

To Love and to Lose

By [bakasi](#) <bakasi_dick@hotmail.com>

Rated: PG

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Summary: Clark has been gone for three years. But is he really dead? When Jimmy stumbles upon a picture of Charles King, author of a new bestseller novel, Lois is determined to find out if he might be Clark Kent. And as Lois and Clark finally meet again, they have to deal with a world of hurt and misunderstandings.

Story Size: 18,308 words (96Kb as text)

I'm sitting at my desk, staring into space. This is a rare occasion, but truth be told, I'm stuck. Try as I might, the article I'm working on just doesn't seem right. I've been typing and editing for the past three hours or so. I've leaned back and reread the whole thing, I've changed the angle several times, I've stopped and written something else. Nothing seems to help. The article on my computer screen is still too long and too complicated. I'd probably lose the majority of my readers before I have even managed to get my point across. I lean back again and heave a sigh. Wistfully, I look at the picture that sits on my desk, right next to the computer screen.

It's a portrait of Clark and me, taken right after he won his first Kerth Award. We're both smiling. Oh, how I wish he could be here now. He'd know how to change all those phrases so this whole article would make sense. I feel that familiar lump in my throat as I run my finger along the picture of my best friend, the man I love, but never told until it was too late. I miss him so much, that sometimes I think it's tearing me apart.

"Get a grip, girl," I tell myself firmly. I withdraw my hand, before tears start to flow down my cheeks. I can't afford a nervous break-down right in the middle of the newsroom. It's been three years since I've last seen him. Three painful years. I should get over him. He's not coming back. He never will. My heart clenches at the thought.

Just to be on the safe side, I push back my chair and decide that a nice cup of newsroom coffee might help me solve my dilemmas, both the emotional and the verbal. I reach for the mug of stale coffee that is still left and pour it onto the plant on my desk. With a pang of guilt, I realize it looks rather sickly.

"Lois!" Jimmy shouts from the ramp. He is so eager to reach me that he almost runs me down. "Lois! You won't believe who is coming to town!" Several colleagues turn their heads to stare in our direction.

*So much for staying under the radar, * I think grumpily.

Jimmy bends down for a moment, trying to catch his breath. As he straightens again, he looks like the proverbial cat that got the canary. By now, most of the newsroom crew is raising their heads. They're just as naturally curious as I

am.

"Oh, come on, Jimmy, just spit it out," I urge. I'm uncomfortable in the midst of everybody's attention. "Is the President running an early election campaign?"

"No, even better, it's - " the squeaking of the door to Perry's office, which Jimmy has been supposed to oil this morning, stops him mid-sentence. Everybody turns their head to see Perry come out ready to usher us all back to work.

"- Clark Kent," Jimmy hurries to say, before Perry has a chance to speak. His words effectively render our editor-in-chief speechless, a feat which is almost unheard of.

"Who?" I croak, dumbfounded. I gape at him, my heartbeat suddenly thundering in my ears. Did he really just say that, or has my aching mind played a cruel trick on me?

"Clark Kent," Jimmy repeats. His face is beaming in a smile that almost resembles Clark's thousand-watt smile.

"But - but - how...?" I stammer, my voice still hoarse.

Perry is the first to find his voice again. "It can't be! Clark is dead!" he reminds us with a pained expression. I know he misses him just as much as Jimmy and I do. Perry forces his way through the crowd that has materialized around my desk. I don't know how I became the epicenter of this mood quake.

"His death was never confirmed," Jimmy replies, unfazed. "And I assure you that he is very much alive. He's published a book under the alias 'Charles King'." Jimmy produces a novel from his bag. "Just take a look at the author's portrait. It's him."

As if on cue, both Perry's and my hand reach out to grab the novel. Much to my dismay, the chief is quicker despite his age. He flips the book open and quickly finds a picture on the last page. Impatiently, I look around Perry's shoulder, trying to get a glimpse.

There is a black-and-white photograph of a man in his thirties or forties. His dark hair is long with a stubborn lock falling across his forehead. A pair of glasses cannot quite hide two beautiful dark eyes. A thick beard covers the other half of his face. Disappointment fills me. I know Jimmy was Clark's friend, too. Maybe I didn't realize how much he really misses him, how badly he wants to see him in this perfect stranger.

I open my mouth to tell him that he's mistaken. But on the second look, something about this man strikes a chord.

Charles King. The name rings a bell. And all of a sudden, I remember a certain bar. It was our first undercover assignment, back when I still refused to be anybody's partner. I posed as a singer, while Clark pretended to be a bartender.

When he first came into the Metro Club, he looked like a seaman with an almost feral air about him that stood in stark contrast to the Clark I thought I had already all figured out. He'd been pretty sexy, though I would never have admitted to that in front of him. He used the name 'Charlie King' back then.

I have a closer look at the photo. Now I feel like I remember those dark eyes and that stubborn lock of hair. And I recognize those lips that are half hidden behind facial hair. My heart is pounding as I read the caption.

"Charles King lives in Kansas. He has worked as a war

reporter during the Latislan-Podansk conflict and has been a freelancer for several international papers before his debut novel appeared on best-seller lists throughout the country.”

Perry’s lips move as he breathes something that to me sounds a lot like “Great shades of Elvis!” So he has seen it, too. After another moment of staring at the book, he straightens himself and shakes his head.

“There might be a slight resemblance,” Perry says. He waves his hand in dismissal and returns the book. The breath I’ve been holding rushes out, leaving me with a sense of betrayal. How could he say that?

“No reason to keep everybody from working,” Perry barks, “Now, this party is over. There is a newspaper to write.” His stern gaze drifts through the newsroom until everyone but Jimmy and I has hurried back to work.

I fold my arms in front of my chest, while Jimmy looks rather crestfallen.

“You can’t fool me, Perry,” I say, just loud enough for Perry and Jimmy to hear. I’m sure the chief will not welcome another commotion “You’re just as convinced as I am that this is Clark! Didn’t you read the caption? War-reporter, freelancer, Kansas.”

Perry raises his brows. “This could just be a coincidence, Lois. Clark is not the only reporter who ever left Kansas.”

“I know you recognized him, too.” I disagree. Call me stubborn, but I just don’t understand why Perry is reacting this way.

“Don’t get your hopes too high,” Perry warns me, always the voice of reason. Though I know he is just trying to protect me, right now I find him rather irritating. “I know you have been searching for him for years. I just don’t want you to get hurt.” He looks genuinely concerned.

“I appreciate what you’re trying to do.” The flash of anger that went through me a moment ago subsides just as suddenly. “But if there is only the slightest chance that Charles King is Clark Kent, I’ve got to see him. There are so many things, I should have told Clark long ago,” I mutter. There is a huge lump in my throat. Before it turns into tears rolling down my cheeks, I look at Jimmy. “You said earlier Charles King is coming to Metropolis?”

Jimmy nods with a giddy smile on his lips. “He’s doing a lecture at a downtown bookshop on Friday evening.”

“That’s three days from now. Then it’s settled! I’m going to cover this lecture for the Daily Planet,” I say decisively. “Any objections?” I hope that my stern look alone conveys that I’m not going to take ‘NO’ for an answer.

Perry sighs. “I hope you know what you’re doing. Just tell me when you’re ready for taking up dog shows, too, will you?” he mocks me. Normally, I would never consider covering a lecture for the Planet.

I chose to ignore that comment. Perry heads back for his office, skipping the Elvis anecdote he might have told on any other occasion. That leaves just me and Jimmy, who still holds the book in his hands.

He doesn’t even flinch as I take the novel. “I guess I’ve got some reading to do.”

“Mind if I join you on Friday?” Jimmy asks. “You might need a photographer.” The look on his face tells me

that he wants to see Clark again almost as much as I do.

Before I can say anything, Perry chimes in. “Don’t be ridiculous, Jimmy. The suits upstairs will already wonder why I sent my star reporter to cover a lecture. They’ll question my sanity if I send in the whole cavalry. After all, the King we’re talking about couldn’t carry a tune in a bucket.” How he has managed to even hear Jimmy is anybody’s guess. “If it’s even Clark, that is.” He obviously considers the case closed. A moment later a thud resounds in the newsroom as he shuts the door behind him.

I flinch in sympathy as I see Jimmy’s disappointment. “I’m sorry. But Perry is probably right.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Jimmy mutters half-heartedly. “Just tell Clark that we all miss him, will you?”

“Of course,” I promise. I watch Jimmy as he returns to whatever he has been working on before.

While I understand that Jimmy aches, too, I’m grateful that I can go alone. Seeing Clark again will stir up some emotions I’ve been trying to bury for years, now. And frankly, I don’t want anyone to witness me falling apart, least of all Jimmy.

Three days later, I sit among the audience inside a bookstore that is rather small for Metropolis standards. I have spent the past days reading the book that I have now clasped on my lap.

It’s the story of a man who is stranded in a faraway land and finds out that he really is the rightful heir of a long-abandoned throne. While the premise is not exactly new, the strange customs, environment, and political system give the whole thing a rather exotic touch. Everything is described so minutely that it could as well have been a travel book. Thrown into the mix is a love story that let my heart ache for the hero. The book is written so vividly that I easily forget it is just fiction. I could hardly stop reading, partly because in my mind the narrator sounded so much like Clark that it took my breath away.

Even after finishing the book, I kept skimming through the pages just to “hear” - for the lack of a better word - his gentle voice again. Now that I’m sitting here, I still can’t quite believe I’m going to see Clark again. My gut does a nervous somersault.

Quite against my usual habit, I’ve chosen a seat in one of the back rows. I need the distance. I don’t know what I’m more afraid of: that Charles King is going to be a perfect stranger or that he is indeed Clark Kent. I’ve been agonizing for hours about what I’m going to say to him. Actually, I still don’t know.

The bookstore is already crowded, but now and again people come inside, hoping to find a vacant chair. The shop owner is standing at the front door, welcoming the many visitors, but also checking their tickets for the evening. The chair and table on the little stage in front are empty, except for a copy of Charles King’s book ‘To Love And To Lose’ standing upright there for everyone to see.

