

# So Close - Thanks For The Memories

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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Personally, I love this story to bits, but revolving first-person? Not so easy to write. Yes, you hear that right. There are four people involved in this little tale. Don't panic; it's very easy to follow, at least for the reader. If you get lost, run your cursor over the white space at the beginning of each section. It will tell you who's speaking. ;) Enjoy, all!

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As I ran my hands into his dark hair and felt him slide his arm around my waist, I thought to myself that this was perfect, exactly what I'd needed and wanted. He kissed me, his mouth insistent, just as hungry and demanding as I was. For the first time in a long time, I felt like myself again. I would've laughed into the kiss out of sheer relief, but he pressed against me, pinning me against the desk, and the warmth of his body made me moan instead.

He lifted me then, such great strength wielded so casually, setting me on top of the desk and moving closer, his hands on my thighs encouraging me to wrap my legs around his hips. The dress rode up and his hands were on bare skin, and I gasped, my hands tightening in his hair. Only then did I remember where we were - my own office. "We can't," I whispered huskily, trying to pull back when every fiber in my body wanted me to surge forward.

"Why not?" he murmured, nuzzling my neck, and I shivered under the caress. Oh, he knew me too well, and on such relatively short acquaintance...

Now he was mouthing my neck, his hands sliding up my back to the zipper of the dress, and I knew I had to end it. If I didn't stop him now, I wouldn't be able to later. Placing both hands flat on his chest, I shoved him back, and made my expression stern instead of lust-dazed.

"No," I insisted, staring him right in the eyes. "Not at work. That's ... that's like having sex in church."

"Works for some people," he replied nonchalantly, displaying the broadmindedness I expected from a man who'd flown all over the world. "Lois..."

Too bad his charming smile wasn't a match for my determination. "No, Bruce."

With all hope of a pre-Christmas party romp firmly quashed, I let Lois lead me out of her office. She's one hell of a woman, and not one I can easily sway once she's made up her mind. I like that about her.

I like a lot about her, in fact, including the way her hips move in that slinky silver dress. She turned and glanced at me, catching me hanging back a half-stride to admire the view, and she smirked before sighing and rolling her eyes. "You're lovely," I told her, moving up to rest my hand at the small of her back.

"I'm sure I'm the first woman who's ever heard you say *that*," she replied drolly, the corner of her mouth quirked up, and I grinned. Lois doesn't want to play all those stupid little mind games, either. She's not in this for love, and neither am I. We both know what we want and what we are to each other.

And what are we? Leftovers, essentially. We've both got someone else who loved us and left us. I don't imagine she's any more used to that feeling than I am. I'm more accustomed to leaving than being left. But Selina...

It's been a year, and I'm still half-hoping she'll be back. Isn't that sort of pathetic for a guy like me? At least I'm maintaining standards with Lois... although she has her own memories haunting her. One weekend not too long ago, she came over unannounced, basically stormed in - well, she said hello to Alfred, she's always polite to him, but *then* she came upstairs and attacked me. I have *no* idea what that was about. No complaints, either. Later that night I had to go out, and found her sitting in front of the fireplace with Miss Kitty on her lap. Wearing just a robe, staring into the flames, and petting the cat. I don't think Lois even saw me. It was spooky, to say the least.

But then, Lois is fairly odd. I knew that from the moment we met. I thought it was one of those typical interviews, nosy reporter prying into the life of Bruce Wayne. I did my best dissolute playboy impression, but Lois wasn't fooled for more than a few minutes. When I told her I had no idea how many residences I owned, she sat back in her chair, raised one eyebrow, and gave me the most intense and piercing glare I've ever had the displeasure to receive. "Sorry, Wayne, I'm gonna call bullshit on that," she said sharply, and proceeded to grill me like no journalist before her ever had. By the time we closed down the interview, I felt like a woozy boxer on the twelfth round. She was nothing like I'd suspected.

