

# The Way It Should Have Been

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Rated: PG-13

Submitted June 2012

Summary: Regret can be a humbling emotion. After so many years apart, will Lois and Clark realize just what they've missed and set things to the way it should have been?

I have to say a very heartfelt thank you to Wanda D. for her story 'New Beginnings'. It was the inspiration behind this venture. I wrote and asked her if she would mind me trying to write an L&C story similar to the G&L she'd written. Of course, as with all things, it took time to hash out. With final approval from Wanda, I think I have something worth reading.

Usual disclaimers apply. None of the characters belong to me.

Comments welcome.

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Clark sighed and ran a hand through his hair as he stared up at the screen. He loathed flying commercially, but waiting on a delayed flight made traveling this way even worse. A thick fog had set in over Metropolis, effectively grounding most flights for the time being. If it wasn't for the fact that his flight had been booked for him, he would definitely provide his own transportation. He would never be able to explain why he hadn't used the reservation.

He glanced out of the terminal window at the waiting planes that had already allowed their passengers aboard. Thankfully he wasn't on his. At least out here, he could go down to the coffee shop and watch the sports reports on the evening news.

"Hey, stranger. How have you been?"

Clark froze. He instantly recognized that voice, even after all this time. He swallowed heavily, an attempt to calm the sudden beat of his heart, and then he turned to the small brunette he thought he would never see again. "Lois!" he breathed. It had been so long since he had last laid eyes on this small package of fire. Time had graced her well because she was still the most beautiful woman he had ever met.

For a moment neither knew what to do- they simply looked at one another. Finally Clark smiled and said, "It's really good to see you again."

"It's good to see you, too," Lois answered him.

When she smiled back, he released the breath he had been holding. The one he had been holding for years. A moment later they stumbled their way through an awkward embrace.

Funny... Things had never been awkward between them before, until the end of course.

He closed his eyes at the onslaught of emotions threatening to overwhelm him, his hands not quite able to open fully across her back. Finally she took pity on him and drew away.

"Are you leaving our fair city?" Lois asked him to break the silence.

"No. Assignment in Chicago. Perry has me covering the National Press Convention."

"Yeah. I read something about that. I wasn't surprised when I saw your first by-line on the front page of the *Planet* though. I always knew you had more to offer than sports scores."

Clark felt his cheeks heat a little. He still had trouble with

people complimenting his work. He had been a successful sports reporter until a year ago when he took a freelance position with the *Daily Planet*. It wasn't long before he had made the move to Metropolis, mainly for personal reasons, and to take a full time position on the newsroom floor. Since his arrival, he had had several front-page stories and had won his first Kerth two months earlier. Clark Kent was well on his way to being one of the best investigative journalists in the country.

He finally recovered from Lois' praise. "And you? Still bagging the big names?"

"Oh yeah. Signed Davis Decker last week. Kid's going to be huge." She looked around the crowded airport. "In fact, I'm here to pick up Farley Younce. But looks like his flight's going to be late."

"Younce? The tailback from Notre Dame?"

"That's the one. Metropolis Tigers have an impressive offer on the table for him. If I can convince him he'll like it here, we're set."

Clark chuckled softly. "He doesn't stand a chance."

Lois let her smile drift into soft laughter. "I see you're still just as quick as you always were."

"I have to be." They shared a laugh before Clark noticed the annoying flickering of the lights, reminding him he would be waiting another hour before his flight could take off. He glanced at Lois, wanting more than anything to ask her to have a drink with him. And painfully reminding himself that maybe that wasn't such a good idea.

But that smile... That little, shy smile he had adored once called to him- the same way it always had. "Ah, I was going to grab some coffee. Want to join me?" He had had absolutely no intention of spending his wait with this woman, yet his big mouth opened before his good sense could stop it. And now that the offer was on the table, his polite manners wouldn't allow him to take it back.

Lois looked up at him for a moment, eyes wide, as if she were studying his very soul. Finally she replied, "I'd like that. It's going to be a while."

Clark smiled, a bit of relief warring with trepidation washing over him. For a moment she had looked as if she would turn him down. For a second he had wanted her to.

And he had prayed she wouldn't.

He waved his hand in invitation for her to walk with him to the coffee shop. Ten minutes later, they were settled and sipping their chosen selections.

"How... how is Taylor?" Clark ventured after a few moments, the question he had wanted to ask the second he had seen her. If he had one huge regret about leaving Metropolis before, Taylor was it.

"He's great. Growing way too fast." It was easy to see that the mention of her son was a favorite subject. Her eyes positively glowed with pride.

"I'll bet." Clark let his thoughts drift to the small boy he remembered. Where exactly had the time gone? Regret was suddenly filling his mind and soul. "He's not a baby any more, huh?"

"Nope. Thinks he's 'the man'."

"Ah... has his mother's spirit." He could easily picture a miniature 'male' Lois.

"And then some." Lois sipped her coffee, then lowered the cup. When she spoke again, she kept her eyes on the mug. "He's gotten all the cards and gifts."

Regret hit him again. It had just been so much easier for him to take the coward's way out and stay away. "I know he probably doesn't remember me, but I just couldn't let time slip by without remembering him," Clark said, his voice soft, his expression sorrowful.

Lois looked back up at Clark. "You could have continued to

see him.”

“Yeah.” He ran his finger around the rim of his cup, as memories of days gone by flooded his mind. The absolute last thing he could have done was continue to see Taylor. “I guess I didn’t want to be in the way,” he managed softly. And he didn’t want to endure the unbearable pain of another man taking up the role he had once played. “He and Dan needed the time to bond. If I’d stayed...” If he had stayed, he would have died inside watching another man be in the one place he would have given anything to be in. He blew out a long breath, as if that simple act could change things. “Look, it was a long time ago.” An excuse to make himself feel better— he always had an excuse in attempt to make himself feel better.

But it didn’t work. It never did when he thought about that time in his life.

“Yes, it was,” Lois commented with her head drooped over her coffee.

Something about the way she had said that made him take a closer look at the woman across from him. He immediately recognized the anguish written across her face.

Funny, he thought. Even after all this time, he could still read her expression. “What?” he asked, curious and genuinely concerned what could have possibly put such shadows behind her eyes. “What is it?”

Lois glanced up, then tucked her hair behind her ear. “Dan and I divorced a year ago.”

There was a time Clark would have shouted with joy to hear Lois state that she was free of that man. But now... now the woman before him looked very hurt over the fate that had befallen her. His nature wouldn’t allow him to rejoice in her misery. “Oh, Lois. I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“No. It’s okay. We actually attempted reconciliation recently. That hasn’t been very successful either.”

A part of his heart screamed in continued frustration because it was apparent that she really had cared about the man she had married. And the part of him that cared for this lady hated to see her in any kind of distress.

But that was another place... another time. Too many things had happened since then. And there was someone Clark was even more concerned about than Lois. “How’s Taylor? Is he handling that okay?”

Lois snorted at that statement. “Sorry.” Her head dropped and it appeared the Styrofoam cup in her hand was suddenly more interesting. Her finger circled the rim and she sighed heavily before she finally said, “Clark, Dan never did... bond with Taylor.”

For a moment he was too stunned to speak. He wasn’t exactly sure what he had expected her to say, but that wasn’t it. “What?”

“Oh, he tried. He really did. But in the end he said he just couldn’t be Daddy to another man’s kid.”

This time pure instinct took over, and he couldn’t help reaching over to lay his hand on Lois’. That statement, the look in her eyes— she looked so lost. She met his gaze when their skin made contact, and immediately he knew he had made the right decision. The look in her eyes spoke volumes. This was a woman who had been through a lot and really needed someone to say that they understood. Though he had never possibly imagined he would be that person, not after everything, there was no way he could be so unconcerned, not with this woman.

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Damn him, she thought as she stared across at him.

And damn me, for feeling this way. He was her past... a time too far gone. Opening up to him— telling him things that are better left unsaid — won’t change that.

But the feel of his hand on hers was...

Incredible.

And the look in his eyes... He really cared that she was upset.

“That’s what caused the initial break-up,” she croaked out, completely negating her previous internal debate. The intensity of Clark’s touch became too much, so she withdrew her hand and leaned back. “I know. Why would I try to reconcile?” She found herself continuing without meaning to. Clark had always been able to get her to open up, without saying a single word. He was so easy to trust. “The fact is I don’t know. I guess I was tired and lonely.” And that was the truth. Jumping in without checking the water level was one thing. Admitting that maybe the water was too shallow was always a lot harder to admit. It was just so much easier to have someone there to help shoulder the responsibilities.

“Lois, you don’t have to explain anything to me,” Clark told her. And he meant it— she could see it in his expression. Even after everything they had been through, this man still felt compassion toward her. “Believe me,” he continued, “I know what that feels like.” He pulled his wallet from his back pocket, opened it, and displayed it before her on the table.

She paused briefly, then she was staring down into two of the most beautiful blue eyes she had ever seen.

“That’s my son,” Clark explained. “He’s the product of a night spent trying to erase some of the tired, lonely days I’d been living.”

“Oh wow!” Lois exclaimed as she picked up the wallet. She hadn’t even heard what Clark had said. The small boy in the photograph looked just like his father, except for the blue eyes and sandy hair. The broad smile that graced his lips was exactly like the man’s across from her. “He’s gorgeous, Clark.”

“Thank you. He’s my heart.”

“I’ll bet.” She glanced back up at Clark, and it was her turn to read more into an expression. “By the way you just talked about him, I take it you’re not married.”

Clark shook his head. “No. His mother was an old friend. In fact, she was my high school girlfriend. We ran into each other when I went home to help out my father after his heart attack.”

“Jonathan had a heart attack?” Lois couldn’t help the instant fear she felt. Jonathan and Martha were always so good to her and Taylor. Instantly she felt deep regret for not staying in touch.

“Yeah.” Clark paused, obviously fighting for control of his emotions. “We lost him a year ago,” he choked out after a moment’s pause.

“Oh, Clark.” Her voice was low, and this time it was she that offered comfort by laying her hand on his. Her heart ached for this man. His father had meant the world to him. Both his parents did. “I’m so sorry.” She felt like dying. She had allowed foolish pride to get in the way of her common sense, and now she had learned that a very dear friend had passed away. She was ashamed of herself for the way she had acted and for not being a bigger person.

Clark looked away briefly to stifle the tears that she could see filling his eyes. At one time she wouldn’t have hesitated to wrap her arms around him to provide the support he needed. Now, she wasn’t so sure he would accept the comfort she had to offer. All she could do was allow her heart to silently call out to his.

Clark took a deep breath before meeting her gaze again. “I miss him a lot.”

“I know.” She squeezed the hand she held, causing his eyes to fall, watching her actions. They stayed that way for a moment— so much to say and neither knowing how to say it. In a way, she felt it was her punishment for how she had treated him. If ever she had had a true friend in this world, it had been the man across from her.

And she had thrown that friendship away. To break the moment, Lois smiled and said, “Tell me about this little guy.” She held up the wallet to indicate the photo.

Clark’s look of anguish was replaced with a soft smile. “That’s Jon. Jonathan Clark Kent. I named him after my dad, of course.”

His eyes sparkled when he talked about Jon. She could actually feel how much he loved the little guy. “How old is he?” Lois continued to hold his hand. He needed a little extra reassurance that someone truly cared, she told herself. There was no way she was still holding his hand because *she* needed the comfort.

“He’ll be three in a month.”

“He’s just too cute,” she couldn’t help but gush. With her free hand, she flipped through Clark’s pictures. It was obvious the man was proud of his little boy because of the sheer number of images of the child he kept so close to him. This was one area she could relate— she adored her son.

Lois smiled at one really cute photo, then stopped on a picture of Clark’s parents. Again, regret roared to the forefront. “How’s Martha?” The older woman had to be devastated. She had adored Jonathan.

“Better. I think Jon’s helped her the most.” He leaned up on the table, his fingers squeezing hers to get her attention. “She’ll be thrilled when I tell her I saw you,” he said when she met his gaze.

“Maybe I’ll call her.” And she would, she vowed silently. Good friends were not very easy to find, and she had traded a very special pair in the name of... temporary insanity. Well, that insanity had cost her greatly. It was time she rectified that.

“She’d like that.” He reached into his pocket and took out one of his cards. After he had scribbled a number, he handed it to her. “I must warn you though, she loves to talk.”

“We’ll get along great.” Lois closed his wallet and reluctantly handed it back to him. Their eyes locked as Clark took the offered item, and they simply stared at each other for a moment or two. So much precious time... She could easily get lost in those dark eyes. “It really is good to see you again,” she told him after a moment. And it was. She had thought of this man often— wondered where he was and what he was doing. Seeing him was as bittersweet as it was satisfying, but more than anything it made her wish she had done a lot of things differently.

“You, too.” Clark’s eyes fell away from hers as he placed his wallet back in his pocket. When he was done, she watched as he settled on gazing at the fingers of his hand still holding Lois’ as he intertwined them with her smaller ones.

Lois allowed him to turn his hand and lace their fingers. What was he thinking? Did he too have regrets? Concentrating on the warmth of his hand, she felt a rush she hadn’t in over four years... Exactly the length of time Clark had been gone from her life. Automatically her eyes drifted up to meet his. One look told her that maybe he did feel similar emotions.

Was it too late? Had she caused too much damage to repair their friendship?

“Maybe we should have dinner sometime,” she heard herself saying even as she tried to decide exactly why that was such a good idea. Dinner implied a bit more than friendship?

Didn’t it?

“Yeah,” was all he said, his gaze dropped once again to their joined hands.

Stupid, stupid, stupid, she chided herself when he didn’t say anything else. Of course he didn’t want to have dinner with her. He had been back in Metropolis for a while now, but for some reason they had never even bumped into one another. He had probably avoided any place that might have put him in contact with her. It had taken her a long time to admit it, but she had broken this man’s heart. There was no way he would want to spend time with her again.

But maybe...

“You know, I’ll bet Taylor would love to see you. I told him all about the man who sends those cards and gifts. He looks forward to them.” Was that desperation in her voice? She briefly felt two inches tall for using her trump card like that.

“So do I.” Clark admitted softly, giving her sweet respite from her maddening thoughts. There was so much that needed to be said, but she just couldn’t get her mouth, or brain, to cooperate. It appeared that after all this time, her heart was getting in the way.

They both turned when the intercom blared the impending departure of several planes. One was to Chicago.

“Guess that’s you?” Lois said reluctantly.

“Fraid so,” he agreed but didn’t look at all thrilled with that fact, which sent a small thrill through Lois.

Or was that wishful thinking? Surely Clark was more than ready to get as far from her as he could.

“Ooo...” She withdrew her hand from the comforting warmth of his and pulled out her wallet to show Clark a picture of Taylor. Maybe it would be enough to convince him to...

To what, Lois? She thought as she extended the photograph. “This is my little man.”

“Look at him. He looks just like you.” Clark held the photo and gazed down at it with a smile. Slowly his smile faded as if he was remembering all of the spirit and memories behind those big brown eyes. Finally he eased the wallet back across to Lois. “Tell him I’ll send a card as soon as I get home.”

That’s all she would get.

And for all she had done, that was enough. “I will,” she promised as she replaced her wallet in her purse.

Clark stood and gathered up his bag. He hesitated briefly before lifting his hand to brush his fingers softly across Lois’ cheek. “Take care of yourself... and that little guy.”

“Always.” She wanted desperately to hug him.

It was much too late for that.

She offered him one last smile before he hurried toward the gate for his flight. Lois was left to stare at the card she held in her hand as her emotions waged war inside her. Clark Kent was the last person she had thought she would see today.

Fate sure had a way of showing you just how human you are.

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Clark stared out the window of the plane as his mind drifted to the woman he had just seen. Lois Lane was amazing, stubborn, pigheaded, independent, and ... absolutely fantastic.

<<<< years earlier >>>>

Clark shook Sam Lane’s hand as the older man greeted him when he arrived at the office of the Lane Agency. Sam had successfully built one of the largest and most successful sports representative agencies in the country. Clark had met the other man a few weeks prior at a convention in Dallas. After deciding that he loved sports, and because of his unique physical attributes, Clark had begun to dabble in the rep trade. He must have made an impression because the best agent in the business wanted Clark to work for him. The young man had immediately been flattered, then very honored. So he had made his way to Metropolis with a fair amount of curiosity. He, in no way, felt himself worthy of such distinction, but if Sam Lane asked for you by name, you answered the call.

“Clark,” said the older man in greeting. “Glad to have you here.”

“It’s good to be here.” Clark was still new to the sports representation world, but he was willing to learn— especially from Sam Lane.

Sam clapped the younger man’s shoulder and started them through the office, introducing him to the staff along the way. They made it to the end of the hall before the older man stopped outside the door of an office and turned to Clark. “Son, behind this door lies the most fierce representative I have ever had the pleasure to work with. She is competitive, demanding, and settles for nothing short of success. She also happens to be my daughter.” Sam finished with a proud smile. “But I must warn you. She is a tiger. We call her ‘Mad Dog’ because when she

wants something she goes after it like a mad dog. She's the best. You can learn a lot from her." He wagged his finger at him in all seriousness.

"I look forward to working with her."

Sam threw his head back and laughed. "Boy, no one works with Lois. They just watch and stay out of her way." Sam was laughing again when he knocked on the door.

"Yeah?"

Sam pushed the door ajar. "Princess, you got a minute?"

The young, dark haired woman sitting behind the desk in the room looked up and smiled. "Sure."

Sam pushed the door open completely so he and Clark could step inside. "I want to introduce you—"

"Papa!"

Whatever Sam was going to say was interrupted when a toddler launched himself at the man. "Taylor!" The older man scooped up the boy and swung him around in the air.

Clark couldn't help but smile at the display. Sam and his grandson were laughing and talking happily.

Sam pulled the boy up to sit on his forearm. "How's my boy?"

"Fine," he answered clear enough for anyone to understand. His little eyes soon fell on their guest. "Hey," he told Clark. "I Taylor."

"Hi, Taylor. My name's Clark." Clark extended his hand and was surprised when the boy shook it like a grown man. "Nice to meet you."

"You, too." The boy offered a smile then turned back to his grandpa.

Sam lowered Taylor to the floor. "How about you go see if Debbie will give you some of her cookies?"

"Tay."

Clark grinned as he watched two fast moving legs carry the toddler down the hall. He returned his attention back to the adults when Sam spoke again.

"Clark Kent, this is my daughter, Lois Lane."

Clark had to remember to breathe as his eyes fell on the small brunette who rose and stuck her hand across the table to greet him.

"Nice to meet you, Clark. Daddy has talked about you non-stop."

Clark's face burned in a rosy blush as he shook her hand. "I hope I can live up to whatever image he's built of me."

"You'll do fine." Lois withdrew her hand and sat back down. "Just treat your prospects with the same respect you'd like to be treated."

"I'll remember that."

She smiled at him, and he couldn't help but offer one in return. "I hope Daddy told you we're one big family here." She waved a hand around her office.

That's when Clark noticed she shared her space with a small child, if the toys strewn around were an indication. Taylor was Lois' son. His heart sank at the realization that she was probably married. It never occurred to question the fact that her last name was still Lane. Of course, that didn't necessarily mean anything. She could have kept her maiden name. He'd known several women who had done that.

"As you can see, everyone has a place here, even my son."

"He seems like he's at home." What else could he say?

"Oh yeah. He always comes to work with me. He stays with Daddy when I have to travel, but most of the time he's at my side."

Stayed with Daddy? Did that mean she wasn't married? He reminded himself that he had just met this woman. Getting excited because she might be single...

Just concentrate, Kent. She's the boss' daughter, for crying out loud!

"So, you'll see a lot of him," Sam told him. "Hope that's okay."

"Sure. I love kids." Absolutely okay, he thought.

Just then the kid in question bounded back into the room with a large chocolate chip cookie in each hand. He ran to his mother's side and held up one of his treats.

"Dot you one, Mommy."

"Thank you." Lois took the offered cookie with a smile.

"Taylor, Mr. Kent will be working with us from now on."

"Ah, I'd really like it if he could just call me Clark. Mr. Kent is my father."

"Okay," Lois said as she looked up at him. She seemed to study him for a moment before her eyes drifted to her father. "I like him. He hasn't been here but a few minutes, and he's already contradicted something I've said."

"I know." Sam clapped Clark on the shoulder with a shake of his head. "I tried to warn him about our resident dog." He and Lois laughed at Clark's expression. "Relax, son, you'll be just fine."

Clark lips spread into a smile when he realized that they were joking. As the trio became acquainted, he also realized he was glad he had come to Metropolis. Good things were in his future.

<<<< \* \* >>>>

Clark rested his head back on the seat of the airplane. Good things *had* happened in Metropolis all those years ago. He and Lois had become friends, good friends. So had he and Taylor. Clark had fallen in love with the toddler and hadn't been afraid to show it. He would often spend time with the boy, even putting a toy box in his office, so Taylor could stay with him during the day.

He had to smile as his mind drifted back to some of the first times he had spent with Taylor.

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Clark arranged the items on his desk as he settled into his new office at the Lane Agency. He had officially been working for a week but had just gotten back from Florida. He had signed his first player already. That had certainly done wonders for his reputation in his new environment.

"Wuz dat?"

Clark looked up to see Taylor standing on the other side of his desk pointing at a medal in a small case.

"This is my medal for hosting an athlete in the Special Olympics."

"Oh," was all the boy said as he looked over Clark's other items. His eyes fell on a photo of Martha and Jonathan. "Dat your Mommy?"

"Uh huh."

"Who's dat?" He was pointing at Jonathan's image.

"That's my daddy."

"Oh." Taylor walked slowly around to the side Clark was on, touching most of his things as he went. Clark smiled and simply watched him. Finally the toddler looked up at him. "I like you."

Clark was taken aback by the comment. He had never been told by a child so bluntly that he was liked. "I like you, too." And he absolutely did. There was something about the child that seemed to just draw him in.

Taylor smiled and ran from the room. Clark just shook his head with a smile. He guessed his new friend would come again when he wanted to. He hoped it was soon because he realized he already missed him.

Funny, Clark thought as he continued to unpack his stuff. A small boy held more fascination than...

Even the boy's beautiful mother.

The next day Clark noticed Taylor ease into the room as he typed up some of his work. The boy had a child's Sippy cup glued to his lips as his small eyes watched the man behind the desk. Clark pretended not to notice him just so he could see what

he would do. When Taylor made it to his side, Clark had to stop his work and smile at him. He was so cute standing there watching him with huge, soulful eyes.

“Hi.”

“Hey,” he managed around the spout of his cup. “Watcha’ doin’?”

“Typing up my report forms.”

“Ya’ bagged a biggen?”

Clark chuckled as he turned his to get a better look at Taylor. “Where did you hear that?”

“Mommy and Papa,” he answered matter-of-factly.

Clark laughed softly again as Taylor sucked the juice from his cup. “Would you like to help me?”

Sure hands plopped the bright cup down on the corner of Clark’s desk. “Uh huh.” He peered up at the screen as if he understood everything on it.

Clark hoisted the boy up onto his lap, so he could show him what he had been doing. Taylor watched patiently as Clark finished his work, then his little eyes lit up when the man punched the keys and produced a child’s game. The next hour or so was spent seeing if they could match colors and shapes.

That had been the start of a beautiful friendship as far as Clark was concerned. He and Taylor laughed and played happily as they sat there at that computer. Clark was impressed by how much that child knew and understood. Obviously Lois and Sam spent a great deal of time with the boy. So wrapped up in their game, neither of them heard Lois until she cleared her throat.

Clark looked up at her sheepishly. “Sorry. Guess I should have told you he was here.”

“No. Debbie told me he was here. I just don’t want him bothering you.”

Clark looked down at Taylor. There was no way this child could bother him. “He’s not. He helped me finish my work, so I’m returning the favor with a game.” The child smiled up at Clark from his position on his lap, and he felt his heart melt. Taylor was a distraction Clark hadn’t known he needed.

“Are you sure he’s not too much trouble?”

“He’s fine.” Clark ruffled Taylor’s hair.

“Okay. Call me if he gets to be in the way.”

“Taylor, tell Mommy to go ‘bag a biggen’.”

“Yeah.” He giggled softly as he looked up at Clark.

Lois shook her head as she left them to their play. Clark refocused his attention on the squirming toddler in his lap, so they could continue their game.

Over the next few weeks Taylor and Clark became closer friends. Taylor was often in Clark’s office, and it seemed the man never tired of the toddler’s visits. Soon enough, Clark had won himself a permanent companion when a few toys started to grace another office besides Lois’.

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Clark sighed as the pilot announced the flight was just about over. Thoughts of times gone by were pushed back into that far corner of his mind he had long ago deemed safe as he locked his belt in preparation for landing.

Certain things might be better left in the past.

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“Mom?!”

“In here,” Martha called from the other room.

Clark followed her voice into the living room where she sat among several moving boxes. After checking into his hotel in Chicago, he had flown to the farm to help his mother pack.

“Hi. I see you’re almost finished.” It had taken him months to talk his mother into leaving the house she had known as home for the last thirty-five years and come to live with him in Metropolis. Since his father was gone, he was reluctant to leave his mother in Kansas alone. Martha would finally be with him and Jon again.

Neither wanted to lose the contact the small farmhouse gave

them to the man that had run it for so many years, so they had decided it should be leased instead of sold.

He leaned over the chair Martha was in to kiss her cheek.

“It’s just so hard to pack up so many years.” She voiced what he had thought so many times.

“I know.” Clark took off his glasses to pinch the bridge of his nose as he sat down on the sofa. “Just remember what I told you. Those memories are coming with you.” Even if they both hated to leave a place where they seemed to be able to feel the man they had loved more than life itself. But Jonathan would be with them no matter where they lived.

“I know.” Martha sighed audibly. “Is Jon excited about Grandma coming to be with him?”

“Mom. You know he’s looking forward to seeing you every day.” That had been Clark’s selling point to talk her into moving. Truth was he needed Martha as much as Jon did.

“Well, I know. It’s just sometimes...” She trailed off as she got a faraway look on her face. “How does Lana feel about me caring for him when I get there?”

“We’ve been through this, Mom. I don’t care what she thinks. As long as I’m writing the checks for daycare, she’ll have to live with what I say. Period!”

“Well, it’s about time.” Martha turned around to face him fully.

“What?”

“It’s about time you quit bending over to kiss her—”

“Mom!”

Martha shot up from the chair. “I can’t help it! She’s leading you around by your love for Jon. She doesn’t care about you. She can’t get past liking herself long enough. And I don’t like how she treats Jon either. She’s short tempered and impatient with him. Clark, wake up! She only had Jon because she knew she’d get you in the bargain.”

“Then why didn’t she agree to marry me?”

“I don’t know. Something changed when you two separated. I think she just likes the control she has over you while still enjoying the freedom to just do as she pleases.”

“She doesn’t do as she pleases.”

“She doesn’t? What do you call coming in here and announcing she’s moving to Metropolis to model for Hayden’s?” Clark dropped his gaze from his mother’s. “She, in no uncertain terms, told you that you’d either have to move or you wouldn’t see Jon. So you follow her like some little puppy dog. But, thank God, you still have enough sense not to tell her about you know what.”

“Come on, Mom. You know I don’t tell her about myself because I’m scared she’ll take Jon away from me completely.”

“That’s another thing. Clark, you’re a successful reporter. You earn more money than Lana right now. You certainly take better care of Jon than she does. Why would she automatically get him? Son, she doesn’t even want him.”

Clark sighed heavily and sank back against the cushions. His mom had good points. Lana wasn’t very adept when it came to Jon. She did just enough to keep him from complaining. On top of that, she was often gone on some modeling shoot or other. When she was home, all she wanted to do was stay in bed. Clark had recently started staying at work to avoid her as much as possible. Lately he had wondered why he stayed with her at all.

He knew he did most everything Lana wanted so that he could stay close to Jon. Not exactly the way he had hoped his life would end up, but he would do anything for his son.

Martha sat down next to him and placed a hand on his knee. “Maybe it’s time you consider doing what’s best for Jon. Clark, I know Metropolis wasn’t your first choice as a place to raise your son, but you’ve done well. Jon is happy and well adjusted. I just think it’s time for you to call it quits with Lana. You know as well as I do that it will never work for you two.”

Clark lifted his head to look at her. As much as he needed to address this problem, he wanted to avoid it as well. He had been telling himself for three years that Lana was not the woman he was meant to be with. "Speaking of Metropolis... Guess who I saw at the airport?" When his mother shrugged, he smiled. "Lois."

"Lois Lane?"

He couldn't help but smile. Just thinking of Lois made him feel lighter than he had felt in months.

Why was that?

Before he would allow himself to answer, he said, "Yep. She was waiting on a football player to get in."

"Lois," Martha said absently.

Clark knew immediately his mother was remembering the woman and little boy she had met. Martha and his father had fallen in love with Lois and Taylor. He knew his mother had wished that he would have ended up with them. She had also been the one to comfort him through his devastation when the girl had married someone else. His mom was the only one who knew exactly how much Lois and Taylor had meant to him.

"How is she?" Martha finally asked him. "And Taylor?"

"She's good. She showed me a picture of Taylor. He's huge... and handsome. Looks just like his mother." Clark stared across the room as more thoughts of the two people he had left behind filled his mind. How much different would things have been...?

He couldn't do this now. Not again.

"I'll bet," Martha answered as she glanced over at the picture of Clark and Taylor that still graced the bookshelves. "What... he'll be seven his next birthday?"

"Yeah. Hard to believe it's been that long." Entirely too long, Clark thought as he met his mother's gaze. "Lois said she's told him all about me." And he suddenly found himself wanting nothing more than to know all about Taylor as well.

"Really? His step-father probably didn't appreciate that." Martha had never been a fan of Dan's, and she had never really hidden that fact either.

"Lois and Dan are divorced." Away from Lois, where he couldn't see the hurt in her eyes, that tiny part of him that wasn't as nice as the rest of him silently cheered.

Martha's brows rose into her hair. "Wasn't the perfect marriage after all?"

And just like that his rational side was back, pulling that part of him that had always jumped automatically to protect Lois back from the depths. "Mom, come on. She really looked hurt over it."

"I'm sure she was. She had to love Dan to marry him.

Breaking up after only a couple of years can hurt just as much if not more than after many years. You have so many hopes and expectations. Having those yanked away can be very painful."

"She said they tried to reconcile recently, but it just wasn't working out."

"How's Taylor dealing with all of that?"

"That's what gets me. She said Dan never... bonded with Taylor. That was one of the reasons they separated. Dan couldn't bring himself to raise another man's child." That fact just rubbed him raw. Taylor couldn't help who his father was. He was a child that needed love. Why hadn't Dan been able to offer that? Why hadn't Lois seen that Dan wouldn't be able to do that? She was a brilliant woman, yet she had read that man all wrong.

"What?" Martha wanted to know.

Clark nodded his head. "You know, there's part of me that really wanted to tell her..." He pushed up from the sofa and walked over to look at the photo of Taylor. He stared down into the two brown eyes there, trying to fuse them with slightly older ones he had seen in the photo Lois had showed him. Part of him had wanted to tell her that she had looked right past the man who would have given her the world. Another part, the aching part, wanted to tell her she had gotten what she deserved.

But then he thought of Taylor. He hadn't deserved any of it. "I guess there's no use driving myself crazy over the way I thought it should have been."

His voice was low and filled with all the pain he had experienced so long ago. Seeing Lois again had thrown him through an emotional loop. He was about to relate this to Martha when Lana and Jon came in.

Lana had flown in to see her parents because she would be leaving the country in a week on a photo shoot in England.

"Oh, Clark. Good, you're back. Here." She shoved Jon into Clark's waiting arms. "I have to catch a plane tonight."

Clark looked up from his reunion with his son to Lana. "What?"

"My agent called and said it was tomorrow or never."

"But I thought you were leaving next week."

"Oh, well..." She shrugged helplessly and glared at Martha.

The older woman caught the hint and retrieved Jon from Clark's embrace, so they could leave Lana and Clark alone. It was obvious the young woman didn't want her to hear what she was going to say.

"I've been thinking," Lana started. "That maybe I'd get a place... when I get back from England."

"Are you saying you want to live apart?"

"I think it would be best. I'll be working constantly, and you're always pretty involved. I just don't think it would be fair to our relationship." She turned her head with a snooty expression on her face. "You already prefer to work rather than spend time with me."

"Lana, all you want to do is have sex."

"What's wrong with that? Look at you. You're irresistible."

From any other woman that would have been a compliment, but Lana only said it to get what she wanted. "Believe it or not, I don't enjoy being attacked constantly."

"Constantly? Clark, you haven't made love to me in weeks."

"And where have you been?"

"I work!"

"So do I. I also take care of our son. And what about Jon? What do you plan to do with him if you work all the time?"

"I'll find a good daycare."

"You'd rather take him to some daycare than have him stay with Mom?"

"Clark, I like your mother. But she's just taking her role in Jon's life for granted."

"What?"

"She acts more like his mother than I do."

"And just why is that? You're never home. And when you are, you're in bed or in the tub or on the phone. When you watch Jon, you make him sit at the table with crayons and a book or put some movie in the VCR and dare him to move."

"Don't you tell me how to care for my son!" Lana pointed her finger at Clark, her expression fixed in an angry scowl.

"He's my son, too!" Clark was glaring back.

Lana stood there for several moments as they continued to stare each other down. Finally she turned on her heel and stalked from the room.

Clark threw his hands up and followed her up the stairs. When he made it to their room, she was packing. "Lana?"

"Jon's coming with me," she told him without looking up from her task.

"What?"

She stopped and turned to Clark. "Me and my son are leaving. I'll take him to England with me."

"You can't take him away from me."

"I can and I will." She pushed past him and continued packing.

"Lana, please don't do this. I'll do whatever you want." He hated to beg, but he couldn't lose his son. Jon was the only thing

that made his life complete.

She wasn't about to give in though. She pushed a few more of Jon's things into the bag and went to get hers from the closet.

Clark could only watch as she finished her packing then went back down the stairs. He sighed heavily before hurrying after her. "Lana!"

She had just entered the kitchen again from putting the bags in the car. Martha was watching in silence, clutching Jon to her breast. Lana approached and tore him from her grasp.

"I'll call you and give you an address so you can send support for Jon."

Clark's mouth dropped open. She was leaving and wasn't even going to let him say good-bye to his son, and all she cared about was the money he would send. How had he ever believed he could have made a life with this woman? Even for Jon? He hurried out the door and reached for a crying Jon as Lana fought to get him into the back seat.

"Let me say good-bye," Clark told her as he gripped Jon's sides, his expression leaving little doubt that he meant business. He had bowed to her whims entirely too long.

Lana glared at him a moment before she let go of the boy. "Make it quick."

Clark looked at Jon then over at Lana. He made a decision that he might regret later, but looking at Jon's face he knew he had to do what was best for his son. "What am I doing?" he whispered as he turned and started toward the house.

"Where the hell are you going?"

"If you want to leave, go. You're not taking Jon. He's just as much my son as he is yours," he told her without looking back. "Clark!"

Clark stopped and faced Lana. "No. For nearly three years I've done everything you want me to do. I've bent over backwards for you just to see my son. If you want to take him, you'll have to get a court order." With that Clark entered the house with his son and slammed the door.

Lana was left staring at the closed door in stunned silence.

Clark exchanged a look with his mother, who looked to be smiling a bit, then sat down. Jon smiled at him, and it furthered his resolve that he had made the right choice. It was several minutes before Lana stormed back into the house and dropped Jon's bag on the floor beside Clark's chair. He looked up from where he and Jon were sitting at the table into Lana's angry face.

"Fine. If you want to play rough, I'll play rough." That was all she said before she turned and left again, the door banging closed behind her.

"Maybe I shouldn't have done this," Clark suggested. It might have been the right choice for Jon, but that didn't mean Lana wouldn't make his life a living hell.

"I say it's about time," his mother told him. "Clark, you can't let Lana dictate the rest of your life."

He sighed and smoothed a hand over Jon's head. "Yeah, I know." And he did know. He was miserable and had been for quite a while. And Jon suffered because of their relationship. He just didn't look forward to the fight he was sure lay ahead. He rose and hoisted the boy into the air. "Come on, Jon. Let's go play down by the pond."

He and Jon left to enjoy what was left of a bad evening. If he spent the rest of his life coddling Lana, he would never have a life of his own. And for some reason, he was suddenly feeling the desire for more of a life than he had had the past few years.

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In Metropolis, Lois tossed her bag on the table in the foyer of her plush two-story home in one of the more upscale neighborhoods the city had to offer. She had traded in her apartment in the heart of downtown for the proverbial American dream home complete with the white picket fence. Taylor now had a small backyard and a swing set. Lois had a permanent

smirk from the satisfaction that waiting until after her divorce to buy her house gave her.

She smiled again as she remembered the last time she and Dan had fought. It had been about her house. Lois shook her head and made her way into the kitchen to fix herself something to eat. Taylor was staying over at her father's, so she was on her own tonight.

An hour later Lois' thoughts drifted to her day, stopping on one thing in particular: her conversation with Clark.

Clark Kent had taken Lois by surprise when he came to work for the agency five years ago. After her relationship, if you could call it that, with Claude, she had promised herself and Taylor that she wouldn't let her feelings for a man cause her to make another huge mistake. Finding out she was pregnant with her son had been a shock, but she had been determined that the baby was not to blame. Claude refused to acknowledge the child as his, and Lois was left to be a single mom, a position she never took lightly. So she had made a promise to make decisions with her head instead of her heart. What a mistake that had been.

Dan was what Lois considered her answer to the incredibly uncontrollable feelings she had for Clark. She had met Dan shortly after Taylor was born at a sports awards ceremony in Los Angeles. They had flirted quite childishly that night, ending up making out in Dan's hotel room. Lois had halted anything beyond kissing and petting when she remembered what her last moment of weakness had gotten her. She left an angry and disappointed man and returned to her normal little life to tuck her feelings, desires, and wants into the back of her mind, so she could concentrate on caring for her son.

Two years later, she met the only man who had caused her to think about a future that included someone other than Taylor. Clark was a breath of fresh air. He loved her son like Taylor was his own. And she could see and feel the love and desire he held for her. That scared the hell out of the young woman who had fought to make her life her own.

When Dan breezed back into town, she jumped at his offer to go out. She had felt he would be the perfect distraction from her growing feelings for Clark. How they had come to an understanding to be sexual partners, she'd never know. She always blamed it on the loneliness and unrequited desire she refused to show to the only man that had ever moved her. When Dan asked her to marry him, she relented. He had promised to take care of Taylor and that was enough for Lois. There would be no deep seated feelings of love involved, just two lonely people agreeing to be friends and make the days easier to take. It also gave her the perfect excuse to run from how Clark made her feel.

There wasn't a day that had gone by since that Lois didn't feel ashamed of herself for the way she had handled things with Clark Kent. He had shown her true friendship, and she threw it back in his face. He was unaware that she loved him so much it hurt, but she was terrified that he would hurt her the same way Claude had. So she hurt him first. The day he left Metropolis she almost broke down and told him how she felt. But she had caused him enough pain. The best she could have done at the time was let him go so he could get on with his life. She had always wished the best things for Clark. Men just weren't made like him anymore.

Talking to him again made all the feelings, even the pain, surge to the surface. From the way he talked about his son's mother, he had not been able to find comfort either. Had Lois really done that much damage to such a gentle soul?

Lois dropped her head over into her hands. Clark was still that same compassionate and caring man she remembered. All the cards and gifts over the years that he had sent to Taylor was proof of that. And she had seen it in his eyes as they had talked. Clark might have excelled professionally, and time had certainly treated him well as far as his looks, but the loneliness had left its mark.

Although his son appeared to be what kept him going.

Lois had to smile as she remembered the small boy in the photograph. He was stunning. Even with the blonde hair and blue eyes he looked just like Clark. She wondered if he had the same disposition. Lois would bet Jon Kent was even more of a sweetheart than his father.

She rose from the sofa to find the card Clark had given her. Lois stared at the numbers for several long minutes before she picked up the phone and dialed. It was only eight thirty in Kansas.

And it was time to repair some of those bridges she had burned.

"Hello?" came the same, sweet voice she remembered on the other end.

"Martha?"

The older woman gasped slightly, and Lois could almost hear her smile. "Lois. How are you, honey?"

Even after all this time, Martha remembered the sound of her voice. "I'm good." Better now that she had heard Martha's comforting tone. "I, ah, saw Clark today, and he gave me your number."

"He told me. How's Taylor?"

"Big, with the attitude to back it up." She felt a smile tug its way out. Martha Kent had always been able to make her feel better.

Martha laughed softly. "I'll bet he's a handful."

"He is. I'd love for you to see him." And she would. Taylor would absolutely love this woman.

"I'd like that, too. Hopefully that will become a possibility soon. I'm coming to Metropolis."

"Yeah. Are you coming to visit with Clark?"

"I'm moving to be with my boys. He and Jon are all I have now. Where else would I be?"

Lois swallowed the lump from the pain she heard in the woman's voice. She had to be devastated without her husband. "Clark told me about Jonathan. I'm so sorry. If I'd known, I would have come out."

"Thank you." Martha took a breath. "Jonathan will always be part of us."

"I think it would be hard to know a man like Jonathan and not feel that way." The elder Kent man had been one of a kind. Meeting him, she had realized how Clark had turned out so well.

