

## Quirks of Fate

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# Quirks of Fate

by [Jerseygrl](#)

## Summary

Lois and Clark, Clark and Bruce, Clark and Sam... and that one, ominous bed that threatened to destroy them all...

Stories of a fateful cruise run amok after reservations are mixed up and our characters are flung together in ways they never could have dreamed of...

“And so the quirks of fate lead to the most portentous meeting of the century!”

## Notes

I really don't know why I'm writing this. I really, really don't. I guess I'm trying to solve the dearth of “only one bed” in this fandom in one fell swoop!

Enjoy!

Thank you to Puzzleboat and my discord friends for being the amazing, witty fodder for all of this. You guys are awesome.

This was inspired by a hilarious silver age comic when Bruce and Clark were thrown together in this ridiculous situation on a cruise. I won't give any more away in case you haven't heard of it, but it's even more tropey than you can probably imagine.

I hope you all enjoy reading this as much as I'm enjoying writing it!

# Lois Lane, before, Part 1

## Chapter 1

### Lois Lane, Before Part 1

When Clark boarded the cruise ship *Varania*, on its maiden voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, he was determined not to let this become a vacation. Lois Lane was also on board, and she was in full reporter mode, her brain swarming with leads. He still hadn't worked up the courage to ask her out, even after he had been working with her at the Planet for months and was only falling further and further in love.

He knew that falling for a colleague was probably a mistake, but he couldn't help himself. He had never met a woman anything like her in his entire life, and he was mesmerized. He was obsessed. And he knew that no matter what he did there was no way he would ever be able to change that.

"Clark, hold my suitcase for a second," Lois said, as she slid her pencil in between her teeth. She rested her elbows on the counter at the concierge desk, waiting for her room assignment.

"Ms. Lane, I'm not seeing your name in the system," the man behind the desk said. Clark glanced over at him, reading the badge pinned to his shirt, which identified him as "Billy."

"It's there, I assure you it is," Lois insisted, leaning in even closer. Billy recoiled, seemingly threatened by her stance. "Look again."

"Ms. Lane, I'm sorry, but it's clear as day. I'm looking at the ship's roster now — and look, you're welcome to take a look yourself. You can see right here, it goes straight from 'Landingham' to 'Lang,' no 'Lane' anywhere... unless it's possible you're registered under a different name..."

Billy stole a glance at Clark, as if insinuating that she might have anything to do with him, or might have even called herself "Lois Kent..."

Clark's eyes glazed over at the thought.

But Lois's eyes only widened, fire burning behind her eyes. "No! No, he's not — no—"

"Look, lady, I'm sorry," Billy said. "But you're not here. I've looked several times, I showed you the roster—"

Lois was rummaging inside her handbag now. "I'll get my editor on the phone, Perry White, I'm sure you've heard of him—"

"Uh, look—"

“He’s the one who made the reservation, he told me. He made the call himself—“

She finally pulled her phone out of her bag. It was a large, thick Motorola, and as she smacked it against her face, Clark knew it was sturdy enough to stand up to any abuse that Lois Lane may throw its way. He had seen it first hand, in fact; just last week she inadvertently dropped it down three flights of stairs, only for it to survive the mishap completely unharmed.

“Hi, Perry, it’s Lois. Listen, I’m at the concierge desk at the Varania. What do you mean, you know what I’m — the *Varania*. Don’t be ridiculous, of course you’ve heard of it, you handled the tickets just last — what are you *talking* about, you told me specifically you were handling it...”

Clark noticed Lois’s cheeks starting to redden as he peered down at his shoes.

Clark watched as she closed her eyes in resignation. He was thinking she should probably apologize to the man at concierge, who had done absolutely nothing wrong—

But, instead, she just looked up at Clark through narrowed eyes. “Come, Clark, let’s go. Looks like Perry dropped the ball...”

“Did you say Clark?” the man said. “You’re not Clark Kent... are you? Why, I see a reservation for a Mr. Clark Kent right here. Room 204, deck two, section four...”

