

The Cat and the Trap

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Summary: Cat sets a trap for Lois to try to prove just what lengths Lois will go to in order to attract the Man of Steel.

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Catherine 'Cat' Grant walked toward the desks of the Daily Planet's two premiere reporters. It seemed that, once again, Lois Lane was commiserating with her hunk of a partner. Most likely about Superman. It really rankled that Lois seemed to get most of the best exclusive Superman stories. Every other reporter in town would give practically anything to have the access to the Man of Steel that Lois seemed to have, including Cat, herself. But was that good enough for the intrepid Ms. Lane? No, she had to personalize everything when it came to Superman. She acted like he was her private domain; only willing to 'grudgingly' share him with her partner, Clark Kent, on rare occasions. Unfortunately, Lois had a problem with her objectivity. She thought that she was in love with the hero, and despaired over the fact that he didn't seem to return her affections.

As Cat got closer she could hear that it was indeed that small problem that had Lois all wound up. The funny thing was, Lois could have it all if she really wanted it. If she wasn't so blinded by her infatuation with the super hero she'd realize what was right under her nose. Clark may not have the powers of the spandex-clad idol of millions, but he was every bit as good-looking, and he was a really nice guy. Her own efforts at the seduction of the farm boy from Kansas hadn't gone too well, but she soon realized that it had been a hopeless attempt right from the start. It was obvious to everyone in the newsroom that Clark Kent was head over heels for his partner. Obvious to everyone except Lois that is; she only had eyes for one man.

Cat sidled a little closer to the pair until she could overhear their conversation. She'd been right. Lois was obsessing about Superman again.

"Oh, Clark, he didn't even notice me." Her voice had a plaintive quality to it.

"Now, Lois, I'm sure he just didn't see you." Clark laid his hand over Lois'.

"I called out to him, but he ignored me."

Cat had heard enough. She couldn't take it anymore. "You only called out to him, Lois? I thought that throwing yourself off tall buildings, or trying to get blown up, were more your usual style."

Lois glanced up at Cat but feigned indifference. "Oh, Cat, you're here? Is it noon already?"

"Next time, Lois, try for something a bit more subtle; like hanging from a flagpole in your bra and panties. That might get Superman to notice you."

Lois rolled her eyes. "I wouldn't dream of stealing your techniques, Cat."

Cat's bark of laughter had a bit of an edge to it. "Like you wouldn't consider it if you thought it would work. Admit it, Lois; you'd do just about anything to get Superman's attention and approval."

"Hah!"

Cat raised a brow. "Are you saying that if Superman were to mention that he preferred a Chevy Blazer to the Jeep that you

wouldn't be down to your local dealership tomorrow looking at a trade-in?"

Lois stood and glared at Cat. "Don't be ridiculous. Superman doesn't even need a car." Lois flounced off in a huff.

Cat slid quickly into the seat Lois had just vacated. She rested her hand over Clark's. "How do you put up with her?"

A wistful smile came to Clark's face. "Oh, she just gets a little worked-up when it comes to Superman."

She smirked. "Yeah, right." Suddenly Cat was struck by a brainstorm. The idea was brilliant, devious, and even a tad cruel. It was perfect. But she'd need some help. "Clark?" Her voice took on a pleading tone. "Could I ask a favor from you?"

She almost laughed at the wary look in his eyes. "I suppose," he answered with only slightest of hesitation.

"You and Lois get all the great exclusives from Superman after all his rescues and such. And I know that you can sometimes get in touch with him." She took a breath. Here it goes. Her plan would hinge on Clark's help. "The next time you see him, could you ask Superman to stop by my place for a quick, harmless, interview?"

Clark shook his head. "I don't know."

She slapped his hand. "Come on, be fair. You and Lois shouldn't be the only ones to gain access to him. I may write the gossip column, but I am a good writer, and I'd like the chance to be able to show everyone that." She couldn't help the somewhat predatory smile that crossed her lips. "Besides, I'm sure I could think up some questions that Superman's never been asked before."

"I think that's what he'd be afraid of."

This time it was Cat who rolled her eyes. "I promise I won't attack the man." She pushed out her lower lip in a little girl-like pout. "Please?" She could tell he was weakening. "For me?"

A sigh of resignation escaped from him as Clark ran his hand through his hair. "Okay. No promises, but I'll see what I can do." Cat gave him a big smile. "Thanks."

Clark stood and glanced about the room. "I suppose I better find out where Lois went."

Cat's smile morphed from friendly to slightly evil as she watched Clark wander off in search of his wayward partner. Things were looking up.

She moved back toward her desk. If Clark came through for her, and Superman did come for that interview, she'd best be prepared. With a little luck she'd soon have the last laugh on Ms. High and Mighty.