"Oh, honey." This time Lois could almost hear the silent tears she knew were making a trail down Martha's cheeks. Lois had been overwhelmed by the love she had seen the older couple had for one another. "Now, tell me about Taylor," Martha finally managed, an obvious attempt to steer the conversation toward more pleasant conversation.

"He's the best." Lois settled into her chair and spent the next half hour talking to a woman that had been shaped with God's own hands. Lois had always been sure of that. Martha Kent was the ultimate dream mother, almost perfect.

Across the wires separating their lives, a friendship was being renewed.

\*\*\* (six months later) \* \* \* \*

"Clark!" Perry White's bellow echoed through the newsroom.

Clark was standing in front of the boss' desk before the man had time to blink. One didn't keep Perry waiting. "Yes, sir?"

"Got a job for you." The old editor held up a pair of tickets in his hand. "These are tickets to the fundraiser for the Superman Foundation. I want you there to cover it for the Planet."

"I thought that was Cat's job?"

"Usually, yes. But, son, this is Superman. I want the Planet's best to be there."

There it was again. Someone else had complimented Clark on his work. "Yes, sir."

Perry smiled at the retreating back of his reporting sensation.

He had been extremely impressed with the young man's resume. Although he had been reporting mostly on sports for the last several years, Clark had also published articles in his local paper and submitted several freelance news items to the larger papers in Wichita and Kansas City. The long time editor liked the young man's writing style and took a chance on him. It had paid off. Clark had bagged numerous front-page stories in his first few months with the Planet. With a Kerth award, a Bailey nomination, and several Superman articles to his credit, the man was truly an asset.

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Clark straightened his tie as he handed the keys for his car to the valet outside the Metropolis Convention Center. These charity functions always made him ill. A bunch of rich people running around trying to impress other rich people. How did someone actually do that?

He would much rather be home with his son. Unfortunately, Jon was with his mother tonight. And Lana had refused to let Clark see him earlier. He would be forced to wait until the following day. Clark also had to consider that this particular function was for the Superman Foundation and since he had a vested interest...

A while later, as he took a glass of champagne from a passing waiter, Clark's eyes drifted around the room. He was pleased with the turn out. Since he had decided two years ago to become Superman, he hadn't had this much satisfaction for what the Man of Steel had accomplished. He had started the Superman Foundation because he was not only tired of being hounded by people trying to get a piece of the him, he had seen it as a way to help others on a much more personal level. His foundation was responsible for building playgrounds for inner city, keeping homeless families off the street, and scholarships for graduates who would otherwise not get the opportunity to go to college. All in all, he was prouder of the smaller things he had done than he was of the larger ones.

He turned to another group calling to him when he stopped short. His eyes fell on a beautiful... No. *The* most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The thin straps of her dress fell across creamy shoulders; the shiny material added a glow to her hair, while a gorgeous smile danced across her lips. She was the one woman he thought he had done well to avoid, yet yearned to see again... and again.

Lois Lane. That was a name he had tried hard to forget, though he knew he would never be able to forget the person. Lois was incredible. She had a fire and a determination the likes of which he had never seen until her. Since the day he had seen her at the airport, he had thought of her often.

Clark had been attracted to Lois from the moment he had first met her. He had done everything in his power to show her that he was the kind of man that could be trusted and depended on. He knew Lois had been attracted to him as well. He had been able hear her heart rate increase when she was near him. Later, as they had gotten closer, he had been able sense her desire for him. Why had she fought her attraction to him and married another man? He had asked himself that question a million times. Looking back, he realized that if he had stayed, although she had married someone else, he might have ached for her constantly, but maybe he would never have had to spend the last few years the way he had. Now he would never know what might have been.

Of course, if he had made a life in Metropolis all those years ago, his son may not exist. And that's something he wouldn't change for the world. Jon was his life, his one true connection to this world. It didn't matter who Jon's mother was or that he had never really been in love with her. It didn't matter that Lana had become someone Clark didn't know or that they weren't even friends any more. All that mattered was that Jon was here and he was real and he was very much wanted and loved by his father.

Clark looked up to a commotion on the other side of the crowd. Lex Luthor had just entered the room and was greeted by Lois. Clark watched as the woman laughed at something Luthor said. Her hair was piled on top of her head, exposing an absolutely gorgeous neck. The thin straps on the black dress she wore drew Clark's eyes back to her delicate shoulders. The curves, the eyes, and... He had to stop this line of thought, or he would be doing laps in the arctic tonight for sure. But even as he thought that, his eyes kept sliding over her absolutely gorgeous curves. For the first time Clark noticed that Lois was... pregnant?

His eyes widened slightly in surprise. To Clark, she looked very pregnant. Her mid-section protruded well out in front of her. Though not a bad picture, it was still something of a surprise to him. It also reminded him painfully that she was still unavailable.

"She's amazing isn't she?"

The voice of Jimmy Olsen, staff photographer at the Planet, brought Clark back to his surroundings. Clark smiled and said, "She certainly is."

"They tell me she used to work at the *Planet*."

"She did... several years ago. Had the potential to be the best around." She had told him about her time at the *Planet* once.

"What happened?"

"Life happened, Jimmy." Clark shook his head slightly at the thoughts that ran through his mind. So many things had happened with this woman. He pulled himself together and searched for something to change the subject. "I didn't know Lois was seeing Lex Luthor," he ventured. He had noticed the exchange between the attractive couple. Though he had no claim on Lois Lane, he couldn't stop his jealousy to think she might be involved with someone... like Luthor.

"They're not in a relationship exactly. A source tells me that Lex wants Lois to write his biography. He's dying."

"What?"

"Yeah. He contracted HIV years ago. In the past year it developed into AIDS and is reported to be in the advanced stages already. Apparently it's turned him into a new man. He wants to do a little good before he dies and wants the world to know just how evil he really was."

"I had no idea. How is it I'm considered the investigative journalist, and you get all the juicy info?"

Jimmy shrugged with a smile. "What can I say?"

Clark chuckled softly. He had shared a few by-lines with the young man. Jimmy aspired to be more than the researcher and photographer he was at present, although his work with the camera had earned him a nomination at the latest awards ceremony.

Clark looked back up at the billionaire across the room. "Who would think Metropolis' top benefactor would be a criminal? But I guess you don't get that high up without doing a few illegal things."

"Yeah well, a few don't come close to Lex." Jimmy snapped a couple of pictures of a nearby couple before turning back to Clark. "I know I shouldn't ask, but how's the custody thing going?"

"Slow. She's postponed the hearing twice. She can't do it but once more, which I look for her to do. The hearing's next week."

"Ouch."

"Yeah. I guess it could be worse though. I could not be seeing him at all."

"You're right. I wish you the best, CK." Jimmy clapped the older man's shoulder.

"Thanks."

"Now... I need to get some shots of these stuffed shirts. Hey, come join us Saturday for our weekly basketball game."

"You got it." Clark smiled after the young man. He liked Jimmy. The kid was going to go far in this business, not to mention he was the best researcher Clark had ever had the good

fortune to work with.

Now that Jimmy was gone, Clark had nothing to do but watch Lois some more. It was not something he wanted to do.

And it was *all* he wanted to do.

He grabbed another glass of champagne and downed it as quickly as possible, an attempt to douse his wayward thoughts. Of course, it didn't help a bit. Sometimes he really wished alcohol had an effect on him.

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After several chats with different people and twice as many internal debates, Clark bit the bullet and decided to ask Lois to dance. Most of the night he had told himself that it was best just to avoid her — to stay as far away as he could. Only thing was his heart didn't agree. She looked as beautiful as ever. But Clark had looked deeper. Behind her tired eyes was something he couldn't discern. And the part of him that had always wanted nothing more than to see her happy immediately wanted to know what had put those shadows behind her deep gaze, even if he knew the encounter might cause him more pain in the long run. Besides, it was just a dance. One short dance couldn't hurt... much.

Lois had been on the dance floor a couple of times with Lex. Now that she was just standing by Luthor's side, looking for the world like she was bored stiff, Clark figured it was as good a time as any.

"Excuse me." Lois slowly turned and smiled when her eyes met his. "May I have this dance?"

Lois let her gaze fall to his outstretched hand a moment before her hand did. "You may," she replied with a smile.

Clark led them out onto the dance floor, taking Lois into his arms with a strong male confidence. Lois wasn't just beautiful, she was stunning. Pregnancy made her absolutely glow. Maybe this dance wasn't such a good idea after all, his heart screamed as he whirled Lois across the small space.

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Lois' heart thundered in her chest as Clark led her out onto the dance floor. It seemed like forever since she had seen him at the airport. She talked to his mother at least once a week, but they had made an agreement not to discuss Clark. Martha had somehow understood when Lois still really didn't. Even if it was the older woman's son about whom Lois couldn't decide how she felt, Martha was also wise enough to allow them to work this out for themselves. It worked for them, but Lois couldn't keep her thoughts from drifting to this man and what he was doing. Clark crossed her mind more now than years ago. She had wondered if he would cover this event for the *Planet*. Standing here with him now, she wasn't so sure how or even what she felt, but she was glad that he was here.

When he had taken her into his arms, she had lost the power of speech. Clark must have asked her out a hundred times when he had worked at the agency, and she had turned him down every time. Sure, they had spent time together as friends, but she would have had to be blind not to see that he had wanted more. Since they had seen each other again, she had found her thoughts drifting to what it would have been like if she had gone on just one date. To be in his arms, after some of the images that had danced around in her head, made her slightly breathless.

"Umm, you're a really good dancer," Lois told him to break the ice.

"I learned ballroom dancing from a Nigerian princess."

"Really?"

"Yes. Mom taught me a few things, too. Mainly how to shag."

"Oh, I love to shag."

"On the boardwalk at the beach is the best."

"I know. The smell of the air, the excitement you feel from everyone. You can't beat that."

“Sure can’t.” Clark smiled as he turned them around. “I wouldn’t have thought a big city girl would know how to do such a non-city thing.”

“What about you, Mr. Kansas? Isn’t shagging a southern dance?”

“It is. My mom’s from Georgia.”

Lois cocked her head to study his expression. How was it she had ever said no to this man? She smiled after a moment. “I knew that.”

“I know,” was all he said as he spun them again.

“It’s good to see you,” Lois ventured after another moment. And it was. It might be making her lightheaded, but she was enjoying the experience.

Clark smiled just as brightly back at her. “It’s good to see you, too, Lois. How are you?”

“I’m good. Busy.”

Clark looked down at her. “I see,” he told her.

“Well, yeah...” Lois lowered her gaze from his. How in hell did she explain this to him? To anyone? It seemed that she just couldn’t make the right decision to save her life.

Clark’s expression was curious, and concerned, as he looked down at her. “I take it this is not... good news.”

“Good? Well... Surprising. Really surprising.” Shocking, devastating, and utterly humiliating!

“Ah...” Clark, ever the gentleman, quickly moved on to another subject. “Mom says she enjoys your calls.”

“I’ve come to see those calls as therapy,” she admitted without meaning to. Martha had done more for her outlook on life in the last few months than Dr. Friskin could have done in ten years of patient sessions.

Clark simply smiled at her and again moved to a safer subject. “How’s Taylor?”

“Enjoying the weekly cards. He wants to meet you.”

“Yeah. Maybe it’s time.”

“Then we should have dinner soon,” Lois suggested quickly, much too quickly. Traitor, she mentally shouted at her wayward mouth.

“Yeah,” he agreed with a smile. Was I coming on too strong? she thought when he didn’t sound terribly thrilled with that suggestion. Again, he jumped tracks... right back to a sensitive subject. “Tell me about this little person,” Clark said as he glanced down at Lois’ stomach.

“I know. I know. Looks like as old as I am, I’d know what causes these things,” she joked, an effort to make light of the situation so she wouldn’t break down and cry.

Clark chuckled softly. “When are you due?”

“She’s due in another two months... give or take a week or two.”

“So you know it’s a girl?”

“Yeah. I wanted to know this time around... And it makes everything easier with Taylor.”

“What does he think about a little sister?”

“He’s excited. Sometimes I think I’m crazy for doing this again.” Actually, she thought that almost constantly.

“Why’s that?”

“Well, look at Taylor. He’s exasperating, exhilarating, and absolutely wonderful. Soon I’ll have another to go with him.” She paused, allowing emotions to flow through her that she hadn’t before. Then she made a confession. “Yet, I can’t see my life without either one.” She realized that it was true. After so much indecision and confusion, this unborn child had become just as vital to her as Taylor.

“Mmm, that’s the way I feel about my son. He’s phenomenal. Bright for his age; asks a million questions. ‘Course you can only understand about half of what he says.”

“I remember that age. It’s great. I bet you need a ton of energy to keep up?”

“Actually Jon’s a relatively calm child. Mom says he’s a lot like I was when I was little. He’s just curious.”

“Taylor’s the same way. Wants to know how and why to everything.”

“Yeah,” Clark agreed before they both laughed softly.

“Wouldn’t change him for the world.”

“I know exactly what you mean.” Lois melted into Clark slightly as they moved to the music. She had never understood what it was about this man that could make her relax.

After a moment she looked back up into his eyes. The loneliness and insecurity she saw behind his brown pools took her by surprise. “Jon sounds wonderful,” she murmured in response to his statement.

He didn’t say a word, just smiled. Lois could almost feel that behind his outer shell, there was a lot going on with this man. She found herself wanting to know more about this person she had turned her back on before.

Clark suddenly dipped Lois, exciting a giggle. When he pulled her back up, they were both laughing softly. “I couldn’t resist.”

“It was great. Not many men dip these days.” They danced another second or two before Lois noticed that everyone was watching them. Scanning the room, she realized the music had stopped. Judging by the way people were looking at them, it had stopped some time ago. “Ah, Clark. I think we have an audience.”

He looked around quickly and then dipped Lois one last time. When he pulled her up, he stepped back and bowed dramatically. “Thank you for the dance, Milady.”

Lois laughed softly. “My pleasure.” She took Clark’s arm as the watching crowd offered them applause for their efforts. Afraid of saying good-bye yet again, she leaned close to his ear and whispered, “Let’s go out on the balcony.” She couldn’t just walk away again. Not tonight. Not after seeing the shadows behind his eyes.

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Clark was a little surprised, but there was no way he was going to let this opportunity pass him by. He might have been arguing with himself earlier that it was a bad idea to get close to this woman again, but now he wanted to be as close as he could get. He directed them toward the balcony, stopping to grab himself a glass of champagne and Lois a club soda.

Once outside, he handed Lois the glass. “Thank you,” she told him.

“You’re welcome. Club soda,” he assured her. “Wouldn’t want to give the baby anything she didn’t need.” He took a long sip of his drink, peering over his glass at the lady before him. Lois was still just as fantastic as he remembered her to be. Standing here with her now, he found himself having feelings that bordered on insane, feelings he had fought long and hard to bury.

Lois lowered her glass, tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, and smiled shyly. “So, where’s your son tonight?”

“With his mother. I get him bright and early in the morning.”

“What’s that like?”

“What?”

“Having to wait to see your son.”

Clark let out a slow, deep breath. “It’s... excruciating. When I first found out about him, I was extremely doubtful that he was mine. Lana was not exactly the picture of fidelity.” Never mind that he doubted he could actually father a child with an Earth woman. Or the apprehension over the paternity testing that followed. Luckily that had turned out well, not revealing his unique abilities to the world. And it had proven that Jon was his son.

“Ouch.”

“Yeah. She was demanding I help with expenses related to the pregnancy. If he was mine, I had no problem with that. I

wanted to help.” Clark leaned over the edge of the balcony on his folded arms. “Before I could suggest a paternity test, she scheduled an amino procedure. When the results came back, I was thrilled. I knew we had a tough road ahead, but we were bringing this little person into the world that was part of us.” He stared out into the darkness, remembering those months gone by. “I made every effort to work things out and make a life with Lana for Jon’s sake. She was just not willing to do the same.”

“I’m sorry.”

Clark turned to face Lois. “For what?”

“For you not getting to be with your son all the time. There are so many fathers out there that don’t have anything to do with their children. When one really wants to, the mother goes off on some power trip.”

Clark couldn’t help but hear the pain in Lois’ voice. There was something she wasn’t telling him. Of course, it wasn’t exactly his place to ask either.

As he continued to look at her, he found himself falling into her dark eyes. His smile faded as a hot flash of desire shot through him. It’s just because I’m so lonely, he told himself even as he lifted his hand up to trail light fingers across her cheek. “You are a very beautiful woman,” he whispered as he leaned into her.

She needed no prompting. Lois met him half way, and her lips touched his in a warm, sweet kiss. It was soft and absolutely wonderful. Clark drew back to look at her. Obviously she wasn’t adverse to this magnificent torture because she grasped the back of his head and pulled him into another kiss. This one grew steamier. It was Lois who licked Clark’s lips seeking entry to his mouth. And he gladly gave it.

Clark couldn’t suppress the moan that escaped his lips when Lois pressed her body against his. Immediately his arms were wrapped around her, holding her in place. Her hands had found their way into his hair, and for a moment she was the only thing in his entire world. He had wanted to do this so many times and had never gotten the chance. Now that he had the opportunity, he was taking full advantage.

But it was powerful, more so than he would have thought. Was this what so many years of unrequited feelings are like when they were finally unleashed. They kissed for several more torturously sweet moments, before he reluctantly tore his mouth away from hers to stare down into her equally surprised face. Both were breathing heavily, and he found himself wanting to kiss her again.

Before either could form a coherent thought, the balcony doors swung open.

“CK! There you are.”

Clark slowly released Lois as Jimmy rushed up to them excitedly.

“CK, I just heard something that might interest you.”

Reluctantly Clark tore his eyes from Lois’. “What is it, Jimmy?”

“I carry this pocket scanner. Anyway, I just heard one of the medics say they took, and I quote, ‘that Kent kid, the one whose mother is the Tyler Hayden model’, unquote, from an apartment uptown to Metropolis General Hospital.”

“What?!” Clark was scared senseless. His son was on his way to the hospital? Why? What had Lana done? Or failed to do? “When?”

“Just a second ago.”

“Thanks, Jimmy.” He turned to Lois with apologetic eyes. He didn’t want to leave, but Jon needed him.

“Go! I’ll call you later.” Lois’s eyes mirrored his terror. She understood.

He nodded then turned to go but stopped to rub Lois’ cheek with the tips of his fingers again. He couldn’t leave without conveying a little of what he had felt moments ago. He hoped it

was enough. A small, regretful smile graced his lips before he disappeared.

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Lois wrapped her arms around herself and sighed. That man was undoubtedly the best damn kisser she had ever had the privilege to experiment with. If she had known that fact years earlier...

The warm moment passed and she turned to the young man before her. “What happened to him?”

“Clark’s son?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds like he was burned. From the sound of it, it’s bad,” Jimmy said regretfully.

Lois felt a rush of fear. “Clark,” she breathed. He would be devastated if anything happened to Jon. She would rationalize their kiss later. Right now she needed to know that the little guy was going to be okay. “Thanks,” she told Jimmy as she headed for the door.

“Hey!”

Lois stopped with the door ajar. “Yeah?”

“Tell CK I’m thinking about him.”

“I will.” She entered the ballroom again and sifted her way through the crowd. Minutes later she was in a cab on the way to Metropolis General.

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Clark landed in the shadows near the emergency entrance to the hospital. He spun back into his tux and ran in. At the desk, a little old lady looked up at him.

“My name is Clark Kent. I think my son was just brought in.”

“Mr. Kent...” she chimed as she sifted through some papers.

“Yes. He’s in the examining area. Through those doors and around the corner you’ll see another desk. Inquire about the room there.”

“Thank you.” He barely heard her say he was welcome as the door closed behind him. When he made it to the other desk, his eyes caught sight of Lana outside a curtain area to the left. The sound of his son’s wailing clenched his heart. Lana looked up at him with frightened eyes as he approached. “Lana, what the hell happened?!” he demanded in hushed, angry tones.

“Clark! What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean? I’m his father. I have every right to be here! What happened?”

“He... ah... he... was burned.”

“Burned? How?”

“He... he... was... a log... from the fireplace. It rolled out. He was sitting on the hearth. It caught his pajamas on fire.”

Clark could only gasp. His fear was beginning to overtake him. If his clothes had caught fire, he could be seriously hurt. “Where were you?” His voice was only a whisper.

Lana turned her head, refusing to answer him. Clark huffed and pushed her aside to go check on his son.

The doctor attending to Jon was also a friend of Clark’s. The poor guy looked relieved when he saw Clark. “Clark, thank God you’re here. He’s been screaming your name.”

The little boy lifted his head at the mention of his father’s name. “Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!” He was crying and reaching for Clark.

“I’m here, son. I’m here.” Clark went to his side, careful not to cause further damage, yet trying to comfort him at the same time. “Shhh. Daddy’s here.” He wiped the tiny tear stained face, clearing away the effects of a runny nose. “Shhh. Jon, Daddy’s here. It’s going to be okay.” His lips touched his son’s head, his mind praying desperately that he was right. There had been many times since Jon’s birth that he had prayed the child wouldn’t inherit any of the powers that at times made him feel so isolated from the rest of the world. But with the knowledge of just what having superpowers could mean, Clark decided that maybe it

wouldn't be so bad if Jon had gotten a few of his father's special genes

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The doctors and nurses carefully assessed Jon's burns then cleaned his wounds. His small back and bottom were completely covered with third degree burns, and his pajamas had to be peeled away. With them came most of the outer layer of his skin, exposing him to serious infection. Intravenous pain medicine and fluids were administered to make him comfortable and hopefully keep him from becoming dehydrated. His small body had been severely traumatized, and the doctors weren't sure if he would pull through. The next forty-eight hours were critical.

Jon's burns were covered in sterile bandages, and he was placed in a tent to prevent exposure to germs. Clark had been allowed to sit with him for a couple of hours just in case he woke and was scared. Since he was in the intensive care unit, Clark had to leave when visiting hours were over, but a hospitality room was provided so he would be close by. The Man of Steel was left to watch helplessly as his only son suffered through his ordeal. He was grateful when the medication finally took affect and the boy was sleeping.

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Clark pushed through the double doors leading from the Pediatric ICU to find Lana pacing at the end of the hall. When she saw him, she marched in his direction.

"What the hell is going on? Those bastards wouldn't let me in! I have been answering questions from DCFS for two hours. They accused me of neglect."

"Lana! I don't really care what you've been doing. Our son has third degree burns over most of his back and bottom. He's in intensive care. He may not survive. YOU did neglect him!" Clark was furious and had to fight to control himself from choking the life out of her.

Lana showed the first signs of comprehension then. She just stopped, staring at Clark. "He was with the sitter. DCFS talked to her. The incident has been ruled an accident."

"Accident?! Our son may die, Lana. An accident like this should never, ever happen!" Clark fought the tears that were threatening him. How could Lana have allowed such a thing to happen? Didn't she understand the consequences of these actions?

"Clark," she said softly. "I want to see him."

He calmed slightly at the pain he heard in Lana's voice. No matter how mad he was, she was still Jon's mother. "You can go in for ten minutes. The ICU ward has other children there.

Neither of us can stay with him, but they've provided us with a hospitality suite down the next hall, so we can be near him."

"Okay." She lifted her hand to place it on Clark's arm.

"Don't," he told her in a defeated tone. The last thing he wanted was for her to touch him. "Just go see Jon." Clark turned and headed down the hall toward their room. He could use a little privacy right now.

Clark opened the door to the suite and stopped dead in his tracks. There, pacing beside the bed was Lois Lane. She looked up at him with anxious eyes.

"How is he?"

Clark had to fight to find his voice, her presence throwing him off guard. He had been at the hospital for over three hours. Surely she hadn't waited all that time?

"He's..." Clark dropped his head, tears filling his eyes rapidly. "Oh, God, Lois. They don't know if he's going to make it."

Lois had him folded in her embrace almost instantly. She held his head to her shoulder while he sobbed his fears. He stood stiffly at first, but eventually his arms lifted and his hands clutched her back. He was absolutely terrified. What would he do without Jon?

Finally he turned his head into her neck. Lois lifted a hand to remove his glasses and wipe his face. "I'm so sorry, Clark," she whispered.

"Thank you... for being here." His grip on her tightened, and he buried his face in the hollow of her neck and shoulder. He could have easily remained that way forever, he decided. Lois was the only other person, besides his mother, that had ever seen him this weak. Would she think less of him? Right now he couldn't bring himself to think about it. Jon was the only thing on his mind. After a final squeeze, he lifted his head and drew back from her. "Sorry," he told her, wiping his face.

He had stepped around Lois, keeping his back to her. "Don't you dare be sorry. You love your son and you're scared he's going to die." She placed a hand on his shoulder. "It's okay for you to cry," she told him softly.

Clark ran a hand through his hair. Maybe she didn't think less of him at all. But Jon... with everything he could do, he hadn't been able to prevent him from being hurt.

"I didn't even hear him," he said aloud, more to himself than to Lois. "The doctor said that sometimes when a child is burned badly, the shock is so much they don't even make a sound." This time he spoke louder so she could hear him. His emotions were waging war, and he found that since he had started, he couldn't stop. His voice was almost hoarse with remorse. "Still doesn't make me feel any better." He chuckled softly. "For all I can do... my son may actually die."

Lois' brows furrowed slightly at his ramblings. "Clark, this was not your fault."

"I should have heard him. I should have gotten there," he continued. There was so many times when he kept things bottle up inside. This time he needed to talk about this. He needed someone to understand, even if it meant he would reveal things about him that might shock her.

Lois' expression was even more confused then. She grabbed Clark and spun him around to face her. "Clark, what are you..." Her question died when she saw his face clearly for the first time. Surprise replaced the confusion on her face as she stood there looking at him, a million questions dancing there behind her eyes.

Superman was nothing less than incredible. Since he had come onto the scene, he had blown the world away. He could perform the most amazing feats, including flying, and his presence had cut crime in the city in half. Not to mention that many, many people were alive because the man in blue had been there to help. He was the persona Clark had adopted as a way to use the incredible powers he had inherited from his home world while leading a somewhat normal life. And without a single word, he knew Lois was trying to decide if what she was seeing could possibly be true.

Though he had worked his entire life to ensure no one discovered his secret, suddenly protecting it just didn't seem all that important. Besides, he was in pain and wanted someone to talk to. He felt Lois was the one. He had felt that way all those years ago, and there was a lot more than attraction between them earlier when they had kissed.

Lois took a step and placed her palm against his face. The look in her eyes told him she knew and that an explanation wasn't necessary. "Clark, even a superman is allowed to be human."

Tears refilled Clark's eyes at the tender expression on Lois' face. How could she so readily accept him? "I'm sorry I didn't tell you before. It's just that most people would totally freak out if they knew that Clark Kent was more than he appeared to be." He felt he needed to explain. He knew he needed her to understand. It would rip him apart even more if Lois felt she couldn't get past his differences.

"No. You don't have to be sorry." She let her hand fall and took his to lead him over to the little sofa. When they were

seated, she turned to him. “I know this would be important to keep quiet so that you wouldn’t lose your personal life.”

“Exactly. Clark is still who I am. Superman is just something I can do.” She did understand! Why hadn’t he taken a chance on her so long ago?

“Clark,” she squeezed his hands to get his attention. “I know. We’ll talk about that later. Now, tell me about Jon.”

She was even more incredible than he thought. Her statement told him that she understood him, but Jon was what mattered most. That made him feel slightly lightheaded. He took a deep breath and began softly. “He’s got third degree burns on his back and bottom. They have him wrapped and in a germ free tent, but his small body was really stressed. The fluid loss may be too much.”

“So he’s not... special?”

“He’s healthier than most kids. I mean, he’s never been sick. But no, he’s not invulnerable yet. I wasn’t until I was over ten.”

“Oh...” He almost smiled at the look on Lois’ face. She wanted to know more, and he would be glad to tell her. Later.

“What happened? How did he get such bad burns?” Lois continued.

“I don’t know. Lana says he was with the sitter, and a log from the fireplace rolled out and caught his pajamas on fire. He was sitting on the hearth. What ticks me off is that she refused to let me see him tonight, but he was with a sitter. And downtown. What the hell was he doing downtown? The sitter usually goes to the house.” Clark ran a frustrated hand through his hair. “And I get the impression Lana didn’t think it was serious. I honestly think she was going to get him patched up and back home without telling me about this.”

“Oh, Clark.” Lois reached to take both of his hands in hers. “Did you call Martha? I can do it if you need me to.”

“I called her. They wouldn’t allow her in, so she went back home.”

“She must be frantic. I’ll call her for you so she’ll know he’s hanging in there.” She squeezed his hands, causing him to nod. It was all he could do.

Clark looked at their joined hands then up at Lois. To have her here meant the world to him. “Have you been here all night?”

“Of course.”

“Why?” He couldn’t help but ask it.

“Because... you needed a friend.”

Clark was choked up again. This woman was not only beautiful; she was compassionate. He leaned over and placed his forehead on hers. His emotions were threatening to overwhelm him, and he didn’t want to make a fool out of himself. If he kept looking at her, at those huge, deep eyes, he might just do something or say something he might regret later. “Thank you. You don’t know how much this means to me,” he whispered, opting for the truth but a safe truth.

Lois smiled when Clark pulled back. She was about to say something when Lana entered the room. Understanding far more than Clark had first imagined, she handed him his glasses back.

Clark put his glasses on with a sigh of relief for Lois’ thoughtfulness. Lana didn’t know about his super side, and he would like to keep it that way. How was it Lois could understand that?

“Who are you?” Lana demanded immediately.

Lois stood and extended a hand to Lana. “I’m Lois Lane.”

“Lois Lane?” she repeated without taking the offered hand. “Clark, what are you doing?”

Clark stood now. “Lana, Lois is a friend.” Clark put a carefully placed hand on the small of Lois’ back, his action contradicting his statement. He wanted Lana to know, to see, that this woman was special to him.

“Oh. Why didn’t you just say she was your latest bimbo?”

“Excuse me?” Lois spoke up before Clark got the chance.

“Ms. Lang, your son is in intensive care. I don’t think you can afford to be standing around calling people names. Clark is a friend, and he definitely needed to have someone here for him.” She turned to Clark, placing a hand deliberately on his chest. “I’m going to go. The last thing you need is more stress.”

“Don’t go. We can go down to the cafeteria and get some coffee.” Did he sound as desperate as he felt? Lois had offered him comfort and he was loathe to lose it just yet.

“Clark, you need to be near Jon. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Promise?” Definitely desperation, but there was no way he could go back to pretending she was his past. Not after she had held him. Not after he had shared so much of himself with her. Lois was his present.

Maybe she might be his future.

“I’ll bring that coffee bright and early.”

“Okay,” he relented. He squeezed her hand briefly before she pulled away.

Lois stopped in front of Lana. “I hope your son will be okay.”

Lana snorted as the door closed behind Lois then turned to glare at Clark. “That was uncalled for.”

“What was?”

“Having her here. Jon is our son.”

“You don’t seem to mind when Eric comes to your place.”

Clark shot back. The young man had been at Lana’s more than once when he went to pick up Jon or drop him off. Eric had also sat in the car when Lana dropped Jon off at his house. He felt sure Eric was living with Lana, but he couldn’t prove it. And he refused to spy on them with his special abilities for fear of seeing something that would make him take actions he would regret.

“Eric’s not here is he? My God, Clark, she’s pregnant. Don’t you think she’s got someone waiting at home?” Lana placed her hands on her hips, a narrowed expression taking over her face. “Unless, of course, it’s *your* baby.”

“You’re out of line!” he almost shouted.

“Am I? You’re always accusing me of this or that. What about you? You’re not perfect!”

“No, I’m not. But right now Jon is what’s important.”

Besides, Lois hadn’t told him about the baby’s father. And it was certainly none of Lana’s business. “Look, Lana,” Clark said in a calmer voice. “I don’t want to fight. Jon is lying in there, fighting horrific burns. We should be coming together, not tearing each other apart.” He didn’t have the energy to fight with Lana right now.

“You’re right,” Lana gave in. “I really am sorry about all of this.”

“Yeah well, tell that to your son.” Clark averted his gaze a moment, unable to stop himself one final barb, then turned back to her. “I’m sorry, Lana. I know this is hurting you, too.” And he did. She loved Jon— maybe not the way he did— but she loved him all the same.

“It is,” she said through tears that Clark would later say were an act.

“Come here.” Clark pulled her into his embrace. No matter how they felt about each other, Lana was still Jon’s mother. Clark would always care for her very deeply.

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After the comforting hug, Clark and Lana had settled on the bed. Clark sat against the headboard and held Lana while she slept. He almost resented the fact she could slumber so easily while so much was going on. He kept picturing Jon, lying helpless inside that tent. Would he get to hold that ball of energy again?

And Lois... What did last night mean? Did she feel anything they might be able to build some kind of future on? God, he hoped so. He had never felt quite so full as he had when she had held him. How much more wonderful would he feel if she held him while they were in some kind of relationship? At this point

he would take friendship. Much like he had known before he left Metropolis years before; being friends with Lois Lane was better than not having her in his life at all.

It was some time later before his thoughts calmed enough to allow him to drift to sleep.

Now he was having the most sensual dream. Lois was placing kisses on his bare chest and neck.

Lois? One kiss and his mind was placing her in his erotic dreams.

He would have to analyze that later because right now her hands were roaming his body. What was that? She had just sucked his earlobe into her mouth, softly moaning his name.

Clark's eyes shot open. That had been no dream. And he was not with Lois. Lana was the one kissing him. He took hold of her head to stop her. "Lana, what are you doing?"

"Trying to make you feel better. We both need this, Clark."

Clark pushed Lana back so he could get up. "You may need sex every six hours, but right now all I need is my son." He picked up his jacket and snatched the door open, leaving an angry Lana behind. How in hell could she want to have sex now?

He rounded the corner and came face to face with Lois. She held up the cups in her hands.

"Just as I promised: hot coffee."

Clark smiled and reached for one of the cups. It felt like he had been holding his breath and hadn't been able to breathe until just now. "Thank you. I really need this." Clark lifted the lid and took a sip." He was pathetic. One kiss... Several very intense kisses, his lips reminded him. He felt as if he had been branded by her touch. Those kisses, and the comfort she had offered—he was hooked, his heart banking on something special with this woman.

"Have you heard anything?"

"Not yet. I was just going to check."

As if on cue, the ICU doors flew open, and Clark's friend from the ER came through. "Clark! Come on. Jon's awake and asking for you. He's going to be okay!"

Clark's face broke into the brightest grin he'd had on his lips since the night before. That was the best thing he had heard since Lois had said she understood about him. Lois reached to take his coffee.

"Go!" she told him with a grin.

In his excitement, and before he could rationalize why he shouldn't do it, he placed a soft kiss on Lois' lips, then he disappeared behind the doctor. Lois could only smile through her own tears for Clark.

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"Daddy!" Jon's little arms were reaching for Clark the moment he saw him.

Clark looked over at the doctor for approval to take his son. The doctor nudged him, giving him all the encouragement he needed. Clark pulled Jon into his arms and hugged him to his chest. He kissed his face several times before lowering him back to the bed. "I love you, Jon," he whispered.

"I wub you, Daddy," Jon chanted. "I want choc-choc."

Clark laughed softly as he turned to the doctor. "He wants chocolate milk."

"I don't see why not. He doesn't have a fever and there appears to be no sign of infection. In fact, he's made remarkable progress. Darndest thing I've ever seen." The doctor ruffled Jon's hair. "I'll go get that milk."

Clark was all smiles as he and his son caught up. There would be time for other worries later. Right now he was thanking God, and a few amazing abilities, for giving him his son back.

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Lois took a deep breath and started back toward the elevator. She wasn't sure how long Clark would be, so she would just have to catch up with him later. And she would definitely catch up

with him. After their kiss the night before, she would never be able to fight her attraction, or desire, for Clark. She had walked the floor most of the night, desperately searching for another insane reason to keep them apart.

Well, she was very pregnant, with another man's baby. That might be the wrinkle in her carefully crafted imagination.

And she had imagined all kinds of things after she had left Clark the night before. Every single one involved him. Even more involved them together.

Later— she would call him and maybe see him again.

Lana's voice stopped her before she had taken three steps.

"Lois, was it?"

Lois turned to look at her. She had instantly disliked this woman. How the heck Clark had ended up with her was a mystery? "Yes?"

"I remember you. Clark worked for your father several years ago. He has pictures of you and your son." Lana sized Lois up before she spoke again. "There are rumors that you two had an affair."

"Don't be ridiculous. Clark and I were colleagues." Yet, she found herself thinking, 'what if we did?' It wouldn't have been an affair back then anyway. They had both been single.

"And friends. That's what you said."

"Yes. Clark and I are friends. Just because he's the father of your son doesn't mean he can't have friends." Why did she have to say that? It was probably going to tick Lana off. Clark didn't need that now, not on top of everything else.

"Oh, I know. Nor does it mean you have any business around my son."

"Excuse me? You cannot dictate Clark's or Jon's entire existence." Wow! Did this lady have any idea who she was talking to? And to challenge her? Her son was lying in the ICU, and for all this woman knew, he was dying, and all his mother could think about was a supposed affair his father had. Can you say obsessively possessive?

"No. But I can cause Clark a whole lot of grief." Lana took a few steps toward Lois. "Surely you don't want to be the cause of Clark losing his visitation rights." Her gaze swept Lois' pregnant body. "And you obviously have your hands full." With a final leer at Lois, Lana went through the double doors into the ICU area.

Lois let out a choked sigh. What nerve! Lana was ordering her to stay away from Clark. Not to mention the fact that the woman made a comment about her unborn child. Well, no one ordered Lois Lane to do anything, and no one would talk about her children. She had seen Ms. Lang with that male model several times around town. It was rumored he was living with her. In fact... didn't he live in an apartment building uptown? Lois jabbed at the call button on the elevator, new fire stoking her into action. She was going to find out exactly what happened to Jon Kent.

"And so help me if his mother did neglect him..." she mumbled as she entered the car.

Lois Lane was doing what she had always done when she was pushed into a corner... she was fighting back. She had fought back when she found out about Taylor. She had fought hard to earn her place in a man's world. Now she would fight to help her friend if his son was being abused.

Why hadn't she fought before? The thought came slamming into her with overwhelming force.

She *had* fought. She had fought to get as far from those feelings as she could. Now though, now she wanted to fight for a different reason.

Or more precisely, she would *not* fight this time. It seemed that she had decided not to fight her feelings for a certain man from her past.

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Clark entered his Hyperion Avenue brownstone later that

morning. “Mom?!”

Martha came into the living room from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dishtowel, to where Clark was sorting through the mail. “How’s Jon?” She had gone to the hospital the night before, but being unable to go into the ICU to see the child, she had come home. At least here, she had been able to work. And that had kept her busy while she awaited news of Jon’s health. Thankfully, her grandson was out of the woods now.

“Good. He’s asking for you. They’ll have him in a room by two. We’ll go back together.”

“I’ll be ready,” Martha assured him. “And I called Perry. He said not to worry about anything at work. He wants you to make sure Jon is okay before you even think about coming back in.”

“Thanks, Mom.” Clark took one last look at his mail before his thoughts got the best of him. He dropped the envelopes and looked up at his mother. “Mom, why didn’t you tell me Lois was pregnant again?”

“What?”

“I saw Lois last night at the benefit, and she came to the hospital. She’s out to here.” He demonstrated with his hands.

“Clark, I didn’t know she was pregnant.”

“You didn’t?”

“No. What did she say?”

“We only spoke about it briefly. By the way she acted the pregnancy wasn’t exactly something she wanted.”

“I guess I’ll ask her about it.”

“No, Mom, don’t. She obviously has a lot going on. Maybe it’s none of our business.”

“She’ll tell me if she wants me to know.”

“That’s right.” Clark pushed a hand through his hair. Maybe he would call her. He would love to offer her the kind of comfort she had given him the night before. “I need a shower.”

“Okay.”

Instead of heading upstairs, Clark sat down at the desk and picked up the mail again. Martha smiled and patted his shoulder before she disappeared back into the other room.

Clark rubbed his temples, trying to figure out what to do about Lana. Since he had refused to allow her to have Jon that day on the farm, she had made his life hell.

It had only taken Lana a couple of weeks to file for and get custody of Jon. How she had done it so quickly was beyond Clark. She had been madder than hell she had had to postpone her shoot in England, so Jon and Clark were the ones to pay the price. Clark had to turn his son over to her with only minimal visitations. He was also forced to pay an obscene amount of child support. It had taken three months for him to get another hearing. Lana kept postponing the inevitable, so Clark filed a temporary injunction to ask for more visits. The end result was that Jon was able to spend equal time with him as he did with Lana. Clark’s child support was reduced, and he no longer had to play by rules to a game that was made up as they went along.

Lana immediately countered with accusations that Clark was an unfit father. The latest hearing, one she had demanded, had been postponed twice. With last night’s accident it may not be such a bad idea if he filed for an emergency hearing to see if the courts would grant him physical custody. As much as he hated to do that to Lana, Jon didn’t deserve to suffer for the sins of his parents.

Clark sighed and rose to go shower. There would be time to think about Lana later. Right now he was going back to check on his son.

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Two days later Lois was fuming. Jon had been burned in his mother’s new apartment. Apparently the lease had been assumed that day. Lana had indeed left Jon with the sitter she used regularly. But when the girl was questioned she was evasive and defensive, as if she had been threatened, bribed, or both.

Obviously a lot more than an accident occurred in that apartment that night.

