

This Strange Effect

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: M

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"167 countries have voted to censure Superman." That news blurb alone had raised Lois Lane's blood pressure by ten or more points. Reading about what he was up to while she looked into corruption in the Caribbean had incensed her even more. Blowing out the Olympic torch? And straightening the Leaning Tower of Pisa? He wasn't acting like himself at all.

That was just too extreme to be chalked up to what had happened earlier this month, when three criminals from his planet arrived just as the hero was renouncing his mission in hopes of having a normal life ... with Lois. All of that had been shattered, and Kal-El had taken even her memories of their time together, trying to erase their affair.

The amnesia wasn't permanent, however. Soon her memories came flooding back, along with the revelation that the hero she adored was the guy sitting across from her at work. Little wonder then that Lois had taken a vacation, tried to get as far away from him as possible. But news such as this got her attention in a major way, and she had headed back to the 'States to track him down before this got any worse.

No matter how furious she was at him for his betrayal, his actions proved that something was drastically wrong, and he trusted Lois. If anyone could find out what was going on and fix it, she could. He had even anticipated certain problems and seen to it that she had the knowledge to forestall them. First she had to find him, though.

It proved easier than expected. In the end all Lois had to do was follow the trail of havoc he was leaving. She found him, of all places, in a *bar*. Flicking peanuts at the bottles lined up in front of what used to be a mirror, with enough force to shatter the glass. The patrons were already leaving, and the bartender waited miserably off to the side. It seemed that news like this got around all too quickly.

Lois stalked in, and he froze for a second, probably hearing her heartbeat. Then he angled the next peanut so it smashed a bottle of Stolichnaya. Oh yes, he heard her. "You have a *lot* of explaining to do," she snapped.

He downed another shot before swiveling slowly around to look at her. Lois flinched; the face she knew so well was almost unrecognizable. Kal-El had never worn that ill-tempered sneer, and his eyes had never been so cold. He stared into her eyes for a moment, that cerulean gaze mocking, then pointedly looked her up and down. "Nice tan. Pity about the tan lines, though," he commented, and even his voice was wrong, a snide chill that had never been there before.

The bartender was trying to catch Lois' eye, shaking his head and mouthing, *Leave him alone, lady*. She was too stunned by the fact that he'd just used his x-ray vision, and gone out

of his way to let her know about it. It wasn't as if he hadn't seen it before, it was that it was being brought up in this context that freaked her out just a touch. As irate as she had been at his obvious casting aside of his duty, she had never stopped to consider just what state she'd find him in. Needless to say, the last thing she'd expected was behavior akin to Lombard after a few brews. Everything she was seeing was wrong, the setting and the liquor being the least of them. It was a total head-trip to even be present for this, most especially after all trouble with his father and his mission not so long ago.

Some serious bullshit was going on here and she was going to get to the bottom of it before his reputation went any further into the crapper. "Yeah, well, sorry about ruining the view. Getting the news that your top story is single-handedly turning the world upside down tends to cut into your sun-bathing time," she snarked back, her expression stormy and just a little disgusted with him. "Now, if you're about done with the voyeur act, the two of us need to have words and it's not going to be here."

He chuckled richly, and *that* was the same, the soft knowing laugh sending shivers down her spine. Standing up, he stalked over to her, and now he moved like one of the big cats, all surety and lazy menace. "Sure, that's just what the two of us need. Your place or mine, baby?"

Never had he seemed so much bigger than her, she thought with momentary dread. A very real part of her wanted to turn on her heel and get out of here, starting to realize how far in over her head she was; but if she did, who was going to stop him? No one else knew his weaknesses as well as she did, no one else really had the chance to talk him down without serious potential violence. At least this way, there was a chance she could get through this without alarming the public much further. She owed him that much, still cared for him that much, despite his stupid little kiss-trick. Smirking as she felt every conscious eye in the room on her, she admitted to herself that the public's tongues would likely be wagging just over the drunks overhearing this exchange between them, but she'd do what damage control she could.

Making herself calm, she turned those unimpressed eyes back to the man approaching her and only made her expression a little less chill. Arms crossed and one black brow raised, she let her gaze run up and down him, more and more dismayed by the changes in him. Even the uniform looked darker somehow. "You wish, Casanova. It had better be my balcony. God help me."

"Then let's go for a ride," he murmured, and the next thing Lois knew she was in his arms, pressed more tightly against him than was aerodynamically necessary. She would've said something, but he had already taken off, and they soared through the air to her balcony, where he landed them both just in front of the doors. Even his flying style had changed, more brash and showy, but the gleam in his eyes afterward was just the same. "You always did enjoy a flight," he commented salaciously.

