

Enough

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: Set during Season Two's "Resurrection" episode: When Clark Kent discovers Dan Scardino and Lois in a compromising position at her apartment, an emotional confrontation unfolds. Lois and Clark are forced to make a critical decision that will shape both of their futures. Will they be able to see past their own insecurities in order to mend their fragile relationship?

Story Size: 23,419 words (128Kb as text)

Chapter 1

<<"I need to know if I'm yesterday's news.">>
 <<"Lois, I'm sorry if it feels like I've been ignoring you lately, but...">>
 <<"I don't want to die."
 "Lois, I would never let that happen.">>
 <<"Oh, Clark, I don't care if he used 'Crazy Glue' you're back!">>
 <<"Lois, I want you to go out with me!">>
 <<"To our almost first date.">>
 <<"But everything seemed to just... 'work.' That's why I can never see you again.">>
 <<"You slammed the door in my face last night."
 "That was amistake.">>

Lois took a deep breath, allowing the water to drum against her scalp and wash away the suds. Her mind was still swimming from the day. The investigation into Mayson's death had led both her and Clark into a strange scheme of supposedly dead prisoners rising from the dead. This was now twice that something strange had occurred at that cemetery. She was sure they were involved but trying to get Clark to see past his pissing contest with Dan Scardino was proving to be an uphill battle.

She didn't understand him. It had been two weeks since their date, and he hadn't said a word about it. *'Two weeks since Mayson's death,'* she recalled mentally pushing away the image of Clark's distraught face as the paramedics peeled poor Mayson's lifeless body out of his arms. It felt so surreal even now to think about.

How had they gone from sharing their *incredible* first kiss to fighting off the demons and mental scars that continued to seep through night after night? The image of Clark cradling Mayson's body on the curb of City Hall flashed through her mind. She shook her head, trying to push the memory out of her mind. Selfishly, she wanted more than anything to forget the haunting images and erase the pain on Clark's face. Maybe that was why she so desperately sought out some reaffirmation from him, proof that everything they had shared that night hadn't been lost.

<<"I need to know if I'm yesterday's news.">>
 <<"Lois, I'm sorry if it feels like I've been ignoring you lately, but...">>

She never *did* get her answer from him. Like clockwork, she found the intimate setting she'd attempted to set shattered with another intrusion. This time it had been Dan Scardino. If it wasn't him, it was Perry or Jimmy or Clark himself having to run off and do...whatever it was he had to do. At this point, she wasn't sure

what to think of his need to run errands in the middle of important conversations.

She stepped out of the shower and wrapped her towel around her, as she patted herself dry, reaching for the dark violet pinstriped pajamas.

<<"You'll be wearing something elegant. Not too dark... charcoal suit and I'll be dressed in deep violet."

"Burgundy."

"Burgundy?"

"Or violet.">>

'He didn't know it was an important conversation,' she reminded herself, recalling the distraught expression on his face when she'd attempted to talk to him about how he was dealing with everything the day after Mayson's murder.

She hadn't been able to sleep and had shown up at his apartment with coffee and donuts from his favorite bakery. Halfway through the conversation, he'd mumbled an excuse about needing to check in with Henderson on the autopsy report. It didn't make sense given the average turnaround on those reports. Every time she found the courage to ask him how he was doing or invite him to a movie or a meal in hopes of distracting him from the events of Mayson's tragic death, Clark ran off.

She grabbed the hairdryer from the counter and turned it on, aiming it at her damp hair as she leaned over to dry it. The memory of how horribly their date ended flashed through her mind. What she wouldn't give for a chance to go back and change that evening. It had been a wonderful evening and she had seen a glimpse of what was possible if she was honest with herself about her feelings for Clark. He wasn't just her partner. He wasn't just her friend. He had the potential to be so much more. If she was honest with herself, she knew he'd been more to her for a long time. She wasn't ready to be honest with herself—at least not then. She hated how horribly she'd ruined the end of their first date and a part of her desperately hoped for a chance to make amends. But she never got that chance. Every attempt to reach out had been shut down by every interruption under the sun, it seemed.

Now here they were stuck in this weird limbo, unable to move forward and unable to move backward. She and Clark were just stuck, and she didn't know how to get out of it. She missed her friend more than anything, and her heart ached to reclaim what she had lost the night Mayson died.

She got halfway through drying her hair and the sound of glass shattering followed by a creaking noise reached her ears. She set the dryer down, clicking it off and reaching for the toilet plunger. She heard another creak and what sounded like footsteps coming from the living room. Someone was in her apartment. She lurked outside the doorway to her living room, seeing a figure move in the darkness. She tightened her grip on the end of the plunger and took a hard swing, knocking the would-be assailant to the ground, followed by her couch in the process. as sShe prepared to deliver a hard blow with the end of the plunger.

"Wait, wait, wait!" the familiar voice cried out, and the light flickered on.

Still holding the plunger in her hand, she stared at the familiar face in shock, "Scardino?!"

"Please, call me Daniel," he corrected.

Anger flooded through her as she still held the plunger in her hands, "What do you mean, breaking into my house?"

A look crossed over him, and he looked down at the current position she was in, hovering over him with the plunger in her hands, "Lois, as much as I fantasized about being in this position with you, you're crushing my legs."

Embarrassed and angry she took the plunger and jabbed it into his gut before standing to her feet. She felt a slight thrill of satisfaction when she heard him groan in pain. Her eyes caught sight of the broken glass by her back door.

“Look, I’m sorry. I rang the bell, you didn’t answer.” He provided weakly.

He’d broken into her apartment. She glanced back at the broken glass once more and paced in front of him, uncertain where to even begin as she threw out a half-response, “I was drying my hair. I just got out of the shower.”

A look crossed his face, and he offered a quiet, “Yeah, I can see that.”

Finally finding the words she growled back, “I cannot *believe* I *defended* you to Clark. He was right. You are crazy!” She shook her head in disbelief, “I don’t answer the doorbell, so you come from the *roof*?”

“I was worried about you, okay?” Dan Scardino defended himself, “Sean McCarthy is an animal. For all I know he was trying to kill you.”

Frustrated with yet another man trying to step over the boundaries she’d clearly drawn and still reeling from her own self-doubt over the last few weeks she lashed out, furious, “Just what do the words, *‘I do not need you to protect me, mean to you?’*”

“Look, I already lost one woman I cared about to McCarthy. It is not gonna happen again. You got it?” Scardino snapped irritably.

‘Cared about?’ She wasn’t sure how to react to the tidbit of information he’d just shared. They’d only been working with one another for a few days. She’d picked up on the subtle flirting he threw her way. Two weeks ago she never would have given the flirting Dan tossed in her direction a second thought. Two weeks ago she would have shrugged it off. However, a lot had changed in that time. The isolation she found herself in left her desperate for reaffirmation; so much so that she found herself flattered by come on lines that never would have caught her attention before. She thought it had been innocent enough, however, Dan Scardino’s revelation hit her with a wave of guilt as she realized how awkward she felt with that knowledge. She had no intention of pursuing anything with him...did she?

‘Of course not!’ her mind shouted back at her. That didn’t help her guilt-ridden conscience as she caught the pained expression on Dan’s face. It mirrored the look on Clark’s face the night Mayson had died and she made a mental note that the two men might have more in common than they thought.

“Who was she?” Lois asked, finding her tone much calmer than it had been before.

“My partner, Jenna.” Dan looked down at his lap before letting out a deep sigh, “She was bright, sensitive. A little mouthy sometimes, but then I’m not exactly a monk.”

“And McCarthy was the bomber?” Lois asked, putting the pieces together with what information he’d given her and Clark in their first official meeting. Before he could respond, she heard a knock at the door. She glanced at the time, seeing how late it was. Who could be at her door at this hour? She gave Dan a quick, “Excuse me,” and went to answer the door.

She opened the door and immediately felt like the wind had been knocked out of her. Clark. Clark was at her door. Dan Scardino was inside her apartment, and Clark was ...*here*. After two weeks of desperately wanting him to show up and talk about anything but work or the weather, here he was. He hadn’t visited her apartment since the night of their first date.

“Clark? What are you doing here?” Her mind quickly began racing as she struggled to act naturally. She was in her pajamas, hair still wet from her shower and Dan Scardino sitting in her ransacked living room. This was bad. This was really, *really* bad. As innocent as Dan Scardino’s presence here was she knew how it would look if Clark found him here. Clark had made no secret of his distaste for Dan Scardino and if he found him here she knew it wouldn’t end well.

“I know it’s late,” Clark said with an apologetic smile. “But I found out Albie Swinson works for a man named Stanley Gables.”

His face was actually animated and happy. She hadn’t seen him like this in weeks. Panic began to rise inside her as she realized how much she missed seeing him like this. His eyes sparkled back at her as he prompted her to respond, “Ring a bell?”

“Gables. Yeah, that was the name on the file on Mayson’s desk.” Lois acknowledged, trying to hold up her end of the conversation.

‘Information about the story. That’s what he was doing here.’

If it weren’t for her uninvited guest sitting on her couch, she would have opened the door and let him in. If it weren’t for her uninvited guest sitting in her living room, she would try to hang on to this brief moment of normalcy and try once again to pick up on the conversation that had been cut short again and again over the last few weeks.

“Oh, there’s more. According to the prison sign-in sheet, Albie visited Big Buster, Martinez and McCarthy on the days that each one of them died.” Clark’s eyes sparkled as he delivered the news, confidence spreading across his features as he beamed back at her. “What do you think of that?”

Before she could respond, she watched his face go from confident, happy and animated with excitement over the major change in the case to numb. The reason for the change became immediately apparent when Dan Scardino spoke up, making his presence known as he stood behind her, “Fascinating. And well told too. Of course, you’re a writer, so you’re good with words.”

She wracked her brain for something—anything to say—as she stared back at the shattered expression on Clark’s face. His eyes filled with hurt and disappointment and he looked as if she had sucker-punched him in the gut, rendering him speechless as her mind screamed out, *‘It’s not what it looks like!’* But all she could muster up was, “Agent Scardino just dropped by to chat about the case.”

She watched his face change from numbness to shock and then to disbelief in a matter of seconds as his mouth opened to respond, but nothing came out and he backed away from her apartment, retreating silently down the hall. His heartbroken expression cut her to the core as she called after him, “Clark!” She flung the door open and chased after him, not even bothering to close it as she hobbled barefoot down the hall to catch up to him, “Clark!”

<<“*You know if you think about it, the only time people are really honestly expressing themselves is when they’re passionate...the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they’re fighting...*”

“...or make love,”>>

<<“*Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.*”

“Fortunately...”>>

<<“*Agent Scardino, you have to understand Clark was probably the only one in Metropolis that didn’t know that Mayson was madly in love with him.*”>>

<<“*Forget the date part. Maybe we could do it another time.*”

“Well... maybe we could say it’s our ‘almost first date.’ Kind of like a test run?”>>

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

Clark stopped in the middle of the hallway, staring at the stairs in front of him then looking toward the elevator doors where a digital ‘2’ flashed above it. Lois felt a lump in her throat burning as she called out his name once more, “Clark!”

“*What?!*” Clark barked at her.

She visibly flinched at the power behind the one-word response. Even in some of their worst arguments, she’d never seen him like this. Still, she couldn’t let him run out of here thinking... *‘What?’* Her mind chided her. She quickly squashed down her inner doubts and reached for his arm, hoping to calm him down long enough to have a conversation.

She tugged on his arm, trying to get him to look at her as she called out to him, “Would you slow down a minute?”

The cold expression on his face caught her by surprise and her certainty on being able to continue this conversation quickly faded. She stared back at him, searching for a sign of her friend—the man that had been standing at her door animated and excited about the break in the case just moments ago—that had disappeared in the blink of an eye. She released her grasp on him, fearful of the drastic change in Clark. The temperature in the hallway felt like it had dropped at least twenty degrees and she could feel the hair on the back of her neck standing up. She searched his face for the familiarity she always found there but couldn’t even get him to make eye contact with her let alone look at her.

“What do you want, Lois?”

She felt an uneasy feeling wash over her as she heard the hollow tone escape his throat. There was nothing but emptiness as he spoke to her and leaned his head back against the wood-paneled wall. He wouldn’t even look at her. She felt the burning inside her threaten to become too much but pressed forward, still determined to finish a single conversation with him. No matter how ugly it may seem.

“Just come back inside,” she said, looking around the hallway, “We need to talk.”

“No, we don’t,” he shook his head, still refusing to even look at her.

The venom seeping from his tone sent a chill through her and raising goosebumps on her arms and legs. She could feel the cold against her from the damp spots on her pajamas that were dripping wet from her hair that was still soaked from her recent shower. Still, she pressed on, “Yes, we do,” she responded, finding the confidence she needed to press on. “I can’t have you storming out of here thinking...”

“I’m *thinking* this is a bad idea and I’m not having this conversation...” he said, motioning to the half-open door where Mrs. Beasley was standing in her open doorway trying not to be obvious about the fact that she was eavesdropping, “...especially not with half your neighbors peeking out the door trying to listen in.”

