

# Such Great Heights

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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*If that woman had watched her son, after I specifically warned her, I wouldn't have to worry about this now.* It wasn't like Clark to think so negatively of anyone else, but Lois was watching him again, that fierce newshound I'll-find-you-out glint in her eyes. It was not a look he was used to having trained on him and it made him nervous in ways that very little in life did. Maybe avoiding her after the rescue hadn't been the best idea. The moment he'd returned to her, she'd cut him off when he tried to come up with a feasible explanation, so now he could only wonder what scheme was running through her mind now.

Since they had left the more-crowded falls area and traveled down the boardwalk toward the Whirlpool Rapids Gorge, Lois had fallen silent and thoughtful. It was enough to make him hope that maybe she'd just leave things as they were. They meandered companionably along the boardwalk, hands again clasped. It was only when he stopped to look at a display of the watercraft that various daredevils had used to ride the treacherous whitewater rapids that Lois broke away. Again that gleam in her eyes, her smile devilish when she implied that he was keeping secrets from her. Yet she had a little bounce in her stride that meant she was on the chase. Not angry, not accusing, more intrigued. She was doing it again; trying to lull him into revealing more than he wanted to. And it was getting so that he didn't want to hide from her. The urge to just have done with it was so tempting. Knowing he could easily break, Clark tried using his standard defense of not knowing what she was talking about, then nervously pushed up his glasses and tried to flee to the hotel.

"What's your hurry, Superman?" Lois taunted behind him, and his heart seized.

He took a breath, knowing his shoulders had gone tense, knowing she had to have seen that. "Sorry?" he said, turning around.

"I gotta admit, y'know, your disguise is nearly perfect. You had *me* fooled," Lois said, rising from where she'd rested her elbows on one of the boats. "And I am nobody's fool, believe me."

Clark heard a warning tone in her voice on that last as she climbed onto the bench, and he slouched a little more, replying nervously, "Oh, no, of course not, Lois." He moved toward her as she sat down on the railing itself - typical Lois, ignoring the park bench placed there for that exact purpose. "I mean, you just have an active imagination. You just get carried away sometimes." The hurried line sounded forced to Clark's own ears, but he couldn't help nattering on as Lois' hazel eyes told him she wasn't buying it.

"Listen," she cut in, as Clark turned his back to her, trying to figure out how to convince her she was wrong. "I'm so sure that you're Superman, that I'm willing to bet my life on it."

Clark's spine went cold. "What?"

She just nodded. "Now if I'm right, you'll turn into Superman. And if I'm wrong, you've got yourself one hell of a story."

Her intentions were clear when she slipped off her jacket, eyes never leaving his. She couldn't be doing this so soon after the fruit cart incident. Hadn't that close call warned her against trying to force him to prove his identity? Maybe she meant to threaten to jump, hoping he would panic. But her hazel eyes, so often changing with her mood, seemed fixed and steady on one goal.

Chuckling nervously, Clark saw that Lois was still sitting there, rolling her eyes at him as he told her she'd almost had him convinced. Well, fine, he would call her bluff, and he started to walk away.

"Bye-bye baby," Lois called jauntily, and he thought in dismay, *She never bluffs*. When he turned around, she was already in the water, calling for Superman.

All the information he'd read on the displays was *not* helpful at the moment, Clark knowing that the rapids contained standing waves up to five feet high, that this gorge set the highest class standard for the eastern half of the continent, and that the water was moving at thirty miles per hour. He hurried along the boardwalk, keeping her in sight, trying to figure out how to save her without letting her find out the truth.

A dead tree and his heat vision provided Lois with a floating log to hold onto, but that was only a temporary solution. He had to get her out before she reached the whirlpool further down. She was a strong swimmer, not in any danger of drowning at the moment, and before he could figure out what to do she managed to get herself into an eddy where she could touch the bottom and climb out.

Clark hurried down to help her, and for the finishing touch, let himself fall sprawling into the water so that *she* had to rescue *him*. The scathing disgust for the whole situation that her tone implied wounded him, but at least his secret was safe for another day.

