

Struggle

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© 12-Oct-07

Rating: K+

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Author's Notes: A birthday ficlet for clioidae. I hope you enjoy it! Thanks to mark_clark for the beta.

"What is your position on the new tax-?"

"Senator Chesterfield! How do you feel about your proposed running-?"

"Do you think our country is capable of extracting itself from the mess in-?"

The press conference had dissolved into chaos, the reporters from every paper in the area, as well as some of the bigger national news organizations. Questions tumbled over each other half-formed as each person tried to get in a parting shot.

"Senator!" Lois pushed her small body through the writhing mass of reporters, leaving Clark to make his way on his own. There was a definite advantage to being five foot five sometimes.

She popped out of the front of the crowd abruptly, hand furiously trying to flag the senator or his press secretary. Chesterfield suddenly turned toward her, indicating she could ask a final question.

She opened her mouth to speak. "Lois La-" Only at that moment did she realize his eyes were focused a foot above her head.

"Clark Kent, *Daily Planet*." Lois turned to look up at him, aghast he was already at her side. Clark cleared his throat and shifted his over wide tie before continuing smoothly, "Senator Chesterfield, what is your connection with Lex Luthor? Is he funding your campaign?"

A sudden chorus of shocked murmurs erupted all around them. *Dammit, Clark! That was my question to ask! Teach me to discuss anything with you beforehand...* she fumed.

But Lois had to admit that the question, asked in Clark's mild tone, had a much greater impact. The senator opened and closed his mouth a few times before responding, "There *is* no connection between Luthor and myself, and there never will be." He shot a glare at both Lois *and* Clark before addressing the crowd again. "That will be all the questions today, ladies and gentlemen of the press. Thank you, and have a good day." He turned on his heel, followed a few moments later by his dumbstruck entourage.

Lois started off after them, ditching her press pass and already twisting her hair into a severe chignon to blend in. She had just caught the door to the exit hallway swinging behind the last staff member when a large hand settled on the crook of her arm.

She shook it off, using her other elbow to hold the door open... but the hand wouldn't let go. She turned to see Clark's pleading eyes. "Let it go, Lois. There's always next time."

"I will *not* let it go!" she hissed, trying once again to shake him. "Chesterfield will not lie to the press and get away with it!"

"He won't get away with it," Clark murmured earnestly, inexorably pulling her away from the door. Damn, he was stronger than he looked! His hand slid farther down her forearm as she struggled ineffectively to get out of his grasp. "That little seed of doubt will shoot through the cracks in his shaky lead... we'll all know the truth soon enough."

"But I-"

"-would only raise questions about your journalistic integrity. It's too public, Lois." His hand had slipped into hers, and he squeezed it in a gesture of finality.

Lois' eyes widened at the sudden tingle in her palm, and she snatched it out of his, scowling. Turning away from the hurt look Clark wasn't able to hide very well, she peeked through the crack in the door one more time. The senator's entourage was well down the hallway... there would be no way to catch them unnoticed.

Lois swore under her breath for a moment. She had been hoping to get a better angle, and that was all shot to hell now. "I hope you're happy," she managed after letting out an exasperated breath.

"Don't worry, Lois." He tilted his head and smiled slyly, gesturing with his eyes toward another doorway. "I know a back entrance." Clark started walking in that direction without another word.

Lois recovered quickly and sped off after her partner, her frustration dimming slightly. Clark was always surprising her lately - she hadn't quite gotten used to it. Ever since Perry had put them back together as a reporting team, Clark was displaying a large amount of... chutzpah...? Initiative...? Backbone...? Whatever it was, even if it was putting her off balance, it was definitely helping them get the stories.

Clark was moving quickly, but not so quickly that Lois had to run to catch him. He somehow was able to slide easily through the crowds of reporters that were leaving the room, leading her out into the main hotel foyer. She started to shout for him not to leave her behind, but just then he glanced back, catching her eye. It was probably not a good idea anyway, the less attention they attracted, the better.

He led her unerringly through a maze of hallways. *Some back entrance*, she scoffed silently. After a trip of a couple of flights of stairs, Clark had paused beside the door to one of the hotel's business suites.

Trying not to huff and puff too loudly, Lois crept up beside him, and mouthed, "Can you hear anything?"

Clark held up by hand to forestall any further questions. His eyes narrowed, and then he took a breath to speak.

But before he had even said a single word, he suddenly tensed, his eyes widening in shock.

"Clark - what?" she asked quietly, eyebrows drawing down in concern.

Lois never got a chance to find out what he had heard, because the floor beneath her feet began to churn and she stumbled, grabbing blindly at the first thing within reach - Clark's arm. "Oh, my God! Another earthquake!?" she cried futilely. Cries of panic started to fill the hallway as people stumbled out of their rooms. "We've got to get out of here!"

Lois ran for the stairwell, but immediately realized that Clark was not behind her. Instead, he was turned away from her, making his way up the hall, instead of toward the exits, pushing against the flow of traffic.

"Clark!" she yelled frantically. Lois staggered up to him, grabbing his arm. He seemed to feel it no more than a fly landing on his arm. "Where the hell are you going?!" Lois tugged with all her meager strength, hands slipping down to his wrist.

Only then did he turn back to her, the skin-on-skin contact snapping him back to her reality. "Lois, I-"

Suddenly, a deafening crash sounded above their heads, and Lois was thrown backward onto the carpet runner. Clark somehow kept his feet, but she only saw him for a second as a massive amount of debris crashed through the ceiling. A chunk of plaster struck her a glancing blow, and she covered her face reflexively with both arms.

When she uncovered her eyes again, she was met with a huge pile of rubble exactly where Clark had been standing only a minute before. "Clark!" No longer caring at all for her own safety, she tried to heave pieces out of the way. *Maybe it's not too late...*

One of the larger pieces tumbled out of her grimy hands as she found herself sailing into the air above the hotel. Immediately she realized what was happening, but for once the blue spandex encircling her wasn't comforting at all.

Lois struggled desperately, choking still on the dust that had filled her lungs. "No! Clark's back there!" She coughed, and spit grit from her mouth. "I'm fine! You have to go back for him!"

Superman sailed on - had he heard her? Was he distracted by the disaster all around? It didn't matter. She struggled even harder, hands clenching around the palm supporting her waist. His head snapped around to look at her, seeming to finally realize what she was saying. "Clark will be fine. I need to get you to safety."

"No, he won't! I think he's trapped under a pile of rubble! It'll take rescue workers forever to find him!" Lois' voice started to become shrill. "Only I know exactly where he is." Even though it was futile, Lois' nails dug into his unbreakable skin. "Take me back, goddammit!"

But even as she swore, he was swiveling in mid-air, rushing back toward the hotel. She couldn't enjoy the sensation of flight, the feeling of being held by her former lover... all she could hear in her mind was Clark's earnest voice. *"Don't worry, Lois."*

Heart pounding, she held Superman's hand in a more comforting grip. *Please let him be okay, please...*

At that moment, Superman's hand gently squeezed hers back, and he murmured those very words:

"Don't worry, Lois."

She gasped at the timbre of his voice, now so familiar to her again... her eyes met his, and the tingles spread outward from his palm to hers... and she knew she needn't worry.

Ever again.