

Accidentally In Love

by Kala Lane Kent

© 25-Feb-08

Rating: T

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Clark woke up from one of those torturous dreams, groaning softly at having to face reality again. The dreams that had become an almost nightly ordeal of late; the ones where Lois learned his secret and hated him for lying to her were terrible, but he was more tormented by the dreams in which she forgave him and loved him. He always woke from those expecting her beside him, the softness of her hair against his cheek as she lay curled in his arms, and was crushed by disappointment when he realized she wasn't there.

He stretched to shake off the bitter longing, and immediately realized he wasn't alone in bed. In fact, a quick glance around the room showed that he wasn't in bed at all - he was lying on the mattress on the floor in front of the fireplace. And the lump under the covers beside him was...

A quick peek under the sheets showed the unbelievable truth. Lois Lane, curled up against him with a satisfied smile teasing her lips, both of them nude. *That really happened? Oh, my God...* He blinked as he stared at her, and then tentatively stroked her ruffled black hair. Lois muttered sleepily, leaning into the touch, and snuggled even closer to his warmth, making his heart skip a beat.

Well. This was unexpected, Clark thought, sitting up slowly and carefully. *I guess it wasn't a dream. She knows, she forgives me for hiding the truth from her, and she loves me.* He blushed a little. *She loves me quite a lot, if last night was any indication. Now what should I do?*

What he *wanted* to do was simply snuggle down beside Lois until she woke up, but he didn't have that luxury. It was daylight, and with the sun shining on him again, he had to do something about the blizzard last night. With a last, shy kiss to Lois' ruffled hair, he crept out of bed and got dressed. Not in the suit and coat he'd been wearing the past several days; in the

suit and cape.

It was the work of moments to melt the trails free of snow, and then quickly fly over the rest of the region, taking care of dangerously iced roads and making sure everyone was safe. Then he headed back to the cabin, where Lois still slept. It was very cold inside, and he changed back into street clothes, built up the fire, and brewed some coffee before realizing Lois had awakened and was watching him with those hazel eyes.

She had known the moment he had left the bed, leaving her alone in the silent cabin. The ghost of his warmth lingered for a time and the shape of him was traced vaguely in the fall of the blankets. For a time, she just lay there watching his side of the bed and soaking up the unbelievable reality. When the knowledge had started to perk through her system, Lois had gotten up and taken a shower, wearing one of Clark's shirts that had been hooked behind the bathroom door while she waited for him to return. They needed to talk about this, figure out what came next. If anything *could* come next...

In hindsight, returning to the bed to ponder what she should do hadn't been the best idea, it seemed.

More so when you knew full well that you weren't a morning person. And when it was very cold in the room, the embers of the fire failing to lift the chill entirely.

Despite her intentions, Lois had eventually fallen asleep again, though this second waking was considerably more pleasant than the first. Her heart was in her throat when she gave him a small smile and fought the way her chest tightened just to look at him. In the light of day, she knew that her feelings hadn't changed with this amazing revelation. Moving her eyes away only long enough to notice the coffee he had left on the edge of the fireplace while she sat up, Lois picked the mug up and took a sip that ended in a groan of satisfaction. No matter what else Clark had gotten wrong, the man could always make the perfect cup of coffee. Finally her eyes rose to meet his again. "Hi," she murmured softly after they had simply watched each other for a moment.

"Good morning," Clark said cautiously, watching her sip coffee. Her damp hair tumbled down around her shoulders, and his red flannel was comically oversized on her slim body. He wasn't sure what came next; this situation was entirely new to him. What did you say to the woman you loved, the morning after she'd discovered the secret you'd been keeping from her - and the morning after going to bed with her for the first time?

Lois was also at a loss for words, every single sentence that came to mind whispering away seconds later like wispy tendrils of fog. It wasn't as if she'd never dealt with mornings-after before, and she had usually been matter-of-fact about it. Maybe a peck on the cheek, possibly a full-on kiss. Into the shower and maybe another moment for them if time and her mood permitted. A cup of coffee while she dressed. Another peck on the cheek and then it was off to work. Most of her relationships had been reasonably casual and uncomplicated, romance never really having been a factor, and none of them had ever been remotely like *this*.

