

Cacophony

By [SonicMessiah](#) <ssjdunn.sd@gmail.com>

Rated: PG-13

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Summary: Funny, episodic piece. A mysterious chocolate shop has opened, and Perry wants his two best reporters on the case. People are breaking into song and dance all over the city. It's early season 1, Clark loves Lois, but does she love him? How will he know? What shenanigans will ensue?

Story Size: 10,254 words (58 kB as text)

Author's Note: This story is set mid-season 1-ish, before "Pheromone, My Lovely," so that Lois hasn't yet revealed in an unconscious way that she has feelings for Clark.

"Lane, Kent, get in here!"

Sitting upright and typing furiously at her desk, Lois tried not to lose concentration.

"I said now!"

Lois pushed through to record the end of her thought. The story had taken weeks of research and interviews (the ongoing impact of Gulf War syndrome on veterans in Metropolis), and now that it was close to publication, she did not appreciate being interrupted.

With a loud sniff, Lois swished her bob over her shoulder as she turned to Clark with an angry questioning glare. He had been with the Planet just a few months and was turning out to be surprisingly not-as-annoying-as-she-thought-he-would-be as a partner. It was a bonus, she had to admit, that he was better looking than the few other men she'd met from small towns. Better looking even than most men she'd ever met. Not that she'd ever let him know that.

Her maybe-more-than-just-acceptable partner shrugged back from his desk, his silent answer one of equal confusion. He didn't know what was going on, either, and his ignorance, despite the little jolt of pleasure his facial features gave her in the pit of her stomach, just riled her up even more.

Lois huffed her frustration, then pushed her chair away from her desk as loudly as she could and marched to their boss's office. Perry better be quick; she had a deadline to meet.

Stepping into her slipstream, Clark sighed to himself and tried not to laugh. Lois's indignation was becoming both familiar and amusing. A constant he could rely on in this new life of his in Metropolis. He shook his head. Perry was in for a tirade.

"Kids, I got a great assignment for you," Perry announced, his arms wide. "There's a new candy store

opening in town. Causing a ruckus. Lines around the block. I want the two of you to get down there to find out what's the what."

Clark thought Lois was going to implode as she crossed her arms in disgust. "Perry, you can't be serious! You want us to report on the opening of a shop? What's the world-shattering headline? 'People Like Chocolate'?!"

"Not just any shop," said Clark with a wry raise of his eyebrows as he picked up an opened box of chocolates on Perry's desk. Two truffles were missing from the pack, each with their own paper casing set neatly in a dainty square white-and-red-striped box. "'The Best Chocolatiers in Metropolis,' apparently," he said, reading the label.

"Well, er, that's just, er, a free sample they sent," explained Perry. Clark swallowed a smile at Perry's embarrassment.

As Lois's outrage rose, so did her shrillness. "I'm in the middle of a very important story. The people of Metropolis need to know that our veterans from Iraq are still suffering! I can't just drop it for a... a...puff piece!"

Perry pinned Lois with his hardest stare. Surprised, she dropped her arms and stepped back, throwing Clark a 'what's up with Perry' look. His voice was dangerously quiet. "Do *I* give you puff pieces? You may be the best damn reporter I've ever worked with, but you are *my* best damn reporter, and if I send you on an assignment, then that is what you do."

"But...Chief...does this really need the two of us?" Clark marveled at Lois's shift from open defiance to whiny pleading. Determined and shameless, he thought, entertained. Personally, he wouldn't mind some fresh air and a light-hearted story. Lois might think him a country bumpkin, but that didn't mean news in the big city always had to be so serious.

“Look. It’ll be good for you two to work together on something, er, sweet.” Perry’s smile demanded that they smile in agreement with his little joke. Clark, already amused, chuckled lightly, and Lois reluctantly curved her lips upwards. “Now, that’s more like it. Show the public how you can work together not just on the heavy stuff. I trust in your ability to turn this story into more than a, what did you say, a ‘puff piece.’ It’s your jobs to find the hidden depths.”

“You can count on us, Chief,” said Clark. “After you.” Clark waved an arm towards the door and then nudged his recalcitrant partner out.

As he turned to close the door behind him, Clark was taken aback to see Perry retrieving a harmonica from his top desk drawer. His stern mood seemed to have vanished into thin air. Clark paused to watch the great man lean back in his chair, look fondly at a photo of Alice in pride of place on his desk, and then, as if playing it for the first time and working out the order of the notes, blow the chorus of “Can’t Help Falling in Love with You.”

* * *

“Can you believe this,” grumbled Lois as they walked along the line that was indeed winding along several blocks. “As if Metropolis has never been excited about an opening before.”

“They certainly have gone all out. Perry can’t have been the only important person in Metropolis to receive a free sample,” said Clark, spotting the odd businessman in a suit in the line with the telltale white-and-red-striped boxes he’d seen in Perry’s office. Not the kind of people one would normally associate with such a line, and in the middle of workday.

They rounded the corner and found themselves facing a shop with banners and balloons, all red and white, a retro ice cream shop-style canopy covering a handful of tables and chairs full of adults scarfing milkshakes, ice cream, and candy. The scene was one of pure 1950s Americana. The sign, in looping italics, read “Sweet Justice Confections.” Two young men in red-and-white pinstripes and straw boater hats manned the entrance and, with gay enthusiasm, managed the line of impatient customers.

Lois flashed her Daily Planet ID at one of the boys. One of the smartly dressed businessmen in the line yelled out, “Get to the back of the line, lady! You gotta wait for candy like the rest of us!”

“You’re a grown man! Go back to work!” shot back Lois. The man huffed and shuffled as Lois threw him a “ha-ha” look when she was let into the shop.

“Lois,” whispered Clark into her ear, “was that necessary?”

“Please. I have better things to do with my time. What kind of job does *he* have that he can stand in line for hours for some candy?”

Clark was about to argue that there was no need to be so rude about it to the man’s face. *I should admonish her*, he thought. Yet despite Lois’s abrasiveness and frequent outright petulance and rudeness, Clark had never felt like this about anyone else before. The pit of his stomach didn’t want to shame her; he was ashamed himself of the times he had already given in to that temptation. It hadn’t been a nice feeling (like when his mother had told him off as a child) when Lois had looked at him, hurt and confused because he had sent her on a wild goose chase that ended up with her hunting through a dump site.

He had never wanted anyone to like him back as much as this.

But she didn’t. Lois had made it perfectly clear when they had first met that she had no room for romance, and certainly not with a co-worker.