Lois glanced back toward her nosy neighbor, feeling anger running through her as she caught sight of her attempting to deny the obvious eavesdropping. “Mind your own damn business!” Lois called out, glaring at the doorway that quickly disappeared behind the slamming of Mrs. Beasley’s door across the hall. *‘Nosy old hag,’* she thought to herself before turning her attention back to Clark. The last thing she wanted to do was have it out with him in front of everyone, but right now she couldn’t even get him to look at her, “Come back inside,”

Clark shook his head, turning toward the stairwell that was a few feet away as he threw out a scoff, “Why?” She felt the lump in her throat burn from the acid dripping behind the harsh tone of his voice. “I’m not real crazy about your current *houseguest*, and I think it’s best for everyone if I don’t see him again.”

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

<<“His two best friends need his help right now, and where is he?”

“If he could be here...”

He’s in the mountains with Mayson Drake!”>>

<<“Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.”

“Fortunately...”>>

The hard blow of what he was insinuating without coming right out and saying it hit her hard. After two years did he seriously think she would do something like that? Two years of friendship and he actually thought she would...

Furious, she lashed out at him with a hard scoff, “*Houseguest?*” Her mind focused on the word he used as she took

a step toward him, daring to close the distance an inch more and make him look at her. “You’ve got a lot of nerve!”

“I’ve got a lot of nerve?” he scoffed, “I can’t go anywhere without that arrogant Mel Gibson wannabe showing up!” His arms flew through the air as he shouted back at her. “You can’t even give me enough time to process Mayson’s death before...”

“Before *what?*!” she challenged, poking her index finger in his chest, repeatedly jabbing him with it as she dared him to finish that statement. ‘*Say it*’ her mind screamed angrily. But he didn’t. He wouldn’t. She knew he’d never come right out and say what the scene at her apartment had looked like. And she knew it looked bad. The *heartbreaking* expression on his face was still etched into her brain as she shouted out desperately trying to hold on and make him talk to her, “I have been trying to be patient and trying to be understanding, but it’s really hard when you *won’t* talk to me!”

“I *can’t!*” he growled back at her angrily. His eyes wandered toward her open apartment door behind them and added, “Especially not now.” Then he pushed past her to leave.

Everything was slipping away. She knew it the second he took that step to walk away from her. Images of the fights from last summer over her engagement and almost-wedding to Lex flashed through her mind. She’d almost lost him then. That coupled with the reminder of the all-consuming pain that overtook her when she thought she had lost him forever after Clyde Barrow had shot him hit her like a wave. Was she seriously going to let her pride win this round when even she knew how bad things looked? He needed an explanation. He needed reassurance not her own insecurities getting the better of her.

“He broke in,” she called out to him before he could take the second step. He stopped but didn’t respond. She could hear the strain in her own voice as she continued, “I was in the middle of trying to kick him out when you showed up.”

“Fine,” he said with a defeated tone as he spoke. “Scardino has boundary issues. I got it.”

“You could say that,” she said quietly watching as he turned to look back at her. Uncertainty covered his face as he finally met her gaze. The agonizing expression still filled his eyes, and she felt a pang of guilt wash over her with the knowledge that she’d unwittingly put it there.

“It’s not what you were thinking,” she said vehemently, tightening her arms across her chest as she spoke.

“And what *exactly* am I thinking?” Clark snapped.

She could feel the eyes on her and turned to see the small crowd of neighbors at the end of the hallway. More than anything she wanted to get away from their peering eyes and ears and finish this discussion somewhere more private, but this was the closest she and Clark had come to having a real conversation that didn’t involve small talk or a story they were working on in over two weeks. She wanted so desperately to finish this exchange inside the safety of her apartment where she could finish drying her hair and not be standing here freezing from her still soaked hair and pajama top that she was sure would be soaked by the time this discussion was over.

“I really don’t want to have this conversation in the middle of the hallway in front of all my neighbors, but if that’s what I have to do to get you to talk to me, I will,” she said, placing a hand on the arms he had crossed over his chest.

<<“Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.”

“Fortunately...”>>

He seemed to be having an internal debate on whether he was going to continue this conversation here or inside her apartment. Deciding it was better to just continue the conversation and hope for the best she let out a deep sigh and acknowledged the obvious, “It looked bad.”

“Yeah,” Clark agreed, stealing a glance back at her.

The tormented expression on his face continued to tug at her heartstrings, intensifying the guilt she felt over putting it there. “I wouldn’t...”

“I know,” he said, cutting her off and meeting her gaze.

She felt like the weight of the world had been lifted off of her as he stared back at her. He didn’t think she was capable of...*that*. The tension that had been in the air dissipated and she wasn’t sure if she wanted to laugh or cry. Why had it taken such a drastic turn of events for him to talk to her—*really* talk to her?

She watched him run a nervous hand through his hair before asking, “Do you still have that box of *Lapsang Souchong*?”

She nodded, recalling the box of tea leaves Martha had given her on her last visit to Metropolis. Clark had mentioned the tea was something his mom always fixed when he wasn’t feeling well. The mention of the tea brought a flood of emotions through her. She wanted so desperately to take away the events of this evening—the last two weeks really—and make the despair on his face disappear.

She reached out for his hand, taking it in hers as she responded, silently reveling in the physical contact she so desperately needed. “I’ve only made it twice,” she cracked a smile, “I can’t get it to come out right.”

His hand tightened around hers, “Maybe we can finish this conversation somewhere a little more private, and I can make us both a cup?”

A relieved smile crossed her face. More than anything she wanted to put an end to the tension that had been building between them over the last few weeks. This was the closest she’d gotten in the last two weeks. Holding his hand. She knew there were probably a thousand reasons why she should probably just be content with the small gesture but she couldn’t. Not after everything that had transpired tonight. She wanted—*needed*—more. The distance between them was unbearable, and the only way to put a stop to it was to close the distance between them once and for all.

So in a split-second decision, she did. Her other hand moved to cup his cheek and capturing his mouth with hers, fully expecting him to pull away. She felt a thrill as he responded in turn, deepening the kiss with a need and desire that sent a flutter down her spine as the electricity between them quickly began to build.

Clark stared at the open door, uncertain how to react to the scene that welcomed him at Lois’ apartment. Lois’ hair was still wet. She’d obviously just gotten out of the shower and Agent Call-Me-Daniel Scardino was standing behind her with that arrogant, smug expression of his. His mind was already tormenting him with the disturbing images that explained the compromising position he’d found Lois and Scardino in. Everything leading up to his and Lois’ first date and subsequently Mayson’s death raced through his mind at what felt like slow motion as he struggled to process everything.

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

<<“I don’t want to die.”>>

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

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

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

<<“I know you’re a nice guy, Clark, and I don’t want to seem, um, too forward... but I really like you.”>>

<<“To our almost first date.”>>

<<“But everything seemed to just... ‘work.’ That’s why I can never see you again.”>>

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

“That was amistake.”>>

<<“I won’t ask you for an explanation, and I won’t ask you out again, but if you want to ask me, I probably won’t say no.”>>

His guilt.

His anguish.

His confusion.

Everything raced through his mind over and over at hyper speed, preventing him from reacting as he heard Agent Scardino’s voice dripping with arrogance as he seemed to be silently boasting over him. “Fascinating. And well told, too. Of course, you’re a writer, so you’re good with words.”

‘No,’ he silently prayed, refusing to allow his mind to go there.

<<“Just because she’s in love with you? You think that bothers me?”>>

<<“Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.”>>

“Fortunately...”>>

<<“I’m mad. I’m furious. It’s always the same thing. Where is Clark Kent when anybody needs him?”>>

“Lois, I’m sure he...”

“He’s supposed to be your friend, but is he here for you? For me?”

“I’m sure there’s a rational explanation...”

“His two best friends need his help right now, and where is he?”

“If he could be here...”

He’s in the mountains with Mayson Drake!”>>

<<“You know if you think about it, the only time people are really honestly expressing themselves is when they’re passionate...the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they’re fighting...”>>

“...or make love,”>>

<<“Things got left kind of up in the air between us...”>>

<<“She wrote some pretty steamy stuff in there, mainly about you. You holdin’ out on me, Kent?”>>

“Agent Scardino, you have to understand Clark was probably the only one in Metropolis that didn’t know that Mayson was madly in love with him.”>>

<<“What is with you? What is so bad about him?”>>

“What is so good about him?”>>

<<“So that’s what you’ve been hiding.”>>

<<“Forget the date part. Maybe we could do it another time.”>>

“Well... maybe we could say it’s our ‘almost first date.’ Kind of like a test run?”>>

<<“The last thing she said to me was ‘resurrection.’”>>

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

He heard Lois clear her throat nervously. Why was she nervous? What was there to be nervous about if this was just an innocent bout of bad timing?

‘There has to be an explanation,’ he thought silently as he heard the words escaped Lois’ lips. ‘She wouldn’t...would she?’

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

‘Yeah, I’m sure there was a lot of chatting with her in the shower,’ he thought bitterly.

The smug, arrogant expression on Scardino’s face coupled with the panicked expression on Lois’ was too much to bear. He wanted to throw back a sarcastic remark—something—*anything*, but he couldn’t even muster the mental willpower it took to deliver anything but a solemn expression as he tried to process everything in the nanoseconds after she spoke. It looked bad. Really bad. Her heart was hammering well over the normal range, and Scardino kept looking at him with that arrogant smile.

‘No, there’s no way Lois would...’

Were things that broken between him and Lois that he’d actually assume the worst? ‘Or what’s right in front of you,’ his conscience chided him.

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

He slowly backed away from the door, feeling the weight of the world press down on him as the images of Mayson’s brutal

death and the many missed opportunities continued to push themselves to the forefront of his mind. He couldn't do this. Not now. The guilt he continued to carry around over Mayson's death was too much.

<<“I need to know if I'm yesterday's news.”>>

<<“So that's what you've been hiding.”>>

<<“Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.”

“Fortunately...”>>

<<“His two best friends need his help right now, and where is he?”

“If he could be here...”

He's in the mountains with Mayson Drake!”>>

<<“Clark was probably the only one in Metropolis that didn't know that Mayson was madly in love with him.”>>

<<“So that's what you've been hiding.”>>

<<“Clark was probably the only one in Metropolis that didn't know that Mayson was madly in love with him.”>>

“Clark?” He heard the sound of his name coming from behind him but didn't react to it, unsure if he'd be able to hold himself together long enough to hold up a coherent conversation.

He had to get out of here. He glanced down the narrow hallway in front of him, leading to the stairs. A couple was making their way up the stairs, and the elevator behind him was stuck on the second floor. He couldn't escape without revealing himself to a hallway of strangers. That was the last thing he needed right now.

“Clark!”

Deciding there was no other escape he turned around to see Lois standing behind him in her half-soaked violet pajamas. “What?!” he barked venomously, silently wincing at the tone that escaped his lips. The harshness that escaped his throat coupled with the escape of cold breath he was sure Lois and everyone standing around could feel.

‘This is a bad idea,’

“Would you slow down a minute?” she jerked his arm, pulling him back toward her. An uneasy tension remained between him and Lois as she looked back at him, silently searching for something in him –what he wasn't sure.

“What do you want, Lois?” he threw his head back against the wood-paneled wall behind him. He saw her shiver from the drop in temperature and he could feel the heat behind his ears grow, silently cursing himself for losing control of his powers in such a public setting. If he hadn't been so furious with her at that moment he might have offered her his coat, but right now he couldn't even look at her for fear that the venom dripping inside him would seep out.

“Just come back inside,” she said, looking around the hallway, “We need to talk.” He could hear the uncertainty in her voice.

“No, we don't,” he bit back, uncertain if he could hold back much longer as the image of her with Dan Scardino continued to plague his mind.

“Yes, we do,” she responded with more power behind her voice. “I can't have you storming out of here thinking...”

“I'm *thinking* this is a bad idea and I'm not having this conversation...” he said cautiously, motioning to the half-open door where the neighborhood gossip was standing nearby trying not to be obvious about the fact that she was eavesdropping, “... especially not with half your neighbors peeking out the door trying to listen in.”

“Mind your own damn business!” Lois growled at the eavesdropping neighbor. The slamming of the door across the hall followed, and Lois turned to him with an expectant glare, “Come back inside.”

Clark shook his head in disgust, turning away from her in hopes that an exit route had cleared up for him. He took a few steps toward the stairwell intent on getting as far away from Lois and the apartment building he was in as fast as possible. “Why?”

he shrugged his shoulders, feeling the pressure building inside him as he lashed out, “I'm not real crazy about your current *houseguest*, and I think it's best for everyone if I don't see him again.”

“Houseguest?” she scoffed, anger flashing through her features as she took a step toward him. “You've got a lot of nerve!”

“I've got a lot of nerve?” he scoffed, “I can't go anywhere without that arrogant Mel Gibson wannabe showing up!” He could feel the anger coursing through his veins as he shouted back at her. “You can't even give me enough time to process Mayson's death before...”

“Before *what*?!” she challenged, poking her index finger in his chest, repeatedly jabbing him with it as she shouted back at him. “I have been trying to be patient and trying to be understanding, but it's really hard when you *won't* talk to me!”

“I *can't!*” he growled back at her angrily. He threw a disgusted look toward her apartment, “Especially not now,” he pushed past her to leave.

“He broke in,” she mumbled just loud enough for him to hear. He stopped but didn't say anything.

‘He broke in?’ He silently went over the information she'd given him, trying to determine how to react. What was he doing there? The Lois Lane he knew never would have let someone break into her apartment and walk away without a scratch. ‘He broke in but she didn't kick him out?’

