of the great fire, and no one ever saw him again, not alive anyway. We have his picture in our hotel museum."

He led her into a small room with glass cases and pictures on the wall.

The Grand Hotel was more than a hundred years old, and there was a lot of history. Lois found herself looking at the items in the case with a certain amount of interest.

"You said there was a picture?"

The man nodded toward the end of the hall.

Lois looked up and stared, her breath caught in her throat.

"His name was Clark Kent," the man was saying. "People said he was really going to be something. They never found his body, but after a while, people just knew."

Lois couldn't move, couldn't breathe.

"Are you all right, Miss?"

Finally she nodded.

"Thanks for all your help. If I need anything else, I'll know where to ask."

The man left, leaving her alone in the room with her thoughts, and with the picture of him.

At least she finally had a name for him after all these years.

As a child she'd thought she'd seen him watching her. Once she'd even stopped when she would have run across a street for a ball when she'd seen him standing with a stern look in his strange, old fashioned gray suit.

A car had come rushing through the space she'd have been.

Later she'd rationalized it away. She'd seen him before, always watching her, but it hadn't meant anything. He'd probably lived in the neighborhood.

Kids always thought everything was about them. When her parents had divorced, she'd blamed herself for a long time. It had taken time for her to realize that it hadn't been about her.

Really, very little was. The world didn't care much about her at all, and the things she did to succeed were just ways to make the world acknowledge her.

They were ways to make her father acknowledge her.

Still, it didn't explain the sudden flashes of recognition she'd occasionally had. She'd thought she'd seen him occasionally, always in the same old fashioned suit.

She'd have thought she had some kind of weird Cosplay stalker except that she'd seen him in places he couldn't have escaped. It had happened; it rarely happened more than once every few years.

The fact that it happened more often when she was in danger had been noticed by her.

It had only been a week since the last time she'd seen him, and again, it had saved her life.

Lois Lane didn't believe in ghosts; she couldn't afford to. If she told anyone what she'd seen it would be a quick trip to the sanitarium.

People who saw ghosts were crazy, and the one thing Lois knew she wasn't was crazy.

Ergo, no ghosts.

Still, it was good to finally have a name to put with the face that had saved her a half dozen times in the past twenty years.

Clark Kent. He was real.

For the first time since she'd learned about this trip, Lois began to feel really excited.

There was something about his smile. The more she stared at the picture, the more Lois saw something she couldn't describe. It was almost as though he was looking directly at her, smiling just for her.

He was handsome, but that alone wouldn't have caught her attention. She'd dated attractive men in the past. Yet even if she hadn't seen him on and off throughout her life, Lois suspected that she'd have been drawn to this picture.

There was something intimate about his expression, as though he was sharing something private just between him and her.

This wasn't the usual picture from her great grandfather's era, with stiff, emotionless features. This was the kind of smile that Lois would have felt touched to have directed in her direction at least once in her life.

It was the kind of smile she'd have loved to have been able to direct in someone else's direction.

She'd always been a closet romantic, but secretly she'd always felt that deep down she was damaged, that she'd never really be able to love anyone. True love was a Hollywood fantasy; sweet, but ultimately a lie.

Seeing the life her parents had shared had caused her youthful dreams of romance to fade; the life she'd lived since had only proven to her just how much a sweet lie these fantasies really were.

There was an emptiness inside her that she knew wouldn't ever be filled. She had her work, and sometimes her family, and that would have to be enough.

Her chest ached a little as she stared at this picture. This was a man she could almost believe really had a great kind of love; not an actor paid to pretend, but someone staring out at something he treasured with his life.

She had no idea how long she stood, transfixed as she stared at the picture, but eventually the ache in her joints forced her back to reality. She still wasn't healed.

Still, forcing herself to look away was a chore. It was bittersweet.

"He's a handsome devil, isn't he?"

Lois started. The man who'd been talking to her before had left. In his place was a distinguished looking woman in her early sixties.

"It's a striking picture," she admitted, forcing herself to turn away and look at the woman.

"I sometimes like to pretend it's me he's looking at," the woman said. "It takes a lot of women that way."

"I suppose he was quite the ladies' man, for his day," Lois said, her cynicism returning a little.

The older woman shook her head. "He had a manager who was determined not to allow relationships to interfere with a promising career. It's said that he lived chaste as a monk until the final days when he met a mysterious woman."

"How can anyone be sure that they didn't just run off together?"

Lois had looked into enough missing person cases to know that most of them were eventually solved. Usually the simplest explanation was the right one.

Of course, the simplest explanation in her case was that this Clark Kent had run off with some woman, had children and grandchildren and one of them looked almost identical to him and had been stalking her throughout her life.

The fact that he hadn't aged or seemingly changed clothes in

that time was...troubling.

"It was the night of the great fire. If it hadn't been for him, dozens of people would have died. He carried people out of the flames, but the woman he'd been seeing went missing. He ran back into the burning building just before it collapsed."

"And they found his body?"

"No bodies were ever found."

There was an awkward silence as they stared at each other.

"I'm sorry," the woman said. "I haven't introduced myself. I'm Irene Matheson. I volunteer to help maintain this museum."

"Lois Lane," Lois replied. "I'm a reporter for the Daily Planet. I've heard there are some ghost stories about this place."

The woman smiled. "There are a few, but Mr. Kent is the only one I've actually seen in person."

"You've seen him yourself?"

"I saw him the first time when I stayed here as a little girl," the woman said. "I've seen him twice since then. There's always such a look of sadness on his face; it breaks my heart. He looks lost."

The woman seemed sincere enough; Lois would have been more cynical if it hadn't been for her own experiences.

Lois forced herself to smile.

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

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Multiple ghost investigators had investigated the hotel, with varying degrees of success, at least as they defined success. No one had ever produced any photographic evidence, and as far as Lois could see, most of it was the usual nonsense these people peddled — flickering lights, cold spots. These things were the stock in trade of hokum artists as far as Lois was concerned.

What startled her was that a physics professor from the University of Minnesota had investigated as well, claiming to be looking for gravitational anomalies.

Although Lois usually left the Internet work to the office intern Jimmy, she was more than capable herself, and a quick look through Dr. Erskin's work didn't show anything related to ghosts or the supernatural.

If anything, a transcription of one podcast seemed to indicate that the man was an avowed atheist, with an almost condescending attitude towards people who were willing to take anything on faith.

The abstracts of his work online seemed to be highly esoteric, but as far as Lois could tell seemed to be focused on the relationship between gravity and time.

Although she wasn't exactly intrigued, Lois's work ethic forced her to call his office and ask for an appointment. The thought that he might be able to come up with an alternative explanation for what she'd seen was encouraging. He didn't seem like the kind of person who would buy into the ghost nonsense.

She managed to get an appointment for ten the next morning, penned in by the graduate student who answered his telephone.

In the meantime, she tried to look more into the life of Clark Kent.

There wasn't a lot online; his career hadn't lasted long enough to make much of an impact on the stage, and he'd lived too far in the past to still have any real fans.

There weren't even any recordings of his voice and pictures were few and far between.

He was born in 1886 in Kansas in a cow town called Smallville. He'd been a farmer until 1908 when both his parents had died from a localized typhoid epidemic when he was twenty-two years old.

Somehow he'd been discovered by a theatrical agent William Robinson and had spent the next four years touring the country with a celebrated acting troupe. He'd eventually become one of the leading men in the troupe before vanishing on the night of the great fire. His agent later died during the sinking of the Lusitania.

Other than a few notes about the plays he'd been in, there wasn't much more about his life online.

Lois scowled. It had been years since she'd had to go to a library; having Jimmy was making her soft.

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Although she was tired from her early flight, Lois managed to take a cab to the library. Finding what she needed took longer than she'd anticipated; the library was in the process of computerizing its archives and things weren't where they were easily accessible.

Finally, however she had what the librarian swore was all the books available on the subject in the library without getting an inter-library loan. Apparently there was more information available about the man in Kansas because Smallville had very few even quasi-celebrities in its history.

Lois wasn't sure she was going to be around long enough for the books to come through; with any luck she'd finish this assignment and get back to Metropolis where she belonged.

The longer she was away from the picture at the hotel, the more doubts assailed her mind. She'd only thought she'd seen the man a half dozen times in the past twenty years, but eyewitness testimony was notoriously unreliable. Lois herself hadn't been a trained observer until relatively late in her life. As a child she'd been precocious but hardly the keen observer she considered herself now.

If it hadn't been for the anomalous gray suit, she'd have written it off as a series of similar looking men who'd just been fortunately in the right place in the right time. The suit though, was distinctive. She couldn't really see it in the picture in the museum, which was focused on his face, assuming he was wearing the same clothes at all.

She flipped through the oversized books.

Maybe it had been a trick of the mind. She'd seen some other kind of suit and transposed it in her mind with something she'd seen in the past. The brain played all kinds of tricks.

There were pictures in this book. Apparently the acting troupe had celebrated with pictures with the locals.

Pictures of people having a picnic on grounds that didn't look that much different than the grounds today, although the old photography gave the pictures a sepia tint that made everything look hazy, almost like a dream.

Clothes were beautiful back in those days; there wasn't a single person who wasn't dressed up. Even the hairstyles were intricate; they looked like they would take some work to...

She froze. There he was, in the exact suit she'd first seen all those years ago. He was wearing it differently; the buttons to the collar were buttoned, not loose, but it was unmistakable.

He was smiling and looking down at a woman. Lois couldn't help but have a flash of jealousy. She was wearing a pale pink chiffon dress with ecru lace and beaded trim. She was turned away from the camera, looking up at him. They were standing close together, almost too close.

This had to be the mystery woman.

She wasn't wearing a hat, like almost all the other women, and her hair wasn't an ornate construction like most of the other women's.

It was a short pageboy cut, not much different from the way Lois had recently had her own hair cut.

The hairstyle was a weird coincidence. Lois hadn't thought women began wearing their hair in pageboy cuts until the fifties and sixties, but she wasn't exactly an expert on the history of women's hair. She had no doubt that there were women ahead of their time; someone had to set the new trends.

She squinted, trying to see if she could make anything out about the woman. Finding out who the woman was would go a long way to helping find out what had really happened the night of the fire.

No body had ever been found, and there had been a search. Either charred bones were even now resting in some out-of-the-way cubby, or Kent had fled with his mystery woman.

The image of two sets of bones trapped together flashed through her mind, and she scowled.

More likely they'd eloped. What she'd read of the manager made him sound like a real tyrant, the sort of person who would be hard to get away from. Lois had seen too many cases of people faking their own deaths to be surprised by anything.

The problem with the mysterious woman was that no one seemed to know anything about her. If she had a name or even a time she'd arrived it would get her something to build an investigation on.

All she had was a picture at a distance in profile; while that was more than she'd started with, it wasn't much.

Lois made a color copy of the picture and she also scanned it and sent it to Jimmy. Maybe he'd be able to find something that she couldn't.

Leaving the library, she sighed. She resigned herself to another night of eating alone. At least at home she was able to eat a diet frozen dinner in privacy. Her only choice here was to eat alone at a restaurant.

Usually she was able to distract herself with work, but she was at a dead end, at least until she spoke to the professor tomorrow morning.

She folded the copy of the picture and put it in her purse.

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The professor was younger than she would have thought, looking not much older than Lois. Given his body of work he had to have started working at a young age.

She also hadn't expected hostility.

"If I'd known you were a reporter I never would have agreed to this meeting," he said. He didn't look at her, instead shifting through a stack of papers that looked like it was about to fall off his desk.

His office was as cluttered as Lois had seen, with barely enough room for a desk and two chairs. The desk was covered with stacks of papers and a laptop, and stacks of books covered every other available surface.

At least there weren't any alien abduction posters. None of the book titles she could see had anything to do with ghosts.

"I'm not sure what you've got against the press," Lois began. "But..."

For the first time, the professor looked up at her. "It doesn't matter what I tell you, you'll twist it around. Either you'll be too stupid to understand what I'm saying, or you'll deliberately misquote me."

"I can't promise that I'll understand," Lois said. "But I work for the Daily Planet, and we pride ourselves on being fair and balanced."

He scowled. "Fine. What do you want to know?"

"I understand you did some research at the Grand Hotel a couple of years ago," Lois began. "And that you were doing some research about the relationship between gravity and time?"

"That's the sort of reporting I'm talking about," Dr. Erskin said irritably. "One reporter thought I was saying that time travel was just around the corner and so he went for the exciting headline."

"I'll try to keep my headlines as boring as possible," Lois said dryly.

For a moment Lois thought he was going to throw her out of his office, but finally his lip twitched and he relaxed.

"As long as you don't write an article the other scientists can use to make fun of me, I'll be fine."

Lois quickly slipped into the one available seat.

"I didn't really understand what you were trying to say about gravity and time," Lois admitted.

"Mass warps space. Gravity is the curve in space caused by mass," Dr. Erskin said. "Imagine a bowling ball on a rubber sheet pulled tight. The ball would sink into the sheet, distorting it. Anything you placed on the sheet would fall toward the ball."

Lois sat attentively, but didn't say anything.

Dr. Erskin looked at her as though he was expecting a question, then he shrugged. "It affects time as well; time passes more slowly on Earth than it does in space; satellites have to compensate for the difference. NASA has to misadjust the clocks on the space shuttle before missions."

"That's pretty basic," Lois said, although it really didn't seem that way to her. "I thought I read something about portals in time?"

Dr. Erskin sighed. "That's where the other reporter got excited. He thought I was talking about being able to build portals here on earth."

"You aren't?"

"It's common to take gravitational measurements because you can make an educated guess at how dense things are below the surface by the gravity. If there's more mass, due to an iron deposit let's say, gravity would be slightly higher. If there's less mass, it'd be lower. Companies use this to make guesses about the presence of oil."

"And that's what you were doing at the Grand Hotel?"

"In a way," Dr. Erskin hesitated. "Did you hear about the discovery of a way to detect wormholes between the magnetosphere of the Earth and the Sun last month?"

Lois shook her head.

"There are places where the magnetic field of the Earth and the sun are connected, creating an uninterrupted path... uninterrupted by time or space."

"What does that mean?"

"It takes light eight minutes to get from the sun to Earth, to travel 93 million miles. The best spacecraft we can currently build would take three months to go there. But at the points of connection, it's possible to get there in the blink of an eye."

"So faster-than-light travel?" Lois pulled a notebook from her purse and quickly jotted down a question.

"There's no distance for the light to travel, or very little," Dr. Erskin said. "Light doesn't have to travel faster than itself, it just doesn't have to go as far."

"So what does that all have to do with time?"

"These portals open and close randomly in the atmosphere, dumping tons of energetic particles. They cause geomagnetic storms and cause the aurora borealis to light up. The problem is that they are invisible and unstable."

This wasn't going to be easy to turn into the kind of story her readers would be interested in. "So this happens on Earth?"

"Mostly they happen a few thousand miles in space. Most scientists would say they don't happen on Earth, but my theory is that it can happen under the right conditions."

"Under the right gravity," Lois said.

For the first time, Dr. Erskin smiled. "You're a little brighter than the last reporter, at least."

"So what would one of these portals look like?"

"It wouldn't look like anything. It would be invisible... almost undetectable," Dr. Erskin said. "Your only warning would be fluctuations in gravity."

"So you could walk into your bedroom and end up walking out... where?"

"Maybe into outer space... maybe into this time yesterday.

These portals travel through space as well as time, but considering that the earth spins at about 1000 miles an hour, moves around the sun at about 67,000 miles an hour and the sun travels around the galaxy at 486,000 miles an hour..."

"I'd think we'd hear about it if time travelers were just popping in randomly."

“The conditions are rare. You’d have to be in the right time, in the right place...you’ve got a better chance of being hit by lightning, and even if you did make it back, most people know what happens to people claiming to be time travelers.”

Lois had read enough about how people were treated in the past in lunatic asylums to shudder.

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Lois walked slowly down the street staring in the store windows, her mind whirling.

According to Dr. Erskin, it might be possible to become trapped in one of those wormholes in time, skipping forward and backward without ever being actually part of reality again.

Once the Earth had moved past the last point of connection, there would be no way to escape. You’d be trapped forever.

There was no way to even know if a human could survive traveling through that kind of wormhole intact.

Unfortunately, time travel seemed doomed to remain in the realm of science fiction, at least for the immediate future.

Lois glanced at her telephone for the fourth time in the last hour. Service was still difficult. Apparently there was some sort of interference from solar storms or sunspots...she hadn’t paid that much attention.

She glanced upward. At least there were some unusual colors in the sky.

It only increased her sense of isolation. This trip was looking to be a dead end, and there was only so long she’d be able to stay before Perry was forced to call her back. Just because she felt drawn to the picture of a dead man wasn’t any reason to obsess over the story.

Sometimes you had to know when to cut a story loose.

It was a lesson Lois had been forced to learn time and time again. Sometimes stories didn’t pan out, and sometimes they had to be put on a back burner.

She typically worked on multiple stories at the same time; the stories she was leaving at home worried her.

Another look at her telephone still showed no bars.

Lois froze as she looked into the next store window.

It was a store that sold antique clothes, money and paraphernalia. They sold Civil War sabers and Confederate money.

What had caught her attention was a dress she saw against the back of the wall on a mannequin.

It was a pale pink chiffon dress with ecru lace and beaded trim. For some reason, it seemed familiar to her.

Lois frowned, then pawed through her purse looking for the folded up copy of the picture she’d scanned.

The woman standing next to Clark Kent had been wearing an identical dress.

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“Mostly we get women wanting to dress up reenacting the Titanic,” the woman behind the counter said. “They get disappointed when they find out women’s clothing back in the day didn’t have sizes. Everything was custom made.”

“I’m sure that makes it a little harder to sell,” Lois murmured.

“We do all right,” the woman said. “Most of this is from my great grandmother’s estate.”

“Oh?” Lois asked. “So this was your great grandmother’s dress?”

It would be ironic if she was standing across from Clark Kent’s great granddaughter.

The woman shook her head. “My great grandmother was friends with the owners of the Grand Hotel; she worked there for forty years. When they were clearing out the Lost and Found there, they gave her some of the clothes. She managed to preserve it in remarkable condition, don’t you think?”

“So you don’t have any way of knowing where this originally came from?” Lois asked, disappointed.

“Actually, this piece is a little special,” the woman said. “My great grandmother collected it herself and always wondered about it.”

Lois was quiet for a moment as she stared at the dress on the wall.

“On the night of the great fire in 1912, only two people went missing. One was a man, and the other a woman. She didn’t leave anything else in her room, no luggage, no toiletries...only this dress.”

“This should be in the hotel museum,” Lois murmured.

“Everybody was always interested in the actor hero, not some unnamed woman.” The woman seemed to realize that she was making the dress seem less attractive. “My great grandmother was always convinced there was some kind of great love story attached to the dress though.”

“So why are you selling it?”

The woman shrugged. “The things I wanted from her were things that reminded me of our time together. The rest of it...I’ve got college loans to pay off. She was a hoarder anyway. I’ve got enough stuff to run a business for years.”

“I don’t suppose you’d know which room the woman was staying in,” Lois asked casually.

“I’m pretty sure my grandmother had it written down somewhere,” the woman admitted. “But I’d have to go through a few things at home...”

“If I bought the dress, would that make it worth your while?”

The woman’s face brightened.

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Lois had ended up buying the dress for almost two hundred dollars as well as two vintage twenty dollar bills for another hundred dollars. She planned on making a gift of the money to her father, who collected old bills. If it got her out of looking for a real gift it would be worth the money; the man was almost impossible to buy for.

The two hundred dollars would be worth it if it meant a break in the case. The sooner she solved the mystery of who the mysterious woman was, the sooner she’d have enough of a story to satisfy Perry and get back to Metropolis where she belonged.

The fact that this was a beautiful place didn’t give her any excuse to treat it like a vacation.

Returning to the hotel, Lois pulled out her laptop and began to do more research. Dr. Erskin had mentioned time slips when she’d been discussing the physics of time travel with him; she wanted to learn a little more about it.

She was surprised at how many cases she found. In 1901 the president and vice president of Oxford University claimed to have slipped back in time to the French Revolution.

An Englishman in 1953 drank in a pub with people dressed like they were from the previous century. In 1979 two English couples stayed at an old fashioned hotel that wasn’t there when they returned.

In the 1990’s three naval cadets claimed to have visited a medieval plague village. A hundred year old Swiss watch was found in a Ming Dynasty tomb.

Some conspiracy sites even linked disappearances to time slips. The crew of the Mary Celeste vanished without a trace, leaving the ship abandoned.

Famed writer Ambrose Bierce vanished in El Paso in 1913 without a trace. Amelia Earhart, four B-57 bombers over the Mediterranean Sea in 1953...case after case of vanishing people were connected by conspiracy nuts with time slips.

In 1880 David Larch disappeared into thin air in full view of a federal judge, his wife, two children and the judge’s brother in law. The ground was searched for concealed holes but none were ever found. The children later claimed to hear the man’s voice as though it was coming from a great distance.

A quick search showed that 900,000 people went missing

every year, but only 2300 cases or so were completely unexplained. Most were eventually solved, more and more with better ways of tracking people.

Lois sighed, closed her laptop and rubbed her eyes.