What *do* you say to the literal man of your dreams? Especially now that the dreams had become a reality, she thought as memories of the night before roared down on her. Unable to help herself, she closed her eyes in an attempt to push back the sensory images that made her cheeks flush and her breath stutter briefly. It had been too perfect to be real and yet, the proof of it was here looking at her with a quizzical expression as her eyes opened again. Had she ever felt this way before? *No*, was the quick answer in her mind. She had only ever been this starry-eyed about the man before her. Which was all the more reason to calm down and stop

dithering.

Meeting those azure eyes was like a punch to the chest, all too aware of what had passed between them in the night, it seemed impossible to form words that made any sense and even then she couldn't force them out of her mouth without fear of sounding like a moron. So much for not dithering.

Finally, utterly embarrassed by herself, Lois managed to whisper out with a soft laugh, "What do you say at a time like this? I can't even make any sense in my own head and *that's* never happened before. It's like my brain's in Norway or something..." She could barely meet his eyes, feeling a shyness she had never felt with anyone else, and laughed as she dropped her face into her hands. "Oh my God, I sound like an idiot."

"No, you don't," Clark argued. Then he chuckled, looking down briefly. "I ... I'm not sure what to say either. Other than I'm sorry for having kept the secret from you. Lois, I..."

"Stop." She was the one looking up at him now, shaking her head. As much as the journalist in her head groused over having been a fool not to see it and a jaded part of her was embarrassed by the romantic fool she was making of herself, she was taking this with more equanimity than either she or Clark had expected. "Obviously there was a reason to keep it secret. Especially since you have the world's best news-hawk sitting two seats down and across from you." Lois rolled her eyes a bit then, grinning a bit before she added, "I'd like to think you trust me a little more than that, really. You might be the story of the century, but still..." All she could do was shrug.

"I still should've told you," he answered stubbornly, those amazing eyes coming up to meet hers again. The look in them was utterly open, no secrets now, no more lies, and he was slightly surprised to see an honest smile on her lips. "I hid the truth from you to protect you, Lois. I don't want you to think I didn't trust you or anything like that. But even though I was trying to keep you safe, I should've told you the truth - because I love you. It wouldn't have been fair to ask you to love half of who I am, either half."

It was amazing how such small words could have such an enormous effect on a human being. Especially on her. For Lois, it held all the impossibly fragile beauty of a newly-blown bubble. Something that could easily burst and disappear forever. She thought she had left these feelings far behind years ago; a young girl's dreams tucked away with the dolls and tea sets of childhood, although she herself had never had any interest in either. But this... Only with him had she ever been so utterly off-balance. It was impossible to keep the longing out of her eyes. *Because I love you.* "Say it again," Lois heard herself murmur softly.

Clark blinked, and then his smile brightened. "I love you, Lois. I always have. I always will. I think I've been in love with you since that first flight together."

The expression of delighted happiness on Lois' face wasn't one Clark was familiar with. He'd seen her savagely triumphant while chasing down a story, and glassy-eyed with wonder over Superman, but never this warm and affectionate. "Obviously there's no point in playing hard-to-get now, huh?" The curve of her lips quirked up a bit more. "I'm in love with you, too. More than just a little." And the fondness in her voice, the absolute love in every syllable, made his heart swell with joy.

There was no way to express how much that declaration meant to him, except to lean forward and kiss Lois, tender and hesitant at first. But when she cupped his cheek and kissed him back, he grew surer of himself and kissed her with more ardor. "I love you," he heard against his lips as she ran a hand into his hair.

In the midst of kissing, nuzzling, and whispering declarations of love, the two managed to

prove that neither of them had any regrets about having made love the previous night. Afterward, Lois sprawled across him with her cheek to his chest, chuckling at herself as she stretched slightly; currently wearing only his flannel, unbuttoned, belly to belly, and with her hair still damp and now ruffled, she knew she had to look like some kind of stereotype.

Clark, however, just kissed the top of her head, too profoundly satisfied for words. To him, she looked like the answer to every wish and dream he'd never hoped could come true. He knew he was grinning like a fool, but didn't care.

When Lois got her breath back and raised her head, she folded her arms on his chest, rested her chin on her hands with a smile, and asked, "So how much of it was true?"

"Huh?" he asked, still not quite capable of following conversation.

Lois chuckled, cocking her head to the side even as that left eyebrow rose. "Ah, the answering machine isn't even on yet. Should I go take *another* shower and try again later?"

"No, I just..." The feel of her skin against his was distracting, but Clark forced himself to focus on those lovely, amused hazel eyes only inches from his face. "How much of what was true?"

