

Whine No More

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Summary: An episode rewrite in which we explore what would happen if Lois and Clark's date at the end of "Individual Responsibility" went a little *too well* and Clark thought he shared a secret but Lois was just as clueless the next morning? Episode Rewrite of Season Two's "Whine Whine Whine."

Story Size: 48,251 words (273Kb as text)

Every moment from the time Clark Kent had asked Lois Lane out on a date a few months back to now he felt like the world was against him. After confessing his love for her in a desperate attempt to stop her from marrying Lex Luthor then taking back his confession things had been fragile between them. Slowly they had grown closer and closer over the last year. So much so that she had turned to him, Clark, not his alter ego when she was in fear of her life from Griffin. Then after almost losing everything when he'd had to fake his death before finding a way to return he decided to put himself out there again. This time he promised he would take things slow.

<<"Lois, I want you to go out with me!"

"What? You're asking me out?"

"Yeah, you know... like on a date?"

"A date? You mean a real date? Like where I take out my best perfume, the one I bought after seeing Love Affair, the good one not the remake, and put a dab behind my knee, and I don't know why?"

"Yeah...">>

<<"I...I don't know what to say."

"Well, most people either pick 'yes' or 'no'."

"It's not that easy. I mean it's easy for you because you've already had time to think about it. You've had a chance to plan what you wanted to say...and what you'd say depending on what I'd say back...and..."

"Lois...I'm asking you out, not to negotiate a nuclear arms treaty.">>

<<"Oh, right, the date thing...What about Mayson?"

"Well, the guy's only got two tickets."

"Clark..."

"Lois, I'm asking **you** out.">>

<<"I mean, we work together. What happens if...you know...it bombs?"

"We'll always be friends.">>

After his first attempt at a date had been called off thanks to Lex Luthor returning from the dead they'd turned their stakeout into an 'almost first date' which had ended with Lois on the couch with food poisoning. It had started out great...well aside from him having to burn the lightbulb to distract her from the cold champagne. After that night, she began looking at him differently. He'd left the ball in her court hoping that giving her the control would help relieve some of the tension in the air between them. For almost a month they'd been dancing around one another until finally, they'd set a date. Well, he suspected she'd set the date as a reaction to Mayson, but at the time he wasn't going to argue.

<<"Why don't you just say what you feel? Unless you have something to hide?"

"I guess...people...say things sometimes because they're

afraid of being direct."

"Why? What's the worst that could happen?">>

<<"When you think about it, the only time people really express themselves is when they're passionate and the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they fight..."

"Or make love.">>

<<"But everything seemed to just... 'work.' That's why I can never see you again."

"Lois?">>

He hadn't known what to do after the door had slammed in his face that night. He'd tried everything to get her to talk to him the next day, but she'd done everything to avoid him, including forcing him on a lunch date with Mayson. It had taken a nuclear disaster – literally! – to get her to talk to him. Then finally they'd shared their first *real* kiss. It had been amazing...

<<"Lois, this isn't the best time, but I've always wanted to tell you something--"

"I like you too, Clark. I'm sorry what I did on our date.">>

<<"Lois, I really don't know how to say this, but...why did you come back for me at the factory tonight? I mean, you were running back into an atomic explosion."

"It doesn't make sense, does it? I just knew...I couldn't leave you."

"You slammed the door in my face last night."

"That was a...mistake."

"Don't let it happen again...Fortunately, there're no doors now."

"Fortunately...">>

Unfortunately, at that very moment, Mayson had triggered a car bomb, and he had been too late to save her. Too late. His guilt had eaten him away during those weeks after Mayson's death. He spent the next few weeks trying to make up for the life he'd lost by overextending himself and burying himself in his Superman duties. He hadn't realized it at the time, but in his grief, he'd been pushing Lois away until it was almost too late.

<<"The last thing she said was 'Resurrection.' What was she trying to tell me?"

"Maybe you'd like a few minutes alone...to say goodbye.">>

<<"I need to know...if I'm yesterday's news?"

"What?"

"You know. Stale, old. It's been over a week since our first date...and...our first kiss. And...you haven't said a word about it. It's like...it never happened."

"Lois, I'm sorry if it feels like I've been ignoring you lately, but...">>

He'd had every intention of reassuring her and picking things up where they'd left off, but everything seemed to be working against him. Namely, DEA Agent, Dan Scardino, who had no respect for his relationship with Lois. He'd tried to give her the benefit of the doubt, but it had hurt...finding him at her apartment like that. Seeing the way she looked at him...it hurt. He'd spent two years trying to break through the barriers she'd set up around herself and get her to agree to go out with him. Scardino had been there two minutes and already had wormed his way into their lives. He was jealous. She was giving a stranger more of a chance than she'd ever given him, her partner, her friend.

<<"Agent Scardino just dropped by to uh...chat about the case."

"It must have been some chat for you to need a shower.">>

<<"Looks like you've got some choices to make...">>

Every call for help he answered was pulling them further and further apart. So far apart Lois had pulled away from him and begun seeing DEA Agent Dan Scardino. After his encounter with the red kryptonite and the couch sessions with Dr. Friskin, he realized if he didn't do something soon he was going to lose Lois.

Here it goes. Take the plunge. Clark watched Lois as he spoke. "I realize that instead of dancing around my feelings for you—" He

saw her steal a glance at him before looking away. Her heartbeat was erratic as she did her best to hide the fact that her defenses were coming down. She was hearing him—*really* hearing him. “I have to deal with them head-on and verbalize my emotions...” No more taking things slow. No more hiding. “And your going out with Dan *does* upset me.” There he’d said it. He’d put himself out there. He prepared himself for the worst. For the last two days, he’d been shut down over and over on his attempts to repair their relationship.

Lois gave him a tender look. “I...I don’t know what to say.”

He took a step closer to her. “Say you’ll go out with me tonight and I promise you I will *not* disappear.” Superman was taking the night off. Metropolis survived one night without him before. The city could do it again. This was more important. He looked at her expectantly, uncertain what her answer would be.

<<“Clark, I’m sorry. I just don’t feel that way about you...”>>

His mind flashed back to the last time he’d put himself completely on the line with her and did his best to squash the inner doubt that was screaming at him to stop. Lois moved a little closer to him, giving him a small smile. “Okay. You can pick me up at seven.”

His face broke out into a huge smile as she moved closer. “Okay.”

He nodded his agreement, unable to trust his voice to speak any more. “But you have to promise you won’t disappear.” She moved closer, sliding her hands against his chest. “And you’ll be there at seven...” She moved closer to him, and he grinned. He was on top of the world. If he wasn’t afraid of breaking the moment he would kiss her. His smile grew broader as she moved closer and moved her hand teasingly up his shoulder. “And 7:01...”

She linked her arms around his neck, and he nodded with a broad smile. “7:02...” She moved closer to him, keeping her arms around his neck as she whispered, “7:03...” He bit his lower lip, trying to suppress a groan as she stepped closer to him. “7:04...”

He really wanted to kiss her, but here in the middle of the Daily Planet was not the place. She leaned in closer, so their eyes were locked and whispered, “7:05...” Then ever so lightly she pressed her lips against his. All too soon she pulled away and began to gather her things. “I, um, I’ll see you tonight,” she murmured before heading for the elevator. He could tell from the blush on her cheeks and her heightened heart rate that she was just as affected by their embrace.

“Whoa...” Clark breathed watching as Lois ascended the steps to the elevator. His head was in a daze as he took a seat at his desk, watching as Lois stepped onto the elevator.

<<“You have to promise you won’t disappear.”>>

Lois’ words echoed through his mind as he contemplated where he was going to take her tonight. He would not disappear. He would not give Lois a reason to give up on him.

“Oh, God.” Lois grimaced as she leaned back against the elevator doors, looking around at the empty elevator car. “I just kissed Clark in the middle of the newsroom. What is wrong with me?” She hung her face in her palms. “Calm down, Lois. Maybe no one noticed.”

‘Yeah right.’

“You just got caught up in the moment and... Oh, God.” She whimpered to herself, glancing at her watch and seeing the time. “I’ve got two hours before I have to see him again.” She did her best to regain her composure. What was happening to her? How was it that she had become weak in the knees by Clark Kent?

‘You’re in love with him.’

“Don’t go there,” she chastised herself.

‘That’s why you slammed the door in his face. You knew if you didn’t you wouldn’t be able to stop yourself from...’

“Bad...*bad* thoughts,” she muttered to herself as the doors to the elevator opened and she arrived in the lobby. Think about something else. Anything else.

<<“Your going out with Dan *does* upset me.”>>

No, definitely not helping.

<<“If that’s what you want Lois then fine get in bed with the devil!”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time...you had to have known.”>>

<<“Lois Lane...Kent...”>>

<<“I want you to go out with me!”>>

<<“What happens if...you know...it bombs?”

“We’ll always be friends.”>>

Friends. He’d promised they’d always be friends but here lately they’d been anything but.

‘And whose fault is that?’

<<“The last thing she said was ‘Resurrection.’ What was she trying to tell me?”

“Maybe you’d like a few minutes alone...to say goodbye.”>>

<<“I need to know...if I’m yesterday’s news?”

“What?”

“You know. Stale, old. It’s been over a week since our first date...and...our first kiss. And...you haven’t said a word about it. It’s like...it never happened.”

“Lois, I’m sorry if it feels like I’ve been ignoring you lately, but...”>>

They’d been stuck in limbo after Mayson’s murder. She had tried to be patient and understanding but not knowing what to do or how to act was just about killing her so she had taken the plunge and asked him if she was ‘yesterday’s news.’ Immediately after the words were out of her mouth she regretted them. Then when Clark seemed to realize where she was going with her train of thought he seemed to try and open up and talk to her but they’d gotten interrupted...*again*. Dan with his impeccable timing as always had shown up and their conversation was left forgotten.

<<“Agent Scardino just dropped by to uh...chat about the case.”

“It must have been some chat for you to need a shower.”>>

The look on Clark’s face that night had just about broken her in two. Another example of bad timing on Dan’s part. It had mildly ticked her off at the time that he hadn’t helped to reassure Clark that he had the wrong idea before Clark walked away.

<<“Looks like you’ve got some choices to make...”>>

It was a simple statement and she knew Clark was talking about the movie choices but at the time she wasn’t sure if he had overheard Dan asking her out.

<<“Don’t tell me, Agent Scardino’s on a stakeout in a florist’s shop.”

“Jealousy is so unbecoming, don’t you think?”

“I wouldn’t exactly call it jealousy, but...maybe we could discuss it Saturday night? Say...over dinner and after a show?”

“I have plans Saturday.”

“Lois, I know I sometimes seem to dart away just when things start to get serious, but now I feel like you’re the one who’s backing away.”>>

He was right. After his constant disappearing act she’d finally had enough and decided to take a chance on Dan. It wasn’t anything to write home about and he did seem a bit secretive about his work...something she wasn’t used to. With Clark there was no need to hide what happened at work because they worked together. She hated the feeling she’d had in the pit of her stomach though. The nagging feeling that she was betraying her best friend by agreeing to see Dan. Now here she was a few hours before her date with Clark with the same nagging feeling. Casual relationships weren’t something she was comfortable with. She’d turned to Dan because Clark seemed to be running away from her. Now, he wasn’t. Where did that leave her and Dan? Where did that

leave her and Clark?

<<“Looks like you’ve got some choices to make...”>>

She could continue to try and date both of them but she knew that would only make her even more miserable. After watching her father parade around his mistresses during her adolescence the idea of trying to open herself up to more than one person just seemed wrong. She didn’t open up to anyone easily and trying to kid herself into believing she could wasn’t helping.

<<“Your going out with Dan **does** upset me.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you for a long time...you had to have known.”>>

<<“What happens if...you know...it bombs?”

“We’ll always be friends.”>>

<<“Your going out with Dan **does** upset me.”>>

As she climbed into her Jeep she pulled out her cell phone and began to dial, waiting for the call to connect. After a few rings the other line picked up and she heard the familiar greeting on the other line. “Hey, Lois.”

“Dan, hi,” she began slowly. “We need to talk...”

“Sure.” There was a pause. “Did you get the flowers? I’m sorry I wasn’t able to make it back to Metropolis but—”

“Yes, I got the flowers, but there’s something I need to say. I hate to do it over the phone, but Dan there’s no easy way to say this...”

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“We need to stop seeing each other,” Lois blurted out, unable to find an easier way to let him down.

“What? Why?” he asked confused.

“I can’t keep doing this.” She said shakily, “It’s not fair to you or me or—”

“Kent?” he asked with a bite to his tone. You would have thought he was saying a curse word instead of Clark’s last name.

“Or Clark,” she said softly.

“I don’t understand,” he began to argue. “I thought we were in a good place when I left—”

Unable to elaborate she did her best to end the conversation. “I just can’t do this anymore. I’m sorry.” With that she hung up the phone. She let out a shallow breath. “There. Done. That wasn’t so bad.”

After doing a patrol around the city, he confirmed his reservation at Bayleaf a small authentic Indian restaurant he’d found in Metropolis. It was owned by an elderly couple that he had saved from an armed robber as Superman. The restaurant was small and quaint, perfect for a romantic evening, and the food was out of this world.

He stopped by his apartment to change, being sure to keep the suit at home. Superman was taking the night off.

Lois dabbed a dot of perfume on her wrist, checking her hair in the mirror one last time before heading to the living room to gather her things. She looked down at the burgundy dress, examining herself in the mirror. The three cord straps hung on her shoulders joining to a crisscross design on the back, meeting the silk material of the dress in the middle of her back. The dress hung on her elegantly, swooping down on her neckline with a layered burgundy mixture of silk and lace. The mixture of lace and silk came down to her knees and showed off her shapely legs. She smiled recalling the conversation they’d had before their first date.

<<“You’ll be wearing something elegant, but not too dark. Like a charcoal suit. And I’ll be wearing something in a deep... violet.”

“...Burgundy.”

“Burgundy?”

“Or violet.”

“That’s what you’ve always dreamed of seeing me in, burgundy? I don’t own anything in burgundy.”>>

She glanced at the clock. 6:55.

<<“Say you’ll go out with me tonight and I promise you I will **not** disappear.”>>

A knock on the door announced Clark’s arrival and she couldn’t help but smile to herself. “Punctual as always.” She gave herself one more once-over in the mirror before heading to the door. “Hi.”

Clark was wearing a charcoal suit with a matching solid tie, a rare tie choice for him. He looked *really* good. “Hi...wow...Lois, you look...amazing!”

She smiled at his reaction shyly, thrilled at the effect the dress had on his ability to string his thoughts together. “Do you like it?” She spun around, allowing the dress to sway from side to side as she gathered her things, walking toward him with a nervous grin.

“You look...*gorgeous*,” he managed to say, taking a step toward her. He glanced at the clock. “I know I’m early.” he began to apologize and she stopped him.

“It’s fine, Clark,” she said, leaning in to kiss him. “Let’s go.”

Clark smiled as they entered Bayleaf, watching as Lois looked around the restaurant taking in the quaint atmosphere with the smells of curry in the air. He smiled at Lois as they approached the hostess desk where Namaad stood in a white *pancha* with menus waiting. “*Dost Suno!* Mr. Kent, so good to see you.”

Clark smiled at his friend. “Namaad, good to see you.” He extended his hand to shake Namaad’s.

“Reservation for two,” Namaad said, patting the menus in his hands.

“Yes.” Clark turned to Lois to introduce Namaad. “Lois, this is Namaad Suri. He and his wife, Sarati, own this restaurant.”

“It’s beautiful,” Lois said, looking around the restaurant that was decorated in lights around the room with what looked like handmade paintings and sculptures in the hand carved shelves hovering above each table with a candle.

“Family-run for fifteen years,” Namaad said with a smile.

“They try to push us out, but...Superman made sure we stay.” He gestured to the room as they walked toward their table. “Mr. Kent a regular for quite some time.” He winked at Clark before turning back to Lois.

“Oh, really,” Lois said taking the seat Clark had pulled out for her as she gave Clark a smile.

Namaad handed them menus as he continued, “Authentic Indian made fresh everyday by my wife Sarita. Every plate is made with love.”

“Sounds great,” Lois said opening up her menu.

The waiter came to fill their water glasses and Namaad gave a smile to Lois. “If you need anything let me know.” With that he left them to look over the menu.

Lois glanced at the menu trying to decide among the exotic dishes as she spoke. “How is it I’ve lived in Metropolis my whole life and never knew about this place and you’ve lived here almost three years and”

Clark smiled back at her. “I found it earlier this year. I was, uh, covering a story on an attempted armed robbery. It was around the same time Intergang was trying to push your uncle out of Southside?” She nodded and he continued, “Well they were having the same problems your uncle was having so I did what I could to help them drum up business. Made it a regular pit stop and had Jimmy get the word out...” He gestured around them. “It seemed to do the trick. The food’s great.”

“I’ve never had Indian before,” Lois admitted shyly.

“Well then you are in luck because Sarita makes a mean Tikka Masala.” He grinned back at her. “Just keep in mind the spice level here is authentic Indian so I wouldn’t try anything above medium unless you feel like guzzling a good four gallons of water along with it. Not that it would do anything but make it even more spicy.”

She laughed, reaching over to grab her napkin at the same time he reached for his. Their hands brushed against one another and he smiled at her, catching her gaze before looking away. That spark had been there from the beginning. The gentle touches, hugs and embraces over the years that sent a shiver down his spine seemed to be having the same effect on Lois the closer they became. It was so hard to keep himself from kissing her when she was this close, looking at him like he was the only man in the world.

She turned away, looking down at the menu in her hands. "Um, I'll try to remember that..." She sighed glancing up at him over her menu.

He took a sip of water. "See anything you like?"

"What?" Her voice caught in her throat as she set her menu down hurriedly.

He looked at her curiously and gave her a light laugh, uncertain what she thought he could possibly be talking about and elaborated. "The menu. Do you see anything you like on the menu?"

She pursed her lips, glancing through the list of entrees uncertainly. "I don't know. I'm not sure what a lot of this is." She pointed to the different sections. "I guess chicken, but I'm not sure about these different curries."

"Well, the tandoori is a grilled chicken on the bone with the red sauce. It's served over rice with onions and bell peppers. It's pretty good," he said pulling his chair closer to her to look over the menu with her as he looked over her shoulder. He held in his breath as she leaned back against him.

'She's trying to kill me.'

"Grilled is good I guess, but I'd like to try something more than just grilled chicken," Lois said, leaning closer to him.

"There's Tikka Masala which is—" he held in his breath as she leaned closer to him reading the menu with him—"really good. It's a yogurt-based tomato curry. Then there's the Chicken Curry which is pretty popular... Chicken Mahkni is similar with a different turmeric spice."

"What are you having?" she asked, leaning her chin against her hand as she looked up at him expectantly.

He smiled back at her. "Chicken Tikka Masala. I've tried everything on the menu, but that's my personal favorite." He glanced back at her. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

She gave him a half-smile. "I think I'm going to try the curry." She leaned back against him resting her head on his shoulder, and he fought the urge to kiss her. Instead, he placed an arm over her shoulder. "Keep in mind if I'm racing to the restroom later I will blame you."

He laughed. "Then I suggest you order yours mild." She gave him a half-smile lifting her head up to look at him. He really wanted to kiss her, but he was terrified of scaring her off. Terrified of losing her.

Namaad walked up to their table. "Ready to order?"

Clark smiled up at his friend and handed him his menu. "I'll have the Chicken Tikka Masala, medium."

"Naan?" Namaad asked.

"Yes, and poori," Clark added.

"Not a problem," Namaad said with a smile. "And for you?" He turned to Lois.

"I'm gonna try the Chicken Curry," Lois said handing him her menu.

"Excellent," Namaad said scribbling on his pad. "Naan?"

"What is that?" Lois asked, confused.

"It's like a, uh, pita bread," Namaad prompted, "but not. It's Indian bread we use to eat with in India. Some prefer to eat with bread than fork, but it helps with the spice too."

"You eat with your hand?" Lois asked, looking at Clark curiously.

"Not here," Namaad reassured her. "You have fork if you like,

but it's still good with the curry."

"I'll give it a try," Lois said with a smile. "As they say, 'when in Rome.'"

"Excellent," Namaad said with a broad grin. "Let me know if you need anything. Should be out shortly."

"Thank you, Namaad," Clark said watching as Namaad left to put their order in with the kitchen.

"He seems nice," Lois commented.

"He is." Clark smiled back at her, fingering her hand that rested against his chest. He knew he should probably just enjoy the moment but he couldn't. Things had been so strained lately. "Lois, are we okay? I mean, I..." How was it that he could bend steel bars with his bare hands and put stories on paper in the blink of an eye but when it came to articulating his feelings for Lois he was tongue-tied?

She bit her lower lip, looking down at her lap for a moment before looking back up at him. "I don't know. I think we both... It's just been bad timing for the last month."

"Yeah." He nodded. "We just seem to..." What? Afraid to take the next step? Here he was scared to make the wrong move and scare her off. He was so afraid of putting himself out there again and getting hurt. The last time he put his heart on the line she'd shot him down and almost married a sociopath. They'd come a long way since then, but it still terrified him. The idea of leaving himself completely vulnerable scared him more than anything in the world. Even more than any kryptonite. Red or green.

"I know," she said softly. "I'm sorry. I know I wasn't the most... understanding after Mayson's death. It just seemed like you disappeared and... it scared me. You're better at the whole touchy-feely stuff. I didn't know what to do, and I think I just made everything worse..."

He chuckled lightly. "Lois, you're babbling."

"I know," she said softly giving him a half-smile. "I seem to do that a lot lately."

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I shouldn't have said anything I just—" He stopped, uncertain of how to articulate everything he wanted to say. "Let's just try and enjoy the evening."

"Okay," Lois murmured leaning her head back against his chest. "I can do that, but I want you to know what you said this afternoon... I know how hard it was and... Thank you for letting me in."

"Lois," he began, uncertain where this was headed. He really didn't want to get into another discussion about his disappearances in the middle of the restaurant. He knew he needed to tell her about Superman, but this wasn't the place.

"I know," she said gently. She seemed to be intent on continuing his conversation and he sighed, hoping this didn't result in his plans for the evening being ruined. "I just want you to know I heard what you said and..." He really didn't want to finish this conversation. It wasn't the place. "I'm not going to see Dan anymore. It's not fair to us, but I need to know you won't pull away again... won't shut me out."

He wasn't sure how to respond. It was what he'd wanted from the moment he'd heard she'd agreed to go out with Scardino. Now here it was. He swallowed hard. "Lois, I don't know what to say... I..."

She leaned into him. "Clark..." She met his gaze. He could feel the sadness and uncertainty in her eyes. He wanted to take it away. He hated that he had helped to put those uncertainties there. He hated that he'd ruined the evening by bringing up their relationship. They'd been enjoying one another's company so easily until he'd asked her that dreaded question.

"Dinner is served," Namaad interrupted, setting metal bowls of curry down in front of them. Lois leaned forward, lifting herself off his shoulder and he immediately felt the coolness from the loss of contact.

Clark cleared his throat, moving his glass out of the way as the

rice, raita, and naan were set on the table. “Thank you, Namaad.”

A tea kettle was set down in front of them with matching cups, and Namaad said, “Chai. Goes well with the curry. Enjoy.”

Clark nodded. “Thank you.” Once the food was laid out in front of them Namaad refilled their water glasses and then turned to leave.

“What’s chai?” Lois asked.

“Hot tea with evaporated milk and cardamoms,” Clark explained pouring her a cup.

“Smells good,” Lois said taking the cup from him warily.

Who would have thought Clark Kent would be the one to introduce her to something new around Metropolis? The restaurant was quaint and romantic, and Namaad was a lot of fun and filled with stories from his hometown in Islamabad. Overall it had been an enjoyable evening.

Then there had been the awkward conversation over dinner when he’d asked if they were ‘okay.’ She couldn’t blame him. The last few weeks had been hard on both of them and from his lack of response when she told him she was sorry about how she’d acted after Mayson’s death and her declaring she was no longer seeing Dan, she could tell he was still hurt.

He was her best friend.

She was afraid of losing him.

She’d lost him...or come close to losing him before, and that terrified her. Her almost-wedding to Lex had nearly destroyed every relationship she held dear. It wasn’t until she was standing in front of the mirror in her wedding dress in tears practicing her married name that she realized how much Clark meant to her. For a moment, she’d thought there was something there, but then he’d taken his declaration of love back and left her in a world of confusion.

She’d spent so many nights trying to get over her newly-realized feelings for Clark. It hadn’t been easy; especially after Mayson had shown up. Mayson Drake, Assistant District Attorney who had had no problem acting on her feelings for Clark. She’d been jealous. She hated that she was jealous. She hated feeling out of control. Most of all she hated that Clark hadn’t seemed to mind. She did her best to be the ‘good’ friend and step aside, but it had been hard and she’d almost given up hope until a few months ago when Clark had asked her out. It had surprised her and scared her at the same time.

The night of their first date she’d realized she had fallen for him. Somewhere along the line, she had fallen in love with Clark Kent. That night she’d slammed the door in his face, afraid of what would happen if she’d allowed herself to give into her emotions. She’d cried on the other side of the door listening to Clark knock on the other side, confused. After diverting a nuclear disaster, he’d made her promise not to do that to him again before kissing her. Now here they were again standing in front of her door saying goodnight.

“Thanks for dinner. It was a lot of fun,” Lois said unlocking her door. “I know we left things in the air earlier, but I had a good time. Thank you...for not disappearing.”

He nodded quietly, moving his hand to cup her cheek, fingering the strands of hair behind her ear. “I know.” He reassured her, “Lois, this isn’t easy for either of us, but I promise...no more shutting you out.” She smiled back at him, and he continued. “I don’t want to lose you, Lois, I hate that I almost did. I love you and...”

She could feel her heart rate pick up as he spoke, unable to focus on what he’d just said. “Lois?” His voice penetrated through her thoughts, and she did her best to focus on what he was saying. “Are you listening? I’m kinda pouring my heart out here, and you seem to—”

“I...I...” she stammered.

Why did this terrify her so much? She loved him. Didn’t she?

Love.

<< “I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.” >>

<< “I would have said anything to stop you from marrying Luthor.” >>

She didn’t know what made her do it. All of a sudden it was like she had no control over her body as she raced into the apartment and slammed the door in Clark’s face...again. What was wrong with her? Why was this so *hard*?

“Lois?” Clark knocked on the other side of the door.

“Get a grip,” she murmured to herself.

<< “I have been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.” >>

<< “I would have said anything to stop you from marrying Luthor.” >>

Another knock at the door as she fought the urge to bury her head in a pint of chocolate ice cream. “Lois, I’m not leaving until we talk about this,” Clark said from the other side of the door.

<< “You slammed the door in my face last night.”

“That was a mistake.”

“Don’t let it happen again.” >>

She cringed inwardly, realizing she’d just ruined another perfect date due to her insecurities. Would she ever be able to move past everything with Claude and her father? Why was this so hard?

“Lois?” Another knock on the door.

She sighed, unable to trust herself to open the door. “I’m sorry, Clark...” she cried.

“Please, Lois, just tell me what’s wrong,” he pleaded from the other side of the door. This time he didn’t knock. Had he heard her?

Finally, she found her voice, and she said, “That’s the problem. Nothing is wrong. It was perfect. That’s what scares me. I...” She could feel the tears burning her cheeks as she cried, “Oh, Clark.”

“Lois...”

Hearing the despair in his voice caused her to cry harder. “I’ve been lying to myself for almost a year. I thought I could hide from it but...”

“Please open the door,” he pleaded with her.

“I can’t...” she cried.

“Why not?” he asked.

“Because I love you too...and that scares me,” she managed softly.

“Lois, open the door, please,” he pleaded with her.

She could hear the strain in his voice. If she opened the door, she wouldn’t be able to stop herself. She could do something she’d regret. If she didn’t open the door, she could risk losing Clark, and the thought of that tore her up inside. Reluctantly she stood up, dabbing her eyes as she turned toward the door. Bracing herself as she turned the knob, she opened the door facing a defeated-looking Clark on the other side.

He gave her a small smirk. “I thought I told you not to let that happen again.” He stepped inside, locking the door behind him. “Why do you keep doing this?” he asked, crossing his arms over his chest. It was odd. He looked a lot like Superman when he did that.

How did she explain to him how she was afraid of losing herself in his arms? How did she explain that she was afraid of getting hurt again even though she knew he was different?

“I’m afraid,” she said shakily.

“Of what?” Clark asked exasperatedly.

She couldn’t blame him. His patience had to have a breaking point after everything they’d put each other through over the last few months. She didn’t trust her voice to relay what she was afraid of correctly, so she simply whispered, “Of this.” She leaned in to kiss him, molding her body against him as his hand cupped her

cheek, caressing her hair with his fingers, deepening the kiss.

He didn't know what had happened. One minute they'd been talking in the hall and the next she'd slammed the door in his face...again. This time he wasn't going to walk away, though. She'd made him promise not to run away tonight. As calmly as he could, he tried to reason with her through the door. His heart broke hearing her in tears from the other side. Nothing made sense until he heard that tearful confession.

"I've been lying to myself for almost a year. I thought I could hide from it but..."

Lying to herself about what? What was she trying to say? He sighed, raking a hand through his hair as he rested his forehead against the door. "Please open the door."

"I can't..." she cried from the other side of the door.

"Why not?" he asked, trying to portray a calm he didn't feel at the moment.

"Because I love you too...and that scares me," she managed softly.

His heart leaped when he heard those three words escape her lips. It took everything in him not to break down the door and kiss her. He tapped his head against the door letting out a long sigh as he pleaded with her, "Lois, open the door, please."

There was some rustling from the other side of the door. He silently prayed that hopefully, he'd gotten through to her. His arm rested on the door frame as he waited. After what seemed like an eternity he heard the clicking of the lock and the knob turning. She looked up at him tearfully, and he fought the urge to take her in his arms and kiss away every tear. They needed to talk. "I thought I told you not to let that happen again," he murmured as he stepped inside, locking the door behind him. She gave him a half-smile, and he sighed, leaning back against the door as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Why do you keep doing this?"