And of course, I wanted her. I wanted to be able to add Lois to my neat little list of conquests, so I could forget about her. There have only been two women who really mattered to me, and they're both gone - Rachel died, and I have no idea where Selina is. Everyone else was just part of the act, a momentary distraction, something to bolster Bruce Wayne's reputation as a debauched billionaire. I made a pass at Lois, and she surprised me again by turning me down cold. The usual tricks - extravagant gifts, all of my considerable charm focused on one goal - didn't work with Lois. It wasn't until we really talked, set aside the games and had a real conversation about life and ideals and heroism and all that kind of stuff, that she showed the slightest spark of interest in me. It helped that I wasn't putting on a façade for that conversation; she intrigued me so much that I decided to actually be honest with her.

Finally, on our second bottle of champagne, I asked about her most famous story. I knew the shadow of pain that flitted through her eyes; I'd seen it in the mirror often enough. Lois cut that line of questioning short, but her redirection was much clumsier than her deft control of

our first conversation, and her reaction told me more than she'd meant to. It was that reminder of the past, I think, that got her into bed with me. But to my surprise, Lois wasn't another notch in the bedpost, forgotten the morning after. *She* was using *me* to forget, too, and in the midst of it we found a balance between past and present that suited us both. It isn't love, but it's respect and fondness and a hell of a lot of fun.

It wasn't until we reached the thirtieth floor that I felt the warm glow of Bruce's admiration start to seep away. It wasn't anything *he'd* done; it was the thought of what this evening could bring. I hadn't wanted to be here at all and wouldn't have been, if a certain millionaire hadn't guilted me into it. Especially since I was all too aware of who two of the attendees would be. Over the dull roar of the noise in the presentation hall, I could hear the latest song's intro just beginning and smiled with bitter amusement as I held tighter to Bruce's arm. It wasn't entirely accurate, but the irony was there in force. What else could be more perversely perfect?

*Last Christmas I gave you my heart  
But the very next day, you gave it away  
This year, to save me from tears  
I'll give it to someone  
I'll give it to someone.....special...*

A bittersweet song played on and on, making me wonder why all the newest Christmas songs were so melancholy. Was everyone else miserable on the holidays, and I'd just never noticed before? Or was my own heartache just making me aware of the sad songs that had always been there?

Ten years ago, I would never have imagined I could be having such depressing thoughts while Lana Lang was finally, *finally*, in my arms. The last six months had taught me a lot, though, beginning with the fact that the image I'd carried in my heart throughout high school was just that - an image, with no more substance or reality than a desert mirage. What I'd felt for Lana had been just a crush; I hadn't really known Lana at all.

Now, though, I was starting to know her. And though she was still a lovely woman, someone I cared deeply about and admired a great deal, I'd learned that my feelings for her were only friendship. That was actually a good thing; I had no business getting involved with another woman, especially not a single mother. Anyone I cared for was in danger, and any relationship I tried to have was doomed. Look what happened with Lois...

The thought felt like someone was driving a kryptonite spike through my heart. Lana noticed my pained expression and reached up to stroke my cheek with a wry smile. She's always there for me, always willing to be a shoulder I can lean on, but I can't tell her what's really bothering me. And I know she's starting to get frustrated with all the secrets and evasions.

Unfortunately, I somehow gave Lana the idea that I was interested in a lot more than friendship. She expects more from me than I can give. And apparently Lois thinks there's more than friendship going on, too, because the two women are practically hissing and spitting at each other in the city room. *When* they see each other - Lois is avoiding the office as much as possible, staying out on stories and coming in after hours to use the computers. Most weekends

her heartbeat sounds like it's halfway across the country.

Lois is furious at *me*, too, and in both guises. I'm not sure why; she can't possibly remember what we had and lost. That would be the most logical explanation for her behavior - avoiding me, being utterly clipped and polite when forced to speak to me, and even dodging Superman stories - but I can't believe that Lois could remember and not tell me. I *know* her. If she thought for one second I was Superman, she'd be hunting down concrete proof in a heartbeat. And if she knew that and remembered that night in the Fortress, she'd never be able to keep quiet about it. She would've verbally torn my head off long before this. So it has to be something else.