"Well, you told me you were from Kansas, and then you told me you were from Krypton. Which one's true? I have this suspicion you let me win last night at poker, because you're better at bluffing than I thought."

"Um ... they're both true," he replied. "I told you, I never lie. And I really can't play cards that well. All I had to do was not use my x-ray vision, and you won on your own."

"Well, if you never lie, how can everything you ever told me be true?" Her journalistic instincts were operating again, and though Lois looked a bit nettled, she wasn't angry.

"When we did that first interview and I told you I was from Krypton, you just assumed I had arrived recently," Clark pointed out. "I'd actually been doing rescues in secret for a while. That night just happened to be my public debut."

"So the world's defender was really raised on a farm in Kansas?" Lois asked incredulously. "You seriously grew up milking cows every morning?"

"The spaceship carrying me landed in the Kent's field when I was about three years old," he told her. "We only had one cow, but I had to milk the goat and feed the chickens, too."

Her imagination had been captured by one word in that sentence. "Spaceship?"

Clark chuckled. "What, did you think I flew here? I was a baby, I couldn't exactly follow directions."

"Yeah, well, I never realized you were a kid when you got here," Lois retorted.

"Lois, I was raised as a human," he said gently. That specific wording brought a knot of worry to his stomach, and his face fell slightly. "I mean, Ma and Pa *knew* I was ... an alien ... but... Speaking of which, you..."

"I know," Lois replied calmly. She reached one hand out to touch his cheek, smiling indulgently. "And it doesn't matter any more than it did in that first interview. Hello, you can *fly*. You *told* me you were from another world. Like I didn't know you weren't from around here - you never tried to hide that from me. At least not when you were wearing the cape and tights. Which *totally* make your butt look great, I have to say."

"*Lois!*" He looked utterly scandalized, and Lois gave him her best wicked little grin.

"C'mon, hero," she teased gently, deciding that the rest of their history could wait to be revisited. "I know someone who's got to shovel a path down to the lodge so I can meet my contact."

"Already done," Clark replied, his blush fading a bit. "For the whole resort. And any time

you're ready, Superman is willing to be interviewed about his visit to North Carolina."

"Aha. Now I know how to get interviews whenever I want them," she purred, making him blush all over again. "Anyway, I need to get a shower. You're welcome to join me..." Letting the sentence trail off, Lois got up off of him and headed for the bathroom, an extra sway in her hips. She never bothered to close the flannel, and pausing just inside the hall leading to the bathroom, Lois shrugged it off and tossed it behind her.

Hearing Clark scramble to his feet to follow her was very gratifying indeed.

Clark hung in midair a thousand feet above the resort, hidden in a cloud with his cape stirring slightly in the breeze. He was listening to Lois' conversation with her contact, Bob, while simultaneously scanning through the paperwork in the floor safe in the resort owners' office. Fortunately, the safe was steel and not lead-lined, so he could see clearly. He'd already noticed the random assortment of valuables resting atop the papers; his own cufflinks were in that stack, stolen from their room the night they'd taken the sleigh ride. Lois, fortunately, had kept her jewelry well hidden.

Among other things, the papers listed several businesses such as jewelry stores and pawn shops. Those seemed to be the fences for the resort owners' stolen goods, and Clark memorized the information. He learned a lot in a short time, without any real risk. However, having to maintain his hover and his concealment, along with seeing into the safe and reading the small print there, took up a lot of his concentration, and he couldn't follow Lois' conversation word for word. He heard her leave and head for the cabin, her heart racing, so he quickly landed there to change clothes and meet her as she came in the door.

"He's ours," Lois said, jumping into Clark's arms and kissing him. "Bob knows practically everything these idiots have been up to, and he's more than willing to dish to a pretty girl. If we can get down to the Clerk of Records today while they're open, we might be able to find proof of where the heiress' ten grand wound up."

"They're definitely into petty larceny, too," Clark replied, hugging her. "My cufflinks are in the office safe, along with a lot of miscellaneous small items of value - and some incriminating paperwork."

"You know, the way you keep finding things out so easily, sometimes I wonder if you're pretending to be someone you're not," Lois said archly. "Is there a blue suit under that shirt, Mr. Kent?"

"As a matter of fact, I *am* here undercover," Clark teased back in the same spirit. "I'm a reporter disguised as your husband, in fact."

"For the moment," Lois snorted in amusement, rising on tiptoe to pull open the neck of his shirt and bare the uniform beneath. "Mm-hmm, just what I thought. C'mon, hero, intrepid reporter - Mr. Smith - let's hurry down to the County Clerk's office." She smirked and kissed him. "Because I *know* you can't use x-ray vision on it from here."

