

# The In-Between Moments: Pont Neuf

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Summary: The In-Between Moments is a series that rewrites, elongates or adds scenes. Most of them take place in between major plot moments. Some of them slip easily into the canon, others roll right into an alternative universe. They're short, not connected, and in no particular order. In fact, they're usually plot bunnies that strike when I'm supposed to be working on the other epic stories I've got in the works.

Story Size: 6,112 words (34 kB as text)

Lois isn't having a good day, but Superman had a great one. Whose mood will come out on top by the end of the night? A scene somewhere amidst Barbarians at the Planet.

Author's Note: Everyone I ask about the origin of the love locks has a different answer. A Serbian town in World War I. An age-old tradition from China. A jilted lover in Cologne. An Italian film from 2006. Let's assume that the story here is just the version that Clark heard. It's not definitive, and the tradition can hold onto its mystery.

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Lois speared her spoon brutally into the tub of rapidly melting ice cream.

She was in a writing slump. There had been a serious lull in interesting news since those moronic criminals had decided to stage a re-enactment of *Die Hard* at the Planet two weekends back.

Since then, she'd had three low-level government press releases to fluff up, something perilously close to a puff piece on a traveling foreign dignitary, the city's report of the pH level of the water in Hobbs' Bay, the announcement of a new downtown parking structure, and a regurgitation of the latest economic trends in tourism since the last season. Closing her eyes, she nearly groaned aloud at the thought of those tedious stories.

She'd done her best to make the writing compelling for the Planet's readers. But the topics were enough to make her snore! She knew it couldn't be much more exciting on the reading side than it had been on the writing side.

To top it off, Perry had pulled her aside and hassled her about it yesterday. He was spinning out over losing a sponsor and had dragged her into his lousy mood. Well, that wasn't going to get to her! She'd seen sponsors come and go steadily during her time at the Planet. Losing one never made a difference.

But she would beat this slump anyway.

She was Lois Lane, three-time Kerth winner, Mad Dog reporter and brightest star on staff of the greatest newspaper in the world.

Of course, beating the slump was easier said than done.

With calls out to all of her sources, nothing had come back.

Flipping through her story notes—again—was making her frazzled. There was just nothing to sink her teeth into! She could try to check if there was any truth behind the affair she was certain her alderman was embroiled in... That sort of story really didn't interest her. It usually just hurt the family, got mud all over everyone involved, and rarely helped anyone else.

She picked up the spoon again and fiddled with it.

Then there was this half-baked but persistent rumor about gun-runners using Metropolis as a port between Africa and who knows where else. But the details were scant and nobody would ever confirm anything. Every time she asked a question about it, her sources would run as silent as snow-fall. She'd checked the harbor logs. The only thing she'd found that could possibly be connected were two freighters with flag states registered in the Zaire. Both had slipped out of port again before she could poke around, but none of their paperwork looked suspicious. She'd even bribed a customs agent at the dock, and he'd come up empty.

...maybe she hadn't paid him enough.

Or maybe there was nothing going on except a couple of freighters refueling at a major international harbor!

She shook her head in frustration, tapping the spoon against the carton.

Both stories felt like duds already, and she vacillated back and forth on which might pan out versus which would waste less of her time before she gave up on it.

Dropping her spoon back into the tub without eating, she huffed. Indecision seemed to be her middle name, lately. And indecision made her cranky. And crankiness was usually resolved with chocolate.

So why wasn't her usual panacea working today?

To tell the truth, it hadn't worked in a while.

Not since Clark had gotten a bee in his big, stupid Kansas-sized bonnet over Lex. They'd been butting heads over it constantly, and at this point she was too mad to even talk about it anymore.

She put aside her notes and picked up a different set of print outs.

Her eyes roved over the list of charitable contributions made by Lex Corp over the last year. Food banks, homeless shelters, orphanages, children's clubs, animal rescue services, city beautification projects, the Ladies' Auxiliary of Metropolis, even the Arboretum upstate.

What was Clark's problem? Lex Luthor was a man who selflessly directed millions of dollars each year toward helping people across social, economic and gender lines.