None of this was anything she could use. She was a respected journalist. The last thing she wanted to do was come off like a tabloid reporter talking about the Bat Boy and Elvis having tea together. Perry was expecting a puff piece, which she could do, but she'd like to have something with a little more substance. Solving a hundred year old mystery would fit the bill nicely.

Her cell phone rang.

A glance showed that it was the store owner.

"Did you find out who owned the dress?"

The woman's voice sounded strained. "It was a little harder than I thought to find. I had to dig through."

The sound of something crashing to the floor in the background made Lois wince.

The woman continued. "I don't have a name, but I do have a number. The dress was found in room 416."

"That's all you have?" Lois asked, trying not to sound too disappointed.

The sound of another box crashing in the background was followed by a muttered curse from the woman. "Sorry."

"Thank you," Lois said.

As soon as she disconnected, she dialed the front desk.

"This is Lois Lane in room 215. Is there any way I could get a look at the desk registers from 1912?"

She'd tripped up enough cheating politicians and businessmen with evidence from hotel documentation to be an old hand. Her only fear was that they might have gotten rid of the books.

There was silence from her phone. Lois waited patiently, knowing the other person would feel they had to fill the silence.

"They might have something like that in storage," the concierge finally said. "They rotate things in and out of the museum. The only person who might know is Arthur, the bellhop."

"The old guy?"

"He'd been here since he was five years old. He helps move the exhibits too."

"I'd make it worth his while," Lois said, mentally crossing her fingers. "I don't need all of them, just the registers for the latter half of June 1912."

"I'm sure I've seen those circulated in and out," the concierge said. "People are interested in the great fire."

"How soon could I get to see them?" Lois said. Although she realized she sounded pushy, she found herself suddenly impatient.

She heard the sounds of a murmured conversation.

"Arthur's about to go off shift, but he says he'd be happy to bring the register by your room. It might take an hour or so."

"Thank you," Lois said.

The waiting after she closed her cellphone seemed almost interminable. She paced the room, sometimes looking out the window at the strange colors in the sky.

She hadn't thought you'd be able to see the aurora borealis this far south.

Eventually she found herself examining the dress, looking for clues to the identity of the other woman, but nothing presented itself.

As she fingered the fabric, she wondered how it would fit.

With a glance at the clock, she slipped into the dress. She was surprised to realize that it fit her perfectly, even though at 5'6 and 120 pounds she was three inches taller than most women had been back then. It was hard enough to find clothes that fit perfectly in all dimensions, but this dress fit like it had been made for her.

It was comfortable as well. She'd always thought that clothes back in those days had been itchy and uncomfortable. Of course, on a hot day with no air conditioning it might be a great deal less comfortable.

At least it didn't have a corset.

There was something about how she looked in the dress that bothered her; while the dress looked old fashioned, her hair and makeup were more modern. It was a little jarring.

There was a knock on the door. As there wasn't time to change clothes, Lois stepped out of the bathroom and looked through the peephole. Just because she was a thousand miles away from Metropolis didn't mean that problems couldn't have followed her from there.

She'd had assassination attempts in the past.

Thankfully, all she saw was the ancient face of Arthur. She slid the chain from the door and opened it.

He stared at her and his face went slack. The heavy ledger he was holding slid out of his hands and Lois had to lunge forward to grab it.

"I'm sorry..." he said. "You just look..."

"It's for a story," Lois said irritably.

Now that someone else was in the room she regretted the impulse that had led her to slip the dress on. She felt a little embarrassed, like a little girl who was playing dress up in her mother's clothes and makeup.

"That dress..." he said. His hand trembled as he pointed.

"It belonged to the mystery woman," Lois said. "I suppose you've seen pictures when you were moving things for the museum."

Arthur shook his head. "I've been here since I was five years old. My father worked here and I'd play with a ball in the lobby."

"You're a hundred and five?" Lois asked. "How much can you possibly remember from a hundred years ago?"

"I remember her," Arthur said stubbornly. "I remember thinking how pretty she was."

"Well," Lois said. "With any luck I'm about to find out who she was."

She carried the ledger into the room and set it down on the table. She switched the lamp on and sat down, careful not to tear the dress.

Knowing the room number, it should be easy to find out who the woman was. Lois began flipping through the pages quickly, the familiar feeling of anticipation rushing through her. She loved the excitement of the chasing down answers, of solving mysteries.

Even though this wasn't a gun running operation, evidence of political corruption or her usual brand of story, it was a mystery that had baffled people for one hundred years.

The earlier entries were all men's names, or men with families. She didn't see any single women's names at all, which didn't surprise her.

That would make her search much easier.

As she got closer and closer to the end of the month her stomach tightened. June 25<sup>th</sup>...26<sup>th</sup>...27<sup>th</sup>.

She turned the page, holding her breath. Guests were signing in at six in the morning, seven...there it was....room 420, 9:18 AM.

For a long moment she sat, staring at the signature. Everything seemed to go white, and her mind simply stopped for a while.

She couldn't understand what she was seeing, and all she could feel was her heart racing in her chest. She couldn't seem to catch her breath. It felt as though the world was freezing around her, motionless.

"Are you all right, Miss?"

Arthur's quavering voice seemed like a lifeline, and she looked up at him gratefully.

Rational thought finally returned, although she still couldn't help but feel chills running up and down her spine.

She looked back down at the familiar signature on the page. This was obviously a hoax, and she'd get to the bottom of it.

Someone had erased whatever signature might have once been on the page and replaced it with her own.

"Who put you up to this?" Lois asked, scowling as she looked up from the ledger.

"Miss?"

Arthur had seemed naïve, maybe a little simple. She should have remembered that old people had just as many skeletons in their closets as the young.

"Did they doctor up the whole ledger or just the one page?"

Lois examined the ledger, looking to see if there was any evidence of pages torn out or newly glued. A quick sniff revealed only the smells she would have expected, of old book and dust. Wherever it had been kept, dust had time to accumulate.

Unless this was some sort of prank Perry had set up, they wouldn't have had long to set this up. She'd been the one to ask about the ledger, and she'd been the one to see the dress and ask about it.

Maybe Perry had signed her up for some sort of really obscure mystery adventure getaway.

She looked up at Arthur again. His expression was clueless.

If he really had been a bellboy for eighty years or more, he couldn't be particularly bright. Even Ralph at work could have been promoted to working the desk after that long.

She stared down at her signature on the page, looking closely. If it was a forgery, it was one of the best she'd seen. She'd have sworn it was her own signature if she hadn't known better.

"Did somebody put you up to this?" she asked again, this time more kindly.

He gave every impression of having no clue what she was talking about.

"Where did you get the ledger?" she asked.

"From the attic, same as I get everything else for the museum."

Lois hesitated. Although she was wavering about his involvement, and she was having trouble seeing how this all might be set up, she couldn't afford to let him off the hook.

"Could you take me there?" Lois said. "I'd like to take a look at it."

Arthur stared at her for a moment, as though it was taking that long for the message to get through. Finally he nodded.

He probably wasn't even a hundred and five.

Lois grabbed her purse, then turned and locked the door behind her. "Lead on."

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It was a dusty mess.

Lois could see the tracks where Arthur had come through. There were several boxes that looked as though they'd been recently opened.

One box was full of registers from 1910 to 1915. Apparently the owners periodically liked to set up a World War One exhibit; at other times they liked to set up a Titanic-themed exhibit. Although it was more than five hundred miles to New York there had been guests who lost family to the tragedy.

Since the movie had come out, there'd been a resurgence in interest in Titanic memorabilia. Lois suspected that Arthur was standing behind her as much to make sure she didn't take anything as to help her.

Lois could understand the appeal, although she'd felt the movie was a little ridiculous. The plank had been more than big enough for the both of them, and if she'd really loved him she'd have taken the risk.

Of course, Lois risked her life for her job all the time; some people weren't as brave.

For the first time it occurred to Lois that Perry might have given her this assignment as much to get her out of town as to give her time to heal.

Mob investigations were always tricky, but Lois was sure that the price on her head had been rescinded by now.

Of course, sometimes people didn't get the message as quickly as other. Maybe an extended vacation wasn't the worst idea. She'd have complained if Perry had forced her to it, but now that she was here...

Setting up the little mystery just to keep her here was a little more elaborate than she'd have expected, but it was thoughtful.

Not that she'd fallen for the whole time travel business for a minute.

Glancing outside she noted that the eerie glow of the borealis was even brighter than it had been earlier. She could see lightning in the distance as well, a storm was starting.

A soft thump came from behind her.

Lois turned, but before she could react she was grabbed from behind. Whoever it was tried to grab her around the neck, but she ducked her chin as she'd been trained. It only took a few seconds to cut off the flow of blood to the brain and cause unconsciousness.

She reached up and grabbed the man's forearm with one hand and stepped to the side. With her other hand she lashed out behind her, hitting the man in the groin. She felt the man moving backward, his head coming down. She lashed out with her elbow, hitting him in the chin.

His arm came loose and Lois managed to duck away.

Martial arts training was important considering the risks she took.

She turned and prepared to kick the man, but she froze as she saw there were two of them.

One had a gun pointed at Arthur, who had fallen to the floor.

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"I don't suppose I can talk you out of this." Lois said. "The Siderno group is out of business. How are they going to pay you if they don't have any money?"

"You think this is about money?" The heavysset man asked. "It was never about money."

The thug who she'd hit had wanted to beat her even further, but this man was in charge.

He was planning to wait until the storm hit before shooting her and Arthur in the head. Although both men's weapons had silencers, they didn't do as much to suppress the sounds of guns firing in real life as they did in the movies.

The sounds of thunder would cover any unsavory sounds and they'd be long gone before anyone thought to look for Arthur.

Given his age, Lois was surprised that he only seemed stunned even now.

"What was it about then?" Lois asked.

The storm was coming closer; it wouldn't be long before they finished what they'd come to do.

The man who'd tried to choke her was clearly an idiot. He'd tied her wrists behind her back without checking to see that she didn't have any slack in the line. Her wrists were thin and she'd had enough experience being kidnapped to have learned a few things.

Her purse was lying near her; although it was small, it contained things she could use as weapons. She'd had pepper spray on her keychain in Metropolis; she'd had to check it in her luggage on the plane. It was loose in her purse now. Even just her pen would make a fine weapon if she could jab it somewhere sensitive.

For the first time she wished her purse was heavier; if she was like some women and had the equivalent of two bricks in there she'd be able to swing it and hit someone in the head with it.

“Honor...family. Things you wouldn’t understand.”

“Like there’s a lot of honor in human trafficking and gunrunning.”

Lois taunted him even as she felt the ropes loosening around her hands. A peal of thunder caused the floor she was sitting on to vibrate.

It took her a moment to realize that the vibration continued even after the thunder stopped. She’d been to a concert when the bass was so low and deep that everything vibrated; this felt like that.

“What’s going on, boss?”

Obviously she wasn’t the only one who felt it. The only one who seemed oblivious was Arthur.

The thrumming was getting worse; she could see her purse vibrating and the boxes around her were shaking. Dust was sent flying, and the thug coughed.

Lois’s hands came loose and she used their moment of distraction to lunge for her purse. The thug was quicker than she anticipated, lunging for her as well.

They both touched the purse at the same time, just as gravity seemed to cease to exist.

Lois’s feet lost purchase with the ground, and she held onto the purse. The thug did the same, and she could see that he was floating inches above the ground.

A moment later, he disappeared. Lois felt a massive yank on her purse, and before she could let go of it, she felt herself being yanked forward.

Involuntarily, she screamed.

The world seemed to blur around her and she felt as though she was falling.

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Like a time lapse movie in reverse, everything flickered around her. Lights appeared and disappeared in the window. Boxes appeared and disappeared and every once in a while Lois almost thought she could make out presences in the room.

At least the gravity seemed to have returned. Sounds, such as they were seemed muted. She could hear the sounds the trees made outside as they grew in reverse.

A glance out the window showed the trees shrinking slowly.

There was no sign of Arthur or either of the thugs.

Still holding her purse, Lois searched for the doorway back to reality. Somehow, no matter how much she looked, it never appeared.

Was she going to be trapped here for eternity?

She made her way down the stairs, slipping through the doorway in a moment between moments. She almost thought she brushed up against someone, but she couldn’t be sure.

As she made her way through the hallways, the flickering seemed to slow at times.

Once she saw people flickering into sight. A younger version of Arthur, still in his sixties looked up at her and stared. He vanished a moment later and Lois made her way through the hotel.

There had to be other entrances to whatever place this was; otherwise there wouldn’t have been so many stories of ghosts.

Maybe Clark Kent had slipped into another portal and was around somewhere.

She saw more people flicker into existence. They were dressed in old fashioned clothing, like clothes she’d seen in old Katherine Hepburn movies.

A little girl looked up at her and looked like she was about to scream before she vanished again.

She ducked into the tiny hotel museum. The exhibits flickered in and out of existence around her, but the one thing that never changed was Clark Kent’s picture. It seemed to stare at her with that same indefinable look.

Even in this weird, half-world, Lois still felt drawn to him.

She stood and stared at him even as the world flickered around her.

The picture vanished, and Lois felt a sudden jolting sensation, as though the world around her was shaking.

She fell to the floor even as she felt a massive lurching sensation.

The world went black.

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For a moment as she woke, Lois couldn’t remember where she was or how she’d gotten there. She was laying on a hard surface staring at the ceiling. She tried to roll over, but the residual pain she’d had for the last week was even worse than normal.

Her purse was in her hand and as she looked down at her dress, now looking somewhat worse for wear, the memories came rushing back.

She sat up slowly, banging her head as she did so.

Looking around, she had no idea where she was at. The last she remembered she was in the small museum on the first floor of the Grand Hotel. Now, though, she appeared to be in a storage closet. The room was filled with linens and cleaning supplies.

These weren’t the standard cleaning supplies she used at home, or even the industrial sized bottles she’d have expected a hotel to use. Instead there were great blocks of something called Sunlight Carbolic soap.

There were strange wire devices hanging in a row; Lois had seen similar devices in a women’s history museum. They were used to beat the dust out of carpets before the invention of the vacuum cleaner.

The place lacked the chemical smell she’d have expected from the storage closets she’d been forced to hide in from time to time. Instead the place smelled mostly like soap.

She groaned as she managed to push herself up with one hand. Her purse was lying next to her. She opened it and pulled out her iPhone. She slipped it out of its case and grimaced. Although it was fully charged, there were no bars.

She needed to call Perry and the police. She’d been kidnapped, again, and apparently they’d given her some kind of psychedelic drug. She’d managed to escape, somehow, but that didn’t mean they weren’t still looking for her.

Pulling her sleeve up, she could still see the bruises around her wrist from where the thug had grabbed her. She couldn’t quite remember when that had happened, but it only served as more proof that she’d been drugged.

Still a little dizzy, she pushed herself to her feet.

If she could get to the front desk, they’d have a telephone she could use.

She stepped toward the doorway, and then cautiously peered outside. A moment later, she quietly closed the door and forced herself to breathe deeply.

Unless a Titanic convention was in town, she couldn’t understand why everyone outside was dressed like they were at a costume party.

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She managed to make her way to a public bathroom without anyone noticing her. She looked like a mess; dust was all over her dress, her hair was sticking up, and she could see faint bruising around her neck.

Luckily, she’d had a lot of experience dealing with all of these problems. Bruising was an occupational hazard in her profession and dust was even more so.

With just ten minutes of careful work she almost looked presentable.

Normally she’d have done whatever she could to preserve the evidence, but her gut was telling her that she wasn’t going to get a convenient telephone call to the police when she talked to the man at the front desk.

The toilets and fixtures in the bathroom had all been changed from the last time she'd been inside. The lobby was less different, but there were obvious changes there as well.

Most costumes, when people wore them were new and typically fancy. The clothes she'd seen the workmen wearing were worn and faded and looked as though they'd been worn for a long time. The people who looked like guests were dressed more formally, but even these people didn't have the crisp look she'd expect from cosplayers.

Instead they had the irritable, tired look of people who'd been traveling for long periods. There was none of the excitement she'd have expected from a costumed reenactment.

A glance outside had shown horse drawn carriages waiting outside. There were no cars. Even the sprinkler system had been removed from the ceiling.

It was too elaborate to be a prank.

Either she was having a psychotic break, or somehow she'd travelled back in time.

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She'd managed to steal a newspaper left abandoned by one of the workmen. According to the masthead, it was June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

President Taft was working on the first specific regulations for the design of the United States flag. He'd recently signed an order that government employees were limited to an eight hour day.

The 1912 Democratic convention was in full swing in Baltimore. Argentinean farmers were on strike. One hundred people had fallen into the Niagara River when a dock collapsed; thirty nine drowned or went over the falls.

All of it was interesting, but Lois knew she wouldn't be able to hide in a bathroom stall all day reading the paper.

She was in trouble.

Nowhere in the lecture she'd heard was anything about how to find the entrances to time tunnels. They were invisible, and by the time the gravity disturbances began it would be too late to find the entrance.

At least she had her purse and the money she'd bought for her father. She wouldn't want to see what 1912 thought was an appropriate jail cell for a woman counterfeiter if she tried to pass 2012 bills.

She carefully folded the paper and stepped out of the stall. Ignoring the women around her, she went to the mirror and carefully checked her appearance again. None of the bruises were obvious, even if she looked a little worse for the wear. Except for her unconventional hairstyle she could pass as a weary traveler.

Leaving the bathroom, she headed for the front desk. She didn't recognize any of the staff, of course, although they all had a dour look.

Lois stood in front of the desk, waiting. The man behind the desk was a stern looking older man. Clearly he could see her, but he ignored her.

"Arthur," he said. "What have I told you about playing ball in the hotel?"

Lois turned slightly. She was surprised to see a small boy with a petulant expression staring up at the desk clerk.

He stepped out from behind the counter, took the ball from the boy and slipped it behind the counter.

Lois stared at the boy for a long moment, trying to see any resemblance to the ancient man she'd left stunned in the attic a century in the future.

The man slipped the ball behind the desk then stared at her. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like to rent a room, please."

The man was silent for a moment. "Will your husband be accompanying you?"

Lois bristled, but forced herself to keep her face neutral. She'd learned to her sorrow about trying to bully desk clerks.

They had ways of getting revenge. They could make keys stop working, or add extra charges to credit cards. They could put huge holds on credit cards. After the third time she was placed in the one room in the hotel that had a number one digit away from room service, so she'd gotten drunk calls every ten minutes all night long she'd given up.

It didn't pay to be rude to the front desk.

"It's not hotel policy to accept unaccompanied young women," he said. "This is a decent establishment."

The look he gave her wasn't a friendly one. It was patronizing, and his tone was condescending.

The implication made Lois's blood boil. He'd as much as called her a prostitute! In the past, she'd have demanded to talk to the manager. Well, in the future, and she couldn't exactly complain that it was the twenty first century anymore.

She'd just have to pretend that she was on assignment again. She'd been cautious in the Congo; she could do it here.

"I'm a widow."

He looked down at her hand.

"He died in a...railroad accident. It was...horrible."

Lois sniffed and looked down at her hands. Modern men were a little wiser, but she suspected that the prospect of a woman breaking down in front of his desk would alarm the man.

"Now...I'm supposed to meet his family, and I'm not sure how I'll be able to...tell them." Lois sniffed again.

She hated pretending to be a weak woman, but she'd have done it for an undercover investigation. Of course, she'd been told her acting skills weren't the best. Bobby Bigmouth had told her not to quit her day job. She'd thought it had worked with her mob investigation; it appeared that it hadn't worked as well as she'd thought.

She was really better at disguises.

Luckily, it appeared the men of this time were a little more credulous. The desk clerk looked alarmed.

"I'm sure something can be made available," he said. He turned and said, "I can put you in room 416."

Lois frowned. She'd been sure the register had placed her in room 420. Maybe the future was mutable. As far as she was concerned it didn't really matter as long as she got back to her own time and had a place to get a shower.

He turned the register toward her. She'd only had a glimpse of the names in the future, but these seemed substantially the same.

She reached for the pen.

"I'm sorry, sir," a younger man said. "I've just situated Mr. Thomason in room 416."

"Room 420 then," the desk clerk said. "That will be four dollars please."

Lois was glad she'd chosen to purchase the second twenty dollar bill. When she handed over the first, the clerk looked surprised. He had to slip into a back room to get change.

Allowing her face to settle into a scowl, Lois reached behind the counter to grab the ball. She walked over to Arthur. The boy was sniffing and staring at the floor.

When she handed him the ball, he looked up and stared at her as though he'd just seen the heavens opening before him.

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Her acting must have been serviceable enough. The room she'd gotten was decent, if more primitive than she was used to. At least there was an old fashioned elevator.

She took a shower, although she hated slipping back into the same clothes she'd just been wearing.

Time travel was a little outside her area of expertise, and as far as she knew there wasn't anyone in this time period who could help her. She could track down HG Wells, but he was just a writer.

The only other time travelers she was relatively sure of was

the thug who'd tried to kill her and Clark Kent.

As she understood the timeline, he had yet to make his journey. If he hadn't made the trip yet, Lois could at least be sure that he would. That meant that if she stayed close to him, over the next few days she'd see him go into a portal and she'd be able to jump in after him.

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Finding him was harder than she'd thought it would be. He wasn't in his room, and from the scandalized look on the hotel maid's face, even asking about him wasn't appropriate.

Rehearsals were being done at the theater, but there too he was absent. His scenes were already done, and now they were working on scenes he didn't appear in. It seemed it was an ensemble act.