"I might," Clark said thoughtfully. "Trying to read small print with x-ray vision gives me a headache, though. So let's go."

Twenty minutes later, he regretted his decision. "Lois!" Clark yelled, clutching the safety bar over his head. "This road is *really* dangerous - don't you think you should slow down?"

"Nope," she replied, laughing. This particular stretch of county highway was a steep, narrow, winding road that led down the mountain in which the resort was nestled, and then after crossing a small bridge, back up the other mountain facing it. On the other side of *that*

was Asheville, the nearest city. Clark had been distracted by the scenery on the way in the first day, and the roads had been icy, which necessitated Lois driving slowly.

Now, though, it had warmed up enough on this side of the ridge to melt the snow and dry the roads, so Lois drove as she normally did: fast. The car they'd rented was a Mazda Miata - payback for the godforsaken red Buick Lois had gotten in California last year - and it clung to the switchback curves as Lois steered it expertly. But to Clark, who tended not to drive very much, she seemed to be taking incredible risks with each hairpin turn.

"Lois, I don't want to have to - watch out for the truck!" Another twist in the road revealed a slower-moving vehicle ahead, and Clark got ready to lift the entire car, with them in it, to avoid a collision.

"Relax," Lois snapped, braking slightly as she checked what she could see of the road ahead. It was clear, and she whipped the little Miata around the lumbering moving truck so quickly that they were in the oncoming lane for mere seconds.

Clark didn't let go of the safety grip above his head, his right foot pressed against the floor seeking the brake that the passenger side lacked. "I swear the inside tires just came off the ground," he said nervously.

"*Clark*," Lois growled warningly, her tone sharp, and when she had his attention she spoke clearly and forcefully. "Number one, I know what the hell I'm doing, all right? I *have* driven in mountains before, and I've also done the police driving course. I could come down here fifteen miles an hour faster than I'm doing now, only I'd have to take part of the opposite lane over the curves, and I don't want to do that. Number two, maybe you've forgotten, but *you're Superman*. It's not like you'd be hurt even if I did total the car. And the way these things are engineered, I might even be able to run it off the side and live. It's got side airbags, the whole nine yards."

"It's still nothing to be so casual about," Clark protested. "I mean, we have all these curves in a road we've driven *once*, in the opposite direction. Plus the constant added acceleration due to going downhill - that's roughly thirty-two feet per second, *every* second, less the coefficient of friction of the road and the tires. And if we hit even *one* spot with no friction..."

"What the hell?" Lois cut him off, taking her eyes off the road long enough to look at him as if he'd grown another head. "Did you just go all physics-geek on me, Clark?"

"Lois, watch the road!" He crossed his arms and stared at her. "What I'm saying basically boils down to *you're going to get us both killed*. In layman's terms."

"You had to let go of the 'oh-shit' bar to cross your arms, wise guy. Better grab it again before I go around the curve," she snorted. When Clark immediately caught it again, Lois sneaked a glance at him, that same incredulous look. "I'd ask what planet you're from, but I already know."

"A planet where no one would drive like this," he retorted. "It's just not sane."

"If I remember your descriptions correctly, they don't *have* roads on Krypton. Let alone cars."

"That *might* be because the whole notion of cars is instant death on wheels. A two-thousand pound vehicle capable of accelerating to over one hundred miles per hour, driven by someone with approximately ten hours instruction? I'm not talking about *you*, Lois; that was a reference to the teen vehicular manslaughter rate article I did last month."

"Says the man who can fly," Lois snarked as they roared around another pass on the parkway. "Oh, stop complaining - at least we're not doing this at night. Can you imagine doing

this in the dark, then?" For a moment, the disguised hero seemed to turn green. "Get over it. I'm not driving like a grandma and getting passed by the locals. Besides, it would be even more dangerous if I went slow."

"No, you're going *around* the locals. And *they* look scared."

Lois sighed aggravatedly, and a particularly wicked series of switchback curves made that the last exchange for several minutes. Clark tried not to wince as Lois navigated them smoothly, instead concentrating on their reasons for going into town.

First was the fact that their cell phones only worked in Asheville. The mountain towns close to the Tennessee border had no cellular service, for the most part. They had to call Perry and report on their progress, and they couldn't very well do that from the cabin. Any of their calls could be recorded very easily, since they went through the resort's exchange, and furthermore, an exorbitant fee applied to all long-distance calls.