Lois’s eyes narrowed even further, until they were barely open at all. Clark could feel her anger emanating from her skin as her heart audibly sped up in chest.

She was amazing. She was incredible. But right now she was also immensely terrifying.

“No, it’s ok, I’ll leave also,” Clark said sheepishly. “Thanks, anyway...”

“No, it’s ok, Clark. You go ahead. Just because Perry remembered for one of us and not, you know, the four time Kerth award winner and runner up for the Pulitzer Prize...”

Clark opened his mouth, tempted to tell her that he had booked those tickets himself, that he had earned his place on this ship, reporting on this story, with his seamless reporting and his tight prose that landed his byline on the front page of the Planet, completely on its own merits...

But, instead, he snapped his mouth shut. It was better to say nothing at all...

“Lady, listen, there’re a lot of people waiting. If you’d kindly move aside, if there ends up being a no-show you’re welcome to be first on the waiting list...”

“She can stay with me,” Clark said, the words escaping before he even had a chance to process them.

Lois jerked her head around so fast it almost looked like a blur.

Clark's face somehow got even redder, and he felt heat rise into his cheeks. "I mean, you can if you want to... there's no pressure, obviously not, and—"

Billy's eyes darted between them, trying to read their expressions, both Lois's clear surprise and Clark's continually mounting embarrassment.

"Look, lady, I don't care what you do, I just need you to make up your mind and move on right along. The line isn't getting any shorter, ya know—"

Lois was staring at Clark now, her eyes wide and round and impossible to read, and Clark felt his stomach sloshing around madly like a crowded tank of goldfish.

God he loved her. He loved everything about her — her long, dark, silky hair that fell on her shoulders like a curtain, the way she held her chin and shoulders high and proud and more confident than any woman he had ever met, how quick and cunning her brain was, and how conniving, and how brilliant she was in every modality (except the kitchen, of course, but, thanks to the tireless efforts of Martha Kent, his own cooking skills were good enough to make up for it). He loved her so much he couldn't even put it into words, or into coherent thoughts...

But then she furrowed her brow, staring deep into him, and he shivered. He actually shivered. He loved her — but boy was he terrified of her.

"Lady, look, move on right along. Please, I don't have all day—"

"Okay," she finally said.

Without breaking eye contact with Lois, Clark felt his eyebrows drifting up along his forehead.

"Did you say okay?" Clark thought, and then, when she cocked her head in response, he realized that he had actually said the words out loud.

She continued to stare at him, to stare *through* him, as though he were nothing but a wisp of smoke, or maybe even an invisible man.

And then she rolled her eyes. "Lead the way, Smallville."

Lois was silent for the entire walk through the corridors, clearly still fuming about the whole situation. But Clark tried not to think too deeply about it, and about what it would mean to actually share a bedroom with Lois Lane. It was hard to even get his brain to wrap around the steps they would inevitably have to take when night finally fell. Who would wash up first in the bathroom? Would they take turns or would they go in at the same time? Clark assumed they would take turns, and he decided he would let her go first, but how would he ever even find the courage to broach the subject? And then afterwards — would they really be in the same room at the same time while wearing *pajamas*?? It was so hard to believe that any of this was really happening at all.

He loved her. He really did. And he wanted to date her, he wanted to find the courage to ask her out, to take her to a restaurant, to buy her dinner (even if it was a stretch on his measly journalist's income). He wanted all of that, he really did... And he knew that ultimately, down the road from all of that, the inevitable next step was to share a bedroom with this woman, that was the *dream*, really...

But to skip right to this, and equipped with his ratty, stained, oversized "Smallville Athletics" t-shirt and ripped gym shorts...

Clark sighed, shaking his head. Maybe he should just sleep in his street clothes.

They passed right by a sign labeled section four, and continued down a long, dark corridor. It was starting to feel ominous, especially as they continued far into the bowels of the ship...

But it was probably just his nerves. That's all it was.

Room 201, 202, 203...

And then, there it was. 204, the number on the door big and bold and ostentatious. Clark swallowed heavily, and then he wondered if he could actually go ahead and do this...