Lois was about to pick up the phone to call Clark when it rang. She had been attempting to call him for the past two days. When she had failed to get an answer at his place, she had spoken with Jimmy and was told Clark had been in conference with his lawyer the day before and would be in court today. She figured he had filed for an emergency hearing for protective custody of Jon. It’s what she would have done.

“Lois Lane?” she greeted her caller.

“Hi. Sorry I missed you the other day.”

Lois smiled as she recognized the deep voice on the other end. “Clark. I was just about to call you.”

“Were you? To what do I owe that privilege?”

“I wanted to see how Jon was... and you.” Did that sound okay? She wanted him to know she cared about him as well as Jon.

“Jon’s great. His burns are healing faster than should be normal. I think maybe that has something to do with his... special genes.”

“Oh, Clark. I’m so glad to hear that. Is he home?”

“Ah... yeah. Lana took him home today.”

Lois could hear the pain in his voice. “What happened, Clark?”

“I took her to court for an emergency protective order. The judge said he didn’t see any evidence that the whole thing was anything more than an accident.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“Thanks, Lois. When I asked about the sitter, he said Lana was entitled to a life. She retained physical custody. I did get an extra night a week with him. Guess that’s something.”

“Yes. That’s definitely something. I’m glad to hear you weren’t totally discounted.” Poor guy. There wasn’t much else she could say to help ease his pain.

“Yeah. I just wish he hadn’t suffered at all. God, Lois, she bought an apartment uptown. She’s moving closer to her lover.”

“I... I know. I asked around. I hope you don’t mind. I was trying to help.”

“No, no. Thanks for the thought. Her new address just means Jon’s that much farther away from me. Good news is since she made the move on her own, I don’t have to pay her rent anymore.”

“See. Something else positive.” They made him pay her rent?!

Clark chuckled softly. “What do you say we celebrate my little victories with dinner and a movie?”

“Well...” She ran Lana’s warning through her head, quickly discounting it. This might cause Clark a little more trouble, but she could hear the pleading tone in his voice. Besides, they needed to talk. “I’d love to. Just let me call Daddy to ask if Taylor can stay the evening with him.”

“Great! I’ll pick you up at seven.”

This time his voice sounded genuinely happy, and she couldn’t stop the smile that spread across her own face. “See you then.”

“Bye, Lois.”

She was still smiling when she replaced the receiver. Lana Lang was the least of her worries. She had best be worried about herself and her incredible attraction to this man. That could seriously be trouble, a lot of trouble.

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Clark’s eyes sparkled as he watched Lois lay her head back and laugh. They had shared a wonderful Italian meal, followed by a show at the Cineplex. Now they were sitting in a little cafe sharing a dessert and coffee.

“Yeah. Mom was great about it though. She once told me that I brought her more joy than she’d ever thought possible.” Clark’s

smile faded, and he hung his head, playing with his dessert. “I never understood that until Jon.”

“Tell me about him,” Lois requested softly.

Clark looked back up at her with a smile. “He’s great, Lois. Other than his head of blond hair and eyes, he looks like me. Even has a mole above his lip...” He indicated with his finger. “He has the most beautiful blue eyes.” Lois smiled as Clark transformed before her eyes. “He likes me to read to him. And loves Disney movies. I take him to the park, and we swing for hours. He’s got these tiny little hands... but when they touch you...” Clark leaned up on the table. “Well, you can’t help but melt.”

“You really love that little guy.” It was more a statement than a question.

“You would, too. He has that way about him. God, I wish I’d listened to my folks. I could have a son in a loving marriage and be with him every night. But no. I had to do things my way.”

Lois could only smile. Clark loved his son so much she could almost feel it. She would give anything if she could take back some of the awful things she had said and done to him so long ago.

Clark straightened and looked over at Lois. “I wanted to ask you to bring Taylor tonight.” He glanced down at his coffee mug. “I guess I’m nervous about seeing him again.”

“Why? He’s looking forward to meeting you again. He talks about you all the time.”

“And I think about him,” Clark mumbled. He took a sip of his drink before looking back up at Lois. “Why don’t you come for lunch on Sunday? Taylor and I could meet again. You could meet Jon. I’ll have him this weekend.” Clark offered her a megawatt smile. “Come on. Mom would love to see you.”

Lois chuckled softly, dipping her head to hide the flush she felt from his smile. She would love that. But still... How much hell would Lana cause for him? “Well, I don’t know if that would be such a good idea.”

“Why not? Just a relaxing afternoon and good food. No strings. I promise. Well, maybe the ones on a kite if the wind’s right.”

“Clark, Lana told me in no uncertain terms to stay away from Jon. She said she would have your visitations stopped.”

Clark let out a ragged breath. She could tell he was frustrated with Lana, and she regretted saying anything about her at all. “Lois, Lana cannot stop my visits. If they take my son away for having a meal with a friend, then they sure as hell should have taken him away from her today.”

What had that woman done to this man? He was such a gentle soul. Lana had tainted that slightly. “So, was I right in believing Lana doesn’t know about your super side?” She had wanted to ask him that question all night. As curious as she was about Superman herself, she was even more curious to know why she knew this personal thing about Clark when a woman he had been very intimate with didn’t even know.

And he didn’t look at all bothered that she had asked. “Yes,” he told her simply. “You’ve seen for yourself how she can jump to conclusions...”

“I can just imagine how she’d react to that,” she finished for him, images of an angry, deranged woman flashing behind her eyes. She wanted to know more and knew without a doubt he would tell her if she asked, but she also knew the importance of keeping his super side a secret. And discussing it in public wouldn’t be very prudent. They shared a glance and came to a silent understanding to continue this particular conversation when they were truly alone.

“So...” he managed and looked relieved when she smiled.

“Lunch on Sunday?”

“Well...”

“Come on. Jon will love you. You’re just alike.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes, really. You’re both stubborn and full of fire.”

Lois swatted at his arm. Clark dissolved into laughter but gently reached for her hand. “Say yes. The kids will have a good time.”

That look, like a begging puppy, was her undoing. If he had been aware of the power of that expression years ago, she would have been unable to resist him. “Okay.”

“Good. Any time after nine. The kids will have time to play if you come early. 348 Hyperion Avenue.” Clark squeezed her hand, then stood. “I think I better get you a cab before you change your mind and decide I’m not a gentleman

“Who says I haven’t already decided that?”

Clark covered his chest with his hand. “Uh, you wound me.”

Lois laughed and took his arm. “Just walk me out, would you?”

Clark covered her hand on his arm with his own, and they exited the cafe with equally large smiles. Why had she waited so long to do this? They had had a wonderful time, and she hadn’t felt the least bit pressured, nor had she been treated like she was a piece of meat. Of course, she knew Clark would be a complete gentleman. It was her own feelings she was worried about. Yet, he had put her at ease, and they had easily slipped into a comfortable companionship.

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Sunday was two days away, but Clark couldn’t contain his excitement over the upcoming dinner. He had wanted to ask Lois out since he had seen her in the airport.

If he were really honest, he would admit he had been avoiding her though. When Clark had lived in Metropolis years ago, he had fallen in love with the city with his first breath. The pace, the action, and the people fuelled his insatiable desire to run the rat race. Clark had also fallen in love with Lois Lane at first sight. She was incredible. She had a fire like no other woman he had ever met. Part of that fire came from the fact that she was a single mother, which only made the total package more appealing.

Lois had worked briefly at the *Daily Planet* as a researcher before she graduated college. She had planned to go to work full-time after graduation. Only her chance never came. She had fallen prey to a smooth talking Frenchman who had told the young girl all the things she had wanted to hear. She was too young to know his seduction was just a ruse to allow him to score the ‘fresh meat’. He had walked away the morning after, leaving Lois devastated. She was too humiliated to continue to work with the man, so she made her father happy by joining his firm. Six weeks later she was once again floored when she found out she was carrying the baby of the man who had treated her so badly. But Lois’ sense of fairness won out, and she called him to let him know he was going to be a father. He, in no uncertain terms, told her that he was not the father of her child and would not be responsible in any way. When Lois collected herself, the woman she would become replaced the child she had once been.

Lois came through her ordeal stronger. She had refused to abort her child and became a single mother. Taylor became the light in her dark world.

While Clark’s relationship with the toddler grew, he couldn’t get so much as a second look from Lois. She had decided that dating was off limits.

That is... until him. Dan Scardino. Dan was the manager of a fighter Lois signed about four months after Clark came to work. It was still a mystery what Lois saw in him, but just months later they were married in a small ceremony downtown. Clark was devastated. He had held out hope that one day she would see him as more than just a friend.

And friends they had become. Over the months they became best friends. Clark always figured that was the reason she didn’t

see him as anything more. But the relationship began to deteriorate when she married Dan. She often travelled with Dan. It became almost painful to be around them. Watching Dan with Lois was hard but seeing him with Taylor was excruciating. Clark knew he had no reason to feel that way. Yet, he couldn't help it either. When Dan came to him and asked him to leave, he was almost relieved. He told Lois he had had an offer from a major agency in Los Angeles, which he had arranged. He said an emotional good-bye to Taylor and left.

He had agreed to leave to allow Dan to develop a relationship with the boy. He felt he owed that much to Taylor. He only wanted the boy to be happy. But Clark couldn't help sending cards on holidays or gifts at Christmas and on his birthday. He felt like he had left behind his own son.

The first few months were horrible, but as time passed his pain lessened. He travelled a great deal, using his powers to help those in need. He would move on when he thought someone was getting too close to his secret. Eventually he thought he might be okay.

A call came for him to come home. That trip changed Clark's life forever. He ran into his old girlfriend Lana Lang when she was home visiting her folks. In a moment of weakness and incredible loneliness, Clark surrendered to his physical desires. His coupling with Lana resulted in a pregnancy. The on and off relationship between the two had often been volatile. And until six months ago he had done everything the woman wanted just so he could be with his son.

Having Jon was fantastic. He gave Clark's life a meaning it never had before. For the first time in months, he was able to focus on something besides Lois and Taylor Lane. He took a slight step backwards when his father died, but it was his mother and her amazing strength that kept him going. He had moved to Metropolis to be near Jon and realize his long-time dream of working for the *Daily Planet*. He talked his mother into coming a few months later.

When he had run into Lois at the airport, all the feelings he had ever had for her rushed around him. He was glad they hadn't talked long. He left the airport determined that he had been hurt enough by his feelings for this woman. She was forced to the back corners of his heart once again. But he had wanted to call several times since he had seen her that day. She was constantly on his mind. And Taylor... he thought of him just as often. As much as he tried to suppress what he felt for those two people, he just wasn't able to go a day without them crossing his mind. Seeing Lois at the charity event for the Superman Foundation made him think that maybe he had been wrong trying to deny his feelings for her. Besides, he was tired as well. If there was a chance at all she might feel anything for him, then he might have a second chance. The kiss they had shared had been completely reciprocated. Just maybe there was a chance for them after all.

But all was not well with Lois. It was obvious by her lack of revelation to his mother about her new baby. He had wanted to go to her and find out what it was. He had wanted to see Taylor, yet his heart refused to budge.

Now, as he thought about their date the night before, Clark wanted nothing more than to see Lois every chance he got. He just hoped his heart could survive another shot from Lois Lane.

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Lois opened the door to a deliveryman. "Thank you," she told him after she signed for the two packages.

"You're welcome."

"Let me get you a tip," she told the young man as she turned to grab her purse from the hall table.

"No need, ma'am. It's been taken care of. Have a nice day."

"You, too," she replied as she shut the door and placed the boxes on the table. She took the card from the largest box, and her lips spread into a smile as she read the words.

"Lois, I just wanted to say thank you for a wonderful night. I had a great time. Tell Taylor hi and that I can't wait to see him. It's long past time we meet again. Clark"

The large box held a dozen yellow roses. A smaller box held two tickets to the Metropolis Braves baseball game for that night. Lois smiled again and called her son in to give him his gift.

"Wow! Clark's the best. Friday night games are followed by fireworks." He turned the tickets over in his hand. "Think Grandpa'll go with me?"

"I'm sure he will," Lois agreed softly. "Clark says to tell you hi, and he can't wait to see you."

"Cool! I can't wait either. I'm gonna go call Grandpa."

"Okay, sweetie."

Lois' thoughts drifted to the man she had worked with years ago as she put the roses in water. Clark was unlike any man she had ever known. At barely twenty-two, he had been as grounded as her nearly fifty-year-old father. It didn't take Lois long to realize Clark was more grown up than the sleaze she had slept with when she became pregnant with Taylor. Falling in love with Clark followed shortly after.

The night after she had seen Clark at the airport she thought she had reconciled all she had ever felt for him. Calling his mom had renewed a wonderful friendship, although there were things she couldn't bring herself to discuss, not even with someone as wonderful as Martha. They never talked about Clark, but she felt like she knew Jon already. Martha loved her grandson and never tired of talking about him.

Lois had decided that having the woman as a friend was all right as long as she didn't have to cause Clark any more pain. So she talked to Martha without contacting Clark at all. When she found out about the pregnancy, she was so glad she had made that decision. He certainly didn't need that.

Since she had seen him at the charity gathering, she had stopped fighting the urge to stay away from him. So many things needed to be said. Still there was a part of her that thought maybe she shouldn't invade his life again. Now it looked like he wanted that world invaded.

Lois sighed for all the things that had happened in the past months. Life had certainly dealt her a different hand than she had wanted. Now she had to play it as best she could.

Did that include Clark Kent? She realized she wanted it to. They had been good friends, best friends even. She missed that. She hadn't had a relationship like that since him. But was that what he wanted? Lois had always felt the reason he left was because of her marriage to Dan. The reason he had given her was that he had been offered a position in LA he just couldn't pass up. He said his good-byes and was gone. Lois had been so distraught that she was livid. He left without telling her good-bye because she wouldn't talk to him. What had hurt the most was knowing she may have cost her son the best relationship he would ever have. Although Clark had sent cards and gifts over the years, he had never attempted to see Taylor again. Now all that was about to change.

Lois smiled at that thought. Clark Kent wouldn't be so bad to have around. Just the short times she had seen him recently, he had given the impression that he had only grown more compassionate and caring with time. Their date had been wonderful. He had talked on and on about his son. And he had sent flowers. Men just didn't do that anymore. Although they had talked openly and easily, she was grateful he hadn't pushed her about the baby. Lois wasn't sure she was ready to face that one.

Was that fair to Clark? She was nearly eight months pregnant with another man's baby. Could she start a relationship with Clark now? Should she? She didn't have the answer for that. She just wanted to see where this all would lead. Besides, a friendship with Clark was more important than anything else.

It was even more important than the fact that he was

Superman. Wow! For as much as she had known about Clark before, she hadn't known him at all. He was this other person—this other man who could do fantastic things. That took her breath away. How had he become so grounded? He could use his powers to do anything he wanted, yet he helped others. He was so selfless, so compassionate, so... Clark.

Lois sighed and grinned widely. No matter what he could do, no matter where he was from, he was still Clark. And Clark was someone she wanted to spend time with.

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"Come look, Mom. Clark's on TV."

"What?" Lois put her files down and turned to the set in the corner of her office. LNN was live on the scene of a fire in an office building downtown. Clark was being shown as he carried a child from the daycare facility on the ground floor. He deposited the child and ran back in. She held her breath until he emerged again with another child. Apparently that was the last one because he stood back and watched as the firefighters attacked the flames.

The announcer's voice cut in, "That's right, folks. *Daily Planet* reporter Clark Kent doesn't just write the news, he is the news. Eyewitnesses say the young man never hesitated when a small explosion rocked the area. Kent had been at the center to interview the director for an upcoming fundraiser. The ground shook and smoked billowed from the windows. Kent ran straight into the burning building with no apparent concern for his own safety. Because of his bravery, three small children that might otherwise have died are being reunited with their parents. I can't speak for everyone, but that certainly is beyond the call of duty in my book."

Lois shut her open mouth as she watched Clark tell the press he had no comment. Why hadn't he saved the children as Superman? Had he been where he couldn't get away to change? Or had he just reacted? She would have to ask him tomorrow.

It was finally almost Sunday. She didn't think she would last much longer. Taylor was about to drive her crazy.

"Isn't he great?"

She looked over at a very impressed Taylor. "Yes, he is."

The boy got up and went to perch on the edge of his mother's desk. He wasn't thrilled about coming to work with his mother on Saturday, but it was better than going to the golf course with his grandfather, at least when the older man played with his buddies.

"Mom, are you sure Clark isn't my daddy?"

"I'm sorry, honey, but yes. I'm sure."

"Couldn't we just say you were wrong?"

"Oh, Taylor. We can't expect Clark to step in and be your father. I know you feel a bond with him because he's the only consistency you've had in your life, but he knows he's not your father, too."

"Mommy, is he the baby's father?"

"No. Dan is."

"Then why does Dan say Clark is?"

"He's convinced Clark and I had an affair."

"What's an affair?"

Lois' mouth drew into a quirk. She had made this mess, so now how did she explain it? "An affair is when you go see someone when you're only supposed to be seeing someone else."

"You mean, have sex with them?"

"Taylor Samuel Lane! Where did you hear that?"

"Grandpa told me that's how babies are made."

"He did, did he?"

"Yep. Said a man and a woman have sex to make babies." He shrugged his shoulders. "Whatever that is. I take it that it's when you kiss and sleep in the same bed. Joey's mom and dad kiss a lot and they have six kids."

Lois couldn't suppress the slight chuckle she was holding back. "It's something like that." She ran a hand through his hair.

"Hey, only one more day."

"Oh wow! I can't wait." The boy was trembling with excitement. "Tell me about him again, Mommy."

Taylor only used Mommy when he wanted something, Lois reflected. But she would allow him this one. "Well, he's a year older than me. He graduated from Smallville High and Midwest University..."

"With honors," Taylor added.

"Yes. He's a reporter now. He has a wonderful mother and a three and half year old son."

"Mom, do you think Clark will want to spend time with me now that he has his own son?"

"Taylor, Clark's not made that way. I know what Dan said to you hurt, but Clark is nothing like Dan. He has a big enough heart for you, too."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. You'll see. Clark is a good man."

Taylor smiled at her. "Mom, how many hours is it till Sunday?"

She smiled back at him, knowing exactly how he felt. She was almost as excited as he was.

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Sunday couldn't come fast enough for Taylor until it actually got there. He was so nervous about seeing Clark again, Lois had to pull over for him to throw up. Her constant reassurance that Clark would love him wasn't going to satisfy him until he saw the man.

Clark opened the door for Lois as he fought down his own case of nerves. "Hi," he said with a brilliant smile. It faded when he noticed Taylor was nowhere to be seen. "Where's Taylor?"

"He's standing at the bottom of the stairs. He's terrified you won't like him. He thinks that because you have Jon, you won't like spending time with him."

"What? What makes him think that?"

"Well... Dan made a comment to him once about real children and step-children."

Clark huffed at the mention of Dan's name. "Come on in. Mom's in the kitchen. I'll be right back." He pushed past her and out onto the stoop. His eyes met the terrified brown ones of Taylor, and immediately a flush ran through him. It was almost like he was seeing his own child again after so long. Taylor was taller, big for his age. His head of brown hair had been trimmed neatly, and he looked a lot like his mother. Clark stepped slowly down the stairs until he was in front of the boy.

"You sure have grown." Taylor was shaking as he watched Clark. "The last time I saw you, you'd just started wearing skivvies." He could still remember that little guy, running around in nothing but his underwear.

"M...M...Mom says you... you potty trained me."

"I did." Clark kneeled in front of the scared little boy, almost as scared himself. "I also bought you the coolest little britches."

"The... the... football ones."

"Uh huh. Did you know I kept a shirt that belonged to you?" Why did I ever walk away from you? Clark couldn't help but ask himself. Taylor was absolutely wonderful.

"You... you did?"

"I did. It's got your handprint on it." <The same as my heart does.>

"I have the one that was yours. I still wear it, but it's getting old."

"We'll just have to make some new ones." That earned Clark a slight glow in Taylor's little eyes. Unable to refrain from reaching out, Clark lifted his hand and touched the dark hair on the boy's head. "God, I was a fool for leaving you," he whispered.

"Will... will you l... leave again?"

"Not a chance." Nothing would ever pry him away from this

child again, he decided firmly.

Taylor's big eyes brimmed with tears. "P... p... promise?"

"I promise." Clark couldn't stand it any longer. He drew the boy into his embrace, inhaling deeply where his face was buried against his hair. He cradled the boy's head when he felt little arms squeeze his neck. This felt just as good as it had been when he kissed Lois and held her. Slowly he could feel his spirit recharge after running on half power for so long. Reluctantly, he drew back to look at Taylor. "Whatta' you say we go in now?"

Taylor nodded his head and took Clark's hand to be led up the steps and into his house. When Clark closed the door, the boy was once more shaking.

"Hey, what's wrong, pal?" Clark knelt in front of him again.

"Do you think Jon will like me?"

Clark smiled and smoothed Taylor's hair across his head.

"Jon will love you. Taylor, your mom told me that you were scared about meeting me because you thought I wouldn't have time for you now that I have Jon."

Taylor hang his head. He had been dreading this moment. The moment he knew Clark would tell him Jon was his son, not him. Clark lifted his chin until their eyes locked.

"I have a really big heart. It has enough room for both of you."

Taylor's eyes lit up then. "You mean it?"

"Of course I do. Taylor, you were special to me, but I haven't been a very good friend to you. If you'll let me, I want to change that."

"But Jon... He might not like sharing you with me."

"I think you'll be surprised. Jon will be glad to get a new friend. He's kind of shy and doesn't have any friends since we moved to Metropolis. I was hoping you'd maybe spend a little time with him."

Taylor smiled at Clark, his eyes sparkling in the light. "I'm a good friend."

"I thought so. Come on. We'll go find him." He stood and took Taylor's hand. The boy in question met them on the first landing of the stairs. "Taylor, this is Jon. Jon, this is Taylor."

Jon waved a hand at the older boy. "Hey. My daddy told me 'bout you."

"My mom told me about you. And your grandma."

"Where's Wois?" Jon asked hesitantly.

"She must be with your grandma." Until that moment, Taylor had forgotten that he would be sharing his mom just like Jon would be sharing his dad.

Clark led them out into the kitchen where Lois was sitting at the counter talking to Martha.

Jon peered out from behind Clark's leg to get a look at the woman in front of him.

Lois noticed the small head and smiled. "Hi. I'm Lois."

"I know. My daddy told me. I Jon."

"I know." She held out her hand in invitation for him to come closer.

He eyed the hand for a moment then took it and walked closer to Lois. "You dot a baby in your tummy?"

Lois rubbed her large stomach. "I do."

"Yeah. I'm going to have a sister," Taylor spoke up.

Jon looked around at the other boy before he turned back to study Lois again. "You purdy," he told her.

Lois smiled down at the small boy. "And you're handsome."

"Tank you." Jon looked back down at the hand he held.

"Taywer, wanna see my woom?"

"Sure."

This time it was Jon that smiled. He squeezed Lois' hand before he let go and faced Taylor. "C'mon."

"Yeah." The boy started after Jon but stopped and looked up at Martha. "I'm Taylor. I think we've talked on the phone."

"We have. And you are just as handsome as I pictured you."

Martha couldn't resist touching his cheek. She received a bright smile before he ran after Jon.

Clark had watched the exchange in silence. "I guess they like each other."

"Guess so," Martha agreed then handed Clark a stack of plates to set the places for lunch. It was still a bit before they'd eat, but they would have a cup of coffee and talk for a while first. The adults talked while the boys played upstairs. Later, Martha finished lunch and had everyone settled around the table, and they spent the next two hours getting to know each other.

Clark fielded dozens of questions from Taylor and asked just as many in return. Lois also answered her fair share from both Jon and Clark. Martha was content to listen. Now and then she answered one of Taylor's questions with a smile. Jon showed off his covered burns, assuring both Lois and Taylor that his wounds didn't hurt at all. The little group talked as if they'd shared many, many meals together.

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Lois brought in the last of the dishes from the dining room and set them down on the counter. Clark smiled over at her from where he was washing the other dishes.

"Thank you, but you didn't have to do that. You're a guest."

Lois waved him off and took the plate from his hand to rinse. They worked for several moments in silence. "I don't know what you said to Taylor but thanks."

"I just told him the truth... that I should have never stopped seeing him and that I want to be a better friend."

"He was so nervous. I had to stop so he could throw up."

Clark paused in his task. "No wonder he was stuttering at first."

"He does that when he's nervous or scared."

"It's not a problem is it?"

"It was for a while. I took him to several specialists and was told the same thing. It was in his head."

Clark picked up a towel, reached in front of Lois to take up a dish to dry, and leaned against the counter while he worked. "Did something happen to cause it?"

"Yeah... Dan." Lois shook the last plate she held. She expected Clark to ask another question, but he kept drying his dish. She faced him and continued. "I didn't know how bad Dan was treating Taylor. Taylor didn't say anything because he thought it would make me unhappy."

"Even as a toddler he hated to see you upset."

"It's worse now. When I found out about the baby, I was crying in my room one night. He crept in and climbed on my bed with me. He held me like he was a grown man all night. It was morning before he asked me what was wrong. When I told him, he placed his little hands on my stomach while he told me the baby was made for a reason and that he would be the best big brother in the world. I didn't abort because of that."

"Sounds like you have one fantastic son."

Lois cocked her head and looked into Clark's deep brown eyes. "I like to think you had something to do with that."

"Me? How?"

"You were around him a lot."

"But he was so young."

"Clark, you have a son. You know they never forget how they're treated." Lois dropped her head and flicked a nail on the edge of the sink. "That's why he still stutters when he's scared." This time she was referring to the way Dan had treated Taylor.

Clark placed his dish and towel on the counter. "Lois, I'd like to see if I could change that."

She lifted her eyes back to him. "What?"

"I meant it when I said I wanted to be a better friend. I think Taylor needs one."

"You know, I told him you were nothing like other men. He had no reason to be nervous about meeting you."

"I try my best." Clark smiled that brilliant smile that could make any woman weak in the knees.

"Hey, Clark. Wanna play football?"

Clark turned to see Jon and Taylor waiting patiently for his answer. The older boy held up the ball. "Absolutely." He started toward the boys but not before he grasped Lois by the arm. "We'll tackle the man with ball." He pulled the ball from Taylor's arm and shoved it into Lois' hands.

"Yeah!" The boys yelled and started toward Lois.

"No you don't," she warned. "I am too big for that." Clark scooped her up. "Clark!"

"Lois is right, guys. We don't want to hurt the baby." Clark carried her out the back door and settled her on one of the lounge chairs on the patio. "But she can be the referee." Clark took the ball and ran across the yard, two boys trailing behind.

Lois was relieved to have a moment to recover. For a second her naughty side had created images that would make you blush when Clark had lifted her from her feet. She had automatically wrapped her arms around his neck — just to hold on, she told herself. She had leaned in a bit closer, for safety. It had nothing to do with the fact that he smelled...

Taking a deep breath to control her raging hormones, she watched as Clark was used as the tackling dummy. Lois couldn't resist laughing as she watched Clark swing the boys around like rag dolls. When he thought they had had their fun, he fell dramatically to the ground.

Taylor scooped up the ball in triumph then squealed in delight as he was pounced by the others. He was so good with the boys, she admired as the game continued. She always knew he would be a wonderful father. If her stupid pride hadn't gotten in the way...

But it was too late to go back now. Too much had happened. And she was sure he wouldn't trade some of his experiences for anything. He had Jon because of some of the things that had happened over the last few years.

Jon. Lois was in love again. One look and she had been hooked. He was so adorable. And to know he was part of Clark... For a moment she was envious of Lana. That woman had no idea what she had given up.

Lois looked up when Martha spoke.

"He's a big kid himself."

"I see." Lois smiled over at the woman. She and Martha had spent hours talking over the last few months. The older woman told Lois how alone she felt when Jonathan died. She spoke of how Clark and Jon helped keep her broken heart from falling apart. In an instant Lois made a decision she felt would give this woman back a bit more meaning to her life.

"Martha, how would you like to help me out when the baby comes?"

"What?"

"I'll go back to work as soon as I can. I'll be taking her with me, but my dad's retiring. I'm taking over the agency. That means a lot more paperwork and tons of phone calls. I thought maybe the baby would fair better with someone who could give her a little TLC a few days a week. I'm pretty sure you can handle that." Oh, she had no doubt Martha could handle that. Her daughter would be so loved and cared for.

"Lois, I don't know what to say."

"Say you'll do it. As many or as few days as you want. I'll provide a car or a driver. You can have free reign at my home and with the baby."

"And Taylor? What about him? I couldn't leave him out."

Lois smiled even brighter then. Leave it to Martha to say something like that. "My children are your children. And I couldn't pay you enough. Good caregivers that love your children are really hard to find."

Martha looked out at Taylor. "I'll do it on one condition."

"Name it."

"I want to start now. Jon would have someone to play with when he's here, and Taylor could keep me company when Jon's at his mother's."

"You have a deal." Lois could see the tears welling in the older woman's eyes. She got up and took Martha into a hug. They were laughing through tears when Clark spoke.

"Hey, you two okay?"

"We're... fine." Lois swiped the tears from her face, smiling to show him she meant what she said.

Martha rose, her own tears still spilling from her eyes. "I think I'll go lie down a while."

Lois nodded and she and Clark watched her go through the door into the house.

"What was that about?"

Lois turned back to Clark. "She's going to be working for me."

"Really?" His brows rose into his hair.

"That's not right. She's agreed to come love my children."

"Mom's gonna take care of Taylor and the baby?" Clark asked and Lois nodded. "What happened to you taking them to work?"

"Well, Daddy's retiring, and I'll be taking over. With the added pressure I just feel that they need a little extra care."

Clark smiled and placed a hand on her arm. "You couldn't have picked a better person to do that."

"I know. If they turn out anything like you, I'll be able to die a happy woman," she told him softly and watched as his smile faded a bit, and his eyes took on a new shine.

"Wow. I believe Lois Lane just paid me a compliment or my mom."

She laughed and hooked her arm around his. "Buy a woman something to drink, would you?" Wise guy, she thought. Why had she stayed away from him? She could literally feel her heart repairing itself. If she had known... Clark could have erased those insecurities created by Claude.

He still could, she pointed out to herself. Just let him.

"You got it." He smiled and walked her back into the kitchen for some iced tea. And she gave up the last bit of hesitation about developing a relationship with this man.

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Lois didn't realize just what she had done by asking Martha to look after her children. Not only had she gained a loving caregiver, she had gained a wonderful friend as well.

The two women discussed Martha's new position later in the afternoon, agreeing for the older woman to start the following day. There was still a few weeks left in the school year, so Lois would drop Taylor off at school each morning and Martha would pick him up in the afternoons. From there they would play it by ear. Martha explained that with children there should never be a 'plan'. Just love them, she had said. Lois had no doubt that's what the older woman would do.

The following morning, Lois couldn't help but grin as she listened to her son rattle on and on about Clark, Jon, and Martha. He was ecstatic to have a new sitter. He would go to the brownstone on Hyperion after school that afternoon, and he could hardly wait. Lois had to fill out the necessary paperwork at Taylor's school to allow Martha to retrieve the boy, which she did with a smile.

Lois made it to work with a warm smile as her thoughts stayed seated with the people from the day before. She and Taylor had ended up staying well past dinner time. They had all cooked together, cleaned up, then settled in the living room to play a game. God, it had felt so good. It had been all she could do to tear herself and Taylor away, so the boy could get some sleep. She found herself as anxious as Taylor for her next trip to Hyperion Avenue.

She pushed the door open to her office and almost wanted to leave again, her good mood washing away the instant she laid eyes on her visitor.

“What are you doing here?”

The man smiled smugly as he leaned further back in his chair, feet propped up on Lois’ desk. “Nice to see you, too, pumpkin.”

“What do you want, Dan?” Lois pushed his feet from her desk on her way around the furniture.

“Okay.” Dan straightened in his chair and pulled some papers from his jacket. “What the hell is this?”

Lois took up the papers to read them briefly. “It’s the paternity acknowledgement for your baby.”

“Oh please. You expect me to sign this crap?”

“Dan, the baby’s yours, and you know it. And I don’t give a damn whether you sign them or not. The insurance company had to send them because I listed you as the father.”

“Well, un-list me. I am not signing a piece of paper that says I’m some kid’s father when I’m not.”

Lois took a deep breath. She wasn’t about to get into this with Dan again. They had been through it all already, and she had decided that if he didn’t want to be the baby’s father, she and her children would be just fine.

“Fine.” She picked up the papers and tore them in half before depositing them in the trash. “Happy?”

Dan glanced down at the pieces in her trashcan. “For now.” Dan grinned as he stood, then reached out and patted Lois’ cheek. “See ya’, honey.”

“I hope not,” Lois commented as she took her seat at her desk. What a way to start the day.

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Despite Dan’s visit, it had been the best two weeks Lois could have imagined. Having Martha care for Taylor was already the best decision the young woman had ever made. Lois had heard countless times what a great time her son was having in his new environment. When he and Martha were alone, they would often stop for a treat and take a walk. Taylor told her that Martha thought it was important for growing boys to get lots of sunshine and fresh air. When Jon was with them, they would have a snack on the patio together. Taylor was learning to garden and even knit. The older woman spent as much time as he needed every day to get his homework done. Of course, she would help him discover the answers to his many questions— never directly providing the way. ‘I have to discover stuff for myself’, he said. Another pearl of Kent wisdom. Her children were so blessed to have someone like Martha caring for them.

One of Taylor’s favorite subjects was Clark. He told Lois that three times during the first week the man had come home and spent the rest of the evening talking and playing with him and Jon. The second week he took them to the park, out for pizza, and to the arcade. Each night when Sam picked his grandson up, Clark had warm hugs and kisses for the boy, along with promises to see him later. And there was a phone call each night from Clark to tell the boy to have sweet dreams.

Taylor wasn’t the only one that seemed to be taken with Clark. Lois had eaten dinner a few nights with the small group that was quickly beginning to seem like her extended family. Every minute she was in the presence of her one time friend, she found herself at a loss. She was lost in thought and speech. Clark was so much like the man she had known so long ago and so much more. The few years since they had seen each other, he had grown up even more. She was starting to truly appreciate the man he had become.

And thinking about Clark reminded her of every feeling she had ever had for him. He moved her in a way no man ever had. She had thought it was because she was so young and lonely. No chance. Seeing him again and spending a little time with him only reminded her that he was male... all male. And she was

definitely attracted.

Lois had told herself the things she was feeling should be placed in the back of her mind. Sure, she and Clark had shared that fantastic kiss at the charity banquet. He had kissed her at the hospital, and when they had gone out, he had kissed her goodnight at the end of the evening. Since then there had been some heated glances, but he hadn’t attempted to kiss her again. Lois wondered if she had read Clark all wrong. One thing she did know was that she hadn’t read *her* feelings wrong.

Maybe it was best that they remain just friends, she reminded herself when the baby made her presence known. What man in his right mind wanted to get involved with a woman about to deliver another man’s baby? Yes, friendship with Clark was best.

But damn it to hell, how did she explain that to her heart? And to her libido? If she had thought Clark was handsome before, she had been sadly mistaken. He was undoubtedly the most gorgeous man she had ever seen. His quiet disposition and overwhelming compassion only seemed to make him more desirable. Pregnant or not, she just couldn’t stop the feelings this man was stirring in her. Not to mention his super side. In that suit... She could probably start a fire she got so heated thinking about him.

Lois fought the immediate attraction as long as she could. In a moment of pure heated desire, she lifted her phone and dialed the *Daily Planet*.

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“Clark Kent?”

“Hi. Busy?”

Clark smiled when he heard the soft voice on the line. He had been trying not to think about her so he could get some work done. “Not really. Doing some paperwork. What’s up?”

“I was wondering if you’d like to have dinner tonight?”

He took a deep breath before he answered. “I think that would be great.”

“Good. Should I pick you up?”

“A woman secure in who she is. I think I could get used to that.” He and Lois laughed softly. “I have to finish this work, so I won’t have to look at it tomorrow.”

“Okay. How about I pick you up there at seven?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“See you then.”

“Okay. Bye.”

Clark replaced the receiver with a smile. He was going on another date with Lois Lane... finally. He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t asked her out again. There just seemed to be something in her eyes that told him she had too much on her plate to mix in a budding relationship. He wanted to ask her if he could help in any way but didn’t want to scare her off either. Lois would talk when she was ready, and he could wait. He had waited this long after all.

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Lois surveyed the newsroom of the *Daily Planet* as she exited the elevator. It had been years since she had been there. She suggested picking Clark up just so she could see it again. This place was where she had buried many of her childhood hopes and dreams. It was bittersweet to be back again and truly ironic that she was interested in a reporter. She spotted the man she was here for and smiled. He seemed to sense her presence because he looked up and met her gaze with a brilliant smile of his own.

Clark continued to watch Lois until she had made her way to his desk. “Hi.”

“Hi, yourself.” She couldn’t help the wide grin on her lips. She felt like a giddy teenager on her first date.

Clark just looked at her for a brief moment, quickly losing himself in her deep eyes. Finally he seemed to realize they weren’t alone and glanced around the newsroom. “Guess it’s been a while since you were here?”

“Yeah.” Lois’ eyes fell on the desk just in front of Clark’s— it had been hers. “Not much has changed though.”

“A few newer computers.”

“Yeah.” Lois moved around to glance at his screen. She raised her brows when she saw it held a picture of a cartoon character. “Gee, Clark, didn’t know you were so busy.”

Clark chuckled softly. “Actually it’s research.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Perry asked me to look into an education website for him.” He tapped a few keys, then his monitor went black. “Long story.” He stood and gathered his jacket. “Ready?”

“Yep.” She smiled and walked next to the handsome man as he led the way to the elevator. Neither missed the strange looks they received from some of the staff, which made her grin wider. That’s right ladies, she thought, he’s leaving with me.

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“So…” Lois traced a finger around the top of her glass. She and Clark had shared a wonderful dinner and moved into the bar for a drink. Of course, hers was iced tea. “Would I be crossing the line if I asked about Jon’s mother?”

Clark swallowed the mouthful of wine he had just taken and replaced the glass on its coaster. “I thought Mom would have told you about her.”

“Your mom and I don’t talk about you very much.”

“Really?” he asked with raised eyebrows.

“I guess… I guess Martha feels I should hear about you from you first.”

“Ahh… sounds like Mom.” Clark leaned over on the bar.

“Her name is Lana Lang, but you knew that. She and I were high school sweethearts. We drifted apart after graduation, but there never was anything stronger than attraction. We both moved on.” He took another sip of his drink. “When I left Metropolis, I only stayed in LA for a few weeks before I went to Australia. From there it was Japan, Russia, Africa. I was in Rome when I got the call about my father. I flew home.”

“And stayed to help out?”

“I had to. Mom and Dad had given me so much. Staying there was the least I could do.”

“I forget you’re adopted. You and Martha interact better than biological parents and children do.”

“Love has nothing to do with biology.”

“That’s so true. You’re also proof it has nothing to do with race either.” Clark had to smile at that one. Lois was right. Martha and Jonathan Kent could have cared less what planet he was from. To them he was just their son.

Lois lifted her glass for another drink. “Okay. You stayed to help out.”

“And I ran into Lana again when she came home for her parents’ anniversary party. The attraction was still there for both of us I guess. I know it was for me. She’d filled out in all the right places.” His eyes twinkled, and Lois couldn’t help but smile. “Anyway, she told me she was moving home. She’d had too much to drink, and I was a little more depressed than I thought I was. We drove up to Rocky Cove, and one thing led to another. She didn’t want to stop it, and I just didn’t.”

Clark downed the remainder of his wine. “She left for France again the next day. She later told me she would probably have said anything to get me to sleep with her that night.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah. Anyway, I got over it and moved on… until she called two months later and said she was pregnant. I found out then that I never really knew Lana. There were three more that could have been the father.”

“Double ouch.”

“She told me she was planning to have an amnio procedure because of a history of birth defects in her family and that paternity testing could be done as well. Of course, I freaked out.”

“Because of those special genes?”

“Yeah. Mom suggested I do a little research on my own first. I did, and it turned out the testing they do for paternity is pretty restrictive.”

“It was safe?”

“Safe enough for me to remain anonymous.”

Lois nodded. “So you had the test?”

Clark agreed with a nod of his own. “Lana was hoping Jon belonged to one of the other guys— told me as much. When it came back he was mine, she told me she was going to abort. I’m still not sure how I convinced her not to do it. But she agreed. We tried to make a life together for Jon’s sake; lived together for a while; broke up and got back together. We were living together— again— when I saw you at the airport that day. After I checked in at the hotel in Chicago, I flew home to help Mom finish packing for the move to Metropolis. It took me months to convince her to come live with me.”

“She told me.”

Clark nodded and continued. “Lana and Jon were in Smallville seeing her parents because she was going to England for a photo shoot. She announced she was leaving that night and was taking Jon. We had a fight, and I refused to let him go.”

“What did she do?”

“She left. A couple of weeks later she had formal custody, and I had to turn him over to her. It took three months, but I finally got visitations. She countered with a suit for sole custody on the grounds that I’m an unfit father.”

“Oh, Clark. I had no idea.”

“She’s postponed the hearing twice. We were supposed to have the final hearing the week after Jon was burned. When I called the emergency hearing, the judge pushed back the date until next month. Now it seems Lana may drop the custody suit.”

“Why?”

