

# Snapshots: In the Dark of Night

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Rating: K+

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Lois managed to arrive at the mayoral hopeful's apartment early, and nosed around the landing for several minutes. At this time of year, it was already getting dark. The fading light meant little; there was nothing interesting to see outside, and the reporter quickly grew bored.

Bored reporters tend to find trouble. Bored reporters with lock picks *make* trouble. Lois noticed that there were four different locks on the apartment door, not unusual in Metropolis. Of course, there *might* be a chain or a deadbolt on the inside, but that could only be locked if someone was in the apartment, and she doubted that.

"Breaking and entering is bad for your reputation, Lane," Lois muttered, pacing back and forth in front of the door. "Then again, ignoring a perfect opportunity for research is really bad for your story." She sighed; it would be just her luck to have a friend on the police force, but one who was principled enough to arrest her for this if Sawyer caught her.

Four locks. Lois glanced at them, and grinned. 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained,' was one of Perry's favorite quotes. Lois herself tended to prefer, 'It's better to ask forgiveness than permission,' but both seemed to apply. She slipped her lock picks out of her purse and had the apartment door open in less than a minute.

Once inside, Lois locked the door behind her. If Clay Duval, the former city councilmember who hoped to win the next mayoral race, came in any time soon, she could always find someplace to hide until he left again. Her research indicated that the man rarely spent more than an hour at a time here.

So why would anyone go to the trouble of owning property in secret if they didn't spend any significant time there? Duval had to be hiding something here. He seemed to have more spending money than his salary suggested he should. The only question in Lois' mind was where the extra funds came from. Drugs, organized crime, embezzlement, loan sharking, fraud, tax evasion, blackmail ... the possibilities were endless.

Lois searched the place quickly and thoroughly. Nothing incriminating at first glance; the apartment was small and sparsely furnished. The living room had been converted to an office, but the desk was bare of paperwork. The filing cabinet next to it seemed to contain only some receipts for gasoline and meals, haphazardly tossed into a folder. *Maybe he just uses the place to meet his mistress*, Lois thought with an aggravated sigh.

She had knelt in front of the filing cabinet, and she turned slightly to stand up. Something caught her eye first - a yellowed scrap of paper, taped to the underside of the desk near the very back. If the light hadn't been filtering into the room at just the right angle, or if the tape hadn't been loose along one edge allowing the paper to hang down, she might never have seen it.

Lois carefully peeled the scrap off of the desk. It had five numbers on it, 55 07 36 19 32. The combination to a safe? The black-haired reporter stared at it for a moment, muttering, "He couldn't be that stupid."

She got up slowly and looked around the room. No safe in here, unless... Lois quickly strode over to a large painting of a desert scene on the opposite wall. It seemed too easy, but then, she'd seen reports of bank robbers who had written their demands on their own deposit slips, conveniently providing the police with their names and addresses. Not all criminals were brilliant, and perhaps Duval felt safe enough in his little hideaway...

Sure enough, there *was* a safe behind the painting. Lois entered the combination printed on the slip of paper, and it opened easily. The sight that met her hazel eyes made her chuckle with delight: stacks of currency, a couple of folders full of incriminating-looking documents, and two heavily-wrapped parcels that looked a lot like drugs. "Jackpot," the reporter murmured. "Damn, this was almost too easy."

A click sounded behind her, and Lois whirled to see Duval standing in the doorway, pointing a gun at her. "Sorry to disappoint you, miss," he said, "but I think it's not so easy anymore."

Superman was on his way out to sea, where a cruise ship was sinking. It had the required number of lifeboats, and the Coast Guard was on their way, but given the large numbers of civilians involved, he felt it best to simply carry the ship to the docks with everyone still aboard. No loss of life or property that way...

Suddenly he heard Lois' heart rate increase. While diving under the ship, the hero turned his hearing in that direction. The first thing he heard was Lois' voice. *"Give it up, Duval. You're through."*

*"Oh, so you know who I am?"* a man's voice replied from near her. *"Then you're not just a random thief. What are you, cop or private eye?"*

Lois' heartbeat was quick, but not panicked, and Superman scowled as he lifted the ship. Unfortunately, though he could reach her in a moment, it wouldn't be safe or comfortable for the cruise passengers. He kept part of his attention on Lois even as he carried the ship back to port as quickly as he could under the circumstances. *"Neither,"* she was saying. *"I'm a reporter."*

The man laughed, his voice moving closer to hers. *"A reporter? You've got to be kidding. Just what do you think you're doing, Miss..."*

*"Lane,"* she replied. Her heart was steadier now. It would still take a moment or two to bring the ship to the docks, set it down, and find Lois. Superman hoped she wouldn't do anything reckless...

