

Super Shook Up

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Summary: What if Superman had crash landed in the alley by Lois' apartment, and she found him in a crater, naked and without a memory? Lois has to try to convince a reluctant Superman that he is indeed an alien who wears spandex. But what other revelations are in store for our favorite couple? Find out in this humorous and WAFFy rewrite of the episode "All Shook Up."

Story Size: 14,815 words (80Kb as text)

2021 Author's Note: Well... this story has a sordid posting past. I started back in 2007. It languished, unfinished on the lcficmbs.com for years until I finished and posted the rest in 2014. And then I forgot to submit it to the archive. So... here we are, 14 years later. Somehow. <g>

Thank you to Julie Gastler for GEing this for the archive!

Original Author's Note: Ages ago, it seems, Paul (HatMan) had this inkling of an idea for a story, but he wasn't sure what to do with it. My muse, Mel, started batting it around like a cat does one of those toy mouses... and before I knew it, we had part one. Then part two and three. And part four seemed to stall for months. Then it languished, half-finished, on the boards for years (eek!). Thanks to the 2014 fundraiser and bidding from Artemis and Darth Michael, I was motivated to get off my butt and finish this thing!

I'd like to thank Paul, of course, for letting me have this idea and run with it. He was also a great beta reader and cheerleader along the way — so much so that I suspect I should give him co-authorship. Thank you for your invaluable help and friendship!

Along the way, I had a few more helpers to nudge me and give me feedback. Rachel (Psychofurball), Catherine Bruce, and CarolineK. Thank you so much!

Last but not least, I have to thank Darth Michael for his winning bid in the fundraiser auction, without which I may never have had the motivation to finish this. He got first dibs at seeing the rest of the story before it was posted to the boards, and he was kind enough to give me detailed and enthusiastic comments, too! Thanks for the push to finally get this finished and posted!

I may have taken just a few liberties with continuity, but they're minor points that I hope add to the story rather than detract. ;)

Part 1

Blackness.

"Where am I?" He groaned, bringing a hand to his head. Whatever had just happened had *hurt*, and now he felt dizzy and disoriented.

He chanced opening his eyes to have a look around. Nothing familiar in sight. Dirt. Asphalt. Tall buildings on either side of him. And a woman.

The woman was staring at him. Staring as if...

He didn't have any clothes on.

And he didn't.

Have any clothes on.

She was stammering something now, something barely discernable through the loud pounding in his head.

"I — I... I saw the light in the sky and came running. I thought... well, it was probably stupid to have run over, considering I thought it could have been part of the asteroid, and I really couldn't tell if it'd landed yet — when I'd seen it. But I felt it — you — when it — you landed. The ground shook a little, and I... do you want my jacket?"

He nodded in a heartbeat and scrambled to cover himself as soon as she'd tossed it down to him.

Down?

It seemed he was sitting, completely naked, in a crater six feet deep. And there was a crazy woman babbling at him. His head swam again — possibly from trying to follow what she was saying.

"... you okay, Superman?"

Superman? He just stared blankly. Who on Earth was Superman? And what kind of egotistical...

She was still talking. "Maybe we should get you inside and... um... dressed. Then you can tell me what happened, and if you're hungry, I can fix you something to... I can call for takeout..."

She was reaching her hand out to help him, and he... didn't really have a choice, did he? He didn't even know where he was. Where home was. Where his clothes were...

He managed to scramble out of the hole... somewhat gracefully, considering his limited attire. After readjusting the woman's jacket around his waist, he followed her out of the dimly lit alley, thankful that it seemed to be the middle of the night when everyone was in bed.

Why couldn't he remember anything? Maybe it had something to do with the lump he was sure was on his head. He must have hit it pretty hard... from falling into that crater? The woman had mentioned something about an

asteroid and lights — maybe he'd been startled and had tripped.

They'd walked up a few flights of stairs and down a hallway, and now they were standing in front of what must be the door to her apartment. One, two, three, four... five locks? Five locks, and she was bringing a strange man into her apartment in the middle of the night?

Though... he'd gotten the impression he was no stranger.

The way she kept looking at him... like she was trying not to look. And her heart would race ever so faster every time she snuck a peek. She obviously knew him, and... liked him?

Well, that would be a good thing; he wasn't immune to her, either. Of course, she was fully clothed while he wasn't, but he couldn't deny the way his heart rate had increased and his breathing had become just a touch quicker. And it wasn't from the hike up five flights of stairs.

He cleared his throat. He needed to be thinking about... something else. Like what his name was, for one. Where he lived...

A glance around his new surroundings told him it wasn't here. Not with those couches. Though there was a hint of familiarity tugging at the corners of his memory.

"I've been here before, right?"

She ducked her head a bit and stepped around him awkwardly to shut the door. Was she blushing?

"Yeah, of course, Superman. You know that..."

He shook his head slightly. "Okay, why do you keep calling me Superman? Is it some sort of... private joke or something? A nickname? Please tell me I don't call myself that."

Her brow creased and she cocked her head. "That's... your name, Superman. Don't you..." She trailed off, and then her eyes widened. "You don't remember, do you? Anything?"

"I... no, I guess I don't. But..." He tried to keep the slight whimper from invading his voice. "Superman?"

She nodded and cleared her throat. She wished her cheeks weren't quite so flushed. "S-sorry. I don't know what else to call you."

She needed to stop staring. She really needed to stop staring. This was Superman. In need of help. And she was taking advantage of the fact that he was more than half...

"Let me see if I can find you some clothes or something, Supe —" He started to wince. "I'll see what I can scrounge up."

He nodded and gave her a slight smile, probably grateful that she'd ripped her eyes away and offered him something decent to wear.

She rushed off to her bedroom, resisting the urge to shut the door behind her and freak out.

Superman was standing in her living room. Naked.

And he didn't have a clue who he was.

The crater had been rather impressive in size. The fireball streaking through the night sky had been lightning-fast. He must have crashed hard. Hard enough to knock his memory clear out of his head.

Why had he lost control? Had he hit the asteroid too hard or... run out of air or something? A feeling of rage surged up, but she tamped it down. She would give those self-saving, ungrateful government officials a piece of her mind later. Right now, she had to deal with the amnesiac Superman who'd crashed back to Earth in her alleyway.

He'd landed outside her apartment. Her breath caught. *Her* apartment. That... had to mean something, didn't it? Sure, he'd made a huge crater next to her dumpster and didn't have a clue who he was, but he'd *been* heading her direction before he conked his head.

And that had to mean something.

He trusted her. He'd obviously been in some sort of distress, and he'd trusted her to help him. He just hadn't realized how much help he would need.

Starting with clothes. She shook herself mentally. She had to remain focused here. Clothes for Superman...

Well, nothing of hers would fit. That was for sure.

And it wasn't like she had any men's clothing around. Not even Clark's, though Superman was far broader in the shoulders, anyway. Taller, too.

Superman's suit must have burned up. That was the only logical explanation she could think of. But... did he have spares? And just what did he wear when he wasn't in the suit? Or... maybe he was always in the suit...

No, that would be tiring, wouldn't it? Though maybe he liked the bright and flashy colors. A brief image of Superman in neon pink bike shorts and an equally loud top flashed through her mind. She stifled a giggle.

She just couldn't picture him in normal, everyday clothes. But that didn't mean he didn't or couldn't wear them. And short of finding an all-night clothing store, it looked like she was going to have to see what Clark's closet had to offer.

The selfish part of her protested at that thought. She didn't really want to share Superman with anyone. Not that he was hers... but he had chosen her to help him.

That wasn't really fair, though. To Superman or Clark. They were friends, too, after all.

She picked up the phone and called Clark. It rang a full four times, and then the answering machine picked up. She glanced at the clock on her nightstand and put the phone back on the hook. Where the heck was he at two o'clock in the morning? Or maybe he was sleeping...

God help him if he had his ringer turned off when the world was ending!

She'd just have to go over there and see. And if he wasn't there, she'd just break in. This was important, and it would be his fault anyway for not being home.

She charged back into the living room with her new plan of action. "Supe — uh... So, I don't have anything for you to wear, but Clark is sure to have something. Not that it'll fit right, but it'll be better than just a towel or something. He's not answering the phone, so I'm going to head over there. Did you... uh..." Eyes on his face, Lane. "Maybe you want to shower while I'm gone. There are clean towels in there, and hopefully I'll be back by the time you're done... otherwise you'll be sitting in a towel, which I just told you was... It shouldn't take me too long."

