

A Box of Swiss Chocolates

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Summary: Forrest Gump said, "Life is a box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get." Kiley Kent finds out this is certainly true when she starts dating Swiss chocolate shop owner — Larry Luthor!

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Kiley Kent put the finishing touches on her latest painting. It was an oil—based piece, showing the heroism, horror and pain of war. She often painted "happier subjects," not wanting to dwell on somber issues like this one. But this subject was important to her as well, particularly after helping survivors of the latest war, in South America, as Superwoman. She wondered if this painting would sell as well as her others had. People were used to bright, happy paintings when they came to Kiley Kent's openings.

She stroked her long brown hair absentmindedly as she began to put away her supplies and clean up her studio a bit. It was a bright room with lots of windows and hardwood floors. Of course, she could put things away at super—speed, and she did that occasionally when she was in a hurry. But Kiley preferred to clean up and put away her things at normal speed. It gave her time to relax, especially after working on an intense, detailed painting.

Kiley was doing remarkably well as an artist, especially since she had only finished college three years ago. So well that she could actually make her income solely on the sales and promotions of her paintings. Therefore, she could choose when she wanted to work on her paintings and when she wanted to take a break. This arrangement came in very handy when she needed to be Superwoman.

Actually, she couldn't really believe she was doing so well. She remembered the years before, when everyone expected the oldest child of Lois Lane and Clark Kent to become a reporter. Her third grade teacher had scolded her for her lack of writing skills. "You must not be trying hard enough! Any child with the name 'Kent' can write better than that!" Her middle school and high school teachers had almost demanded she join the school paper, saying they needed an asset like her to make it succeed. She snorted. Of course, that only made her want less to do with writing than she had to begin with, which wasn't very much. Fortunately neither of her parents had been upset that she wasn't 'following in their footsteps.' Apparently her mother had received that kind of pressure from Grandpa Lane, and she couldn't do that to her daughter. Her father had always supported whatever his children wanted to do, as long as it was ethical. Of course, she was following in her father's footsteps with his "other job."

Kiley finished cleaning up and surveyed the room, satisfied. Her studio was attached to her apartment, for which she was grateful. For one, it meant she didn't have to share it with anyone. That made changing into Superwoman so much easier. The arrangement also made it easier because she didn't have to transport across town in order to "go to work." That meant she could work as early or as late as she wanted. Secondly, she was a rather quiet person who preferred to work alone. She was very

shy about showing her paintings with others until they were finished. Even her parents, who were always supportive, rarely saw her paintings until they were finished.

So, now that this painting was done, she needed to put it on the list for her next show. Hopefully, people wouldn't be too bothered by it. 'When was her next show, anyway?' she wondered, looking at her calendar. June 29th, exactly one month from today. Was there enough time to call the gallery today, or should she wait until tomorrow? Kiley sighed and used her X—ray vision to check the time. She didn't have a clock in her studio because she didn't want to be distracted by time while she was working on her paintings. When she needed to know the time, she simply looked through the wall and looked at the clock inside her apartment. It was 6:00 PM. Was that too late to call Mr. Grant? Probably, but you never know. She sighed and exited the studio, satisfied that it was clean again. Then, entering her living room, she picked up her phone. There was no reason why she couldn't try to reach him, anyway.

The phone was answered on one ring. "Metropolis Art Gallery," a familiar voice said into the phone.

"Hello, Mr. Grant, this is Kiley Kent," she told him politely.

"Hello Miss Kent!" Mr. Grant replied enthusiastically. "To what do I owe the pleasure of talking to my gallery's best artist?"

"I just thought I let you know I finished another painting that you can put on my list for the June 29th opening. I'm calling it 'War's Honor and Grief.'"

There was a pause. "Ummm," Mr. Grant stammered. "That's a different kind of painting than we usually get from you, but um, okay, I'll put it on the list."

"Thank you, Mr. Grant," Kiley replied, then hung up the phone, looking around her living room. It was a pretty room, decorated in blue and purple. A few of her favorite paintings hung on the walls. One was a bright sun, covering the entire canvas. The sun had a special meaning to her, because it gave her, her father and her siblings their special powers. Another was a painting of her family. Her father had his arms wrapped around her mother. Her brother, Thomas, stood beside both of them. Almost as tall as Dad, Thomas had Mom's hair and Dad's facial expressions. Kiley and her sister, Alice, sat in chairs in the front. While she had brown hair, a shade between her mother's and her father's, Alice had inherited blond hair from Grandma and Grandpa Lane. Both the girls had their mother's facial expressions, however. She found it very special that she had painted her family portrait herself, even though she had copied the painting from a photograph because she had wanted to be in the portrait as well.

Thinking back to her new painting, 'War's Honor and Grief,' Kiley paused. Maybe she should start to do other paintings like that when it was appropriate. She didn't realize how much painting the battles, injuries, the destruction of life, and deaths would help her work through her feelings about that war. She always liked to keep a positive attitude, and that attitude was reflected in her bright, happy paintings. But a person didn't live as she did, seeing disasters, crime, and terror without being affected. Perhaps this was one reason why her father often reported Superman stories. It was his way of working through the pain of hard situations. Her paintings could help her that way, too.

Thinking of her parents, she realized she needed to change her clothes. They had wanted her to come to dinner at the house tonight. That meant she should probably wear an outfit not completely covered with paint, Kiley thought, grinning. After quickly changing into a green top and tan pants, she spun into her Superwoman suit and prepared to fly to Hyperion Avenue. Her outfit was blue, much like her father's, although a lighter shade, and she completed the look with a yellow cape and yellow boots as well.

However, as it was commonly known in the Kent household, a superhero's work was never done. On her way over, she noticed a thug attacking a young woman. She quickly defused the situation and sent the scumbag to the police station. She often wondered why people had to attack others like that. Then she remembered her family and how they were doing their part to help. She smiled.

Kiley landed at super-speed, so no one would see her touch down, in the backyard behind the fence. She knocked on the door. Her brother Thomas, who had also been invited for the evening, answered the door. Thomas was two years younger than she was and had moved out to their grandparents' farm after finishing college at Kansas State. Grandpa Kent had welcomed his assistance on the farm. He was getting too old to do the work himself, but with Thomas's assistance, he could still do some farming. Grandpa and Grandma Kent had been invited for the night as well, but the elder Kents had opted to spend some time alone instead.

"Hey, Kiley!" he greeted her. "Dad's got dinner all set. Come in."

Everyone else was already seated at the table. "Sorry I'm a little late," Kiley apologized. "I was, you know," she explained, making the famous Kent hand signal for "superhero business." Everyone nodded, understanding. It went with the territory in their family.

"So, the steak looks great, dad!" she exclaimed. Then she took a sip of milk. "And, of course, Mom sure can pour milk!" she added, and everyone laughed. Everyone in the Kent family knew that Lois couldn't cook. From the time they were small, Mom's 'duty' in making dinner was to pour the milk because she hadn't wanted to be left out of the preparation.

"Well, the meal wouldn't be complete without it!" Mom laughed as well, enjoying her close—knit family's teasing.

"Of course it wouldn't, honey," Dad agreed, kissing her hand. Mom smiled at him.

Kiley sighed. Her parents had always been openly affectionate toward each other. She used to be embarrassed by it when she was younger. These days, she understood a little better, particularly because of her activities as Superwoman. As much as she appreciated her family's support and her recent understanding that painting could help her through trauma, she wished she had someone close to be with, like her father did. Would true love ever come?

"So, Thomas," she said, trying to draw her mind to more pleasant thoughts, "how are things in Smallville?"

"Pretty good," Thomas replied. "I'm glad to be done with college so I can really start farming. I'm showing Grandpa some of the new techniques they taught us in college, as well as handling the more physical jobs around the farm. And he's teaching me how his land works. I hate leaving him alone when I have to be Whirlwind, though."

Whirlwind was Thomas's superhero persona. His suit was green, with lots of swirls on his costume. However, since he lived in Smallville now, his 'superhero business' usually consisted of bigger accidents and disasters that were announced on LNN. He had, however, been known to stop an occasional smaller-time criminal in the area.

"Don't worry about that, Thomas," Dad told him gently. "Your grandpa is just glad you're out there so he can still do a little farming. Besides," he chuckled. "Apparently my parents still like time alone." He stressed the last word.

"It must be something in this family," Alice grumbled, looking accusingly at Mom and Dad. Alice was only seventeen, and she had not yet reached the "understanding" about her parents' open affection.

"So, how is your painting going, Kiley?" Mom asked, apparently deciding to change the subject.

"Well," Kiley replied. "I just finished a new one today. It's a little different than my usual stuff. I'm calling it 'War, Honor and Grief.' It's kind of my reaction to the war in South America where I helped with the relief effort. I'm actually thinking of doing others if I get in to another situation like that. It helped with my pain."

Everyone nodded. "That's good Kiley. You need to have a release like that. I worry that you kids are taking too much on sometimes," Dad commented seriously.

Everyone rolled their eyes. Dad was so overprotective! "We'll be fine, Dad," all the kids said at once.

"So, what's going on in the newsroom?" Thomas asked. Living in Smallville, he didn't see his parents often, although he could fly over whenever he needed to see them. Still, he liked to hear what was going on in his parents' lives.

"Well, we're trying to figure out what's going on with the city council," Mom replied. "It seems some people are noticing they're not spending as much money on the city as they usually do. But we're still paying the same amount of taxes. So they must be using it for something else. Something personal, maybe even illegal. It will be a great story." Mom was getting excited, the way she always did when she was in pursuit of something big.

"That story could take a while to come together though," Dad continued. "So Jim's got us on other stories as well." Jim "Jimmy" Olsen had become the editor of the Daily Planet after Perry had passed away. Perry had wanted to give the job to Lois or Clark, but they wanted to remain work partners, having had a bad experience with Lois as the editor several years before. Perry had considered appointing them co-editors-in-chief, but the 'suits upstairs' would not pay two editor-in-chief salaries. So Jimmy, who had become a reporter and a well-known photographer in the last few years before Perry died, had taken the job. After all, Jimmy was the other member of Perry's Planet "family," and the only other person he really trusted. And thus "Jimmy" had become "Jim."

"We know you'll get it eventually. You always do," Kiley told them, realizing they needed some support to complete a long investigation. It was nice to encourage her parents the same way they had always encouraged her and her siblings.

"Thanks Kiley," Mom replied.

"So, are you ready for your senior year, Alice?" Dad asked, realizing everyone had talked about what was going on in their lives except her.

"Sure, Dad. You know I'm on the honor roll at school. I should be able to get some scholarships for college easily," she commented, shrugging. Alice was serious about her studies, tending to be a perfectionist like Mom. But she also had a very casual attitude about school, because she wasn't sure what her 'purpose' in life was yet. Mom and Dad had both wanted to be reporters since at least high school. Thomas had wanted to take over Grandpa Kent's farm since he was five years old. Kiley had not found her passion for painting until she was in college, as that was when most of Metropolis had stopped 'strongly encouraging' her to pursue a career in journalism. But she had begun to develop an interest in art when she was in her junior and senior years.

Alice had interned at the Daily Planet last year. She thought it was okay, but she wasn't sure that was what she wanted to do for a living. She did know that she wasn't going to live in Smallville like Thomas, though. It was too quiet there.

The family continued to "catch up" on smaller matters and otherwise enjoy each other's company. They had always been a close family, especially since Dad was finally able to tell all of them about his alter-ego and their heritage. But since Kiley no longer lived at home and Thomas had moved to Smallville, they didn't see each other every day. So Mom and Dad liked to schedule "family dinners" every couple of weeks were they could

all be together again.

Clark was glad that these family dinners were going so well. After Kiley and Thomas moved out, he was afraid that their family would go apart. But they were just as close as they ever were. Clark was overjoyed when Dr. Klien had found a way for he and Lois to have children, and he valued his relationship with them.

He was, however, glad that his oldest children had found their niches in life, like he had found his in writing, even though he didn't see them every day. Thomas was happy in Smallville. And his Kiley was doing wonderfully as a painter. He hoped Alice would find her way in life as well, but she had plenty of time.

Kiley and Thomas also assisted him in superhero activity, which he was immensely proud of. He hadn't wanted to force any of his children to adopt the kind of lifestyle he had, but they accepted it without question, even though he knew it was hard on them sometimes. Lois said it wasn't surprising, considering they had the same gentle, kind personality that he had. Of course, he told Lois she had just as much effect on their young superheroes that he had. Lois had the same desire to make a difference in the world he and the children had. And her insistence that the children drink milk, he grinned inwardly, certainly improved their health.

Lois. He loved her so. Clark was so glad he and Lois were still happily married. They had a relationship, a partnership, like his parents had. Speaking of which...

As Kiley and Thomas took off, he wrapped his arms around Lois. "We've got some great kids."

She wrapped her arms around his neck. "I know. Hey, thanks for the chocolate cake. It brought back memories and was delicious."

"I was hoping you'd remember that kind of cake. It completed a great first date." They kissed.

In the next room, Alice pretended not to notice her parents. That lasted until Lois and Clark sat down next to her. "What are you watching?" Lois asked innocently.

"I was trying to watch 'Time of Day,'" Alice replied with a hint of a grudge.

Clark smiled again. He knew Alice would grow up eventually. She was already shaping out to be a little Lois, complete with perfectionism, impatience, and a loud personality. That of course, was something of a contrast to his other daughter, Kiley, who was so patient and quiet.

Although he loved all of his children, and was proud of all their accomplishments, he had to admit he shared a special bond with Kiley. Their personalities were so similar, so they understood each other extremely well. And he and Kiley shared the superhero duties in Metropolis, often working together in big disasters like fires, bombs, and bridge collapses. He was glad she had found an outlet to some of the pain she experienced through her painting. He hoped, however, that someday she would find the constant support from someone like Lois. As he thought this, he took Lois's hand and kissed it. She smiled at him.

And Alice groaned again.

Kiley flew back to her apartment, smiling. It was so nice to see everyone again. They had finished their dinner with a dessert of chocolate cake. Kiley grinned. There was nothing like Dad's chocolate cake to make a Kent Family Dinner perfect. Of course, Mom thought so, too, naturally. Actually, she always seemed to get sentimental when Dad served that kind of cake, for some reason. It probably had something to do with their courtship. Dad was sentimental enough about those things stuff that he would bake a cake just to remind Mom about it. It was a good thing Alice hadn't noticed Mom's sentimental attitude. She sighed and decided to read her new book.

The next morning, Kiley got up and ate a quick breakfast. Then, she suddenly felt like she hadn't had enough chocolate. She felt a sudden desire for real Swiss chocolate. She visited Switzerland for chocolate at least once a month. Sometimes there was just no substitute for the real stuff. And even though she had just eaten Dad's chocolate cake last night, this was one of those times. She flew off to Switzerland.

Once again, Kiley touched down in an alley faster than a normal human eye could see. She didn't have any preferences on which chocolate shop she used. They all sold the same stuff, and that's what counted. So she walked about two blocks in the small city before spotting a place called "The Choco Bean." They had lots of choices, including fudge, chocolate candies, brownies, truffles, and variations of each in milk chocolate, dark chocolate, and nutty chocolates. She finally decided on a box which had all the varieties of chocolate candies. Once she picked up a box of chocolates, she quickly went to the cash register.

Then she took a step back. Standing behind the cash register was the most handsome man she had ever seen. He had bright blond hair, a long pointy nose, and deep brown eyes. Kiley blinked a few times. Just in time, she remembered to speak Swiss German, as this was the language of the area. "Uh...hi. I'd just...like to buy...these chocolates," she stammered. This whole situation was catching her off — balance.

"Sure," the man replied in the same language, although did she detect a soft accent? "I just had these made yesterday," he said, gesturing toward her box of chocolates which he was ringing up.

"That's great! There's nothing like real fresh Swiss chocolate!" Kiley exclaimed. She had hit the jackpot today!

The man grinned. "I have them made every three days, at 7:00 AM, if you want them as fresh as they come."

Kiley made a mental note to come to this chocolate shop whenever she wanted Swiss chocolate.

"By the way," he added, "My name is Larry. I'm the owner." Kiley nodded. She would remember that. "And I'm Kiley."

Over the next two weeks, Kiley bought boxes of chocolate even more frequently than usual. In fact, she found herself coming almost every other day. Actually, she was lucky she burned so many calories when she was flying or she might not fit into her spandex, since it turns out Kent children did have to worry about them. And she was a lot more particular about which chocolate shop she went to as well. She told herself that the chocolate at Larry's chocolate shop was just better than anything she had ever tasted. After all, he said he made it fresh every three days, right? The problem with that argument was she was only happy when she was waited on by Larry himself.

In fact, Kiley remembered what happened when she came in yesterday.

(flashback)

She had cheerfully flown to Switzerland and strolled into The Choco Bean. She picked up her favorite box of chocolate and strolled over to the cash register. But instead of Larry standing behind it, there was a shorter guy with sandy — colored hair.

Kiley took a step back as was about to place her chocolates on the counter. "Where's Larry?" she asked in Swiss German, a little snappish.

