

What a Gentleman Desires

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Summary: Looking at things from a different angle makes Lois think that Clark isn't the man with whom she fell in love. A romantic comedy with plot supplied by KatherineKent.

Author's Note: This story came about because KatherineKent won my fundraising auction for the LnC Message Boards. Winning gave her the prize of being my muse for a 1-3 part story. This story would not exist without her plot idea. Thank you, KK, for your inspiration.

Lois opened her eyes, closed them again to wipe the sleepers away, and then opened them to verify that *yes*, indeed, she had woken up before her alarm clock. By two minutes.

Argh!

Well, that gave her two minutes to think about that strange dream she just had. That was what had woken her up. Clark was acting so odd, so out of character, it felt as if he were from another planet or something... not that he was. If he were from Krypton...

She settled back against her pillows to imagine the possibilities.

Locked doors? *No problem!*

Two seconds to find a secret document? *Easy peasy.*

Tailing the suspect? *Ha! Give us a real challenge.*

Kisses to melt her kneecaps? *Oh, wait, Clark already had those.*

Sigh.

Unfortunately, they were never real. They were always a charade to cover up something else. To distract her from crazy, paranoid, armed men. To say goodbye. To pretend that they were about to make love.

Sigh.

Lois settled into that last memory for an extra second. The weight of his body against hers. His hand upon her hair. The want so obvious with his lips pressing against hers. The shift of his hips. She had thought...

Well, it didn't matter what she *had* thought. It wasn't real.

The maid had burst in and then turned around and left, none too quickly Lois could add, and Clark had gotten up as if nothing had happened, but something had. Lois's world had shifted, tilted on its side, irreparably damaged.

Okay, fine. She hadn't acknowledged it *then* how much her world had shifted, but when she *had* realized it, he had to go and tell her that it was all a lie.

Bleep! Bleep! Ble...

She slammed her hand down on her alarm clock. Lois sat up, smashed her pillow with her fist, and dragged her feet out of bed.

If she were going to have insane dreams, why couldn't she dream something ridiculous like Clark as Superman? Clark, who couldn't open that jar of pickles the other day, with the ability to literally sweep her off her feet. Now, there was a crazy thought. Instead, she had dreamed of Clark being so one-sided. Could she ever see him being so cardboard? So much like a stereotypical man, instead of the sweet, genuine, caring...

Impossible!

Clark would never think like the man in her dream! Certainly, never act like that. Maybe she had just dreamed about a man who just *happened* to look like Clark.

It wasn't Clark.

It was a Clark clone.

Although, why would she dream about a Clark clone when the only real clone she'd met was Superman's? Then again, the Superman clone had acted a bit like that Clark from her dream. Anyway, who would clone Clark? Well, besides Lois. It might explain his odd behavior as of late, though.

I love you... I've been in love with you for a long, long time. You had to have known.

It wasn't true. I would've said anything, done anything, to stop you from marrying Luthor.

Lois frowned. Now, why did she have to go and think about that?

Oh, right. Morning. Time to face reality once more. Put a plastic smile on her face and wonder why Clark Kent wasn't interested in her, while she secretly longed for him in her heart.

Lois stood up and padded over to the bathroom.

She should've known. All the signs were there.

He had sent her to the Sewage Reclamation Facility. If Clark really had been in love with her since he first met her, he never would have done that. He wouldn't have chanced her hating him forever, instead of respecting him for standing up to her. Actually, if it had been anyone else, hate would have been her go-to emotion with revenge close behind. There was just something about Clark that was so... so... forgivable.

Hell, the two of them had been sprayed with pheromone perfume and *he* hadn't stooped to do a striptease for *her!* Even Superman couldn't resist Lois under Revenge's power, but Clark only caved after two days of her throwing herself at him.

But for *two whole days*, Clark had been able to resist her full frontal assault on his senses. So, what did that prove?

One: Clark was a true gentleman.

Two: Clark was human, a true male in every sense of the word, *and* heterosexual. He *had* caved after all.

Three: Clark really and truly wasn't interested in her for more than a friend; although, if she stripped for him again, he might take friends with benefits.

The big question was *why*. She was in good shape. She had intelligence. She could be witty. She was reasonably hot in a classy non-stripper like Cat Grant sort of way. Johnny Taylor thought so when he hired her for the Metro Club. Lex Luthor thought enough of her to propose! And *he* had been the third richest man in the world. Well, the second richest man, third richest individual, and top most scum of the Earth, but that was beside the point.

Lois turned on her shower.

Clark didn't even try to make a move on her that night she had burst into his apartment last week when Kyle Griffin was stalking her. He had offered to let her stay the night... on his couch. He had even cuddled with her while they watched the movie, but not once did he try to make a move on her. True, she wasn't looking her best that night, but still... something like that wouldn't matter to Clark.

It *shouldn't* matter to the man she thought Clark was.

Maybe he was as flawed as the Clark in her dream was.

Clark knocked on Lois's door. Waited. When her hair dryer switched off, he knocked again.

He could hear her cursing to herself as she approached the door. He wasn't trying to overhear what she was saying, he just could. "It's me, Lois," he said, so she wouldn't have to peek through the hole.

Lois paused by the door for ten seconds before he heard her

unlock the top two locks and the bottom one. Hadn't she recognized his voice? Perhaps he shouldn't have assumed that she would. It wasn't as if they hadn't been working together all that long. A year, close to eighteen months now. Although, he could easily calculate the exact length of time that had passed since he had first set eyes on...

Clark heard her footsteps moving away from the door. His brow furrowed. What now? Should he have lifted up her coffee, so she had known he had come bearing breakfast?

"It's open," she called from down her hall.

O-kay.

He opened the door tentatively and entered.

"I'm not quite ready," she said from down her hall once he closed her front door, and then she swore at herself again.

"Are you all right?" Clark asked, tempted to peek and see, but knowing he shouldn't, and so he didn't.

"Fine. I just overslept. I'll be right out."

"Do you want me to take a look at your alarm clock?"

"Why would you want to do that?" Lois queried.

"Because you overslept," he replied.

"I set my alarm clock, Clark."

"But it didn't go off this morning," he said.

Lois came down the hall hopping on one foot as she put on her high heel. "Who said it didn't go off?" she asked.

"But you said..." Clark said as she peered around the corner of her hall and he lost his train of thought as one of her beautiful brunette locks slipped across her face like a veil. Quickly realizing the direction of his mind, he shook his head. "Never mind."

She leaned against the corner, still mostly out of sight, and pulled on her other shoe. "Was that a roundabout attempt to see inside my bedroom, Kent?" she asked in a sly tone of voice.

He flushed. He couldn't see his face, so he didn't know how red it was, but it sure felt hotter than that two-alarm fire Superman had helped put out last night. He glanced away, not wanting her to see how much her words had affected him, and he mumbled some sort of feeble apology.

"Just as I thought," Lois said and disappeared back down her hall.

She had *thought* he was trying to worm his way into her bedroom? *Me?*

"If I ever gave you the impression that I would... I'm so sorry, Lois, I would never, *never* invade..." he started in with a more heartfelt and adamant apology, but she stopped him once more with her presence. This time, it was her full body, which came around the bend, taking away his breath. How did she do that? His record for holding his breath had been twenty minutes when he had arrived in Metropolis, yet around Lois Lane it fell down to less than twenty seconds.