Inside, there were more employees in pinstripes and straw hats. The walls were full, floor to ceiling, of old-fashioned glass candy jars, and in the center was a self-service table with an array of different chocolates in separate baskets. A sign hanging from the ceiling above the table announced, “Flavors that free your soul.” Customers were shoveling the papered truffles into striped bags with a candy scoop while workers limited people to one free bag each.

A woman in her forties was digging her way through the chocolate table, ensuring she had at least one of every flavor. Clark stepped beside her.

“Ma’am, I’m a reporter for the Daily Planet. May I ask why you were keen to come to the shop today?”

The woman shrugged. “It’s just like being a kid again, ain’ it.”

Lois tapped Clark on the shoulder. “I bet you love this place. It must remind you of Smallville. This would be the latest fashion trend there.” Lois smirked as she waved her hand around the retro shop.

“Ha-ha, very funny.” Clark reached for two chocolates with strawberry centers and handed one to Lois. “I think you’re missing the point. Isn’t there just something pleasurable in being reminded of what it was like to be a kid again? When the world was so much simpler.”

Lois rolled her eyes and begrudgingly accepted the chocolate. “So, what? The story is ‘people like nostalgia’?”

“What’s so wrong with that?”

“Eurgh, I *hate* nostalgia. It’s looking at the past through rose-tinted glasses, ignoring all the real truths. As if the world really was better in the past. That’s delusional nonsense.”

“Wasn’t it great to be a kid, though, and not know all the bad things that go on in the world? If a little bit of chocolate can bring us joy, I don’t see what the problem is.”

Of course, thought Lois, Clark would believe that. As if chocolate could paper over the cracks of reality. But then, with parents like Martha and Jonathan, he must have had an idyllic childhood, so what cracks were there to paper over? Lois felt a pang of envy, but then she glanced at a grinning pin-striped seller. Small-town life? No thanks. Her own family childhood had been far from perfect, but she was thankful that it had been intellectually and culturally stimulating and challenging.

“The problem is, Clark, that hundreds of people are skipping work for it. Why?”

Clark shrugged happily. “Let’s taste and see.”

Clark popped the truffle into his mouth and, grinning, chomped through the whole chocolate, much to Lois’s disgust. He was being annoyingly cheery. She carefully took her chocolate from its paper casing and nibbled on the outer coating. It did taste good. She reached the strawberry center and swirled the fruity pink ganache around her mouth. It was, in a guilty way, delicious. Not earth-shattering but sweet and pleasant, and sure, there it was: a Proustian recall of strawberry-and-cream-flavored lollipops from her childhood—the kind she and Lucy would sneak into their backyard to share after a particularly brutal fight between their parents, the sharing of the candy a comfort that they at least had each other. Like a balm, the chocolate poured itself to the ends of her fingers and toes; the cozy sensation overrode the upsetting memory of her parents’ fight.

Clark frowned. “It’s good, but did you taste that... I don’t know what it was... like an after taste or a sourness?”

“No,” said Lois as she picked up a paper bag and a scoop. “What?” she responded to Clark’s querying look. “It’s just for research.”

“We should talk to the owner,” said Clark, looking around as Lois filled her bag. A woman wearing pinstripes overheard him and said, “Oh, the owners aren’t here. They prefer to keep their anonymity, to let the candies speak for themselves. We’ve only been open twenty-four hours, and we’re a sensation!”

“A mysterious owner. Hhm,” said Clark, frowning. He looked around at the customers. Lois had lost interest in their conversation and, like the woman before her, was

elbowing her way to the front and making sure her bag contained all the flavors.

Grinning with success, Lois returned to Clark and consumed another chocolate, whole this time. “There’s nothing significant here, Clark.” Between chews she added, her voice thick and chocolatey, “It’s just a well-run, nostalgic candy store with an effective marketing strategy. And tasty confection.” She waved her bag at Clark and ate another one. “Mmm, pistachio,” she moaned, closing her eyes.

A smudge of chocolate remained on the corner of Lois’s mouth. Lois seemed so lost in the moment... Clark reached out with a thumb and, with a featherlight touch, wiped the chocolate away. Lois’s eyes flashed open. Their eyes met. For a split second, the noise of the shop faded away as if a spotlight was on them. He knew she didn’t want a romance with him, and he should be professional and quash any feelings he had for her, but every now and then he couldn’t hide them. Was there something reciprocal in her gaze?

Embarrassed, Clark pulled his hand away and dropped his eyes. It wasn’t fair to her. She had made her position perfectly clear, and it wasn’t gentlemanly for him to muddy the waters.

He should focus on their assignment. *Something isn’t right*, thought Clark. *The chocolates aren’t that tasty*. He still had a sour aftertaste and no desire to eat any more, yet Lois’s mood had changed. Her shoulders had dropped, the tension in her cheeks had disappeared. She was more... relaxed. Her pleasure in eating the chocolates was bordering on sinful.

“I think you’ve had enough,” said Clark gently, reaching for the bag in her hands.

“Hey,” she pouted, tugging back. Clark raised his eyebrows sternly at her, and, like a resentful child, she relinquished the bag.

* * *

Lois and Clark walked back towards the Daily Planet. As they rounded a corner, they were surprised by the scene before them. A couple in business suits was dancing a flamenco in front of a bank, in the middle of the sidewalk. They didn’t seem like normal buskers. For one thing, the music was coming from an accordion played by one of the bank’s uniformed doormen. The doors of the bank were open, and people were watching on, happy and relaxed.

The dance and music came to an end. Onlookers clapped and cheered, but neither the couple nor the doorman collected any money. The couple themselves looked dazed as they picked up their briefcases and staggered away. The confused doorman put down the accordion as if unaware of where it had come from.

The noise on the busy urban street was different, Clark realized. Quieter, sweeter. Less rushed. Bizarrely, there was literally music in the air. The soft sounds of singing and people playing instruments wafted from the windows of the high-rise buildings.

Clark glanced at Lois, who seemed nonplused by the unusual incident. City folk were normally rushing from one place to another, impatient, with no time to watch the world go by. *I suppose I've still a lot to learn about city life*, mused Clark to himself. *Maybe it's not as predictable as I imagined.*

They strolled back the rest of the way, Clark having to slow his pace to keep in step with Lois. Which was strange as she normally marched everywhere and he was the one who usually had to keep up with her.

"Lois, are you okay?" he asked.

"Sure, why do you ask?"

"Well, it's just, er, I thought you wanted to get back to your story."

"Oh yes, that's right."