"Oh, he has the day off today," the man behind the counter answered in the same language. He shrugged and reached for the box.

Kiley stopped him. "When will he be in again?" she demanded.

The man behind the counter looked confused. "I think he'll be in tomorrow."

Kiley looked at the chocolates, then at the man. "I think I'll just wait until tomorrow, then."

"But ma'am, I can ring up your chocolates just as easily."

"If it's all the same to you, I'll be leaving now," she replied, fed—up with dealing with this man. She put the chocolates back on the shelf and left the store.

Behind her, the man looked bewildered. What had he done to offend that woman?

Meanwhile Kiley flew off, confused. What had happened there? Why was it so important that Larry wait on her to receive her chocolates? Okay, so he was handsome, but she had met a lot of handsome men, and they didn't affect her like that! Besides, she really shouldn't have taken it out on that poor man! Her personality had always been somewhat quiet and patient, qualities needed for the detailed artwork she painted. But maybe she had more of her mother's famous temper and impatience than she had thought. Tomorrow, when she saw Larry, she would make sure to tell him his employee hadn't done anything wrong.

(end flashback)

Kiley strolled into the chocolate shop at 7:15 in the morning Eastern Standard Time. To her relief, Larry stood behind the counter. She picked up the chocolates and headed to him.

He smiled at her. "So I hear you were looking for me?" he said in Swiss German as he picked up the box.

Kiley blushed. "Uh...yeah, I guess. I wanted to tell you to that the employee that I snapped at yesterday didn't do anything wrong. I shouldn't have taken it out on him. Please let him know I'm sorry."

Larry read between the lines. "So does this mean that you missed me?" He smiled.

"Weeeelllll, um, yeah, I guess," Kiley replied nervously.

"I miss you, too, Kiley, on the days when you don't come in," Larry told her gently.

She smiled at him.

"Well, then I thought maybe you'd like to go to dinner with me when I get off work at 6:00PM," Larry suggested bravely.

Kiley paused for a second. 6:00PM here was 12:00PM in Metropolis. Was that too early for her to eat a big dinner?

"Or if you don't like that idea we could do something else," Larry said quickly, seeing her hesitation. "Or we could keep hoping to run into each other in The Choco Bean," he added, chuckling.

Kiley chuckled as well. "No, I uh...think dinner is fine," she replied. All she had to do was fly at superspeed to burn off the calories, anyway. Besides, she didn't have a set time to get up tomorrow did she?

"Let's meet here at 6:00, then." With that, Larry rang up the chocolates and she paid for them.

Kiley then left the store. But instead of flying right home, she paused. The Swiss Alps would make some wonderful paintings. Maybe she should go home and bring back some of her art supplies with her.

So Kiley flew home and picked up her sketchpad and a few pencils; she figured she'd sketch what she wanted to paint first.

Maybe she'd sit at the Swiss National Park. It was not far from here and she was sure it had some great views.

One hour later, Kiley was in her "painting clothes" sitting on the lower level of the park. Even though she wasn't painting right now, they came in handy because she wouldn't have to worry if she got grass or mud stains on them.

She could easily get to the upper level of the mountain if she wanted, but she didn't want people to wonder how she could without a guide or good hiking shoes.

Kiley sketched for a couple of hours. There was nothing so fulfilling to her than starting a new painting. Looking at the breathtaking beauty in front of her, she wondered if she would be able to capture it on canvas when the time came.

As she carefully penciled in one of the birds flying near the

mountains, she paused. What was the time? She had forgotten that she needed to pay attention to her time today. She sighed. Once again, she hadn't thought about time at all because of her art. She had conditioned herself not to pay attention to time while she was painting, and now it backfired.

Besides, she thought as she got up, still needed to go home and get ready. She certainly couldn't go to dinner in this outfit!

She quickly grabbed her sketches and pencils. Then glancing around and realizing there was no one to be seen, she took off as fast as she could.

When Kiley got home, she realized she had left so quickly, she had forgotten to change into Superwoman. She was really getting careless. Of course, since she had flown faster than a normal human eye could see, it was not likely to be a problem, but still! What if she had needed to perform a rescue?

Okay what was the time, anyway? 9:15 in the morning. That was plenty of time. Maybe she'd go back to sketching, after all.

As she prepared to leave again, she stopped herself. 10:15 in the morning was 3:15 in Larry's section of the world. She needed to get ready. She was really going to have to get the hang of this time zone stuff if she wanted to date him!

Then Kiley paused. Date? Had she just said date? They were just going to dinner, right? She rolled her eyes at herself. He had said he missed her. And she was picking out one of her nicer skirts. Of course it was a date!

Fortunately, she had enough time to get ready at normal speed. She had used enough super-speed tonight when she was flying earlier. Or was it this afternoon? Whatever!

She jumped into the shower. At least she should wash off the dirt she had gotten all over herself this afternoon. The shower took about fifteen minutes without super-speed.

After getting out of the shower, she put on a simple black skirt. Was the skirt too short for a first date? How about the blue skirt? But that didn't go as well with this blouse! What about this one, she asked herself, taking out a light blue blouse. No that was too much blue! The grey skirt? And the black blouse? She looked again. She supposed that was okay.

What about makeup? Should she wear makeup as well? Kiley didn't wear makeup very often, but she did have some to wear to her openings. She sighed. How dressed up should she be? Would Larry think she was overdoing it?

In the end, Kiley left the makeup on her dresser, unused. Now what about her hair? Should she wear it up? Or just brush it down the way she normally wore it? Would Larry prefer to see it the same way he always saw her, or a different look?

She tried putting her hair in a French twist. Did that look right with this outfit? Or how about braids? Or should she just wear it normally, she wondered again, putting her hair back down at its normal length, halfway down her back.

How much time did she have left? She checked her clock. Only ten minutes left! Of course, she could fly fast enough to get there on time, but she still wasn't ready! What about shoes? Should she wear black? Or white? Definitely black. What about these? Or the black with the frills on them? No, that was too much. Ahhhhhhhhhh!

Eventually, Kiley decided to wear plain black shoes and let her hair down her back like she usually did. But she had to leave now. She only had five minutes left! She quickly spun into her Superwoman outfit. (She wasn't going to make the same mistake again!) Then she flew out the door.

Unfortunately for Kiley, a superhero's work is never done. While she was halfway there, in London, she spotted a hostage situation that was definitely out of control. Even though she knew she would be late, she couldn't let this situation go.

A half hour later, the police finally had the situation under control. But she was late! Would Larry even still be waiting for her at his chocolate shop? He probably thought she had stood him

up! She flew off, faster than the eye could see.

Two minutes later, Kiley landed in an empty alley near the near the chocolate shop. Then she spun into her "date" outfit and strolled over to the front door.

The store was all closed up. And Larry was nowhere to be seen. She sighed. He really thought she had stood him up. Maybe it was no big deal. She really didn't know much about him, anyway. All she knew is that he owned this chocolate shop that sold the best Swiss chocolate she had ever tasted. And that he was really handsome, she added to herself, conjuring up a mental image of his face. And that he was fun to talk to, she thought to herself, remembering their conversations as she came into buy chocolate.

In fact, Kiley remembered one conversation particularly last week. She had just picked up her favorite chocolates and headed to the cash register.

(flashback)

"Hi!" Larry exclaimed. "Glad to see you again!"

"You too," Kiley replied cheerfully. She set her chocolates on the counter.

"So, I hope you don't mind my asking this, but how do you eat so much chocolate and still stay thin?" He asked, looking appreciatively at her trim waistline.

"Well, I work out quite a bit," she replied grinning. Of course, the Kents had long since realized that flying, especially when done at superspeed, was excellent exercise.

"Well, I'd be interested to hear how you do it." Larry grinned as well.

Kiley wondered what he would say if she told him she "did it" by flying! "Oh, you know, just general exercise." She shrugged. Her parents had taught her how to be vague with such questions. "I think you look pretty good as it is, anyway."

"Thanks, but I'd never be able to eat that much chocolate. I love my chocolate shop, but sometimes the stuff is so tempting, you know?"

"I can imagine," said Kiley. Suddenly they both picked up her box of chocolates at the same time. "Opps!" she exclaimed, handing it to him. "Go ahead and ring it up."

"Ah, yeah, sure." Larry blushed. Then he rang up the chocolates and handed them to her.

Kiley left the store slightly off—balance. That was certainly an interesting encounter.

(end flashback)

Yeah, Kiley said to herself, he definitely was fun to talk to. And why was it that her hand got slightly tingly when she had touched him? She sighed again. Well, it looked like there was going to be no date tonight, no matter what she wanted. Stupid superhero business! She walked around the outside of the store, feeling defeated.

Ten minutes later, she wondered if she should just fly home. What was she waiting for, anyway? She could always just come back to buy chocolates tomorrow. Assuming Larry would be there tomorrow, she sighed, remembering her encounter with the other employee.

Just as she was about to leave, she saw Larry walking toward his store. He stopped suddenly when he saw Kiley. "So, I guess you decided to show up after all, huh?" he asked, annoyed.

"Yes, of course I did!" Kiley took a deep breath. She needed to get this right if she wanted him to stay with her. "I was just held up for a while! Look, I really was looking forward to going to dinner with you. Please give me another chance."

Larry paused for a minute, thinking. "Okay," he said finally. "Just let me pick up my record book inside," he commented, gesturing toward the store. "That's actually why I came back, although I guess it was a good thing." He chuckled.

Kiley chuckled as well. It was nice that he had decided to give her another chance. "I guess we have to thank your forgetfulness, huh?" she asked him as they both walked back into the chocolate shop.

"Yeah, forgetfulness does have its uses sometimes." Larry picked up his report book and they left the store.

"So where do you want to go to eat?" Kiley asked as they walked.

"I was thinking of this little family place around the corner here," he replied. With that, they both walked toward the restaurant.

A half hour later, they were happily munching on the food. Kiley decided on the wurstsalat, which was apparently salad with sausage mixed in. It was definitely interesting. Although she often came to Switzerland for chocolate, she didn't usually have dinner here. Still, she was used to international foods.

Larry decided on the sauerkraut. It was a traditional dish, complete with meat and potatoes.

"So," Kiley suddenly said. "I hope you don't mind that I ask, but I detect a soft accent in your Swiss German. Is it not your native language?"

Larry was surprised. There weren't many people who would be able to detect his accent. "Um, well," he stammered. "Are you sure?"

"No, I'm not positive," Kiley replied slowly. "But I do have a good ear for languages and dialects, so I'm pretty sure. Does it bother you?"

He sighed in defeat. "You're right, Swiss German isn't really my native language. And I guess it does bother me a little. My mother, and uh, certain others," he said vaguely, "raised me on English," he continued. "But Mother used to lecture me on making my accent not show when I was speaking Swiss German. She wanted me to blend in, you see, so people wouldn't know I wasn't a native Swiss."

Kiley nodded, remembering her parents lecturing her to not use her strength and other powers when she was younger. She had to 'blend in,' too.

"Well, that's interesting!" Kiley exclaimed, switching to speaking English. "Because English is my native language, too. Actually, I grew up in Metropolis."

Larry spat out his food. This just kept getting worse. How was he going to have a relationship with someone from Metropolis?

"Do you have a problem with Metropolis?" Kiley asked, surprised by his reaction.

"No, of course not," Larry replied, a little too quickly. And he didn't really, although he could do without the two superheroes that made their home there. It was more like Metropolis had a problem with him. "So, why are you in Switzerland, anyway?"

"Oh." Kiley paused for a second. She certainly couldn't tell him she only flew in to see him and buy his chocolates! Then she remembered what she had spent this afternoon doing. "Well, I'm an artist, actually. I'm here to do some paintings of the scenery around here."

"Oh, really?" Larry replied, somewhat interested. "Maybe you could show me some of your work."

Kiley nodded. "I'll show you some of my finished work sometime." While she wasn't willing to show her works-in-progress, she appreciated that he wanted to see some of her paintings.

They finished their dinner, and Larry paid for their meals. "Ah...listen...I'd...like to give you my business card. You know, so you can call me if you want. Or if you know you're going to be late again."

Kiley blushed a little and nodded. It would be nice to be able to call him. But she felt a little guilty letting him believe tonight's situation could have been solved if she had called him.

Slowly, Larry withdrew his business card from his pocket. "My home number is on the back," he added before handing it to her.

Kiley looked at the business card and almost fainted when she saw, written in Swiss German:

Larry Luthor "The Choco Bean" (1)

54 Whintle Street

Zurich Switzerland 8019

Phone: (01) — 555 — 9989

Fax: (01) — 555 — 9989

LL@chocobean.com

The next day, Kiley looked through her sketches of some of the Alps. Not bad, but maybe she should go back later today to draw some more.

She sighed. Back to Switzerland. That was the whole problem right there, wasn't it? Should she go back? Should she see Larry again? Should she call him? His last name was Luthor, which gave her the creeps. Did that mean he was related to Lex Luthor? Maybe his son?

A person didn't grow up in Metropolis without hearing all the evil things that Lex Luthor had done to the city, although he had died long before she had been born. And didn't he have another son, too? Someone she seemed to remember that had tried to briefly take his father's place in Metropolis. He turned out to be a bad seed, too, if she recalled correctly. So, in that case, were all Luthors bad?

Kiley causally stroked her canvas with her paint brush as she thought. She wasn't painting anything in particular right now. But she often played with paints while she was thinking. And given the fact that she had planned on painting this morning, it made sense that she seemed to be "doodling" with her paints. Her mother often buried herself in her work when she was upset or needed to think. She supposed she was doing the same thing, in a different way.

Speaking of her parents, maybe she should talk to them to get more information on Luthor and Son. If she remembered correctly, they had gotten a lot of the stories on him. Not that that was surprising. They got most of the "big stories" in the city, although they were not as aggressive in seeking them since having children.

Still, in some ways she was inclined to give Larry the benefit of doubt. After all, if he really was a bad guy, like his father and brother, why hadn't he tried to take over Metropolis as well? Maybe he wanted to run Switzerland instead? Yet, he didn't strike her as a power-hungry guy. She liked him. But should she like him?

She stroked her canvas with her paintbrush again. She would really like to at least go back and do some more sketches of the Alps. But to do that she would have to go to Switzerland again, and in her mind she already considered that "Larry's territory." Even if she never went near his chocolate shop, it was still "his." And that scared her.

Kiley put down her brush and left her studio, sighing. Maybe she should just get some information on Luthor through the internet. Then she wouldn't have to bother her parents. Seriously, how would she bring up the subject, anyway?

Heading toward her computer, she passed the box of chocolates she had bought yesterday. He really did sell great chocolate. She opened the box and ate one. Yeah, that's how it should taste. She imagined Larry behind the counter, smiling at her, and she sighed again. The chocolates were good, but they still reminded her of Larry. And that brought her back to her problem again. Could a Luthor be a good man? Who were these Luthors, anyway?

She sat down at the computer and got to work. There really was a lot of material. It seemed Lex Luthor jumped to his death

in 1994, off the end of his balcony on his penthouse. And then Mom and Dad revealed all of his criminal network over that summer. He had run almost all of Metropolis! Wait a minute! He had actually bombed the Daily Planet! She knew how much the Daily Planet meant to her parents. Not to mention Uncle Jim and Grandpa Perry. Lex Luthor had destroyed it.

But that wasn't all. Most surprising was that her mother had been engaged Lex Luthor at one time. It was just before he jumped to his death in 1994. The idea that her mother would ever consider marrying anyone but his father was appalling to her, especially considering how affectionate they were with each other.

Lex Luthor wasn't even done with Metropolis then. In 1995, he had 'risen from the dead!' Briefly, she wondered how that was even possible, before moving on. And then he kidnapped her mother when Mom was about to marry Dad! What was that all about, anyway? Where did her mother fit in Lex Luthor's criminal mind? What purpose was there? Was he obsessed with her? Or was he just using her? And if that was the case, did that mean Larry's interest in her was also unhealthy?

Larry seemed like a nice guy, but Lex Luthor had apparently fooled a lot of people, too. What if Larry was fooling her as well? What was she going to do?

Suddenly Kiley's super-hearing snapped on. There was a large warehouse on fire, and it was completely out of control. She spun into Superwoman and took off. Her father arrived shortly after she did. The two of them got the fire under control. Then they helped the Metropolis fire department put out the fire. When they were almost done, she suddenly heard someone moaning. She flew toward the sound. In the back of the building, there was a man being almost crushed by the rubble. "Dad, help me with this!" she called out. Understanding the situation, her father quickly removed the rubble so she could pick up the man. She flew him off to the hospital. Hopefully, he'd be okay. She sighed. Did they push the rubble onto him while they were putting out the fire? She hoped not.

When she left the hospital, Dad was waiting for her. "Thanks for the help." He sighed. "I don't know if I could have handled that myself."

She looked back at her father sadly. "Dad, do you think we caused that man's injury? I mean, we blew on the building pretty hard to stop the fire. We could have blown the rubble right on top of him! Why didn't we x-ray the building to make sure it was okay? We should have taken him out first!"