I guess she's mad at me-as-Clark because of Lana. That's what Perry thinks, anyway. But it's not as if Lois and I were ever serious. She sees that part of me as nothing more than a friend, someone whose puppy dog crush is adorable but not to be encouraged. Still, I haven't been paying as much attention to Lois lately, partly because she's snappish or cold with me, and partly because Lana gives me this wounded look if I so much as say 'good morning' to Lois. Maybe Pa was right. Maybe no man will ever understand women...

With that melancholy thought in mind, Lana and I spun idly to the strains of the song. Unfortunately, another two steps brought me around to face the entrance, and I saw Lois walk in.

Oh.

Wow.

That dress ... that silver dress ... it clung in all the right places, flowing over her curves just the way the reflected light had flowed over her that night. I froze in place, eyes going wide, my mouth drying up suddenly as a sharp and sudden pang of longing gnawed at my heart.

Lana turned to see what I was staring at, and I felt her stiffen. The look she turned to me was pure agony. At that instant, I thought the evening couldn't possibly get any worse.

And that was *before* I recognized the man at Lois' side as billionaire - and all-around irresponsible playboy - Bruce Wayne.

For a few moments, everything seemed all right. Clark and I were dancing, and he'd managed not to step on my toes - I limped all day after the first time we danced - and Lois hadn't shown up. I thought it could be a lovely evening for both of us, that Clark and I could enjoy this time together.

And then he froze in mid-step, every muscle in his body locked up with a humming tension I'd never sensed from him before. Clark - sweet, shy, gentle, chivalrous Clark - looked so intense, all of his diffidence gone in that instant, as single-minded as a pointer locked onto grouse. I turned to see what he was staring at, and felt it strike my belly like a physical blow.

Lois Lane, looking like a million bucks as always. That black hair down and wavy, and in a silver dress that showed off those perfect legs. She wasn't pretty like me; she was strikingly beautiful, impossible to ignore. I could really *hate* her if I let myself. And Clark was staring at her as if no one else in the room existed, which for him, they might as well not have. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I purposefully stepped on his toes, and was mortified to realize he didn't even notice.

Lois caught his eye from across the room, and she came to a sudden halt, the handsome man at her side looking over at us curiously. For one second, Lois and Clark stared at each other, eyes wide, their expressions equally blank with shock. Lois snapped out of it first; she

glanced at her date, gave him a small smile, and nudged his elbow to get them both moving again. But once she stepped off toward the refreshments, Lois shot a venomous look over her shoulder at Clark.

He finally realized just how obvious his staring had been, and gave me a sheepish grin. It's hard to stay annoyed with him when he does that; Clark can look so much like an apologetic puppy, it's unbelievable. "What on earth is Bruce Wayne doing at the *Daily Planet* Christmas party?" he asked, trying to explain himself.

Right. Because I'll believe that. "I believe Lois brought him," I said sweetly. "I guess we know where she's been going on the weekends now."

The wounded look on his face when I said it made me feel even worse for having been so cruel. After that dance, I slipped away for a few minutes. Hiding in the bathroom, willing myself not to cry, I tried not to wonder if Clark would even notice my absence now that *she* was here.

As Lois and I walked into the party, I automatically tensed. Nevermind that I was raised for this sort of thing, I really don't like big glitzy parties, despite the amount of them I'm forced to throw. Surrounded by strangers, forced to make inane small talk, when I could be out doing something *useful*... Not to mention the fact that I was out of town, and anything could be going on at home. Alfred said he'd call me if something happened, but I know he thinks I need to take a vacation from my calling every now and then.

Still, I was the one who'd pressured Lois into bringing me here, so I did my best to pretend I was having the time of my life. And just a few minutes after we arrived, I learned something interesting. This guy out on the dance floor completely froze when we walked in, staring at Lois and completely ignoring the lovely redhead on his arm. Lois stared back, and I saw the agonized look that flitted across her features before she turned and practically dragged me away.