But then Lois was pushing past him, elbowing him in the ribs as she shoved her suitcase towards the door.

"Key?" she asked brusquely. He stared at her blankly for a moment. "Smallville! Are you even in there?" And then Clark realized that Lois was shaking him, peering deep into his eyes, and he startled. "Smallville! Key!"

"Oh, right," Clark sputtered as she scrambled in his pocket. "One second..."

He finally pulled out a small keycard, which he quickly slid into the card reader. The small light turned green on the card reader, and Clark heard the lock disengage inside the door with a click. Lois grabbed the silver doorknob, pushing it down eagerly and shoving the door open wide...

It was a small room, but it was clean. There was a large bed with a fluffy white comforter smack in the center of the room, and a few feet away from it was a small but well-kept bathroom with gleaming, white fixtures and tiny bars of soap stacked against the wall of shiny, white subway tiles. Lois took a fleeting glance at the bed and then, without hesitating, she threw her suitcase onto it, collapsing in a heap right beside it.

But Clark was frozen solid in the doorway, the door still ajar behind him. His eyes were wide and unblinking, and his heart was beating so hard and so fast he was sure it was going to burst out of his chest.

At first, Lois didn't seem to notice. Her suitcase was open on her lap and she was pulling stacks of papers out of it, licking her finger as she sorted through them. She was here to work — she had made that clear from the get-go. This wasn't a vacation, it was never going to be.

But Clark wasn't sure if Lois even had it in her to go on a vacation at all — he doubted that she had a single sedentary bone in her body.

“Ok, so look,” Lois said. “The diamonds are here. I know they are. You can see here on the receipts I got from Bobby, they should have made it straight into the cargo hold, two hours ago at most. Of course, they would have come via the USS Schuster and straight through Brazil, and I know you keep telling me the shipping lanes down there can have ridiculous delays, though I can't imagine how you could possibly know that, but see here, the timing of the acceptance at the warehouse? It seems to check out, so I guess you might be right about that...”

Clark blinked several times as he struggled to listen. He cared about the story, he really did. In fact, it had been his idea to book these tickets to begin with, to give them a better avenue to investigate all of this.

“...I think we should start with pulling the ship's manifest. I'm sure we're going to see some familiar names on there, if you catch my drift. Maybe even more familiar than we can possibly anticipate. I know you don't think it's likely, but I'm telling you, Intergang *is* involved in all of this. Intergang...” She paused, looking up at him. “Intergang... and Luthor.”

He didn't respond. He was too busy staring at the bed. The one, solitary bed, with its absurdly fluffy comforter that seemed to be trying to engulf her in its posterously thick stuffing.

“Clark?”

He blinked as he tried to listen to her. He really did try...

“Kent!”

Clark's eyes finally snapped up, finally meeting hers.

“Now I *know* you're not listening to me. Did you even hear what I said??”

He did not.

“Of course, Lois, I hear everything you say,” Clark replied. He tried to clear his throat, but it only hitched awkwardly, so he attempted to force a grin onto his face — but, instead, it emerged as a grimace.

Lois was finally starting to catch on that something was amiss, and she narrowed her eyes yet again...

“Clark, just spit it out. What's going on?” she said. “And, by the way — close that door already!”

Clark jumped at that, quickly shoving the door closed with his heel, but then he continued to stand awkwardly at the door, afraid to move a single inch.

Lois was still staring at him, her brow furrowed, and then she cocked her head, rolling her eyes. “Seriously, Clark. You’re the one who’s been telling *me* that it can’t possibly be Intergang — or Luthor. That came from *you*. What’s going on with you? I need you on your A-game, Kent. We can’t afford to slip, not now, not ever! We need to—“

She cut herself off, her eyes widening. And then she slowly shook her head, letting out a loud sigh, as she finally glanced down at the bed. At the one, solitary, full-sized bed. “For god’s sake... Clark...”

“It... it’s okay,” Clark said, suddenly trying not to look at the bed, as if glancing in that direction would burn his irises. “It’s okay, it’s fine — I can just sleep on the floor...”