“I went to pick him up this morning and found him in a soiled pull-up, drinking warm milk, and eating cereal from the box. He’d gotten his own breakfast because his mother was entertaining a man in her bedroom.”

“No?”

Clark nodded. “It was two hours before she realized he was gone. She didn’t even have the decency to call and check on him. Her lawyer contacted mine and said Lana would be out of the country on a shoot for the next two months. The hearing was rescheduled, and I get to keep my son. I called and asked her what she was up to. All she said was that she thought I’d be pleased that Jon was going to be staying with me.”

“How could she just let him go like that?”

“I don’t know.” Clark shifted to face her. “Jon has really come out of his shell since we came here.” He shook his head slightly. “More importantly, since he’s met you and Taylor. He’s always been so withdrawn and shy. I saw him hug you last night. You’re the only one he’s blessed like that besides me and Mom.”

“Well then, I feel special.” She covered her heart with her hand.

“You should. I know it sounds too far out there, considering he’s only known you a couple of weeks, but he’s crazy about you.”

“I feel the same about him.” Clark watched as she emptied her glass. Was that a little anxiety he saw in her eyes? “Does he… hug Lana?” She asked after a moment, and Clark realized that wasn’t anxiety. It was uncertainty. She was unsure of her relationship with Jon.

“No. Lana is not the hugging type.”

“Oh, Jon,” she said in a low voice. She looked away from Clark, but he could still see her battle with her emotions.

“Want another drink?” He asked, wanting to change the subject as much as he wanted to prolong the night. He had had a good time and didn’t want the night to end.

“Why, Mr. Kent, are you trying to keep me in the bathroom until this kid’s born?”

“No. I’m trying to prolong the night,” he answered quite honestly. Her smile faded as they stared at each other. He had certainly been right in his first assessments of Lois. There was something going on with this woman, and he wanted to be the one to help her with whatever she felt she needed. “Your turn,” he asked, hoping she would tell a bit of her story.

“What?”

He hesitated briefly before he said, “I know about Taylor’s dad.” He didn’t want to push, but he just wasn’t sure he could keep from asking any longer.

Lois stilled. Clark could tell she wasn’t exactly sure how to answer him. Maybe he had pushed her too far. She would talk when she was ready. And he had waited this long on this woman. What was a little more time?

“That’s okay. You don’t have to tell me,” he told her as he pushed his glass back. If she wouldn’t talk to him, he might as well order another drink. But she leaned over and placed a hand on his, effectively stopping him from moving.

“No. I think I should but not here. Let’s go back to my place. I’ll fix some coffee.”

“O- kay,” Clark replied slowly as he saw the anguished look on her face. It was apprehensive, to say the least. He couldn’t imagine why Lois felt she *should* tell him about the baby’s father, but to be alone with her a little longer, he would go listen.

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“Nice,” Clark commented as his eyes roamed Lois’ home. It was the first time he had been to the two-story house on Riviera in the exclusive Lakeside Plantation. “Lois Lane has done well.”

She smiled over at him as she prepared the coffee maker. “I felt it was time to spend a little of that money I make. It was a divorce present to myself.”

“Divorce present? I don’t think I’ve ever heard of that.”

“Yeah, well, some people go partying when their divorce is final. Others have meaningless sex with strangers. I bought a house.” She shrugged with a small smile on her lips.

“You always did have to do things your way.”

She laughed as she made her way into the den. She kicked her shoes off at the end of the sofa and draped her suit jacket on a chair. “Sit down. I don’t bite. At least not hard,” she mumbled as she eased onto the cushion.

Clark smiled at her comment. He wondered if he should remind her that he could hear her. She drew a leg under her bottom and faced Clark.

“Dan is the baby’s father.”

“I kinda’ thought so.” He had both hoped he was wrong and prayed he wasn’t. And he still hadn’t figured out the reasoning behind that.

“That’s not the half of it.”

“Guess not. He hasn’t been around.”

“Probably won’t either.” Lois took a deep breath. “When I saw you at the airport, I told you Dan and I had been trying to reconcile. Don’t ask me why. It lasted a couple of months. A few weeks after I saw you, I found out I was pregnant. I was shocked. That was the last thing I needed or wanted. I called Dan. To my surprise, he was ecstatic. For the next three months, you couldn’t have asked for a better man. He was even good to Taylor.

“We went shopping for the baby one afternoon and ran into one of Dan’s buddies. He mentioned that he had seen me at the airport that day. He went on to say that he thought Dan and I were separated because he had seen us, you and me, holding hands. Of course, he only did it to piss me off. He, the friend, never really liked me. From then on, Dan was convinced that you and I had had an affair.”

His brows raised in surprise. “What?”

“Hmmm... He thinks this baby is yours. Clark, I’m so sorry.”

“What for?”

“You don’t deserve people thinking those things about you.”

“They’ve thought worse.” Clark leaned forward on his knees. “Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“I don’t know.” She looked away for a moment then back at him. “Yes, I do. I was scared that it would freak you out, and you’d leave.”

Clark reached out to place a hand on Lois’. “I’m not leaving, not this time.”

She looked relieved. Had this been one of the things that had been bothering her? “Well, at least he’s not planning on making an issue out of it... at the moment. I saw him a couple of weeks ago. He’d gotten the paternity acknowledgement from the insurance company. We fussed a few minutes before I tore the papers up and threw them in the trash.”

“Good for you.”

“Good for me? Clark, I’m barely twenty-seven years old, and I already have two children by two different fathers. Neither child has a relationship with their father, and it doesn’t appear that’s going to change.”

“Lois, you’re a great mother.”

“I know that logically. But irrationally... well...” She closed her eyes to shut out the tears behind her lids. “Sometimes I have dreams that he’ll just take her away after she’s born.”

“That who’ll take her? Dan?” Clark asked and she nodded. “Lois, Dan is not going to take your baby away from you.”

“I know.” She rubbed her face and smiled. “It’s just really hard sometimes.”

“I know.”

She looked up at him. “I guess you would. Lana’s pretty much put you through hell, hasn’t she?”

“Yeah. It’s only because I’ve let her. But... Could I ask your opinion on something?”

“About what you should do about Lana?”

“Yes. Do you think I’m doing the right thing by trying to keep my son from his own mother?”

“Are you trying to keep him from his mother? Or are you trying to keep him safe?”

“I like to think I’m keeping him safe.”

“Answer this: Do you have any objections to her getting visits with him?”

“No. I want her to see him. Thing is she doesn’t seem to want to.”

This time Lois put her hand on his. “Clark, that’s something you can never change.”

He covered her hand with his other one. “Just like you can’t change how Dan feels,” he said softly.

She smiled. “You’re good, Kent.”

“And don’t you forget it,” he said jokingly.

Lois laughed at his expression. “At least I have my best friend back.”

“You do,” he confirmed with a squeeze to her hand. And she could have so much more, if she would only give the word.

“And you’re sure Dan’s belief in our affair doesn’t bother you?”

“It doesn’t bother me.” He squeezed her hand in his again. “How ‘bout that coffee?”

“And maybe you can tell me about Superman?”

“Absolutely,” he agreed. He had wanted to talk with her about his super persona long before now but patiently waited for her to ask. He watched as she smiled, withdrew her hands, and went to get the coffee.

He had also known something else was on her mind. If he had known it was Dan, he would have relieved her of those fears long ago. Clark wasn’t at all concerned about Dan or what he thought. As long as he knew what Lois thought, that was enough for him. Things could be much worse than being mistaken for

fathering the baby of the woman who had once again worked her way back into his heart.

That was slightly laughable, Clark thought, since he was beginning to believe Lois had never been pushed from his heart to begin with. There was just no way one could know a woman like Lois and not fall helplessly and completely in love. There was also no way to go back once you'd fallen either. He might have fought it for so long, but he could see now it had been useless to try and stop the pull.

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Clark couldn't stop thinking about what Lois had told him. Dan had never been his favorite person, but he had even less respect for the man now— if that was possible. Dan had always believed that he and Lois were more than just friends. It seemed that hadn't changed. And Clark had always believed that Dan used his feelings for Taylor to manipulate him into leaving. With what Lois told him, now he was sure.

The thought that Lois was afraid he would leave again also didn't sit well with him either. He wasn't going anywhere. This was his home. He had been sure of that once and left it behind. He could never do that again.

And the baby... Dan thought she was his. When he got home from Lois', he had been unable to sleep. He had stared up at the ceiling for hours wishing Dan was right.

<That's crazy, Clark. You've only just gotten Lois back into your life two weeks ago.>

But was that true? Did he have Lois back? He had been slightly apprehensive about his super side. After all, he had been super his entire adult life, which meant he had kept that fact from her before. She hadn't seen it that way though, telling him they both had skeletons in their closet. He came away from their date fairly certain their friendship was firmly solidified. And from what he felt when they had kissed goodnight, she might be much more. Still he didn't want to ruin things this time. He couldn't take another heartbreak.

He thought about the new little life that would be coming into this world soon. How could her father not want to be part of her life? He would be happy if she was his. Clark smiled a sad smile. He guessed it was okay to dream a little. He just hoped he didn't let his mouth spout something he would regret later.

He should focus on his renewed friendship and his budding relationship with an absolutely fantastic woman. They had spent nearly two hours talking about his super side. Lois had been amazed at what he could do. And she had insisted on numerous displays. She was the first person, aside from his parents, that he had shared his secret with. It had felt wonderful to share who he really was with her. If there was any chance for them to have a lasting relationship, they had to be completely open and honest with one another. Countless nightmares had been dispelled when the only thing Clark had seen in Lois' eyes as he laid himself open was respect and admiration. She had also told him as much. She respected him for taking the gifts he had been given and using them to help others. She had also astonished him when she told him she was also a little envious as well. He had learned that she would love to be able to help others the way he did. That, she had admitted, was one reason she had agreed to write the Lex Luthor biography.

After his confessional, the conversation had switched to their interests in writing. Clark wasn't the least bit surprised to learn just how talented Lois was. It seemed she succeeded in everything she did. He read a rough draft of a novel she had started and promised to share some of his own writing with her.

Over the next couple of weeks he managed to get Lois to have dinner with him three more times. They went to a movie and even took the boys to the fun park. Clark grilled hamburgers and hot dogs to celebrate the end of the school year, which seemed to impress Taylor to no end. Lois also shared dinner at the

brownstone with them a few times, and Clark took take-out to her house one evening when she got back in town really late from a business trip. He and Lois were finally getting to know each other the way he had wanted them to before, and it felt so right.

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Clark drugged into the kitchen for breakfast. He needed to hurry because he was running late. He had gotten in late the night before. Lois had been out of town for two days on a trip to take some classes in preparation for her new job. He had brought Chinese take-out to her house after she had called and informed Martha that it would be late before she got in, being as she'd had to drive this time around. Her doctor had grounded her until after the birth. Martha had insisted Taylor stay in bed.

Clark smiled at the sight that greeted him. Two bright eyed little boys were sharing breakfast, and his mother was busy at the stove. This was living, he thought as the door swished closed behind him. Suddenly his day was a lot brighter.

"Morning Daddy," Jon told him happily.

"Good morning." Clark bent and kissed the top of his head. "And to you," he told Taylor and kissed his head.

"Morning. How was your date with my mom?"

Clark stopped and looked down at the boy. He certainly didn't waste time, did he? "It wasn't a date. It was just take-out and conversation."

"Yeah, yeah. So how was it?"

Clark grinned at the boy. "It was nice... for your information." He pinched his nose then settled at the table.

"Why was it just nice?"

Taylor's question made Clark lower the paper he was lifting to read. He looked at a very serious little boy. "What?"

"You said it was nice. Why wasn't it great? Or fantastic? Or amazing?"

"Taylor, I had a wonderful time with your mother."

"Wonderful enough to ask her out again?"

"Absolutely. I thought I'd take her to a game on Saturday. Is that all right with you?"

"Not very romantic."

"And what would you know about romantic?"

"Clark, I'm seven, not blind. My mom really likes you. And I know you like her. I just don't want you guys to blow it."

Clark opened his mouth to respond but shut it again. He had almost told Taylor he loved his mother, something he had been denying even to himself until now. "Taylor, I promise I'm going to do everything in my power not to blow it." And he realized he meant every word. Lois was worth it— all the pain, all the sacrifice, everything he had done and would have to do to *finally* win her heart.

"I hope not."

Clark turned to Jon. His comment came out of nowhere. "And I suppose you know what you're talking about?"

"I wike Wois... wots."

"So do I." He ruffled the boy's hair, glad his son felt the way he did about Lois.

"I think you should take her dancing," Taylor told him. "She likes to dance."

"Does she?" Suddenly he realized that maybe he should have asked Taylor long ago about the things his mother enjoyed.

"Yeah."

"What else does she like?"

"She likes the amusement park, taking long walks, going to the beach, and jazz. She loves jazz."

"Really?" Clark remembered a lot about Lois, but that wasn't anything that came to mind.

"Uh huh."

"And she wikes to weed," Jon offered. "She weed me a tory. An' sings."

"I think they're on your side," Martha told Clark with a hand

resting on his shoulder. She leaned forward and set down his breakfast.

“Sounds like it. I’m glad.”

“Daddy, I take Wois out?”

Clark smiled over at Jon. “And where would you take her?”

“Da zoo. She wikes cola bears.”

“I think you mean koala. And that would be okay. Tell you what, I’ll ask her out for Saturday, and you ask for Sunday afternoon.”

“Kay.” Jon smiled, jumped down, and raced from the room.

Clark noticed Taylor had grown silent, a frown drawn across his face. “Hey you, what’s wrong?”

“Nothin’.”

Clark smiled, knowing exactly what was wrong. “How ‘bout I take you up to the state park Sunday and show you how to catch some fish?”

The boy’s face lit up, and he smiled broadly at Clark. “Yeah! That would be too cool. But... I don’t have a rod,” he said, the frown returning.

“We’ll get you one.”

Taylor jumped from his seat and ran into Clark’s arms. “You’re the best, Clark.” He leaned back and offered up a brilliant smile before he disappeared.

Clark chuckled softly. It was funny how things worked themselves out. A few months ago, it was just him, his mom, and Jon. Now it seemed he had a full house and an even fuller heart.

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Rather than ask Lois out over the phone, Clark decided to go to her office. He stood outside the window of the conference room to watch her in action. She was prepping several agents in the morning meeting and was absolutely breathtaking. She looked up from what she was doing and caught his gaze. He waved and smiled, receiving a smile in return. She resumed her speech, and he stood there, content to simply watch her. After a few minutes the meeting ended.

She stepped through the door and smiled at Clark. “Hey, you. Did you decide to take me up on my offer to come back to work here?”

“Maybe,” he told her. “Gotta minute?”

“Sure. Is something wrong?”

“No, no. I just wanted to ask you something and didn’t want to do it over the phone.”

“Okay. Come to my office.”

He followed her down the hall and into the coveted corner office that had been Sam’s when he had worked there. Clark noticed the changes Lois had made to the room, making it more her own.

“Impressive.” He looked out at the view of the city. “I always loved this view.”

“I know. I love to watch the sun set from here. Taylor and I sit together sometimes to watch it.” She put the folders down she was holding and eased into her seat. “I, ah, had an interesting phone call this morning.”

That got Clark’s attention. He walked over to her desk and perched on the edge. “Really?”

“Yeah. A Mr. Jon Kent called and asked me if I’d like to go out with him on Sunday afternoon.”

Clark smiled broadly. “Looks like you have an admirer.”

“I think so. Anyway, I told him I’d be delighted.” Lois chuckled softly. “It was so cute. When I said yes, he told me I’d have to ride with him and his grandmother because he wasn’t old enough to drive yet.”

Clark laughed with her. “He asked me this morning if it was okay to ask you.”

“He told me. So, I have a hot date Sunday.”

“Then I may be too late.”

“For what?”

“I wanted to take you out Saturday.”

“Two days with two gorgeous men.” She grew silent and her eyes locked with Clark’s. The electricity jumping between them was undeniable. “I, ah, I...” She broke his gaze and looked away. “I don’t think I’m going to apologize for that. I do think you’re... well, you don’t hurt the eyes,” she finished as she looked back up at him with a smile.

Clark smiled back as the heat rose up his cheeks. It was bad enough when people complimented him on his work, but to receive praise over his looks... And from Lois... well, that was... “Thank you. I happen to think you’re pretty amazing, too.”

“Okay then,” she decided and hooked her fingers together on her lap. “Are you asking me out?”

“Yes.”

“Whole day or night?”

“Well, I have the day off. Do you think you could put up with me the whole day?”

“I think maybe I’d like to try.”

“Okay.”

“Good. You have about thirty five hours or so to come up with a way to keep me happy for a whole day.”

“I have my work cut out for me then, huh?”

“Yes, sir. I’m not easy to please.”

Clark laughed softly. “I think I’ll take that challenge.” He rose from his seat. “I hate to run. I’ve got a story to get done.”

“Yeah. And I have more paperwork.” She rose to follow Clark to the door.

He stopped and turned to her. “Oh, before I forget. I asked Taylor to go fishing with me while you’re on your date Sunday. Is that okay?”

“He’d love it.”

“I’m looking forward to it myself.” He reached out and squeezed her elbow. “Talk to you later.”

“Okay.” She offered him one last smile before he hurried down the hall. She was still watching the empty space when a co-worker came up.

“You are one lucky gal, Lois.”

“Why’s that?”

“That man is the best looking son of a gun I’ve seen in my life, and he only has eyes for you.”

Lois looked at the woman. “He *is* good looking, huh?”

“Good looking, successful, nice, and single. What more could you ask for?”

Lois gazed back down the empty hall. “Really good sex,” she said under her breath.

The other woman laughed out loud. “Lois, I have no doubt he’s every bit as good as he looks.”

Lois blushed when she realized the woman had heard her. “Yeah, well, I don’t plan to find out any time soon. Every time I have sex, I get knocked up.” She met the woman’s gaze, and they both burst into laughter. “Maybe not every time,” she relented after a moment.

“Yeah but think of it this way. You can’t get any more pregnant than you already are.”

“You got me there,” Lois agreed, then mentally kicked herself for even thinking along those lines. She wanted a good, strong foundation with Clark on which they could build. She had made her mistakes where he was concerned. She wouldn’t make them again. But then again, she reminded herself, she never had made *that* mistake with him.

Get a grip, she told herself. What man wants to have sex with a huge pregnant woman?

Lois sighed and returned to her desk to finish her paperwork.

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Clark rose on Saturday full of excitement and anticipation. He had wracked his brains for things to do with Lois to keep her interested all day. He would start with breakfast at a little café he

had found on the pier. He knew Lois loved waffles, and the place had some of the best he had ever eaten.

He trotted up the steps to her house. Today he was picking her up at the front door. He had called her and told her to dress casually and comfortably. He had opted for a nice pair of grey slacks, a black pull over that zipped half way up the front, and loafers. Since his mom had kept Taylor the night before, Lois had been able to sleep in slightly. That had also been part of the date.

He lifted his hand and knocked. A few moments later, Lois answered.

“Hi.”

Clark swallowed. She looked great. Her long hair was down, and it framed her face. She, too, wore slacks. Hers were tan. She had on an open front heavy shirt, burgundy, that matched the blouse underneath. Being pregnant suited Lois. She absolutely glowed. This must be what she had looked like before she had had Taylor.

Clark extended the red rose he held. He had had a tough time deciding on the color of the flower but had finally decided on red. Their friendship was as solid as it was going to get at this point, and he was more than anxious to move their relationship forward. Why not help it along just a bit? “This is for you.”

“Thank you.” Instead of going to put it in water, she reached for her bag. “Ready?”

“Yes, ma’am.” He held out his arm for her, and she took it as they left to start their day.

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Breakfast at the café was great. They laughed and talked about the kids and work. When they were finished, Clark took her to a poetry reading on the pier. Lois sat mesmerized by the wonderful words and the atmosphere. Then it was on to a theater to see a local players group have their final rehearsal before opening night. Clark explained that he knew one of the actors and asked if they could sit in on the performance. Lois thoroughly enjoyed it.

She also enjoyed lunch at the ballpark. They took in a baseball game while munching on hot dogs and drinking soda. Clark listened as Lois explained which players she thought would make the best prospects this season. She listened as he talked about playing in high school and college. He had to promise to play softball on the agency’s team later that fall.

Afternoon wended into evening with the couple drifting through the antique shops in the colonial district. And just in time for sunset, found them at Devil’s Overhang, a cliff that overlooked the ocean. Clark spread a blanket, and they shared a picnic dinner.

With dinner finished, Lois thought the day was over. Clark had other plans as he pulled into the parking garage at the *Daily Planet*. She thought he was taking her into the newsroom, but he led her in the opposite direction. She was thrilled when they went to one of the jazz clubs that dotted the street. It was also one of the best.

Lois was on cloud nine by the time Clark finally pulled into the drive at her house. He rushed around to open her door and escorted her up her front steps.

“Would you like to come in for coffee?”

“Sure.”

They entered, and Lois went ahead into the kitchen to put the coffee on. Clark flipped on the light in the foyer to look at the pictures that covered the walls.

He was looking at one of him and Taylor that was taken before he left when Lois came back. She glanced up at the photo.

“You two looked good together.”

“It felt good to be together.” His eyes drifted to another photo, one of him and Lois.

She noticed his expression change as he looked at the image. “Do you ever wonder what would have happened if you had

stayed?”

“All the time,” he admitted.

Her hand went up to his arm, making him turn to look at her. “I was a fool.”

“Lois...”

“No, Clark. I was. Do you know why I married Dan?”

“I’ve wondered.”

“Because he was safe. He told me from the beginning that he didn’t believe in love. He felt relationships should be based on mutual attraction and interests. I knew I’d never feel the things for him that could one day break my heart. So I married him.”

“What?”

Lois turned and walked back into the den. Clark followed and stopped in the doorway to hear what she was about to say.

“Clark, I thought I was in love with Claude, and he nearly tore my heart apart. I know now that what I felt was just teenage infatuation, but the principal of the thing had been embedded. I was terrified that if I felt something, anything for another man, he’d hurt me the same way. I’d dated a few men after Claude, and all of them were the same.” She turned to face him. “Until you.”

She approached him to stand a foot in front of him. “I felt things for you that were more powerful than what I felt for even Taylor.”

“Lois, are you saying...?”

“Yes. I was just as much in love with you as you were with me.”

“Then why marry Dan?”

“Like I said, I didn’t want to get hurt. My mind kept telling me that one day you’d break my heart if I trusted those feelings.”

“Oh, Lois. You should have told me this.”

“I know. God knows I know that.” She twirled around again and hugged her arms to her body. “I have kicked myself a hundred times over. I let my irrational sense of logic drive you away. And Dan... God, that was the biggest mistake I’ve ever made. I mean, what was I thinking?” She faced Clark, her hands animated now as she talked. “Sex is not worth Dan Scardino.”

“Is that all it was?”

“Sex? No. Not all. I mean, the sex was good, but he did have his moments. He could be sweet and romantic. I was just too stupid to see that was how he got what he wanted. I think to him that’s all it was... sex. He told me he asked me to marry him so he could take care of Taylor. Boy, was I a fool to believe that one.”

Clark frowned at the thought of Taylor ever being hurt.

Lois stopped and looked deeper into Clark’s eyes. “Do you know Taylor has asked me if you were his father?”

“What?” He was thrown slightly by her change of subject.

“He asked me right before he met you again if I was sure. He even asked if we could just pretend it was true.”

“I know how he feels,” Clark told her.

She went to him again. This time she placed her palms on his chest. “Can you ever forgive me for separating you two?”

Clark trailed his fingers through her hair. “Lois, there’s nothing to forgive. I should have been man enough to stay in his life. At the time, I thought I was doing him a favor. I didn’t want to cause any problems.”

“And now? What do you want now, Clark?”

His hand stilled in her hair, his eyes bore into her soul, and he lifted his other hand to hold her face as he softly kissed her. His lips moved on hers gently and slowly as he sought to learn this woman as intimately as possible. She pushed her arms up around his neck and licked his lips, asking invitation into his mouth, which he gave permission for willingly. He opened his mouth and met her tongue touch for touch with his own. His hands smoothed down over her back, his arms surrounding her body as he continued to work his mouth over hers.

Needing air, she broke the kiss. They stood, looking at each

other, and panting. A second later they were trying to devour one another. This time the kiss lasted for a long time. Clark drew back and rested his head against hers when the emotions between them became too much for him to handle.

He held her face again and with his eyes closed he said, "I want everything it could have been." His voice was a whisper.

Lois drew her hands back up to rest on his chest. "So do I," she admitted. But she pushed Clark away. He stared at her with a slightly hurt expression. "Clark, too much has happened for that now. We could never go back."

"I know that, Lois."

She started pacing, one arm clutched around her body while the other waved in the air. "Before it could have been wonderful. There was just me and Taylor. But now, after Dan, things are so much more complicated. It's not two of us anymore. I went out and got myself pregnant again, so now I have two kids, by two different men. Real classy."

"Lois, what are you babbling about?"

She turned back to face him. "I'm saying that asking you to have any kind of relationship with me is foolish."

"Why? Because of the kids?"

"Yes, Clark, because of the kids. When I made the decision to have this baby, I knew I'd be sealing my fate as a single mother and woman for the rest of my life. No man, no matter how wonderful he is, not even you, could possibly want to get involved with a woman and two kids. Not to mention the fact that one isn't even here yet. And, I might add, her father believes she belongs to you."

Clark couldn't stop the smile that spread across his lips. She was amazing.

"What are you smiling at? This is not funny!"

"No, it's not. But, Lois, you're wrong." He closed the distance between them and lifted her hand in his. "I do want to get involved with you... and both of your kids." He rested a gentle hand on her stomach. He had wanted to touch her stomach so many times but was afraid to ask.

"How could you, Clark? Two kids." She held up her fingers to illustrate her point. "That's twice the..."

"What, Lois? Trouble? Because I don't see them that way. They didn't ask to be born, but they're here. And they don't change the way I feel about their mother."

"What about tomorrow? Or the next day? They'll still be here." She just wouldn't let this drop.

"And Jon? What about him?" She scrunched her brows at him. "He'll be here tomorrow, too." When she acted like she didn't understand his question, he continued, "If it were just me and Jon, would you bow out of a potential relationship because of him?"

"Well, no."

"Then why would I want to bow out of one because you have Taylor and a baby on the way? I happen to be crazy about your son. And I know I'll be crazy about this one." He rubbed her mound gently, exciting a moving frenzy underneath his fingers, causing him to smile up at Lois. "They're part of you."

Lois lowered her head, then turned and walked to the mantle. "And what happens when Dan makes waves?" she asked, refusing to look at him. "He will. That's how he is. He'll eventually bring up paternity issues? Will you still be crazy about me and her when that hits the fan?"

"Absolutely."

"How about when Dan gets visitation rights and carries her off every other weekend?"

Clark stepped up behind her and grasped her arms. "Lois, I never stopped loving you."

That made her turn to look at him. "What?"

"I have loved you from the moment I met you. You rejecting me so many times, your marriage to Dan, and all the time in

between hasn't dampened how I feel one bit. I tried not to love you. God knows I've tried. I wanted to just get on with my own life. You certainly had yours." He lifted his fingers to play in her hair, relieved to finally have that revelation out in the open. It felt as if the weight of world had been lifted from his shoulders. "But I couldn't. And that won't change. Paternity tests, beautiful babies, Dan Scardino, none of it will change how I feel about you." He leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "I just want to spend time with you *and* your kids. I want to show you that this man is very different from any you've ever known."

Lois rested her palms against his chest. "I didn't stop loving you either," she whispered. They stared at each other for a long moment, exchanging in that heated look more than they would ever be able to say aloud. "I guess this changes everything, huh?"

"Well, it sure makes them a lot better. At least it does for me," he said hesitantly.

"And for me," she told him, easing more of his anxious nerves.

"Good." He smiled brightly, rubbing his hands up and down her arms. "As much as I hate to do this, I'm gonna say good night."

"Why?"

"Because if I don't do it now, I won't be able to do it at all."

"And that would be bad?" She smiled at him with a gleam in her eyes.

"No, not bad. Just... premature."

"Why? Because I'm pregnant."

"Lois, no. I happen to think you're beautiful. This..." He put his hand on her stomach again. "...has nothing to do with it."

He took her hand and led her to the door. "You told me some things about yourself tonight that I fully intend to disprove."

"Huh?"

"I want to show you that there is one man that will never break your heart... at least not intentionally." He cupped the side of her face. "There'll be plenty of time for everything." He leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "Besides, you have to get some rest. You have a hot date tomorrow."

Lois laughed softly. "I'm almost as nervous about that as I was ours."

Clark's brows furrowed. "What? Why?"

"Clark, Jon sees me as the mother he'd like to have."

"And that bothers you?"

"No. It... warms my soul. I just don't want to mess this up."

"You're not." He leaned in for another sweet kiss. "Mmmm," he groaned as he stepped away from her. "I had a great time today."

"Shouldn't I be telling you that?"

"I don't know, should you?"

She placed her palms on his chest again. "Clark, today was incredible. And you definitely kept me interested."

"Thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it." He rubbed the backs of her hands where they rested on his body. It felt so good for her to touch him and touch her whenever he felt the urge. He had wanted this for so long.

"I did. And since it went so well, I was wondering if you'd be my date for the sports awards banquet next Friday?"

"Absolutely. I wouldn't pass up a chance to see you in an evening gown." His appreciative gaze swept down her body, the gleam conveying that he was remembering the last time he had seen her dressed that way.

"Ooo, and you in a tux." She gripped his shirt and pulled him down for another kiss.

Clark smiled against her lips. When she pulled back, she shoved him toward the door.

"Go! Hurry."

He laughed as he opened the door but stopped to say something else. "Ah... Mom told me you asked her to be your

coach in the delivery room.”

“Yeah. Daddy would pass out.”

Clark smiled as he thought about Sam Lane hitting the floor at the sight of blood. Since Lois had told him Dan thought he was the baby’s father and he had lain awake all night thinking about the unborn child, he had wanted to ask Lois if he could be her coach. To share that with her would mean so much. What better way to prove to her he meant all those things he said about wanting to be with her?

“What is it, Clark?” Lois asked, apparently knowing there was something else on his mind.

“Well, I was wondering...”

“Would you like to be my coach?”

His eyes met hers, relieved she knew what was wrong with him. He couldn’t find the words to ask her aloud. “Yeah.”

Lois smiled brightly. “Sure it wouldn’t bother you?”

Clark lifted his hand to her belly. “Lois, I would love to help you bring this baby into the world.”

She seemed to contemplate that for a moment before she looked at him and said, “And I’d love for you to help.”

Clark smiled, rubbed her stomach one last time, then turned and trotted down the steps to his car. If he stood there a second longer, he wouldn’t be able to leave. And that was a step he wouldn’t take right now. Not that he didn’t want to. His body almost ached to be with Lois, but he wanted to prove a point. He wanted to show her how incredible her life could be when a man truly loved her.

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Lois watched until he was out of the drive, a sappy smile on her. As she pushed the door closed, the baby made her presence known. Rubbing a hand over her protruding mound, a flash of apprehension ran through her. She had just agreed to share an incredibly intimate and meaningful experience with Clark. How could he possibly want to do something like that? This wasn’t his baby, yet he was the one who had asked to be her coach. Was it wise to agree? Especially when they had only just found one another again. Or had they finally, after all this time and so many bad choices, decided to just be honest?

And honest she had been. She wasn’t sure she had done the right thing tonight by telling Clark how she felt. They had only been on a handful of dates and around each other for a few weeks. But apparently Clark felt it was the right thing to do. He had been the first to admit his feelings, after all. He had also confirmed what she had known years ago— Clark had indeed been in love with her.

Confused, anxious, apprehensive and scared to death, Lois sank to the sofa. Maybe all of this was too soon. Then again, they had wasted five years. This might not be fast enough. The one thing she was glad for was that he had ended the evening gracefully. Her hormones might be raging out of control, but there was no way she would jeopardize their relationship a second time.

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“That’s gross,” Taylor told Clark as he watched him put a worm on a fish hook.

“It’s not gross. And you have to do this to catch a fish.”

“I’m not so sure I want to.”

“Sure you do. Come on.” He lifted the rod to demonstrate how to cast it. “Just press the button, swing it forward, then let go... of the button, not the rod.”

“Duh,” Taylor said with a smile. He took up his new rod that Clark had let him pick out just that morning. He pressed the button and swung it forward. The line sailed out over the water. “I did it,” he said as the cork landed with a plop.

“Yes, you did.”

“So when will I know I have a bite?”

“When your cork goes under.” Clark pointed out at the little

bobber. “Watch.”

“Kay.” They fell into a silence after Clark cast his line.

Taylor kept glancing up at the man beside him. In his seven-year-old mind, this man was a giant. “Clark?” he ventured after a while.

“Yeah?”

“I have to tell you something.”

He turned to the boy and waited for him to go on.

“I wanted to do something that was wrong... to you.”

“What?”

“I wanted to do something that would have been really wrong, and you would have known it.”

“What, Taylor?”

“I wanted Mommy to say that you were my daddy.”

Clark’s hand came up to cup his face. “She told me.”

“I’m sorry. I just...” He looked out at his cork. “Sometimes I just wish you were my daddy.”

Clark turned his face to look at him. “Sometimes, I wish I was, too.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Is it okay that I love you like you’re my daddy?”

Clark pushed his hair back off his head. “Is it okay if I love you like you’re my son?”

That earned Clark a brilliant smile. Taylor turned back to his cork just in time to see it sink out of sight. “Oh wow! I got one!”

“Pull back on your rod and turn the handle... fast.” Clark watched with as much excitement as Taylor was displaying in reeling in his catch. When it was close enough to the bank, Clark pulled up the small fish.

“Cool!” Taylor held the line so he could get a better look.

“This is great.”

Clark smiled and took the fish off the hook, then demonstrated how to hold it. Taylor stuck a small thumb in its mouth and held it proudly while Clark snapped his picture.

“Wow! My first fish. Clark, did your dad take you fishin’ when you were a boy?”

“Yep. And hunting and swimming. We used to skinny dip in the pond on the back of our property.” Taylor giggled at that. “Should we keep that or throw it back?”

Taylor inspected the fish one last time. “Let’s throw him back.”

“Good choice.” Clark watched as the boy stood in the edge of the water to release his fish. He put another worm on Taylor’s hook and handed him the rod.

Taylor cast his line and settled back beside Clark. “Clark, this could be the best day of my life.”

Clark wrapped an arm around Taylor’s shoulder and pulled him closer. “Mine, too, Taylor.”

“Hey, will you tell me some stories about your dad?”

“Sure.” Clark shifted and the rest of the afternoon was spent catching fish and talking about Jonathan Kent. Clark’s hero status was growing, and it had nothing to do with his other personality.

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Clark pulled into the drive of Lois’ house just after dark.

They entered through the back door, and Taylor rushed over to his mother where she sat on the floor beside the coffee table helping Jon put a puzzle together.

“Mom, you won’t believe it. It was so cool. I caught bass and brim. And Clark caught a big ole ugly catfish that had whiskers, and he was this big.” The boy’s arms stretched out to show her the ‘whale’ Clark had caught. “And, and I put a worm on the hook. And his guts gushed out. It was gross. And, and we ate fish at this little restaurant for dinner, and it was awesome.”

“I’m glad you had a good time,” she told him through a chuckle.

“It was the best. And guess what? Clark’s taking us all to the

drive-in in Sherman Thursday night... if it's okay with you. And, and he said we could go to Smallville to see the farm he grew up on and, and go skinny dipping in the pond."

Lois' brows raised, and she shot a glance at Clark.

The man winced slightly. "Ah, Taylor, maybe you shouldn't tell Mom that part."

"Well, you did say it. And, and he says he'll coach my football team this year. Isn't it great?"

"It is. Now, why don't you go take a shower? You smell like fish."

"Kay. Hey, Jon."

"Hey." Jon looked up at his dad. "Wois say I stay wif her tonight."

"She did?"

"Uh huh. I get to sweep in her bed." He smiled over at Lois then looked back up at Clark with a serious expression. "She said you should know dat."

Clark dropped his head and laughed. Jon was completely unaware of the significance of what he had said. But the implication certainly wasn't lost on him. He would love to sleep in Lois' bed, with Lois.

Well, sleep wasn't exactly what was on his mind.

Lois pulled Jon over to her. "Good boy," she whispered in his ear. He smiled and kissed her cheek. "Wanna go wait for Taylor to finish up?" He nodded and ran out of the room.

Clark leaned back against the bar that separated the kitchen from the den. "You are evil."

"You could have stayed, too," she countered as she sauntered over to him. She wrinkled her nose when she got close. "You smell."

"Sorry. Guess I should go take a shower."

"You know, you should do what I do: carry an extra change of clothes in your car."

"Yeah. Maybe I'll start." They locked gazes and burst out laughing at the irony of the statement. This was the man who wore another outfit under his clothes most of the time. He pushed up and stepped toward the door. "Give the guys a goodnight kiss for me."

"I will." He leaned over and touched his lips to hers. He almost forgot his resolve to take things slow but remembered how bad he smelled and pulled back to grin at her. "Night."

"Good night." She closed the door behind him, then went to find the boys.

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Clark could feel the numerous eyes on him and the woman on his arm the moment they entered the room. Although her figure was swelled in pregnancy, she looked fabulous. But even Clark wasn't naïve enough to think that people were looking at them because Lois was beautiful. No. Most knew Lois and knew she was not married. Clark had only come into her life recently so most folks were probably wondering why he would want to put himself in the position of surrogate father. Their attitudes made him angry. When they had been out a few times, they had gotten a congratulatory statement or two. Clark would smile and say a kind thank you, but he could feel Lois tense. Later, she would offer him an apology, which he had always deflected. He hoped she would soon come to trust him when he said he was with her because he wanted to be, kids and all.

They spotted her father and went to say hello.

The sport awards banquet was a huge affair. It boasted some of the biggest names ever to grace the professional arenas of the various sports. The Lane Agency had been a major sponsor for the last several years. They often signed top players as a result of their involvement with the event.

Clark smiled over at Lois' father dancing with his mom. They had insisted Martha come along tonight because she had been spending so much time with the children. They had hired a sitter

and pulled her out the door. Now it seemed she was having a great time.

"Clark?" Lois asked a while later.

"Mmm." He was barely able to answer her. Dancing so close was beginning to have a serious effect on him.

"I think your mom is having a good time."

Clark glanced over at her with Sam. "Seems so." He tucked Lois back against him. "Maybe Sam will get lucky tonight."

"Clark Kent!"

He drew back to look at her. "What? Lois, our generation did not invent sex."

"I know that, but they're our parents."

"And they have needs and desires just like we do."

"Just like some of us," Lois mumbled.

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Since their heated kisses after their date the weekend before, her desires were all she had been thinking about. Even arguing with herself about this very thing hadn't helped a bit. Clark had taken her to lunch Monday. They had parted with another slightly passionate kiss. And on Wednesday, he had brought lunch to her office. They had ended up with her straddling his lap and trying to devour him. He had cooled it down before they went at each other on top of her desk. She knew he wanted her, and she certainly wanted him. She just couldn't understand why he was holding back. Okay... so they still hadn't been together that long. So what? And she figured it didn't help that she was a blimp at the moment. What man would want to have sex with a woman that was about to drop any day? But that was Lois' problem. Her hormones were running wild and being with the man was about to drive her mad. A part of her also wanted him to disprove all of those doubts and fears she had harbored about men for so long.

Clark sighed at her comment. He stepped out of the dance, took her by the arm, and led her onto the balcony. Good, she thought as she followed him. The cool air might help her a bit.

"Lois, I have needs and desires, too."

"I know. It's just so frustrating." Lois walked a few steps away from Clark before turning back. "It's not like I'm a fanatic or anything. It's just that you look good... really good." Her eyes ran over his body as she said that. "... all the time. And I finally admitted how much you mean to me, and my hormones kicked into overdrive, and I just want us to be as close as we can get."

Clark closed the distance between them and lifted his hand to her exposed neck. She had worn her hair up on her head because she knew the effect it had on him. He had made the mistake of commenting how much he loved seeing her neck. She thought that a little extra enticement certainly couldn't hurt.

"I want us to be close, too." He spread her hand out and placed it over his heart. He did the same to her. "I want us as close as we can get in here long before we become close physically. I meant what I said about showing you that I'm not like other men. I want you to feel my love for you before you feel my desire. And believe me, it's very much there... all the time."

She smiled at his echo of her earlier words. Their lips met in a warm, gentle kiss that promised so much more in the future that lay ahead. She could feel some of the tension drain away. This was *Clark*. He wasn't like the other men who had hurt her.

Clark tucked Lois against his chest and rested his chin on her head. "I love you, Lois."

"I love you." She squeezed her arms around him. He said some of the most beautiful things. He had spoken to her that way often lately, spoken of how much she and the children meant to him. She supposed if he wanted to make her feel cherished before they made love, she could indulge him that. It was certainly good for her emotionally fragile state of mind to hear it.

They remained wrapped around one another until they heard the speeches start inside.

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For the first time in her life, Lois hated her job. She cursed the entire week it took to make the transition from being an agent to becoming CEO. Then Lex called. He was fading fast, and Lois needed to be with him to get the account of his last days for the book. She wasn't sure why the man had asked her to write his story, but it was promising to be a best seller, and she had made the commitment so she had to follow through with it.