"I'm afraid," she said shakily.

"Of what?" Clark asked exasperatedly.

"Of this," she whispered, leaning in to kiss him, molding her body against him. He moved his hand to cup her cheek, fingering the strands of hair behind her ear.

He slowly broke off the kiss resting his forehead against hers. "Lois?"

She looked up at him as he slowly broke off the kiss, apprehension in his eyes. "Lois?"

She leaned in to kiss him again, wrapping her arms around his neck as she deepened the kiss. He groaned against her as she slipped her tongue inside the warm confines of his mouth. "I love you," she murmured against his lips, sighing happily as his arms encircled her waist, pulling her to him as his lips sought hers out hungrily.

She leaned against him, pressing him up against the door as she fingered the silk of his tie, reveling in the feeling of being in his arms. "I love you, Lois," he murmured against her lips, tightening his arms around her waist as he walked them back to the couch, not losing contact with her lips for a moment.

She tightened her arms around his neck, feeling her thighs brush against something soft. The couch she thought, tugging him closer as she fell back onto the cushions, pulling him down with her. He broke off the kiss for a moment. "Are you okay?"

She just nodded in response, leaning in to recapture his lips with her own once more. She felt his hand massaging her upper thigh, sighing against him as she wrapped her hands around his waist from beneath his suit jacket. "I love you, Clark," she murmured against his lips.

He groaned against her, and she could feel the effect she was having on him as he slowly broke off the kiss, pulling away. She frowned in disappointment as he sat up. "We need to slow down."

"Oh," she managed to say uncertainly. She glanced down at

herself and saw her dress had hiked up to her mid-thigh during their embrace. She blushed, readjusting herself as she sat up.

"Lois, we need to talk," Clark began hesitantly.

"I know," Lois murmured.

"What just happened? I mean, one minute you're slamming the door in my face and the next..."

Lois nodded, letting out a quiet sigh as she turned away. "I know it doesn't make much sense." She looked back at him hesitantly. "I guess the best way to explain it is...I'm afraid of the past repeating itself."

He ran a hand through his hair. "Lois, I'm not Claude."

"I know that." She gave him a half-smile. "I just... Oh, Clark, it's not easy for me..."

"It's not a walk in the park for me either, Lois." He sighed. "These last few weeks..."

"I know. I know." She nodded, not wanting to rehash the mistakes they'd both made over the last few weeks. "I just..."

"What is it?" he asked.

She looked up at him hesitantly. "When you said you loved me...I kinda flashed back to that day in the park..." He turned away, not meeting her gaze. She could tell he was still hurt from that day. "And then in front of the Planet."

"I lied," he murmured so softly she wasn't sure she'd heard him.

"What?" she asked, uncertain whether she'd heard him right.

"I said, I lied," he said cautiously. "In front of the Planet. After everything you went through I didn't want to complicate things even more for you so..."

"Oh," she murmured quietly before giving him a small smile. "You should have let me go first that day."

"Why?" he asked. "What were you going to say?"

"I was going to thank you...for not giving up."

"Giving up?" he asked, confused.

"On me," she said softly. "You seem to save me even from myself without me even realizing it," she admitted shyly. At his confused expression flashbacks from her failed wedding to Lex came back to her. He wasn't there. Perry and Henderson—even Jack had been there. But Clark wasn't, "You weren't there. You didn't know," she recalled aloud, turning to face him. "I couldn't go through with it. I had just said, 'I can't' when all hell broke loose."

"What? I thought..."

"You thought that Perry and Henderson had stopped the wedding?" Lois prompted. He nodded, and she continued, turning to face him as she took his hand in hers. "Those last few weeks when we were fighting I realized how important you were to me. When I was getting ready that afternoon, standing in front of the mirror in tears...I came to the realization that I could live without Lex but I couldn't live without you in my life. That was when I realized I was making a mistake." She looked up at him tearfully. "I was going to tell you I had feelings for you too but you kinda cut me off...wanting to go first."

"I'm sorry." He hung his head, running a hand through his hair. "I had no idea. I thought that—"

"I know." She sighed. "I spent months trying to talk myself out of what I was feeling...then with everything that happened after our date..." She sighed, uncertain how to continue.

"It's okay," he said, squeezing her hand. "Let's just move forward."

She laughed, leaning towards him. "I thought that was what I was trying to do earlier..."

He smiled, turning to cup her cheek. "I think we were both getting a little carried away."

"I didn't think that was a bad thing," she teased as she leaned in to kiss him, pressing her lips against his as she moved her hand to stroke his cheek. He sighed, looking down for a moment and she leaned into him, feeling the effect her closeness was having on

him.

He'd lied. He had been in love with her this whole time. He hadn't been in love with Mayson. She wasn't his second choice. Suddenly the fears she'd been harboring over the past few months seemed minuscule. Was that why he'd kept running away? Because he was afraid of getting too close?

She hated how she'd acted back then. Clark had tried to warn her about Lex repeatedly, but she'd dismissed him. She refused to entertain the idea that she could possibly be wrong about Lex. After all, she was Lois Lane, intrepid investigative reporter. Nothing got past her, right?

Last summer had been a humbling experience. Amidst all the chaos and the fights between her and Clark he still wouldn't give up. He could have walked away and let her get married to a sociopath, but he didn't. He'd even lied about his feelings to help her return to her normal routine.

He'd been in love with her this whole time. How had they wasted so much time? She readjusted herself against him, sliding her other leg across his lap, so she was straddling him.

"Lois..." he breathed softly. His arms encircled her waist as she leaned into him, loosening his tie as she continued their embrace.

He had to be dreaming. Lois had been in love with him since her almost-wedding to Luthor? How had he not known? How had he so stupidly wasted all these months?

"Lois..." he breathed softly, encircling her waist as she slid on his lap, continuing their embrace, seeking her mouth out hungrily. He moaned against her lips as she tugged on his tie, seductively pulling it out from his collar as she pressed her body against his.

"I love you, Clark," she murmured huskily against his lips. "So much wasted time..." she murmured against him as she helped tug his arm out of his jacket, brushing her hands up and down his chest seductively as she did so. He allowed his hands to wander up her sides, exploring the burgundy lace and silk with his palms.

"I love you so much, Lois," he whispered, cupping her cheek, "I can't believe I almost lost you." He gasped in surprise when he felt her fingernails graze against his chest. When had she unbuttoned his shirt? Fast. They were moving too fast...

He broke off the kiss and looked up at her curiously.

"I'm right here," she murmured, leaning in to recapture her lips.

He swallowed hard as he felt the soft flesh from beneath the fabric of her dress press up against him. Her hand brushed against the cotton of his now completely unbuttoned dress shirt as it hung on his shoulders loosely. He needed to tell her. He had to stop and tell her before they...

"Lois," he murmured against her lips, moaning in pleasure as she slid closer to him, grinding herself against him. "Oh, God..." He let out a shuddered breath. "I'm..." She slid the three-cord straps off her shoulders and he swallowed hard. "Are...you...sure?" He managed in-between heated kisses.

"Yes," she whimpered against him, recapturing his lips once more.

He tried to force his mind to focus. He couldn't cross that threshold with her. Not until he told her. "Lois," he began again, taking a shuddered breath, "I'm..." She raked her fingers up and down his chest seductively. "Superman..." he finally managed to say.

She grinned down at him, slipping her hand below his now unbuckled waistband. "Yes, you are," she murmured, leaning in to recapture his lips once more.

What? Did she know already? Was that why she was ready to take that step with him? Was that why she had given him a second chance? Had he given himself away during his red kryptonite exposure? Wait! After Mayson's car bombing she began to pull

away. Maybe she saw something that night? So many questions raced through his mind.

"Oh, God." The tantalizing movements of her hands brought him back to the present. The questions racing through his mind were no longer important. No more secrets. She knew. She knew and she wasn't pulling away. He slid his hands up her back as he began to rain a trail of featherlight kisses down her throat. The reasoning for 'why' slowly began to disappear from the forefront of his mind as he focused on the feeling of Lois Lane in his arms. He'd dreamed of this moment for so long. The small metal zipper brushed against his hand, and he stilled his motions looking at her for consent. She nodded, twisting herself to give him a better view as he lowered the zipper. She moved her hair out of the way, looking back at him as he lowered the zipper and revealed her smooth ivory back. The burgundy material fell, pooling around her waist. She wasn't wearing a bra. He drank in her bare back knowing the moment she turned around... She smiled at him, turning to face him and he smiled, catching his breath in his throat.

He looked back at her hungrily. "You're so gorgeous," he whispered as she turned on his lap to face him, tightening her thighs around him.

She linked her arms around his neck and whispered, "Make love to me, Clark."

Without a word, he leaned in to capture her lips hungrily, standing to his feet as he stood up with her in his arms. She wrapped her legs around him as he walked them back to the bedroom and laid her on the bed. She had tossed his dress shirt to the floor clumsily as she kicked off her pantyhose, inching herself back onto the bed. He lowered himself between her legs, brushing his lips against her inner thigh. "Yes, Cl..."

She sank back against the mattress, meeting his eyes as he lifted his head, staring at her hungrily. It was odd. She didn't recall when he'd taken his glasses off. He looked so familiar, yet different without them. Her eyes gazed over his taut muscles in desire. He still looked as good as he did that morning at the Apollo when she'd caught him in a towel. How had she worked beside him for almost three years knowing what was under those suits and not...

He moved up her body, teasing each layer of skin with his mouth as he moved up her body, gliding his palms up her legs as he did so. His mouth sealed over her right breast, caressing it with his tongue as he grazed his teeth against the sensitive flesh. "Yes, Cl..." She gasped in pleasure, fisting his hair enthusiastically. His hands moved up and down her thighs, gently massaging them as he moved his ministrations to her other breast.

She glided her ankles up and down his lower back pushing his dress slacks further and further down from where they loosely hung on his waist. She reached between their bodies, caressing him through his slacks as she unzipped them, tugging them over his hips.

He groaned against her, whispering featherlight kisses along her chest as he moved upwards. She sought his mouth out impatiently, pulling him to her level as she fisted his hair encouragingly.

She heard the rustling of fabric and looked down to see he had tossed the remaining item of clothing off, pressing himself against her as he slipped his tongue inside her mouth. She moaned against him wrapping her arms around him as she marveled at the powerful muscles she felt beneath her fingertips. He stilled his movements for a moment, resting his head against hers as he wrapped his arms around her and caressed her face with his hand. "I love you, Lois Lane," he murmured softly.

She could feel tears forming in her eyes as she felt the emotion behind those five simple words. She could sense from his voice and the tenderness in his eyes that this was more to him than it had been with her previous lovers. It was everything. He looked so

different like this...without his glasses he seemed so vulnerable... and familiar.

She reached up with her hand caressing his face with her hand. "I love you, Clark Kent." He leaned in to kiss her. His arms tightened around her. She ran her hands through his hair, encouraging him as she anticipated his next move.

What was he waiting for?

Just as she was about to voice her frustration, she felt their bodies become one. "Oh, God yesss!" she growled, digging her fingernails into his back as he pressed her firmly against the mattress filling her so completely.

He looked at her in concern. "I'm not hurting you, am I?"

"No, no, no," she whimpered against him.

"Oh, Lois..." he murmured, stilling his motions as he gathered her in his arms. "God you're so beautiful," he murmured against her neck. "I've loved you from the moment I saw you."

His body rocked back and forth as he slowly began to adjust himself to her. "Cla..."

"I've wanted to tell you for so long..." he murmured against her neck.

Tell her? Oh, right the lie in front of the Planet... How in the world was he able to talk coherently? She felt like her entire body was one movement away from...mind-numbing, pleasurable...

'Oh, God...' She arched her back, grinding her hips against him.

"More," she pleaded with him. Not trusting her voice. "Oh, God..." She moaned as his hips bucked against her.

"Wrap your legs around me," he instructed. She nodded, feeling the pulsing sensation continue to spread through her body with each movement.

"Oh, God, yesss..." she cried out as she linked her legs tightly around his waist. "Clark, that is so..." Before she could finish her sentence, he had flipped them over, so she was straddling him.

She arched an eyebrow at him, and he smirked. "You said you like to be on top."

She grinned back at him recalling one of their first conversations when she'd been 'schooling him' in the ways of the newsroom after Perry had teamed her up with him. "And don't you forget it," she murmured leaning forward to capture his mouth with hers.

"Never," he said softly, reaching up to cup her cheek. Suddenly self-conscious with him looking up at her she turned away, closing her eyes as she began to move against him. "Lois, open your eyes," he murmured softly, brushing his lips against her skin as she continued to move against him.

Her eyes fluttered open, looking down at him. Why did he look so familiar but different without his glasses?

His hips lifted off the mattress, meeting each movement at a rapid pace until she was crying out in pleasure. His was a few seconds behind, and she fell against him, clinging to him in the aftermath of their lovemaking. "Wow..." she rasped out incoherently.

He nodded, stroking her cheek as he leaned up to kiss her. "You are so sexy."

She laughed. "That was so..."

"I know," he chuckled, murmuring something else that she couldn't make out in her euphoric state.

"Why did we wait *so long*?" she asked breathlessly, leaning in to kiss him. She was startled when she felt his body coming back to life again and grinned. "Making up for lost time?" she teased.

He grinned up at her. "You have no idea." With that, he rolled them over so he was hovering above her, becoming one with her once more.

"Oh, Clark, yesss..." she cried out.

"Oh, Lois..." he murmured, as he gathered her in his arms.

From the moment he'd carried her into the bedroom, he had fought against every impulse to lose himself completely in her arms. "God you're so beautiful," he murmured against her neck, nibbling on her sensitive skin as he began to move their joined bodies as one. "I've loved you from the moment I saw you."

Her heart rate was skyrocketing with each movement. "Cla..." He smiled to himself, taking in her dazed expression.

"I've wanted to tell you for so long..." he murmured against her neck. He had dreamed of this for so long. Finding someone to love that he could be completely open and honest with... It was a dream come true. From the moment he'd met Lois Lane he'd been a goner. Completely in love with her. He had been so afraid the day would never come when he could tell her everything...but it had. She seemed to have already known. He wondered why she'd pulled away from him after Mayson's death, but now he knew why. She knew. She had figured it out. It didn't matter now. Nothing else mattered. He was finally where he belonged with the woman he loved.

"More," she pleaded with him.

More? As it was, it took everything in him not to lose himself in her arms until he reached that pleasurable point of no return.

"Oh, God..." she moaned as his hips met hers.

'Bad idea. Bad, bad idea.'

He had to slow things down, or he was going to end up finishing this race without her. An idea came to him as her hips bucked against his, grinding her body against his. "Wrap your legs around me," he instructed. She nodded, wrapping her arms around him. He bit his lower lip as he felt the effect of the movement, suppressing a moan of pleasure.

"Oh, God, yesss..." she cried out as she linked her legs tightly around his waist. "Clark, that is so—" He didn't give her a chance to finish, flipping them over, so she was on top of him, straddling him. She smiled at the newfound position, arching an eyebrow at him.

He smirked. "You said you like to be on top,"

She grinned back at him, seeming to recall their conversation when she'd been 'schooling him' in the ways of the newsroom after Perry had first teamed them up. "And don't you forget it," she murmured leaning forward to kiss him.

"Never," he said softly, reaching up to cup her cheek. Something in her demeanor changed. She turned away, closing her eyes as she began to move against him. He could feel the pleasurable jolt wash through him with each stroke. "Lois, open your eyes," he murmured softly, brushing his lips against her chest as she continued to move against him.

Her eyes fluttered open, looking down at him. He heard her sharp intake of breath and grinned to himself, watching mesmerized as her body moved so perfectly against him. He could feel the world around him begin to fade. The only thing he could focus on was Lois. The soft sighs she made with each movement, bringing them closer and closer to ecstasy.

Finally, she cried out his name in ecstasy a few seconds before he followed suit. She fell against him, clinging to him in the aftermath of their lovemaking. "Wow..." she rasped out incoherently.

He nodded, stroking her cheek as he leaned up to kiss her. "You are so sexy."

She laughed. "That was so..."

"I know." He chuckled. "Maybe later we can try the ceiling..."

"Why did we wait *so long*?" she asked breathlessly, leaning in to kiss him. To his horror, he felt his body come to life once more. She looked back at him with a seductive grin. "Making up for lost time?"

He grinned up at her. "You have no idea." With that, he rolled them over, so he was hovering above her, joining his body with hers once more.

"Oh, Clark, yesss..." she cried out, gripping his back as he

continued to make up for lost time with her well into the night.

The next morning Clark woke up smiling to himself. He had spent all night making love to Lois until they both had given into exhaustion. She'd kept her legs wrapped around him in a vise-like grip well into the night as they'd made love again and again and again. At first, he'd been shocked by his body's response to her. Maybe it was another super power, or maybe it was from finally being able to share everything with the woman he loved. He didn't care.

He rolled on his side, brushing a stray hair out of her face as he did so. "I love you so much, Lois Lane. You are my ultimate weakness...more so than Kryptonite."

"Hey." Her eyes fluttered open sleepily, reaching out for him. "You're still here."

He smiled. "Yeah."

She grinned back at him, leaning in to kiss him. "You stayed the night."

"Mmm hmm," he murmured against her lips. "Was I not supposed to?" he teased, looking down at their current state of undress. "Someone fell asleep with an alarmingly tight grip on me."

"Just making sure you didn't disappear in the middle of the night," she said quietly, stretching her arms up over her head as she stretched her legs out to straighten them out.

"Never," he murmured as he brushed his lips against hers.

"What time is it?" Lois asked, glancing at her nightstand.

He looked over his shoulder and read, "Nine thirty." He began to sit up. "We should probably get a move on and try and get something to eat."

"It's Sunday. I don't want to—" she began to argue until her grumbling stomach interrupted her. "I guess I am a little hungry," she admitted sheepishly.

He leaned in to kiss her neck. "We could go to Callard's..."

"That does sound good," she said dreamily as his lips caressed her neck, "but that would require a shower...and clothes..."

Her stomach growled again and he laughed, pulling away. "Why don't you get a shower and I'll go home and change then meet you there in half an hour?"

She nodded, pulling herself out of his arms grudgingly before giving him one last kiss. "Don't be long."

He smiled, leaning back to watch as she headed toward the bathroom and closed the door behind her. He fought the urge to sneak another peek at her, reminding himself that that wouldn't be a good idea if they planned on leaving the apartment today. He got up slowly scanning the room for his missing articles of clothing. He'd found everything but his tie, shoes, and jacket. He headed back to the living room and found his jacket, shoes, and glasses. His super-hearing picked up the sound of an alarm blaring, and he winced at the noise. All night he'd ignored distress calls. Thankfully nothing major had occurred.

"All units respond...we have a jumper...Metropolis Bridge." He grimaced, realizing it was time for Superman to get back to work. At super-speed he left her apartment, flying to his apartment to change into the suit and head to the Metropolis Bridge to help. Hopefully, this wouldn't take too long.

Lois slowly woke up feeling the familiar weight of Clark's body pressed up against hers. She smiled to herself recalling the previous night of lovemaking with him. Things were different now. Unlike her previous experiences, she didn't feel like she'd lost something afterward. The way he'd made love to her she felt like he was pouring his soul into every kiss...every caress. They'd fallen asleep in one another's arms.

"...more so than Kryptonite," she heard him say.

"Hey." Her eyes fluttered open sleepily, reaching out for him. "You're still here." She was still trying to allow her eyes time to

adjust as she woke up. She glanced down at their current state of undress. Her legs were still wrapped snugly around his waist.

He smiled, cupping her cheek. "Yeah."

She grinned back at him, leaning in to kiss him. "You stayed the night."

"Mmm hmm," he murmured against her lips. "Was I not supposed to?" he teased, glancing down at where her legs were still securely wrapped around him. "Someone fell asleep with an alarmingly tight grip on me."

"Just making sure you didn't disappear in the middle of the night," she said quietly, stretching her arms up over her head as she stretched her legs out to straighten them out. He had spent the night. She hadn't had anyone do that. Even Claude had been gone the next morning...along with her story and Kerth.

"Never," he murmured as he brushed his lips against hers. She grinned against his mouth. She was a goner. How in the world was she going to be able to work side by side with him after last night and not drag him into the nearest supply closet? She had never felt like this before. She just couldn't get enough of him last night.

'*God he's gorgeous,*' she thought to herself as she slowly came back to the present. He looked so different without his glasses. She just couldn't place it...

"What time is it?" she asked, glancing at her nightstand.

He looked over his shoulder and read the time on the digital clock. "Nine thirty." He pulled away from her, sitting up in bed. She frowned at the loss of contact. "We should probably get a move on and try and get something to eat."

Eat? She could definitely eat, but right now eating was the last thing on her mind. "It's Sunday. I don't want to—" she began to argue until her grumbling stomach interrupted her. "I guess I am a little hungry," she admitted sheepishly.

He leaned in to kiss her neck. "We could go to Callard's..."

"That does sound good," she said dreamily as his lips caressed her neck, "but that would require a shower...and clothes..."

Her stomach growled again and he laughed, pulling away. "Why don't you get a shower and I'll go home and change then meet you there in half an hour?"

She nodded, pulling herself out of his arms grudgingly before giving him one last kiss. "Don't be long."

She climbed out of bed closing the door behind her as she headed for the shower to begin getting ready. Just as she was stepping into the shower, she heard what sounded like a sonic boom that usually indicated Superman's presence. She frowned, grabbing a robe, wrapping it around her as she poked her head out of the bathroom. "Clark?"

She spotted the neatly-made bed and looked around the room, frowning when she didn't see him. She poked her head out into the living room. No sign of him. Maybe she'd heard wrong? She didn't see any sign of Clark or Superman. She spotted his tie on the back of her couch, smiling to herself as she recalled stripping him on the sofa the night before. The memory of last night's date ran through her mind, and she smiled, recalling each detail.

<< "*Lois, this isn't easy for either of us, but I promise...no more shutting you out. I don't want to lose you, Lois, I hate that I almost did. I love you and...*" >>

It seemed like a lifetime ago when he'd been pleading for another chance. They'd both made mistakes but after last night. Things were different. They'd finally talked and now that they'd finally taken that step in their relationship she doubted she'd have to worry about him running away again.

<< "*Are you listening? I'm kinda pouring my heart out here, and you seem to...*" >>

<< "*Lois, I'm not leaving until we talk about this.*" >>

<< "*Lois, open the door, please.*" >>

She'd almost blown it. When she slammed the door in his face, she'd almost blown it. The exasperated look on his face when she'd opened the door told her he'd been close to walking

away.

<<“I love you, Lois.”>>

<<“Lois, I’m not Claude.”>>

<<“I lied.”>>

<<“In front of the Planet. After everything you went through I didn’t want to complicate things even more for you so...”>>

His reassurance and confession about his true feelings helped give her the courage to tell him what she’d been hiding from for so long. She was in love with him and had been for months.

Something changed between them after that, closing the gap between them that had formed after Mayson’s death.

<<“I think we were both getting a little carried away.”>>

<<“I love you so much, Lois, I can’t believe I almost lost you.”>>

<<“Are...you...sure?”>>

He had been so hesitant, afraid to touch her until he was sure she was ready to take that step. After her experience with Claude, she’d gone out of her way to avoid—as Clark had put it yesterday—“being completely intimate” with anyone. She’d been hurt... lied to. But she had been intimate with Clark. Not on the physical aspect of things but emotionally... She’d never opened up to anyone the way she had with him. He knew things about her even Lucy wasn’t privy to. Her compulsiveness. Her fears of not being enough.

<<“Lois, I’m...Superman...”>>

What was that about? Sure, she’d had a crush...okay, infatuation with Superman when he’d first arrived but that had faded after the fiasco with her almost-wedding to Lex. She’d practically propositioned him, and he’d firmly but gently turned her down. Maybe Clark was trying to give her her fantasy? She shook her head, not sure what to make of Clark’s euphoric statement. She hadn’t known how to respond so she’d just simply grinned back at him with a “yes you are” in hopes it would calm his insecurities. He hadn’t said anything else about it. So she hadn’t given it a second thought.

<<“You’re so gorgeous.”>>

<<“I love you, Lois Lane.”>>

<<“I’ve loved you from the moment I saw you.”>>

She’d lost count last night after the sixth or seventh time of them making love. Something seemed to have been awakened inside her. She had never had this problem in any of her past relationships. Maybe that was the problem. With Clark, it had been more than sex, more than just physical...just love.

<<“I’ve wanted to tell you for so long...”>>

He’d been holding back on his feelings for so long just as she had. It amazed her how saying those three simple words could change their relationship so profoundly.

<<“You said you like to be on top.”>>

<<“Lois, open your eyes.”>>

She’d been self-conscious with him looking at her so she’d looked away, but he’d made sure to pull her back, ensuring that she was enjoying every pleasurable moment. That had been different. Her other partners hadn’t cared if she was looking at them or not. By the time it came to actual lovemaking, it was a race to finish, and many times she never got where she needed to. Clark had been different, focusing on her needs the entire time.

She frowned, looking over the living room once more. No sign of Clark or Superman. She could have sworn she heard... She headed back to the bathroom to finish getting ready.

Clark landed in an alley outside Callard’s and quickly changed back into his street clothes. He’d changed into a pair of jeans, T-shirt and open plaid button-down shirt, opting for something more relaxed since it was their day off. He headed inside Callard’s and scanned the restaurant for Lois. Not seeing her yet he went ahead and got a table, waiting patiently for her.

Lois stared at herself in the mirror, trying to decide on what to wear. The weather had been so weird lately. Hot then cold. She could wear jeans and a cotton top and risk getting hot later or she could wear a skirt and blouse and risk being too cold. On the other hand, jeans were a lot harder to take off than a skirt... She sighed realizing where her mind had wandered. After years of being practically celibate here she was unable to go half an hour without thinking about...

She shuddered involuntarily, recalling every pleasurable moment in Clark’s arms. Who knew Clark Kent, mild-mannered farmboy from Kansas, was so...talented? Her past experiences had left a lot to be desired, but not Clark. All night long he’d had her begging for more. She’d been both surprised and thrilled with how quickly he recovered last night. Again and again. He made sure she was enjoying every second of their lovemaking. At one point she thought they were floating.

<<“Tell me what you want.”>>

<<“What do you need?”>>

“Skirt it is,” she mumbled to herself. Maybe after breakfast they could make a detour back to the apartment and stay in bed all day? She finished getting ready then grabbed a pair of slip-on shoes before heading to the door.

In the living room she glanced at the clock as she gathered her things, preparing to head out the door. “I’m late.” She sighed, tousling her hair slightly as she tried to get the few stubborn strands to go down. Her stomach growled again and she huffed, “Forget it.” She grabbed her purse and keys and headed for the door. She opened the door to leave and found Dan Scardino on the other side. “Dan, uh, what are you doing here?”

He stepped into the apartment. “We need to talk.”

She sighed, staring at the clock. “Can it wait? I’m on my way out.”

He glanced down at her in a long floral skirt and white blouse with slip on shoes. “A bit early to be dressing up.”

She crossed her arms over her chest shaking her head. “I’m meeting Clark for breakfast...and I’m running late,” she said glancing at her watch, before looking at him pointedly to send the message of ‘get out.’

“Might want to give him the extra time. He might have a video to return,” Dan said snidely.

Her eyes narrowed at him. “Is there a reason you’re here or are you just trying to make digs at Clark?”

“You hung up on me last night. Didn’t even give me a chance,” he pressed, taking a step towards her.

“I’ve said everything I need to say, Dan, I’m sorry,” she murmured softly, turning toward the door. “Now if you don’t mind...” She gestured to the open door.

He turned around, pacing her living room. “No, Lois, I do mind. I don’t understand how you can—” He stopped in front of the couch spotting the scattered clothing from the previous night crumpled on the floor. “Well, I guess he doesn’t waste any time does he?”

“Dan, get out!” she said vehemently, growing more and more impatient with each passing moment. She knew he might take her breaking things off hard but the remarks he was making about Clark and insinuating he’d somehow taken advantage of her? No wonder Clark couldn’t stand him.

He walked toward her, shaking his head. “I thought you were holding back a bit but this...”

“Out!” she repeated angrily, unwilling to listen to him any longer. Now he’d moved his remarks to her. What she did with Clark was none of his business.

“He’ll break your heart again,” he said heading toward the door again. “Always does. If you change your mind...” She glared at him and he stopped mid-sentence. “I’ll see you around.” Finally he left and Lois waited a few minutes before heading out the door.

Clark glanced at his watch for the tenth time looking around the crowded diner. The server had come by at least four times asking if he was ready to order. He did his best to calm his fears that something had happened on the short drive from her apartment to the restaurant. He was about to leave and do a quick scan for her when he spotted a frazzled Lois Lane make her way into the restaurant. He smiled as he eyed her shapely legs beneath her floral skirt. She looked stunning as always. "Hey."

"I know. I know I took longer than a half hour," she said, sliding into the booth with him. "Sorry." She leaned in to kiss him. "I had an—"

She didn't have a chance to finish because the server that had been over to the table before returned, prompting them for their order. "Can I get you something to eat, drink?"

"Coffee, black. Two-egg omelet... No, make that three... with grilled chicken, cheese, spinach and mushrooms. A side of fruit and whole grain toast... and an OJ." Lois rambled off her order in full babble mode. He couldn't help but chuckle at the server who was scribbling furiously in his notepad to keep up with her complicated order.

He looked over at Clark hesitantly. "Uh, French toast." He handed the menus to the server, chuckling as he heard the server muttering under his breath about always the pretty ones with the complicated orders.

Lois leaned her back against him. "Thanks for waiting."

"You're worth the wait." He grinned at her, leaning in to place a kiss on her shoulder.

"I would have been here sooner but I had an unexpected visitor this morning that decided to barge in while I was leaving," she explained sitting up as the server brought her coffee. She took it gratefully. "Thank you." The server took his cup and refilled it. He grabbed a few sugars and creamers to fix his coffee, watching Lois out of the corner of his eye. She brought the cup to her lips, sipping on the rim to savor the taste for a moment. "Their coffee is always so good."