But the room was small — no, it was positively minuscule, and there was almost no floor at all, the bathroom so close to the bed that the door was easily reachable from the edge.

Lois rolled her eyes.

“Clark, we’re not children,” she said. “Don’t make this more than it is.”

And then, as Lois reached again for her piles of notes, Clark realized that the conversation was over. He glanced at his wristwatch — it was only four PM, he had *hours* to go until this would even become remotely relevant...

Though as he peered back up at Lois, who was pushing her gorgeous, shiny, silky, raven-black hair behind her shoulder, he swallowed heavily.

He had no idea how he was going to survive this.

Though little did he know that the sleeping arrangements would end up being the least of his worries...



# Lois Lane, before, Part 2

## Chapter Notes

I have had so little time to write these days but somehow I got this chapter in. This story is a little pet project of mine, I hope you're enjoying it!

Quirks of fate

Chapter 2

Lois Lane, before part 2

They spent the afternoon and into the evening in full investigative mode. As always, Lois was completely in the zone, and before long, Clark found himself mesmerized by everything that made her the amazing person who she was. He was so entranced by her that he almost forgot about that one, portentous white bed that was waiting for him on deck two, section four, room 204...

Almost.

But as was inevitable from the start, eventually the sun was starting to get low in the sky, and an orange hue cast over the white clapboard on the ship's mast, making it look almost the color of a pumpkin. They were traipsing along on the upper deck now, in the first class area where Lois was convinced they would come across someone sinister, who wouldn't even see them coming.

"We're so close, Clark. I can smell it. I can feel it. Deep within my bones..."

And then she grabbed his hand, giving it a squeeze...

And his heart leapt inside his chest, to such bounds that it put his famous leaping over tall buildings to shame.

She didn't drop his hand after that, only continuing to hold it as she led him down the hall. And it felt so good to be touching her like this that despite everything, and despite all the anxiety and foreboding, he felt a meek smile sneak onto the corner of his mouth, rapidly spreading straight across his face and stretching between both of his dimples.

They continued down the hall in silence, but it didn't even feel remotely awkward. On the contrary, actually; with her hand nestled inside his he felt calm, he felt serene, as if he didn't have a care in the world...

When he turned to glance at her, he didn't know what he expected to find—

But he certainly didn't expect to find her smiling right back at him.

His eyes widened in surprise, and her smile only grew, and then she gave his hand another small squeeze.

"I'm really happy you're here with me, Smallville," she said, completely unprompted. "Even if you're a huge distraction that I really can't afford..."

A distraction. She said he was a *distraction*. He didn't dare think about what she could possibly mean by that.

But then he *was* thinking about it, and he was thinking about it so much that he barely even noticed when she picked one of the locks along the corridor and dragged him inside, shutting the door behind them with a loud click.

It only took one glance at the ornate, gold trim along the edges of the ceiling and the lavish, solid wood furniture that decorated the room and he knew that they were in deep — and also, that he had been wrong. But of course he had. Of all the times he disagreed with Lois over a story, the number of times he had been proven right continued to be a grand total of zero.

"Lois, I'm not sure if this is such a good idea," Clark said as Lois's eyes started glittering in excitement.

"Oh, nonsense, Smallville," Lois replied as she swatted his shoulder. "Anyway, we won't be long, he'll never know we were even here..."

She started rummaging around the empty room, peeking inside the drawers of the desk, inside the dresser, really anywhere she could think of where she could possibly find evidence of his involvement.

"Lois, this is Luthor we're talking about," Clark said. He cocked his head, listening for any sign of the man's voice, or even just his shoes clip-clopping along the ship's deck.

Lois raised her eyebrows. "Yes, I'm very aware of that."

"Lois, just think about this... please..." Clark lowered his glasses, giving the room a quick scan, and then he shook his head. "And anyway, there's nothing here..."

She froze, her head jerking towards him, her brow stitched in confusion. "How the hell could you possibly even know that??"

"I just do..."

But then he cut himself off abruptly as his hearing suddenly picked up on a very familiar, low, baritone voice.