In the shower, Lois let her self-disgust have free rein as the hot water boiled feeling back into her freezing skin. How could she have been so *stupid*? Jumped the gun and overplayed her hand. She felt like beating her head against the tile of the shower to jostle out anything else foolish that might be up there. No wonder Superman hadn't shown up - he had to think she was out of her mind. The water was just a degree or two above freezing, and if the waves weren't enough to crush her, the boulders could have easily done the job. At least once when she had gone under, it had amazed her that she had bobbed back up. It wasn't the most terrified she had been in her life, but it was damn close.

And Mr. Wonderful? Just where had he been? If her guess was right, he had done nothing but panic and sure hadn't swooped in to save her. No, he'd run down the boardwalk in full-bore panic. If she was just fooling herself, her regularly-scheduled savior had blown her off yet again. What had seemed in the moment like a brilliant solution had blown up in her face. Who knew she'd be so grateful for a branch that had landed right in her path and thankfully not on top of her...

Unable to help herself, her mind locked on that. Wait. A branch fell right in front of her? How coincidental was that, anyway? And Superman was right there just moments ago, why couldn't he swing back by and grab her before she almost drowned? He hadn't shown up when she leaped from the office window, either, and that was right in the middle of Metropolis.

Lois froze as her eyes widened, the water beating down on her skin unnoticed. Did she

really think that Superman would turn such a blind eye to her peril? Of course not. Even if he didn't have feelings for her, he claimed to be her friend. So what, then, was he doing while she was almost dying?

Saving her, unobtrusively. She'd felt as though she were slowing down toward the end of the fall from Perry's office, but at the time Lois thought it was just the effect of seeing her death rushing up to meet her. And she didn't see Clark leaning out of the window until after she landed. Somehow he'd slowed her fall, and somehow he'd arranged for the branch to land in the water right when she needed it.

A knowing, mischievous smile slowly curved her lips as she rinsed her hair. Oh, she'd get him - the third time's the charm. Clark had gotten dried off while she scrambled into the shower, and then he'd left the room in a hurry. She hadn't heard the door open to announce his return yet, so she lingered in the bathroom, fussing with her hair and making plans. Oh, yes, this time she had him. If it took every weapon in her arsenal, she'd have him.

*Your dynamic eyes have attracted a secret admirer*, her fortune cookie had read. Well, he wouldn't have any secrets left when she got done with him.

The last thing that Clark had been expecting on coming back in the door from changing clothes had been to be confronted by Lois still wearing only a towel. Shocked not so much by her usual lack of modesty as his mind's reaction to it, he tried to look anywhere but at her as he closed the door. Meanwhile, his partner strolled over to the vanity as if nothing unusual had occurred, breezily remarking that she hadn't heard him knock.

Still taken off guard by seeing her like this, the least she'd ever worn in front of him, he couldn't help clucking at her like a mother hen. "For goodness sake, the door wasn't even locked! Just anybody could walk in here." It wasn't like Lois to leave doors unlocked; she had lived in Metropolis too long.

"There you go, putting yourself down again," Lois retorted offhandedly, having picked up a hand mirror and started grooming her eyebrows. There was a little frown of concentration while she did this, more interested in her own reflection than in what he was saying.

He gave an annoyed little frown at that little slight. "Oh, very funny." It was clear that she was still planning to go through with going to the ridiculous kissing contest tonight, he realized, seeing that she already had an outfit on a hanger over the back of the door. Light blue and a bit more sensible than the little black dress she'd worn the night before. He had to hold in his sigh of relief; it wasn't as if she wasn't beautiful in anything she wore, but he wasn't sure he could survive another outfit of that sort while they were here.

"No, really, I'm serious," Lois deadpanned, still in those dismissive tones as she moved on to mascara.