Cat paced nervously about her apartment. Clark had told her earlier that Superman had agreed to talk to her and would be over at about 8 o'clock. She had planned her approach meticulously. The apartment was clean, but not so neat as to look artificial. She was dressed casually but not as 'down home' as she had been when Clark had come over. She wanted to make Superman comfortable, yet not come off as sloppy, or as trying to seduce him. Not that she wouldn't welcome the Man of Steel to her bedroom, but she was pretty sure that bold advances weren't the way to win over the hero. Besides, this interview had a different purpose. This interview would provide her with the ammunition she needed to finally take Lois down a peg or two.

It took several raps on her window before she recognized it for what it was. She rushed over and opened it. Superman floated into the room. She knew from his smile that she had a goofy look of awe on her face. She had to get a grip.

"Superman, I'm so glad you could come. Please come, sit."

He walked over to the sofa she'd indicated. "Thank you, Ms. Grant."

She inexplicably found herself blushing. "Please, call me Catherine."

"Very well... Catherine." He sat. "So, Clark told me that you

wished an interview?"

"That's right."

"I have to admit that I'm at a loss here. I don't know what you could possibly ask me that isn't already part of the public record. I haven't been involved in any major rescues, or taken down any significant criminal activity lately."

"Oh, I'm not interested in all that kind of stuff. I leave that to Lois and Clark. No, my readers are mostly women, and they would like to know other 'things' about their resident hero."

Superman frowned. "I know what kind of column you write, Ms. Gra... Catherine. I don't think I'd be able to provide you with the kind of fodder that your readers have come to expect."

Cat felt a stirring of anger rise in her. Typical reaction from a man. Even if he was Superman, he was still a man. "Look I know that you think that I write trite, empty words that are only intended to titillate and expose scandalous behavior. I don't write hard news like your buddy Clark, or Lois. But you should know that my column is the second most read column in the entire paper."

He looked like he was about to apologize, but she waved him off before he could speak. "Don't give it a second thought." She slid a little closer to him. "Please, don't think that I'm looking for some juicy piece of gossip that I can fill several column inches with. I don't want to give them the public Superman. I would like to give my readers a bit more of a human picture of the Man of Steel. What are some of his likes and dislikes? What do you do for fun? And most important... what do you look for in a woman?"

She saw that she'd made him uncomfortable. "Oh, I'm sorry. I never thought that you might not have any interest in a woman. Perhaps you swing the other way; and that's fine if you do. It's just that my readers would be very disappointed if you do."

He chuckled. "No, I like women just fine. But I do have to warn you that I'll probably come off as quite boring and uninteresting to your readers."

"I hardly think so." She pulled out a small portable recorder. "Do you mind if I record this? I don't have a perfect memory and I don't want to be accused of 'putting words in your mouth'."

He nodded. "No, that would be fine. So, what do you want to know?"

A sly smile fought its way onto Cat's face, but she quickly smoothed her features. She didn't want Superman to suspect that this was anything but a legitimate interview. People often underestimated her given the kind of column that she wrote, but Catherine Grant was very good at her job, and one of the reasons she always got the good stuff is that she knew how to make people open up to her.

She started Superman off with a lot of fluffy softball-type questions. She asked about his basic statistics, like height, weight, and such. She followed up with several innocuous questions such as favorite color, most beautiful place he'd ever visited, and the like. They spoke easily for about a half an hour before Cat decided it was time to prepare her trap for Lois.

"Well, Superman, you had to know these next questions were coming, so we might as well get them out of the way. Just what do you look for in a woman?"

His smile had a resigned quality to it. "Unfortunately, in my position, I can't really have any close relationships with anyone, let alone with a woman. It would be too dangerous. They would become targets for those who might want to strike back at me."

Cat frowned. "Don't you think that sounds a bit patronizing? Any woman who did get involved with you would have to know what came along with the relationship, and it would be her choice as well... wouldn't it?"

Superman shrugged. "I suppose... maybe."

Cat waved off his growing unease. "Never mind that. You still haven't answered the question. Let's talk in a hypothetical

sense. If you were free to have a relationship, what qualities would you look for in a woman?"

He frowned and took several moments before he answered her question. "Well, I suppose she would have to be someone I respect. She would have to be intelligent, have a passion for what she does, and would be loyal to her friends. She'd also have to have compassion for those less fortunate."

Cat snorted. "Except for those last couple of points, it almost sounds like Lois." She saw him blush. That was interesting. There'd always been talk that Lois' situation was more than just a one-way infatuation. Could it be possible that Superman actually *liked* Lois more than a casual friend? It seemed unlikely, given how hard Lois was to actually like, but it was something that Cat decided to file away for future consideration.

She shifted the notepad she held on her lap. "Those are all admirable qualities, but you haven't given me a physical description of this wonder woman. Is she short, tall, blonde, brunette, redhead? What makes Superman sit up and take notice?"