"Glad you're enjoying yourself," he said with a smile, leaning in to kiss her cheek.

"I'll be enjoying myself even more once I get some food. I'm starved!" Lois said glancing around the crowded restaurant.

"Should have gotten here sooner," he teased.

"I couldn't decide what to wear," she said sheepishly. "The weather's been kinda crazy lately. Hot one minute then cold the next..."

"Well, I think you look beautiful." He smiled at her, eyeing her shapely legs beneath the hem of her skirt.

"Thanks," she murmured back, leaning in to kiss him. "You're not too bad on the eyes yourself." She brushed her lips against his once more before whispering, "But I still prefer you how you woke up this morning."

He could feel the blush creeping up the back of his neck. "Lois..."

She grinned back at him as if she'd accomplished a great victory, leaning against him. "What?" she asked innocently. He chuckled, opening his mouth to respond but stopped when one of the servers arrived with their food. "Yum," Lois said, grabbing her silverware to begin eating.

After finishing up their breakfast, Lois began relaying her confrontation with Dan. "I don't know what his problem is. He just showed up...took me ten minutes to get him out of the apartment so I could leave."

Clark nodded, listening quietly as she spoke. He did his best not to react as she told him about Dan showing up at her apartment unannounced. After last night, he was confident the man posed no threat to his relationship with Lois. It angered him that Scardino thought he had a right to just show up like that, and it angered him even more that Scardino had upset Lois; however, he knew Lois

could handle herself.

After paying for breakfast, they headed toward where she'd parked the Jeep. As they approached the street she'd parked on, a flyer distributor handed them a bright yellow flyer which Clark took. "What is it?" Lois asked curiously.

"It's a flyer for the *Planet's Street Fair for Coates Orphanage*," Clark said, reading the flyer.

"Oh, right, I forgot about that," Lois said, searching for her keys in her purse.

"Wanna go?" he asked, glancing at his watch. "It starts in a few minutes."

Lois grinned. "It would be fun to see Perry dressed up as a fortune teller..."

He laughed. "I must have missed that one."

"I overheard Jimmy placing an order for—How did he put it? 'Ugly Old Woman Drag.'" She laughed, unlocking the Jeep as she climbed in.

Later that afternoon Lois and Clark walked hand in hand through the street fair that had been set up in front of the Planet. There was live music being set up on stage and vendors everywhere with different things being donated so the profits would go to the Coates Orphanage.

"I love cotton candy," Lois said, tearing a pink piece of fluff off her cone of cotton candy.

"I can tell," he said, mesmerized as he watched her lick the sweet pink snack off her fingers, recalling how her tongue felt against his skin the night before.

"I never had cotton candy until I was sixteen. When I was a kid my parents wouldn't let me have these," she said taking another bite of the pink fluff.

"Ever?" He looked at her incredulously. "I find that hard to believe."

Lois shrugged as they walked toward the booth marked "Madame Blavatsky," pulling another piece of cotton candy from her cone, doing her best impression of her dad. "'The girl's hyperactive enough, Ellen. Don't feed her dyed sugar.'" Clark laughed at her impression and she smiled, placing a piece of cotton candy in his mouth. He savored the taste of it as he allowed it to melt in his mouth, catching the heated gaze Lois was giving him. "Now, I eat cotton candy every chance I get." She leaned in to kiss him. He moaned against her lips, feeling her tongue slip inside his mouth as she sought out the taste of the cotton candy from earlier.

"Step right up, folks. One dollar, one measly dollar to learn your future. Madame Blavatsky knows all, sees all, tells all." Jimmy's voice echoed from in front of Madame Blavatsky's booth.

Clark laughed, pulling away from her, wrapping his arm around her waist. "I think we found the Chief."

She nodded. "Wherever Jimmy is..." She gave him another kiss before tugging his arm with her toward the booth. Jimmy grinned as they approached. She reached in his pocket, surprising him slightly before she pulled out a dollar. He watched as she turned to Jimmy with the dollar. "How much of my dollar goes to charity?" Clark suppressed a laugh as she grilled Jimmy on where *her* dollar would go.

Jimmy grinned, playing the part of street fair announcer proudly. "One hundred percent, one hundred pennies of your dollar will go to charity. Madame Blavatsky's heart is as big as—"

Perry's booming voice could be heard from inside the tent behind them. "Olsen!"

Jimmy grinned sheepishly. "—her voice." He gave them a half-laugh, shaking his head.

"Is that Lois I hear?" Perry asked from inside the tent.

"It's us, Chief." Lois laughed, taking her cell phone out.

"Us?" Perry asked.

“Hey, Chief,” Clark called out with a smile.

“Come on out. We had to get a picture of this,” Lois teased, pulling her camera on her phone up.

“Don’t you *dare*, Lois,” Perry barked back from inside the tent.

“I promise it’s only for posterity,” Lois added with a grin, looking back at him as she shook her head, ‘*not in this lifetime*,’ she mouthed to him.

“Put the camera away,” Perry barked from the tent.

“Fine,” Lois sighed, turning the camera off.

“Kent?” Perry called out.

“She turned it off, Chief,” Clark reassured him.

Perry poked his head out of the tent. He couldn’t help but laugh. Perry was covered in make-up and scarves. His hands were covered in make-up and fake fingernails that were threatening to fall off. He held up his hand and pointed it toward Lois. “How do you keep these things from falling off? Why in thunder do you women do this to yourselves?”

Lois laughed, handing her cotton candy to Clark. “I’ll just be a minute.”

“I’ll be right here,” he reassured her. She smiled, leaning in to kiss him before disappearing behind the tent with Perry.

He laughed, turning to Jimmy, brushing his hand against Jimmy’s hat. “Part-time job?” he teased.

“Very funny.” Jimmy smiled back at him, putting an arm around his shoulder. “This is your idea of a date? You think Scardino takes her to silly street fairs and buys her cotton candy?”

He sighed, trying his best not to react to his friend comparing him to Scardino. He knew he meant well, but his relationship with Lois was private. Not something he wanted to share with Jimmy in the middle of a street fair with Lois a few feet away. “Jimmy, I don’t care what Scardino *did*. What I do with Lois is no one else’s business but—”

“Did?” Jimmy grinned, looking at him curiously.

He was quiet for a moment, nodding, before he repeated with a smile, “Did.”

Jimmy gave a fist pump before hugging him. “Thank you! I was really getting worried for a while. You know I always got your back, CK.”

“Hi, guys,” the subject of their discussion said from behind.

“Someone’s ears were burning,” Jimmy muttered under his breath as they turned to see Dan Scardino standing in front of them in jeans and a plaid button-down shirt, similar to Clark’s.

Dan pointed at the tent behind them. “What sucker got talked into playing a fortune teller?”

Clark shared a look with Jimmy but didn’t say anything.

Perry’s voice could be heard from the tent. “Who you calling a sucker?”

Dan gave a sheepish grin. “Whoops.” He looked around the street they were on. “Lois around?”

Annoyed, Clark crossed his arms over his chest, keeping the two cones of cotton candy in his hand as he did so. As annoyed with Scardino’s presence as he was, he was doing his best to not give into his temper. Getting into a pissing contest with Scardino wasn’t how he wanted to spend his afternoon.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business,” Jimmy said, crossing his arms over his chest, mirroring Clark’s expression.

Dan cocked an irritated expression at Jimmy. “I think that’s up to Lois to decide.”

“From what I hear she already did,” Jimmy said smugly.

“That’s still...unresolved,” Dan said evasively. “Where’s Lois?”

“Isn’t there some kind of unspoken rule about horning in on another guy’s date?” Jimmy countered, taking a step into Scardino’s face.

“Date?” Scardino laughed. “I’m sorry. *This* is a date?”

Unable to keep his mouth shut any longer Clark snapped

coolly, “What are you doing here, Scardino?”

Dan opened his mouth to respond but Lois cut him off walking towards them with her arms crossed over her chest to confront him. “Yes, Dan, what *are* you doing here?”

He smiled back at her. “Well, I—”

“Look out!” A panicked shout from the stage called out. Clark glanced toward the stage and saw a man on a ladder struggling with a huge amp above the stage. Directly below was a guitarist, tuning his guitar with his headphones on, oblivious to the shouts above him. “Oh, my God! Look out!”

Clark tried to catch Lois’ gaze to let her know he had to go, but she was looking toward the stage with the rest of the crowd. “Look out!” another shout from the man holding the amp could be heard and he winced. He needed to help but that would mean leaving Lois in the middle of their date. With Scardino here it wouldn’t be easy.

“I can’t hold on!”

With everyone’s attention diverted he silently cursed himself as he changed into the suit at super-speed to stop the amp from falling on the oblivious guitarist, whisking him off the stage seconds before the amp crashed on the stage where the guitarist had been seconds before. He set the man down on the ground, checking to make sure the guitarist was all right. The guitarist looked up at him slightly dazed.

“I’m glad I was nearby.”

Just as he was about to fly back to Lois a young blonde walked up to them. “Calvin! Oh, Calvin!” She wrapped an arm around the guitarist before turning to Clark. “Oh, thank you, Superman!”

“He’s a little dazed, miss, but he’ll be fine,” he reassured taking a step to leave but Calvin stopped him.

“Fine? *Fine!*?” Calvin fumed, pointing to his hand. “He broke my hand, Elise! Just when I get my big break, this baboon busts my hand!” He turned back to him. “Take me to the hospital right now.”

Clark sighed. He really didn’t want to leave Lois any longer than he had to...especially not with Scardino hanging around like a vulture.

“I mean it.” Calvin demanded.

Seeing there was no getting around this, he grabbed Calvin to fly him to the hospital, silently praying Lois wouldn’t be too angry about him leaving her with Scardino.

“Man, did you see that?” Jimmy asked, looking up at the stage.

“That was some close call, huh?” Dan asked. “Lucky Superman was nearby.”

“Yeah,” Lois breathed, looking around. “Jimmy, where did Clark go?”

Jimmy looked over his shoulder. “Uh, he was just here a second ago.” He glanced at Scardino nervously before adding, “I’m sure he’ll be right back.”

“Yeah, sure he will,” Dan said snidely.

“Clark?” Lois called out, looking around the crowded street for Clark once more.

“So now you know,” Dan said.

“Know what?” Lois asked.

“Just about how much you mean to Clark Kent,” Dan said with a smug smile.

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, glancing around her uneasily. Where was Clark? How could he just leave? How could he just leave her like that? After everything that happened last night... It didn’t help that Dan was circling like a vulture, pointing out the obvious. Clark had left again. After this morning she didn’t want to give Dan the satisfaction of being right so she replied coolly, “He probably had a good reason.”

“Sure he did,” Dan said sarcastically, “Maybe he had a library

book to return or maybe he's just a wuss—" She narrowed her eyes at him, daring him to say one more thing. She was angry at Clark, but she still didn't like anyone talking like that about him.

"Man, don't you have some DEA agent stuff to do?" Jimmy interjected, coming to Clark's defense. "*Buzz off!*"

Dan ignored Jimmy. "I'm sorry, Lois, the guy just brings it out in me. I don't understand what you see in him."

Jimmy tried to intervene again. "Come on, Lois, you don't owe him an explanation for anything..." Jimmy narrowed his eyes at Scardino in disgust as he tried to pull Lois away from Scardino.

"No, but Clark sure owes her one," Scardino remarked with a bite in his tone.

"Do you ever shut up?" Jimmy asked, annoyed as he stepped toward Scardino.

"Do you?" Scardino scoffed back at Jimmy, growing more and more irritated with his intrusion by the minute.

Jimmy shook his head. "I mean you don't even know CK and you're..."

"Calling it how I see it?" Dan prompted.

"Enough! Both of you!" Lois shouted in disgust. "Jimmy, I can handle this without you." Jimmy nodded and then Lois turned to Dan. "And as for *you!*" She jabbed Dan in the chest angrily.

"Me?" He looked around, uncertainly. "What did I do?"

"You deliberately horned in on my date with Clark and tried to make him look bad." She fumed, jabbing her finger in his chest again.

"I didn't have to try very hard," Dan said snidely.

"You had no right to..." She shook her head in disgust.

"Lois, I am trying here. I want another shot," he began. She looked at him in disgust, trying to walk away. "Look, I'm sorry about this morning, but I'm here, and I'm here because I want to be with you whenever I can. Can you say that about Clark Kent? I mean, he's the one you had a date with. Where is he?"

Four hours. He had waited patiently for *four* hours, listening to Calvin berate him over and over about his *sprained* wrist. It wasn't broken. It was sprained. That was good news. He'd been a bit concerned when Calvin had said it was broken, but after the doctors had checked it out he felt a bit better. He hated that he'd been the cause of an injury.

He followed Calvin and his wife, Elise outside the hospital, listening as he continued to blame Superman for his troubles. "I'm a musician, I'm an artist, I need both my hands, what would Jimi Hendrix have been with one hand? I'll tell you what: he'd have been nobody, he'd have been nothing, he'd have been—"

Thankfully, Elise interjected, "Alive. You're alive, Calvin, and you're going to be fine."

Unfortunately, Elise's words had the opposite of their intended effect and to Clark's horror he turned his anger on Elise. "You don't understand anything! You're a waitress, for God's sake! You serve slabs of dead cows to fat businessmen. You wouldn't know art if it jumped up and bit your kneecap!"

Angered by Calvin's words Clark interjected in Elise's defense, "People who love each other should be kind to each other." He glared angrily at Calvin.

Calvin glared at Clark. "What are you, a greeting card on steroids? You fly around putting your nose into other people's business. Who asked you?"

He did his best to control his anger, recalling he was still in his Superman persona. "I've never been sorry I saved anyone's life, Mr. Dregg. I'd hate to start now."

Calvin glared back at him. "Why are you still here? What are you waiting for? Gratitude? You ruined my life!"

Clark sighed. "It will heal," he replied irritated at Calvin's anger towards him and Elise.

Elise laid a hand on Clark's arm. "Please go. He won't calm down until you go." He glanced back at Calvin uncertainly. He

really didn't want to leave her with Calvin like this. What if he took his anger out on her in more than just words? She seemed to sense his hesitancy and nodded. "I'll be okay. Really. And thank you."

Clark sighed, ready to leave this nightmare behind him. He flew off hearing in the distance, "You ruined my life!"

When he returned to the street fair everyone was gone. Frustrated he headed to Lois' apartment to try and salvage the rest of the day and apologize for taking so long. He had stopped at the florist down the street and picked up a single red rose, praying she'd be receptive to his apology. He knocked lightly on her door. "Lois?"

No answer.

He knocked again. "Lois?"

No answer.

He scanned the apartment and found her curled up on the couch in her sweats with the television on, seeming to ignore him. From the look on her face she was more than just angry.

He knocked again. "Lois?"

"Go away, Clark!" she called out angrily. "I don't want to talk to you. I don't want to see you. Just leave me alone!"

He let out a long breath, debating on trying to wait her out. Realizing she wasn't budging he laid the rose outside her door and walked away.

The next morning Lois arrived at the Planet earlier than usual, hoping to miss running into Clark. She wasn't ready to see him. She was still *so angry* at him. He had left her in the middle of a date. He'd never done that to her before. How could he just—? After everything that happened Saturday night how could he do that to her?

She couldn't understand.

The story on Superman's rescue of the guitarist yesterday had been filed and Perry had requested a follow-up. That required talking to Superman, which meant she needed to either jump out of a window to get his attention or talk to Clark. She didn't like either of her options at the moment.

Lost in thought she began typing furiously on her computer what she really, *really* wanted to say to him. "Whoa! That must be some story!" Jimmy said passing by her. He stopped when he saw her screen.

She arched an eyebrow at him angrily, fighting back the tears she knew were threatening to escape. "Seen enough?"

"You're not actually going to say all that stuff to CK are you?" he asked weakly. Lois glared at him. "Mind my own business?" She nodded giving him a fake smile with an arched eyebrow. "You got it," he muttered, walking away from her.

Clark stepped into the newsroom, mentally preparing himself to deal with a very angry Lois Lane. He'd scanned the newsroom when he'd arrived and spotted Lois typing furiously at her computer. He'd overheard Jimmy's conversation with her. She was angry. He'd left her for four hours when they'd been on a date. He'd hoped she would be more understanding but it seemed she was still upset with him.

Jimmy approached him, complimenting his new suit. "Hey, CK, nice coat." He glanced at his coat self-consciously as Jimmy continued, "Although a flack jacket might have been a better call."

"She mad?" he asked hesitantly. He already knew the answer.

Jimmy chuckled lightly. "Ooh, you only wish," he said patting him on the shoulder in sympathy as he headed towards his desk.

Clark followed him, heading toward Lois' desk. "Lois..." She continued typing, ignoring him as she continued to stare at her screen. He sighed, repeating himself as he took a seat next to her. "Lois..."

Jimmy approached them with a file in hand and Lois looked

up at him. “Jimmy, did you hear something?”

“Like what?” Jimmy asked uncertainly, looking between her and Clark.

“It sounded a little like my name. You didn’t say my name, did you?” she asked.

Jimmy bit the inside of his lip, uncertain if he wanted to get any more involved than what Lois was making him. “Uh, no. Clark did.”

“Clark, who?” she asked.

Frustrated, he hung his head. “Lois...”

“There it is again,” Lois joked, looking around as if she was looking for the mysterious voice.

Jimmy glanced toward him and mouthed, ‘*Good luck*’ before retreating.

Clark reached out to touch her wrist. “Lois...”

She shook her head at him, pulling away. “Clark, don’t even start! Allow me. ‘Lois, I can explain I suddenly remembered that my mother’s sister’s poodle needed a haircut and so you can see why I had to leave you in the middle of a date with your thumb in your ear but I’m sure you understand.’ How am I doing so far, Clark?”

He stared at her incredulously. Did she seriously think he’d *wanted* to leave? “Lois, what are you talking about?” he asked in confusion. Then in a hushed whisper he continued, “You know exactly where I was...I didn’t expect to have to take that Dreggs guy to the hospital...otherwise I would have come right back.”

She glared at him angrily. “What are *you* talking about? You disappeared...like you always do!” she hissed angrily. “How could you? How could you just...after everything?” The tears she’d been fighting back escaped and she looked down, not willing to meet his gaze.

He let out a long sigh. “We need to talk.”

She glared at him. “Why so you can just run off in the middle of the conversation? I don’t think so. I’ve had my fair share for the week.”

“Lois...” he breathed irritated with her behavior.

“*What?*” she shot back angrily.

“Conference room, now,” he said, pulling her to her feet.

She glared at him angrily, tugging her arm back. “Fine. Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she muttered angrily as she headed toward the conference room. He closed the blinds one by one then locked the door behind him. Lois shook her head. “What are you doing?”

“I don’t feel like giving the *Planet* grapevine anymore to talk about than I have to,” he muttered.

“That is the least of your worries...” she muttered angrily.

“What is your problem?” he fumed angrily. “Why are you acting like this? And what was with the crack about me disappearing? You knew exactly where I was!”

She looked at him like he was crazy. “Uh, no,” She glared at him. “Do you really think I would be *this* angry if I *knew* where you were? No, I turned around and you were gone! *Gone!* How could you do that to me?”

“I wasn’t gone. That amp was about to crush that Dreggs guy. I had to help,” he argued.

“What are you talking about?” she asked incredulously. “What amp? What guy?”

“The guitarist? The one that I had to take to the hospital...” he prompted.

“What?”

“Oh, for the love of—” He shook his head, unsure what game she was trying to play. Was she trying to be difficult? “As Superman. I had to go rescue him...not that it did any good. The guy was a complete jerk...started blaming everyone for everything...Verbally abusing his wife like that—”

“Wha—” She took a seat. “Hold on now. Back up.”

“What?” he asked, confused.

“Repeat that,” she instructed.

“Which part?” he asked.

“The Superman part,” she instructed shakily.

“I had to go rescue Dreggs as Superman?” He shrugged. “Yes, I’m sorry I left you like that, but sometimes it can’t be helped and —”

“Oh, God...” She buried her face in her hands.

“Lois, what is going on?” he asked, confused, realizing her response wasn’t normal. “I told you this Saturday night. Why are you acting like—”

“Like it’s my first time hearing it?” Lois asked shakily.

“What?” He hung his head.

He’d told her. He’d told her everything. She had known. She had said... ‘*Oh, no.*’

Realization dawned on him. “I thought...”

“Oh, God...” she breathed.

He ran a hand through his hair. “I’m *so* sorry. Believe me, I *never*...would have...”

“I’m an idiot. Oh, God, how did I not see it?” She buried her face in her hands as she rocked herself back and forth.

“If I’d known...” he stammered, trying to get her to look at him.

“No wonder you looked so familiar...Oh, God...” She began to cry.

“You’re not an idiot,” he argued. “Lois, I am *so* sorry.”

“You *lied* to me...” she cried angrily.

“I know,” he said softly, placing a hesitant hand on her arm, kneeling down so he was eye level with her as she continued to turn away from him. “I’m sorry, Lois. I’ve hated keeping this secret from you. I’ve wanted to tell you so many times... Everything just got so complicated.”

“You made me believe you were *dead*,” she spat out angrily.

“And then you...you...” She fumed angrily as realization began to dawn on her. “How could you?”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized again, reaching for the hand she was wringing.

“Don’t touch me,” she breathed coldly. “I...I...” She looked around the room in confusion. “I need some air...” He was about to follow her but she turned around and gave him a warning.

“Don’t even think about following me!” With that she slammed the door behind her.

Elise rummaged through her studio apartment as she finished getting ready for work. Calvin sat on the couch with his arm resting on a pillow to keep it elevated. The doctor had assured her it was just a sprain but the way Calvin was acting you’d think he’d been amputated. He’d demanded a cast which the doctors had given only to get him to stop complaining. She hated the looks they gave her. The looks that crossed their faces. Looks of pity.

When Superman had rescued Calvin yesterday he had been more than accommodating. He’d even intervened when Calvin began verbally attacking her. He had surprised her. He never looked at her in pity. He had looked at her in concern and at Calvin with annoyance but never pity.

“Calvin, have you seen my keys?” Elise asked, lifting pillows on the couch.

He shook his head at her. “You’re not going to work?! What if I need something?”

She pointed to the coffee table behind her. “Everything you’ll need is on the coffee table, Calvin.” She lifted the pillow he was resting his arm on.

“Hey!” he shouted at her.

She grabbed her keys from beneath the cushion. “Sorry,” she apologized. “I have to go.”

“What if I need to write something down, like a phone message?”

She sighed. “Use your other hand.”

“What if I need to open a beer?” he asked.

Beer? He didn't need to open a beer. "You don't *need* to open a beer, Calvin. You shouldn't be drinking with the medication they gave you."

"But... what if I need to go to the bathroom?" he asked.

She opened her mouth to retort but thought better of it. "I'm sorry, Calvin, really, you know I am, but I have to go to work."

She was useless. Here he was injured and his *wife* had left him to fend for himself. Calvin clicked the remote on the television angrily. Didn't she know it was her job to take care of him first?

"Have you been injured?" a powerful voice on the television asked. He looked up and saw a balding man in a sharp blue suit. "Then just call me, Barry Barker!"

Calvin looked at the television in interest. This could be the answer to his prayers. Superman had injured him. He would make him pay.

"I'll go to the mat for you! I'll sue anybody for anything! And when I say anybody, I mean anybody!"

Calvin jotted down the number eagerly before reaching for the phone. "Yes, I'd like to speak to Barry Barker!"

Lois stood on the roof of the Planet, pacing back and forth as she went over every detail over the last two and a half years, trying desperately to make sense out of everything. She couldn't trust herself to be around anyone right now. She couldn't trust anything.

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<"Lois, trust me on this I am not your typical male.">>

<<"I said nine. I thought you'd be...naked...um, ready.">>

<<"I'm a friend.">>

<<"You know he didn't seem that special to me. Except for the flying and the uniform he could have been any ordinary guy."

"Ordinary? Give me a break!">>

<<"Clark is the before. Superman is the after... Make that the way, way after...">>

So many clues. Why didn't she see it before? Clark came to Metropolis at the same time Superman did. He had practically come right out and admitted it when they were interviewing Baines. He always seemed to know how to 'contact' Superman. Seemed to know what he was thinking or how he was feeling.

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<"Maybe all this frenzy isn't what he expected. Maybe he's gun shy."

"That's ridiculous. He has no reason to hide...especially from me...">>

<<"We? There is no 'we.'"

"How do you know I don't have the inside track on finding Superman?"

"Sure, Clark. And when you run across Jimmy Hoffa and the Easter Bunny why don't you reel them in too?">>

<<"Now there you go using that word again Clark. There is 'you,' there is 'I,' there is no 'we.'"

"Not yet."

"Not ever."

"We'll see."

"How long can you hold your breath?">>

<<"I was saving for Tahiti. But a date with Superman...that would have been a real adventure. Oh, Clark, he doesn't even know I'm alive. Maybe it was stupid of me to think that he really cared..."

"Not so stupid, Lois...Did you ever think that maybe Superman was afraid to reveal himself...his true feelings?">>

<<"You'll always be special to me, Lois."

"I will?"

"Of course you're the first woman that I hel...um, interviewed me.">>

All along, every conversation with Superman had been with

Clark and vice versa. She had been fawning over her partner like a lovesick school girl and didn't even know it. How had she not known? How had he let her believe he was two different people for so long and not said anything?

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<"Not exactly what you had in mind, huh?"

"Let's see, so far I've been given a glimpse of ritual crop worship, been treated as your girlfriend, and insulted your parents. No, I couldn't have planned this.">>

<<"You feel normal."

"I am...normal.">>

<<"I'm...bleeding."

"Haven't you ever had a paper cut before?"

"Not that I can remember.">>

<<"You should have been there, Perry. Here's a man so far around the bend that he starts beating on Clark to get to Superman.">>

<<"This rock that Trask convinced himself was gonna hurt Superman. What's it called?"

"Called you want a name? Nobody can even find it. Even the sample Irig sent to the lab disappeared.">>

Kryptonite. That was the only explanation. Clark had been bleeding. Trask had been right. She shuddered slightly recalling Trask's intentions for Superman. He'd almost succeeded. That week in Smallville she'd begun to look at him as more than just a co-worker, but a friend. She'd been friends with Superman for almost three years and didn't even know it.

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<"I'll be back, Lois. We'll go flying.">>

<<"But that would have to mean that I found you...Clark, you were sprayed. How come you didn't fall for me?"

"I guess I'm just not attracted to you, Lois."

"Liar! You are so attracted to me.">>

<<"Clark, whether or not that memory of yours comes back, I just want you to know I think you're terrific."

"Likewise,"

"I mean, I love you...like a brother.">>

Even back then she'd known her feelings for Clark were more than just friendly. It had taken a combination of pheromones and the threat of an asteroid to come close to admitting it. Still she wasn't ready. She could admit her feelings for Superman freely but not Clark.

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<"Superman is in the shower? Did you actually see...I mean...Does the outfit actually come off?"

"I didn't look.">>

Of course not. He was Superman. Why would he look? She blushed, recalling where her mind had wandered during that conversation with Clark. It made her even more embarrassed to realize she had been talking about him ... with *him*.

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<"Wait! What are you doing?"

"I'm going to stop the train."

"You can't... You gave your word."

"I have to, Lois. You know that.">>

<<"You can't leave."

"I don't have a choice.">>

<<"Goodbye? We're partners!"

"You don't *need* a partner, Lois. You never did."

"Maybe not, but I was starting to like having one.">>

<<"Goodbye, Lois.">>

<<"First Superman then Clark. I don't know who I'm going to miss more.">

Why hadn't she seen it? Superman left at the same time Clark was trying to leave and Clark came back when Superman came back. How had she been so blind for so long?

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman.">>

<<“So what you’re saying is that you saved my life twice today?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know the odds against that?”>>

He’d saved her life countless times as Clark and Superman.

<<“Lois, I’m...Superman.”>>

<<“I have been in love with you...for a long time. You had to have known.”>>

<<“If you had no powers, if you were just an ordinary man leading an ordinary life, I’d love you just the same. Can’t you believe that?”

“I wish I could Lois but under the circumstances I don’t see how I can.”>>

<<“Where’s Clark?”

“Right here.”>>

She cringed, recalling the way she’d thrown herself at Superman after dismissing Clark’s declaration of love. No wonder he couldn’t believe her. She’d been so blind back then. He’d tried to warn her about Lex over and over but she’d ignored him. She’d almost married a sociopath just to prove him wrong. Wait. He was Superman. Why didn’t he save Lex? Did his hatred run that deep? A memory popped in her mind...

<<“I...can’t...”>>

Can’t? What did that mean? Could Lex have found out about Kryptonite and hurt him? It was the only explanation that made sense. She recalled how he’d been intent on getting his hands on Kryptonite during his rise from the dead. Destroying Superman and getting her back were his main goals. She shuddered, recalling the pit of rats she’d been rescued from. Lex had known...even back then. Did he know Clark’s secret?

At Barry Barker’s office Calvin relayed his story to the hopeful attorney. “Superman?” Barry asked happily. Calvin nodded. “Superman?” Calvin nodded again. “Finally, I’ll be famous! Finally, I’ll get respect! Finally, women will sense my power!” Barry rubbed his palms together greedily.

Calvin shook his head. “Excuse me, this is about me!”

Barry nodded happily, rushing Calvin out of his office. “Of course it is, my boy. I know that. I never lose sight of the true objective.” He extended his hand to shake Calvin’s good hand. “I’ll take your case, and it won’t cost you a cent, I’ll be working absolutely on contingency, forty percent of the settlement when we win.”

Calvin’s eyes widened. “Forty percent??”

Before Calvin could argue Barry shoved Calvin out the door. “Could you ask the receptionist to step in here please?” He shut the door on Calvin before he could argue and began reciting headlines. “Barry Barker versus the Man of Steel!”

The door opened and his receptionist entered. “You wanted to see me?”

Barry nodded happily. “You’ll have to work late tonight, Mother. There’s something I need you to do.” He rubbed his hands together greedily. This was going to be his big break.