"All right. I think I can manage that." He ran a hand through his hair and let out a deep breath. "Thank you for... all of this, Ms...?"

Oh. Right. He didn't... know her. No reason for that to bother her. Really. He didn't even know his own name.

"Lane. Lois Lane. But you call me Lois."

He smiled that familiar smile of his. "Thank you, Lois. And... be sure to pass along my gratitude to your friend Clark."

She couldn't help but smile back. "He's your friend, too, but I'll let him know."

Either Clark wasn't home, or he slept like a rock. His neighbors didn't; that was for sure. She scowled. More than one had stuck a head out the door and yelled for her to shut up. Didn't they realize what was at stake here? The world needed their superhero. And he needed clothes.

She pulled out her lock-picking kit and made quick work of his lock. He really ought to have more than one, or at least one that wasn't so easily picked. She rolled her eyes; he was too trusting for his own good. It wasn't like he had Superman watching over his place 24/7.

Once the lock was open, she hurried inside and shut the door behind her before any of Clark's neighbors could decide to complain about her breaking and entering, too.

Great. It was dark. She groped for a light switch on the wall beside her. No luck. Didn't the man leave a light on when he left?

At least the moonlight sneaking in through the windows was bright and afforded enough light so she didn't trip on her way down the stairs.

It felt funny... wrong, almost, to be here when Clark wasn't. Where was he at this time of night, anyway? If he had stepped out for a midnight snack or even a late night stroll, he would have certainly left a light on for himself. Had he been gone all day?

She frowned. Now that she thought about it, she hadn't seen Clark since...

Since before Superman left. He hadn't even come to send their hero off. Worry crept into her chest. She hoped he wasn't hurt or in trouble, especially since Superman was clearly off duty.

She made her way past the couch and picked up the picture he kept on his end table. Him and her line dancing at the Smallville Corn Festival. Something Martha had snapped when they hadn't been paying attention. She looked so happy, carefree.

"Where are you, Clark?" She ran her hand down the glass over his image.

She caught a glint of light reflecting on the glass. Where...

Over to her right, there was a sliver of light peeking out from under his wine rack.

She set the frame back down and edged closer. Where on earth was that light coming from? It appeared the wine rack was actually raised from the floor. Barely an inch, but enough to let light through from...

Her heart started racing. There must be a room or something behind the wine rack! Clark Kent had been hiding something from her. From everyone. She rushed over to the wooden structure and started feeling along the walls. There had to be some sort of catch or hinge that opened it.

Nothing on either side. She frowned and worried at her lower lip. Maybe if... She pushed at one side of the rack. Nothing. She pushed a little harder, and the whole thing started to pivot, rotating as if on some sort of turntable. She kept pushing until half the section was three feet further back than where it'd started out.

Clark had a... a... She stepped around to look at the opposite side.

A secret compartment...

And half a dozen of Superman's suits.

Part 2

Her jaw dropped and all the air disappeared from her lungs.

She...

He...

Clark that... that... fink!

This was why he got all those exclusive Superman interviews! Oh, that just wasn't fair. She would have gladly offered up closet space for an interview or two. But, no... seems Clark and Superman were better friends than either one of them had ever let on.

Clark had a *lot* of explaining to do as soon as she found him. They were partners, for crying out loud! He couldn't have mentioned this?

Superman kept his suits here. Did he live here, too?
No, she would have noticed that.

But even just keeping his suits here... in a closet that was obviously constructed for solely that purpose... Superman spent a good deal of time here; that was for sure. Maybe this was where Superman put his feet up, relaxed, watched TV, chatted with Clark about his day...

Did they talk about her? Complain about her pigheadedness and her unrelenting infatuation?

She let out a slow breath, and her eyes wandered to the spiral staircase leading up to his loft. What other secrets was Mr. Greenjeans hiding from her? She narrowed her eyes and took a step towards his bedroom.

And stopped.

No. She shouldn't. Clark, annoying and underhanded as he was, still had a right to privacy. For now, at least.

And Superman... well, he was lucky he had no memory at the moment.

The important thing now was that her clothing problem was solved. She pulled a suit and a cape from their hangers and draped them over her arm. They hung heavily and the cape dragged on the floor. She couldn't very well take it back to her place like this. She'd need something to put it in. Clark had to have a duffle bag around somewhere.

She managed to find one, and she crammed the suit inside along with a pair of his red boots. If the suit wrinkled, Superman would just have to deal with it. It wasn't like she'd be letting him out anyway, not when he didn't even know who he was.

He stepped out of the bathroom, a towel secured around his waist. It felt good to be rid of the dirt and grime that'd been clinging to him. He hoped Lois had found something comfortable for him to wear. The towel was better than nothing, but he still felt... exposed. And vulnerable.

And he had nothing to do until Lois returned with the clothes. He could have a look around, though. She'd said they were friends and he'd been here before, so it wasn't like he'd really be invading her privacy. He'd just be reacquainting himself with the place. And her.

He started towards the knickknacks and things on top of her dresser, but... the bedroom was a bit personal, wasn't it? Maybe she wouldn't appreciate his being in here for longer than it took for him to walk from the bathroom to the living room.

He left the bedroom without another look and found himself staring at the armoire just to the left outside the door with funny shaped blocks of crystal inside. No, those were... Kerth Awards, right? He opened the cabinet to have a closer look. Yup, Kerth Awards for investigative

journalism. And, wow, Lois had three of them! She must be quite the journalist.

The other figurines and such didn't give him too much more of a clue as to who Lois Lane was, so he closed the cabinet and he wandered further into the living room. There was a picture on the end table. That ought to be of some help. He reached out to grab the frame and turn it so he could see it.

Oh. Wow. It was him. And her. A candid photo, it appeared, taken in what looked to be a newsroom. Must be, since Lois was a reporter, and they were both obviously in business attire. The picture showed her sitting at her desk, hands at the keyboard, and he was leaning over close to her, his hand on her shoulder. He laughed quietly at the silly grin on his face in the picture, probably caused by the look on Lois's face — a challenging glare, one eyebrow hitched — but there was more mischief in there, it seemed, than actual anger.

His eyes in the photograph...

Well, he wasn't sure he quite believed what he was seeing there. Surely, it couldn't be. Lois would have mentioned something if they'd been... were... lov — really close friends.

He brought the frame a bit nearer to him to examine it more closely. It almost looked as if...

The locks on the door started clacking one by one. He set the frame down quickly just as the door opened and a bundle of brunette and duffle bag came bustling through.

"I'm back, and I actually managed to find one of your su —" She stopped mid-sentence and mid-stride.

"Welcome back." He smiled, a little unsure of why she was... oh, right. He was still half naked. At least the towel was more decent than her jacket had been.

"I... uh..." She was staring, slack-jawed.

He shifted uncomfortably and ran a hand through his still wet hair. She'd already seen him... well, wearing less. Why was she...

"You, um..." She blinked, and then shook her head.

He felt a blush rising to his cheeks. "What?"

"Nothing. It's just you reminded me of someone — of..." She shook her head again. "Never mind. It's late. I'm seeing things, and I'm low on caffeine. I didn't have time for much coffee today, what with all the... with the asteroid and such. But you've taken care of that now. Not that I've watched the news to be sure, but I assu —"

"Um, Lois?" he interrupted.

"Huh? What?"

He gestured down to the bag hanging from her arm. Clothes would be nice right now. Really nice.

She glanced down, and then back up. "Oh! Here," she said as she opened the bag and pulled out... something. She handed him a bundle of red and blue... spandex? "It's

a good thing you keep some extra suits over at Clark's place, otherwise I'm not sure what we'd have done. And you were lucky I found them, too. Quite a hiding place the two of you constructed..."

Her words barely registered. He was staring at the red and blue spandex. No, just the blue was spandex. The red was a heavier, almost silky material. He raised his arm and let the garments hang loosely so he could see... it wasn't seriously a cape, was it?

"Lois?"

"Yes?"

"You're kidding, right?"

"No, you really do keep your suits over at Clark's. I didn't know that before, but you have a closet and everything. I know you don't remember much now, but really, how do you think I'd have gotten it otherwise?"

He shook his head. "This isn't a suit. This is... a Halloween costume."

She frowned at him. "It's... it's what you always wear, Superman."