To her chagrin, Lois came to the awareness that other things were the same, too, despite the craziness of the situation. Flight had always triggered certain reactions in her that she was more than a little embarrassed by, but it was made worse by the fact that she was being turned on by a totally screwed-up version of her not-quite-ex that she wasn't even supposed to know was an ex. And the last thing she needed to think about was her single-minded hormones. "Yeah, okay, so point to you. What the hell is going on with you? Because this isn't you. Now how did you manage to go completely nuts when I'm only gone for three days?"

His hands cupped her face, thumbs tracing her cheekbones. "This *is* me, Lois. Need me to prove it to you?" He stepped even closer, and she couldn't move away, that gentle grip as solid as steel.

His face was so close to hers that she could still smell the alcohol, which mixed so strangely with her perceptions; those blue eyes tore at her soul, blood-shot though they were. The past wasn't so far away that she couldn't remember what had passed between them. It wasn't that she didn't still want him, her sensory memory was alive and kicking; it was just the double-edged sword of 'He doesn't even want me to have the memory of our past' and 'This guy's out of his mind'. Her Kal-El, her Superman, had to be in there someplace and as furious as she was with him, she needed to get him back. Maybe, just maybe, there was a way to do that. "What happened in Smallville? This isn't you."

"I just *told* you it's me," he purred at her. When her hazel eyes narrowed, he let her go to snarl, "Nothing happened in Smallville, except I realized the town's as boring as the guy who says he's from there. That place means nothing to me anymore."

Kal-El stalked away from her, his shoulders tense. The mention of Clark's hometown had definitely struck a chord. But he didn't let her take advantage of that. When he turned toward her again, the leer was back in his expression. "I'm not interested in the past, anyway. I'm more about the future - say, the next two hours."

So his real life was a good trigger, huh? There was her in... "Last I checked, I *was* a part of your past," Lois retorted, leaning back against the edge of the brick ledge. "You were eager enough to be rid of me quickly last time. Why double-dip? I couldn't have been too memorable if you didn't want me to remember it." The implication hurt her to consider, but it really was a possibility. And it might just give her a few answers.

His grin was absolutely feral. "Oh no, it wasn't like that at all. I was trying to be noble and spare you the pain. Since Daddy Dearest said I *had* to choose between the woman and the world, I didn't want the woman to suffer. Good thing I don't go in for that kind of stuff anymore, huh? And now that I'm not at the world's beck and call ... maybe you could use a few reminders..."

Apparently he didn't want to give her the chance to say 'no' again, because in the next instant Lois was in her own living room, the French doors banging shut behind them, pressed against the wall with his mouth on hers and his hands sliding down to her hips. He'd never been like this before, never this insistent and greedy, and she found herself responding to it in spite of what she'd set out to do.

It was as if every nerve in her entire system roared to life at once; after being left in a forced state of emotional limbo for months, her body wasn't giving her mind a chance to consider what was happening. Lois just managed to bite off a shuddering moan before forcibly turning her head. What in the hell was she doing? This was wrong on so many levels she couldn't even count! Then again, she had known she would need to get close to him for any plan to work and she was as close as she could get at this moment. Regardless of what she might think of herself later, maybe going with it was the best course of action. But giving in too easy would be considered suspect... "Stop it. This is nuts. Seriously, get *off*," she protested, turning her face further away while baring her throat to him.

He kissed her neck, his teeth grazing along her throat, before laughing against her skin. "And just how do you plan to stop me? As if you even wanted to. It's not just my sight and hearing that are super-sensitive, Lois. I know you want this."

The meaning of his words hit Lois hard enough to make her gasp out loud, her fingers tightening in his hair then. Ordinarily, a man would have gotten his face slapped with numbing force for something like that, but this... If he was going to be a ruthless bastard about it, maybe it was time to get a few things out of her system. At least that was how she explained it to

herself. "I hate you, you know that?" she growled into his ear in turn, taunting him with a slight arch against him. "I *hate* all this crap you've put me through. This is just because you were one hell of a lay and hormones are a bastard. Got me? I'm not in love with you any more than you ever were with me."

Kal-El nuzzled her neck as he caught her thighs and lifted her, pinning her against the wall at a more convenient height. "Hate me if you want, you'll still scream my name," he murmured, biting her neck right at the most sensitive spot. She shuddered in reaction, eyes rolling back, and his breath was hot against her ear as he whispered, "Glad to know I'm one hell of a lay. You're damn good yourself - do you have any idea how many hot blondes I fly past every day? *Still?* None of them could even begin to compare." He didn't give her the chance to process that, or to realize he'd said absolutely nothing about love, before grabbing the shoulder of her blouse. The buttons rained down around them as he tore it off.