One stage hand thought he'd seen Kent walking down by the lake. Lois thanked him, and then went searching.

It wasn't until she reached the shore of the lake that she saw him.

He was staring out onto the lake, but as she approached he looked up at her sharply.

If anything, he was even better looking than he'd been in the picture, although his face didn't have the expression that had intrigued her so much.

Instead, there was a wary look.

"Is it you?" he asked.

What kind of question was "Is it you?"

"Of course it's me," Lois said. "I'm not sure who you were actually expecting, but it's definitely me."

He made a faint noise deep in his throat and stepped back, almost as though someone had struck him. For a moment he looked almost afraid.

"Are you all right?"

Clark Kent flushed. "I'm sorry. That was rude of me."

In Metropolis, a man who blushed would be a naïve rube. Here, though, it almost seemed charming. Being old fashioned wasn't a sign of weakness, it was just...exotic. He hadn't answered the question, though.

"Who *were* you expecting?" she asked.

His flush deepened. Before he could answer, an older man came up from behind Lois.

"There you are! You're wanted in rehearsal."

William Robinson looked a little younger here than the picture she'd seen when she was looking up Clark's history, but he was clearly recognizable. The manager barely even glanced at her, but he seemed irritated.

Kent frowned. "I was given to understand that I was done for the day."

The older man smiled grimly. "Plans change."

"I'm sorry," Clark said, turning to Lois. "Apparently the stage awaits. Perhaps we'll meet again."

"I'm sure we will," Lois murmured.

He strode off in the direction of the theater. Lois watched him speculatively. If she was going to be with him whenever he made his jump in time, she'd have to get to know him.

The older man was still looking at her.

"Can I help you?" she asked, irritably.

"He's not for the likes of you," the man said.

"Excuse me?" Lois asked, focusing fully on the man for the first time. "What exactly are you trying to say?"

"You aren't the first and you certainly won't be the last woman to try to...lure him away from his true calling." The man shook his head and smiled, although the smile didn't reach his eyes. "It seems romantic; the life of an actor, but it is no life for a married man."

Lois stared at him. "Who says I want to get married?"

If anything, the man's expression darkened. "I think you will find that if you are not an honest woman he will have nothing to

do with you."

What was it with these people and prostitution?

"My interest in Mr. Kent is entirely aboveboard," Lois said. "I'm a reporter for the Daily Planet and I'd like to do an article on him."

From what she'd read of the man's ambitions, that should pique his interest.

"That hardly seems likely. This doesn't have anything to do with the society pages or female fripperies, and I'm given to understand that the Daily Planet hires men to do the real reporting," William Robinson stared at her. "Also, if they'd sent a reporter several hundred miles, they'd have sent word in advance."

Kicking him in the groin was looking alarmingly attractive, but Lois suspected it would get her kicked out of the hotel at the very least and possibly stuck in jail.

The last place she wanted to be was trapped while Clark Kent went on his little jaunt to the future. If she missed that window, she might be trapped here, and it was becoming more and more apparent that she didn't belong.

There were two world wars coming, and Lois would never be able to stop herself from getting involved, any more than she could have not tried to stop the 9/11 terror attacks. Yet there was no way to know how any of that would change the future.

Would her parents have met each other at all if the massive displacement of people from World War Two hadn't happened? How much would what she did here affect the future?

Was the future immutable, or would stepping on a butterfly lead to Pat Buchanan becoming president? Was everything predestined?

Time travel made her head hurt.

Lois noticed a little girl pointing at her. Her mother shushed her and hurriedly turned her away. She'd known her hairstyle would stick out, but a bad haircut wasn't any reason to point at a person.

It took her a moment to realize that no one passing by would look her in the eye.

She checked herself, fearing that her dress had been damaged in an embarrassing place. She didn't feel any drafts.

Yet somehow people were still looking at her strangely.

Lois couldn't understand why. It was like one of those puzzles where you looked at two pictures, with one only slightly different from the other. If the difference didn't jump out at you, you had to painstakingly search detail by detail.

Everything she was wearing seemed to fit the period, although she didn't know enough about current fashions to really tell.

It took almost five minutes to realize that it wasn't what she was wearing. It was what she wasn't wearing.

There were at least fifty people walking around, and with the exception of some of the children, everyone was wearing hats.

Lois scowled. If she'd known she was going to be stuck in the past she'd have bought a lot more period money.

Of course, if her hatlessness was what was making people call her a prostitute all the time, it needed to be corrected. Another dress might help. She suspected being seen in the same dress several days in a row wouldn't help her prostitute reputation.

She'd have to gamble everything on following Clark Kent into the time stream. If she stayed even a day later, it seemed she'd be penniless.

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Lois felt exhausted and overwhelmed. Apparently finding an off the shelf dress was impossible and women changed hats more often than they changed shoes in her own century. Bras hadn't been invented yet.

The woman hadn't understood her adamant refusal to wear a

corset. Even if she'd been inclined to wear a medieval torture device in the service of fashion, it didn't seem like the kind of thing that would be easy to put on without someone's help.

Fashion was, if anything even more complicated than it had been in her day.

Apparently the dress she was wearing was an evening dress; the fact that she was wearing it in the early morning probably wasn't helping the impression she was making.

There were so many small rules in any society and it was easy to make social gaffes. If she didn't get out when Clark Kent did, she'd be stuck here, a prospect that seemed less appealing every minute.

Unfortunately, she couldn't just follow him around for the next two days. Although Lois had some experience in doing stakeouts, this wasn't the kind of urban environment where you could blend in with the crowd until someone did something you could report on. He'd already seen her face.

She needed some kind of excuse to stay close to him.

At least she didn't have to ask about asking around for his room number. That had been prominent in the information in the hotel museum; presumably so that guests could pay a little more to visit the "haunted" room. The last thing she needed was more scandal.

In her own time she'd have been able to threaten to sue for discrimination, or to write negative articles about the hotel. She had a feeling though, that the desk clerk would be more than happy to evict her if Clark's manager complained.

She'd have to be careful.

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His door opened. In contrast to his wary expression the first time they'd met, he looked almost glad to see her.

"I didn't get a chance to introduce myself," Lois said. "My name is Lois Lane. I'm a reporter for the theater section of the Daily Planet."

For some reason the pleasure in his expression smoothed into something more guarded and neutral.

"I'd like to write a profile on you...on the entire troupe, but most especially on you."

"Why?" He asked. "I'm just an actor playing the circuit in the middle of the country. Shouldn't you be writing about one of the real success stories in Broadway?"

Lois forced herself to shrug. "I'm a woman, Mr. Kent. Do you think editors would trust me to write about anybody really important?"

It galled her to say it, considering that she'd spent her entire career fighting to prove that not only was she just as good as any man, but better. Yet if the prejudice still existed in the twenty-first century, how much worse must it be now, a hundred years earlier.

William Robinson's assessment might be closer to accurate than she was comfortable with.

She didn't want to spend the rest of her career reporting on flowers and women's fashions, so she had to convince Clark Kent to keep her.

Something of her anxiety must have shown on her face, because he relaxed.

"What would you have me do?"

"Well, I'd like to write a piece about what an actor's life is like. If it's possible I'd like to shadow you for the next couple of days."

"Shadow me?"

"Follow you around and write about the things that happen."

Lois smiled, hoping that it reached her eyes. In this situation her anxiety only made her story seem more plausible.

"I can't imagine that anyone would find my life all that interesting."

"You get to travel," Lois said. "Pretend to be romantic heroes, villains. You get to meet people, live a life that most

people never get to experience."

At this time in history, if Lois remembered correctly, most people never traveled farther than twenty miles from home in their entire lives.

"It's about the same everywhere you go," Clark Kent said.

"My readers don't know that," Lois said. "At least not the less wealthy ones."

Of course, people reading the theater pages were probably wealthier than most. She'd just have to push through and pretend that wasn't a stupid thing to say.

"You've spoken to my manager about this?"

"He refused to believe that a woman could be a reporter for anything other than the fashion pages," Lois said. "I'd like to prove him wrong."

Hesitating, Clark said, "You aren't intending to write a negative piece about the troupe, are you? William can be quite protective..."

"I swear I'm not going to write a negative piece about anyone," Lois said.

That was true enough. She wasn't going to write any piece.

"All right," he said.

"Your manager might not approve," Lois warned.

Shaking his head, Clark Kent said "I'll deal with him."

"One other thing," Lois said. "What did you mean when you asked me if it was me?"

Clark laughed, uneasily. "It was foolish of me."

Lois didn't speak, just waiting expectantly.

He sighed. "I spoke to a medium once. She knew things that...she couldn't know. She told me that I would meet a woman who would end my life as I know it."

Lois froze. "And you thought that women might be me?"

He flushed again. "There were things she told me that led me to think so."

No matter how she asked, he wouldn't say more on the matter.

Of course going into his room was out of the question. Lois could see that Clark Kent didn't even consider it. She had to remind herself that this wasn't an era where women reporters went into male locker rooms. This was a different time, and she had to adjust to it.

Instead, he offered to buy her lunch. As much as she would have preferred to pay for her own meal. Lois was actually grateful. Even though she only had a couple of days to go, hopefully, her funds were limited and every bit helped.

"I haven't done this before," he said, offering his arm as he escorted her down the hallway. His forearm felt firm and muscular through his sleeve, more like what she'd have expected from a farm hand than an actor.

"Escorted a woman?" Lois asked.

"Been interviewed. I'm not exactly sure what would be of interest to your readers. My life seems perfectly ordinary to me."

Lois smiled up at him. "Don't worry. Part of a reporter's job is to ask the questions, then cut the story down into just the interesting parts. It's a little like being a sculptor."

"Like Michelangelo saying he just chips away everything that didn't look like David."

Lois blinked. That was an educated response. Her impression of the past was that people were mostly poorly educated and poorly read.

"I wouldn't have expected the son of a farmer to know anything about Michelangelo."

He stiffened almost imperceptibly, but relaxed a moment later and smiled. "We're not all ignorant rubes in the middle of the country. I've talked to enough people from Metropolis and New York to know what you think of us."

"I thought most people from Kansas were in one room school houses," Lois said. Although she wasn't really writing the story

he thought she was writing, it might make an interesting piece if she got back to her own time.

"You know more about me than most people," he said, frowning.

"I don't know a lot," Lois said. "Just a little preliminary research."

"I know Robinson wouldn't have told you anything. He doesn't particularly want me speaking with you at all."

He'd agreed to the interview. Why would he have done that if he had something to hide in his past? Surely he wasn't really so naïve as to believe she wouldn't ask. Of course, this was an era where no one had ever seen an investigative report on television or even on the radio.

It would be more than a quarter of a century before people would panic when they heard the War of the Worlds broadcast.

"I don't really know much more than the bare basics," Lois said. She prodded. "I wouldn't have expected a one room schoolhouse to have provided more than the basics."

"Smallville got lucky," he admitted. "The schoolmarm was college educated and very dedicated in her work. I was in the top of my class."

Going to college wasn't very common in these days, as far as Lois could recall. Even high school was only really coming into its own now.

"She taught me Greek and Latin and German," he continued, "As I was the only student she thought might make it to college."

"I would have thought college would be hard to afford for a farmer," Lois said. "From what I understand farming isn't all that profitable."

"The better everyone gets at farming, the lower prices go," Clark admitted. "It's a difficult life. The farm became much more profitable after I was old enough to help out, and there were a few good years."

"So you went to college?"

"I went to Fairmount College in Wichita," Clark said. "It was only twenty miles from Smallville and I was able to visit my parents once a month."

She'd never heard of Fairmount; of course it might have gone out of business in the next one hundred years.

His steps faltered. "I sometimes think that if I hadn't been so selfish, I might have been able to protect them."

"From typhoid?" Lois asked.

He looked at her sharply. "I'd be very interested to know where you get your information."

"I understand there was an outbreak four years ago," Lois said.

"I was...traveling between semesters," Clark said. "I'd always been good at spotting contaminated foods. My parents said I was their lucky charm. There was a church social...some of the food was tainted. Almost a third of the people there died."

"If you'd been there you'd have gotten sick too," Lois said.

Shaking his head, Clark said, "I'd have known."

"Nobody could have known," Lois said. "You'd have eaten just like everyone else, and you'd have been sick too."

Clark stared into space. "It took them a month to die. With everything I can..." He hesitated and glanced at her. "I couldn't save them no matter what I tried."

Lois patted his arm. "I'm sure you did everything you could."

"You are very easy to talk to," Clark said. "It would be easy for a person to tell you all their secrets?"

"You have secrets?" Lois asked archly.

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"I haven't told anyone about my parents," Clark said. "I'm not sure I'd be comfortable having it be public knowledge."

They were sitting in the hotel dining room, which seemed elegant.

"It doesn't seem like the sort of thing that theater patrons

would be interested in," Lois said. "I'll try to be discreet."

"You seem very, experienced at this," Clark said. "Much more than I would have expected from..."

"A woman?" Lois asked archly.

"From someone working on the theater section of the paper," Clark said carefully. "You aren't much like what I would have expected from a theater columnist."

"What would you have expected?"

Clark sipped his wine. "In my experience, theater patrons tend to be very careful about how they dress. They change clothes several times a day."

This again? Lois should have made up an excuse about losing her luggage. It was substantially true anyway.

"They tend to be much more reserved and demure."

"It's a new century," Lois said. "Maybe it's time for women to stand up for themselves, get the vote."

"You are a suffragette?"

"Absolutely. It won't be long until women get the vote, I can guarantee you." Lois hesitated. "You don't approve?"

Clark smiled, and what had been a handsome face became considerably more so. "My mother was a suffragette. She always said that she had more sense than my father and he didn't disagree with her."

"I'm sure he was a wise man," Lois said, allowing herself a small smile.

"It just seems refreshing," Clark continued. "To meet a woman who cares more about matters of substance than about looks."

"I'm sure there are other modern women out there," Lois said, taking a drink from her glass. "They can't all be throwbacks to the last century."

"Maybe I haven't spent enough time in the big cities," Clark admitted.

Lois shrugged. She picked at her food.

"You don't care for your food?"

"I'm not used to food that's this...rich."

He looked sympathetic, and Lois grimaced. He probably thought she was too poor to appreciate the menu, but that wasn't it at all. Everything was made with real ingredients — real fat, real sugar, real lard. It tasted delicious, but she wasn't sure her stomach could take it.

If she didn't follow him to her own time in two days, she wasn't sure she'd be able to fit in her one dress.

Although only of average height in her own time, and thin, compared to the other women here she was tall. The people were all slightly shorter, but much thinner than she was used to.

"That's a pity," Clark said. "Good food is one of life's pleasures."

"I've heard that it might not be particularly good for your health," Lois said. She winced internally as he took another bite. This food was a heart attack on a plate.

He smiled. "I'm not worried."

That smile again. It bothered her that she noticed it.

Normally she was able to dismiss handsome men as being shallow or vain. Clark though had none of the preening arrogance she'd come to expect from handsome men in Metropolis.

Actors in general tended to have that strange combination of arrogance and insecurity. Clark...for some reason she was thinking of him as Clark now instead of as Clark Kent, seemed to have none of that.

She hadn't met anyone as comfortable with himself in a long time.

Maybe it was just because he was the only one not assuming she was a whore, but he seemed like a very reasonable kind of person.

For the first time Lois began to feel a little guilty that she was eagerly awaiting the complete disruption of his life.

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“My mother miscarried a number of times,” Clark said. “My birth was her last chance...by the time I was born she was in her forties.”

A few glasses of wine were leaving Lois feeling a little flushed, but fortunately Clark seemed perfectly willing to do most of the talking. Her biggest worry was that he would ask something about modern 1912 Metropolis that she didn't know.

However, he seemed more than happy to talk about himself. It was almost as though once the floodgates were opened he couldn't help but talk.

She had the impression that he rarely talked with anyone about his past.

“She always called me her miracle. When I was young she always told me that I'd come on a shooting star.”

“That's nice,” Lois said. “Your parents sound like the kind of people I'd have been fortunate to know.”

Clark looked down at his plate, which was now mostly empty. “They made me who I am today.”

“So why theater?” Lois asked. “Most people don't go to college these days to learn the stage, do they?”

“I wanted to be a writer,” Clark admitted. “But of course, that's a difficult profession in which to gain entry. Journalism seemed a good alternative career.”

Lois simply sat and stared at him with one eyebrow raised.

He looked down at his plate again. “After my parents' deaths, I was consumed by guilt. I should have saved them. If I'd been there, I could have. When Robinson offered me the chance to be someone other than me, I jumped at the chance.”

“How did he even find you?”

“A medium he trusted told him,” Clark said. “I had no idea I even had any talent in theater, but I'm told that I'm quite good.”

“I'd like to see that,” Lois said.

“I've arranged for a ticket to tonight's show to be waiting,” Clark said.

At her look of surprise he said, “Surely you can't write about the troupe without seeing a sample of our work. Otherwise all you have is hearsay, and that would be doing a disservice to your readers.”

Ah...the fake story.

There was a good chance that her new dress wouldn't be ready in time. The last thing Lois wanted was for Clark to see her as a homeless woman, even if at the moment that's exactly what she was.

When had she begun to care what he thought about her? She didn't really care what anyone here thought about her, other than a general sort of irritation at their troglodyte customs and their insistence on thinking she was some sort of prostitute.

Yet Clark was already seeming more like a person than anyone here.

What she needed was to step back, to be a little more objective. She couldn't afford to let her feelings get involved. He was her ticket home, nothing more, and she'd have to remember that, even if she was beginning to feel a little guilty about it.

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“I'm not sure I can move,” Lois said. “That was more than I'm used to eating.”

Stepping out onto the lawn of the Grand Hotel, Lois was again struck by how beautiful it was. If anything, it was even more beautiful now than it had been in her own time.

“You barely touched your food,” Clark said. He sounded surprised.

“Not everybody has the metabolism of a farm hand. Some of us have to watch our figures.”

The man had eaten a startling amount of food for someone so trim. Of course, people these days did more physical labor, but he was an actor, not a stevedore. Maybe he helped move sets around.

“A walk after lunch does wonders for the constitution,” Clark said. He offered his arm again.

She nodded. It surprised her how comfortable she was with this man. He should have repelled her, like the other men she'd encountered here. They were primitive meatheads as far as she was concerned, but Clark would have easily fit into her own time.

He was more polite than the men of her time, more gallant, but somehow Lois was able to accept it from him. She'd have protested when men of her own time tried to pull out her chair for her or open the door; women had fought long and hard for equality.

Yet from what she could discern, Clark didn't look down on women at all, at least not to the extent his compatriots did.

Gallantry was a sign of respect, not of exerting power.

“A penny for your thoughts?”

Pennies were worth a lot more in this time than in her own.

“It's beautiful here,” Lois said. “Almost like a dream. Back home in Metropolis, it's...busier.”

“Cities have their own unique fragrance,” Clark admitted. “I've been to New York, Chicago, Atlanta and New Orleans. Horse manure, the smell of wood and coal fires, the smells of a thousand meals being prepared...it's surprising that you city dwellers have any sense of smell left at all.”

“It smells good here,” Lois admitted. The fact that her own Metropolis wasn't anything like that at all wasn't something she could share with him.

They walked out onto the lawn. People were out enjoying the sun. Many of the women carried umbrellas despite their hats, another thing Lois had missed.

For some reason, she was having the strangest feeling of déjà vu.

To cover her sudden uneasiness, she asked “Have you had a lot of experience in cities?”

“The summer before my parents' deaths I traveled extensively. I made friends in many places. I stayed with one fellow in New York. He lived in a tenement, with dark hallways and tiny, sweltering rooms. Like a lot of his neighbors he'd sleep on the roof when the weather got too warm. We watched a meteor shower.”

“I'd have thought there would be too much light to see the stars,” Lois said.

“It was late,” Clark said. “After most people had banked their fires.”

Frowning, Lois said, “What about the electric lights?”

Clark shrugged. “It's not as though people leave them on all night. Most people have to work early, and my friend's neighbors weren't the kind who could afford electrical lighting.”

He glanced at her. “I suppose a reporter's life is different.”

Shrugging uncomfortably, Lois said, “Most theater is done by night. If you are a reporter you have to adjust your schedule to that of the people you are reporting on.”

The fact that those two statements were not connected didn't mean they weren't individually true. Lois wasn't sure why she felt reluctant to lie to Clark.

Maybe it was because it felt like lying to a condemned man.

Clark was a good man, and he didn't deserve whatever was about to happen to him. For a moment Lois felt tempted to tell him. Maybe they could change things, have her jump through and have him remain here where he belonged.

The future couldn't be immutable, could it?

She looked up at Clark and hesitated.

Clark glanced to the side and smiled slightly. By the time she was able to turn it was already too late. A man was standing with an old timey camera on a tripod, taking in the scene.

He'd only gotten her profile looking up at Clark, but the picture of Clark was undoubtedly visible.

Now she knew why she was having that strange feeling of

having been here before. She'd seen these people, all of them in the photograph she'd seen when researching Clark and his life.

The mystery woman looking up at Clark with the same haircut Lois had and wearing the same dress... Lois hadn't realized at the time that she was looking at herself.

Where did the dress come from? Lois found herself suddenly wondering. For some reason, if things played out the way they seemed destined to, she would leave her dress behind. It would eventually find its way to the shop where she'd bought it, only for her to bring it here.