She smiled at him. "I know, Clark, *that's* just what I thought."

"Oh," he murmured, and felt his cooling face warm again.

He hated that his love for Lois was written across his forehead in permanent ink. Not that it was permanent, but that it was there for all to see. He feared that everyone could see the writing on Superman's face as well, how much he loved her.

How could he not love Lois? She had the fieriest, most opinionated, most stubborn, most intelligent personality he had ever had the pleasure of coming across, and it was all stuffed inside this petite frame with legs that never ended, eyes he could stare into for hours on end, and often did, and luxurious silky hair that gave him chills whenever it brushed his cheek.

Lois Lane was explosive. That was just what she was. She had all this personality bottled up inside the body of a goddess, and if she didn't let it out, he was sure she would self-combust. He honestly believed that was why they would be a perfect fit. She needed someone with the strength of Superman to help her stay together, sometimes literally. And he needed... well, simply,

her.

Clark held out his hand. "Your coffee," he said, changing the subject.

She smiled at him as if he had told her that Superman had personally made it himself and kissed the cup before handing it to Clark to give to her. Tempting though that might be, Clark knew his boundaries and that certainly would be crossing the line. But, *oh*, to know that his kiss would be caressing her palm, while she drank her coffee...

"Thanks," Lois said briskly, taking the coffee, and picking up her briefcase. "Ready?"

He nodded and followed her out the door.

As she locked her numerous locks, she said, "You know, Clark, it's about time... long past time, actually, for you and me to eat lunch at my Uncle Mike's."

"Pardon?" he asked, knowing he heard her correctly but still not understanding.

"My Uncle Mike's Café Americana is over on the Southside. Don't play coy with me, Kent. You know all about my father's brother, the ex-Marine, who bakes like a dream. I'm sure you read all about him when you researched my background when we became partners," Lois said, heading down the hall to the elevator.

His jaw dropped open. "I would never..."

"Really? You let yourself be partnered up with someone whom you've never done a background check on?" she scoffed, clearly not believing him.

"I didn't have to do a background check on you, Lois," he retorted. "When you're partnered with the best, you just give thanks, and try to keep up. Everything else doesn't matter."

Lois raised an eyebrow at him. He knew flattery where her ego was concerned was the best way to sooth the Mad Dog, not that he had said anything that could be refuted. She merely shook her head and took a sip of her coffee.

"*Anyway*," she started up again, once the elevator doors opened. "We should have lunch down there today."

Seeing that she had forgiven him for his journalistic faux pas, Clark couldn't help but smile radiantly at her. She wouldn't have to ask twice. He would follow her to the moon if she asked, and she knew it. "That sounds nice."

"Don't think you're not paying, either," Lois said, skipping down the steps of her front stoop. "You still owe me for your losses at the poker table."

"I'll be forever in your debt," he replied from behind her.

"If you keep playing like that, you will be," she said, realizing that she was walking down the street alone. Turning around, she saw that Clark was holding the door to her building open for that blonde woman in 404 with her two towhead kids, babe in her arm, and another one on the way.

But she isn't thinking that 'blondes have more fun,' now, Lois thought to herself.

As soon as the family passed through, Clark smiled at them and jogged to catch up with Lois.

"You're going to miss a bunch of scoops being that gentlemanly, Clark," she warned.

"Good thing you'll be right there to catch them for us, then," he replied. "Partner."

"Just see to it that I'm not stuck doing all the heavy lifting," she retorted.

Clark smiled at her in that way he did as if he found something funny in what she said. "I'll be sure hold up my end," he assured her.

"What?"

"I'll be sure..."

"No, what's with the smile?" Lois probed, pointing at his face.

“I can’t smile?”

“Don’t be silly, Clark. Nobody can smile like you do,” she snapped.

Instead of disappearing, his smile only grew larger, more radiant, as if harnessing the power of the sun.

“What does it mean, though?” Lois said, stopping and jabbing him in the chest.

Clark chuckled. “Does a smile *have* to mean anything, Lois? Can’t I just smile because today is a beautiful day, and we’re outside enjoying the sunshine as we walk to work?”

Lois pressed her lips together and harrumphed before continuing to march down the street. She hated it when he avoided her questions with questions. She was a reporter. She knew what he was doing.

Several blocks later, they missed the pedestrian crossing because Clark had stopped to help a couple of Norwegian tourists find their way to their hotel. Of course, Clark spoke Norwegian. The man had been more places in the world and had a better ear for languages than Superman had.

As she waited, drinking her coffee and tapping her foot, Lois was reminded of her dream. She looked this pair of tourists over and wondered if Clark had *volunteered* to help just because he could speak their language or because they were blonde, buxom co-eds, who didn’t realize that shorty-shorts weren’t appropriate in Metropolis in autumn, or *ever*. Really, they could cause a major ten-car pile-up with those outfits. It seemed that even her partner wasn’t immune to feminine wiles.

The question was why didn’t he notice hers?

Clark pointed down the street, gave some directions, and handed the tourists back their map. The co-eds smiled, waved, and said something that sounded an awful lot like a recommendation for a date to Lois’s ears before they walked on.

“What nice girls,” Clark said to Lois, rejoining her to wait for the pedestrian crossing to change again.

“Clark, can we just get one thing straight? If they’re old enough for you to date, they’re ‘women’ not ‘girls,’” Lois corrected, starting across the street despite the red hand.

He grabbed her arm and held her back as another crazy Metro cabbie zipped by. “They’re nineteen, and only just graduated from high school, Lois. Certainly not old enough for me to date; therefore, ‘girls’ was the right word,” he said, letting go of her arm two seconds later as the red hand became a green walking person.

“I bet Jimmy would side with me,” Lois grumbled, although inwardly smiled that he considered those potential runway models still children.

“Jimmy’s twenty-one, and therefore they would fall within five years of his age. So, of course, he would side with you,” Clark replied, and then added almost under his breath, “Plus, he values his health.”

“What?” Lois snapped, tripping over the curb on the other side of the street.

“What, what?” he returned, catching her elbow and making sure she didn’t fall.

Sometimes, she just wanted to clobber that man, she thought, jerking her elbow away from him. Maybe it would knock some sense into him.

Lois brushed off the droplets of coffee that had landed on her sleeve when she tripped. “By your logic, Clark, you should be calling...” She paused. “You’re twenty-eight, now, right?” Then she continued before he could do more than nod. “Twenty-three year old *women* ‘girls’.”

Clark was tired of this subject. Something was clearly bothering Lois. “Granted, Lois. You’re right, and I’m sorry.”

Her step perked up at this acknowledgement. She glanced over at him under her lashes and gave him a shy smile, which

caused his heart to skip a beat.

“Are you annoyed that I stopped to help those girls?” he asked, and then quickly corrected himself. “*Women?*”

“No, no,” Lois said slowly. “It’s best that they went to their hotel room to change, since someone obviously had stolen their clothes.”

Suddenly, he knew what was wrong. “Were you jealous of those women?”

“Those girls?” Lois scoffed. “Hardly.”

“You’re *so* jealous!” he crowed. “Just as you were jealous of Toni Taylor of the Metro gang. Admit it!”

“I’ll admit that Toni Taylor irked me, but I was *not* jealous!” Lois insisted. “I still can’t see how you were interested in that... that...” She paled. “Woman.”