However, nothing could erase the incredible ache in her heart. She wanted to see Clark and Jon. She had barely managed to see Taylor, let alone anyone else. And now even he was mad at her. He had hardly spoken to her after a particularly bad morning a few days ago. He had been trying to tell her something when she had gotten short with him. She had yelled at him, and he had shut himself in his room. When she finally slowed down long enough to get her bearings, she knew there was something horribly wrong.

Taylor still refused to talk to her any more than he had to, so she attempted to call Clark. Martha told her that Lana had come home early, and the hearing for final custody was in a week. To make matters worse, Jon had been at his mother's for days. Lana was refusing to let Clark see him. This had caused the man to pour himself into his Superman duties when he wasn't working. He also spent a lot of his time with Taylor. Lois kicked herself for not being there for him. If she was going to make a life with Clark, she had to learn that she couldn't take without giving.

And she knew without a doubt she wanted to make a life with Clark. She loved everything about him, especially his super side. He was a wonderful writer— his articles in the *Planet* were top rate, not to mention the things he had written in his journals. He was kind, gentle, compassionate... His sense of humor complimented her fiery side. He cared deeply for others— grieved for those he couldn't save. His ethics were rock solid. He was crazy about her son, and apparently he felt the same way about her daughter. He was gorgeous, smart, and he even had good taste in clothes; he looked good just lounging around the house. He drove a Jeep Cherokee, took care of his mother, and rarely ran out on her to be Superman. He accepted her, flaws and all, and wanted nothing more than to make her happy. He was almost perfect.

So, why had she been treating him so badly?

The lead story on LNN the next day put Lois' world back into focus. Reports were flooding the station of a devastating fire in an elementary school in Los Angeles. It had blazed out of control before Superman had a chance to get there. She watched the images as the Man of Steel carried out child after child. At least twenty had perished from smoke inhalation. The realization that Clark was this hero clarified itself as she saw the incredible pain in his eyes.

Suddenly her feelings didn't matter. She knew this was devastating Clark. This fire, coupled with Lana taking Jon, would be taking its toll on him. She practically broke the laws of physics as she sped the distance to his house. He wasn't there. She waited with Martha through the night. Finally giving up the next morning, she headed for the *Planet*. Someone had to know where Clark was. Surely he hadn't been fighting the fire that long. The news showed no signs of him being there anymore. It wasn't long before she received her answer. He was fighting another fire, a wild fire in Arizona. Lois' heart ached for him. He looked exhausted. Knowing Clark and what a tender heart he had, she knew he was probably grieving for each and every child that had perished in California. Keeping himself busy as Superman was his way of making it through the excruciating pain.

Lois returned to Clark's house that night. Martha told her he was upstairs in his room. She found him sitting on a blanket on his balcony.

"Clark?" She approached him slowly. He was sitting with his arms wrapped around his drawn up legs, no shirt, and a pair of

shorts on. He was missing his glasses and even from the side Lois could tell he hadn't shaved in days. He was staring at the cement wall in front of him. Slowly he turned toward her. Lois almost gasped at the haunted look she saw in his eyes. He had been crying and as he looked at her, the tears filled his eyes again. Lois was immediately on the blanket beside him to offer comfort. He didn't hesitate. He practically fell into Lois' arms. She desperately wanted to take away his pain.

No words were said. She allowed him to set the pace. He slowly stretched out, laying his head in her lap. She stroked his hair, offering as much comfort as she could give. After a while she leaned over and placed a tender kiss on his face. Clark drew closer to her, one of his hands clutching her back. He reminded her of a scared little boy needing to feel safe. She kissed his face again, then again. At that moment all she wanted to do was take away his fears.

Lois tilted Clark's face up enough to kiss his lips. He didn't try to fight it. Instead he pushed himself up to return her kiss. One kiss faded into another. Clark lifted a gentle hand to cup Lois' cheek as he caressed her lips with his own.

Lois was on fire. She wanted to offer this man the ultimate comfort. The hand that had been grasping his head slid down to his neck, then further to his shoulder. Clark's answering moan gave her the courage to move lower.

Clark drew away from the kiss and put his hand over hers on his chest. His eyes seemed to be searching hers for any hint of indecision. All he could possibly see was the heated desire she had kept bottled up for so long.

"Lois?" he questioned.

Her hand came back to run warm fingers through the hair above his ear. "Don't say no tonight, Clark."

He closed his eyes, and she could tell he was trying to control his own desire. He looked at her again as he slowly placed his hand on her swollen mid-section. "Should we do this?"

Immediately Lois wanted to kick herself. Of course Clark didn't want to do this. She was heavily pregnant, with another man's baby no less. Even a man as wonderful as Clark couldn't possibly want to make love to her now. She dropped her gaze from his only to have him lift her chin again with a gentle touch.

"Lois, I *do* want you."

"I know... just not right now."

"No, no, no." Clark placed a tender kiss on her lips. His hand held her head as he continued to speak. "There is nothing I want more than to make love to you... right here... right now." His hand once again covered her mound. "I just don't want to hurt the baby."

"Clark, pregnant women can enjoy sex, as long as there aren't any problems, right up until the end."

"I know." He looked down where his hand stroked her stomach. "I'd die if I hurt you or her."

This time it was Lois that lifted his chin. "You won't hurt either of us."

Clark continued to look at her for several moments. "You have so much faith in me." He looked so defeated today. "I'm Superman, yet you manage to take my breath away."

"Clark, you don't think I would have reservations about you being Superman, do you?"

There was a bit of uncertainty behind his brown eyes. "Well... that's something we haven't talked a lot about."

"Clark Kent! I can't believe you still doubt how I feel about you." Both her hands came up to hold his face. "I love you... you... all of you."

"I love you," he whispered just before his mouth covered hers again. He drew back to look at her. "I can't believe how incredibly lucky I am to have you." He placed another kiss on her lips before he rose and lifted Lois in his arms. Anticipation roared within her as he carried her into his room and placed her on his

bed. When he joined her, he kissed her once more.

She answered with a sigh against his lips. She was in heaven. Her raging hormones were finally about to get a little attention. She was excited beyond belief. Lois had wanted to make love to Clark for years.

Once again he ended their encounter by pulling away from her. “Do you want me to... cover myself?”

“What?”

“Well, I know we don’t need protection for pregnancy.”

“That’s an understatement,” she snorted.

Clark smiled as he tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I didn’t ask for that reason. This is our first time and well, I just don’t want to make assumptions that you’d want to do this without a condom.”

“Clark, that is... thoughtful. I think.”

“Gee, thanks. Look, I know I’m sucking all the excitement out of this.”

She covered his lips with a finger. “I want to feel *you*. But... are you sure you want to do this?”

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“Why don’t I show you?” Clark leaned over to kiss her again. He took his time to kiss her with all the emotions he had ever felt for her. She must have liked what he was doing because she was the one that sought and got permission to enter his mouth.

A guttural groan escaped Clark’s lips as he sank further into their encounter. He had to force himself to relax. He had wanted this for so long, and now that it was about to happen, he had a hard time keeping himself calm. He wouldn’t rush this—not one moment. Slowly his hand began to explore her neck. The passionate kiss ended, so he could layer a trail of open mouth, wet kisses down her neck, then back up to her ear.

“You smell so good,” he whispered in her ear. Lois sighed and arched into his questing mouth.

“Ohhh,” she gasped as he sucked an earlobe between his teeth. He nibbled softly before he continued to cover her in kisses. Unable to remain idle any longer, Lois’ hand roamed the hard planes of his chest. “You’re gorgeous,” she told him as she smoothed a hand over his solid pecs.

“Mmm,” was the answer as he drew back to look at her. “Are you sure about this?”

“Positive.”

“Please be sure, Lois. After we do this, I won’t go back being just friends.”

Her only answer was to grind her mouth against his. He groaned loudly and renewed his assault on her senses. His hand moved over her arm, her side, and when he became bolder, he felt her tremble slightly.

Clark lifted his head to watch her expression as he began to unbutton her blouse. He had waited for this moment his entire life. Suddenly he felt overwhelmed. His hand shook as he undid button after button.

With the last impediment successfully out of the way, Clark pulled one side of Lois’ blouse back to allow him his first glimpse of her satin clad bosom and taut, swollen abdomen. His hand splayed on the skin of her chest as he kissed her. She held his head to her as the kiss deepened. Quickly his excitement took over, and Clark began his exploration again. His touch was gentle, causing both to groan in pleasure.

Clark broke away from the kiss as he continued to undress her. He gasped when realization hit him completely. He was finally, *finally*, making love to the woman he loved more than anything on this earth. It was overwhelming.

“Clark,” she breathed, her breath whispering over his neck sending shivers down his spine.

“God, Lois, you are incredible.” His voice was husky with desire as he continued his slow, deliberate movements. “Are you okay?” he asked as he looked up a while later, his hand covering

her belly.

“Very okay,” she assured him.

He smiled and began to run his hand over her taut skin as he eased back up to kiss her senseless. This time Lois broke the kiss to nuzzle his neck and ear. Clark’s head fell back to give her better access. His low growl vibrated through his neck and transferred itself to Lois.

She had grown restless, wanting to give him as much pleasure as he was giving her. The kisses continued, her hands smoothed over soft skin.

This was absolutely fantastic, Clark thought as she branded his skin. Thank goodness he was Superman. He didn’t think he could stand this experience if he wasn’t. Clark drew away from Lois’ mouth, and she forced herself to meet his gaze. The intense fire she saw there took her breath away.

“I’m about to realize my deepest desire,” he told her softly.

“To make love to me? That’s your deepest desire?” she asked, curiosity temporarily overriding her raging libido.

“No,” he told her with a soft smile as he lifted his hand and gently pushed her hair back off her face. “For us to finally be one. One in heart, one in mind, and...” He kissed her again. “... one in body,” he breathed. “And this... this is a precious gift.” He kissed her slowly, tenderly, and continually as he finally lost himself to the woman he had loved for so long.

It was a long while later before he settled beside her and buried his face against her neck. “Thank you,” he whispered. “God, I needed that.” He kissed her neck. “I’m so sorry.”

Lois responded by lifting a hand to his face. “Clark, you have nothing to be sorry for.”

“Lois, you obviously came here to try to comfort me, and I ended up... doing this.”

“I think it was mutual.”

Clark pushed back to look at her. “Why would you even want to do something like that? Make love to me just to comfort me?”

“Because you needed it,” she whispered. She traced his lips with her finger. “I need to apologize to you. I should have called no matter what. All my life I’ve let my work and my stubborn pride get in the way of me having a real life. This time it may cost me the best friend I’ve ever had.”

He lifted his hand to cup her cheek. “You haven’t lost me. You never could. I’ve learned my lesson where you’re concerned.” He leaned over and kissed her stomach. “Are you okay?”

“Clark, I’m fine. You are an amazing lover.”

A slow smile spread across his lips as Clark lowered his mouth to hers again. He trailed kisses to her ear. “Hold on,” he said softly.

A few seconds later Lois was standing in Clark’s shower stall as he adjusted the water.

“Wow! That was awesome.”

Clark smiled brightly as he turned and took her in his arms. “Mmmm... You ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

“Oh, oh, oh, mmm.” She could only give herself over to this man as he floated them slightly off the tile floor.

Later, as they in bed, basking in their afterglow once again, Clark lifted his hand and gently cupped her cheek.

“What would you say if I told you I thought I’d just found my other half?”

His voice was a soft whisper. Lois closed her hand over his where it still rested on her face. “I’d say I’d just found mine,” she answered.

Clark kissed her slowly and gently before rolling them over to their sides facing each other. He tucked Lois in against his chest and held her tightly. With his demons finally released, Clark drifted to sleep. Lois followed shortly behind.

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Lois stretched her aching muscles and smiled as she

remembered the night before. When Clark worked at the agency, there had been discussions among the women about him being as good as he looked. She finally knew the answer to that. He was better.

His side of the bed was cold. She rose to find her clothes had been washed, dried, and folded. They were laid out on Clark's dresser, a single white rose on top. Lois smiled and lifted herself from the bed.

Wrapped in Clark's large robe, she found him in Jon's room. He was sitting in the rocking chair holding a stuffed animal. She could tell he had been crying. He turned to meet her gaze when she placed her hand on his knee as she kneeled at his side.

"Hi," he told her with a smile.

"Hi." She placed a kiss on his knee. "How are you?"

"Better... a lot better," he answered. "I'm sorry I left you alone in bed. I just couldn't sleep."

"Oh, Clark, I understand." She reached up to play in his hair.

He reached out to cup her cheek. "Thank you for coming here last night. I really needed to see you." He smiled at her and pulled her up onto his lap. "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"Why *did* you come last night?"

"The same reason I came to the hospital. You needed me."

He squeezed his arms around her. "Where's Taylor?"

"At Daddy's. I asked Dad if he could stay before I came over last night."

"I wish he was here."

Lois pulled from his grasp and faced him. "You do?"

"Of course I do. Lois, Taylor's great. I think I like him more than you." He waggled his brows intending for that last remark to be a joke. However, Lois' expression was very serious.

"That means the world to me."

"Lois, you forget I know how it feels to be a single parent. I've turned down a lot of dates because I knew how women would act if I told them about Jon."

"Why did you ask me out?"

"If I'm not mistaken, I believe you asked me out first."

"No, I didn't. You must have asked me out a few dozen times when you lived in Metropolis before."

"True."

"But this time... Why would you go out with me... now?"

"I could tell you all sorts of things, but I guess the real answer is that I was attracted. I mean, I've been attracted to other women, but nothing like this." Clark blushed and dropped his head. "Sorry. I didn't mean for that to sound—"

"Good?" Lois wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned in for a kiss. "It sounds really good to know I can still turn a man's head."

"You definitely do that." Clark took advantage of her position by kissing her again.

"So, when do you get to see Jon again?"

"Hopefully today. Lana called sometime yesterday and wants to see me."

Lois leaned back against Clark's chest. "Does she know we're seeing each other?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"Guess she'll find out sooner or later."

"Does that bother you?"

"I want the world to know we're together," she assured him. "But I don't want her to cause any more trouble for you."

"I can handle Lana."

"*We* can handle Lana." And she realized she meant it. This man was part of her very soul now. She wasn't about to give any part of him up to a woman that had literally tossed him away like yesterday's trash.

"Mmm. I think I like that word." Clark rubbed her arms before letting his hand drift to her stomach. "Has Dan called?"

"No. Thank God."

"I'll be glad when she's born. I can't wait to meet her."

Lois covered his hand on her stomach. "How did I get lucky enough to find you again?"

"I'm the lucky one." Apparently the baby agreed because she picked that moment to move. "That's amazing."

"What?"

"A baby, pregnancy, all of it. It's just incredible to know there's this little life growing inside you."

"And it really doesn't bother you?"

"Lois, how many times do I have to tell you that I love you? All of you." His hand splayed over the taut skin. "Or maybe you need me to show you." Clark grinned and lost himself in another kiss. Before long their passion was raging out of control again. She had denied them this kind of relationship for so long. It was time to make up for all those years of yearning and pain.

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Clark made it to Lana's apartment shortly before nine. He was excited to see Jon after so many days. He knocked and waited patiently for her to answer.

Lana pulled the door open with a jerk. "You're early."

"Only ten minutes. It's been over a week. I want to see Jon."

"Well, he's not here."

"What?!"

"Could you come inside? This isn't the type of building where arguments should take place in the hall."

Clark huffed his indignation and pushed in past her. His eyes swept the immaculate apartment. Obviously Jon's child support was paying for the housekeeper. He pushed that aside and faced Lana.

"Where's Jon?"

"He's with Eric."

"What?!"

"They went to the store. We needed some milk. I thought it would give you and I time to talk."

Clark wanted to say more, but he kept his mouth closed. He followed Lana into the dining room.

"Do you want something to drink?"

"No. Just tell me what you want."

She faced him with her arms folded across her chest. "I think we need to settle this custody case out of court."

"Really? And when did you come to such a stunning revelation?"

"Don't get smart, Clark."

"I can't help it. We've been having this battle for months, and all of sudden *you* decide we need to settle it. I've been trying to tell you this all along." Clark sighed and shoved his hands into his pockets. "So did you finally think of someone other than yourself?"

"Do you want to hear my offer or not?"

"Okay. What?"

Lana walked across the room to stand on the other side of the table from Clark. "Full joint custody..."

"In exchange for...?"

"Child support remains the same... and you don't say anything about Eric living here."

"Eric's living here?" Clark already knew it but wanted her to admit it.

"Yes." She lowered her arms and traced a pattern on the table with her fingers.

"Why? Why now?"

"Well..."

"No, no. Don't tell me. Your lawyer told you if I pressed the issue I'd get custody, didn't he?"

"Look," she told him a little forcibly. "Do you want joint custody or not?"

"Lana, when Jon was born I swore to always do what was

best for him no matter what the cost to myself. That includes protecting him when I feel his well-being might be compromised. I can't, in good faith, allow him to stay with Eric and not know anything about him. I should have checked him out long before now. I guess I wanted to give you the benefit of the doubt to take care of your son. But with you making an offer out of the blue like this leads me to believe something is wrong."

"I can take care of my son!" she spat at him.

"Oh yeah. Like the morning I came to get him, and you were having sex in the bedroom while Jon was out here by himself."

"And you've never had sex with Jon in your house?"

"No! And even if I had, I certainly wouldn't do it while he was awake and filthy in the other room."

"Come on, Clark. I know you're dating that Lois person. But why you feel you have to be shackled with a pregnant woman, I'll never know."

Clark opened his mouth to speak, but something in Lana's expression stopped him. "That's it. You believe her baby's mine. You think you need to assure yourself a cash flow in case she and I decide to get married. Someone told you a stable home would be considered a better custodial home than a single parent home."

"That's not true. It does bring up an interesting point. If her baby *is* yours, that means you were sleeping around on me."

"Excuse me? That's like the pot calling the kettle black isn't it?"

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Come on, Lana. You know exactly what it means!"

They were in full battle mode when a tiny voice broke the tension. "Daddy!"

Clark turned to see Jon running at him full steam. He bent and caught him in his arms. "Hey you!" He placed soft kisses on the small face and neck before him. "How's my big guy?"

"I'm dood." Jon drew back to see his dad. "How's my daddy?"

"Daddy just got a whole lot happier."

Jon giggled and lifted his hands to hold Clark's face. "How's Nana? And Taywer? I miss him. And Wois? She wanna see me?"

"Nana is missing you something awful. Taylor is sick without you. And Lois said to give you this." Clark leaned forward and kissed Jon's lips.

A tiny hand came up to wipe his small mouth. "She kisses better, Daddy," Jon told his dad.

Clark chuckled and pulled him to his chest. "She does, huh?" Jon simply nodded where he lay on Clark's large shoulder. Clark held his small back as he turned to look at Eric. "I don't think we've officially met. I'm Clark Kent." He thrust his hand out in the air to the man.

Eric reached out to grasp the offered hand. "Eric LaLonde." He withdrew almost as soon as he took the hand. "Lana, all they had was this low-fat mess." He gave Lana the milk and spun on his heel to leave. "Terry called me. You have to be at the studio in an hour," he called over his shoulder as he disappeared.

"Nice guy," Clark told Lana.

"Oh shut up." She marched into the kitchen to put the milk away.

"Do you have a new agent?"

"What?"

"Eric said Terry called. Is he your new agent?"

"What I do is none of your business," she snapped out. "Now, what do we do about Jon? We need some kind of arrangement. I have to go to Spain at the end of the week."

"Ahh... Another reason to work this out. You'll miss another hearing."

"Clark!"

Jon leaned up to look at his mother. "Don't yell at my daddy!"

Lana was about to throw a retort at Jon but caught the glare

from Clark and thought better of it.

Clark rubbed his hand up and down Jon's back. He was quiet while he contemplated his situation. What should he do? Of course, he wanted full joint custody and for all of the hearings to be behind them, but he wasn't so sure he wanted to settle on Lana's terms. And he definitely didn't want to discuss this with Jon in the room. Finally he bent and put Jon on the floor. "Hey, big guy. How about you go to your room and get your things while Mom and I talk?"

"Kay, Daddy. No yelling," he reminded them.

"No yelling," Clark told him. He waited until the boy shut his bedroom door before he turned to Lana. "The way I see it, I could make life really difficult for you. If you miss this hearing, I get custody by default." Clark had hit a nerve. Lana started to squirm. "I'm not happy that you feel your career is more important than your son, but I'm not going to play your games. I want full joint custody. However, I don't feel I should have to pay the same ridiculous amount of child support."

"Clark..."

He held up his hand to stop her outburst. "I won't budge on this one. Half what I'm paying now. Take it or I'll push for the hearing. You can't postpone again."

Lana fumed in anger. Clark was right. He could push for the hearing and receive custody, and she knew it. She had no choice but to take what he offered. "Fine."

"And your... living arrangements best not become a problem." He gave her the most unmistakable glare he had ever shown her, leaving little to doubt what he meant. He couldn't say a whole lot about her living with a man because he was pretty sure there were a few sleepovers in his future as well. Unlike Eric, he trusted Lois with Jon's life. She would never hurt him. If Eric even breathed wrong on Jon, so help him, he would have her back in court.

"Anything else?"

"I mean it, Lana. The first sign of anything out of the ordinary and..."

"I get it!"

Not entirely happy that Jon would be living with someone he didn't know, but knowing this was the best he would get for now, he relented. "I'll have Constance draw up the papers and send them to your lawyer."

"Whatever. I'll go say good-bye to Jon." She stormed from the room.

Clark wanted to smile. He had won a small battle where his son was concerned. Yet, he couldn't help feeling there was something going on Lana wasn't telling him. Those thoughts were interrupted when Lana came back down the hall with Jon.

"Ready to go?" Clark asked Jon.

"Yep." He smiled and turned to take his backpack from his mother. "See ya'."

"I'll call before I leave on Friday. Maybe we can have lunch."

"Kay." Jon reached for his dad. A short wave was the only form of affection he would get from Lana. She wasn't much for hugging and kissing, and he rarely asked her for those things any more. His dad always saw to it that he had more than his fair share of attention, which was fine with Jon. Of course, his Nana helped out in that department, and he had Lois now, too.

Clark said a final good-bye to Lana and took his son home.

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"Remember... she'll be doing all the hard work. You offer as much support as possible."

Clark rubbed Lois' stomach from his position behind her on the pillows. They were taking a refresher course in Lamaze to help Lois during her labor. She only had a couple of weeks to go, and everyone was getting excited about the upcoming birth.

"You know, this would be easier if you'd just do this for me," Lois told Clark.

He chuckled as they started her breathing exercises. Twenty minutes later they were making their way up the sidewalk toward Clark's brownstone.

"I'm glad we decided to walk tonight," Lois told Clark.

"Me, too. I love taking walks on warm nights."

"Yeah." Lois squeezed the hand she held a little tighter. "I haven't told you how happy I am that Jon's home."

"I thought Taylor was going to cry when he got home the other day. He followed Jon around all afternoon."

"I know. He talked about Jon non-stop this morning." She looked down as they continued to walk.

"What?" Clark could tell there was something wrong.

"I was just thinking."

"About?"

"About my life now. It's wonderful." She looked up at Clark. "Thank you."

"What for?"

"You, Martha... Jon."

Clark stopped and turned Lois to kiss her softly. "Thank you."

She giggled and pushed her arms around his neck to deepen another kiss. Things were quickly getting out of hand when Clark's head shot up. Lois had come to recognize the look he got when he heard a cry for help. Though he would often choose to remain with her, there were times when he was needed by someone else just as much as she needed him. In those instances, she would hand him over, sharing him with the world.

"Go!" She gripped his lapels and kissed him hard on the mouth. "Hurry home."

"Do you plan to be there?"

"Guess you'll have to wait and see."

Clark growled his appreciation before disappearing in an alley. Lois smiled as the familiar sonic boom registered his departure. She made her way to Clark's place in perfect contentment. It felt almost as natural to go to his house without him as it did going home. Actually, it felt better than going to her place. With Clark, she *was* home.

\*\*\*

Lois had found her true place in the world, something she was scared to admit. Being with Clark and Jon was better than chasing down the latest multi-million dollar sensation. That realization stunned the otherwise no nonsense workaholic. She couldn't deny it either.

Her carefully erected defenses were adamant to remind her that it was all too good to be true. Her little inner voice kept telling her that no man in his right mind wanted to be strapped to a pregnant woman and her seven year old son. Another evil voice told her that Clark would run for the hills as soon as the baby was born. Where would that leave her? Taylor was so crazy about Clark and Jon. It would devastate him if anything happened between her and Clark. And it would devastate her to have to give up Jon. She had fallen so completely in love with the boy, something she never thought possible. She loved the little guy as much as she loved Taylor. Lois found herself wondering if she was really supposed to be this happy. Was anyone supposed to be?

She and Taylor had only intended on staying a night at Clark's place, but she couldn't force herself to go home. A night quickly turned into a week. Clark was thrilled to have them with him. He made a quick trip to her place for more clothes for her and Taylor, so Lois wouldn't leave, not knowing she had already lost that argument with herself.

But work called much too quickly. Lois had to spend all day Saturday at a conference with the agency's lawyers and accountants, looking into business related to the transfer of power from her father. Clark wasn't thrilled to be away from her but knew her work was important to her. He decided he would pass

the time by taking the boys to a park upstate to camp for the night. He had made them the happiest little guys alive.

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Clark chose a campsite that was fairly secluded that sat up on a hill from the lake. It only took him a few minutes to pitch the tent and set up camp. When that was done, Clark outfitted the boys in lifejackets, and all three set out to play in the water.

The boys played in the water for nearly an hour before Clark went to fix lunch.

Clark's head snapped up from the sandwiches he was making when Taylor screamed in pain. A second later Clark was on his knees beside the crying boy. Taylor had fallen and cut his leg on a jagged rock. The cut was bleeding pretty badly. Clark snatched Taylor up and with speed just short of super, he had the boy sitting on the hood of the jeep.

Clark's face was a picture of determination as he started to assess the wound. "Taylor, son, I know it hurts."

"It... it does."

"I know." Clark looked up at his swollen eyes. "I'm going to take care of it, though."

"I... I... (sniff) know."

Clark rubbed his leg just above the cut. "Jon, would you get me some water?"

"Yes sir." He hurried to the spigot and filled a cup.

Clark took the plastic cup and poured it over the cut to clean it. Taylor had calmed to snuffles but was wailing again when Clark touched his leg with antiseptic.

"I know. I know." He blew gently to help cool the sting. The cut refused to stop bleeding though. "Taylor, do you trust me?"

"Yeah."

"Close your eyes." The boy did. "Squeeze 'em tight." He did. "Now, when you open them you'll be all better."

"Kay." He kept his eyes squeezed tight.

"Make Taywer better, Daddy."

Clark nodded at Jon and somehow the boy understood his father's unspoken request to be quiet. The young boy forgot that Taylor still didn't know his dad's secret. He had wanted to tell him so many times, but Clark insisted that was something he had to tell the boy himself. Jon respected his father's decision and kept the secret. He would be so glad when Taylor finally knew though. It was hard to keep secrets from his friend, especially at his age.

Clark shifted slightly, lowered his glasses, and stared at Taylor's leg. Jon's eyes widened as the cut sealed shut. He loved to watch his dad do 'super' things.

"It's burning."

"I know. One more second." He finished closing the wound, pushed his glasses up, and blew again. "Better?"

Taylor opened one eye. "Yeah."

"You can look now."

He looked down at the dark streak where his leg had been bleeding earlier. "Wow," he said with wonder. "It's better."

"It is. Think you'll live?"

Taylor looked up at Clark. "I'm a big baby, huh?"

"No. That cut was pretty nasty. But it's all better now."

"Thanks, Clark."

"You're welcome." He lifted him up and set him on his feet. "Just be careful."

"I will." He ran back toward the water, but stopped when Jon didn't follow. "It's okay, Jon. See. Clark fixed it."

Jon reached to touch his dad's arm. "Tanks, Daddy," he said quietly.

"You're welcome, son." Clark smiled and watched as the boys raced back to the water. He really needed to tell Taylor about his secret soon. He couldn't expect Jon to keep quiet with Taylor becoming such a close friend. Clark also secretly hoped he would someday be more than just Jon's friend. He wanted Taylor

to be Jon's brother. To Clark both boys were already his sons.

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"Look, guys. You have to be quiet, or you'll scare them off." Clark spoke in a whisper as he pointed out a small herd of deer across the cove.

"Oh wow!" Taylor was thoroughly impressed. He had never seen deer in their natural habitat. Being outdoors was something his mother just didn't do well. His grandfather had taken him camping the summer before, but there were too many campers to catch a glimpse of any wildlife other than squirrels.

They watched the animals until it got too dark to see them clearly. Clark lifted the flashlight and bounced the beams of light off the glowing eyes of the deer as they continued to look for food on the bank of the lake.

"That was too cool!" Taylor and Jon talked as Clark built a fire. Soon enough they were eating s'mores and telling ghost stories. "Clark, thanks for this trip."

"Anytime, son." Clark ruffled his hair.

"Daddy?"

"Yeah?"

"Is Taywer your son?"

Clark turned to face Jon. "Not the same way you are, but I like to think of him as my son. Does that bother you?"

"Nope. I got a brudder." Jon smiled over at his friend. "Think Wois will care if I call him my brudder?"

"Why don't we ask her when we get back?"

"Kay." Jon smiled as he ate the rest of his treat. Finally he looked over at Taylor. "Kay?"

Taylor smiled brightly at the younger boy. "Sure!" He got up and settled close enough so that he could throw an arm over the boy's shoulder. "And soon we'll have a little sister to play with."

"Yeah. A smelly, crying baby," Jon reminded him.

"That's okay. We can take her for rides in the wagon. And we get to be 'big' brothers. She'll need us to protect her."

"Yeah. And we can teach her to do stuff."

"Yep..."

Clark settled back on his elbow to listen to the boys plan how they would take care of the baby once she was born. He didn't have the heart to tell them she would only eat and sleep for the first few weeks. They'd find out soon enough.

That night three very happy guys settled to sleep. Tomorrow they would have to go home.

Sunday morning was spent breaking up camp. The boys were disappointed, but Clark assured them they could come again, even though he had to stifle his own disappointment as they made their way back to Metropolis. There was nothing he loved more than spending time with his boys.

His boys... That sounded like music to his ears. For the first time in years, Clark was content and happy to be himself.

\*\*\*

"This is great," Sam told Clark as they settled into their seats at the baseball game. "Sorry you had to tell the boys they couldn't come."

"I spoke to them. They understand we needed to talk." Clark had come home Sunday to find out Sam Lane wanted to see him. They decided to go to a ballgame.

"Good. So, I guess I'll get straight to the point before the game starts." Sam shifted to look at the young man by his side. "Clark, I'd like your blessing to court your mother." Sam watched the young man nod his head. He continued quickly. "I am not, by any means, trying to take the place of your father. I happen to think Jonathan Kent was an extraordinary man. I respect your mother's feelings for him. And this is no declaration of marriage. I really like spending time with her and just think it will help us lonely old birds pass the time."

"You know she'll love my father until the day she dies?"

"As I will my Ellen. Son, you of all people should know what

love does when it grabs you by the heart and won't let go. That kind of love only happens once. I love my time with your mother. I can't say it's the same as with Ellen, but it's just as strong and just as powerful."

Clark took a long drink of his beer before speaking again. "Sam, the only thing I ask is that you cherish my mother. She's one in a million."

"I agree. And I intend to show her I think so... and those beautiful grandkids. Speaking of which, did you speak with Lois this afternoon?"

"No. Why?"

"Dan went by her house today."

"What did he want?"

"Just to pull her chain a little. Made some snide comments about you and the baby."

"Oh man. She was probably upset, huh?"

"A little. Angry more than anything. She hates that he keeps insisting the baby is yours. She thinks it will drive a wedge between you two."

"I've told her that was crazy."

"I know. In her very insecure mind, she believes you and Jon and what you two have now is too good to be true."

"I know. I told her I wasn't going anywhere."

"Yeah. Just be patient. Lois is stubborn and scared."

"I'll spend the rest of my life trying to change her mind, if she'll let me."

Sam clapped Clark's shoulder. "Now who needs to ask blessings?"

"Well, speaking of..."

\*\*\*

"Lois Lane?" Lois answered her phone at work the next day.

"Hi, beautiful," came the sexy voice.

"Hi. I missed you last night."

"And I missed you. But you know something occurred to me. Your father can't ever marry my mother."

"Why not?"

"That would make us step brother and sister in a weird way. We'd have to end our relationship if they ever get married."

"Bite your tongue. Maybe I can talk Daddy into just living in sin with Martha."

Clark laughed softly. "Hey, I was wondering if I could take out my favorite girl tonight?"

"Oh, Clark. I'd loved to, but I can't seem to stay awake past eight. I'm sorry."

"Honey, I'm sorry. I should have thought you might be too tired to go out. Only eight days left."

"Yeah. I'll be glad when this is over."

"Are you having problems?"

"No. Just tired."

"I understand, sweetie. How about I cook you dinner?"

"Really, Clark, I'm too big to eat anything but a snack."

"Okay. Would it be possible to let me come see you for a minute or two?"

"Damn! Do I sound that bad?"

"No. I just want to spend some time with you."

"I like the sound of that."

"Good. I'll bring Taylor home when I come."

"Okay. Clark, I really am sorry."

"Lois... hush. Before you see your son, I need to tell you something."

"What?"

"While we gone, he cut his leg on a rock. It was bleeding, so I sealed." He sounded nervous over her reaction.

"You sealed it?" she asked.

"Yeah, with a little heat vision."

"Wow," she said. "I wasn't aware you could do something like that."

"I did the same thing once when Jon cut his leg on his bike. It stopped the bleeding, and it looks really good. I just thought I would tell you before you saw and freaked out. I'm sorry. They were playing in the water and..."

"Clark," she interrupted him. "Boys are boys. They might get hurt."

"Lois..."

"Don't tell me you're gonna have a complex over this."

He chuckled softly. "Point taken."

"My son is your son," she told him.

He was quiet for a moment before he took a deep breath.

"That means the world to me, honey."

"Together, Clark," she reminded him. "We're in this together."

"Do you know how good that sounds?"

"I do, and I'm sorry I'm just not up to going out."

"What did I say? I'll see you tonight."

"Love you," she said.

"I love you."

Lois replaced her receiver and smiled brightly. She wanted to spend time with Clark just as badly as he wanted to spend time with her, but her very heavy pregnancy was making things too difficult to function let alone do anything else but sleep when she got home. She looked forward to at least seeing him later.

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Later turned out to be sooner. Shortly after lunch Lois' water broke.

"Where is she?" Clark asked as he made it to his mother's side. He had been out saving the day as Superman when Lois went into labor. His mother left messages for him at the *Planet* and home. As soon as he checked his messages at work, he raced back out to the hospital.

"She's in labor room four."

"And she's asking for you," Taylor told Clark.

Clark nodded and headed for the L&D ward. He heard Lois' wail long before he got to her. He hurried in to her side.

"Clark!" Her eyes lit up when she saw him. "You made it."

"I wouldn't miss it," he told her. He wiped the sweat from her brow. "How far are we?"

"We? We! WE ARE READY... to... PUSH!"

"Okay, honey, okay." Clark was about to panic when a nurse came in.

"Hello. I'm Haley. I'll be the nurse during your wife's labor."

"She's not my wife," Clark told her regretfully.

"Oh... Well, Ms. Lane is fully dilated and ready to push this little visitor out." The nurse started preparing the bed for delivery.

Lois continued to yell and curse loudly. Poor nurse. Guess she heard a lot of that. Clark rubbed her back and offered as much comfort as he could, smiling slightly at a particularly colorful word.

"Clark, this hurts so much more than when I had Taylor."

He leaned over to place his head against hers, wishing he could take away some of the pain. "You have to breathe," he told her softly and demonstrated. She repeated his action and after a moment or two, she was able to get a better handle on the situation.

An hour later Clark cried with her as he watched a beautiful baby girl take her first breath.

"Look at you!" Clark trailed a long finger over a tiny cheek as he leaned to look at the baby where she lay on Lois' breast. "Lois, she is so beautiful."

"She's perfect." Lois placed a quick kiss on the baby's head as the nurse came to take her to be cleaned and examined.

Clark's eyes followed the baby as they placed her under the heating lamp. He just looked at her for several minutes before he turned to focus on her mother.

"How are you?" His hand stroked her hair as he spoke.

"I'm tired."

"You did a great job. I'm so proud of you."

"Yeah, well, I feel like I was hit by a truck."

Clark chuckled softly. "As soon as you're settled in your room we'll see about getting you something for pain."

"Okay."

Clark leaned to place a soft kiss on her lips. "I love you, Lois."

"I love you, Clark."

\*\*\*

"She's so tiny," Taylor said as he stood outside the nursery window with Clark and Jon to get a look at his new baby sister.

"But she's great," Jon said. He leaned forward in his dad's arms and placed his small face and hands against the window.

"She looks like Taywer."

"Think so?" Taylor scrunched his face to see her better. "I think she looks like Mommy."

"Daddy, is Lois okay?"

"Sure, Jon. She's just tired."

The boy reached out for his father's neck. "She was crying and yewwing. You sure?"

"Positive. You can see her later tonight. Right now she needs to sleep."

"Kay." He leaned against the window again. "She's great."

The threesome looked at the newest addition to their little family for a few more minutes before they decided to go find Martha and Sam.

Taylor reached out to take Clark's hand when Jon ran ahead to his grandmother. "Clark, could I ask you something?"

Clark stopped and kneeled in front of the boy. From the tone he used this was serious. "Taylor, you can ask me anything."

"Will Dan take her away like Lana takes Jon?"

Clark sighed and took his small hands. "Taylor, I won't lie and say Dan will never see her. I hope if he does decide to be part of her life, he and Lois can work something out, so she'll never get hurt."

"Can't you be her Daddy?"

"I want to, more than anything. The fact is I'm not."

"Nana says a Daddy's not made, he's born. She said Papa wasn't your real Daddy, and he loved you like he was."

"That's true. And I will love your sister the same way. I just can't say she's mine to keep her real father from seeing her. That would be wrong."

"I know." Taylor looked back up at the nursery window. "I just don't want him to take her away and not bring her back."

"Taylor, I don't think we'll have to worry about that. Your mom is the best mother in the world. No one is going to take your sister away."

"Kay. Let's go buy Mommy some flowers."

"That's a great idea." Clark smiled and lifted Taylor in his arms. That earned him a huge hug. Taylor was an age where he often thought himself too big to be held. But every now and then Clark got a chance to do it. When he did, he took full advantage.

They caught up with Jon and went downstairs to the gift shop to see how many goodies they could find.

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Lois opened her eyes to see a set of brown ones and a set of blue ones a mere inch or two away looking back at her.

"Hi," came a small voice. "How are you?"

Lois lifted her hand to rub Taylor's head. "I'm better, now that you're here."

"And me?"

"And you." Lois cupped Jon's tiny cheek with her other hand. Jon answered with a huge smile.

"Clark's with Nana and Grandpa. They're tired," Taylor informed her.

"I'll bet."

“Mommy, the baby’s pretty. She’s the prettiest baby in the nursery.”

“Thank you, sweetie.”

“We have shirts. See.” Taylor sat up so she could read his shirt that read: ‘I’m a big brother’.

“I see.” She noticed Jon wasn’t smiling any more. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“I got a shirt, too. But I’m not her brudder.”

“Sure you are,” Lois told him.

“Reawwy?” That earned her an expectant glow.

Lois held his face so he would continue to look at her. “Jon, she’ll need a big brother to look after her when Taylor can’t be around. I wouldn’t want that to be anyone but you.”

“Kay!”

Lois pulled him down to kiss him softly. “Aren’t you guys tired?”

“We wouldn’t go home until we saw you.”

“Daddy told us you’re okay.”

“But we wanted to make sure,” added Taylor.

Lois smiled brightly at her boys. She would have never thought her life would change so drastically in two short months. She felt so full.

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“Hey you,” Clark sang out when he came in a few minutes later.

“Hey.”

He went to her side and offered her a kiss and a rose.

“Mmm... thank you.”

“There’s more.” Taylor let his hand sweep the room.

Lois saw there was indeed more. There must have been at least ten different arrangements along with stuffed animals and several balloons.

“Clark,” she admonished.

“There not all from us. The Agency sent a balloon arrangement and a couple of stuffed animals for the baby. *The Planet* sent one.”

“*The Planet?*”

“Sure. Perry even said to bring her by when you’re back on your feet. He told me he remembers her mother and needs to start early so that he can win her over to the paper before you get your teeth into her.” Lois couldn’t help the wide smile. “Your dad bought one and then Mom... And the boys... They had to...”

“Thank you.”

He stopped and looked down at her. “You’re welcome.” He gazed at her a moment before he noticed both boys were perched on the bed with her. “Hey guys, you should get down. We don’t want to hurt Mommy.” He froze when he realized what he had said. That was the first time he had grouped both boys together. At once he wanted to kick himself. He and Lois hadn’t made any kind of a commitment and to be honest, he wondered if things were moving too fast.

If Lois noticed, she didn’t react. She simply held one of each boys’ hands in hers. “They are going to stay right here and tell me all about their camping trip.”

Jon and Taylor broke into happy chatter. Clark settled in a chair and shook his head. Not only was Lois following both boys as they talked simultaneously, she was injecting questions into the conversation. He was Superman, and he couldn’t follow a thing they said.