The man, who had been standing at the entrance, closes the door and walks toward the stage. He is maybe about fifty years old, but still looks kind of boyish with wild red locks and freckles all over his face.

It takes a moment before the commotion in the shop

dies down and everyone has taken a seat.

The owner waits until everyone is silent. A huge smile on his face makes him look even younger. “Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you all for coming tonight! I’m Steven Conelly, owner of this book shop,” the man says. “It’s not every day that I can present to you an author who is not only an excellent writer but also an inspiring reader. He’s the rising star of modern American literature, Mr. Charles King.”

The audience claps as Charles King walks up to the stage. Tall and broad shouldered, he could have made quite an impression if it hadn’t been for his haggard features and slumped shoulders. He leans onto a cane and drags his right leg after him in a heavy limp. As in the photo, thick frames, long black hair and a full-grown beard hide most of his face.

Charles King smiles as he turns towards the audience. But it is certainly not Clark’s thousand-watt smile, the one that I loved so much about my partner.

As I stare at the man on stage, I try to figure out if this man is Clark. He certainly has the same color of hair, almost the same stature and also wears glasses. But at least half a dozen men in this shop fit that description. A huge lump of disappointment settles in my stomach. I feel the sudden urge to just get up and storm out of this store. Jimmy was wrong. This man is not my former partner and best friend. I just wanted him to be.

The applause dies down as Charles King timidly smiles again. “Thank you very much for the warm welcome,” he says. The sound of his voice has me rooted to the spot.

I stop breathing as memories transfer me right back to a place in time when Clark and I still were the best of friends. Tears well up in my eyes.

<There is no such word as ‘chumpy.’>

<Of course, there is. Somebody’s a chump. Therefore, he’s chumpy.>

<Try again.>

<Are you challenging me?>

<You bet your sweet chumpy I am.>

Suddenly I remember all those days and nights we spent on a stake-out, the couple of days we visited his family. How I wish that it had not only been for a story.

<Give it a whirl?>

<You’re kidding?>

<No, I’m not kidding. I’d like to dance. If you promise never to breathe one word about this to anybody at the Planet.>

<Promise.>

It was such a thrill to take my place in the line, knowing that the gorgeous man on the other side was my partner.

<You actually know how to do this?>

<Last year I had a girlfriend convince me it was a great way to meet guys.>

<Was it?>

<Define ‘guys.’>

It had been the first time in what had felt like forever that I had truly enjoyed myself in the company of a man. Why had I not realized it that day?

Why is it that all the kisses and embraces we shared were either a ruse or result of a life-threatening situation?

He was such a great man, and I guess on a subconscious level I knew that. I knew I could turn to him when my life was threatened when I was sad or frustrated. He never even once said ‘Told you so.’ He was still supportive even while I made the big mistakes that were bound to hurt him. Like almost saying ‘Yes’ to Luthor’s proposal, like having an affair with Superman...

In the end, it had just been too much, even for Clark. And the day I finally realized that the man I loved had always been Clark, I found his place abandoned. He had left me a note and that was that.

It had taken me months to find as much as his byline again. He had become a war reporter, writing about the Latislan–Podanks conflict, a war that around this time had been turning bloodier day by day. Not long after that, his name had appeared on a list of missing reporters around the globe that “Reporters Without Borders” had published.

Clark - if it is really him - sits down and opens the book.

“Milord!” The voice sounded distant but urgent. “Milord!”

Something or rather someone was tugging at his sheets, slowly dragging him back to a world of pain. Lord Elwood moaned as he slowly came to. His vision swam as he opened his eyes. He recognized the voice of his loyal advisor Gareth sometime before he managed to get a clear view of his features.

“Oh, good, you’re finally with me,” Gareth muttered. “We need to hurry, Milord. The palace is not safe anymore.”

“What do you say?” Lord Elwood asked, confused.

Now that he was awake, the pain in his arm and back had returned with such a vengeance that he wondered how he had been able to sleep in the first place. The pain kept him dazed, but still the tiny bundle Gareth carried in his arms did not escape his notice. Lord Elwood’s mouth went dry.

“Is this -?” he began, but Gareth, who had followed his Lord’s line of sight, interrupted him.

“Yes, this is your daughter,” he hurriedly confirmed. “But there is no time to explain, Milord. Please try to get up! We must leave the palace immediately. Your life and that of the little princess depend on it.” Holding the baby in one arm, Gareth used his other hand to assist Lord Elwood as best he could, removing the sheets further to expose his battered body.

“What is going on here? Where is Lady Judith?” Lord Elwood asked. He was quite reluctant to let himself be dragged out of bed without further explanation. “I’m not going anywhere until you tell me what this is all about.”

Gareth heaved a sigh. “I’m deeply sorry, Milord. Lady Judith is gone. The midwife and doctor did everything they could, but they were unable to save her.”

Lord Elwood blanched. “Judith is dead?” he whispered, pained.

Gareth nodded, sadly. “I’m afraid so.”

He paused for a moment. This gave Lord Elwood some time to let Gareth’s words sink in and to compose himself. A heavy silence settled between them.

Lady Judith had been the heart and soul of their

marriage, their whole kingdom. With her gone, all their fights, the whole war had been for nothing. The people would not look up to Lord Elwood, would not respect him the way they had Lady Judith.

A commotion on the far side of the palace shook both Gareth and Lord Elwood from their stupor. The baby began to wail in fear as Gareth flinched in shock.

“They will soon be here, Milord,” Gareth said fearfully. “We must leave now, or both you and your daughter will be killed. Since Judith had a little girl, your line of heritage is considered terminated. There is no legal way for you to produce a rightful heir now. As soon as word went out that you were badly injured, several noblemen began claiming that they were the next in line. Now the war that we so painstakingly stopped is raging all over again. Only this time there is nothing you can do to bring peace back to us. I’m so sorry, Marcus.” Gareth added. For once, Gareth dropped the formalities and addressed his Lord using his first name.

“So, it’s either leave or die?” Lord Elwood muttered. His gaze came to rest on the tiny hands of his daughter that were balled into fists and shaking with her crying. It was enough to finally get him into motion. With a grunt of pain, he got out of his bed. “Who would have thought that it would end like this, Gareth, my friend?”

“It doesn’t have to be the end, Marcus,” Gareth replied as he laid a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “You and the little one can start a new life. I will help you return home safely and tell the world that the baby was stillborn and that you died in the final battle. None of us will ever bother you again.”

Lord Elwood smiled sadly. “I thought that I had made myself a home here, found a good friend, love even. I can’t believe that Judith is really gone.” He swallowed hard. “It should have been me instead of her.”

More noise filled the palace as the intruders moved in. Gareth laid the baby in Lord Elwood’s arms. “We need to get going now. There is no time to dwell on the past if you want to have a future,” he said. Gareth dragged Lord Elwood with him. “You were the best leader our kingdom could have wished for, if only the people had been ready to appreciate your wisdom.”

Charles King, or maybe Clark Kent, closes his book and looks up into the faces of the people who have spent the past forty minutes listening in awe. One after the other begins to clap, until the whole audience applauds enthusiastically. Slowly the man gets up from his chair and reaches for his cane before he walks a couple of uneven steps up to the front to take a bow. Steven, the owner of the book shop, joins him on the small stage, applauding as well.

“Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen,” he says as the applause fades. “Charles King will now sign your copies of his novel and answer your questions.” Steven announces proudly. “He has two hours, so please don’t hog his time.” He pats Charles-Clark on the back, who seems quite uncomfortable with so much attention. “Thank you so much for coming, Mr. King. I have quite enjoyed this evening so far. Hearing you read that passage made me feel as if I was there with the characters. It’s not every day that we can

welcome talented authors like you, not even here in Metropolis.”

“Thank you for having me,” Charles-Clark says as his smile broadens. “I’m honored that there are so many people who want to hear my story. This still is kind of new to me. When I wrote this book, I did not imagine it would have such an impact. Thank you.”

With a grateful nod towards the audience, Charles-Clark limps back to his chair and takes a seat. Several people have already gotten up firmly holding their copies and stepping in line to have Clark sign it. Soon Charles-Clark is busy chatting with people who probably tell him just how much they liked his book.

For a while, Charles-Clark keeps signing books and chatting amicably with his readers. I watch him from the distance. I can’t bring myself to get up and join in the line. A part of me desperately wants to talk to him, to see if there is something left of our friendship if maybe I might even get a second chance. But if there were, have I earned it? Haven’t I already blown all my chances with Clark?

He declared his love for me and I told him off, said that I loved him like a brother, and went right ahead to breaking his heart.

<And Luthor, do you love him?>

<I don’t know. I do have feelings for him. I haven’t said yes, yet. And I won’t, until I’ve talked it over with someone else.>

<Who?>

<I think you know. If you see him, will you tell him I’m looking for him?>

Actually, I still don’t quite understand why Clark even passed on the message. However, that same night Superman came to my apartment and I gave him my little speech.

<Well, there’ve been a lot of changes going on in my life and I’m trying to make the right, decisions, but I can’t until I know how you feel. Superman, is there any hope for us? You and me? I’m so completely in love with you that I can’t do anything else without knowing... >

The kiss that followed still takes my breath away, even if there is nothing left of it but a memory. It had been a moment of pure bliss. His hands on my body had been my every dream come true, or so I had thought. Making love to Superman had been exhilarating. Hovering above the bed, held by his strong arms, knowing that I was the one who got to kiss every inch of his body... This was such a great turn on that I just forgot about the few men before him.

For weeks I’d walked on cloud nine, and I’d actually been so naïve to think that the dream would never end.

But of course, it did. Sometimes being in love is just not enough. At any rate, it provides a poor basis for a stable relationship if hormone driven madness is all there is. At first being Superman’s secret girlfriend had given me quite a thrill. But in the long run I was not happy about all the secrecy. I wanted us to go out, to watch a movie in the cinema and cuddle, to have dinner in a restaurant. I wanted to be able to talk about my boyfriend, confide in my sister about the problems we had in our relationship. I wanted to do all those things that normal couples did.