Just how many times had the dress made that loop, and why wasn't it just tattered rags?

There was so much she didn't understand, and there wasn't anyone who actually knew anything real about time travel.

As far as she knew, Lois was currently the only living person who had actually experienced time travel. That made her the expert, she supposed.

"I'll be right back," Clark said.

She looked up at him, confused.

It took her a moment to realize that she'd agreed to something without really listening to what she'd agreed to. Clark pulled away from her and she couldn't help but feel a little bereft.

He was the only person she even remotely knew in this time period. Even her great grandparents wouldn't be born for a few more years, and they'd died when she was young.

She saw him step down to the dock, where he spoke to a man who stood beside a group of rowboats.

He wasn't expecting her to get out onto the water, was he?

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It wasn't as bad as she'd thought. He'd helped her into the boat, lifting her as though she weighed nothing and setting her gently inside.

Most of the men she knew would have strained to lift her up like that, at an awkward angle. It wasn't that she was heavy or that they were particularly weak. It was just that the men of her era didn't do the kind of physical labor Clark apparently did.

It was peaceful, actually, gliding over the water which was as still as glass.

"Are you happy?" Lois couldn't help but ask. Maybe having his life disrupted would actually be doing him a favor. Robinson seemed like a controlling ass.

"Here? Now?" Clark asked. He smiled suddenly. "I can't remember being this happy in a long time."

It took Lois a moment to realize that her cheeks felt warm. That wasn't what she'd meant at all, but she was suddenly aware that there was something in the way he was looking at her. It wasn't the look of a man who was being interviewed.

"I mean with what you do," Lois said. "You said you wanted to be a writer."

Clark leaned forward to lift the oars out of the water before pulling back. He'd done this before, apparently. His movements were efficient. He'd taken his jacket off and rolled up his sleeves and she was suddenly very aware of his arms.

It was ridiculous, being attracted by a man's forearms. Was this what it was like for men of this era, everything so covered up that even the sight of an ankle was scandalous?

He stopped and the boat continued to glide silently through the still waters.

"I'm liked," he said. "And I have prospects. With luck, if the troupe does well I may get a chance to write my own plays. I'm content with my life."

That was more than Lois had ever been able to say about her own life. Nothing had ever been enough; she'd always been after the next big story, the next Kerth, the elusive Pulitzer. Content had never even been in her vocabulary.

Before today, she'd have thought the idea of rowing silently across a lake to be boring. She'd have been checking her

telephone repeatedly for updates, looking for the latest news, or worrying about her next story.

Just sitting in contented silence would have been inconceivable. Yet somehow she was able to simply sit and watch Clark row and she found herself fascinated.

Most of the men she knew would have been uncomfortable in the silence as well. They'd have felt pressured to say something inane.

Clark, though, looked as though he was perfectly comfortable to sit and row and let her carry the conversation or not.

The first clue she had that things were about to change was a feeling of wetness on her nose. The smooth tranquility of the water around them was broken, first by one drop and then by another.

Maybe the women carrying umbrellas weren't just slaves to fashion after all.

Instead of looking dismayed, Clark simply grinned at her and rowed faster. It was only a moment before it felt like they were flying across the water.

The lighthouse that she'd seen before loomed in the distance.

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Running with a sort of reckless abandon, Lois felt a strange sort of joy. Clark was holding her hand and her feet splashed through the water as they ran.

It was exhilarating to be in the rain and not be cursing and fighting for a taxi.

She couldn't remember the last time she'd simply held hands with a man. It was a simple pleasure, but it almost made her feel like a child again.

There was no one here to look over her shoulder or to criticize. She wasn't competing with anyone.

Only the raindrops, the puddles and the hand of a man she was becoming increasingly comfortable with existed in this moment.

Looking up at Clark, she searched for any censure, any suggestion that she was being childish. She'd learned early in life not to argue that since she was in fact a child being childish was perfectly normal.

Her father had expected a little adult, and her mother had needed one.

Her childhood had been all too short, and there hadn't been very many moments of simply splashing through puddles without worrying about her shoes or clothes.

Clark was grinning at her as he ran, her hand in one hand and his jacket thrown over his right shoulder. Lois couldn't help but laugh. Unfortunately, looking at Clark instead of where she was going wasn't particularly smart.

Her foot somehow found an exposed root, and she found herself falling forward.

Somehow Clark was there before she even realized he'd moved. He scooped her up and a moment later he was carrying her as he rushed toward the lighthouse.

This felt even more like flying.

He carried her effortlessly, as though she didn't weigh anything.

Before she could say anything they reached the lighthouse. With the sky overcast above them, Clark slid into the open door of the red and white square brick lighthouse.

The interior seemed to be filled with boilers and equipment. At least it was warm.

For a moment longer than she would have expected, he held her. He looked down at her for a moment, the smile gone from his face.

He carefully set her down, and now it was Lois's turn to hold on to him a little longer than was appropriate. She leaned against him, and then found herself shivering.

His clothes were plastered against him, but they couldn't

have been as revealing as Lois's dress. She didn't dare look down at herself.

Clark's eyes never left her face as he pulled his jacket gently over her shoulders.

Against all expectations, it was warm.

Staring up at him, Lois couldn't help but notice that despite the chill his body was warm. As he slipped the coat over her shoulders, it was warm as well. It shouldn't have been; he hadn't been wearing it on the boat or on the run to the lighthouse. The day had been overcast.

Yet somehow it was.

Impossible things seemed to happen around Clark. Seeing his picture, being drawn back in time, now this. If she didn't know any better, she'd think he really had arrived on a star.

For some reason she couldn't stop staring up at him. Her mouth felt dry suddenly and she licked her lips.

His eyes darted down to her lips and then quickly away. He flushed.

"I should have paid more attention to the weather," he said. "I'm usually more alert, but I find myself...distracted."

As far as Lois was concerned, knowing what the weather would be like was like reading a crystal ball even with the help of the National Weather Service. Reading the wind and the sky seemed like magic, and she couldn't fault him for something she'd have been clueless about.

"It's not as though you could know the weather," Lois said.

"When I was a farmer it was my job to know. I can see farther than most," he said. "Normally I never would have put you in this position."

For a moment, Lois was confused. Other than a wet dress, semi-transparent as it might be, what position had he put her in?

"A man and woman alone, without a chaperone," he said, "It can lead to some...difficulty."

"You're worried about my reputation?" Lois asked incredulously. She wasn't sure why it surprised her so much.

Maybe it was the fact that she'd thought he wanted to kiss her and she was disappointed.

"A man's reputation is easy enough to lose," he said gently. "A woman's is even more fragile."

Lois supposed that was true, even in her own time. People engaged in slut-shaming, vicious gossip, back biting and professional jealousies led to other sorts of outrages. Yet in her own time, most neighbors didn't know their neighbors, at least not in the big city.

People didn't care what those outside their immediate circle did, unless they were a celebrity.

Now, though...Lois could only imagine how bad it would get if she was found alone with a handsome man if just showing up in the wrong dress made the concierge call her a slut.

"Well," she said. "Maybe we aren't alone."

He glanced up at the ceiling and said, "I am fairly certain that we are."

At her expression he continued. "The lighthouse keeper usually goes to breakfast at this time. His job is mostly at night and so he breaks his fast when most are having lunch."

"So he leaves this open and unlocked? Anyone could just come in here and steal or destroy anything they want?"

"Why would they want to?" he asked, seeming puzzled. "There's nothing of value here."

Lois hesitated. She wanted to explain, but she'd never really understood herself why some people felt compelled to destroy beautiful things for no other reason than that they were there.

She shivered despite the warmth of the coat.

He frowned slightly, and then took her hands in his own. She hadn't realized how cold her hands were until she felt the welcome warmth of his hands.

It was as though the sudden chill to the air didn't affect him

at all. Whereas she was shivering, his hands were rock steady.

She stared down at her hands in his, and for some reason she found herself flushing again.

He was silent, and Lois found herself searching for something to say. Somehow the silence wasn't uncomfortable; instead it was pregnant with meaning.

"I don't spend much time outside," she admitted.

Clark chuckled. "I can tell. No umbrella, no gloves. Your hands feel like ice, and it's not even all that cold."

"I'm sure it doesn't seem cold compared to the farm," Lois said, pulling her hands out of his, "But winters in Metropolis are better spent indoors."

He stared down at his hands for a moment. At first Lois thought it was because she'd pulled away, but a moment later she realized she'd misjudged him. He was rubbing the finger of one hand.

Before she could react, he grabbed her hand, turned it over and rubbed as her wrist.

Her wrist had taken longer to begin bruising than her throat, but she'd covered it with concealer as well. She wasn't even sure when she'd gotten hurt; it might have been when the thug was holding on to her as they were making their journey backward through time.

"Who did this?" he asked.

For the first time she heard anger in his voice.

His eyes scanned up and down, as though he could somehow magically see through the makeup. His lips pursed even more.

"Being a reporter isn't always safe," Lois said.

"The theater pages can't be that dangerous," Clark protested. "Unless Metropolis is much different than every other city I've ever been to."

Her Metropolis was, but Lois couldn't go into that, of course.

"It was Robinson who assumed I worked the theater pages," Lois said.

"Still," Clark said.

"My editor sent me here to do an easy story, to get me out of Metropolis until it was safer," Lois admitted. "I was reporting on organized crime, and some of the people I was reporting on were dangerous."

"I can only imagine," Clark said.

He kept staring at her wrists and for some reason her neck. Lois wondered if the concealer had somehow washed off in the rain. It was supposed to be waterproof, but you couldn't always trust the label.

"A man who would do this to a woman...he isn't a man at all." Clark's voice was low and controlled, but she could hear suppressed anger in it.

"You aren't going to tell me this is why women shouldn't get involved in real reporting?"

"The Daily Planet is one of the best newspapers in the world," Clark said. "If its editor trusted you to report on significant news, it must mean that you are better than good at what you do."

Lois flushed again. Praise about her looks had never meant all that much; it was superficial and she had never understood why many men thought that would be impressive. Her looks were the result of good genes. She could highlight them with makeup and clothing, but at the end of the day looks weren't an accomplishment.

She'd worked long and hard in her career, though, and she was proud of that fact. Even though things were slowly changing, she still had to work twice as hard to get half the credit.

Of course, she'd have had to have been even better in 1912, and she felt a little guilty for misleading him.

"I work hard," she said.

"But it occurs to me that men who would do...this wouldn't hesitate to follow you halfway across the country if you caused

them enough trouble.”

“I...” Lois said, then hesitated.

From what she knew of Clark, he was a brave man. There were records of his rushing into fire to rescue people, part of the reason he was still remembered a hundred years later, along with his ghost.

And did she really know if the thug wasn't around somewhere? They'd gotten separated in the time stream, but he might have simply arrived a little later.

If he was feeling protective, it would only make it easier for her to stay near him until the time came for his journey out of this life. Being so manipulative never bothered her with a criminal; they deserved everything they got. She couldn't help but feel a stab of guilt at being this way with Clark.

“I'm not sure,” she admitted.

Clark was silent for a long moment. “I promise you this...I will protect you. As long as I am with you, you will not come to harm.”

He said it as though it was some sort of great declaration.

In Lois's world, promises were ephemeral. People broke promises almost as quickly as they made them. Nobody went around making great declarations, because the world changed too quickly.

Yet there was something about the way Clark looked at her when he said it. It was like a knight making an oath.

A chill went down Lois's spine.

Hadn't he kept his promise?

A half dozen times throughout her life he'd been there.

Somehow, impossibly, hundreds of miles and a lifetime away, he'd found a way to keep his promise.

“I believe you,” Lois said.

He looked her in the eye for a moment, then smiled.

“Apparently we're the lucky ones, to get the big city reporter away from the stories that matter.”

“I never said theater didn't matter!” Lois protested. “It's just not as...challenging...as corruption, vice or politics.”

“A great play can touch people's hearts. It can widen their view of the world.”

As far as Lois was concerned, plays were occasionally entertaining, but rarely enlightening. Of course, she rarely had time for them.

“I haven't seen many,” Lois admitted. At his look, she rushed to explain. “My work has been my life. It doesn't allow a lot of time for other things.”

“You don't even have time to go to a Nickelodeon?” Clark asked.

“I'm not sure I've ever seen even one,” Lois admitted.

She wasn't exactly sure what Nickelodeons were; in her mind she had vague images of men in bowler hats staring into a metal machine at hula girls.

“Although it's a poor substitute for the theater, it's much cheaper and more convenient,” Clark said. “A nickel, and these days, films last almost fifteen minutes.”

“I've always thought they were...”

“Middle class?” he asked. “There are nicer theaters now. It's not just folding chairs in a back room anymore. You must have come from a wealthier family.”

“My father was a doctor,” Lois admitted.

“I'd have thought you'd have gotten to see more theater, then. Many doctors are very concerned about their standing in the community.”

“My father was more concerned about the work,” Lois said.

“You have no brothers?” Clark asked.

Lois shook her head.

“I suppose like many men he wanted a boy to take up the mantle once he was gone?”

Not answering was as much an admission as outright

admitting to something, but Lois found that she couldn't even look at Clark.

“What if he did?”

“You are different from any woman I've ever met,” Clark was silent for a moment then said, “You don't worry about the usual things women worry about...fashion, clothes, your reputation.”

Why did everyone keep harping on her clothes?

“I've been around enough women to know that most worry obsessively about details men don't notice at all. Which shoes go with what dress, which hat goes with which shawl...”

Her shoes didn't match her dress? What kind of man noticed that?

A man in the theater, apparently.

“They worry about getting married and having children.”

“How do you know I'm not married?” Lois said, challengingly.

“You are a good woman. You wouldn't leave a husband or children behind while you fled to safety,” he said. He glanced down at her hand, which obviously didn't have any rings.

“How could you possibly know that? You don't know me.”

“You are braver than most men,” Clark said. “After being assaulted, most women and many men would be overwhelmed. You act as though it is nothing more than a mild impediment.”

“There are brave people who are evil,” Lois said. She wasn't sure why she was arguing, except that she'd had too many people make assumptions about her.

“Evil people don't try to fight corruption, they revel in it,” Clark said. “They don't risk themselves for others; they let others take the risks for them.”

“All you have is my word that I do any of that,” Lois said. “I could be lying.”

“I'd know,” he said firmly. “And I trust you.”

The feeling of guilt that had been gnawing at her was getting more intense the longer they talked. Clark wasn't just innocent. Everything she saw said that he was a good man. He wasn't just handsome; he was intelligent and perceptive.

He called her a good woman, but was she really? At the very least he was going to be displaced in time, and maybe lost forever.

Did she have the right to call herself a good person if she went along with that, even if it was to go back to her own time?

Maybe the future wasn't immutable. Was he destined to lose everything, or could the future be changed?

Did she have any right to make that decision for him?

The urge to warn him was growing, no matter what the cost might be for her.

“Clark...” Lois said hesitantly.

She couldn't believe she was even bringing this up. If he believed her she might lose the future. If he didn't, she might end up in an old-time insane asylum. In no version did she see a good ending for her.

Yet if she didn't tell him, what kind of person would she be?

Was she the kind of person who could possibly send someone else to his death just so she could get home?

She hesitated, thinking of everything she would be losing. In her own world she was treated as almost an equal. Here, she would always be looked down on. No matter how good she was, she would always be a little like a trained monkey; amusing, but not something to be taken seriously.

Her entire lifetime and its body of work would be lost. She would never see Lucy or her parents again. She would lose Perry and Jimmy.

She'd be trapped in a time before antibiotics, before birth control. In only two years the world was going to war; in six years the Spanish flu would kill a sizeable portion of the world population.

Living here, in this time, she'd always be a fish out of water. She would know what was coming; the horrors of the both world wars, of trench warfare and of the Holocaust. She'd doubtless make countless mistakes that people who were born to this time would notice.

She'd never be able to force herself in the tiny life that most women here had.

Yet wasn't part of the reason she'd become a reporter was to change the world? If time was changeable, and Clark didn't go forward, that would mean that other things could be changed as well.

She might be able to alter the outcome of things to come, stop Hitler before he ever came to power, create a new world better than the one she'd come from.

Either time was immutable, in which case telling Clark wouldn't matter, or it could be changed.

If it could be changed, didn't she owe it to the world to at least try?

Clark simply stood, staring at her. She'd been standing silent for several seconds as she debated.

Ultimately she would have to live with whatever she decided. Was she the person that Clark obviously thought she was, or was she the person she'd always assumed herself to be in Metropolis?

There was no guarantee that she herself would survive a second trip through the time vortex. There had been no sign of the thug who'd come with her after all, and for all she knew he'd been thrust out into the depths of outer space, or been trapped in a permanent loop, doomed to spend eternity reliving the same times until he died.

Yet there had never been any question in her mind that she was going to try to go back. Clark represented her only chance to get home. Although other portals might exist, finding them would be almost impossible and might take decades.

"Clark," she said finally. "Do you believe that there is more to the world than what we can see?"

"Are you asking if I am a God-fearing man?"

"No, I'm not talking about religion. I'm talking about other things..." Lois hesitated, unsure of how to continue.

"If you are asking about spiritualism, I wasn't sure until I met Robinson's medium," Clark said. "After one meeting, though, I was a believer."

In Lois's experience, psychics were mostly frauds. She'd done a report once on some of the underhanded tactics they used to draw in the gullible. They were often very good observers of subtle cues. That and the power of suggestion, along with a handful of other tricks was more than enough to separate the gullible from their money.

She was a little disappointed that Clark had been so easily taken, but now wasn't the time to argue.

"What about..."

She didn't have time to complete her sentence.

A strange expression on Clark's face was followed by a sigh. "We must depart quickly."

"What?" Lois asked. "Why?"

"The lighthouse keeper is on his way back. If he finds us here, alone, he's certain to spread all sort of unspeakable rumors."

The rain had mostly stopped, although a few drops were still falling here and there. Before Lois could protest, Clark pulled her outside.

He pulled at her hand and she had no choice but to follow. They made their way quickly around the square brick building, and just as she made her way around the corner, Lois saw the lighthouse keeper in the distance.

The man had to be at least a hundred yards away, walking silently over wet grass. He wasn't whistling or making any noises in particular, and he was looking at the ground and avoiding

walking in puddles.

How had Clark known?

He'd been facing away from the doorway; in any case the keeper wouldn't have been visible from the door. Yet he couldn't have heard the man, not from that far away.

Maybe the reason Clark was so gullible in the face of a fake psychic was that he was a real one?

Lois scowled. Now who was the gullible one?

There had to be a rational explanation. Just because portals in time existed didn't mean everything did. If she continued down this line of thought, she'd start believing in ghosts and angels. She'd be no better than those rednecks who thought aliens were real.

She might as well start writing for the National Inquisitor.

Telling Clark was the only decent thing to do, but she'd wait. She'd left her purse back in her room. If he saw her iPhone and a few of the other things in her purse, his chances of believing her would be a lot greater.

She'd be a lot less likely to end up in an old-style insane asylum. The last thing she needed was a lobotomy or electric shock.

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Her dress was the worse for wear, despite having mostly dried. It had a little mud on the hem, and Lois didn't want to look at the seat, even though Clark had gallantly draped his coat on the wet seat of the rowboat so she would have a place to sit.

If she'd been wearing mismatched clothes before, she looked like a ragamuffin now. Clark had been tactful enough not to say anything, but she knew what she looked like.

She wasn't sure what she was going to do without a dress. These people changed clothes several times a day, possibly due to the lack of air conditioning. It was going to be increasingly obvious as the evening went on that she was essentially homeless.

As she stalked through the lobby, she was surprised to be called over by the desk clerk.

"Your clothes have arrived," he said. "I took the liberty of having them sent to your rooms."

His tone was much more respectful than it had been earlier in the day. Lois wasn't certain why, but she was immediately suspicious.

Given Clark's concerns about rumors, Lois wondered if his manager had mentioned that she was a reporter for the Daily Planet.

He might be angling for a glowing report about the hotel. If she were actually writing for the current day paper, she'd give high marks for the hotel itself, but her report about the front desk staff might be considerably different.

"An older gentleman also came calling," he said.

Lois frowned. She didn't know anyone in this time period.

"Are you talking about Mr. Robinson?"

He shook his head. "Mr. Robinson is well known by the hotel staff."

"Then who is he?"

"He wouldn't give his name, but said that he would return at a more amenable time."

"I'm not expecting anyone," Lois said, frowning. "Maybe he has me confused with someone else."

"I wouldn't be able to say."

"Call my room if he comes around again," Lois said.

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As Lois stepped into the room, her mouth went dry.

There had to have been some mistake. The dress she'd ordered hadn't been anything like this. The dress she'd ordered had been simple, something she could afford.

This dress was beautiful.

It was a dream of lace and pure white chiffon, clearly another

evening gown, but of much higher quality than the gown she was wearing.

A note was lying on the bed.

She scanned it quickly. Apparently there had been an accident and the gown she'd ordered had been partially burned.

This gown had been ordered but never collected. Unlike many gowns, this one would require neither corset nor girdle. Apparently the owner had been struck by Lois's irritation at the idea of a corset.

She stared at it for a long moment. She still didn't have a day dress and would still be out of place, but she was only going to be around for one more evening.

As much as she wanted to try the dress on, she needed a shower first.

