

Interlude Over Burritos

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Rating: K

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Lois took a deep breath to clear her head as the elevator doors opened onto the bullpen floor. She spotted Richard, Jimmy, Clark, and Jason in the conference room. Richard had obviously ordered take-out for all of them. She tried to brush her windblown hair back into place as she opened the door.

Richard looked up. "We've got beef, honey... Do you want the veggie or the tofu wrap?"

Lois found herself blankly staring at him as though he was suddenly speaking a foreign language. "Honey beef...?"

"What?"

Jimmy and Clark had both turned to stare at her and she noted in some portion of her mind that was actually in the room with her that Clark had tucked a napkin in his collar just like she always did with Jason. In fact, sitting at the table the way they were, Clark and Jason... She blinked and the world seemed to come back into focus.

"Sorry... veggie. I'll have the veggie wrap," she said. Richard stared at her a long moment.

"Lois, where have you been?" he asked.

"I was just on the roof, getting some air," she explained. She smiled at him, hoping he'd buy her explanation.

He didn't. Instead he frowned. "Lois, tell me the truth... Have you been smoking?"

She noticed that Clark's attention was fully on her, eyes bright and curious, just like Jason's

She smiled at Richard sheepishly. "Busted." She settled into the chair beside Richard and took the veggie wrap he handed to her.

"So, how do you plan on getting in touch with Superman?" Jimmy asked.

Lois shrugged. "Good question," she answered after a moment. "It's not like he has a phone number I can call."

"Well, how did you get hold of him before?" Richard asked.

She took a bite of her wrap, chewed and swallowed before answering. "I didn't, exactly. Oh, he would show up if I was in trouble, if I screamed loud enough. Heck, he saved Jimmy's skin more than once. But for the rest... I know it sounds weird, but it was almost like he knew when Perry was on my case to get another interview." As she spoke she looked over at Clark. His head was down as though he didn't want to meet her eyes.

"Clark, how did you get a hold of him?" she asked.

His head came up, eyes wide as if the question had startled him. "Huh?"

"Superman used to give you interviews, too," she reminded him. "How did you get in

touch with him? I mean, it wasn't like you ever needed rescuing."

The comment seemed to take him aback. "Uh, he usually found me."

Something pricked Lois's memory. Superman up on the roof less than an hour before.

"Clark says..."

"Clark?"

"A guy I work with."

Superman doesn't lie. So why didn't he admit to knowing Clark?

Clark's head went down again and Lois realized she had been staring at him. She took another bite of her wrap. Jimmy was talking to Jason and Richard, inconsequential nattering.

Clark had finished his burrito and pulled the paper napkin from his collar. Now he was nursing his can of soda.

"So, where did you go?" Lois asked. *'To Krypton,'* the words came unbidden to her mind.

"Go?" Clark managed to stammer out.

"When you left," Lois said with forced patience. "Where did you go?"

"Around."

Lois snorted. He sounded just like Jason did when he didn't want to admit he'd done something. He must have read her mind because he cleared his throat and said, "I stayed in Paris for a bit, then down the Iberian Peninsula, over to Africa. Stayed here and there. Visited Bhutan for a few months, then Hong Kong, then South America for a while. I sent postcards."

"I showed them to her," Jimmy offered.

Lois ignored him. "So, did you find what you were looking for?" she asked, eyes on Clark.

Clark sighed and she could see the sadness behind his eyes. The same sadness she'd seen earlier in another man's eyes. Superman's eyes.

"No," Clark replied after a moment. "No, I didn't. But I did come to the realization that I never was going to find it where I was looking. And maybe just giving up trying was the best option."

"You know," Richard said quietly. "Sometimes what you need finds you, once you've stopped looking for it so hard."

"So I've been told," Clark said. "But, uh, somehow I doubt that'll happen. Too much has changed. Right now I'm like the red queen, running as fast as I can just to stay in one place."

Clark's bleak statement seemed to cast a pall over the little group.

After a moment Richard spoke up. "How about you guys take another hour working on the blackout then we'll call it a day?"

"Sounds great," Lois said. She had dropped her purse on the floor by her chair and now moved to pick it up. That's when she realized there were folded papers tucked inside. She pulled them out and skimmed them over - neatly printed interview notes. She even recognized the writing: Superman's. Just as in his first interview with her so long ago, Superman had left notes for her, answering the questions that she had forgotten to ask.

"What're those, honey?" Richard asked.

"Just some interview notes," she told him, stuffing them back in her purse. *Why am I hiding the fact that I've seen Superman? Why can't I tell Richard that Superman was looking for me, actually wanted to be interviewed, to explain himself?*

She stood and headed for her desk. Clark was standing quietly by her chair, watching her with the same wary, resigned expression she had seen on Superman's face just before he flew off. *'Richard's a good man... And you've been gone a long time.' You didn't say good-bye either, did you, Clark?*