In the end, I felt like I was having an affair with a married man – a man who was married to the world. I was

not happy that way, and neither was Superman. Oh, of course I did no longer call him Superman then. He had told me his name, Kal. But even now, in my mind, he still is Superman, and maybe **that** is the most telling thing about this whole episode.

Over time, Superman withdrew. He spent more and more time rescuing the world and less time with me. I couldn't help the feeling that he kept something from me. Though I never suspected that he was seeing another woman, there was only a certain level of emotional intimacy that he would allow. I don't think I ever truly got to know him.

One lonely evening I watched this old movie "The Apartment", with Jack Lemmon and Shirley MacLaine. You know, the one where he lets his boss use his apartment for his extramarital affairs. That evening, I realized that the girl played by Shirley MacLaine was really me. While Superman never treated me as badly as Mr. Sheldrake did Fran, he also would never be really there for me like Clark could. That was when I realized that Clark loved me, though he had withdrawn his confession of love after we had managed to bring down Luthor. And I realized that I loved him.

But instead of really seeing him for the great man that he was, what had I done? I had been busy looking down on this 'Hack from Nowheresville'. I had made fun of his mild manners and his tendency to see the good in everyone. I had been so afraid of kissing another frog that I hadn't even taken the time to check if maybe he was a prince.

Lost in my train of thought, my body has decided to take action and step into the line. So, when I emerge from the world of memories, I find myself standing behind a young woman who is the next one to let Charles-Clark King sign her copy.

"Your book is quite an amazing mix of tender love story and brutal war. It kept me on the edge of my seat the whole way through. I couldn't stop reading," The young woman walks up to him and lays her copy into his hands.

Charles-Clark smiles and replies, "Thank you."

"Neither could my husband, and usually he only expresses contempt for any love story I ever read." The woman goes on in a lower voice. She leans over and for a moment, I think that she is going to touch Charles-Clark's hand. But if she had something like that in mind, she refrains from doing so. "Thanks to you, we finally have a book we can talk about. So could you please write something to both of us?"

"Sure," Charles-Clark says easily. "What are your names?"

The woman grins. "You wouldn't believe it... Judy and Marc. Isn't that a funny coincidence?"

Charles-Clark laughs softly. "Yes, indeed," he agrees. He picks up his pen and writes, 'To Judy and Marc, may you always find something to enjoy together,' He adds his signature and hands the book back to her. My heart stops at the sight of his handwriting. I have seen that so many times.

"Thank you so much," Judy says excitedly. "It was such a pleasure meeting you."

"Yes, you too." Charles-Clark sounds a little subdued as if something is troubling him.

His eyes don't quite meet Judy's, and so he does not recognize me as I step forward. I'm the last in line, and in a moment it's only him and me. My heart is hammering in my chest and for the blink of an eye, I contemplate again to just run out of this store. I take a breath. Soon, he will look up, and then I'll have reached the point of no return. Another shaky breath enters and leaves my body as I fight to find the right words. Will my voice even work?

I take in a last gulp of air, clinging to the hope that this is not going to be a complete catastrophe. "Clark? Is that really you?"

Startled, Charles-Clark looks up. Our gazes lock and his eyes widen as he recognizes me.

"Lois," he croaks.

"Clark!" I breathe in relief. I feel a smile spread across my face, as I blink the tears away that are threatening to roll down my cheeks. "Famous author, huh?" I ask nervously. "I thought I recognized the writing." I take in the glasses and beard, then stopping at his cane leaning against the table. "Where have you been all this time? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Clark says softly. He dodges my first question. "And you? Still, working for the Planet, huh? I read some of your articles. You're still the best."

"Thank you" I blush as I reach for his hand. Touching him sends jolts of electricity through my body. "I was afraid I was never going to see you again, Clark. I missed my friend and partner."

Clark opens his mouth, but instead of telling me that he had missed me, too, he closes it again. For agonizing seconds, he says nothing at all.

Then after what to me seems like an eternity, he replies. "Well, I guess you were right from the beginning. I just wasn't cut out for the big city."

I frown as new tears well up in my eyes. "So you just ran off, practically vanishing from the face of the earth? Just like that?" I snap my fingers.

"I left a letter," Clark argues, probably knowing that is a weak excuse. "You were the one distancing from me first. I didn't think you cared that much."

"I had just gone through a pretty difficult break-up," I mutter defensively. Difficult break-up, indeed. I almost snort at the thought. Of course, he's right. Clark is not the bad guy here. I am. "I'm sorry that I shut you out as I did."

"I'm sorry, too, Lois," Clark replies softly. "About so many things."

"Would you like to... I don't know... go for a drink when you're done here, Clark? I'd really like to talk some more, you know... catch up." I ask him this shyly, desperately hoping that he will give me another chance to make things right.

"I'm sorry, Lois, but I really need to go back to the hotel now. Maybe some other time." Clark uses that non-committal tone of voice that really means "Thank you, but **NO**."

My smile falters a little, but I quickly try to put it back into place. Most likely it's not all that convincing. "Sure. You're pretty busy right now, I guess. Working on your next novel or something. Just give me a call when you've got some spare time, will you? It's still the same number." I turn on my heels, then look back over my shoulder.

“Goodbye, Clark. It was nice seeing you again.” I wave at him as I leave the book shop, almost running.

I stop outside. When has Lois Lane ever been known to give up that easily?

But surely I’m able to see when a battle is lost. And what have I been thinking? That Clark would gladly pick up our friendship from where we left off? I hurt him so badly that he became a [B]war reporter[/B] rather than to stay in Metropolis. How could I ever convince him that I truly love him after what I did to him? And he doesn’t even know half of it! How can I expect that he loves me after all this time?

I still remember the dejected look on Superman’s face when I broke off with him.

<I knew that you never really loved me, Lois. I’ve known from the very beginning.>

<How could I really love you, Kal? I don’t know you. You don’t let me.>

<It’s true, Lois. There are things about me that you don’t know. But I don’t think that knowing them would change anything. In fact, I believe they would only drive us further apart. I just can’t be the man you want me to be. I have tried, oh Lord, have I tried.>

I believe this was the first time I saw Superman cry. Tears were rolling down his cheeks when he said goodbye. In the blink of an eye, my world fell apart. Breaking up with Superman had been no decision I had taken in the spur of the moment. But still, as soon as I had done it, I felt strangely empty. The worst thing was that there was no one to talk to, not Lucy and particularly not Clark. For a year and a half, he had been the one to turn to in times of need. Even after I had started my relationship with Superman he was there for me.

It had killed me to keep him in the dark about Superman and me. But Kal had insisted that it was better that way. The fewer people knew, the safer I was. He had probably been right. Still, all those secrets had turned my life upside down.

I’m standing on the other side of the street as Steven and Clark leave the shop. Clark talks to Steven for a while until they finally shake hands and walk off in different directions.

I can’t help but follow him as he leaves the side road the book shop is located. He heads for the next main street. I know I’m going to lose him if he’s taking a cab there.

Clark turns the corner and the next moment he’s out of sight. I let out a soft curse and hurry to catch up with him. The lights on my corner of the street turn red, and a few moments later traffic on the main street is going again. I see several cabs pass the crossway. Disappointment washes through me as I realize that Clark is probably gone.

Finally, I reach the crossroad and change the sidewalk, walking around the same corner Clark did. And suddenly, I see him again. He’s leaning on his cane and walking down the street.

Should I call him? Should I close the distance and join him? Truth be told, I’m not ready to face him just yet. So I keep following him. With a rush of panic, it dawns on me that I haven’t got a clue what I’m going to say to him as soon as we reach his destination. And given his heavy limp, that might be any minute now since he decided to walk the

distance.

Superman’s voice echoes in my head again, drowning out my thoughts.

<There are things about me that you don’t know. But I don’t think that knowing them would change anything. It would only drive us further apart>

What had he been talking about? What kind of secret had he been hiding? Had he already known about New Krypton? That he would have to leave?

<You know, Clark, I have a funny feeling that you didn’t tell me your biggest secret.>

<Well, just to put your little mind at ease Lois... you’re right.>

That memory of Clark pops in my head. He, too, had been hiding something. I had almost forgotten about his irritating habit of running out on me and his lack of suitable explanations.

And suddenly, an epiphany hits me like a ton of bricks. Clark’s book, New Krypton, Superman... Could it be that Lord Elwood is really Kal El? Has Superman returned to earth and told Clark his story? They had been friends after all... Or is this book such a page-turner because it’s actually an autobiography disguised as fiction?

I gasp in shock at the implications. Is Clark really Superman? Reflexively, I shake my head. That is ridiculous. How could my clumsy former partner be Superman? I’ve seen them together, haven’t I? The three of us were at my apartment. We...

But that was Superman’s clone. And aside from that, I’ve never really seen them in the same place. In fact, Clark used to run off to call the police or contact Superman only seconds before the caped hero showed up. Was that how he did it? Had he just changed into the costume?

Lost in thought, I still follow Clark. The streets are deserted in this area because most of the shops are closed at this hour. A few cars pass by, but even the traffic is low by Metropolis standards.

Clark has slowed down, making it rather easy for me to keep up. His shoulders are slumped and he runs a hand through his hair. It’s a gesture that usually indicates he’s distressed. As I watch him from behind, it seems even more unlikely that he could be Superman. It’s not only the cane and the limp that rule out the possibility. He doesn’t look like him at all, not anymore anyway. Years ago, there might have been a slight resemblance. Besides, Kal has super-healing. Wouldn’t that mean that whatever happened to him on New Krypton should be healed by now?

And he would have told me, wouldn’t he? After all, Superman stands for truth. He wouldn’t have kept his secret identity from me. Superman is much stronger than that. If Clark was really him, he wouldn’t have gone into hiding. He wouldn’t pretend he’s dead.

<I tried to be the man you wanted me to be.>

What had Superman meant by that? I have no idea. In fact, I don’t know what to think. Right now, I’m not even sure why I am following Clark. To clear the air? To get answers he might not even be able to give? To win him back? What am I going to do if my crazy idea is right? If Clark really is Superman? Would I be mad at him for never telling me? Would I even want him back? After all, I broke

up with him. And what if I'm wrong?