*"Lane?!"* the man was saying, his tone growing fearful. *"Lois Lane? The one Superman*

*always saves?"* His voice actually cracked, and Superman winced. *That was my cue right there - unfortunately I happen to be carrying a full cruise ship at the moment. Hold on, Lois, I'm coming...*

"*Afraid so,*" Lois replied coolly. Superman heard the man curse, and then a pause followed by what sounded like a scuffle. His own heart started to race, and he hurried to set the cruise ship down at the dock.

Only a few moments later, Superman found Lois inside an apartment. His x-ray vision revealed her in the act of putting down the phone, while an unconscious man lay on the floor. Relieved, the hero knocked on the window by the fire escape, startling her.

Lois hurried over and opened the window. "Geez, don't *do* that," she muttered. Before he could reply, she continued, "Where on earth have *you* been? Out cheating on me with another reporter?"

Superman stepped back as Lois climbed out onto the fire escape. "Rescuing a sinking cruise ship, actually. Lois, what are you doing?"

"Getting away," she replied. "Which you ought to consider doing, too. I just anonymously called the cops, and Officer Sawyer still thinks you're a dangerous vigilante."

He held out his hands to her, but asked, "Why are you in such a hurry to leave, Lois?"

"Because I broke in," she replied. "Duval's going to be in a helluva lot of trouble when the cops get here. I told them I locked the gun he threatened me with in his safe and gave them the combination. When they open it, they'll find out where he's been getting his money." Lois gave him a saucy grin as she took his hands and stepped closer. "You're aiding and abetting a burglary suspect here, Superman."

He sighed. "Lois, one of these days..."

"I know, I know," she replied, rolling her eyes. "It'll all get straightened out in court, eventually. He's dirty, he'll do time for this. And I'll have all the info, even if I have to hear another lecture from Maggie about my methods."

Those amazing blue eyes looked into hers sternly. "Lois, what you did was dangerous. He was holding a gun on you."

"So? It's not the first time it's happened. Besides, as soon as he realized who I was, he started looking for *you*. Gave me enough of a chance to snatch the gun from him and knock him out. So I guess I still have to thank you for being a good distraction, even if you *were* late."

*I wasn't late this time,* he thought somberly. *I was lucky. I arrived too late once before, Lois, and it cost you your life, even though you don't remember it.* The memory of pulling her car out of the chasm, holding her limp body in his arms while he tried to come to terms with her death, chilled him. Impulsively, he hugged her. "I worry about you, Lois," he murmured.

Later, she wasn't sure what surprised her more: the words or the embrace. Lois hugged him back, trying to memorize the feeling of his arms around her. *Maybe I ought to get myself into scrapes like this more often.* "I'm glad you do," she said as if this were an everyday occurrence, pulling back only slightly within the circle of his arms. "We really should get out of here."

"We already are," he replied, mouth curving up in a grin.

She looked down then, saw that they were already above the rooftops, and flung her arms around his neck again with a startled yelp. *For love of God, don't even warn me.* Yet some time had passed their first flight or even their second, but she was still adjusting to it. Obviously. When the first wave of fear passed, Lois looked up at him archly and said as she

was fighting a smile, "You love to do that, don't you? Scare the living daylights out of me, why don't you?"

"You're perfectly safe," Superman told her, trying not to notice how close they were, how her body pressed against his from chest to knee. She was close enough to kiss... *Think of something to say, quick.* "Besides, turnabout is fair play, Lois. You just gave me quite a scare, you know. Do you enjoy getting into trouble?"

Lois laughed, her eyes sparkling. "Oh, now *that's* a loaded question. *How* long have you known me?"

"True, you do tend to get into as much mischief as a two-month-old kitten," he teased her. "If you're not stranded somewhere very high, you're falling off of something. If you're not falling, you're breaking in where you shouldn't be. And if you're not trespassing, you're picking a fight with someone bigger than you - who usually has a gun."

The expression on Lois' face was priceless, a mixture of imperiousness and shock. "Did you bring me up here to *lecture* me?"