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It fit like a dream.

Staring at herself in the mirror, Lois couldn't believe what a transformation it made. She felt beautiful; a little like Eliza Doolittle on the night of the ball.

For the first time she regretted her pageboy haircut. Long hair was beautiful, but it was impractical for a woman as busy as Lois had been for the past few years. Her hair didn't get in the way, and it was easy to maintain, but her options were limited, especially given the time she had. She wouldn't have known where to find a hairdresser in this part of the country even in her own century.

The best she could do was use a clip to pull her hair back in a ponytail-bun using a hairclip. It wasn't one of the sophisticated hairstyles she'd seen the other women sporting, but it looked better with the dress at least.

She'd stand out less in the crowd, at least because of her hair, although the dress might just make up for it.

For some reason, the thought of Clark seeing her in the dress made her heart race.

She'd tell him tonight. She was to meet him before the play to wish him luck, then she'd see the play and they'd have a later dinner together.

Maybe the dress would make her news a little easier to bear.

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"I'm supposed to meet Clark Kent," she murmured.

Apparently this wasn't the best idea. Preparations for the play were ongoing and backstage cast members and the crew were rushing back and forth. Lois had to weave in and out among busy people who were impatient.

It was their last night, apparently, before the troupe moved on to their next venue. It was important to make a lasting impression.

She could hear the audience outside beginning to filter in to the auditorium.

Waiting until after the play would have been a better idea, but she'd agreed, and Clark had been emphatic about wanting to see her before the play.

Maybe he was still worried about her safety.

"Have you seen Clark Kent?" she asked a young stage hand.

"He's getting his photograph taken," the young man said. "In the back."

Lois nodded and slowly made her way through to the back area, which had been screened off. A cloth backdrop had been set up, and she could see a man with an old fashioned boxy camera.

He was the same man who had been taking the picture out on the lawn earlier in the day.

She wove her way through props and large stage pieces, and she overheard the man speaking.

"A little smile please."

Still unable to see, she stepped forward.

"It's still not quite right. Perhaps if you think of something happy or bright."

Lois stepped around a tarp. Clark was sitting on an armless stool, looking distinctly uncomfortable. His smile was patently false.

As she stepped into view, he looked up. His smile changed, becoming genuine, intimate.

It was a smile to be shared between lovers, even though they'd never even kissed. It was profoundly intimate, and yet seemed strangely familiar.

"There we go," the photographer said. There was a flash as the picture was taken.

Lois felt chills up and down her spine as she realized where she'd seen that smile before. When she'd first seen the picture, she'd thought no one would ever look at her that way, and it had made her feel profoundly sad.

She'd felt drawn to it, feeling that it almost seemed meant for her.

It would have been impossible to guess how true that was. The first time she'd seen the picture on the wall of the Grand Hotel, she'd fallen in love a little.

That was nothing compared to what she was feeling now.

A friend had once described to Lois her experience of wearing glasses for the first time. She'd enjoyed mountains, sunsets, and paintings before she'd gotten them, but she hadn't really known what she was missing. The moment she'd slipped them on, it was like a revelation. The entire world came into focus, and what she'd thought was pretty before became truly beautiful.

That's how Lois felt now.

She couldn't breathe, and her hands felt clammy, but she wasn't afraid.

Wanting to experience what her friends did, Lois had tried to imagine what it would be like. She'd been attracted to men at times, and amused by them more often, but none of them had ever really affected her on a visceral level.

She had realized that it could be a little painful.

Clark's smile slipped and he rose to his feet immediately. "Are you all right?"

Lois forced herself to smile. "I'm fine. I'm just excited to see the show."

For the first time that was actually true. She'd expected the play to be an old time, dreary bore, but now...

At the very least it would give her time to sort through her feelings before she had to talk to Clark again. He was far too perceptive, and if she wasn't careful he'd be able to ask anything of her.

He took her arm and was speaking to her, but she wasn't really following. All she could do was stare up at him dazedly.

Was this what it was like for everyone? How did the world keep from going crazy?

All too soon they were separated, and Lois found an usher leading her to her seat. Normally she hated waiting, whether it was for a play, a restaurant or even a source. She tolerated stakeouts because she had to, but they were never her favorite activity.

Now, however, she was almost grateful. She needed time to process.

She'd had to talk herself into the decision to tell Clark before, but now it was clear that she had no choice. She couldn't allow him to be trapped in the time vortex, no matter what the cost to her.

The thought of him being trapped forever in a timeless void had bothered her enough before, now it was intolerable.

Even if the best outcome occurred, and he was ejected into her own time, how would he survive?

He was a creature of this time. In the future he would be as much a fish out of water as Lois was in this time. He'd find the future distressingly fast paced and confusing, a horror show of

cars whizzing around at unimaginable speeds, of constant noise and smells.

She'd done a report on culture shock once. For the first few weeks, the new world was exciting, with fascinating differences and new things to learn. By the third month, the differences between the old culture and the new started to become apparent, and this often caused anxiety, frustration and anger.

The immigrant began to feel lonely and homesick.

It often took six to twelve months to adjust to the changes, and some people never did acclimate completely.

Unless he wanted to live with the Amish, Clark wouldn't be able to find a group of like-minded people to live with if he couldn't adjust.

There was a century of cultural references that he would have no way of relating to. He'd have no idea what television was, much less what the latest shows were about.

He'd have some advantages over the immigrants she'd interviewed. He spoke English fluently, even if he was more formal in his way of speaking than most people of her generation. He was able to speak multiple languages, although she had no way of knowing how fluent he was in them.

Many of the basic aspects of western culture hadn't changed since Clark's time.

Yet the technology would be bewildering to him.

Automobiles in this time were rare oddities. Computers hadn't even been imagined, at least not in the mind of the average person. The internet was a little bewildering at times even for her; she couldn't imagine what it would be like for a man of Clark's sensibilities.

Airplanes now were even rarer than cars. The concept of giant planes carrying hundreds of people would seem ludicrous.

Even if he was more adaptable than she suspected, there were other concerns.

He wouldn't have a birth certificate or a Social Security number. He wouldn't have a college degree or even a high school diploma that anyone would accept.

Without a work history or documentation it would be very difficult to find a job even waiting tables, especially in a post 9-11 world.

He'd be lucky to get agricultural work by waiting in the parking lot of a Home Depot.

Unfortunately, he didn't strike her as the sort of man who would be content to be a househusband, to stay at home and let her earn a living for the both of them.

His generation believed that men were supposed to be the providers, and she suspected he'd be frustrated and unhappy when he found that he couldn't.

She felt torn. There was no scenario that she could see that would leave them both happy. If she stayed, she'd have to deal with sexism, racism, and the knowledge that the world was about to enter a century of disease, war and famine.

If he came with her, he'd die inside.

Yet somehow, her leaving him behind would feel like ripping the heart from her chest.

It didn't make any sense; she'd barely known him a day, yet somehow he almost felt like a part of her. It felt like destiny, like he'd drawn her here to be with him.

Maybe staying wouldn't be as bad as she feared.

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The play wasn't as bad as she'd feared. It was an amusing farce, and whenever Clark came on stage it felt as though the room was brighter.

He'd found her in the crowd of hundreds of faces, and whenever he said a romantic line, it felt like he was speaking directly to her.

Although she might be biased, he seemed better at this than the actors around him. They weren't bad, but he stood out like a

rose among orchids.

In truth, the play flew by with Lois in a bemused daze.

She tried to reason with herself. It was stupid to fall for a man for a smile; she'd tried to talk friends in college out of similar stupidities. She barely even knew him, and even if what she'd seen had been very attractive, there was always a secret side to everyone.

On the other hand, he was guaranteed to have old-fashioned values — he could hardly help it due to his upbringing. He wasn't like Claude, likely to use and discard her without ever looking back. People put a lot more weight on relationships in this time. They committed in ways that Lois wasn't even sure were possible for the people of her generation.

He wasn't jaded and cynical like most of the men Lois met in Metropolis. Yet he wasn't innocent because he was a rube. He was intelligent and Lois couldn't dismiss him as some sort of country rube like she might have in her own time.

He wasn't a person out of his time, she was.

Back home Lois would have sworn that there wasn't a single man in the entire world that she could fall in love with.

Maybe she'd been right, which is why she had to find one in another world.

The thought occurred to her that she might be getting ahead of herself. Why was she already having fantasies of him being a househusband? Devastating smile aside, he hadn't given her any real sign of wanting to go anywhere with her.

True, legend had it that he hadn't been involved with anyone, but this wasn't an era where people could look through your cell phone records. It was possible to keep secrets here, at least outside of the small towns.

If he wasn't interested enough in her, she'd go home.

Was it crazy that her chest felt heavy? Everything was going to rest on his response to her tonight.

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"You've been quiet," Clark said. "Didn't you care for the play?"

Lois blinked. They were in the dining room in the hotel sitting next to large windows looking out into the darkness outside. She couldn't see anything but their reflection in the windows now.

"It was nice," she said.

"Words of faint praise often indicate subtle criticism," he said, frowning.

"I liked it, really. It's just..." she hesitated. "I've been a little distracted."

"Oh?"

"I've been thinking about the future."

He was silent for a long moment. "I must admit that I've been thinking about this as well."

"You have?"

"We live very different lives. I travel constantly and have no home; you live in the city; you have family and ties to the world. It was an act of providence that we ever met at all. Under normal circumstances our lives would never intersect again."

Lois found herself leaning forward in spite of herself.

"Yet I find myself drawn to you."

Reaching out, Lois touched his hand. She wasn't sure whether doing this in public was scandalous or not, but he didn't pull his hand away.

"I feel the same way."

"This isn't how things are normally done," he said.

"Normally I would approach your father for permission to see you, and we would have time to get to know each other."

"I haven't depended on my father for anything for years,"

Lois said.

The relief she felt was palpable. She'd hoped he'd feel the same way, but there had been no way to be sure.

"If we only had more time," he said. "Our troupe is to move on tomorrow, and I can only assume that you plan to return home soon."

"Tomorrow night," Lois admitted. "Unless circumstances change."

"Under normal circumstances, the woman goes wherever the man leads. In this case, though, that may not be wise."

"Oh?" Lois asked.

"You have an exceptional job, an opportunity so rare for a woman that many wouldn't believe it. I couldn't ask you to leave that for an ordinary life as a housewife."

Lois found herself looking at his hands.

Even though he had no idea about the unusual nature of their relationship, he had the same doubts she had. Maybe they weren't meant to be together.

It would be nature's cruel irony if she'd traveled all this way to meet a man like this only to lose him.

"It would be much more sensible for me to follow you,"

Clark said.

"What?" Lois asked.

"I know this is sudden, and I am not asking you to make a decision immediately. We need time to see if this between us is truly what it seems to be."

"You'd leave your job just for a chance to date me?" Lois asked.

"I'm not asking for your hand in marriage," Clark said. "Not yet. It would be a scandal for us to marry after knowing each other a few hours, and rightfully so. But if we both go on, we'll never get a chance to know if we might be suitable for each other."

"I...I don't know what to say," Lois said. "Don't you love this job?"

Clark shrugged. "It got me away from the farm. I couldn't stay; I kept seeing the ghosts of my parents. Memories of our life together...I'd have gone mad if I'd stayed."

"Your manager won't be pleased."

"I've returned his kindness to him manifold," Clark said. "The troupe will do well enough without me."

He was willing to turn his entire world upside down for her. Lois felt stunned again.

She'd grown up with a father who wouldn't sacrifice even time with his mistresses much less his job for his family. His mother had been a nurse and had similarly sacrificed. She'd learned early on that career was everything.

The first thing a man was asked when meeting someone was what he did for a living. It was the lynchpin of his identity.

For a man to be willing to give that up for her...

If she'd thought she was in love before, it was nothing compared to what she felt now.

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She was holding him closer in the dance than was strictly appropriate, but she didn't care.

Asking a man like this to give up everything for her, then watching him wither and die in her own time was more than she could bear.

She'd stay with him, but she'd tell him the truth. If she didn't, he'd be expecting her to have a non-existent job, and he'd expect to meet her father.

There was no way to know how he would react, but as the last of the music faded from the last song, she sighed.

It was time.

The gazebo was the perfect solution, given Clark's sensibilities. There were no walls, so no one could claim that they were doing anything scandalous, yet it was separated from the hotel far enough that no one could hear.

It was dimly lit with electric lights, but in the darkness that would be more than enough for anyone to see.

Lois suspected that many couples used the gazebo to whisper sweet nothings, but she couldn't afford to do that now. Time was running out.

Setting her purse down carefully, Lois frowned.

Clark, seated beside her said, "Are you having second thoughts?"

Lois smiled nervously. "I'm not. I'm just afraid that you might, once I tell you what I have to tell you."

"Are you going to tell me that what you've told me isn't true?" he said, frowning.

"I wish it was that simple." Lois hesitated a long moment. "The things I've told you — about the job, being assigned here to get away from Metropolis...my family...it's all true."

"Then what...?"

"It's just not the whole truth. There are things you don't know about me that may change how you feel about me."

"I can't imagine anything that would do that." He took her hand gently. "Whatever it is, I wager I will feel the same."

Lois took a deep breath.

"In your lifetime, you've seen a lot of changes, haven't you?"

He frowned and shook his head.

"When you were younger, would you have ever imagined something like an airplane or an automobile or even electric lights?"

He shook his head, a puzzled look on his face.

"You can imagine, then, that technology will continue to improve in the future," Lois said. "Things will get smaller, better, more reliable. There will be things that you never even imagined, and the world will change in ways no science fiction writer could ever dream."

"I'm not sure how any of this relates to us," Clark said.

"It's got everything to do with us," Lois said. "About what will happen to both of us over the next couple of days and the rest of our lives."

She reached into her purse carefully, searching for her iPhone.

"When I said I was thinking about the future, I wasn't just talking about your future or mine," Lois said finally. "I was thinking about the future I came from."

He stared at her without speaking.

She pulled the iPhone from her purse and slipped it out of its case. "I know that sounds like the rantings of a madwoman, but I have proof."

After learning she was in the past, she was grateful that she'd turned the phone off. These things never had the kind of battery power she really wanted, and she wasn't sure whether these old time outlets were even compatible.

He leaned forward as the screen lit up with the familiar apple logo. He flinched as the screen was replaced with her usual array of icons. In the background was a picture of the Daily Planet building, the globe on the top famous worldwide.

"In the world I come from, this is a telephone. It won't work as that here because...it's hard to explain really, but it will do much more."

She clicked on her photos.

"This is my editor, Perry, and Jimmy, our intern."

She began flipping through pictures, her thumb flicking past in ways that had to have been dizzying for Clark. "This is my father...my mother...my sister."

An idea flickered through her mind and she exited her picture application.

"Smile," she said, holding up her phone.

There was a small flash, and a moment later she turned the camera toward him again to show him his picture.

In his time, developing pictures took a long time.

She switched the camera to movie mode, and then turned it, holding out as she leaned toward him.

"This is Clark Kent, a man I've met in 1912. Say hi!"

He looked stunned. "Hello?"

A moment later she replayed it for him.

"You can play movies on devices not much larger than this," Lois said. "It uses too much memory for my taste."

She showed him her calculator, and flashlight apps, and then she flipped through her iTunes, looking for the oldest music in her collection. She didn't dare let him hear the death metal songs Lucy had downloaded, or she'd never see him again.

Ah. Sergei Rachmaninoff...his Rhapsody. It was slow, beautiful music, unlikely to frighten him away.

As the sounds of an entire concert flooded the area, she carefully turned the sound down. There was no point in making anyone curious.

"Is there anyone anywhere in the world who has anything like this?"

He shook his head mutely.

"It's from the future," Lois said. "The same place I am."

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"So you've come back in time, like the hero in one of Mr. Wells's stories," Clark said.

It had been almost twenty years since H.G. Wells's time machine novel had been published. Lois shouldn't have been surprised that Clark had at least heard of it.

"Not exactly," Lois said.

"So people have invented time travel...have you had to come all this way just to escape the people who are after you?"

He was taking this much better than Lois would have hoped. Most people would have run screaming into the darkness. Lois was guiltily afraid that she might have been one of them.

"It was an accident," Lois said. "Apparently there are these...tunnels in time. They are invisible, and only appear very rarely under certain conditions and in certain places."

"And you fell into one of these tunnels."

He really was very quick witted. Lois would have spent at least thirty minutes trying to rationalize away what she'd seen, but he seemed to accept it right away. He was already leaping forward to what it meant.

"I was doing a story on ghosts," Lois said, "A puff piece to get me out of Metropolis. I spoke to a scientist who theorized that at least some ghost sightings are people moving through these tunnels."

He was silent for a long moment. "Was I the ghost you were investigating?"

Lois stared at him. "How could you possibly know that?"

He smiled sadly. "The medium I met four years ago told me that my life as I know it would end when I met the most beautiful woman in the world. She also said my time in this world would come to an end."

"When did you meet the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"This morning, by the lake. I looked up and found that I couldn't breathe."

For a moment Lois felt jealous. She'd been with him almost all morning. When did he have time to — oh.

Her face flushed.

He thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world?

"You knew that early?"

"The moment I laid eyes on you," he said. "My whole world stopped."

It had taken her longer, but then, she was the cynic. Clark seemed more grounded than she'd ever been, more accepting.

Now, though...

"When?" he asked.

She didn't have to ask what he meant. It was there in his eyes.

"Tomorrow night," she admitted. "There's going to be a fire.

You'll save a lot of people, then you'll go in one last time, and that's all anyone will have heard of you."

"Perhaps I simply left?"

"There will be ghostly sightings over the next one hundred years...possibly longer," Lois admitted.

"And you believe this scientist and his ghost theory?"

"There were people who seemed to see me when I was making my own journey," Lois admitted. "I was mostly interested in your ghost and didn't have time to look into any of the others."

"So my offer to leave my life and be with you..."

"Is a lot...more...than you can ever imagine," Lois said. "It's not just about leaving acting and moving to Metropolis. It would require leaving everything you know behind."

"I would imagine that remaining here would be just as difficult for you," Clark said. "It would involve giving up a great many things."

Lois nodded. "There's no easy solution. The tunnel that takes you is the only tunnel that I have any way of knowing about. I could spend a lifetime looking for another and still never find one."

Clark was silent for a long moment.

"I made a promise to you, and I will keep it."

"I can't ask you to do that," Lois said. "You have no idea how much things have changed."

"I could have lived in 1812 fairly easily," Clark said. "I would imagine that living in 2012 is within my grasp."

Lois shook her head. "Change speeds up in the next hundred years. It's speeding up so fast that even my parents are having trouble dealing with all the changes. How could you even imagine..."

"I'm not an ordinary man," Clark said.

"I noticed," Lois said.

"Many of the things I love about you are the things that set you apart from the people of this time. How could a time period that gave birth to someone like you be anything but a wonder?"

Lois stared at him for a moment, his innocent eyes looking at her, and she sighed.

If she was going to convince him for his own good to stay she didn't have any other choice but to disillusion him.

So she told him about the twentieth century.

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"It all starts in just two years?" he asked, stunned.

"One gunshot in the wrong place and the whole world goes up in flames," Lois said.

"So if we stopped it..."

Lois shook her head. "It was just a pretext. If it wasn't that it would be something else. The whole world is in a slow boil toward war."

"And it leads to the next great war...the one with the horrors."

Grimly, Lois nodded.

It broke her heart to tell him about the horrors of her world. The crime, the promiscuity, the famine and war and death.

She was a journalist and it was her job to chronicle exactly those things, because it was important that people know what was happening.

"I could make a difference," he said. "There are things I could do that could stop all of it."

"Nobody can stop it," Lois said. "I fantasized about changing things, but really it's bigger than anything one person can do."

He looked stubborn. "I don't believe that. Didn't Archimedes say that he could move the world with a long enough lever?"

"Nobody has a lever that long," Lois said. "If you go over there, all you'll do is end up getting killed in the trenches like sixteen million other people."

"I'm not talking about that," Clark said. "There are things you don't know about me...things just as fantastic...wait."

"I'm willing to stay," Lois said. "But I don't think I could bear to see you go off to get killed."

He reached out and took her hand. "I'm honored that you would be willing to give up your whole world for me. But even though I am torn...I could make so much of a difference here, but I'm not sure we have a choice."

"Who says that time can't be changed?" Lois asked.

"What happens if I don't make that trip forward?" Clark asked. "If I am not in the hotel as a ghost, your editor would have never sent you here. You would not have fallen through time into my arms, and we would not be here now."

Lois stared at him.

"Your history has no record of me in either of the wars, and I can assure you that I would not have allowed half of what happened to occur."

He was certainly deluded about his ability to change the course of world history, but Lois for some reason found that to be cute instead of arrogant.

"If we choose not to go forward, will you vanish and I'll have never known you?" Clark asked. "I'm not sure I could bear that."

The thought of never having known Clark created an ache in her heart.

"But if I don't go forward, I can create the kind of world you can be happy in," he said quietly. "Even if it means I never..."

He slowly rose to his feet. "I've got a great deal to think about. I'll meet you in the morning."

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Of course he wasn't thinking it through. If she disappeared, then he would never be warned about the tunnel through time and he would step into it. She'd hear the stories of the ghosts and come to report on him, only to be sent back.

Time travel made Lois's head hurt. She had to wonder whether they'd been through all this before.