Clark stared at her, aghast, as she checked her job on her lashes and moved on to blush. She was never like this - she might taunt or harass him, but she was never disdainfully cruel. Perhaps it was because she'd embarrassed herself earlier, leaping into the rapids. It wounded him to make her feel silly, but he couldn't let her learn the truth. And he *had* to discourage her from any more near-suicidal attempts.

Perhaps the best way to do that was to shake her up a little. He couldn't often do that, but if he played his cards right, maybe he could get her off the track of his alter ego *and* get out of the kissing contest, the one *she* insisted they attend. *Your dream will come true when you least expect it*, he thought ruefully. He'd certainly never expected to kiss Lois for the first time in a room full of strangers, but he was going to work to make sure this particular fortune didn't

come true.

Clark had never spoken openly about his feelings for Lois. If anything could shock her out of the mood she was in, that might do it. He rambled around the topic before finally saying he was beginning to feel a bit like a newlywed.

"A newlywed? You?" Lois actually turned away from her mirror, hazel eyes on his speculative. Her tone, the arch of her eyebrow, suggested a plain disbelief that stuck him to the core. Especially in light of his comments earlier in the day.

"I don't see why that should be so strange." He didn't have to fake his indignation.

At last, Lois actually looked at him, biting her lip, her face softening the way it always did when she knew she had misspoken. It was as if she had only then realized how cold she'd been. "Oh, I'm sorry, Clark. Really, I didn't mean that. I mean, I'm sure there's thousands of girls who'd ..." He couldn't help the relieved smile he could feel growing. But his hope that the storm of disregard was over died an early death when she paused, pondering the compliment a little further before adding, "Well, a few girls anyway."

Any other time, he'd have chalked this up to Lois playing rough with him; it wasn't the first time that they had bantered back and forth. Usually a barb like that was followed by an impish grin and a bubble of mischievous laughter, her eyes dancing. But in this context was downright nasty, and he was both wounded at her casual cruelty and secretly relieved. He had thought more and more recently that he just didn't know how to react to her since he'd become more attached and this was a prime example. He had no idea where her frosty attitude was coming from, what Clark had done to bring this on, but an argument would keep them out of the contest. It would also, maybe, cure a little of this infatuation he had with her. Maybe a fight was for the best. "Go ahead and say it," he told her with more anger than was common for Clark.

Her hazel eyes were wide, trying too hard to be innocent. "Say what?"

"That somehow... you're not satisfied being here with me, hmm? That in some way, I don't seem to, um, shape up very well, in your eyes." He sat down in the chair across from the vanity, surprised at the vehemence in his own voice. Maybe he'd been more sincere than he'd realized in hoping Lois would regard Clark as more than a friend. Which was patently ridiculous - the sort of girl who would fall head over heels for a hero wouldn't give the time of day to a man whose entire personality was a carefully-crafted disguise, meant to be the complete opposite of that hero. But, honestly, she had. She had treated Clark in a way that she hadn't treated any of the others, not even Jimmy. She *had* let him in. That was what made all of it all the more confusing.

She almost seemed to ignore his accusation for a second, gaze locked to her reflection, which stung more than Clark wanted to admit. "Well, darn it, I don't have anything to apologize for," he continued in the same forceful tone, his voice growing more heated. "I'm a good reporter - no, I'm a *very* good reporter, and an even better friend to you."

Lois, who had been applying her lipstick, swiveled in her seat to face him. Now polished and perfected, her distance and contempt tore at him all the more. Did she have to be so beautiful? "Stand up," she said without presence, her tone brooking no opposition.

He had expected a number of reactions, but this hadn't been one of them. "Stand up?" he asked, giving her a puzzled frown. Where was she going with this?

"Yeah, stand up, just for fun." As quickly as that breezy, too-casual note had disappeared a moment ago, it was back in her voice, and Clark began to suspect that she was forcing herself to keep some emotion out of her tone. When he rose reluctantly, she pulled him over in

front of the vanity mirror. "Now c'mere, look at yourself. Just look at yourself."

Clark closed his eyes. This was *not* going to be good.