His mind went over the information again and again trying to rationalize what he'd seen with what she was saying. He felt a mixture of confusion and relief wash over him as he desperately hung onto the rational explanation that had been presented to him. Fear continued to hold him at bay, preventing him from embracing relief or gratitude fully. Fear was his biggest enemy. The underlying fear that he was losing her right before his eyes. He didn't know how to pull himself out of the drowning sensation of self-loathing and guilt that had consumed him, tripled with the grief that continued to haunt him.

<<“I need to know if I'm yesterday's news.”>>

<<“So that's what you've been hiding.”>>

<<“His two best friends need his help right now, and where is he?”

“If he could be here...”

He's in the mountains with Mayson Drake!”>>

<<“Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.”

“Fortunately...”>>

He could hear the strain in her voice as she continued, “I was in the middle of trying to kick him out when you showed up.”

‘Bad timing,’ he rationalized her statements and felt some of the tension leave him. He hadn't lost her completely, but he still couldn't bring himself to turn around and look at her. “Fine,” he said softly, contemplating if he had the strength to continue this conversation. “Scardino has boundary issues. I got it.” He could feel his temper slowly simmering inside him. There were so many things he wanted to say but he couldn't. He knew there was a very real chance that if he did lash out, he wouldn't be able to stop.

“You could say that,” she said quietly.

The tension hung in the air, thick enough that it was almost suffocating. He stole a glance toward Lois, uncertain what to do. He took a moment to recognize the small puddle around her feet from where her hair was still dripping wet on the floor. There was a lot that needed to be said, but he still wasn't sure he could bear to make the trip back into her apartment where he'd found the arrogant DEA agent with her.

“It's not what you were thinking,” Lois said vehemently, tightening her arms across her chest defiantly.

“And what *exactly* am I thinking?” Clark snapped, turning to look at her.

Lois glanced behind her, and he followed her gaze where he could see two of the neighbors crowded in the hallway, trying to not look like they were eavesdropping. She let out a sigh and turned back to him, “I *really* don’t want to have this conversation in the middle of the hallway in front of all my neighbors but if that’s what I have to do to get you to talk to me, I will.” She placed a hand on the arms he had crossed over his chest. He let out a shuddered breath and met her gaze, debating internally on what to do.

He could feel her eyes on him, piercing through him as the wave of emotions continued to course through him. A silence fell between them as he stood there, unable to move as the image at Lois’ door continued to run through his mind again and again.

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

<<“So that’s what you’ve been hiding.”>>

<<“Fortunately there are no doors here tonight.”

“Fortunately...”>>

<<“Clark was probably the only one in Metropolis that didn’t know that Mayson was madly in love with him.”>>

<<“So that’s what you’ve been hiding.”>>

Lois continued to stare back at him, expecting some kind of a response. He knew he couldn’t hold back much longer. He should probably just leave and give himself time to calm down but he couldn’t. Lois held a power over him that even he didn’t quite understand at times.

The image of Scardino standing behind Lois’ freshly showered figure haunted his mind, and he struggled to push away the many ugly scenarios of how that had happened. Lois said he broke in. But that didn’t explain why she was so nervous. That didn’t explain...

‘Stop it,’ he berated himself, trying to force the thoughts back into the mental box in which he’d buried the fears of what could have happened so many times. The fears and doubts that had plagued him for months as he came to terms with what had happened with Luthor and as he continued to battle his own guilt over Mayson’s death. If he let those fears out, he knew he wouldn’t be able to reel them back in.

The guilt that continued to gnaw at him for every bit of pain he held himself accountable had taken away his ability to fight any more. He was tired. Tired of fighting. Tired of mourning. Tired of feeling like everything he touched was doomed to destroy itself. If he had just been a few seconds faster. If he had just been stronger. The power of the world of ‘if’ continued to haunt him in his nightmares.

He glanced up at Lois who was staring back at him expectantly. Did he dare go back into her apartment and talk through everything knowing there was a very real possibility that he might not be able to hold back if he did? Or did he walk away and possibly make things even worse between them?

All the lies.

All the deceit.

Still, here she was trying to reach out to him. That had to count for something, right?

He ran a hand through his hair for what felt like the millionth time in the last ten minutes and let out a defeated sigh. They needed to talk. They *really* needed to talk. He still wasn’t sure how good of an idea it was to continue this conversation tonight, but given his choices, he knew it was the safer bet.

“It looked bad,” she acknowledged.

“Yeah,” Clark agreed. He felt a pang in his chest as he crossed his arms over his chest. The wave of guilt that he managed to keep at bay continued to press against the forefront of his mind, threatening to overtake him as she took another step toward him.

“I wouldn’t...” she began to say, but he cut her off not letting her finish.

“I know,” he said meeting her gaze. As bad as it looked, in his heart he knew Lois and despite how things appeared, he knew she

wouldn’t do that to him. Still, Scardino’s presence here tonight felt like the final straw in a series of bad timings and half-conversations that left him wondering how in the last two weeks things had become so broken between the two of them.

Relief washed over her face, and she cracked a smile at him. He let out a deep sigh, uncertain what to do or say at this point. He wanted more than anything to tell her how guilty he felt over Mayson’s death, but he couldn’t—not really. Not without revealing how he’d been deceiving her for almost two years. He knew he needed to tell her, but not tonight.

Not now.

Not on the heels of Mayson’s murder.

Not when he felt so out of control.

He caught the watchful eyes of now three neighbors that were watching him and Lois and let out another deep sigh. Despite his own reservations of returning to her apartment, continuing this conversation out in the open wasn’t ideal for either of them and Lois was shivering from the temperature drop he’d caused and her half-soaked pajama top and damp hair weren’t helping things either. He ran a hand through his hair, glancing toward her apartment.

“Do you still have that box of *Lapsang Souchong*?” he asked, recalling the box his mom had gifted Lois on their last trip to Metropolis.

Her face relaxed, and she nodded as she took his hand in hers, “I’ve only made it twice,” she cracked a smile, “I can’t get it to come out right.”

He nodded, tightening his hand around hers, “Maybe we can finish this conversation somewhere a little more private, and I can make us both a cup?”

She nodded, looking back at him with a relieved smile. The torment that had filled her eyes moments ago had disappeared. Her hand brushed against his cheek, and her lips touched his, igniting the electrical storm tumbling inside him. His hands moved to cup her face, instinctively responding with a passion that made the kiss they shared two weeks ago pale in comparison.

Chapter 2

The sound of the door shutting behind them echoed in the back of Lois’ mind as she let out a low moan, unwilling to break her mouth from Clark’s as he walked her back into the disheveled living room. She felt her legs hit the back of something and mumbled her protest when he pulled away to ask, “Why is your loveseat upside down?”

“I knocked it over,” she whispered against his lips, gasping in surprise when he lifted her up to carry her over to the other sofa that hadn’t been knocked over.

“There’s glass,” he murmured against her lips.

“Broken candlestick,” she explained in-between heated kisses as her hands wandered up and down the side of his face, reveling in the sensation that ran through her as they sunk down onto the sofa.

Two weeks ago, she would have been questioning how good of a decision this was. Two weeks ago, her biggest fear was moving too fast and dealing with the very real feelings that had simmered deep inside her for the past two years. Now all she could think about was how close she was to losing everything.

Her hands roamed through his dark hair as she pulled him on top of her, desperately seeking to hang onto this moment and never let go. He let out a low moan as he fell on top of her, tearing his lips away from hers.

“We need to slow down,” was all he could get out before pulling back and resting his forehead against her shoulder.

She let out a shuddered breath, uncertain how to take the sudden change. She could feel the heat that had built up between them in the last twenty minutes. It was intoxicating. The intense emotions and overpowering tug that drew her to him. She knew he

was right. They needed to slow down. There were so many things that needed to be said, but stopping would mean giving life to the fears and inner doubts that had been plaguing her over the past few weeks. This was the closest she'd felt to him in weeks, and she couldn't help but feel a sense of panic as she felt him withdraw from her arms.

He sat up, letting out a shaky breath. She propped herself up on the arm of the couch, uncertain what to say as she tried to calm her racing heart which continued to pound inside her chest. She could feel a tingle run through her at the loss of contact as she stared back at him. He appeared to be having the same problem she was.

Though she had the overpowering desire to pull him back in her arms and resume the intense activities they'd been embarking on for the last twenty minutes she knew she couldn't do that just yet. Clark was right. They needed to slow down. They needed to talk—*really* talk. Walking on eggshells around one another was only amplifying the tension between them and if the last hour had taught her anything it was just how fragile their relationship was.

She didn't want to lose him.

He meant too much.

He turned to her, opening his mouth to say something when a faraway look crossed his face. She bit her lower lip, recognizing the look as a sign he was once again going to run away and disappear with some lame excuse. She let out a deep sigh, preparing herself for the worst as she uttered his name in defeat, "Clark."

"Hold that thought," he said, standing to his feet and heading toward the kitchen. She watched him in confusion before the sound of the refrigerator door opening reached her ears. Before she could assess what had just happened, she heard a loud bang come from the kitchen. She stood to her feet and heard a muffled cry followed by the shattering of glass and Clark's low growl, "What are you *still* doing here?"

'No, please tell me he's not still here,' she thought to herself in disbelief.

Careful not to step on the broken glass scattered on the floor in front of her, she tip-toed across the floor and into the kitchen where she found the remnants of her blue ceramic plate on the ground, a half-eaten sandwich and Clark jamming his forearm against Dan Scardino's throat as he pinned him against the refrigerator door. Lois watched the scene unfold, not ready to make her presence known just yet.

"Gr...ip," Dan Scardino called out, waving his left arm in the air as he patted at the door.

Clark's stern features remained as he loosened his grip and tossed Dan Scardino to the ground in a heap on the tile floor, landing him face first into the disassembled sandwich covering her kitchen floor.

Dan let out a half-wheeze, "I'm just..."

"Breaking and entering?" Clark finished for Dan as the DEA Agent stood to his feet, attempting to brush the mayonnaise and cheese off his face. Clark tossed the broom and dustpan to him as he listed off Agent Scardino's offenses one by one. "Stealing. Destruction of property." Dan opened his mouth to protest, and Clark cut him off with a growl, "Please argue these points with me."

Dan's face fell to a frown and he glanced at the mess that had been left on his leather jacket with a grimace before glaring up at Clark. "In case you've forgotten, there's a ruthless killer with a love for sadistic violence out there."

Clark looked around the apartment, "And yet the only criminal I see here tonight is *you*."

"Last I checked I was the one trained to take on cold-blooded killers!" Dan jabbed a finger in Clark's chest. "Unless you've got a badge or special ops training—which I highly doubt—I suggest

you back off and let me do my job! Quit butting into *my* investigation and leave the job of protecting your *partner* to me!"

"Why? So you can trip over yourself while making a sandwich?" Clark scoffed as Dan brushed the mayonnaise off his jacket with a napkin. "No thanks. Lois has a better chance of being struck by lightning than being safe anywhere around you."

"That your professional opinion, Kent, or just jealousy talking?" Dan jabbed another finger in Clark's chest, and Lois noticed Clark's scowl grow tense, and the vein on his forehead rise up from his normally smooth features.

"*Enough*, both of you!" Lois shouted, deciding to interrupt the verbal sparring that was taking place escalated any further.

Dan glanced back at her and cleared his throat, "Yeah, Kent, enough. I mean, can't we set aside your differences for the *big story* here?" He puffed out his chest as his eyes sparkled with amusement and added, "I mean how do you expect to work together if we can't all get along?"

'*Is he serious right now?*' Lois wondered to herself watching Dan continue to play innocent as he tried to bait Clark.

"That's what this is all about, right? Finding Mayson Drake's killer? Putting Sean McCarthy back behind bars?" Dan then added the verbal jab, "Unless you don't want to find Mayson's killer."

"Get out!" Lois hissed angrily, seeing the flash of hurt and anger cross her partner's face. Dan looked back at her in surprise, seemingly trying to register that she was indeed talking to him. She crossed into the living room to fling the door open, "Yes, you! The walking sandwich! Out, now!"

"Get out or be thrown out. Makes no difference to me." Clark said, taking a step toward Dan.

Dan was smart enough to assess the threat of bodily harm was greater than his ability to talk himself out of the hole he'd dug himself into. He stopped by the door and added with an arrogant smile, "I'll go, but I'm not going far."

"You show back up here again, and you'll be leaving by police escort," Clark warned, pushing him out the door.

Dan looked at her for confirmation, and she nodded, "I think Clark and I are perfectly capable of finishing up this investigation on our own."

"Your loss," Dan Scardino snorted storming down the hall before she slammed the door closed after him.

"In case you've forgotten, there's a ruthless killer with a love for sadistic violence out there." Scardino threw the reminder back at Clark as if it somehow justified his actions here tonight.

Anger and frustration over the current situation still lingered from before when Scardino's arrogant face appeared behind Lois' freshly showered figure. She said he broke in and from the condition of her apartment and backdoor, he could tell she'd probably wailed on Scardino with whatever was around her to make him think twice about that choice. Still, Clark couldn't get that image out of his mind.

The arrogance with which the DEA agent continued to hold as he tried to justify his actions was astounding. The raw emotions of anger and hurt coupled with the nauseating guilt Clark had been working through over the last few weeks made any attempt at being civil with the DEA Agent an impossible feat.