These are too many what-ifs. I'm not going to find the solution by mulling over the problem.

Before I really know what I'm doing, I pick up my pace and close the distance. Clark is just walking into Centennial Park. A few lights brighten the deserted path. Maybe that's for the best - no prying ears.

"Clark!" I yell after him. "Clark, wait, we need to talk!"

For the longest of moments, he doesn't react. I wonder if, by a cruel twist of fate, I've been following the wrong man with a cane. But as I reach him, he stops and faces me, his brows raised.

"Lois," he says softly. In his eyes, I see the faint hint of a smile. "I should have known that you wouldn't give up that easily."

"Of course, I'm not giving up, not now that I've finally found you. I thought you were dead. Everyone at the Planet did." I swallow hard with the lump that suddenly is in my throat.

"Well, as you see, I'm not," he replies. "You can go back and tell everyone the big news." He shrugs as if none of this really matters to him, as if he no longer cares for the people he used to call friends. His agonized expression, however, belies his words.

"After everything we went through, you can't tell me that you don't care," I challenge him.

"That's just it, Lois," he retorts almost angrily. "We went through too much! What do you even want?" He looks pained, completely spent.

I've seen him like that before. When I told him that I didn't want to be his girlfriend anymore. I don't know how I could have been so blind to never realize they were one and the same. Now it's so obvious I want to knock myself over the head. A pair of glasses, a cane, long black hair, and a beard - he's never hidden his identity better than now.

But he is no longer able to fool me. Clark Kent is Superman.

"Why did you never tell me that you're Superman?" My voice is unsteady, trembling with the last shred of uncertainty about his true identity.

For a moment there, I think he's going to laugh and tell me that I'm nuts. But then Clark's eyes widen in shock. His mouth opens and closes a few times as if he's trying to say something. Maybe he feels just as overwhelmed by my discovery as I am. Seconds stretch into an eternity.

"Because I'm not," he finally whispers.

A rush of anger fills me. Doesn't he realize that it's a little late for denial? The look on his face alone is all the confirmation I need.

Before I can respond, he continues. "I've only ever been Clark. That is who I was when I came to Metropolis and I was still Clark when I left. Superman was someone I created to help. He ceased to exist when I left for New Krypton."

I find Clark's perception of Superman rather irritating. "He was real to me."

"I know." Clark heaves a sigh. "For your sake, I tried to make him real. But I failed, didn't I? You broke up with me as soon as you realized that Superman was just another guy with flaws, same as everyone else. Or did you already know

then that he was in fact just plain old Clark?"

I shake my head. My innards are burning with anger. "That's not the reason, you mule-headed moron," I shout out. Too late, I realize that calling him names is not the best course of action if I want to regain Clark's friendship. Filled with shame, I clamp my mouth shut and look at my feet.

"That's it. I'm done here," Clark retorts and turns his back on me.

For a moment there, I'm ready to let him go. He's just aggravating. After putting Superman on my private list of federal disasters, I glorified Clark - his patience, his consideration. Superman hadn't been patient. Or why else would he have made love to me the first chance he got? He hadn't even been such a great lover. Well, actually I'm not being fair, since I had been his first time. Later, he'd changed in that respect. Clark was different, or so I thought. But how could he be, when he was actually Superman? How could that even be true? This is all so confusing. But no matter what becomes of it, I have to know the truth, now.

"Don't you dare run out on me," I cry. I can't keep the anger from my voice.

Clark turns his head and flashes me a furious glance. He brandishes his cane and laughs bitterly. "As if I could."

Wrong choice of words. Again! Inwardly rolling my eyes at my own tactlessness, I bite my lips.

He heaves a sigh of resignation. "Okay, Lois, by all means, go on insulting me. I'm listening."

I take a deep breath and try to calm myself. I know that he won't give me another chance.

"I'm sorry, Clark. That was uncalled for. The truth is, I had no idea Superman was you all along. I realized it just now. I have been so blind. But something about you suddenly opened my eyes tonight."

I pause and wish he would say anything to indicate whether I have finally managed to find the right words. But he just looks at me impassively.

"I broke up with Superman because there was a part of him that he just wouldn't let me see." There is something else I need to say. After this tremendous mess we created, someone needs to speak the truth. I take a deep breath before I continue. "And I broke up with him because I love you, Clark."

Clark stares at me, open-mouthed. Then his jaw tenses and he clamps his mouth shut. He looks down, his jaw still working. Anger seeps through his every pore until it becomes almost palpable.

His face shows his pain and he is not even trying to hide it. "You broke my heart, Lois," he croaks. "Twice. Love is not something you put on like a robe and change whenever you feel like it."

"But Clark..."

"I'm not done yet," he interrupts me. His brows furrow in anger. "Lois, we both know that you don't love me. You told Clark so in no uncertain terms, and you told Superman. What kind of future could there be for us?"

"Then tell me, why did you come to me as Superman and kiss me senseless? Why didn't you just tell me about your secret? Why did you make love to me, when I had just broken your heart?" Tears start to flow freely down my

cheeks. “You didn’t even stop to ask if I wanted that!”

“I don’t remember you complaining,” Clark retorts. “Who chose that flimsy, revealing breath of nothing? I sure didn’t make you wear that!”

Now it’s my time to fly off the handle. “That’s so chauvinistic! Okay, I wanted it, too. But that still doesn’t explain your behavior. Did you do it just to spite Luthor? The Clark I knew wouldn’t have done that. The Clark I knew even resisted my advances when I was under the influence of the pheromone!”

His expression softens. “Yeah, he did, didn’t he?” he says wistfully.

The shared memory obviously has a calming effect on both of us. “Clark, don’t you think I deserve the truth? After everything that happened between us, I think we both need to talk.”

He lets out a slow breath and nods reluctantly. “I guess we’ve both done things we’re not proud of,” he concedes. “Okay, let’s talk. I owe you that much. Come on, Lois. I need to get back to my hotel. We can talk there. This is not something we should discuss here.”

“Where are you staying?” I ask curiously. We’ve been walking past several decent hotels, but as far as I know, the next place is several blocks down the street.

“Centennial Hotel,” Clark replies.

“You can’t be serious,” I gasp. That’s on the other side of the park. It’s quite a walk from here for a healthy person. For Clark, it must be next to impossible.

“I needed some fresh air,” he explains uneasily. After a moment, he adds, “I guess I could use a cab.”

Despite the late hour, it is pretty easy to hail a cab. We spend the ride in an uncomfortable silence, which is rather difficult for me. A myriad of questions appear in my head. It takes all the willpower I have not to ask them all at once. But even Mad Dog Lane has to admit that a cab is not the right place to discuss our private issues.

Fortunately for me, even a ride through half the city doesn’t take all that long at this late hour.

A little later, I follow Clark along the corridors of the Centennial Hotel until we reach his room. He fumbles for his key card and opens the door. Then he steps aside to let me go first. Still the gentleman.

I shrug off my coat and step into the room. It’s a suite with an adjoining bedroom. I stop dead in my tracks as I find myself looking into the blue eyes of a blond woman my age. She gets up from a large, comfortable sofa.

“Clark, you’re back,” she says. Her brows rise in surprise as she sees me. “Oh, you have company.”

Clark introduces us. “Lana, this is Lois. We used to work at the Daily Planet. Lois, this is Lana. She’s an old friend from Smallville.” Clark, too, takes off his coat. Then he turns to Lana. “How did things go with Sara?”

Lana smiles broadly. “She was such a sweetie! Fell asleep right away and hasn’t woken up once.”

“Thank you for looking after her,” Clark says. For the first time this evening, a full-blown smile appears on his lips.

“Is there anything you need?” Lana asks.

“Thank you,” Clark says gently, “but no. You go to bed.

It’s late already. I’m sorry for keeping you up this long. Have a good night, Lana.”

“It was my pleasure. Good night, Clark.” Lana gives him a soft peck on his cheek before she turns to leave.

The kiss is innocent enough. He doesn’t pull her into an embrace and she doesn’t linger any longer than strictly necessary to say goodbye. There is no indication that the two of them are anything but what Clark already told me – friends. Still, I feel incredibly jealous all of a sudden, jealous at their familiarity that seems just so natural.

Clark and I both stand there in silence until Lana closes the door behind her. I need a moment to sort my feelings. Clark takes my coat and hangs it up.

When he comes back, I ask, “Who is Sara?”

Clark’s jaw tenses. “Just to make one thing crystal clear, Lois. Everything we discuss tonight is strictly off the record. Not to mention my having been Superman.”

Ouch! That hurts. “Do you have so little trust in me?”

“I’m sorry, that was petty. Of course, I know you wouldn’t destroy my life just for a headline.” Clark’s stern expression softens a bit. “Sara is my daughter,” he volunteers. Then he points towards the couch, inviting me to sit. I take the gesture as a peace offering.

“You... you have a daughter?” My stutter betrays my shock and I sit down quickly. “How... why...”

“The people of New Krypton were pretty adamant about needing an heir for their throne,” Clark says with a wry smile. He sits down as well, putting as much distance between us as physically possible. “They wouldn’t take ‘No’ for an answer. Much as some other person I happen to know.”

His dark brown eyes rest on me. Sometimes they seem to look right into my soul. For a moment, I really don’t know what to say. This has happened lot tonight, too many times for my comfort.

“So, your novel is autobiographic,” I ask. I have the strange notion of leading an interview with the man I used to call my best friend. How did we even get to this point? This feels far too formal.

Clark lets out a soft chuckle. Maybe he has exactly the same thought? “Pretty much. There are some details I invented, though.”

“Such as? And don’t tell me you changed the names. That part is obvious!”

The Clark I used to know would have taken the bait and teased me. This Clark doesn’t.

Instead, he looks down at his lap. “The love story, for example. That didn’t happen as I described it.” He looks up again and his eyes find mine. “After you broke up with me... after I left the Planet, I became Superman almost full time. Two Kryptonians, Lady Zara and Lieutenant Ching, came to earth around that time. They only watched me, at first. Eventually, they contacted me and told me about the war on New Krypton. Lord Nor, a cruel and selfish man wanted to claim the throne and marry Lady Zara. They asked me to come with them. That was when I decided to let Clark be a war reporter. That way no one would suspect a thing if he vanished about the same time as Superman did.”