“I wasn’t. Charlie King was. It was just a cover, Lois, just as you weren’t really interested in Stoke,” he reminded her.

“Anyway, you’re the one who brought up the whole ‘diagram’ scenario.” Point to him. “It’s not my fault that Toni found me more charming than Johnny Taylor found you.”

She frowned. “Johnny Taylor hired me because of my legs. He never even heard me sing or dance until rehearsals,” she said. “Are you going to tell me that you didn’t enjoy kissing Toni?”

He grinned and leaned closer. “I’ve kissed better.” *Namely, you, Lois Lane.*

“Who? That other Toni?” At his confused expression, she continued. “Dr. Antoinette Baines?”

“Oh. I didn’t kiss her!” Although, Clark thought, he bet Lex Luthor had kissed Dr. Baines and then some, but that wound was still too raw for him to mention.

Lois scoffed. “I was sitting right there, Clark. You kissed.”

But her back had been towards him. How had she known Toni had kissed him? “What was I supposed to do? Head butt her?”

Lois groaned in what must have been frustration. “For starters!” She tossed her empty cup into a trashcan. “She was trying to kill us.”

Okay, he’d grant that argument, if his head butt wouldn’t have knocked Dr. Baines’s skull across the room.

“I bet if Miranda hadn’t sprayed the whole newsroom with Revenge, you would’ve been plying her with ideas of playing hooky.”

Miranda? “You *are* jealous!”

“Well, you’re a broken record,” Lois retorted and marched off. “Always repeating yourself!”

Huh?

“Why don’t you try something new for a change?”

“Something new?” he echoed, completely lost. “What do you mean?”

She tossed her hands up in defeat and hurried off, making it across the next intersection before the pedestrian sign changed to red, stopping him. He would give her a few minutes to cool off as he tried to figure out what exactly was bothering her this time.

That was one of the things Clark loved most about Lois. She was completely unpredictable. Never a dull moment with her. He doubted he would ever truly understand Lois, but, oh, what fun he would have trying.

His love for her notched up another level, once more overflowing and warming him with happiness. He loved that she was jealous of all those women who had found him attractive. Perhaps it meant that she was giving him a second look from over the edge of the rock wall surrounding her heart.

The question was would she like what she saw?

“Clark?” Lois asked hesitantly, as his fork of chocolate cake with raspberry sauce lifted to his mouth. “Did you find Linda King attractive?”

“What?” he gasped, pausing the movement of his fork just

long enough for a drop of the sauce to land on his tie. He shook his head as if this question had come out of thin air, as far as he knew. “Uh... I wouldn’t call her ugly.”

“You dripped,” she said.

“Now, Lois, that’s unfair. Just because I thought Linda was pretty doesn’t mean I would have ever made a move on her. I respect your opinion and our friendship more...”

Lois pointed at his tie. “You have raspberry sauce on your tie, Clark,” she said, interrupting him before he went on praising Linda King’s so-called good looks. “You dripped, you drip.”

“Oh,” he murmured, blushing as he gazed down at his yellow tie with a big red dot on it.

“You better go wash that out or it’ll stain,” she said. It would be a shame to ruin one of his more somber ties.

Clark nodded and stood up.

“Dab, don’t rub,” Lois suggested as he wandered back towards the restroom at Café Americana. As soon as he was out of sight, she took a big bite of her chocolate raspberry torte and moaned with a satisfaction usually reserved for Clark Kent and Superman kisses.

“What was that about, honey?” asked her uncle.

Lois sat up straighter and wiped her mouth with her napkin. “Good cake, Uncle Mike, as always.”

“Thank you, but I was referring to the third degree on your partner. Isn’t Linda King that girl who stole your story in college?” Uncle Mike asked.

“How do you know about that?” she asked.

He grinned at her and winked. “They only take the best in the Marines, honey.”

She waited.

“You mentioned her at Christmas dinner that year,” he reminded her.

Uncle Mike had moved back to Metropolis the year she had started college and had invited her to spend her holidays with him. A promise of Christmas away from her folks *with* a home cooked meal was too much for Lois to refuse.

“Actually, it was *you* who suggested I should retire and open a restaurant.”

Lois didn’t recall that. “Only proves that I’m always right,” she said, giving him a huge smile. “That meal was delicious.”

He leaned towards her. “You’re avoiding the subject.”

“What subject?” Lois lied innocently.

An explosion erupted in the kitchen and before either of them could react, Superman was there blowing it out.

Superman nodded to Lois and disappeared around the edge of the building. He returned with a man and locked his wrist to the handle of the dumpster in the alley. “Tell the police that this man is responsible for the bomb,” he told them, before taking to the skies once more.

“Thanks, Super...” But he was gone. Lois jumped to her feet, her mobile phone already open. “Clark?” she called towards the restaurant as she dialed 9-1-1. She had sent him inside to use the restroom. *Oh, God! What have I done?* “Clark!”

“9-1-1. What’s your emergency?” a voice said in her ear.

“Café America on the Southside has just been bombed... No, I can’t hold!” she screamed into the phone.

“Don’t waste your breath, honey. The last time I called, it took over two hours for an officer to show,” Uncle Mike explained. “Just look at the neighborhood. We just don’t get the priority attention we used to before the neighborhood declined.”

“Clark!”

“I’m right here, Lois,” her partner said, stepping up behind her and setting his hand on her shoulder.

“Where have you been?” she snapped, taking out her leftover anxiety on him. *He could have died.*

“The restroom. I was washing my tie,” Clark said, lifting the tip of his tie. He nodded to the man, swearing up a blue streak

from his position at the dumpster. “I saw him out the window. He was holding a bomb. I saw everything.”

A witness. *Yes!* They got ‘em now. Lois turned and hugged him. “That’s terrific news, Clark.” Realizing what she was doing, she quickly let go of him. “Do you know that 9-1-1 put me on hold? Can you believe it? That operator isn’t going to survive after I’m finished with her.”

“It’s not her fault if the city doesn’t have the resources,” Clark began, defending a woman he hadn’t even met.

Lois couldn’t believe him. Actually, since it was Clark, she could. “Well, *I’m* going to get the bottom of this. As soon as the police arrive, I’m going to lodge a complaint and then write an article about it when we get back to the Planet. This is unacceptable!”

Clark nodded. “I agree.”

“We were lucky that Superman happened to be flying by,” she said, setting her hand on Clark’s arm. She didn’t know what she would do if she lost Clark. She didn’t even want to think of that possibility, and he didn’t even know how she felt about him. She should really tell him. She opened her mouth.

“9-1-1. What is your emergency?” a voice said into her ear and she realized she had still been waiting on hold.

Well, perhaps this wasn’t the best moment to bring up how much she loved Clark. He would just assume it was motivated by the bomb, which it wasn’t. After they got back to the office would be better.

“Café Americana over on Southside has been bombed. Superman was able to put out the fire and catch the suspect, but we need an officer here to do the actual arresting,” Lois told the woman on the phone.

No, she couldn’t tell Clark this at the office. Too many people. Too many interruptions. Not enough privacy.

Tonight! Yes, Lois would stop by his apartment tonight after all this craziness had calmed down, and she would tell Clark that she loved him.