Clark threw his hands in the air and looked around the apartment, giving the pretense that he was searching for the mysterious killer Scardino feared. "And yet the only criminal I see here tonight is *you*."

He knew there was a killer out there responsible for Mayson's death. He also knew Lois probably had a target on her back after the recent incident at the cemetery, but there was no way any of that justified Scardino breaking into Lois' apartment and attempting to interfere in his and Lois' already fragile relationship.

"Last I checked I was the one trained to take on cold-blooded killers!" Scardino said, jabbing a finger in Clark's chest. "Unless

you've got a badge or special ops training—which I highly doubt—I suggest you back off and let me do my job! Quit butting into my investigation and leave the job of protecting your *partner* to me!”

That remark earned Scardino a sharp scowl. Did he seriously think he was more capable of protecting Lois just because he worked for the DEA? Clark let out a bitter laugh, “Why? So you can trip over yourself while making a sandwich?” He shook his head and added, “No thanks. Lois has a better chance of being struck by lightning than being safe anywhere around you.”

“That your professional opinion, Kent, or just jealousy talking?” Dan jabbed Clark in the chest once more, and Clark did his best to push down the festering rage that was building inside him. He knew exactly what he was doing. Clark was sure of it.

“Enough, both of you!” Lois shouted, grabbing both his and Scardino’s attention.

He looked toward the doorway leading to the living room and saw a very irritated Lois standing there staring at both of them. He watched in disbelief as Scardino tried to play off the encounter as if he was just an innocent bystander.

“Yeah, Kent, enough. I mean, can’t we set aside your differences for the *big story* here?” Scardino puffed out his chest and that arrogant smile crossed his face once more, “I mean how do you expect to work together if we can’t all get along?”

Clark suppressed the urge to throttle him right there. If he thought there was any chance of him working with Scardino again after tonight he was out of his mind. He stole a glance at Lois uncertain if he would be able to argue his case with her. Dan Scardino was trouble. He knew it. The longer they left the door open for him to interfere in their lives the worse things would get. He was more than confident he and Lois could find Mayson’s killer without Scardino’s help. They’d brought down far worse criminals than Sean McCarthy without any help from any federal agencies and they could do it again.

“That’s what this is all about, right? Finding Mayson Drake’s killer? Putting Sean McCarthy back behind bars?” Scardino reminded him in an innocent tone that made Clark want to puke. Then Scardino added the verbal blow that tested his limits, “Unless you don’t want to find Mayson’s killer.”

He wanted to scream. He wanted to throw something. Preferably Dan Scardino through the nearest window and off the top of the tallest building in Metropolis. He’d done it to Dillinger a few times and he could do it to Scardino and get plenty of satisfaction out of scaring the DEA Agent with the threat of imminent death before pulling him back at the last second...again and again. He could feel his fury simmering inside him like hot lava, threatening to seep out as he stared back at the DEA Agent.

“Get out!” he heard Lois roar out in anger.

Clark watched in amazement as Lois sprinted over to the front door of her apartment and flung it open. Scardino seemed to be having difficulty distinguishing that Lois was indeed talking to him. She pointed at Scardino and hissed, “Yes, you! The walking sandwich! Out, now!”

Scardino stumbled a few feet back as Clark walked toward him, helping inch him toward the open door that Lois was pointing at. Feeling confident that Lois would have his back he added sternly, “Get out or be thrown out. Makes no difference to me.”

Scardino looked back at him, seeming to assess the risk wasn’t worth it and backed away toward the open door. He stopped in front of Lois and with an arrogant smile, “I’ll go, but I’m not going far.”

It took everything in him not to throw Scardino out the window after that comment. Clark took a step toward him and pushed him into the hallway with a carefully measured shove that was hard enough to tell Scardino he meant business but not hard enough to leave a mark. “You show back up here again, and you’ll be leaving by police escort.”

Scardino looked back at Lois, seeming to try and get her to plead his case. Truth be told, Clark knew he couldn’t have Scardino escorted out of here by the police without Lois’ support. It was her apartment after all and her decision on whether she wanted this clown showing up unannounced. He just hoped she could see him for what he truly was. A menace.

Lois took a step toward Clark and nodded, “I think Clark and I are perfectly capable of finishing up this investigation on our own.”

Clark looked back at Lois in surprise, feeling a wave of relief wash over him as he heard Dan Scardino scurry off with a snort, “Your loss.”

Lois slammed the door after Scardino and let out a shaky breath. “Are you okay?” She placed a hand on his chest, seeming to read the turbulent emotions he was struggling within that moment.

“Yeah,” he said evenly, though he was far from okay in that moment. He placed a hand on her cheek and whispered, “Thank you.”

It was moments like this that made hiding everything from her so hard. She was his biggest defender, both as Superman and Clark Kent. Though her defense of Clark Kent seemed to be more evident in the recent months as they’d grown closer.

“What are partners for, right?” Lois asked with a sad smile.

“Yeah,” he let out a defeated sigh, looking around at the mess he’d made in her kitchen. He looked down at her still bare feet and partially damp hair. “Sorry about the mess.”

“It wasn’t exactly spotless, to begin with,” she smiled back at him as she looked toward the kitchen with a sigh. “I’ll get the broom.”

He reached out to stop her, “No, I’ll clean up. There’s glass everywhere, and you’re the one that’s barefoot.”

She nodded, looking down at her feet. Her hand went to her hair, “I guess I can finish drying my hair without distractions now.”

“If anyone tries to break in again I’ll be sure they leave with a police escort and restraining order,” he promised with a smile. He didn’t think Scardino was stupid enough to try something again, but then again he didn’t think he was dumb enough to break into Lois’ apartment.

She stared at him for a long moment then leaned in to kiss his cheek before tip-toeing through the wreckage in the living room and disappearing behind her bedroom door. He heard the hairdryer turn on and turned his attention to the mess in the living room.

Keeping an ear out for Lois’ hair dryer to stop he moved at super-speed to clean up the glass and ceramic from both rooms then discarded the disassembled sandwich into the trash and cleaned up the tile floor with soap and warm water. After ensuring the floors were cleaned he grabbed a pot from her bottom cabinet and poured two cups of water into it and set it on the stove to bring it to a boil. He then found the box of *Lapsang Souchong* from the cabinet and measured out the tea leaves to prepare the tea he’d promised Lois.

He reentered the living room and began picking up the furniture that had been knocked over and found the bathroom plunger on the ground by the couch. He let out a deep sigh as he set it against the bathroom door for Lois. He turned his attention back to the kitchen where the tea was just starting to come to a boil. He finished adding in the milk and sugar to Lois’ liking and then reached in the drawer and pulled out the tea strainer he’d given her. He heard the hair dryer stop as he began to pour the tea into the two mugs.

The door opened, and he heard Lois’ voice from the living room let out a low whistle, “How long was I in there?”

“I work fast,” he called over his shoulder as he picked up the two mugs and carried them into the living room. She was fluffing

one of the pillows on the couch, preparing to take a seat when he set the cup on the coffee table for her.

Her hair was freshly dried and combed, and he noticed she'd taken the opportunity to change into another pair of pajamas that weren't soaked from her dripping hair. The gray cotton pajamas were a welcome change. He was still struggling to push the image of Scardino standing behind her out of his mind.

"Thanks," she smiled back at him, reaching for the mug he placed in front of her. He took a seat on the opposite end of the couch from her, trying to collect his thoughts after the tempestuous evening. He could hear Lois' heart patter against her chest in a calm, rhythmic tone, much different from the hammering it had been doing an hour ago during their heated argument in the hall.

They still needed to talk. There were a lot of issues that needed to be sorted out. Namely, the reassurance he knew Lois needed that she was not yesterday's news. Far from it. Though his actions earlier should have conveyed that, he knew Lois needed to hear the words. He just wasn't sure how to start this conversation he was sure they both desperately needed.

Lois was the first to break the silence, "Clark, do you realize this is the most you've even spoken to me outside of investigating Mayson's murder in..."

"Two weeks," he mumbled out on auto-pilot. It had been exactly two weeks ago tonight since the night of Mayson's death. Two weeks since their first kiss and two weeks and one day since their first date. "It's been two weeks."

"I know," she said carefully, her voice was an eerie calm. "It feels more like two years." He didn't respond choosing instead to watch the tension move from her eyes to her mouth as she asked, "Why won't you talk to me?"

He wasn't sure how to respond to her question. He still had so many emotions running through him. How to explain the torment he was going through without risking losing Lois was a balancing act he found himself constantly trying to stay one step ahead as he fought his inner demons.

He hung his head, running a hand across his forehead when he heard Lois' hoarse voice whisper, "Did you love Mayson?"

"What?" he looked back at her in surprise, caught off guard by Lois' question. The idea seemed preposterous.

He blamed himself for Mayson's death. He blamed himself for hurting Mayson and not being direct with how he felt. He foolishly had thought keeping his distance would be enough to deter the affections Mayson was trying to throw toward him. His experience with relationships—with women—were lacking, to say the least. He never was quite sure how to handle situations where he was actively pursued, and he didn't return the affections. Hurting anyone intentionally—no matter how great the reason wasn't something that came easy to him. He hadn't realized how deep Mayson's feelings had run until he heard her confession two weeks ago.

Lois had thrust Mayson on him just hours after their first date trying to push him away. The lunch with Mayson had been awkward, to say the least as Mayson had been asking for an explanation on why he wasn't responding to her attempts to start a romantic relationship with her. He never could give her an answer. The conversation had been cut short, and now he never would have the chance to let her down gently.

<< "Just tell me. Look, Clark, I'm a lawyer. I know you're hiding something. Something keeping us apart."

"What is it? I can deal with it."

"It's not that easy."

"If it's Lois, just say it." >>

"Did you love her?" Lois asked again with more strength behind her voice the second time. "You seem to be taking her death harder than a lot of her friends, and you won't hardly talk to me unless it's about work..."

"Lois," he cut her off, putting a stop to her rambling. "I didn't love Mayson," he reassured her. Then he added with a deep sigh, "I couldn't..." At her questioning gaze, he waved his hand in the air, "It's complicated."

"Oh," she met his gaze, looking over the rim of her mug as she sipped the tea. "Then why...?"

"I knew," he spoke up, finding his voice amidst the tension in the air.

"What?" Lois looked back at him in confusion.

He cleared his throat and responded, "You told Scardino I didn't know how Mayson felt." He shook his head, "I knew."

She bit her lower lip and nodded, "Oh," She cleared her throat, "I didn't know that."

He stared down at the mug in his hands and muttered, "She let it slip on that lunch you forced me to go on."

Lois' cheeks flushed with a slight pink, and she gave him an apologetic wince, recalling aloud, "The one after our date?"

"That's the one," he said uneasily.

<< "Mayson, I like you. And I like Lois" >>

'Like? I've been hopelessly in love with Lois for over a year. Even when I didn't even know it,' he thought to himself as the raging emotions ran through him.

<< "I love you." >>

<< "You're not flying around with a big 'S' on your chest, bragging about what a hero you are..."

"You heard Superman brag?"

"Not in so many words..." >>

'I could never love someone that couldn't accept all of me,' he thought to himself, recalling the shock on Mayson's face as she stared at the red and yellow emblem on his chest. 'But I never meant to hurt her.' He set his mug down on the table in front of him and hung his head, running his hands over the back of his head as if that would somehow relieve the guilt and anguish that he carried.

"I'm sorry," Lois said, placing a hand over his and pulling him back to the present. He looked back at her, and she shook her head ruefully, "I still don't know why I did that."

"You don't?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

"No," she shook her head, "I don't know why I freaked out the way I did. It was like all of a sudden..." she stopped short of completing her thought. "Maybe if I hadn't pushed you away, you wouldn't be so torn up about what she said to you?"

'If.' That was the word that continued to tumble around his thoughts like a tumbleweed being blown through the desert sand. If he had been faster. If he hadn't been afraid of his own feelings for Lois. If he hadn't allowed things to get so completely out of control.

Maybe—just maybe—he could have spared Mayson some pain in her final moments. Perhaps he could have saved her from such a gruesome end, and maybe he wouldn't be carrying this guilt around that continued to be an iron anchor in his and Lois' relationship. How long could he carry around this boulder-sized guilt and keep Lois at arm's length before everything imploded?

"This has nothing to do with that," he said turning to her. "It's just...stuff I have to work through."

"Are you...talking to anyone?" she ventured cautiously. He let out a deep sigh and gave a noncommittal shrug. He probably needed to talk to someone. The guilt alone was eating away at him little by little but explaining why he felt so guilty over Mayson's death to a therapist or anyone specializing in trauma would require divulging information he couldn't share.

After Mayson's death, he'd done his best to keep busy and not think about the horrific scene. He had been required to attend a counseling session for dealing with trauma by Perry, and he'd gone and said all the right things so he could continue business as usual. He felt his fists instinctively clench and unclench as he

recalled yet again the ticking sound of the car bomb that had killed Mayson.

“Clark?” Lois placed a hand over his fist, forcing it to relax as she threaded her fingers over his, “Talk to me, please?”