Had she tried to convince Clark, he'd stayed and she'd disappeared only to have things start all over again? How many iterations had they been through, like some sort of demented version of Groundhog Day, except that there was no one to remember that things were repeating?

She cut the power to her phone and slipped it back into her purse. If she did manage to get back to the future, she might need the phone to last long enough to call the police.

Clapping sounds from the darkness startled her.

William Robinson stepped out of the darkness, walking toward her. How much had he heard? The sounds of music would have probably reached out much farther than speech.

"An amazing performance," Robinson said. "Truly a masterpiece."

"What are you talking about?"

"You..." he said. "Convincing a man with a bright future to throw it all away."

Apparently he hadn't heard, or he'd have a much different take on things.

"Whatever choices Clark has to make are his alone," Lois said.

"You think losing one of the brightest stars of a generation isn't going to affect every member of our troupe? Do you think success in the theater is easy?"

Lois wasn't sure she liked his tone or the expression on his face. The fact that he was carrying a cane despite lacking a limp worried her as well.

"Clark says you'll be fine without him."

"He's a fool, blinded by love," Robinson said. "Willing to fall for the first trollop with an engaging story."

"I thought you said there were others who'd tried with him?"

"Common women," Robinson said. "Easily seen through even by a man as thick headed as young Mr. Kent. You, my dear are an entirely different kind of creature."

"I'd like to think so," Lois said.

"You're clever, I have to admit. That reporter story was inspired. But even as perfidious as I thought you were when we first met, I had no idea..."

"What?" Lois asked.

"A married woman shouldn't be trulling around for other men."

"I'm not married!" Lois protested.

"You told the desk clerk you were a widow when you knew perfectly well that your husband was alive."

"I don't have a husband!"

"Tell that to your betrothed," Robinson sniffed.

Uneasy, Lois backed away from him, only to feel arms wrap around her and a cloth held up to her nose.

She tried to struggle, but she was held in a grip like a vice, and she couldn't breathe. She felt confused, and her muscles felt oddly weak.

No matter what she tried, he seemed to be ready for her, and as she grew weaker, her options grew more and more limited.

As she fell unconscious, she managed to look up to see a familiar face, although now it was wrinkled, with gray hair.

"Hello dear," the thug grinned down at her. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

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She gasped for air; her tongue feeling like it had swollen to three times its former size. She'd been blindfolded and couldn't see anything.

"Thank heavens," Robinson's voice sounded relived. "I thought you'd killed her."

Still groggy and sick, she tried to open her eyes but everything was blurry.

"I should kill her, after what she's done to me," the thug's voice was deeper than she'd remembered, more throaty.

"I do not believe it's my place to come between a man and his wife," Robinson said. "I only ask that you keep her away from Mr. Kent until after we leave."

"I'll make sure she doesn't go nowhere," the thug chuckled. "Me and the missus have some getting reacquainted to do."

"I'd feel eminently satisfied if you give her a few extra wallops for all the trouble she's caused."

"She'll get what's coming to her."

She couldn't help but fade from consciousness.

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When she woke again, it was light.

From the smell of things — wood chips, hay, dust, old sweat and the smell of new horse droppings, she assumed she was in a barn.

"You awake, chippie?"

Lois blinked.

"Shouldn't have used so much chloroform," he said. "It's not like the old movies. Thought you'd swallowed your tongue there a few times."

Her eyes finally focused.

The man who'd fallen into the tunnel through time with her had been in his late twenties. This man had to be forty years older.

He leaned close to her and grinned nastily. "You're awake for real this time. Had a few false starts earlier."

"What's going on?"

Despite having apparently had a night's sleep, she still felt groggy and confused. Her head was pounding with a tremendous headache.

"I knew you'd end up here," he said. "Heard the boss talking about you doing some story about a dead guy from the nineteen tens."

"What happened to you?" Lois asked. Her voice was as hoarse as if she'd been strangled again, and her throat was dry.

She'd been kidnapped on multiple occasions since the first time in the Congo. She'd learned a few things about escaping. She needed time to assess the situation, to regain her strength and to make a plan.

As long as he was talking he wasn't doing anything worse.

Getting hysterical would only make it easier for him to choose to kill her, and it would limit her options. It was harder for someone to kill someone they saw as a person, although given what she knew of his employers, she couldn't rely on that.

"There wasn't a hotel here in 1872, you know," he said. "You wouldn't believe how many people I had to...take care of before I understood I really went back in time. I thought they were all making fun of me, lying."

He pulled Lois up into a sitting position. Her hands were tied behind her back. He pulled the blindfold from her eyes and she saw that she'd been right. She was in some sort of stable or barn.

"Things got hot around here for a while. I looked for you until the locals started trying to lynch me. I figured I'd head down to the old west, meet some real heroes."

He grabbed a canteen from the ground, unscrewed the cap and lifted it to her lips.

Trying not to think about where the water in the canteen had been, Lois sipped. Although it was lukewarm, the water soothed her parched throat and she found herself gulping at it greedily.

"Turns out it's all a big lie. You know what a saloon smells like when it's a hundred degrees outside, nobody's heard of air conditioning, and some of the guys have been on a trail drive for a month without bathing? It's like hell on earth."

He pulled the canteen from her lips and screwed the top back on. He set it down beside him.

"Cowboys are just stupid working grunts, Might as well be longshoremen without a union. There wasn't even hardly any killing."

Lois was sure that hadn't stopped him, but she knew better than to say so.

With the water, she felt her strength returning. She slowly started trying to test the ropes around her wrists.

"I bummed around, robbing stagecoaches and trains, the usual," he said.

He'd been thorough when he'd tied her; he was clearly a professional, even if he didn't seem terribly bright.

"It sounds like you did all right for yourself," she said.

He scowled. "You ever had to use an outhouse in the middle of summer? Even if you dodged the rattlesnakes, the smell would kill you. I'm a modern guy...I should have been able to rule like a king."

Reaching behind her, he checked her bindings. Lois fought not to scowl.

"Instead, I wasn't any better than anybody else. I had it worse, really, because I knew better. Those dumb schmucks never heard of flush toilets, deodorant, air conditioners...but I knew. I never knew how good I had it back in the real world. That's where you come in."

"Me?" Lois asked cautiously.

"You're a smart lady. You wouldn't have come here if you didn't have a way back," he said. "When you go, I'm coming with you."

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Nothing she could say convinced him that their trip back in time had been an accident. The more she tried, the angrier he got.

Apparently he'd buried some of his loot and planned to be rich when he went back to the future.

Telling him might have tempted her, but it would involve bringing Clark into this. She couldn't risk Clark getting hurt, not for her.

He had some idiotic idea that he could stop World War One; there was no way he'd put her life over that of millions of other

people. Even if he did want to find her, he wasn't a detective. She'd have had a much better chance of finding him than vice versa. He was only a farmer and an actor.

Yet the thug would kill her for sure if they missed their window. He had no idea there was a time limit, but he wasn't stupid enough to keep her alive forever.

He'd torture her to get her to talk, and it was only a matter of time before he got angry enough to kill her.

She forced herself to dry heave, claiming that she was still feeling sick from the chloroform.

That did it. Despite his expertise in some areas of crime, at heart he was still a follower. He hadn't had the forethought to bring food.

She listened as he left, then she rolled over.

There was a nail projecting from one of the beams. Given her experiences, that was all she'd need to escape, assuming there was enough time.

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His room was empty.

Lois found it ironic that Clark's was the first place she ran to instead of to the police, only to find that he'd decided to abandon her after all.

Her chest hurt.

A maid was passing by.

"Have you seen Mr. Kent?" Lois asked quickly.

The maid frowned at her. Again she was in a dress that looked like it had been slept in, with dirt and other unmentionables probably embedded in the fabric.

"The troupe left last night, Miss," the woman said. "Something about catching an early train to Atlanta."

That was that then.

Her chance at love, and her chance at finding her way home all gone at the same time.

She felt numb.

She was almost out of money, and her options in this time period were going to be few and far between. She didn't have any references, and it wasn't like jobs were easy to come by.

For a moment she considered asking the maid where she could apply for work.

Letting herself hope had been foolish. She knew better than to depend on love. It had let her parents down, let the people she reported on down...she'd never really seen a time outside of books or movies where love really worked out for anyone in the long run. She walked through the halls of the hotel in a daze, feeling a little like a ghost herself.

Reporting her kidnapping to the authorities was the obvious next step, but Lois couldn't make herself care. She wondered for a moment if she really was having lingering aftereffects from the chloroform.

She stepped outside onto the wide veranda.

It really was beautiful here. It was just too bad.

Feeling the warmth on the back of her neck from the sun, she rested for a moment. She couldn't make a plan when it felt like the light had gone out of her life.

A prickling sensation on the back of her neck caused her to slowly turn. If the thug was back, she'd scream and cause enough of a commotion that he'd have to go away.

On the lawn, looking up at her was Clark Kent.

She felt as though her heart was exploding.

"Clark!"

He looked up at her, and his face brightened into a look of joy.

Watching two lovers run toward each other in slow motion had always seemed like the worst of clichés to Lois. It was silly and melodramatic, and her cynical side had always sneered a little when she saw it. It wasn't realistic; none of the people she knew would ever act like that.

Yet time really did seem to slow down as she saw him. She felt like she was having a moment of perfect clarity, in which she was aware of everything. She could smell freshly cut grass, the smell of lilacs in bloom, even the smell of rain from the night before.

Colors seemed more vivid; the grass was greener, the charcoal of the suit Clark was wearing, the blackness of his hair; it all seemed brighter and yet at the same time a little diffuse, almost as though she was in a dream.

Tripping a little as she rushed down the stairs, she felt herself almost flying into his arms. He caught her, and ignoring the watching people below took her in his arms.

He kissed her despite the people watching in the distance.

For the first time in her life Lois felt as though fireworks were going off in her head. She saw stars.

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How they got to his room, she couldn't remember. This wasn't the room he'd been in before, but somehow she couldn't make herself care about why. All she could do was stare at him. It was as though there was something magnetic about him; no matter how she tried to look at anything else her eyes always seemed to gravitate back to him.

One kiss turned into another, and before she knew it, he was carrying her to the bed.

He reached over to extinguish the lamp beside the bed, but she gently grabbed his hand. The thick curtains on the window weren't blackout curtains, but she didn't want to miss anything.

There were no guarantees that they would be able to remain together on their trip forward. For all she knew he would be flung a hundred years ahead of her time, or he would land in her time and she would go forward.

For all she knew this was the only time they would have together and she didn't intend to waste it.

He hesitated, and then turned back to her.

From the uncertainty in his expression, Lois suspected that she was going to be the more experienced one in this, at least. She pulled him back to the bed.

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She traced her finger idly over the expanse of his chest. Although he'd initially seemed uncertain, it hadn't been long before he'd proven himself to be almost superhuman.

Yet it wasn't his virility that had impressed her; it was the tenderness. Making love was a very different experience than having sex; it amazed Lois that she'd never realized that before.

"I thought you'd left," Lois said.

"I was torn," he admitted. "Saving the world, or saving...my world. If something I did were to cause your parents never to meet, or even your grandparents...I don't know what I'd do."

"It wouldn't happen," Lois said. "If I wasn't around to warn you..."

"I thought of that, and when I did, it felt as though a great weight had lifted off my shoulders. I came to see you, but you weren't on the grounds...I thought you might have..."

"Gone on without you?" Lois asked.

He nodded soberly. "You made your world sound impossibly difficult for someone of my era, and I was afraid that you'd given up."

Lois hesitated, considering. Was Clark less at risk knowing that a man was out there who meant her harm or not knowing?

If he knew would he try to find the man?

Yet if he didn't and something happened to him because he wasn't prepared...

"I was kidnapped and taken to a barn off the island," Lois admitted. "By one of the men from my time; the one who'd given me the bruises."

Clark stiffened. He was silent for a moment, and Lois felt herself tensing. This was the point where most of the men in her

previous relationships would have insisted that she go to the police.

"I would imagine he didn't let you go."

"I've had some experience escaping from that kind of thing," Lois admitted. "It's an occupational hazard."

"Do you think he will come for you again?"

"It's been...longer for him. He came out forty years before I did. If he's been willing to wait all this time, I can only assume that he won't quit until we are gone."

"Surely he can't mean to continue his mission after all this time?"

"He thinks I have a plan to get back," Lois said. "Which, coincidentally I do. He's got gold buried somewhere nearby and thinks he'll be rich when he goes back."

"I won't let him hurt you," Clark said. "I know my promise may not seem worth in light of last night's events, but..."

"You said no one would hurt me as long as you were with me," Lois said. "But it's not like you can watch over me twenty four hours a day."

With a strange expression on his face, Clark opened his mouth to speak.

Lois put her finger to his lips. "I'm not sure I'd want you to. I'm a modern woman, and that means that I have to be free to take risks. I want a partner, not a protector."

"I'm..." Clark hesitated. "You can understand that this is foreign to me."

"You're a man ahead of your time," Lois said. "Any of the other men I've met in this time would never stand a chance in my time, but I think you just might fit in."

"I can try," he said. He was silent for a long moment. "But I won't let you get hurt if it's in my power to stop it."

She let her fingers drop back to his chest.

"You were ok with this..."

"It was a revelation." He smiled slightly. "If you were a woman of my time I'd feel obligated to ask you to be my bride."

Lois stiffened. "And you don't now?"

"You aren't the kind of woman who would do...this casually, even if the people of your times don't take it as seriously as we do in mine. I certainly don't."

He reached down, took her hand and brought it to his lips. He kissed it.

"I've made...mistakes," Lois admitted. "But it was never casual."

A man of his time should have been horrified by her admission, but Clark only smiled sadly. "I'd tie my future to yours in an instant if I was sure we had a future together. But there are no guarantees that we will be together when we come to the end of our journey tonight."

His expression turned grim.

"I would not make you a widow, or worse, not free to find love again because you were waiting for me to return when it might not ever happen."

Any other man and Lois would have been horrified at even the mention of marriage within the first two days of knowing each other. With Clark, though, she found herself wanting to argue.

"If we get separated, I'll find you," she promised. "I'm good at finding people."

He smiled sadly. "Don't make promises you cannot keep."

"Watch me," Lois said. "I'll find you."

Kissing her hand again, he said, "I wish..."

Before he could say anything else, she pulled him down to kiss her again. If this was their last day together, Lois didn't want to spend it talking.

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The notion of staying in his room throughout the day was appealing. Clark had seemingly unending amounts of enthusiasm,

inventiveness and stamina, and between bouts of lovemaking they would talk.

She learned that he wasn't just a gentleman, he was an artist. He showed her some of his work, and she had to admit that she was impressed. He seemed to have a knack for bringing out what was timeless and human. His work was like the farce of a play he'd been acting in. That had been sort of archaic and never would have passed muster in Lois's time.

Showing her his plays and stories, though, obviously meant a lot to him.

In return, she shared with him the pain of her childhood. Her father had wanted a boy, and he had been critical. She'd learned that the only way to get his approval was to be perfect.

Sometimes she thought that it wasn't that she was a woman fighting against a man's world. It wasn't all men who were holding her down, although there were still prejudices. It was her father.

Most of her friends would have told her to get over it, but Clark didn't. He understood, in ways that no one else had.

Yet despite those idyllic hours, eventually Lois found herself becoming hungry.

Room service wasn't as discreet as it was in her time, and Clark was afraid that they'd be thrown out of the hotel if it was discovered that they were together and unmarried.

Lois didn't tell him that clandestine affairs were the bread and butter of hotels in her time, along with business travelers and vacationing tourists.

Eventually, despite the risks they both dressed. Lois was almost reluctant to give up Clark's shirt. All she had was the dress she was in, and the dirty dress back in her room. Yet women didn't wear men's clothing in this time and Clark seemed to believe that her dress would still pass muster.

He seemed rather adept at avoiding people; stopping her several times around corners before people would come walking by.

It might have been safer to stay in the room, but Lois couldn't remember what time the fire had started, and they couldn't risk missing it for more reasons than one.

If they missed the tunnel, Clark would never become a ghost in time, and Lois would have never arrived. She would be erased from this time as though they had never met.

Even if it only meant that she reappeared back in her own time with no memory, Lois couldn't bear the thought of losing the past couple of days.

Clark was supposed to save people; he had to be there to do so.

Lois felt frustrated that she hadn't paid that much attention to the fire. She'd been more interested in Clark and the mystery of the dress. It would have helped to have known when the fire started, or where.

The kitchen seemed like the most likely candidate for a fire, as the rest of the hotel was outfitted with electric lights, but there was no guarantee. An electrical fire could occur anywhere in the hotel, and Lois suspected that fire safety wasn't nearly as good in this time as it was in her own.

There were no overhead fire sprinklers in this time, whereas there had been many in her own time.

Still, the restaurant seemed like as good a place as any to spend their last hour together.

Lois did insist that they be seated away from the windows. With the lights inside turning them into darkened mirrors, she'd hate for the thug to be walking by and see them.

With any luck they'd be on their way and he'd be trapped here where he belonged.

Roll on antiperspirants wouldn't be invented until the fifties, although according to Clark there were already a couple of products out there that were inconvenient to use.

It would be at least thirty more years before air conditioning became common.

Leaving the thug here would be better than prison as far as Lois was concerned.

Still, she couldn't help but feel anxious as they waited for their meal. When would the fire start? What would happen? Would there be anyone Clark wasn't able to save?

If she was to go through the tunnel with him, she'd have to stay with him as he went through the fire.

It was enough to make her stomach tight, and she couldn't help but feel a growing sense of dread that something was going to go wrong.

Lois couldn't help but feel as though every person they passed was looking at her. Although Clark assured her that her appearance was in good order, she was convinced that her hair was disheveled and that her lips were obviously swollen from kissing.

It didn't help that every time Clark looked at her she felt herself blushing.

Anyone observant about body language would know that they were now together, and Lois felt emotionally open and raw.

"I feel exposed," she admitted to Clark, glancing at the windows across the dining room.

They'd been seated near the kitchen, normally one of the least desirable locations in the restaurant, but Clark was hoping he'd be able to help more quickly if he was there.

Lois's gut, though, told her that the fire wouldn't start in the kitchen. Fires in kitchens were expected, and people prepared for them. With the number of people on staff in a kitchen, someone would notice a fire in plenty of time to take action.

Of course, what she knew about kitchens could be printed on the back of a matchbook.

Still, even away from the windows, the feeling that she was being watched was intense. Looking around the crowded dining area, Lois thought she could see people staring at her.

"No one is looking," Clark said. "Except for that small boy."

Arthur was peeking over the back of his chair at her. Apparently she'd made an impression on him the day before when she'd given him the ball.

His father wasn't at the table, which was unusual in this time period. His mother seemed distracted as well, looking around for her husband.

"He's the desk clerk's son," Lois said quietly. "We met yesterday."

Clark frowned. "Most people don't allow their children to behave that way."

Lois winced as a sudden memory of the last time she'd been in a fast food restaurant flashed through her mind. Compared to those children, Arthur was an angel.

"Children in my time aren't as...disciplined as they are now."

Clark looked distracted. "From what I've seen of the desk clerk he seems like a stern taskmaster. He doesn't seem like the sort to abandon his..."

Lois caught sight of the desk clerk, who was striding through the dining room with a bellhop trailing behind him. The man looked grim.

The sinking feeling in her stomach worsened. Was he going to throw them out of the hotel in front of all the other guests in the dining hall?

Reputation might mean more in this time than in her own, but that didn't mean that Lois would stand for being shamed in public. She would be leaving this place soon, one way or the other, and she didn't have to take any more abuse from the man.

"Mr. Kent," the desk clerk said.

Clark looked up, outwardly calm and confident.

"May we speak outside? It is a matter of some...delicacy."

Clark glanced at her. "If this is about my association with Ms.

Lane...”

The desk clerk didn't even look at Lois. Instead his hands tensed and he shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

He was anxious.

“Please...may we speak outside?”

Clark glanced at Lois, then nodded. If it was some ploy to humiliate them, it was better to do it outside, away from the crowd. If it wasn't, then it was something that needed to be looked in to.

He rose to his feet and followed the two men.

Lois stared after him, hoping that they weren't about to be evicted. They had to remain on the grounds for a little longer, at least until the fire started. If they didn't, they'd miss their window.

She was beginning to wonder whether she'd changed too many things.

It was still unclear whether everything was set in stone, in which case no matter what she did time would remain the same, or whether time was mutable.

If time wasn't changeable, what did that say about the nature of free will?

Every time she thought about the nature of time and time travel it made her head hurt.

“I thought he'd never leave.”

Lois looked up to see a man in a waiter's outfit, a cloth thrown over his arm. From beneath the cloth she saw a glint of metal. She looked up to see the thug staring down at her.

“You wouldn't kill me here,” she said. “In the middle of all these people.”

“What do you think happens in a train robbery? If I shoot you, most people will just see the waiter's uniform.”

Lois frowned. One of the first rules of being kidnapped was to never let them get you alone. While most of her kidnappings had been professional affairs, this man had a personal grudge against her and had been ordered to kill her.

“If you want to get home you can't kill me,” Lois pointed out. Although she was outwardly calm, her mind was racing.

If Clark returned and found him here, there was a good chance that he would be shot and killed.

If she went anywhere with him, it would soon become clear that she didn't have a way to get them home, and she would be killed.