Clark expected her to snap into action, but she continued to walk at a leisurely pace, swinging her purse without a care in the world.

"Mmm, it's a beautiful day, isn't it, Clark?" said Lois, smiling up at the sky and then turning her contented face to him. "Weren't those two dancers wonderful? Just being free and expressive." Lois took in a lungful of air. "Ah, fresh air. Makes you feel so wholesome."

The fume-filled air was hardly fresh compared to home, but Clark let it slide. Lois normally just breathed the air from the newsroom and cabs. To her, it probably was fresh.

Clark stuck his hand in his pocket and agreed. Whatever had caused Lois's change in mood was a welcome one. Why look a gift horse in the mouth? She was always on the go, always chasing after something, always competing, needing to be first. Why question her pleasant, calm, and unhurried mood? If it took just a little bit of chocolate to do that, maybe he would be sure to remember to bring her some occasionally.

* * *

As they rode the elevator to the newsroom, the sound of music didn't go away. A beatbox was thumping from the newsroom. The doors pinged open, and before them was a sight Clark never expected to see. Nor did Lois.

"Jimmy!" called out Lois, shocked.

Jimmy ignored her. He was far too engrossed in what he was doing. Clark's mouth dropped open, agape. Jimmy was

wearing a bandana, a sheer tank top that looked like Jackson Pollack had thrown blue and black paint on it, meshed sleeves, an oversized gold chain with a pendant, and baggy trousers. In the middle of the newsroom, he and two interns were sidestepping, popping, and locking to a complex dance routine.

And Jimmy was singing:

"You got the right stuff, baby

Love the way you turn me on

You got the right stuff, baby

You're the reason why I sing this song."

The chorus ended, and Jimmy dropped to the floor, spinning on his back and throwing break-dancing moves with full vigor. A crowd, including Cat, had formed around them, cheering him on. Should he be amused or concerned? Clark looked at Lois for her reaction. She seemed to have gotten over her shock and, to his surprise, was nodding her head and swaying in time to the beat. She caught his eye and, embarrassed, corrected herself.

The song wound up, and laughing, Jimmy shook the hands of his fellow dancers. The crowd dispersed, and everyone returned to work.

"I didn't know you were a New Kids on the Block fan," said Clark to Jimmy as he removed the bandana and wiped his forehead. "Have you joined a dance group or something?"

"No. And I'm not. I have no idea where that came from. It just kinda happened. I didn't even know that I knew the words." Looking down at his clothes, Jimmy seemed genuinely confused.

"Well, I like the look," purred Cat. "I think it's... 'rad,'" she added, with quotation marks in the air and cackling as if it were the punchline to a joke. She reached out to touch Jimmy's hair but recoiled as she realized how wet with sweat it was. Jimmy's face fell, crestfallen, at her grimace.

"Hell's bells!" belted Perry from his office door. "What in God's name is going on out here? Jimmy, get out of that ridiculous getup right now. And who ate my candy?!" he shouted, waving the now empty white-and-red box.

"Yes, Chief," stammered Jimmy under his breath. He searched for his work clothes and rushed to the bathroom.

No one confessed to the candy theft, but, Clark noted, the interns who had danced with Jimmy looked sheepish.

A siren sounded. No one else heard it. Clark's ears tuned into the auditory scene: a fire in an apartment block, people trapped. Urgent help needed. This wasn't one he could leave

for firefighters alone. He would rather stay; something very weird was happening in Metropolis.

“Er, Lois, I... um, have an, a... er... a letter I need to post. Stamps. I need stamps.”

“Sure, Clark,” said Lois breezily as she wandered over to her desk. Clark needed to leave, but he just had time to catch a look from Lois. Did she just check out his butt? The last thing he saw as the doors closed on the elevator was Lois eating another chocolate.

* * *

“You saved our lives, Superman, we can never thank you enough!” Clark stood at a safe distance with the couple he had just rescued from a high-rise apartment block on fire in the outskirts of Metropolis.

In his professional Superman voice, Clark replied, “You’re welcome, ma’am. Just be sure to get checked out by the paramedics.” He crossed his arms, causing his biceps to flex their biggest. The woman and her young son hugged each other and staggered to one of the many ambulances lined up by the fire trucks.

Clark spoke to the firefighters. “Everything is under control now.” The firefighters looked exhausted; they’d been fighting the fire for hours. Clark frowned, unsure if he should leave. The fire was out, just remnants of acrid white smoke floated up from the blackened windows. The ground surrounding the burned building was covered in water and foam. Even with his help, the firefighters had had to use all their resources. When he had arrived, without discussion, Clark had understood his role as Superman had been to rescue those trapped, while the firefighters had concentrated on putting out the blaze.

Thankfully, there were no fatalities, but still, some people were being driven to the hospital with burns. His part was over, but the impact on these people’s lives would last for months or even years. Clark sighed. There was nothing more he could do, so, waving at the little boy with his mother, he rose into the air and, to the delight of the youngster, gave him a wink, then zoomed off in a blur of red and blue.

In an alley by the Daily Planet, he spun back into his work suit and strolled into the building. The afternoon was closing in on evening; the fire had taken up far more of the day than the usual emergency.

The reception desk in the lobby of the Daily Planet building was unmanned. An empty white-and-red bag of chocolates lay abandoned on the desk. *Those chocolates sure are popular*, thought Clark. The fire had been so all-consuming that the visit to Sweet Justice Confections a few hours ago felt like it had been days ago.

Just then, a lilting, out-of-place sound piqued Clark’s ears. He turned to locate its source. In the corner of the vestibule sat a man in a suit, delicately plucking a melancholic tune on a Spanish guitar and humming quietly with his eyes closed. The man seemed as lost in the music as Jimmy had in his dance routine. Clark recognized him as one of the building’s receptionists.

Just one of the musical incidents today alone would have been a notable oddity, but this was turning into a series of weird musical events: the flamenco dancers, Perry playing his harmonica, and Jimmy breakdancing. *This is a story*, Clark realized. He ought to discuss it with Lois right away.

He entered the newsroom from the elevator, checking that his tie was straight and his shirt tucked in.

“Lois,” he called, although he couldn’t see her. He rushed over to his desk, keen to start investigating the phenomenon. “We need to investigate these musical outbursts,” he said loudly, talking as much to himself as to the absent Lois.

Lois’s voice coming from behind him stopped him dead. She didn’t sound like herself. Her voice was low and husky and dripping with sultry sensuousness.

“Tell me about it.”

Oh no, not you, too, Lois. In slow motion, Clark turned to face her.