And those were just the official Luthor Corp charities. That wasn't even his personal list of personal projects! Those were reserved for needs that were less wide-reaching, but perhaps more emotionally felt. His pet projects included the police widow's fund, the fireman's widows fund, a medical research program for endangered amphibians at the local zoo, and programs that gave job training to reformed felons and bicycles to children.

None of this even touched on the non-profit institutions the man had implemented city-wide, all of which were angled toward helping the people that needed it most. These programs collected food for soup kitchens, paid for counselors at battered women's shelters and supported arts classes in schools that couldn't otherwise afford it.

The latest initiative provided experts to animal shelters to treat blindness in kittens. The man was trying to cure blindness in orphan kittens, for goodness sake!

It tugged at her heart. Lex was a poster child for philanthropy.

Why couldn't Clark see that?

Her eyes continued to scan down the list. She couldn't help but notice that a lot of the charitable contributions were directed a little differently than she might administer them.

For instance, it looked like an awful lot of the programs aimed at young boys focused on training in computers and the sciences. The funding list for girls was, well, a little

more domestic. It chafed at her that the girls weren't sent to the computer coding classes, too.

And come to think of it, there wasn't a single literacy program on the list. It was an issue very close to her heart as a writer. She tried not to take it as a personal slight that it had been overlooked.

Also, when she looked deeply at some of program details, it seemed like to her that recovering drug addicts were treated more like criminals than like the other groups with medical needs. She was the daughter of a mother with a history of heavy alcohol abuse. Like other family members of addicts, she knew firsthand that addiction wasn't a crime, but a treatable, chronic medical disease.

Now that she'd dug into it... it was a very well-rounded list. There were plenty of causes that would intentionally tug at your heart... Who could resist blind kittens, for goodness sake?

If she didn't know better—and she did, she reminded herself—but if she didn't know better, she'd say it was almost designed to be manipulative.

Another thing that struck her was the pure sprawling reach fit all. It covered every element of life in Metropolis. That would create quite a network if someone wanted to put it to use in a less altruistic way...

No! She stopped herself from going down that path. She wasn't going to let Clark get in her head with his vague suspicions and baseless accusations.

Lex Luthor was a man clearly invested in being a thoughtful philanthropist. He obviously wanted to help his fellow man and leave a legacy of charity, good will and generosity.

And that was just the sort of man she was looking for.

...And he'd asked her to marry him.

The ring was sitting on her dresser, ostentatiously calling out to be worn, and she was out here, sulking over print-outs. What was wrong with her? What was she even looking for by rooting around in his philanthropic history? Didn't she know a good thing when it walked up to her and offered her a lifetime of respect and comfort?

Her eyes flicked back to the page with resources allocated to the boys' only coding classes.

The ice cream was dripping onto the table and she had the sudden impulse to chuck it across the room.

Trying to tamp down the irrational surge of emotion, she didn't notice that the curtains rustled and a breeze swept past her into the room.

She was about to get up and put the ice cream back into the freezer like an adult and not a petulant child at all, when she caught the fluttering red cape out of the corner of her eye.

“Superman!” she said, surprised to see him.

“Good evening, Lois,” he said.

“Hi,” she greeted him, standing. “Come on in,” she gestured stupidly to the room around her.

He floated in through the window and set down in her living room.

“I think your ice cream is melting,” he observed. A little embarrassed, she had to quell the urge to throw the whole tub peevishly out the window behind him.

The way her week was going, he’d probably chastise her for littering.

“Uh, yeah,” she said inarticulately. She picked it up gently and moved to the freezer, popping the top on as she went. It wasn’t the ice cream’s fault she was in a bad mood tonight.

Ice cream safely stowed, she turned back to face him.

Was that amusement flickering through his eyes?

She ran a hand self-consciously through her hair and moved back into the living room. He was smiling, she noticed. The expression looked better on him than the stern facade he so often wore in public.

“It’s not that I don’t love seeing you,” she said, urging herself to resist babbling. “But what are you doing here? Aside from rescuing my ice cream?” So much for not babbling.

“I just had a really good day today,” he said with a smile.

She nearly grinned back. He’d had a good day and he was... coming to her?