A blonde woman dressed in a suit, which Lois had to admit was nicer than hers, held out a hand to Clark. “Mayson Drake, Assistant D.A. I’d like to see if you’re willing to testify against Baby Rage.”

The man who Superman had captured earlier was still yelling threats at Lois as he was dragged down the hall of the police precinct.

“Baby *Rage*?” Clark repeated. “Wonder why they call him that?”

Inwardly, Lois smiled. She loved Clark’s jokes. Outwardly, she frowned because that flirtation wasn’t being addressed to her, but to this blonde Assistant District Attorney.

“You must be Mike Lane,” Ms. Drake said to Lois’s uncle. “I’m sorry about what happened to your restaurant.”

“Thanks. But they’re going to have to do a lot better than that to get me to pull out,” Uncle Mike replied.

Go to show that Lanes aren’t quitters! Lois agreed silently with a nod of her head.

Ms. Drake turned to look at Lois with a vacant expression. “I’m sorry, you’re...?”

“Lois Lane.”

Apparently, Mayson Drake was the only person in Metropolis who hadn’t heard of Lois. Even Baby Rage knew who she was.

“The one who called the police?” Lois continued at Ms. Drake’s blank expression. “And I just wanted to say about their response time, I’ve seen maple drip faster.”

Ms. Drake turned away from Lois, completely uninterested. Typical blonde. If it had been Clark who had complained about the response time of the police, the A.D.A. would be all ears... not that she wasn’t already.

“Also, this kid threatened Lois,” interjected Clark.

“Oh, Clark, he was just trying to scare me,” Lois said, brushing aside the incident. It wouldn’t be a day ending in Y if someone hadn’t threatened her.

“Well, now it’s my turn to try and scare *him*,” Ms. Drake said, bringing out her tough lawyer talk.

Lois needed an antacid and *not* from her Uncle Mike’s cooking.

Ms. Drake batted her eyelashes in Clark’s direction and purred, “With *your* help.”

Oh, please. Clark was so going to see right through this woman’s come-on.

“Sure, of course,” he replied, his shoulders tilting back slightly as his spine straightened.

You’ve got to be kidding me, Clark. Lois thought sarcastically. *Her?*

“I should warn you, it’s not going to be easy. This whole thing happening on the Southside isn’t just about gang turf,” Ms. Drake informed Clark, and only Clark, apparently. “There’s big money and big players in the shadows. I think Baby Rage knows a lot and I might just find out how much...”

“Yeah, he seems to be a fountain of epithets,” Lois mumbled.

Clark actually glanced at her with a ‘hush’ expression.

“If I can make a strong enough case to strap his butt to a broiler and turn the heat up,” Ms. Drake continued.

“Lovely imagery,” Lois murmured under her breath.

Clark looked at her again, before responding to that other woman, “Whatever I saw, I’ll tell it in court, Ms. Drake.”

“Mayson,” the blonde lawyer corrected him, handing him her business card. She held Clark’s hand a moment longer than necessary while doing so as well, Lois noted. “Call my office in the morning so we can arrange a deposition. And if you need to reach me in off hours, my home phone’s on the back.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “Subtle.” She grabbed Clark’s arm and practically dragged him out of the police station. “We’ll be in touch, Ms. Snake. Bye, Uncle Mike!”

“Lois!” Clark gasped, once they were outside. “That was rude. You know darn well that her name is Mayson *Drake*.”

My description fit better. “Oh, was it? My mistake,” Lois said. “Come on, Clark. That woman was throwing herself at you. Highly unprofessional, if you ask me. We should check and make sure she doesn’t have complaints against her. If Baby Rage gets out on a technicality, it’s my uncle’s restaurant which will pay the price.”

“You’re being ridiculous, Lois,” Clark replied. “Mayson hasn’t done anything wrong.”

“You’re defending her? Of course, *you’re* defending her. Think about it, Clark. Why would you need to reach her at home?” Lois asked.

“What if someone from Baby Rage’s gang threatens me?” Clark replied.

“I’m sure Mayson would be more than happy to put you up at her place,” Lois snidely returned. “You’d be better off yelling ‘help Superman!’ At least, his response time is within seconds, instead of within hours. Or better yet, call me. I know karate, and I owe you a sleepover after Griffin scared... er... threatened me last week. There’s no reason you would ever need to call that woman outside of business hours.”

Clark smiled, slipping the business card into his pants pocket. “No?”

Good God! Lois was putting ideas into her partner’s head. “No. Now, let’s go investigate who’s causing this slowdown on the Southside.”

Clark couldn’t help the extra skip in his step.

Lois was jealous.

Completely, totally, and irrationally, jealous of Mayson Drake. He was sure Mayson was just being polite so that Clark

would testify. Although, he had to admit the lawyer had rubbed Lois raw by intentionally implying that Lois wasn’t important enough to address, but still...

Lois was jealous.

Perhaps that meant something. Had Lois finally noticed that her partner was a man? A man other women found attractive? A man worth knowing outside of work? A man who could come to her in his hour of need?

His brow furrowed as he frowned. Was that what she thought of him? That he couldn’t take care of himself? He could.

Clark was Superman. Of course, Lois didn’t know that.

Outside of that time when Arianna Carlin had shot Superman with a Kryptonite bullet, he couldn’t picture a scenario in which he would ever need to go to her in his hour of need, as she had done with him when Griffin had threatened her.

His footsteps slowed.

Perhaps he had misread Lois’s reaction to their whole conversation with Mayson Drake. Maybe Lois was merely irked because Mayson was paying attention to him, instead of her. Lois did hate to be ignored.

Possibly what Clark had interpreted as jealousy was just Lois being ticked off that she had shown weakness to him when she had come to his apartment seeking assistance last week, and she was worried that Clark would hold that over her someday. Not that he would, but Lois tended to think the worst of people. Lois could also be worried that she could lose her one chance to reciprocate and put their relationship back on more even footing, because he might call Mayson Drake instead of Lois should trouble with Baby Rage’s gang occur.

He might have teased Lois that morning for being jealous, but only to push her buttons. He doubted that she was jealous of any of those women. She had to know that Clark loved her and only her. It wasn’t as if she had ever shown any interest in him anyway.

Clark had opened his heart to her the previous spring and she had declined, and not very kindly, he might add. He should know better than to hope for more than friendship to develop between them. She had already mentioned that she wasn’t interested in him. His lips pressed into a line. Well, the average Joe side of him. The Super side of him would be accepted in seconds flat.

Maybe Clark should hang up this crush he had on his partner. She *had* told him, after all, that he was ‘always repeating himself’ and that he should ‘try something new’. Was that what she meant? Stop following her around like some lovesick puppy?

Unfortunately, love wasn’t something he could turn on and off. He had been in love with Lois from the first moment that she had stormed into his interview with Perry. He had never before felt the way he did with her with anyone else. He couldn’t imagine ever feeling this way again with someone new. Any relationship he might develop with another woman would always pale in comparison to how he felt with Lois.

Lois was the one.

Sadly, she didn’t realize Clark was her ‘one’, too.

Unfortunately, due to a meeting with her shadowy police source late the night before, Lois had been too preoccupied with this story to enter into a discussion with Clark about how important her partner was to her. The postponement of one night was all Lois would allow though, especially after Superman stopped by the Daily Planet to inform her that Intergang had specifically targeted her. She knew that Superman was watching her back and her uncle’s. She was worried that if some other rescue distracted him and one of those paintball missile thingies shot her before she could tell Clark about her true feelings for him, she would just die.