He laughed. "Well, I hate to sound wishy-washy, but I don't really have any preferences. I can appreciate a beautiful woman as well as the next guy, but it really all depends on how the woman puts it all together. The individual parts aren't as important as the total look. Do the hair, make-up, and clothing work together well to showcase the person at her best, and tell me who she is?" He held up his hand to forestall her comment. "Now, you realize that I'm talking strictly about first impression physical looks here. Once you get to know a person, their inner beauty, or lack of it, far outshines the mere physical."

Cat rolled her eyes. "Very diplomatic." Cat set down the notepad. It was time. "Okay, let's say I buy into your politically correct answers. I do find it interesting that what you are saying here is a bit contradictory to what I've heard."

"What have you heard?"

"Well, for one, I heard that you liked brunettes best." She noted the slightest reaction to that. So much for objectivity. "And I also heard that you prefer women with short hair."

He looked confused. "Who told you that?"

"Which?"

"That I prefer women with short hair."

"You don't?"

"Like I said, it doesn't really matter. If short hair works for the person, fine; if long hair works, that's fine too."

"So, there's no particular trait that earth women possess that reminds you of Kryptonian women?"

Superman shrugged again. "Since I look pretty much like a normal earth man, I assume that Kryptonian women look pretty much like normal earth women."

Cat raised her brow. "You assume?"

She knew immediately that she had struck some sort of nerve because suddenly Superman looked like a little boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar. There was something here. Something that wasn't common knowledge. Something that maybe even Lois didn't know.

"Look, Superman, if I've made you uncomfortable, or have stumbled across something that you don't wish to talk about, I'm sorry. I won't press you." Cat leaned back and studied the nervous hero for a few moments. "Okay, here's the deal. You were right. This isn't going to make a very interesting article. You are exactly what everyone thinks you are, and that isn't going to make for good copy. But I have to admit that you've piqued my curiosity here. If there is something that you don't want made public, I promise it will go no further than this room. I hope you know that you can trust me."

The Man of Steel steepled his fingers in front of his face as he seemed to be thinking. Finally, he sighed, and gave Cat a smile. "I do believe I can trust you, Catherine. Most folks believe

I've only been on this planet a short time. It's a belief that I haven't exactly dissuaded people from thinking. The truth is, I came to earth as a baby and have grown up on this planet. A kindly couple raised me as their own son. You can understand my reluctance to let this information become well known. My foster parents' lives could be in great danger if any one knew."

Cat was thunderstruck, but she managed to weakly nod her agreement. After a few moments she was able to find her voice. "I understand, and I will keep your secret. Does Lois know?"

"No, not yet." Yes! Not yet? "Anyway, you see, to answer your question. I have no idea if Kryptonian women are any different from earth woman since I really have no memory of them. Actually, I wouldn't know if Kryptonian women had long hair, or if they were hairless." He gave her a smile. "For all I know, they could look like little green men."

She joined him in a fit of laughter.

Cat stood up. "I'm sorry; I've been a terrible host. Would you like something to drink? I have soda, Perrier, or something stronger?"

Superman stood up. "No thank you. I'm sorry that the interview didn't go the way you had hoped. If you have no further questions I should really be going. I still need to make a patrol over the city."

"No, I won't keep you any longer, and it's too bad that I don't really have what I had hoped for, but you don't have to worry. Not only won't there be any column from this, but I swear I won't breathe a word about you coming to earth as a child to anyone."

"Thank you, Catherine. I do appreciate that. Take care." He turned and stepped onto the window sill. In another moment he was gone, leaving only the telltale sonic boom to mark his passing.

Cat stared at the curtains as they fluttered in the breeze allowed in by the open window. She walked over and closed it. A smile touched her cheeks as she turned and contemplated the evening. It had been nearly perfect. She couldn't have asked for anything better, except maybe really getting a column out of this faux interview. But she was happy. She'd gotten what she needed for her plan. She had a long night of tape editing ahead of her, but it would be worth it. Come morning she would have some very interesting things for Ms. Lois Lane to listen to.

Lois Lane sat at her desk staring at her blank computer screen. She had no story, and no story ideas. Clark wasn't going to be in till later. He'd called her and told her he had several errands to run and that he'd catch up with her for lunch. Lois was just about to give Bobby Bigmouth a call to see if there was any word on the street about anything the least bit shady when she was distracted by the elevator doors opening. A quick glance told her that it wasn't Clark. It was just Cat. Lois frowned. It seemed a bit early for Cat to be coming in, and the woman didn't look too happy.

Cat caught Lois' eye and marched right up to her desk. "I see that you're having problems coming up with something too."

"What?"