*"Now, Otis, listen to me. We have it in the bag. But there is just one element that could throw a monkey wrench in it all together. Do you know what that is?"*

*"Uh... a screwdriver, Mr. Luthor?"*

*“A screw... a screwdriver?? My god, Otis, not a— no. Not a screwdriver.”*

*“No?”*

*A pause.*

*“Hmmm... no. Just.... no. Not a screwdriver... a woman.”*

*“I’m sorry, Mr. Luthor, I’m not sure what woman could possibly mess up your plans, they’re perfect Mr. Luthor, just perfect—“*

*“How about a Miss... LOIS LANE.”*

And then Clark heard their footsteps continuing down the hall, coming closer and closer to the absurdly ornate room.

Clark cleared his throat. “Uh... Lois?”

Lois threw him a cursory glance before she shook her head, rolling her eyes at him. “Look, I really don’t know what you’re trying to do here. I’m sure it’s here — it has to be...”

“Lois, listen,” Clark continued, his heart starting to speed up inside his chest as the footsteps continued to approach. “I think it’s probably best if we go. You know, we’re wasting our time here. Besides... was that my stomach? By golly, it was. And I’m sure they’re serving dinner over in the mess...”

*By golly??* Did he actually say *by golly??* He pinched the bridge of his nose... man, he loathed himself...

But then his hearing focused on those footsteps yet again and he shook off his awkwardness, launching straight into a panic instead.

Lois’s head snapped up, her eyes suddenly narrowing in frustration. “Are you kidding me, Smallville?? How could you *possibly* think about your stomach at a time like this?”

*Clop clop clop.*

The footsteps were impossibly close now, only three rooms down the hall, and they weren’t slowing down.

“I’m not, I mean, gee, Lois...”

He needed to focus. He needed a solution. He couldn’t let them get caught by Luthor...

But what was the alternative?

*“Listen to me, Otis, because I’m only going to say this once. If and when we find Lois Lane — and we will. We will find Lois Lane. When we do, she will never be permitted to see the light of day again. Do you understand?”*

They were walking right by the front door of the adjacent room. Their time was up. He could let it happen, allow Luthor to discover their presence and let the repercussions unfold...

Or he could speed them out of there.

He looked up at her, watching as her eyes narrowed at him more and more, her brow furrowing with deep, angry lines.

He could speed them out of there — and thereby reveal himself.

But this was a decision of epic proportions. He could do it, it wouldn't be difficult in the slightest...

But if he did, his relationship with Lois would never be the same again.

And he loved her. Of that he was certain. He loved her... and he thought there was a chance she might actually be able to love him back...

But if he revealed himself now it would all be over, even before it had a chance to begin.

No. He couldn't do it. He couldn't—

*"Mister Luthor, I'm embarrassed to say I have no idea what you're talking about. What do you mean we won't let her see the light of day?"*

*"What do I mean... what do I mean?? You idiot, I'll tell you exactly what I mean..."*

Clark heard a hand closing around the doorknob, and then it slowly started turning...

And his heart was beating faster and faster, so fast he was convinced it was about to leap out of his chest entirely.

He glanced at Lois again, just as she finally sighed deeply. She shrugged her shoulders, tossing her long, silky hair over her shoulder, and then she turned back to sort through the papers on Luthor's desk...

And she wasn't looking. *She wasn't looking.*

This was his chance...

*"Lois Lane is dead!!*

And then the door started opening, suddenly swinging open to reveal a very familiar, tall man, his head so shockingly bald that it easily reflected the moonlight right on the surface of his skin...

And Clark launched himself forward.

Otis's jaw dropped, though he couldn't have seen much more than a blur. "What in the world..."

But they were gone.

---

Clark tucked Lois under his arm, feeling her hair tickling his chin and her heart pounding against her ribs, but he tried not to think about any of that—

Or about what any of this would ultimately mean.

In the end he didn't have a choice. Lois was worth the world to him — so much so that he knew he had just thrown away his future, all in one, solitary act — but he was happy to do it. Lois was safe now thanks to that act, and he would do it again a thousand times over.