Lois stared at the street below her as she recalled everything over the last year with Clark and Superman. She’d been up and down the stairs repeatedly trying to pace the anger out of her. How could he just lie to her like that? He had made love to her while she thought he was *two* different people. But he’d said he’d told her. Didn’t he realize she didn’t know he was confessing at the time? Did he not care?

<<“Lois, I’m...Superman.”>>

<<“I don’t want to die.”

“Lois, I would never let that happen.”>>

<<“I know our relationship has always been ...difficult to define. But, when I thought about how much I missed you, how much I was going to miss you for the rest of my life...well, I

started to think maybe there’s more to our relationship than just friendship.”>>

<<“Oh, Clark, I don’t care if he used Crazy Glue! You’re back!”>>

That was the part that kept coming back to her. He lied to her about his death. He made her believe he had *died*. For what? Keeping his secret? He should have told her. He should have given her a chance. It wasn’t the first *lie* she’d caught the Man of Steel in. Surely he should have known she wouldn’t betray him.

<<“Lois, I’m...Superman.”>>

<<“We need to talk to Superman and the only way I can get his attention is to fall out of a window which I’d rather not do right now or tell you. So, here I am.”

“I, uh, forgot my mail downstairs.”

“Clark, this is important. You can get your mail later.”

“I’m expecting my, uh, Cheese-of-the-Month shipment. I’ll be right back.”>>

<<“Did you lie to me?”

“What makes you say that?”

“Either you know what I mean or you don’t...”

“I didn’t...lie.”

“All right, did you lead me to believe something that wasn’t exactly true?”

“Yes.”

“I wouldn’t have expected that from you...You know when I kept Kryptonite a secret it was because it was life threatening. This is news.”>>

Even out loud she seemed to subconsciously realize Clark and Superman were similar in traits. Why hadn’t she been able to connect the dots? Saturday night she’d seen Clark without his glasses but in her euphoric state her mind had been focused on other things.

<<“Lois, I’m...Superman.”>>

<<“Clark, that’s not what attracts me. It’s his intelligence and caring. He has integrity and innate goodness. I mean...he’s a lot like you.”>>

<<“Lois, yesterday you saved my life. I want you to know... I’ll never forget that.”>>

<<“I want you to know that I think what you did for Clark took incredible bravery.”

“It was nothing.”

“Was it?”

“No, I guess not. I guess there isn’t anything I wouldn’t do for him.”

“I think you two are very lucky to have each other.”>>

That had been the last time he’d come to her apartment as Superman. She’d thought it was strange he’d push her towards Clark one minute then seemed to be flirting with her the next. She smiled, recalling her dance with him after the Charity Ball in her apartment.

<<“You know this isn’t really dancing.”

“It’s not?”>>

She’d been so mad and hurt and confused after Mayson had interrupted her dance with Clark. She had been so mad at that woman for butting in. That night they’d gone to the ball as friends but the way he was looking at her... She’d been really close to telling him how she felt that night. Then Superman showed up to cheer her up, leaving her even more confused about her feelings for Clark. How could she have the same feelings for two different men?

<<“Lois, I want you to go out with me!”

“What? You’re asking me out?”

“Yeah, you know...like on a date?”

“A date? You mean a real date?”>>

<<“Oh, right, the date thing... What about Mayson?”

“Well, the guy’s only got two tickets.”

“Clark...”

“Lois, I’m asking you out.”>>
 Mayson. That was another thing they needed to talk about.
 <<“I mean, we work together. What happens if...you know...it bombs?”
 “We’ll always be friends.”>>
 <<“...and here in this apartment, we find the final piece of the puzzle which tells us that Superman is none other than Clark Kent.”>>
 <<“Sometimes what it seems people are doing isn’t what they’re actually doing.”>>
 There had been so many signs. How had he managed to get that press conference together? How had he ended up with Kryptonite inside of him? He seemed to be practically spelling it out to her the last few months. The closer they got the more he seemed to be leaving hints to her.
 <<“Why don’t you just say what you feel? Unless you have something to hide?”
 “I guess...people...say things sometimes because they’re afraid of being direct.”
 “Why? What’s the worst that could happen?”>>
 <<“You’ll be wearing something elegant, but not too dark. Like a charcoal suit. And I’ll be wearing something in a deep...violet.”
 “Burgundy.”
 “Burgundy?”
 “Or violet.”
 “That’s what you’ve always dreamed of seeing me in, burgundy? I don’t own anything in burgundy.”>>
 <<“When you think about it, the only time people really express themselves is when they’re passionate and the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they fight...”
 “Or make love.”>>
 <<“But everything seemed to just...work. That’s why I can never see you again.”
 “Lois?”>>
 <<“Lois, this isn’t the best time, but I’ve always wanted to tell you something...”
 “I like you too, Clark. I’m sorry what I did on our date.”>>
 <<“Lois, I really don’t know how to say this, but...why did you come back for me at the factory tonight? I mean, you were running back into an atomic explosion.”
 “It doesn’t make sense, does it? I just knew...I couldn’t leave you.”
 “You slammed the door in my face last night.”
 “That was a...mistake.”
 “Don’t let it happen again... Fortunately, there’re no doors now.”
 “Fortunately...”>>
 <<“The last thing she said was ‘Resurrection.’ What was she trying to tell me?”
 “Maybe you’d like a few minutes alone...to say goodbye.”>>
 The pieces seemed to be slowly fitting. He hadn’t been pushing her away he’d been feeling guilty. He was Superman and he didn’t get there fast enough. Did he blame her? After all, he’d been kissing her when Mayson’s car exploded.
 <<“I need to know...if I’m yesterday’s news?”
 “What?”
 “You know. Stale, old. It’s been over a week since our first date...and...our first kiss. And...you haven’t said a word about it. It’s like...it never happened.”
 “Lois, I’m sorry if it feels like I’ve been ignoring you lately, but...”>>
 <<“Agent Scardino just dropped by to uh...chat about the case.”
 “It must have been some chat for you to need a shower.”>>
 <<“Looks like you’ve got some choices to make...”>>
 She cringed, recalling the look on his face once more when

he’d found Dan in her apartment after he’d broken in. That seemed to be the turning point when he’d mentally withdrawn himself from her. No more friendly banter. No more flirting. They still hadn’t talked about that.

Later that evening Barry stood at his open window on the top floor of his office building with his receptionist and the lawsuit against Superman. The only way he knew how to serve Superman was to create a disaster so he had his mother call for help.

“Help!” a frail cry for help came out.

Barker grimaced. “Louder, Mother. He can’t hear you.”

“Help! Help!” she cried a little louder.

“I said louder.” He leaned her forward, causing her to cry out in terror.

“Hellllppppp!!!”

“Good! Mother!” Barker cheered, pulling her back. The familiar sonic boom echoed around them and he came face to face with a very angry Superman.

“What exactly do you think you’re doing?” he asked, approaching him in anger.

Before he could grab him, Barker slapped the lawsuit against him. “Superman, you have just been served.”

Lois stared at the spot Clark had just vacated shaking her head. These two men that had become so important to her were one and the same. That also meant that every time Clark had been running away he hadn’t been running from her but running to a disaster. He hadn’t left her in the middle of her date. He’d been rescuing someone. Now realizing all this all she seemed to be coming back with is more questions.

<<“Your going out with Dan **does** upset me.”>>

<<“Lois, this isn’t easy for either of us, but I promise...no more shutting you out.”>>

<<“Are...you...sure?”>>

<<“Lois, I’m...Superman.”

“Yes, you are...”>>

After his confession about lying about his feelings for her, she hadn’t been interested in talking anymore. She’d been so tired of the back and forth so when he’d finally stayed and not disappeared on her after declaring his feelings she’d decided she was ready. He’d said the words. She just hadn’t connected the dots. She hadn’t been focused on what he was saying.

<<“I love you, Lois Lane.”>>

<<“I’ve loved you from the moment I saw you.”>>

<<“I’ve wanted to tell you for so long...”>>

At the time she thought he was talking about his confession about being in love with her. Now she mused it was probably about what he’d thought was his confession.

<<“Making up for lost time?”

“You have no idea.”>>

<<“You stayed the night.”

“Mmm hmm, was I not supposed to? Someone fell asleep with an alarmingly tight grip on me.”

“Just making sure you didn’t disappear in the middle of the night.”>>

Everything had been perfect the next morning. He hadn’t disappeared. He’d promised not to disappear. How many calls for help had he ignored that night to be with her?

He’d stayed the night, and they’d had breakfast together then gone to check out the street fair together. Everything had been... perfect. Even now after everything... She couldn’t deny how she felt. She was still in love with him...both of him. He was still Clark. Her best friend. The man she’d been in love with for almost two years now...and the superhero that had saved her from herself countless times.

<<“Isn’t there some kind of unspoken rule about horning in on another guy’s date?”

“Date? I’m sorry. **This** is a date?”

“What are you doing here, Scardino?”

“Yes, Dan, what **are** you doing here?”>>

<<“Man, did you see that?”

“Lucky Superman was nearby.”>>

<<“Clark?”

“So now you know.”

“Know what?”

“Just about how much you mean to Clark Kent.”>>

Dan. That was another problem she had to nip in the bud.

Obviously, he wasn’t taking ‘no’ very well, and she needed to take care of him before he caused any more issues between herself and Clark. She recalled how he seemed to get some sort of pleasure out of one-upping Clark every chance he got. That night at her apartment flashed through her mind again. Obviously, he still thought he had a chance with her.

<<“I’m sorry, Lois. I’ve hated keeping this secret from you. I’ve wanted to tell you so many times...Everything just got so complicated.”>>

Complicated was an understatement.

A sonic boom and familiar breeze of wind brushed against the nape of her neck. She turned around to face him and was surprised to find him standing in front of her in his suit and tie from earlier. “Hi,” he said softly.

“Hi,” She crossed her arms over her chest, rubbing her arms up and down.

<<“When you think about it, the only time people really express themselves is when they’re passionate, and the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they’re fighting...”

“Or make love.”>>

He sighed, “Lois...” at the same time she said, “Clark...”

He said, “I’m sorry. Go ahead.”

“Okay,” she said, pacing in front of him. “I think I get why you didn’t tell me at first and why you felt like you couldn’t tell me...at first...but.” She slowed down turning to look at him, “What I don’t get is why you felt you couldn’t tell me after we started getting closer. I mean, you **died** right there in front of me and... Do you have any idea what you put me through? You should have—”

“I know.” He sighed, raking a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry. I just kinda panicked and *really* didn’t think things through. I was so focused on how to get out of the mess I’d created I didn’t think about how it was affecting you. I never meant to hurt you.”

“Then why did you?” she asked holding back her tears.

“Honestly?” He shrugged. “I was afraid.”

“Of what?” Lois asked.

“This!” He gestured between them. “Lois, you have no idea how many times I’ve tried to get the courage to tell you. The other night was the first time I actually did...or thought I did. I should have made sure you heard me, but—”

“You thought I already knew?” Lois finished for him, recalling their argument from earlier.

“Yeah,” he said shamefully. “I swear, I would never have taken that step without telling you everything.”

Lois nodded. “I know,” she said quietly. “At least I think I do, but you waited **so long** to tell me. I mean, I thought... Am I really so intimidating?”

He gave her a half-smile, taking a hesitant step toward her.

“No, but you have to understand how I grew up...”

“I’ve met your parents, Clark. Not exactly a hard childhood,” she retorted bitterly, leaning against the *Daily Planet* globe as she crossed her arms over her chest.

“No, but growing up with powers developing and not knowing why...not knowing where I came from. It scared me,” he said, walking toward her, squatting down to the concrete of the roof by her feet. “When I was younger...before the invulnerability kicked in my dad was afraid I’d get picked up by some government

agency, so he always gave his speech of ‘One of these days someone’s gonna see you and they’re gonna put you in a laboratory and dissect you like a frog.’”

Lois bit her lip, suppressing a laugh at Clark’s impression of his dad. She squatted down next to him. “I’m sorry. I thought...I mean you told me you came from Krypton. I guess I thought you always knew.”

He shook his head. “Not until we found Bureau 39 and Trask.”

“Oh,” Lois murmured softly. “So, all those years you never knew?”

He shook his head. “Not until the globe started playing those messages.”

“Globe?” Then she recalled the globe Clark had had stolen from his apartment. “Oh, right the globe. I had forgotten about that.”

“It’s just a disguise...I wear the suit and change my voice a little, so I can use my abilities to help. I got tired of moving every time someone got suspicious...thus, Superman was born.”

“It’s pretty clever.” She gave him a half-smile. “I’ll give you that.”

“I just wanted to help. That’s all I ever wanted. Now, I’m not even sure I’ll be able to do that anymore,” he remarked bitterly.

“What do you mean?” she asked, looking at him in concern.

“Look, I know I got angry earlier but I would never...”

“No, not that.” He shook his head. “This...” He pulled out a rolled-up copy of the summons he’d been served with. “Superman just got served.”

“What!?” Lois snapped, grabbing the papers from him. “Half a million dollars??? Reckless endangerment? Loss of income? For a *sprain*? You have got to be kidding me!” Lois fumed as she read through the subpoena.

Clark hung his head. “I know. All I did was move him out of the way. There’s no way he should have even been that injured...”

“You’re gonna need a lawyer, Clark,” Lois said reading through the rest of the summons. “I know a guy who handles cases like this... He’s never lost a case.”

“Is he a good person?” he asked.

Lois gave him a shrug. “He’s a *lawyer*.”

“Lois...” He sighed. “I can’t just go with any lawyer. How would it look if Superman was being represented by someone who is anything but honest?”

“I guess you’re right,” Lois relented. “We’ll call around and see if we can get any recommendations. Maybe talk with Perry?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “Thank you. I didn’t know who else to talk to about this. I know you must hate me right now—”

“Oh, Clark, I don’t hate you. I’m just...confused.” She glanced back at him and sighed. “You’ve just got to give me some time. I mean I spent almost three years getting to know you as two different people and trying to wrap my head around all of this.”

“I know.” He stood up, helping her to her feet. “Do you need a lift home?”

Lois nodded. “I suppose we should get going. I’ll take a rain check on the flight home.” He hung his head, and she continued, “But you can ride with me, and we can finish talking if you’d like.”

“Okay.” He smiled back at her.

Elise stared at the papers in front of her in shock. “Calvin, are you out of your mind?”

“What do you mean?” he asked in confusion. Her eyes widened as she read through the details of the lawsuit.

“Calvin, this says you’ve lost wages. You weren’t working. If you say this stuff on the stand...” She began to panic.

“No, no, no, darling,” he cooed. “You don’t understand. It’s a loss of *potential* wages. See?” He pointed at the line on the lawsuit. “See? If I can prove Superman damaged my hand to the point of not being able to play again, then I can clean him out...”

We'll be rich! You won't have to work at that stupid diner anymore and can stay home with me."

"But Calvin, Superman saved your life..."

"And he's going to pay for it," Calvin reassured her, patting his wrist.

On the drive back to her apartment Lois had begun picking Clark's brain. Asking question after question about things she'd wondered about but had been too afraid to ask. He obliged, answering what he could with what he knew.

"I don't know." He shrugged.

She parked the Jeep and got out, grabbing her things. "What do you mean, you don't know?" she asked, "You said you got tired of moving. So what was different about Metropolis?" Was he trying to be difficult? She gave him a lingering gaze, and he shifted, turning away for a moment.

<<"Lois, I'm...Superman..."

"Yes, you are...">>

"I don't know." He sighed, shoving his hands in his pockets as they continued. "I guess it was a combination of things. I just wanted to lead a normal life. Friends, a job..." He glanced at her with a blush. "Girl?"

She gave him a small smile. Girl. The memory of Lenny Stokes' taunt to him some months back flashed through her mind.

<<"She's your girl?">>

It hadn't been true at the time. She had often wondered why Superman seemed so torn and taken aback by that statement. It was another reason why she'd thought she'd had a chance with him. Now, she slowly realized it had been Clark all along.

<<"When you think about it, the only time people really express themselves is when they're passionate, and the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they're fighting..."

"Or make love...">>

<<"I have been in love with you for a long time...">>

"I guess, getting the job at the Planet, meeting you... It gave me a reason to want to stick around," he continued.

<<"You're so gorgeous..."

"Make love to me, Clark...">>

She felt a shiver run down her spine as her mind flashed back to the other night in her apartment. They climbed the steps to her apartment building, and she sighed. "I guess I can understand that."

He smiled. "I've been trying to tell you for months you know..."

<<"Oh, Lois... God you're so beautiful... I've loved you from the moment I saw you...">>

She nodded, trying to force the memory of the other night out of her mind. This was not helping things. "I know."

"You do?" he asked.

"Looking back I could see the signs where you seemed like you were trying to hint at something but just never finished saying it," she murmured. He had. There were so many signs over the years. She'd just never followed through on them because she'd been too mad at him.

<<"I've wanted to tell you for so long...">>

"I'm glad you know," he said as she fumbled for her keys in her purse. "I've carried this for so long, but you have to understand when I decided to become..." He glanced around the hallway and mouthed, 'Superman.'

She bit the inside of her lip, recalling the way he'd felt the other night. Why was her mind so intent on recalling every detail of that night at this very moment? "You became a target so anyone close to you would be a target and then it got to be more complicated when you realized you loved me..."

"Which was about two minutes after I met you," he added with a smile.

<<"I've loved you from the moment I saw you...">>

'Two minutes? No, don't go there. Bad bad thoughts...'

"Don't try and score points," she warned.

<<"I lied..."

"What?"

"I said, I lied...In front of the Planet. After everything you went through I didn't want to complicate things even more for you so...">>

"Sorry," he sighed. "Lois, I know this is a lot, and I'm sorry about the way you found out. I know you need time to adjust and I'll give you whatever time you need...just please don't shut me out," he pleaded.

She unlocked her door as she spoke. "I know you are, and I'm not. I just..." She sighed, opening the door and stepping inside.

"I love you, Lois." He leaned in to kiss her, cupping her cheek as he spoke. "Everything I said Saturday night... I meant every word." He mouthed 'Superman' before returning to his normal tone of voice "...doesn't change any of that. No matter what I've always loved you... I just hope you can forgive me."

Forgive him? Did she forgive him? She didn't know. She did know being this close to him was making it hard to concentrate. All she seemed to be able to focus on was his nearness and the memory of what he felt like the other night.

'Stop it.'

<<"You said you like to be on top..."

"And don't you forget it..."

"Never...">>

"Oh, Clark, I love you too," she said, wrapping her hand around his wrist as he stroked her cheek.

<<"You slammed the door in my face last night..."

"That was a mistake..."

"Don't let it happen again...">>

"You do?" he asked uncertainly.

"Always. That's what was so confusing... Trying to figure out how I could feel the way I felt about you and"—she mouthed 'Superman'—"but now it makes sense."

"Do you regret Saturday night?" he asked.

<<"Lois, open your eyes...">>

"A part of me wants to say yes," she said softly, noting the way he hung his head and turned away.

<<"Making up for lost time?"

"You have no idea...">>

<<"When you think about it, the only time people really express themselves is when they're passionate, and the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they're fighting..."

"Or make love...">>

"But another part...says, not in this lifetime," she said gazing at him hungrily as she bit the inside of her lower lip.

He caught her gaze for a moment and cleared his throat, pulling away. "Um, I should go."

<<"You stayed the night..."

"Mmm hmm, was I not supposed to? Someone fell asleep with an alarming tight grip on me...">>

"Yeah." She nodded, watching as he took a step toward the door. He leaned in to kiss her one last time. "Good night, Lois." Before she could protest he'd already pulled away.

<<"When you think about it, the only time people really express themselves is when they're passionate, and the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they're fighting..."

"Or make love...">>

She didn't even remember how it had started. All she clearly remembered was dropping her things on the floor and pulling Clark to her by the tie, capturing his mouth with hers hungrily. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she recalled slamming the door shut and locking it as she molded her body against his. "Lois, what...are we... Oh, God, yes..." he murmured against her lips. "Bedroom?" he suggested.

She smiled, hearing the strain in his voice. “Too far,” she gasped, as she loosened his tie.

“Does this mean I’m forgiven?” he murmured in her ear as she glided her right leg up his backside, trying to increase the contact of his body against hers.

She unbuckled his belt and murmured, “It doesn’t hurt your case.”

“I have a case?” His body rumbled against hers as his hands slipped below the edge of her skirt, inching it higher as he spoke.

“Does this mean we’ve made up?” he asked.

“What do you think?” She tugged his tie from his collar and grinned up at him.

“Good, I’ve missed this...missed you,” he said between heated kisses, fumbling with her pantyhose as his hands roamed up and down her thighs slipping the edge of her pantyhose lower and lower as he walked her back toward the door until she found herself pinned against it.

“I know. I had so many plans for you on Sunday,” she murmured, running her palm up and down his chest seductively.

“Plans?”

“The rest of the day in bed...clothing optional,” she whispered seductively and laughed when he groaned against her.

“Take these off,” she ordered, pointing at his slacks.

“Always giving orders,” he murmured against her lips.

“Someone’s got to.” She kicked the pantyhose off and let out a long moan when she felt his hand brush against her. “Oh, God, Clark...”

His jacket and tie found its way to the floor. “Cl...” She helped him out of his dress shirt.

She fumbled with the buckle of his belt as his mouth whispered feather-light kisses against her collarbone. “You like that?”

She moaned against him, raking her fingers up and down his expansive chest. “You have no idea...” He helped her out of her blouse, tossing it over his shoulder. “Clar...” She gasped as his lips brushed against her chest, nuzzling the curve of her breast with his face.

“Oh, God, yesss!” She growled, fisting his hair as she tugged his head to her, capturing his mouth with hers. She bit her lip in frustration, reaching for the zipper to his pants. “You are so frustrating...”

“You are so impatient,” he murmured against her lips.

“Oh, God, I love you.” She let out a guttural moan. She was about to protest with the loss of contact when she saw him unfastening his slacks. “Oh, thank God!” she hissed, helping him tug his pants and underwear down, licking her lips in anticipation.

He hoisted her up in his arms, pressing her against the door as he pulled her skirt up. “I love you...so much,” he murmured against her neck.

“Now, who’s being...im-patient?” She tightened her legs around him, linking her arms around his neck, “I’m still wearing...half my clo— *Oh!* Oh, Clar...”

All coherent thoughts quickly dissolved on her lips. “I love it...when you wear...these...skirts...”

“In that case...maybe I’ll...wear...them...more...often,” she teased, tightening her arms around him. His hands roamed up and down her legs. “Tease you in...the office...”

He chuckled against her neck. “Only if you don’t mind...being whisked into...the nearest room with a lock on it.” She laughed, and he recaptured her lips with his. He grinned against her neck. “Do you like that?”

“Yes,” she breathed heavily. He slowed his motions causing her to whimper, “No, no, no, don’t stop... So not nice.”

“I am *very* nice to you,” he murmured, pressing himself against her.

“Prove it, Superman,” she challenged, tightening her grip on him. He stepped away from the door turning, so his back was

against it for support, leaning her back against his arms as he began to do just that. “Clark!” she gasped. “Oh, that’s...very...”

“Nice?” he breathed in her ear.

She nodded, not trusting her voice as he continued. “I love you.”

“I love you ... so much.” His chest shuddered against hers.

His grip on her tightened as he molded his body against hers. He let out a muffled cry of pleasure against her mouth as his body shuddered against hers. She clung to him, fisting his hair as the world around them disappeared, shattering around them.

He slowly broke his mouth away from hers, resting his forehead against hers. She gripped his shoulders, burying her face against the curve of his neck and shoulder. “I love you.”

He ran his hands up and down her legs massaging them, looking down at their current state of undress. “How’s my case now?”

She grinned against him. “I’m becoming more open-minded... but I could use some convincing.”

He lifted her up walking back towards the bedroom. “I can be *very* convincing.”

Nothing. No one had heard anything about what had happened with Lois and CK yesterday. They had literally disappeared yesterday after their confrontation in the newsroom. When Jimmy had asked the Chief about it, he’d told him to just let them sort it out. He hoped they’d sorted everything out soon. It was hell tip-toeing around them when they were at each other’s throats like that.

Jimmy headed toward the coffee machine to get a fresh pot going so he could wake up. He’d spent a lot of long hours at the police station last night talking with different officers that had responded to *noise disturbance* calls from the Dreggs residence. From what he was able to gather neighbors would call the police on Calvin for his *emotional outbursts* and Elise Carr would try to reason with him while the officers gave him warnings and tickets.

He needed to talk to CK about what he’d found. From the sound of it there seemed to be a suspicion of possible mental or emotional abuse going on, but nothing anyone could prove. Unlike with typical abuse cases, the emotional wounds weren’t something you could see on the outside.

“Did you see the way Clark carried Lois out of the newsroom yesterday? I thought her eyes were going to pop out of her head!” Dianne laughed as she fixed her coffee.

“Uh, yeah,” Jimmy stammered, feigning interest as he began fixing his cup of coffee.

Kathy from Marketing interjected, “I know, right? Who would have thought? Then again, Lois does have a way of pushing people’s buttons...”

“They disappeared after that. What do you think happened?” Dianne snickered. “Think they made up?”

Jimmy headed back to his desk and groaned when he realized Dianne and Kathy were following him. “I don’t know, but my guess is Clark spent the rest of the day *making her* listen to him just like she told him to.” Kathy laughed.

“You don’t think they’re...” Dianne gasped.

“That passion’s gotta come from somewhere.” Kathy shrugged as she and Dianne headed to their respective desks.

“Please make them shut up,” Jimmy muttered as he took a sip of his coffee. The elevator bell rang, and he looked up to see Lois stepping out with a stack of papers in her hand, engrossed in what she was reading. “Come on, where’s CK?” he muttered, realizing Clark wasn’t with Lois...which usually meant they were fighting.

“Too bad. Clark could probably *make* any woman in the office do whatever he wanted...and he wouldn’t get nearly as big of a fight.” Dianne laughed.

Jimmy cringed. “Go away,” he muttered under his breath. “Just go back to your desks so I can’t hear this conversation...”

anymore.”

Lois approached his desk, and Kathy smiled at Lois. “Morning Lois, you’re looking... well.” She eyed Lois’ burgundy suit with a matching skirt that came just above her knees. “New suit?”

“Uh, yeah.” Lois smiled, looking down at herself. “Thanks.”

“Yeah, no way,” Dianne muttered under her breath before adding, “Um, looks great on you. Is that where you disappeared to yesterday?”

Lois seemed to realize where Dianne was going with this and gave her a forced smile.

“We heard there was an incident,” Kathy added. “Are you and Clark okay?”

Lois glared at the women. “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

The two women looked back and forth uncomfortably before heading back to their desks. Lois muttered under her breath, “Nosy busybodies...” She then turned toward Jimmy. “Jimmy have you seen Clark this morning?”

Jimmy shook his head. “No, and don’t even think about trying to stick me in the middle of it.”

Lois crossed her arms over her chest and arched an eyebrow at him. “Excuse me?”

Realizing he might have poked the bear a little too hard, he relented. “I mean, uh”—he looked around the office, praying Clark would show up and rescue him from Lois’ wrath soon—“no, I haven’t seen him this morning...yet, uh... Why?”

Lois laid the packet of papers she was flipping through earlier on his desk. “Superman is being sued. I need you to dig up everything you can on this Dreggs guy and help try and find something we can use in court to fight this.”

Jimmy picked up the papers she’d laid on his desk and laughed. “Man things between you and CK must be *baadd...*”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lois snapped irritably.

He handed her the file he had ready for Clark earlier. “It just means you’re not talking to one another. CK had me do some research on them yesterday. Superman apparently suspected the Dreggs guy was abusing his girlfriend...or wife. She hasn’t changed her name yet or identified as married, but I found a marriage certificate.”

“Oh.” Lois twisted her mouth slightly. “No, he didn’t tell me. We were a bit, uh, preoccupied yesterday.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet.” A snicker could be heard a few cubicles down and Lois turned to shoot a threatening glare in the offender’s direction before turning her attention back to Jimmy.

“Unfortunately we’re going to need a bit more than this to get this lawsuit thrown out.”

Jimmy grabbed his pen. “What do you need?”

“Job history, financials, maybe check the courts and see if he’s got anything pending against him...” Lois listed off.

Jimmy nodded, jotting down the list as she continued. “Okay so background checks, employment and financial and any court proceedings. You got it.” He spotted Clark coming down the ramp and did his best to prepare himself for the fireworks. “So, Lois, about yesterday—”

Before he could finish, Clark approached them, placing an arm around Lois’ waist from behind. She turned to him and smiled. “Hey, I was just updating Jimmy about that lawsuit.”

Clark smiled back at her. “Good. We can use all the help we can get.” He leaned in to whisper something in her ear, and she laughed. Jimmy smiled, watching as Lois leaned back against Clark with a grin. It seemed things had definitely begun to pick back up in the romance department between the duo.

Jimmy cleared his throat. “Uh, CK I ran that background check on that Dreggs guy and his girlfriend... Turns out it’s his wife.”

“Poor woman,” Clark muttered, shaking his head.

“Tell me about it,” Lois said, handing him the file. “Great minds think alike I guess. I was gonna have Jimmy run a

background check on him. We need to figure out a way to shut this lawsuit down before the paparazzi get wind of it.”

Jimmy winced, pulling out a copy of this morning’s *Dirt Digger* from his desk. “Uh, Lois?” He held up the cover for her to read. “Might be too late for that.”

Lois took the paper from him, reading the headline. “Super Rescue = Super Bully?” She shook her head in disgust. “What a load of—”

Clark took the paper from her, trying to change the subject. “Well, since the *Dirt Digger* is telling this Dreggs’ side of things maybe we can let Superman tell his side of things. Jimmy, is the Chief in yet?”

Jimmy nodded, pointing toward Perry’s office. “Been in since six.”

“Come on.” Clark guided her toward Perry’s office.

Lois called over her shoulder, “Let me know the minute you find something, Jimmy.”