Her father placed his hands on her shoulders. "Kiley, the building was lined with lead! You can't use x-ray vision on lead! Besides, there is a good possibility that the rubble simply fell on top of him because of the fire, especially since it was burned. And we needed to put out the fire or he would have died, anyway."

Kiley sighed and checked the building quickly. He was right! She really had too much on her mind. She needed to put her problem with Larry aside. "I'm sorry, Dad. You're right."

Dad sighed again. "Kiley, are you okay? You wouldn't normally forget to check the building first."

Kiley paused. How was she supposed to answer that? She couldn't pretend nothing was wrong; her father already knew she was upset about something. But she wasn't ready to tell him about Larry yet.

"I'm trying to start a new painting of the Swiss Alps, and I'm having trouble putting it together," she replied finally. That was partly true.

Clark frowned. He knew that couldn't be the real reason. Kiley painted tough pieces all the time, and they didn't affect her concentration like that. If she was forgetting to use her x-ray vision on a rescue, this was serious.

Still, Kiley was obviously not willing to tell him what she

was really worried about. And as much as he wanted to help her, he couldn't force her to talk to him until she was ready. But maybe there was still something he could do for her. "Kiley how would you like to come over for dinner? It will get your mind off your problem."

She nodded. They both flew to Hyperion Avenue.

Lois was somewhat surprised when Clark arrived with Kiley as well. But she welcomed her daughter with open arms, just as Clark knew she would. Clark decided to make pot roast, knowing it was one of Kiley's favorite meals. Maybe that would make her feel better.

Soon, he was dishing the meal in to their plates. As Lois poured the milk, they accidentally bumped into each other. "Clark, watch it!" she exclaimed. Before the milk or the roast could land on the floor, he used super-speed to retrieve them. "Thanks, honey," Lois said as he put them back on the table. They shared a loving glance.

It was nice to spend time with her parents, and Alice as well. Dad had obviously made pot roast with her in mind. That was sweet of him. Some of her earlier tension was already disappearing.

"Guess what I did today?" Alice asked everyone excitedly.

They all shrugged their shoulders and indicated she should continue.

So Alice carried on with, "I went to the mall and I saw a band performance. It was a lot of fun. In fact, I'm thinking about taking up an instrument myself."

"That's great."

"I'm glad you had a great day."

"I hope you'll be able to do that, Alice."

They all congratulated and encouraged her in her new-found interest at once.

Kiley was a lot more relaxed now. "How's the paper going?" Kiley asked her parents. "We're still working on that corruption in city hall story," her mother replied. "It's hard to find anything concrete, but I know there's something there."

Dad nodded. "They don't seem to have enough money to operate, but the city's paying the same percentage that it always has. It just doesn't smell right. But it's hard to prove, because people argue that it's just an increase in expenses." He looked a little frustrated.

Kiley thought for a minute. "You guys have had a lot of stories where your theories are hard to prove, right?"

Her parents both nodded, wondering what brought this up.

"So is it better to go with your gut feeling or what the evidence seems to support?"

Her parents exchanged glances. Traditionally, Lois had always believed in gut feelings, while Clark believed in looking for proper evidence. But over the years, they understood the value of both tactics.

"It's really best to a little of both," Dad replied, grinning. "That's why it's nice to have a partner who looks at things a little differently." He smiled at Mom and rubbed her back.

Alice rolled her eyes.

Kiley sighed. That really didn't answer her question. Was it a good idea to trust Larry or not? She certainly couldn't ask a "partner" as Dad implied she should! She wasn't supposed to be thinking about this tonight, though!

She spent the rest of the evening spending time with her family. They ate, they laughed, and they watched old comedies. It was fun. Mom and Dad kept 'making eyes' at each other when they thought no one was looking. Alice grumbled when she saw them. Kiley remained quiet, but it only served to remind her that they had something she was lacking.

When she went home, she looked at her box of chocolates again. Wasn't there a saying about chocolates? Something about

never being certain what you were going to get? And that was like life? (2) She opened the box and ate one. Then she paused. That really didn't apply to someone who had x-ray vision. As long as that person remembered how to use the vision, that is.

The next day, Kiley decided to go to Switzerland. She still wasn't sure whether she should trust Larry, but she wanted to try. Spending time with her parents had only reminded her of how much she wanted someone to love. She might have a chance on that with Larry. Assuming he wasn't the classic Luthor manipulator, that is.

Besides, even if he was all wrong for her, she had to see him and talk to him again. He was destroying her ability to concentrate, as her father had clearly pointed out last night. Anyway, she needed to do some more flying if she intended to eat more of his Swiss chocolate. With that thought, she ate another chocolate, spun into her Superwoman outfit, and took off.

A few minutes later, she strolled into the chocolate shop. Hopefully Larry would be here today. Or was she really hopeful, she thought to herself nervously, as she picked up another box of chocolates.

He was.

Larry smiled when she walked up to him. "So, you're still giving me business, huh?"

Kiley nodded nervously.

"Given your reaction to my, uh, business card, I thought maybe you had decided to get your chocolate elsewhere," Larry commented just as nervously.

"No, there's no beating the chocolate you sell here," she replied. She brushed her long hair with her fingers.

"So, are you still getting some good scenery for your paintings?" he continued, remembering why she was here.

"Oh! Yes, of course!" Actually, she'd have to fly back home and get her supplies again. In her obsessing about Larry last night and this morning, she had completely forgotten about her desire to work on more sketches. Gosh, if this guy made her forget about her painting, he really did have an effect on her!

"So, um, I thought maybe after you finish work again, we could talk about our, um, situation." Kiley brushed her hair with her fingers again.

"Yeah! I think that's a good idea, I guess." Larry sounded excited and nervous at the same time.

"So, um, I should probably pay for these," she said, gesturing to the chocolates.

"Oh, right!" He rang them up and she paid for them.

Kiley quickly flew home and grabbed her sketch pad and pencils again. Now, should she sit in a different spot so she could get a different angle of the mountains?

Later that morning, she looked at her all of her sketches of the area. Did she have enough to start painting? She really preferred painting to sketching, but she couldn't start a picture like this without seeing some ideas on what she wanted to paint. Still, if she started painting, she wouldn't have a good excuse to stay in Switzerland that Larry would understand. That was, assuming of course, that she wanted to keep seeing him.

Time! What was the time again? She remembered how she had almost lost track of time last time she had a date with Larry. But then, this wasn't really a date today. They were just going to talk. To see if it was possible to have dates in the future. So she didn't need to dress up or anything.

Still, as Kiley looked at her pants, covered with paint, dirt, and grass stains, she decided it might still be a good idea to change. She flew home. She quickly dropped her sketches in her studio. Maybe she would be able to use them in her painting in the near future. Then she walked into the living room and checked the time. It was 9:30 AM.

Good. That was enough time to get ready, considering it was

only 3:30 where Larry lived. She could even use the extra time to make sure there weren't any disasters that needed Superwoman's attention tonight. She didn't want to be late because of such complications, like she was last time.

So she took off her painting clothes, and picked out some clean pants and a blue t-shirt. Nothing too fancy, but nice enough, she thought, inspecting herself. She ran her fingers through her hair again. What would come of this meeting tonight? What did she want to come of it? She couldn't decide.

It was now 9:45 AM. She was going to fly over Metropolis and over Europe. That way she shouldn't be late again, right? Of course, logically, Kiley knew that wasn't necessarily true. Some rescues took longer than others. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that she wouldn't see or hear someone that needed rescuing when it was time to meet Larry. But it was easier to tell herself that there was a solution to this problem than that there wasn't. She didn't like situations when there wasn't anything she could do. She spun into Superwoman and took off.

Metropolis was rather quiet this morning. Naturally, with both her and her father on guard here, they didn't get as many problems as they used to, but it was still a quiet night for a city. London had a bomb threat. She located the bomb, defused, and handed it over to the police. They appreciated her help. Paris had an armed robbery. She assisted there as well.

Finally, it was time to go see Larry. Kiley flew into an empty alley and spun into the pants and shirt she had picked out. Then she strolled into his chocolate shop.

"So, uh, are you all set?" she asked him as she came in. She spoke English this time, since it was the language they were both raised on. She ran her hands through her hair. She had forgotten how handsome he was.

Larry looked up at her. "Oh, yeah. Just let me make some notes and get my stuff." He finished up in a few minutes. Then he picked up his record book and they walked out of the store.

"So...." he began, not sure where to start.

"Yeah, um...." Kiley continued.

"I guess by your reaction to my business card that you've heard of my uncle." Larry finally commented. They both thought back to the moment he had given her the business card.

(flashback)

Kiley continued to stare at the business card, particularly at the name "Luthor." This wasn't good at all. She had heard the name enough times growing up to know it was synonymous with evil.

Avoiding Larry's eyes, she finally said, "I think I should be going now," before turning sharply and walking off. In fact, she almost dropped the card because she was walking so fast. She needed to get out of here now! Would it even matter if she dropped it?

(end of flashback)

"Not that it's surprising if you lived in Metropolis," he continued.

Kiley stopped walking and looked at him. "Uncle??? I thought Lex Luthor was your father!" This was exactly what she was afraid of. He was related to Lex. But it was still better for Larry to be Lex Luthor's nephew than his son.

"No, he's not. I don't even know who my dad was. But Uncle Lex was like a father figure to me until he died when I was nine. So it's not much better. The only man I looked up to as a kid turned out to be an international criminal."

"I see," Kiley replied. He didn't sound happy that Lex Luthor was his uncle. Was it right to judge him by his uncle's example? Should she trust him? But he also said he looked up to Lex when he was young. So what did that mean?

"But that's why I live here and not in Metropolis," Larry

continued. "Even though he was an international criminal, he had the most control over Metropolis. I know that. So his name, and my name, is more well-known there.

"And I don't want to take over his empire. My chocolate shop is successful, and that's enough for me."

Kiley nodded. She had figured that last night. Or at least, she thought she had. She had so many different scenarios running through her head she hadn't known what to think.

They walked again, neither saying anything.

"So, I guess I need to tell you my last name too," Kiley finally announced, sighing. She wondered if he would recognize it. Apparently her mother and Lex had been a couple at one time. How much of that would he have discussed with his nephew?

"My name is, ah...Kiley Kent." When Larry didn't quite recognize the name, she added "As in Lois Lane and Clark Kent."

It was Larry's turn to look completely shocked. It was probably more than he bargained for. All he was interested in was dating a pretty, interesting woman who liked his chocolates. But then she had to be from Metropolis, the center of his uncle's empire. And then she had to be Lois Lane and Clark Kent's kid.

"Well," he finally said, "I remember Uncle Lex mentioning Lois Lane when I was young. He talked about how beautiful she was. Although," he added, "if she looked anything like her daughter, he probably had a point, there. And he talked about how he intended to make her his no matter what it took. With that kind of history, I'm surprised that you were willing to see me again at all."

"I am too, I guess," she admitted. "But I decided to give you the benefit of doubt." Although she wondered for a second when he told her she was beautiful. While it was certainly flattering, it had some unwanted connotations because Lex Luthor had thought her mother was beautiful as well. She sighed. She needed to stop thinking about this!

Larry smiled from ear to ear. "Thank you."

They continued their walk. Larry pointed out some of the places he enjoyed going to on his day off. They walked through the park. Kiley pointed to one of the spots she had done her sketches for her paintings. It was a nice night. They even made plans to have dinner again the next day.

The next day, Kiley decided to start painting one of her scenes of the Alps. She looked at her sketches, trying to decide how to put it on the canvas. Should she put the mountains in the background or the foreground? And what about the picture of the golden eagle?

She was in a much better mood today than she had been a couple of days ago. She was glad she had decided to visit Larry yesterday after all, as well as get some more drawings for her painting. She smiled. Life was pretty good right now.

Suddenly she sneezed. What was that all about? Was there too much paint in the room? It didn't usually bother her. She continued working on her painting.

A few hours later, she decided to take a break to get something to eat. She liked grilled cheese sandwiches when she ate alone. There was something enjoyable about eating something simple. Maybe it was to make up for her complicated life. She put down her supplies and headed for her kitchen.

Her kitchen was spread out, complete with all the standard appliances. She had decorated it in light blue and green. She picked up a frying pan made of steel and placed it on the burner. Then she made her sandwich and placed it in the pan. Although she didn't like to use superspeed in her everyday life, she had no problems with using some of her powers to cook. Or at least to protect her from heat. So she never bothered with pot holders.

Kiley sniffed. Her nose was starting to run. Why was that? She continued cooking her grilled cheese happily. Finished, she

poured herself a glass of milk. She liked to drink milk with her meals; it reminded her of her childhood. The image of her mother telling everyone she was the one who would pour the milk as Mom stubbornly grabbed everyone's glasses, flashed through Kiley's mind. She smiled.

She finished her meal and cleaned up. Now should she work on her painting again? She paused and opened her latest box of chocolates. How was it possible for chocolate to be that good, anyway? Was the man as good as the chocolates? Or was he, as the saying goes, 'too good to be true?' She had decided to give him the benefit of doubt last night, and she was glad. She was looking forward to their next date. Still, a kind Luthor...was that possible?

Kiley sneezed again. That was the second time today that she had sneezed. And her nose was getting clogged, too. Was she getting a cold? She hoped not. Not only were they annoying in themselves, but she couldn't be Superwoman with a cold. She could infect some of the people she rescued. Besides, it wouldn't do for people to realize some of the superheroes were vulnerable to human diseases.

Of course the fact that she and her siblings could catch colds, flues and other diseases was something of a surprise to her parents, especially considering they had received Dad's powers.

It probably had to do with how they had been conceived. She didn't understand all of it, but apparently Mom and Dad had been told early in their marriage that they could not have children together because Dad was Kryptonian. They had been devastated. However, about six months later, their family doctor had told dad that he had read about a new little-known treatment that would allow him to alter his DNA enough so he could reproduce.

Her parents had been ecstatic and quickly began the procedure. Dad was asked to produce sperm which was then taken by Dr. Klien and a sperm was very delicately altered. Dr. Klien then cloned the new altered sperm so there would be enough of the altered sperm to fertilize. Then they had used artificial insemination and Mom had gotten pregnant.

Her parents and Dr. Klien had been very pleased with the procedure and they had repeated it two more times, thus giving Kiley her brother and sister. But it had a side effect. Because of the DNA altering, Kiley and her siblings were only humans with superpowers. That meant they could get sick, be drugged, and needed to watch cholesterol.

That was probably one of the reasons why Mom always insisted on her children drinking milk, Kiley said to herself. Her mom wanted her children to have a healthy immune system. It was also the one of the reasons she insisted they avoid alcohol. Besides her mother's own history with living with an alcoholic, drunken super-powered people could cause a lot of damage with their strength and loose tongues.

Of course the benefit of having human genetics was that drugs also helped her when she was sick. Speaking of which, she wondered if she had any cold medicine, as she sneezed again. She needed to blow her nose.

Kiley continued working on her painting that afternoon with a box of tissues handy. It was annoying to have to blow her nose or sneeze every so often, but it wasn't really a big deal. Still, she should mention to her father that he needed to handle all of the emergencies for the next few days.

What time was it? Would he be at the Daily Planet or at home? She walked into her living room. It was 5:00 PM, so it could go either way. It depended on how many stories her parents had worked on today, how many calls for Superman her father had already received, and whether her parents had anything else planned for tonight.

Kiley decided to try the Daily Planet first. She dialed her father's number.

"Daily Planet, Clark Kent," he answered.

"Hi Dad, it's Kiley," she responded.

"Hi sweetie, what's up?" he asked cheerfully.

Kiley sniffed again. "Well, I think I'm coming down with a cold. So I'd like you to remember that I probably won't be available to answer calls for help for a few days."

Her father's voice softened. "Sure, that's fine. But are you okay? You're living by yourself. Do you need me or your mother to come check on you?"

Kiley sighed. Dad and his over protectiveness again! "Dad, I'm going to be fine. It's just a cold. It's more annoying than anything else."

"Yeah, I know I guess. I just don't like to see you get sick. It's too bad you didn't inherit my ability to resist disease as well as invulnerability," Dad replied as he sighed as well. "Are you sure there isn't anything I can do for you?"

"No, Dad!" she sighed in exasperation. "Just answer all the superhero calls for the next few days. I'll see you later. Say hi to Mom for me. And Dad? I love you." Then she hung up the phone.

Maybe she would watch a movie tonight, since she wouldn't be able to go outside. And she was all done painting for now. She sneezed again. Cold medicine! She needed cold medicine.

Kiley checked her medicine cabinet. There was a bottle of night-time cold medicine in there, but it was the kind that made a person drowsy. She didn't want to go to sleep quite yet. She'd save it for right before she went to bed.

For the time being, she'd simply keep the tissues handy. So what movie should she watch tonight? She walked over to her DVD cabinet. It was wooden but painted with green and pink swirls. She had decorated it herself. Even though she usually painted paintings rather than furniture, she had enjoyed it immensely. Looking at it now brought a smile to her face.

Well what movies did she have? She preferred old movies. But she had several different kinds of those. There were the classics, including Casablanca, Affair to Remember, and Gone with the Wind. There were tearjerkers like, Schindler's List, Love Story, and Ghost. But the movie she finally decided on was Heidi.