And in light of the current trend in their argument, what she said next surprised him. "What we have here," Lois proclaimed, "is a potentially aggressive, dynamite guy who can do anything he wants." She said it as if she expected Clark - the original Mr. Milquetoast - to suddenly manifest the same willful determination that had always been *her* hallmark. Clark couldn't help chuckling at that wild notion. Lois went on to add, "I mean, it's not *my* fault you keep putting yourself down."

After the remark about 'a *few* girls, anyway' just moments ago, she couldn't even pretend to claim innocence. Hoping to throw her off whatever track she was on, Clark replied with an edge to his voice, "Oh yeah? How?"

It didn't seem to faze Lois. She looked up at him with those inquisitive eyes, utterly unconcerned by the fact that she was still wearing just a *towel*, and started in. "Well, for starters, you slouch all the time. Here, stand up straight." Before he could distract her, Lois had unceremoniously grabbed his arm, turned him toward the mirror, and yanked his shoulders back to forcibly straighten his posture. Clark couldn't control his flinch, unnerved by her hands on him at this, of all times, and why was he the only one worried about that towel slipping off?

The raven-haired reporter never missed a beat, going full-steam ahead. "There, that's better," Lois continued as if this was business as usual, as if she hadn't just defeated one of the primary parts of his disguise. With his back straight, it was obvious that he was a head taller than she was, something he took pains to hide. "And get yourself a jacket with a vent, and some shoes that don't lace up, and a shirt with a little color or a pattern or something." He shied back from her touch as she waved her hands around his shirt; he couldn't let her feel the toned muscle she'd so often leaned her cheek against when they flew. While she was sidetracked by Clark's dressing habits, he started to slouch again, hoping she hadn't noticed the height difference.

As he fussed with the shirt as expected, Lois added in a scathing undertone, "And a bow tie that doesn't look like a letter opener..."

Ordinary he would easily let a comment like that go; Clark's wardrobe had been carefully cultivated to do just that: make people take one look and dismiss him as a lost cause, a hopeless geek. But for some reason, after the events of the past few days, that set Clark's already anxious nerves on edge. And Clark Kent finally lost his temper. "All right, Lois, all right." That caught her attention. She clasped her hands and looked up at him assiduously, as if his angry voice revealed something fascinating. "Now, we've been through all this before, haven't we?"

"Yes." Her eyes drew away, then. Reaching for a bottle of polish on the tabletop, Lois chose that moment to prop her foot up and paint her toenails. Again, he wasn't sure if he felt it a rude dismissal or a reason to be grateful. Her nonchalance infuriated him, even as the amount of leg she was casually baring left him disconcerted, and Clark began to stammer.

"I-I know where this is all leading to, um..." He kept trying to tear his eyes away from her leg, but his gaze kept returning like a compass needle to true north. He could smell the scent of her body wash on her skin, still warm from the shower, that warm and faintly spicy scent that always clung to her. His head was starting to spin, opposite reactions to her keeping him off-balance. "And I'm sorry. I mean, I'm ... I'm sorry. But no matter how hard I try I just..." Lois leaned back from her work with a noncommittal sound, seemingly unaware that she'd just put both leg and cleavage into his line of sight. Glancing away and shoving his hands in his

pockets, he managed to stumble on, "Just ... just never will be *him*."

That exasperatingly light tone again, not even bothering to raise her eyes. "Him who?"

That only irritated him more. "Him who? Him, Superman." Clark all but spat the last word, leaning toward her, and a part of his mind was impressed by his acting. Perhaps it wasn't as much of an act as he thought. As much as it gave him a headache to consider that one of his alter egos might be jealous of the other, where Lois was concerned, he had always tended toward irrationality.

"Oh." She still hadn't so much as glanced at him.

"Now, I can't help the fact that you seem to think that you love him," Clark said, unaware that he'd begun pacing. "That's something I'll have to live with. But darn it Lois, now that's *enough* now." He heard the forcefulness in his own voice. This wasn't an act; at least part of him was angry at Lois for ignoring Clark, who practically worshipped her, in favor of Superman. But what woman could possibly see that the courageous superhero and the mild-mannered reporter were the same man?