“Stud,” she finished, dropping a cigarette to the floor and grinding it with an opened-toe red stiletto. If his mouth could fall open, it would, but he was paralyzed. He was unable to look away. As attentive to detail as fingers, his eyes slid up along her long legs encased in shiny skin-tight black leather pants. Spellbound, his gaze travelled over her hips to find a black leather jacket. Like a magic trick, she whipped off the jacket and dropped it to the floor. Beneath the jacket was a black top, fitted as tightly as the pants and accentuating every curve and sinew. The thin sleeves hung halfway along her toned upper arms, exposing her shoulders so that everything above her cleavage was bare.

Unable to look away even if he’d wanted to, his eyes traced a line over her collarbone and neck to reach her face. Her lips were a deep, deep red, and her hair, dear God, her hair. Gone was the straight bob. Instead, it was permed, a messy bundle of curls framing her face. The impact was irresistible; it went straight to his gut. Clark was both horrified and thrilled. What the hell was happening? Lois seemed... possessed. And sexy. Obscenely sexy. His chest tightened, and he felt flushed. Clark shook his head, trying to free himself from his own enrapture.

“I got chills, they’re multiplying.” Her heavy-lidded focus was entirely on him, oblivious to the onlookers.

“Lois!”

“*And I’m loooooosing contro-o-ol.*” Lois ran her hands along her curves from her hips up towards her neck.

“My God, stop!”

“*Cause the power, you’re supplying...*” Her hands found the back of her neck and her fingers threaded themselves through the curls.

“*It’s electrifying!*” She jumped in the air, her hands exploding from her hair upwards, so that her arms were stretched out wide.

Breathless, Clark looked around, desperate for help. Jimmy had appeared beside him and instead of being shocked, he slowly shook his head and snarkily commented, “That’s not even Olivia Newton John’s part; those are John Travolta’s lyrics.” Clark balked at his lack of concern.

Lois, it seemed, couldn’t care less that she was singing both parts to the *Grease* duet.

“*You better shape up,*” she continued, her singing voice jumping a register. “*Cause I need a man.*” She pointed seductively at him; her eyes locked onto his.

“Please, Lois,” begged Clark. “This isn’t you.”

“*And my heart is set on yo-oo-ou.*”

Carefully so as not to spook her, Clark shifted off his own jacket. Did Lois know what she was doing? There was a mania in her eyes that suggested that, no, she didn’t.

The song continued unabated.

“*You better shape up, you better understand. To my heart I must be true. Nothin’ left, nothin’ left for me to do.*”

Willing himself to stay calm, Clark stepped closer to Lois to wrap his jacket around her. Unresponsive, she kept on singing, and gyrating, and shimmying through the rest of the song, twisting herself around him one minute, then skipping across the newsroom the next.

A couple of guys wolf whistled. Angry, Clark shoved the ogling circle of co-workers away, telling them to go back to their desks. “Nothing to see here, folks.” Clark did his best to shield her from gawking eyes.

After several repeats of “*Ooh, honey, you’re the one that I want (You are the one that I want). Ooh ooh ooh, honey!*” finally, the song came to an end with Lois resting her hands on Clark’s shoulders and looking up into his eyes with unbridled lust.

The way Lois’s smile filled her face with nothing but adoration for him was everything Clark could have ever dreamed of. But not like this. This, whatever *this* was, was very wrong. Gently, he lifted her hands from his shoulders

and took a small step back. He watched her face as awareness crept back in. Slowly her brilliant smile faded, and the pool of lust in her eyes began to clear.

Lois shook her head as if waking from a trance. “Clark?” she whispered, confused. “What the...?” She looked down at herself. “Oh my God! What am I wearing?!” she cried. Lois ran a hand through her hair and pulled a curl in front of her eyes. She stared up at him, horrified. Then, her face fell even more as she looked around the office and realized that she was on display for everyone. Her voice dropped an octave. “Did I just...? Was I... singing? To yo—” She stepped back from Clark, the full memory hitting her. “Oh my God. Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God!” She pulled Clark’s jacket tighter around her shoulders.

“Lois,” started Clark, desperate to reassure her, but Lois backed away.

“I... er... I need to...”

“It’s okay,” he tried to sooth, laughing. Maybe if he joked about it, she’d be less embarrassed? “You look... great,” he said, his hand on his chin as if appraising her look.

It was the wrong move. Lois was mortified and seemed even more so by his laughter.

He tried to backtrack and switched his tone to serious. “I think—”

“No, it’s fine,” she interrupted. “I’m fine. You know, I think I can work at home for the rest of the day.”

Clark wanted to argue, to tell her that her actions were part of a bigger story, but Lois looked crushed. It wouldn’t be fair to embarrass her even further, so he left her to escape to the elevator instead. She didn’t even turn to look at him as she pushed the buttons over and over and repeatedly told the elevator to hurry up.

Lois isn’t the only one who needs to recover from this, thought Clark. Much as he tried to avoid it, every cell in his body was aroused. How could they not be? It being almost the end of the workday, Clark decided the best thing he could do was head home himself and take a cold shower.

He spent the evening, in between his Superman duties, turning the incident over and over in his mind. He felt terrible for laughing at her; she must be furious with him. Once he got past the shock of her in that outfit and the sexiness of her performance, he ruminated on one question: was he really the one that she wanted?

* * *

The next morning

Clark closed the door to Perry’s office behind him. “Chief, I need to investigate these musical... outbursts.” On

the way to work, it had been impossible not to notice the number of people singing, dancing, or playing instruments.

“I thought you were working on the Sweet Justice Confections opening. You working with Lois on this?”

“Well, er... I don’t think she wants to work with me right now.” Lois had yet to make an appearance. Clark had thought about calling her, as he had all last night, but had decided she was best left to lick her wounds. She would come back when she was ready. Even as Superman, he didn’t feel comfortable checking up on her; the memory of her draped over him in skintight leather made his normally fixed body temperature rise. He imagined running his fingers through those curls, then cupping her face. No, he needed to put those thoughts out of his head. It wouldn’t do if other parts were to visibly rise too...

The office was only half full; a group of copywriters were harmonizing as a barbershop quartet. Metropolis seemed to be under some kind of musical spell. Somehow, Perry had missed Lois’s performance yesterday, and it was a relief to Clark that Perry was back to his usual gruff self. At least someone was acting like their normal self.

“Perry, sir, yesterday I saw you playing the harmonica. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to spy on you. Have you always played?”