“You got it,” he called after them, watching Clark rest his hands on Lois’ hips as they headed toward Perry’s office. He leaned in to whisper something in her ear, and she turned to laugh at him before leaning in to kiss him. Yes, things had definitely changed between the duo.

Perry was at his desk, marking up the latest story when Lois knocked on his door. “Chief?”

“Just a sec,” Perry said, finishing the line he was on. He made a note then looked up. “Lois, Clark, what’s up?”

Clark handed the copy of *Dirt Digger* that Jimmy had shown them earlier to Perry. “We found out last night Superman got served with a summons for this lawsuit.”

“And we were wondering if you knew of a...”

“Honest...” Clark interjected at the same time Lois added, “...but good...”

“...trustworthy...” Clark added.

“...lawyer?” they finished in unison.

Perry grinned at them, pondering for a minute. “I know a couple. I can give you some names. My top pick would be Constance Hunter. She used to work in Legal. Real smart, good character. She started her own practice about five years ago. Won’t take a guilty client,” Perry said, pulling her card out of his Rolodex.

“Sounds perfect,” Lois said, taking the card from Perry.

“Uh-huh.” Perry nodded. “So can I assume that...whatever it was that was going on yesterday is...ironed out?” he asked, leaning back in his chair to look at them sternly.

They both had the decency to look ashamed, but Lois interjected, “Sorry about that Chief. It was just a *big* misunderstanding.”

“Won’t happen again,” Clark added.

“It better not,” Perry said with a raised eyebrow, pulling out a few more cards from his Rolodex. “They’re not all pure, but they’ll get the job done. Tell Superman the *Daily Planet’s* got his back.”

“We will.” Clark nodded. “Thanks, Chief.”

Perry nodded, turning back to the story on his desk. “And tell Jimmy to stop bringing this trash into the newsroom.” Perry tossed the copy of *Dirt Digger* in his wastebasket to illustrate his point.

Lois laughed, closing the door behind them. “Well, I guess Superman has some work to do.”

He nodded. “I’ll check these out and see what I can find out. Hopefully, Ms. Constance Hunter is as good as Perry says she is and Superman won’t have to meet with anyone else.”

Lois glanced at the clock, grabbing him by the tie. “It’s almost eight right now. Maybe if Superman gets there early enough, he can get in without an appointment?”

“I guess now is as good a time as any,” he sighed, glancing at the clock.

She leaned in to kiss him. “Good luck,” she whispered, loosening his tie for him.

Elise helped Calvin with his suit, brushing the lint off his jacket. “I’m sorry I can’t go with you, Calvin,” she apologized.

“I don’t understand how serving slop to stupid businessmen is more important than me being on *The Jerry Show!*” Calvin whined.

“I tried to get someone to cover for me, but no one was available. I’m sorry,” she said, hoping he would understand.

“You don’t care about me,” Calvin whined, pulling away from her.

“That’s not true!” she argued. “Please, Calvin, try to understand. I have to work.”

He scowled at her. “I don’t want you to work. I want you to be with me.”

“I know,” she sighed. “I’m sorry. Listen, I get off at noon. I’ll get a portable television on my way to work so we can watch the show together when I get off. How does that sound?”

He seemed to be mulling it over. “Okay, but don’t be late. You know how I hate to wait.”

She nodded. “Just meet me at the café.” She gave him a peck on the cheek before leaving.

Clark stared up at the building in front of him uncertainly, eying the passersby that were staring. They were probably wondering what Superman was doing standing outside a law office. It had been a rough morning.

After several hours of ‘convincing,’ he and Lois had fallen asleep from exhaustion. Since he’d forgotten to patrol the night before, he’d had to slip in a quick patrol after stopping by his place for a shower and change of clothes. On patrol, he kept running into people that were trying to fake injuries. After that, he did his best only to intervene in absolute emergencies and let the police handle the rest. It wasn’t the ideal situation, but it was the only thing he could do until this lawsuit was nipped in the bud.

A tall woman with messy, dirty blonde hair and glasses carrying an arm full of files began climbing the stairs hurriedly. Her foot slipped on the last step causing her to lose her grip on the files and the stairs as they scattered around. He reached out to catch her at super-speed before she could hit the pavement. “Are you all right?”

She let out a huff, pulling herself up and straightening herself. “I, uh, guess so...” She began tucking her hair behind her ear as she looked at the mess. “But this...” He nodded, picking up the files for her at super-speed. She smiled. “Thanks. Lucky for me you were nearby. Doing your daily Boy Scout routine?”

He smiled. “Uh, no, actually.”

She extended her hand. “Constance Hunter.”

He gave her a half-smile. “Superman.” He showed her the card Perry had given him. “Mr. White said you were the most honest lawyer he knew.”

She sighed, motioning for him to follow her. “How is Perry? Still cheating at poker?”

He laughed. “I’m not sure.”

She closed the door behind them and motioned toward the office marked ‘Constance Hunter Attorney at Law.’ He nodded, entering the room that was filled with file after file. It was a mess. “I have my own system. It’s organized chaos.” He raised his eyebrows at the mess but didn’t say anything. “Have a seat.” He complied. “Well, Superman, I’d ask why you need a lawyer, but after listening to the radio on the way in this morning I already know.”

He nodded, folding his hands in front of him, looking around the room nervously. It was odd being here like this as Superman. “I guess you could say no good deed goes unpunished.” He pulled out the summons to show her. “His hand will heal, and since he

has no job, there’s no loss of income...”

Constance nodded, taking notes on a legal pad. “So aside from his medical bills, he has no case—”

He nodded. “Yes, and at the hospital, I offered to pay the medical expenses.”

Constance nodded, jotting a few more notes down. “What was his response?”

He chuckled lightly. “He seems to have only *one* response to everything: he *complained*,” he said with a strain. This whole experience was frustrating.

Constance smiled back warmly, setting her pen down. “I know the type. *They* want, *they* need, *they* deserve. Nothing is ever right, and nothing is ever enough. They stand alone at the center of the universe whining for more. Their hunger is insatiable, their thirst unquenchable, their demand unappeasable...” She rolled her eyes, blowing a stray hair that had fallen in her face out of her eyes. “I *really* hate them.”

Clark smiled. “You must be great in front of a jury... So you’ll take the case?” he asked, confident he’d found the right lawyer.

To his surprise, she shook her head. “No.”

He looked at her in shock. “What?”

She sighed, shaking her head. “I don’t want to be the person who destroys Superman.”

“Excuse me, but don’t you think you’re being a little hyperbolic?” he stammered, uncertain why she could think she could destroy Superman.

“No... I don’t try cases anymore. I gave it up because I never won. I never won because I think justice should be about truth, not about who’s the better liar,” she said, shaking her head.

“But that’s what I need: someone who understands that justice is about truth.”

“No. You need to win,” she argued. “Otherwise you’ll spend the rest of your life in court answering to greedy plaintiffs and their obnoxious attorneys. Is that what you want?”

He frowned. “No, of course not.”

She smiled back, handing him the copy of his summons back. “Then you need someone who sees an open wound and automatically reaches for the salt. You need a *real* lawyer... I’m sorry.”

He sighed, accepting defeat for the moment. It looked like he would have to keep looking. Maybe he and Lois could put their heads together and find one semi-decent lawyer out of the bunch. He hated he couldn’t go with Constance. She seemed to genuinely care about truth and justice.

Back at the Planet, Lois sat at her desk going through the research she’d found on Calvin Dreggs and Elise Carr. She seemed like a good person. From what Clark had said she had thanked Superman and tried to intervene to keep Calvin from blowing up even more at the hospital. What Lois couldn’t understand was how someone like that had ended up with someone like Calvin. He was an out-of-work deadbeat. He was always starting fights. From what Jimmy had found out his musical career he was suing Superman over was non-existent.

It amazed her to no end how anyone could tolerate such behavior. It was abuse. Not the kind you could see with bruises but still abuse. Emotional abuse was just as powerful. She should know. She’d watched the emotional abuse her parents put one another through for years. When it was finally over her mother just fell apart; almost like she didn’t know how to cope without the abuse there. Her mother turned to alcohol causing a rift between herself and Lucy and their mother. After the divorce and a much-needed intervention by their Aunt Lynn both her parents had gotten into counseling and worked out their issues. Her dad claimed he was a changed man, but she still didn’t trust him. She blamed him for what he’d done to her mother, and she knew Lucy did too.

She'd done her best to put it all behind her and had made her attempts at trying to have some semblance of a normal life. She'd dated in high school and college but never found herself able to really trust a man; especially after what happened with Claude. Even with Lex she never fully trusted herself with him. That had been part of what had kept her from consummating the relationship as well as her realization that she wasn't in love with him. Clark was the only one that she'd been able to trust, completely.

After working through their issues yesterday...and last night...repeatedly they were in a better place. She still wasn't sure if she had completely forgiven him yet, but she was enjoying the 'convincing' thoroughly.

She felt a pang in her back and winced, massaging her backside slightly. As fun as last night was they definitely needed to make sure not to use doors for support anymore. The area where the knob of the door had been pressed against her back was still a bit tender. She leaned back in her chair, propping her feet up on her desk, hoping that the removal of pressure on her back would help. She glanced over at Clark's desk. Maybe when he got back, she could talk him into a back massage? She smiled to herself, recalling his teasing from last night and this morning.

<< "I love it...when you wear...these...skirts..."

"In that case...maybe I'll...wear...them...more...often... Tease you in...the office..."

"Only if you don't mind...being whisked into... the nearest room with a lock on it.">>

<< "I thought we talked about these skirts...">>

<< "So not nice."

"I am **very** nice to you."

"Prove it, Superman...Clark! Oh, that's...very..."

"Nice?">>

"Nice view." Dan Scardino's voice broke her out of her reverie, pulling her back to the present.

Startled, she looked up to see him standing over her desk eyeing her legs appreciatively where her skirt had ridden up, hinting at the edge of lace from her thigh highs. Following his line of sight, she hurriedly tugged her legs down off her desk, pulling at her skirt to make sure her stockings were covered. "Uh, Dan, what are you doing here?"

He held up a pastry bag. "I thought I could interest you in breakfast. Thought maybe we could talk..."

"I already ate," she said hurriedly, recalling the French croissants Clark had picked up for them early this morning before he'd left for his patrol.

"O-kay." He set the bag down, pulling up a chair. "How about we just talk then?"

"What is there to talk about?" Lois asked, getting up from her desk to take the information she'd just received on Dreggs and Elise Carr to Jimmy. "Like I told you before I can't continue doing this—"

"You aren't being fair to me," Dan argued, following her across the newsroom.

"Jimmy, here's the info Henderson faxed over..." she said handing Jimmy the file in her hand.

"Uh, thanks," he murmured not too happily when he looked up from his keyboard and saw Dan standing behind her. "Agent Scardino, something we can help you with?"

Dan ignored him. "Lois, I'm just trying to be a good friend, and every time I turn around you're shutting me out. I know you're hurt about what happened this weekend but—"

"How is what happened this weekend any of your business?" she asked, turning to face him as she headed back to her desk. "That is between me and Clark!"

"Well, I figured after he"—Dan looked around seeing the crowd their argument had begun to draw and lowered his voice—"abandoned you again."

Lois crossed her arms over her chest. "Again, not your business!"

"Well, forgive me for being a little upset about seeing you hurt," he retorted sarcastically in a hushed whisper. "You're really not being fair to our relationship at all. You dump me while I'm out of town then hang up on me before I could even argue. Then when I try to talk to you about it, you keep shutting me out. I'm just trying to figure out—"

"What? You want to talk about *fair*?" Lois asked, irritated, "I told you from the beginning I was seeing Clark, but you kept horning in, trying to wiggle him out of the picture. Making your digs...and your sarcastic comments...and making him think something more was going on than what was—"

<< "What is your problem? What is so bad about him?"

"What is so good about him?">>

<< "Fascinating...and well-told too. Of course, you're a writer, so you're good with words."

"Agent Scardino just dropped by to, uh, chat about the case."

"It must have been some chat for you to need a shower.">>

<< "If you remember awhile back we talked about maybe us going out."

"Dan, I'm really flattered, but the thing is...I've been seeing Clark..."

"Kent? Nice guy. Real...polite."

"Oh, he's a lot more than that.">>

<< "Shall we toast?"

"To what?"

"How about the future?"

"Whose?"

"How about ours?">>

"What does it matter?" Dan asked. "The guy's a wuss. Never around when you need him. Letting you boss him around like he doesn't have a spine. Wouldn't know how to treat a woman if his life depended on it—"

<< "Always giving orders."

"Someone's got to.">>

<< "You are so frustrating...">>

<< "You are so impatient.">>

Her mind briefly flashed back to just how well Clark had treated her last night before she lit into Dan. "Excuse me?" It took every ounce of her self-control not to bite back and tell Dan exactly how wrong he was but divulging her and Clark's personal business in the middle of the newsroom was not what she wanted. "How dare you?!"

Jimmy seemed to sense her struggle to maintain her professionalism and put Dan in his place after the low blow he'd delivered and came to stand by her for support, ready to intervene if necessary. "Is there a problem here?"

"Why don't you take a walk..." she said to Dan in-between gritted teeth.

"Off a cliff—" Jimmy added with a stern gaze.

Lois bit her lower lip to keep from laughing. Dan glared at her. "Why are you defending Kent? Don't tell me he actually convinced you to take him back after what happened Sunday?"

<< "Does this mean I'm forgiven?"

"It doesn't hurt your case."

"I have a case?"

"Does this mean we've made up?"

"What do you think?">>

The memory of just how *convincing* Clark had been last night flashed through her mind for a moment, and she shifted uncomfortably beneath Dan's gaze. "That's none of your business," Lois replied coolly, crossing her arms over her chest.

<< "How's my case now?"

"I'm becoming more open-minded...but I could use some convincing."

"I can be **very** convincing.">>

“Hey! What in the Sam Hill is going on out here?” Perry bellowed, busting out of his office.

“Nothing,” Lois reassured. “Agent Scardino was just *leaving*.” She arched her eyebrow at Dan.

Perry approached them. “Agent Scardino unless you’re here on an official capacity I’d suggest you head out...*now*.”

Dan shook his head. “I’ll leave...but I’m not going far. This is far from over,” he said before turning to leave.

Perry watched as Dan stepped into the elevator and turned to the crowd that had begun to form to watch the confrontation between Lois and Dan. “I’m not paying you for your mime impressions! Everyone get back to work!” Everyone began to scramble back to their desks in record time, and Perry then turned to Lois. “Lois, my office...*now*!”

Jimmy winced patting her on the shoulder. “Good luck,” he whispered.

Lois sighed, following Perry into the Editor-in-Chief’s office. “Close the door,” Perry instructed.

“*Oh, boy, this is gonna be good,*” she thought to herself, noting the crowd that had begun to form by the water cooler, watching with interest. She closed the door behind her. “Perry before you say anything—”

“I thought I made myself perfectly clear this morning. No more outbursts!” he barked.

“Perry...” she began.

“No more personal problems making their way into the newsroom,” he continued.

“I know, but—”

“I thought you and Clark worked things out.”

Annoyed, Lois sighed. “We did, but...”

“Can’t you see that boy is *crazy* about you?”

Frustrated, Lois tried to interject. “Yes, Perry, I know, but if you could just let me—”

“These last few weeks I’ve done my best to sit on the sidelines, but you and Kent are pushing my buttons.”

“I know, Perry, if you would just—”

“I am through sitting. You need to make a decision, and you need to make it now! No more of this back and forth and—”

“*Perry!*” she finally yelled loud enough to get him to stop talking. “Thank you very much for your insight, but I think Clark and I can handle our personal lives without our *teacher* poking his nose in.” She huffed, crossing her arms over her chest in frustration.

He cocked his eyebrow at her. “That’s not what it looked like from here.”

She sighed, pacing around the office. “I know. I broke up with Dan on Saturday, and he seems to think he can *convince* me to give him another chance.”

“Oh,” Perry said a little more softly. “So, things are good between you and Clark?”

Lois nodded. “Yes...very good,” she reassured him. “We just had a bit of a...*miscommunication* that we needed to work out yesterday but everything’s fine.”

“Good,” he harrumphed. “I mean, uh, I don’t need a breakup tearing up my newsroom. Hurts circulation.”

Lois fought the urge to say something sarcastic back. Perry tried to put on a good show of being a tough editor worried about his bottom line, but she knew he was just a big teddy bear at heart. “Don’t worry your circulation is safe, Chief.”

“Good,” Perry nodded. “So, about this lawsuit mess—”

Lois nodded. “Clark went to find Superman and try and get his take on it...and also pass on the attorneys’ names you recommended. I’m working on background checks on the plaintiff. We’re hoping we can get what we need to help get it tossed, but I think the *Planet* needs to stand behind Superman. Obviously, this guy has all the slimeball paparazzi eating out of his hand. Superman needs to know he’s got at least one friend in

his corner.”

Perry sighed. “I couldn’t agree more,” he began. “Our publisher’s given us the go ahead to back Superman. He wants us to back Superman and try to nip this in the bud.”

“That’s generous,” Lois said surprised.

“Well, let’s just say he got a new appreciation for everything Superman does when he saved his wife from a mugger last week.”

Lois smiled. “That’ll do it.”

Clark stepped off the elevator and entered the newsroom, looking for Lois. He spotted Jimmy at his desk. “Jimmy, have you seen Lois?”

Jimmy pointed at Perry’s office. “She’s in with the Chief after the scuffle this morning.”

“Scuffle?” he asked confused.

Jimmy nodded. “Scardino showed up, and Lois got in his face trying to get him to leave. You should have seen her face. She was *piiissssed*. What a day to be charging the video camera. That guy is such a *tool*! Anyway, she was trying to get him to leave when Perry overheard from his office and kicked him out.”

Clark scowled as he listened to Jimmy relay the happenings from this morning with Scardino. “Is Lois okay?” he asked.

Jimmy shrugged. “She seemed fine. A couple of people were trying to listen in, but they shut the door.”

He nodded, heading to Perry’s office he listened in to see if it was a good time to interrupt. Hearing it wasn’t anything personal they were talking about he decided it was okay to open the door.

“Our publisher’s given us the go-ahead to back Superman. He wants us to back Superman and try to nip this in the bud,” he heard Perry say.

“That’s generous,” Lois said surprised.

“Well, let’s just say he got a new appreciation for everything Superman does when he saved his wife from a mugger last week,” Perry added.

Lois smiled. “That’ll do it.”

“Definitely,” Clark said, placing a supportive arm around Lois’ waist. She turned to smile at him.

Before he could ask her about the confrontation earlier, Perry interjected, “Kent, were you able to track down Superman?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “I was able to talk with him briefly. Apparently, Ms. Hunter doesn’t try cases anymore because she doesn’t want to lose. So he’s still looking for an attorney.”

“Aw, that’s too bad,” Perry said shaking his head. “She was always a lot of fun to watch in the courtroom.”

“She said she didn’t want to be the one to ‘destroy Superman.’” Clark sighed, giving Lois’ shoulders a gentle squeeze as he spoke.

Perry shook his head. “That’s a shame, but what can you do?” He shrugged. “Lois said you two were working on the background for the plaintiff in this case...”

“Calvin Dreggs,” Lois supplied with a nod, leaning back against him. His eyes widened when he felt her back her bottom against the front of his slacks. He suppressed a moan, biting his lip but Perry seemed oblivious.

“Right!” Perry snapped his fingers. “I’d like to get something ready for the afternoon edition. Do you have anything ready for print?”

He was about to respond when she brushed up against him again. Was she *trying* to kill him? He could feel his body begin to respond to her nearness. He shuddered, trying to get his mind to focus on anything else at the moment.

She shifted away from him, and he sighed in relief as she spoke. “No, nothing yet. We’re still in the research stage.” He counted to ten backwards, slowly but surely he could feel his body calming down. He sighed in relief, thankful he’d avoided an embarrassing situation...until he saw Lois’ hand reach behind her thigh to scratch behind her upper thigh, brushing against him again

with her hand. He caught a glimpse of the lace edge below her burgundy skirt and swallowed, diverting his gaze back up.

'This is bad. Very very bad.' He thought to himself. *'Think states, countries, capitals...Ottawa, Canada, Vienna, Austria, Paris, France...'* The heat wave that had washed over his body seemed to disappear and he sighed in relief.

"All right, well get out of here and keep me posted." Perry said. "Kent?"

"London," he said before realizing he'd said the capital of England out loud. Realizing Perry was looking at him funny, he covered. "Uh, I just remembered that's where Calvin Dreggs is from. London."

Perry looked at him with a perplexed look for a minute. "Uh-huh, well, uh, thanks for sharing."

"Come on, Mr. Walking Encyclopedia." Lois turned, grabbing him by the hand to guide him out of the office and they headed back to the newsroom. "I think Superman's hunch about that Elise Carr was right. From what Jimmy was able to find it definitely sounds like emotional abuse."

It took him a minute to realize she was talking about the story and he cleared his throat. "Right, uh, which is going to be harder to get her help than if it was physical."

"Always is," Lois said softly.

"Huh?" he asked, not sure if he'd heard her right.

"Uh, nothing," she said shaking her head as she took a seat at her desk. "It says she's a waitress at Marge's Café. Maybe we can go there before lunch hour and try and talk to her? See if she can reason with this guy...or at the very least get herself out of this abusive relationship."

"Yeah, that sounds like a great idea, and then maybe we can talk about what hap—" He stopped short when he heard an alarm blaring in his ear.

'All units respond! Carjacking in progress! Minor child is involved. Repeat...'

'Help! Somebody help! He's got my baby!'

Lois looked at him in concern and mouthed, *'Superman?'* He nodded, and she sighed. "Is it a *real* emergency? Because with that article this morning there's probably going to be people climbing out of the woodwork...trying to get their six minutes of fame."

"It's a carjacking...with a baby," he whispered, tugging at his tie.

"Go," she said softly. "If you're not back by ten—"

He leaned in to kiss her. "I'll meet you there, I promise. As long as nothing else comes up."

Lois watched Clark leave and sighed. At least now she *knew* where he was running off to. She turned in her chair and spotted the pastry bag Dan had brought from earlier. The confrontation from earlier echoed in her mind. She needed to nip this crap with Dan in the bud and make sure he kept his nose out of her relationship with Clark for good. Recalling how secretive he had been with his work an idea began to form. She grabbed her things, calling over her shoulder, "Jimmy?"

"What's up?" Jimmy called, poking his head up from his desk.

"I'll be back in a little bit. If Clark comes back tell him to meet me at the café. He'll know what I'm talking about," Lois said as she climbed the steps to the elevator.

"You got it," Jimmy called, waving as she stepped on the elevator.

After stopping the carjackers and safely delivering the crying infant back to his mother, Clark did a quick patrol around the area to make sure there were no other pending disasters. Thankfully, everything seemed to be quiet for the most part. He headed over to the courthouse to try and see if he could catch some of the attorneys Perry had recommended after court.

Constance had said he needed a shark. He still hated that

Constance wouldn't take his case.

A throng of reporters was crowded on the steps of the courthouse steps. Curious he turned to see what the commotion was and saw at the top of the steps seven men in sharp suits surrounding Bill Church Jr. His eyes widened as Bill Church Jr. continued to give his statement to the press. "No, I'm certainly not bitter and—" Bill Jr. spotted him in the crowd. "Superman!"

Clark took a few steps toward him. "Don't tell me you made bail..."

"Bail? No. They're dropping charges," Bill Jr. sneered.

"*What?*" He still recalled all too well how Bill Jr. had kidnapped Perry, drugged him with Red Kryptonite and tried to kill both Lois and Perry.

Bill Jr. patted him on the shoulder as he strode down the steps with the crowd of reporters moving with him. "All you need's a good lawyer. Trust me; you're gonna love it in there." Clark watched him descend the steps, resuming his statement to the press. "I just signed to write a book on the whole experience, called *Why This Is The Greatest Country On Earth...*"

Clark shook his head, heading into the courthouse. "Open mind, open mind, open mind..."

"Bobby?" Lois tapped on the window of Marco's Italian Buffet. He looked up through the window, mouth full of pasta, as usual, motioning for her to come in and join him.

Upon entering the establishment, she looked past the servers setting up for lunch and found Bobby in the corner eating a plate full of spaghetti. "Hey, Lois, you ya doing?" Bobby asked in between mouthfuls.

Lois took a seat across from him, trying to divert her eyes from the sight of him slurping his food. It was enough to make her stomach churn. "Oh, you know chasing bad guys, writing stories, same old same old..." She shrugged.

"Yeah, I heard you and Clark finally made up after locking horns like the Hatfields and McCoys..."

"How did you—" she began to ask, but stopped. "Never mind, uh, Bobby I need a favor."

"And I need to eat." Bobby said in-between bites, "I'm a starving artist here..."

"Artist?" Lois asked, cocking an eyebrow.

He puffed his chest out, smoothing his hair. "I used to make a real good Olly Winter."

"I'm sure you were, Bobby." She smiled pulling out her notepad, "I need you to do some research for me on an Agent Scardino."

He nodded. "Yeah, your uh DEA agent boyfriend?"

"He is *not* my boyfriend," Lois corrected.

"Figure of speech." He shrugged.

"Find another one," Lois said. "Anyway I need you to find out what he's working on."

"Okay, but it'll cost you extra."

"Panda House?" Lois asked.

Bobby shook his head. "Too greasy. Hunan House is better. Chicken Lo-Mein...extra wontons... Oooh! Don't forget the egg rolls!"

"I'll tell you what, you get me what I need by this afternoon and after lunch, I'll get Clark to get you some of those Belgian truffles you like so much."

"Oh, Swiss chocolate! Even better! You're on girl!" Bobby grinned.

The first lawyer Clark ran into was Arnold Sharp, Attorney At Law. He was intense, to say the least. He had caught him on his way out of court after getting a vehicular homicide case tossed. He was brutal. "Lemme tell ya a little about my strategy in a case like this, Superman. I don't just beat the other side...I kill them. You think I'm kidding?" He could smell the sour onion on his breath as

Sharp got in his face with a glint of insanity wavering in his eye. His face then softened, and he laughed. “I’m not kidding,”

He swallowed hard, looking around the elevator nervously at the crowd of disapproving looks. Sharp continued to illustrate his *strategy* as his face turned red with anger. “You choke ‘em on paperwork”—he illustrated his point by making a fist in the air—“cut off their air, then go after their families, friends...” Clark sighed, shaking his head. This guy was out of his mind. “And when their bones are breaking in your fists—”

“I don’t think—” he began to argue.

“—you squeeze harder!” The elevator dinged, and he stepped off grateful for a way to escape as Sharp continued, “*Kill! Kill! Kill!*”

“I, uh, really have to go...” he began. What? Run as far away from your crazy self as possible? It wasn’t like he could say he had a doctor appointment. “Rescue someone...or something...”

Sharp looked down at his watch and nodded, his softer demeanor returning once more. “Oh, yeah, I’m late for yoga. Listen, we’ll talk soon, huh?”

Back at the Planet, Lois finished placing the order for Bobby at Hunan House with a sense of satisfaction. If her plan worked, then hopefully this would get Dan to back off and keep his nose out of her and Clark’s relationship. At first, she’d felt sorry for the way she ended things with Dan, but after the way he’d been acting lately, she now felt she hadn’t been hard enough on him. The constant digs about Clark and him showing up everywhere wanting to *talk* was getting old.

Clark still wasn’t back yet. She sighed, glancing at his desk. He was still holding out on her. When he’d told her about the kryptonite cage yesterday, he was holding something back. After last night she’d figured the best way to get the information out of him was a bit of slow seduction and teasing. She had to admit she was enjoying every minute of it.

“Hey, Lois?” Allan called from across the aisle.

“What’s up Allan?” Lois asked.

“Some guy with a Brooklyn accent is on line three for you. Sounds like he’s trying to shovel a dump truck of food in his mouth while he’s talking.”

“Thanks, I’ve got it,” Lois said, grabbing her phone, “Bobby? That was quick! I just finished ordering the food.”

“Yeah, I know,” he said in-between bites, “I got some information for you. I’m headed over to Hunan House right now. Nirvana...” Bobby mumbled in-between bites.

“Nir-what?” Lois asked.

“Nirvana,” Bobby said a little clearer. “Project Nirvana. It’s a code name for the case Scardino is working. Lois, are you sure that guy is DEA?”

“Pretty sure,” Lois said.

“Well, from what I heard he’s not DEA. He’s FDA.”

“What?”

“Food and Drug Administration, Lois.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “Bobby, I know what FDA stands for... Are you sure we’re talking about the same Scardino?”

“That’s what my guys say,” Bobby said.

“All right, well what does the FDA have to do with Project Nirvana?”

“From what I hear Project Nirvana is something to do with Intergang. They’re looking to get a drug approved.”

“Which would make sense for the FDA and the DEA to be involved,” Lois reasoned. “FDA says ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to companies that want to market new drugs, but if the drug is harmful the DEA is involved...”

“Sounds like a tangled web,” Bobby said, “but I’m not sticking my neck in that noose any farther than I already have. Remember you didn’t hear any of this from me. Don’t forget about my chocolates.”

“Well enjoy your lunch,” Lois said.

“Remember, the Swiss chocolates, and then we’re even,” he repeated before hanging up.

Lois sighed, hanging up the phone before turning to Jimmy. “Jimmy!”

Jimmy looked up from Allan’s desk where he was in conversation. “What’s up?” Lois motioned for him to come to her and he sighed, getting up to walk over to her desk and Jimmy wheeled himself to her desk. “You bellowed?”

Lois grinned. “Yes, I’m guessing you’re about as sick of the intrusions by Dan as I am?”

“You have nooo idea,” Jimmy said shaking his head emphatically.

“Well, I have an idea to put an end to all of these intrusions, but I need your help. You still got those contacts at the FDA?” Lois asked, pulling out a notepad to begin jotting.

Jimmy puffed his chest out. “I might,” he said with a grin.

Lois smiled. “Well, how about you do a little research for me?” She handed him the paper from her legal pad. “See what you can find out about Project Nirvana and let me know what you find out...”