There was the Superman thing again. This had to be a dream. He glanced at the material again. It was this or the towel, apparently, because she hadn't brought anything else with her. She couldn't be serious; there was no way he wore this all the time. In fact, the picture he'd just seen proved otherwise.

He wanted to tell her he'd just stay in the towel, but he got the distinct impression that it would upset her somehow. She wanted him to wear the costume — expected him to. Not to mention her eyes kept wandering over his chest and... lower.

His eyes flicked to the photograph. If they were... friends after all, maybe she'd already... maybe they'd...

The towel needed to go. Get replaced, rather. And he needed a bit of breathing space.

Well, this costume thing couldn't be that bad, right? At least it would cover more of him.

Lois cleared her throat hesitantly. He looked up to find her holding out the duffle bag to him. There was another piece of clothing inside. He pulled it out and watched Lois as a blush rose in her cheeks.

Red spandex briefs.

"You... uh... you wear them on the outside."

No. No way.

He groaned and gathered the garments against his stomach. She was still holding the duffle bag out. He didn't even want to know what else was in there. He just snatched the bag from her and headed back to the bathroom. Hopefully this nightmare would end soon.

Safely inside the bathroom again, he stepped into the spandex costume and felt the smooth material slide neatly

into place. Funny, it was much more comfortable than he would have imagined. Snug and almost familiar.

It took him a minute or two to work out how the harness and the cape were supposed to be worn, but he managed. He cringed inwardly as he pulled the red underwear into place, the red underwear that had... belt loops?

He looked into the duffle bag. Yeah, definitely belt loops to be adorned with a bright yellow belt. There were boots in the bag, too. Red, but he could handle boots. And, thankfully, no more remained in the bag.

He was all dressed now, and nothing felt out of place. Considering. He was scared to look in the mirror, though.

He looked anyway, and... it... actually wasn't half bad. The ensemble seemed well thought out and put together, if loud and a tad garish. Only... the tight-fitting spandex didn't leave much to the imagination. At all.

He gave the discarded towel a longing look, then left the bathroom, wondering if Lois would look at him funny if he came out with the cape wrapped around him, covering his front.

She stared at her closed bedroom door. Superman was... not wearing any clothes. In her bedroom. Right now, he was dropping the towel and putting on the spandex. She could... say she forgot something from her room and, oops, didn't realize he'd been...

No, that was a lame excuse.

Then again, the man didn't have a memory. For all he knew, they were involved. Dating, a couple, in a relationship... just like she'd always wished for. Who knew when — or *if* — his memory would come back? He'd need someone who knew him, someone who could tell him all about himself. And it wasn't as if she'd be fudging any of the details, not really. She'd just be embellishing a little. After all, Superman *did* have feelings for her. He'd never been able to hide them very well. All she'd be doing was removing whatever silly inhibitions had kept him at a distance. There wouldn't be any harm in that, right?

She growled at herself and sighed. Get it together, Lane. Superman needed help, not ogling and grandiose plans to make him her significant other. Lies, basically. Superman stood for truth, and here she was plotting to lie to him.

This was *not* the time to take advantage of his vulnerability, as contradictory as the concept of his even being vulnerable seemed. She'd done that once before, just a few weeks ago, and she still felt guilty about it, even though she couldn't quite bring herself to regret kissing him while he'd been under the pheromone spray's influence.

Lois Lane was better than this. She wasn't shallow. So, she wasn't going to accidentally look in on him or tell him they were... anything more than friends. The only thing she was going to do was...

What was she going to do?

It wasn't like she could call a doctor or take him home to rest. She could tell him as much as she knew about him to try and refresh his memory, but then what? Oh, why couldn't Clark have been home? He would've known what to do. Or at least he could have helped her think of something. Because any minute now, Superman was going to come walking out her bedroom door and ask her —

"So, you said something about dinner?"

... to feed him.

Dang. That hadn't been on the top of her list of concerns. But it should have been.

What the heck did Superman eat?

The change into the costume had worked after all. At least insofar as she wasn't gaping at him any longer. She was treating him more... normally. Sort of.

Now there was a slight touch of awe — or something. She seemed a bit more... reserved. If you didn't count her ushering him to have a seat on the couch, then making a mad dash for the kitchen.

Whatever it was, it was disconcerting. This whole "Superman" thing was disconcerting, too. And the costume. That was the most disconcerting of all.

Because... it felt familiar. And it fit perfectly. Which had to mean that Lois had been serious. But even that was confusing because she'd said the costume was what he always wore, yet there was photographic proof that she'd seen otherwise.

That was something he really wanted to ask her about. As soon as she finished remodeling the kitchen. He cast a worried gaze toward the next room where all the rustling of papers and banging of doors and drawers and pans was coming from.

Hadn't she said earlier that she would order takeout? Certainly that didn't involve so much noise and commotion. Maybe she'd decided to cook instead?

He should remind her. He didn't want her to go to any more trouble for him than she had already, especially because, now that he thought about it, he didn't feel all that hungry.

He was about to get up from the couch when she came bustling back in the room, just a tad winded, and held out a menu for him. It was probably better not to ask what she'd been up to. He just took the tri-folded paper and started to mull it over. She sat on the armchair to watch him.

"Chinese is okay, right? You like Chinese, don't you? I mean, probably not from Peking Palace since you can fly

around the world for real Chinese anytime you like. I was trying to find the menu for this place Clark always gets food from, but I guess I don't h —"

"Did you say fly?"

Part 3

She was staring at him now like a deer caught in the headlights. A confused deer. "Yeah... I said fly. You don't... you don't remember that you can fly?"

"Fly how? Like I own a private jet? They let me pilot a plane wearing *this*? Wouldn't... the cape get in the way?"

"No..." She bit at her lower lip. "You, uh..." She made a wavy motion with her hand. "Fly."

"Huh?" He wrinkled his brow in confusion.

"It's sort of like this." Her hands and arms came out in front of her, and she leaned forward a bit.

This had to be another joke. "I fly?"

"Yeah."

"Without a plane?" The punch line was coming any second now...

She nodded.

"How?"

Her brow creased. "I'm not sure. You just... do it. Somehow."

"Okay," he said slowly. He was trying his best to believe she wasn't crazy, but she wasn't doing much to make him think otherwise. Maybe he should just humor her. After all, for all he knew... she could be right. Probably was right.

She was still looking at him expectantly. Nervously, as if she was afraid she'd said something wrong. She broke eye contact, and he followed her gaze to her fidgeting hands. She glanced back up, her eyes disappointed.

He felt a small twinge in his chest, and he smiled, hoping he could reassure her — maybe even himself — that she hadn't lost it. That seemed to break her from her distraction.

"So," he started. "Chinese food. Why don't you go ahead and order what you like? It all looks good to me."

She nodded shyly and took the menu back from him. She was quiet on her way back to the kitchen to phone in the order.

Flying?

The idea sounded... wonderful. Insane, but wonderful. Flying under his own power, soaring among the clouds...

It just... couldn't be possible, though. Could it?

He glanced over his shoulder to make sure Lois wasn't watching, raised his arms out in front of him as she'd done, and strained upwards from his seat on the couch.

Nothing.

Yeah, too good to be true. Men didn't fly. She had to have meant something else... something similar that made it seem as if he could fly.

What other bizarre revelations did this woman have up her sleeve? Would she be telling him next that he could see through walls and catch bullets in his bare hands? He turned a palm up and examined the creases in his hand, and his eyes wandered to the line of blue spandex that stopped exactly at his wrist. Not too short, not too long.

Where had he gotten this outfit? And who did he think he was, walking around wearing something so ostentatious and calling himself Superman?

Maybe Lois had the answers. She seemed to know a great deal about him, certainly more than he did. And maybe if she had enough answers, he'd be able to remember everything... or at least *something*.

She cursed under her breath as she hung up the phone. Of course they'd be closed. It was the middle of the night. Even Chen's Chow. They were *always* open. But tonight, with the asteroid and everything else going on, even they'd decided to close up shop. Why hadn't she thought of that before?

She was a wreck. That was why. Superman was in her living room without a clue who he was. And he was expecting her to feed him. She bit at her lower lip. What was she supposed to do now?

She made her way back to the living room with trepidation. "Uh... Superman?"

She caught the end of a wince on his features before he smiled up at her. "Yes?"

"I, uh... how hungry are you? Because I kind of... there's nothing open right now, and I don't really have anything to feed you. Unless you wouldn't mind one of those frozen dinners, but it's been in the freezer for... a while. I'm not sure it's good anymore. I mean, they don't go bad, normally, it's just that I opened it one night and didn't get around to —"

"It's okay, Lois." There was an amused gleam in his eyes when he interrupted her. "I'm actually not that hungry."