I nod. Before he had left for New Krypton, Superman

had given an interview to the press, telling us about an impending war on his home world and that he needed to go. He hadn't given any more details back then.

Softly, I ask "And why did they need you?"

"Well, I was the rightful heir to their throne," Clark replies. A faint blush creeps onto his cheeks. I know that he had never been very comfortable being the center of attention. "My father Jor-El had been High Emperor of Krypton before it exploded. Lady Zara and I had been married as babies, a custom that's pretty common among Kryptonian nobles. Her father had been the leader of their people when they were still searching for a new home world." He pauses and gets up from the sofa. "I'm thirsty. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Some water would be nice," I say gratefully.

On his way to the mini-bar, he continues. "Zara's father had died. While she was his successor, she was also a woman. According to Kryptonian Law, she could never become more than an interim leader. She had to marry, and as long as my death could not be confirmed, Zara wasn't free to marry anyone else but me."

Clark bends down to open a little fridge standing close to the door. He takes out two bottles of water, picks up two glasses that are sitting on the fridge, and limps back to the sofa.

"Kryptonian Law is more than just a little complicated," he says with a sigh. "I don't think I ever fully understood why things had to be so utterly difficult. Anyway, in my novel, Lord Elwood falls in love with his Lady Judith." Another pause follows as Clark sits down again and pours each of us a glass of water. Then he puts both bottles on a little table that is standing in front of the sofa. Slowly he takes a sip of water and looks at the glass in his hands. He swirls the contents around a few times before he empties the glass in another gulp and sets it on the table as well.

"The truth is that Zara was already deeply in love with Lieutenant Ching. When Zara's and my marriage was sealed, I told her that I wouldn't hold her to her vows." Looking up at me, he shoots me a meaningful glance. "Actually, I was too heartbroken to really give myself into a marriage after what happened between you and me. Particular since I didn't love Zara."

My cheeks flush with embarrassment. Before I allow myself to get carried away by my feelings, I quickly ask, "And how did you end up having a child together?"

"Uhh, things didn't go as planned," Clark grunts and looks away. "I wanted to prevent the war and then change the law so that Zara and Ching could marry after all. But that plan failed. After one year into our marriage, we were still not any closer to peace than we had been in the beginning. The Council of Elders was worried about our inability to produce an heir. Little did they know that we hadn't even tried." Another chuckle escapes his lips, hinting at the humor that I love so much about Clark.

Incredulous, I ask, "So they forced you to have a baby?"

Clark nods. "Artificial insemination," he mutters, blushing once again. "Not my favorite procedure, I'll have you know."

"I guess it was even less pleasant for Zara."

"You may have a point there," Clark concedes. "At least

we could convince the Council to try it this way before they could force artificial fertilization on us. That would have been even worse for her."

He takes the bottle of water again and pours himself another drink. This time he empties the glass in one gulp.

"The rest pretty much happened as I wrote it. The war turned from bad to worse. Nor almost won the upper hand until I eventually managed to defeat him. I was badly wounded and almost didn't survive. Zara died in childbirth after Ching was killed in the final battle." Clark's expression turns sad. I can tell by the look on his face that while he might not have been in love with Zara, she had been a good friend.

"Perhaps Zara had lost her will to live when she learned about Ching's death, I don't know." He heaves a sigh.

"Without Zara and without a male heir, I lost almost any support I had in the Council. After Nor's death, there suddenly were a couple of families next in line to inherit my title."

Clark stands up and walks over to the window that is behind the huge sofa. He turns his back on me and looks into the darkness outside. I see him clench and open his fist a few times as if he is struggling with the memory.

"Most of the Elders hoped I would die so that one of their sons could claim the throne of the High Emperor. Some of them were even ready to kill me to achieve their goal. So right after I ended one war, another one started." He shakes his head sadly.

"In the end, I had only one ally left. They realized before I did that I would be fighting a losing battle. He urged me to leave. He refused to sacrifice my life for a world that was so obviously incapable of embracing peace." Clark turns around to face me again. "Sara and I owe him our lives."

"And then you returned to Earth."

"I was sent back to my parents," Clark continues softly. "They were pretty shocked to find me on their doorstep, covered in blood and cradling a wailing baby to my chest." He falls silent for a while and stares into space.

I don't know what to say. Instead, I reach for my own glass and take a sip. Reading about a bloody war in a book is one thing. Knowing that mild-mannered, gentle Clark actually fought it is something completely different. There is a haunted look in his eyes, as if he is reliving all those memories right now.

I put my glass back on the table and break the silence. "How long have you been back?"

"About a year, give or take," he says. The haunted look disappears.

"You still haven't healed." I wonder for a moment in what a terrible shape he might have been when he returned.

"Uh, actually, I don't know about that," he shrugs. "My wounds have healed, my invulnerability has kicked back in. All my other powers are still noticeably absent."

I glance at the cane that still rests in Clark's hands.

"What about your leg?"

"Mom calls it a dissociative paralysis. She's picked up her psychology classes again," Clark replies, a wry smile appearing on his lips. "Basically, she thinks that my subconscious is suppressing my powers and causing the pain in my leg so that I don't have to be Superman again."

I frown. “And what do you think?”

Clark shakes his head. “I don’t know. She could be right. Or maybe after living under a red sun for almost two years, it just takes time for the yellow sun to work its magic.”

I’m surprised by his casualness. Or is it just an act? “Don’t you miss your powers?”

“I’ve always wanted to be normal, have a family.” Once again, Clark doesn’t really answer my question. “I admit that this is not quite how I imagined becoming a father.” A smile spreads across his lips as he thinks about Sara.

He loves her, but I think, deep down he misses his powers, too.

<When we were little, Lucy and I’d play a game. We’d ask each other, ‘What would you rather be able to do - fly, or be invisible?’>

<And you chose...>

<Invisible. I wished I could walk through all those closed doors. I guess I still do.>

<And what do you think you’ll find there, behind those closed doors?>

<I don’t know. Something different, wonderful... something I don’t have, or can’t have. So, what about you?>

<Huh?>

<Invisible? Or fly?>

<Fly.>

<Really?>

<Yeah.>

“I bet you miss the flying,” I whisper.

“Who wouldn’t?” he says softly.

Suddenly, I wish I could go back in time to start over new. I want to be on that roof again, just getting to know Clark. I want to take off the blindfolds and really see him. Not that he is Superman, I mean. I don’t think that I would have made good use of that knowledge. But see him for who he really is inside. That could have spared us both some trouble.

Or would it? A tiny voice keeps nagging me in the back of my mind that there are things I still don’t know about Clark.

I heave a sigh and shift on my seat. “How did we end up here?”

He raises his brows. “On this sofa? Let me think. You followed me, insulted me, and then demanded that I tell you everything about myself.” For the briefest of moments, he lets me see his smile again. I think that for the first time this evening he’s actually smiling because of me. “Yeah, I guess that about sums it up.”

“No, silly!” I roll my eyes. “How did we end up making each other’s lives so miserable, Clark?”

His expression sobers. “Well, we made some pretty bad mistakes.”

“Like me hurting you when I asked you to contact Superman, right after you had confessed your love for me...” Maybe that had been the worst of all. A little stone I kicked off that started a landslide. “But why on Earth did you come? Why did you let me add insult to injury?” I take a deep breath, still not able to understand how he could have kissed me after I had just broken his heart.

“I wasn’t in my right mind,” he replies. He gets up from the sofa to look out of the window.

“You can say that again!” I mutter. “Clark, what-”

A soft wail interrupts us, followed by another, louder cry.

Clark turns around to look at the bedroom door. “Sara is awake,” Clark says. “Look, I have to take care of her. Perhaps it’s even better when you read what happened to me. I brought the journal I wrote back then.”

Much to my surprise, he grabs a notebook that sits on the coffee table and hands it to me. “The notes you’re looking for should be somewhere in the middle. I’ll be back in a bit.”

I gasp in surprise. “You’re carrying around your journal from three years ago?”

Clark chuckles softly. “I was asked to write another book. Turning my time on New Krypton into a novel proved to be rather therapeutic. So I thought this emotional rollercoaster ride might be worth a shot.”

He turns and hurries into the bedroom. “Hello, Sweetie,” I hear him whisper. “Did you wake up? Daddy’s here now. Shush.”

I look at the notebook and open it, still a bit flabbergasted. Each page is marked with a date and filled with Clark’s neat handwriting. I flip through the pages until I find the date I am looking for, the day I told Superman about my feelings for him. But I can’t find the exact date. It should be May 1st. Clark’s journal stops on the day before. That’s strange, because aside from that he seems to be a very regular writer.

I read about the destruction of the Daily Planet, about me starting to work for Luthor... Clark wrote about his failed attempts to tell me what kind of a man Luthor was and how afraid he was that I might accept his proposal. The journal stops one day before Clark revealed his feelings for me in Centennial Park. For some strange reason, the journal picks up three days later.

May 3rd, 1994

Just when I thought that life was difficult enough with juggling two identities, things completely get out of hand. I wish I could pinch myself and wake up from this nightmare. But try as I might, I can’t go back in time and change what happened. I’ve got to live with it somehow. Any hope of making Lois see Clark is shattered now. Lois Lane is Superman’s girlfriend. I don’t even know how that happened. Well, I do know which events led to it. But for the life of me, I don’t understand what was going on with me.

When I try to remember the past few days, it’s as if it’s all veiled by some haze, as if I had been drugged. Is that even possible? I’d like to say that this Superman wasn’t me. Mom would have a field day. And she’d tan my hide, too, if she knew what I’ve done.

It all started three days ago, when I met Lois and told her about my feelings for her. That probably wasn’t such a smart move, but I was kind of desperate. I couldn’t let her marry Luthor just like that. Unfortunately, pouring my heart out backfired, painfully so. Lois said that she only loved me like a brother. I guess I had half expected that. It still hurt, though. Admittedly, not as much as what she said

next. She asked me to contact Superman for her. Of course, she has only eyes for him. But why does she have to rub it in my face when I just confessed that I loved her? That would be cruel even if I actually were two people.