"No, I brought you up here because you asked me to," he replied, adding, "We had planned to meet this evening anyway, Lois. Or were you cheating on me with another story?"

Lois blushed to hear her own words cast back at her. Then again, this man could always make her blush, with the ambiguous comments that could be so flirtatious, if he wasn't above all that. "You make it sound like something personal," Lois muttered.

Superman grinned at her, but she wasn't meeting his gaze at the moment. *Trying to make me seem jealous, hmm? My, Ms. Lane, you really do like me - and boy, do you hate admitting it.* He decided to change the conversation before they became too involved in banter. "Lois, I really do worry about you at times. What would you have said to Detective Sawyer if I had left you there? You know that breaking and entering is against the law."

"Listen," Lois began testily. "Maggie serves the law; she's a cop, it's her job. I'm a reporter. I serve the truth. Which, incidentally, is one of those things *you're* fighting for, remember? Truth, justice, and the American way. The law wasn't one of them."

"The law falls under the heading of justice," Superman told her. "Which is also Sawyer's ultimate loyalty."

"Yeah, well, which is more just? Letting Duval get away with whatever he's into, or busting him for it? The ends justify the means. I didn't hurt anyone, I didn't steal anything, I didn't even damage the locks. And now we don't have to worry about our next mayor being a pawn of some drug cartel."

"Lois, that's an awfully slippery slope," Superman told her. How very weird to be having a conversation like this with her arms still around his neck, Lois scowling at him from only inches away. "The laws exist for a reason. I admire your dedication, but I worry about your methods."

"Now you sound like Clark," she muttered, rolling her eyes. "Bloody naïve Kansas farmboy... I mean, Clark's a nice guy. Too nice for this business, you ask me."

"It's good to know I'm not the only one concerned," Superman said with a small smile. "How *are* you going to explain today? Duval knows who you are; he could press charges."

"I very much doubt he'll want to mention the fact that the person who knocked him out was an unarmed five-foot-five woman," Lois replied. "Besides, he's got more to worry about, especially explaining the two packages of drugs in his safe. I didn't get a chance to touch them, so he can't claim I planted them."

"What if he *does* implicate you, Lois?"

"It's his word against mine. I'd tell the cops we met in the hallway. I asked him some questions; he got nervous and forced me inside at gunpoint. I managed to distract him, grabbed his gun arm, and knocked him out. Then I found the safe looking for a place to put the gun. Before you ask, my fingerprints aren't on the gun, either - I used a handkerchief to pick it up so I wouldn't spoil *his* prints."

"Is that how it happened, Lois?" His gaze was just slightly stern.

Hazel eyes met his calmly. "It could've been," she answered without hesitation.

"I don't want you to get in trouble, Lois," he said quietly.

"I'm an investigative reporter," was her gentle reply. "Trouble is practically my life's work. I'm an expert at it. Besides, I've been doing this since I was a kid. I can take care of myself."

"Except when it comes to helicopters and earthquakes," he teased.

"Yeah, good point," Lois chuckled. "I never said having you around wasn't useful, you know."

That startled a laugh from him as well. They had been drifting along above the city, too absorbed in each other to notice the thickening clouds above them. Metropolis' many lights below made the lack of starlight less obvious. "Glad to know you think I'm good for something," he replied.

Lois' mouth curved up in a saucy smile. "Hmm. More than one thing," was all she actually said, but the mind behind those bright hazel eyes was spinning with everything he could possibly be good for. If he asked her for an explanation, Lois would've commented that his flight was faster than any jet - and easier on her travel budget.

That wasn't what either of them was thinking. Alone in the dark sky with the man she loved, supported only by his arms around her waist, Lois looked up at him as her expression slowly changed from teasing to wonder. Everything about him amazed her; the rich blue of his eyes, his miraculous powers, and his continued interest in her. He could have any woman on Earth, literally, and yet the only one he chose to spend time with was her. The only one he took flying - just to talk - was Lois.

And the way they flew tonight, face to face, so close she could feel his every breath, so close he was aware of every curve of her body... Superman looked down into the eyes of the woman he loved with his entire heart, seeing something mysterious and fey in her gaze. Something a lot like the look she'd given him in California, when out of sheer relief he'd been about to break his vow not to interfere in her life, not to endanger her with his love. Lois had looked at him like that just before tilting her face up to his, and they had been so close ... close as they were right now.