“Nirvana?” Jimmy asked. “Like the band?”

Lois rolled her eyes. “It’s a code name for a case Dan is working on. Just let me know what you find out...”

“I don’t know, Lois isn’t that a bit...”

“Intrusive?” she asked with a smile. “That’s the idea.”

Richard Smith seemed like a much more reasonable attorney than Sharp. His demeanor was a lot more relaxed and friendly. “You’re right to shop carefully for an attorney. I’ve handled dozens of cases like this, and none of them have ever gone to trial. I’ve always settled amicably and cheaply.”

Clark smiled, thinking to himself. ‘*Finally, some good news.*’

“That’s great. How?” Clarks asked.

Smith smiled back at him, “Find the plaintiff’s darkest secret and threaten to print it unless they back off.” Blackmail? No way. Smith handed him a bowl of mints. “Mint?”

Richard Bowler was a professional. He’d been handling litigation law for years. He seemed to be a reasonable man. Clark listened as he explained his strategy. “Superman, you’re the one being exploited here, and I’ve got an idea. Let’s sue them.”

“What?”

“And not just them—let’s go after those guys selling Superman t-shirts and not cutting you in and the comic books, let’s get you a little taste of that action.”

‘*Those go to the Superman Charity for helping those in need. I’m not going to sue them!*’ Clark thought before trying to interrupt. “But—”

“I know, I know, no money, right? Don’t worry; the first few are on me, pro-bono...if you just sign over the TV movie rights to me.”

‘*TV Movie rights?*’

Lois arrived at Marge’s Café a little before noon. She spotted Elise in the corner and was preparing to confront her when she spotted Calvin sitting at a table in the corner. Discreetly she grabbed a menu and headed inside the café, so she was sitting across the table from where Calvin was sitting.

She glanced at the time. Where was Clark? Elise grabbed her bags and came to sit down next to Calvin. “Did you bring it?” he asked.

‘*It?*’ Lois wondered. Could he be on drugs?

“Yes,” Elise said, pulling a handheld, portable television set from her purse.

The sound from the portable television echoed around the

café, but Calvin and Elise seemed oblivious. Lois craned her neck to see what they were watching. “Is Superman getting too big for his britches? Next on Jerry...”

“Oh, no,” Lois muttered, “He didn’t...”

“Isn’t this great, Elise?” Calvin beamed at Elise. “I’m on national TV, and Barry Barker says there’s no way I can lose the case.”

“Over my dead body,” Lois muttered under her breath.

“That’s wonderful, Calvin... If you win a lot of money, then can we tell people we’re married?” Elise asked cautiously.

‘What? That pig won’t even admit he’s married to her?’ Lois did her best not to react verbally. A server approached her table, and she pretended to be on her phone, nodding back and forth so as not to miss anything and to not draw attention to herself. The server filled her water glasses, and she mouthed *‘Thank you... waiting on someone.’* The server nodded and left.

“Absolutely, honey. You know the only reason I wanted to keep it secret was so your friends wouldn’t think you’d married a bum,” Calvin reassured Elise, taking her hand in his. Elise smiled intently back at him.

‘Is she seriously buying this crap?’

“You understand what you have to say when you’re on the witness stand, don’t you?” Calvin asked.

Lois’ ears perked up. *‘Witness stand? He’s probably going to get her to lie for him. That no good...’*

“Yes, Calvin.” Elise nodded.

She was just about to open her mouth to say something when Clark arrived taking a seat next to her. “Hi.” She noticed he was eyeing her legs that were crossed from beneath the table appreciatively as he sat down, leaning in to kiss her cheek.

Still seething from what she had witnessed she muttered, “Men are pigs.”

‘What?’ He looked at her in surprise.

Realizing she’d said that statement out loud, she whispered, “Not you...” She motioned toward Calvin and Elise, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Here it is, it’s starting!” Calvin said excitedly.

On the television set, Jerry is on the screen with Calvin.

“Today we’ll be talking to Calvin Dreggs, a master guitarist on the cusp of major stardom...until he suffered a career-ending injury at the hands of Superman. Yes, folks, Superman. Is The Man of Steel the Champion of Justice, or is he just a bully in a cape? You decide.”

“There I am! There I am! I’m so photogenic!” Calvin cheered happily.

“We tried to contact Superman to hear his side of the story... but The Man of Steel apparently feels he’s not answerable to anyone. Well, we’ll see if he’s answerable to the law,” Jerry continued.

“Lying, no good...” Lois muttered under her breath, and Clark placed a hand on hers to calm her down.

“You look so good on TV, Calvin,” Elise gushed.

“Shhh! Shhh!” Calvin shushed her.

On the television, Calvin said, “According to the doctor my attorney found for me, I have permanent nerve damage, I’ll never play the guitar again.”

Lois couldn’t take any more of the show. She glanced at Clark and saw him lowering his glasses and realized he was just as frustrated.

‘...and Superman didn’t even apologize.’

ZZAP!

The television sparked and the signal died, filling the screen with static. Lois couldn’t help but laugh. “Nice aim.”

“Nice legs,” he said, glancing down at her stocking-covered legs beneath the table as he wriggled his eyebrows at her seductively. She smiled back, leaning over to kiss him.

Calvin threw the TV set across the table missing Elise by a

few inches. “You idiot! You bought a defective TV!” He stood up in his anger and Elise cowered down.

“Clark...” Lois breathed.

Before she could finish saying his name, Clark had already stood up and approached Calvin who had his arm raised as if he was about to strike Elise. “Don’t even think about it,” he warned sternly, grabbing Calvin by the arm.

“Who the bloody hell are you?” Calvin asked. “Mind your business!”

“Where I come from it is never okay to treat a lady like that. I’m making this my business. Take a walk,” he warned sternly.

Calvin was about to argue but saw the stern look on Clark’s face and thought better of it, jerking his hand back. “Come on Elise, let’s get out of here...”

“But—” Elise began to argue.

“I said let’s go!” he argued. When she didn’t move, he threw his arms up. “Whatever, I need to find another TV set anyway...” With that, he stormed off.

“Are you okay?” Clark asked, kneeling down, so he was eye-level with Elise.

She shook her head, holding back tears. Lois got up from the table and approached. “Can I get you something?”

“I, uh...” she began to stammer. “He’s never done that before... I’m sorry I’m kind of in shock right now.”

Lois pulled up a chair, pulling out a pack of tissues from her purse. “Here,”

“Thank you,” Elise said, wiping her eyes with the tissue. “I don’t know what got over him. He’s never acted like that before.”

“He shouldn’t have been talking to you like that,” Clark said, shaking his head in disapproval.

“He just gets upset.” Elise tried to cover. “Uh, thank you, but... I think I should probably try and go after him...” she said, getting up from the table. “When he’s angry like that he could get himself into a lot of trouble.”

Lois was quiet for a moment. “Elise, don’t you think you should distance yourself a bit?”

“How did you know my name?” she asked suspiciously.

“I, uh”—Lois pointed to the table she had been sitting at—“overheard him call you Elise,” she managed not so convincingly.

Elise looked between them for a moment then started gathering her things. “I should go.”

“Wait!” Lois started to argue.

“Thank you, but I have to go,” Elise said heading out the door.

Lois sighed, getting up from the table. “Unbelievable,” she muttered staring out the entrance Elise had left from.

“Tell me about it,” Clark muttered, in her ear, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind “Come on.” He motioned to their vacated table. “Might as well get something to eat while we’re here.”

Back at the Planet, Jimmy was sifting through the files on his desk when he ran across his message pad with half the carbon copy torn off. On the bottom was a number ‘555-0373’. Trying to recall who the message could be from he picked up the phone to dial the number. After a couple of rings, he reached a recorded voice. “You have reached the office of Charles Knox, president of OmniCorp. Please leave your name, number and the purpose of your call. Thank you for calling OmniCorp.”

He hung up the phone before the beep. He didn’t know anyone that was researching OmniCorp. Why would there be a message on his pad? Maybe someone jotted the number down by mistake? No, the top two copies had been torn off. Almost like someone didn’t want to leave the number lying around. Not something someone that worked at the *Planet* would do...

The wheels in his head began to turn, and he pulled up his browser to do a search: “Charles Knox Omnicorp” in the search

engine. He smiled when he read the first article that popped up, “Charles Knox Pushes For New Pain Pill Approval.”

“Bingo,” he said in a sing-song voice to himself.

After ordering their food Lois and Clark sat in silence, unsure of what to say after the incident with Calvin and Elise. “I shouldn’t have done that,” Clark muttered bitterly.

“I admire your restraint,” Lois said, sipping her water. “If I had heat-vision Calvin Dreggs would have been missing a very crucial body part.”

Clark laughed. “It was just that show...all those lies he was telling...just eats me up.”

“I know.” Lois smiled up at him, placing a hand over his. “It was kinda funny to watch you scare the pants off him, though.” She grinned back at him, placing a peck on his cheek. He smiled back at her, still a bit distracted from what had happened earlier. She decided to change the subject. “So, any luck on Superman finding an attorney?”

He sighed heavily. “No, everyone on that list is dishonest or cruel or greedy...Superman can’t be represented by someone like that.”

Lois sighed. “Well, maybe go back to Ms. Hunter? Maybe Superman can convince her to take the case?” She slipped her hand up his thigh. “He can be very persuasive when he wants to be.” She giggled when he took a sharp breath.

“Lo-is...” he hissed, pulling away from her.

“What?” she asked innocently, reaching for her glass of water from across the table. She smiled inwardly when she heard him groan as she made sure to brush up against him ever so slightly, giving him a perfect view of her cleavage from beneath her blazer.

“You know...what,” he whispered. “*Stop it. We’re in public.*”

Deciding she’d pushed his buttons enough for the moment, she pulled away but not before brushing her leg against his calf seductively as she re-crossed her legs from beneath the table. He glanced down at the table, and she uncrossed and re-crossed her legs again, watching as he continued staring intently at the table as he took a shuddered breath.

She gave him her best innocent smile. “Something...*wrong?*”

He narrowed his eyes at her, and she laughed. He leaned in to kiss her but stopped before their lips touched, getting a familiar look on his face. He hung his head in defeat. “You’ve got to be kidding me...”

“Is it a...” She gave a flying motion, and he nodded, leaning in to kiss her before he disappeared.

As he left she could hear him muttering under his breath, “Kinshasha, Moroni, Bangui, Praia, Algeiers, Rabat...” She couldn’t suppress the laugh that escaped her throat as she watched him disappear through the corridor. A few minutes later she heard a familiar sonic boom.

Clark landed at a crosswalk where he’d heard the cries for help. It had been a child crying for Superman to help. When he landed, he saw no danger. He looked through the streets and saw a group of people that had fallen, trying to fake injuries.

“Superman, what did you do?”

“Oh, no, my back!”

“My leg!”

“Superman, it’s all your fault!”

Unable to stand the chaos any longer he flew away, hoping to catch Lois before their food arrived to pick up where they’d left off. A small grin crossed over his face when he thought of the sweet torture she’d been putting him through earlier.

“Okay, thanks, Jimmy.” Lois nodded as she spotted Clark returning to the table, tugging at his tie. She hung up the phone as he took a seat next to her. “That was fast...I mean, I know you’re faster than a speeding bullet but—”

“False alarm,” he said simply turning to face her, irritation written all over his face.

“Sorry,” she said apologetically, placing a supportive hand on his. He intertwined his fingers with hers, looking up at her with a smile when the server arrived with their food. He released her hand, and they began to eat.

“Calvin, I’m sorry!” Elise tried to apologize again.

Calvin shook his head. “I don’t understand what’s gotten into you? How could you embarrass me like that?”

“It all just happened so fast! I just...panicked,” she stammered.

“I would never hurt you. You know that, don’t you?” His face softened as he cupped her cheek.

“I know that Calvin.” She smiled weakly back at him. “I was just in...shock. I’m sorry.”

“Okay.” Calvin smiled back at her. “It’s not your fault. It’s that big bugger’s fault for sticking his nose in where it doesn’t belong.” Elise smiled weakly at him, and he continued, “Come on, we’re supposed to meet with Barry about our testimony...”

After they finished their meal Lois and Clark headed back to the Planet. Clark decided it was a good time to ask her about what had happened earlier with Scardino when he’d been meeting with Constance. “So, Lois, about what happened earlier today...”

She grinned. “I thought you were enjoying the teasing. Do you want me to stop?” she asked with a teasing tone.

He smiled, wiggling his eyebrows at her. “Never.” He cleared his throat. “No, I was talking about what happened back at the Planet when, uh, Superman, was meeting with Constance Hunter.”

“Oh, that.” She sighed, pulling away from him. “It was nothing I couldn’t handle. Besides I’ve got a plan to put a stop to it once and for all.”

“Define ‘*nothing*,’” he pressed before adding, “and what do you mean you have a plan? Your plans always include unnecessary risks and—”

She pressed her lips against his, smiling as he moaned against her lips. “Not now,” she said, tugging on his tie. “We need to work on getting Superman a lawyer. We’ll deal with Dan later.” At his disapproving look she relented. “Okay, he was under the misinformed impression that there was a chance to work things out after Sunday...which after I corrected that he just got petulant and started with his sarcastic comments and digs...Then Perry kicked him out. It was nothing.”

“That’s not *nothing*,” he retorted.

“It is now,” she corrected, leaning in to kiss him. “Come on.” She loosened his tie some more as she tugged his hand to lead him into the *Daily Planet* lobby.

He followed, still intent to finish his argument. “About this plan...”

Lois spotted a magazine from the newsstand. “Oh look, a new *MetroWoman*.” She flipped through the magazine as she pulled out her wallet to pay for it.

“Lois...” Clark continued, giving her a warning tone. She continued to ignore him, so he got her attention the best way he knew how he kissed her. He ignored the catcalls around them as he focused on kissing her. She melted into his arms, linking her arms around his neck as he moved his attention to the sensitive spot behind her ear.

She sighed against him, and he could tell the effect his nearness was having on her. He wrapped his arms around her waist, walking them back toward the elevator, pressing the call button without losing contact with her. He brushed his lips against her earlobe, smiling as she shuddered against him.

The elevator dinged, and he pulled away slightly seeing the empty elevator car behind them and walked them towards it, intent on continuing their embrace inside. As he moved to step on the

empty elevator car with her, she held up her hand to stop him, pushing him away. “What are you doing?”

“Getting on the elevator,” he said simply.

She shook her head. “No, you’re not.”

“I’m not?” he asked, confused.

“You have to go...meet Constance Hunter,” she corrected.

“But—” he began to argue.

She shook her index finger at him. “No, no, no, you said it yourself. She was the perfect attorney for Superman. She just needs a gentle nudge. Go. Grovel if you have to,” she said leaning in to kiss him before pushing him back. He was about to argue, but the elevator doors closed behind her.

Jimmy sat in his car across the street from Ruby’s coffee shop, watching from a safe distance as Daniel Scardino grabbed his things from the table he was sitting at outside and left. He saw Scardino get in his car with a briefcase and take off. After waiting a few minutes, he pulled out into traffic and began trailing Scardino a few cars behind him.

If his information was correct, then Dan Scardino was a crooked DEA agent, and he was going to be the one to catch him in the act. He’d grab the story of the year, and then the Chief would have to give him a shot at reporting. Lois seemed too sidetracked at the moment to deal with another investigation. She’d thank him later.

Lois sat at her desk going over everything Jimmy had filled her in on the information he’d come across for their investigation into Dan Scardino. What had started out as just a revenge investigation, had morphed into an investigation into Intergang. If what Bobby Bigmouth said was true and Intergang was involved with Project Nirvana, she was going to be the one to nab the exclusive when they finally were able to arrest the organization for all its crimes. She pulled out her and Clark’s file on the criminal organization trying to find any mention of a ‘*Project Nirvana*’ that might give her a clue.

How was OmniCorp connected to Intergang? The background check on the company as a whole didn’t have a whole lot of info. It was a large pharmaceutical company that nearly went bankrupt a few years ago until it made its stocks public...

“Wait a minute...” she murmured looking at the paperwork on the investors that had bought up OmniCorp stock. ‘CostMart, Church Industries...’

“Son of a—” Lois muttered as realization began to dawn on her. Intergang owned OmniCorp. That was the connection. She glanced back at Clark’s desk. He still hadn’t returned from his meeting with Constance Hunter. She glanced at the clock. It was just after five. OmniCorp closed at five thirty. She could go down there and ask a few questions then fill Clark in when he got back. She grabbed her purse and headed out.

At Constance Hunter’s office, Clark did his best to put on his puppy dog face and plead with her to take his case. “I can’t find a lawyer I’d want to spend five minutes with, let alone entrust my entire career to. Please.”

She sighed, grabbing a file from her file cabinet as she huffed, “You’re being pathetic.”

He nodded. “I know, I’m sorry—”

She looked at him aghast. “Don’t say you’re sorry, it’s pathetic...I can’t say no to pathetic, I never could...and *you* being pathetic is...*really* pathetic.”

Clark bit his lower lip. She was right. Superman being pathetic and begging for an attorney was pathetic. “Ms. Hunter, I thought I’d seen every kind of evil there is...every perversion of man, law, and God. And I thought I knew how to fight them all. But there’s something out there I’ve never really seen before, and I can’t fight it because I don’t understand it: Greed. I need an ally, Ms. Hunter,

someone who does understand it but doesn’t want to be a part of it...and if that’s pathetic, well...”

She took a deep breath, staring at him intently for a moment. He held his breath, praying against hope that she would take mercy on him and save him from the pack of rabid animals that Metropolis called lawyers. “God, just once, I’d like to have a client come in here with a case I thought I could win.”

“So, you’ll do it?” His face lit up when he realized she was going to take the case.

She nodded, waving her arms in the air. “Go...wherever it is you go and rest up. We’ll start at nine tomorrow. You bring the bagels.”

Scardino pulled up to a building with tall glass windows covering the sides, opening his trunk and pulling out what looked like a radio of some sort, tucking it into his jacket pocket before heading inside.

Jimmy parked across the street.

Inside, he watched from a corridor as Scardino met with a man by the elevator and listened intently from the corner, behind one of the office doors. “Hi, Charles Knox, right? Dan Scardino, FDA.” Jimmy cringed listening to the fake tone as Scardino tried to charm his way into Knox’s good graces. Scardino pointed at the metal case in Knox’s hand. “Is that the, uh, money?”

Knox lifted the case up and snapped it open, revealing cash. He couldn’t believe how much was in there, but from where he was standing he could tell it was a lot. “Let’s talk dates,” Knox said sternly, unaffected by Scardino’s attempt to be charming.

“We hardly know each other, but hell, if you’re paying...” Scardino smiled. Jimmy held in a snicker.

Knox stepped into Scardino’s face, grabbing him by the collar as he spoke in a harsh whisper. “Go be Chuckles the Clown on your own time; on my clock, shut your mouth. Now...we want FDA approval on the drug. We want it by the first of the year. And we want it guaranteed.”

“You got it,” Scardino said. Knox left, leaving Scardino alone on the floor. He rolled his eyes and grabbed the briefcase, picking up his phone to dial. “Yeah, Carter? It’s Scardino. Payoff went just as you expected...” Scardino headed for the elevator.

“Mother of everything that is holy...” Jimmy muttered under his breath as he backed up into the cleaning woman. “Oh, excuse me, Miss I—” He stopped when he recognized the brunette in a cleaning uniform. “Lois? What are you doing here?”

“Me? What are you doing here?” Lois whispered.

“I was tailing Scardino,” Jimmy answered with a shrug.

“I was investigating Knox,” Lois whispered back. She heard footsteps from down the hall. “Shhh!” Lois warned, glaring at him, stepping out from behind the door to where Scardino was standing.

Scardino stopped, turning around. “Yeah, I got to call you back...”

“Uh-oh,” Jimmy said, realizing Scardino must have heard them because he was headed in their direction. “Lois, let’s get out of here...” It was too late.

Scardino approached them and gave a light chuckle. “Lois, what are you doing here?”

“Oh, you know I’m just taking a page out of the Dan Scardino handbook of manners. Showing up where I don’t belong, horning in on another person’s investigation... Sound familiar?” She narrowed her eyes, as she circled around him.

He glared at her. “Are you out of your *mind*? This is a *federal* investigation? Lois, there are things going on you can’t know about—”

“Really?” she said, crossing her arms over her chest. “Like, you’re posing as a corrupt FDA researcher? And the man you just met is the President of OmniCorp, which wants to push through a new painkiller called...Nirvana, which the DEA suspects might

have mind-altering effects?”

Jimmy spotted a red blinking light on the end of Scardino’s case. ‘*Oh, no,*’ He tried to get their attention by clearing his throat. “Guys?”

“How did you—” Scardino fumed angrily. “Lois...stay away from this.”

“Excuse me?” she scoffed.

“Stay—”

“What do you think I am, a house pet?” she scoffed before stepping into his face angrily. “Kind of annoying, isn’t it? Someone over there butting into your territory...stepping on your toes?”

“This has nothing to do with you or Kent!”

“Really? Well, according to my sources Nirvana is linked to Intergang which is the story *Clark and I* have been working on since November.... So yeah it kind of *is* my business!”

“Lo-is...” Dan warned.

“Lois...” Jimmy hissed, trying to draw attention to himself long enough to get them to quit fighting.

He spotted Jimmy. “*Seriously?* You brought Kent’s sidekick too?”

“Hey!” Jimmy fumed irritably but he was still being ignored.

“I’m warning you, Dan, you make one more comment about my partner and see what the hell happens!” Lois warned.

“Still got you fighting his battles for him, doesn’t he?”

“Lo-is...” Jimmy said a little louder.

“Let’s get something crystal clear: I don’t tolerate anyone going after my partner. You go after him, I go after you. Got it?”

“You’re joking, right?”

“Lois...” Jimmy said raising his voice a little louder.

“And one other thing, there is no you and me so you can get that little idea out of your head before you—”

“*Lois!!!*” Jimmy yelled louder.

“*What!?*” Lois asked, irritably looking back at him.

“*Shut up!*” he hissed, pointing at Scardino’s case. “You’re being *spied* on!”

“What?!” Lois asked, confused.

Knox reappeared with a gun trained on the three of them.

“Looks like I’ve got a mess to clean up, Mr. Church,” he said into his phone. “I’ll call you back.”

Lois gave her best forced smile. “I don’t suppose you’d believe we’re the cleaning crew?” Knox shook his head, waving the gun at them to follow him into the elevator.

Back at the Planet, Clark was looking everywhere for Lois. There was no sign of her or Jimmy. She had mentioned a “plan” which was never good. He flipped through the notes on her desk and found some stuff on Calvin Dreggs and Elise Carr. There was a note about OmniCorp and something called Nirvana. He wasn’t sure what the connection was.

He headed over to Jimmy’s desk and found a printout of an article about OmniCorp pushing for the approval of a new drug along with a note, “Scardino = FDA??”

“Oh, no,” he muttered under his breath. “She didn’t...”

Lois stared at the walls in the empty office begrudgingly, glaring at Scardino. Knox had locked them inside the empty office warning them not to touch anything and stepped out.

Unfortunately, there were no windows for them to call for help and their phones had been taken, so there was no way to call Clark and let him know where they were.

“What a mess,” Lois muttered, looking around.

“Maybe CK will realize something’s wrong and send for help?” Jimmy suggested.

Dan snorted, and Lois glared at him. “Problem?”

“Yeah, you!” Dan shot back. “If you hadn’t horned in on my investigation we wouldn’t be in this mess!”

“Uh, correction, if you hadn’t horned in on my relationship with Clark we wouldn’t be in this mess!” she shot back. “Jackass!”

“Paparazzi!” Scardino shot back.

“Would you two quit it?” Jimmy sighed angrily. “Geez!”

Knox stood outside the OmniCorp offices on the phone with Bill Church Jr. “I’ve got bad news.”

“I admire your bluntness...and your courage,” Bill Jr. said on the other line.

“It’s about Operation Nirvana...” Knox said.

“Nirvana? Ahhhh...”

“It’s a synthetic nerve block we were developing...disguised as aspirin? Makes people susceptible to suggestion?”

“Right, right, right, people take it for headaches, then buy our crap because they’ll just believe what they’re told. What’s the problem?”

“Are you alone, sir?”

“I just got out of *jail* Knox.”

“A DEA agent and a couple of reporters are onto us...”

“Pull over.”

Clark watched, hovering above the building as he listened in on Knox’s conversation with Bill Church Jr. “These reporters... What are their names?”

“I heard them say...’Lois’...and there was another mention of someone named Kent, but this Agent Scardino presented himself as an FDA rep. If he gets a hold of the drug—”

“Lane and Kent.” Bill Jr. sighed. “Knox, why do you do this to me?”

“I’m sorry sir.”

Clark watched as Knox stepped into another room. Something seemed to be blocking out the sound as he continued to scan the building looking for any sign of Lois and Jimmy.

“Maybe CK will realize something’s wrong and send for help?” he heard Jimmy say. He zeroed in on where the voice was coming from and spotted Lois, Scardino, and Jimmy locked in an upper office with no windows. He scanned the building to make sure there were no surprises from Krypton waiting for him as he continued to listen in.

Dan snorted, and Lois spat, “Problem?”

“Yeah, you!” Dan shot back. “If you hadn’t horned in on my investigation we wouldn’t be in this mess!”

“Uh, correction, if you hadn’t horned in on *my* relationship with Clark we wouldn’t be in this mess!”

Clark smirked at that comment. ‘*Sounds like she really lit into him,*’ He landed inside one of the offices with a window and checked for security cameras. After assuring himself there were none he quickly changed into his suit and tie from earlier and headed down the hall where the voices were coming from.

“Jackass!” Lois growled.

“Paparazzi!” Scardino shot back.

That comment angered Clark as he stood in the hallway outside the door where they were locked in and aimed a blast of heat vision at the locking mechanism before inserting his finger in the melted metal enough to jimmy the lock.

“Would you two quit it?” Jimmy sighed angrily. “Geez!”

He opened the door, mildly amused to see Scardino tense up as the door opened. “CK!” Jimmy cheered happily when he saw Clark on the other side.

“Kent?” Scardino snapped his head around. “What are *you* doing here?”

“Don’t tell me,” Clark began sarcastically as Lois opened her mouth to explain. “This was all a part of your brilliant *plan.*”

“Ha, ha,” Lois bit back crossing her arms over her chest. “Can we get out of here?”

“Knox disappeared on the other side of the building,” Clark

explained. “It should be clear...for now.”

“Great, let’s get out of here,” Jimmy said, walking toward the door. “I’ve seen enough of this place.”

“Tell me about it,” Scardino muttered, heading for the door.

Clark heard a loud clicking noise and looked behind him to see Knox raising his gun at him. “You must be Kent. Thanks for joining us. You saved me the trouble.” He cocked the trigger and started firing.

Without thinking, he knocked Knox to the ground calling out, “Lois, *get down!!!*” as he kicked the door behind him closed in an attempt to protect her from any gunfire.

“CK!” Jimmy hollered as the gun fell firing once more at the ceiling as debris fell around them.

Clark wrestled Knox to the ground, doing his best to keep his strength in check, aware he had an audience. After restraining Knox and pulling him to his feet by the collar, he turned to Scardino and Jimmy who had planted themselves to the ground to avoid the gunfire with Dan shielding Jimmy. He kicked the gun toward Scardino. “I think you can take it from here, Scardino.”

Scardino stood up, pulling a bag out of his pocket to pick up the gun, nodding as he pulled out a pair of handcuffs from his back pocket. “Charles Knox, kidnapping is a federal charge...and assaulting a federal agent is a big no-no...along with trying to push counterfeit drugs.” He slapped the cuffs on Knox. He pulled out his phone to call the police and walked away with Knox in tow.

“Clark?” Lois stepped into the hallway, wrapping her arms around him, leaning in to kiss him. Forgetting they had an audience his arms encircled her waist, savoring the feeling of her being in his arms for a moment before pulling away momentarily as he kept his arms around her waist.

“Are you all right?” he asked, checking for any injuries.

She nodded, leaning up to kiss him once more. “Fine. See?” She held up her hands for inspection.

“Good,” he began. “Now, can I ask you two a question?” He looked between Lois and Jimmy as the sound of alarms and sirens could be heard from outside indicating the arrival of the police. “Are you *CRAZY*??? What were you thinking???”

“Well, it didn’t start out as bad...” Lois began. “At first I was just trying to step on Dan’s toes a bit”—Clark gave her an annoyed expression, and she continued—“then the more I dug, the more I found, and then we found a connection to Intergang...”

“Trying to go after Intergang by yourselves?” Clark sighed in disbelief, shaking his head. “You should have called me.”

“Well...” Lois began, shrugging her shoulders.

“Actually, CK, the Intergang part was just dumb luck...” Jimmy interjected.

Clark gave Jimmy his best ‘*Yeah right*’ look as Scardino approached them interjecting, “I think we all did a couple of dumb things tonight, Kent. Come to think of it, why didn’t *you* call the police?”

“Well, I...” He glanced at Lois who raised an eyebrow at him with a smug expression.

“I mean, having your partner’s back is one thing, but when you’re not trained for situations like this that’s just reckless,” Dan admonished, pulling out his bulletproof vest to illustrate his point.

Clark glanced at Lois who thankfully didn’t leave him hanging for long. “Well, I’m sure Clark didn’t think he needed to call the police because he had Superman keeping an eye out for us. With the lawsuit looming he’s just been keeping his distance, but I’m sure he would have intervened if he needed to.”

“That true, Kent?” Scardino asked.

Clark glanced at Lois for a moment before nodding. “Uh, yeah.”

Scardino looked between him and Lois for a moment before nodding. “Well, however, you did it... Thanks for the help, but next time leave the heroics to the professionals.” He patted himself

on the chest before glaring at Lois. “And keep your partner out of official investigations.”

Lois glared at him. “Is it my fault *my* Investigation lead me here?”

“You only got here because you started investigating *me!*” Dan shot back.

“Enough! Both of you!” Clark said looking between the two of them.

“Can we *please* get out of here?” Jimmy pleaded.