I spent the next few hours agonizing about whether I should go and see her as Superman. I mean, I could imagine what she was going to ask him. That was bound to hurt some more.

Before I could make up my mind, a false bank alarm sounded. There hadn't been a robbery. From then on, something strange was going on with me. Suddenly, I felt relaxed and completely at ease. All the frustration and heartache were gone. And visiting Lois seemed like a fantastic idea. So I did. It was already dark when I hovered over her apartment. Lois had been waiting for me.

She wore a sweet little nightgown that revealed more than it covered.

"I heard you wanted to see me," I said.

She invited me in. "Yes, please come in. I'll put on a robe."

"Please, Lois, don't. I like what I see," I replied huskily.

If she had been put off by that, she covered it well.

Instead of fetching the robe, she just stayed with me. Her cheeks looked a little flushed.

"There have been a lot of changes going on in my life and I'm trying to make the right decisions. But I can't until I know how you feel." She closed the distance between us and touched my chest. "Superman, is there any hope for us? You and me? I'm so completely in love with you that I—"

That was when I kissed her as I had never kissed her before. Nothing else mattered but the feeling of her lips on mine. My hands explored nearly every inch of her body I could reach without undressing her. And I wanted more, so much more. I wanted to lose myself in her; wanted to feel her naked skin on mine. I couldn't get close enough to still my hunger for her. It was all-encompassing. When we parted, we were both breathless.

"Oh, Lois, you don't know how much I've been longing to hear you say this," I muttered. Then I kissed her again.

It didn't matter to me that I was with her as Superman. I didn't waste a thought on the possible consequences. I simply didn't care about anything but my pleasure.

Somehow I'd been reduced to my primal instincts and let lust take over. One thing led to another and suddenly I was making love to Lois. She didn't stop me, either. I'm not sure what would have happened if she had tried to. That's what scares me most.

Hours later, I woke up from this drug-induced state or whatever it was. Totally confused, I excused myself with having to save someone and flew off. But before I could come to terms with what I had done, there were similar events like the false alarm. And each time I arrived at the scene of a supposed crisis, I felt that same kind of lethargy take hold of me. Nothing seemed to matter but what I really wanted. And that was to lose myself in Lois' touch, her body, her kisses.

I lost three whole days that way. For some reason, those incidents stopped and I was my old self again. I don't know what caused this. I'd suspect it was Luthor's doing, but I really don't see why he would want Superman to have an

affair with Lois. That just doesn't make sense!

The problem is, what am I going to do now? Tell Lois that I didn't mean for this to happen? That I made a mistake? She'll be devastated. She'd probably lose any trust in men in general. Moreover, I'd push her right back into Luthor's arms. She just told Luthor that she couldn't marry him. I should be overjoyed, only I'm not. Can I really love her as just Superman and only be her friend as Clark?

But what's the alternative? It would be totally crazy to break up with her as Superman and keep wooing her as Clark. In the end, she'd end up dating Superman anyway. Or should I tell her my secret? Would she understand and welcome Clark into her life as well? Or will she think that I tricked her into a relationship she didn't want? I don't know what to do.

I don't want to watch Lois from afar when she is in love with someone else, even if that someone is me. This is nuts!

I put down the journal. Whatever I've been expecting, it certainly wasn't this. It's definitely interesting to read his version of our first intimate encounter. Actually, looking back to the first night, I'm not even sure why I readily jumped into bed with Superman. I guess I was overwhelmed that of all women he had chosen me. His kisses had made my knees weak and his hands had set my body on fire. I had wanted him, no doubt about that.

But if I'm completely honest, I don't think I had been entirely ready. My experience with men had been limited. And the men I had been with had cared more about their pleasure than about mine. I thought that was just the way sex was like. Later on, Superman - or rather Clark - showed me that it could also be different. Still, in hindsight, I was a bit resentful that Superman had not asked my permission, the first time. It just didn't fit the image I had of him. Now I know why.

I look at the journal again and continue to flip through the pages. After that first night I went to Luthor and told him that I couldn't marry him. He was furious, and I caught a glimpse of the man behind the suave exterior. Luthor said that I made a mistake and that I would come to see reason. It sounded like a threat.

May, 8th 1994

I'm worried about Lois, but I'm also glad that she's finally listening to me. She even apologized to Clark for not believing him when he warned her about Luthor.

We've started to investigate the bombing of the Daily Planet building. Jimmy is helping us, and even Perry took a break from retirement to give us a hand. Together, I'm sure we'll find enough evidence to bring Luthor down.

Working with Lois again almost feels as if nothing happened between us. I'm beginning to hope that maybe I can still win her heart as Clark before I tell her my secret.

We actually managed to expose Luthor as the criminal that he truly was. Inspector Henderson had been delighted to find out who the boss was. When he had stormed Lex Tower to make the arrest, Luthor had jumped from the balcony of his penthouse. He hadn't been able to escape justice, though. Superman had caught him on his way down and Luthor went into prison, sentenced for a lifetime.

October 2nd, 1994

So much has happened in the past few months. The Daily Planet is fully renovated now. Luthor's trial is over and things are settling back to normal. It still feels kind of strange to have Lois as my secret girlfriend. I asked her not to tell Clark about us. One reason is that I don't want to discuss her love life with Superman or give her advice if things don't go smoothly. The other reason is that I want to be able to flirt with her as Clark. This is such a bizarre situation. Am I actually thinking about trying to betray myself with Lois? Mom already told me that I'm going crazy. She decided to pick up her psychology classes again, just in case.

Yesterday, Lois got suspended because her source was killed. She really is devastated. When I visited her as Superman, she cried her heart out and I tried to comfort her. We cuddled on her sofa and talked. In times like these, I'm grateful that she lets me get so close to her. I wouldn't have been able to give her a firm hug as Clark. She would have put on a brave face and told him that she didn't need his pity.

Later, Lois visited Clark in the middle of the night with one of her brilliant ideas. I was also happy that she still turns to Clark when she needs him.

But it kills me that I can't give her both Superman and Clark at the same time. Mom said that I should go on and tell her about Superman. I'm afraid that Lois will feel betrayed if I do. After the past few months, I've told her so many lies and half-truths that she won't be able to forgive me. How can I get myself out of this mess?

I pause for a moment and stare into space. I can't help but wonder what I would have done if Clark had told me about his secret identity then. The truth is that I don't know. I'd been shocked to find out about Luthor's true character because I absolutely hadn't seen that coming. The trial had revealed even more of his wrong-doings than we had uncovered. Finding out that Superman had lied to me as well would have just been the icing on the cake, I guess.

Clark's lullaby to Sara in the bedroom interrupts my thoughts. Perry is right. He really couldn't carry a tune if his life depended on it. But while he might lack talent as a singer, he certainly is a good father.

Anyway, instead of giving myself a hard time about not seeing through Lex's philanthropist act, I had been living a dream. Superman had visited me each night, spending a few hours at my place. He had supported and protected me as the Prankster had threatened to kill me. He had been there for me when Clark had been killed by Clyde Barrow.

I take in a breath. Now that I think about it, Clark couldn't have been killed by that bullet. He had pretended to be dead! Hastily, I turn the pages until I find the right date.

November 13th, 1994

Clark is dead. My final hope that I might be able to win Lois over as Clark is shattered. I don't know what to do. Maybe, given time, I will come to realize this is a good thing. I could stop playing this hide-and-seek game with Lois. If I was Superman full time, I wouldn't be lying to her anymore. But the truth of the matter is that I don't know how to become Superman. So far, he's just an act I was hoping I could drop someday.

But what if the right day will never come? Shouldn't I spare myself a lifetime of heartache?

But is that fair to Lois? She is suffering at the loss of her partner and friend. But how could Clark return?

I'd like to ask Mom's advice. But I'm afraid she's going to tell me that I'm losing it completely. Perhaps she's right about that. I doubt there is even a psychological term for problems like mine.

I close the journal and put it back onto the table. I feel a little guilty reading about Clark's innermost thoughts. It doesn't feel right, even though he gave me permission to do so. Thinking back at the first few months of my relationship with Superman, I was just deliriously happy. Clark's death, however, had been a major setback. I guess it was the first time I actually realized how much this man had meant to me. I was utterly devastated. Superman had been my anchor. But I couldn't let him see how much I actually missed Clark. It felt like betraying him because I began to understand that he wasn't the only man I was in love with.

Before Clark returned from the dead, I had just been incredibly sad. But when he came back, I had a huge problem on my hands. How do you love two men? I had told myself that I had already made my decision. I had thought that he was happy with Mayson...

My gaze darts back to the journal. What about her? I pick the notebook up again to read some more when Clark steps back into the living room. He's carrying his daughter in his arms. The baby girl is resting her head against his chest, her eyelids drooping every now and then. She blinks into the light. Then she turns her head to hide against his shoulder.

"She's hungry," Clark explains softly. He walks over to a cupboard with several bottles on it. There's a small water boiler, too.

"Can I help you?" I ask.

"No, I'm good, thank you." Clark takes a bottle of water and twists off the lid. He pours some of it into the water boiler and fills an empty baby bottle with the rest. For the next few minutes, he prepares a bottle of milk for his daughter, talking softly to her while she watches him.

Sara seems to become a little bolder and more awake as she waits for her meal. She's starting to take a look around until her little eyes focus on me. A smile spreads across her face and she points to me with one small finger.

"Lana," she says. "Lana."

Clark turns his head to look at me. "No, sweetie. That's Lois. Lana has gone to bed. You'll see her again tomorrow."

"Lana," Sara insists.

Clark shakes his head and smiles. "Ever since she saw Lana for the first time, she seems to think that every grown woman is called Lana. Except for my mother, of course. She's Gramma."

I suddenly feel compelled to ask, "Are you and Lana a couple?"

"No, she's just an old friend," Clark says. "Happily married, by the way."