“Well, see, son, that’s the thing of it—no, I haven’t. It was peculiar, I have to admit. My son bought it for me as a Christmas present one year, and it’s been sitting in my desk drawer untouched for years.”

“May I ask what made you want to play it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Think back. Please, sir. I think it could be important.”

“Let me see. I was talking to you two, and then I caught the picture of Alice, and I was just... overcome... with an urge to express my feelings through music.”

“Before Lois and I came in, what were you doing?”

Perry paused as he thought back. “I had just eaten two of those sample candies. Hazelnut and orange flavors. Both delicious, I can tell you.”

Clark pondered aloud, “And when Lois and I went to the shop, we both tried the chocolate and then she... changed.”

“Changed?”

“Relaxed. Didn’t seem to care. About the story she’d been working on, about the shop. And then later, back at the Planet, she... well, let’s say her inhibitions went out the window.”

“What are you saying, son?”

“Chief, I think it’s no coincidence that these outbursts started just as this shop opened.”

“I need concrete evidence, Kent, you understand. A coincidence is just a coincidence until a link is proven.”

“Yes, sir. Can I just ask one more thing?”

“Shoot.”

“How many chocolates did you eat?”

“Just those two. Someone stole the rest.” Clark remembered the look on the interns’ faces—it must have been Jimmy.

“And you haven’t had any since?”

“What do you think I am! I’m the editor-in-chief of a busy newspaper. I don’t have time to be eatin’ no candy!”

Clark backed out of the room.

* * *

Clark walked thoughtfully back to his desk. He looked over at Lois’s and dropped his glasses down his nose. Using his x-ray vision, he nosed through her drawers, and sure enough, the bag she had filled yesterday was empty and one drawer was full of wrappers.

“If these chocolates are somehow causing this,” he said to himself, “and Lois ate all of those, but Perry only ate two yesterday, no wonder they affected Lois more.” At least the effects seemed to wear off. The idea of Perry breaking out into song was as laughable today as it had ever been.

“Jimmy, have you heard from Lois today?”

The boy wandered over. Clark spotted an unopened bag of Sweet Justice Confections chocolates on Jimmy’s desk.

“Yeah, she said she was going to investigate a lead at the Trade Center.” So, Lois wasn’t yet over her embarrassment and was still avoiding him.

“Er, Jimmy,” said Clark, nodding towards Jimmy’s desk, “I think you should be careful about how many chocolates you eat from that place. I have a theory that they’re linked to the musical outbursts.”

Jimmy perched on the edge of Clark’s desk and leaned over conspiratorially. “That was some show Lois put on yesterday.” Then he rewound his movements at Clark’s hard stare.

He needed to keep the boy on track. “Do you remember how it felt? Were you aware what you were doing?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Not really. I just knew I felt... compelled somehow.”

Clark shook his head, stood up, and spoke firmly. “We need to put a stop to this. It could get dangerous.”

“Dangerous? CK, relax! What’s not to love about a little music, a little dancing? It’s good to lighten up once in a while.”

“That’s true but... look around. No one is working properly.”

“You worry too much, CK,” said Jimmy as he strolled back to his desk.

Clark pursed his lips in frustration. He needed to go back to the shop. He frowned as Jimmy opened the candy bag. Maybe it would be better if Superman made a visit to the shop.

* * *

The line to the shop still wound its way around the block, but now people already had candy in their hands, and the line itself was becoming rowdy, resembling a line to a dance or singing competition with people performing their own pieces, oblivious to the person next to them.

At the entrance, the happy-clappy control that the young pinstripe-wearing staff had yesterday was now gone. Instead, they look scared.

“Where are the owners?” urged Superman. “Where do these chocolates come from?”

“We don’t know,” whimpered one harassed employee. “We were just told not to eat the chocolates, and we didn’t because the salary was better than any other retail job.”

“But how did you get this job? Who interviewed you?”

“No one, there was just an ad on Metropolis University campus for students to apply to a PO Box address. First come, first served.”

“The candy arrives in vans in the middle of the night,” offered another staff member. “They’re here in the morning, and we just lay them out.”

“I’ll take a bag of these, if you don’t mind,” said Superman, scooping up a selection from the same table where Lois had helped herself the day before. He would examine them back at the Planet. He wanted to tell them to shut the doors and cut the people of Metropolis off, but he feared that the already agitated crowd would break into a riot.

* * *

Superman was about to spin back into Clark’s clothes in his usual alley, but the cacophony outside the news building stopped him as he flew in. He landed on the sidewalk opposite the Planet. Either he hadn’t been paying attention earlier (which was possible, his focus on the way to work having been on planning what he would say to Lois when he saw her) or things were escalating rapidly. Because the situation was getting worse. Much worse.

There was music everywhere. A bus stood at an odd angle in the middle of the road, and the male driver in his 50s was leaning out of the doors, serenading a much younger man with George Michael’s “Father Figure.” The young man wasn’t walking away, Superman noted. Maybe Jimmy was right. If these chocolates were simply reducing people’s inhibitions and revealing their true feelings, what was so bad about that?

But it wasn’t the only incident. Superman vaguely recalled that a brass marching band had been parading up and down the sidewalk in front of the Planet when he had arrived for work. But now, instead of an up-tempo, well-synced group, they were exhausted. The brass instruments were no longer in tune with each other; the Star-Spangled Banner sounded more like a Star-Mangled Banner. Their blue-and-gold band uniforms were damp; their eyes had a wildness to them... It was as if they were bound to their instruments, unable to stop playing. They marched back and forth over the same few steps, the beat less and less rhythmic.

Superman turned in a circle. Everywhere he looked, people were singing, dancing, or playing instruments. And looking tired. Yesterday, the music had been uplifting, giving the city an air of romance, but now, the clash of musical styles was becoming painful to the ear. A block away, a rap battle competed with a woman in a window above them belting out “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina.”

Superman walked into the Daily Planet vestibule again. Clark, distracted, had had his head down on his walk through the foyer to work. Sure enough, there was the receptionist sitting where Clark had seen him yesterday. He was wearing new clothes, so he hadn’t been there all night, but when Superman looked more closely, he saw the man’s fingers were bleeding, still plucking and strumming away. Empty candy wrappers lay beside him on the sofa.

A shriek pierced Superman’s ears. Faster than a speeding bullet, he flashed to catch the Evita-wannabe just as she slipped from her window. He deposited her carefully on the ground with instructions not to eat any more chocolate.

“I only had one, Superman,” she promised.

“Good, no more now. It’s not safe, believe me.”