New. Unexpected, too. But welcome.

“What made it such a good one?” she asked, intrigued.

“Do you ever have one of those days where things just seem to go your way?”

Not lately, she thought irritably, but instead said, “Sure.”

“Today was like that.”

“Exactly what does that kind of day look like for you?”

He gave her a look that was part knowing and part wary.

She rolled her eyes in return, and said, “You’re off the record here! I’m just a friend offering to talk. But I need at least a couple of details to be a good conversation partner.”

A smile was teasing the corner of his mouth again. “You haven’t had a good day.”

“I had a frustrating day,” she acknowledged, thinking of both her partner and her potential fiancé. She wrinkled her nose at how wrong that sobriquet sounded. “But I don’t want to talk about it. Tell me about your day instead.” Recalling how well that question went over last time, she put her palms up in a gesture of peace and amended awkwardly, “Tell me what you’d feel comfortable telling me about why you’re in such a good mood today.”

His smile was full force now, but she has the feeling it was more about their current exchange than anything that had preceded it.

“It was one of those days where I just knew I made a difference,” he said.

She could understand that. “I feel like that sometimes when I write a story that helps people,” she said.

“Exactly!” he said enthusiastically. “I stopped a mugging this morning. When I started to reprimand the mugger, he just broke down apologizing. No running, no threats. He just said he’d never done anything like that before. He and his wife had both lost their jobs and he felt like he had to do something to feed his kids.”

“You’d think that with kids, they’d have some savings put away,” she said uncharitably. She was still feeling grumpy from earlier and the mention of parental neglect felt like salt in the wound, as usual.

“Not everyone’s that lucky,” he told her squarely. “And with kids, it’s even harder to save.”

“But still, couldn’t they try food stamps instead of turning to a life of crime?”

He tilted his head. “Lois, did you know that it could take four months to be approved for that program in Metropolis?”

“I didn’t,” she conceded. “But I do know that there are food pantries and soup kitchens in the city.”

He nodded slowly. “I’ve been to some of those. They’re woefully under supplied. It would be tough for a family of four to survive that way.”

That didn’t quite make sense. She’d just seen the numbers on what one man alone was donating to the food pantries in the city. The unemployment numbers would have to be staggering to eat through those supplies.

...Or the money would have to have been rerouted somewhere along the line?

Maybe she’d take a look at that again after he left. It wasn’t as exciting as a drug smuggling ring, but it already

had the soft human interest angle that Clark was always going on about.

“Anyway, what happened?” she tried to move them past their point of disagreement.

A chatty, enthusiastic superhero was a rarity. She didn’t want to ruin it.

“When I told him I’d have to take him in, the woman he’d mugged stopped me. She actually gave him money to buy food for the kids.” He leaned in, warming to his story. “And it turns out that she works for a temp company! His wife is going in on Monday to see if they can find anything for her.”

“That’s unusual,” she said. Cynically, she couldn’t help but wonder if those kids the mugger had flaunted really existed.

“It is,” he agreed. “But it was the best outcome I’ve ever seen in that situation. It gave me hope.”

The look on his face warmed her, in spite of her skepticism. “Well, it gives me hope, too,” she allowed.

“After I left them, I was flying over the Midwest, and I heard a kid calling my name. I raced toward southern Illinois and when I got close, I realized that the kid wasn’t in trouble. He was blowing out the candles on his birthday cake. He was wishing out loud!”

Lois smirked. That wasn’t so far from her last birthday wish, either.

She watched his smile light his whole face as he recounted the joy on the 9-year old’s face when Superman himself wished him a happy birthday.

“I never get to do that,” he said in something like awe. “Usually when I hear a child’s voice call for Superman, it’s terrifying. Rescues are always so much more nerve-racking when kids are in danger. But this time, I got to do the fun part.”

A 9-year old’s birthday sounded like a nightmare to her. But it was clearly something that was cementing into a core memory for him.

He took a step toward the window to look out at the city. “It just feels like the world got a little better today.”

She’d never deeply considered that rescues could be anxiety-inducing for the hero. He was always so calm and reassuring, whether he was swallowing a bomb, facing down an all-powerful clone or heading to space to stop a world-ending asteroid.