Alright, that was a statement of fact, but not at all what Lois meant. She meant that she couldn’t let one more day pass where

she might be hurt, without telling Clark that she loved him. It was now or never.

Lois stepped up to Clark's front door, only to notice movement inside. She looked through the mesh on the door to see Mayson Drake, that hussy of a District Attorney and agent for Intergang, lean over and kiss Clark!

Her Clark!

On the lips!

Did Clark step away? No! He even closed his eyes.

How... How... How... ? The big lug. He was supposed to fall for *her*!

Mayson turned with a big grin on her lips, a grin that was rightfully Lois's, but Lois scurried around the corner so that Mayson and Clark wouldn't spot her. She didn't want Clark to know that she had discovered his little secret... his weakness.

After that... that... slut left Clark's apartment, Lois knocked on his door and crossed her arms.

"Lois!" Clark said with surprise upon opening his door.

She bet he had been hoping for some more kissy-face with that... that... lawyer.

"I... um... dug a little deeper," she said, rocking on her heels. She had worked late because Superman had told her Intergang had targeted her. "And I found something else out about Church."

"Well, come on in," Clark said, taking a step back from the door.

Lois noticed that his hair was a little ruffled and she wondered if that kiss she had witnessed was the first kiss he had shared with Church's blonde tart or merely the latest. This thought tore at her heart.

"I can't stay, but... ah..." she said, entering his apartment. A place that had once been her sanctuary, where she turned to when in need, now made her ill at ease and she wished to spend as little time there as possible. "You should look at this." She pulled a photograph out of her briefcase and handed it to Clark. "Mayson Drake used to work under Snell for Church's Acquisitions."

"What?" Clark gasped.

She had him just where she wanted him, feeling as horrible as she did. "Why are you upset?"

"I'm... just... surprised," he sputtered slowly, as if carefully choosing his words.

Surprised. Lois nodded, her lips pursed in disbelief. Yeah. Right. She bet he was surprised to find out his newest squeeze wanted his partner dead. She ought to tell him that the feeling was mutual.

Her beeper saved Clark from further amazement; although Lois had already decided that *this* wasn't the proper time to pour her heart out to that shallow sap, who only liked women with skin-deep beauty. Lois would only come off as whiney and needy if she offered Clark her heart after seeing him kiss another woman, and she knew what his response would be. Lois glanced down at her beeper. "Oh, no! It's Uncle Mike. He's in trouble." She looked up at Clark, her panic rising. "Give me your phone!"

"You better get down to the street and hail a cab," he suggested. "Right away. I'll... I'll..." He went down his steps and into his living room.

"Right! Time is of the essence. I'll call from my mobile," Lois said, and ran out the open front door.

It wasn't until she was stepping into the cab and giving the driver the address of Café Americana that she realized that Clark had never said *what* he would do. Call his new girlfriend, with her luck.

Lois dialed 9-1-1. Gee, Mayson Drake to the rescue. Lois would be sure not to hold her breath on that one.

After leaving her uncle's café, Lois did something she usually didn't do. She stopped by a bar for a drink, and not just a glass of wine. A real drink. A drink of hard alcohol. She only had one,

because she knew how alcohol could ruin someone's life. She didn't do it to calm her nerves. She did it to have something in her hand as she thought, and the Fudge Castle was already closed for the night.

Lois thought long and hard about Clark, and what she knew about him. Every time she thought he was a superior example of man, he would do something stupid like kiss Mayson Drake and prove her wrong.

She hated being proved wrong.

Lois could also imagine what her life would be like if she continued to allow her partner to make lunkheaded mistakes. It would be a miserable life pining away after a man who never saw her as he ought to. Her one drink could turn to two and then to many more as she slowly morphed into her mother, regretting not standing up for herself and what she knew to be right. Lois couldn't let that happen.

She needed to find a way to enlighten Clark on the stupidity of his ways.

Her lips curled into a grim grin.

There was one way that would surely get Clark's attention. It would have to be a last resort, though; after she had exhausted all other avenues.

Lois sighed, and it would have to be soon. If she allowed Clark to continue with his flirtation with Mayson Drake, all could be lost.

She downed her drink and headed home. She would visit the new Cost Mart store on her way into work the next morning, before she lost her nerve.

Clark followed Lois into the conference room.

"Clark, she's dirty!" Lois insisted.

"Show me the proof," he said, leaning towards her over the table.

"You don't have any proof on Snell and you're willing to go after *him*," Lois retorted instead of showing him any proof.

"That's different, Lois. I told you I have..." *witnessed the snake send a paint bullet after you.* "... a... a source," he said weakly instead.

"I'll tell you what's different," Lois said, pointing at him. "When Snell bats his eyes, you don't get quite so giddy."

Giddy? His heart lifted. "Are you jealous?" he asked hopefully.

"What?" she said, protesting too much, in his honest opinion. "I'm not jealous. We're friends, and we're partners, whatever you do in your own time..." She held up a hand as a sour expression crossed her face.

Whatever he did? He raised his brows. Mayson was a *what*, in Lois's opinion. He was becoming more insulted by the moment. "Yeah?" he probed.

"Whatever you do," Lois finished. "I don't care, except when it affects our job."

What did she think he had been doing with Mayson? Playing strip checkers? He pushed that retort out of this argument. His sex life, or the lack thereof, was not the issue here.

"How is it affecting our job when I say 'I disagree'?" Clark asked, knowing the answer already. Lois hated it when he didn't agree with her. "Or say that you have no proof that Church is the head of Intergang, and therefore, no proof that just because Mayson had worked for him that she's part of Intergang? We've got to stay on track."

Cold hard facts, Lois. With Bill Church being one of Perry's oldest and dearest friends, their boss wouldn't accept anything less.

"But you're not saying 'stay on track'," Lois disagreed, despite him having just said those very words. She moved around the conference table to jab him in the chest. "You're saying 'stay away from my girlfriend'."

Whoa! He knew that Lois was good, but how had she found out about Mayson's date request? How long had she been outside his apartment the night before?

"She is *not* my girlfriend," he replied, trying to calm his tone so that his words could penetrate her anger.

"Whatever she is, she's got you finger-wrapped and blindfolded!" Lois insisted.

He could sense her jealousy with every word, but what he couldn't do was understand it. Hadn't it been *her* idea that he move on? Hadn't Lois wanted him to try something new?

"You know, if anybody's blind here, it's you!" Clark snapped and marched out of the conference room before he said something he would regret.

Lois was the most stubborn person he knew. If she wasn't so blind, she would see that he could never love, never seriously date *anyone* other than her. He was doing what *she* told him to do and *still* she wasn't happy. He liked that Lois kept him on his toes, but this was ridiculous.

There was a message for him on his desk from Bobby Bigmouth. He turned back to the conference room to tell Lois, but decided that he should take this one on his own. Grabbing his jacket off the back of his chair, he headed to the elevator and to lunch. He couldn't afford, literally, to have Lois anger their best source by stealing his payment.

Bobby inhaled another deep breath over the container of manicotti Clark had picked up at that little restaurant he liked to visit on Italy's Adriatic coast and moaned with desire.