Urgent now, he returned to the Planet and flew into the offices. This was becoming dangerous. People were getting hurt. Clark would simply need to be off somewhere on assignment. He needed all his superpowers right now.

“Superman!” cried Perry as he whooshed past him.

In the newsroom, Superman skidded to a halt, temporarily stunned by the sight of Cat Grant holding court in the middle of the room in a fitted Marilyn Monroe pink satin

evening gown with men pawing over her. She crooned to them,

*“Cause we are living in a Material World
And I am a Material Girl.”*

Of course she would be singing Madonna, what else, chortled Superman, shaking his head. Cat at least wasn't someone to worry about. (The men around her, however...) Although he'd only known her for a few months, he could be pretty sure she would only eat one or two chocolates, and her performance would soon be over. And he doubted she would afterwards suffer the same embarrassment as Lois. Had she even eaten any chocolates, he thought dryly.

Jimmy was another matter. His desk was strewn with empty wrappers, and he was sweating and panting as he flung himself on the floor performing jagged and erratic break-dancing moves.

“Please, Superman,” begged Perry. “He can't seem to stop. What's happening to him?”

“Mr. White, keep him away from any windows, give him water, and just keep him safe. And *do not* give him any more candy. I've spoken to Clark Kent, and we're investigating how the chocolates are causing this. It seems the more they eat, the harder it is to stop. But I think he will if he just doesn't eat any more.”

Superman dropped the candy he had picked up at Sweet Justice Confections onto Clark's desk. Perry left him to it, his attention on Jimmy. They looked like ordinary chocolates. Maybe they had a substance in them that was causing this? Clark had detected a strange aftertaste, and the chocolates clearly hadn't had any impact on him—he had had no urge to burst into song (except for last night when the image of him, too, dressed in leather and dancing flush with Lois had briefly entered his head).

Superman examined them more closely. He focused his hearing, shutting out all noise, even Jimmy's panting. One sound remained. A high-pitched frequency, barely detectable. Coming from the chocolates. He zoomed in to their molecular level. The atoms were vibrating, creating an ultrasonic emission undetectable to the human ear. He turned to Jimmy and scanned his stomach. Sure enough, in his digestive system was the unusual vibration.

“The candy is vibrating!” he exclaimed. “At such an atomic level that even when chewed and swallowed, the atoms are still active inside people. A kind of sonic poison,” said Superman, victorious.

Perry half heard him and muttered, “Uh, huh.” His concern was all for Jimmy. It was touching to see Perry down

on his knees, swabbing Jimmy's brow with a damp cloth (when he could reach the boy between his swinging limbs).

More cries came from outside. Superman abandoned the candy on the desk and flew out the window. People were collapsing from exhaustion. Now that the cause had been identified, Superman needed to stop people from continuing to consume the candy. Then he spotted how groups of dancing performers were sharing chocolates around, encouraging each other that if they ate more, they would have more energy. A vicious cycle was in play.

He flew back to the office and tapped Perry on the shoulder.

“Mr. White. We need to get a message to the people. They have to stop eating candy from Sweet Justice Confection. They're poisonous.”

“Poisonous! Judas Priest!”

“I can't explain now. Clark will tell you everything later. I need to get rid of the candy.”

Clark didn't like being underhanded, but he, and the people of Metropolis, didn't have time for him to be polite. At superspeed, he raced from person to person, retrieving any candy he could see. He even took candy from a grey-haired woman about to pop one into her mouth, leaving her standing in the middle of the sidewalk, her hair blown by a sudden wind. She stared at her empty hand in surprise and anger.

“It's for the best,” muttered Superman under his breath to all the confused people.

At least Lois was alright and had only suffered one incident yesterday. Jimmy said she had gone to the Trade Center. She had probably sulked all night and decided she would go straight to an assignment without him. Which was fair enough, he surmised, if his theory that she was angry with him for laughing was correct.

And yet, a fear niggled at the back of his mind as he flew to Sweet Justice Confections. Once there, he yelled at the sales people to get out of the shop, and then, with a steel bar, he twisted the doors of the shop shut. He sped along the line and collected all the candy, ignoring the angry cries.

Superman hovered above the city and surveyed the streets. There were too many people with injuries: exhaustion, bleeding feet, bleeding fingers. Paramedics would have to help all those suffering. He didn't know why, but he felt a pull to Lois's apartment. Was it instinct? Or fear? A sixth sense?

Lois's apartment was empty. He scanned the rooms. His stomach dropped. There they were. Empty wrappers on her bed. Of course, Lois had gone back for more chocolate.

Yesterday they hadn't made the connection between the candy and the musical outbursts, and in her embarrassment, it would have been her go-to comfort food. Had she eaten them last night and sung and danced alone? Or had she eaten them this morning? Had she taken more candy with her to the Trade Center? The chocolates did seem to have an addictive quality, given how people were obsessing over them. If Lois had made the connection herself, Clark was sure she would have contacted him with the theory.

"Oh, Lois." He sighed as he imagined her using her ID card to jump the line again.

* * *

The high-rise Trade Center tower stood out from its neighboring buildings like the city's trophy. There were no scheduled press reports in the building, so Lois was most likely investigating something, possibly illegal, incognito. Clark had no immediate evidence for his guess, but he knew Lois and her exceptional ability to secretly navigate places. And given how much chocolate she had eaten, speed was of the essence. What if she was stuck somewhere, unable to stop singing or dancing, unable to ask for help? Superman didn't waste time inquiring at the front desk but flew instead around the building in circles from bottom to top, x-raying the building as he went, searching for his partner. He quickly confirmed that Lois was not inside the building.

The roof was currently being developed into a restaurant and gardens and was covered in scaffolding and tarpaulin. Superman flew above it and hovered. He was about to scan the building works, but there was no need.

Like a Busby Berkley number, a whirling circle of dancers high kicked their way out from under the tarpaulin towards the edge of the building where barriers had yet to be erected. It was just a sheer drop, a hundred floors high.

Clark was mesmerized by the sight. Men who could be easily identified as mobsters by their striped suits, hats, and spats were linked arm in arm, kicking in sync. In the center was a solo performer, a woman, tap dancing. And tap dancing. And tap dancing. Smoke arose from her feet. Superman flew closer. The noise grew louder. She seemed to be singing but no... she was crying. Sobbing. Pleading for help.

Lois. Lois was the tap dancer, and the troupe of mobsters was spiraling closer and closer to the edge of the building.