The water has obviously reached the right temperature, because Clark pours the hot water into the bottle, closes the lid, and starts to shake it. He returns to the sofa and sets Sara down on his lap. He holds the bottle to his cheek to

test the temperature one last time before he hands it to Sara. Hungrily, she begins to drink the milk.

“Lana and I went to high school together. I dated her a few times, but it just didn’t work out.” Clark shrugs, causing Sara to drop her bottle and stare at him. “Sorry, sweetie, didn’t mean to startle you.” He bends down to pick up the bottle and hands it back to her. “When she heard that I had returned to Smallville with a little daughter, she came to see the baby. Lana loves kids as long as they belong to someone else. Sara and Lana – that was love at first sight. Lana has been an occasional babysitter ever since. But for the most part, she’s busy running her own travel agency back in Smallville.”

I feel strangely relieved to hear their relationship is just platonic. But there is still something I want to know. “And why is she here now?”

“Mom didn’t have time. She’s attending a psychology class this weekend, so I couldn’t leave Sara with her. That’s why I asked Lana if she could do some babysitting for me while I was holding the lecture. She was thrilled because she wanted to test this hotel anyway.”

For a time we both fall silent. I watch little Sara as she drinks her milk. How do I feel about her? I certainly didn’t expect to learn that Clark is a father now. Suddenly I feel like an intruder. It’s been three days since Jimmy stormed into the newsroom to tell me that Clark was still alive. It seems like that happened in another life.

I had been hoping to find the Clark I knew. I wanted to persuade him to resume our friendship until I would eventually reveal my feelings for him. But the man I’m sharing this sofa with is not this old Clark. He’s changed. We share a history that I hadn’t even been aware of. He’s been in a war. He’s become a loving father.

I’m not sure how I feel about all this. Do I even want to be friends with Clark again? Can he forgive me? Can I forgive him? There are so many questions and I’m sure that tonight won’t be enough to find answers to all of them.

Clark seems to read my thoughts. “This is a bit much to take in, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” I reply. I’m not sure what to say. There are so many questions I still have no answer to. So, where should I start?

“I didn’t think I would ever see you again,” Clark says softly. “Frankly, I didn’t want to. But for what it’s worth, I’m glad you followed me and made me talk to you. There are things I was never able to tell anyone about. It feels good to finally get them out in the open.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” My eyes dart back to the journal that is still sitting on the table. I wonder what other secrets it contains. My gut twists painfully. I had been about to search for Mayson when Clark entered the room.

“Did you sleep with her?” The words are out of my mouth before I even know it.

Clark gapes at me, taken aback. “Sleep with - who?” He blushes.

Wow, Lois, just great. I know I’m not the world’s most tactful person. But tonight I really go out of my way to put my foot in my mouth. The thought that he might have betrayed me with her just sends my emotions spiraling out of control.

“Mayson,” I mutter. I clench my hands to keep them from fumbling around nervously.

Clark shakes his head. “No. I have to admit that I was flattered by her attention. It was kind of refreshing to have someone fawn over Clark instead of Superman. We had lunch a few times. But that never amounted to more than a kiss on the cheek.”

“You kissed her on the mouth,” I accuse him.

“She kissed me,” he counters.

“Oh, big difference,” I spit. A sudden rush of anger pours through me. I feel awfully reminded of all the arguments between my parents.

Clark takes my hand and squeezes it gently. I feel the urge to pull back. But before I can act on that impulse, his warmth radiates through me. His touch has a very calming effect.

“You assumed we were a couple,” Clark tells me. “I encouraged that belief. I was secretly hoping that maybe you were a tad bit jealous.”

That I was. “Why did you never tell me about your secret?”

Clark looks down. His daughter has emptied her bottle by now and is resting her head against his chest. Her eyelids start to droop again.

“I didn’t know how,” he says softly. “I was so happy to be there for you in a way that I couldn’t before. To hold you and kiss you and talk to you on a more intimate level than Clark.” He shifts on his seat and Sara’s eyes flutter open again, but only for a moment. “I didn’t want to give that up. At the same time, I was unhappy that I couldn’t be entirely myself when I was around you...” His voice trails off. “Excuse me for a moment. I’m taking Sara back to bed.”

He gets up, cradles Sara against his chest, and blows a kiss on her forehead.

His limp seems less pronounced than earlier. I watch Clark as he vanishes into the bedroom and closes the door behind him. I release a breath I didn’t realize I have been holding. Clark is right. This is very much to take in. And there are so many questions I still want to ask. My gaze drifts through the room until I find the journal again that is of course still sitting on the table. I can’t help myself. I have to pick it up again. Flipping it open, I immerse myself in Clark’s memories.

December, 24th 1994

I did something very selfish, today. I lied to Lois and led her to believe that Superman was so busy saving lives, that he couldn’t spend Christmas with her. But I visited her anyway, as Clark. It was one of the most wonderful evenings I ever had. We talked and we laughed, just as friends, but still... I feel much more comfortable around her when I’m not wearing the suit. After we had had dinner, we stood behind an open window and listened to the carol’s singers. I lay an arm around her. Oh how much I wished I could just kiss her hair, inhale that incredible scent. Perhaps I should just tell her. Everything would be so much easier if I did. Or everything will be over...

I still remember that Christmas Eve. I remember how much I enjoyed being so close to him. And when we listened to the carol’s singers, I was so happy to share that moment with someone else, out in the open, for the world

to see. I couldn't help but think that with Kal things would never be that easy.

Kal came to spend Christmas Day with me. But after that, he made himself scarce. I don't quite know if he was actually so busy being Superman, or if he might have tried to spend more time with me as Clark. In the light of knowing that they're the same man, I'm not so sure anymore. Right now, I don't even remember if Clark and I actually did spend more time together. I was just too disappointed about seeing so little of Superman.

Everything seemed to change again when Superman was blinded by Dr. Leit's light. He needed my help, and suddenly we were much closer again.

So what was the final shove? What made me break up with Superman? Well, I guess it all started when Luthor escaped prison. Clark and I figured that his lawyer, Sheldon Bender, would be a good place to start looking for him. Perry organized a stake-out in a small apartment at the Metropolis Marina. Once again I got a glimpse of what life of a normal couple might be like. And I thought about what would happen if I asked Clark out. We could just go into a restaurant, eat dinner and share the dessert. And suddenly I realized that I craved this kind of normal life. Being with Superman and stealing mere moments between rescues with no hope of that ever-changing – that wasn't what I wanted. I had thought that loving Superman and being loved by him was worth any sacrifice I had to make. But at the end of the day that just wasn't true.

March 19th, 1995

I'm beginning to realize that it's over. We spend such a wonderful night at the Marina, again just as friends. I thought that maybe the day to tell her my secret would come soon. But right now, Lois is just fed up with Clark. I have been so busy as Superman that we haven't been able to spend much time together. And I have to admit that I also feel guilty about Mayson's death. If I hadn't been lying in Lois' arms as Superman, she might still be alive. I know I can't rescue everyone. But even though I didn't share her feelings for me, she was still a dear friend.

But what really worries me is that Lois is flirting with someone else. A Dan Scardino has suddenly appeared in her life. He claimed he was investigating Mayson's death, but he clearly has some other agenda. I don't know what and frankly, I couldn't care less. All I need to know is that Lois turns to him rather than to Clark. It was hard enough to have her love Superman instead of Clark. But I couldn't stay and watch her fall in love with someone else.

I swallow against the lump in my throat. I had been so caught up in my own emotional disaster that I hadn't realized how Clark had perceived my flirting with Dan Scardino. Or rather his flirting with me. I don't think that I had actually realized what I'd been doing. My thoughts had revolved around more acute problems. Did I really want to break up with Superman and try to start a relationship with Clark? Just around that time, Clark had been noticeably absent on several occasions. I just hadn't been sure if I was just going to jump out of the frying pan and into the fire.

I turn the page and go to the next important date, my heart beating in my chest.

April 2nd, 1995

Lois broke up with me. I should have seen that coming, only I didn't, not really anyway. I thought that we were just having a hard time with my rescues and all.

Did I really believe that she would never break up with me just because I'm Superman? That somehow my invulnerability would stretch out into any part of my life?

Well, it doesn't. And having to say goodbye to Lois hurts more than kryptonite ever could. It cuts deep into my soul.

I've been fooling myself into believing that she really loves me. I was hoping that someday I'd share my secret with her. When she'd be ready to accept that she has to love Clark too...

But as I suspected from the very beginning, Lois only fell in love with the fantasy. She never really loved me. Not the Clark me, and not the Superman me. I'm a stranger in this world. Perhaps love for me is just not meant to be.

Now that Dan Scardino has turned up, she doesn't want me anymore. I don't know what to do. I flew into the Arctic and screamed my head off, but that didn't help much. The only thing I know is that I have to leave Metropolis. Clark will just stay long enough to pack his things. Superman might be around for a little longer. I don't know. Actually, I don't know anything at all right now.

I fight against the tears that are about to roll down my cheeks. He really thought that I'd broken up with him because of Scardino? No wonder he'd been so angry with me. I have to admit though, that my timing had been really bad. I know that my decision to end my affair with Superman was made before I even met Dan. I'd been so busy trying to come to terms with everything that had happened and with what I wanted. I guess I hardly registered what kind of effect the presence of Dan Scardino had on Clark. And I hadn't told Dan to get lost either. So, when I had finally made up my mind about how to proceed with Clark, I had knocked at his apartment. But the door had been open and the place abandoned.

Later, Perry showed me Clark's resignation and a note that told me he wasn't going to come back.

"Are you okay?" Clark's voice pulls me out of my reverie.

I look up. He leans against the frame of the bedroom door. A small frown creases his forehead. The door behind him is closed. Sara obviously is asleep again.

"I'm so sorry, Clark," I mutter past the lump in my throat.

"Me too," he says softly.

The frown disappears. Clark looks relaxed as if by letting me read his journal a huge weight has been lifted off him. Slowly, he walks back to the sofa and sits down a lot closer than before. He reaches out to shut the journal that is still in my lap.