The boys ran out of steam just before the nurse came in to check on Lois. “Hi, Ms. Lane. We need you to fill out this paperwork on the baby. She needs a name for the birth certificate.” She stopped and handed a piece of paper to Clark. “You need to sign this.”

“Me? Why?”

“It’s the paternity acknowledgement. We can’t put your name on the birth certificate without it because you and Ms. Lane

aren’t married.”

Clark’s eyes shot to Lois, then back to the nurse. “I, ah, I’m...”

“Does that have to be done now?” Lois spoke up, thoroughly surprising Clark when she didn’t immediately tell the nurse he wasn’t the father.

“No. There’s no rush to get the final certificate. Uncle Sam could care less as long she’s accounted for. But she can’t take his name until it’s signed. Better get it done before you leave the hospital, or it will be a whole lot more than one piece of paper.”

Clark put the paper on the side table while the others were handed to Lois before the nurse left again. He should have said something, but he just couldn’t get his mouth to cooperate.

“What are we going to name her?” Taylor asked his mother.

“I don’t know. I had all these wonderful names picked out, but now... I just don’t know.”

“I wike Choe,” Jon offered.

“He means Chloe. And I like it, too,” Taylor added. “How ‘bout that, Mom? Chloe Lane.”

“Robin,” came a soft voice.

Lois and the boys turned to look at Clark. “What?”

“Robin. She looks like a Robin.”

“And what does a Robin look like?”

“She looks strong and confident. She looks like an angel with dark hair and big brown eyes.” He turned his head to look at Lois. “She looks like you.”

“You think my name should have been Robin?”

“Nope. Lois is the only name that would have fit you.”

Lois smiled over at him for several moments before facing the boys again. “Okay. How about Chloe Robin Lane?”

“Kent,” was mumbled as Clark rose when the nurse pushed the baby into the room. He immediately reached in to pull her up. He found himself wanting nothing more than to sign those papers so she *would* be his. He knew that wasn’t possible. So, he was going the next best thing he could— he would hold her first. She had laid across her mother’s stomach right after birth, but *his* arm would cradle her even before Lois’.

“So, Mr. Kent... Do we have a name?” If Lois minded, she didn’t say a word.

And if she had heard his murmur, she chose not to acknowledge it either.

Clark ran a careful hand over the baby’s head, caressing her as gently as if she was a piece of glass. We’ll have this, he silently told her. ‘This first connection is mine alone.’ He placed a soft kiss on her cheek then lowered her to Lois’ waiting arms. “Don’t listen to me. She’s your daughter.” Damn! That didn’t come out quite the way he had intended it to.

He smiled at Lois, but he could tell she wasn’t happy with his statement. She cast him a hateful glare before turning to focus on the rest of her company. He had no doubt he would eat his words later.

“Wow!” Taylor peeked over at the baby girl his mother held. “She’s great.”

“Wet me see.” Jon eased closer to get a good look. “Oh, Wois. She wooks wike you.”

“Thank you, Jon.”

Clark eased back down in the chair beside the bed as another round of happy chatter erupted. He was angry with himself for saying what he did about the baby. He knew her name could never be Kent. He knew she would never truly be his daughter. And he had no right to be short with Lois. He had come into this relationship with his eyes wide open. He knew all the risks. Lois and her children held the power to crush him. They also held the power to make his life wonderful. He had told her time and time again this was what he wanted. Then he went and stuck his big foot in his mouth. His remark had hurt her, and that was something he had promised her he would never do.

He looked back up at the four people on the bed. These four people were vital to his very existence. In that instant he decided that the joy to come from being here, with Lois and her children, was worth any kind of pain and heartache he may have to endure later. Right here, right now was a moment Clark would never have missed. And all the wonderful moments to come was something he not only desperately wanted, he needed them. The first chance he got he would apologize to Lois, and he would never make the mistake of reminding her that Chloe wasn't his daughter again.

\*\*\*

Lois and Chloe Robin went home the following day. Clark and the boys had been to Lois' house and cleaned it from top to bottom. There was more than enough groceries and an appropriate amount of junk food in the cabinets. The fridge ran over with any kind of beverage you could imagine. And the baby was set with diapers and all necessary items needed.

Lois praised their work when she walked in and thanked them over and over. They made her sit down in the den and waited on her hand and foot. Clark was desperately trying to make up for his blunder, and she knew it. Maybe she would make him sweat it out a bit, she thought as he brought in the best looking sandwich she had ever seen.

\*\*\*

Lois watched as Clark lowered Chloe back into her bassinet then pulled it closer to the sofa. The boys had finally gone out to play, and they were alone.

"Comfy?" he asked her when he was certain the baby was content.

"Very." She straightened the throw over her legs. They had only been home a few hours, in which time Clark had jumped at her every grunt and groan. He offered her a smile before he leaned back against the cushion. The television was on, but he seemed to stare at it without actually seeing it. He had something on his mind, and she felt pretty sure she knew what it was. He was thinking about what he had said to her in the hospital. He had tried to play it off, act as if it had been said casually—like it wasn't meant the way it had been said. She had heard the raw edge to his statement. The reminder seared a lot more than she had imagined it would. And she had imagined this day and many more. She had envisioned many theoretical fights over this baby; she just couldn't let it go. Apparently, neither could Clark.

"It's okay," she told him. It wasn't—it never would be. But what else could she tell him?

"What?" he asked as he turned toward her.

"To take it back," she almost croaked. This hurt so much. There was just no way she would make him feel obligated to her baby.

"Take what back?" Then it seemed to dawn on him what she meant. "Lois, no." Clark got up to kneel on the floor so he could be face to face with her. "I am so sorry about what I said. I was hurt and a little angry, and I took it out on you."

"Hurt and angry?"

"Yes. This beautiful, perfect little person had just come into the world, and all I could think about was how badly I wanted her to be mine."

Lois' brows furrowed. "What?"

"I meant it when I said I wanted to be part of your life, kids and all. I really do wish she was mine. But she's not, and the nurse reminded me of that. I should have never thrown it back at you."

"I'm sorry," Lois whispered as her eyes filled with tears.

Clark pulled her into his arms. "Don't you dare be sorry. I love Chloe. It doesn't matter who fathered her, she's here, and I intend to love her like she's mine."

Lois sighed heavily. She wanted to believe him. He treated Taylor like his own son, but Taylor had already been born when

Clark met him. Clark had nurtured this baby *before* she was born. Was that the difference? Was he more emotionally attached because of that reason? Maybe he was, and maybe he *would* treat her like his own. Only time would tell if he really meant what he said. Even after all he had told her, she still didn't completely believe him. She wanted to, and she hated it that she didn't. Please, God, she prayed, don't let my insecurities ruin this.

\*\*\*

Clark and Jon stayed with Lois and Taylor for the next two weeks. Martha came during the day to help out while Clark was at work. Lois couldn't help but feel very blessed. After that initial hiccup, things had changed. Clark did indeed treat Chloe like his own daughter. He changed diapers, even the dirty ones. He bathed her, and his favorite pastime was rocking her. He could be heard talking to her, and Lois had even been blessed once to hear Clark sing to her. She often found herself wishing that Chloe really was his.

And Clark couldn't help but feel like he was on top of the world. He and Lois would talk into the night. He embraced his role as surrogate father without another hint of benevolence. He held Lois as she drifted to sleep at night and woke to the soft cries of a beautiful baby. He even got up for two o'clock feedings. He would make sure the boys were dressed each morning, feed the baby while Lois slept in, and left only when his mother was there to take over. Then it was off to work, breaks to be Superman, and errands for groceries or whatever they might need before he rushed back to Riviera Drive. Clark Kent couldn't be happier. His dream had come true. He had a family, even it was for just a short time. He was determined to take advantage of every single minute—every minute before Dan showed up to pull the rug from under his feet.

\*\*\*

Lois looked over at Clark as he held Chloe. She watched him day after day use his strength and incredible powers to perform amazing feats. Yet, she also watched him tend to a small baby with such tenderness.

"I think she's out," Lois told him. The baby was sleeping soundly in Clark's arms.

"I'll just go put her to bed."

Lois nodded and went to fix coffee while Clark took Chloe to her room.

He tucked the baby in with a kiss to her head. "Good night, Sunshine." He eased from the room and started back for the stairs.

"Daddy?"

Clark stopped outside Taylor's door to see four bright eyes peering at him from the entrance to the small tent they were in. "Hey, shouldn't you two be asleep?"

"We just wanted to say hi," Taylor offered.

Clark stepped into the room and sat down in front of the boys. "Were you two good boys today?" He hadn't seen the boys before now. Work kept him late, then several rescues detoured him before he could get home.

"Yes sir," Jon answered as he climbed onto Clark's lap. "Wois gonna re... re..."

"Remodel," Taylor helped out with the word he couldn't remember.

"Yeah. Her say..."

"She says," Taylor once again spoke up. He had been helping Jon with his speech delays and conversation with the child was becoming a lot easier to understand.

"She says," Jon corrected himself, "I get my own bed." Until now, he and Taylor had shared a bed, if they weren't sleeping in their tent.

"Really?"

Taylor climbed onto his opposite leg. "We want to share a room. You know, just like real brothers."

Clark smiled and wrapped an arm around each boy. Jon looked up at his father. “Taylor says I share his mommy.”

“Did he?”

“And I tell him he share you,” Jon finished with a bright smile.

“I think I like all this sharing,” Clark told them. “Is it okay if I share Chloe with you guys?”

“Sure. We’ll even let you share Mom.” Taylor was grinning widely, extremely proud of himself.

“I definitely like that.” Clark kissed each boy’s head, then lifted them back into the tent. “Now, you both should get some sleep.”

“Okay.”

“Night, Daddy.”

“Good night, fellows.” Clark smiled and rose to exit the room. Lois had him a cup of coffee when he made it back to the sofa. “Thank you,” he told her as he took the mug.

“You’re welcome. What took you so long?”

“I was saying good night to my boys,” Clark answered absently. He stared across the room as he sipped the hot liquid in the cup.

Lois couldn’t help but notice there was something on his mind. “Okay, let’s have it.”

“Have what?”

“There’s something on your mind, and I want to know what it is.”

Clark faced Lois with a smile. “How is it you know me so well?”

“I have no idea.”

“Lois, I’ve been thinking about Chloe.”

“Oh.” She shifted and set her cup back on the table.

“Yeah. I’ve been thinking about her father.”

Lois leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees. “I guess I should call him.”

“Well...” Clark ran his hands up and down his legs. “I was thinking... maybe we could... just...” He took his glasses off and tossed them on the coffee table. “Why do you have to tell him?”

“Clark, he’s her father.”

“He has a funny way of showing it. Lois, he didn’t offer to help during your pregnancy. He hasn’t called at all to see if you were close to delivery. And where is he now?”

“Well, we can’t expect him to come if he doesn’t know about her.”

“And do you think he’d come if he did know?”

She was about to say something else, but Clark held up his hand to stop her.

“I know what you said. Now you listen to me. Chloe doesn’t have to go without a father.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying... what would be wrong with just letting everyone think Dan’s right?”

“What?”

“I don’t think it would be a bad idea if we just let him think it.”

“Clark...”

“I know what you’re going to say. Lois, this is all I’ve thought about. I love Chloe as if she was mine. Why can’t we make it so?”

“Clark, I can’t let you do that.”

“Why not? I’m laying my heart out here. I’m even willing to sign papers; make her mine legally.”

Lois’ mouth fell open. She stared at him as if he had two heads. “Do you hear yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Seriously, Clark. You’re saying something that could have monumental consequences.”

Clark pushed up from the sofa. “I know what I’m saying. I

know all the risks. We could tell her when she’s old enough to understand.”

“Could we? Don’t you think she might regret not being allowed to know her real father?”

“Lois, any man can father children. But I don’t want to be her father. I want to be her daddy. I want to be the one who holds her when she cries. I want to tuck her into bed at night. I want to read to her and watch her learn how to walk and talk. I want to teach her how to fish, take her to the first day at school, and attend PTA meetings. The past couple of weeks have been some of the best weeks of my life. I enjoy getting up with her during the night. I live to come home to see her again. Right before I get home, I get all giddy; my stomach fills with butterflies. And I see her and know I’m where I should be. I want to bathe her and sing to her while I rock her to sleep. Can you tell me Dan will do those things?”

“Shouldn’t we at least give him the chance?”

“Come on, Lois. Dan’s not made that way, and you know it. You said yourself he doesn’t believe in love.”

“That’s relationships.”

“I think this is a pretty important relationship, don’t you?”

Lois got up and walked back into the kitchen and dumped her coffee into the sink. Clark sighed and followed her.

“Did you know he thinks Taylor is mine, too?”

Lois looked out the window into the darkness. “He’s hinted as much.”

“Well, he came right out and told me.” Clark walked up behind Lois and raised his hands to her arms. “Look, I didn’t mean to upset you. I love Chloe. To me, she is my daughter. I know maybe I shouldn’t feel that way considering we’ve only been seeing each other such a short time, but I can’t help it. You can’t stop love. I’ve tried. It just doesn’t work.” He leaned his face next to hers. “I feel the same way about Taylor. Neither of those kids ever have to be without a daddy again.” He kissed her cheek before withdrawing. “Think about it.” He backed away and left her to think about what he had said.

Lois was so torn after he left for his patrol. How could this man possibly feel that way about her children? Sure, he had told her he felt this way— acted like he felt this way. He had said he would take on the responsibility of fatherhood. And he had said it without asking more from her.

She made her way upstairs and sat beside Chloe’s crib. Could she do something like this to Chloe? She would be playing God, in a way. Deciding one man was better to be a father than the other, even if it was true. But Clark was right. She couldn’t see Dan being the kind of father Chloe needed.

She lowered her face to her hands and started to cry softly. So many times she had wished she had just left that night, the night Chloe was conceived. Yet, she was totally in love with her daughter.

“Don’t cry, Mommy.”

Lois looked up to see Taylor standing next to her. “Honey, what are you doing up?”

“I heard you cry.” He pushed her hair back. “What’s wrong, Mommy? Is it Dan? Does he want to take Chloe away?”

“No, honey.”

“Then why are you crying?”

“I’m crying because someone offered to do something that I don’t know would be right.”

“Was it Clark?”

Lois cocked her head to look at her son. He was so inquisitive she often forgot he was only seven. “Yes. He wants me to let him say that Chloe is his daughter.”

Taylor thought about that for a moment. “Even though he knows she’s not?”

“Yeah. He doesn’t think Dan would be a very good father.”

“I agree with him. I don’t think Dan would be very good to

Chloe.”

“But, Taylor, isn’t it wrong to let Clark do this? You remember you wanted to do the same thing.”

“This is different. Clark knows and still wants to say it. He told me he loves me like I was his son and even wished I was. And he’s all Chloe knows. Why should she have to go with Dan when Clark wants her?”

“Taylor, Mommy just doesn’t know if that would be right. What happens when she gets older and finds out?”

Taylor turned and held the bars of his sister’s crib. “What happens when she doesn’t want to go with Dan anymore because he’s just plain mean?” The boy climbed over the rail and pulled the baby close to him as he lay down beside her. “If Clark wanted to be my daddy, I’d say yes.” He kissed Chloe’s face. “I think I’ll stay here for a while, Mommy.”

“Okay, honey.” Lois rose and rubbed Taylor’s face. “Thank you, for talking to me.”

“I love you, Mommy.”

“I love you, Taylor.” Lois smiled through tears and left the boy where he was. She might not be closer to an answer for this dilemma, but she knew, without a doubt, that she was the luckiest woman alive.

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Clark was punching his keyboard a little harder than he really should. He was still upset about the whole issue with Dan. He knew his suggestion was absurd, but he couldn’t help himself. He was totally and completely in love with Chloe and wanted to protect her at all costs.

“Clark?”

He looked up into the eyes of Lana Lang. “Lana?”

“Don’t sound so thrilled to see me.”

“Ah,” Clark stammered as he rose to his feet. “Why didn’t you call?”

“Last minute change. I can’t stay long.”

“Here? In Metropolis?”

“No, in this room. Look, I want to go pick up Jon. I’ve been away so long he probably won’t even know me.”

Clark almost mumbled that was so true. “I should talk to him first.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m his mother.”

“Lana, a lot has happened since you’ve been gone.”

“All the more reason I should go get him now.” Lana turned and started for the elevator. Clark was right behind her. “I’ll let him call you in a day or two.”

“Lana...”

She punched the call button and shifted impatiently while she waited for the elevator. “I figured I’d keep him until he wants to come home.”

“What?”

“You know, make up for lost time.”

“Lana... He’s not at the brownstone.”

She turned to look at Clark. “Where is he?”

“He’s at Lois’. We’ve been staying with her since the baby was born.”

“Wait. You rattle on about him staying with me and a man, but you have him living with your...”

“Don’t say it, Lana,” Clark warned her.

“Just go get my son. I’ll meet you at your place in an hour.”

“I can’t get away now.”

“Then call your mother and have her bring him.”

“Lana...”

“Don’t Lana me. We have joint custody. I want to see my son!”

“Okay.” Clark wanted to avoid the scene she was making. “I’ll call her.”

She stepped into the elevator. “Thanks, Clark. You’re a sweetie.”

Clark was left to stare at the closed doors of the elevator. He always let her do this to him. Suddenly he knew exactly what Lois meant when she told him she didn’t know whether it would be right to let him say Chloe was his. He hang his head and forced a breath out of his lungs. Things just went from good to awful.

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Jon ran down the stairs when his grandmother called for him, stopping at the bottom to stare at the woman standing inside the door. His dad had called and told him that his mom wanted to see him, but he hadn’t wanted to leave Lois. So, Taylor had offered to come along.

“Hi, honey,” Lana told him as she leaned over to see him better. “You’re so big.”

Jon just stood there; his eyes never leaving hers.

Lana held out her arms. “Come give Mom a hug.” Instead of going to her, he backed further into Taylor. Lana straightened and turned angry eyes to Martha. “What have you and Clark told him?”

“We haven’t told him anything, Lana. You haven’t been here. What do you expect from him?”

“I expect him to want to see his mother!”

“You’re not my mommy!” Jon yelled. Both women turned to look at him. “My mommy would never leave me.” He had started to cry. “She love me and... and she hug me all the time.”

“Jon, sweetie, I have to work. You know this.”

“You take me, too. Wois take me to her work. At your house I watch TV. I don’t wike it there. You don’t talk to me. You don’t pway wif me. You don’t feed me.”

“Jon,” Lana started in a sweet voice. “Mom’s sorry. Come with me. I’ll show you. We’ll go to the park and the movies, and I’ll order pizza. Surely I haven’t been gone that long. It’s only been a few weeks.”

Jon shook his head. “I don’t want to.” He moved around behind Taylor.

For the first time, Lana noticed the other boy. “Who is this? Your friend?”

“I’m Taylor Lane.” He stuck out his hand to her. “Jon and I,” he glanced at the younger boy. “I guess you could say we’re like brothers.”

“Really? That close?”

“Yeah.” The older boy wrapped a protective arm around Jon’s shoulders when the woman refused to take his hand.

“Hey, I have an idea. Why doesn’t your new friend come with us? We can spend the afternoon together. If you still want to come home, I’ll bring you back.”

Jon looked from Lana to Taylor. The bigger boy smiled and nodded before he turned back to Lana. “I’d have to call my mom and ask if it’s okay.”

“Make it a quick call.”

Taylor moved over to the phone, Jon right beside him. He dialed the number to his house. “Hi, Mom?”

“Taylor! What’s wrong, sweetie?”

“Nothin’. Mom, Jon’s mom is here. He doesn’t want to go with her unless I go, too. Would it be okay to spend the afternoon with them?”

“Oh, Taylor, I don’t know.”

“Please, Mom. Jon won’t go without me.” Taylor cupped the phone and turned his back to the waiting woman. “Mommy, he’s scared,” he whispered. “I gotta go.”

“Is that what you want to do?”

“Yeah. Member our talk last night? Maybe this will help me understand.”

Lois smiled through tears. Her son was a little man. “Okay, honey. But if you want to come home, either of you, all you have to do is call.”

“I know, Mom. We’ll be okay.”

“Tell Jon... tell him...”

“I know and so does he. Bye, Mom. Love ya’.”

“Love you.” Lois hung the phone up with very mixed emotions.

Taylor turned back to Lana. “She said okay.”

“Good.” She smiled and held out a hand to Jon. He took Taylor’s instead. She huffed softly and led the boys out the door.

Martha gave each a kiss and a hug and forced her anger to stay in check. She didn’t like Lana and was having a very difficult time not making that fact known.

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Lana took the boys to the park. She tried to bribe Jon with ice cream and hot dogs, but he wasn’t biting. She attempted to play with them for only a few moments before her cell phone rang. She drifted over to a bench and started an animated conversation with the person on the other end.

Jon cut angry eyes at her from where they sat on the swings. “I wanna go home.”

“Come on. Maybe you should give her a break.”

Jon looked up at Taylor with tears in his eyes. “She wef me.”

“I know.” Taylor got off his swing and wrapped an arm around Jon’s shoulder. “Jon, do you love your mom?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “She don’t wove me,” he pouted.

“Do you miss her when she’s gone?”

“I did.” He raised his eyes to the other boy. “Until Wois. I wish she was my mommy,” he whispered.

“It’s okay if you love her like she was,” Taylor offered.

That brought a smile to Jon’s face. “Thanks.” He glanced at Lana when she laughed. “I still wanna go home.”

“Okay.” Taylor took his hand and led him over to Lana. He waited patiently until she looked up at him in disgust.

“What?” she snapped.

“We want to go home.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. We just got here.”

“We want to go home,” he repeated.

Lana looked at him incredulously. “You’re serious?”

“Very,” the boy told her. When she waved him off and returned to her conversation, he took Jon’s hand and started toward the nearest pay phone. He carefully dialed his house number.

“Taylor?!” Lois answered after the operator clicked her over.

“Mom, we want to come home, and Ms. Lang won’t bring us.”

“Where are you?”

“The park, on the south side.”

“I’m on the way.”

Taylor hung up the phone and took Jon to sit on a bench so they could see the entrance to the park. Lana was still wrapped up in her phone call. She hadn’t even noticed they had walked away from her.

Twenty minutes later, Jon’s face lit up when he saw Lois’ jeep stop outside the park gates. He jumped up and raced to her. She was around the jeep and kneeling to catch him as he launched himself into her arms.

“Are you okay?” She drew back to look at him, then over at Taylor. “Where is she?” Taylor pointed to where Lana sat on the nearby bench. “Why don’t you guys go wait in the car?” She waited until the boys had climbed into the jeep and locked the doors before she approached Lana.

“Excuse me?”

“Yes?” Lana covered the phone with her hand. “You,” she said when she noticed it was Lois.

“I’m taking Jon and Taylor home.” She turned and started toward the gate.

Lana clicked her phone shut and stood up to follow Lois. She reached out and snatched her around. “And what gives you the right to take my son anywhere?”

“They called and said they wanted to go home, and you refused to take them.”

“Not that it’s any of your business, but I have every right to spend time with my son.”

“On the phone?” Lana glared angrily at Lois. “Taylor is my son. When he told you he wanted to go home, you should have brought him.”

“They were okay. They were playing.”

“That’s not the point. They wanted to go home. You should have took them. Period!” Lois turned and stormed away from the woman. If she stayed another moment, she might not be able to control her temper.

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Clark arrived home to see a police cruiser in front of his brownstone. He ran up the stairs when he heard Jon screaming. He burst through the door to see the officer pulling Jon from Lois’ arms.

“What the hell is going on here?!”

“Is this the father?” the officer asked Lana. She nodded.

“Mr. Kent, Ms. Lang has custody papers that state she has equal access to her son. She’s requesting he go with her now for her allotted visit. Your mother refused to make him because he said he didn’t want to go. Ms. Lang called so we could help enforce the order. I don’t know who this lady is, but she took the child illegally from the park this afternoon. Ms. Lang has agreed not to press charges if the child comes now. She has the legal right to take him.”

Clark turned very angry eyes to Lana. “You’re making him go?”

“I want to see my son.”

“Lana, he doesn’t want to go.”

“Clark, he’s not old enough to know what’s best for him.”

“Oh and you do?”

“That’s not fair.”

“It’s not?! No one made you leave. No one kept you from calling him. You didn’t even send him so much as a card. Don’t make him do this!”

“You don’t tell me what to do with my son!” Lana turned and stalked to the door. The officer understood and pulled Jon’s arms from around Lois’ neck.

“No! Daddy! Don’t make me go! No!” He was kicking and screaming.

Lois was crying and shaking. “I’m so sorry,” she whispered. She turned and ran from the room.

Clark attempted to reach for Jon, but the officer rushed him through the door.

“Daaaaddyyy!”

Clark was about to go after him when his mother put a hand on his arm. He looked down at the hand with pain filled eyes. Her strong, steady gaze stopped him from doing something he would regret.

From the landing at the top of the stairs, Taylor wiped the back of his hand across his eyes. He jumped up and ran upstairs to the room Chloe was sleeping in. His small hand smoothed her cheek. “I won’t ever let anybody take you away like that. I promise.”

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Lois found Clark in Jon’s room, curled up in the middle of his bed. She eased down beside him. “Clark.”

He rolled over to face her. “I can’t believe I let him go,” he said softly.

“You had no choice.”

He stared out the window. “I wonder what he’s doing. I bet he’s so scared.”

“Yeah.”

Clark seemed to come out of his pity and sat up to face Lois. “That’s why I want Chloe.”

“Clark...”

“No! Lois, I would never mistreat her or Taylor. If that’s what’s bothering you, I’ll sign papers on both of them. I want them, Lois. Can you say the same for Dan?”

“Don’t do this now.”

Clark angrily got off the bed. “Fine! Have it your way. Let the bastard tear her away from you like Lana did Jon today.” He stopped at the door and turned to her. “Lois, you were here. You know what it felt like.”

“I also know how Lana feels.”

“What?!”

“Jon is her son. She has the right to be with him.”

“Listen to what you’re saying. Lana has no idea how to be a mother. You saw that today. Mom told me about the trip to the park. That’s Lana. Not sometimes. All the time.”

“Then why the hell did you get tangled up with her to start with?” The question left her lips before she could stop it. She was angry and hurt and couldn’t control all the emotions she was feeling. As much as it had hurt to see Jon ripped from her arms today, she *did* know how Lana felt. In that very first moment of pain, she had briefly thought about doing what Clark wanted. But as she had cooled off, she had considered the whole situation, from every view point. While agreeing to allow Clark to become Chloe’s father would be so easy, she knew Dan had to be the one to make that decision.

Clark stared at her in shock. The expression on his face ripped through her like a knife. In that instant, she knew exactly how Clark had felt the day he had painfully reminded her Chloe wasn’t his daughter. He whirled around, snatched open the door, and almost ran to his room.

Lois dropped her head when he slammed his door hard enough to shake the house. Slowly, she stood and went to find Taylor and Chloe. Her statement had possibly caused irreparable damage. She had to go home before she made things worse.

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Lana contacted Clark the next day to inform him that she would be keeping Jon for two weeks. A quick call to his attorney told him there wasn’t much he could do about it. When Jon refused to talk to him on the phone, he knew things would never be the same again.

Clark spent most of his time at work and on his Superman duties. When he was at home, he barely spoke. The first day or two Lois came to pick up the kids she attempted to talk to him, but he would make up an excuse to leave. Martha quickly tired of the incredible tension between the young couple so she opted to keep the children at Lois’ until things could be worked out. Unfortunately, both Lois and Clark had very long stubborn streaks and held on to their pride.

Taylor was as angry as everyone else by the end of the following week. Refusing to talk to Lois, he moped around the house without Jon and Clark. It was he who called Clark to say good night now. Other than that, he had almost stopped talking and sat looking out of the window for hours on end. The only time he seemed to smile was when he was with Chloe.

Lois, too, was dying inside. She might have understood a little of why Lana did what she did, but it didn’t change the fact that a piece of her heart had been ripped from her arms that day. The look on Jon’s face was seared into her memory. It was almost impossible not to close her eyes and see it. To make things worse, Clark refused to talk to her. She had tried several times to apologize for what she had said; he just wouldn’t listen. To make matters worse, she was also worried about her son. How did she help him through this when she didn’t know what to do herself? It was almost time for Lana to bring Jon home. She prayed the small boy’s return would bring Taylor out of his fog. And maybe everyone else would be able to work through their differences as well.

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Clark watched through the window in the den as Lana took Jon out of her car. The boy followed her up the stairs obediently, and he could tell something wasn’t quite right. By the time Martha opened the door for them, the man was nearly trembling in anticipation and apprehension.

Martha smiled and hugged Jon, who wasn’t too interested. She frowned as she pulled back to look at him, but his eyes remained lowered. She cast a worried glance up at Clark.

“Jon.” Clark stepped toward his son hesitantly.

Jon eased closer to his mother. “I wanna wiv wif my mommy,” the small voice said.

“What?”

“I don’t wanna wiv here no more. I wanna wiv wif Mommy.”

Clark’s heart was pounding loudly in his ears as he kneeled in front of Jon. “Jon, son, you can stay with Mom any time you want. I just want to spend time with you, too.” Hadn’t he told him that before? Didn’t Jon know how much he loved him and wanted to be with him?

Jon hid his face against Lana’s leg, and she put a hand on his head. “I need you to keep him this week while I make arrangements for him to come with me on my next shoot.”

Clark was still staring at Jon, barely hearing what she had said. “Did I do this?” Fear was quickly replacing the apprehension.

Lana leaned over and lifted Jon’s chin. “Be a good boy. If I can get a nanny before Friday, I’ll come get you.” He nodded as best he could with her holding his face. “Who’s my big boy?”

“I am,” he said flatly.

She smiled and released him. “Have his things together,” she told Clark. “We’ll be gone for three months. The shoot’s in California. He’ll love it.” With a wave, she was gone.

Clark was almost in tears as he watched Jon standing at the door. He looked so lost—the hurt evident in his expression. When the boy looked up at him and spoke, the world shattered into a million pieces.

“I hate you,” he whispered, then ran up the stairs.

Clark could hardly breathe, barely see. Spots danced behind his eyes as pain shot through his heart. This hurt worse than Kryptonite. He clutched his stomach as he struggled with this revelation. What did he do? How did he handle this? He had never imagined his own son would utter those words to him.

Behind him, Martha covered her mouth then ran up after Jon.

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When Clark thought he could pull himself to his feet, he got up to go talk to Jon. His mother stopped him at the door and told him to give the little guy some time. Clark closed himself up in his own room, only coming out to attempt to coax Jon into talking to him. The young boy was just as stubborn as his father and refused. Two days later Jon still hadn’t come out, and Clark was utterly devastated.

Martha was at her wits end. She had phoned Lois and told her that the children would have to go to work with her while she tried to restore her family. Jon wouldn’t leave his room and hadn’t spoken a word since he had said what he had to Clark. He refused to see Taylor or talk to him or Lois. He ate very little of what Martha brought to him and had reverted to wetting his pants and sucking his thumb.

As day three approached, Martha had to call in help.

“Lois Lane?” With nothing to fill her time, Lois had returned to work after only five weeks on maternity leave. She had hoped the time would help her sort out how she felt, but it wasn’t working.

“Lois, it’s Martha.”

“Hi. Are things better?”

“No. Lois, I don’t know what to do. Jon hasn’t spoken, and Clark only comes out of his room to try to get him to. Jon won’t

eat, and he's started wetting his pants."

"Oh, God! I'm on the way." She slammed the phone down and gathered up the children. Martha had been sugar coating the situation at Clark's. She hadn't told her it was this bad.

By the time she got to the brownstone, Lana was pulling away from the curb. She hurried into the den to find Martha holding her head in her hands.

"Martha? What's wrong?" She shifted the baby as she sat down beside the woman.

"Lana took Jon." She lifted her head. "Jon told Clark he wanted to live with her when she brought him home. He also told Clark he hated him."

"Oh, God! Jon must have been so confused when she made him go. That witch! She had to have told him horrible things for him to say that to Clark."

"I know, but he wouldn't talk to me. He wouldn't talk at all. And I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I just felt you and Clark..."

"It's okay, Martha." Lois covered the other woman's hand with her own.

Martha offered a small smile to the grinning baby. "Come here, sweetie. Nana has missed you." She took Chloe and held her close.

Lois looked around for Taylor only to find him half way up the stairs.

Clark's head jerked around when his door opened. He stared at Taylor.

Taylor looked at the man sitting next to the French doors. He was wearing only shorts and hadn't shaved or brushed his hair in days. Worse yet, even his seven-year-old mind could tell the man's spirit was broken.

The boy closed the door and walked slowly over to Clark. He placed a small hand on Clark's head. "Jon's gone."

Clark's eyes filled with tears. "I know."

Suddenly the little boy balled up his fist and hit Clark. "You're a big fat fake! You said you loved us. But you let Jon stay in his room for three days. You're his daddy. You should have went in there and held him till he loved you again!" He pounded Clark's chest as he yelled. "Now he's gone and thinks you don't want him!" He drew his hands back and took a step away from Clark. "I wanted you to be my daddy," he said in a softer voice. "I wanted you to be Chloe's daddy. You can't even be Jon's... and he's yours."

Taylor turned and ran from the room. That worked. Clark sat straight up.

"Taylor!" He was on his feet and after the boy.

Lois and Martha looked up when Taylor and Clark ran into the room. Taylor stopped at the end of one of the sofas and stared at Clark.

The large man was trembling as he held out his hand.

"Taylor, I'm so sorry. I do love you. I do. And I love Chloe and Jon." He took a step toward the boy. "I'm not sure I know how to breathe without you guys. That's why these past few days have been so painful. Jon told me he hates me, and I let it tear me apart. I stayed shut away from him, from you, from everything because I was feeling sorry for myself. I tried to talk to him. When he wouldn't, I let it rip my heart apart. I should have tried harder." Clark stepped closer. "Taylor please. Help me." He dropped to his knees. "I've learned my lesson. I won't hurt you again."

"And Jon? What about Jon?"

"We'll go see Jon. Lana's not taking him to California until next week. I'll go take a shower, and we'll go to Jon. I'll tell him I'm sorry."

"And you'll tell him you love him?"

"Yes. I'll tell him I love him."

"What if he still wants to stay there?"

"Then I hope you'll hold my hand until I quit shaking." Clark

looked down at his hands. He was nearly crying again when he looked back up at Taylor. "I hope you'll hang out with me... Let me love you," he finished in a whisper.

Taylor shot across the small space and threw his arms around Clark's neck. The powerful man sobbed as he clung to the boy. The two ladies on the sofa were crying with him as they watched them.

Taylor turned his face into Clark's neck. "I love you, Clark."

The man cradled Taylor's head while he kissed his face. "I love you, too, Taylor." He drew back enough to look into his eyes. "I'm sorry. I forgot that I'm not alone anymore." His hand came up to cup a small cheek. "I won't forget again."

"Promise?"

"I promise." Clark leaned over and kissed Taylor. "You're amazing."

The boy smiled before he pulled away from Clark, reached down and tugged him to his feet. "Come on. You have to shower. My brother needs us."

Clark chuckled and followed him up the stairs.

Half an hour later, a clean-shaven, Clark and Taylor came down the stairs. Clark had dressed casually in jeans and a pull over shirt, and he looked ten times better.

"Mommy, we're going to see Jon."

Lois smiled at the pair. She had to take a breath. They looked great together.

Clark let Taylor's hand go and walked over to his mother to pull Chloe into his arms. He closed his eyes, held her close, and took a deep breath, inhaling her scent. Everyone seemed to understand he needed to be alone with her when he drifted into the dining room.

Clark cradled her head and held her back to look at her. "I know you don't understand what's going on, but you can feel that things aren't right. I promise I'm going to do everything I can to change that." He kissed her forehead. "I love you, Chloe. For someone who claims to want to be your daddy I sure haven't been doing a very good job. That's going to change." He hugged her again before taking her back out to his mom.

"Ah, I guess we need to go." The women nodded. He turned to Taylor. "Ready?"

"Yep."

Clark stopped at the door to face Lois. "I'd like to see you later, if that's okay?"

"Sure. Why don't you and Taylor hang out the rest of the day? You can bring him home tonight, and we can talk."

"Okay." Clark smiled and followed Taylor out the door.

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A short time later Lana opened her door to Clark and Taylor. She snorted her indignation. "What do you want, Clark? He wants to stay with me."

"I know. I would just like to talk to him for a moment."

She rolled her eyes and pushed the door open. Jon was sitting on the couch staring at the television. He didn't even look up when everyone entered the room.

"Jon?" Clark sat down on the sofa. "Son, I wanted to tell you that I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you thought I made you come that first day. I'm sorry I didn't come see you when you were with Mommy. I'm sorry I didn't talk to you more while you were at the house. If you want to live with Mommy, it's okay. I won't try to talk you out of it. I hope you'll want to come see me again one day, but I won't make you. And Jon, I love you."

The little boy's head turned to look up at his father.

"I love you with all my heart." Jon nodded and turned back to the television. "I'll miss you."

"Me, too," Taylor added. Jon got off the couch, waved at Taylor, and left the room.

Clark let out a long breath. "Guess we can't do any more."

"He'll be okay. He just needs time."

Clark smiled sadly and stood. "Lana, tell him I'll call."  
She retrieved a card from the desk in the hall. "This is the number to the hotel we'll be staying at."

Clark took it, looked down the hall one last time, then left. Taylor took his hand as they walked out the door of the building. "I won't let go till you quit shaking," he told the man.

Clark looked down at him. Not being able to stand it, he pulled the boy into his arms. "How about I hold on to you till I quit shaking?"

Taylor wrapped his arms around Clark's neck and rested his head on a large shoulder as the pair made their way down the sidewalk. It was going to be a long three months.

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By the time Clark and Taylor made it to Lois', Taylor was fast asleep. She opened the door for Clark to take him up to his bed. Clark came back down to the den ten minutes later. Lois was sitting on the end of the sofa with her legs drawn under her. She patted the cushion next to her, and Clark eased down beside her.

Without a word she pulled him to her chest and held him while he let his feelings go.

Lois' hand played with Clark's hair where his head lay in her lap. They had been that way for over an hour. She felt he needed the comfort more than anything.

"I'm sorry."

Lois smiled. "I know. So am I."

"I love you."

She tilted his head so she could see his eyes. "I love you."

Clark pushed up so that he was face to face with Lois. "How do I live without Jon?"

"You don't. You call him every day. You send letters and cards, e-mail. And you tell him you love him."

"Taylor said the same thing."

"Yeah, well, Taylor's a smart boy."

Clark smiled at her. "Lois, I won't pressure you about them again. But I do intend to show you I meant what I said."

Lois ran her fingers through his hair. "And I won't ever say anything about Lana again. Clark, I didn't mean it."

"No. You're right. I should have never given in that night. Although Jon is the result. And I can't say I regret having him."

"I know that. That's why what I said was way out of line. I wouldn't take anything in the world for Jon. There has to be some good in Lana somewhere. She helped make him."

"I feel the same way about Dan. And I do understand about you wanting them to know each other."

"I understand you wanting to protect her." Lois wiped at a tear that had found its way down her cheek. "When Lana took Jon that day, I felt like my heart was being ripped from my chest. I wanted to protect him. I wanted to smack the blonde out of her hair."

Clark laughed softly. "So did I." He rubbed his hand up and down her side. "I'm so worried about him. He thinks I made him go. Lana probably told him terrible things. He has to be so confused and in so much pain. What do I do?"

"Love him, Clark. Do everything you can think of so he'll know you're still here and always will be."

"I will." Clark nestled his face in the crook of her shoulder. "Has Dan asked to see Chloe yet?"

"No." He leaned back to look at her. "I still haven't told him about her. I don't know if I want to," she finished in a whisper.

Clark swallowed and squeezed his eyes shut as he hugged her again. "Lois, I'll support whatever you want to do. But, honey, if you tell him, you and Dan have to do everything you can to be friends. Don't do to her what Lana and I have done to Jon."

Lois pulled him tighter against her. "I know," she said softly. Her hand came up to his face. "Clark, I want you to stay with me tonight."

He looked up at her. Everything he needed to know was said

in that exchange. Their lips met in a sweet, tender kiss. A few minutes later he stood and held out his hand to Lois, then they made their way upstairs in silence. Clark stepped into Taylor's room and placed a kiss on his head. Lois smiled as she continued to hold his hand when he stepped into Chloe's room to give her a kiss before he led Lois into her room. The door was closed and locked before he turned and started undressing her.

"Is it okay to do this? It hasn't been six weeks yet."

"Five and half," she told him as the heat in her body rose.

"Saw the doctor yesterday." She turned her head as Clark nibbled at her neck. "But, honey... we need to take precautions now."

Clark's head snapped up. "I'm doing it again. I'm so sorry." He was making assumptions where their intimacy was concerned.

"Stop." She placed a soft kiss on his lips.

"Mmm... I guess I should run to the store."

"No need. I bought something weeks ago."

Clark grinned as he leaned to kiss Lois again. "Were you planning on getting lucky?"

"Just hoping," she told him as he started to finish undressing her.

"Clark..."

"Shhh. No talking. Just feel."

Lois closed her eyes as he began to worship her the way only he could.

"God, Lois, you are so beautiful," he whispered as he drew away from a particularly mind blowing kiss a moment later. "I want you so much."