<<“I know you’re hiding something. Something keeping us apart.”>>

<<“So...that’s what you’ve been hiding.”>>

“I can’t,” he said, shaking his head, knowing she would never understand. It would make things so much easier if he could talk to her about this. The guilt he carried around continued to eat away at him little by little. “You wouldn’t understand,” he whimpered.

“What?” Lois looked at him incredulously. “What wouldn’t I understand, Clark? I was *there!*” She placed both hands on the sides of his face and forced him to look at her. A lone tear escaped the corner of his eye as she wrapped her arms around him. “I don’t know what it is that’s eating away at you or why you feel this need to hold everything in like this, but something is tearing you apart. Please talk to me.”

He heard the words but still couldn’t allow himself to be forgiven for the role he’d played in the pain Mayson had endured in her final moments. Burdening Lois with his pain would only make the pain all the more unbearable by burdening Lois. “I can’t,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Why not?” Lois looked back at him with a distraught expression, pleading with him to let her in. “I’ve already watched someone I love lose themselves in their grief.”

The story of her parents’ messy divorce and her mother’s subsequent alcoholism as she grieved the loss of a twenty-year marriage and even longer relationship was not news to him. He’d heard the story both from Lois and her sister. Over the years as they’d grown closer and the walls had come down little by little she’d let him see some of the darker parts of her broken childhood. She’d practically raised her sister and had been forced at a young age to grow up too fast, watching her mother battle alcoholism as grief consumed all of their lives.

Lois’ tear-stained cheeks and hoarse plea caught his attention as she added with a fierce determination, “I’ll be damned if I lose you too.” The hidden meaning behind her warning caught his attention as he stared back into her eyes. Someone she *loved*. She didn’t want him to lose himself in his grief too. His head began to swim as the reality of what she was saying registered with him. She whimpered out a heartfelt plea, “You mean too much to me. I lo...”

“I love you too, Lois,” he whispered, brushing away the tears that had escaped the corners of her eyes.

Her eyes sparkled through the pain as she stared back at him. “Please, let me help you.” Her left hand brushed against his jaw, and she whispered, “Whatever it is that’s eating away at you, you can’t just keep burying it inside like this.”

Lois loved him. He should be over the moon, but he couldn’t even muster up the strength to celebrate that small victory. Finally, she was returning his feelings. Finally, she saw him as more than just a colleague or friend. He could finally see the future he hoped and prayed for right there before his eyes. Yet he couldn’t even savor the precious gift he’d been bestowed.

<<“At least tell her how you feel. If she feels the same, it shouldn’t take her too long to figure out you’re no ordinary man.”>>

“I need to tell her,” he told himself, silently preparing himself for the worst as he leaned in to kiss her. He felt her respond to him, running her hands up and down the sides of his face as she let out a sigh. What he wouldn’t do for a chance to savor this moment just a little while longer but he knew he couldn’t...not really. Not with so much continuing to hang over his head.

“You’re right,” he said solemnly, tearing himself away from her as he let out a shuddered breath. “I do need to talk to someone,

and it makes sense that it should be you.” Silence fell between them, and he took a moment to collect his thoughts uncertain where to begin. “There’s something I’ve wanted to tell you for a long time, but the time just never seemed right,” he began carefully. “I’m actually not sure that there will *ever* be a right time for this.”

A concerned expression crossed her face, “Tell me what?”

He could feel the dread building up inside him as he searched for the right words, “I’ve never shared this with anyone. The only other people that know this are my parents.” He met her nervous gaze and let out a heavy sigh, “I couldn’t for a long time see myself sharing this with *anyone*.”

“But now you do?” Lois asked, her eyes scrunching as she stared back at him.

He nodded his head as he gave voice to his greatest fears and made the heartbreaking promise he hoped he wouldn’t have to deliver on, “I’ll understand if it’s too much. I really wouldn’t blame you. I...I’ll leave. I...”

“Leave?” Lois stared back at him incredulously, “Clark, what in the world is so big of a secret that you think you need to leave?”

“Just let me explain,” He ran a hand through the hair on the back of his head and stood up, pacing in front of her nervously as he allowed the words to flow out of him at an alarmingly fast pace. “Mayson...” He shook his head again. “I wasn’t honest with Mayson about a lot of things. I never meant to hurt her. I just didn’t know how to let her down easy. What she *thought* she wanted was impossible.”

“Because you didn’t love her.” Lois supplied for him carefully.

Clark nodded his agreement. “That was part of it.”

“Part of it?” A frown crossed Lois’ face.

“I’ve only ever loved one woman, Lois,” he said stopping mid-pace and catching her gaze as he added softly, “You.” His tone was almost reverent as he looked back at her, feeling the fear inside him threaten to consume him.

“Oh,” Lois’ lips pursed into an ‘o’ shape. He held her gaze, wanting to convey the gravity of what he felt to her before he delivered the hard blow of how he had let her down as well. She took a breath, then reminded him of the misunderstanding a few months ago that he never did give her a clear answer on, “You agreed to go to the mountains with her.”

“No! I *never*...” Clark let out a heavy sigh and quickly amended, “I wasn’t paying attention to the conversation,” Clark explained, raising his right hand to stall her next question he knew was coming. “I never agreed to anything like that.” Relief washed over her face, and she looked back at him expectantly, content to let him finish for the moment. “I wouldn’t...I couldn’t...” He let out a deep sigh, “Everything just got so complicated. I’m not exactly skilled in this department.” He caught Lois’ questioning gaze and supplied, “Letting someone down gently. Sometimes I think it’s to my own detriment.”

He tilted his head up toward the ceiling, gathering his strength for what was to come. “I figured she’d get the hint eventually, but it didn’t help things when we kept having to work with her for a story or for information on a case...or to help stop Jimmy from being railroaded.” He trailed off.

Lois looked back at him with a stunned expression. “I would have found another way to get the information. If I...”

Clark let out a long breath, “I didn’t realize how big of an issue it had become until a few weeks ago.”

“When I forced you to have lunch with her?” Lois asked, wincing at the reminder of her part in the situation.

“Yeah,” he shook his head. “Right before you called I was trying to let her down gently. Then before I left, I heard her confess how she felt.” He shook his head ruefully, “You always think you’ll have more time, but you really don’t know how long you have.”

He let out a frustrated growl, shaking his head. Lois cleared her throat, “Well, no one’s guaranteed tomorrow. If anyone knows that it’s me.”

A light chuckle escaped his lips, “That’s the understatement of the century.” Lois cracked a smile at him, and he let out a shaky breath, uncertain how to continue. “I thought I’d have a chance to explain things and set her straight, but I never imagined...” He pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to regain control of his emotions. He had to get this out.

“You had no way of knowing what was going to happen, Clark,” Lois tried to reassure him, standing to her feet and crossing the room to where he was pacing. She placed a hand on his chest, and he was sure he would crumble beneath her touch right there.

“I should have stopped it,” he let out a shuddered breath. “I couldn’t get there in time. I went as fast as I could.”

“Clark, you didn’t set off that bomb. You didn’t make her get into that car. There is *nothing* you could have done.” She whispered, stroking his cheek. “The arson report said...”

“I know what the arson report said,” he said, pulling away from her. “She triggered the bomb the second she put her key into the car door.” He waved the information off. “I know. I’ve read over it a hundred times, but I know if I’d just gotten there sooner...”

“Then you’d be dead too!” Lois cut him off her eyes filled with tears. “There is *nothing* you could have done.”

“Lois, please,” he pleaded with her, “just let me get this out.” He let out a snort of disgust. “I never wanted her to know. I never wanted *anyone* to know for the longest time...until I met you.” His expression softened as he stared back at her, “You’re the *only* one I ever even considered sharing this with.” He hung his head in shame, “but she found out by accident the night she died.”

He could feel Lois’ eyes boring into him as he paced in front of her nervously. “Know what? What is so bad that...” She stopped mid-sentence, meeting his mournful gaze and pulled her arms up, hugging them to herself.

He stopped, turning to face her and put an end to this once and for all. “If I’d gotten there in time, I might have been able to stop the bomb. I’ve done it a thousand times. You’ve watched me do it at least a hundred times over the past year.”

“Clark, what are you talking about?” Lois demanded, her face filled with confusion.

He let out a heavy sigh, “But I didn’t. Because of that...” He swallowed hard and then said, “It’s probably easier if I just show you.” Taking the final leap of faith, he took his glasses off and set them on the table. A flicker of recognition crossed her face just before he took the final step and disappeared into a blur of red and blue before her eyes. The blue, red and yellow suit left him feeling exposed and naked under her widened eyes as he met her gaze. His secret—what he’d spent his entire life hiding—was finally out. She now had the final piece of evidence she needed to put the pieces together and shatter his world forever.

Her mouth opened as she stared back at him, shock written over her face. “You’re...”

“Superman,” he finished for her.

“It’s probably easier if I just show you.” Lois heard Clark say in an eerily calm voice. His hand moved to his glasses, taking them off his face and setting them on the coffee table in front of him. It was strange. She couldn’t think of a single time she’d seen him without his glasses. Even when she’d caught him at the Apollo fresh out of the shower, he’d been wearing them. He looked so different without them yet so familiar.

It felt like she had the wind knocked out of her as she stared into his eyes. She’d stared into those eyes countless times before. She knew those eyes. She knew that face. As if confirming what her mind had already figured out he completed the final piece to

the puzzle and disappeared into a whirlwind of red and blue. The colors mixed together in a burst of pigments running together as Lois stared at the spot Clark had just been standing.

He reappeared in front of her in the familiar blue spandex and red and yellow ‘S’ emblem across his chest. She blinked, allowing her eyes to register that she had indeed seen Clark just change into Superman.

Clark was Superman.

Superman was Clark.

Clark was Superman.

She opened her mouth, finally finding her voice as she stared back at him, “You’re...”

“Superman,” he finished for her.

A million thoughts raced through her mind as she stared back at him, uncertain what to do or say. Flashes of memories from the last two years pushed their way to the forefront of her mind, again and again, reconciling the memories with the two men she thought were two separate people as one. It was Clark who had saved her life countless times. It was Superman who had sent her on a wild goose chase for stealing his story. It was Clark she had been fawning over at the beginning of their partnership. It was Superman who she had turned down that day in the park. It was Clark. All of it was *Clark*.

He called out her name, but this time it was Clark calling her —in Superman’s suit. Was that all it was? That’s what it felt like. A suit. A disguise. Some façade to cover up the fact that her partner could bend steel bars over his head and fly across the world in under a minute.

Her head was spinning as she paced back and forth in front of him. “I...” she tried to form the words but couldn’t get them to escape the back of her throat where they were trapped. She sunk down on the sofa, trying to wrap her brain around the new reality she was in. Anger and hurt flooded through her as she recalled the many, many lies she’d been told over the past two years.

Two years.

She clamped her eyes closed as the image of him lying on the floor of Georgie Hairdo’s casino —supposedly dead—after being shot by Clyde Barrow. The painful reminder of how deep the lies were stung the corner of her eyes as she fought back tears. Finally finding the strength to choke out her response she looked back at him with a cold expression, “You... are Superman.”

“Yes,” he responded in an even, guarded tone.

Raw. Unfettered. Gut-wrenching. She felt the emotions hit her one by one, retelling one simple truth to her over and over again. Clark was Superman. She wasn’t sure how to react or what to say. What was there even left to say when nothing was as she had thought or remembered? Every memory. Every moment. Everything had changed.

“I wasn’t sure how to tell you,” he said carefully.

One by one the tears began to fall as the emotional rollercoaster from the evening became too much for her. Clark’s hand rested on her shoulder, and she brushed him away, crying out, “No, don’t!”

The hurt on his face was evident, but he quickly covered it, “I’m sorry.”

She bit her lower lip, trying to form the words as a thousand thoughts jumbled through her mind. One by one each memory of what she thought she knew about him disappeared until she found herself questioning everything she thought she knew about the two men she had once called friends.

“Wh...?” she stammered out, trying to vocalize the turbulence of emotions that continued to hit her again and again. She felt like she’d had the wind knocked out of her and been punched in the gut. “You lied to me. Two years... You made me think you were *dead!*” Lois accused staring back at him numbly. “I watched the bullet hit you, and you fell to the ground...”

"I know," he acknowledged. He had the decency not to give an excuse—there really wasn't one. She glanced up at him, noting the uncertainty on his face as he stared back at her. His facial expression went from uneasiness to almost fear in the few minutes after he responded. Imagining Superman—*Clark*—afraid of anything was a strange and unwelcome feeling.

The memory of the heart wrenching evening she'd spent mourning his death rippled through her and she looked back at him with a tearful whimper. "I spent two days blaming myself and..." she stopped herself from finishing that statement as she stared back at him, shaking her head. "Do you have *any idea* what you put me through? What you put *everyone* through?"

"I'm sorry," he offered the two-word apology that she wasn't even sure meant anything at this point given the gravity of the lies. He looked down, not meeting her gaze and she shook her head in disbelief.

"You're sorry?" Lois scoffed, shaking her head as she felt tears escape the corners of her eyes, "You keep saying that word like it's going to just erase the lies and ...and the deceit and ..."

He opened his mouth to say something and stopped, clamping his mouth shut as a faraway expression crossed his face. "I'm really, *really* sorry..." he stammered as he looked toward the window.

"Are you *serious* right now?" she snapped angrily as he walked toward the glass door leading out onto her balcony. "You cannot be trying to leave...*now!*"

"I have to go," he said with a pained expression.