Her body instinctively rocked at the action, the sudden bolt of lust that shot through her taking her breath away. She was rapidly losing control here. The combination of the stab of hurt and jealousy she felt from the reminder of the percentage of the human race that continued to throw themselves at him, the feel of him pressed against her and proving his point, and the sudden violence of the rending of the clothes only conspired to drive Lois all the more mad. Why the hell did he get so far under her skin? And why the hell did he feel so good against it?

Having been tortured by recall's slow revelation in the nights following the standoff at the Fortress of Solitude, this was nearly an ideal balm to her broken heart. All those nights lying awake with the cold memories of the way their bodies had moved in perfect rhythm, the way she had opened so easily to him in all ways, only to have had him snatched away from her with no choice in the matter. Her eyes burned into his, glaring at him even as she shivered. "I've got news for you, buster; I've given up more than my fair share over you." Her voice was a husky weapon then, one hand releasing his hair to slide down his side to search for the hidden seam of the uniform shirt. The memory of having worn it the morning after flashed into her mind. Her remaining hand tightened into the darkness of his hair, jerking his head further back. "God knows Perry's nephew was giving me the eye last week during the visit; maybe I should take him up on it, y'know? Seems that we had the discussion about you being married to your job. No point in me being alone at night just because you can't balance your needs and wants. Never was before you got here and if you're not available..."

"I have everything I want and everything I need right here," he murmured back, kissing her roughly. As insistent and forceful as he was, he wasn't just taking what he wanted. Every caress showed how well he remembered their one night together, and how thoroughly he'd learned her desires. Breaking the kiss, he leaned back from her and vaporized her bra straps with a quick glance of heat vision. Lois' heart raced at that. Such uses of his powers always got to her for some weird reason. And he knew it, too, giving her a sardonic grin as he tossed the bra aside to reveal her hardening nipples. "As if any other man had a chance with you," Kal-El chuckled, cupping her breasts.

"Who knows? I was never the wait-around-and-mope type. I'm pretty sure that I'd be able to top you with someone else. You're not the only cape out there." At these words, his hands tightened on her, thumbing her nipples gently. It took far too much control to keep the moan out of her voice, but she couldn't help the way her lower body slammed into his. Pure insanity, this, and she was shaken by the sheer blinding lust that this whole situation was unleashing in her. All her high-minded arguments were slipping away, her fury at all of the destruction he

had caused around the world now banked embers, even as she fought to control the way her breath stuttered over her lips with every movement he made. Any chance she had of staving this off was evaporating like steam, an all-too-apt image. But even if she couldn't fight it out with him right now, there was no way she was losing her edge.

One thing was guaranteed to sidetrack him, if not utterly destroy his train of thought. Recalling his reaction last time brought on a feral grin of her own. Gritting her teeth against the rush she felt from the mere thought, she stopped trying to get the top off of him and let her free hand slide down between them. She had to close her eyes for a moment when she touched him; images of the past scalded her, tactile sensation melding with hidden remembrances. No fabric between the two of them the last time she had done this. That thought in mind, her darkened eyes met his again. As she stroked him, she firmly ignored the heat she herself was generating.

Kal-El growled in a familiar guttural tone, arching into her touch, his eyes slipping closed. With his expression blanked by pure desire, he looked once again like the man she'd fallen in love with and she increased her ministrations. Regardless of the way they had parted, he was still in there, a part of this corrupted version of himself that was even now desperate to have her. And the knowledge of having him at her mercy here was enough to make her shudder again. Madness or not, Lois couldn't resist him at this point. When those azure eyes opened again however, they were far too knowing and she found she had no defense against it. "The only thing that's gonna be on top of me tonight is you," he told her huskily, and slid his hands down to her skirt. Sliding his thumbs under the fabric, he tore it in half and ran his fingertips lightly over her thighs.

The suddenness of it made her flinch back enough for her to lose her grip on him. With a whimper of loss, she caught his side with her eyes blazing. Her initial plans thwarted, she searched roughly and finally found the fastening of the suit. Once her questing fingers caught it, she was jerking the tight material up from his waist. Her lips met his, demanding, nipping him lightly. The last time she had had him, he had been human for all intents and purposes, invulnerability lost under the red rays of his father's contraption. The thought of harming him in the least hadn't occurred to her the way it did now. In the back of her mind, she still remembered the plan she'd come armed with, but it might just have to wait when confronted with this turn of events. Her nails scored his back, encountering a surface that had very slight give. When she spoke, she could hear how the huskiness had increased. "You think so, hotshot? Just exactly how do you think you'll manage that if I don't want it?"