Heidi took place in what was becoming one of her favorite places to visit, Switzerland. It showed the beautiful Swiss Alps and the countryside through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl

Watching Heidi gave her hope that things could work out between her and Larry. Surely a relationship that was surrounded by such beautiful countryside had to succeed, right? Besides, Heidi was able to get what she wanted by the end of the movie. She was able to return to her grandfather and Switzerland without losing her friendship with Clara and her family. That meant there was hope for her as well, Kiley thought to herself.

She grabbed some tissues and blew her nose again. It would, however, be more pleasant if she could finish the movie without sneezing!

Maybe she should just take some cold medicine and go to bed.

The next morning, Kiley felt worse. Not only was her nose completely clogged, but her throat was very sore. And she felt very weak. So much for her cold being only annoying!

She should probably call Larry and tell him she wouldn't be coming tonight after all. There was no way she was going to be able to fly tonight. Besides, she didn't look very appealing. She knew her nose was red and swollen because she had to blow it so often. And she didn't feel very appealing, either.

How was Larry going to find her attractive now? Lex Luthor always liked beautiful women. Surely his nephew would be the same in that respect. And she certainly wasn't beautiful today. She sighed and took some more cold medicine and got back into bed. Maybe she could sleep it off.

Hours later she woke up again. She really did need to call Larry. She certainly couldn't stand him up again, she thought as

she remembered how upset he had been when he had thought she stood him up before. She stretched and got out of bed. Then she blew her nose again. Gosh she felt awful!

Kiley used her x-ray vision to scan her apartment. She could find his business card quicker that way. And since she didn't have the strength to look all over her apartment by normal or superspeed, that seemed to be the best option.

She found the card upstairs on her dresser. It was a good thing she had kept it after all. She remembered what happened after finding out Larry's last name was Luthor, especially after she looked up more information on Lex Luthor and found the connection to her mother. She had considered throwing the card away, ripping it up, or even throwing it into the sun. Fortunately she had decided to keep it "just in case."

So now it looked like she was about to call Larry Luthor. Was she ready for this? Didn't calling someone indicate a more serious relationship? She sneezed again. Would he even recognize her voice with this stupid cold? Then she pictured the way his face looked when he had thought she had stood him up. She grabbed the card.

She was still going to have to go back downstairs in order to use her phone, though. She wished she didn't have to walk all the way down there. This was one occasion where she would have used superspeed in her own home. She didn't really need the extra time to think and relax. But flying would have simply taken more energy out of her.

Ten minutes later, Kiley finally made it to the phone in the living room. She used her fingers to brush her hair before picking up the phone. Then she quickly dialed the number. "Hello," said the person on the other end in Swiss German.

"Hello," Kiley replied in the same language. "I'd like to speak to Larry, please."

"One moment, ma'am."

Larry picked up the phone. "Hello, Kiley! What's going on?"

Kiley sniffed again. "Well, I, uh, don't feel well. I have a cold. So I don't think I'll be able to see you tonight."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Larry replied sympathetically. "Maybe I could come over and bring you some chicken soup or something," he added, trying to be helpful.

That was not going to happen on so many levels! Kiley thought to herself. In the first place, she couldn't very well tell him she was in Metropolis. He thought she was staying in Switzerland until she finished her artwork, instead of flying over when she needed to. Besides, there was no way she was going to let him see her like this!

"Well, I don't think that would be a good idea...I wouldn't want you to catch my cold," Kiley said, glad that she came up with a logical reason.

"I'm not worried about that. Do you have anyone to take care of you? It's lonely to be by yourself when you're sick. Let me come over."

"No, really, I'll be all set," Kiley insisted. Then she quickly hung up. That conversation was becoming uncomfortable. Still he was right. It was lonely to be by yourself when you're sick. She blew her nose again. Maybe she shouldn't have 'chased Dad off' so-to-speak so quickly yesterday.

Meanwhile, Lois and Clark were walking back to the Jeep. They had just finished interviewing one of the city council members.

"He knows more than he's saying, Clark," Lois commented, frustrated.

"I know," he replied. "His heart rate was over 150."

Lois nodded, glad that her husband agreed with her assessment. Then she burst out laughing.

Clark looked confused. "What's so funny?"

"I love your 'Smallville expressions,' Clark," she replied,

grinning.

"Huh?" he asked. Then suddenly his eidetic memory kicked in. "Miranda," he grinned, as well, remembering one of the earliest cases in their partnership. When he had said "her heart rate is over 150," he had explained it by saying it was an expression. Lois had said that it must be a Smallville expression.

"Well, I'm glad you like them, because I've got plenty of them," he teased his wife. "That's what happens when you spend the first eighteen years of your life there."

"Well," she laughed and bumped her hip with his. "I've got plenty of Metropolis sayings, too. After all, I've lived here all my life."

"I love 'em," Clark replied. He put his arm around her.

"You know, Smallville expressions and traditions always make me think of family. The closeness everyone has there. I'm glad we have that with our family, too. In fact, I was thinking of going to visit Kiley tonight. She's got a cold, you remember. I just think it would be a good idea to check up on her. Maybe make her some chicken soup."

Lois nodded. She could understand that.

So when they got back to Hyperion Avenue, Clark quickly made some chicken soup and headed over to Kiley's. He hated it when his kids got sick. Why couldn't they inherit his invulnerability to diseases as well as bullets, fire, and other such things? And he took it especially hard when his Kiley got sick. He knew it was just a cold, but he was still hoping to make her feel better somehow.

Kiley had spent most of the rest of the day lying on her blue velvet couch. She felt awful. She knew she should get something to eat, but her strength had almost disappeared today. How could she get up?

Suddenly she heard a knock on the door. Who was bothering her today, of all days? "Kiley?" She heard her father's voice. "I've got some chicken soup for you."

Thank goodness for Dad! He had come after all. "Come in, Dad," she commented softly.

He opened her door and stepped inside. "Gosh Kiley! You look awful. Why didn't you call me earlier, sweetie?"

Kiley sneezed. "I guess I didn't think about it for a while." That was true. When she was trying to decide what to do about Larry this morning, she certainly hadn't thought to call her father. "And then I didn't want to bother you after I'd told you I'd be okay. But I'm glad you're here, Dad." She smiled weakly at him.

Her father sighed. "Well, I'll get your soup warmed up. He took the lid off the container and used his heat vision until it was warm, but not too hot. Unlike her, Dad had no problem with using his powers to make everything quicker, whether it was super-speed or heat vision.

Then he handed the container to her very gently and took a seat next to her on the couch. He sat with her for the rest of the night as she finished her soup, drank juice, and took naps. She was glad she wasn't lonely anymore.

Within a few days, Kiley's cold was much less noticeable. She no longer had to keep tissues near her because she had to blow her nose so often. Her throat was much clearer, and she had her energy back. So she happily spent her time working on her painting of the Swiss Alps.

How much lighting should there be in it? She wondered. Should the sun be shining right over the mountains, or on the side? And she needed more depth of the mountains over here if she wanted to show their majesty.

As she continued to paint, Kiley wondered if she should call Larry. She would be able to fly in a day or two, as all traces of her cold disappeared. Should she call him to set up another date? Or should she just buy another box of chocolates and hope he

was there again? That was the way they usually conducted their romance. The only problem with that was that there was no guarantee that he would be working. She remembered how upset she had been when he wasn't there before. So upset that she actually blew up at an innocent bystander!

Still, this was assuming she still wanted to see him. She thought she had the other day. And she had enjoyed spending time with him even after she knew he was related to Lex Luthor. But that was before she had gotten sick. Being physically weak tended to make her mentally weak, and that made her irrational.

So she wondered if he was really interested in her after all. Was he just trying to be nice? Was he a typical Luthor and just using her? She put her Swiss Alps painting down. If she was going to brood, or obsess like her mother liked to call it, while she was painting, she should get a fresh piece instead of ruining one of her works in progress. She stroked the canvas with her paintbrush while she thought.

Or even if he had been interested in her before, maybe he wasn't interested anymore. Maybe she was a passing attraction or something. A lot of men have causal relationships; she knew that. They dated one girl one week and another girl the next because they got bored easily or something. Wasn't the original Luthor supposed to be a playboy as well?

Then Kiley thought about the chocolate. His store really did have good chocolate. In fact, she had a craving for that chocolate right now. She exited her studio and went to her living room where she was keeping her latest supply of Larry's Swiss chocolate. She never kept food in her studio; she didn't want to take the chance that her paintings might be ruined accidentally.

She reached in her latest box and picked one out. Yeah, that was the stuff. Maybe she should just go back in a few days and pick up some more chocolate. There was nothing wrong with that.

She went back to working on her Swiss Alps painting.

Three days later her cold was almost completely gone. Kiley let her father know she would be available for rescues again. And since she was able to fly and wear the suit again, maybe she'd go to Switzerland and pick up another box of chocolates. Of course, the chocolates were the only things she was interested in. That's why she was going.

She landed and causally walked into The Choco Bean. Quickly scanning the area for her favorite box of chocolates, she grabbed one of the boxes on the top. Unfortunately, the boxes were apparently not stacked well. When she grabbed the box on the top, five or six others began to fall. They were followed by a least eight to ten chocolate boxes nearby.

Kiley hesitated for a few seconds. Naturally, she could use her superspeed to pick them up before they caused any damage. She hated to make a mess and possibly ruin some of Larry's sale if some of the chocolates fell out of the boxes. And all this just because she had been a little careless! But was it really worth giving her secret away, her family's secret, just to avoid a mess?

She let the boxes fall.

Then she sighed as she began to pick them up. She hoped she hadn't ruined too many. A few people turned to see what the commotion was all about. They smiled at her after noticing the fallen boxes, understanding. The man behind the cash register, who she immediately noticed was not Larry, came over to help.

"Are you okay?" he asked her in Swiss German, concerned.

"Yeah, don't worry about me. I just hope I haven't ruined the chocolates," Kiley replied in the same language. She tried to hide her disappointment that he wasn't Larry. Why was she disappointed about that anyway? Hadn't she decided she was only coming to get chocolate today?

Just as they were almost finished, a door in the back opened. "I came out to see what the noise was all about," he explained.

Kiley turned her head. Larry! He was here after all. Maybe she should have dressed nicer, she thought, still feeling a little insecure because of her recent cold. Did he think she was pretty enough? Luthors always seemed to go for pretty women.

As Kiley continued to mull over her appearance, Larry noticed her. "Kiley! I'm glad you're back. Your cold all gone?" When she nodded, he continued, "Don't worry about the chocolate boxes. I'm sure you didn't do it on purpose."

Kiley smiled back at him. "No, I didn't but I still feel bad that I ruined some of your sales."

"It's okay. We get them in fresh every three days anyway, remember?" He touched her hand lightly.

Between the three of them, they finished cleaning the rest up. Afterwards, Larry stayed behind for a few minutes. "So I was thinking, maybe, since your cold is gone, we might be able to get together again tonight?" he said a little nervously.

Kiley paused. Larry was nervous? Weren't Luthors supposed to be all suave and sophisticated and all that? Why would he be nervous about asking her on a date? "Yeah, we can do that," she finally replied.

"Great!" Larry said enthusiastically. "Why don't we meet here again?"

Kiley nodded. Larry turned to head to the back room again. She turned to head out the store. Suddenly she stopped. In all that fuss, she had completely forgotten about the Swiss chocolates she had come here to buy! She turned around and picked up another box, carefully.

Then she quickly paid for them at the cash register and headed out the door. She had a big grin on her face. Larry still wanted to see her!

She flew home doing swirls and loops, still on a high from that meeting.

Then she headed into her art studio. She wanted to spend some more time finishing her Swiss Alps painting. Right after she ate another chocolate, that is. Maybe Forrest Gump had a point about chocolate being a good metaphor for life. You really never know what you're going to get. She picked one up and ate it.

Three hours later, she decided to get ready for her date. What should she wear tonight? The same outfit she had worn last time? No, she didn't want to make him think that was the only nice outfit she owned. How about her purple skirt? That didn't go with any of her blouses, though.

Just then, she heard someone yelling "help!" She could wait for her father to assist, but it sounded very close. Almost right outside. She could get there quicker. And what if she decided to wait and she was too late? She spun into Superwoman.

Two houses from her was a boy who seemed to be insisting on having his way with a girl. She grabbed the boy, ripping him off the girl. The girl, seeming to be in shock, sobbed in relief. Then she flew to the Metropolis Police with the slime-ball.

When she returned to her apartment, she shuddered. That was the kind of slime that needed to be taken off the streets. Why did he think he could treat a girl like that, anyway? Didn't he know what "no" meant?

What was she doing, dating a guy with possible questionable intentions, anyway? If Lex Luthor was capable of murder, surely he was capable of other things as well. Did that mean the same for Larry? Of course, surely she could hold her own against him with her powers, but...

Then she remembered his smile and his nervousness today. Was that the kind of guy capable of rape? Maybe she was being too hard on him.

She looked at the clock. She only had seven minutes! She was going to have to use superspeed to be ready on time. Darn! And she hadn't even decided what to wear yet! At superspeed, she tore four outfits out of her closet. How about the green skirt and the black blouse? That would work. And the black shoes. There,

she was all set. Now she had to fly out of here!

Two minutes later, she was in Switzerland again. She landed near the Choco Bean and spun into her regular clothes. Briefly her mind flashed back to the rape attempt she had interrupted. She wavered for a second, and then walked in.

Larry looked up from the paperwork he was finishing. "Hi, Kiley! Just a second. Wow, you looked nice." He said that to her in Swiss German. Although they had both realized that English was their native language, he continued to converse with her in Swiss German as long as they were in the Choco Bean.

He admired her outfit. Kiley shifted uncomfortably. Although she had dressed this way to impress him, after stopping the rape attempt, she was having second thoughts. At least he wasn't leering at her.

"Okay," he commented cheerfully. "We're all set." He shut his record book. "I was thinking I might let you come to my home for dinner tonight."

Kiley paused and considered this. She'd like to see his home. It would tell her more about him. But was she ready to be alone with him?

"If it makes you uncomfortable, that's okay," Larry said quickly, noticing her hesitation. "We can go to the little place we went to last time. I just thought I would show you that I can cook."

She thought about this again. Then she brightened, thinking of a compromise. "Do you think we could eat outside? Do you have a patio, or something?"

Larry brightened as well. "Yeah, actually, I do. That's a really good idea. It's a nice summer evening. Come on, my place isn't far."

They walked about three blocks south of the Choco Bean. Larry's house was a good-sized home, but not anything too large, especially for a Luthor.

It was grey, two-story home with black shutters. Off to the side, as promised, was a patio. "We can go into the kitchen for a few minutes, if you'd like. I'd just like to show you the different options I have for dinner." He had switched to English, demonstrating the more causal atmosphere and their personal relationship.

Kiley noticed the change and understood what it meant. "Yeah, that'd be fine," she replied, also in English. She was still a little nervous about being alone inside his house, but since they were only going to be in the kitchen for a few minutes, it should be okay. She stepped inside. As they headed toward the kitchen, she noticed the living room. The walls were light brown and were decorated with pictures of a blond woman holding a young Larry. A comfortable-looking cream-colored couch sat in the corner on one side. On the other side sat a shelf with a set of books and a shelf with a set of CDs.

She gestured to the pictures. "Is that your mother?"

Larry nodded. "She is a great woman." He snorted. "Even though Uncle Lex never seemed to think so."

"Why's that?" Kiley asked, as they went into the kitchen. She was interested in aspects of his past. What, if anything, made him different than Lex Luthor and his sons?

"Well, Uncle Lex thought his sister was somewhat inferior because she was a woman. Ever noticed there's nothing in his official biographies or anything about a sister? That's because he never openly acknowledged her. And it didn't get any better after she had a child illegitimately," he commented, pretending to be nonchalant as he talked.

Kiley was shocked. How could anyone not publicly acknowledge a family member just because they were female? And didn't she read something about Lex having illegitimate children himself? Still, that did fit what she had read about Lex. He didn't seem to treat women like they had minds of their own. And he never acknowledged his illegitimate children, either. "I'm

sorry, Larry. I'm sure your Mom is a great mother."

Larry smiled. "Yeah, she is. She raised me to understand that women should be valued as equals to men, unlike what Uncle Lex thought. And that's what I believe." He gazed at her, meaningfully.

Kiley was glad to hear that, particularly with the recent rape attempt she had seen. She smiled at him. "Come on. You promised to show me you could cook, remember?"

He grinned, brightening. "That's right. I did."

He led her into the kitchen. It was a bright room, decorated in yellow and wood. Pot holders hung over the stove. A cozy round table was placed in the middle of the room. Larry reached into the refrigerator and pulled out a few items. Then he began searching through his cupboards. "Well, I have ingredients to make sauerkraut, if you want. That's the dish I had when we went out to dinner last week, remember?" She nodded. "Or I can make some American fried chicken with potatoes in a special sauce. Take your pick."

Kiley thought for a second and then decided. "I'd like to see what this special sauce is."