Lois, meanwhile, was applying perfume to her chest, giving him a single cool glance, and he sighed. "Maybe I just can't stand the competition anymore." Maybe he'd been waiting all his life for someone to realize that neither Clark nor Superman was the whole truth of who he was - both were disguises and both were truth. Superman projected more confidence than he'd ever felt, and Clark was far shyer than he really was. Both sides of his persona were constructed to fit the circumstances, and it was only Clark's bad luck that the two were entangling over the same woman - this woman, whose enrapturing hazel eyes were shuttered as she leaned her chin on her hands and stared at him.

Her voice was low and almost conspiratorial when she replied, watching his every movement. "And just maybe you've *been* the competition all along."

Clark felt his heart freeze. He had been right; she was still on the hunt - that remark about slouching had forced him to show her his true height, and all the business with flashing her legs had only been to unnerve him. Trying for a little nonchalance of his own now, he told her, "Lois, I've never been particularly good at riddles." He felt his mouth settle into angry lines, knowing she'd backed him into a corner.

"Lemme make this one really easy for you," Lois responded in the same silky, persuasive murmur, and he knew her well enough to know this was her triumphant reporter voice interrogating him. His heart crushed into his stomach, feeling a rare moment of gut-wrenching sickness. Oh God, was she chasing a *story* here? After all this time? Was that what all of it came down to, the story of the century, *Superman Revealed*? As he came to this conclusion, Lois had continued on, "Why, with thousands of children potentially falling off something lethal all around the world, would Superman be in Niagara Falls today? Why not the Grand Canyon?"

"Why don't you ask the child's family, I'm sure they would know," Clark retorted, trying to fob her off. She was really onto him this time, and he had no idea what madness she'd try to prove her point.

"And why is it always when I'm with you?" she shot back, and his heart fell deeper, if it was possible. It had been a slip-up, he knew that now, not to have acknowledged her in front of the crowd. Clark Kent not being there he could have played off, but Superman failing to at least glance her way, when she was yelling out to him in fact? It had been a lapse in judgment, but what else could he have done in the situation? "Until Superman appears, and then you disappear. Very conveniently, it seems to me."

Clark tried to protest; *she* was the one who'd sent him out after hot dogs, after all. But Lois was having none of it. That grin, the one that congressmen and criminals had learned to fear, curved her lips. Overriding him without warning, she goes for the jugular, "And when Superman appeared, I looked over at that hot dog stand, and you were gone. You weren't there."

*Think of something. Think of something. She has you and you know it. **Think**, dammit.* "I was..."

Again, she cut him off, her voice so sure. "Nowhere."

Stuttering, he tried to pretend he'd gone to the men's room, but he knew he was losing. Mad Dog Lane wouldn't be put off by any more glib excuses, and he grieved to see that predatory light in her eyes. After as many times as he'd saved her, as often as he'd protected her, as much as he'd held himself back to keep her safe from the havoc that being Superman's beloved would cause, as much as she's turned his world upside-down, he could hardly believe it would come down to a *story*.

Those five little words fall from her lips again, deceptively soft. Daring him to deny it. "You are Superman, aren't you?"

He managed, somehow, to laugh, though it sounded forced even to him. Rallying, Clark tried as hard as he could to dissuade her with words. "Lois, look, we've been through these hallucinations of yours before. Can't you see what you almost did? Throwing yourself off a building sixty stories high - and then into the rapids beneath Niagara Falls?" While he spoke, something strange was happening. She had gone wide-eyed, watching him with just the slightest nod, and he heard her heart rate speed up. He attributed it to having hit her where she lived and felt mixed feelings rise up in him yet again. But he couldn't stop now, not when she was this close to the truth. "Can't you see what a tragic mistake you almost made?" Lois took a deep, deep breath, and for a moment he let himself believe he'd convinced her not to pursue this anymore.