Again that low, rich laughter, which inflamed her ardor and infuriated her for the realization that her defiance *amused* him. Kal-El's eyes met hers as he slipped one hand between them, stroking her through the damp satin of her panties. "I don't have to worry about that. You *do* want it, and we both know it." His voice was so completely certain that a scathing reply rose to Lois' lips, but before she could speak, he'd slipped his fingers beneath the edge of her panties. She gasped, eyes going wide, no way to hide from the rich royal blue of his knowing gaze as he stroked her open and slid two fingers into her warmth.

He knew her so well, his fingertips finding the exact spot even as his thumb rocked against her clit. The world went white before Lois even knew what was happening. Her head slammed back against the wall with the force of it, teeth gritted tightly as she gave an unguarded throaty cry. *Oh dear God, oh dear God...* With a moan of denial that belied her next move, Lois bucked her hips with a violent thrust, clutching him closer.

And just as before, her climax made his desire burn even hotter. No more taunting words.

Kal-El tore the panties off her and flung them aside. He stepped back for a fraction of an instant, but before she could slide down the wall he was back, pressed against her and now completely nude, having used his super-speed to shed the last of the clothing keeping him from her slick heat. And then he'd captured her mouth, kissing her hungrily, as he caught her thighs and sheathed himself in her.

This time, a scream of passion tore itself out of her as she convulsed with considerable force in his arms. Somehow she had forgotten just how glorious this had felt, the memory nothing against the reality, as the desire in her grew electric. Her nails scrabbled for purchase against his unassailable back as Lois rose up against him, long legs drawing him more directly against her. The room disappeared in fireworks for the second time in five minutes.

The son of a bitch masquerading as her former lover had been right; she wished she could have even feigned surprise. Which would be a joke at this point; conflicted gentleman or greedy bastard, her desire for him didn't change an iota. The proof of her own arousal was there on her thighs as she moved, shivering as she felt him move inside her. Lois decided that if she was going to give in, she was going bring her own terms to the game. Her breath was coming in harsh shudders while she gazed at him through hooded eyes, but she scrambled for enough control to contract her sex around him without another thrust before going slack again, repeating the rhythm for several moments.

He felt that squeeze, and grinned, his eyes as lust-dazed as hers were. "Knew you wanted this as much as I did," Kal-El managed to whisper harshly. His breathing roughened as he picked up the pace, leaning his head close to her. The quickening rhythm forced a sultry moan from her, and the feel of his body against hers was indescribable. Everywhere he touched her, every brush of slick skin, seemed to spark flames that burned down to the core of her. He mouthed her neck, one hand on her hip holding her just where he wanted her. Kal-El breathed against her ear, "Come for me, Lois. One more time, come on and come for me, scream my name."

The words, hot and blunt and totally unexpected, threw her off the cliff she'd been teetering on and she closed her eyes as everything burst into flames inside her. Arms behind his back, she jerked him forward with all her strength and clenched those inner muscles mercilessly. Her last ties to the Earth broke and she couldn't hold back a scream of sheer ecstasy that held just a bit of fear for her own sanity.

A second later, her voice broken and trembling, her cry was the name she had been whispering with tears of quite another sort in her eyes for months. To hear her calling out for him like that drove him over the brink, pounding into her until he too moaned her name. Lois opened her eyes just in time to see the man she'd loved and lost, caught in the blaze of desire and fulfillment, his head thrown back as pleasure roared through him.

And then, while they were both shuddering and trying not to slide down to the floor, he opened his eyes and gave her a lazy, insolent smile. Just that arrogant grin was enough to remind her yet again that this wasn't her hero. Her hair a wreck and her breath still coming in gasps, she could only stare at him while she attempted to get her mind in gear for a decent retort. Which was taking an effort. Her voice still raspy, eyes still dazed with heat, she whispered, "I'd slap you ... if I had the strength for it right now. As it is ... it may be a minute."

He chuckled, nuzzling her neck insolently. That made Lois shiver, every inch of her skin deliciously sensitized. Kal-El knew it, too, brushing his lips gently across her shoulder. But when he spoke, the sweetness was replaced by swagger. "In a minute, you'll be too busy to slap me. Or did you already forget one of the benefits of being with a Kryptonian?" He rocked

his hips against her slightly, reminding her how quickly he recovered.