He grinned back at her. "Oh, you will. You definitely will."

So Larry began making the fried chicken and got out the ingredients for the sauce. That included tomatoes, onions, black pepper, mozzarella cheese, cream, and various spices. After the sauce began sautéing, he began to peel the potatoes.

Meanwhile, Kiley went out back to sit on his patio. It included walls which came up to her waist. Both the walls and the floor were white and were decorated with a few plants. Sitting in the middle of the patio was a brown wicker table and a few chairs. Beyond that was a small yard, about the size of her parents' at Hyperion Avenue. In the background, as in most of Switzerland, you could see the Alps. She sat down to take it all in. It was nice that he was a cook, she said to herself. He kind of reminded her of her father that way. She always felt safe and comfortable with Dad.

Forty-five minutes later, they were sitting down to a meal on Larry's patio. They drank ginger ale to go with the meal. Kiley would have preferred milk, of course, but she was too embarrassed to tell him so. Drinking milk with dinner at her age was unusual; she knew that. She also knew Larry was trying to make this a romantic dinner, and she didn't want to offend him.

"So, how's your painting going? You told me you were here to do some paintings of our scenery," Larry asked her.

Kiley brightened. This was a topic that would make her feel comfortable. "Great! I'm working on one that has a golden eagle in the front and the Alps in the back. The mountains go from the lower levels, where there's still grass, to the upper levels. I think it's coming along well."

Larry smiled as well. "I'm glad it's going well. Maybe you could show it to me. You've already seen the fruits of my labor," he joked.

Kiley grew serious. "When it's finished," she replied firmly. "Actually, I never let anyone see my work unfinished," she added, hoping to make him feel better.

Larry nodded. "Okay, that's fine. So what do you think of my special sauce?"

"It's great!"

"I got the recipe from one of the servants," he admitted. "Even though Uncle Lex never openly acknowledged Mom or me, he made sure we had plenty of help. Of course, the benefit was that they were great chefs so I could learn to cook well."

Kiley nodded. His childhood seemed to be a bit of a contradiction, from what she could tell. Lex Luthor never openly acknowledged him or his mother, but he gave them plenty of servants. Larry admitted Lex being somewhat of a father figure, but he was well aware that he had been an international criminal. His mother obviously — hopefully — had more affect on raising

him, but Lex Luthor had left his mark as well.

Kiley and Larry enjoyed the rest of their dinner and their time together.

A few days later, it was time for Kiley's opening at the art gallery. Her parents, her siblings, and her grandparents had all come to show their support. Many prominent business people and other professionals also came, hoping to acquire a painting by Metropolis's most well-known artist. And of course, many of her colleagues in art also attended. It was a beautiful Wednesday night at the end of June. Everyone was in a good mood.

Kiley was dressed in one of her best dresses for the occasion. It was a full-length dress in a deep purple. She had her hair all done in a French twist, and had put her makeup on as well.

The mayor marched up to Kiley with an aura of purpose. Kiley shuddered for a second. She knew her parents believed the mayor and the city council were corrupt. In fact, they had just gained more evidence today to support their theory, although they still had a long way to go. Still, right now the mayor was one of her patrons, and she owed him her kindness.

"Miss Kent!" The mayor exclaimed. "I was just looking at this piece, here." He pointed to an abstract piece which consisted of yellows, pinks, and greens in soft strokes and swirls. "Can you explain it to me?"

"Yes. I painted that a few months ago. The idea was that those are spring colors, and I was trying to paint my feelings about the coming of spring. I see spring as a gentle season, so that's shown with the gentle strokes of the paint."

"I see," the mayor replied, obviously trying to appear more enthusiastic than he felt. Kiley knew many people had a hard time understanding abstract art. Still, she also knew it was important to the mayor to appear interested in her work. She sighed. She wished she knew if her parents were right about him. She usually trusted her parents. But she had a suspicion that they would have a different opinion about Larry then she was beginning to have. She put that issue out of her mind.

Grandma Kent examined another painting. This one was of a family, very similar to hers, sitting at a table enjoying dinner. You could see the love for each other that Kiley had put into it. "I've got one like this at home somewhere," she commented. "I did it when Clark was about ten years old." She smiled, remembering her son at that age. "If I can find it, I'll have to show it to you when you come by."

Grandma Kent had been an artist for as long as Kiley could remember. Although she dabbled in many fields, from sculpting, to welding, to jewelry-making, Kiley and Grandma had shared a bond ever since Kiley had started painting. They often painted together when she visited, and Grandma enjoyed showing Kiley all her paintings, both old and new.

Mr. Grant came up to her from behind. "Miss Kent! Wonderful turnout, as always! Your paintings are going incredibly well." He offered her a glass of champagne. "Cocktail?"

Kiley froze for a second. She knew Mr. Grant was only trying to be kind, and she needed to be polite to him; it was his gallery that sponsored her openings, after all. But she couldn't afford to drink alcohol. She didn't know her limits, having never tried the stuff. And testing them could have disastrous consequences for her. And although avoiding it all together was probably unnecessary, it made her very nervous. "Thank you Mr. Grant," she replied politely. "I appreciate your support. But I think I'd like some ginger ale instead." She carefully walked off and picked up a glass of ginger ale. Hopefully he wasn't offended.

Next to the drinks, there were also several other refreshments, including cheese and crackers, fruit, and brownies. She picked up a few pieces of fruit and one of the brownies. As she was doing so, she nearly bumped into her mother, who was also trying to

pick up a brownie.

"I'm sorry so sorry, Kiley," Mom exclaimed. "I didn't see you. I guess my mind was on other things." She looked in the direction of the tray of brownies.

"Don't worry about it, Mom. My mind was on other things as well." Kiley also looked at the tray of brownies. They both looked at each other and laughed. Kiley may not have as much of her mother's personality, but her fondness for chocolate definitely came from Lois Lane.

Mom picked up one of the brownies as Kiley bit into hers. "So, your opening seems to be going well," Mom commented as they walked away from the refreshment table.

"I know, Mom," Kiley replied. "A lot of people are interested in them." Kiley sighed inwardly. The brownie she was eating was good, but nothing compared to Larry's chocolate.

"I hope you know I'm proud of you," Mom continued, smiling.

Kiley's mind snapped back to the present. Her mother was saying something. "Thanks, Mom," she replied. It was nice to have her parents' support.

Another patron walked up to her. The Metropolis District Attorney, John Carver. "Hello, Miss Kent," he said cheerfully. "This is an interesting piece," he said, pointing to one of her paintings. It was a scene of the skyline of Metropolis. Only instead of painting the skyscrapers their normal silver-grey color, Kiley had painted them bright yellow, green, pink, and orange.

"Oh, yes!" Kiley agreed. "That's my 'Rainbow Metropolis' painting."

Mr. Carver nodded. "Your stuff is always so bright and cheerful. Maybe I'll get this one."

"Thank you, Mr. Carver. I'm glad you like it."

Speaking of 'bright and cheerful,' she wondered what people thought of her "War's Honor and Grief." She hoped it wasn't too depressing for them.

Kiley walked over to the area where she knew it would be sitting as she finished her brownie. She seriously had to eat some of her Swiss chocolate when she got home. This wasn't bad, but it was a poor substitute when she had Larry's chocolate.

Her father was standing in front of the painting, examining it intently. He looked up when he saw her coming. "Hello, Kiley. This is a wonderful piece of all the different aspects of war," he said carefully.

"Thanks Dad. I was a little afraid to put it in the show. You know most people who come to my openings are expecting to see paintings that are a little more...uplifting."

"It's still good, Kiley, even if it isn't as bright and cheerful as your others," Dad reassured her. "Only, I wonder if I was right to subject you to that," he added softly. In fact, Kiley needed her super-hearing to understand him.

"Dad, may I remind you that I chose to go to South America? And even though it was one of the hardest things I've done, I don't regret it. I did help some people."

"I know, Kiley, I know." Dad sighed. "But still..." his voice trailed off.

Kiley glanced around quickly, to make sure know one was watching. Then she leaned over and hugged her father. It would look unprofessional for her patrons, especially the more fancy ones, to see her in her father's arms.

Stepping away from the hug, Kiley walked away, smiling. It was nice that she had a close relationship with her father. She could see Dad walking towards her mother. They had such a close relationship, as well. Briefly, she wondered if she and Larry would ever be that close. Then she mentally shook her head. It was too soon for her to be thinking like that.

She could see Arnold Framer coming toward her. Of course. Arnold Framer was the Arts Editor for the Daily Planet. Every time she had an opening, he interviewed her. Naturally, her

openings were big events in Metropolis. Obviously, The Planet wanted to have it covered. And she was happy to help the newspaper that her parents and Uncle Jim worked at. But she didn't like him.

"Hello, Miss Kent," Arnold said politely. Or at least, he tried to make it sound polite. Kiley could hear the underlying sneer behind it.

"Hello, Mr. Framer," Kiley replied, trying her best to be polite to him as well.

"So," he continued, taking out his notebook. "I see you've had another successful opening at the Metropolis Art Gallery. What do you have to say for yourself?" Arnold made that last comment sound a little condescending. This was why she didn't like him. Arnold never said anything negative directly to her face. But he made little jibes with his voice. Like that last one. He made it sound like she had given bribes to the gallery and to most of the people here in order to have the opening, or something.

"Well, I think this opening has been successful, Mr. Framer," Kiley commented as carefully as she could. Even though she didn't like him or his attitude, she didn't want to stoop to his level. "Mr. Grant told me as much. And I've been asked by several people to explain my pieces. Some have offered to buy them."

"Of course they have," Arnold agreed. "You've done so well as an artist." There it was again. He made that last word sound almost as it were beneath him or something. Did he think just because he wrote for a living he was better than her? For a moment, she was back in school, listening to her teachers tell her that she needed to be a writer, just like her parents. Then she snapped back to the present. She loved painting and was doing extremely well with it.

"Yes, I have," she agreed firmly. She couldn't let him get to her! "In fact, this is my tenth opening since I graduated from college. My paintings always sell well. I'm very pleased."

"Of course," Arnold replied, sighing when he realized he had nothing left to say. "I think this will be enough for the interview, Miss Kent. I've already seen the guest list, so I'm all set with that. And I've seen enough of your paintings to describe them as well. I guess I just need to talk to Mr. Grant." He had returned back to his 'business' voice.

As he walked away, Kiley grumbled inwardly. At least she was through with that man until her next opening. She knew, even though he played into her insecurities about being artist, he was ultimately jealous of her accomplishments. From what she understood, he had tried to sell some paintings of his own and had not been successful.

Still, she really didn't like listening to his veiled comments. She knew if she really wanted to get him off her back, she could tell Uncle Jimmy. He would never let one of his employees treat her like that. Not to mention the fact that she was pretty sure his behavior was unprofessional for a journalist during an interview. But she was determined to fight her own battles with Arnold.

Thomas came up to her from behind. "Hey, Sis! Great turnout."

"Thanks," she replied softly. She wasn't quite as confident after going through another interview with Arnold, even though she knew it was ridiculous to let him get to her.

"Your paintings are selling just as well as they ever did. I'm proud of you, you know."

Kiley's heart warmed and her confidence was restored. Support from her family always did that for her. Thomas was a great brother! And she knew he was right. She put Arnold out of her mind.

"And I'm proud of you, too. I hear the crops are doing great in Kansas. It's a wonderful thing you're doing, helping Grandpa stay where he wants to be, you know."

Thomas shrugged. "I know, but it's where I want to be too."

Ever since I was five, I loved that farm. I loved the way Grandpa talked when he was planting the crops and doing the harvest. It's the best place for both of us, sis. Just like this," he gestured at all of her paintings, "is best for you."

Kiley smiled.

Within another half hour of greeting more patrons and explaining her paintings, her opening was over. Mr. Grant told her the gallery would buy the remainder of the paintings that had not sold to private owners. Included in the gallery's collection, as she had suspected, was "War's Honor and Grief." She reminded herself, that sale or no sale, it had been good for her to paint that. Besides, just because the gallery was buying it instead of a private owner, didn't mean it wasn't a sale. But the gallery didn't pay as much for her paintings as the independent buyers did.

Kiley arrived home and decided to relax with one of her favorite books. Her openings were important, and she was glad when they were successful, but they were mentally exhausting. So she picked up her copy of classic fairytales. But before she started reading, she picked up her box of Swiss chocolate. She needed real chocolate. Then she started reading.

The next day, as Kiley was finishing her painting of the Swiss Alps, she remembered Larry had offered to see her artwork sometime. When this one was finished, she should show it to him, she decided. It was, after all, inspired by his homeland. And Kiley needed to know that he would really support her artwork. Like her parents did, as well as Thomas and Alice. That meeting with Arnold last night showed her how much their support meant to her. She needed that from Larry as well.

They had a date in another two days. She'd show it to him then. It was amazing how far they'd come in the past weeks. They'd gone from trying to run into each other while she was buying chocolate, to doubts that he was honest because he was a Luthor, to getting to know each other as they scheduled prearranged dates.

When Kiley finished her painting on Thursday evening, she was very excited. She thought the painting, which she was going to call 'Swiss Alps Mystic,' was one of her best yet. She hoped Larry would like it as well. In fact, maybe she'd come by early to show it to him.

Then she looked at the clock in her living room. It was 8:00 PM here. That meant it would be about 2:00 AM in the Zurich area. She sighed and sagged her shoulders in disappointment. She would have to wait until tomorrow after all.

Two hours later, she looked at the clock again. It was still too early in Larry's time. What ever happened to her patience, anyway? She was supposed to be very patient, just like Dad. Everyone told her she had to be patient in order to paint the details in her artwork. So how come she was acting almost more impatient than Mom here? She needed to go to bed.

The next day, Kiley woke to news of a major fire in Washington D.C. It was close to the Capitol building, and officials were afraid it was going to spread. She flew off to help. Dad wasn't here with her, so he was probably busy with another emergency. She helped the D.C. firefighters find survivors, using her x-ray vision this time, she kept the flames from spreading to the Capitol or any other buildings, and she assisted in taking out the fire. Fortunately, there were no casualties or wounded.

By the time she flew back home, it was time to get ready for her date. She put on a plain green shirt and black pants. She didn't feel the need to impress Larry so much anymore. Not that she was going to show up for a date in her painting clothes or anything but...

Now, if she was going to bring 'Swiss Alps Mystic' with her, which she was, she needed to be careful. She couldn't fly too fast,

or her painting would vaporize. But if she flew slowly, she needed to make sure no one noticed Superwoman carrying a large oil-based painting! It would raise too many questions. Maybe if she stayed above the clouds, she would be okay. As long as she didn't run into any airplanes, that is. She spun into Superwoman, grabbed her painting, took a deep breath, and took off.

Fortunately, when she got to Switzerland, it looked as if no one had noticed her, after all. They had decided to meet at Larry's house tonight. So she carefully picked an alley nearby and spun back in to her regular clothes. Within minutes, Larry came strolling toward her. "Hello, Kiley. How are you doing tonight?" he asked her. Because they were in private, he spoke to her in English. "Hey, what's that package you've got there?" He asked her, noticing her painting. She had wrapped it up in brown packaging, kind of like a big paper bag. It protected it from the elements.

"Oh, this is my painting that I just finished of the Alps. You said you had wanted to see my artwork once so..." her voice trailed off, slightly uncertain. Was she being too presumptuous?

"That's right," Larry agreed, nodding his head. "Let's go inside and you can show it to me."

They both walked into to Larry's living room. She set the painting on his couch so they could both have a good look at it. Then she carefully unwrapped her canvas. "I'm calling it 'Swiss Alps Mystic,'" she explained as she finished.

Larry gasped as he saw her painting in full view for the first time. It took him a few minutes to recover his speech. "Kiley, this is amazing!" he exclaimed in awe. "You know, I grew up around the Alps. I can see them from a distance everyday. And sometimes on my day off I go to the park. But I've never seen them the way you've captured them here." He pointed to the painting, brushing the canvas in wonder. "You've captured the beauty, the mystery, the wonder of the Alps. And you've included animals as part of that wonder." He gestured to her portrayal of the golden eagle. "There's so much detail in this. So much emotion, too. You can see how much you enjoyed looking at them."

"Thanks, Larry." Kiley replied. She was surprised at how much his support meant to her. She was used to getting praise for her artwork, with a few notable exceptions. So why did Larry's praise make her feel like she was flying to the moon?

"Seriously, Kiley," Larry continued, "I've never seen a painting like this in my life."

She smiled at him. Then she made a decision. "You know what? It's your homeland that inspired this. You can have it. This is my gift to you."

Larry looked completely shocked. "Are you sure, Kiley?" he asked sounding unable to believe it.

"Yes, Larry."

"I'll put it right over my couch," he said, grinning from ear to ear. "And every time I see it, I'll think of you."

They both smiled at each other very tenderly. Without thinking, Kiley and Larry leaned in and kissed.

The room was silent for a few minutes before they broke a part. They looked at each other for a moment before whispering "mmmm."

"Let's do that again," Larry murmured before leaning in to kiss her again.