I knew there was an ex-boyfriend around somewhere; rumor had it Lois was involved with Metropolis' own superhero. But I figure he has to have a hard time dating. I mean, the guy wears a bright blue suit and red cape. Zero camouflage value, and if he'd so much as taken her out to dinner, it'd be all over the gossip pages. I'm not too worried about Superman.

But *this* guy ... no idea who he is, but he's completely hung up on Lois. He stared after her when we walked away, and the redhead looked so wounded I felt so for her. The guy's as much of a cad as I pretend to be, ignoring her like that.

Just to show him how it was done, I swept Lois out onto the dance floor, holding her close and swaying to the beat. If you're rich enough and wearing an expensive enough suit, nobody cares how you dance. Lois snuggled in against me, seeking comfort and protection, and I gave it to her. Hell, I've given her anything she asks for since got together - she asks for damn little, though.

Once, I caught her peering over my shoulder at the guy. Such a smoldering look, as if to prove that she was happy with me and didn't need *him* anymore. Vindictive little thing, isn't she? Of course, whatever he did to drive her into my arms means he deserves every spiteful thing she can do to him. And I wish I knew what was going on between them; I hate mysteries, and why Lois Lane would have *any* history with a guy that nerdy is more unexplainable than the Bermuda Triangle.

Of course, I'm not asking Lois about him until she gets a little more champagne in her.

Seems like maybe there might be more going on in Lois Lane's past than just the story the papers were following ... maybe not all of her men wear capes.

Everyone knows about Bruce Wayne. The wild, drunken parties and the burnt-down mansion. The expensive cars wrecked and the yacht cruises to privately-owned islands. And the women - oh, the women. Rumors have linked him to nearly every popular singer and actress, although that's probably all nonsense. No one has that kind of time. Still, he's been known to show up at a party with *three* supermodels as his dates, so at least some of the gossip is true. Bruce *uses* women, and he's only interested in one thing. He's the *last* person I expected to see with Lois.

Granted, Lois herself isn't exactly celibate, but she wouldn't want to be anyone's arm candy. She's never let anyone use her or abuse her reputation, and no matter what she thinks of me right now, I can't let her get involved with someone like *him*.

I'm not being jealous ... well, okay, I'm not *just* being jealous. I don't want to see Lois hurt. Look what I gave up to spare her pain - there's no way I could stand by and watch Bruce make a fool of her.

She saw me watching her, and shot me a look over his shoulder. That burned like kryptonite - the look in her eyes, the way she cuddled close to him, made it obvious that she wanted me to know she was sleeping with him. I felt my heart lurch as the music stopped. No, I couldn't stand to watch this. The first chance I had to get her alone, I'd have to talk to Lois.

As it turned out, I didn't have to wait long for Bruce to step away from Lois. It was almost too convenient, how quickly he left her side and Lana left mine after that one dance. I didn't worry about it; I was too busy worrying about Lois.

I can't get involved with her again; I can't make her a target like that. But I can at least protect her from someone like Bruce Wayne.

After watching him and that damn redhead make their little twirl around the floor, the last thing I wanted was to be in an enclosed space with him. And I never would have been if Bruce hadn't played the gentleman by going to get me champagne; thank God he hadn't seen the look I know had been on my face. And now the devil had come home, the man in front of me trying to talk sense to me that he had no business meddling in.

"Bruce Wayne's trouble, Lois," he was saying now, so earnest. "You've heard of his reputation, I'm sure. I'm just trying to protect you." The look on his face was that of a worried younger brother, so sure his sister is in over her head, even if he was five years older than me. If *that* was even true. But the look in his eyes? Something not so brotherly lurked there, something I was both angry and elated to see. Something like beyond concern. Plain, unvarnished, un-Superman-like jealousy. "He's not in this for..."

Before he could go any further, I cut him off, "Rest assured, Clark, I know exactly what I'm doing. Hell, it's the same thing I've been doing for three months." I was rewarded by the wounded look on his face that he didn't hide fast enough. The question was, was that reaction simply the act, Kal-El acting out Clark's reaction in this elaborate farce, or had I actually hurt him? I decided to go for it, set the guns blazing. Nailing him with my gaze, I stalked forward until we were only height-distance from each other as I continued, "And what, exactly, do you think *I'm* in it for, Clark? We all know I'm no lily-white virgin. What's to say I didn't go rushing

right into his arms when my last little affair went south? That I didn't lose the man who didn't want me in one that was more than willing to help me forget?"