Lois wished she still had her purse. The pepper spray inside would have been a lifesaver.

“I can kill the little kid that's watching you,” he said, glancing back at Arthur's table. “And the kid's mother. And I can keep killing people until I find somebody you care about.”

“What do you think would happen if one of these people is your great grandfather?” Lois asked, glancing back in the direction from which Clark had come.

“Way I figure it; I've got lots of other great grandparents. If I kill great granddad, great grandma will just marry someone else. I might even get a better head of hair out of it.”

Lois blinked.

“I might not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but I've had a long time to think about all of this.”

“Fine,” Lois said. “I'll go with you.”

She hadn't gotten to eat more than a dinner roll, but she knew from experience that getting into a fight on a full stomach was a mistake.

Still, it might have been nice to have gotten a salad.

Lois carefully wiped her mouth with her napkin and slowly stood up. In contrast to her earlier paranoia, no one seemed to notice them at all, except Arthur, who was too young to be taken seriously.

Some of her best assets were not available to her. Most men underestimated her because of her size and her gender. They

always assumed that her reputation was overblown. That made it easier to surprise them.

She'd hurt this man already, and despite the decades it had been, she could see a certain wariness in his eyes that showed that he remembered.

In her favor, he was older now and presumably slower and weaker. His eyesight might not be as keen and his aim might not be as good.

“Through the door to the kitchen,” he said.

She nodded. Hopefully the chaos and confusion of the kitchen would give her an opportunity to get away from him. In her experience a face full of boiling grease tended to make even the most experienced professionals drop their weapons.

Despite what he'd threatened, Lois suspected that he was a professional. He'd happily use anyone as a hostage, but if Lois wasn't there to see it he wouldn't bother. All she had to do was get away before he could grab anyone.

The kitchen was as busy as she'd expected, although it was darker and dingier than any modern kitchen. The stoves were of cast iron and probably dated from the last century.

Cooks and servers were moving around in frenzy, as were busboys. Everyone was so absorbed by their own tasks that they didn't even notice Lois and the stranger behind her.

Prodded from behind with a piece of metal, Lois reluctantly moved forward. The man behind her was keeping a wary eye on everyone in the room, lest he be discovered. Lois risked grabbing a dish towel as she passed by a sink. Apparently mechanical dishwashers hadn't been invented yet.

She slowly wrapped the towel around her hand as they walked, careful not to move so much that he'd realize what she was doing.

A chef in front of her turned from his task to grab spices from a cabinet.

Gambling that he wouldn't shoot his only way home, Lois lunged forward and grabbed an iron frying pan with the hand she'd wrapped in the towel. Despite the towel the handle was hot, but Lois grabbed it anyway. She whirled, swinging the pan as hard as he could.

The hot grease hit him in the face first. He screamed and his hand went up. Lois heard the sound of a gunshot, followed by screams from around her.

A moment later her hand was jarred as she felt the heavy iron connect with the thug's face with a crack. She dropped the pan and stepped back quickly.

Somehow, Clark was there. She hadn't seen him arrive, although she'd been more than distracted.

A moment later the desk clerk was through the doors, staring down at the man lying on his back screaming.

Clark kicked the gun away from the man.

“Was this the man who threatened you with a gun?” he asked.

The desk clerk nodded.

Apparently the thug had threatened him with a gun; the man had given in but rushed to warn Clark as quickly as he could.

“Call for a doctor,” he said. “The police are on their way.”

He grabbed a towel and in a move so quick Lois almost didn't see it grabbed the man's hands and tied them together.

“You don't want to touch that,” he said.

The man shuddered violently and a moment later he fell unconscious. Lois stared down at him suddenly anxious. Although he was a vicious killer, she didn't want his death on her conscience. The rasping sound of his breathing relieved her.

“Are you all right?” Clark asked, looking up at Lois.

“I'm fine,” Lois said, massaging her hand. “I just hope the bullet didn't hit anyone.”

Clark looked around, almost as though he expected to spot the bullet from where he was standing. He stood up and pointed.

Lois squinted.

With the help of another cook, Clark dragged the thug to his feet, “We’ll take him outside, behind the kitchen. That way he won’t disturb any of the other guests...that is, if you are sure you are all right.”

There was a look of such respect and admiration in his eyes that Lois couldn’t help but nod.

The cooks reluctantly returned to their routine.

Some of the meals were probably going to be overdone tonight, but Clark was doing what he could to make sure that no more people were inconvenienced than had to be.

Still...

Lois carefully threaded her way around cooks and busboys.

As she approached, she finally saw the hole in the door. How had he seen it from all the way across the room?

“Where does this lead to?” she asked, grabbing at a passing busboy with her uninjured hand. Her other hand wasn’t injured, just tender and a little overcooked.

“Just the water heater, miss. Cook keeps it locked; doesn’t want the likes of us to bother with it.”

Lois relaxed.

There was a chance that what she’d done had scarred the thug for life, possibly even blinded him. Despite the fact that he’d been willing to kill her, that was bad enough. She couldn’t bear the thought that someone innocent might have gotten shot and killed because she’d had an only half thought out plan.

In the back of her mind there was something she felt she wasn’t remembering. There was something about water heaters. It was there for a moment, and then it was gone. Lois couldn’t imagine what it could have been.

Whatever it was couldn’t have been that important.

She headed outside to wait for the police with Clark.

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Although they did their best, Lois didn’t always respect the police in Metropolis. Many of them seemed willing to simply punch a time clock and they weren’t willing to take the kinds of risks she did, although she suspected that was true of most people.

Even those who honestly tried couldn’t seem to keep up with her mentally. She sometimes found the police to be frustratingly slow to reach conclusions that she herself had reached long before.

Yet compared to the police of this time, the Metropolis police were a group of genius crack investigators.

They took her statement, but kept looking at Clark when he hadn’t even been there when she’d hit the man with a frying pan. She had to keep prompting them to ask questions they should have asked on their own.

In their defense, they hadn’t heard of fingerprinting or even many of the most basic forensic techniques. Policing a city with less than five hundred people was probably a little less demanding than making peace in the Suicide Slums.

Still, they took the statements of several witnesses and accompanied the thug to the hospital. Considering that antibiotics had yet to be invented and surgical techniques had to be rudimentary, Lois suspected it would be a long time before the thug was able to be a bother.

“So that’s it?” she asked.

“I suppose so,” Clark said absently, staring after the ambulance.

Lois fidgeted. Deep in her gut she knew that something was wrong. Everything else — the dress, the picture, her name in the ledger...all of it had led her to believe that what she had done had already happened before she’d ever done it.

Yet she’d seen no mention of the thug being arrested, and there was no sign that the fire was even going to happen.

“I must have changed something,” she said. “Maybe stopped him from starting the fire.”

Clark was silent for a long moment before he said, “Would that be so bad?”

“If I wink out of existence and we have to go through all of this again without remembering any of it, it would be,” Lois said.

“Maybe the woman who did all those things was another Lois, from another time,” Clark said.

“You mean that we’ve created some sort of alternate timeline?” Lois asked.

It impressed her that he was able to work it out without any exposure to a hundred years of science fiction speculating about the nature of time.

“If that were true,” he began, “And your choices were your own, would you stay with me?”

Now it was Lois’s turn to be silent. Was she willing to stay behind in a time where women had even fewer opportunities than in her own?

If this was really a new timeline, maybe that meant she could actually make a real difference, change things for the better.

“I’ll stay,” she said. “It’s not like we have much choice anyway. Finding the portal is going to be almost impossible without you being where you had to be to save people.”

“That’s the only reason?”

She looked up at him. “Stop begging for compliments. You’re the only interesting thing in this whole era, as far as I’m concerned.”

She shivered.

Clark pulled his jacket off and slipped it around her shoulders. It was warm again.

“Those lights in the sky are unusual,” he said.

“The sun is doing...something,” Lois said. “Solar storms... it’s hard to explain. It’s one of the things the scientist I spoke to suggested might help activate the tunnels through time.”

“So once the sky returns to normal we know we are in a whole new world.”

Lois nodded soberly. Once the borealis was gone, she was trapped here, probably forever.

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As it was getting colder, Clark led her back through the kitchen. The interrogation had taken long enough that the evening rush was over and most of the people in the kitchen were involved in cleaning up after the evening meal.

The door with the bullet hole was open. Lois glanced inside, where the water heater sat. The cook was arguing with another man, holding up a small piece and gesturing inside.

As far as Lois could tell from his heavily accented English, all the bullet had done was hit something at the top of the heater and knocked it off before lodging itself in a wall.

The police in her time would have already looked into this, taken innumerable pictures and figured out the angles of the shot.

These police had been willing to take her at her word. She could have been lying! How could they possibly be that trusting?

Barney Fife would have done a better forensic job than the local yokels.

As they left the kitchen into the now largely deserted dining room, Clark said, “We need to talk.”

Lois said, “In my time, guys hate it when girls say that to them. It’s usually about something unpleasant.”

The expression on Clark’s face was neutral. “I’m hoping you won’t think so.”

From his body language, and the fact that he wasn’t looking her in the eyes, Lois could see that he wasn’t sure she’d be accepting of whatever it was.

“If it was important, we had plenty of time to talk about it today, after...”

Clark stopped and said, “Today I thought it was likely that we were going to be separated forever. Telling you wouldn’t have been a kindness and might even have tainted your memories of

our time together.”

“And now?”

“If we are to move forward, you have to know everything,” he said. He looked pointedly at the servers cleaning dishes in the distance, along with a few remaining diners. “Not here, though.”

Her mind raced. What sort of secret could he possibly have that would change the way she thought about him? Although he hadn’t said it directly that was what he was implying.

Did he have a wife and children somewhere, stashed away out of the reach of history?

He didn’t seem like the kind of man who would let himself get involved with her if that was the case. In any case, he wouldn’t have had to wonder about her opinion on the matter.

A sexually transmitted disease didn’t seem likely; while they existed in this time period, Lois didn’t see Clark as the kind of person who would burden anyone else without informing them before they’d had sex. In any case, he hadn’t seemed all that experienced, in the beginning at least, although he was a fast learner.

“Where, then?” she asked.

“Follow me,” he said.

The one thing she was sure of was that she wasn’t going to let herself get separated from him again. Although staying in this time period would be difficult, it might be worth it if she could be with Clark. Going forward in time with him would also be acceptable.

The one thing that would be a disaster would be if he went forward and she was left behind. She didn’t think she’d be able to bear that.

She followed him through the front lobby and out the entrance. They made their way through to the gazebo.

After everything they’d been through, he could have easily taken her back to his room. The fact that he hadn’t suggested that he wasn’t certain how she would receive what he was about to tell her.

“All right,” Lois said. “What could possibly be so important?”

Clark led her to a bench and gestured for her to be seated. As she did so, he sat down beside her and took her hand.

“My parents warned me to only share the secrets of my birth with the woman I was going to spend the rest of my life with,” Clark said.

Lois forced herself to remain silent, although she found herself relaxing. If it was about something that happened when he was born, then it couldn’t be that serious. Probably his parents hadn’t been married when he was born or something similar, something that would have been a scandal in his time, but almost inconsequential in hers.

“My parents were not my biological parents,” Clark said. “They found me, abandoned.”

“So you were adopted,” Lois said. “That happens to a lot of people. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“That’s not the secret that I wasn’t to share,” Clark said. “The secret was where they found me.”

“Ok,” Lois said. She forced herself not to smile. For some reason he was taking this very seriously, and it obviously meant a great deal to him.

“I told you my mother told me I’d come on a shooting star,” Clark said. “What I didn’t tell you was that she wasn’t speaking figuratively.”

Lois frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“My parents kept a few cows,” Clark said. “And they had to check the fences regularly or cows would get out. Old man Schuster hated that, and he’d complain.”

He went from stars to cows? How did he go from the eloquent man she’d come to know to someone who had forgotten how to tell a story?

“They were on the edge of their land fixing a fence when they saw a ball of fire in the sky. It landed, not too far from them, and they went to investigate.”

His hand tightened on hers.

“When I first heard the story as a child, I always imagined the machine they found to be some sort of train. My parents tried to explain it to me, but trains were the only large machines I’d otherwise been around, other than horse drawn reapers.”

Machine? What?

“The first motion picture I ever saw was Melies’ ‘A trip to the moon,’” Clark said. “I was sixteen at the time, and the minute I saw the craft they used to get the moon I realized that what my parents had found wasn’t a train.”

He released her hand and stood up, stepping away from her.

“I read Jules Verne’s stories about reaching the moon, and Mr. Well’s story about going to the moon as well. It wasn’t until I read ‘War of the Worlds’ that I truly understood what it all meant.”

“Are you saying you think you’re some kind of alien?” Lois asked.

“I know I am,” Clark said.

“Did you ever see the machine your parents were talking about?” Lois asked.

Clark shook his head. “Mr. Schuster sold it to a travelling circus.”

“What seems more likely,” Lois said. “That your parents were just telling you a fanciful story, or that you are some kind of space alien who just happens to look exactly like a human being?”

Clark leaned against a post and stared up at the colors in the sky.

“My parents assumed I was human, at first. I never got sick, and I never got any of the scrapes or bruises that other children did, but they just assumed it was because I was lucky.”

He took a deep breath. “When a bull ran over me at six, and I wasn’t hurt at all, they assumed it was a miracle. But when I was as strong as three grown men by the age of ten, they began to wonder.”

“So you’re telling me you’re some sort of superman?”

“You asked me to believe that you are a time traveler,” Clark said. “If I wasn’t...different myself, I’d have had a hard time believing that.”

“I showed you proof,” Lois said. “You’ve got to understand. I’m a reporter and it’s my job to be skeptical. Asking me to simply...”

Raising his hand, Clark turned to the post he was leaning against.

Smoke began to rise from the surface, and a moment later she saw initials appear, hers linked with his.

“You could have painted some kind of chemical,” Lois said. “Triggered it...”

Before she could continue, Lois heard the deeply guttural sound of an explosion coming from the direction of the hotel. She saw something white flying upward, through the roof.

Too late she remembered what she’d struggled to remember before.

Water heaters had a safety valve, often on the top of the machine. Without it, the water inside the heater continued to heat, pressure growing and growing until it became a bomb.

Clark stared into the direction of the explosion, looked back at her and then sighed.

A moment later he wasn’t there. It was as though he’d vanished into thin air.

Lois lunged forward. If Clark had slipped through an invisible gateway in time, there was no telling how long it would stay opened. Staying here alone would be a nightmare.

Waving her arms, Lois suspected that anyone watching would

assume she was a madwoman, assuming they weren't watching what was happening in the hotel.

Despite her best efforts, Lois felt nothing.

For a moment, she felt a sense of hopelessness. After everything they'd been through together, were they going to be separated just like that?

Why had Clark been telling her some strange story about being an alien? If he wanted to leave her, there were easier ways without coming up with a story so fantastic that no one would ever believe it.

Of course, the only aliens he would have read about would be tentacle d monstrosities from H.G. Wells and his contemporaries. The idea of a human looking alien wouldn't appear...Lois wasn't sure, but she suspected for thirty or forty years.

He was ahead of his time, but he'd never shown signs of being that creative.

The alternative, though, that he'd been telling the truth...

She reached up and touched the letters on the post, jerking her hand away quickly. They were still hot. Sniffing her fingers, Lois didn't smell any kind of chemical residue.

Shouting from the front of the hotel caught her attention.

Lois blinked; she could see flames rising up from the back, by the kitchen. A moment later she saw a figure carrying someone out onto the front lawn. She stiffened; although it was hard to tell, it looked like Clark.

She was running before she realized it.

Had he vanished into a short term portal and was already back? If not, how had he managed the disappearing act?

None of the gravitational effects had been apparent; she was sure now that she would never forget them after the first time she fell through the tunnel. If he hadn't fallen through a tunnel, what had he done?

Had she blacked out for a moment? Maybe there were neurological effects to the portal that hadn't been discovered yet. It couldn't be healthy, being blasted all over time and space.

Maybe he was telling the truth.

The thought kept nagging at her. As far as she could tell, Clark had always been honest with her. She considered herself a good judge of character, and he'd seemed utterly sincere when he told her that he hadn't been born on this planet.

Yet she'd examined every inch of him earlier, and there was nothing inhuman about him. She'd have expected a tail, or a tentacle or something to set him apart from ordinary men.

Still...He'd vanished before her eyes.

Could he teleport? If he could do that, just what else could he do?

If he was telling the truth, what did it mean for the two of them?

All she knew was that she had to be with him, no matter what. He was her last chance at getting back to her own time, and with any luck they'd go together.

She reached the front entrance just as Clark came out. He had one of the cooks, a large man, slung over his shoulders. In his arms he was carrying a waitress. Together they had to have weighed three hundred pounds, but he carried them as though they were weightless. He sat the waitress down on the lawn, and then slid the cook carefully off his shoulders.

"Clark!" she said, running up to him.

"There are more people inside," he said. "Wait here."

He was gone before she could reply.

Staring after him, Lois tried to remember what had been said about him back in the future. He'd saved several people, then went back in one last time and vanished.

It looked as though he'd already saved five people. Lois wasn't sure how many several was, but she couldn't afford to wait for him.

Grimacing, she raced into the building, ducking the desk

clerk who tried to grab her.

"You can't go in there, miss!"

All traces of condescension were gone; all she could see was concern as Arthur and his mother huddled behind him.

People were streaming down the stairs. The smoke was already thick, and Lois saw one woman fall to her knees. Two men stopped to pull her up between them.

"Over here!" she shouted. The smoke was already getting thick and several people seemed dazed and bewildered.

With a glance toward the dining room, Lois scowled and then ran toward the group.

"This way!" she said, grabbing one woman by the arm. The woman's children were clinging to her legs through her dress.

She led first one group, then the next to the front.

The smoke was rising, so the upper floors had to be even worse.

It seemed forever before the crowd coming down the stairs began to thin. Lois didn't see Clark among them, and she began to worry.

Where was he?

Had he gotten hurt? It was easy to get disoriented in the middle of a fire, especially if you didn't know to stay low to the ground where the air was better.

She asked one of the stragglers if he'd seen Clark. The man shook his head impatiently and pulled past her.

The fire had started in the kitchen; her only choice was to get closer to see if she could find Clark.

She coughed as she approached the dining room. Black smoke filled the air and it was getting hard to see.

"Clark!" she called out.

She could see flames rising from the kitchen and she grimaced. She could already feel the heat on her face and she was reluctant to get any closer. Was he inside?

Nothing could survive that kind of heat, not without protective clothing.

The flames were spreading much faster than she would have expected, and the smoke was black and fast moving. No one had heard of flame resistant materials or building codes, apparently, and Lois didn't doubt that the ventilation system was primitive.

When she was a teenager, she'd had a fast food job. She remembered how permeated with grease everything had gotten, and that was with proper ventilation. The grease ducts over the stoves had been periodically cleaned and gallons of grease had been collected.

Lois suspected that grease ducts hadn't been invented yet. Grease would have gotten into the walls, and now with the fire and improper ventilation...

It was alarming that the smoke was as thick as it was. The ceilings were high, and she'd have expected it to take longer to fill the air.

She crouched, trying to get below the smoke.

Lois slowly began to back away from the fire. The heat was getting worse and it was getting hard to see.

She grimaced. Where was he?

If anything the smoke seemed to be moving faster. She coughed again.

"Clark!" she yelled.

There was no way he was still in the kitchen, not alive. Her only choice was to head outside and hope that he'd gotten out.

Beginning to back away in the direction she'd come from, she dropped to a crouch and began to move back to the door. It was getting hard to see even at this lower level, and Lois found herself reaching back blindly.

She heard a creaking sound from above her.

As she saw the roof falling, she screamed.

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Staring up at the aurora, Lois wondered if she was dead. One

moment the fire had been washing over her, and another moment she was here, staring up at the sky.

The fact that she was in Clark's arm didn't even register at first. It took her a moment to realize that she was alive and that wherever they were she was safe.

She lunged forward and hugged him tightly.

For a long moment all she could do was hold him tightly, her eyes closed as she simply breathed. Her heart was racing and she knew from experience that her hands would be shaking if she let go of him, so she didn't.

"I thought I'd lost you," Lois admitted finally. The fact that losing him would have meant more than losing the future was no longer as surprising as it once had been.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said. "Wherever you go, I'll find you."

"Where were you?" she asked.

"There were people trapped on the second and third floor," Clark said. "I had to get them out."

"How did you..." she began, but then she shrieked.

Clark was holding her cradled in his arms, but he was floating unsupported in mid-air. She grabbed him even more tightly.

She closed her eyes for a moment, and then said, "I guess this was one of the things you were going to show me to prove that you aren't from around here?"

He nodded.

"I need to set you down now," he said.

Lois shook her head. "If we get separated..."

"Then put your fingers in your ears," he said.

She hesitated, and then looked down. The fire was burning, smoke rising from the hotel. Finally she nodded and stuck her fingers in her ears.

He pursed his lips and a moment later a sound like a tornado made Lois wince.

She could feel an intense cold even without being in the path of whatever it was coming from his lips. It continued for a long moment before he finally stopped.

She looked down; the smoke was dispersing.

"Why didn't you do that before?" she asked.

"I had to get all the people out first," Clark said. "And there was a two thousand gallon grease trap under the floor of the kitchen that was on fire. I couldn't risk scattering the burning grease until I knew everyone was safe."