"No?" Her hands twisted in front of her.

He shook his head and smiled softly. "No."

She bit back a sigh of relief and tried to ignore the little flip in her stomach at the sight of his smile. That smile. The one she'd always known was reserved for her and her alone. Not that he ever did it consciously, but he never looked at anyone else with the same... tenderness. Kind of like the way Clark smiled at her, but not quite.

"Uh, okay. Good. Then we should probably..." Talk? She talked to Superman all the time; there was no need to be nervous. Well, other than the fact that he didn't

remember a thing about himself, yet his subconscious seemed to remember how to smile just for her.

Nope. Nothing to be nervous about. And nothing to read into. It was just a smile.

"... talk?" he provided.

"Yeah, talk." Good grief. Couldn't she even finish a sentence? "I, uh... I bet you've probably got a few more questions. I'm not sure I can answer them all for you, but I can try. I know where your suits are now, what kind of rescues you do, some of the charities you volunteer for —"

"Lois?" he interrupted.

She stopped and looked over at him. His eyes were... well, she wasn't going to think about how his eyes were because they reminded her of Clark's when he'd thought she'd gone off the deep end and was worried about telling her so. And that was just ridiculous.

"Yeah?"

"Are we... more than friends?"

She nearly choked. Oh, god.

How was she supposed to answer that? Yes, please? No? If you'd only give it a chance? Only in my dreams?

She swallowed. Hard. She should have at least made some coffee. Taking a sip or ten would have given her time to... think.

No, no. No thinking needed. She knew the answer. No, they weren't. That was the answer, plain and simple. That was how he wanted it. As much as he seemed conflicted with his own boundaries, he'd still been the one to set and keep them. She had to respect that.

She shook her head, though didn't say anything. Her voice didn't feel very trustworthy at the moment, as if it were holding on to some silly notion that if she didn't actually say it aloud...

She coughed. "No, we're not... more than friends."

An inscrutable look passed over his eyes, but she did catch more than a touch of confusion in there. "Ah, okay," he said.

Asking him why he'd asked would be out of the question. Right? Or maybe...

Well, there had to be a reason why he had. It wasn't her place to pry, though. No reason to open up a can of worms she had no business opening.

He cleared his throat, and she looked up again. "I, uh... I'm just asking because..."

She swallowed again, resisting the urge to offer him a can opener.

She followed his gaze over to the picture frame on her end table. The photograph wasn't facing them, but she knew well which one it was — her and Clark in the newsroom. She loved that picture. But why was Superman...

He wasn't asking. His eyes had dropped from the frame already and were staring down at his wrist where the spandex met skin. "Never mind," he told his wrist before he looked back up at her. "So, you were saying something about charities, right?"

Her brow furrowed. He wasn't going to give a reason for his abrupt change of mind.

It was better not to ask her. She'd said they weren't more than friends, and she didn't really have a reason to lie about it. Unless it was one-sided. Which could be possible but didn't really explain why she'd been so flustered all night. Or why she'd been... gawking at him when he'd been wearing nothing but the towel. There was definitely a mutual attraction. He just... got the feeling that he shouldn't mention it. And for some reason that made him unaccountably sad.

He watched her and half-listened as she rattled off charities and functions and a slew of other events that didn't sound at all familiar. Then she yawned. A huge yawn.

It was late, wasn't it? He looked around for a clock. Yikes. Three a.m. "You're tired, Lois. We should go to bed." He found her wide-eyed and staring at him. And he could have sworn he'd heard her breath hitch, but that had to be his mind playing tricks on him. "Sleep. We should go to sleep."

She nodded slowly.

"Which brings up the question... where do I live?"

She stared, speechless, and his heart started thumping.

"Oh, god. I'm sorry, I should have asked that first off! Here I am keeping you up at all hours when I could have been home already, and..."

"I don't know."

Huh? "You don't know what?"

She blushed, ducking her head. "I don't know where you live."

She didn't... They were friends, weren't they? "How do..." Why didn't she know?

"I... well, you've never told me before. And I just found out tonight... you keep all your extra suits at Clark's place."

"Extra suits?"

"Well, yeah. More of the..." She made a sweeping gesture at the loud red and blue he was wearing. "Suits."

That was just... something to worry about later.

"Anyway, you keep them at Clark's place, so maybe... I guess maybe you don't have a ho — don't have a place to... stay."

How did he not have a place to live? "Maybe I live at Clark's, then?"

"I... I don't think so. I would have noticed. Or Clark would have told me. At least, I think he would have told me. Even though he didn't tell me about the suits. But I've been there plenty of times and... I'm not sure."

"Could we call and ask him? Or is he asleep already?"

A worried look crossed her face. "I... He actually wasn't home. I'm not sure where he is." She frowned and her brow creased.

He didn't like seeing her like this. Something about her being upset sat uneasily with him. But at the same time, he felt a small pluck of jealousy towards this man who was apparently a good friend of his.

She waved a hand in the air, as if brushing the worry aside, though he could clearly see it still bothered her. "He probably managed to find a flight to Smallville to see his parents or something."

"If you're sure..." What was there he could do? "We could look for him or something."

She shook her head and cleared her throat. "No, it's okay. He'll be fine. He has a habit of disappearing, anyway. Meantime, you need a place to stay. I know my couches aren't the most comfortable, but you're welcome to sleep here. Or, actually, I should take the couch. You take the bed. You've been through a lot, and you're my guest and —"

"The couch is fine, Lois. I insist." The word comfortable shouldn't even be allowed *near* the description of her couches, but he didn't want to kick her out of her own bed, not when she'd done so much to help him already. "Thank you," he said softly.

Her head tilted slightly. "For what?"

"For whatever it is that you've done for me that makes me feel so good about you."

Her cheeks flushed a bit, and she ducked her head. "You're welcome." She smiled at him and he felt his heart do a little flip. "Okay. I, uh... I'll go get you a blanket and a spare pillow. I'll be right back."

He watched her disappear into the bedroom. Maybe he should have offered to stay over at Clark's. She still seemed a bit nervous around him, and he didn't want to make her more uncomfortable.

But... he didn't know Clark. Even if they were supposed to be good friends, he just didn't feel right intruding, especially when the guy wasn't there. Not to mention he didn't know anyone but Lois. Yeah, it was a selfish reason to stay, but the idea of leaving everything he knew, leaving her, made him anxious. He'd figure out where he could go in the morning.

Lois climbed into her bed and pulled the covers up over her shoulders. It might have been a little rude to just hand him the blanket and pillow and retreat to her room

with nothing more than a quiet goodnight, but she couldn't help it. She felt horribly unbalanced and depressed.

Here she thought she'd be the best person for Superman to have help him in this situation, but she wasn't. Not at all. She hadn't known where he kept his suits. She didn't know where he lived. She didn't know how he flew, or how *any* of his powers worked, for that matter. She didn't really know Superman at all.

She turned to her side and curled up, hugging the pillow to her cheek. How had she disillusioned herself so much? If anyone had asked her yesterday, she would have told them she was the foremost expert on Superman. She knew him best. She was friends with him.

Well, that wasn't even close to the truth. Sure, she probably still knew him better than most of the world, but when it came to the important stuff, she was still in the dark.

Clark knew, though. She'd always known Clark was closer to Superman than she was, but she hadn't realized how much closer. Clark certainly knew where Superman lived if the superhero was keeping his capes at Clark's apartment. He probably even knew how Superman took his coffee and how he liked his eggs. There was a whole other side of Superman she didn't know about. And Clark did.

That was what hurt the most. Clark hadn't told her. She'd thought she knew Clark pretty darned well. She knew how *he* drank his coffee. She knew lots of things about Clark. She knew she could call him her best friend and mean it. And she'd thought he could say the same of her. But what kind of best friend never said anything about building closet space for the local superhero's wardrobe? And what kind of best friend took off without notice or explanation during such a time as this?

He had better be all right. She'd call first thing in the morning to see if he'd gotten home yet. Then, after she gave him a piece of her mind for disappearing during a world crisis, they'd figure out a way to help Superman get his memory back.

Part 4

He woke up to the sound of a sharp gasp and looked over to find Lois in the doorway to her bedroom with her mouth hanging open. Why was she staring at him like that?