* * *

Lois's ears were buzzing, her arms and legs ached, and her lungs burned. Her scorching feet were tap-dancing to their own manic beat. Her whole body seemed to pulse to a new and frightening rhythm. Trapped in the mobster circle, she was desperate to stop, but her twirling body would not

obey. The world blurred as she was ricocheted, terrified, from mobster to mobster, bouncing off their linked arms like a bruised boxer in a ring. Although the mobsters were dancing, too, even in their confusion, they eyed her with lethal threat as she pinged between them.

Like a spinning top, the chaotic speed of the Busby Berkley mobsters bundled her outside.

The sun was blinding, but even so, a flash of blue and red caught her attention, and Lois gathered what little strength she could.

"Superman!" she panted hoarsely. "Please, I can't... I can't stop. He-elp!"

The circle was moving too fast and losing its cohesion. It collapsed on itself, the men falling over themselves like dominos. But Lois couldn't stop moving. The men collapsed just as she was thrown from the opposite side of the circle, and as she tripped over the fallen men, her momentum sent her tumbling over the top.

Then there was nothing beneath her feet. Nothing to tap dance against.

Just the suffocating tornado-force wind on her cheeks as she dropped into an abyss.

Falling.

Arms flailing. Anything to grasp onto.

Screaming.

"Heeeeeeeeeelp!"

Then thud.

Solidness surrounded her.

"I've got you," she heard whispered into her ear.

Lois buried her head into Superman's shoulder as he flew slowly towards Earth. Fear and panic made her tremble, and she held on tighter to try to quell them.

Once they were on the ground, he lowered her to her feet.

"Thaa-thaank," she stuttered, barely able to speak. It was over.

A foot tapped. Then the other.

"Oh no." It wasn't over. Superman wasted no time and scooped her up again. The tingling sensation that preceded the compulsive tapping faded as he held her, as if his strength brought her body back to its equilibrium.

"I'm taking you home."

Lois just nodded.

* * *

Clark held Lois tight. He sat at the end of the sofa in her apartment, his cape falling over the back. Lois lay in his arms, her legs draped out along the sofa. She still wore her beige work suit, and it was damp at her back. Her face, too, was covered in a thin sheet of sweat. Strands of her disheveled hair, now back in its usual bob, clung to her cheeks. She must have been stuck dancing for ages. His heart constricted at the thought of how frightened she must have been, how out of control. Thank goodness he was Superman right now. Not only had he been able to rescue her, but there was also no way Lois would allow Clark to comfort her like this. He treasured her touch, the way she was pressed against his torso.

"I'm sorry if this is making you uncomfortable," she said quietly, her voice buried in his suit. "It's just that when you hold me, the dancing stops."

He squeezed her in response. If he could hold her in his arms forever knowing she was safe, he would.

"That's nice," she said, looking up into his face and smiling shyly. "It's like you're grounding me." Her voice was soft and calm, in a way it never was with Clark.

"It will wear off soon, I promise." Despite the odor of panic, she smelled sweetly of chocolate and, incongruently but not unpleasantly, cucumber.

"You know what's caused this?" she asked.

"Clark and I worked it out."

Lois tensed in his arms.

"Clark?" A sharpness returned to her voice.

"It was the candy from Sweet Justice Confections."

"Oh well, I... didn't have... many," she stammered.

"It's alright," he assured. "They were poisoned with a sonic poison and seem to be highly addictive."

"Do you know who's behind it?"

"I haven't had a chance to properly investigate."

"Oh, well, go! *I* should go! We can't let whoever did this get away with it!"

Clark loosened his grip to let Lois scramble to her feet, but no sooner was she standing than her legs began to tap and her hands shake as if they were about to break out into jazz hands.

"Don't worry," said Clark, pulling her back down into his embrace. "We will catch them. And I've reclaimed as much chocolate as I could; the shop is closed, and the Daily Planet has issued an announcement alerting Metropolis to the danger. We just have to wait for the effects to wear off."

"I suppose Clark is out there—hey, did you see him singing and dancing?"

"Er, no," stuttered Superman. He didn't like lying, but he could hardly reveal the truth. "He said he didn't really like the chocolate." That much was true.

Lois huffed. "So, it's just me that made a fool of myself."

If only he hadn't laughed. How could he have made Lois think that he thought she was a fool? It was the last thing he thought of her. "Clark doesn't think that."

"Oh, yes, he does. You weren't there, Superman. He laughed at me. Actually laughed!"

"Well, I'm sure he didn't mean anything by it." Clark shifted uncomfortably beneath her. Only Clark could reassure her, and he had not yet had the opportunity. He wished he could make an excuse to leave and return as Clark so that he could tell her as himself that he was sorry. But Lois needed him, physically, as Superman more right now. This proximity to her yet feeling like he was lying and hiding from her was making his arms ache. He remembered how she had looked up at him at the end of her song: free of inhibition. He wanted her to look at him like that again as Clark, not Superman. But maybe there was a chance she *would* soften towards Clark. If he told her now the truth of what the candy did, she would have to acknowledge that she has some feelings for him.

"It looks like... that when people are singing..." He hesitated. He could just be making Lois feel worse. "They're expressing their true feelings. That's it at first. But then they just can't stop singing or dancing."

"Oh God, and there I was, singing "You're the One That I Want" to Clark! And he laughed!" Lois waved an arm angrily in the air, then let her hand drop limp on Superman's chest. "I mean, he's a good-looking guy, it's not like I haven't ever thought... But clearly he's not interested in me that way. And we're partners, professionals; there shouldn't be anything between us anyway." Lois shifted out of Superman's embrace to sit beside him on the sofa. She hugged herself while one persistent foot tapped a jig on the floor. She turned towards him, her eyes shining, dropped one hand to his knee, and spoke softly. "He's a great guy, Clark. We're friends. A good partner in fact... but Superman, well... I... you know, have feelings for someone else." Only a head width apart, she looked hopefully into his eyes.

Superman met her gaze head on. He was on the verge of replying that *she* was the one that he wanted. That his laughter had been to break the tension, not to humiliate her. That he regretted doing anything that would make her think that he, Clark, wasn't interested in her romantically.

“Maybe he was nervous,” he whispered. “I know I would be if a beautiful woman had performed like that for me.”

“You think I’m beautiful?” Clark knew it wasn’t the last remnants of the candy that was making Lois flirtatious. From the outset, she had been incapable of hiding her crush on Superman—there were no inhibitions to break down there. Goodness knows what song she might have sung had she been faced with Superman back at the Planet.