As soon as the words were spoken, Lois' eyes widened with sudden recall. Just how much of a mess had she gotten herself into now?

Mmm, that had been just as perfect as his memories. Kal-El grinned triumphantly as he locked his gaze with Lois'. Obviously it had been good for her, the trembling and moaning giving the lie to her harsh words.

Not that his Lois wouldn't still try to deny it. Her voice husky with fulfillment, she told him, "I'd slap you ... if I had the strength for it right now. As it is ... it may be a minute."

He chuckled, nuzzling against her neck right where he knew it would affect her most. Her startled gasp was his reward, and the delicious way she shivered from such a gentle kiss inflamed his ardor all over again. He rocked his hips against her, murmuring, "In a minute, you'll be too busy to slap me. Or did you already forget one of the benefits of being with a Kryptonian?"

Her eyes went wide, and he caught her thighs, adjusting her slightly as he stepped back from the wall. It was easy to hold her slight weight balanced in his hands; it must've felt like flying, for her, and she wrapped her arms around his neck. "So how do you want it this time? Up against the wall again? Back across the couch? In bed, with you on top like the very first time, so I can watch you move?" Kal-El asked. "And don't pretend you don't want it. I know better." He pulled her close, the heat of him still buried in her slickness.

She hissed, stifling a gasp by locking her jaw, and glared savagely at him. That was fine by Kal-El. "You're so sexy when you're angry," he told her. "You give me that look like you want to tear my throat out with your teeth, and I just want to tumble you into bed and make you scream my name. Because you're *mine*, you always will be, and..." The rest of the sentence vanished as she tightened around him, crossing her legs behind his back to squeeze harder. Like wet velvet, wrapped so tautly around him, he burned for her again already.

Lois seemed to unerringly notice it, too, and took shameless advantage of it. He could feel one small hand tighten the hair at his scalp, her other hand clutching the back of his neck. Oh, yes, she was more than a little bit angry with him. "Don't flatter yourself," Lois forced out through her teeth. "Why bother with teeth when a girl would just shatter them on that throat of yours? Oh, no, there are other ways to get your attention."

"And you know them all," he growled, the pressure on his scalp only spurring him on. This was lust and anger woven into each other so tightly it was hard to tell the difference, a heady mix indeed. "From spraying soda all over me to wearing short white skirts split halfway to heaven, you know exactly how to make me notice you."

Despite her obvious irritation, he felt a shiver run through her and roughly pulled her closer. Unable to guard herself against it, her shudder was loud in the silence of the room. Once the sensation passed, the hellfire came back into her eyes twice as strong. "Right. Like you have room to talk; this coming from a man who wears head-to-toe spandex while he flies around town," she snapped back, hazel eyes locked to his with the threat of vicious revenge. "Exactly where the hell do you get off lecturing me on wardrobe? Especially when you were sneaking peeks at my underwear when I never thought you'd take me up on it?"

A low, sardonic chuckle answered her. "You *invited* me to look at your underwear, *Ms. Lane*, and as for where I get off, I'd be happy to show you. I think... it'll be your bed, this time. I've always wanted to have you here in this apartment, where it all started."

That seemed to throw her for an instant, one traitor moment when her body reacted to his

words before she made herself freeze. But he heard her heartbeat accelerate once again, faster if possible. From the look that passed over her face, she clearly realized that he knew it, too. One hand pistoning against his chest, she pushed away from him. "Don't you just wish. Put me down, you bastard."

For all the harsh words she threw at him, it didn't change the reality of the situation. Any struggles she put up were futile; there was no escaping his arms around her. Kal-El carried her into the bedroom, one hand on her back, the other resting on the curve of her buttocks. Not even a whisper was between them. Each step reminded them both of how intimately they were joined, prompting a threatening hiss from her every time he jostled her.

His heart beat faster at the sight of her bed. It was the first time he had been this deep into her inner sanctum. The darkened room smelled of her: warm, faintly spicy, sandalwood mixed with a light musk and roses. Vanilla somewhere. A little jasmine. Just like the scent of her hair, the skin of her neck...

Most people never realized just how intimate it was to enter someone else's private spaces, what one could learn about someone just by meeting them on their own ground. His grip on her tightened then. How many times had the image of her lying here found its way into his dreams? Too many to count.

Now he was here, and he would finally have her. Looming over her, he slipped her down over the cotton sheets, pinning her on the bed effortlessly. Her eyes were smoldering again, her body taut with the control she tried to exert over her reactions, but she had moved with him when he laid her back. They both knew her struggles were only for show, to make her feel less guilty for giving in to him; her legs were still wrapped tightly around his back, and even as Lois fought him she arched up against him. Never give in, never surrender, unless it was on her terms.