The shocked, wounded expression on his face was too keen to be faked, though he smothered that instant of jealous agony with more of the false brotherly concern. "Lois, he's not... The man has an unsavory reputation. You can't trust him."

*You can't trust him.* The minute the words left his mouth, I could feel my jaw tighten. A white-hot fury roared through me then, almost too much to bear. There's not a moment that I can ever remember being that eaten up with righteous anger. "Funny you should mention that, since I couldn't trust the last one, either. What is it they say, better the devil that you know? Bruce might not be head-over-heels in love with me, but at least we're honest with each other. Which is a lot more than I can say for..." The word *you* was on the tip of my tongue, but I had just enough control left to stop myself and growl, "*him.*" I wasn't going to play my hand just yet, not after all the time I had struggled with this for so long.

The moment had to be just perfect.

I couldn't keep my expression neutral when Lois flung the facts of her relationship with Bruce in my face. Could she *really* be that callow? That night in the Fortress, Lois had showed me another side of herself, a vulnerable facet of her personality. What happened between us was about love and trust. How could she have turned something so casual, so carnal, so soon after?

Well, it *might* have been the simple fact that I had taken her memories... I regretted it almost every moment since it had happened. For a while, at least, Lois had seemed back to her old self, the misery and loneliness of knowing what we'd lost erased. I was the only one suffering, and that felt fair - I was the one who'd put Lois and the whole world in danger. I grieved for what we'd had, but I thought I'd chosen what was best for everyone.

I was wrong. If *this* was where it had led us, I was wrong. Lois hated me, and she didn't even know it was me she hated. But how on earth could I explain things to her? Clark Kent wasn't supposed to know Superman's motives. "Lois, I'm sure he had a reason," I said haltingly.

"Really," she drawled, eyes fiery. "So what are they?"

My throat tightened, and for a moment I thought she had to have figured me out. That blazing look dared me to speak, and for once in my life I wanted to just run, flee to the Fortress where everything was cold and clean and free from attachments. I quickly smothered the cowardly impulse, fiddling with my glasses to gain time to think. "Well, Lois, maybe he thought he was putting you in danger... I mean, you got kidnapped by those other Kryptonians because Luthor knew you were the perfect hostage. If everyone knows how much Superman loves you, it makes you a target."

Lois scoffed at me. "*Loved.* Past tense. *If* that was ever the case. And on top of that, even if he's stepping away now, d'ya think the public has that short of a memory? Doesn't matter what he does now, I'm always going to be a target. Hell, I was a target from the moment I met him - go look up Superman, and you'll see my byline on just about every story. Next?"

I was cornered; Lois wasn't acting like she was trying to get her best friend to give her possible reasons for someone else's behavior. She was pressuring *me* for answers, as if she knew I'd have them... No time to think, with her glaring at me. The wrath in those eyes was something I knew all too well, but the hurt beginning to seep into her expression I'd thought I would never see again. "Well, Lois, I don't know. Maybe ... maybe he was trying not to hurt

you. Maybe he didn't want to disappoint you. I mean, it's not like he can be there all the time..."

My voice sounded lame to my own ears. By the way Lois' lip curled up, it didn't impress her either. "He wasn't around half the time before. Why would I ask him for more?"

I shrugged in utter defeat. I could explain everything, but I'd have to start by telling her *I'm Superman*. So instead I spread my hands in surrender and said, "Why are you asking *me*?"

Her eyes went flat, the deadly glare I'd seen leveled at Steve Lombard but never aimed at myself. "We both know why I'm asking you," Lois said coldly.