“We still have a story to write...” Lois argued.

“Lo-is...” Clark warned, and she looked back at him with an arched eyebrow.

“What? We all almost got killed because of this!” Lois began rambling sensing where Clark was headed with this. “We’re going to miss out on a big story because—”

“Now hold on, aren’t you forgetting something here, Lois?” Dan interrupted.

“Oh, now, it’s ‘Lois?’” she shot back, turning to face him. “I thought I was just the ‘paparazzi.’”

“CK, make them stop,” Jimmy pleaded.

“Just calling it how I see it,” Dan said, throwing his arms in the air. “You are the one that busted in on my investigation and got us kidnapped—”

“Oh, please!” Lois sneered. “If I hadn’t, you never would have known Knox was working with Church! You should be thanking us!”

“*Thank you?*” Dan scoffed. “For what? Almost getting me killed? Gee, thanks for that!” he continued sarcastically.

Clark let out a sharp whistle, and they both turned. “Enough!” Lois opened her mouth to argue, and Clark stopped her. “I don’t want to hear it.” Dan snickered, and Clark glared at him, shutting down any thoughts Dan had about saying anything. “Now, I think we’re all a little tense. Let’s just take a step back and calm down.”

They both nodded, and Lois leaned back against the corridor wall with her arms crossed over her chest. Clark looked at her expectantly. “What?” She let out a long breath as she scoffed, “You cannot be serious? This is *huge!* After months of investigating Intergang and everything that happened to Mayson —” She stopped when he looked down at his feet. “I’m sorry,” she said softly. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“It’s okay,” he reassured her, squeezing her shoulder.

“You can’t print the details of this investigation,” Dan said. “I could lose my job...”

Lois opened her mouth to respond, and Clark stopped her. “We don’t want to jeopardize your job, Scardino”—Lois glared at him—but this *is* news. We can leave out the part of *how* certain people found Knox...”

Dan looked between Lois and Clark for a moment. “I guess as long as you don’t go into the details of my federal investigation I can’t stop you from printing—”

“Great!” Lois said, reaching for Clark’s hand. “Come on, let’s get this written up. If we’re lucky, we can catch Perry before he puts the evening edition to bed.”

Dan smiled. “Just can’t stand not to boss someone around, huh?”

Clark grinned. “I like it when she bosses me around.” He noticed Lois’ cheeks turn a crimson red and added, “Keeps me on my toes.” With that, they left Dan to contemplate that statement.

Perry had just finished putting the evening edition to bed when he spotted Lois, Clark, and Jimmy exiting the elevator. “This Knox guy was just another underling, but we haven’t found anything yet to tie Church or his son to Intergang...” Lois was explaining as they approached Clark’s desk.

“Lois, Clark? What are you doing here? It’s almost eight! Don’t y’all have homes?” Perry asked, approaching them with a ‘What mess did you get in now’ look on his face.

Clark took a seat at his desk, pulling out the infamous Intergang file he and Lois had been collecting since November. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you, Chief.” He looked at Lois and Jimmy with a pointed look.

Lois smiled proudly, perching herself on the edge of Clark’s desk. “OmniCorp’s president, Charles Knox was arrested tonight for attempting to pay off an FDA rep and push a mind-altering drug on the market—”

“And don’t forget *kidnapping*, assault of a federal agent...” Clark began ticking off the points on his hand, looking at Lois and Jimmy with a disapproving look.

Jimmy looked at Clark sheepishly. “Well, look at the bright side, CK, at least this time no one ended up in the hospital.”

Perry laughed, patting Jimmy on the shoulder. “Well, sounds like you’ve had an eventful evening...”

Clark took a seat at his desk, pulling out the file he and Lois had on Intergang to begin trying to cross-reference the information they’d learned tonight to see if there were any connections. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you, Chief.” He looked at Lois and Jimmy with a pointed look.

Lois smiled proudly, perching herself on the edge of his desk. His eyes widened when he saw the edge of her lace thigh-highs when her skirt rode up. She was sitting at an angle so that only he was treated to such a view. Perry and Jimmy seemed oblivious. Did she know what she was doing?

Her legs uncrossed and re-crossed and he saw a glimpse of her panties. He swallowed hard, trying to force himself to look anywhere else but at the tantalizing lace that was currently teasing him just below the edge of her burgundy skirt as it continued to play peek-a-boo.

“OmniCorp’s president, Charles Knox, was arrested tonight for attempting to pay off an FDA rep and push a mind-altering drug on the market—” Lois was explaining.

He forced himself to look up from her legs and added, “And don’t forget *kidnapping*, assault of a federal agent...” He ticked off the points on his hand, looking at Lois and Jimmy with a disapproving look.

Jimmy looked at him sheepishly. “Well, look at the bright side, CK, at least this time no one ended up in the hospital.”

Perry laughed, patting Jimmy on the shoulder. “Well, sounds like you’ve had an eventful evening...”

“You could say that.” Lois laughed, her foot brushed against the back of his knee and he bit his lower lip, looking up at her. She was looking back at Perry and Jimmy as she spoke.

“Did I hear you say, ‘assault of a federal agent?’” Perry inquired.

Clark nodded. “When Agent Scardino was made on his undercover operation—he gave Lois and Jimmy a look—”Knox tried to take things into his own hands.”

Perry shook his head. “Well, I just put the paper to bed so have the printable version ready for the early edition. We’ll run it with our editorial about frivolous lawsuits and your piece on Superman’s trial. Morrison said the mayor’s in such a rush to get this mess settled he’s pushing to have the trial moved up to Thursday.”

“What?” Lois and Clark asked aghast. This was news to both of them.

Perry shrugged. “Apparently there’s been a huge influx of people trying to cry wolf, and it’s keeping Superman from doing his job as well as keeping the courts booked with frivolous lawsuits and Mayor Berboski has had it. I can’t say I blame him.”

“I guess not,” Clark said solemnly. He knew all too well how annoying this lawsuit had become. He watched as Perry headed to his office to grab his things for the night.

Jimmy was over at his desk grabbing his things. “I’m gonna call it a night. See you guys tomorrow.”

“Night Jimmy,” Lois said, watching as he ascended the staircase to the elevator.

Perry left his office with his coat and briefcase. “Y’all don’t stay here too late working. Try and get some rest, ya hear?”

“We will.” Lois nodded. “We’re just going to type up what we’ve got, and then we’ll polish it up in the morning.”

Perry nodded, stepping onto the elevator with Jimmy. He glanced around the empty newsroom. “Where do you want to start?” Lois asked. Her heels fell to the floor, and she slid her foot against his inner thigh as she positioned herself, so she was on the edge of his desk.

He could see the hint of the lace from her stockings from below her skirt at the angle she was sitting. He took a deep breath, forcing himself to look up. “I guess we should figure out how to explain you and Jimmy finding Knox.” He began shaking his head. “I still don’t understand why you didn’t tell me you were investigating Scardino...or why you pulled Jimmy into it and not me.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I got mad earlier, and you know how I get when I get mad...I start investigating.” His breath caught in his throat as she leaned forward, so he was awarded the exquisite view of her cleavage beneath her blazer.

“All...too well,” he managed to say as she playfully kicked his knee.

‘Stop. Dear God, please stop. You’re in the office...’

Did she realize what she was doing to him? He turned his eyes back up and swallowed hard as he saw her toying with the top button to her blazer as she spoke. “I wasn’t expecting to end up in the middle of an investigation with Intergang.” He cocked an eyebrow at her, rolling his chair under his desk to help hide the effect she was having on him.

“And Jimmy?” Clark asked with an expectant look.

“What?” She shrugged shyly. “The boy’s gotta learn sometime. Who better to learn from than the best?” He cocked an eyebrow at her, and she relented. “And that was just dumb luck. I was following a lead, and he was tailing Dan.”

“Ah.” He nodded. Now that makes sense. “What lead were you following?”

She got up from his desk and padded her way over to her desk to grab the file she was pouring over earlier. He breathed a sigh of relief when she got up. ‘*Minsk, Baku, Vienna, Brussels, Berlin...*’ The heat wave that had washed through his body slowly began to subside, and he sighed in relief.

She returned to his desk with the file, leaning her back against his desk. “Here.” He took the file from her and began reading as she spoke. “Turns out OmniCorp had money problems a few years ago and was forced to make their stock public which in turn made them susceptible to a hostile takeover by—”

“Church.” He nodded, reading the list of buyers. “Well, there’s the connection.”

“Told ya,” Lois said, crossing her arms over her chest.

He hung his head. “Lois, you took a huge risk tonight. You could have gotten both you and Jimmy killed tonight,” he argued, noting how she looked down at her lap, picking at a piece of lint on her skirt. “Lois...”

“I know.” She sighed, looking up at him with a frown. “I jump in without looking. Don’t test the water level first. I thought we went over this before?” She grinned back at him. The button she’d been toying with came undone. He could see the soft curves of her breasts hidden behind the v-neck of her sleeveless blouse as the blazer hung open.

He looked away, trying to force his mind to focus on anything but the effect she was having on him. ‘*There’s no one else here.*’ It didn’t take a lot of imagination to think about what he could do. The teasing she’d been putting him through all day.

“Clark?” she asked, waving her hand in front of his face to get his attention. “You okay?”

“F-Fine,” he stammered, looking back at her. She twisted her mouth looking at him curiously as she leaned back against his desk. Her skirt inched higher.

‘There’s no one around. All you’d have to do is lean her back on your desk and...’

“You don’t look fine,” she said, fingering the knot to his tie. “What’s wrong?”

‘Stop it.’

“Nuh-Nothing.” He shook his head, looking away as he fought to focus on anything else at the moment.

“How’d it go with Constance?” she asked, toying with the end of his tie. She was still looking at him curiously as she spoke.

He shifted in his chair again. “Uh, good. She agreed to take the case.”

“That’s great!” Lois cheered, leaning in to hug him. He pulled away, shifting in his seat as he sat up in his chair. “What’s wrong?”

“Uh, we should really get this story written,” he said hurriedly, pulling up the word processor on his computer. He could feel her gaze on him.

She watched him curiously for a moment before nodding. “I guess you’re right.” She hopped on his desk once more. “We should get the story written.”

He began typing at super-speed, relaying what had happened upon his arrival and what Knox had admitted to when he’d had Lois and Jimmy held hostage. He felt her foot brush against his knee again, and he stopped. He looked up at her curiously. “Yes?” Before he could argue, she pulled him to her by his tie, rolling his chair, so he was positioned between her legs.

“Lois...” he breathed huskily, feeling the effect her nearness and current position were having on him. “What are you doing?”

She slid into his chair, straddling him as she whispered in his ear, “If you have to ask... then I’m not doing a very good job.” She linked her arms around his neck, nibbling at his earlobe as her bottom came to rest on his knees.

He let out a ragged breath, arguing half-heartedly, “Here? You can’t be...” Her hand slipped between their bodies, and he groaned in approval.

“Why not? No one’s around... You’re definitely in the... mood,” she teased, unbuckling his belt.

“Lois...” His hands slid up the back of her thighs, pushing her skirt up as she leaned in to kiss him.

“Do you want me to stop?”

His breath caught in his throat. Did he want her to stop? No. But the idea of doing this here...in the open where anyone could walk in... She looked at him expectantly, and he breathed a barely audible, “No.”

“Then quit arguing and take it like a man of steel,” she whispered before leaning in to kiss him once more.

“Teasing all day,” he breathed. “What did you... Oh, God... I love you.”

“Teasing, moi?” she asked innocently.

He groaned, inching his hands higher until he found the bare flesh just above her silk stockings. “I really like thes... Oh!”

“Like putty in my hands,” she whispered with a grin.

Putty? Her grip tightened on him, and he gasped. “Cl-a-rk,” she teased in his ear.

“Hmm?” He could feel the pressure building.

“Remember that conversation we had yesterday?” He groaned in disapproval. Why was she torturing him like this? The memory of last night and how perfectly their bodies fit together teased him as he did his best to focus on the words that were coming out of her mouth. “You know the one where you were still hiding something...”

‘Oh, God, not now...’

“Lois, you’re killing me here...” he argued half-heartedly.

“Oh, I have every intention of ending your torture”—he

moaned his approval, and she silenced him with a kiss before pulling away—“after you start talking.”

‘Talking? What was she talking about?’

“Wha—” He felt her tighten her grasp on him and he let out a guttural moan which she was quick to silence with her mouth, slipping her tongue inside his mouth. He felt her shift her weight against him and pull away. He was just about to voice his protest at the loss of contact when she turned back in his arms, moving closer to him.

“Now, about that conversation from yesterday...”

“Not...now,” he argued half-heartedly. Who was he kidding? He was in no position to argue or negotiate.

“If you want to finish I suggest you start talking.”

“Right now is...not the time...for this conversation,” he said in-between shuddered breaths.

He pressed his lips against her collarbone, feeling her shudder against him. “Now, I know it had something to do with...” He brushed his lips against her chest. “Oh, that is so not...” He could feel her defenses begin to waver.

Clothes quickly became discarded as they quickly lost themselves in one another’s arms. Unable to achieve the closeness they both were seeking Clark had moved them to his desk as they continued their embrace.

“You are so sexy, Lois Lane...” He leaned in to capture her lips, brushing feather-light kisses against her lips.

She smiled up at him as he leaned over her, caressing her cheek. “Not so bad yourself, Farmboy...”

“Farmboy?” he asked in-between heated kisses.

“Oh!” she cried out, digging her fingers into his back. “Super Farmboy?” she offered, and his body rumbled in laughter against her.

He pulled her to him. They quickly lost themselves in one another’s arms until the world around them disappeared into oblivion. “Oh, God, baby...” He held her close against him as he collapsed on top of her, cradling her securely in his arms.

Lois lay curled up against him, staring up at the ceiling. She laughed. “Did we really just do that?”

“Yeah.” He grinned, chuckling lightly as he gave her a peck on her forehead.

“That was hot.” She giggled leaning in to kiss him. He moaned his agreement against her lips, and she grew thoughtful for a moment. “Did you just call me ‘baby?’”

“I figured if we’re throwing out pet names”—he wiggled his eyebrows at her and she laughed—“you started that with that whole *Farmboy* business.” She laughed even harder against his chest and he murmured, “If this is the end result of you trying to seduce information out of me I’ll have to hold out on information more often.”

“Don’t you dare!” she warned, smacking him on the chest lightly. “Not that it did any good. I still didn’t get what I was after.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” he teased, wrapping his arms around her as he nuzzled her ear.

“You know what I mean,” she argued half-heartedly.

She gave him a look, and he sighed, sitting up as he began adjusting his clothes, pulling his pants back up and straightening his dress shirt as he spoke. “Fine, it just wasn’t something I was willing to talk about when we were that...involved... Definitely, kills the mood.”

She nodded, fastening her bra. He frowned his disapproval, and she sat up, buttoning her blouse. “O-kay, I guess I can understand that.” She glanced back at the desk she was still sitting on, noting where the file they’d been reading earlier had been shoved to the ground in their frenzy.

He followed her gaze and picked up the file, and the scattered papers that had fallen to the ground earlier, replacing it on his

desk. She gave him an expectant look, and he nodded. “You sure you want to hear this?” She crossed her arms over her chest defiantly, narrowing her eyes at him and he relented. “All right, remember when I was telling you about being trapped in that Kryptonite cage by Luthor?”

Her face fell, and she looked down, nodding. He moved his hand to tilt her face toward him. “What I didn’t tell you was what I had to listen to while I was in there.” He sighed, running a hand through his hair. “Are you sure you want to hear this?”

“Just tell me,” she said, grabbing his hand.

“He was gloating about finally defeating Superman.” He stopped himself for a moment, and she nodded for him to continue, taking his hand in hers. “I had to listen to how he planned on killing me once I was...vulnerable enough.”

“Oh, Clark,” she breathed, leaning her head against his chest.

“I had to hear how he was going to continue to destroy Metropolis...he finally admitted to every despicable crime he’d committed...Prometheus, the tests around Metropolis with the jumpers and the Carlin building, Smart Kids, heat wave, Carpenter, the Superman clone and the Toasters... It was all *him*.”

“But he’s in jail now. He can’t hurt anyone any more,” Lois said softly.

“That wasn’t even the worst of it, Lois. It was like some sick game to him. All these peoples’ lives he’d destroyed...he didn’t care...and worst of all...” He took a deep breath, cupping her cheek as he spoke. “He gloated about his ultimate prize, you...and how he was going to...break you.” She stiffened against him, hearing the words echo in her mind. He let out a long breath. “Now do you see why I didn’t want to tell you?”

She nodded. “You can’t protect me from everything, Clark.” She leaned up to kiss him.

He nodded. “I can try.” He fingered her hand still grasping his gingerly. “I’m sorry. I never wanted to tell you—”

“It’s fine,” she said softly, squeezing his hand gently. “I made you tell me, and I’m glad you did.”

“You are?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes, it means no more secrets.”

“I like that.” He smiled at her, cupping her cheek as he leaned in to kiss her.

“Me too.” She grinned back at him, toying with his tie.

“Just do me a favor, okay?” he asked.

“What?” she asked.

“Don’t ever sit on my desk like that again,” he breathed huskily.

“Or what?” she asked, her eyes glinting with mischief as she spoke, curious as to why he didn’t want her sitting on his desk. “What would you do if I did?”

“Take you in the nearest room with a locked door and help you redefine the word ‘frustration,’” he murmured, leaning into kiss her. She grinned, tugging on his tie to deepen the kiss, leaning up to kiss him once more and he pulled away, looking up at the elevator. “We need to get dressed before the cleaning crew makes their way down here.” He helped her to her feet just as the elevator dinged announcing the arrival of the cleaning crew.

She quickly pulled her skirt down as she tugged her blazer closed. He leaned over his computer, quickly saving his file from earlier.

She smiled, grabbing her things. He looked at her curiously, and she tugged him by the tie toward the elevator. “Come on, we have some...experimenting to do.”

Before he could argue, she had already dragged them onto the elevator, pressing the button to the lobby. “Experiment?” he asked, perplexed.

“Just curious what happens when we’re this close and you know I’m not wearing anything under—” Before she could finish her statement, the elevator emergency stop had been pulled, and they continued to *experiment* her theory well into the night.

The next morning, Clark awoke with a very familiar weight wrapped around him. He smiled down at the sleeping figure of Lois Lane curled up against him. He glanced at the clock on his nightstand and groaned when he saw ‘6:15’ blinking back at him. He needed to get up. He was supposed to meet Constance this morning to go over his legal strategy, but being with Lois like this felt so good...and the idea of moving wasn’t very appealing at the moment.

Last night he’d planned on cooking dinner for her. They’d gone to her place at first but when he saw her bare cabinets he’d convinced her to grab an overnight bag since she kept insisting on further ‘experimenting’ with her theory last night. After a quick patrol around the city to make sure the criminal element was indeed asleep for the night he’d thrown together stir-fry with some fried rice. They’d enjoyed dinner with a movie, opting to watch *Lethal Weapon* with dinner. Soon after dinner, the movie was forgotten, and they’d found themselves in the bedroom where Lois had resumed testing her theories on him well into the night. She’d said her back was sore from the other night, so he’d tried to keep from showing off too much, making sure she had enough support for her back when they’d made love.

He smiled at her, watching as she curled up next to him in her sleep. Recalling their lovemaking the night before he held her close. “I love you, Lois Lane.” All day long yesterday she’d been torturing him mercilessly until she’d had him literally melting in her hands. He was a goner; hopelessly addicted to Lois Lane. He couldn’t seem to get enough of her. He wondered briefly if it was normal to become so consumed like this, but upon further reflection, he decided he really didn’t care. All he wanted to do for the rest of his life was please her and continue to make her happy.

She’d been right. After last night they no longer had any more secrets between them. It had been hard, telling her about his experience in the cage with Luthor. Although he knew she was putting on a brave face at the time, she’d encouraged him to tell her everything. It had unnerved her to realize how twisted Luthor really was but afterward, she’d been supportive. He’d expected her to try and pull away like she normally did when something bothered her but instead she’d enjoyed teasing him all night.

The loud beeping of his alarm clock brought him back to the present, and he groaned his disapproval, reaching over to turn the alarm off. Lois sleepily turned in his arms. “What time is it?”

“Time to get up. I’m afraid,” he apologized, brushing the stray strands of hair that had fallen in her face behind her ear.

She groaned against his chest. “I don’t want to move. Too comfortable.”

“I know,” he agreed. “Me neither, but Superman has to be over at Constance Hunter’s office at nine this morning and...” He stopped, stiffening as his super-hearing and its impeccable timing picked up a radio call from a nearby ambulance.

“What is it?” Lois asked. “What are you hearing?”

“Ambulance broke down. There’s a heart attack patient. They don’t know if they can get him to the hospital in time.” He sat up, giving her an apologetic look.

She nodded. “Go.”

He leaned in to kiss her before whispering a quick “Love you,” and changing into his suit to fly the broken-down ambulance to the hospital in time.

After Clark’s departure, Lois glanced at the clock and grimaced. She needed to get ready. She grabbed her things to begin getting ready. Just as she was putting the finishing touches on her makeup, the sonic boom announced his arrival and he reappeared in the apartment with breakfast in tow. “That was quick,” she remarked walking into the dining area of the kitchen where he was pulling out bagels from Martin’s Deli. She noticed he had one box set aside on the corner of the table.

“Took a little longer than I expected, but everyone’s fine. I stopped and got some breakfast,” he said, leaning in to kiss her before pulling away, glancing down at himself still in the suit he nodded. “I’ll just be a”—he disappeared before her eyes and before she could blink he reappeared fully dressed, showered, and groomed for the day in his business suit and tie—”sec.”

She took a seat, grabbing a knife to begin spreading cream cheese on her bagel. “Your life is so strange,” she remarked with a smile. He laughed, leaning in to kiss her. She was about to pull him down for a longer kiss when the jingling of keys at his front door caught both their attention. “You expecting someone?”

He shook his head and opened his mouth to respond but before he could the door opened, and Martha and Jonathan stepped into the apartment carrying their luggage. “Clark! Don’t be mad! I know you said you could handle this Calvin character, but we saw *The Jerry Show* and—” She stopped when she saw Lois and began backtracking. “I mean, I know you said ‘Superman’ can handle this Calvin character,” she amended.

Lois fought the urge to laugh. Obviously, Clark hadn’t updated his parents on the latest bit of news about his revelation yet.

“Lois, good to see you,” Jonathan said, trying to change the subject.

It was really amusing to watch them squirm a little. “Hi, Jonathan, Martha, what are you doing here in the middle of the week? Is everything okay?”

She heard Clark suppress a snicker. He had to realize she was toying with the elderly couple just a little bit.

Martha nodded. “Well, we saw the coverage on…”

“*The Jerry Show*?” Clark supplied.

“Yes!” Martha said, “and we thought maybe…” She looked at her husband for help, and he seemed clueless as to how to cover.

“Maybe?” Clark looked at them, confused as he grinned ear-to-ear. Martha shot him a dirty look as she struggled to cover.

“You could use some moral support?” Jonathan supplied.

“Moral support?” Clark looked at Lois, confused. “For what?”

His mother glared at him, and she couldn’t hold in the laughter any longer. “Okay, enough! You shouldn’t tease your parents like that, Clark,” Lois scolded.

“I was just trying to see how far they were gonna take this.” He grinned back.

They looked over at Lois in shock for a moment before doing a double take, looking between Lois and Clark once more before Martha asked, “You know?”

Lois nodded, and Martha grabbed a hand towel off the counter and threw it at Clark. “That is not funny!”

“You guys are terrible liars.” He laughed.

Martha leaned over to hug her. “Thank God he finally told you!” She leaned over to whisper, “It’s about time.”

Lois laughed. “Thanks, Martha.”

Clark looked around the room and smirked. “Boy, I must be in trouble if the calvary’s here.” They all laughed, and Martha and Jonathan pulled up a few chairs as they finished their breakfast and updated the older Kents on the happenings with the case against Calvin Dreggs.

Later that morning Lois stepped into the newsroom, praying Perry didn’t ask her where Clark was. She wasn’t sure she could give a very good excuse right now. Hopefully his meeting with Constance this morning didn’t take too long. She still had to clean up their copy for Perry to look over on last night’s adventure. She glanced at the time. Ten thirty. She was more than late. Surely Perry would notice. He noticed everything.

She had stopped by the courthouse this morning to see what she could find out about Calvin Dreggs from the Solicitor’s office. From what she’d found it looked like this Calvin guy was a litigious dirtbag who made his money from suing everyone he could.

“Lois! Where have you been?” Perry hollered across the newsroom as she laid the copies she’d made from the courthouse on her desk. “Get in here!” He pointed to his office.

She sighed, bringing the file she was reading with her as she closed the door to Perry’s office. “Um, what’s up, Chief, I’m kinda swamped this morning…” she said impatiently.

“You’re kinda swamped? I’m out two of my best reporters this morning. Where’ve you been all morning?”

“Uh, courthouse,” she said, patting the folder in her hand. “What’s up?”

“Where’s Clark?” Perry asked.

“He, um…”

‘*Come on, Lane, think.*’

Unable to think of a better excuse she opted to go with the truth…or a modified version of it. “—was meeting with Superman’s attorney this morning to help with strategy and get some quotes for our follow-up,” she said weakly.

‘*Not a complete lie.*’

“Oh, okay,” Perry said gruffly. “Superman found himself an attorney? That’s good news. Who did he go with if you don’t mind my asking?”

“Um, Constance Hunter…” Lois said, hurriedly as she flipped through the copy of the judgment in front of her on *Dreggs vs. Nell*. Settlement after settlement. Not many of these cases made their way inside a courtroom. What was different now?

“I thought she couldn’t take his case?” Perry asked, confused.

“Um, she changed her mind when he begged for her help. She couldn’t say no to pathetic—” she said hurriedly before she realized what just came out of her mouth. “I, uh… I mean…” she stammered as Perry gave her a funny look. “Do me a favor Chief and please forget I just said that?”

He looked at her with a smile and nodded. “Said what?”

“Thank. You’re the best.” She grinned.

“Where’s that piece on Intergang? I know you two were working late last night…” Perry drawled.

Lois could feel her cheeks burning, and she glanced toward Clark’s desk through the window of Perry’s office unconsciously as he spoke, recalling the ‘work’ they had been focused on last night.

‘*I’m never going to be able to look at that desk the same ever again,*’ she thought to herself.

“Lois?” Perry called her name, trying to get her attention.

“Are you all right?”

“Fine,” she stammered. “I’m just…trying to finish this research on this Dreggs guy so we can help Superman. I’ll get that story to you in a sec,” she said, hollering over her shoulder as she left his office.

Thankfully when she left Perry’s office, she spotted Clark descending the steps from the balcony into the bull pen. She gave him a smile, and he gave her a forced half-smile.

‘*Uh-oh. That’s not good,*’ she thought to herself as he approached her desk.

“Morning.” Lois smiled at him.

He leaned in to kiss her. “Morning.”

“Bad?” she asked. She already knew the answer.

He shrugged. “I don’t know. Constance said Superman needs character witnesses and witnesses from what happened that day at the fair. She said that based on everything he doesn’t really have a case but Barker is a slimeball that doesn’t play fair, so there’s no telling which way the judge will rule. And if she rules against *Superman* then that’ll just open up whole other can of worms with the line of people waiting to sue him.” He sighed. “Sorry for dumping all this on you. It’s just…”

“I know.” She reached out to grab his hand. “It’s fine.” She pulled out the file she had been looking at earlier. “By the way, after breakfast, I stopped at the courthouse to talk to the Solicitor’s office about this Calvin Dreggs…see if there’s anything on him

we might be able to use. That sort of thing?”

He nodded. “Find anything useful?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “He’s got quite a record back in England. Loved to sue people. Loved to get sued so he could counter-sue. Now I think that establishes a real pattern—” She stopped when she noticed Clark shaking his head. “What?”

“It would if it were admissible.” Clark sighed.

“You can’t use this? It proves he’s vindictively litigious—” she began to argue.

He sighed. “I wish we could, Lois, but...” He stopped when he spotted Scardino coming towards them, “Oh, no. I am not in the mood to deal with Inspector Gadget...” he muttered.

She looked up to see Dan Scardino approaching them with a file in hand. “Dan? What are you doing here?”

He waved the file in his hand. “You two cut out of there last night before you could give your official statements. Told my sergeant I’d get the report to him by noon, so here I am...” He shrugged handing them two forms to fill out with their statement.

They nodded, taking the forms and filling them out with their corresponding stories about what happened, keeping out the part about Lois’ confrontation with Dan to protect both her and Dan from any further investigation by the higher-ups. “Here ya go,” Lois said, handing the form back to him. Clark finished his and handed it to him as well.

He nodded his thanks and turned to leave but stopped himself. “Listen, about last night, I think I owe you both an apology.”

Lois looked at him with an arched eyebrow. “Just one?”

“Okay, Lois, I’m sorry for calling you a ‘paparazzi.’ It was uncalled for. I lost my head,” Dan began.

Lois twisted her mouth for a moment. “Sorry for calling you a ‘jackass’ even though you were acting like one,” she added. Clark glared at her. “Lo-is.”

“What?” Lois shot back. “You weren’t there...”

Dan smiled between the two of them. “It’s okay. I deserve it.” He then glanced at Lois sheepishly then turned back to Clark.

“Look, Kent, I think maybe we didn’t get off on the right foot, but I’m really not as big of a *jackass*”—he looked pointedly at Lois before continuing—“as I may have...acted.” He cleared his throat as Lois looked at Scardino with a smug grin. “And maybe you’re not what I thought you were either...” He cleared his throat again. “What I’m trying to say is...”

“Yes?” Lois asked, arching her eyebrow at him, daring him to say the wrong thing.

“I’m sorry. There’s obviously a lot more to you than meets the eye. No more unannounced visits or sticking my nose in where it doesn’t belong, I promise,” he finished.

Clark looked at him for a moment before extending his hand to shake Dan Scardino’s. “I appreciate that Dan.”