And that just couldn't be, he thought with another slow smile. He knew from past experience that there was one sure way to force her to admit to her desire. Keeping her hands pinned over her head, he caught her eyes before he bent his head to her breasts. Loathe him or not, her response was immediate and without façade. The peaks stiffened in anticipation of his mouth, Lois' body rising to him as he kissed her there. She cried out, hands knotting into fists.

Chuckling under his breath, he licked and suckled her nipples, letting her feel his teeth scrape lightly over them in a way that made her moan despite herself. Her mind and her body were at war, but he knew all too well which was winning. She was losing herself and they both knew it... "Yeah, we both know what you want," he murmured against her chest, increasing his movements against her. "You can't hide that from me. You've always been crazy for me."

The next thing he knew, Lois had jerked away from him to grab the back of his shoulder, her other hand shoving hard against his chest. Her legs around his waist would normally provide just enough leverage to knock him easily onto his back, if he had been merely mortal. As it was, he had to yield to her impulse, let her think she could overpower him. And why not, when she was giving him exactly what he wanted?

Lois hissed as she came down just as she had planned, her head rocking back for a moment, the sudden depth forcing a startled moan out of her. Her expression showed her weakening resolve, but then her hands were on his chest, nails against his skin as those furious hazel eyes once again bored into his. "You can go to hell. It was being crazy over you and getting screwed for it that got us into this mess. We see where it got us the last time you ran the show." That said, she sneered at him and bucked against him so hard and fast, it took his breath away for a moment.

Kal-El gasped, running his hands up her thighs possessively. She felt so good atop him, and looked even better, the long fall of her hair wild. He stared up at her, his eyes darkened by lust, and thrust up into her, matching her fierce pace while wrenching another groan from her lips. "Looks like you enjoy getting screwed almost as much as I do," he managed to growl.

She reacted to the unfiltered and uncharacteristic bluntness by thrusting her hips even harder, her shaking increasing from the tension. Her hands clenched suddenly. The nails didn't hurt, but that didn't stop her from bearing them down on his chest. "I got screwed over by your dad a lot harder than I did by you. Actually, no. You, too. You turned your back on what we had pretty quickly when Daddy said you had to stop playing with the human." Her breath was starting to come in quick little pants now. It was getting to her, irate as she was. "Nice to know ... that the sex wasn't even good enough for you to hold on to your promises ... once Daddy knew what was going on."

"Trust me, babe, the sex was more than good enough," he gasped, watching her move through lidded eyes. She was utterly glorious, a goddess of anger and lust claiming him as her own. "I guess that means you're glad I've stopped being the obedient son?"

"Hell, no, this is going to... cause even more trouble. Obviously. Even if I got some answers." Those hazel eyes pierced him then, the expression in them both blazing and hurt. "It means that I've ... got to clean up behind you ... again. Thought I've made a career of it. Why the hell can't I not care? You certainly didn't. *Dammit.*" She gave a sudden, sharp cry then, eyes going wide.

He took hold of her hips and set the rhythm for her, rocked so deep within her that her voice dropped into a throaty inarticulate moan. Kal-El's was rich with contempt for the man he'd been as he answered her accusations. "Oh, I cared... I cared so much I would've rather had you forget everything between us ... forget me, never look at me the same way again ... never touch me again, rather than see you shed one more tear for my sake... I cared too much to keep you... What a fool I was..."

Lois arched her back, eyes closed in mingled heartbreak and passion. There was no questioning that revelation - the man he was now had no reason to lie to spare her feelings, so it could only be the truth. Raking her nails over his chest, she rose up almost off of him before sinking down again, driving him deep inside her, trying to blot out that knowledge by overloading her senses.

For a few moments it almost worked, Kal-El groaning her name, Lois crying out his, taking each other rough and wild and full of desperate hunger. But he felt so good, and her body was so primed by their first round, that all too soon she was screaming her fulfillment.

Stunned by the force of her climax, she let him roll her under, let him grab the headboard above her and thrust into her so roughly she knew her thighs would be bruised. Still she loved it; their time in the Fortress had been so gentle, so tender, but this was raw lust with no filters. Before it had been like good tea, refined and elegant, something she savored. This was newsroom coffee instead, blasting heat into her veins like caffeine, just what she needed.

To Lois' surprise she started to moan again, rising toward yet another orgasm. Kal-El laughed softly against her ear. "Yeah, Lois, again, come for me again, I love to hear you, *come on.*" It seemed almost blasphemous to be enjoying it this much, but Lois let herself be swept away, and when he finally tensed with a drawn-out growl of gratification, she answered him with sharp cry of ecstasy.