They both grinned after finishing another couple of kisses. "So, seriously," Kiley commented, breaking the silence, "I'm really glad you like my painting. Your support means a lot to me." She looked deep into his eyes, hoping to convey how important this was to her.

Larry nodded, seeming to understand.

"I might do some other paintings of the Alps as well," Kiley said brightly. "I'm thinking maybe a bird's-eye-view of the same area."

"That's a good idea," Larry replied. "It would be interesting to see the same area from a different angle."

"That's what I thought," Kiley responded, already mentally planning the sketches that would need to be drawn and how she would transfer it to her canvas.

She grinned, thinking of how much fun it was to fly. She could get a really nice bird's-eye-view of the area! "Don't you think it would be fun to fly just like a bird?" she asked casually.

Larry hesitated for a moment. "Weelll...I think that sort of flying isn't meant for humans," he replied slowly. "Airplanes are fine, because a lot of people use them. But anything else..." his voice trailed off.

Kiley thought for a second. What did he mean by that? Was he trying to say that people who fly without airplanes (like her family) were doing something wrong? Once again, she wondered if she was doing the right thing by getting involved with him. Then she mentally shook her head. She was probably reading too much into his comment.

"Well, that does make sense, I guess," said Kiley, trying to understand his views. Maybe he just meant he was nervous about the idea of flying.

"You know, I've got a great idea!" Larry exclaimed, trying to relieve some of the tension in the air. "Why don't we take a picnic to the park tonight? I know I've seen the area before, but looking at your painting makes me want to see it again. With new eyes."

Kiley nodded eagerly. That was a great idea. She needed to put these ideas about his comment out of her mind. She had nothing to worry about!

"That's settled, then," Larry said brightly. "So what do you want to bring for our picnic, then?"

"Well, what do you have here?" she asked.

"Let's see," Larry replied, as he walked into his kitchen. "I've got stuff for salad, either American or Swiss cheese, whatever you want. And I've got Swiss cheese to go with turkey, ham, or chicken sandwiches." He removed the items he mentioned from the refrigerator to show to her. "Here's some crackers," he added as he opened a cupboard and pulled out a box. "I've only got water to drink, though. Sorry." Larry paused for a minute. "I could pick up a bottle of wine at the store if you wanted."

Kiley's eyebrows went up and she mentally jumped a mile. Discreetly, she looked down to make sure her feet hadn't left the floor. Alcohol! She wouldn't touch that stuff for fear of what might happen if she drank even a couple of sips. But how was she supposed to explain that to Larry? It was perfectly normal to offer to provide wine on a romantic picnic.

"No, that's okay," she replied after a few seconds. "I like water, actually. You don't have to go out and buy any." She hoped he would buy her reasoning. She couldn't afford to be questioned to deeply on this issue.

"Oh!" Larry added, his eyes lighting up. "Guess what I also have." He pulled out a container on his counter and showed her a batch of double chocolate chip cookies. "They're supposed to be for the store, but I brought this batch home for us."

"They do look good," Kiley commented. "But are you sure you aren't hurting your profits? Especially after I dropped all those boxes the other day?" she asked, concerned. She appreciated the idea, but she didn't want him hurting his business for her sake.

"Of course not!" Larry exclaimed. "Look, I made an extra batch just for us. Besides, you gave me one of your paintings as a gift tonight. You usually charge money for those, right?"

She nodded.

"So you lost money because you wanted to give me a gift, Kiley. I want to share these with you. Come on, let's package them for our picnic."

Kiley chuckled. She supposed he had a point. She got busy

helping him make sandwiches, American and Swiss salad, and putting them in containers. "Do you have a picnic blanket?" she asked when they had finished.

Larry blushed for a few seconds. "Actually, I don't. I have my own patio, and I'm afraid I didn't spend much time outside when I was young. Uncle Lex always told me young men were not to crawl around on the dirt." He paused for a minute. "I can't imagine anything funnier than Uncle Lex sitting on the dirt, even if it was covered with a blanket! But anyway, I guess I still don't like sitting on the ground. But we can take these chairs." He pointed to the patio furniture. "They fold up."

Kiley chuckled for a minute at Larry's joke. She never knew Lex Luthor, but he really didn't strike her as one to sit on the ground! Then she thought for a minute, running her fingers through her hair as she followed behind him. Larry said that statement applied to her as well. There was another legacy of Lex Luthor in Larry's life. He probably had others as well. But just how much influence did Lex Luthor have on his life? How much was too much for him to really be a good man? She sighed and picked up a chair. She had decided to give him the benefit of doubt. She needed to remember that.

"Are you sure you can carry that chair all the way to the park?" he asked, concerned.

Kiley laughed inwardly. Of course she could! In fact, she could carry both chairs and their picnic basket with no trouble at all. But she knew that would be unusual for a woman. So she needed to pretend it was harder for her than it was. Not hard enough for Larry to believe he had to carry the chair himself, of course. Just enough to make it realistic.

"Um...yeah, I should be fine. Don't worry." She held the chair low, pretending it was too heavy to carry over her head.

They reached the park within half an hour and quickly set up the chairs and spread out the food.

"It's a really nice evening for a picnic," Kiley sighed in pleasure as she looked around her. The sky was clear and it was relatively warm, despite the altitude of the area.

"Yeah it is." Larry bit into his turkey and Swiss sandwich. Then he looked around himself, in awe. "I appreciate this so much more, just because of your painting. How can you make something more real, more magical, on a painting, than anything I've ever seen in my everyday life?"

Kiley shrugged. "I don't know. It's just something I can do as an artist. I feel the wonder and the magic of this place, and I do my best to capture it on a canvas." She munched on her salad. "I love putting my emotion into my art. I think it's one of the things that make it valuable to me."

"I'm glad you can, Kiley. It doesn't just make it valuable for you, it makes it worthwhile for others as well."

"Well, the chocolate you make certainly is worthwhile," she teased him, as she bit into one of his double-chocolate chip cookies.

They smiled at each other, and Larry put his arm around her.

Within another ten minutes, they had finished their meal.

"Come, on. Let's explore more of the park. I want to see all of the wonder that I never noticed before."

Kiley nodded. They cleaned up the area quickly and folded up the chairs. Then they put them aside, figuring it they were unlikely to be stolen in such a quiet area. Larry reached for her hand, and they set out.

Two hours later, Kiley flew off. They had a wonderful time together. She loved that Larry supported her in her painting and saw all the emotion she had put into it. She remembered the way he looked when he first saw her painting. Complete awe. She was happy that she had given him "Swiss Alps Mystic." They had even planned to spend the day together next Tuesday, when he had the whole day off.

Once again, she wondered about his comment, "I think that

sort of flying isn't meant for humans." What did he mean by it? Was it just an off-hand comment that people shouldn't try flying without a plane because it was dangerous? That could be it; he had meant it as a joke. Still, he hadn't sounded like he was joking when he said it, and he wasn't surprised when she didn't laugh.

So what had he intended that statement to say? Before she could ponder that statement further, she heard screams coming from below. There was a huge building on fire in Manchester, England, and it had spread to two other buildings. A group of children were trapped in the top floor of one of the buildings!

Kiley flew down to the building with the children in it. She could see the fire coming dangerously close to the children. The fire fighters were trying to get them out, but they could only take them down on the ladder one at a time. Superwoman quickly picked up three children and flew them out of the building as quick as it was safe for them. Then, she returned to the building, and picked up three more children, who were crying.

"Mummy!"

"Where's my teddy bear?"

"Daddy!"

She wished she could calm the children down, but she needed to get them out of the building first! She set them on the ground, next to a couple of firefighters who had decided to watch the children. Then she returned to pick up the rest. The remaining children were huddled under a bed, choking on smoke! Kiley sighed. She needed to focus on her task or these children were not going to survive! She picked up the children as fast as she could. Then she huddled them to her chest as close as she could, so they would not breathe in as much smoke. Flying as fast as she could without endangering the children, she exited the building.

They needed to go to a hospital, given the fact that she didn't know how much smoke they had inhaled. She quickly scanned the area and found a hospital. Hopefully, someone would notify their parents. Unfortunately, because they were not entirely conscious, she couldn't ask the children who their parents were. After entrusting the children to the hospital staff, Kiley flew back to the fire to assist in putting it out. She hoped the kids would be okay.

One hour later, Kiley arrived home. That was a traumatic situation. Not as traumatic as the war in South America, but more than what she was used to dealing with. She usually had Dad's help with fires like that. And all those children, crying for the Mummy and Daddy! Even worse were the kids who couldn't cry. She sighed.

Did Larry really mean she shouldn't fly to help in situations like that? How could she live with herself if she didn't? Would he support her the way Mom supported Dad? She needed to do something about her emotions.

Kiley went into her studio and picked up a new canvas. She had planned on doing another painting of the Alps. Like she had told Larry — a bird's-eye-view. But she didn't feel like painting that right now. Instead, she began painting her feelings for Larry. How gentle he was when he touched her. His teasing. The way he supported her art. The amazing things she felt when they kissed. Not to mention the chocolate. The man had the best chocolate in the world. Her conflicting feelings about him being Lex Luthor's nephew. Her anger about him possibly not supporting her superhero job.

And she painted the sorrow and grief she felt for the kids who lost their homes, their teddy bears, and possibly even more.

Kiley grumbled as she stroked her canvas. She and Larry had kissed tonight. Did that mean they were headed for a more serious relationship? Was she ready for that after what he said tonight? The support he had given her for her painting made her think she was. But what about the other thing? Would he ever accept her other life?

She finished her painting for the night at 6:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. She was glad to have painting help her work through those types of emotions. They didn't seem so serious anymore. She was still upset about those kids, but the pain had lessened. Larry was a more complicated issue. Still, she had probably read too much into the statement he made tonight about flying.

She began cleaning up her studio. It had a calming effect on her, as it always did after dealing with intense emotions. She finished about a half hour later.

She still wondered about Larry a little, though. She remembered the comment he had made about not sitting on the dirt because his uncle had told him not to. How much had he wanted to please Lex when he was young? What kind of things would he do to please him? Larry obviously did not agree with his uncle's morals as an adult but still...

Kiley ran her fingers through her hair. She really needed to calm down. Apparently cleaning up her studio didn't work as well as it usually did, though. Maybe she should clean her whole apartment. It had been a while since she had done that. She chuckled. Most people would find it odd that she found cleaning to be a calming and relaxing activity. Maybe it was because it was something so ordinary. Yes, she needed something ordinary tonight. Right after she ate another one of his chocolates, that is.

By the following Tuesday, Kiley was ready and eager to see Larry again. He really was a great guy, and she was sure she was overreacting. They would work everything out.

They had planned to meet at his house at 10:00 AM his time. That meant she needed to leave at 4:00 Eastern Standard time. It was a little difficult, but she did want to spend the day with Larry. Besides, because of her painting schedule, she could really go to sleep and get up anytime she wanted. And she didn't need as much sleep as an ordinary human, anyway.

So Kiley got up and put on some tan pants and nice pink shirt. She looked nice, but not too fancy. Perfect. She spun into her Superwoman outfit and headed for the sky. It was a beautiful day for flying. She spun around and did loops as she flew. Today was going to be a great day.

A few minutes later, she landed near Larry's house. Then she quickly spun into her regular clothes and walked the short distance to his house. She walked up to the front door and knocked, using the big brass door knocker.

Larry opened the door immediately. "Hi Kiley!" he exclaimed. "Will you come in for a minute? I'd like to show you something."

Kiley nodded, wondering what he thought was so important to show her. She walked slowly into his living room.

"Look over here," he steered her towards the middle of the room. There, just above the couch, Larry had hung "Swiss Alps Mystic." It fit perfectly, like it was meant to be there. "Doesn't it look great?" he asked her eagerly. "I love seeing it when I come downstairs every morning and when I come home at night. It's you, Kiley."

"Thanks, Larry," Kiley replied. He was so sweet. In fact... Kiley leaned over and kissed him softly.

"Well," Larry commented when they had finished, "I was thinking you might like to visit the art gallery we have here. If you like to see other paintings, that is."

"I'd love to." They grinned. Larry took her hand and they walked out the door. "It's on the other side of the city, though. We should probably take a taxi." So they did. After a very long trip, due to traffic jams and angry drivers, they arrived at the art gallery.

They saw some beautiful paintings inside, including those by William van Aelst, Gerard David, Willem Corneliza Durster, Johann Rudolf Loutherburg and many others. Kiley enjoyed Emil

Anner and Samuel August Aeyerter, who painted beautiful snow scenes. They both discussed the Max Ernst modern/cubist painting extensively. (3) "I love the fact that it's so colorful," Kiley commented as she looked at it. "It makes it look cheerful. I like to use a lot of bright colors in my art."

Larry examined the painting from several angles. "It certainly is colorful," he agreed. "But I'm not sure if I can call it cheerful." He squinted as he thought intently. "It's too bizarre."

"Well, it certainly is different," Kiley agreed. "But not all art has to conform to a mold of what people expect. Sometimes the artist wants to break free of trying to please everyone." Kiley thought about her "War's Honor and Grief" painting. That certainly was a painting that most people had not expected her to do. But it had helped her to paint that, and she was glad she did.

"Well," Larry shrugged as he looked Ernst's painting again. "Maybe bizarre can be a good thing."

"I remember doing cubism in college," Kiley commented. "I ended up going a different route with my art, but it was nice to do something different. And one of the things I always liked about it was the colors involved."

They moved on to look at another painting. Kiley was really enjoying sharing the art world with Larry. She also enjoyed looking at other artists' paintings. Actually, she didn't do it often enough at home, between her superhero business and working on her own art. But it was nice to see what others were doing. Sometimes she could get inspiration from another painting.

Next they discussed the work of Albert Landerer, who had a beautiful painting of men riding horses under a bridge in the winter. The most interesting discussion, however, was the painting of Johann Heinrich Ferdinand Oliver.

Larry stopped short when he saw this painting. It was a beautiful scene of a wooded area and a running brook coming down the front. Further back, there was an imposing structure in the center. It looked similar to a medieval castle in some ways, only it didn't have a drawbridge or a fence. In the background, you could see the mountains.

Kiley looked at the painting intensely as well. It was a beautiful painting. In some ways, it reminded her of her "Swiss Alps Mystic," although hers featured the mountains as more of the focus of the painting. "This is a really good one," she commented.

Larry nodded slowly. "It looks kind of like where I grew up," he said as he continued to stare at it. "Not exactly, but close enough. Especially the whole 'away from the world' image."

Kiley nodded, confused. What did he mean by that?

"Uncle Lex had this fortress in the Alps that he used as one of his 'get away from the city' retreats. Actually, it didn't even have any windows in it. When I was born, he told my mother we should live there so she could have all the support she needed to care for a child. Since she didn't have much money, she ended up there even though she really didn't want to be supported by her brother and all his paid servants. Uncle Lex would show up every so often when he needed a 'retreat' and to visit the child he considered his protégé — me."

Kiley nodded, beginning to understand more of his childhood. "So your childhood was pretty sheltered, huh?" She looked at the painting with new eyes. It was still beautiful, but she could see how it was secluded from everything as well.

Larry nodded. "Yeah. I had tutors instead of going to school. Nothing but the best for Larry Luthor, you know." He said that last sentence sarcastically, in a fake snobbish voice. "So since Uncle Lex only appeared sporadically, and there weren't any other children for me to play with, I kind of grew up befriending the servants. Uncle Lex tried to discourage me from doing that when he visited, but I always ended up spending time with them after he left. That's how I learned to cook."

Kiley nodded. It was good to hear he was able to hold his

own against Lex Luthor sometimes.

"But since Mom could only get the support from her brother to raise me if she stayed at the fortress, she became dependent on him. Even after he died, we still lived there because she didn't think we had anywhere else to go. And even though she's really smart, today she only works as a waitress." Larry had a bitter tone in his voice as he said this.

Kiley nodded. There was another example of Lex Luthor making his women dependent on him. It did seem to fit with the character of him that she had read about. But fortunately, Larry really didn't agree with Lex's methods towards women. That was good. Actually it was really sweet how angry he seemed to be about his uncle on his mother's behalf. Larry really was a sweet guy.

He held out his hand. "Come on. Let's see what other paintings are here." She took his hand and they moved on to the next painting.

Two hours later, they decided to take a break for lunch. Although there was a small snack bar in the art gallery, Larry decided to take her somewhere more fancy. He knew a nice place around the corner that he wanted to show her. They walked into the crowded restaurant. It was one of those places where you needed to put your name down and wait until they called your name.

When it was their turn, Larry stepped up and said quickly, "Two for Luthor."

The hostess raised her eyebrows. "Luthor, huh?" she asked with surprise and a small sneer in her voice. It kind of reminded Kiley of the way Arnold talked to her.

Larry took a deep breath, trying to appear confident. "Yes, that's right."