Lois stared up at him. "I guess history played out just like it did last time, but we're still here."

Clark was silent. "I wouldn't have minded seeing your time."

"Now you won't have to," Lois said. She hugged him again.

She felt giddy. It was probably the adrenaline still pumping from her near death experience, combined with the relief from finding Clark again, but she felt like laughing out loud.

It almost felt as though her whole body was thrumming, like being at a concert where the bass was set far too deeply.

Clark's hair, short as it was, began to rise and Lois could see her own hair floating, almost like they were in free fall.

A quick glance toward the ground showed that they were stationary, not falling as she'd feared.

Her eyes met Clark's, and she saw the sudden moment of realization in his eyes.

Portals in time didn't have to only exist at ground level.

A massive yank and both of them were pulled into the vortex.

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Everything flickered around them, like a time lapse movie set to fast forward. Clark held Lois, but an irresistible force kept pulling her away from him.

Unlike the thug, Clark had no trouble in holding on, but as they traveled the force pulling them apart grew. Lois cried out in pain as Clark's arms around her back pressed into her like metal

bars.

The pain only grew worse the longer it lasted.

She stared into his eyes, trying to hide her pain but unable to stop from crying out as the pressure pulling on her grew.

Clark spun them around so that his entire body pressed against her instead of just his arms. That helped for a little while, but as the pressure continued to grow, Lois found it harder and harder to breathe.

Clark seemed to be struggling to fly backward, to take the pressure off her, but the pressure was growing faster than he could fly. She couldn't understand why the force pulling on her wasn't affecting him at all.

She looked back at Clark, then down at the earth below.

Sunrise followed sunset in rapid succession, with only the stars being constant.

Lois's vision began to turn gray. She stared at Clark and she saw the look of regret in his eyes. Although her hearing was muffled, she could see his lips move as he said, "I'm sorry."

For a moment she was confused; then she realized that he was turning. A moment later she was pulled from his arms and the pressure was gone.

She stared back at him. He was following her a look of determination in his eyes, with his hands outstretched.

He was keeping up with her! Lois felt suddenly optimistic. He'd promised to find her no matter what happened, and he was going to keep that promise.

He was yanked to one side, almost as though he was being battered by some invisible force.

A moment later, he was gone.

As she stared back at Clark, it took her a moment to understand what she'd seen. The tunnel through time wasn't a single tube linking present to past; there were junctions that led off to the side. Clark had been pulled into one.

She felt a moment of despair. Not only had she been separated from Clark, there was no guarantee that she would end up anywhere even remotely related to where she'd started.

As she continued to spin, she felt nauseous as she too was pulled to the side.

All she saw around her was blackness and the stars. As she spun, she saw the earth below her, and she gasped.

She'd seen pictures, but it couldn't compare to what she saw before her now. The earth was a great blue shape. She could see masses of clouds rushing by below her even as continents spun fast so quickly they almost seemed to be standing still.

The clouds slowed, as did the continents, and for a moment Lois simply floated, alone, gasping for air and feeling her skin burn with the growing, unbearable chill.

The sun never rose, until the last moment, and then Lois felt herself being blinded. She closed her eyes and prayed that she wasn't about to be ejected into the cold void of space.

A moment later she was falling.

Lois had never really seen the appeal of roller coasters. Danger was common enough in her life that she didn't need the simulation of danger to feel a thrill. Nevertheless, she had been on the occasional ride when pressured by Lucy.

This was more terrifying than any of them. The earth rushed up at her far faster than terminal velocity would have allowed. She found her vision graying again, and she blacked out.

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She woke on the side of a road, confused, and wondering where she was.

For the moment she couldn't remember how she'd gotten here, or where she was. All she knew was that it was dark and she was confused. She staggered out into the road and thought she'd follow it until she found some help.

There was a curve up ahead, among the trees, and for a moment she thought she saw light.

A moment later a car swung into view. It was a 1956 Ford Thunderbird, much like her grandfather had owned, except this one was blue. It looked new, but it didn't have the shininess most collectors preferred. This car looked used.

She stared into the headlights, confused.

The car slid to a stop, only a few feet in front of her, and then the shadowy passenger leaned over.

He was a teenager, dressed like it was the 1950's, with a hairstyle to match. Lois had a confused moment wondering if he was heading for a costume party.

Working the crank to lower the window, he kept staring at her. Lois looked down at herself and wondered why she was wearing an old fashioned white gown and why she looked like she was glowing.

Whatever he said was muffled, and a moment later she was yanked away.

Awareness flooded her; she was in a time tunnel.

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She found herself bouncing from place to place; apparently this branch of the tunnel led all over the globe. She appeared above battlefields, on highways, once above what looked like Woodstock. Time stuttered along, slowing at times and speeding up at others. Sometimes she was noticed; more often she was not.

Despair began to creep in. There was no guarantee that she would end up anywhere close to her own time, and if she did, she might end up anywhere in the world.

In no version of the future she could see would she ever see Clark again.

Until she did.

As time slowed yet again, Lois found herself in familiar territory. She was in Metropolis, in her old neighborhood.

Her friend's house was just to her left. She'd always been jealous of her friend for having a front yard, even if it was tiny.

When she saw the red ball rolling across the street, chills ran up her spine.

*She remembered this.*

It was strange looking at herself. At five she was awkward and uncoordinated. Her face was completely open and trusting and naïve. Here was a Lois Lane who hadn't seen her parents' divorce, her father turn to philandering, her mother to alcohol.

Here was a Lois who had never been to the Congo and seen people living in conditions so terrible that the poorest people in America would almost seem like they lived like kings.

This Lois hadn't been betrayed by Claude, hadn't seen sources murdered and politicians caught in scandal after scandal.

This Lois had an entire world of possibilities in front of her.

At least she would have, if the ball hadn't rolled out into the street.

Before anyone noticed, young Lois was running. What she didn't see was the car filled with teenagers, more interested about what was on the radio than what was on the road.

Lois couldn't take her eyes off herself as she ran for the ball.

She remembered this day. It was the first time Clark had saved her.

He appeared, just as she had remembered, out in the middle of the street. While the teenagers wouldn't have seen her, they couldn't help but see him, and they swerved to miss him, cursing.

Little Lois was behind him, grabbing for the ball. She looked up at him, and she grinned. A moment later she was running back toward her mother, who was shouting angrily at her.

Clark looked lost and sad looking down at her, and then he looked up and saw Lois.

"Clark!"

His head snapped up, and the expression on his face was even more beautiful than the one in the picture.

He ran toward her, and he vanished.

Lois stared after him, and she wept.

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It wasn't until she retched into the bushes that Lois knew it was over.

Her entire body ached, almost as though she had the flu; this was on top of her pre-existing aches and pains. She felt as though her entire body was one massive bruise.

At least she was back to the Grand Hotel, although she had no way of knowing just when she had landed.

She felt exhausted, and worse was the sense of loss. She was heart sick.

As she heard footsteps across the lawn, she froze. She was still halfway in the bushes, and the sky was still lit up with an aurora.

It was Arthur, and he was carrying a familiar ledger.

Lois froze. The last time she'd seen Arthur, he'd been hurt and on the floor of the attic, with two of the three assassins standing over him.

Now he wasn't injured, although he was wearing the same clothes he'd been wearing when she'd last seen him.

She'd landed before she left.

For a moment, she was tempted to follow him. She'd have a long hard talk with herself about time travel, and then she'd just fade away into non-existence, becoming the version of herself who never went back in time, never met Clark.

The pain in her chest had nothing to do with any of her injuries. She was going to have to live without Clark and part of her was tempted.

It would be easier never to know what love was like than have to experience this for the rest of her life.

Of course, with her luck, this would just be an alternate timeline, and she'd be stuck here with a version of herself who'd never gotten to go back.

She suspected that she'd never be able to tolerate herself. The other her would have all the negative traits that she hated about herself. Worse, she hated to lose, and how would she ever be able to compete with herself?

Keeping up would be impossible. In her way, this Lois was as innocent as the Lois she'd seen at the age of five.

Love was just a fantasy to her, and she wouldn't be burdened by the grief that even now made Lois want to curl up into a ball and cry.

Yet despite the pain, the more Lois thought about losing the memories of her time with Clark, the more anxious she felt.

Memories were all she had left of him, and she wouldn't do anything to jeopardize that.

Still, she couldn't let Arthur get hurt.

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The frying pan jolted in her hands for a second time, and the leader of the thugs sagged to the ground. Modern frying pans weren't nearly as heavy as the ones back in Clark's time, and this one wasn't filled with hot grease.

Nevertheless, she'd chosen one sturdy enough that it would be able to stun a man if she hit him in the back of the head with it.

The man's gun fell out of his hand, and Lois kicked it into a corner. She kicked him in the gut three times.

Contrary to what Hollywood depicted, hitting someone hard enough to completely knock them out risked brain damage and death. Hitting them hard enough to stun them was much easier, but that meant that Lois had to keep hitting them.

Her anger at her loss made kicking them more satisfying. "Freeze!"

Lois stopped and carefully raised her hands.

"My name is Lois Lane, and I'm the one who had the desk clerk call for you."

"Turn around and keep your hands up!"

Lois did as she was told, and as she stared down the

trembling gun of a man who looked far too young to be a police officer, she wondered if anything was ever going to be all right again.

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The celebration was in full swing. Lois had been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and although she hadn't yet won, her chances looked good.

Although her chest still hurt, throwing herself into her work helped. As long as she was working, she wasn't thinking about what she'd lost.

She still cried herself to sleep every night, but she knew that in time it would fade to a simple dull ache.

There were times that she thought she saw him in a crowd, but it was always just someone with a similar build, or a similar suit.

She wondered sometimes if she was crazy. Sometimes it almost seemed easier to believe that it had never happened.

Yet the proof was in the back of her closet. She still had the second dress she'd been wearing. She'd put it in the back of the closet because she was afraid that she'd wear a hole in it, rubbing the fabric. It was her only link to Clark's time, and thus, to her, it was precious.

She hadn't even had it cleaned, for fear that the cleaners would lose it, and with it, her only proof she hadn't gone crazy.

Besides, sometimes as she held the dress she almost imagined that she could smell him.

He'd watched over her as a ghost for much of her life. It wouldn't surprise her if any minute he simply appeared before her. They might not be able to touch, but just being able to look in his eyes on last time would be infinitely precious.

The noise level in the room began to drop.

Lois looked around, wondering if someone was about to begin a toast. Although she'd wanted a Pulitzer for much of her adult life, it now seemed empty and meaningless. Still, it was an accolade for the entire paper, and she wasn't going to cheat them out of the celebration.

It took her a moment to realize that only the people on one side of the room were getting quiet.

The crowd began to part, and a moment later Lois could see why.

An incredibly ancient man, withered and feeble stepped forward. He made Arthur look young, and his breathing rasped with effort.

Lois felt a sense of growing dread in her stomach.

It wasn't until he looked up and she saw his eyes that she knew.

"Clark?"

She ran to him just as he fell.

"Clark!"

He stared up at her, his expression as beautiful as the one that had drawn her to him back in the Grand Hotel.

Breathing was obviously difficult for him.

"Come back to me," he said.

A moment later she felt his body relax, and the light vanished from his eyes.

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Lois gasped as she jerked awake.

She was in a jail cell, pending her story checking out. The men who'd tried to kill her were in separate cells.

Her heart was still racing and she winced as she tried not to focus on the dream.

"Your story checks out," the deputy said, slipping the key into the lock. "The men who assaulted you are wanted for a dozen murder charges back in Metropolis. You're free to go."

Lois stood up slowly. The beds in jail cells in Mackinac Island weren't much better than jail cells in Metropolis or the Congo. Her body now was becoming increasingly stiff.

"The last guy got my purse," Lois said. "How am I going to get back to the hotel?"

"You've got someone waiting to pick you up," the deputy said.

Lois stiffened. There wasn't any way Perry had gotten here this fast, and there were no guarantees that the men who wanted her dead had only sent three people to kill her. She might be safer inside the cell, although she wouldn't put it past them to kill the few policemen on the island in an effort to get to her.

"Can you do me a favor?" the deputy asked.

Lois stared at him. He'd arrested her and thrown her in jail and he wanted a favor? While it was true that she'd been kicking two semiconscious men while holding a pan she'd "borrowed" from the hotel kitchen, he could have at least listened to her story.

"What?" she asked finally.

"Can you get his autograph?"

"What?"

"My wife loves his books. She'd be thrilled to get one autographed by him."

The deputy didn't look old enough to be out of high school, much less be married. Lois was still groggy from waking up with too little sleep and she felt confused.

"Who are you talking about?" Lois asked irritably.

"Clark Kent," the deputy said. "He's waiting for you."

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He looked different.

His hair was longer, styled in a much more modern fashion than when she'd seen him only hours ago. He wasn't wearing a hat, and he was wearing black slacks, a black vest, and a pinstriped burgundy shirt. The clothes looked as though they were tailored and expensive.

She'd been afraid that he'd look older, but he didn't. Still, the way he stood was much less formal than what she'd grown used to.

He was talking to a police officer and didn't seem to notice her. Lois stopped, her heart in her throat.

How long had it been for him? Had his feelings changed?

Their romance was still raw for her, and she wasn't sure if she could bear it if he was to turn away.

In his world, she was something special, a modern woman with modern ideas. In this world, she was just one woman among many, and a man who looked like Clark wouldn't lack for female companionship.

The idea that he'd come here out of a sense of obligation tore at her.

He stopped, suddenly, and turned slowly in her direction. As his eyes met hers, his expression lit up into an expression of joy.

Despite the presence of the police, Lois found herself flying into his arms.

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She wouldn't have expected him to drive a Prius.

In truth, she hadn't envisioned him as driving at all. He could fly, after all, and cars had been a rarity in his time.

Yet he drove like someone who'd been driving for a long time.

She couldn't stop looking at him, but she was afraid to ask the one question that had been plaguing her mind since she'd met him.

"How long has it been?" she asked.

"It feels like forever," he said.

Even his speech patterns had changed. His speech was much less formal than it had been, although the longer he talked to her the more he seemed to be slipping back into his old accent.

"Really," she said.

"Fifteen years," he said.

Lois stared at him, aghast.

"You don't look any older," she said finally.

"I'm not like other men," he reminded her. "I just didn't realize how different."

"I'm sorry."

She should have been there to introduce him to this new world. She couldn't imagine what it would have been like to be trapped in a world where no one you'd known was alive. He'd been utterly alone, and she'd never told him exactly when she'd come from.

"How did you find me?"

"It wasn't that hard," Clark said. "You told me you lived in Metropolis and that your father was a physician. They had telephone directories in my time."

She'd have been eleven years old when he'd arrived. She tried not to think about the despair he must have felt when he'd realized the gulf that separated them.

"So what did you do when you found out you'd shown up early?"

"The public library became my home for a time," Clark said. "You'd be surprised the kind of education you can find if you read the right book. Fortunately, I'm a very quick reader."

"Still..." Lois said. "How could you eat, or find a place to live? Metropolis isn't exactly an inexpensive town."

Without any identification, even renting a hotel room would be almost impossible.

"I like to eat, but apparently I don't have to," Clark said. "Yet another way I discovered myself to be different from other men. I don't need much more than three hours of sleep a night and I slept on roofs sometimes."

He'd been homeless.

"That didn't last long," Clark said. "I'd always wanted to travel the world, and since I couldn't be around you, I decided that was exactly what I'd do."

"Why couldn't you be around me?"

He glanced over at her. "The temptation, especially once you became an adult. If you knew me before you went back, it would risk changing everything. Yet how could I be around you without being tempted to stumble into your life in one way or another?"

Lois was silent, staring at the dash in front of her.

"I'd seen flashes of your life in my journey forward in time," Clark continued. "You seem remarkably prone to danger. But I had to have faith that you would be all right without me."

"You didn't have any identification, citizenship papers. How could you get a job?"

"I worked unskilled jobs in places around the world," Clark said. "Eventually I found a crab fisherman in Alaska who was willing to give me a chance. It's a profitable profession."

Lois supposed it wouldn't have been as dangerous to him, given his strength and his reduced need for sleep.

"This world of yours has so many people in need," Clark said. "I discovered that I enjoy helping people where I can. My abilities have helped me make a difference."

"I heard you were a writer?" Lois asked. She wasn't sure just how Clark was using his abilities, but she supposed she'd have plenty of time to find out.

She was just having trouble imagining how he'd adapted to her world.

"I helped a government agent out of a few tight spots," Clark said. "He helped create an identity for me. From what I was willing to tell him, he assumed I was from an Amish family and had no identification. This was before 2001, when things were a little more lax."

He turned down a side road.

"Once I had the proper papers, I was able to put money in a bank, pay taxes, buy a home. Crab fishing only takes part of the year, and after just a few years traveling was losing its appeal. I eventually went back to my old dream and started to write."

"I found some success in writing historical novels, historical

novels and oddly enough, science fiction. People seem to enjoy the way I'm able to describe the past."

"The police officer's wife wanted an autograph," Lois said.

"I rent a lake house here every year, on the other side of the lake from the island. A few people have commented on my resemblance to myself; I don't spend a lot of time on the island because of it. Some people assume I'm my own descendant. I'm relatively well known among a small circle of readers."

Lois wondered why she hadn't uncovered any of this during her search about Clark Kent the last time. She'd been rushed and more focused on the ghost angle and she hadn't had time to ask the right people in town.

He turned another corner, down a dirt road, and behind a grove of trees, a large white house came into view facing the lake.

"Some success?" Lois asked.

"It's a rental," Clark said. "I've continued crab fishing, although the industry has changed somewhat, and I have made some wise investments. When I saw the iPhone introduced, I invested in Apple and I began keeping a closer eye on your life."

Lois looked at him, startled. Things were starting to fall into place. There had been a few miraculous escapes in her life when the ghost hadn't shown up, but seemingly impossible things had happened.

"You saved me," Lois said. She hesitated. "How many times?"

"More than I'd like," Clark said. He glanced at her, "You are horrifyingly danger prone, especially since you have become a reporter."

"I thought you were avoiding me, because of the temptation."

He shrugged as he pulled into the driveway. "I couldn't risk missing your return, either. I'm only sorry that I didn't get here sooner. I thought I'd have time, but when I heard the borealis had been seen, I knew I had to come."

"You can't be there for me all the time," Lois said.

The thought that someone had been watching over her for much of her adult life should have seemed stalker-ish, even creepy, but somehow it comforted her instead.

"I promised to protect you," Clark said. "And I will keep that promise, even if your feelings for me should change."

"It's only been a few hours for me," Lois said. "Why would my feelings change?"

He stopped car, shifted it into park and switched off the ignition.

"I've done a lot of reading," he said. "People who are separated from everything they know can become...vulnerable. I'd never take advantage..."

Lois put her hand on his arm. "I've been worried your feelings for me would change."

He shook his head. "As I followed your life and saw your courage and determination and drive, my feelings have only grown deeper. I love you, and that's not going to change no matter what happens."

"You don't know what it's like to live with me day to day," Lois said. "I had roommates in college, and they were always complaining that I was stubborn and controlling and overbearing."

"I can be stubborn," Clark admitted. "And there are some aspects of this new world that I don't think I'll ever be able to accept. Twerking, for example..."

Lois shuddered.

"So we take it slow, get to know each other better."

Clark smiled. "In my time, I'd have asked your father for permission to court you."

"It's not your time," Lois said firmly. "The only person you have to ask now is me. The answer, if you want to know, is yes."

He smiled slowly, and Lois felt a flutter in her stomach. She

wondered how long her proposition that they take it slow would last.

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It didn't last the evening.

Somehow, Lois didn't mind.

Over the next weeks and months she discovered that what she'd thought was love with Clark was a pale imitation of what she felt as she grew to know him.

He was gentle and caring, modern in ways that she loved, but old fashioned in ways that were important as well. He was a gentleman, and a gentle man.

She'd fought her entire life to prove to her father that she was just as good as the boy he'd really wanted. With Clark, though, she discovered that she had nothing to prove. He'd known exactly what he was getting into long before she'd had any inkling he even existed.

He cared about people in ways that Lois wasn't sure she, herself was capable of. He went out of his way to help people that Lois wouldn't have given a second glance. She found herself softening as she spent more time with him.

He made her a better person, and yet she challenged him in ways that he hadn't expected.

His panoply of abilities astonished her, but he never let them go to his head. Anyone else would have been corrupted by the tremendous power he had, but he was humble.

It became harder and harder to remember a time when she hadn't been with him.

Despite his time in her world, there were still things that she got to introduce him to. There was an endless number of movies and of music that he hadn't experienced, and she always felt thrilled to share another thing that she loved with him.

Getting him to wear a costume and go public as a superhero had been like pulling teeth; he was modest and any costume that would last had to be skin tight. Despite that, he insisted on more modest outfits that kept being destroyed.

Still, he could afford them, and as time went on, he and Lois were only growing closer.

Her life with him was rich and interesting, and far superior to anything she'd known before.

She'd once believed that there wasn't a man in the world who could keep up with her. As it turned out, she'd been right.

It had taken a man who wasn't from this world at all, or from this time, but in the end all that mattered was that they'd found each other.

Lois wasn't sure that she believed in soulmates, but if they existed, she'd found hers.

Life was good.

THE END