Cat pointed at Lois' blank screen. "You apparently don't have any copy for tomorrow morning's edition either." Cat sat on the corner of Lois' desk and sighed. Lois wondered what heck the woman was going on about. She was holding a tape recorder in her hand and waving it about. "Here I thought I had a chance at the perfect column. An inside scoop on Superman, but it turned out to be a bust."

Lois' attention immediately perked up. "What are you talking about, Cat? What about Superman?"

Cat let go another dramatic sigh. "Oh, I had a personal interview with the Man of Steel last night. You know, I thought I could get him to tell me some juicy tidbits about his personal

life."

Lois was stunned. "You had an interview with Superman?"

"Yeah, but do you know what, Lois? He really is a big boy scout. Oh, he had a few interesting things to say, but nothing I could build a column around. It seems he really is 'all work and no play' and that makes Superman a dull boy."

Lois had to hide her smirk. Obviously, Cat's idea of what made an exciting person and hers were quite different. "Maybe he just didn't feel like he could open up to you."

"Maybe, but I doubt it." Cat stared down at the seated Lois.

"Look, I knew that coming on to him wouldn't work against Superman, but I do know how to get people to talk to me. It's what I do, just like you ferret out crime scandals. Superman did open up to me. The proof of that is on this tape." She waved the recorder about. "The simple, sad, truth is; he just isn't that interesting. At least not to my readers."

Lois watched as Cat strode off and dumped the small tape machine on her own desk. Cat didn't stop; she just kept on walking, making her way up to the coffee station. After pouring a cup and making a face after taking a sip, she threw the cup into the trash. She turned toward Lois.

"Lois, if anyone asks, I've gone out to Manny's to get a decent cup of coffee... and maybe a Danish. I should be back by... lunch." Cat then headed for the elevators and in another minute was gone from the bullpen.

Lois waited for several moments after the elevator had departed, then turned her attention to tiny recorder sitting on the desk no more than ten feet away from her. Lois glanced around the newsroom, checking to see if anyone was watching her. From the moment that Cat had mentioned that she'd had an interview with Superman, there was no doubt in her mind that she was going to listen to that tape. She just didn't want anyone to know that she was doing so.

Lois rose and walked up to the coffee station and poured herself a cup, even though she still had a fresh cup on her desk. On her way back she passed by Cat's desk and palmed the small machine and put it in her pocket. Sitting back down, she pretended to start working on something at her computer. She kept up the pretense for a couple of minutes, then rose and made a beeline for the ladies room.

Once inside one of the stalls, Lois grabbed the tiny earphone and pushed it into her ear. It wouldn't do her any good to have someone walk in and hear her listening to Cat's tape. She took a deep breath and pushed the button.

Lois listened as Cat fed Superman a lot of the kind of questions designed to put the subject at ease. She was familiar with the technique. Superman answered just as she thought he would. His responses were concise and honest. They were as Cat said they were. They were boring. But that was to be expected. Lois was getting fidgety. When was Cat going to get to some good questions? Superman was surely comfortable enough by now?

Suddenly Cat's voice caused Lois to take notice, and she refocused her attention on the tape.

"Well, Superman, you had to know these next questions were coming, so we might as well get them out of the way. Just what do you look for in a woman?"

"Unfortunately, in my position, I can't really have any close relationships with anyone, let alone with a woman. It would be too dangerous. They would become targets for those who might want to strike back at me."

Lois snorted. "Oh, pu-leese."

"Don't you think that sounds a bit patronizing? Any woman who did get involved with you would have to know what came along with the relationship and it would be her choice as well... wouldn't it?"

"I suppose... maybe."

“You tell him, girl.”

“Never mind that. You still haven’t answered the question. Let’s talk in a hypothetical sense. If you were free to have a relationship, what qualities would you look for in a woman?”

Lois frowned. Hypothetical, give me a break.

“Well, I suppose she would have to be someone I respect. She would have to be intelligent, have a passion for what she does, and would be loyal to her friends. She’d also have to have compassion for those less fortunate.”

Lois smiled.

“Those are all admirable qualities, but you haven’t given me a physical description of this wonder woman. Is she short, tall, blonde, brunette, redhead? What makes Superman sit up and take notice?”

Lois stared hard at the little device as if she could will it to tell her what she wanted to hear.

“Well, I can appreciate a beautiful woman as well as the next guy, but I prefer women with short hair.”

Lois nearly dropped the recorder. “What?” Cat’s voice cut through Lois’ confusion.

“Well, I guess that lets me out. So, any reason for that preference? Is it a trait that most Kryptonian women shared?”

“Actually, Kryptonian women were hairless.”

Lois’ hand went involuntarily to her hair as her mouth hung open in disbelief. There was the sound of some shared laughter on the tape.