And then, just as quickly as they had launched into superspeed, he came to a sudden stop. They were now standing in front of room 204, alone in the long, dark corridor. Lois jumped as she noticed him there, her eyes widening in confusion and wonder.

She stared at him wordlessly for a moment. “Clark...”

And then she cut herself off, falling into silence.

Clark awkwardly adjusted his glasses on the bridge of his nose. “Look, Lois,” Clark said, at a total loss of where to begin. “I... um, I mean...”

“Superman,” she said simply, her gaze unwavering.

He simply stared at her in response.

“It was Luthor,” she continued. “He was coming. Wasn't he.”

“I... yes, um, I mean...”

“But Superman...” She trailed off as she peered even deeper into his eyes, almost as if she were trying to burrow straight into them. Almost as if she were trying to extract the deeper meaning of all of this, and come to some unsettling truth. “Superman...”

“Yes,” Clark said, his heart rapidly falling in his chest. It was over. It was all over. “Yes. You're right,” he continued. “I'm—”

“Superman,” she repeated, interrupting him.

There was a long, uncomfortable pause as Clark tried to prepare himself for the inevitable. He took a deep breath.

“Look, Lois, I know this is came as a—”

“He came!” Lois interrupted, seemingly oblivious to his words. “Superman came, at the very last minute, and he saved us! Didn't he?” And then she was suddenly talking very fast. “Did you see him? Or a sign that it was him? Maybe a glimpse of bright red? Or royal blue? Or even his S, did you see his S??”

Clark blinked several times, barely believing what he was hearing. “I’m sorry... what?”

Lois cocked her head, raising her eyebrows. “Seriously?? Clark, keep up, will you? Don’t you see what just happened?”

“I... I mean—“

“It was a close call — probably *ridiculously* close...”

Man, Lois really had no idea.

“Don’t you see?? Luthor could have *found* us, just waiting there like sitting ducks. He would have taken us by surprise, ambushed us, and then who even knows what he would have done...”

Clark swallowed heavily, thinking about Luthor’s ominous words.

But before he was even able to put his meandering thoughts into words, Lois started fishing around in her pocket, pulling out the keycard and inserting it into the lock. Clark watched the green light start flashing as the lock disengaged inside the door.

“I can’t believe Superman was here,” Lois said as she turned the doorknob and pushed the door open with her shoulder. Clark followed behind her...

And then his heart fell as he caught sight of that big, white bed yet again.

And this time it was late, later than he even wanted to think about...

But Lois didn’t even seem to notice, or if she did, she certainly didn’t care. She collapsed onto the bed in a heap, letting out a deep sigh through the corner of her lips as she folded her arms under her head.

But once again, Clark was just frozen at the door.

And then he realized that Lois was staring at him.

Her brow was furrowed in confusion — but even more so, in unmistakable annoyance. “What on *Earth* do you think you’re doing?”

“Uh... what?”

The bed was even smaller than he remembered. He couldn’t even imagine the concept of climbing into it, especially now that she was sitting on it, and taking up much more of the surface than he had anticipated.

“Are you planning to come in? Or do you have somewhere else you were thinking of spending the night?” She glowered at him, peering up at him through hooded eyelids. “Last I checked they had just *dozens* of vacancies, no, *hundreds*...”

“I... um, I mean...”

Somehow, her eyes were narrowing even more, her glare intensifying.

And she didn't need to say more.

Soon enough he was inside, and Lois was closing the door with a gentle tap, and then she turned the lock with an impossibly loud, terrifying click...

And they were alone.

And he realized he was shivering — actually, and very obviously shivering — and as she threw another heavy glare in his direction he knew that it hadn't escaped her notice.

"I'm going to say this again," she said, her voice low. "And I'm only going to say this once. *We are both adults*. This doesn't have to be a big deal. It *isn't* a big deal. So just stop it. Be the adult I know you can be."

Act like an adult. Right. Clark could do that. She was right, it didn't have to be a big deal. Clark didn't even know why his mind was building it up the way it was...