Panting and tangled together in the aftermath, Lois heard the traitor words fall from her lips in an exhausted sob, "God help me, I'm a fucking idiot. Why can't I stop loving you?" Just

saying the words aloud burned, realizing how raw an admission of weakness for him this was. And, the words hanging in the air between them, the reporter dreaded his unfettered response. Raising her eyes wasn't an option.

Kal-El chuckled, and opened his mouth to tell her, *The sex was great for me, too, babe.* But something in him refused to allow those cynical words out; it felt like his voice had been choked off. Hot, red rage bloomed in his chest like some evil flower; not his own anger, sly and nasty, but something purer and stronger.

He sat up abruptly, tumbling Lois off him and clawing at his throat, fighting for air, for speech. What the hell...? The answer came in a flush of anger and a voice in the back of his mind. *No, I won't let you do that, how dare you answer love with sarcasm!*

"Goddamn farmboy," he managed to snarl. He'd thought he'd killed the man he used to be, but apparently Clark Kent was back from the dead. Ridiculous, that he hadn't complained about the sex, but a few words brought him back to annoying life.

You will not hurt her in the only place she's vulnerable, and it was that implacable Clark voice, foolish Boy Scout idiot, never so much as a twinge while he fucked Lois half out of her mind but when he tried to say the wrong thing to her he lost his breath. Really, how ridiculous can you get? Kal-El tried to fight, tried to shake off the unwanted presence, but found himself finally matched. Clark should have been scoured away, should have succumbed to the effects of the kryptonite, but he was still there, still stubbornly fighting.

Kal-El was frozen in struggle, the past and the present at war for his mind and body, unaware of Lois. She took one look at him - eyes bugged out with insane fury, muttering under his breath at himself - and knew this was her chance.

Lois scrambled off the bed, running for her purse, not even bothering with clothes. Knowing the implications made her sick to her stomach. The whole reason that she had sought him out was to stop him and maybe get some answers. There was no way to stop this without harming him, despite the words and actions that had passed between them. She had to get the crystal before he realized something was up.

Now he was making strange half-strangled noises, as if trying to wring his own neck, and she had the little lead case in her hands. Her heart in her throat, her emotions tangled up in knots about what would come next. There was time, he was paying no attention to her, and Lois made herself open the lid on the green crystal before he noticed.

Kal-El screamed when she shoved it against his shoulder, a raw howl of agony that made Lois' stomach do painful flips. It tore her to shreds to be the one doing this, the one causing this pain. But she held it there, counting to five as he'd told her, and then backed away. This wasn't him, wasn't the rest of the world's hero, and only she could have gotten this close. There had been no other option. Now, she could only hope that it worked. Watching him warily, she put the kryptonite back into its lead case.

Green fire seared him, burning away the effects of the corrupted kryptonite. The snide brute he'd been for the last few days was gone, finally truly *gone*, leaving only Clark, weak and in pain. And grateful; Lois just saved him, and he knew it. But at what cost?

As soon as he physically could, he rolled over to face her. Lois was still staring at him, her eyes haunted. "Lois," he managed to whisper. "Lois, thank you. It worked."

She just sat there on her heels, watching him in the most wounded way. And now the secrets again, the pushing her away for her own good. On one hand, she had done what she needed to do, the only thing that could have been done. A Superman maddened to evil by some weird form of kryptonite had no business in this world. Still, he had told her things that

her Kal-El had never breathed a word of. He had wanted her on a level she'd never dreamed was still possible. But now she couldn't help but mourn its loss. Back to the status quo. Back to being a fleeting moment of foolish human want. Adored from afar like some misty memory. Steeling herself to keep the heartbreak out of her voice, Lois managed a small smile and murmured, "You're welcome." Taking a deep breath, she pulled the bed sheet to her and stood, moving toward her shower.

"Lois, wait," he called, but she didn't turn around, only interested in putting distance between herself and him. This was more than a momentary escape; if he let her go now he was sure to lose her completely, the last hour between them never to be spoken of again. And after that, after what he'd done and said, Kal-El couldn't watch her walk away one more time. Not even if he was still weak and shaky from kryptonite.

He staggered to his feet, clutching the comforter around him, and managed to make it to the bathroom door before she closed it. Kal-El caught the door in one hand and reached for her with the other. "Lois, don't. I can't lose you again. Not after that."