"Fine," she bit out, venom dripping from her tone as she stared back at him coldly. "Go."

"We can finish this later," he started to say.

She shook her head, "No, just...go."

"I *am* sorry, Lois," he said, looking back at her as he stood by the window.

"Yeah," she watched her window curtains billow in the wind as he disappeared, closing the window behind him. She let out a frustrated growl and threw her pillow across the room.

Chapter 3

Clark let out a sigh of defeat as he landed on the balcony of his apartment. He entered through the unlatched window at super-speed and changed into a t-shirt and boxer shorts, tossing the crude-oil-covered suit in the hamper. Thankfully there had been no injuries. A minor miracle out of the night that had turned into a living nightmare for him.

<<"*You made me think you were dead,*">>

<<"*Just...go.*">>

<<"*I spent two days blaming myself and...*">>

He let out a heavy sigh and sank down into the soft cushions of the couch, burying his head in his hands. The look on Lois' face right before he left continued to haunt him. She was hurt. He couldn't blame her. He'd lied to her and deceived her for two years. He wasn't sure what to do or say to excuse any of it.

<<"*You mean too much to me,*">>

He let out a shallow breath, recalling the admission of love from earlier. A year ago, he would have been over the moon to finally have her return his feelings. It wasn't Superman she'd declared her love for, it was him—Clark Kent. Selfishly, he wanted Lois to love the man beneath the big red 'S,' but her acceptance of his alter-ego was one of the pivotal reasons he had been captivated by her, to begin with.

It was ironic. Lois' declaration of love for Superman was the excuse he gave himself for why he couldn't tell Lois the truth. Then Mayson's hatred for Superman was the reason he knew he could never have anything more than friendship with her. But neither Clark Kent nor Superman was the real man. Both were just different versions of himself that he presented to the world to hide

behind. He'd been taught since childhood to keep himself hidden from the outside world.

Lois knew both versions as well as anyone could. She knew them as two separate people and now thanks to his own insecurities and fears he may have blown his one chance with the one person that could accept him completely.

He let out a bitter snort, recalling one of the many arguments he'd overheard between Lois and Mayson. Even with all her faults, Lois was consistent. No matter what, she always defended Superman. Not once did she ever look at his alter-ego as a vigilante or the strange visitor from another planet that he was.

He had hurt her.

He knew he couldn't have continued down this path much longer. Lois needed to know everything. Still, the fear of the unknown continued to plague his mind. He had so many questions that remained unanswered. Questions he wanted to address with Lois, but given the harsh dismissal she'd given him when he'd heard the cry for help earlier, he knew any attempt to resume their conversation tonight wasn't a good idea. She needed time. That was the least he could do given everything he'd put her through. He just prayed she would eventually forgive him.

He spotted the laptop sitting on the coffee table and his notes on Albie Swinson from earlier. He'd been so excited about the break in the case that he'd rushed over to Lois' to tell her. How strange that his impulse to share the news on their story had resulted in not only their biggest fight but also a revelation on both their parts. Deciding the only way to occupy his racing mind was to give it something to focus on, he picked up the notes and began scanning through them. His information on Albie Swinson had led back to a man named Stanley Gables. Maybe a quick patrol over Gables' property could provide some answers. If the man was responsible for breaking out McCarthy and Diego, it was only a matter of time before Big Buster Williams showed up too. Whatever these criminals were up to, he was sure it couldn't be good.

He quickly spun into a clean suit and made his way over to the Gables residence. Maybe some good would come from tonight after all.

Clark was Superman.

The thought rolled around Lois' mind for the umpteenth time as she paced around her living room apartment, running through the emotions that came with the revelation. Two men that she had come to think of as good friends were one and the same. The anger that had risen up initially had subsided and in its place was confusion and doubts as she tried to come to terms with everything Clark had told her tonight.

Clark was Superman.

It wasn't a question. It wasn't a theory. It was a fact that she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt and still she found herself in disbelief. How had she missed something so huge? How had she been duped into believing her partner and Superman were two different people?

Her mind ran through the facts once more, recalling one by one the memories of strange occurrences over the last year that now made logical sense. Each disappearance. Each unexplainable and strange behavior. All of them could be explained by the truth she now knew.

Clark was Superman.

It was soothing to compartmentalize each fact one by one just like a story. It was comfortable and familiar and right now she needed something that made sense.

The lame excuses and disappearances weren't him being flakey or scared when they got close. They were him running off to help someone. The strange things Clark always did. Being able to pick a lock in seconds, crack a password before she could refill her coffee, and his ability to just *know* someone was up to

something thanks to a *source*. All of it could easily be explained now. Clark and Superman were never in the same place at the same time. She frowned, recalling the press conference Clark had held a few weeks ago.

She'd have to ask him about that one. There would probably be a lot of conversations over the many things he'd done to deceive her and the rest of the world to keep up the pretense of leading a double life. Reconciling the two sides of him felt like an impossible feat. Every time she felt like she had a good handle on it, another memory would pop up, and all the emotions would rush through her once again, repeating the cycle.

She felt numb. Which was surprising given the anger that had been rushing through her veins less than an hour ago. All that was left seemed to be numbness and despair. She kept coming back to the same question: Where do we go from here? She had loved him, both sides of him and now with this new knowledge, she found herself in a corner unable to pull herself out.

He had lied to her for two years. Made her believe he was *dead* for two days and continued to lie to her over and over again. He had deceived her. He had hurt her. She had opened herself up and taken the leap of faith that this time things would be different. She'd trusted him and in return...

A tear ran down her cheek as she paced around the living room. Clark had gained her trust early on in their working relationship—before even their official partnership. She'd shared some of her deepest secrets with him, and he'd been lying to her. She should just walk away. It was probably much safer to cut her losses and protect herself from any further emotional scars. Yet, he had been the one to reveal the depth of his deception.

She ran a hand through her hair, contemplating her options and how to move forward. Despite her disquieting new knowledge, the fact remained that he — both sides of him — had been her friend for a long time. He had been the one to share this with her. She hadn't discovered it on her own and confronted him. He hadn't been forced to do it, but he had chosen to share what was probably the biggest secret he had. He made the decision to share it with her. He had chosen to be honest with her. That had to count for something, right?

He'd surrendered into her possession his greatest secret with the promise to leave if she so desired, telling her that he expected her to reject him. He had so much self-doubt. Who would have imagined Superman being so unsure of himself? He always appeared so confident and at ease with himself. How had she never seen through the masks he wore? She knew all too well how easy it was to put on a mask for the rest of the world. She had been wearing one for years. Clark was the only one outside of her sister that had been able to see past the façade. Only with Clark, for some reason, had she ever been able to let the barriers down enough to allow a glimpse of the real Lois Lane slip through her hard-exterior.

<<“You can't even give me enough time to process Mayson's death before...”>>

<<“What she thought she wanted was impossible.”>>

<<“I wouldn't...”

“I know,”>>

<<“Did you love her? You seem to be taking her death harder than a lot of her friends, and you won't hardly talk to me unless it's about work...”

“Lois, I didn't love Mayson. I couldn't...”>>

<<“We need to slow down,”>>

<<“You're the only one I ever even considered sharing this with, but she found out by accident that night she died.”>>

<<“I have been trying to be patient and trying to be understanding, but it's really hard when you won't talk to me!”

“I can't! Especially not now,”>>

A frown crossed her face as she grew contemplative, recalling the many conversations from earlier. She knew he'd taken

Mayson's death hard. A part of her had feared that it had been because their relationship had been much closer than she realized and he was grieving someone he loved rather than just a friend. Though now seeing the last two weeks and that night through new eyes she began to realize what she'd mistaken for grief had been guilt. Raw self-loathing guilt that she never imagined Superman experiencing.

The thought of what happened after the rescues never occurred to her before now. Her frown quickly turned to worry as she recalled how hard it had been for him to open up to her. He blamed himself for Mayson's death. Though there was no merit to his self-blame, she also knew to convince him differently was going to be a challenge. He had entrusted her with his secret. He had trusted her with his guilt. Deciding she had put her decision off long enough, she headed into the bedroom to change.

She needed to talk to Clark.

Clark flew back to his apartment with a satisfied smile on his face, content in the knowledge that the case of the missing felons had been solved. Sure enough, when he scanned the Gables residence, he'd found the missing criminals looking over blueprints to STAR Labs with Stanley Gables. He'd kept a close eye on the house when he called the tip into Henderson and then tried calling Lois but had gotten no answer. Knowing Perry would have a conniption fit if he sent their story in without a page one photo, he called Jimmy who surprisingly had still been awake. It had taken his friend less than ten minutes to make it there. Jimmy had been ecstatic at the chance, and Clark had ensured his young friend got enough shots of the trio of criminals when he helped escort them into police custody.

Clark reached his apartment and quickly flew inside, changing into the shirt and shorts he'd been wearing earlier. The tension from the night hung over him as he quickly typed up the story and sent it over to Perry with both his and Lois' by-line on it. Jimmy was sure to get the prints developed in time for the morning edition. Hopefully, the wrapping up of their story could work as a peace offering for Lois. He let out a shaky breath as he turned to the clock, startled to see the late hour blinking back in red digit numbers, '11:58 p.m.'

A hard knock on the front door echoed, pulling his focus away from the story and the time. He scanned the front door and quickly jumped up to answer it when he saw the familiar figure on the other side of the door. “Lois?”

“Hi,” Lois said, twitching her mouth as she stared back at him.

He felt his throat tighten and his chest tighten as he stared back at her. She had spent days freezing him out over their fights about which angle to take on a story, yet a mere three hours after dropping a bombshell on her and leaving to tend to a rescue here, she was.

“Hi,” Clark breathed, uncertain what to make of her appearance on his doorstep.

“Can I come in?” she asked, not waiting for his response as she crossed the threshold of his doorway and into his apartment.

“Yeah,” he closed the door behind her, watching in agony as she paced nervously by the sofa he'd been sitting on moments ago.

“You lied to me.” It was a statement, not an accusation and he mutely nodded, acknowledging the assessment as she continued, “For two ...years.”

“When I needed to tend to a rescue or explain away something that I had done without revealing ...” he stopped, catching himself and sighed, “Yes.” He took a step toward her, “I know this is a shock.”

“This isn't something I can just...snap my fingers and be okay with,” she said as her voice wavered. He heard the slight hitch in her voice. “I mean, two years of memories...thinking you're two people when you're not. Everything I thought I knew...it's gone.”

"I know this is ...a lot," he began carefully, trying to form his response without sounding too eager. She was here, trying to talk to him rationally about this. She wasn't yelling. She was *trying*. "But you *do* know me. You're the *only*one outside of my parents that ever did."

"As two people," Lois corrected. "Not as one."

He took another step toward her, "I've only ever been one person with you, Lois," He spread his arms out, gesturing to himself, "The only thing that was different was a suit and pair of glasses meant to hide everything else from the rest of the world."

She stared at him for a long moment, seeming to take his statement in before responding, "It wasn't just a suit."

"It was to me," he said with a shrug. "Superman—he was never meant to be anything more than just someone who swooped in and helped."

"Maybe this isn't what he expected." Her face grew contemplative as she recalled aloud, "You were talking about yourself."

"Yeah," he nodded.

She took a deep breath and then a step toward him, "I'm not always good at thinking things through—at all."

"I know," a small smile crossed his face. "Though I do wish you would think about things just a little," he brought his index finger and thumb together before adding, "At least when it comes to dangerous situations."

"Sometimes I'm going to make decisions that you may not agree with, but those are *my* decisions," Lois said, continuing to pace in front of him. She stopped mid-pace in front of him, "If this is going to..." she stopped, shaking her head. "This isn't going to change that, got it?"

He couldn't suppress the smile from his face as his mind focused on the term '*this*.' *This*. What was *this*? Was she talking about their relationship? Their friendship?

"I'm not going to stop trying to protect you," he said carefully.

"I know," she fidgeted nervously in front of him. "As long as you don't try to do that by flying me off somewhere for my protection." He nodded his agreement, and she let out a long breath, "I'm still trying to come to terms with all of this, but I can appreciate the fact that you *did* tell me... even though you didn't have to."

"Yes, I did," he replied, taking another step toward her.

"I won't tell anyone," she shrugged her shoulders. "I..." She bit her lower lip, "You can trust me."

"I know," he nodded, finally closing the distance between them and running his hand across her cheek. "I never thought you'd do something like that, Lois."

"Then what was it?" she asked, looking back at him. "I mean, why...for two years?"

"I have always kept this part of my life hidden. *Always*, Lois," he said cautiously. "After everything that happened with Trask ... and Luthor." His hand fell, and he let out a deep sigh, "I was afraid of putting you in danger. Making you a target."

"I'm already a target," Lois clarified.

Clark nodded and shrugged his shoulders. "I never wanted this. I just...I wanted to help. That's all." His brow furrowed. "But in doing so, I've somehow put a target on my back, drawing out every evil criminal that decides taking Superman out would be a good game of sport."

"That you stopped," she pointed out gently. The guarded look she'd had on her face earlier had disappeared. The hard features softened as she looked back at him, her eyes filled with concern.

"Yeah," he nodded his head, "But not without risk. Everyone I care about. Everyone I love is a target. This secret—It's not something I could share with just anyone."