“I’m sorry that the interview didn’t go the way you had hoped. If you have no further questions I should really be going. I still need to make a patrol over the city.”

“That’s okay, Superman, it was a long shot anyway. Thanks for coming over, and I want you to know that I do appreciate all that you’ve done for this city.”

“Thank you, Catherine. Take care.”

Lois’ hands shook as she barely managed to switch off the small recorder. She chewed on her bottom lip as she got up and quickly exited the ladies room. On her way back to her own desk she surreptitiously dropped the recorder back onto Cat’s. She dropped down into her own seat with an audible thud.

She stared at the computer screen but her mind refused to pay it any attention. Instead she could only replay what she had just heard, over and over, in her mind. A shadow moving across her desk top caused her to look up. Jimmy Olsen was walking by, his arms loaded down with files.

“Jimmy.” He stopped and looked at her. “Would you say that I have short hair?”

Jimmy looked confused by her question as first, then he shrugged. “No, I wouldn’t say that your hair is short. It’s not really long either. I guess you’d call it mid-length.” He pointed at a young intern who was standing by some filing cabinets on the other side of the room. “Donna has what I’d call short hair. Why?”

Lois looked over to where Jimmy had pointed. She saw a young woman with dark blonde hair cut in a very short, almost boyish, style. She had a nicely shaped head, and the style looked good on her. Lois began to worry her bottom lip again. “No reason. Just curious.”

She stood up and, grabbing her bag, swiftly moved up the ramp toward the elevators. “Jimmy, when Clark gets here, tell him I’ve gone home for the day. I’ve got some errands to run.”

After a brisk fifteen-minute walk, Lois found herself in front of Cindy’s Salon. Lois and Cindy had become friends back in college. College girls had little money to spend on their hair, so Cindy had been the one in the dorm who had kept everyone’s hair neatly trimmed. After school the young woman had opened her own shop and Lois had been a faithful customer ever since.

She stood outside the door for several minutes. What was she

doing here? Finally, with a sigh of resignation she entered the small shop. Once inside she was spied by Cindy almost immediately.

The young woman came over to her. “Lois, what are you doing here? Your normal appointment isn’t for several weeks yet.”

Lois nodded mutely. It took her a few moments to find her voice. “I, um, I was in the neighborhood, and I was thinking that, ah, maybe it was time for a change. You know, something, um, perhaps a little... shorter?”

Cindy raised her brow, then shrugged. “Okay. I’m with another customer right now, but I just had a cancellation today, so I can squeeze you in.” She indicated the few chairs that occupied the small waiting area. “Have a seat; I’ll only be about fifteen minutes or so.”

Lois sat down and quickly picked up one of the magazines to give her hands something to do. It was a magazine of short hairstyles. She began to page through it. She seemed almost mesmerized by picture after picture of smiling young women sporting a variety of short styles.

Her brow furrowed in a frown. Was she really contemplating getting her hair cut short just because Superman said he preferred short hair on women? Well, why shouldn’t she? She desperately wanted Superman to notice her, what better way than to get the kind of haircut that he preferred. Wouldn’t that be a good reason to get her hair cut? Her fingers found themselves combing through her locks. Would she look good in short hair? She’d never had it shorter than it was now. Did she have the guts to cut it short?

She glared at her reflection in a nearby mirror. She was Lois Lane. She didn’t run off and consider cutting her hair because some man thought she’d look better that way. Of course, this wasn’t just some man. This was Superman, and if you’d asked her earlier she’d probably have said that there would be nothing she wouldn’t do for him. If a short haircut would make her more desirable to him, then why not? Actually, if she really wanted to make him notice her, she’d just shave it all off. Become bald, like the women of his home planet.

She clenched her fists as she looked up and saw that Cindy was nearly done with her current client. Her time was almost up. She had to make her decision. Either she stepped up and told Cindy to cut it short... or she would keep her hair the way it was. What should she do?

Lois walked briskly down the sidewalk. The breeze blew her hair in front of her face. She reached up and tucked an errand strand behind her ear. She had walked out of Cindy’s. As her friend had approached her, Lois had realized that she couldn’t cut her hair because she thought Superman might notice her because of it. That wasn’t who she was.

That wasn’t to say that she would never cut her hair. She held no romantic notion of the power and beauty of a woman’s long hair. Not that long ago she had contemplated cutting her hair very short for her undercover work when she broke the car theft ring story. If she hadn’t noticed that some of the other young boys who were employed by the thieves had long hair; she’d probably have done it. Instead she had opted for a fake mustache and goatee.

The simple fact was, if she felt she needed, or wanted, to cut her hair for whatever reason, she would. There would be no histrionics, no remorse, it would just be... gone. The decision though, would have to be hers. If the mood should happen to strike her that she wanted to try a short hair cut, she would, but she would make the choice, not someone else. If Superman didn’t like her the way she was, then, tough.