Secondly, they needed to get into the Buncombe County Courthouse. While the resort itself was in Madison County, its owners had been spending most of their money in the more populous region to the south. The records of their sudden financial gains would be there.

At last, the Miata rattled over the bridge at the bottom of the valley, and almost immediately started the long climb up the opposite ridge. By necessity, Lois drove more slowly to spare the engine the rigors of the steeply-rising road. "I'm sorry, Lois," Clark offered. "I just worry about you. A lot."

Despite her earlier annoyance, the dark-haired woman smiled crookedly at him. She just looked at him a moment before confessing, "Yeah, well, I can't say I *completely* hate that, all right? You worrying about me *has* been useful in the past, especially where helicopters are concerned. That was one hell of a debut, by the way. Thank God you left on time that night instead of working late." They both chuckled. "Not to mention blizzards," Lois continued with an impish grin. "I think I've discovered that blizzards are right behind helicopters on my top-ten list of Ways to Get Super-Attention in a Good Way."

That made Clark laugh out loud even as Lois snorted at her own humor. "You're something else," he told her affectionately.

"Yes, well, I always knew that. Although now I can say that about you, too. Definitely." Lois wasn't looking at him, but her salacious little smirk made her meaning all too clear, and Clark blushed. With a wicked grin, she made herself turn her attention back to the Blue Ridge's treacherous winding roads and not the man in the passenger seat. Even if said man provided the better view.

Clark had categorically refused to allow Lois to make a call on the cell phone while driving, so the moment she parked in the county courthouse lot, Lois began dialing Perry. Sitting beside her, Clark couldn't help hearing both sides of the conversation.

"*Daily Planet*, Perry White speaking," their boss answered his phone.

"Hi, Chief, it's me," Lois said, and Perry cut her off.

"Lane? What the hell have you and Kent been up to? I heard there was some kind of blizzard yesterday. And then Superman dropped by this morning - I swear he follows you around or something. Anyway, have you got a story for me or not? I expected to hear from you two days ago."

"Yes, we're fine, and yes, I saw Superman," Lois replied, giving Clark a knowing grin. "And chill out, Perry. We were snowed in yesterday and I couldn't meet my contact until this morning. But we've got a hot lead and we're at the courthouse to back it up. It'll only take us a

couple more days, tops." She sighed heavily, making her irritation plain. "We already missed Christmas, so what does it matter now?"

"Bring me back a story that justifies your travel budget and I might put a raise in your Christmas stocking, Lane," Perry barked. "Just keep in touch, will you? I'm paying too much for that Mazda not to know where the damn thing is at all times."

Lois rolled her eyes, chuckling. "You owe me for that ugly-as-sin Buick. Besides, I know you're just worried about your star reporter."

"Star *reporters*," Perry corrected. "You're not the only show in town, Lane. Speaking of which, where's Kent? Did you stuff him in the trunk?"

"I'm fine, Chief," Clark called, smiling slightly.

"See, he's alive," Lois said. "Speaking of staying in contact, though, I'd call more often if I could get a cell phone signal anywhere near the place we're staying. It's a forty-five minute drive into Asheville from Hot Springs, and there's no cell service anywhere up there. All that's in Hot Springs is the resort, a coffee shop, and a couple of places that rent kayaks in the summer. The rest is just trees, deer, and log cabins."

Clark sighed at her over-simplified description. *He* had enjoyed the scenery, and so did Lois. She just refused to admit it; a city girl to the core, Lois preferred concrete canyons to the wilderness.

A few more minutes of needling, and Lois hung up with a sigh. "He misses me," she said.

"Sure," Clark replied. "Can we go inside now? Where it's warm?"

"What do you care?" Lois shot back. "You're always warm."

"Yes, but blue lips don't exactly flatter you," he said, grinning. "And I *do* feel the cold; it's just not going to harm me."

That startled a laugh out of her. "Be careful. Making snarky remarks about my blue lips is *not* the way to get on my good side."

"I thought I already was on your good side," he bantered back. "Twice."

Both eyebrows shot up, Lois turning to look at him. "Ohh... The hero grows bold. Well, Mr. Man of Steel, let's just see if you can *stay* on my good side." With that parting shot, she swept out of the car and headed for the front door. Without obvious use of super-speed, Clark managed to be there before her and chivalrously open the door for her, still smirking a little at the self-confident sway of her hips. "You'll have to do better than that," she whispered as she went past him into the building.