My heart started beating faster, my chest tight. Oh, no. She couldn't ... she couldn't mean ... if she knew, then everything thing I'd done was complete foolishness, and I'd caused agony for the one person I loved above all others. Hoping my suspicion was wrong, I shrugged again. "I really *don't* know ... I'm also a guy, maybe?"

She looked so frustrated, I thought for a moment she might punch me. "You fooled me once already. Just *stop* it, and tell me why."

*Please* let me be misunderstanding her. "All I can think is he was trying not to hurt you, Lois. I know I wouldn't."

"Then why did you?" The look in her eyes when she said it was like a bullet to the heart. I think it would have been easier to handle that incendiary anger better than the pain I saw there. Worse than that was the knowledge that *I* had hurt her. She accused *me*. She all but said that she remembered...

"Lois, I..." I began, groping for words. She remembered, and everything I had done to keep from hurting her was in vain; Lois was twice as wounded now. Clinging to the hope that maybe, just maybe, I was misinterpreting her, I said, "I never meant to hurt you..."

Just the look on her face was enough to still my tongue. For a long moment, we just stared at each other before she said very clearly and distinctly a phrase that made it impossible to misunderstand, something that only we two had known about. "I bet my life instead of yours."

I flinched, feeling as if kryptonite had been injected into my veins. The last shadow of doubt was gone. Lois remembered. And I was the biggest fool, the worst cad, to ever walk the earth. Stunned, I could only whisper, "I'm sorry. Lois, I'm so sorry. I ... I only wanted to keep you safe..." I'd never been more ashamed of myself than that moment. And while I was already miserably hoping for the floor to open up and swallow me, I also had to cope with the fact that Lois *knew* my identity, she'd been furious with me - rightfully so - and she had still kept my secret. I didn't ask her forgiveness. I didn't deserve it.

This wasn't turning out the way I had planned it to, not that I had ever dreamed this would happen here. Worst of all, I hadn't expected his words to affect me as much as they were. He had been in the wrong, he had taken the decisions out of my hands, denying himself to me out of a sense of duty, only to get involved with his old high school flame, and here I was feeling sorry for him? What about me? What about the moments we shared that now haunted me twice as much because they were ones that had been taken from me? Forbidden emotions and actions that were best forgotten. And I *was* hurting for *him*? The fact that I could feel tears threatening only made it worse.

I had been so sure I was over this, beyond the cruel way that the life I had reached out for had been slapped from my hands by the very man I had considered sharing it with, but the longing I felt when I watched his face made it very clear that I'd been pretty damn mistaken.

Bruce and I had been hiding our hurts in each other, trying to barricade the door against our personal boogeymen while we found safety in each other. Unfortunately, I had expected my good luck charm to keep the scary things away and stayed in the dark room alone. I had known better, but hadn't been able to stop myself. And now what?

"So you just ended all of it without asking me rather the two of us finding a way to deal with it," I heard myself say in a voice that wavered just a bit. Looking him in the eyes now was excruciating. Why the hell couldn't I shut down now? Why wasn't the pain enough for me? "I loved you then. I let you inside to a point I never trusted anyone else to. And in the end, you took it out of my hands without a word of warning, stole that time out of my mind, and suddenly start avoiding me like the plague for no reasons I could understand. Then you turn around and get involved with a *divorced mother*."

The outrage in my tone wasn't something I even attempted to control. The last galled me more than anything else. He couldn't be with me, a single woman who had a way of masking his secret from the rest of the public, but he's latched onto a single mom who was the type to want an old-fashioned relationship. Not to mention the little boy, who was sure to grow attached, as his father was completely out of their lives. Or so I've heard. "Very responsible. What do you do for an encore? Oh, that's right! You get her to work for the paper we work for. Better yet, you set her up to be Perry's secretary. All the better to remind the two of us that we can't be trusted together."

All of the hurt and anger I'd kept in a straight-jacket the last six months was swarming in now. The ghosts of the past rose up, the mad kind of love I had felt for him in those all-too-brief moments before the world fell down. Shaking that away, I braced myself. He had moved on, despite the fact that I knew deep down that I might never be able to entirely. I had to break it off this time and I had to do it *now*, now that we *both* knew the score. Because I'd never get the courage to do it again.