"We both made mistakes, Lois. It wasn't fair of me to keep my secret from you. I was selfish to hope that I could win you over, that there was still a chance for us. I should have told you and let you decide what kind of future we had." He looks down at his hands.

"That would have been better," I agree. "Clark, the reason I broke up with Superman was never that I didn't love him. But I realized that I could never be more than his secret affair. And that was something I couldn't live with

for the rest of my life.”

I reach out and take Clark’s hand in mine and squeeze it for a moment. “And then there was Clark, the man I could always turn to. The man who came over to spend Christmas with me. The man who chose me as his date for his first Kerth Award. The man who teased me, stood up to me, and was always there when I needed him. Not just to save my life, but to help me in any way he could. I realized that I’d rather spend an all-night stake-out at the Marina with you than one perfect evening above the clouds. But you were gone when I wanted to tell you that.”

A sad look clouds his face. “So, I was successful, after all, huh?”

For a moment there I hope that the spell is broken. I want him to bend towards me and kiss me again like only Clark can kiss me. I want to feel his lips the way I felt them when he was with me as Superman. But he doesn’t move and neither do I, because I’m afraid that I’d be crossing an invisible line. Maybe it’s too late for us. There’s too much damage to repair in one night. I can’t expect him to just forgive me. One small mistake could shatter any progress I have made. So instead of asking him if there’s still a chance for us, I settle for something safe.

“Did you ever find out what happened to you that first night?” I ask.

He looks a little confused by my change of subject. “Uh huh,” he mutters. “Remember the few days Superman just didn’t care about robberies and such? Right after we broke up?”

I nod. “I thought that he was out of it because I broke up with him.”

“Well, that was when I encountered Red Kryptonite for the second time,” he explains. “The effect of it was quite similar. Only that time, I wasn’t so crazily in love with you. While the Green Kryptonite makes me physically sick, the Red Kryptonite has an effect on my psyche. It amplifies my feelings and lowers my inhibitions. The first time I went crazy with lust. The second time I got so depressed that I just didn’t care for much of anything. I figured that Luthor must have found Red Kryptonite.” Clark lets out a small chuckle. “I bet he wanted to get the green variety.”

As he says that, I remember something that I heard when I told Luthor that I couldn’t marry him. “Yeah, now that you mention it. Luthor was talking to someone on the phone about a ‘Series K,’ when I went to him. He was quite angry. He ordered whoever was on the phone with him to run more tests. I didn’t know what to make of it then. And over time I just forgot.”

Clark nods slowly. “I’d say that confirms my suspicions.” He takes off his glasses and pinches the bridge of his nose. It’s the first time I see him do that. He sets his glasses down on the table. “Is there anything else you want to know?”

I look at Clark and feel my heart beating in my chest. That’s my cue. I know that if I leave this hotel room now without asking, I’ll probably never get another chance.

I take a deep breath, trying to muster all my courage. “Clark, I know you have no reason to believe me. But I really do love you. I was so happy to see you again. Is there a chance for us at all that we can be friends?” I swallow

hard and bite my tongue for a moment. But this needs to be said, no matter the fallout. “And maybe more?”

Clark’s eyes rest on me. He remains awfully quiet. I’m desperately trying to read his expression, trying to discern whether it’s longing and love I see there. But I know that whatever there might be, my wishful thinking is clouding my judgement. A moment stretches into an eternity as we both sit on this sofa in silence.

He lets out a slow breath and shakes his head. “No, Lois. I promised to tell you the truth tonight.” He shifts on his seat restlessly before he finally gets up again and walks over to the windows to stare out into the night. “It’s not that I don’t love you anymore. I don’t think that I could ever stop loving you.” His voice is no more than a whisper. “But I can’t go through that kind of heartbreak again.”

“So - if I go now, this is goodbye?” I’m fighting a losing battle against the tears that are now falling freely. “Forever?”

As he turns towards me, I see tears glistening in his eyes as well. “Yes, Lois. I’m sorry.”

I have this strange sensation of falling as if someone just pulled the rug out from under me. Suddenly I feel numb, completely detached. My body seems to belong to someone else as I close the distance between me and Clark. He is still standing in front of the window.

“Then all I can say is - goodbye, Clark,” I hear myself say. My voice is hoarse. My feet walk on their own volition, just a few steps until I’m only inches away from him.

I stand on the tip of my toes and place a soft kiss on his cheek. I could lose myself right there in the feeling of his skin on mine. I breathe in the soft scent of his aftershave. He hasn’t changed it. After all this time, he’s still Clark. Hot tears are rolling down my cheeks and I wish that I could continue to exist in just this split second that I kiss him. It’s painful to stop touching him, but I have to drag myself away.

“Goodbye, Lois,” he says softly.

The alarm clock rings, pulling me out of sleep. I need a moment to come to. It’s much too early. It takes me a moment to remember what happened. But suddenly it comes back with a vengeance. Clark. I met Clark again. I don’t know how I made it home, or even out of his hotel room. At some point I must have called a cab, else I wouldn’t be at home in my bed. But that seems no more than a distant memory, like a dream.

The memory of Clark is still fresh, though. And so is the pain of having to say goodbye to him. I pull my blanket above my head and try to bury myself underneath it. I don’t want to get up ever again. I had no more than a couple of hours of sleep. But while I fell asleep instantly, completely spent from the emotional roller coaster ride that lay behind me, I’m fully awake now.

For a moment, I think about calling in sick. I’m not ready to work. If I step into the newsroom, where everything reminds me of Clark, I’m bound to have a nervous breakdown. But on the other hand, what am I supposed to do at home? Sit on my sofa, clad in a terry cloth robe with a big container of chocolate chip ice cream – how long can I do that?

So, like a robot, I drag myself out of bed and go through my morning routine. Perhaps work will help me keep my mind off the things that happened yesterday. All those revelations that still take my breath away. I drink a cup of coffee but forego breakfast. I don't think I could keep anything down.

About an hour later, I sit in front of my computer and try to type up an article about yesterday's lecture. The newsroom is busy as always. Strangely, the bustling activity helps me to stay focused. My fingers type mechanically and now and again, I take a sip of stale newsroom coffee.

"Hey, Lois," Jimmy interrupts me. "How did it go yesterday?" Curiosity is written all over his face. I'm glad he keeps his voice down as he continues. I'm not sure I could handle another commotion. "Was it Clark?"

He sits down on the edge of my desk, blocking my view on the computer screen to make sure he has my complete attention. With a sigh, I lean back in my chair and look at him.

"Yes, it was Clark," I confirm.

"I knew it," Jimmy rejoices. "How is he? Is he coming back? Where was he?" He asks quickly, not stopping to take a breath.

"No, Jimmy, he's not coming back," I say sadly. "He's..." My breath catches in my throat. I can't continue. Once again tears are threatening to roll down my cheeks. Besides, I don't really know what to tell Jimmy. There are just so many things I can't explain without revealing Clark's true identity. And I don't want him to know everything that went on between Clark and me. It's too private to discuss with him, even if he's a good friend. "Never mind. It's complicated."

Jimmy's smile falters. He looks at me in sympathy. "I'm sorry, Lois. I know how much he means to you."

"Thank you, Jimmy." He gives me a quick nod and pushes himself off my desk. But then he suddenly stops and touches my shoulder.

"Lois, you should see this," he mutters and points towards the elevators in my back.

I turn around to see what caught Jimmy's attention. My heart misses a beat.

There is Clark, carrying Sara in one arm and holding the cane in the other hand. His hair is a lot shorter and his beard is gone. Lana is standing a few feet behind him. His gaze darts across the newsroom until his eyes finally come to rest on me. A smile plays around his lips and he hands Sara over to Lana before he comes down the ramp. Today, his limp is hardly visible.

"Well, well, if this isn't our prodigal son," I hear Perry's drawl all across the newsroom. "Clark, is that really you?"

"In flesh and blood, chief," Clark says and the smile on his lips is increasing.

"Come for another interview, huh?" Perry winks at him. "You know, I always have a job opening for an author with your talents."

"We'll see about that, Perry."

"C.K!" Jimmy shouts happily and pulls Clark into a firm hug. "It's so good to see you again. We've all missed you so much. Where have you been all this time?"

"Jimmy," Clark says, "it's good to see you, too. We can

catch up later. There's something I need to do first."

As Jimmy steps aside, there is no one left between Clark and me. We look at each other, and for a long moment, neither of us says anything at all. I take in the change in Clark's appearance. It seems as if a dark cloud has been lifted off him. A faint blush is creeping into his cheeks.

"Lois," he says hoarsely. "My plane is leaving in a few hours, but there is something that I wanted to talk to you about." He looks around, realizing that almost everybody in the newsroom is staring at us. "In private?"

"The conference room?" I offer. He nods and follows my lead. A few seconds later, I close the door behind us. "What do you want, Clark?"

"I don't know how to say this, Lois. I thought I'd feel liberated if I told you that I don't want to see you again. But it's not a pleasant feeling at all. It was so good talking to you yesterday. I finally felt like I might be able to heal someday. My heat vision even returned this morning and I could shave again," he says. He looks down at his feet and a blush creeps onto his cheeks. "You made me feel so good about myself like I haven't felt in a long time. You're my best friend, and I can't lose you again. I guess that true love is worth risking a few bruises." He lifts his hand a little as if he wants to cup my cheek, like he did as Superman, back in the days when we were open with each other. But his hand stills and he lets it sink again. "Do you really love me, Lois?" His voice is no more than a whisper.

"With all my heart," I reply. There is a huge lump in my throat.

"And what if Superman never comes back?" he asks. He raises his hand again, this time cupping my cheek.

I cover his hand with mine. "Then I'd love you just the same."

"And if he does come back, could you share me with the world?" Clark says softly.

I turn my head and place a kiss on his palm. "As long as you're willing to share your world with me."

Then I close the distance between us and capture his lips in a fierce kiss. It's everything that needs to be said, everything that I want him to know. I melt into him and for a moment I don't want to ever breathe again. If we never part, that will be soon enough. We've lost so much time, and I don't want to waste another minute not touching him. I have finally found Clark again.

THE END