She sighed. Well, maybe if he were to mention to her that he’d like to see her in a shorter style, she might consider it. But

she wasn't going to do it based on a comment she'd overheard from some interview. She hadn't been there. She hadn't seen him give his answer. Maybe his concept of short hair was different than hers? Whatever the reason for Superman's comment, the bottom line was... Lois didn't want to cut her hair short, so she wouldn't.

Lois had been so involved in her mental argument that she wasn't watching where she was going, and that proved to be unfortunate.

Before she realized that it was in front of her, she had run smack into a large ladder that had been propped up against the store front she'd been passing.

"Hey, watch out!" Lois grabbed onto the ladder, keeping it from falling over.

Suddenly she was struck on the head by a plastic bucket, as bright green paint splashed over her head and shoulders. She jumped back, sputtering in shock and confusion.

"What the..."

"Are you all right, Miss? Are you hurt?" Suddenly a young man was beside her wiping the paint off her face using a large rag.

Lois was still stunned. "What happened?"

The fellow pointed toward the building. "I'm a sign painter. You ran into my ladder and knocked my paint bucket off. You're lucky you weren't hurt."

"Lucky!" Lois grabbed the rag from the young man's hand. "Look at me! My jacket and blouse are ruined. I've got green paint all over my face and in my hair." She wiped furiously at her face, getting most of the paint off, though there were still several smears along her jaw line. "I'm going to be showering all night to get this out of my hair... what?"

He seemed quite nervous as he took a couple of steps back. "Well, about that. I hope you are close to home because if that paint dries, you're screwed."

Lois' glare changed to a look of wariness. "What do you mean?"

He pointed to the empty bucket that rested on the green splattered sidewalk. "That's a paint designed especially for outdoor signage. It's waterproof. If you don't get it washed out while it's still wet, it won't come out... ever."

Lois' eyes grew wide in horror, then, while muttering barely audible curses at the fates, and at butter-fingered painters, she set off at a dead run.

It was a disconsolate Lois Lane who sat at her kitchen table staring at nothing in particular. She was still dripping water from her latest shower... her sixth. Her hair was still mostly green.

She had tried to flag down a taxi in an effort to get home quickly, but after the third one who'd stopped drove off, not wanting to get paint all over the inside of their cab, she gave up.

She next looked for a public restroom in which to try and wash off as much paint as she could, but she encountered the same problem. None of the store owners would let her into their establishments as long as she was still dripping paint. After being asked to leave the fifth place of business she realized the futility of her quest and just headed home... on foot. It took her nearly an hour. Of course, by then the paint had dried.

Still, she wasn't about to give up without a fight. Stripping off her clothes and throwing them directly into the trash, Lois grabbed all sorts of cleaning supplies, some of which weren't actually meant for use on people, and headed for the bathroom.

It had been a frustrating two and a half hours, but she had been able to get rid of some of the paint. She had gotten it all off her face and hands. She was sure that was due in part, to the fact that she had wiped most of it off with that rag while the paint was still wet. That, and the fact that she had to resort to scouring power to get that last bits off. Her face was still sore in spots.

She had also managed to get some of the paint out of her hair. The bright green scum clogging her shower drain at the moment attested to that. But in the end, the paint had won out. She still had mostly stuck together clumps of green painted hair.

She glanced over at her reflection in the glass of her living room window. She knew what she had to do. With a sigh of resignation, she reached for the phone and dialed.

"Cindy, hi, this is Lois. Sorry to bother you at home, but I have a big favor to ask. Can you come over to my place? You can? Thanks... oh, and bring your kit."

Cindy arrived at Lois' apartment within a half an hour. Lois unlocked her door and let the woman in. She'd obviously come right over at Lois' request. She was dressed in an old ragged sweatshirt. The kind that's so beat-up that you'd never wear it in public, but you still keep it to wear around at home because it's so comfortable. She also carried what looked to be a gym bag.

"Omigod, Lois, what happened?" Cindy appeared shocked when she first spied Lois.

"Don't ask." Lois moved over and dropped down onto a kitchen chair. "Just tell me that you have something in that magic bag of yours that can fix this." She pointed at the green mess that had earlier been her dark brown locks.

Cindy walked around Lois. She reached out and lifted up a few of the green clumps of stuck together hair, clicking her tongue as she did so. Lois kept clenching and unclenching her fists.

"Well, can you do something, or not?"

Cindy nodded as she unzipped the gym bag. "I think I have just the thing."

"You do?"

"Yep." She reached in and pulled out a pair of barber's shears.

Lois just stared at the scissors as Cindy made a play at slipping her thumb and finger in and snapping the shears open and closed several times as if testing them.

"Crap."