Lois' brow furrowed and she murmured, "That's why you didn't want Mayson to know."

"She never would have accepted this side of me." Clark said firmly, then snorted as he added with dismay, "No one could. I knew there would never be a future," Clark explained calmly. A pained look of disbelief crossed Lois' face with that comment, and he let out a defeated sigh, "She died realizing I was a stranger—someone she never really knew—someone she hated. It's *my* fault."

"*Your* fault?" Her voice wavered slightly as she shook her head, "The paramedics said she was dead the minute she got in that car. There's no way you—even with your powers at full force could have stopped it from happening. You read the report just like I did."

"I wasn't fast enough," he said shaking his head.

"You can't do everything. You can't be everywhere. It's impossible." Lois argued with him, taking a step toward him.

"I *am* impossible," he pointed out.

"You..." she paused before continuing, "...can do a lot, but even you have your limits." She placed a hand on his chest. He heard the words, but he still wasn't convinced. In his heart, he knew he could have stopped that bomb if he'd been faster. Lois ran a hand across his cheek, "There's only so much one person can do."

He felt a lump build in his throat as he listened to her. She was right. He knew she was right, but the responsibility he felt to protect those that couldn't defend themselves was a great one. It was something he'd taken on during his time traveling around the world after college. The desire to use his gifts for good and help those in need, but when he couldn't...the pain and guilt was all consuming.

It still astounded him how fiercely Lois could fight for him. Even after everything he'd put her through, she was here trying to talk him out of his guilt over Mayson's death. He had shattered her trust in him and still here she was. His eyes met hers, sinking into the dark pools that reflected the things he never thought he'd experience in this lifetime. Love. Acceptance. Understanding. Forgiveness.

He felt the tension from the guilt he'd been carrying begin to fade as he cupped her cheek with his palm. He could feel his heart burst with the love he felt for her. Lois was the only one that had ever looked past Superman's powers and tried to see the man behind the mask. The power she held over him was frightening and exhilarating all at the same time. He loved her with every fiber of his being and knew without a doubt he wanted nothing else out of life other than to spend every last second with her.

"You can't blame yourself for what happened. It was not your fault," Lois whispered to him.

Before he could argue any further, he felt her lips on his, igniting the electrical storm tumbling inside him. His arms came up around her as he instinctively responded, and he pulled her tight against him. "Lois..."

She cut him off with one kiss after another, each soft caress working to release the compounding guilt that had been weighing on him for the last few weeks. The tension from his guilt began to dissipate as a new tension began building inside him. Her body draped against him, and he shivered in response as her arms flung around his neck, pulling him to her. There was no pulling back. There were no doubts clouding the intoxicating effect Lois was having on him.

"I love you," he let out a low moan as his fingers grazed against the exposed skin from where her cotton top rode up.

"I love you too," she murmured against him.

"Does this mean I'm forgiven?" he asked between heated kisses.

She threaded her hands through his hair and brought him to her, helping guide him back toward the living room as she murmured, "I'm working on it." She let out a long gasp as they

reached the wall leading to the bedroom. “I’ll let you know in the morning.”

Needing no further encouragement, he lifted her up and carried her into the bedroom, not losing contact with her lips as they sunk down onto the bed. She was perfect. Her body pressed into him, seeking him out as all thoughts died and the sinful pleasure of instinct and raw desire took over.

Anticipation ran through him as he slid a possessive hand underneath the material up to her ribcage and kneaded the flesh beneath her cotton top, grazing his hand against the fabric of her bra. He let out a low groan as he allowed himself to sink further down into her arms as she peppered his face with featherlight kisses. The sound of cotton ripping reached his ears as he helped toss the remnants of her top to the ground, focusing his attention on fulfilling his unwavering desire to touch every last inch of her.

The bra quickly found its new home in the corner of the room, followed quickly by his own shirt and both of their shorts. She let out a shuddered gasp as he ran his hands up and down the unencumbered path of her body as he sought her taste. Her legs looped around his hips, pressing herself into him.

“Clark,” she moaned out his name, threading her hands through his hair. “Yes...”

“I love you, Lois,” he let out a guttural moan as her hands continued to move up and down his body, taking every opportunity to touch him. All he could focus on was the intoxicating sensation of her smooth, delicate hands on him as she devoured him. He wanted nothing more out of life than to spend every waking minute right here with Lois Lane’s body snugly intertwined with his. Just when he thought it couldn’t get any better, he found new heights of pleasure as she enveloped him so completely.

Gone were the doubts. Gone were the fears. All he could focus on was the intoxicating way her legs wrapped around his hips, and her fingers gripped his hair as she called out his name over and over again.

“Lois?”

Lois stared back at the face in the doorway. A stray lock curled across Clark’s forehead and the gentle eyes unobstructed stared back at him. It was strange to see him like this —no glasses and no cape. A mixture of the two men she’d come to know over the last two years. “Hi,” she finally spoke.

“Hi,” Clark breathed.

“Can I come in?” she asked, stepping into the apartment before he could respond.

“Yeah,” he closed the door behind her.

She looked around the apartment. It all looked the same. Everything seemed so different now but yet the same. She felt his eyes on her as she paced around the couch. Finally deciding to just say what she came here to say she spoke up.

“You lied to me.” The statement was met with a nod as she continued, “For two ... years.”

He didn’t try to argue or give her an excuse. He nodded his head and responded, “When I needed to tend to a rescue or explain away something that I had done without revealing ...” He stopped mid-sentence and then sighed, “Yes.” He took a step toward her, “I know this is a shock.”

Shock felt like an understatement compared to what she’d been feeling a few hours ago. This was big. It was a bombshell that she was still reeling from but his alter-ego wasn’t why she was here. She needed to stay level-headed. They needed to talk this through.

“This isn’t something I can just...snap my fingers and be okay with,” she said, feeling the tension in her vocal chords give her own hesitancy away. “I mean, two years of memories...thinking you’re two people when you’re not. Everything I thought I knew...it’s gone.”

“I know this is ...a lot,” he said, staring back at her, “But you *do* know me. You’re the *only* one outside of my parents that ever did.”

“As two people,” Lois corrected, eying him as he took a step closer to her, “Not as one.”

“I’ve only ever been one person with you, Lois,” he gestured to himself with his arms open, “The only thing that was different was a suit and pair of glasses meant to hide everything else from the rest of the world.”

She twisted her mouth as she contemplated his statement for a moment. What he was saying made sense she supposed. She knew all too well how similar the two men were. Had even commented on it many times, but to her, Superman wasn’t just a costume or a disguise. He was a real person. He was someone to the entire world.

“It wasn’t just a suit,” she said softly.

“It was to me,” he said with a shrug. “Superman—he was never meant to be anything more than just someone who swooped in and helped.”

She recalled the conversation shortly after Superman’s arrival when Perry had sent the entire newsroom after the Superman exclusive. Her face grew contemplative as she recited his words from so long ago out loud for him, “Maybe this isn’t what he expected.” She met his gaze, fitting the pieces together. “You were talking about yourself.”

“Yeah,” he nodded.

Superman was just the disguise. That thought seemed so surreal to her, yet staring at him like this, broken and defeated—unsure of himself and riddled with doubts she found it easy to accept. He was Clark. She recognized the uncertainty on his face that mirrored her own self-doubts she’d come face to face with many times. He put up a good front for the rest of the world, but underneath it all, he was just as insecure as anyone else. Fearful and doubting himself. That struck a chord with her as she took a deep breath then took a step toward him, “I’m not always good at thinking things through—at all.”

“I know,” a small smile crossed his face as he held up his hand. “Though I do wish you would think about things just a little,” he brought his index finger and thumb together before adding, “At least when it comes to dangerous situations.”

“Sometimes I’m going to make decisions that you may not agree with, but those are *my* decisions,” Lois said continuing to pace in front of him. The doubts and fears on his face were reflective of her own insecurities, stirring up many long-ago buried feelings of resentment from her almost-wedding to Lex. She stopped mid-pace in front of him. “If this is going to...” she stopped, shaking her head as she decided the more direct approach was best. “This isn’t going to change that, got it?”

She watched the smile spread lazily across his face and felt a flutter inside her abdomen. “I’m not going to stop trying to protect you.”

The sincerity and determination in his tone sent a flood of emotion through her, and she fidgeted nervously beneath his gaze. “I know. As long as you don’t try to do that by flying me off somewhere for my protection.” She looked to him for confirmation, feeling herself waver from beneath his gaze. He nodded his agreement, and she let out a long breath, “I’m still trying to come to terms with all of this, but I can appreciate the fact that you did tell me even though you didn’t have to.”

“Yes, I did,” he replied, taking another step toward her.

She met his gaze, feeling the need to reassure him that his trust wasn’t unfounded. “I won’t tell anyone.” She felt the tension in her shoulders release as she stared back at him and bit her lower lip, “I... You can trust me.”

“I know,” he nodded, finally closing the distance between them. She felt a tingle run down her spine and let out a short gasp

as he ran his hand across her cheek. “I never thought you’d do something like that, Lois.”

“Then what was it?” she asked, looking back at him, searching his face for the answers to why he kept her in the dark for so long. “I mean, why...for two years?”

“I have always kept this part of my life hidden. *Always*, Lois.” His face grew contemplative as he spoke, “After everything that happened with Trask ...and Luthor.” His hand fell from her face, and he let out a deep sigh, “I was afraid of putting you in danger. Making you a target.”

“I’m already a target,” Lois clarified, recalling too many times she’d been put in harm’s way in the hopes that it would draw out Superman.

Clark nodded and let out a deep sigh. “I never wanted this. I just...I wanted to help. That’s all.” His brow furrowed. “But in doing so, I’ve somehow put a target on my back, drawing out every evil criminal that decides taking Superman out would be a good game of sport.”

“That you stopped,” she pointed out gently.

“Yeah,” he nodded his head, “But not without risk. Everyone I care about. Everyone I love is a target. This secret—It’s not something I could share with just anyone.”

<< “I never wanted her to know.” >>

The memory of his confession from earlier popped in her head and Lois’ eyes widened as she put the pieces together. He closed himself off to a lot in keeping the dual identities. Unlike the men she’d encountered in her past, he couldn’t risk a causal relationship or fling for fear they might find out. In the two years she’d known him she hadn’t seen him take on any serious relationship. His friendship with Mayson had been the most interaction she’d seen outside of their own relationship. She wondered momentarily if he ever had been given a chance to have a serious relationship with anyone.

<< “I’ve only ever loved one woman.” >>

He never wanted Mayson to know about his alter-ego, but she’d found out anyway. It wasn’t grief he’d been carrying around this whole time it was remorse and guilt. She met his pained expression and the final pieces to the puzzle fit. The gravity of how much of a burden carrying this secret around must be reminded her of her own isolation and loneliness over the years, and she wondered aloud, “That’s why you didn’t want Mayson to know.”

<< “I never loved, Mayson,” >>

<< “I’ve only ever loved one woman...You.” >>

“She never would have accepted this side of me.” Clark said firmly as he added with dismay, “No one could.” Lois opened her mouth to protest as he let out a defeated sigh and added, “I knew there would never be a future.” A pained look of disbelief crossed her face as she listened to him voice his certainty that he would always be rejected. Forced to live in isolation, “She died realizing I was a stranger—someone she never really knew—someone she hated. It’s *my* fault,”

“*Your* fault?” She shook her head adamantly, angered at the blame he was trying to place on himself. “The paramedics said she was dead the minute she got in that car. There’s no way you—even with your powers at full force could have stopped it from happening. You read the report just like I did.”

“I wasn’t fast enough,” he said, shaking his head mournfully.

“You can’t do everything. You can’t be everywhere. It’s impossible.” Lois argued, desperate for him to hear her.

“I *am* impossible,” he pointed out.

“You...” She stopped, pausing for a moment to collect her thoughts before continuing, “...can do a lot, but even *you* have your limits.” She placed a hand on his chest and moved it up to run a hand across his cheek. “There’s only so much one person can do. You can’t blame yourself for what happened. It was *not* your fault.”

She didn’t give him a chance to argue any further, choosing instead to reassure him in a way she was sure he couldn’t ignore. Throwing caution to the wind, she flung her arms around him, silently celebrating victory as his arms instinctively wrapped around her as their lips met for a soul-shattering kiss.

“Lois...” he let out a muffled moan against her lips as she snaked her arms around him, pulling him closer. She whispered one kiss after another against his lips allowing him to walk her further and further into the living room. “I love you,” he let out a low moan as his fingers slid up the edge of her cotton t-shirt.

“I love you too,” she murmured against him, savoring the sensation of his body pressed against hers. A flutter of anticipation began to build as the heat between them began to build. She let out a soft sigh as he continued to walk her further into the living room.

“Does this mean I’m forgiven?” he asked between her insistent kisses.

She threaded her hands through his hair and guiding him closer to her as the wooden paneled wall came in contact with her back, “I’m working on it.” She let out a long gasp as he pressed into her, silently asking the question that was left unspoken. Was she ready for this? Were they? Her heart was pounding out of her chest, and the thought of stopping seemed torturous. She could feel the soft pangs of desire, encouraging each caress. The aching need in the pit of her stomach continued to flutter as her body demanded more. Two years was long enough she finally decided and let out a sultry whisper, “I’ll let you know in the morning.”