As usual, Lois managed to wheedle her way into the records room. She and Clark went searching for the deeds that would show when the owners of the Hot Springs Honeymoon Resort had made major purchases. Bob had hinted that they'd bought some property with the ten thousand dollars the heiress claimed was stolen, and if his story was true, the record of that transaction would be here.

Unfortunately, the records were not fully computerized, which was why Lois and Clark found themselves in a stuffy room poring through a mountain of paperwork. At least Clark could scan *through* the file drawers, which saved time, but having to focus so intently made his eyes ache. He took a brief rest, listening to Lois curse under her breath, and glanced out into the lobby for a view of something other than cramped type.

A young couple was just entering the clerk's office, their arms around each other's waists and their expressions all beaming smiles. They couldn't be more than twenty, obviously young newlyweds who had just gotten their marriage license and were now being wed by the clerk of courts. Clark smiled wistfully at them, watching through several walls as they said their vows.

"Earth to Kent! Hello, Clark, are you in there? Hello?" He whipped around, realizing Lois had called his name several times, and grinned at her in embarrassment. "Well thank God. I thought you were listening to an approaching comet or something. You've been standing there staring at the wall for almost twenty minutes."

"Sorry," he replied, adjusting his glasses with a nervous smile. Lois was up on a ladder, going through a drawer full of files, but at the moment she was simply leaning down on the open drawer and staring at him curiously. Clark couldn't help comparing the starry-eyed young bride he'd just seen with the sarcastic expression on Lois' face. He also knew exactly which one he preferred.

"See, that's the kind of thing that used to make me wonder if you were completely bananas," Lois opined, flashing him a quick grin as she brushed her hair out of her eyes. "I'm so glad I have an explanation now. What were you looking at, anyway?"

"Um..." Clark hesitated. She would probably laugh at him, but then again, she had surprised him several times since learning the secret, simply by being serious when he would've expected her to crack a joke. "Actually, I was just resting my eyes for a minute. I looked out in the lobby and saw a young couple coming in to get married."

Lois just looked at him for a second, and then smiled affectionately. "Well, we better warn them about the resort, huh?" she teased gently. Lois looked back down, concentrating on the files before adding offhandedly, "I guess it's no surprise - the wedding industry here is almost as bad as Niagara Falls or Las Vegas."

"Hmm," was Clark's only reply. He too got back to work, and the minutes dragged past as they both pored over titles.

Clark worked much faster than Lois, scanning all the lower files through the upper ones. So it wasn't entirely unexpected that he would strike gold first. "Got it!" Clark called out, opening a long drawer and pulling out the file. "The owner's wife bought a piece of land four days after our heiress lost her money. And it looks like ... yes, prime real estate right off the new interstate 26."

Lois slammed her file drawer shut and hopped off the ladder, hurrying over. She grinned at the title he was holding and punched his shoulder in elation. "All right!" Thinking about it for a minute, her grin turned sly, and she added in a mutter, "Showoff."

Clark just smiled. "Let's get a certified copy of this. Want to head back and confront the resort's owners?"

"Let me think," Lois said, walking away briefly to pace and consider. Clark had seen her do it several times, and he waited patiently for her to make up her mind.

At last, Lois stopped and faced him. "It might be better to show the evidence to Bob and see if he'll testify in court. If it ever comes to that. Hmm. Well, we can try Bob first, and then go for direct confrontation." She came back to Clark's side at a quick pace then, grabbed his tie without warning, and pulled him down for a quick, hungry kiss. "You're brilliant - come on."

With that, she swept past him, still grinning triumphantly, and Clark was left to collect his wits and follow her.

Damning evidence in hand, Lois and Clark stopped by a pizza joint called the Mellow Mushroom to discuss their plan of action. He'd nibbled his calzone while marveling at Lois' pizza; called the Magical Mystery Tour, it had several kinds of cheese, mushrooms, pesto, olives, and jalapenos. Over the course of the meal, they decided that Lois would approach Bob alone while Clark listened in. She planned to tell him the truth - that they were reporters, not

newlyweds, and that they needed his help to bring down the resort owners. Bob hadn't seemed particularly loyal to his bosses, and Lois thought he'd turn them in with a little prompting. Even if Bob was in on the plot, Clark would be only seconds away, so Lois was as safe as she could possibly be.