"I'm yours, honey." Lois reassured him with a warm hand on his cheek.

Clark's gaze was as intense as she had ever seen it as he began his glorious exploration once again.

"Wow!" The only word Lois could say when they lay staring up at the ceiling a while later.

"You can say that again." When each had gathered enough breath for coherent thought, Clark spoke. "Did you call me 'honey'?"

"Uhhh... I did." Her arm tightened around his waist where she had pulled close.

"I like it."

"I'm glad."

Clark kissed the top of Lois' head. "I need to go..." He motioned toward the bathroom. She giggled as he disappeared in the other room. When he came back, he pulled down the covers to get under. Lois scrambled in behind him and snuggled close, content to let all her thoughts rest for tonight. They would think about everything tomorrow.

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Clark ran a hand over his face to stop the annoying itch he felt. A second later he felt it again. This time he heard a muffled giggle. He opened one eye to see Taylor standing in front of him holding Chloe.

"Get up, sleepyhead. You'll be late for work."

Clark smiled and rolled to his side. "Oh really?"

"Uh huh." Taylor shifted the baby. When she saw Clark, her face lit up.

Clark held out his hands to take the baby. "Hey, Sunshine." He kissed her head. "How are you this morning?"

Taylor climbed onto the bed beside Clark. "Will you come eat lunch with us today?"

"If I can get away." Clark held the baby above his head, exciting giggles. "Listen to you." He pulled her down and kissed her cheek. "Where's Mom?"

"Downstairs. She got a call from some baseball player."

"Ah, Tony Bower. She's been trying to sign him for months."

"Yeah, that's him." Taylor looked down at Clark. "Did you have sex with my mom?"

Clark nearly choked. He drew the baby back to rest against

his chest and looked at the boy in total surprise. “Excuse me?”

“Well did you?”

Clark pushed up to a sitting position. “And just what do you know about sex?”

“I know that’s how babies are made.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Grandpa told me.”

“Did he tell you what sex is exactly?”

“No. But I think it’s when you kiss a lot and sleep in the same bed. Joey’s mom and dad do that, and they have six kids.”

Clark couldn’t contain his laughter. He leaned over and kissed Taylor’s head. “It’s a little something like that. I don’t know how to explain this to you. Let’s see. Sex is when two people share their bodies with each other.”

“Sort of like good touching and bad touching?”

“A little. But when they do this, they do touch each other. And it’s okay because they want the other person to do it.”

Taylor’s brow furrowed at Clark. “You mean you touched my mom? That’s... that’s gross.”

Clark smiled at him. “It’s okay, Taylor. She wanted me to.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“So sex is kissing and touching and sleeping in the same bed?”

“Well, all that and more, but I really don’t think you’re old enough to know about that now.”

“I think you’re right. I think all I need to know is that you love my mommy and would never hurt her.”

“Not a chance, big guy. Mommy means the world to me.”

“Good.” Taylor climbed from the bed and took Chloe. “You can stay over any time you want.”

“Thank you. And you and Chloe can stay with me any time you want.”

“Can we... stay tonight?”

“Absolutely.”

“Kay.” Taylor turned and started for the door. “Get a shower,” he called over his shoulder. He passed his mom in the hall. “Morning beautiful,” he told her without stopping.

Lois just stared after him until he was half way down the stairs. She made her way into the bedroom just in time to see Clark climb from the bed. She whistled her appreciation of his firm rear end before he could pull the cover around him.

He faced her with a huge smile and red cheeks. “Good morning.”

“Good morning.” She sauntered over for a brief kiss. “I just signed Bower.”

“That’s great, honey.” Clark pushed her hair off her face and leaned to kiss her neck. “We should celebrate.”

“Mmm. What did you have in mind?”

“I was thinking of dinner, a little dancing, and a flight to this little island I know of. We could make love under the waterfall.”

“Ooo, that sounds wonderful.”

Clark sucked gently on the skin of her neck before pulling back. “I should warn you that boy of ours has been asking questions.”

“What kind of questions?”

“He asked me if I had sex with his mother.”

Lois pulled away from Clark, upset with her son. “What?”

“Relax. We had a talk.”

“So what did you tell him?”

“I basically told him yes.”

“Clark!”

“Come on, Lois. I’d rather for him to hear what sex really is from me than some kid at school who doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“And from you it’s...”

“It’s mutual touching, kissing, being together.”

“Clark Kent!”

“What? Did you want me to tell him that his idea was right? We can’t have him thinking that every time we kiss or sleep together we’ll have a baby.”

“I know.” She sighed and flopped on the bed. “I just forget that Taylor is too smart for his own good.”

Clark sat down beside her, rubbing her back. “Taylor is brilliant, just like his mother. I promise I won’t give him the unabridged version until he’s at least eight and half.”

Lois pushed at him. He chuckled softly and drew her closer. “Last night was amazing.”

Clark ran his fingers through her hair. “It was.” He kissed her nose. “*You* are amazing. How is it you knew what I needed?”

“Because it’s what I needed,” she said with a grin.

“That’s not what I meant. Lois, the physical aspect of last night paled in comparison to how I felt inside.”

“You know, I think you just gave me a permanent ego boost.”

“And you filled me with life,” he whispered a second before his lips met hers.

“Hey! You can’t take a shower kissing my mom.”

The adults turned and laughed at a smiling boy. “Okay, okay,” Clark mumbled as he stood up, taking the sheet with him so he could stay covered. “Sheez, can’t a guy have any fun?”

“Watch it, Kent. That’s my mother you’re talking about.”

Clark chuckled and closed the bathroom door. Taylor and Lois shared a laugh as well.

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The next week found Clark making up for lost time as Superman. He saved an airplane from crashing, assisted in countless robberies, stopped two rapes, a dozen muggings, and even averted lava flow from a volcano on an island in the Pacific. Lois had felt using his powers would be therapeutic and take his mind off missing Jon for a while. She was right.

But missing Jon was a constant ache in everyone’s hearts. Clark called him at least three times a day before he left for California with Lana, then once a day after, even though most days Jon would only say hi and bye. He sent a card every morning and a letter every night along with about five e-mails a day. He was determined to show the boy that he would always love him no matter what.

Lois and Clark had once again put things into perspective as far as their budding relationship was concerned. Clark stayed nights with Lois and the children at her house, or they stayed with him at the brownstone. He spent a great deal of time with Taylor and Chloe. Long walks, even longer talks, and play became his saving grace. Reading bedtime stories was also popular. He answered a million and one questions with all the patience and honesty he possessed.

Clark had long ago given up on his dreams of Lois Lane, reconciling himself to a lonely future save for Jon and his mom. To actually be able to love the woman that he had longed for all these years was incredible. He often caught himself just staring at her. He was falling deeper by the day. That realization scared him as much as it thrilled him. He kept believing that it was all just a dream he would wake up from at some point. If he could work things out with Jon, his world would be complete.

Lois had to remind herself daily that she wasn’t dreaming. There was actually a man that cared about her and what she thought. Clark was unlike any man she had ever known. He was attentive, compassionate, and funny. She didn’t mind spending hours listening to him talk. And she certainly didn’t mind spending hours making love with him.

As much as he was wonderful, he was also special. Lois had begun to help Clark with his other persona without realizing she was doing it. She would make excuses for him when they were with the children. She found herself watching the news for his every move. Clark was nothing short of magical to Lois. He had

taken her breath away the first time he had taken her flying. They had hovered among the stars, Lois becoming intimately acquainted with the allusive superhero the world longed to know. Clark was sharing himself completely with Lois, and she was loving every second. Her only regret was the horrible pain she could feel in him over the loss of Jon. She hoped they would soon find their way back to each other again. It was her idea for him start a novel to help allay his anxieties.

Slowly the weeks drifted by. Clark spent hours with his new best friend. He and Lois were falling deeper in love with each day that passed. Friday night dates became a regular occurrence, and Saturday mornings found them playing with the kids.

Taylor was happier than he had ever been. The relationship he shared with Clark was what he had been missing for so long. The little boy had boasted a bright eyed smile as Clark took him to school his first day back. As promised, Clark coached his little league football team as summer slowly faded into fall. He missed Jon terribly, refusing to allow his room to be remodeled until Jon was there to help. He, too, wrote Jon daily and talked to him on the phone. His favorite pastime became sleeping in Jon's bed, so he would feel close to him. And without Jon, Chloe was always by his side. It was never far from his mind if Lois would call Dan, and he would come for her the way Lana had come for Jon. If that happened, the boy wasn't sure he would make it.

Lois took over as the big boss at the Lane Agency and was surprised with a small party from Clark and Taylor. She was thrilled with photos Clark had gotten Jimmy to take of the baby and Taylor. Lois surprised them all when she hung an empty frame on the wall next to the others and declared it would stay that way until one of Jon could fill it. Clark made love to her on her office desk later that day.

Before anyone knew it, nearly two months had drifted by. Jon still only said a couple of words to his father on the phone, Martha and Sam spent a great deal of time together, Lois and Clark were both contemplating taking their relationship to the next level, and Taylor and Chloe were growing by leaps and bounds.

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Lois looked up from her work when a knock came at her office door. "Come in." Hoping Clark had decided to surprise her today, the way he often did, she was almost shocked when Dan pushed the door open.

"Hey, sugar blossom," he said in his annoying little boy's voice.

"Dan. Whatcha' need? I'm a little busy here." She hadn't known how she would handle this day when it finally came—and she knew it would come eventually. Unable to bring herself to call him, she knew it was only a matter of time before he would show up. She almost felt relief because seeing him didn't bother her half as much as she had feared it would. She was certain her new relationship had a lot to do with that.

"Good to see you, too, Lois." Dan drifted into the room and sat down across from Lois. "Look, I've gotten a job offer in Atlanta. Garcia needs a promoter. It's too good to pass up." Lois put her pen down to look at him. "But I heard you'd had the baby."

Lois stared down at her desk for a long while before she answered Dan. "Yes."

"I, ah, hear you and Kent are pretty tight. Guess he's chosen to be a man and take care of his responsibilities."

Days of painful hours without Jon filled Lois' heart. His screaming and crying as he was ripped from her arms came back to her with a vengeance. So did the many wonderful memories that were filling her home now.

"Clark and I are raising Chloe just fine thank you." She couldn't quite bring herself to say what she was thinking.

"Chloe? That's a great name. Is that her?" His eyes shot to a

photo on the wall.

"Yes."

"She's beautiful. Of course, you and Kent make pretty babies."

"What?"

"Hell, Lois, look at Taylor. He's a good-looking kid."

Something Clark told her that Dan had said came back to her, and before she could stop herself, she asked, "Dan, did you tell Clark you thought Taylor was his?"

"I told him I knew it."

"When?"

"When I asked him to..." He realized what he was about to say and stopped to look at her. "Ah, before he left Metropolis after we were married."

"That's not what you were going to say. You were going to say after you asked him to leave. You *asked* him to leave. How dare you?!"

"I just thought it best. Damn, you were crazy over him, and I couldn't get Taylor to do anything with him here."

Lois' anger was barely being contained as she sat there listening to him. "And don't you think if Taylor was really his, he would have stayed no matter what? He's not like you. He would never walk out on his child. You know damn well Chloe is yours and so does he. But Clark's the one being the daddy you refuse to be." She shot to her feet, renewed anger surging to the surface. "I can't believe you cost him and Taylor so many years. You bastard!"

"Come on, Lois. Don't be so dramatic. You got what you wanted."

"Yeah. But look at the price I've paid— the price we've paid!"

"What price?" Dan rose as his voice did. "You have Kent and his bastard kids."

Lois drew back and slapped Dan as hard as she could. "Don't you ever..."

Dan put his hand on his face. Suddenly he was angry beyond belief. "Okay, Little Miss CEO. If you want to play hardball, we will. We'll see how tough you are when I haul your ass to court and take that kid away from you. If she's really mine, there's no way in hell I'm letting Kent raise her!"

"What judge in his right mind would give you custody?"

"Shouldn't be too hard. You're living with Kent. Judges frown upon unmarried couples, especially those with small kids. And I hear Kent has a kid that lives with his mother. Maybe I should get acquainted with her." He spun on his heel and stormed from the office.

Lois was left heaving breathlessly in anger. That's not what she needed, not now. She and Clark were building a strong relationship— had finally learned to cope with everything that happened with Jon. If Dan got hooked up with Lana, they could cause considerable misery. Why didn't she listen to Clark and just let him sign the papers to say he was Chloe's dad? They wouldn't have to worry about something Dan might or might not do. Lois had no doubt Dan would pursue this just to get back at her. He could care less about Chloe.

The ringing phone calmed Lois only slightly. She would wrap up her day and get home as fast as she could. She and Clark needed to talk... right after she gave him a piece of her mind.

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Lois was pacing the floor in her den when Clark finally made it to her place that night. She had left word with his mother that she needed to see him.

"Honey?" Clark called the time he stepped through the back door.

Lois stopped and glared at him. "Why didn't you tell me he asked you to leave?"

"Who?"

“Dan! He told me, Clark. He told me he asked you to leave before.”

Clark sighed and dropped his head. “I’m sorry. I thought I was doing you and Taylor a favor.”

“By lying to us?! You said you couldn’t pass up that job offer.”

“I did get a job in LA,” he told her as he met her eyes again. “Only I called them. I did lie about that.”

“Why?! Why did you leave us?!”

“Because I couldn’t take it anymore. Seeing you with Dan. Seeing him with Taylor. It was killing me. I had to leave. If I’d stayed, I would have done something I would have regretted.”

“But you left us!” Silent tears rolled down her cheeks as she yelled at him. She couldn’t believe how much this hurt.

“I know. And I’ve paid for it every day of my life since.”

Lois clutched her body as she paced the room. She knew he had been hurt, but that still didn’t dampen her anger any. And what about Dan? Now she had to tell him what he had said. She finally turned back to him. “He saw pictures of the baby.”

Clark could feel the tightening in his chest. “Does he want to see her?”

“Well, see, here’s the thing. He started going on about what beautiful babies we make, and then he told me about asking you to leave. When he got to the part where he called Taylor and Chloe your bastards…”

“What?!”

“I slapped him.”

Clark couldn’t suppress the small smile that played across his lips. “Good for you.”

“Not good. Now he’s pissed and says he’s going to file for custody just to get back at me. Said he’d make sure the judge knew you and I lived together.”

“We don’t live together, not technically.”

“Dan could care less. One night to him is major commitment.” She stopped pacing and thrust her hand through her hair. “He plans to introduce himself to Lana.”

“Wouldn’t that be a blast?”

“Yeah.”

Clark moved forward to reach out to touch her arm gently. “Lois, no matter what happens, I love you, and I’m here. I’m not going anywhere, and he’s not getting Chloe.”

“Why didn’t I just let you sign the papers?”

“Shh…” Clark lifted a hand to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. “We’ll get through this. If I can live without Jon, we can live *with* Dan.”

“You told him?”

Lois and Clark turned to see Taylor standing in the doorway. Lois slowly faced the boy. “Taylor, I didn’t call him. He came to see me. One thing led to another…”

“And he’s going to try to take Chloe?”

“We won’t let that happen, honey.”

“The same way we didn’t let Lana take Jon?”

“Taylor, that’s not fair.”

“Don’t tell me what’s fair! You could have said yes when Clark wanted to sign the papers! He couldn’t take her if you’d said yes!”

“Taylor! I don’t think that tone’s called for. You apologize to your mother,” Clark told him with a forceful tone and gave him a stern glare.

Taylor looked up at Clark with tear filled eyes. “If he takes her, I’ll never forgive you.” His eyes shifted to his mother. “Either of you.”

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Clark couldn’t believe his ears. He didn’t think it was possible for the boy to be this way. Yet, he didn’t let his words hurt him the way he had Jon’s. He had learned a lot since that day. Clark reached down to grasp Taylor’s arm. “I think you need

to go to your room. I’m extremely disappointed in you.”

Taylor jerked from Clark. “And I know why Jon hates you,” he spat and ran away.

The painful words Jon had yelled at Clark were just repeated again in the den in Clark’s mind. Clark took several deep breaths, trying to calm himself. Taylor’s words hang in the air. ‘I hate you!’ was not the exact words he had said, but they hurt just as badly. He might have learned a lot in the past few months but that hurt like hell. Lois’ hand on his face brought him back around.

“Shhh, honey, he didn’t mean it.” She was kissing his face.

Clark clung to Lois tightly. He couldn’t find any words for how he was feeling. His happy family was suddenly not so happy or as full as it had once been. And he wasn’t sure how to put it all back together again.

The next morning Clark found Taylor sitting in the rocking chair next to Chloe’s crib. He wouldn’t make the same mistakes he had made with Jon. He wouldn’t allow such a gap to come between them. He eased down to his knees beside the boy.

“Taylor.”

“He’s gonna take her away,” the boy said.

“What?”

“Dan… he’ll take her away and we won’t ever see her again.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I just know.” He rose and climbed into her crib and pulled Chloe to him. “I’ve lost my brother, and soon I’ll lose my sister.” The tears fell from his eyes as he clung to the baby. “I don’t want to go to school today.”

Clark rose and reached down to smooth his hair. “Okay. How about I stay home with you? Me and you and Chloe can hang out.”

The boy nodded and rolled over away from Clark. The man took a deep breath and left him alone. At least the little guy was still talking to him.

He found Lois slipping into her jacket to leave. “Will you take Taylor to school and Chloe to your mom’s?”

“They’re not going today.”

“What?”

“I’m gonna hang out here with them today. He feels really bad.”

Lois stopped her dressing to look at Clark. “Should I stay?”

“No. You go on.” He held her jacket for her to put her other arm in. “We’ll be okay.”

Lois kissed him softly. “What would we do without you?”

“And I without you… Now, go!”

She smiled while he held the door open for her to leave. Clark called Perry and went back upstairs to see if he could help his son understand everything that was happening, even though he didn’t understand it himself.

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Taylor had blown Clark away with his tearful apology for yelling at him. He promised never to hurt anyone that way again. The boy took Clark’s breath away for the second time when he told the man he knew Clark was Superman. After a long, careful discussion, the boys took Chloe to Martha and went flying.

Clark flew Taylor to a small island to spend the day talking. The bond created that day was one that was stronger than even being bound by blood could create. When Lois arrived home, there was a hot supper and two slightly happier guys waiting for her.

Taylor settled between the grown-ups to watch television. That night they all shared his mother’s bed. The comfort was essential for the trials that lay ahead.

\*\*\*

“Ms. Lane, there’s a process server here to see you,” Debbie told Lois over her intercom just two days later.

“I’m coming.” Lois walked the distance to the lobby. A young man greeted her and handed over an official envelope. Her

fears had been realized in record time. Dan had filed to have Chloe's paternity proven. The fight had begun.

Lois allowed her anger to surface, and she directed it at Clark. They had a huge fight. Clark ended up taking Taylor home with him, but Lois refused to let him take Chloe. In a few days, Lois would be forced to take her daughter to a lab to prove her father was really her father. How had she been so blind?

Clark and Taylor rented videos and took take-out back to Clark's place. They piled up in Clark's bed and shut the world away for the rest of the day.

Clark rolled over the next morning expecting to find Taylor. Instead he found Lois. She was staring at him from her side of the bed.

He didn't say a word, just lay there looking back at her. They stayed that way for nearly ten minutes before Clark closed the distance between them and kissed her. Lois moaned and thrust her tongue into Clark's mouth. Their encounter was immediately passionate and out of control.

In their afterglow they lay on their sides, once again looking at one another. "I'm sorry, Clark," Lois told him.

"So am I." His hand gripped her hip. "We seem to spend a lot of time fighting, don't we?"

Lois wiped a tear as it rolled down the side of her face. "I don't want to fight any more. Can't we talk? Can't we be adults?"

"Oh, honey." He kissed her softly. "I forget I'm not alone. I told Taylor I wouldn't do that." He scooted closer and leaned over her. "Lois, I promise from now on to try harder to hold up my end of this relationship."

She lifted her hand to place it on his face. "Why do you want all of this?"

Clark drew back and reached for the picture that sat on his nightstand. It was a picture of all of them taken at the hospital right after Chloe was born. "This... this is why I want this. Look at them, Lois. Look at the people in the picture. They are so happy. The man is in heaven."

She glanced at the photo. "I just want our family together, without having to worry about someone tearing us apart."

"Soon, baby." He kissed her nose. "Soon we'll be together. We'll take a vacation, just the four of us."

"Five," she reminded him. "We can't leave Jon out."

He smiled at her. "No, we can't."

"Promise?" She echoed the boys' favorite question.

"I promise." Clark sealed his declaration with a kiss.

A while later they ventured from the bed and made it to work, although both were thinking of the tests to come.

A small boy's mind was on those same tests as well as he left for school.

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"Ms. Lane, Taylor's teacher is on line two," came Debbie's voice over the intercom on Lois' phone later that day.

"Mrs. Murphy? Is something wrong?" she asked the time she picked up.

"I'm afraid so, Ms. Lane. Taylor is missing."

"What?!" Lois shot to her feet. "What do you mean, he's missing?"

"We went out for recess, but Taylor didn't come back in."

"Weren't you watching? How could this happen?"

"Ms. Lane, there was three of us covering the grounds. How he got out, I don't know."

Now wasn't the time to rebuke his teacher. She had to find her son. "Look, I'm on my way."

"Okay."

Lois slammed the phone down and raced out of the office. "Daddy!"

"What?" He was standing in the lobby when she made it there. He had come in today to do some paperwork.

"Taylor's missing from his school."

"What?!"

"I'll tell you on the way." Sam ran after Lois as they left the building.

\*\*\*

Clark was already waiting on Lois and Sam when they made it to the school. She had called him on the way and didn't even have to finish her sentence before he was airborne.

"Clark!" She spotted him in the small crowd outside the school. He turned and caught her as she launched herself into his arms. "I'm so glad you're here."

"I wouldn't be anywhere else." He kissed her neck, then drew back. "They wouldn't let me in, so I don't know what's going on."

Lois grabbed his hand and pushed through the bodies until an officer stopped her. "I'm Lois Lane. My son's the one missing."

"You can go through, but they have to stay." He motioned to Clark and Sam.

"That's his grandfather," she said with a wave at Sam, then glanced at Clark. In a split second she made a decision she wouldn't be able to go back on. "And this is his father."

Clark's eyes widened, but he nodded his agreement at the officer. The young man stepped aside and let them pass. Twenty minutes later, they were pacing the floor with no more information than they had had earlier.

Detective David Aston told them to go home and wait to see if he showed up there. Lois was almost hysterical by the time she got to Clark's brownstone. Sam and Martha had agreed to go to her house in case he showed up there. Taylor knew his address and how to get home from various points around the city, including school. And recently he had learned how to get to Clark's place. But without much to go on, they didn't know whether he had been kidnapped or had just run off. And if he had run off, why?

\*\*\*

Taylor pushed the button to the intercom outside the apartment building that Dan Scardino lived in. He had thought of little else but what could happen if Dan found out he was Chloe's father. He had lost his brother. He had to keep from losing his sister as well.

"Yeah?"

"Dan?"

"Who's this?"

"It's Taylor Lane. I'd like to talk to you."

The buzzer on the door sounded, and the boy made his way up to the apartment he had been to a few times. Dan opened the door almost immediately.

"Hey. Does your mother know you're here?"

"No. And I don't want her to know until we talk."

Dan's brows rose at the little man beneath him as he held the door open for the boy to enter. Taylor stopped a couple steps inside the door. "What can I do for you?"

"You can leave my sister alone."

Dan looked at the boy in surprise. "And just what business is it of yours?"

"It's my business because I'm her brother. It's my job to protect her. I want you to leave her alone."

"Look, kid, all I want is to prove the baby's Clark's."

"And what if she's not? You'll take her from us. You said you would. I heard Mom say you would. You told her you'd take her just to get back at Mom."

"I don't want her, Taylor. I told your mom that because I was mad." Dan sighed and kneeled in front of the boy. "I don't want to be anyone's father. My career's too demanding. I wouldn't get to see Chloe even if she were mine. Clark would be doing me a favor by filling my shoes."

Taylor stared at Dan a moment, then pulled his backpack from his back. He took out a pencil and paper. "Write that down."

“What?”

“Write down what you said. You write that you want Clark to be Chloe’s daddy.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because my mommy thinks it would be wrong if she didn’t give you a chance to be a father. You write down that you don’t want to be so Clark can. He wants to.” The boy shook the paper at Dan. “You owe Chloe that much,” he whispered.

Dan glanced at the paper then back up at the fiery little eyes before him. “Maybe I was wrong about you.” He stood and reached for Taylor’s hand. “Why don’t I take you home and tell them in person?”

“You mean it?”

“I mean it.”

Taylor took his hand and followed Dan out the door and into the elevator. He looked up at Dan. “Maybe I was wrong about you, too.”

Dan smiled and squeezed the smaller hand in his.

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“Where the hell is he?!” Lois flopped down onto the sofa in frustration. Taylor had been missing for nearly two hours.

Clark sat down beside her to rub her back. He couldn’t offer very much comfort because he felt as helpless as she did. He had wanted to look for him from the air, but Lois wouldn’t let him. She had insisted she needed him with her.

“I wish Jon were here,” Lois said softly. “He’d let me hold him, so I’d feel better.”

Clark’s eyes misted over when he heard her. He pulled Lois into his body just before the door opened. They looked up to see Taylor and Dan.

“Taylor!” Lois ran to take her son into her arms. She clutched him to her body as more tears fell.

“I’m sorry, Mommy. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to make you worry.”

Lois drew back to look at him. “Why would you scare me like that?”

“I think maybe I can explain.” Everyone’s attention turned to the other man in the room. “He came to see me.”

“What?”

“He wanted to ask me to leave Chloe alone.”

Lois rose and shifted Taylor against her body. Clark had come to stand next to them.

Dan glanced down at Taylor. “I, ah, I underestimated him. He’s already more of a man than I’ll ever be.” His eyes lifted to Lois. “Chloe’s mine isn’t she?”

“Yes.”

Dan smiled wistfully and glanced over at Clark. “I guess I knew it. I’ve just always been so jealous of Kent. He could make your eyes dance the way I never could. I know what I said about not believing in love. It’s just…” He sighed and let the sentence trail off without finishing it. “I guess you and Kent here do.” He smiled over at Clark. “You’re one lucky son of a…”

Clark’s hand squeezed Taylor’s shoulder.

“Sorry,” Dan told him when he saw the gesture. “Lois, Taylor’s right. I wouldn’t be a very good father. Truth is, I don’t want to be anyone’s father. If Kent is offering, take him up on it. I’ll even make it easier for you. I’ll sign my rights away, if I need to.”

“What?”

Dan smiled and reached out to touch Taylor’s face. “This little guy had to show me how to be a man. Chloe is better off without me.” He faced Clark and his smile faded. “All I ask is that you don’t change your mind when she starts high school. I know what a tough time my folks had with me.”

“Dan, to me Chloe *is* mine.”

“I know.” Dan took a deep breath. “I know this isn’t what you wanted to hear, Lois.”

Lois blinked several times, trying to comprehend what was happening. “I, ah, actually I think it’s exactly what I wanted to hear.”

“Yeah.” Dan looked around the room. “Would it… would it be okay if I saw her? I’d like to say good-bye.”

Lois glanced up at Clark. He nodded and left the room. Dan looked back up when Clark re-entered with Chloe. Clark kissed her head before extending her to Dan.

“Wow. Look at you.” Dan smoothed his hand over her head as she stared at him. “One day you’ll know I did the best thing I could do. Clark will be the daddy I never could.” He looked at the baby for several moments before handing her back over to Clark. “Take care of her,” he said quietly.

“With my life,” Clark assured him.

Dan nodded and smiled. “You were born to be these kids’ daddy. Why else would you love them the way you do?” Dan didn’t wait for Clark to answer. He turned and held out his hand to Taylor. “Thank you.”

The boy took the man’s hand. “Thank you. Now I know what Mom saw in you.”

Dan kneeled down so he was looking in the child’s eyes. “And I know what Clark sees in you.” The man’s large hand came up to ruffle the boy’s hair before he stood. “I won’t bother you again, Lois, any of you.” He turned to leave but stopped at the door. “Hey,” he started at Clark. “Hurry up and marry this woman. They don’t make ‘em like her any more either.” Dan smiled and was gone.

Everyone in the room stood in silence after the door closed. Finally Clark smiled down at Chloe.

“Guess you’re stuck with me, kid.”

Lois turned Taylor around to face her. “As much as I am pleased with things right now, I’m also very angry with you.”

“I know. And I promise I won’t do anything like this again. But, Mom, I had to try to stop him. If he’d taken Chloe…” Taylor’s eyes were full of tears. “I couldn’t lose her, too.”

Lois’ anger melted instantly. She pulled Taylor into her arms. “Nobody’s taking her anywhere…” She pushed back to see his face. “Except maybe down to the Department of Vital Records. We need to fill out what’s needed for Clark to become Chloe’s legal father. It may take a little longer to get her birth certificate, but the end result will be the same.”

Taylor’s eyes lit up. “I’ll go pack her diaper bag.”

Clark chuckled as the boy rushed past him. “Think he’s happy?”

Lois rose and took the baby. “You should know.”

“I do… Thank you very much. Happy doesn’t begin to describe what I feel… what we feel. It’s incredible.” He smiled brightly as Lois changed the baby’s diaper.

“Clark, there’s no going back once we do this. Please tell me now if this is what you want.”

He went to ease down beside her. When she was done with the baby, he looked over at her. “Lois, is this what *you* want? I meant what I told Dan. To me Chloe’s already mine. A piece paper won’t make a difference in how I feel. Yes, I will like the fact that she’ll be mine legally. I also know it’ll… solidify things between us. We’ll be connected from now on. If this is not what you want, then we won’t do it.”

Taylor had heard the exchange. He stood, with his breath held, and waited for his mother’s answer.

Lois looked down at Chloe before lifting her eyes to Clark. “I made a mistake with you once. I won’t do it again.” She handed the baby to Clark. “Dan’s right. We do have beautiful babies.”

Clark smiled as he gazed down at Chloe. “And maybe one day we’ll see if we *make* beautiful babies,” he mumbled.

“I heard that,” Lois told him as she stood.

“I thought I was the only one with super hearing.”

Taylor ran to open the door before Lois could. “Let’s go.”

Lois smiled and waited patiently for Clark and Chloe to join them. Twenty minutes later, Clark was signing the paperwork to make his daughter legally his.

\*\*\*

“Hey, you two,” Lois told her two favorite guys. They were stretched out on the sofa, feet propped on the coffee table, watching the football game on television.

“Hey,” they answered in unison without looking at her.

She and Martha had just finished cleaning up Sunday dinner. They had celebrated Clark becoming Chloe’s daddy. Lois thought it funny how a simple piece of paper could offer so much satisfaction. He hadn’t blinked an eye when the clerk at Vital Records handed him the paperwork. He was already holding the pen. And it was Clark who immediately forked out the extra money to have Chloe’s birth certificate printed right then. He had even made Lois a copy— a *copy*— because he wouldn’t let the original out of his possession. He had once again told her that the paper was irrelevant— he loved Chloe the same— but she could tell he liked reading her name. Chloe Robin Kent. After the pain she had caused this man, she was thrilled to see his eyes dance with happiness.

Lois snuggled up to Clark, who immediately put an arm around her. Their game was interrupted when the phone rang.

“I got it,” Taylor said as he jumped over the back of the couch. “Hello?”

“Daddy?” came the small voice on the other end of the line.

“Jon!”

Lois and Clark sat straight up and turned to face the boy.

“Taywer, tell my daddy I wanna come home.”

“Okay.” He held the phone out to Clark. “He wants to come home.”

Clark took the receiver. “Jon?”

“Daddy.” The boy was crying now.

“Son, what’s wrong?”

“I wanna come home,” he said through his tears.

“Where are you? I’ll come get you right away.”

Anything Jon was going to say was interrupted when a man’s voice came on the line. “Who the hell is this?”

“This is Jon’s father. Who the hell is this?”

Clark could hear the man yell at Jon in the background. “What did you tell him?!”

“Look, my son wants to come home. Just tell me where you’re at.”

“Kent, this is none of your business.”

“The hell it’s not. Jon’s my son.”

There was a long silence before the man spoke again. “We’re in Metropolis. Come get the kid.”

Clark gave Taylor the phone and turned to put his shoes on.

“Clark?” Lois questioned.

“Something’s wrong. Jon was crying and that bastard was yelling at him.”

“Oh, Jon,” she gasped.

“Jon’s coming home. It won’t be long before he’ll be back to his old self again,” Taylor told them.

Lois smiled hopefully. Truth was she didn’t know if Jon was going to be okay. He had only talked to her twice since he had been gone. And then it was only a few words. And this... whatever this was.

Clark stood up after he had slipped his shoes on. “I won’t be long... I hope.” He kissed Lois softly.

“Can I go?” Taylor asked.

“Maybe you should stay,” Lois told him.

“No, no. He can go.” Taylor ran ahead of Clark to the door.

“We’ll hurry, honey.” Clark shoved Taylor’s coat into his hands as he stepped through the door.

“Yeah, honey. We’ll hurry.” Taylor echoed as he followed.

Clark chuckled softly as they hurried down the stairs. Lois

slumped back against the sofa. It wouldn’t be long before they would know just how Jon had fared the past few months.

\*\*\*

Clark and Taylor went to the apartment Lana had rented uptown in the neighborhood known as the ‘The Zone’. As soon as they stepped off the elevator, he could hear Jon’s cries without his super hearing. He hurried to the door and pounded loudly.

“Lana!” What sounded like flesh meeting flesh brought Clark through the door with a shove. Eric was standing over Lana where she lay on the floor. Her face was covered with blood. She had obviously received more than her fair share of Eric’s outbursts.

Eric twirled around to glare at Clark. “Get the hell out of here, Kent. This doesn’t concern you.”

Clark’s gaze went from Eric to Lana, then fell on a crying Jon, who was standing in the hall watching everything that was going on. Clark rushed over and took the boy up into his arms.

“Shhh... Daddy’s here.”

Lana had managed to get herself up off the floor, wiping her blood and tear stained face.

“What’s going on, Lana?” Clark asked.

“None of your business,” Eric shot at him.

“It is my business when it involves my son.”

“This is between me and Lana.”

“But my son was watching you hit his mother!”

Lana stepped between the men, who had started a showdown. “It’s really okay, Clark.”

“No it’s not. Look at you. Lana, he *hit* you.”

“No, no. He just...”

“Just what? Got your attention loudly?”

“Clark, please. Just let it go.”

“Lana, Jon saw him hit you.” Lana turned her head away from him. Eric had obviously let her know that if she said too much here, she would get worse later. “I don’t know what’s going on. I guess it shouldn’t matter as long as you leave Jon out of it. But that’s not the case.”

“Just take the kid and get out!” Eric boomed as he went to hold the door open for Clark.

With Jon tucked against him, Clark walked slowly to the door. He stopped and looked back at Lana. “You know this is very wrong. He has no right to hit you. And neither of you have the right to do this in front of Jon. It won’t happen again.” Clark put a hand on Taylor’s shoulder. “Come on, son,” he said as they left the couple standing in silence.

“Will he be okay?” Taylor asked Clark as they exited the elevator on the bottom floor.

“I hope so, Taylor.”

Once they made it to the car, Clark opened the back door to put Jon in his booster seat. Taylor jumped in ahead of him. “I’ll hold him.”

Clark carefully sat the boy in the bigger boy’s lap. Taylor pulled him close to his body.

“It’s okay, Jon. Nobody’s gonna hurt you now. I won’t let them.”

“He hit my mommy,” Jon whispered.

“I know.” Taylor pushed Jon’s hair out of his eyes. “Daddy’ll take care of it. He’s Superman.”

Jon’s eyes widened as he looked at Taylor. “He told you?”

“No. I just knew. And he won’t let that man hurt your mommy again.”

Jon closed his eyes tightly. “I want Wois.”

“Okay.” Taylor looked back up at Clark. The man nodded and ran around to get in the Jeep, so he could take his boys home.

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Lois shot to her feet when the door to the brownstone opened. Clark was holding Jon. He sat up to see the anxious woman before him. He wiggled to the floor and ran to her. She caught

him immediately.

“What happened?” she asked softly.

“I’ll tell you later.”

Lois nodded and turned to carry Jon upstairs for a bath. He clung to her the rest of the evening, not allowing her to get more than a few feet from him. She managed to get him to eat a little something, but the only thing he would say was, ‘Don’t wet me go’. Lois constantly reassured him she wouldn’t do that. She sang to him while they sat in the rocking chair in his room. When the boy was finally settled and asleep, she tucked him next to Taylor.

The older boy wrapped an arm around him and pulled him close. “I’m glad he’s home, Mommy.”

“Me, too, Taylor. Me, too.” She kissed the boys’ heads, eased from the room, and went to find Clark. He was sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee.

“Did he go to sleep?”

“Finally.” Lois poured herself some coffee and joined Clark at the table. “He was pretty upset. What happened, Clark?”

“When I got off the elevator this afternoon on the floor where Lana lives, I heard Jon screaming. I ran to the door and shoved it open when I heard the sound of skin making contact with skin. Lana was on the floor. Apparently Eric had hit her... several times. Her lip was bleeding, and one of her eyes was swollen.”

“Oh, God. Jon saw that?”

“Yeah. He was standing in the hall.”

“How could she let that happen? Not just letting Jon see it, but Eric hitting her period?”

“I know. And him... How can a man strike a woman?”

Lois reached out and put her hand on Clark’s arm. “Clark, do you think he hits Jon?”

“I don’t know. I would hope Jon will tell me... or you, but I just don’t know. Lana acted like this was nothing new. What if he does, Lois? What do I do? If I leave him there, I wouldn’t be any better than Eric is.”

“I know. I hate to say it, but you have to talk to Lana. If Jon means anything to her at all, she’ll be honest about this.”

“And if she won’t talk to me?”

“Then you may have to call Constance.”

“But if I can’t prove anything it won’t do any good.”

Lois drew a breath and pushed up from the table. “Then you’ll have to do what you do best.”

“Investigate?”

“Yes. We’ll just have to prove Eric LaLonde is a danger to Jon if he stays in the home with him.”

Clark drew a face, shrugging his shoulders. “I don’t like it.”

Lois walked over and lifted his face to hers. “It’s better than leaving Jon to be possibly scarred for life.”

Clark sighed and wrapped his arms around Lois’ waist. “I’m glad I have you.”

“Always.” She kissed the top of his head and hugged him close. They both knew they could be in for one heck of a ride, but it was one they would make together.

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Clark decided not to question Jon about what happened when he was at Lana’s. She was the adult and the one that should answer any inquiries about the well-being of their son. He waited until Eric left the apartment the next morning before he went to talk to Lana.

Lana opened the door, very surprised to see Clark. “Ah, is something wrong? Is Jon okay?”

Clark noticed her left eye was black and nearly swollen shut. Her bottom lip displayed a nasty gash, and she was paler than Clark could ever remember seeing her.

“You tell me.”

“Excuse me?”

“You tell me. Is Jon okay? Has he seen this before? Has he received any of it?”

Lana heaved a breath and held the door open wider for Clark to come in. She knew they would end up fussing and didn’t want the whole building to hear it. Clark entered and crossed his arms over his chest, waiting for Lana to answer.

“Clark, I wouldn’t let Eric hit Jon.”

“I don’t know that, Lana. You let him hit you while Jon watched. That’s just as bad.”

Lana turned from Clark. She couldn’t look him in the eyes because the truth was she didn’t know if Eric had hit Jon. Her photo shoots kept her working to all hours, and often Jon was sent to the hotel with Eric. Jon never acted as if he was being mistreated, but she couldn’t say for sure. Jon was withdrawn and quiet. If fact, Lana had started to worry about him.

“Lana, why do you let him treat you like this?”

“It’s not as bad as it seems.”

“Really? It seems like he busted your lip and blackened your eye. Damn, Lana, you don’t deserve that. And what about your modeling? You can’t work with your face in this kind of shape?”

“What do you care?”

“I care because you’re Jon’s mother. I’ll always care.” He waved his hand at her face. “This can stop you from any modeling. How will you take care of Jon if you can’t work?”

“Eric takes care of us.”

“I know. I saw for myself last night.”

“He usually doesn’t hit me.”

“Usually? Just what does he do?”

“Look, this is the first time he’s hit me.” And it was. Eric was known for his angry outbursts, but he usually refrained from striking Lana. Bruises were costly in her line of work. “We’ve fought, but he usually just yells a lot. Honestly, he’s really good to me.”

Clark stared at her. She was covering for the snake, and it was making him angry. “And Jon? Does he yell at Jon?” When Lana walked away from Clark, he saw red. “Dammit, Lana, you have a lot of nerve. When I wanted to see my son, you accused me of being an unfit father. Yet, you allow some jerk to treat him just any way he wants to.”

Lana whirled back around to look at Clark. “Don’t you come in here and start with me. You live with your lover.”

“So do you! But there’s a huge difference between Eric and Lois. Lois loves Jon like he was hers. She doesn’t yell at him or threaten to hit him. And she certainly doesn’t have to worry about me hitting her in front of him. And not that it’s any of your business, but we don’t live together. Although the thought has more appeal every day.”

“And I suppose you’re perfect. You and Miss Lane never fuss or argue?”

“Of course we have disagreements, but Lois and I have never raised our voices in front of Jon or any of the children. And we won’t.”