"You're floating!" she exclaimed, and then stood silent for brief moment before the astonished look left her face. "I mean, of course you're floating. You would float. I just didn't realize, wasn't expecting you'd float in your sleep and..."

Floating? He looked around himself. Oh god. He was floating!

And then he hit the floor with a thud, catching the edge of the coffee table on his way down. It scraped a few inches across the floor.

"Oh my god!" She'd moved closer, her hand held out as if she wasn't sure what to do. "Are you okay?"

He rubbed his thigh where the table had hit him. "I... " That ought to have hurt, but it didn't. Odd. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Oh, good." She looked almost confused for a second. "Right, you would be okay, being invulnerable and all."

Floating. Invulnerable? Why did that sound so... familiar?

He watched Lois, still a bit dazed, as she ran a hand through her hair, smoothing it out of its sleep-tousled state. He felt a warm — and familiar — flutter in his chest when he looked at her in her oversized t-shirt and sleep shorts.

She seemed shy all of a sudden. "What?" she asked with a hint of a smile.

He couldn't help but smile back. "Nothing, it's just... after I kept you up all night, you look pretty decent first thing in the morning."

That spooked her, apparently, because her eyes went wide and he was pretty sure he heard her gasp, too. She composed herself quickly, though, and made a nervous gesture towards the kitchen.

"I'll, uh... just make us some coffee." She gave him a weak smile before she disappeared into the kitchen.

He'd been right to back off on the whole relationship neighborhood of conversation last night. If a small compliment like that had made her uncomfortable, how would she react if he simply out and told her about what he'd been feeling ever since she'd rescued him last night?

And what exactly had he been feeling, anyway? It had to be more than simple attraction, didn't it? That look in his eyes from the picture — there'd definitely been more than attraction there. There was no mistaking Lois's attraction for him, but she seemed to be avoiding it.

He stood and went to the end table, picking up the picture again when he got there. His expression in the photograph was definitely one of adoration, quite possibly... love. He couldn't tell from the picture whether or not Lois felt the same way about him, but if he looked hard enough, he could see affection there in her eyes — something that hinted at more than friends, despite what Lois had said last night. That same affection, though, was something he'd noticed when she'd spoken of Clark being missing. Did she have feelings for him and Clark both? Or maybe she and Clark were in a relationship, so she wasn't free to pursue one with him. Maybe that was why she seemed so unsettled, especially when he'd been... less than clothed.

She tried not to bite at her nails as she watched the coffee brew — the first time in her life wishing it would brew more slowly. Pretty decent in the morning, was what he'd said. They were just words. Appropriate words for the situation. So what if they'd been almost the exact words Clark had used just last week when they'd been in the Honeymoon Suite at the Lexor? So what if he'd sounded just like Clark when he'd said them? And so what if she'd gotten the same flutter in her stomach as when Clark had smiled and told her that?

It didn't mean anything. And it certainly didn't mean... that.

Because *that* was an impossibility.

Clark didn't fly; he tripped over his own feet. Clark didn't lift rockets into space; he had trouble opening his orange juice bottles in the morning. And Clark most certainly didn't do things like fly into outer space and save the world because... because Clark could get hurt!

Suddenly, she had to see him. She had to see for herself, convince herself it wasn't true. Her best friend and her crush couldn't be the same person; they just couldn't, especially because, despite all her struggling against it, her best friend had started becoming her crush, too. And she just wasn't sure if she could handle all that.

She made her way cautiously back to the living room and found him studying the picture he'd almost mentioned last night. The one of her and Clark... of her and Superman? The picture that she secretly loved because, if she looked at it just right, she could pretend that Clark had feelings for her and that they'd make a really cute couple even though a relationship — and especially one with Mr. Nowheresville — was the last thing she wanted.

He noticed her presence and held up the picture to her, pointing to her expression in the photograph. "This look on your face, that was because I was editing your copy, wasn't it?"

She tried to swallow back the lump that'd suddenly appeared in her throat, struggling to keep her face from betraying the tumult of emotions assaulting her.

Looking back at the picture, he continued with a slight smile on his face that reminded her so much of Clark, "I think I'm remembering a little. You're always yelling at me not to edit your copy, aren't you? I'm just curious, though... why am I wearing a business suit here? You told me —" He stopped short when he looked back up at her.

She couldn't say anything. She was holding her breath, trying not to cry.

"Lois? What's wrong?"

All Clark. His voice was all concern and all Clark. Her Clark.

Clark was standing in the middle of her living room wearing Superman's suit, asking her why she'd made him wear it.

"Clark." The name came out on a sob, and she wasn't sure if it was a question or a plea.

"What?" he asked. The adorable look of concern and confusion on his face secured the revelation in her mind if the rest hadn't already.

"Because you're Clark Kent." She sniffled and smiled, almost laughing.

"What?" The concern dropped off his face and left confusion there all by itself.

This time she did laugh, softly. His hair was slightly mussed and much more Clark-like than Superman. She stepped closer to him and pointed to his likeness in the picture. "Because that's you. You're wearing the business suit because you're Clark Kent."

"I know that's me! But why..." He was now looking at her with suspicion added to his confusion. "Is this some sort of practical joke you and Clark are playing on me?" He gestured down to his suit and looked back up at her questioningly.

"No... you *are* Clark."

"I am?" he asked, almost wryly. "Then why didn't you bring me some of my normal clothes?! What's with this getup?" He almost whimpered the last line.

It was almost endearing enough to let him get away with. "Because *you*," she said, poking him in the S to emphasize her point. "You never told me you were Clark."

Confusion and a touch of annoyance played across his face. "What the heck are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you never telling me that you were Superman," she said, matter-of-factly.

"Huh?" His brow furrowed and he tilted his head slightly. "You've been telling me all this time that I *am* Superman — a name, I might add, that is really embarrassing and egotistical. How could you *not* know that I'm... Superman?" He didn't hide the wince at the name this time.

She bit at her lip and tried not to let all the hurt surface, but his cutting remark about the name — the one she'd given him — nudged a small hole in her defenses. "I... um..."

She took the picture from him gently and turned away, putting the frame back where it belonged. She started fussing with the rest of the knickknacks on the table, anything to not look at him right this second. He'd never said anything before. He'd seemed to like the name, and he certainly hadn't told her she could call him anything else. She looked at Clark's smiling face in the picture.

He couldn't have told her his real name, though, could he? What was he supposed to have said, "You can call me

Clark”? That wouldn’t have gone over well; she knew herself.

She thought she’d known Clark. And it hurt to know that he’d been lying to her for all this time.

She heard him clear his throat behind her. “Uh, Lois,” he said softly. “I’m not sure what I did to upset you, but... I’m sorry.”

And there he was. Always there to comfort her. Even when he was the one causing the pain. Even when he didn’t know who he was. And, suddenly, she was mad at him because she couldn’t be mad at him. It wasn’t fair, and that just made her want to cry more.

A hand touched her shoulder. “Lois? Are you okay? I didn’t mean to...”

She shook her head and wiped at her tears, then finally looked back at him. “C’mon, I’ll take you to back to your place to get some normal clothes.”

He had tried not to watch her the entire drive over to what was apparently his apartment. She’d snuffled a little and wiped the stray tear away, but she hadn’t said anything. He couldn’t tell if she was mad at him or just upset, though he’d guess the latter.

He didn’t understand why she’d thought he was two different people, or why he hadn’t told her. He didn’t really understand the Superman thing to begin with, let alone why he’d lie about his identity to someone who clearly meant a lot to him. And if her actions were any indication, he clearly meant a lot to her, as well. Why the lies? Why the different names? And, for goodness’s sake, why the spandex?

For the first time since she’d found him, he was angry at not having his memory, at not knowing anything. There were so many pieces of this puzzle that just didn’t fit, so many little flashes of memory starting to prick at his mind that didn’t make sense, and the only thing he knew — the only thing he was one hundred percent certain of — was that it hurt to see her so upset. And *that* was a familiar feeling.

Oh, there were other familiar feelings, too, like the little jump in his heart every time she’d smiled and the warm sensation in his chest when he just looked at her. But watching her be upset was the most prominent of feelings right now, and he wanted nothing more than to make it go away.

He’d stood by silently as she’d picked the lock on his front door, something he was quite... amused by not being surprised at. Now, she was pacing a bit, obviously flustered.