Dan nodded. “You and Lois are pretty good at your jobs. Olsen too. Maybe if we put our heads together, we can try and nab Intergang together?”

Clark chuckled. “I’d like that.”

Dan then turned back to Lois. “I am really sorry about the way I was acting. I guess I didn’t handle rejection as gracefully as I should have. I hope eventually we can be friends.”

“We’ll have to see,” Lois said, leaning back against her chair as she grew thoughtful. “For now, colleagues?” she said, extending her hand to shake his.

“Colleagues.” He nodded his agreement. “And...you know I really appreciate you guys not blowing the whistle on me with my sergeant. I could have seriously been in major hot water over what happened and— Well, if you need anything let me know.”

Lois was thoughtful for a moment before calling out to him. “Hey Dan?” He turned back to look at her. “There is one thing you could help with...”

“Name it.” He shrugged.

“You heard about this Dreggs guy that’s suing Superman?”

Lois prompted. Dan nodded. “Well, Superman’s gonna need all the help he can get. Character witnesses the whole works. Would you be willing to help him out?”

“No problem.” He smiled. “I’d be honored. He’s helped me out of enough jams these past few weeks...I figure I owe him.”

“I’m sure he’d appreciate any help he can get right now.”

Clark smiled back at him.

Later that evening in the visitor’s room Bill Church Jr. sat in the corner of the darkened room waiting patiently. The door opened, and Charles Knox entered, looking grim when he saw Bill Church Jr. waiting for him. “Mr. Church? To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Calm down, Knox, I’m not here to kill you,” Bill Jr said with a smile.

Knox visibly relaxed, taking a seat across from him. “Okay, what’s this about?”

“Social call,” he said firmly. “The, uh, sergeant at the DEA is an old golfing friend of Dad’s. He seems to have ‘lost’ your paperwork so unfortunately, they won’t be able to charge you”—Knox smiled broadly when Bill Jr. gave him the news—“but there’s a catch,” he added. “He could always ‘find’ that paperwork again Knox.”

“Yes, Mr. Church.” Knox nodded.

“You’ll have to disappear,” Bill Jr said grimly, “but before you do...” He laid a copy of the *Metropolis Star* on the table for him. “We have something we need to discuss.”

“SuperBully Meets Super Jury?” Knox read the headline.

“Read the next line,” Bill Jr. instructed.

“Star Reporters and DEA Come to Superman’s Defense?” Knox read.

“Exactly!” Bill Jr. continued, “Now, wouldn’t it be ironic if something happened to them right under Superman’s nose? Might put the last nail in the coffin of his career?”

“Yes, yes it would...” Knox nodded.

“Transportation will be here when you get released. We’ll talk details over drinks,” Bill Jr. said as he stood up.

“Yes, Mr. Church.” Knox nodded. “Thank you.”

“Oh, and Knox?” Bill Jr. called over his shoulder.

“Yes?”

“Don’t screw up again. I’d hate to have to...replace...you after all that hard work and training.”

“Yes, sir.” Knox nodded.

That evening Lois and Clark continued going over everything they’d found out about Calvin Dreggs hoping they’d find something that could be used in court the next day. The Kents had insisted on staying at a hotel to ‘give them their privacy’ as Martha had put it, causing Clark to turn fifty shades of red at the time. Lois had just laughed it off, trying to keep him focused on the task at hand, getting Dreggs’ claims thrown out of court.

“Don’t you find it odd that this is the *one* case Calvin Dreggs isn’t willing to settle out of court on?” Lois asked, pointing to the list of cases he’d settled with.

Clark took the list from her. “Let me see that.” She handed him the list and he scanned it, looking to see if he could find something in common. “This list of companies he’s sued. Looks pretty familiar...*really* familiar.” He grew thoughtful for a moment before a light bulb went off in his mind and he recalled where he’d seen those names before. “O’Neal Industries, Bayview Finance, Metropolis Waste Disposal, Armstrong Capital Group, Advanced Digital Processing...”

“Clark, what are you—” Lois began to ask as he got up from the couch and started sifting through files on his desk.

“My file on Luthor,” he said grimly, pulling out a very thick manila folder from the file.

“Lex? What does that have to do with—” she began to ask

when he started pulling out reports on company acquisitions, each one matching the names he'd just listed off.

"LexCorp," he said grimly. "All of these companies this guy has been suing bought at least one piece of LexCorp after he jumped last year."

"Looks like Lex has gotten creative with his attacks on his enemies," Lois sighed, running her hand through her hair. "Clark, you don't think that—"

"That he set up the whole thing, so Calvin Dreggs had an excuse to sue Superman? I wouldn't put anything past him," he spat bitterly. She let out a long breath, cradling her head in her hands and he placed a sympathetic hand on her shoulder. "Lois?" She didn't say anything, and he moved a little closer, wrapping his arm around her in a hug. "This is just what he does. He finds a weak spot and attacks. Don't worry...I'm sure we'll be able to beat this and then turn this over to the DA to add a couple of extra hundred years to Luthor's nine-hundred-year sentence."

She laughed at that, sitting up. "It's not that."

He looked at her in concern, seeing the pained expression. "What is it?"

"It's just another reminder at how...*stupid* I was back then," she remarked resentfully.

"Lois, you are not stupid," he admonished.

"Aren't I?" she questioned. "I spent the good part of a year getting played like a fiddle, unable to see what was right in front of me for so long..."

"He is a master of deception," Clark added. "How long had he been running his criminal organization without anyone being the wiser? *Decades*. He had judges, the mayor, the district attorney... All of them were fooled."

"Not you," she accused, folding her arms over her chest. "You never trusted him."

He gave her a half-smile. "He got my attention by pointing the Macedonian sword of Alexander the Great at my throat when we first met that night. Something in his eyes gave way to something...I wasn't sure at the time. It wasn't until we were kidnapped by Baines and she used the same phrase as Luthor. *Higher ground*. That helped me begin to put the pieces together." He moved to cup her cheek, tilting her head to look at him. "Lois, you are the smartest woman I know. Don't ever question that." He leaned in to kiss her.

"Really?" she asked, looking up at him hesitantly. "Then how come you were able to fool me for almost three years with a pair of glasses?"

"That one's simple. People see what they want to see." He leaned in to kiss her once more, and she grinned back at him.

"I guess you're right." She sighed happily, wrapping her arms around his neck as she leaned back against the cushions of his couch, pulling him with her.

"I have to be," he teased, leaning in to kiss her again. "I'm Superman, remember?"

She laughed, swatting his chest lightly. "How could I forget?"

He readjusted himself, so he was lying next to her on the couch rather than on top of her, then reached over to stroke her jawline with his hand, cupping her cheek. "Thank you."

"For what?" she asked.

"Everything," he whispered. "Helping me with all this. I don't know how I would have gotten through all this without you. The fact that you were able to forgive me..."

She grinned back at him. "Well, what can I say, you made some very persuasive points."

"I love you, Lois, more than words could ever say." He leaned in to kiss her, and she smiled against him, linking her arms around his neck as she dipped her tongue into his mouth and the intensity of the kiss turned deep and hungry.

"I love you too, Clark," she whimpered against his lips as one kiss became another and another, melting into a fiery inferno of

desire as their hands roamed aimlessly up one another, seeking the feeling of skin beneath their fingertips. The need to feel her skin against his became too much for him, and at super-speed he whisked them into the bedroom, laying her on the bed with him.

"Lois, I love you. I always have," he murmured as he began a heated trail of feather-light kisses down her chest, unbuttoning layer after layer of skin with his hungry exploration of her body.

"I love you, Clark...for so long..." She reached beneath the hem of his t-shirt, pushing it up over his head. He helped her to disentangle him from the garment, tossing it to the floor before turning his attention back to Lois who was watching him with darkened eyes of desire. "Shirts are so overrated."

"I couldn't agree more," he whispered, pressing his lips against her navel as he finished unbuttoning her blouse the rest of the way down. She giggled, shrugging the blouse off her shoulders as she reached between their bodies. "Oh, Lois—"

She pushed him back on the bed, kicking her jeans off before climbing on top of him, whispering heated lips against his chest, "I love you." He watched her in admiration, mesmerized by the sight of her in nothing but a pair of pink panties and matching lace bra as she teased his pectorals with her tongue. "So...gorgeous," she murmured as her hand brushed against the waistband of his shorts.

"Breathtaking," he breathed as he felt her wrap her arms around him. "So...so...breathtaking." Her lips grazed against his pectorals, teasing him lightly with her tongue before moving to the other. "Oh, honey." He let out a soft moan, and she tightened her grasp on him, eliciting a sharp gasp as his hips lifted off the mattress involuntarily.

She lifted her head up to look at him as she worked to free him from his remaining clothing. "Honey? That's a new one," she murmured, leaning up to kiss him, freeing him from her grasp as she finished tugging his shorts and briefs over his hips.

"There's a list," he murmured against her lips, flicking the clasp to her bra, watching in awe as the soft lace fell from her shoulders.

"A list?" She laughed as he began to nibble at her earlobe, tugging on it seductively with his teeth as he moaned agreement.

"Sweetheart," he whispered. "Darling." His teeth grazed lightly over the pulse point at her throat, nibbling on the sensitive skin seductively. Her fingers wrapped around the back of his neck, fingering his hairline as she breathed his name in pleasure. "My little...tornado."

"How long is this list?" she questioned breathlessly.

"It's a work in progress. I haven't perfected it yet." He nibbled at her collarbone as he spoke, slipping his hands down to her waist.

"How long does it take to... Oh!" She gasped as he slipped his index finger beneath the waistband of her panties as he watched her eyes darken with desire from his ministrations.

"For you, Lois, it takes a lifetime," he whispered before leaning up to capture her lips with his.

"Promise?" she murmured against his lips, devouring him with her mouth.

"Promise," he repeated solemnly. "I'll love you forever." He said in-between heated kisses before rolling them over, so he was hovering above her. The world around them slowly disassembled, and the only thing he could hear, touch, or feel was the woman he loved in his arms. After what seemed like an eternity, everything slowly came back into focus as he rolled onto his side, holding her to him.

Lois stared up at the ceiling in a daze, feeling her mind slowly come back into focus after their recent lovemaking. She glanced over at Clark who had a sloppy grin on his face as he stared at the ceiling as well. She couldn't help but laugh.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"Me." She sighed happily. "I went years without sex; now I

can't even go twenty-four hours without..." She let out a long sigh. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"Do what?" he asked.

"Make love like that," she breathed. "You never miss your aim." She grinned up at him lazily as she added, "Remind me to thank whoever taught you that."

His face grew thoughtful for a moment, and she looked at him curiously. "You'd have to be thanking yourself then."

"What?"

He cupped her cheek and whispered, "You're my one and only, Lois."

Realization began to dawn on her, and she summarized, "So, before the other night you were a..." She stopped, frowning over the revelation. "Then how?"

"Intuition, books, and a healthy use of super-hearing," he whispered, accentuating each point with a kiss.

"Super-hearing?" she asked.

"When you're really enjoying yourself your heart rate picks up," he murmured, leaning in to kiss her collarbone. "Like this"—he moved his head higher, brushing his lips against her neck—"and this." She giggled as he nuzzled her ear, tugging at it gently with his teeth.

She sighed happily. "And to think I wasted all that time stressing about that first date for nothing."

"Is that why I had a door slammed in my face?" he asked half-joking.

She grinned. "I didn't trust myself."

"Really?" he asked intrigued, propping his head up on his hand.

She swatted at him. "Six months of denial does that," she retorted, drawing random patterns on his chest as she spoke.

"I think it was longer than six months," he argued. "I seem to recall someone showing up at my apartment in a harem costume"—he wiggled his eyebrows at her—"doing the dance of the seven veils."

"I was drugged!" She swatted him.

"You're lucky I wasn't." He laughed.

"Why?" she teased.

He moaned, growing thoughtful as he spoke. "Remember when you sat on my desk in that skirt with a slit that ran all the way up your thigh? If I'd been drugged like everyone else, you wouldn't have made it off my desk without losing some articles of clothing— No scratch that. You just wouldn't have made it off my desk."

She laughed at the memory. "I was so blind back then..." She moved her hand to stroke his cheek. "It took me being drugged to admit how I felt."

"Oh, you mean how there was an"—he placed a kiss on her forehead—"eensy"—then moved to her nose—"weensy"—he kissed her left cheek—"microscopic"—he kissed her right cheek—"highly unlikely"—he nibbled at her earlobe—"unmotivated"—he tugged at her earlobe with his teeth—"unrealistic"—he whispered in her ear—"attraction to me." He finished, leaning in to kiss her.

"Do you remember everything I say?" she asked embarrassed.

He nodded. "It's the curse of having a photographic memory I'm afraid."

She laughed. "At least you can't ever forget anniversaries."

"Nope, our almost-first date... February twelfth. Our actual first date... one month after that, March twelfth," he recalled lazily, brushing her hair out of her face as he spoke.

"It took us a month to go out?" Lois laughed. "Oy..."

"You were worth the wait," he whispered.

"So were you." She smiled back at him, leaning in to kiss him.

The next day Lois found herself seated in the gallery of the courtroom, watching Clark from afar as he fought to defend his name against the likes of Calvin Dreggs. She, Perry, Dan, and

Jimmy had been called to testify to what they saw that day at the street fair. It should have been an open-and-shut case, but Barry Barker was as slimy an attorney as they came. He was doing everything he could to make Superman out to be some kind of miscreant on society for intervening to save Calvin's life.

"Where's Clark?" Perry asked, looking around the crowd of people around them in neck braces, slings and bandages. "Oh, brother..."

"He's at the DA's office checking out a connection to this Dreggs guy and a couple of theories we were throwing around last night," Lois said hurriedly, looking away so Perry couldn't see she wasn't being completely honest with him. She glanced back at the gallery in disgust. "Look at this... the next wave of injured plaintiffs." She cast a sympathetic look towards Clark who was in the Superman suit with Constance at the defendant's table watching as Elise Carr was sworn in. Who knew what the woman would say?

"Amazing. Superman's spent his whole career fighting megacriminals, and he's getting brought down by a mealy-mouthed talk show whiner and his sycophantic mouthpiece," Lois muttered in disgust.

Perry shook his head, glancing around the room in disapproval. "Says just a little too much about the society we live in right now."

Lois nodded turning her attention to Elise who was testifying about Calvin's injuries. "—and Calvin hasn't been able to use his hand since."

Barker embellished each statement, looking at the jury as he spoke. "Completely paralyzed?"

Lois rolled her eyes in disgust, waiting for some hope that Elise would correct him but she didn't. "Yes. Completely."

"That lying no good—" Lois muttered under her breath.

"Shhh..." Jimmy warned, placing a hand on hers to calm her down.

"And what about his moods?" Barker prompted, giving Elise a look as if he was coaching her in her testimony.

"Oh, they're... mmmm, they're bad..." Elise continued, looking toward Barker and Calvin at the plaintiff table. "Um, he's not himself."

"Probably a welcome change," Lois muttered. Perry gave her a warning glare, and she sighed, crossing her arms over her chest. "I smell ham..." She glanced toward Elise and Calvin. "And cheese."

Charles Knox stood in the hallway of the courtroom, watching as different individuals left the courtroom, making way for him to drop off his package for Superman. "Are you sure this will work? It can't look like those reporters are the only target..."

The hired hit man smiled back at him, patting the steel case in his hand. "It's silent, no moving parts, just two globs of liquid C-12, separated by this little piece of plastic. Start your acid eating through and in five minutes, whammo. Always wanted to try this little sucker... right under Superman's nose."

"Just do it," Knox ordered, motioning for him to enter the courtroom with the case.

Lois caught Elise by the arm before she could leave the courtroom. "Can I ask you a question? How can you sit there and lie on the stand for a man that won't even admit that he's married to you?"

Elise looked at her in surprise. "You... *How* did you—"

She didn't give Elise a chance to voice her questions, outraged at her attempt to sully Clark's good name. "The kind of degradation you'll tolerate in your personal life is your business, but you're ruining an innocent man and I'm not going to sit by and do nothing while you—"

"Leave me alone." Elise began to walk away.

Angered by her lack of empathy Lois called out, “He doesn’t love you, Elise.” Elise stopped, staring at the doors to the courtroom, but still not turning to face her. “You can tell when a man loves you by the way he treats you, by the way, he looks at you, by the way, he—”

Elise turned around, cutting her off. “Look, Miss—” She looked at her for a name.

Lois sighed. “Lane, Lois Lane.” She crossed her arms over her chest.

“Miss Lane, if you’ve found the perfect man then I’m happy for you but Calvin and I—”

Lois shook her head. “No, he’s about as far from perfect as you can get, but I’ll tell you the difference between him and Calvin... I know that he wants my happiness more than his own.” She gave a soft smile as she continued, “I can feel it every second I’m with him, and every second I’m not with him. Love is complicated and messy, but it’s never hard... at least not when it’s right. When it’s right, it’s never as hard as Calvin is making it for you. One day he’ll prove just how *wrong* he is ... in a very ugly way and—”

Elise tearfully turned away from her, running past a tall man in a business suit, carrying a metal case. She sighed, looking around the empty courtroom. Maybe she could try and find Clark and update him on what she’d found out at the District Attorney’s office earlier.

Clark sat outside the courthouse, cradling his head in his hands exhausted from the court proceedings from the day. A small voice broke his thoughts. “You look sad, Superman.”

He looked up and saw a little girl no more than five years old in pigtails and a violet jumper staring at him. He smiled at her. “I’ll, uh, I’ll be fine.” He tried to reassure her even though he wasn’t so sure himself.

“Want a hug?” she asked with a grin.

“Sure.” He nodded.

She looped her arms around his neck and gave him a big hug, patting him on the shoulder before giving him a peck on the cheek. “Don’t be Mr. Gloomy Pants.”

“I’ll try,” he reassured her, watching as she turned to skip away back to her mother who was waiting for her.

“Careful,” Lois said from behind him. “I might get jealous.”

He looked around. “Lois, what are you doing here? I thought you weren’t testifying until this afternoon.”

She shrugged. “I couldn’t stay away,” she said, taking a seat next to him.

“Thanks for coming,” he said.

“What are friends for?” she asked, placing a hand on his chest for a moment before pulling it away.

He turned away, trying to keep his demeanor around her professional since he was still in the suit. “I can’t believe he got her to lie like that on the stand.”

“I found a few extra witnesses if you’d like to add them to the witness list... which I checked. You can add them because they were in the original discovery,” she added before he could argue. He looked at her curiously, and she continued, “The ER doctor that treated Calvin and the intake nurse are both willing to testify the injury was a sprain; not a break as this other doctor is saying.”

“That’s great.” He smiled.

“And the DA has a special room ready for Calvin when the case is finished. He’s waiting for this to get settled then he’ll come in and make a big stink.”

He smiled. “You’re amazing.”

“Oh, if Perry asks, that’s where you were all day. The District Attorney’s office,” she added, recalling the excuse she gave their editor.

“DA’s office.” He nodded. “Got it.” He stood up, spotting everyone heading back inside the courtroom. “I guess it’s time to

head back inside.”

After a long line of his friends and his former competitor, Dan Scardino gave testimony of what they witnessed at the street fair on Sunday afternoon Superman was called to the stand. Lois watched in rapt attention as Constance paced in front of the witness stand. “Sitting here, listening to all this demeaning testimony, I’d like to know... why do you want to *be* Superman? It seems to me it’s never offered you much but exposure to danger and ridicule...”

Clark caught Lois’ gaze for a moment before turning to Constance. “No, that’s not true.”

“Explain?” Constance prompted.

Clark nodded. “All the things I can do... the powers I have... All my life, I’ve asked myself a thousand times, why? And the only answer I could come up with is to help. As quickly and decisively as possible. Maybe because of that, I’ve become a target...”

Lois nodded her encouragement as he continued, mouthing ‘*You can do this.*’

“People I care about... friends I’ve come to rely on have been put in danger because of their relationship with me, greedy opportunists try and take advantage of my good will”—he cast a glance toward Calvin and Barker at the plaintiff’s table continuing—“but when I save a life... in that instance I know two things most people will never figure out: why I’m here and how I can make a difference.”

A smug smile crossed Constance’s face as she turned to Barker. “Your witness.”

Clark cocked his head, sniffing the air. Lois could hear Calvin mutter, “Fry him,” from the plaintiff’s table.

“In hot oil, kid,” Barker snapped before standing up to address the court, giving a fake applause. “Well, that was a heart-rending speech. Can I get anybody a tissue?”

Something was burning. She sniffed the air. Clark seemed to smell it too. “Do you smell something?” he asked, rising from the witness stand.

“What?” Barker scoffed.

“I’ve smelled it before...” Clark explained.

“Your Honor—” Barker began to argue.

Clark cut him off, walking down the aisle sniffing as he spoke. “I’m sorry, Your Honor, but I think what I’m smelling is C-12, it’s an explosive”—he approached the bar, stepping into the gallery and looked down, searching for the source “and it’s burning somewhere...”

“Oh, please, this is the most disgraceful form of courtroom theatrics I’ve ever witnessed,” Barker continued, following Clark into the gallery as he followed the smell of the burning explosives.

Lois stood up in outrage. “Listen to him!”

“I suppose next you’ll tell us we’re all going to *die*.” Barker mocked him.

Perry stood up. “Hey! Hey! Hey! Mister, if you don’t back off and let the man do his job, you’re gonna be suing me for assault!” Barker looked around the courtroom. “I hope everyone heard that!”

Calvin raised his hand. “I did!”

“Naturally,” Jimmy muttered.

“Superman, should we evacuate the building?” Lois asked. He was still scanning the gallery for the bomb.

He shook his head. “Everyone stay calm, I think... yes, it’s right”—he pulled out a metal case from beneath Dan’s seat—“here.”

“Oh, my God...” Elise gasped, covering her mouth as Clark opened the case to reveal the bubbling and smoking bomb from within. Shouts echoed through the room and at super-speed Clark flew the bomb out of the courtroom, crashing through the ceiling. Plaster from the ceiling fell around the courtroom. Some of it landed on the plaintiff’s table where Calvin was sitting.

Lois watched in disgust as Barker nudged Calvin and the con-artist began faking another injury right before their eyes. “My eyes! Something’s happened to my eyes!” He reached out his arm to feel the air in front of him.

Barker swooped in. “Calvin, are you all right? Someone get a doctor!”

The sound of an enormous blast echoed from above. The smell of burning chemicals filled the air as Clark returned, carrying the burnt case in his hand, landing in front of Dan. Dan looked at the case glumly. “If I had to guess I’d say that was meant for me...”

Clark nodded. “Agent Scardino, you should have your men at the lab take a look at this...” He handed him the burnt case. Dan nodded, taking it from him and walking out of the courtroom as he pulled out his phone to dial.

Lois pushed through the crowd that had begun to form at the bar of the courtroom. “Superman are you all right?”

Before he could respond, Calvin began shouting, “I..I can’t see..the dust in my eyes..Oh, dear Lord...I’m *blind!! Blind!!*”

Lois rolled her eyes, fuming at the depths with which this man was willing to stoop to discredit Clark. Barker interjected, “Is there no end to the suffering Superman causes??”

“Calvin, *shut up!*” Elise hollered across the courtroom. Lois grinned, seeing Clark’s surprised look before turning back to Elise who was standing in front of Calvin in anger. Calvin tried to shush her, motioning her to sit down. But it was too late. She was on a roll. “I have had it with you, Calvin! We’d be *dead* if it wasn’t for Superman! And there’s nothing wrong with your eyes, except you can’t see anything but yourself!”

Barker tried to backtrack. “Your Honor this witness has been excused—”

Elise reached over to rip off his sling, revealing a perfectly healed hand out of its cast. “And your arm will be fine!” She turned to face the judge. “And he’ll play guitar just as lousy as he ever did! He just wanted the money, and he got me to lie for him!”

“Elise, honey—” Calvin tried to shush her once more.

“You don’t speak for me anymore, Calvin. I want a divorce... not that anyone ever knew we were married,” she added bitterly. Elise caught her gaze, and she gave her a nod of approval.

Constance turned to the judge. “Your Honor, in light of this new evidence...”

The judge nodded. “Save it, counselor.” She banged her gavel. “Case dismissed.”

“All right!” Jimmy cheered.

Lois patted Clark on the arm. “Congratulations!” She smiled at him, leaning in to give him a quick peck on the cheek, pulling away as she scanned the courtroom. This was another part of the secret identity thing that was hard. She wanted to hug him and never let go but she couldn’t. Not with everyone staring.

“Do you need a lawyer?” Barker called out, chasing Elise across the aisle.

Lois laughed, watching the scene unfold. A crowd of officers entered the courtroom with Inspector Henderson standing in the middle holding a warrant. “Calvin Dreggs, I have a warrant for your arrest.”

“On what grounds?” Calvin argued.

“Malicious litigations, falsifying a police report, conspiracy to extort...” Henderson listed off the charges.

“Barry! Barry! Barry!” Calvin called out for help.

“Sorry kid! Crime doesn’t pay!” Barker called out to him.

Lois sat in the gallery watching as the courtroom emptied itself, leaving Clark, herself and Ms. Hunter who was busy gathering her things. She walked over to them with a smile. “Looks like your losing streak is over, Ms. Hunter.”

Constance smiled back at her. “It didn’t hurt that Superman here saved the judge’s life...tends to make them more lenient.” She winked at Clark, patting his shoulder.

He smiled back at her. “Thank you for believing in me, Ms. Hunter.”

They shared a smile, and Constance sighed. “No, Superman, thank you,” She then headed out of the courtroom to address the media circus that was dying to know the outcome of the trial. She watched as Clark headed out with Constance to address the media and smiled to herself.

A tap on her shoulder made her turn around. She was surprised to find Elise standing there. She smiled at her. “Elise...” She gave her a sympathetic smile. “You did the right thing.”

She smiled. “Thanks.” She sighed then added, “I wanted to thank you. You didn’t even know me, and you and your boyfriend intervened to help the other day, then today...I’m sorry. I have no idea how I got talked into all this...”

Lois nodded her understanding. “Sometimes we lose sight of what the right thing to do is when it comes to the matters of the heart.”

Elise nodded. “I’m sort of looking forward to being single again... There’s a world of possibilities out there.”

“You’ll do fine. Just remember to find happiness with yourself first. You can’t expect anyone else to love you or make you happy if you can’t do the same.” Lois said softly, recalling the words of wisdom she’d received from her months of therapy after the fiasco with Lex and his ex-wife Arianna Carlin.

“I will.” She nodded, leaving Lois alone in the empty courtroom.

Two strong arms wrapped around her from behind and she sighed. “I’ve missed you!” she whispered, turning in his arms to hug him, linking her arms around his neck as she wrapped him up in a big hug.

“I’ve been wanting to do that since they called out the verdict,” he said, wrapping his arms around her in a tight embrace. “Thank you.”

She leaned up to kiss him, whispering in his ear, “Let’s get out of here.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“I have a few ideas...” she began slowly.

Lex Luthor walked into the visitor’s room, uncertain who had scheduled a visit to see him. He had been wracking his brain all afternoon, but nothing had come to him. When he saw the familiar duo sitting at the table, he smiled to himself. “Lois, radiant as always!”

“Save it for the rats, Lex,” Lois snapped back, placing a copy of the afternoon edition on the table for him to read. ‘*Omnicorp’s Knox Arrested* by Lois Lane and Clark Kent.’

He looked over at Clark Kent who was sitting at the table with his hands folded on the table staring him down. “Kent,” he said coolly. He noted how Lois shifted her chair closer to Clark and grimaced in disgust. Had he really fallen so far that she’d prefer Clark Kent’s company to his?

He picked up the paper uncertain what she wanted him to read, and she nodded. “Page 2B.”

“*Calvin Dreggs Indicted On Conspiracy Charges?*” Lex smoothed a smile on his face. “I’m not sure what this has to do with *me*.”

Clark shook his head, and Lois smiled. “Tsk tsk tsk you have been a naughty boy haven’t you, Lex?”

Clark Kent’s smile grew smug. “Let’s see, trying to sue your competitors out of business so you can buy back LexCorp... paying off a con artist, chasing Intergang...” She shook her head as she listed off the points.

He did his best not to react, and Clark added, “Inspector Henderson caught your butler, Nigel, trying to smuggle an unusual substance through customs last night.” He laid a photograph of the Kryptonite cage taken from Lex’s wine cellar and another photograph of the familiar green glowing meteorite he’d acquired

from Devane. “Seems he doesn’t like the idea of the death penalty, so he’s singing like a canary on all your plans against Superman... including your attempted murder of him last year and all your racketeering crimes the Feds were unable to pin on you last year.”

Lois folded her arms over her chest staring him down. “You won’t see the outside of a prison for at least another hundred years...but that doesn’t matter to you does it?” she asked sweetly. “No, what is important to you is control...and power. Neither of which you’ll have after the IRS traces those wire transfers you used to pay Calvin.”

“Wha...” He did his best not to react but found it difficult. “You can’t do that,” he argued.

“I’m not doing a thing.” She shrugged. “It’s called justice.” With that, she stood up with Clark right behind her. He watched them through the top window of the door in agony as Lois pulled Kent to her by the tie, capturing his mouth in a heated embrace.

“*Nooooo!*” he growled, grabbing a chair and throwing it toward the steel door. How had this happened? How had he gone from the third-richest man in the world to a man rotting in a cage? If what they said was true... He would lose everything. Respect. Power. It would all be gone. He glared at the photos in front of him. How had he let that alien slip through his fingers?

“Did you see his face when he realized he was about to lose all his money?” Lois laughed as they exited the Metropolis Penitentiary.

Clark nodded. “I gotta admit I was skeptical when you first suggested this, but this was a really good idea.”

“I always have good ideas.” She sniffed.

“Uh-huh.” He looked at her skeptically.

She looked up at him with a smile. “In fact, I have a really good idea right now.”

“Oh, yeah?” he asked. “What’s that?”

“You remember that dance of the seven veils...” The sound of laughter could be heard in the evening sky as the familiar sonic boom echoed around Clinton Street.

THE END

...or the beginning? You decide.