"Well," the woman looked at her list of names. "I guess we can fit you in." She wrote the name down. Kiley noticed the sneer was still there in the undertones of her voice. Larry and Kiley nodded and decided to walk around the block while they waited. "What was with her attitude?" Kiley asked, upset that anyone would be treating such a sweet guy like that. She sighed. To a certain extent, she understood. After all, when she first found out Larry's last name was Luthor, she had been nervous and bothered by it. And by then, she already knew that he was a pretty nice person. Still, she was from Metropolis. Surely people around here wouldn't pay as much attention to "the evils of Luthor?"

Larry sighed. "Sometimes I run into that. Uncle Lex may not have run Zurich like he ran Metropolis, but he was still an international criminal. People remember that. And he did have something of a reputation here, too, with his fortress."

"I'm sorry you have to deal with that," Kiley replied, trying her best to soothe him.

He shrugged. "It's part of life. Actually, I'm lucky I run such a successful business with The Choco Bean. It gives me a more positive image."

Kiley nodded. "I'm glad I can help you with that business!" she grinned at the thought of his chocolates.

He grinned as well, temporarily easing the tension of the situation.

"But I guess it does kind of bother me," he continued, going back to the other topic. "That's why I don't like to give out my last name unless I can help it. I never know when I'm going to meet someone that has a reaction like that. Darn it!" he said as he kicked a rock on the sidewalk. "I know Uncle Lex gave Luthor a bad name and then some! But I'm not my uncle. Why can't people see that? Sometimes it seems like I'm always going to be in his shadow!"

Kiley sighed and ran her fingers through her hair. What could she say to help him with this situation? "I don't know if you know both my parents are reporters for the Daily Planet?" she asked.

Larry thought for a minute, with a confused look on his face. "Maybe I heard it once or twice, but about the only thing Uncle Lex ever said about your mother was that she was beautiful and she would be his someday. There's another example of Uncle Lex's bad name," he grumbled.

Kiley ran her fingers through her hair again. This wasn't starting out very well, but she had a point she was trying to make. "Well, they are. And I don't mean just reporters. I mean 'star reporters,' 'everyone in Metropolis knows them as the best reporters in the city,' and all that jazz. For years when I was a kid, my teachers, some of their colleagues, and almost half the city told me I needed to follow in their footsteps and become a reporter, too. It took me a long time before I found painting as my own voice. I know what it's like to be always in someone else's shadow, believe me."

"But at least your parents have good names to follow," Larry commented.

"That's true," Kiley acknowledged. "I love my parents and I'm proud of the articles they've written. But that doesn't mean it's still not hard to have a lot of people shoving you in a direction you don't want to go in. I was still in their shadow, no matter where I looked."

Larry nodded, finally understanding where she was going with this. "I understand what you're saying. But you've got painting now."

Kiley brightened, as she always did when she talked about painting. "Yes, and I love that. But sometimes I can still be sensitive when people tell me I should write more often than I do, or that they're better than me because they can write and I can't."

Larry's face was beginning to look up as Kiley continued to speak. "And Larry, you have your chocolate shop, like you said earlier. You've got your own voice, too."

Larry nodded happily. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

Just then their name was called and the couple went inside again. They were shown a table near the window. Kiley and Larry sat down happily and looked at their menus. Larry quickly decided on the alplermagronä, which consisted of elbow macaroni and fried onions with mountain cheese, as well as applesauce. Kiley decided to try the gschnätzlets, which was veal with cream sauce. She added milk to complete the meal, which earned her a strange look from Larry. But drinking milk brought back fond memories for her, even when she was in a restaurant in Switzerland. They ordered their meals in Swiss German, and then went back to talking in English.

The rest of the day was spent at the park and at Larry's house. They talked, laughed, and enjoyed kisses as well. By the end of the day, Kiley felt a lot closer to Larry. She understood his relationship with his uncle better than she had before. And their common experience of "living under others' shadows" had bonded them, even though the circumstances of those experiences were vastly different.

A few days later, Kiley arrived at Hyperion Avenue for another family dinner. Clark was finishing up with the chicken, and Alice was setting the table when her mother answered the door.

"Hi, Kiley," Mom said cheerfully. "Come on in."

She smiled as she walked into the kitchen. It was nice to see her family again. She hadn't seen them as much as she used to because she had spent so much of her free time with Larry. But they always had the family dinners to reconnect.

"Dad's making a new chicken and rice casserole. It sounds really good," Alice commented excitedly.

Kiley nodded. "Is there anything you guys need me to do?" she asked

"No, that's okay, you can sit down. We're still waiting for Thomas."

So Kiley sat down in the chair she had always used when she lived with her parents.

After Alice finished setting the table, she sat down as well. "Do you like this shirt?" Alice asked Kiley, gesturing to a blue t-shirt she was wearing. It had some lace and button work on it. "I just bought it yesterday."

Kiley looked at Alice's shirt closely. It was a nice shirt, although Alice usually wore less decorative clothing. "Yes, I like it, but I thought you like...um..." Kiley's voice trailed off. How could she put this delicately? "Well, less frilly clothing," she finally commented.

Alice looked a little confused. "I have two other shirts like this, one in green and one in pink."

"Alice has decided she wants to wear more enhancing clothing," Mom commented. "She's completely reinventing her wardrobe."

Kiley nodded. "I see. It does look good on you, Alice." Kiley felt a little out of place. Apparently this was another one of Alice's phases where she tried to "find herself." She didn't see them as often as she used to because she didn't live at home. Still, Kiley used to be able to keep up with her family a little more.

Thomas knocked on the door. "Sorry about that. There was a robbery at the convenience store in Smallville. Whirlwind helped catch the guy, but it took a while. I just didn't want to know he was out there with Grandma and Grandpa around, you know?"

Everyone nodded. Smallville was a really small town, so it didn't have much action. Still, every town had problems occasionally. Everyone agreed Thomas was right to help with that case. With Grandma and Grandpa alone in Smallville, who knew what might happen if the robber hadn't been caught.

After Mom poured the milk, everyone dug into the dinner. The new casserole was great. "So what have you been up to lately, Kiley?" her Dad asked her suddenly.

Kiley stopped for a second. What was she supposed to say to that? She wasn't ready to tell him about Larry yet. "Oh, just working on my paintings, you know." She shrugged, pretending to be nonchalant.

"Did you get the one done with the Swiss Alps scene you were telling me about a couple of weeks ago?" he asked innocently.

Wow, that was way too close! All of her emotions and comments that had to do with that painting had to do with Larry. It was his homeland that inspired it, and every time she had worked on it, she had thought of him. Plus, she had given it to him! It now hung in the center of his living room. "Um, yeah...I finished it," Kiley answered slowly. "So, how's your investigation of the city council going?" she asked her parents, hoping to change the subject.

Dad gave her a strange look, but replied, "Not too bad. We've got some more evidence that supports our theory. We just still can't nail down what they're doing with the tax money instead of spending it on city expenses."

"We've got some more stuff to look through on Monday, Clark," Mom added. "We'll get it."

"How's the farm going, Thomas?" Kiley asked, still eager for the family's attention not to be on her.

"Good," he replied, nodding. "It looks like we're going to have a really good crop this year. Grandpa and I have really helped each other. He says all this new technology is giving him the best crop he's seen in years, and I told him I would never have gotten it as good as it is if I didn't have his intimate knowledge of the land."

They finished the rest of the meal but Kiley was glad when she could go home. It didn't used to be like this. She used to love spending time with her family, especially the family dinners. She still enjoyed spending time with her family, but it was harder now. She was hiding a part of her life, and that part was growing

more important to her everyday. But she wasn't ready to tell her family about Larry. She just didn't think they'd understand why she was dating Lex Luthor's nephew.

With all the things Lex had done to Metropolis, from what she had read in the papers, he had a personal vendetta towards her family. Furthermore, she only read what her parents had been willing to print. She knew from experience that there were things that they didn't make public, especially when it had to do with Superman. What else may have happened with Lex Luthor that they hadn't been willing to print? How much less objective would it make her parents toward Larry?

She remembered their discussion a few days ago, about how upset it sometimes made him that he was still living under Lex Luthor's shadow. Would her parents make that even worse for him? She wanted to protect him from that. Besides, she still wasn't 100% sure it would work out with Larry. She remembered his comment about how people shouldn't fly without airplanes. What had he meant? Was it innocent or did he believe her family was doing something wrong? Until she knew, she was going to keep quiet.

Unfortunately, it seemed keeping quiet about Larry meant keeping distance from her family. Kiley wished she wasn't in this situation, but right now, there was nothing she could do. Well, maybe she could have some Swiss chocolate. She brightened. That always made her feel better. She reached into the box without using x-ray vision, because then she couldn't see what kind of chocolate she had taken. "You never know what you're going to get," she said to herself. That was how her life felt right now. Who knew what would happen next?

Clark ran his fingers through his hair that night as he got into bed. What had happened to Kiley? It seemed she was putting up a wall between her and her family. It reminded him of the walls Lois used to have when he first knew her. Why was Kiley doing that now? He had been uneasy about it all night. He and Kiley had always been so close. How was he supposed to fix whatever her problem was when she wouldn't even talk to him?

Lois climbed into bed beside him. She had a worried look on her face. "Are you worried about Kiley?" she asked, gently.

Clark nodded as he ran his fingers through his hair again. "She didn't even want to talk about painting tonight, Lois. Did you notice how fast she changed the subject after I asked her about it?"

Lois nodded. "I know. Kiley loves to talk about painting. Why wouldn't she want to talk about painting? Something must be really bothering her. I just don't understand why she won't tell us what it is." Lois sighed in frustration as her babble ran out of steam.

Clark smiled through his frustration with the situation. Almost thirty years since he had met her, and Lois was still the best babbler he knew. "Maybe you can give me some insight, honey. It seems to me that she's putting walls up around us, like you did when I first met you. Do you know what I mean?"

Lois thought for a minute. "Yeah, I guess I do. She is afraid of us for some reason. Why is that? Why would Kiley ever be afraid of her family?"

Clark sighed. "I don't know. I just don't get it. I've never seen her freeze up like this before."

"Kiley's always been so much like you, Clark. Quiet strength, patience, and always so open with us."

Clark nodded. That was what was really bothering him. His Kiley wouldn't talk to him anymore. He and Lois fell into a troubled sleep, all cuddled up together, like they could shield each other from the pain.

Kiley continued to work on her abstract painting which showed her conflicting feelings for Larry and what to do about

those feelings for the next few days. She ran her fingers through her hair as she put her paintbrush down. What was she going to do?

She had another date with Larry tonight. They were going to spend some time at his house again. He would make dinner again, and then they would watch some movies and eat some popcorn. She sighed. It sounded like an ordinary date for an ordinary couple. Even though inside, she felt they were anything but that.

Her parents would probably think she was dating the enemy. Even though she no longer believed that, she could understand their perspective. Still, some of the things he said about his uncle made her uneasy. Besides, there was also the issue about the superheroes. Was she making too much of his comment? Or did she have a reason to be wary? But Larry was so fun to be around, aside from those other issues. And he was a wonderful kisser, too.

She picked up her paintbrush again and continued painting. She had about a half an hour before she needed to get ready. It was 11:00 AM here, which meant it was 5:00 PM in Zurich. She was supposed to meet him at 6:00 PM. At least she was getting the hang of this time change thing!

A half hour later, she began cleaning up her studio. She sighed contently. There was nothing more relaxing, in her opinion, than cleaning up her art studio after she had finished. She certainly needed to relax now.

After Kiley finished cleaning, she changed into a more sensible outfit. Her blue and green shirt with black pants was a good choice. Then she quickly spun into her Superwoman outfit and flew out the window.

However, on her way there, she noticed a hostage situation in Madrid. It seemed that someone had placed a bomb on one of the trains and was demanding \$1,000,000 in exchange for the code to stop it. She grumbled. Criminals! Didn't they know any other ways of making money? The bomb squad was working frantically to stop it, but it didn't seem like that they would be able to in time. She flew down to the train and grabbed the bomb quickly. Then she hurled it into space. The passengers sighed with relief and thanked her profusely.

She accepted their thanks politely, but she really needed to leave! She was going to be late. Kiley sighed as she flew off as fast as she could, remembering how upset Larry was the last time he thought she had stood him up. And they were a lot closer now than they were then. How much more angry or hurt was he going to be this time?

Within a minute, she landed a few blocks from Larry's house. She quickly changed into her normal clothes. Then she ran as fast as a normal human would be able to run to his door. She nervously knocked on the door. What was she going to say to him? What would he say to her? Would he even be home? Kiley ran her fingers through her hair as she waited.

About three minutes later, Larry finally answered the door. He was dressed casually, in a blue t-shirt and a pair of jeans. He looked just as handsome as he always did, Kiley said to herself. The expression on his face, however, was hard to define. "I thought you said you'd call if you were going to be late," Larry commented curtly.

Right. Now was the time that she had to explain herself. Too bad she hadn't come up with an excuse in advance. She didn't have much experience with creating excuses, because she didn't usually need them. "Weeeelll... it was kind of a last minute thing. I had already left when I realized that I would be late. I'm sorry." That much was true.

Larry nodded slowly. "I see." He continued to stand in the doorway, not letting her in or shutting the door in her face.

Kiley sighed. He was obviously on the fence, so to speak. How could she make him land on her side? "I'm sorry I hurt you, Larry. I know it makes me look like I don't care, but I do. Really.

Please let me in." She reached up, hesitantly, to stroke his face. Would he welcome her touch or consider it invasive at this time?

Larry looked as if he might reject her touch for a second, but then seemed to welcome it. He sighed, looking confused. Then finally, he said, "Okay, come in, Kiley. But next time, please tell me if you're going to be late."

Kiley sighed in relief as she walked into his house. Larry was going to give her another chance! Then she paused, as she thought of his last comment. She couldn't promise to do that. What if it was another last-minute decision like it was today? Still, how many more times could she hurt him like this by making him think she didn't care enough to let him know? She wasn't ready to tell him the real reason, yet. She knew that. That would require a lot of careful thinking on her part. So what else could she do?

Kiley ran her fingers through her hair again. She needed to stop thinking about this stuff and enjoy her time with Larry. "So what do you have for dinner?" she asked brightly, trying to concentrate on more pleasant topics.

Larry rummaged around in his kitchen, looking for ingredients for various recipes. "I've got enough for the two of us to have Teriyaki Sesame pork chops and some rice to go with it. Is that okay?"

Kiley nodded. She looked outside and added, "Since it's gotten quite windy in the last few minutes, I think it would be okay for us to stay inside this time." She sat down at his table. It was a small round wooden table that had been painted brown. It was perfect for two.

Larry looked at her strangely, then looked outside. It was true that it was a windy day, but not much more windy than normal. It could get quite windy in this area because of the altitude, she was quickly finding out. Larry grinned at her. She knew he was realizing it was her way of saying she was comfortable enough to spend time with him alone in his house now.

He began mixing the garlic, seasoning salt, pepper, and teriyaki in a bowl. "I had a group of children come into the store today for a field trip," he commented as he got the pork chops ready. "I took them all around the store, showing them the different kinds of chocolates that we have. I even took them back to the bakery to show them how the chocolates are made. They loved it." (4)

Kiley smiled as she pictured Larry showing off his chocolate business to all those little tykes. She was sure he'd be great with kids.

He placed the pork chops in the oven and then began getting the rice ready. "Maybe I could show you the bakery sometime," he said softly.

Kiley smiled at the idea of getting to know Larry better through his work. Not to mention seeing all those different chocolates being made. "I'd like that," she said just as softly.

Forty-five minutes later, the table was set and dinner was ready. "Do you have some milk to go with this?" Kiley asked. She really preferred to drink milk, especially for dinner, and she was no longer embarrassed to tell him that.

Larry looked surprised, but opened the refrigerator and examined it. "Yes, I've got some." He handed it to her.

"My family always drank milk at dinner," she began explaining. "There was even a joke about it. Dad always cooked, because Mom couldn't save her life. In exchange, she always poured the milk, so she could feel like she was a part of the process. I guess drinking milk at dinnertime always has fond memories for me."

Larry nodded, finally understanding. "I'll remember to keep my milk supply for when you're here, then. It's nice to see someone drinking milk," he teased her.

Kiley laughed and poured her own milk. That still felt kind of weird, even though she had been doing it since she left home.

They enjoyed their meal. It seemed Larry knew a lot of recipes. Naturally, that made sense, as he had learned to cook from world-class chefs when he was a child.

After they finished their dinner and cleaned up, they stepped into Larry's den. It was a small room, off the side of the living room. It had a small blue couch, a television, and a shelf with DVDs. The walls were painted beige. "What do you want to watch tonight?" Larry asked her.

Kiley shrugged. "I don't know. What do you have?" She looked at his DVD case, reading the titles as she went along. "Madame Butterfly, Faust, The Valkyries, Carmen...you have a lot of operas, don't you?"

Larry blushed. "Yeah...um, Uncle Lex liked to watch opera a lot. When he visited, we would watch them together. I... guess they bring back fond memories for me." Larry was all flustered, the way he often acted when he talked about his positive relationship with his uncle.

Kiley sighed, not sure what to make of this. She was uncomfortable when he mentioned his positive relationship with Lex Luthor. But it obviously made him uncomfortable as well. Once again, she reminded herself to put it out of her mind for now and enjoy the night. She looked at his DVD case again. What could they watch that wouldn't make them so uncomfortable and would give THEM pleasant memories?