And then Lois cocked her eyebrow. "You're not sleeping in *that*, are you? Strip, Smallville..."

His cheeks immediately reddened. She paused, momentarily confused... but then, as what she had said dawned on her, her hand flew up to her mouth.

"I mean... that's not what I meant. Obviously..."

Clark snatched his overnight bag off the floor, clutching it against his chest. "Er... I'll be right back..."

And then he slipped into the tiny, white bathroom.

Somehow it had slipped his mind entirely; but when he unzipped his overnight bag and spotted the shirt languishing on the bottom of the bag, the situation suddenly felt a thousand times worse. He slowly pulled it out of the bag, his nose wrinkling. It was just as gray as he remembered, but the ratty sleeves and tears under the arms were even more obvious than he had anticipated. And the words on the front were so faded they were barely discernible at all. He wore his Smallville Athletics shirt every single night, as it was the most comfortable shirt he owned, but he couldn't even conceive of the notion that Lois would actually see him wearing it.

"*Smallville? Did you get lost in there?*"

Clark's eyes widened. He hesitated, holding the shirt between his fingers.

"*Smallville? You didn't get eaten by the toilet – did you?*"

"No, of course not," Clark replied quite obviously. "I'm fine..."

He glanced at the shirt one more time, loathing himself for not bringing a different shirt – literally any other shirt would have been preferable to this one – and then, taking a deep breath, he slipped it over his head.

He peered at himself in the bathroom mirror, mortified at the mess that looked back at him.

Slowly he tiptoed to the bathroom door, grasping the doorknob. He turned it slowly, wondering if there was a way he could stop time all together – or maybe he could just shoot off into the sky, disappearing entirely.

Because contrary to what Lois believed, he did indeed have another bed he could sleep in – his own bed in his own apartment in Metropolis. And if he were to fly over there he could be under those warm, welcoming covers in less than a fraction of a second...

But there was no way he could get away with that, not without revealing way too much.

So here he was, very hesitatingly opening the bathroom door.

As it finally opened and the bed came into view, Lois shifted, turning to look at him. Her bright, blue eyes flashed right at him, piercing straight through his pupils and deep into his soul.

Clark shivered, and at first he didn't even know why...

But Lois was continuing to stare at him. She didn't seem even remotely nervous, and the flat expression on her face was entirely unreadable...

Until Clark suddenly noticed a small twitch in the corner of her lips.

Clark jumped, startled. He wondered if he had imagined it entirely, she couldn't possibly be nervous. She was Lois Lane, perpetually confident and in consummate control...

But then her lips twitched again, and this time much more obviously, and there was no doubt in his mind that it was real.

Her eyes were wide and beckoning to him, that much was clear. He wasn't sure what she wanted exactly... but then the twitch suddenly transformed, spreading across her face and turning into a large, brilliant smile.

She was smiling – *really* smiling – and he knew somehow that the smile was meant entirely for him.

She raised her eyebrows. “Seriously, Smallville, what on Earth is going on with you?”

She was still smiling at him, looking straight into his eyes, and he realized that she hadn't even glanced at his ratty shirt...

And then she patted the bed next to her. “Remember, we're both adults. This is no big deal...”



But Clark couldn't help noticing the slight tremor in her voice as she said those words, as if she didn't entirely believe them, either...

Somehow, Clark managed to put one foot in front of the next...

And then, before he knew it, his legs were sliding under the covers.

Lois reached for the lightswitch, and she unceremoniously switched off the light.

"See, no big deal," Lois repeated. But the tremor was still present underneath her false confidence – even Clark couldn't miss it.

"Right," he spit out as he inched towards the edge of the bed, trying to avoid contact with Lois. "Right, it's ok, it's–"

But then he felt a warm, soft hand gently touch with his shoulder. He jumped, startled by the sudden sensation, even as her fingers closed around his shoulder and gave him a little squeeze.

"Clark..."

Clark didn't know what to do. He was already at the edge of the bed, and if he shimmied over even further he would just topple onto the floor. Of course, he could always use his powers and stay suspended in the air adjacent to the bed, but if he did, there was always a chance that Lois would make a discovery that he very much preferred to avoid.