With that decided - not without some trepidation on Clark's part, but Lois insisted that Bob would be more receptive to her approaching him alone - they headed back to the resort. This time, with his stomach full of delicious food and both of them wrapped up in the excitement of the chase, the winding road didn't seem so treacherous, and Clark could relax and enjoy the trip.

Lois had managed to find a radio station she liked, and she was humming along with Lifehouse as she drove. Clark smiled fondly at her; she was the very picture of a successful reporter on a hot story, energized by the prospect of her byline on the front page, and at the moment in total command of her world. He felt it too, that sense that they could conquer anything together. Nothing could possibly go wrong with both of them feeling this good, no obstacle was insurmountable...

A new song came on, something by Counting Crows. It was a bouncy, upbeat song, a song about falling in love unexpectedly, and it happened to strike both reporters as perfect for them at that moment in time. Grinning, Clark turned it up.

*Come on, come on, turn a little faster
Come on, come on, the world will follow after
Come on, come on, 'cause everybody's after love*

At 'turn a little faster' Lois gave the car a little more gas, roaring down the narrow road on an exhilarating high. She laughed, glancing sideways to catch Clark's gaze, and to her astonishment he was laughing with her instead of panicking at her driving. This was a perfect moment, and she delighted in the freedom and power she felt. Ever since last night, she had constantly been surprised by the depth of love she felt for Clark. Best friend, hero, lover, confidant, the ideal working partner who complimented her strengths and mitigated her weaknesses, it seemed she'd turned around one day to learn that her soul mate had been right beside her all along.

*Well I didn't mean to do it
But there's no escaping your love
These lines of lightning
Mean we're never alone,
Never alone, no, no*

It had been a pure accident that Lois learned his secret last night, but in spite of that Clark didn't regret a moment. He hadn't quite realized just how alone he had always felt since learning about his Kryptonian heritage. The last of his kind, a man apart from all of humanity, in love with his adopted world but always warned against setting one person above his duty to all of them - he had grown accustomed to his solitude. But now that was over. Lois knew and loved him, and he knew her well enough to realize that she would never let him go. Not Lois, who was willing to risk her life over a story; there was no way the determined, tenacious reporter would turn her back on someone she loved so much.

*We're accidentally in love
Accidentally in love
Accidentally in love*

Accidentally in love...

Accidentally

I'm in Love, I'm in Love,

I'm in Love, I'm in Love,

I'm in Love, I'm in Love,

Accidentally...

The last section of the song happened to coincide with a series of near-lethal turns near the end of the downhill section of the road, and Lois knew the moment she entered the first curve that she was going too fast. But the joy and triumph in her heart wouldn't let her be frightened - she rose to the challenge with a thrilling laugh, braking before each sharp turn and accelerating afterward to get traction.

It was dangerous, crazy, wild, too much, too fast, and she loved it. The little Miata started to slide a bit on the last two curves, but Lois held it together until they were on the flat section and shooting across the narrow bridge with the last of their excessive speed. Lois threw her head back and shouted in victory just as the song went off.

"Love ... I'm in love," the singer's voice and final guitar chord echoed around the car, and Clark turned to Lois with all of his love and pride for her shining in his azure eyes. Had he ever doubted that she was perfect for him, that the rest of his life could only be improved by sharing it with her? And more importantly, was there any possible way he could convey that love and admiration in words?

"Marry me," Clark said, and looked startled at his own audacity.

"*What?!*" Lois was still laughing, but that shocked her into turning to face him. Her eyes were still bright with amusement, but now they'd gone wide with surprise.

It was suddenly so ridiculous, and so perfectly *them*, that Clark laughed too. "Lois, watch the road!"

"Oh, my God," she muttered, turning her attention back to driving. But the question had rattled her so much - she'd never expected a *proposal*. "I've gotta pull over." Shaking her head in consternation while Clark continued chuckling, Lois found a spot to safely pull over and turned in her seat to face him. "Now, *what* did you say?"

"Marry me." This time he was utterly serious, the laughter having faded when she parked the car. "Lois, we love each other. And we've had the time of our lives since you found out. Everything just seemed to fall into place perfectly. I don't ever want that to end - do you?"

"Are you crazy?" Lois was still laughing, albeit nervously. "Clark, I'm a vicious ill-tempered psychopath before my coffee."

"I know," he replied, smiling. "I think it's kind of cute, actually."

"I'm not exactly the sweet little wifey type," she warned. "My career comes first, always. I'll have a Pulitzer by the time I'm thirty-five, one way or another."