“Clark, I won’t get into this with you. My life is my own. If I want to live with Eric, I will.”

“But you won’t continue to expose my son to your little wars.”

Lana stared him down. Who was he to tell her what to do with her child? He may be Jon’s father, but the boy was still hers. “Don’t threaten me.”

“It’s not a threat. It’s a fact.”

“And just what does that mean?”

“It means you and Eric will not argue in front of Jon any more. And he’ll damn sure never see you get hit again.”

“What are you going to do? Take him away from me?” Clark glared at her, his eyes very intense. “You would? You would take your son away from his own mother?”

Clark calmed some then. How was it that Lana could always cool his anger like that? “Lana, I don’t want to take Jon away from you. I just don’t want him to see what he saw last night

again. He's too young to witness your fights."

"And you're in no position to tell me how to live my life."

"I'm not trying to. My only concern here is Jon. You can't possibly want Eric to whip your butt in front of your son."

"He didn't 'whip my butt'. He was angry."

"No man should ever get that angry."

Lana had had enough. What she did and with whom she did it was her business. "This discussion is over. I take care of Jon, and that's all you need to know!" She yanked the door open for Clark.

Clark was livid. She had denied being hit before, but something in the way she talked told him that he didn't know half of what was going on in this house. He stormed past her, not bothering to say another word. He didn't understand Lana. He meant it when he told her she wouldn't have another chance for their son to witness more arguments. He would do whatever it took to stop that from happening.

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Before Clark could contact Constance to see if he could get a protective order to keep Jon, Superman was needed. He hated to go, but people would die if he didn't. Besides, an article for the *Planet* couldn't hurt either. He had missed a lot of time at work lately and needed to smooth things over with Perry. Jon was safe with Lois right now so he figured he had a little time.

Lois hadn't known she could feel so happy yet so sad at the same time. She was happy Jon was home but felt bad for the things he had suffered through.

She was about to go check on him when Jon came into the kitchen shortly after Clark left.

"Hi," Lois told him when she saw him standing in the doorway.

"Did you want me to go that day?" The small boy's words were spoken clear enough for anyone to understand.

"Oh, Jon, no." Lois was almost in tears. "The last thing I wanted was to make you go. But... she had papers. The police had to do what those papers said."

"Do you wove me?"

"Oh honey. I love you so much." Lois clutched her chest.

"You wove me as much as you wove Taywer?"

Lois thought about that a moment. "If someone asked me how many children I have, I'd say three: Taylor, Chloe... and Jon." She moved closer. "I have two wonderful sons." Her hand came up to caress his face. "As far as I'm concerned, you *are* my son."

Jon held out his hands for Lois to take him and she didn't disappoint. She pulled him up into her arms and held him as if breaking the connection would result in catastrophe.

"I wanna stay wiv you," Jon whispered.

Lois pulled back to look at him. "What?"

"I wanna stay wiv you."

"Honey, don't you want to stay here with your dad?"

He hugged her again. "I wanna to stay wiv you. Please." He leaned back to look at her. "You said you gonna make me a room at your house."

"And we will... But, honey, your daddy has missed you."

Jon looked at her. "You let me stay if Daddy comes, too?"

Lois was about to say something else, but a thought popped into her head. "How would you like to ask Daddy if he wants to come live with me?" Why not? They spent most nights together anyway. They could save a ton of money in just one house. And no one would have to leave at night.

"Really? We wive wiv you and Taywer and Choe?"

"I think I'd love for my boys to come live with me."

"But Nana? We can't weave Nana."

"No we can't. We can remodel the apartment above the garage. Think she'll like it?"

"Can we make her room to paint? She wikes to paint."

"We can." Lois took a seat and settled Jon on her lap. "But

Jon, I need to ask you something." He waited for her to speak.

"When you were at your mom's, did Eric hit you?"

"No. He yelled a lot. I wocked my door."

"Has he hit Mom before?"

"No. You mad at me?"

"Why would I be mad?"

"I called."

"No, honey. I'm very glad you called." She leaned over and kissed his forehead.

Jon looked up at Lois with wide eyes. "Wois, Eric hurt Mommy."

"I know, honey. I know you don't want him to hurt your mom. What he did was wrong. Men and women should never hit each other. Never."

"That why you wove my daddy?"

"That and more." Lois ran a hand through Jon's hair. "Your daddy is the most wonderful man alive. He's the best daddy, and he's patient and kind."

"You know he's super?"

"Yes, Jon. And I think that's incredible."

Jon looked down at his lap. "Daddy's mad at me."

"Why? Because you told him you hate him?"

Jon nodded sadly. He looked back up at Lois with tears in his eyes. "I don't hate my daddy."

"Oh honey, he knows."

"Really?"

"Mmm huh. He knows you were hurting and scared. He knows you didn't mean it."

Before anyone could speak, Taylor stepped up and placed his hands on Jon's shoulders. "I told him that, too," he told the younger boy softly. He had been listening from the doorway. Jon turned to Taylor with wide eyes. "You know what he did?" Jon shook his head. "He took the day off work, and we spent it together."

Jon turned back to Lois. "He never do that wiv me."

"Oh, Jon." Lois reached out to tuck his hair behind his ear. "I think Daddy was so hurt at the time he didn't know what to do. He knows now. He loves you with all his heart. I'm sure if you asked him, he'd take the day off or the week. He just wants to love you and be with you."

Jon's little lip quivered. "I'm not a big boy anymore."

"Your dad will always be proud of you," Taylor told him.

"Nuh uh. I suck my thumb and potty in my pants."

"But you're home now, and I'll help remind you not to suck your thumb and to go potty."

Jon's eyes brightened a bit as he looked at Taylor. "You still my brudder?"

"Of course. And brothers look out for each other."

Jon looked back at Lois. "I go put on big boy pants."

"Okay. I'll help."

"No way, Mom," Taylor told her. "We men don't need help." He smiled and pulled Jon to the floor. He threw an arm around the smaller boy's shoulder, and they left the room.

Lois could hear their happy chatter. Her heart was full. She thought back to something Dan had told Clark. He said Clark was born to love her kids. Now she knew she had been born to love Jon. And she would... with every fiber in her being.

Now if she could convince Clark that moving in with her was a good idea...

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Jon was disappointed that Taylor had to go to school but was happy to get to spend time with Lois by himself. Lois had even asked Martha to keep Chloe so she and the small boy could spend the day alone.

They stopped off at an office supply store and outfitted Jon with his very own briefcase full of paper and pens. Another stop was made to buy him some new clothes and get a haircut. Lois

couldn't stand another minute looking at him with his hair falling into his eyes. They made it to her office, and Jon quickly set up his own 'work area'.

Lunch was spent in the park. Jon ate more than he had eaten since he had been home. After an ice cream cone, they decided they had done enough work for one day. They picked up Taylor from school and headed for the local builder's depot. By the time they made it home, they had plans for a new bedroom.

Taylor and Jon settled at the coffee table with a pile of catalogues to pick out the new furniture for their room while Lois started dinner. Having Taylor had forced Lois to learn to cook. With her family growing so quickly, she was glad now she had taken the time to do it.

The doorbell rang just as Lois took the pasta up to drain. She wiped her hands and headed to answer the call. Neither boy moved from their positions looking at the books. Lois couldn't force the smile from her face— that is until she opened the door. Lana was on the other side.

"I'm not here to cause trouble. I would like to talk to Clark. I called his place but didn't get an answer."

"He's still at work."

"Oh."

Lois pushed the slight anger she felt away. "Would you like to wait on him? I can page him."

"That would be nice."

Lois opened the door and stood aside as Lana came in.

"You have a beautiful home," she told Lois as she looked around.

"Thank you. I worked hard to get it. The boys are in the den. Would you like to see Jon?"

"Ah, well, it'll probably upset him."

"I think maybe he needs to see that you're okay."

Lana nodded and followed Lois down the hall to the den. The boys looked up when the women came in. Jon was immediately pale.

Lois noticed his reaction, but thought it was Lana's place to reassure him she wasn't here to upset him. And the woman surprised Lois.

"Jon, please don't get upset. I didn't come to get you."

"You not gonna take me?"

"No. I just need to talk to your dad."

"He's not here."

"I know. Lois said I could wait on him. Is that all right with you?"

"Yeah."

"Jon," Lois said in a stern voice.

"Sorry. Yes ma'am."

Lana's brows rose at the little exchange, jealousy shooting through her. She quickly doused those feelings. She was here to make her son's life better. For once she was thinking of someone other than herself.

Lois motioned to the kitchen. "I need to check on dinner."

Lana nodded as Lois left her standing there.

Taylor looked up at Jon, exchanging a silent request. The smaller boy's eyes drifted to his mother. "Wanna see?"

"Ah, sure." She made her way over to Jon's side and eased down on the sofa when he scooted over.

"Wois is re... re..."

"Remodeling our room," Taylor helped him out.

"Yeah," Jon said with a smile. "We get new stuff."

"Really?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Mom is having my room and the room next to it remodeled to make one big room for both of us," Taylor told Lana.

"Yep," Jon agreed. He pushed the computer images across so Lana could see them. "See. We gonna have a cubhouse and eberyting."

"We're, Jon. We're, not we," Taylor corrected helpfully. Jon smiled at the older boy that had become his mentor. Taylor smiled back and turned to Lana. "And there's gonna be a secret compartment in the wall where we can hide things."

Jon eased closer to her. "And a big ole chair for bedtime stories. Lois and Daddy read to us eberyntight."

"They do?"

"Uh huh. And we get a hamit..."

"Hammock," Taylor helped him.

"Uh huh. And, and a bed for Choe," Jon finished happily.

"Yeah. And Grandpa's gonna help us build a remote control train all the way around the ceiling."

"What about Superman? You guys don't like him?"

Both boys stared at Lana like she had two heads. "Why would we want him when we have Clark?" Taylor asked her seriously.

Lana couldn't help but smile. "I guess he is pretty super."

"He's the best." Taylor and Jon looked at each other for a moment then burst into laughter. They knew they had the real thing. They didn't have to have things with Superman on them in their room. *He* would be there.

Lana ran her fingers through Jon's hair. "I see you've had a haircut."

"Wois took me. Her says I wook just wike my daddy now."

"I think she's right," Lana told him with a smile.

The backdoor opened and a very surprised Clark Kent stepped in. Before he could say anything, Jon jumped up and ran past him.

"Hey, Daddy. Gotta' go."

Clark didn't need to ask where. Jon slammed the door to the laundry room. The little guy had to use the facilities.

Clark looked over at Lois. "Did he just go potty?"

"Yep," she answered with a smile as she continued her dinner preparations.

"Wow!" Clark dropped his keys on the counter and turned to face Lana. "Lana, is something wrong?"

"No," She told him as she stood up. "I just need to talk to you."

"Sure. Shoot."

"Well, maybe we should do this alone."

"Lana, Lois and the boys know what's going on and they're my family. What happens to Jon concerns them, too."

"Yeah." She crossed her arms over her chest. "I thought about what you said this morning. You're right. Eric has no right hitting me."

He sighed, relieved beyond belief. He had been worried about Lana. "You don't know how glad I am to hear you say that."

"Well, you always did care too much." She ducked her head and studied her fingers. "It also made me think about Jon and what's best for him." She raised her head to look at him again. "It's time I did the right thing. I want him to come live with you."

"What?"

"I had an offer for a shoot in Spain. It will last much of the next year. I just think it would be best if... Jon stayed with you."

"You're serious?"

"Yes. He is your son."

"Lana, Jon staying with me is not a problem. But you're telling me that you're... walking away."

"I'm not walking away. I'll call and write. I'll visit the states some. And I will be coming back." She walked a few feet away from Clark. "Truth is Jon hasn't been very happy with me. He talks about Taylor and Chloe constantly. He stares out the window most of the day. He isn't eating well, and he won't go out and play." She turned back to Clark. "Whether you believe it or not, I do love my son. And I can't watch him hurt like this anymore."

"Wow. Lana Lang is human."

She laughed softly. “Gee, thanks.” She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I just want Jon happy and healthy. I think he’ll be that and so much more when he gets back to the life he knew before I came along and screwed it up.”

Clark stepped over to Lana and reached out to squeeze her arm. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, Clark. I’m the one that kept you two apart.”

“You’re also bringing us back together.” He turned when he caught a glimpse of the boys. Jon had eased back into the room and was standing with Taylor at the end of the counter separating the den and the kitchen. Clark’s eyes fell on Jon’s. “Hi, son. How are you?” The boy shrugged.

Jon looked up at Lana. “You weaving?”

Lana frowned and crouched down in front of Jon. “Jon, honey, I think it’s best that you go back with your daddy while I go to Spain to work.”

Jon looked between the two adults. “You don’t want me?” he asked Lana.

“It’s not that I don’t want you. I do. It’s just that you’ve been so lonely with me. You talk about Taylor all the time and Chloe. And I know you miss your Grandma.”

“Yeah,” Jon sighed.

“And your dad,” Lana said. “You miss your dad. And he loves you so much.”

Jon looked up at Clark skeptically. He stood in silence for a few moments before his lip started to quiver. “You call me?” he asked Lana.

“I will.”

“And visit?”

“I will, very soon.”

He turned away and started down the hall towards the stairs. Lana rose from her position crouched on the floor.

“I guess maybe we have to give him his space,” Lana told Clark.

Clark was about to answer her when Jon appeared in the doorway again. He was clutching a small teddy bear in his hand.

“For you.” He held out the black and white bear to Lana.

“Thank you.” She took the offered gift but remained a couple of steps from him.

“Eric hit you more?”

“No. Eric moved out.”

Jon studied her for a long moment before he spoke again. “Don’t forget me.”

Lana kneeled and held open her arms for him. Jon glanced at them only briefly before he closed the distance and hugged his mom.

Lois turned away as her emotions threatened to get the best of her. She was so happy for Jon. She hadn’t forgotten Clark telling her that Lana wasn’t the type to give hugs.

Clark noticed her reaction and went to stand with his hands on her sides. He leaned forward and whispered in her ear. “You okay?”

She stopped and turned her head to him slightly. “I know what you saw in her now,” she told him. She gave Clark a quick kiss before she turned toward the den. “Lana, would you like to stay and eat dinner with Jon?” Clark’s brows rose into his hair, but Lois simply shrugged and waited for an answer.

Lana looked down at the two bright eyes watching her. “Well, I don’t want to intrude.”

“Stay wiv me?” Jon looked at Lana hopefully before he turned to Lois to help him out.

“Stay, Lana. Please. Jon, why don’t you take her upstairs and show her what we plan to do with your room?”

“Kay. ‘Mone Mom.” He pulled on her hand until she was standing.

“Don’t we want Taylor to come?”

Jon smiled up at Lana then waved at Taylor. The older boy

launched into the famous Lane babble mode as the trio disappeared.

Clark looked back at Lois. “Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m fine.” She pulled a stack of plates out of the cabinet, then stopped and faced him. “But are you okay with this? I didn’t stop to think that it might make you uncomfortable. She is an ex after all. It has to be strange that the...”

Clark pressed his lips to Lois’, effectively stopping her babble. He was smiling when he pulled back to look at her. “I’m very okay with this as long as you’re comfortable.”

“I remember what you said about doing everything to be friends. And I could tell it really bothered you that Eric was hitting her. And then there’s Jon.” Lois looked down the hall. “She is sending him home. And he loves her. So I’m stepping up to be as adult as she and Dan have been.”

Clark lifted his hand to cup her face. “I love you, Lois.”

“I love you.” She thrust the stack of plates into his hands. “Now set the table.”

“Yes ma’am.” He turned and made his way into the dining room. “Hey, where’s my daughter?” he called back.

“With Nana and Grandpa. They’re bringing her over after they go to dinner with some friends of theirs.” Lois joined him with the silverware.

“Good. I’m feeling a little clingy. I want all my kids home.”

“Clingy, huh?” Lois stepped into his chest. “I have a cure for that,” she purred.

“I bet you do.” He was about to lean in for a kiss when she rubbed a towel in his face. “Uhhh... you’re killing me.”

She giggled as she left him beside the table. “Just wait till later,” she whispered, knowing he would hear her. Clark smiled and went upstairs to change his clothes.

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Although Clark had told Lois he was okay with Lana staying for dinner, he was sure it would be a little odd with her there. He was completely surprised that he was actually having a good time. The two women laughed and talked happily about several subjects. He was surprised to learn they had a great many things in common. He had never seen Lana quite this way before, and it was a welcome change.

Lana fielded dozens of questions from both boys. She told them about her modeling career and some of the places she had been. And she appeared to be comfortable as well.

Jon looked up at Lana about half way through dinner. She was talking to Lois so she had her head turned from him slightly. When he spoke, everyone became quiet.

“Mom, I wove you.”

Lana turned to look at Jon. “Oh, Jon. I love you.”

“I wove Wois, too.”

“I know.” She reached out to take one of his hands. “I think it’s great that you have someone like her to take care of you.”

“You not sad for me to wove her?”

“Not at all. I was at first but not now. I see how happy you are here.”

“I am. Wois says I can stay. But we gotta get Daddy to stay, too.”

Clark looked over at Lois who simply smiled with a shrug.

“Jon, maybe we should hold that discussion until Daddy’s holding Chloe. He can’t say no when he looks at her.”

Clark’s mouth fell open. He stared at Lois, but Taylor’s laughter broke his resolve to look upset. Soon everyone was laughing.

“She’s got you there, Clark,” Taylor said between gasps of air.

“Hey, what can I say? It isn’t easy saying no to those big brown eyes.” Laughter filled the room again.

Soon enough dinner was over, and Lana had been introduced to Chloe after Martha and Sam brought her home. The young

woman had a private conversation with Martha that ended with a hug. It wasn't long before Lana announced it was time for her to go.

"I'll miss you," Jon told his mother as he received his second hug of the night.

Lana leaned back to look at him. "I'll miss you."

"Call me."

"I will. And we can write. Taylor said he'll help you."

"Kay." Jon lifted his hand to touch the bruise on her face. "I'm gwad you're okay."

"Thank you. Jon, you do understand about me going?"

"Yes. I wove you."

"I love you." She smiled and rose to her feet. She faced Lois when a soft hand touched her arm.

"Lana, you're welcome here any time."

"Just take care of him."

"Always." Lois smiled softly and left Lana at the door with Jon and Clark.

Lana glanced over at Taylor. "See ya', Taylor."

"See ya'. I'll take care of him."

"I know you will."

She rubbed Jon's head one last time. "Take care of that little sister."

"I will."

"Okay." She watched as Jon made his way back to the den.

"Thank you," Clark told her.

"Just take care of our boy."

"You know I will." She opened the door and stepped out onto the stoop. Clark followed.

"Call soon. Leave a number where he can get in touch with you," Clark told her.

"I will." She looked back at the door. "Is Chloe really your daughter?"

"She is. Dan, Lois' ex-husband, is her biological father. But I've been with her since she was born. I was even in the delivery room."

"That's what Jon told me. She's really lucky to have you."

"A compliment from Lana Lang. I'll have to write this down."

She laughed softly. "I guess I have been pretty awful to you."

"That's in the past." He reached out to grasp her elbow. "Take care of yourself."

"I will. And you take care of those beautiful babies." She leaned over and hugged Clark quickly.

Clark released her and watched her until her car was out of sight. He smiled when a slender pair of arms surrounded him from behind.

"I love you, Flyboy."

"I love you."

"How much?"

Clark shifted to face her. "What?"

"Do you love me enough to move in with me?"

"What?"

"Jon wants to stay with me. I want him to be with you. So..."

"You think we should live together?"

"Yes. Come on, Clark. We've hardly been apart the last couple of months. Even when we argued we still ended up at one or the other's house. It makes sense. We could save a lot of money."

"Like you need to worry about money."

"Well... I guess you could say you're being put up by your 'little woman'."

"Lo-is."

"Don't tell me that my money bothers you?"

"No, of course not. If you remember, I made a substantial amount of money when I worked at the agency myself." He leaned to kiss her. "How much do you make?"

"I make a comfortable six figures."

Clark whistled. "Wow! I had no idea. I'll be lucky to see half that any time soon."

"I would have made only eighteen thousand dollars if I'd stayed at the *Planet* that first year. I made nearly thirty my first year with my father. Last year was my best year so far, nearly three hundred thousand."

"Damn!"

Lois laughed softly at Clark. "That's nothing. Next year it'll nearly double since I've taken over for Daddy."

"Guess I picked a winner," Clark said with dancing brows.

"Careful, Kent. I'll make you stay home and be Mr. Mom."

"I'd love every minute."

Lois' smile faded. "Would you? Is that something you'd do if I asked you to?"

"Lois, I'd do anything for you." He lifted his hand and caressed her face. "One day you'll know how I feel," he said softly.

Lois stretched to kiss his cheek. "I'd love to know how you feel," she told him as she pressed her body against his.

Clark groaned and turned her to go back in the house. "Be a good girl, would you?"

"Oh honey, do I upset you?" She giggled loudly when Clark shut the door and picked her up.

\*\*\*

Clark stood in the doorway and watched as Lois turned the sheets down on the bed. He had been elected for bedtime duties, which he had handled with a smile. But looking at Lois was proving to be much more fascinating. And definitely more alluring.

He closed the door and made his way over to where Lois was bent over picking up a pair of shoes off the floor. He grinned devilishly when naughty thoughts started to cloud his vision. His hands grasped her hips and tugged her closer. "We've never done this position before."

Lois stood and leaned back into his touch when he walked up behind her. "Mmmm," was all she could manage as he began to nuzzle her neck.

"You look so good in this gown," he whispered just before he dipped his tongue into her ear.

A shiver ran through Lois. Clark was sending chills down her spine; his hands began to move, causing them both to sigh.

"Tell me yes," he said softly.

"Yes," she breathed and gave herself over to him again, trusting him to protect her.

And he would. He would protect and worship her so that she would never doubt how much she attracted him.

"Mmm, we have got to do something about this protection thing. One day we're gonna be in such a hurry, we'll forget," Lois told him just moments later. Neither had bothered with foreplay tonight.

"Incredible," Clark breathed as Lois turned and wrapped her arms around his neck. Standing there, in the middle of the room, half naked, he was not a bit embarrassed or self-conscious. He was very, very sated... for the moment.

"Come on, Flyboy. I need a shower."

"Yes ma'am." Clark chuckled slightly when Lois ran from the room. He shook his head then sped after her.

Lois Lane probably wasn't even aware of the trust she had given Clark when she allowed him to make love to her the way he wanted to. He had always been a bit reserved with Lana, mostly to protect his secret. Later he realized a lot his reservations were based on the fact that Lana was not really who he wanted to be with. He was with the right woman now, and his desire for her often scared him. Not Lois though. She seemed to thrive on his need for her. And the fact that he was super didn't bother her a bit. No one had ever known about his powers until

now. That had always held Clark back when he had sex. But with Lois, she not only let him act out his desires, she *wanted* him to. She seemed to like the hurried, passionate encounters they shared. Of course, the slow, tender lovemaking they had shared was just as wonderful and certainly more loving. It was just that now and then a person needed the release from an almost frantic pace. He was thankful he was Superman though. He was beginning to believe that making love to Lois Lane might actually kill him if this continued.

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Lois sang softly as she put away the last of the clothes in the new dresser she and Clark had picked out for Chloe's room. The nursery had been transformed into a little girl's paradise. Clark just *had* to fix up her room along with the boys'. A fresh layer of bright yellow paint set the backdrop for the mural Clark had created, compliments of his alter ego. Cartoon characters played on the walls to watch over the child that would sleep in her crisp new sheets.

A few months ago Lois would have never thought something as domestic as creating a home would appeal to her. She and Clark had spent the last two weeks moving his things into her house, weeding through things they didn't want or need, and buying new things to make *her* home *their* home. His things were strewn throughout the house, and she couldn't help but sing. She was happy he was here.

Clark stopped at the open door to Chloe's room to listen to Lois' voice. She was absolutely mesmerizing. It felt so foreign to Clark to think about his life before Lois, Taylor, and Chloe. Knowing they would be with him from now on made him smile almost constantly.

Lois turned back to the door. She never faltered in her singing when she saw Clark there. She simply smiled, touched his arm, and continued back down the hall to finish her chores. Clark chuckled softly and went to find something to fill his time.

\*\*\*

Life couldn't get any better as far as Clark was concerned. He and Lois had been living together for nearly two months. Martha had been nestled into the small apartment above the garage, as equally happy with her new surroundings as everyone else. On top of that, he had a wonderful career and three beautiful children.

They'd celebrated Taylor's eighth birthday, Jon's fourth birthday, Chloe would soon be five months old, and Christmas was less than a week away. This year would be much different for Clark. Sure, he had had Jon last year. He had even spent a Christmas with Taylor all those years ago. But this holiday he had a family. They were all together and happy. He had begun to anticipate the big day as much as the boys. Of course, he looked forward to it for a much different reason. His mind was on the gift he'd like to give Lois.

Lois, too, felt that she couldn't be happier. She could watch Clark endlessly. He was incredible. He would take her flying and spend hours with her just talking. Of course, making love was their favorite pastime. She had even made it in to see her doctor, so she could get a prescription for birth control, made possible by the fact that her daughter would no longer nurse, and formula had replaced Lois' breast milk. That new freedom was, of course, reason to celebrate. And they did so, super style.

Lois' thoughts were also drifting toward Christmas. They had shared a wonderful Thanksgiving as a family, so she couldn't wait for their next holiday. She was having fun shopping for the children and for Clark and Martha. It was a shopping trip that gave her the idea for the ultimate Christmas present for Clark.

\*\*\*

Jon held Lois' hand as they walked through the crowded mall. Lois had brought him to pick out his father's gift. So far he had rejected at least ten different things.

"Jon, honey, I'm running out of ideas," Lois told him as they left another shop. She made her way over to a bench for a much needed break.

Jon sat down beside her in silence. Since they had entered the mall his mind had been on an idea for the perfect gift for his dad, but he wasn't sure how to tell Lois what it was.

She pushed his hair back in an attempt to get his attention. "Sweetie, do you have *any* idea what you want to get him?"

Now how did he answer that one? His father was Superman, the defender of truth and justice. He couldn't very well lie to Lois. He chose instead to shrug.

"Jon..." Lois had shown incredible patience all afternoon. However, what little she had left was growing thin.

Jon suddenly turned to face Lois, deciding it was now or never. "I-want-you-to-marry-my-daddy," he said in a rush.

Lois stared down into his anxious eyes. "What?"

"You make him happy. You make me happy. And if you married him, we'd never have to leave."

"Jon, you'll never have to leave. I love you and your father."

"I know." He looked down at his hands a moment. "I just want us to be a real family."

Lois lifted his chin until their eyes met. "We are a real family. Marriage won't make us any more real."

"But it would make Daddy so happy."

"And how do you know that?"

"Cause when he took us shopping the other day, some lady told him he had beautiful children. He said, 'thank you'. She said that him and his wife must be very proud. He didn't tell her he wasn't married, but you could tell it bothered him. And I saw him looking at a dress in a window. It was a wedding dress. Taylor said you'd look good in it. And he agreed."

Lois stared down into the beautiful blue eyes before her. Jon had come out of his shell in the short time he and Clark had lived with her. No longer the quiet, shy little guy she had met nearly seven months ago, this boy was full of spirit and energy. You could now understand everything he said, thanks to speech therapy and the help he got at home. Taylor had taught him to read, he was learning to paint— thanks to his grandmother— Sam had taken him along on a trip to sign a new athlete, he had grown closer to his mother, and he had wrapped Lois around his little finger. She indulged him much more than she should. So when she sighed and pulled Jon closer to her, it wasn't a surprise that she asked, "Do you think I'd look good in that dress?"

He turned to look up at her. "Yes."

Lois rubbed her hand up and down his arm for several long minutes as she thought about what he had said. If she was honest, she had been fantasizing about marriage to Clark for a while now. He was perfect. He was honest, compassionate, loving, and he had proven himself to be trust-worthy. They had grown so close that they hardly ever argued any more. When they did, they made up almost immediately. Why not spend the rest of her life with him?

"Show me the dress."

Jon jumped up and half dragged Lois through the mall to the shop where the dress was displayed. She gazed at it, trying to picture herself with it on.

"You're right," she told him after a moment. "I would look good in that."

Jon smiled brightly. "You'd look great."

"So, how should I propose? Or should he do that?"

Jon was almost trembling with excitement now. He and Taylor had talked of nothing else for the last several days. Somehow they were determined to get their parents married.

"I thought you'd never ask." He took Lois' hand, and they walked toward another shop as he explained to Lois just how she should propose to his father.

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Christmas morning dawned clear and bright. A fresh layer of white powder covered the ground outside as a fire crackled softly in the fireplace of the den. Clark rolled over to snuggle with Lois for a few more minutes before their little tornadoes came blowing in, but she was gone.

“Lois?” He lifted his head to look around the room, surprise covering his face. Balloons covered the ceiling. Each one had a different endearment on it. Clark smiled and pulled a card from one of the strings hanging before him. He chuckled softly as he read the words.

‘Good morning, handsome. And Merry Christmas. Follow the trail to your gift.’

Clark pulled on his robe as he eased out of bed. How had she gotten those in without him hearing?

Well, he thought with a blush, after last night even Superman would have slept hard enough not to hear an earthquake.

Outside the door he saw another card on the floor. This one read, ‘Chloe’. He bent over to pick up the card before continuing to follow the trail. He found another half way to the stairs. ‘Jon’ was written in blue. At the top of the stairs he found a card with Taylor’s name on it. Three different cards lay on the stairs. The words on those were ‘love’, ‘Kent’, and ‘us’.

He stopped at the bottom of the stairs to look at the balloons in his path. There was a single yellow rose tied to the strings and a card that read, ‘friendship’. The trail continued to the formal living room to the ‘untouchable’ tree that had been put up. A new ornament had been hung from one of the branches. It was a tiny snow dome. Inside was a picturesque house. It almost looked like theirs. Another card had ‘family’ written in bold letters. It also directed him to go to the dining room where the Christmas village was displayed.

Clark couldn’t help but laugh when he saw the Superman action figure erected to look as if it were flying. There was another card that read, ‘Superman’. He was shaking his head when he made it into the hall. Another group of balloons held a red rose. The card on this one had a perfect impression of a pair of lips, Lois’ lips, and it smelled of her perfume.

“Damn,” he mumbled as he continued to the den. He stopped when he saw Lois standing in front of the tree. She had a huge, red bow tied around her waist, and she was holding a card. Clark walked up to her in silence and read the card.

‘Together’ was written on the paper. He smiled and fingered Lois’ bow. “Looks like Santa came. I must have been a very good boy.”

“You have been,” she told him with a bright smile. “Very good.”

He waggled his brows and leaned to kiss her, but she held up her hand. For the first time he noticed she had one of her hands behind her back.

“There’s more?”

“Yes.”

She pulled out the final card. This one was inside an envelope, so Clark opened it and slowly removed the paper.

‘Clark, All my life I’ve known I was looking for something. I never knew what it was until you. You’ve made me so happy... Did you figure out what all the cards mean? Put them together and what do you get?... I hope we get about fifty or sixty beautiful years.’

He looked up at Lois with hopeful eyes.

“Will you marry me?”

Clark couldn’t speak. He had planned on asking her to marry him today. His smile spread across his lips. “Do you know what I got you for Christmas?”

“You mean the small, gold box in my stocking?”

“Yeah.”

Lois smiled and launched herself at him. “Great minds think alike,” she told him.

“Kiss her already,” came a chorus of voices from behind them.

Clark turned with Lois in his arms. All the children, his mother, and Lois’ father were standing behind the counter in the kitchen.

“Were you guys spying on us?”

“Yes,” came the combined answer.

“Just kiss her,” Jon said.

“And somebody say yes!” Taylor added.

Clark laughed softly as his eyes fell back on Lois. “Yes,” he told her in a husky voice just before his lips met hers. A chorus of yells and whistles filled the air.

“This calls for champagne,” Sam announced.

“Sam, it’s seven in the morning,” Martha told him.

“In that case, this calls for chocolate milk!” Everyone dissolved into laughter as the family continued to celebrate. In the early hours of Christmas morning, a new life had finally begun. It had taken many years and much more pain than it should have, but at long last two souls destined to be together had finally found each other.

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Clark’s heart soared. He and Lois were celebrating their engagement in New York City. They had watched the famous ball drop on Times Square from the top of a nearby building, thanks to Superman, before making their way back to the hotel room they would share for the night. Their parents had agreed to keep the children, so the couple could get away. Now, as they danced around the room on a pillow of air, Lois listened as Clark tried to tell her what was on his mind.

“In a week I hope we know each other just a little better than we do today. I have lost interest... in any other woman but you. And my feelings are stronger now than they were a second ago. Lois, I’ve been in love with you from the beginning.”

“And I’ll love you till the end,” she added in an emotional whisper.

“I want to know you more with every breath I take. No one has ever made me feel the way I do when I’m with you. When we become one, I feel it in here.” He placed his hand on his chest. “When we’re together, it’s not sex. I made love for the first time in my life with you.”

Lois’ lip had started to quiver. Her eyes held the unshed tears she was trying to keep from spilling over. “I guess... I just get so... insecure sometimes. Every man in my life has done nothing but hurt me. I feel like I’m waiting for you to take your turn.”

“Oh, Lois, you’ve got one hell of a wait ahead of you.” Lois laughed softly, wiping the tears from her eyes. Clark stopped their dance and lifted his hand to her face. “I can’t promise to never hurt you, but I do promise to try like hell not to. I love you. *You*, only you; mind, *body*, and soul.” He leaned to kiss her, and she met him half way.

After a glorious kiss, Clark drew back and started their dance again. As he continued to stare at Lois, he began to sing. Clark didn’t do it often, but when he did, Lois tried to be close enough to hear it. The song was slow, and the words were of love and commitment. When it was over, he lifted his hand so that he could wipe the tear from her cheek.

“That was beautiful, Clark,” she told him after a moment.

He shrugged, a slight blush creeping across his cheeks. He had never sung to a woman before. And though he shared so much with Lois, it still made him self conscious doing so.

“The first time I heard you sing was to Chloe, and it was mesmerizing. I didn’t know you had such a beautiful voice.”

“I could say the same about you,” he told her as he pulled her just a bit closer and spun them slowly. They were dancing now to music only they could hear, the CD having long ago finished playing.

“You just can’t take praise very well, can you?” she asked, a

smile on her lips. He chuckled softly and leaned over to kiss her neck. “Will you sing for me again?”

“Now?” he wanted to know as he moved up closer to her ear to explore the skin there.

“Well,” she replied, closing her eyes as he continued to nibble on her neck. His lips came up to capture hers, ending all coherent thought. The kiss was immediately deep and passionate. Clark lost altitude, bringing them back to stand on their feet. Hands became frantic as clothes were thrown to the floor. When they were both completely naked, Lois stopped to look in his eyes.

“Make love to me, Clark,” she whispered.

He kissed her collarbone as he gently lowered her to the floor. “Heart to my heart,” he breathed against her mouth.

“Soul to my soul,” Lois answered as she gripped the back of his neck.

“May his seed bring forth many offspring,” he continued some obscure poem absently as his head fell to her shoulder. He felt Lois’ change immediately. He drew back to look at her with concerned eyes. “Honey?”

“Get up, Clark.”

“Okay.” He drew away from her and reached out to help her up. She pushed him away and disappeared into the bathroom. Clark was left to wonder what he had done to bring all this on.

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“Lois?” He knocked on the door to the bathroom. When Lois hadn’t come out twenty minutes later, he decided it was time to check on her. She didn’t answer, so he pushed open the door slowly. “Honey?”

Lois was sitting in the now cold water of her bath, staring into space. She turned to look at him but failed to really see him.

“Lois, what’s-a-matter?”

She watched him sit down on the toilet, looking at her with worried eyes. “I don’t know if I want to have another baby.”

“What?”

“I don’t know if I want to have any more children.”

Clark stared at her, trying to fathom why she would say this. The words he had said when they were making love came rushing back to him. “Oh, honey, I didn’t mean those words literally. It just... kind of fit at the time. I love that poem, and it just came out.”

“It spooked me.”

“No kidding. You’ve been in here for a while. Do you mind telling me why you feel this way? Don’t get me wrong. I’m not asking you to change your mind. It’s just we’ve never talked about the possibility of another pregnancy happening.”

“Clark, I see what unplanned pregnancies have gotten both of us. Sure, we love our babies, but they’ve still suffered for the mistakes we’ve made. I just don’t want to do that to another child.”

“You think that if you were to become pregnant, I wouldn’t want it? Or you?”

“No. Not that. I just don’t want us to be naïve enough to think that we could have another baby, and everything would always be terrific. Clark, if we were to have a child together and something happened, I’d never forgive myself for putting another child through the break-up of its parents. Hell, it would be bad enough that Chloe and Taylor and Jon would have to go through it. I wouldn’t want a helpless baby to have to. Or worse, the child may be older and end up hating one of us or both of us. I just don’t want that.”

“Lois, I wish you’d stop begging for trouble. Look at me.” She met his gaze slowly. This had spooked her, really spooked her. He knew she was very insecure, but this was far worse than he first thought. “Nothing is going to happen between us that we can’t handle and settle. Do you know why?” She shook her head. “Because unlike what’s happened between me and Lana and you and Dan, we *love* each other. The kind of real, honest to goodness

love that lasts.”

Lois sat there for a minute before her lips slowly spread into a smile. “You can always make me feel better.”

“I hope so.” Clark reached over and stroked her hair. “As for more babies, I feel that should be something we both want to happen. If you don’t want any more, ever, then I sure hope you don’t mind me just continuing to make love to you because it feels good.”

Lois laughed softly. “It does, doesn’t it?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Clark!” Lois laughed out when he got up and settled in the tub with her, clothes and all. Her laughter soon died when he lifted her onto his lap and proceeded to show her just how good making love could feel.

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Lois often found herself looking at the sparkling diamond on her finger. She had said yes. More correctly, he had said yes, and she had agreed to marry the most wonderful man on earth... and he wasn’t even from this earth. Clark was her superman.

They were planning a spring wedding. Both were incredibly excited. Their lives wouldn’t change a whole lot from how they lived now, yet just the thought kept them giddy. And they weren’t the only ones. The boys asked tons of questions and were involved in every aspect of the arrangements. Martha and Sam seemed to be just as thrilled. The only one who seemed to care less was Chloe. As long as she was fed and rocked to sleep, she was happy.

The couple received well wishes from everyone. They had gotten a large bouquet of roses as a congratulatory offering from Lana when Jon told her about the engagement. They had even gotten a card from Dan. Life was good and it just couldn’t get any better.

But it could get worse...

“Once again, you’re looking at live coverage of what appears to be a spaceship.” The announcer covered his ear for a moment. “The feed is going live to the site.” The cameras zoomed in on the odd looking vessel that had landed in the middle of runway 5 at Metropolis International Airport. It had landed nearly twenty minutes earlier, and already it had been surrounded with military troops. Nothing of this magnitude had ever happened anywhere in the world, and the US was not about to take any chances.

Smoke puffed from around the shiny, metallic door, and you could hear the hiss of air as it was opened. A woman and a man, both dressed in black, walked down the platform and onto Earth soil. They slowly surveyed the area, not attempting to move when one of the Army officers slowly stepped up to them. A short conversation took place before a camera crew was motioned to come forward.

“Ladies and gentleman, this is Lady Zara and Lt. Ching... from the planet New Krypton,” the officer said into the microphones.

Lois’ eyes found Clark’s shocked and surprised ones. She had seen the hologram in the globe Clark had from his world. They thought he was the only survivor from his planet. Not exactly his planet, but New Krypton was close enough for them. Obviously Clark hadn’t been the only survivor from his dying world.

THE END

(part one)

Credits:

I need to thank a Wanda once again for her wonderful story ‘New Beginnings’. It was my inspiration to start and eventually finish this story.

I have to give credit to Reese Wilson, Van Stephenson, and Tony Martin for the words they wrote to a great song. ‘I Didn’t

Ask and She Didn't Say', sung by Tim McGraw, was the inspiration for the opening scene. (I know... Seems I get a lot of ideas from songs. I happen to find music very inspirational. Just goes to prove words are powerful. You should be careful what you say.)

I would also like to dedicate the scene in which Clark takes Taylor fishing to my husband. He is an avid fisherman, and one day soon hopes to be able to enjoy his favorite pastime to provide for his family. Though he's not a huge reader, has only read a couple of my stories in fact, he has never protested to the many hours I've spent at the computer. He's the best.

Taylor was patterned after another special person in my life: my oldest son, Hoyt. He's intelligent beyond his nine years; he's constantly asking tons of questions; he's incredibly compassionate and tender hearted; he's also about as close to perfect as a mother could ask of a child. I look forward to watching him grow and do wonderful things during his life.

Points of interest:

DCFS in some states in the US stands for the Department of Family and Children Services.

L&D is widely known as labor and delivery at most hospitals.

And a hospitality suite is a room often provided inside the hospital for parents to stay close to sick children who cannot be put into a private room.

June 2012- I wanted to make another note. I wrote this years ago (9 to be exact). The Nfic version is on Annesplace and reads a bit different from this one. For those who have read that version, I hope this one makes the Gfic cut. (or PGfic cut).

Thanks to Virginia for helping me get this shaped up enough to post. And thanks to everyone who is still reading and enjoying L&C fic after so many years. I happen to think we have the best fandom on the net!