Clark froze, making sure he didn't move a muscle. Maybe if he didn't move at all it wouldn't be a problem. Of course, he had no idea how he would manage to actually sleep like this, but that was the least of his worries. He was pretty sure he didn't actually need to sleep every night, though he had always done so out of habit, more than anything.

At first he didn't feel anything further, other than the hand that was still gripping onto his shoulder. He listened in with his superhearing, hearing her heart beating steadily at a normal, resting heart rate of 68 or so...

But then, out of nowhere, it started to speed up. 72...84...90...102...112...

Clark's pupils dilated as he struggled to keep his breathing steady, but despite all efforts to the contrary he felt it become ragged and panicked...

And then he felt her leg brush by his. He flinched, wondering if he was about to jump out of his skin entirely...

And then Lois recoiled in response.

"Clark..." Lois repeated, louder this time, snatching her hand away from his shoulder in the process. "Clark... listen. I..." Lois cleared her throat. "I thought... I mean, never mind. It doesn't matter what I thought, your feelings couldn't be clearer..."

Clark's eyes widened.

“Look, I just wanted to say... I’m sorry. I’m *really* sorry. I shouldn’t have...” She cleared her throat again. “I shouldn’t have touched you. It was out of place. *Totally* out of place. It was inappropriate, especially coming from a colleague. I just... I mean, I thought... ugh. I’m awful. I’m terrible. Clearly I misinterpreted your signals...”

Clark’s eyes widened even more, becoming huge saucers.

“Look,” Lois said. She sat up in bed, turning on the light. “If you want to report me to HR, that’s totally understandable. I won’t hold it against you – obviously. I’m sorry, I’m *really* sorry...” And then her face fell into her hands – but when it did, her silky, long hair fell over her arms like a curtain...

She startled, looking up at him suddenly, and then she glanced at the tips of her hair...

Clark followed her gaze, discovering that his fingers were right there, grasping onto her hair like a lifeline.

Clark heard her breath hitch.

And then she looked up at him, meeting his eyes again...

And suddenly Clark found courage that he didn’t even know he had. He didn’t know where it came from, but once he found it, he wondered how it had possibly taken this long to find it. He was familiar with courage, he used it every day as Superman... but somehow, it had only been this moment, this woman, who had helped him find it as Clark.

And then he spoke. “You didn’t,” he said. And his voice was steady and confident, not a single tremor underneath the surface.

Lois blinked several times. “I...what?”

“You didn’t,” he repeated. He reached towards her, and somehow he got himself to take her hand. She was still peering deep into his eyes, as though his eyes were the only thing that mattered in the entire world...

And suddenly, Clark knew. His feelings about her weren’t one sided, not even a little bit.

And as he took her hand, feeling her soft fingers settling inside his palm, he gave her hand a small squeeze – and then, somehow, she squeezed his hand right back.

“You’re saying...” Lois said tentatively. “You’re saying I didn’t misinterpret your signals.”

Clark simply nodded, not trusting himself to say another word.

And then the light was suddenly off again, and Lois was laying back down...

But this time she made no pretense of trying to avoid contact...

And neither did he.

When she settled into his arms, and he felt her nestling under his chin, resting deep against his chest, it felt like the most natural thing in the world. His arms snaked around her, holding her tight, and then she started running her hands up and down his forearms soothingly.

They rested like this for several minutes, not uttering a single sound. Nothing more needed to be said. They were adults, they were colleagues... it didn't need to be a big deal...

Except it really, really was.

They really didn't need to say anything else. Her actions said everything – and he knew that his did, too.

Clark knew that this was it. This was the start of something huge – this was the start of the rest of forever. This was where he wanted to be, for the rest of his life. He wasn't going anywhere. And somehow he felt confident that she wasn't either.

Clark knew that all of this really needed to be discussed...

"Hmmm," Lois merely said as she snuggled against him.

Clark grinned. There would be plenty of time for all of that.

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