He had kissed her only once before, and Lois didn't remember it. That bittersweet kiss of farewell burned in his mind, demanding that he kiss her now to dull its memory. The terrible grief at finding Lois... dead... insisted that he forget the consequences and kiss her now, when she could kiss him back...

To Lois' knowledge, they had never kissed. But she had imagined it more times than she would admit, imagined the taste of his mouth as she ran her fingers into his hair and held him close. The warmth in his eyes was very clear, sending shivers all the way down her body, held so unbearably close to him. Hazel eyes began to slide closed as she lifted her face to him, as he bent closer to her...

The moment before their lips met, Lois closed her eyes completely, surrendering to the romantic impulse that swept over her. But just an instant, a breath away from kissing him at

last, something cold and wet splashed onto the bridge of her nose.

Lois gasped and pulled back, almost wrenching herself out of his grasp. Superman automatically tightened his grip on her, looking at her with confusion and a trace of hurt. Had Lois suddenly come to her senses? But no, a raindrop splashed onto his face as well, and they both looked up to see the dark gray clouds above.

"Oh, no, it's gonna..." Lois began, and then the sky lit up spectacularly. Thunder rumbled in the distance, and then the rain began in earnest. Lois yelped, ducking against his chest, and Superman quickly covered her with his cape to keep the worst of the rain off. That left him exposed to the elements, but he didn't mind - he couldn't catch pneumonia, after all. The woman under his cape was a different story.

They flew swiftly down from the heights, and Superman headed toward Lois' apartment. To his surprise, she was shaking with laughter, and he wondered what she was thinking. Little did he know that much the same thought was in both their minds at that moment. *If it isn't Jimmy walking up on us in California, it's a sudden rainstorm. Something always seems to get in our way.*

And the next thought, one neither of them would dare to complete, *Someday, when we finally make it past all the obstacles in our way...*

The rain was still pouring down when he set her down gently on her own balcony, drawing his cape off of her. Lois looked up at him, ignoring the rain now pattering down onto her shoulders, quickly soaking her hair, and smiled warmly. "It never fails," she said with an amused shrug, for once in her life not minding the downpour.

For a long moment they simply stood there, still as close as they had been while flying, and regarded each other as the storm raged around them. The warmth in both their expressions was clear, but was it more than that? It was difficult to guess to either. Superman knew he made her heart race, but was that simply infatuation, or something deeper? And Lois - twice now it had looked as if he meant to kiss her, but he had always drawn back, never pursuing her. His true feelings were a mystery to the reporter. And sometimes she was too worried about the answer to think on it too hard.

They were both getting soaked to the skin in the downpour, but neither seemed eager to end the moment. Lois admired the way the rain and wind had tousled his black hair, wanting to run her fingers through it. But Superman, eventually, remembered that it wasn't good for Lois to stand around in the cold rain. "You'd better go inside and get warm," he said gently.

"Mm-hmm," she replied absently, lost in his eyes even as she nodded. Flying with him always left her euphoric, her common sense a distant memory. "You're probably right."

Whether it was wrong or right, whether they had a chance at something more or not, he *did* enjoy seeing the hard-nosed reporter act so dreamy in his presence. Smiling, Superman reached out and tucked a wayward lock of her hair behind her ear, and then stroked her cheek softly with his knuckles. Those keen hazel eyes went wide at the touch, gasping softly in surprise, and he murmured, "Goodnight, Lois," before rising gently into the air.

*Don't go*, rose to her lips, but the raven-haired woman somehow stayed silent. Lois didn't take her eyes off him until he was lost in the storm, watching him quite the same way Clark had gazed after her retreating form hours before. Feeling that chaste little caress burn in her blood, her hand ran up over her cheek as she stepped back under the awning with her eyes still on the sky. So small a thing, but for Lois, it meant so much more than one would expect.

Yet another miracle of this man's existence. He could affect her more with one simple touch than all of her past lovers combined, even though they hadn't acknowledged that they

were anything more than a reporter and her subject, or maybe even friends. And despite that fact, the lack of placing a label on what they could possibly be to each other, he had managed one more thing she had never imagined, had taken without really trying something she had guarded fiercely for years. Somehow he had slipped beyond the barriers and taken the one thing she had never willingly given. Her heart.

But for now, even if she didn't have the man, she did have a front-page story. Quietly, with a small secretive smile on her lips, she called out into the rain, "See you later."