"Kent, I swear one of these days I'm going to figure out the name of your secret restaurant and where's it's hidden." Clark's source eyed him, hoping for a hint. "This food is better..." He lowered his voice. "— than my mama's. You've *gotta* tell me."

"Where would the challenge be in that, Bobby? I would never ruin your fun," he answered with a smile. He aimed to please. "You said you had some information for me."

Bobby opened the to-go container and took a large bite. Between chews, he said, "You've got to stop dating that A.D.A. Drake woman."

The color faded from Clark's cheeks. He didn't know what surprised him more: that Bobby had learned about his one kiss with Mayson Drake, which had happened only the night before, or that Lois been right about her. The lawyer had seemed so sincere about wanting to do a good job and put Baby Rage away.

"You've got proof linking her to Intergang?" Clark asked, his heart sinking. He hated being wrong about people, especially people he liked... as friends and *friends* only.

"God, no!" Bobby gasped. "Nah. She's clean, even if she has bad taste..." He shoveled another bite into his mouth.

Clark wondered why Bobby was insulting him.

"...in employers," Bobby finished. "Anyway, proof is *your* business. I work in hunches and rumors."

"Then why shouldn't I date Mayson Drake?" Clark asked, crossing his arms and leaning back to appear at ease. If it wasn't Intergang... He sat up. Was Bobby about to tell Clark that Lois was secretly in love with him? The ease was gone as Clark leaned forward with his full attention, not wanting to miss one single syllable. "Spell it out for me, Bobby."

"Baby Rage bombed Mike Lane's Café Americana on the Southside, right?"

Clark nodded.

"A shame, too. Have you tasted his chocolate raspberry torte?" Bobby asked, kissing his fingers and blowing them into the air. "Sheer heaven."

"I agree."

"Anyway, you're the star witness Mayson Drake has against Baby Rage for the bombing, right?"

Clark nodded again.

"She could be disbarred for trying to influence the testimony of a witness if it comes out that you two have become involved, especially during the trial. If not disbarred, then her professional reputation would be in tatters. If you like Mayson..." Bobby pointed his fork at Clark. "And even more so, since you're in love with Lois, keep your lips away from Mayson Drake's. The case could be thrown out on the technicality that the D.A. was dating her star witness, alone. Lois would never forgive you if you did that to her uncle. Even though I've got to say, you couldn't have picked someone who would rub Lois more raw: blonde *and* a lawyer!" He chuckled.

Clark's jaw dropped open. Once again, Bobby had surprised him. Not only had his advice been sound, he somehow knew that Clark was in love with Lois. "How do... I don't... how...?" he stammered.

"Oh, please. Does Perry White listen to Elvis Presley? Does Lois Lane have a chocolate addiction? Does Superman leap tall buildings with a single bound? You being in love with Lois is a no-brainer, Kent," Bobby said, stuffing another bite into his mouth. He swirled his fork around in the air while he chewed to indicate that he wasn't finished speaking. "The only people who don't know about it are Mayson Drake and Lois herself." He picked up his Pellegrino and took a long swig. "One last thing..."

"Uh-huh," Clark asked, leaning forward. He was on the edge of his seat.

"Didn't this meal come with dessert?"

With Clark's good luck – or bad luck had Bobby not opened his eyes – Clark had been able to get Mayson to leave their 'date' at Café Americana before it had even begun with a few innocent questions about her former boss Bill Church, CEO of Cost Mart. Then, after a few scary moments in the courtroom when it had appeared that Mayson was as dirty as Lois had initially thought, Mayson had become *their* secret source in the District Attorney's office on Intergang. Martin Snell had been arrested, Baby Rage's trial scheduled, and Lois's uncle Mike's restaurant saved from the Southside gangs.

Everything was good in Clark's world again.

Lois had realized that Clark's judgment wasn't swayed by a pair of brown eyes that weren't her own. They were still together, at least as partners. Nothing could stop them now!

Clark knocked on Lois's door to pick her up for the Cost Mart Ball, of all things. Her uncle Mike had been hired to cater it. Clark was hoping to catch Lois's eye with his tuxedo, even though she had seen him in one before. Perry had said that Alice got amorous when he put on his monkey suit. That was more of a reaction than Clark was hoping for from Lois, but a flirtatious smile would be nice.

The admiration she usually saved for Superman would be nicer.

"Who's there?" Lois's voice tentatively asked through the door.

"It's me, Lois," he replied, his brow furrowing.

"Clark?" she positively squealed.

"No, it's Prince Charming," he said wryly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to escort you to the ball." Hadn't they arranged to go together? Or had he merely assumed that they would? They always went to these parties together. "Lois, can you let me in?" he asked.

"No!" she exclaimed. "I'm... I'm not ready. Yes, not ready. You better go on without me, Clark."

"I can wait," he said. The dance wouldn't be any fun without her.

"I'll be a while," she replied. "I... I... uh... tore my dress."

"Don't you have another dress?" he asked.

"Clark, I bought this one especially for the ball," Lois

returned.

So? "I'm sure you will be lovely in whatever you wear."

"Oh, Clark!" she practically sobbed through the door. "You don't understand. You'll never understand."

He set his hand on the wood of her door. He had to admit that when it came to women and the panic they put themselves in over their clothing, he was a novice of understanding. His mother never seemed to worry about such things and he had no sisters to torment him with such experiences as a teenager.

"Please, Lois. Let me help," he said. She was in crisis. He could hear it in her voice. Every fiber of his being wanted to be the one who rescued her.

"No!" she gasped, and then said, almost shrilly, "You can't come in here."

Something was wrong. Was someone holding her captive? Clark wanted nothing more than to glance through the door to reassure himself of her safety, but he didn't. What if she wasn't lying and was standing on the other side in her underwear? That would be a huge violation of her trust, so he refrained from lowering his glasses. He steeled his voice, "Lois, is everything all right?"

"No," she said softly. "But there's nothing you can do."

"I'm pretty good with a thread and needle," he said, twisting two fingers behind his back as he skirted very close to the edge between truth and lie. Could he use a needle and thread? Yes. Was he good at it? Not particularly.

"Thank you, Clark, but this isn't some problem you can solve," Lois replied. "You better head on to the party, Clark. Mayson will be there. I'm sure she'll want to dance with you."

But I only want to dance with you, he wanted to say aloud, but didn't.

"I know *I* do," he heard her whisper to herself so softly that any other man wouldn't have heard her.

It was at that moment he realized he had totally disregarded some of the vital information Bobby Bigmouth had imparted to him.

Clark took a deep breath and exhaled. This was it. Whatever her response would be to his next words would determine whether he would continue on to the dance and to Mayson as Lois said that she wished. "But I would rather dance with you."

Oh, God! Why now?

Lois's cheek leaned against the cold wood of her front door. She turned her face to peer through her peephole at him once more. He hadn't just said what she thought he had, had he? She brushed away a tear from her cheek and sniffled her nose, wiping it on the sleeve of her schlumpy robe. She must have misunderstood him.

"Clark..."

"Yes, Lois?" he said, looking at her door as if he knew she was watching him. Why did he have to be so handsome? She could see the expression of anticipation on his face. It was edged with dejection as if he hung on her very next words and that gave her courage.

"I'm not dressed," she confessed.

"I don't mind," he said. A streak of horror crossed his face as he flushed redder than Superman shorts. "I mean, I don't mind waiting until you get dressed."