But he hadn’t used any of those larger-than-life examples. What Superman worried about wasn’t himself, but the vulnerable people he was trying to help.

He didn’t have a list of carefully cultivated good deeds, she realized, glancing down at the pile of papers scattered across her table. Superman just did what he could. He helped people when they needed it most. And it really mattered to him that he helped every single one of those people, whether it was saving their lives or wishing them a happy birthday.

It moved her in a way that the endless charity list of Luthor’s didn’t.

He’d turned away from the window and was smiling at her in that way that made her dizzy.

“But my last rescue tonight was one of the easiest I’ve ever had,” he said.

“What happened?” She was becoming won over by his mood, in spite of herself.

“Three men were trying to blow up a bridge in Paris. Usually I don’t even find out about that kind of thing until it’s too late.” He shot her a smirk of his own. “Unless, of course, a certain intrepid reporter has tracked it down and calls it to my attention.”

“You stopped a bombing in Paris tonight?” She’d barely heard the rest after that. Here she was, treading water between a civil servant’s affair and an imaginary gun-runner from the Congo, and he was sitting on the scoop of the week! It wasn’t exactly Metropolis-centric, but after all it was called the Daily Planet, wasn’t it? Perry would happily print world news on the front page if there was nothing else happening. “Would you be willing to go on record about that?”

“I might,” he said, a gleam in his eye.

“You might!”

What a time for her normally polite, somewhat stoic hero to learn to tease her!

He chuckled at her outright. Still at the window, he held out his hand. “Come see it with me.”

That stopped her cold.

“What?”

“The bridge. It’s beautiful this time of night. And it’s still standing.”

The bridge.

In Paris.

Right.

She paused her mind, which was working too fast and failing to process what he was saying.

“Did you just ask me to go to Paris with you?” she asked.

“Well, just for you to see the scene of the crime, of course,” he replied, grin intact.

No way.

Had she fallen asleep in the tub of ice cream earlier?

Superman was asking her to go to Europe with him... where he would show her one of the fabled bridges of Paris and hand her a scoop for the next edition.

“How would we get there?” she asked dumbly, trying tonight off a giddily dazed feeling.

“I thought we’d fly,” he said, holding out his hand again.

Her brain didn’t need to process an invitation to fly with him. It didn’t matter where.

She stepped forward and her hand touched his.

Electricity sparked. She looked back up at him to see if he’d felt it, too.

But before she met his eyes, they were falling out the window and then hurtling into the stars above.

She gasped and he laughed, taking her through a barrel roll in mid-air.

She tightened her grip on him, but found herself laughing along.

So this was what a good day for a superhero looked like.

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From above, the city was all shimmering lights, even this late at night. Laid out like spokes on a wheel, the streets led from the center of the city at the famous Arc de Triomphe to the outer arrondissements. The air was fragrant, both from the Seine below them, but also with the gentlest hint of lavender from the fields south of the city.

He dipped lower, taking them between the banks of the Seine. It was dark, but the bridges were still brilliantly lit as they passed beneath them. The Eiffel Tower, with its glittering light show, was easily spotted as they passed.

“Most people look at the Tower here”, he said. “But on the other side of the river is the Trocadero.”

She followed his eyes to a sprawling palace, lined with columned pillars.

“We’re about to head under the bridge dedicated to Alexander III—it’s probably the most ornate one along here.” He slowed a little so that she could see it as they approached. “On the right, you should just be able to make out the gold dome of the Invalides. Napoleon is buried there.”

Her eyes searched the sky and caught moonlight glinting off the ornate, sectioned dome.

This was unreal, she thought, following his attention to the repurposed train station that was now the Musée D’Orsay. Was Superman really giving her a guided tour of Paris? She’d just been in her apartment, lamenting the state of her job, angry at her partner, and waffling over her—she shied away from the word ‘fiancé’—suitor. And now she was magically transported to the most magical city in the world.

He’d taken her down the river as far as the Bastille, before pointing it out and circling back.

“This is incredible,” she breathed, as they headed back toward Notre Dame, aiming for the far side of Île de la Cité that they hadn’t passed when they’d been headed the other way.