I was in the right; none of this was my fault at all, but try telling that to my tear ducts. I could feel my brave face finally breaking down. It was too much to confront after months of turning my back on it. Bruce was a wonderful man and we had an amazing time together, but I had never felt about another man the way I left about this one. You know, the one that put a knife in my back? What does that say for me as a person? I don't even want to think about it.

My heart in my throat, it was difficult to ignore the hitch in my voice when I locked eyes with him. It was the most difficult thing I've ever done, next to holding back the secret all these months, and even then I felt the tears coming. I could do this. I had to do this, if only for the peace of mind of knowing I had. "I guess all there is left to say is thanks for the memories, even if they weren't so great and I only just got them back." The dam was breaking and I knew if I didn't move away from him soon, I'd lose the weak grip I had on myself.

Taking a deep breath, I started to back away. The part of me that still longed for what we had was yelling at me to stop, stop now, but its call was distant. Instead, I murmured with gritted teeth, "If you'll excuse me, I have a date waiting for me. Bruce is probably wondering where I am and the last thing you want is another person knowing. Look what happened last time." I could feel the tears stinging my eyes when I turned on my heel and fled into the crowd near the dance floor, all the time calling myself a coward. Most especially since I just wanted to find Bruce and hide in him again.

Why am I even surprised anymore? I came out of the bathroom - where I'd retreated to

sniffle over the fact that Clark had been so obviously staring at Lois, and that I'd been so snippy to him about her being here with Bruce - wondering if Clark would notice that I'd left. He didn't. Of course.

He was over in a corner with Lois, arguing with her from the looks of it. She turned on her heel and stormed away, leaving him with the most agonized expression on his face. Part of me wanted to run to him; he doesn't deserve to be treated like that. Another part of me thought cruelly, *I would never make you feel this way, Clark - why are you chasing the one who will?*

At the same time, I was noticing that Lois looked as though she wasn't far from tears herself. *You two only hurt each other, why can't you just stay out of his life and out of his heart?* I wanted to say that to her, but knowing Lois, she'd probably backhand me into next week. She's been nothing but spiteful and cold toward me since I took this job, as if I'd arrived expressly to ruin her life.

Maybe she thinks I did. I'm not sure anymore. Why on earth is she so angry at me? I didn't steal Clark from her. He never gave any hint that he and Lois had ever been together, and everyone at work says they were never a couple. And she acts as though she hates him, can't stand the sight of him. So why is she behaving like this to me? She doesn't want Clark, but no one else can even look at him? What kind of sense does that make?

Then again, I shouldn't expect sense anymore, should I? I know Clark's keeping secrets from me. His excuses for why he's always late are just ridiculous. Sometimes he flat-out forgets to call or meet me, which I would believe, except he can remember word-for-word conversations from high school. *Something's up*, and I wish I knew what it was.

Well, *that's* odd. And damn suspicious.

I got a little sidetracked picking up Lois' champagne. First of all, a room full of reporters is pretty much hell on earth for me - I swear they all look at you like they *know* you have a secret and they're one step from figuring out what it is. Secondly, I spotted a couple of shady types having a whispered conversation by the bar. Metropolis isn't my beat, but old habits are hard to break; I listened in long enough to make sure they weren't planning anything nefarious.

I *was* a bit late getting back to Lois, and what should I find but this guy - the same one who was mooning after her - standing there looking poleaxed while Lois storms away. And even more perplexing was the expression on her face: equal parts wrath and heartbreak. What the *hell* is going on here?

Lois' expression shut down when she saw me; she's got this great trick of making her face totally blank. Tough girl, never let anyone see her heart, never let anyone know she's hurting, but I *saw* that. And it means all my half-formed suspicions about this guy are probably true. *Something* happened in the past, something Lois hasn't told me about, and seeing how much pain was in her eyes before she got a handle on it, I have to know what it was. I have to help her, if I can. If she'll let me.

I should've brought her vodka. It'll take more than champagne to get this secret out of her.