"Hey, I'm not going anywhere but the shower. You can calm down. I'm fine." The reporter still wouldn't look at him. Trying to pull out of his grip, she ruthlessly pushed her emotions aside. "And stop feeling guilty about it, okay? Just stop. You weren't yourself; no one expects you to make good on what he said, especially after that. I was able to stop it, that's all. No one else would have known what to do. I wasn't really hurt. Consider us even, all right? It's not going to hurt anything to let me go." She amazed herself with how she kept her voice from breaking. The aftermath of the encounter had been the last thing she had considered at the time, a fact that showed now as she tried to disengage again. But she'd do it. By God, she would.

"No," he insisted, and maybe it was a lingering trace of the kryptonite that made him pull her into his arms in spite of her resistance. "Lois, it's not a matter of 'him' and 'me' - he *was* me. He was every thought that's ever crossed my mind but that I never acted on because I knew it was wrong. And maybe a couple I should've, anyway." Kissing her disheveled hair, he told her fiercely, "It would hurt *me* to let you go. It felt like dying to lose you once. I can't turn my back and pretend none of this happened."

Here she was trying to feel the slightest bit noble, to not go here again when it would only hurt them, and then he had to say something like that. Something that sounded so perfect that she was on the verge of doing something even more dangerous, even more foolish. Like forgive him. "Except that we already did. Look, we saved everyone including you from something horrible. Isn't that what we're supposed to do? Think of the rest of the world and not ourselves?"

"Maybe we can do both," Kal-El told her. "He spoke the truth, Lois. I left you to keep you safe, I took your memories to spare you pain, and I *was* a fool for doing both of those things. Doesn't what happened today prove I need you more than ever?"

That gave her enough courage to look up at him, those hazel eyes searching his eyes boldly. "Maybe, but for how long? And under what circumstances? What, until your father finds out? Until someone starts to guess? And then what? Will it be a year? A month? I guess it'll be a record, regardless, if it stands the light of day for longer than the last time." Lois gave a little laugh then. "Can't you just let me do this and let's go back to pretending? Do you think this has been any easier for me since that morning? Do you think it'll be easier now? Maybe if we just let it go, we can at least go back to this little dance of trying to be friends and act like the other doesn't know. I mean, we were actually pulling it off pretty well, weren't we?"

Such terrible grief in his eyes, regrets he could never take back. "No, we weren't. I can't go back, Lois, not now that I know you know, not after this. I can't pretend anymore. We're not just friends, we mean far more to each other than that." Kal-El lifted one hand to stroke her ruffled hair out of her eyes. "I promise you this, though. If my father has anything to say about it, I'll remind him that nothing he did or said could have helped me today, while you were here saving me. And at a price I never expected you to pay."

She frowned at him, unsure of what to do next. It didn't feel right to give in, to let the possibility of a second chance bloom, and yet she couldn't help wanting to reach for it. Those stolen days had been among the happiest she had known. It might seem romantic idiocy, but Lois found herself wanting to believe. Standing here in the doorway to her bathroom, both of them wrapped in bedclothes like embarrassed teenagers and after having some of the most intense sex she'd ever even dreamed, it seemed like it might even have a chance in hell of working. Pondering it a moment longer, she finally spoke, the barest smile on her lips. "I've done worse things than sleep with you in my lifetime. And I have to say, driving you back sane this way has its advantages."

"Maybe it does. You've seen the worst in me, and you still love me." He smiled then, some of the sadness leaving him, and kissed her forehead. "And I love you, Lois. Always have, always will."

"Slow down. Don't get all starry-eyed just yet." Her words were cautious, although she couldn't quite conceal the way her smile was growing. "We both know it's not gonna be that easy. So let's just say that we'll try. There's no real harm in just trying, right? At least that way I'll get the 411 faster if we're actually talking about something other than office babble. Might just be able to nip this in the bud, next time. Before it gets dangerous for the rest of the world?" Now her lips were curved in the impish grin so typical of this teasing side of her. "Although, I promise not to use the kryptonite to win arguments. Or to bend you to my whims. What kind of girl would that make me?"

"Not the one I love, that's for sure. Though why you'd use kryptonite when you have so many better advantages, I'll never guess," Kal-El said with a grin, smoothing his hand down her back. A chance to try and work things out between them was all they needed.

And then he realized just how much of his doppelganger's mischief he still had to put to rights. "Oh, God, I have so much to do. Lois, I need a shower..."

That decided her, the distracted look on his face as the realities of his duties came back to mind. "So do I. And I don't see any reason not to share," she told him.

If Lois had any doubts about that other side of him being gone, they disappeared then. That slow, warm smile belonged solely to her Kal-El.