“I, uh... I’ll go get you some — No, wait. It’s your bedroom and closet and everything. You should probably just go yourself. I mean, you probably don’t want me

rooting through your underwear and telling you what to wear. I — ” She stopped herself short and turned to glance at the suit he was still wearing. “I, yeah... your bedroom’s right through that opening. Whatever you find should fit you just fine because... well, it’s yours and — ”

“Lois.” He stepped towards her, cutting her off and putting a hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay, Lois.”

She shook her head and took a halting breath, as if the babbling and pacing had been acting as a dam for the rest of her emotions. Her whisper was so low, he wasn’t sure how he’d heard it. “It’s not.”

Before he realized what he was doing, he’d gathered her into his arms to hold her. He still didn’t quite understand why she was so upset but comforting her was the only thing he knew to do. It almost seemed... instinctive.

He felt her sag against him, trembling and weeping softly as she did. He held her for long minutes while she cried, whispering and shushing her, telling her it would be okay. Then, her voice still quiet, she spoke again, her breath warm against his chest.

“It’s not okay. You’re supposed to be Superman. You’re supposed to be Clark. And you’re not supposed to get hurt.” She started to pull away slowly, wiping the tears from her cheek as she did.

“But I feel fine. Look, no harm done.” He tried smiling for her as he gestured to his body.

Lois shook her head and put a small hand to his temple. “You don’t remember anything.” She sniffled again and cast her eyes away from his, drawing her hand back.

“That’s not true! I remember the way I — ” He stopped himself. He’d been starting to remember just how he felt about her. It’d just been a combination of intense feelings up until a few minutes ago, but now his feelings for her, if nothing else, were starting to make themselves... remembered.

Her eyes came back to his quickly, a hint of hope and anticipation in them. “You remember what?”

Could he tell her that? He didn’t know if it was something she’d know he was supposed to remember. What if, among all the other things, he hadn’t told her that either?

She was still watching him, waiting for a response.

What could he say? What *should* he say? He remembered the way he kept his apartment? He remembered the way he made spaghetti? He remembered the way he made her coffee...

He *did* remember the way she took her coffee, and that he always brought her a cup in the newsroom every morning. And he remembered...

“I remember that I love you,” he said. “Actually, I don’t think I ever forgot that.”

She gasped slightly, her face quickly gaining creases of some emotion he couldn't quite place — some place between horror and shock. Oh, no. He hadn't told her before. He started trying to come up with some way to backtrack, but then the creases smoothed into a meager attempt at what he hoped would have been a smile. And then she started crying again.

Part 5

Clark's words hit her chest with psychical force, robbing her of her breath. She couldn't help the tears starting again. He loved her. She'd known that. Sort of. But... but...

How did he remember that he loved her, of all things, when he couldn't even remember that he was the most powerful man on the planet? How did... what did that mean, exactly? And what was she supposed to say? She got the feeling she ought to say something, especially as he'd gone deathly silent in the last minute. She glanced back in his direction but didn't quite meet his face.

He was standing there, all Clark-like in his discomfort. He even had one shoe — red boot — pointed inward like he always did when he was unsure of himself or when... when his feelings were hurt. Oh, god. What was she supposed to do? She needed time, space to breathe, to think.

But she didn't have that. She had a superhero, best friend, partner, and love interest all rolled into one, who wasn't quite sure who he was or where he was from. He just knew he loved her. And she had to deal with all of that.

Or him. Maybe it'd just be better to deal with him, not how he felt about her. She should focus on getting him to remember something else. The rest of his memory should start coming back now, right? That one memory should have opened the floodgates, theoretically. Not that she knew anything about psychology or the like aside from the intro course she'd taken years ago in college. She couldn't remember them ever having covered memory loss.

Clark cleared his throat softly. She didn't look up. She couldn't look up until she had a plan, not into those eyes. She couldn't stand to look at Clark's eyes when he was hurt. But how much time had passed? Thirty seconds? Three minutes? How long had he been standing there... worried? Upset?

"Clark?" she started, not really sure of what to say. She'd have to make up the plan on the fly.

"I... uh, Lois, I..." he stammered.

She looked up. Oh no. Her concerned and adorably befuddled Clark had disappeared, and now he was just plain... she wasn't sure what he was. Devastated? And seeing devastated dressed in red and blue spandex was more than wrong.

All she had was a tenuous grip on the situation, and it was slipping fast.

He started again, "I, uh, I'll just go get changed." He hooked his thumb in the general direction of his bedroom and walked away, his cape flowing behind him as went.

The last time she'd seen the cape walking away from her had been over twenty-four hours ago. God, it seemed like a lifetime ago. She'd kissed him goodbye. No, not goodbye. She'd kissed him for luck. Because she'd been scared to death he wouldn't make it back, and she hadn't wanted him to know that. She'd told him as much, though. Scared enough for the both of us, she'd said. And what had he done? He'd smiled, assuring her he'd come back and that they'd go flying.

How had he done it? How could he have been so brave? Not Superman, he was Clark. How could her Clark have been so brave as to put it all on the line for the planet?

She'd kissed *Clark* for luck before he'd flown off, surely uncertain of his success. And when he'd been in distress on his way back, he'd headed for *her* apartment.

And look how she'd helped him. She'd crushed him and stomped on the only memory he'd found.

What was she supposed to do now?

He'd made her cry. Again. Twice in the space of five minutes, and he was trying not to cry himself. She... didn't love him. Knowing — remembering — she didn't feel the same way hurt like hell.

He tugged at the cape to pull it off, then remembered it was attached by a harness, or *to* a harness, rather. He fumbled a moment for the catches, finally finding them, and let the cape fall to the carpet with a soft thud. He exhaled heavily and ran his hands through his hair.

She should have said something in response, right? Women didn't just break down when you told them you loved them, did they? Sure, they might cry, but... not like this. Not when they loved you back. She should have said something.

<Don't fall for me, Farmboy. I don't have the time for it.>

Or maybe she had. When had that been? Recently? Had he already confessed his love for her only to have her turn him down cold? Was that why she was crying? Because she'd already told him not to love her?

<In your dreams, Kent. In your dreams.>

He remembered kissing her, though. More than a few times. Were those dreams, too?

<Oh, Clark, I love you! I want to spend the rest of my life with you!>

That one had to have been a dream.

He pounded his fist against the armoire in frustration. He was getting flashes of memories now, but he couldn't piece any of them together. And they all had to do with her. With Lois. And he... he'd punched a hole straight through the door of the armoire.

How the heck had that happened?

Lois's voice carried from the other room. "Are you okay in there?"

He wasn't sure what to say. It wasn't like he was in pain.

Her head peeked around the corner of the wall. "Clark?" she asked softly. "Are you okay? I heard a noise."

"I, uh..." He pulled his arm out of the splintered wood. "I think I broke something."

She hurried over to his side and gaped at the hole, then his forearm. "Clark! That's solid oak!"

She grabbed his hand and turned it over, as if looking for some sort of injury. Which, by all rights, she should have found. He should have at least had a scrape or something.

"Are you sure?" he asked, skeptical.

Her eyes were wide as she looked up at his face. "Look at it, Clark! That wasn't particle board."

He tried not to notice that she hadn't let go of his hand yet. Maybe she wouldn't notice, either, and she'd keep holding it.

She did notice, but she didn't let go. "You're not hurt." He wasn't sure if it was a question or a statement.

"I know. It's weird. I didn't even feel anything," he added, keeping very still so she wouldn't drop his hand from her grasp.

She dropped it, her hands searching out the wood instead, examining the hole. "What am I saying? Of course, you're not hurt."

"Of course?"

"Yeah, you don't get hurt, remember?"

He flinched a little at the word. It was an innocent question. But he didn't remember, and a little more to the point, he *could* get hurt. Just not the way she was implying. His feelings weren't quite as invulnerable as his body seemed to be.

"No," he said quietly. "I don't remember." He turned away from her slightly and moved to open the ruined door. He still wanted to get changed out of the loud costume. It didn't feel right on him anymore.

He paused when he felt her hand on his arm. She spoke softly. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that. I..."

"I know, Lois. It's okay." It wasn't, really, but he didn't have the heart to make her cry again. He wasn't sure he could handle it, but she didn't have to know that.

She pulled at his arm, trying to turn him to face her, so he did. She wasn't crying, at least. But the look on her face was still far from happy.

"Clark, look at me."

He did, but said nothing, and found her eyes searching, reading his face.

"What you said back there..." She nodded her head in the direction of the living room.