So beautiful, it hurts. Clark’s heart clenched. Whatever attraction Lois had to him, Clark, the truth was that those feelings were buried beneath her obsession with Superman. Even having just revealed that she did have feelings, or attraction at least, to Clark, it was obvious that she wasn’t willing to accept those feelings now. If ever.

“Relationships, friendships, they’re complicated. It isn’t right that people’s inhibitions are broken down against their will. Whatever you feel for Clark, you should be able to tell him in your own time, in your own way.”

“See, I don’t, I mean, I *do* have some feel... Oh I shouldn’t be discussing this with you, you’re friends with Clark.”

Clark deliberated. He would be as bad as those behind the poisoned chocolates if he continued this conversation with Lois, even though he was desperate for clarification of exactly *what* feelings Lois had for him. Was it simply lust or something deeper? It wasn’t Superman she should be talking to, but Clark.

“I am here for you, and for Clark. One thing I can say for certain: Clark is worried about you and is sorry that he laughed.”

“Clark told you that?”

“He did. He’s the one who sent me looking for you.”

“Oh.”

“And if you want to talk to him about the... incident... he promises he won’t laugh. But he doesn’t expect you to talk about it. That is up to you.”

Lois exhaled slowly and leaned against Superman as if lost in thought. Hesitantly, he lifted his arm around her, and she dropped her head onto his shoulder. He didn’t want to encourage her obsession, but only his close touch seemed to completely cancel out the effects of the poisoned sonic candy.

* * *

The next day

“So, Superman didn’t find out who did it?” confirmed Perry, shaking his head.

“I’m afraid not,” replied Clark. “He was able to trace the chocolates to a factory on the outskirts of the city, and he destroyed the equipment and the candy he found there, but whoever made them was long gone.”

Now that the newsroom was back to normal, reporters and copy editors rushed around getting on top of the big story. With no villain to blame, the story broke down into hundreds of anecdotes about individual experiences: lovers’ quarrels, blossoming romances gone wrong, and countless injuries coming together to paint a picture of a city suffering when impulsive music became the only form of emotional expression.

“Don’t dillydally, Kent, get your interview with Superman typed up and on the front page.” Perry looked over Clark’s shoulder at Lois studiously typing at her desk and ignoring the gossiping whispers and sniggering looks thrown her way. Of all the outrageous performances that had taken place at the Planet, Lois’s had been the most scandalous, given how out of character it had been from her typical buttoned-up professionalism. Perry therefore had now heard about Lois’s adventure in leather. Perry added more quietly, “I notice you didn’t add your personal anecdote.”

“Er, no, Chief. I think there are enough stories to tell the people of Metropolis what happened.”

“Quite right,” said Perry, patting Clark on the shoulder. “I knew you two would make a good team. Partners protect each other.”

Sighing, Clark made his way over to Lois. She finished typing and looked up at him as if he were any other colleague. Gone was the vulnerability she had displayed to Superman. Gone, too, was the easy softness she had displayed when they had visited Sweet Justice Confessions. All of Lois’s sharp edges were back. The candy had definitely worn off.

“How are you feeli—”

“Never better. Chief!” Lois pushed herself from her desk. “My Gulf War syndrome piece is ready for the front page!”

Clark touched Lois’s shoulder as she was about to barge past him.

“Lois, can we talk? Please.”

Lois crossed her arms and raised her eyebrows expectantly. “Look, Clark, there’s nothing to talk about.”

“I just want to say that I’m sorry I laughed.”

Lois brushed a strand of hair over her ear and looked at the floor with her lips pursed. “Well. Thank you,” she said tersely.

“You know,” he said, leaning towards her so others couldn’t hear. “Superman said the candy made people express their true feelings. I shouldn’t have laughed, I didn’t know.”

Clark waited. He hoped. If he cut through to the core of the matter, if he made it plain, maybe her defensive shell would crack. After all, he’d seen it as Superman, he knew it was breakable.

Lois rolled her eyes. “Don’t let it go to your head. Yes, I think you’re... cute.”

“Just cute?” replied Clark, his eyes boring into hers. He had to know.

Lois met his gaze. Her pupils flickered back and forth, revealing the speed of her silent thoughts. A million emotions seemed to whizz past before him.

Lois’s breath hitched. “It’s...”

Clark’s muscles unclenched. Lois bore the same conflicted expression she’d had last night. Nothing had changed.

“Complicated,” he finished. Clark stepped back and let out the breath he’d been holding. “I know.” Whatever she felt for him, Superman was a giant wall between them. And yet, Lois looked like she wanted to say something more. His heart leapt. Her mouth opened, her eyes were watery, and she closed the gap he had made. Words seemed to be on the tip of her tongue, but she was unable to speak as if trying to overcome an internal struggle.

“Not breaking out the leather today,” interrupted Cat Grant, stepping between them and grinning, oblivious to the moment.

The door slammed shut in Clark’s face.

“Don’t worry,” snarled back Lois, all emotion swept away. “Your wardrobe is still intact.”

“Ha, you couldn’t handle my wardrobe.” Cat sashayed away, pleased with herself. Clark did a double take as he realized the gossip columnist was still wearing the same pink Marilyn Monroe gown from yesterday. Cat looked over her shoulder at him and winked. Clark looked away, blushing.

Clark tried to recatch Lois’s eyes, which seconds ago had been full of longing, but the bubble had burst, and she was marching to Perry’s door. For now, he would have to hold on to the memory of how she had looked at him during her performance, uninhibited and adoring—not unlike how she looked at him when he was Superman. But this had been different. Under the influence, it had been Clark she had danced for. Her feelings may now be buried back beneath her Superman crush, but they were there.

Under his breath he said, “You are the one that I want, too, Lois, and I’ll wait for as long as you need to accept that.”

* * *

A truck wound its way silently around the outskirts of Metropolis, the city lights fading in the rearview mirror. Two men sat up front. The driver glanced nervously at his passenger.

“Eyes on the road, Victor. Or do you want me to stuff every last one of those candies down your useless gormless throat?”

“No, Kyle. Please, no. Though I do have a lovely falsetto voice. My mother always sa—”

“No one cares what stupid praise your idiot mother told you, and no one wants to hear you sing! Superman shut us down. But have no fear, we’ll be back, and next time, Lois Lane will know exactly who she’s dealing with.”

“Yeah, they don’t call you the Prankster for nothing!”

* * *

End note: This fic was written for the 2025 Ficathon. The prompt I received was as follows:

Wants:

- * Musical instrument
- * Fluff
- * At least one scene of Superman among public, rescue or otherwise

Don’t want:

- * Luthor
- * High angst
- * New Krypton