Lois was nervous as she checked herself out in the mirrored walls of the Planet's elevator. She still couldn't get used to how she looked. Her hair was short, really short. It was a lot shorter than any of the styles she'd been considering when she'd looked through the magazines back at Cindy's shop. But it wasn't like she'd had any real choice.

Cindy had spent what had seemed like hours cutting away the clumps of green paint covered hair. Lois had watched as the trash can she'd set in front of her had collected more and more of her emerald locks, until she was afraid that before Cindy was through she'd look positively... Kryptonian.

She reached up and patted the short dark locks, then mentally scolded herself for her apprehension. She was Lois Lane and how she wore her hair was nobody's business but her own. If her co-workers didn't like it, that was their tough luck. Still, when it came right down to it she had to admit that she did care what some people might think; well, two people. She hoped that Clark wouldn't hate it. And if the 'accident' had any beneficial effects when it came to her and Superman, well, she couldn't complain about that could she?

The five-floor ride, which usually seemed to take so long, was over before she'd even had a chance to completely compose herself. The bell chimed, and the doors opened. She stepped into the newsroom. The bullpen was its usual bustle of activity and people rushed back and forth about their varied tasks. Nobody was stopping and pointing at the funny looking woman with the short haircut.

"Whoa, Lois! What gives with the new do?"

Lois just glared at Jimmy until he raised his hands in defense

and quickly scurried away. Lois continued her determined march toward her desk. Once she reached it she sat down and focused her attention on booting up her computer. She didn't look around; she kept her eyes on the screen. That was why she was a bit startled when Clark appeared next to her desk.

He had a slight smile on his face. "Will you bite my head off if I ask the reason behind the new haircut?"

She frowned at him. "Why do I have to have a reason? I felt like it was time for something different. Is that a crime?"

Clark chuckled. "No, it's not a crime, but the Lois Lane I know always has a reason for everything she does. It usually has to do with a story. Is that what this is? You cut your hair for a story?"

Lois felt disappointment at Clark's comments. "You hate it, don't you."

Clark shook his head. "No, Lois. Why would you say that?"

"Well, it's obvious. You can't accept that I might have wanted to try something different. I mean, why would Lois get such an unflattering haircut if there wasn't some hidden agenda involved?"

"I'm sorry if I gave you that impression, Lois. I will admit that it was kind of a surprise when I first saw you this morning. It is quite a change for you."

"Yeah, so what are you saying? Do you like it or not?" Lois stared at her partner for a few moments, then angrily turned away.

"Oh, why am I asking you? I don't really care one way or the other if you like it or not. It's my hair and if I want to chop it all off, then I will."

Clark placed his hand on Lois' arm. "Lois, I don't..."

Suddenly they were interrupted by a shriek that came from the opposite side of the room. "I knew it!"

They both looked up to see Cat Grant running toward them. "I knew it! I knew it!" Cat stopped next to Lois' desk and rubbed her hand over Lois' head. "I was right. I knew you'd cut your hair for him."

"Cat, what are you going on about?" Lois could tell that Clark was confused, but she, unfortunately, knew what Cat was talking about.

"It's not was you think, Cat." Lois spat the words out and tried to dismiss the hovering gossip columnist by beginning to type on her keyboard.

"Oh isn't it?" The woman wouldn't go away. "I know you listened to the tape, Lois. You forgot to rewind it." Lois stopped typing for a second, but then, without looking at Cat, she resumed. "I knew you'd do practically anything to get Superman to notice you. That's why I set this little trap."

Lois stopped typing again and looked up at Cat. The woman had a smug smile on her face. "What do you mean... trap?"

The smile got larger and more smug. "Superman never actually said those things about short hair. I edited the tape to make it sound like he had. The whole interview was just a ploy."

Clark grabbed Cat's arm and turned her to him. "Just what are you talking about? What do you mean the interview was just a ploy?"

Lois noticed that Cat had the decency to look a bit chagrined. "I'm sorry that I had to use you to get that interview with Superman, Clark. But, like everyone else around here, I'm just so tired of Lois whining about Superman that I just had to do something to take her down a peg."

"But, what..." Clark was still confused.

Lois put her hand on Clark's arm. "What Cat's trying to say is that she thinks I cut my hair because I heard Superman say he preferred short haired women on her interview tape."

"But Superman would never have said such a thing." Clark seemed really angry.

"Of course he didn't. I see that now. Cat doctored the tape to make it sound like he had." Lois turned her attention to Cat. "The

laugh is on you though, Cat. I didn't cut my hair because of your tape. I cut it because of an accident. A sign painter dropped a bucket of paint on my head and it dried before I got home. It wouldn't wash out so I had to get it cut out."

"Yeah, right, Lois. Like I believe that." She patted Lois on the head once again, then the smug columnist turned and walked away, confident in her assumption of victory.