Here it was; she was going to respond now, and he closed his eyes and braced himself for the worst.

"I just... you took me by surprise, is all."

He didn't want to open his eyes. He felt off balance, like the floor might suddenly disappear and swallow him. Her hand touched his face, and it made the feeling worse.

"Open your eyes, Clark."

He wasn't sure he could handle the look on her face, the tender rejection he knew he'd find there. She ran her thumb across his cheek. Why was she doing that?

Slowly, he opened his eyes. She...

There was no rejection in her expression, no regret in having to let him down. He let out the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

"I do," she started softly. "I do care for you..." She trailed off, ducking her head a little.

<Like a brother.>

He sucked in a breath and waited for the words.

"I... It's just a lot to take in." Her eyes met his again. "I care for you. A lot. I... There's so much I'm feeling right now. You're hurt — mentally, at least. You don't remember anything, and all I know is that you're my partner, my best friend, and... maybe the start of something so much more... And I don't know how to help you." Her voice was shaking slightly.

The start of something so much more. He held on to that. It felt important and it grabbed at his heart. He lifted a hand to cup her cheek. "I don't know how you can help me, either. But just being here is a start."

She smiled softly and placed a hand over his.

"Let me finish getting changed and we can talk." He ran his thumb over her cheek softly before letting go.

She nodded and turned to leave his bedroom.

She sat on the couch and pulled a cushion to her stomach. Clark loved her. Superman loved her. Clark was Superman. He'd risked his life to save the world, and he'd come back to her. There was so much to process, so many emotions flooding through her. She didn't have to do it all now, though. Or figure out if she really did love him, too. Right now she just had to concentrate on helping him, helping Superman — no, Clark — get his memory back.

She thought hard. What helped to trigger memories? What had triggered his first memory? The picture. Him

and her together. That was a start. Him editing her copy. Little things, things from the newsroom. She could do that.

What else? They teased each other in the newsroom, playful banter. Maybe if she engaged in a little of that, that might help. But what about his powers? How did she help him remember those when she didn't even know how they worked? Obviously some of them were unconscious, like his strength. And the floating. Maybe now that she knew he was Clark, she'd be able to help him better. Somehow.

He emerged from his bedroom then, wearing jeans and one of those snug-fitting t-shirts she'd always unwillingly admired. He smiled at her, and she smiled back, and he came to sit next to her on the couch.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey," she answered, suddenly immensely more comfortable around him now that he was just Clark. Clark without his glasses, but somehow that was more endearing. More natural, even. He looked more comfortable, too.

He shifted a bit so he was facing her. "So, where do we start?"

She froze for a second. Start what? Why her mind suddenly supplied "kissing" as the answer, she had no clue. "With what?"

"Getting my memory back?" His smile was a little unsure.

"Oh, right. Your memory. I forgot... er, you know what I mean." She felt her face flush.

His smile grew warmer, and he nodded. "Maybe you could tell me more about these... uh, powers I have."

"Sure. I mean... I don't know all that much about them..."

"Well, you know more than me, I'm sure. You mentioned flying. And there was the floating thing. And, of course, I seem to be stronger than an ordinary man." He nodded in the direction of his bedroom. "And it didn't hurt, either."

She glanced down to the hand she was holding and ran her fingers against his skin and along his forearm, as if she needed to reassure herself he hadn't been hurt. "No, you're invulnerable. To everything, as far as I know. And you can fly — floating comes along with that, I assume. You're strong, really strong."

"How strong?" Clark looked intrigued, curious.

"Well, you lifted an entire spaceship into orbit the first time I met you."

"I did what now?" He was incredulous.

"There was a small problem with a shuttle launch a while back. You showed up out of nowhere, swallowed a bomb, then lifted the shuttle into orbit after you found out the rocket boosters were shot."

"A bomb?! I swallowed a bomb?"

She nodded shyly and wondered if now was a good time to bring up the super speed and X-ray vision. Just how much could he handle? "Should I go on?"

His eyes went wide. "There's more?"

She nodded again, unsure if she should continue.

"I, uh..." Clark started. "I guess I really should know everything... as impossible as this all seems."

She went on to tell him about the X-ray vision, heat vision, super cooling breath, super speed, and everything else she could think of. He still looked as if he was having trouble believing her. Who could blame him?

Clark leaned his side against the couch, probably for a bit more support. "So, how is it that I can do all this? Where did these powers come from?"

Where *did* they come from? She wasn't exactly sure. Superman was just Superman. She was pretty sure he got his energy from the sun and told him as much. But then there was the hard part...

"Clark, you're Kryptonian."

"Cryptwhatian?"

"Kryptonian. You're... an alien."

He paled. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

Part 6

It'd taken a lot of coaxing and reassuring on Lois's part, and he'd made her repeat what she'd told him already, before he started to relax a bit. Sure, "I'm an alien" was still reverberating loudly in his mind, but there was something about the way she talked about him that made it okay. There was caring, compassion, and a strongly instilled sense of... it wasn't hero-worship. It was more like... she found Superman — him — as something to believe in, to build a few hopes around. And she'd mentioned those same qualities in Clark, too. She'd all but told him she loved him, and that was enough for now.

She'd gone to make them some tea, and he could hear her shuffling around his kitchen, albeit much calmer than when she'd been in her kitchen. He grinned. It was no wonder he loved Lois; she was passionate and smart and slightly high-strung all rolled into one, a fascinating mixture of perfect with a little crazy thrown in.

Lois reentered the living area, carrying a tray with two teacups and the necessary accoutrements. She smiled softly as she set the tray down on the coffee table and reclaimed her seat next to him on the sofa.

"Oolong tea," she said.

He nodded his thanks as she handed him a steaming cup. Her hand brushed his and he felt his skin tingle. Their eyes met for a moment, but she looked away quickly as if she'd noticed too but wasn't sure what to do about it.

"You gave me the same box of tea once. You said this kind was really calming. I don't think I ever got around to

making it, though. I don't do calm well. It makes me edgy."

He found himself grinning again, and she smiled shyly back.

"Are you edgy now?" he asked softly.

"Me? No. Not at all. Why do you ask?" She reached a hand to smooth down her already smooth hair. "Do I look edgy?"

Her heartbeat suddenly filled his senses, an erratic flutter. A small voice reminded him he had super hearing and that he ought to tell Lois it was working. But his heart was beating its own staccato rhythm, and there was no force in this world, let alone a small inner voice, that could make him end this moment. He was going to kiss her, and he'd make damn sure he wouldn't forget this one.

He set his teacup down on the coffee table and said, "No, you look..." He paused, a little unsure, then forged on. "You look beautiful."

His heart started racing faster as he watched a blush rise in her cheeks, and that only made her look more beautiful. He leaned slightly closer to her, and she started babbling again.

"I'm sure I look a mess. It's been a rough couple of days... well, I guess they've been rougher for you, losing your memory and saving the world and all..."

He watched her eyes flit to his mouth and realized he must have done the same. He shook his head. "No, not a mess. Beautiful," he repeated.

Her heartbeat was thrumming in his ears. She inhaled softly, and he went for it, closing the distance between them until their lips met, softly at first, then more insistently. She sighed, leaning closer still. He brought a hand up to cup her cheek, his fingers splaying across her soft skin.

Memories flashed in his mind. The inside of an airplane and Lois giving him a tender kiss goodbye... a newsroom and him giving her a farewell kiss... a bright room, racing hearts, and he was on top of her, kissing her passionately... a tarmac on a blustery day and she was kissing him almost dreamily... another tarmac, crowded with people, and she was kissing him goodbye again — for luck...

All of them ruses or farewells. But this, now, this was real. She was warm against him, willing and more than... Oh, he was thinking too much. Feeling. He should be feeling. Her lips, her tongue, the warmth of their breath mingling as they parted, barely, and gasped for air.

They sat, mere inches separating them. His eyes searched hers, drank in the sight of her, and he leaned in again to recapture her lips.

A sharp rapping at the door startled them both apart. Lois, wide-eyed and breathing heavily, just stared for a half a second. Another knock, but neither of them moved.

"Clark, open up! It's Jimmy," came a muffled voice through the door.

Lois sat back and gave him a worried look before she stood and moved toward the front door. "Something must be wrong."

Clark followed her up the stairs onto the landing, still unsettled by both the kiss and the sudden interruption. Who was Jimmy?