“It’s nice to share it with someone,” he said, taking in her wide eyes and appreciative expression.

She tore her eyes away from the small island sitting luminously in the middle of the river in front of them, and looked up into his kind face.

Their gaze held and she felt warmth suffuse her cheeks.

“This is the oldest bridge in Paris, the Point Neuf,” he said, slowing to a stop and directing her attention forward again.

The wide stone bridge in front of her was impressive. It stretched the whole of the river, but was bisected by the green tip of the island. She could see lit iron lampposts peaking over the edge above the thick rounded wall at street level. The bottom was comprised of a series of arches, with ghoulish gargoyle faces lining the side, challenging their approach.

“This is the one you saved today?”

“It is.”

“It’s beautiful,” she sighed. “I’m glad it’s still here.”

“Me, too.” His voice had turned a bit wistful, looking at the bridge with her.

She hated to spoil the mood, but he had ostensibly brought her here for a reason, after all. “Um, on the record,” she said, “How did you catch them?”

He cleared his throat, and spoke with what she’d come to this of his ‘public’ voice. “Three men had planted explosives along the base of the bridge that rests on the Île de la Cité. They were working their way along the underside of the bridge when I found them.”

Her eyes were wide. “How did you know they were there?”

“I could smell the explosive materials they were using.”

He lowered them down to the center of the bridge, where disaster had almost struck.

“Did you have a tip that the bridge was in danger?”

“No, I was just passing by.”

“That’s incredible,” she gushed.

“It was lucky,” he conceded.

She got back on track. “Do you know why they were planning this?”

He looked conflicted. “Based on what they told the police, they were protesting.”

“Protesting what?” she gently prodded.

“They believe that the French government is complicit in the genocide that happened in Rwanda that took place earlier this spring.”

“So it was a political statement,” she assessed.

He was quiet, and she noticed.

“You don’t think so?”

“I didn’t ask.”

He’d slid around answering.

“But you don’t think that’s what it was,” she said, arching a brow.

“The men were Rwandan. It seemed like an expression of grief as much as anything else.”

It seemed to be her night for a skeptical outlook. “Grief? They were setting bombs in the middle of one of the busiest cities in the world. At best, that’s irresponsible and negligent.”

“Have you heard any cars pass by above us the whole time we’ve been here?” He inquired.

The background noise suddenly came into focus for her. It was a massive bridge that should still hold some traffic, even at this late hour. But he was right. The street above was empty.

“No,” she said.

“The bridge is closed. It went under renovation earlier this year.”

“They knew no one would be here,” she realized. This was a different story than she’d thought it would be.

“It’s more than mere politics. Almost a million people died in their home country. Neighbors and friends were pitted against each other. There’s a refugee crisis now. These men had family members in the thick of a massacre.” He shook his head. “I can’t condone a public act of violence,

but I think it’s meaningful that those men put so much care into not inflicting more death.”

He was clearly moved by the situation, but the plight of numberless thousands caught up in this atrocity. Even the men at the bridge tonight.

“I’ll make sure to include that in the article,” she said.

He nodded in response.

She wondered if he knew that this angle would double the impact of the article. Perry would be thrilled with this sort of tie-in, with both humanitarian and political ramifications. She knew her hero was letting his guard down more than he might with another reporter, his bleeding heart for all of humanity clearly on his sleeve. She’d be sure to do his thoughts justice when she wrote the piece.

The moon came out from behind a cloud then. Her mind refocused on the caped man hovering them above the Seine, moonlight reflected in his eyes.

“Can I ask you another question?”

“Of course,” he said, still using his ‘official’ voice.

“What’s your favorite part of the city?”

His grin reappeared. “How about I show you?”

He flew them under the Pont Neuf, moonlight cascading off the water below and stone above them. The next bridge they came to was much smaller, much more intimate, and meant only for foot traffic.

“This is the Pont des Artes.”

“The Artists’ Bridge,” she translated.