He should have known better. In a day of unforeseen surprises, this one was the most unexpected. "I made a mistake," Lois admitted slowly, gaze never leaving his. "I made a mistake because ... I risked my life instead of yours." And then he was staring down the barrel of her Ladysmith, Lois' finger on the trigger.

All the pieces in place, Lois was both excited as hell and scared to death. After all the indications, all the missed moments, all the signs, time had narrowed down to this moment. Once and for all, she'd have her answer, and either way it would change her life completely. She had known that since the possibilities first started to occur to her. Either Clark, her devoted follower, was also the hero who swept her off her feet ... or she was a complete lunatic who was about to severely damage her best friend's trust. Never in her life had she been in a situation quite like this, but that was an experience she'd found herself often since she had met him. She had to know; it was nuts to do things this way, but she had the feeling that cornering him where he couldn't get away would be her only chance at knowing for sure. And when she was gambling with her emotions, Lois had to play to win. She only hoped that she wasn't wrong about both his real identity and the way he'd always looked at her.

It didn't help her nerves that the terror on his face was so plainly real. Clark knew the gun; it was a model she'd picked out on police recommendation, built for maximum stopping power. He also knew Lois' proficiency with it, as she had to have marksmanship to earn a permit to carry a concealed weapon. Evidently he hadn't known she'd packed the gun for this

trip, but then, Lois took it everywhere. She didn't have this in mind when they came to Niagara, hadn't expected any trouble here, but the gun went wherever she did.

"Lois, d-don't be insane." Clark backed away, his eyes almost comically wide, and she prayed she was right. Not only because the tension of not knowing the truth had been driving her to distraction, but mostly because if she was right, she might have a chance in hell that he might forgive her.

*Just brace yourself and do it. Don't think about it; you've thought long enough. You have to know before you make an even bigger fool of yourself. You've come this far. Trust your gut.* "And don't fall down, 'cause you're just gonna have to get up again," she said sternly over his protests, forcing herself to go through with it.

"Lois, now d-don't be crazy now," Clark practically yelped, and she steeled herself. *Just do it already!* She closed her eyes as he yelled her name, and squeezed the trigger.

The revolver was shockingly loud in the hotel room, but Clark didn't fall to the floor. To her breathless amazement, the man in front of her drew himself to his full height and *glared* at her. That instant was so surreal, she didn't truly trust her eyes. Her jaw dropped as she stared at him, stricken wordless. *You were right. Oh dear God, you were right. He's been with you all along.* Her heart stuttered when he sighed with evident vexation, still giving her the full weight of his stare.

Lois wasn't quite sure how much time passed before she managed to whisper, "It is you," as the whole world seemed to shift beneath her feet, and she was very glad she was already sitting down. *Oh, and by the way, you just **shot** this man. I wonder how well he's going to take your explanation for why you did it.*

He took off his glasses, and everything about him was different, from his stance to the set of his shoulders to the expression on his face. *Superman.* "I guess I've known this for the longest time," Lois managed to say. Was that why she'd felt so comfortable with Superman, so safe in the arms of a man who could bend steel in his bare hands?

When he spoke, the timbre of his voice had changed. "You realize of course, if you'd been wrong, Clark Kent would have been killed." He'd started out resigned, but by the end he was angry again, and she supposed he had a right to be. From his end of things, it looked as if she was willing to sacrifice her best friend's life to learn the truth.

He didn't know her as well as he thought, then. Lois had to suppress a chuckle; she also carried a pocket knife at all times, and it had been swift work to pry the lead bullet from her revolver cartridge, replacing it with a harmless cotton ball to hold the powder in. All she'd had to do after that was lurk in the bathroom, wearing only a towel, until he walked in. She'd even had time to blow-dry her hair and put it up while she waited.