She opened the door quickly, out of breath, and he wondered fleetingly if it was from her rushed trip to the door or his kiss. Before he could ponder that further, a young man came through the door hurriedly and turned to face them on the landing.

"Thank god I found you guys! Didn't you hear? EPRAD said that Superman didn't get rid of all of the asteroid. There's a large chunk of it still on course for Earth. We don't have much time and Superman's still missing."

Well, he could solve one problem for the young man — if he was Superman, he wasn't missing any longer. He was about to open his mouth to say so when he felt a sharp tug on his arm.

Lois spoke before he could. "We'll find him, Jimmy. He's got to be out there somewhere. Why don't you head back to the Planet and see if you can pull up any sightings of anything having fallen from the sky last night. Clark and I will hit the streets and look for Superman."

Jimmy nodded vigorously. "Good thinking, Lois. I'll call your cell as soon as I find anything."

"Thanks, Jimmy."

The young man hurried away again, and Lois shut the door after him.

"Why didn't you tell him, Lois?" It didn't seem right to send Jimmy off to research when they both knew exactly where Superman was.

Her hand was still on his arm and she turned him gently towards her. "No one else knows, Clark." Her eyes were full of concern. "At least, I'm pretty sure no one does. I mean, if you hadn't told me, you certainly wouldn't have told Jimmy. Besides, as far as we can tell, Superman *is* still missing." She raised her hand to touch his temple. "We have to get you your memory back."

He nodded resolutely in understanding and then headed back to the couch. Lois followed and they sat facing each other.

"Now, is there anything you remember?" she asked. "Besides you always editing my copy?" She gave him a teasing grin, though there was still a touch of anxiety in her voice.

He smiled in return as he searched his mind. Their shared kisses flashed through his mind again in sequence. A brief image of Lois making coffee and chastising him for all the full cream and sugar he put into his own cup. And then, an image of him throwing Lois, dressed in an evening gown, in a dumpster. He tried not to laugh out loud. Maybe she wouldn't appreciate him recounting that, but he'd definitely have to ask her later how that had happened.

She was looking at him expectantly. "Anything?"

"Little things are starting to come back. Nothing about Superman, though."

Why was the Clark part of him filtering back, but he couldn't remember anything about Superman? He strained for a super memory, anything, but all he got was a tight knot of anxiety deep in his gut. He glanced around his living room, searching for something that might trigger a memory of Superman. Knickknacks, books, a wine rack, photographs. Nowhere was there a flash of the red, blue, or S Lois had made him wear earlier. She'd said no one else knew, so obviously he kept that part of himself well-hidden. He almost laughed at the irony. Apparently he kept it so well-hidden even he couldn't find it now. Was that the reason he couldn't remember? No, that just seemed silly. Obviously, he'd known he was Superman.

His gaze traveled back to the photographs on his mantel. There was one of him and Lois. He smiled, searching for the memory that matched his smiling face, her carefree expression, and the little bear she was holding. There — the Smallville Corn Festival. He'd won that bear for her. No anxiety this time. Why was that? Was there something so terrible about Superman that he was repressing the man in blue altogether? Something terrifying?

What was he afraid of? He pushed harder for a memory. A flash of darkness, pricked by streaks of light, hit him. He was falling. Choking. Burning. Crashing... No!

He looked back at Lois. She'd apparently been waiting patiently for him to remember something. But there was anxiety written all over her face, matching what he felt inside.

"What's wrong?"

She worried at her lower lip for a moment, as if she were afraid to say what she was thinking, but then she said, "Jimmy said we're running out of time, that a piece of the asteroid is still headed for Earth." Her look turned to one of fear and anguish. "Oh, Clark. What are we going to do?"

His heart sank, and he wished there was something he *could* do. "I don't know."

She leaned into him and he pulled her into an embrace, stroking her hair as her head came to rest against his chest.

"I don't want to die," she whispered into him. He could feel her body start to tremble, barely perceptible, as if she were trying to hold back her emotions.

And then something inside of him clicked into place. His mind was flooded with images. Red and blue. The cape. Him in the suit. Saving her. Again. And again. He felt a sharp pull in his chest, his heart racing. Losing Lois was not OK. His chest tightened. The anxiety was there again in his gut. But this time it was different. This time...

He remembered how he felt in all those moments, saving Lois, almost not making it. The fear was almost paralyzing. Losing Lois was. Not. OK.

He couldn't lose her now.

She tried to fight away the fear in her chest. She didn't have time to be afraid; they needed to get Clark his memory back. She needed Superman.

But it wasn't fair to be crying against him now, not when he had to be just as worried and scared. She didn't need Superman — the world did. What she needed was Clark here to hold her and assure her everything was going to be all right, even if it wasn't. If she was going to die, there wasn't any place she'd rather be but in Clark's arms. It was selfish of her, though, to hold on to this moment as if it were her last. There was still hope. There had to be.

Suddenly she was filled with a fresh surge of determination. She pushed away from Clark, gently but hurriedly, and then she stood and started pacing. She had a new plan.

Bubbling with newfound excitement, she spoke, "We should call your parents, Clark. They'll know what to do. They can help. Oh, no... do you remember their number?"

"No, I —"

"No? Oh, boy. That's not good. Think, Lois. Maybe I have it written down somewhere or... Ooh, I know! Perry'll have it. We can call the Pla —"

"No, Lois. I mean we don't need to call them."

She stopped mid-pace and turned to look at him. That voice... it was deeper, confident, and it was Superman's.

THE END

Epilogue

The Planet was bustling with excitement and relief. The world was no longer ending. He hung back by the storeroom and watched his coworkers, his friends celebrate and pour champagne. They were safe now. She was safe.

He thought back to the moment it'd happened, the moment that all his memories of being Super had come

flooding back. She'd been scared. The strong, determined, and seemingly invincible Lois Lane had been terrified. She'd been terrified of dying, and for him, losing Lois... well, that was a fate worse than death.

The anxiety had still gripped him, clutching at his chest. But saving her was something he *had* to do. No question about it. So, despite his own fear, his heart had given his mind a jump-start to jog his memory. All the pieces of his life had clicked back into place. Clark Kent. Superman. Lois.

He'd flown at the remaining chunk of asteroid with a renewed vigor, determined that it wouldn't survive to threaten Earth this time. Comparatively, it'd be easy to steer it off course, the chunk being far smaller than its whole. Small despite its looming devastation.

The flight back had given him time to revel in his newly rediscovered memories in addition to the new memories he'd created. Things were certainly different now. Lois knew. She knew about Superman, and she knew he loved her, though she had to have suspected the latter already. And she loved him. She hadn't said it yet, but it was clear to him.

Now, as he watched everyone celebrate, he felt all was truly right with the world.

He made his way over. "Did I miss anything?" he asked.

"Clark!" Lois exclaimed. He watched as she caught herself, though. She quickly tempered her emotions. She managed a wry smile and said, "Only Superman saving the world."

Perry chimed in, pouring some champagne for Clark. "A real day to remember."

Lois almost choked on her sip of champagne. A real day to remember indeed. She caught his eye and smiled. He smiled warmly and raised his glass to her.

He and Lois slowly edged their way to the fringe of the crowd, eventually making it to a conference room when Lois had indicated that she wanted to talk without an audience.

Safely behind closed doors, she said quietly, "You're amazing, you know that?"

"Am I?" He had a hint of a grin across his lips. He guessed he had been pretty amazing today.

"How do you do that?"

"Do what? Move an asteroid?" he asked, slightly amused. He wasn't sure what she meant.

She thwapped him on the shoulder. "No, how do you come back from... saving the freaking world. Like you didn't just fly into space, putting your life on the line for the entire planet? Again!"

"Oh. That. Just practice, I guess." He felt the beginnings of a blush rising in his cheeks. "I have to do it all the time."

"Oh. Right." She nodded, clearly processing and understanding quickly. "I guess that's something I'll have to get used to now. She smiled at him warmly and stepped toward him, putting a hand on his lapel.

His heart did a little dance, both at her words and at her touch. He inched closer to her. "There are a few things I think I'll need to get used to too now."

"Oh? Like what?"

He reached up a hand to cup her cheek and leaned his head closer to hers. "Like this." He brought his lips down to hers, heady with the feeling that he could, and kissed her.

She smiled against his lips and kissed him back, deeply, lovingly.

He pulled back to look into her eyes, still amazed and touched at what he found staring back at him. "Yeah, this'll definitely be a day to remember."

THE REAL END