Lois smiled, as a feeling of everything would be all right washed over her. Then, she froze, realizing that she couldn't let Clark see her like this.

"I'm going to unlock the door, but I want you to wait until the count of fifteen before coming inside," she said, raising her hand to her top most lock.

"I can do that," he replied with a determined nod.

She unlocked the bolt. "And you *must* stay in the living room."

"Come on, Lois. It's me, not some peeping Tom."

"You're a reporter, Clark..."

"Thanks for noticing," grumbled the smart aleck.

Lois ignored him as she unlocked another lock. "And a reporter is known for his or her unquenchable curiosity."

"I knew you wanted to see what I look like in my new tux," Clark teased.

"I have a peephole, Clark," she reminded him, using it once more to glance out at him.

"No matter how you look, Lois," he said. "I will still love you."

Her hand on her next lock halted. "*What?!*" Her heart was thumping so loud in her chest that it caused the blood to rush through her head. Closing her eyes, she rested her head upon the door, again. "Please, don't say 'like a sister'. Please," she whispered. "Not 'like a sister'."

"No matter how you look, it won't change how I feel about you," he amended. It was still nice, but not as thrilling as his declaration of love had been.

"Of course it wouldn't," she said, her voice cracking. She turned the last lock, and said, "Count slowly."

"One Meriwether Award. Two Meriwether Awards. Three..."

Lois hurried down the hall to her bedroom as quickly as she could move. She heard her front door open and close. She dove into her closet to search for something to wear.

"Hello?" Clark said.

"Still not ready!" she called. Lois already knew what she had available hanging from her rack, so she started pulling down boxes from her shelves to search through them.

"Do you need any help?" he asked a few minutes later.

"NO!" she emphatically reminded him. The last thing she wanted was for him to peek into her bedroom as she sat on the floor in her schlumpy robe and dug through boxes. "Feel free to put on some music." If they couldn't dance at the ball, perhaps Clark would concede to do so here.

There was no response to her request, and she wished she had Superman's ability to look through walls. Finally, she found something that might work, if only temporarily.

Lois went into her bathroom to start over on her hair. When she opened her bathroom door again, a towel wrapped tightly around her head, she could hear the soft, sultry sounds of some smooth jazz. Clark had found her stereo. Good.

"Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars. Let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars," crooned the singer.

She smiled and leaned against her wall for a moment, thinking of Superman. How could she not with this song? Then she remembered that she had Clark.

Waiting for her.

In her living room.

Lois gulped. She took a deep breath. "I love this song," she called out to him.

"So do I," he replied. "But I think the lyrics should be 'dance among the stars'."

She started to hum, moving to the rhythm of the tune, as she padded out towards her living room.

Dance amongst the stars. The only way she would be able to do that was with Superman.

Superman!

Lois placed a hand to her cheek as she bit down on her bottom lip with indecision. What was she doing?

Out of the shadows of her hall, she gazed into her living room and saw Clark. He had his back towards her, but she could see him swaying to the music.

Right.

Clark.

Her heart started to flutter in that way that only Clark could make it do. Superman made her heart pound, but with Clark, her

heart felt as if it could take flight. Clark didn't need Superman's powers to fly her to the moon. He only needed to...

"In other words, hold my hand," the singer continued. "In other words, darling, kiss me."

Yeah. That.

He turned and peered down the hall towards her, and she slunk further back into the shadows. "Ready?" he asked.

Oh, God, no. Lois moved a hand up to her head, touched her towel.

Clark took a step towards her. "You're not dressed," he said.

"No," she admitted, and then raised a finger before turning back to her room. "Stay in the living room."

"Lois, is everything all right?" he asked. "You seem..."

She glanced over her shoulder in time to see him shake his head as if he didn't know what she seemed.

Lois knew how she felt. Unsure. Unconfident. Scared. An idiot. Oh so wrong.

But the one thing she knew about Clark, one of the things that most endeared him to her, was that he would never use any of those words to describe her. Especially the last one, if he knew what was good for him.

"Flustered," he finally finished.

She smiled, loving him more. "Typical Clark," she murmured, stepping into her bedroom. She did feel flustered. "I wonder what it would take to fluster you."

"You."

Lois opened her bedroom door and stared back at him. He was leaning against the corner of her wall where her hall met her living room. "Excuse me?" she asked. He couldn't possibly have heard her.

Her question seemed to startle him and he straightened up, tugging down on his jacket. "Um... do *you* need me... to...uh... do anything?"

"Stay in the living room," she commanded with a poke of her index finger towards him.

"Stay in the living room," Clark echoed with a roll of his eyes.

He moved back into the living room. He had no idea what was taking Lois so long to get ready. It wasn't as if this was some important shindig like the Kerth Awards Banquet. It was just some charity party, hosted by the Daily Planet and Inter... Cost Mart. Just with a quick count on his fingers, he could recall over ten occasions he had seen her dressed to the nines, and that was when she hadn't been undercover. Therefore, he knew it wasn't an issue with not having anything to wear.

He liked that Lois wasn't one of those women who fretted constantly about her wardrobe, and usually seemed to take no time whatsoever to get ready and yet always looked amazing. What made tonight different, he wondered. He glanced down at his watch. Was he early? Nope. If they didn't get out of there soon, Perry would send a posse after them.

Clark couldn't believe she had heard him answer her rhetorical question about what flustered him. He chuckled. Well, she had proved his answer correct, hadn't she?

"Clark?" Lois called from her bedroom, causing him to spin around in anticipation, but she still hadn't left her room.

"Yes?"

"What is the name of that girl in the photo on your bookshelf at home?"

His brow furrowed. *What girl? What photo? What bookshelf?* "I don't..." he sputtered, sitting down on her settee.

"The girl with blonde hair to her shoulders. You had a photo album on your bookshelf in your room back in Smallville. She featured prominently in the latter half of the album," Lois clarified.

She had looked through his high school photo album? He

shook his head, but not in disbelief or surprise at Lois. Of course, Lois went through his photo album. The disbelief was aimed at himself for not realizing that she would have gone through everything in his old bedroom in Smallville. "Lana?" he guessed, even though he knew it couldn't be anyone else.

"Lana," Lois repeated. "Who is she?"

"Um... just some girl I dated off and on in high school. Why?"

"Was she the one who got away?" she probed.

What was with the twenty questions? "No, I was," he replied, laying his hand across the back of the settee. A stray thought crossed his mind. "Are you wondering if she's the first girl I kissed behind the Frosty Freeze? Because the answer is 'no' on that as well."

"You kissed more than one girl behind the Frosty Freeze?" Lois retorted with humor, clearly disbelieving the possibility.

"Oh, you caught me, Lois," he said with heavy sarcasm. "I was the Cat Grant or Casanova of Smallville. The girls all lined up behind the Frosty Freeze to kiss me." He laughed. "They all wept the day I graduated and went off to Mid-West University."

"Really?"

"No, not really," he said with a chuckle. "Smallville doesn't even have a Frosty Freeze franchise."

Lois laughed. "You mean it's a real business? I thought I made it up."

Clark was pleasantly surprised at how relaxed she sounded when admitting to being wrong or making a mistake. It was refreshing. Whatever had been bothering her before seemed to have faded into the woodwork. "Why are you curious about Lana?" he asked.