While he glared, she felt that devilish grin return to her lips. Edgy as she was of his understanding, or lack thereof, her triumph couldn't be denied. She had done it; finally, she had the truth. *I pulled one over on Superman and he didn't even see this one coming. I can't believe he thought that I'd actually not take precautions.* "With a blank?" The laughter she wouldn't voice danced in her eyes, and he winced as he realized the bullet had never struck him. "Gotcha," Lois murmured, as he sat down with a defeated sigh.

But the victorious grin faded as he continued to stare at the floor. Here was the man she loved, the man who'd made such a determined effort to keep her from finding out his secret, and he'd just fallen to a cruel trick of hers. She had known that this would happen; the problem was making him get why she had done what she had done. "I'm sorry," she whispered huskily, pleading for him to understand.

"No, you don't have anything to be sorry about," he said, but his eyes when he raised them to her were bleak. What was he thinking? What was going through that amazing mind of his? His voice was resigned as he continued, "We'd better talk."

*Just say it. This is what you wanted. Take the chance.* "I'm in love with you. I couldn't stand the tension anymore," Lois blurted out, and he looked so frankly amazed she could have laughed out loud. Hadn't he guessed it before? Apparently not, though his feelings for her were obvious in his expression. Letting it sink in, the wonder of what was happening tried to engulf her again. What had he thought this was all about? What other reason could she have had for doing everything she'd done, leaping off buildings and boardwalks until she had to shoot him to get the truth?

She remembered his fortune then, *Your dreams will come true when you least expect it.* Oh, yeah, that was probably the *last* thing anyone would expect, to find their love required moments after the person they loved *shot* at them.

Just when his heart had sunk the lowest, when he was prepared to try and convince her that she couldn't expose his identity and destroy everything he'd worked for, she shocked him with her declaration of love. So *that* was why she'd gone to such lengths, and he felt foolish for having thought her so mercenary. He knew better; no one could be as vehemently anti-marriage as Lois without having a secret, easily-wounded romantic side buried beneath all the cynicism.

"Well, we really better talk," he managed to say, his smile growing wider.

Lois shifted her gaze away from him then, giving a quiet chuckle. It was then that he became aware of something extraordinary: her heart was still pounding when she met his eyes again, an openness in her very posture he'd never seen before. She was back to worrying her lower lip, almost shy when she returned the smile. There was wonder in her voice when she murmured, "I'm listening."

He wanted to laugh with relief. His dilemma was solved; he hadn't had to tell her the truth, she was stubborn enough to find it out on her own. In the joy of it, he went to her, catching her outstretched hands and pulling her to her feet for a kiss, the first real kiss between them.

His lips found hers readily, as if this was always meant to be, and he could feel her smile pressed to his own. At last, at long last, he kissed the woman he'd loved since the moment he laid eyes on her. And judging by immediate response and the way she twined her fingers into his hair, she'd been waiting for this kiss just as long as he had.

That kiss was the fulfillment of everything he'd ever wished for with Lois, and it took a moment for Kal-El to come back to reality. If the world ended right then, he would have been happy, just having her in his arms. They were both laughing quietly when they pulled away. "I guess your secret admirer isn't so secret anymore," he told her finally, kissing her hair.

"Mmm, but I think maybe both of our dreams came true," she replied, leaning back to smile up at him, just as starry-eyed. "Told you the fortune cookies wouldn't suck." Neither of them wanted to relinquish the other, too caught up in the magic of simply being together, holding each other, at last.

"We can't stay here," he murmured, cupping her cheek. In spite of having known her more than a year, he couldn't stop looking at her now that he could let her close. Could be free to show her how he felt. "Perry will be calling ... and someone will have heard the gunshot. I'm surprised no one's called the police."

Lois looked up to him with her usual wicked amusement, her whole countenance bright as sunlight as she pressed her cheek closer into his touch. "You have a point. So, where do you want to go?"

He leaned back from her slightly, considering then. *If she knows, she should know it **all**.* *And there's only one place to do that.* "Let's go to my place," Kal-El whispered.

And from the way Lois smiled, he knew it was the right answer to give.