He set her down, and the moment that her feet touched the bridge, she felt transported into the past. The wooden slats beneath her were so different from the paved, crowded sidewalks she treaded daily. From the ground, she could see how the city rose up around her, not in streamlined skyscrapers, but with ornate, storied palaces and cathedrals. She stood in the middle of the Seine, in the city of dreams, and inhaled with wonder.

She turned back to her guide and found him watching her, expression masked.

“I can’t get over this,” she breathed. “You can just go to Paris whenever you want to.”

He tilted his head. “It’s really only special if you have someone to share it with,” echoing his earlier sentiment and pushing it a little further.

He’d chosen to bring her.

Her eyes met his again, and she felt a frisson of heat.

“So why is this your favorite place in the city?”

He began a slow amble along the footbridge, and she followed.

“There’s an old story of a young couple who were once very much in love. She was a schoolteacher and he was an officer in the military. They decided to get married, and pledged their love on a bridge like this one. But fate wasn’t with them. The first World War came, and he was sent away to serve before they could marry. He never came home. But she couldn’t let him go. So she wandered the world looking for him, leaving locks on the bridges that she passed, as a symbol of her unbreakable love. When people asked her why she was leaving a lock, she would tell them their story.”

He guided them over to the edge of the railings and knelt down, his hands moving to a worn and rusted padlock at the bottom of the wire mesh railing.

“Lovers from all over the world retold the schoolteacher’s story. Some of them were inspired to leave locks of their own. They engrave their names into locks and attach them to the sides of bridges. Then they throw the key in the river as a symbol their unending devotion.”

His hand caressed the lock at his feet briefly before releasing it and standing, resting his arms on the railing and leaning against it, looking into the river below.

“They couldn’t be together, but their love lasts even now.”

“That’s...” She knew that she would usually classify the entire story as the worst schmaltz she’d ever heard. But something about the encompassing night, and the rush of the river and the stone city around her had a spellbinding effect, and she couldn’t bring herself to mock it. “That’s a very sweet story,” she settled on.

She leaned against the bridge railing beside him.

“It gives me hope.”

She glanced at him as he looked out over the Seine. “Hope?”

“That love can live forever,” he said, breaking off with a self-effacing grin. The expression looked somehow familiar and it drew her in. But it was gone before she could pin down the fluttering feeling in her mind.

“In the midst of muggings, bombings, and all kinds of atrocities,” he went on, “there’s still space for love. Every crime I stopped today could have been so much worse, but people chose to pull their punches. It gives me hope.”

He pointed down at the lock between their feet.

“But only in Paris can you find a reminder of hope like this, right in the middle of the city,” he said, bringing them

back to her original question of why this bridge was his favorite.

She’d known that the man beside her was a romantic, but she hadn’t seen it to this extent, and she hadn’t seen this side of him in a while. Maybe not since their dance on air, all those months ago? Whenever it had last sprung up, it was shining brightly tonight, and it was enough to shift her cynical view by a few degrees.

Leaning against the railing next to him, her mind wandered back to her other romance this week. She’d nearly forgotten that Lex’s ring was sitting loudly on her dresser, waiting for her to return.

The weight of the decision dimmed the lights of Paris for her.

She glanced down at the lock again, imagining Lex scratching her name onto it before throwing its key over the side on the bridge. The thought made her heart rate spike, and she frowned. The story, though saccharine, had a certain charm to it. But it didn’t bring her the cozy feeling she’d expected when putting it in the lens of her own relationship. Shouldn’t she want love to be eternal? Shouldn’t she want the man proposing to her to intend for it to last forever? So why was the love lock story somehow so incongruous with her own love story?

Was it her?

Or was it Lex?

She pushed the analogy forward.

If he was missing, would she search for him the world over?

She didn’t think so. But then again, the love lock story was clearly just an old wives’ tale. People didn’t act like that today.

She got the feeling that Lex would properly grieve her and move on. He definitely wouldn’t turn the whole world over to find her.

But she couldn’t say the same of all the men in her life.

She had a feeling that Clark would enlist Superman and they’d comb the globe, Clark investigating her path and captors and Superman executing a search and rescue. Both of them were so stubborn, who knows how long they’d persist.

But that was different.

Clark was her best friend, *not* her fiancé.