"Well..." she hesitated before continuing. "You're the most courteous man I know. You're polite, kind, sweet, generous, and humble. You treat every woman you meet with respect and compassion..."

"Only the women?" he asked, wondering which man he had offended.

"Sorry. You're right. You treat *everyone* you meet with respect. You, Clark Kent, are the epitome of a modern gentleman," she said. He could hear her high heels walking down the hall.

Clark wondered what he had done to receive this outpouring of praise. *From Lois, no less.* "Thank you, Lois, but I doubt I deserve such high esteem."

"Did I mention 'modest'?" she said, as her footsteps paused in the hall.

He blushed, which stopped him from glancing over his shoulder at her.

Lois took a deep breath and exhaled, before stepping out into the living room. "So, I wondered if the old saying still held true. Do gentlemen prefer blondes?"

Clark's eyes widened and his head snapped quickly to look over his shoulder. He stumbled to his feet, his eyes staring, and his mouth hanging agog.

Lois stood before him in a silver evening gown, looking ravenously beautiful as always, only now with platinum blonde curls.

Her beaming smile faltered as he continued to stare at her without saying a word. "So?"

So, *what?* Clark had no idea what to say.

Clark continued to stare at her with that stunned expression. She couldn't tell what he was thinking, and he clearly wasn't going to help her by saying anything.

Lois pinched her lips together. So, gentlemen preferred blondes, but Clark preferred someone else to her. She got the message. "I'm sure Mayson's waiting to dance with you at the ball," she said, returning down hall.

“No! Lois, wait,” he said, following her. “You.”

She stopped and turned to face him, causing him to collide with her and knock her off her feet. He caught her, as if holding her in a low dip.

“You, Lois,” he said, his lips hovering just above hers. “I liked you as a brunette, but if you prefer being blonde...”

Lois pushed out of his arms and marched through her bedroom door, slamming it in his face. She couldn’t believe he had gone there. *There* of all places!

Clark knocked on her door. “Lois! Please, talk to me.”

“No!” she yelled, plopping down on her bed and dropping her head into her hands. “I can’t believe you said *that*, Clark Kent.”

The knob of her door turned, and he strode in.

Lois stood up and pointed out the door. “Get out!”

“No, Lois. If you’re going to be in here, then I’m not leaving until we’ve talked this through,” he retorted, crossing his arms.

“Fine. You want to talk, then talk, Mr. Always Right,” she growled.

“I didn’t say that. Don’t put words into my mouth, Lois.”

“I’m not. *You* did say it,” she said, plopping back down on the bed. “You said exactly what you said you’d say.”

He shook his head as he knelt down beside her. “I don’t know...”

“You made me into the ghastly red head!” she snapped.

“The ghastly red...?” Clark echoed in confusion before his eyes widened. “Oh, God, Lois. Is this some kind of test?”

“Test? No, this isn’t a test,” she said snidely, although she was lying through her teeth. This was a test to see if he would like her now that she had blonde hair and *she* had failed beyond her wildest nightmares. She dropped her face back into her hands so he wouldn’t see how freely the tears were falling from her eyes. She was humiliated, that was all. The tears couldn’t possibly be from her broken heart.

“It is a test. You’re trying to see if I’d still love you with blonde hair, aren’t you? You wanted to know if I’m one of those shallow guys, who can’t see past some woman’s looks and see into her heart. Well, I’m here to say...”

Lois looked up and into his eyes. “You love me?”

“I...” Clark sputtered, suddenly getting this adorable deer in the headlights expression on his face. His expression softened and he raised a hand to her cheek, cupping it and running a thumb under her eye to wipe away her tears. “Of course I love you, Lois Lane. There is only you.”

“Then why on earth were you kissing Mayson Drake?” she asked.

“I... *She* kissed me. Anyway, you told me to,” Clark said. “I didn’t want to kiss her.”

Lois held up a hand to stop him from sticking his foot further down his throat. “First of all, *I* most certainly did *not* tell you to kiss her, and secondly, you didn’t *discourage* Mayson from kissing you.”

Clark groaned and his shoulders slumped. “But you said to stop ‘repeating myself’ and to ‘try something new,’” he explained. “So Mayson was that ‘something new.’”

“Yes!” Lois said, throwing her hands up into the air, and then crashed them back down on his shoulders, wanting to throttle him. “No!”

He looked even more lost. “So, stop trying to get you to love me and find someone new, but not Mayson?”

“No, Clark!” Lois said, trying to speak calmly. She grabbed hold of his shoulders. “Stop chasing after blondes and try a brunette for once. *I’m* not a blonde!”

“Oh, thank God!” Clark exclaimed, embracing her. “It’s a wig, then?”

“Um... yes,” she replied in a small voice, burying her face in his neck.

He turned her face towards his. “You asked if I preferred

blondes or brunettes. The truth of the matter is I prefer you, and only you. Whether you have black, brown, yellow, orange, red, or purple polka dotted hair, I would love you just the same.”

Lois smiled through her tears. “I love you, too, Clark.”

A burst of sunshine appeared disguised as Clark’s smile. Lois had to close her eyes so it wouldn’t blind her. He tilted her head in his hands and brushed his lips softly against hers. Lois greedily opened her mouth and deepened the kiss.

It was more wonderful than she remembered. It had been worth all the heartache and sorrow to take this chance on love. She was so glad she did.

All too soon, Clark slowed the fervor of their kisses. “I should really let you freshen up,” he said, leaning his head against hers and speaking through panting breaths. “Take off the wig, so we can go to the ball.” He stood up and backed towards the door. “Perry is probably wondering where we are.”

Lois frowned, biting her bottom lip. “Do we have to?”

His brow furrowed. “You *want* to wear the wig?” he asked.

“No,” she said softly.

“Do you still have a tear in your dress? Because I wasn’t being exactly honest when I said I could sew,” he admitted bashfully. “Anyway, you look beautiful in this dress.”

It was now or never, she decided. The truth was going to come out eventually.

“This is the dress, Clark. It isn’t torn.” Lois reached up to her head and unpinned the wig. “I had forgotten I had this, so when I decided to get you to see the error of your ways in only falling for women with a certain hair color, I... I bleached my hair blonde first.” She slowly brought the wig down to her lap. “And I messed up.” She took a gulp of air, her eyes filling with tears again. “You know what they say, if at first you don’t succeed, dye and dye again.”

Clark stared at her in wonder, his head falling to the side. “Oh, Lois,” he murmured sympathetically. He knelt back down, giving her a soft kiss. “When I said polka dotted earlier, I never knew that it was actually possible.”

She slugged him. “You said that you loved me!”

“I do! I do!” he said, raising his hands in self-defense. “But I don’t have to love that hair.”

She glowered at him.

“We can fix this,” Clark insisted, taking her hands in his. “Together, we can accomplish anything.”

Lois smiled with relief, acknowledging silently that Clark had finally gotten something right.

THE END

Disclaimer: Inspired by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster’s characters as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. The characters do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros, DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). The premise of the story – Lois dying her hair blonde – was KatherineKent’s and given to me to do with as I pleased (within reason). The way the words ended up arranged on the page are my own, except when I borrowed dialogue and scenes from “Church of Metropolis” written by John McNamara. Bart Howard wrote, “Fly me to the Moon” in 1954.

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