"I don't expect any less," Clark said. "Lois, I love that about you."

"I can't cook, either," she said desperately.

"I can," he said with a smirk and a shrug. "We won't starve."

Lois sighed, dropping her face into her hands. "Are you sure about this? *Really* sure? This is *ridiculous*... I'll probably shock the hell out of your friends and family back in Kansas."

"Smallville could use a little shaking up," Clark replied, brushing her hair back. "Lois, I know what you're doing. I *know* you, remember. You're so brave in everything else - why are you scared of this?"

Lois threw her hands up in the air. "I'm scared of having you only to lose you, all right?"

There, you happy?" She frowned, glaring at him for having dragged the admission out of her.

Clark stroked her hair gently. "Lois. I take marriage very seriously - if I tell you 'til death do us part, ' I mean it. And I'm very difficult to hurt, so don't worry about *that*. No power on earth will tear me away from you."

She looked at him steadily. "What if you're wrong?" Lois asked in a small voice.

"We won't know until we try," he whispered back. "Lois, we've only ever found one substance than can harm me, and it's extremely rare. I have the only known sample in my possession. Barring kryptonite, there's *nothing* that could keep me from you. I love you; I want you to be mine forever. Lois Lane, will you marry me?"

Sighing heavily, she rubbed her hands over her face quickly, muttering, "Don't believe this..." When the reality finally hit, though, Lois started to laugh again. She looked up at him, caught between hope and disbelief. "Yes. Yes, I'll marry you. Oh my God, what are we *doing*?"

"Something I always wanted to and never thought I had a chance at," Clark replied, beaming at her. He smiled and took her hand, kissing it. "I love you so much."

"We're out of our minds, you know," Lois commented affectionately. "So, when do you want to have the wedding?"

"How about tomorrow?" Once again, the suggestion surprised them both and started them laughing.

"Are you *serious*?" Lois burst out.

"Sure, why not?" The more Clark thought about it, the more feasible it seemed. "There's no waiting period here in North Carolina. And they don't require a blood test - which would be a problem for me, anyway. We could go back to Asheville tomorrow morning and be married in the courthouse before noon. I've got my best suit with me, I'm sure you have something suitable..."

Lois' head was spinning. Strangely enough, she *had* packed a white dress, expecting to need it for some sort of 'newlyweds' dinner' at the resort. It wasn't a bridal gown by any stretch of the imagination, but to be truthful, the fewer trappings of a traditional wedding, the better. Lois had grown up viewing marriage as a shackle, and the long, solemn ceremony merely a formal indoctrination into life without freedom.

Now, for the first time in her life, it seemed possible that she could be married and *enjoy* it. "I can't *believe* this, but yes," she agreed, shaking her head again. "Just don't expect anyone to wave the magic wedding wand over me tomorrow and turn me into Martha frikkin' Stewart. I'm not the perfect housewife, Clark, and I never will be."

"If I wanted the perfect housewife, I'd have married someone from back home," Clark retorted. "I think it's obvious that I prefer big-city reporters with great legs and quick tempers."

She stopped suddenly - he had never given her a specifically physical compliment before. "Ah, I see. This is payback for the 'tights-make-your-butt-look-great' remark this morning, isn't it?"

"Right as usual. I finally have the chance to tell you *exactly* what I think of you." His grin became wicked, sapphire eyes sparkling even in the dimming light.

Lois arched one eyebrow, seriously tempted to slide over into his lap based on that expression. But before she could consider the relative seclusion of their parking spot, she noticed the deepening gloom. "I'd love to hear more, hero, but it's getting dark, and you hated this road by daylight. And Man of Steel or not, I don't want you having a heart attack at the way I drive."

"All right, I'll yield the point," Clark replied easily. Once Lois put the car in gear and

headed out again, though, he asked quietly, "So, seriously. Tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow," she replied as softly, following it with a laugh. "I can't *believe* I'm going to do this."

Clark finally relaxed back into his seat, watching Lois with an affectionate smile. "And after we're married, I can fly you up to my place..."

At that remark, Lois cast him a slightly suspicious look, and Clark smiled at the thought of bringing her to the Fortress. On the drive in from the airport, Lois had remarked several times on the beauty of the icicles hanging from rocky cliffs only a few feet from the road. If she thought that was gorgeous... "No more secrets, Lois. I have a lot to tell you - and the perfect place to do it..."