And the man standing next to her was, well, enigmatic to be sure, but a literal superhero. And also not her fiancé.

And anyway, that kind of wild abduction scenario wasn't going to happen on a slow news week—unlike her potential offered engagement, which was coming up all too fast.

“Penny for your thoughts?” His voice was soft.

She looked at him with serious eyes. She didn't want to tell him. But she couldn't lie to him either. She knew she would have to just tear the band-aid off on this one.

“Lex Luthor proposed to me.”

Her own voice rang in her ears and it felt like the night went still.

She watched him carefully, and her brow furrowed.

She hadn't known that his skin could pale.

“Congratulations,” he said after a brief pause.

“I haven't said ‘yes,’” she said hurriedly.

“What did you say?” he asked just as quickly.

“I told him I needed time to think about it.” It had sounded lame then and it sounded even more lame now.

But she had said that.

However, actually doing it was another matter. Unfortunately, even before her impromptu trip to Paris, she was spending a lot of time not thinking about a marriage to Lex. Instead, she was spending a lot of time reassuring herself of his good deeds after her partner's insidious warnings, and engaging in one-sided arguments with Clark in her head.

“That's wise,” he finally said. “It's a big decision.”

Too big, she thought, with a flicker of apprehension.

She suddenly regretted that she'd brought up the engagement at all, looking down the river toward the bridge that the man next to her had saved.

She'd only been to Europe once before, she realized in the moment, but just this week she'd been to both Rome and Paris. Gazing across the river, she marveled at how different the famous pedestrian footbridge of Paris felt compared to the chic restaurant scene of Rome. Unconsciously, the thought arose that Paris suited her better. Maybe she'd reallocate her Tahiti savings to come here one day instead.

Then, again, if she ended up marrying Lex, maybe he'd bring her here one day.

That didn't feel quite right, but she couldn't pin down exactly why.

Her relationships shouldn't be this confusing, she thought with a pained grimace.

Focusing on the dark horizon line, she wished for a moment that her travel partner tonight would ask her to

chase the sunrise forever instead of standing here talking about Lex.

How had her life become millionaires and superheroes? Was this what she'd been hoping her life would be?

In reply, her mind offered up an image of Clark in the newsroom, handing her a cup of perfectly warmed coffee, leaning over her shoulder as they wrote together. Now that was the life she'd wanted to build for herself, before the millionaires and superheroes had appeared. All of her favorite things in one mental snapshot: a job where she was in the top of her field and helping people, non-fattening legal addictive stimulants, and a partner she could rely on.

Her partner...

Clark was going to hate her engagement when he found out.

“It's getting late,” her hero said, interrupting her thoughts. “I should get you home.”

She blinked. Had she just been daydreaming about Clark Kent while standing on a moonlit Parisian bridge with Superman?

It's been a weird week, she thought.

She turned to him, then, and recognized how deeply the atmosphere had shifted. It felt like there was something between them now that hadn't been in the way before. She wondered if it was on her end, because of her sudden thoughts of Clark or on his end, because of her sudden announcement about Lex.

“Thank you for the story,” she said. “And for bringing me here.”

She felt the wind catch her hair then, and casting one final look around, she leaned out over the railing into the breeze. It reminded her of flying. The exhilaration of it all pulled one last grin from her. Whatever was going to happen with her love life, right now she was in Paris, and she wanted to memorize this feeling while she was present in it.

I'll be back for you soon, she thought, saying *au revoir* to the city. Not goodbye forever, she promised herself, with a quick glance down at the love lock, just for now.

She turned back to her hero. His expression was still but the look in his eyes was haunted and longing. It made her breath catch in her chest, and she was sure he'd heard her heart skip that beat.

She stepped toward him, a question forming on her lips.

But then he blinked and it was gone.

“Metropolis Express,” he interrupted her thought, holding out a hand to her. “Ready?”

Giving into the magnetic pull that was always there, she took his hand, feeling the warmth of it spread out across her whole body.

Then and there, she promised herself that she would never return to Paris without him.

That thought felt more right than anything else had in the last few minutes.

“I’m ready,” she said, and hopped into his arms.

She had a lot to think about this week.