Lois watched Cat walk away, shrugged, then shook her head. Her attention was directed back to Clark. The man had a wary look on his face. "What?"

"So, what are you planning to do, Lois?"

"Do?"

Clark nodded toward Cat's desk. "About Cat. What are you going to do... to her?"

Lois looked over to where the gossip columnist was reveling in her victory. She turned back and captured Clark's eyes.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Excuse me; I was talking to Lois Lane here a minute ago."

Lois gave him a mock glare, then shook her head. "I hate to admit it, but I think she may have done me a favor."

Clark raised his brow. "You're going to have to explain that one to me."

Lois smiled. "In one respect she was right. I can see now that I was close to becoming pathetically obsessed with Superman."

"Close?"

"Don't go there, Kent." She wagged her finger at him. "I can guess how my attempts at getting Superman to notice me might have been viewed by others, but I can't help the way I feel about the man." She chewed on her lower lip for a few moments. "Still, this little incident has been sort of a wake-up call for me." She stared down at her hands for a few breaths, then looked back up at Clark. "Do you know that I had actually gone to my stylist's shop with every intention of getting my hair cut short because I thought that Superman would like me better that way?"

Clark nodded. "I can understand that. If you have feelings for someone, you want to do things that you think they'd like, but..."

"But you have to be true to who you really are. It isn't really about a haircut. It's about acceptance, acceptance for what and who you are. I'm Lois Lane, warts and all, and I can't, and won't, try to be someone I'm not just to please a man, even Superman. If he can't accept me for who I am, then there is nothing I can do about it."

"That makes a lot of sense, Lois. But you do know that Cat is going to spread her version of this incident all around. Everyone will think you cut your hair because she tricked you into thinking it would please Superman."

Lois shrugged. "I know, but I don't really care what other people think, and in a way, the truth is even crazier than Cat's story will be." Suddenly it was important to Lois that Clark believe what had really happened. "You believe me, don't you?"

Clark smiled. "Yes, Lois, I believe you." He glanced up at her newly cropped locks. "Was the offending paint, by any chance... green?"

Lois was surprised by Clark's comment. How had he known? "Yes it was. How did you know? I don't remember saying what color it had been."

Clark laughed softly as he gently brushed his hand through her short tresses. "Well, I can see a few touches of green still shining out amongst the dark brown."

Lois' hands flew to her head. "Oh god, if Cindy finds out she'll take the clippers and shear me down to stubble for sure." Lois began to paw through her purse looking for a mirror. "How bad is it?"

Clark laughed out loud. "Don't worry, Lois. No one will see anything unless they are specifically looking for it. And even then, they'd have a hard time. I just have great eyesight."

She frowned. "You wear glasses."

"Exactly."

Lois decided not to pursue that line of reasoning any further. Instead, having found her compact, and its mirror, she gave herself a quick once over, finger combing her hair into place as she did so.

"So, Clark, you never did answer my question. How much do you hate it? How bad does it look?"

Clark sat down on the corner of her desk and placed his finger under her chin, tilting her eyes up to meet his. "I hate to burst your bubble, Lois, since you seem so determined to be a martyr here. The truth is, I don't hate it at all. In fact, the more I get used to it the more I like it. Short hair seems to suit you."

"Really? You mean that?"

He laughed. "Of course I mean it. Why would I lie?"

"Because you are a nice guy, you are my partner, and you are... my friend."

"And as your friend I'm telling you that the haircut looks good on you. You can't escape the fact that you are still a beautiful woman, Lois."

Her answering smile was almost shy. "Thanks, Clark. The strange thing is, at first, I hated it. But as I've gotten more used to it, and how it looks on me, the more I find that I like it too. And, of course, there is the incredible ease of taking care of it." She flashed Clark a brilliant smile. "Heck, I may just decide to postpone growing it out for awhile... a long while."

Just then Ralph came oozing up to her desk. He gave his typical leer, which she supposed he thought was a smile. "Hey, Lane, is it true that you chopped off your hair because you heard that Big Blue liked skirts with cropped tops?"

Lois turned to Clark, her eyes beseeching him. He laughed as he held up his hands.

"I'm afraid you're on your own here, Lois. I have to get back to work." Still chuckling, Clark left, heading toward his own desk.

Lois turned her attention back to the misanthrope standing next to her. "Go away, Ralph. I don't have time to deal with Inspector Henderson right now."

"What's Henderson got to do with anything?"

"Well, he's going to want to question me about your murder." Ralph got the hint and left without any further snide comments.

Lois glanced over at Cat's desk. Maybe she had been a bit hasty in her decision to let Cat off the hook for what she'd done. She was definitely going to have to rethink that one. After all, what's good for the goose...

Fin.