His mouth sealed over hers and her legs wrapped around his waist as he carried her into the bedroom and they sank down onto the bed. His hands wandered up and down her torso, blindly searching for the warmth of her flesh beneath her cotton top. She reached down to help shed the garment off of her when she heard a loud rip echo in her eardrums. She craned her neck, seeking him out as she peppered his face with feather-light kisses. Her legs looped around his hips, pressing herself into him as his lips ran down her body.

“Clark,” she moaned out his name, running her hands through his hair. His hands wandered up and down the length of her legs “Yes...”

“I love you, Lois,” he let out a guttural moan as his palms glided up and down her legs as he buried his head in her shoulder.

He rested his forehead against hers, stroking her cheek as he whispered, “I love you, Lois...so much.” His thumb grazed against her jawline as he ran his fingers through her hair.

“I love you too,” she let out a low moan as he moved against her, running his hands up and down her sides, “...so much,”

Her grip on him tightened as they soon lost themselves in one another’s arms. The world around them slowly disassembled. The tension from the evening’s events and revelations had disappeared and all that remained was the realization that this moment would forever shape her and Clark’s future together. An elated smile spread lazily across her face as she found solace in his arms knowing the distance that had been plaguing their relationship was gone and feeling reassurance that there were no longer any doubts plaguing his mind. The world faded away as they both focused their attention on more urgent desires before succumbing to sleep in the late hours of the morning.

The sounds of the traffic outside echoed in Clark Kent’s eardrums as he began to stir. He squinted his eyes open and felt the bright sun’s rays on his face. A lazy grin spread across his face as he caught sight of the gorgeous brunette nestled against his chest. Recalling the many changes to his and Lois’ relationship last night and the intoxicating way they’d spent the early hours of the morning in one another’s arms, his grin spread into a megawatt smile as he ran a possessive hand over her backside, admiring the way her curves fit so perfectly against him. “I love you, Lois Lane,” he murmured, running his hand across her cheek.

She began to stir, stretching her long legs against him from beneath the covers as her eyes fluttered open, “Hey,” she smiled up at him.

“Hey,” he murmured, tightening his arm around her, enjoying the feel of her bare skin beneath his palm.

“You’re still here,” she grinned back at him. “No one...needed you?” He let out a low groan as her right leg glided up and down the back of his calf.

“I don’t know,” A smile tugged at the corners of his lips as he looked down at her naked figure wrapped beneath the cotton sheet beneath him. “I was...preoccupied with the eventful evening,” he then added with the waggle of his eyebrows, “...and morning.”

“Eventful?” she slanted her eyes at him, giving him a questioning gaze.

He quickly amended his description, “Amazing,” He leaned in to kiss her, capturing her lips with his.

A blush crossed her cheek, and he pulled her to him, cradling her in his arms. She craned her neck back into the pillow and looped her arms around his neck and whispered her own description, “Incredible.”

He felt the crimson blush cross his cheeks as he stared back into her eyes. Every barrier had come down last night. He couldn’t imagine being any closer to her. He knew without a doubt he wanted to spend every last moment until the day he died with her in his arms. He still wasn’t sure what he had done to deserve her forgiveness but he wasn’t going to question the good luck that he had been blessed with.

The doubts and insecurities that had plagued his mind for months were now gone and in their place was certainty and assurance that he had found where he belonged. He made a mental note to remember to stop by the jewelry store for whenever she let him make it official. For now, he was content to remain in her arms for as long as she would have him.

His lips brushed against hers and a smile spread across his face as he whispered, “Perfect.”

She let out a soft sigh and stroked his cheek, silently reading his features for a moment as he reveled in the feeling of being in her arms. So much had changed in the last twelve hours. The soft pang of the clock in the living room chiming the new hour pulled her attention toward the clock on his nightstand. A playful smile spread across her face and she asked, “How mad do you think Perry’s going to be when we stroll into the newsroom after one?”

Clark glanced up at the clock and shrugged, “I can get us there before noon,” He loosened his grip on her and rolled on his back, allowing her to sit up with the sheet draped across her chest.

“I still have to go back to my apartment to change,” she reminded him. “It’s not like I brought a change of clothes with me,” She reached for the torn shirt on the ground and tossed it to him. “Not that they would have survived last night.”

“Right,” he grinned at her, “Note to self, bring *several* changes of clothing.”

“You owe me a shirt,” she fingered his nose with her index finger.

He gestured to his dresser, “Take one,” She opened her mouth to respond and stopped when the phone on his nightstand rang, dragging his attention away from Lois’ naked figure next to him.

He reached over for the cordless phone and answered it, “Hello?”

“Hey, CK, you feelin’ all right?” Jimmy asked over the phone.

“Uh, fine,” Clark glanced toward the dresser and spotted the unobstructed view of Lois digging through his dresser for a shirt.

“It’s eleven,” Jimmy announced the time as if it should mean something to him.

“Yeah, well, weeyuh....I...I had a late night going through the stuff on Gables.” He caught Lois’ questioning gaze and he mouthed, ‘Jimmy’ to her. He could feel Lois’ eyes on him as he did his best to prevent Jimmy from figuring out he was not alone.

Jimmy was a good friend but his filter and ability to keep anything to himself left a lot to be desired. Navigating romance in the workplace was hard enough without giving their co-workers tidbits on his and Lois’ personal relationship.

“Uh-huh,” came Jimmy’s response, “I thought you might want to know that DEA Agent you guys were working with is looking for you.”

“Olsen!” Perry’s bellow could be heard from over the phone.

“And the Chief is looking for you too.” Jimmy stammered out.

“I’m just finishing things up here and I’ll be in shortly,” Clark said.

“And Lois?” Jimmy asked.

There was a dead silence on the phone as Clark feigned ignorance, “I-is she not in yet?”

‘God, I’m bad at his,’ he thought as he listened to the silence on the other end of the phone.

“No, I just assumed ... You know what, never mind,” Jimmy backtracked. “I’ll see you when you get in.”

“Bye,” Clark hung up the phone before he could make things any worse. He glanced back at Lois who was standing in front of him in his old Midwestern University t-shirt. The gray material fell just above her knees and hugged her curves beneath the cotton material.

“What’d Jimmy want?” Lois asked, a smile crossed her lip. “I mean besides the obvious you’re late routine.”

“We’re late,” Clark corrected, watching Lois slip on her shorts from last night. He moved at super-speed and disappeared into a blur of pigments, showering and changing before reappearing in front of her in a dark tan suit and pale-yellow dress shirt.

Her eyes wandered over him for a moment before she added, “That’s going to take some getting used to.”

“Jimmy said the Chief is looking for us,” Clark said confirming her assessment, “But I did...” He stopped mid-sentence when he heard a loud tapping sound at the front door, “Hold on.”

He grabbed the pair of glasses from his nightstand and slipped them on before going to the door to answer it. He frowned at the clock. It was well past the time his landlord or any deliveries would typically be made. He scanned the door and let out a groan when he saw who was on the other side.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he muttered under his breath, jerking the door open. There on his doorstep was a very irritated Dan Scardino. “What do you want, Scardino? A restraining order?”

“Kent, you get enough sleep? Stealing my case right out from under me must have really taken a lot out of you!” Scardino pushed his way inside, holding a copy of the newspaper in his hand. The frown on his face told Clark he wasn’t happy about the arrest. “I didn’t think you had it in you.”

Clark looked at the front page that showed a copy of Jimmy’s photo and the headline ‘*Resurrection No More!*’ with his and Lois’ by-line. He’d used part of the story that Lois had started yesterday and added to it with what he found out last night after Gables’ arrest.

“Wasn’t the objective to catch Mayson Drake’s killer?” Clark stared back at him with a questioning gaze. “I’m not seeing the problem.” He gestured toward the door, “Unless you have something new to discuss...there’s the door.”

“How’d you find him?” Scardino asked, pulling his notepad out, ready to get his statement. “The police said there was an anonymous tip that called in the report.” Scardino took a step into Clark’s face, “I’m going to go out on a limb here and guess that was you.”

“Those sources are called *anonymous* for a reason,” Clark said firmly. “I believe there’s actually a law about it.”

“I don’t give a crap about your damn shield law, Kent,” Scardino snapped irritably. “Gables was up to something and I

need to know who all was involved. Your buddy at the Metropolis P.D. isn't exactly the most cooperative witness."

"And you think *I'm* going to help you?" Clark guessed, looking at Scardino in disbelief.

"You're an intelligent guy, Kent," Scardino replied smoothly. "You don't like me very much. I don't like you." A smirk crossed Scardino's face and he added, "I can make this investigation with the DEA last as long as I want. I hear Washington's got an open position for a field agent here in Metropolis."

"I'm sure you'll get your answers once they finish their investigation," Clark said undeterred by the veiled threats Scardino was making. "You want to move to Metropolis just be sure to give me your address so I can fill it out on the restraining order I'll be filing."

"You really think you can get a restraining order on me?" Scardino scoffed, "We both know the only reason you don't like me is because of a little green-eyed monster. You may not have the guts to make your move on that partner of yours, but ... I'm more than capable of delivering where you *can't*."

"Did you get a head injury in the last twelve hours that made you forget the part where she kicked you out last night?" Clark reminded him in disbelief.

"High emotions make for rash decisions." Scardino shrugged off his dismissal last night, "She didn't mean it." Scardino then turned his attention back to the case, "How did you know McCarthy was with Gables?"

"A source," Clark threw back irritably.

"Name?" Scardino prompted.

"None of your concern," Clark shrugged, gesturing toward the door, "Now if you'll excuse me, I'm already running behind this morning and I don't have anything left to say to you."

"Trust me this conversation is no picnic for me either," Scardino growled back irritably. "Unlike you, I ... " He stopped mid-sentence and lurched his neck over to where Lois was standing in the doorway of the bedroom with her arms crossed over her chest. Clark watched Scardino's eyes wander over Lois' long legs poking out from beneath the oversized t-shirt she wore over her shorts. A knowing look crossed Scardino's face, "Oh, you've got to be kidding me." Scardino gave her a leering look and then turned his attention to Clark, "You two are...?"

"None of your damn business." Clark cut him off with a growl, pointing at the door.

"What about my case?" Scardino shot back.

"What about it?" Lois cut in, shaking her head.

"How did you find McCarthy?" Scardino pointed at the paper.

Lois took the paper and scanned it, her brow furrowing for a moment before responding, "I'm sure if you ask Bill Henderson real nicely, he can help you out."

"He's not!" Scardino looked toward Clark, "And your *boyfriend* over here is holding out on information for an *active* DEA case."

Lois didn't even blink at the label, choosing instead to shrug her shoulders, "Mr. Scardino,"

"Dan," Scardino corrected.

"In your dreams," Lois quibbled before picking up on her original train of thought. "You seem awfully determined to prove Clark had something to do with Gables and the other escaped prisoners' arrest."

"An anonymous source called in McCarthy and Buster's location to the Metropolis P.D." Scardino glared at Clark as he added, "And the Daily Planet is the only one to have the story on it." He held up the paper and pointed at the by-line.

"*'Resurrection No More'* by Clark freaking Kent!"

"And Lois Lane," Clark corrected, placing a hand on Lois' shoulder.

"We were given information on the arrest after the fact," She let out a deep sigh and added, "I can guarantee you that Clark and

I were nowhere near Gables' residence when the arrest happened." Lois gave Clark a wink as she added with a wicked grin, "We were preoccupied *all* night."

Scardino shook his head, "But..."

"From the sound of it, the DEA's expert on the Resurrection pill is behind bars," Lois said with a raised eyebrow. "Probably a good place to start," With that, she slapped the paper across Scardino's chest. "Now if you'll excuse us, we had a very, very, *very* long night and I still have to get ready for work." She pointed at the open door for Scardino to exit. Before Scardino could argue Lois gave him a gentle shove out the door and Clark slammed it behind him.

"*'Resurrection No More'?*" A smile spread across Lois' face as she quoted the leading headline from the story he'd sent in for them last night. She looped her arms around Clark's neck, pulling him to her, "Someone was busy last night."

"You didn't answer when I called." Clark shrugged, wrapping his arms around her waist. "I had Jimmy show up with his camera just as Superman decided to fly by and help nab the resurrected escapees."

"Perfectly timed arrest," Lois grinned back at him.

"I added to the story we wrote and sent it over to the Chief last night," He explained, hoping she wouldn't be too mad about missing out on the wrapping up of the story. "So hopefully that'll save us from Perry's wrath for being late this morning."

"Thanks," she grinned back at him.

"What are partners for, right?" he whispered, leaning in to capture her lips with his. He grinned against her lips, reveling in the feeling of contentment that came with the knowledge that he could finally be himself completely with her. He briefly wondered just how long she'd make him wait before he could convince her to take a trip down to the jewelry store on Broad Street.

"Right," Lois murmured against his lips. "We're going to be late."

"We're *already* late," he reminded her.

"True," an impish grin crossed her face as she pulled him to her. "Might as well earn those dog show articles, right?" With that, she recaptured his mouth with hers in a soul-shattering kiss. All thought of the Planet and last night's emotional rollercoaster disappeared as he concentrated on the path back to the bedroom, she was leading him on.

"And obituaries," he added as she loosened his tie.

"So worth it," she grinned back at him. A smile spread across his lips. Things would definitely be interesting around here.

THE END