Finally, her eyes settled on a copy of the original of the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. "How about this one?" she asked, pulling it out.

Larry smiled. "I think that would be perfect." He put the DVD into the player and turned on the television. Then he and Kiley settled in and cuddled up on his couch. It was nice to be close like this. They enjoyed the movie, especially the kissing scenes, as they used them as an excuse to kiss each other.

Kiley smiled as she painted the next day. That had certainly been a great date. She and Lary seemed to be getting along wonderfully. She paused for a second. Except for her superhero business getting in the way, of course. Hopefully that wouldn't happen very often.

Speaking of her superhero business... "Help. I need HELP!!" she heard someone yelling. Since this was during the day, it would probably be better for her to answer it, since Dad would be at work. She quickly spun into Superwoman. It sounded like it was coming from Suicide Slum, so she'd better move. Cops didn't usually patrol that area very much, even during the day.

She flew towards the noise, and soon found a couple of guys beating up a girl. She sighed, and picked the thugs up to take them to the police. She wondered why they were beating her up. Where they angry at her for some reason? Were they working for someone else? Or were they just the type who thought pounding women for the heck of it was fun for some reason? She'd have to get the woman to the police station to explain her situation, whatever it was. Hopefully she'd be willing to do that. Especially since, given the type of clothes she was wearing, Kiley thought the woman might be homeless.

So Kiley flew back to where the woman had been standing. Fortunately, she was still there. "Are you okay?" she asked gently.

The woman nodded. "I am now. Thanks for coming, Superwoman." She winced slightly, and Kiley noticed that her left arm seemed especially beaten, complete with bruises, scrapes, and cuts.

"Do you want me to take you to the hospital to get checked out?" Kiley asked, concerned.

The woman shook her head. "No, I'll be all set."

Kiley took a deep breath and nodded. Then, "Would you let me fly you to the police station so you can file a complaint and explain your situation? Those guys are just going to be back on the street unless you do, you know."

The woman thought for a minute, then nodded nervously. So Kiley picked her up gently, not wanting to hurt her more than she already was. As she was leaving Suicide Slum, she absentmindedly turned on her x-ray vision. In one of the buildings was an illegal gambling casino. Not that was unusual, especially for suicide slum. But some of the people in there...city council members?

She sighed. She'd deal with that later. Right now she had a woman to take to the police station so she could file a complaint and explain her situation. Hopefully she could get a couple of thugs off the streets.

Fifteen minutes later, the woman had explained her situation to the police, with Superwoman's help. It seemed the men were angry at her because she used to supply them with drugs, but wasn't willing to do that anymore. It looked like her situation was going to be all right, especially since she wasn't into drugs anymore.

So Kiley thanked the police officers and flew off. Now what was it that she had seen before? An illegal gambling casino. They were always popping up in Metropolis, because they were good money. Every time the police busted one up, another would open. But it looked like the city council members were spending a Saturday gambling. She remembered the story her parents had been working on. They believed the council was spending taxpayer money on other things. What if they were using it to gamble? Of course that was a very big if...but given what her parents had told her...

She grinned. This could be the lead Mom and Dad had been waiting for! She flew towards the Daily Planet. They'd want to know right away. After landing in a nearby ally and spinning into her normal clothes, she went inside.

The security guards nodded toward her. "Hi, Kiley. Are you here to see your parents?"

She nodded.

"When are you going to join our staff permanently, anyway?" the guard teased her. "We need another Kent on staff."

She sighed. She knew the guard was only teasing, but it really bothered her. Couldn't people just accept that she didn't want to write? She stepped into the elevator. No. Why did fate have to be this cruel?

"So I see the high — and — mighty artist has decided to come to the written world for a change," Arnold said snidely, standing in the corner of the elevator. Of course, when he was not interviewing her, he was just down right nasty.

"Yes, I've got some information for my parents," she replied, still doing her best to be polite to him.

"Ah, so Miss Kent is running back to Mom and Dad! Does that mean you're going to start writing after all?"

She pressed her lips together. She really didn't want to lose her temper, but he was really pushing it. Was this information really worth this? Maybe she could just call them up. But then she remembered how guilty she felt about putting distance between her and them lately. "No, I've just got a tip for them," she replied firmly. "Then I'm going to go home and paint."

Fortunately Arnold's floor was next, so whatever snide remark he had planned for her next was cut short. She sighed. Hopefully telling her parents this lead would bring them close to her again. After stepping off the elevator of the city room, she remembered another reason why she hadn't wanted to be a reporter, especially for the Daily Planet. There was too much noise.

Uncle Jim yelled at his reporters to start writing soon, Tim Hathaway complained that he had to work on Saturday, computers clicked, someone whined that there wasn't enough soda in the machine, feet shuffled, one of the newer interns begged for a chance to work with Mom and Dad, and Mom pounded her fist on her desk in frustration.

She sighed. Give her a quiet art studio where she could work at her own pace any day. But she had a reason for being here today, and she needed to remember that. So Kiley walked over to her parents and asked, "Can we go to one of the conference rooms? I think I might have a lead for you."

Mom and Dad looked up at her, surprised, and then nodded.

Clark was very interested in Kiley's lead as he walked into the conference room. Lois had been very frustrated about their city council story earlier. They both knew the city council was up to no good, but how could they prove that? Lois had pounded her fist in frustration, because neither one of them had any idea where to go from here.

Besides, the fact that she was willing to come to the Daily Planet to talk to them said something. She could have waited until tonight or called them on their phones. Kiley made it no secret that she didn't like to come to the Planet when she didn't have to. She didn't like the noise, and there were still people that teased her about joining the staff. So the fact that she was here meant that this was a big lead. Or maybe this was her way of trying to bridge the distance between her and them. It could even be both.

All three of them sat down in the conference room. "So I was performing a rescue in suicide slum this morning," Kiley began. "And while I was flying I happened to turn on my x-ray vision to one of the buildings in the area. It was an illegal gambling casino. I know that's not unusual, but I saw what looked like some of the city council members in So I got to thinking, what if they're using our tax money to gamble?"

Clark raised his eyebrows. Kiley didn't babble very often, but when she did, she certainly proved she was Lois's daughter.

Lois nodded at Kiley's assessment. "That makes sense. Why don't we look at that angle Clark? We're certainly not getting anywhere ourselves."

Clark nodded. "I think this is just the lead we need, sweetie. Thanks." He leaned over and gave her a hug. Maybe their father-daughter relationship was getting back on track.

Kiley hugged him back. "I'm glad I could help." She grinned. "But now that I've told you, I'm going back to paint. You guys need to work, and you know how much I don't like being here when I can help it. Nothing personal."

Lois smiled. "We know. And that's what makes this visit so special. You thought it was important enough to come see us at the Planet."

Kiley grinned from ear to ear as she left the building.

Clark turned around and grinned at Lois. "Maybe we'll be okay."

Lois gave him a kiss on the cheek. "I think we'll be fine. With the story and with Kiley. Now let's get to work."

About three days later, things were really coming together with the city hall corruption story. Kiley had been right, Clark said to himself. She may not have any desire to be an investigative journalist, or any kind of journalist for that matter, but she was still very sharp when it came to information.

He and Lois had known the city government was spending the city's budget on other things, but they didn't know where to look. Kiley had come in and opened their eyes the other day. Since then, they had compared the budget to the gambling casino's earnings and had definitely seen a connection. Last night they had taken a trip down to the casino so they could get some more information from the city council members themselves.

(flashback)

Clark noticed Lois's hands were shaking as she drove to the casino that Kiley had told them about. "Lois," he said softly, "It'll be okay."

She sighed as she continued to drive. "I know we need this for the story, Clark. And I'm happy we have this lead. But...But Clark, I don't have good memories of illegal gambling casinos."

Clark ran his hands through his hair. "I know, I don't either," he replied, knowing what she was referring to. "But Lois, there won't be any gangsters this time. Just a bunch of corrupt government types."

"I know," Lois said as she turned into the "suicide slum" area of Metropolis. "I'm sure we'll be okay. I just wish we didn't have to go in there."

"Well, we can figure out something else if it's a big problem for you. Maybe get a source or something," Clark offered. He didn't want to cause Lois any more pain. When Kiley was withdrawing from them, it had been painful for both of them. But he knew remembering THAT NIGHT was extremely painful for her. And he hadn't done anything to make things easier for her back then. The least he could do was spare her the prospect of reliving it all over again.

"No, that's okay, Clark," Lois replied softly. "We already tried talking to the city hall people, remember? They won't say anything to us. And we can't talk to any of the people in charge of the casino unless we go in there. I can handle it again, with you. Just don't get in front of any guns this time, okay?"

"I promise, Lois. No guns." He rubbed her shoulders, trying to give her some comfort.

She smiled gratefully at him as she drove into the parking lot of the building Kiley had described. Then she took a deep breath and got out of the Jeep.

"So we're doing this?" he asked her, trying to give her one last chance to back out.

"We're doing this," she replied, taking his hand.

So they went into the casino, pretending to be everyday gamblers. Fortunately, no one recognized them.

"How many people do you usually get a night?" Lois asked the person who seemed to be in charge, trying to appear causal.

"About 30 on an average night," the man replied, just as causally. "Sometimes we can get up to 50 on a weekend or special occasion."

Lois nodded. Clark came up behind her. "So, do I see some city council members around here?" he asked, also trying to appear causal.

The man chuckled. "Yeah, I guess some of them have a big 'itch' for gambling! They just can't get enough." He had a coldness in his eyes, like he enjoyed feeding their "itch."

Clark didn't like the look in the man's eyes. It reminded him of some of the looks in the toughest criminals he had faced. Lex Luthor, Tempus, and Bad Brain Johnson came to mind. He shook himself. That wasn't important right now. They had a job to do here.

He thought about the man's words, "an itch." So they had a gambling addiction, in other words. Which meant they needed help. Still, that didn't explain why they had to use the city budget to feed it!

They needed to talk to some of the city council people. Maybe since they had them cornered, they could even get them to go on the record.

So they talked to a couple of members who agreed to go on the record if they spoke quietly. They explained how their gambling addiction started small, as a recreation activity on the weekends. Then it grew until they were using city budget money every night.

Still, that couldn't be the answer for all the city council members. Every one of them having an uncontrollable gambling addiction? It was hard to swallow. So they asked around and found some of them enjoyed being able to get away with it.

"Oh yeah," said one. "I know Mr. Howe loves the thrill of using city budget money. He gets a kick out of the fact that we've

been doing it for months and no one has caught on yet. Wonderful adventure and great profit, he says.”

But now they had almost enough to print the story. They even had a deal with the police department to have the exclusive in exchange keeping quiet until their bust succeeded. Superman planned to assist with that as well, to maintain order.

And his Lois was getting just as excited as she always did when they were about to break a big story. “Look at all information!” she exclaimed, flipping through their notes with glee.

Clark grinned at her. Yep, that was Lois. She never backed away from a challenge.

He absentmindedly flipped through some European papers. Sometimes they had good ideas, and he could read them pretty fast. Suddenly he stopped on one in particular. “Superwoman Spending Free Time in Europe. Why?” it read. Clark stopped flipping through the articles in shock. What was really going on with Kiley?

Kiley continued to work on her abstract painting of Larry. She was enjoying painting her boyfriend, although sometimes it could be difficult because she had so many conflicting feelings about him. She liked him and enjoyed spending time with him. Larry really was a sweet man with a love for cooking, just like her father. He also had a lot of hidden insecurities with regards to his uncle, as she had recently found out. And he supported her painting, which was important to her. But she also worried he might not support her as Superwoman. When she was with him, those doubts seemed to disappear. But at home, her insecurities grew. Was he really that different than the other Luthors she had read about? But it still helped her to work through these emotions by painting. So paint she did.

Her phone rang from the living room. She sighed and put her paintbrush down. Who was it? she wondered. She didn’t often get phone calls. She contacted the art gallery when she needed to. Larry didn’t have her phone number, because she didn’t want him to notice the Metropolis area codes. He knew she was from Metropolis but believed she was staying in Zurich right now for her paintings. She wanted to keep it that way for now. Kiley couldn’t think of anyone else that would need to call her today.

“Hello?” she said into the phone when she finally picked it up.

“Hello, Kiley,” her father’s voice greeted her. “Your mother and I would like you to come over AFTER dinner tonight. We would like to talk to you.”

Her parents! She hadn’t even thought of that possibility! Since most of her family could travel very quickly, they usually tended to come over when they wanted, or needed to talk. Why hadn’t they done that this time? Did it mean it was more serious? And why did Dad make such a point saying their discussion would take place after dinner?

“Uh...sure...I’ll do that, Dad,” Kiley stammered. What was this about? “Hey, how’d that tip I gave you the other day work out?”

Her father’s voice brightened. “You did great, Kiley. We think we’re going to break this case because of your help.”

“I’m glad, Dad,” Kiley replied, brightening as well. She really was proud that she could help her parents like that. Still, why did she get the feeling that it wasn’t going to help restore her relationship with her parents as much as she had thought?

“Please come by at about 8:00 PM, okay?” Dad added.

“Okay, Dad.” Kiley hung up the phone and sighed. She supposed she should get dinner first, then.

By the time Kiley was ready to see her parents, she was a nervous wreck. She ran her hands through her hair over and over

again. What was this about? Had they figured out about Larry somehow? Although if they had, she would’ve expected them to be more upset than they seemed to be. But it certainly was serious. She realized the reason why they wanted her to come over after dinner was because they didn’t want Alice to be included in the discussion. Besides, family dinners were supposed to be relatively happy occasions. She didn’t get the impression this meeting would be a happy one.

Kiley landed in the backyard of her parents’ Hyperion Avenue home. Then she took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

“Hi Kiley,” her mother greeted her as she answered the door. “Come in and have a seat,” Mom said as they walked into the living room.

Kiley nodded and sat down on one of the couches.

Her father sat across from her on the other couch. He took a deep breath and ran his fingers through his hair. Mom sat down next to Dad and snuggled against his side. Kiley sighed. She and Larry were getting closer, and they liked to snuggle together as well. But looking at how her parents automatically leaned against each other for support reminded her how far she and Larry still had to go in their relationship.

“So, Kiley,” Dad began, taking a deep breath. “I know you’ve been keeping your distance from us for a while now. I wish you’d tell us what’s wrong, but I can’t force you to do that. But, sweetie, we’re not the only ones who have noticed a change in you.”

He picked up an article that had been laying on the couch he was sitting in, and handed it to Kiley.

She picked up the article, puzzled. What did this have to do with anything? Journalism was their business, not hers, her parents knew that! Then she noticed the headline. Oh no.

The article went on to explain that Superwoman’s presence had been noticed at least six times in Europe for the last month. That was very unusual, especially since all the Superheroes were based out of the United States. Certainly they had been known to help in major disasters, such as earthquakes, large floods, volcano eruptions, war relief effort, and such things. But none of the things that Superwoman had assisted in while she was in Europe fit that description. While all of the police officers, firefighters, and everyone involved, especially the victims, appreciated her assistance, they had begun to wonder why she was in Europe so often. These events wouldn’t have even aired on LNN before Superwoman had arrived. How did she know they needed help so quickly?

Kiley finished reading the article and slowly looked at her parents. “Well, I did say that I was working on a painting that involved the Swiss Alps,” she commented. “I needed to fly to Europe in order to get my sketches for that painting.”

Dad nodded. “Yes, I understand that. But Kiley, there has to be something else going on here. There’s no reason why you would need to go to Europe as often as this article claims. Besides, didn’t you tell us that painting was finished?”

Kiley nodded. That’s right, she had. “I needed a lot of sketches for that painting,” she replied quickly.

Dad sighed again. “Kiley, you should know better than not to tell me the whole truth. I always know.”

Kiley ran her hands through her hair. “I have reasons for going to Switzerland, okay. And they’re good reasons.”

“Okay, but Kiley, we would really appreciate you telling us what those reasons are.” Mom said, joining the conversation. “Journalists who poke around like this,” Mom pointed to the article, “Might notice more than they should. In Metropolis, we can control most of the media concerning you and your father. And Smallville is so rural that we really don’t worry about Thomas. Plus, he still has Grandma and Grandpa to look after him. We don’t have that luxury in Europe.”

Kiley sighed. She understood what her mother was saying, she really did. The idea that journalists in Europe would notice that she was becoming a frequent visitor had not occurred to her, but they obviously had. Still, she wasn't ready to tell them that she was dating Larry. This conversation was intense enough as it was! Besides, she still wasn't 100% sure things would work out with him.

Still...maybe she could tell them a little bit more. "I'm kind of seeing someone in Switzerland."

Her parents nodded, seeming to understand a little bit more. "We're glad for you, Kiley. But you need to be a little bit more careful," her mother told her gently.

Kiley nodded, glad that they had accepted her explanation. "But what am I supposed to do when I'm flying by and I see someone who needs help? I don't go looking for trouble, but I can't ignore it when someone is suffering!" Kiley particularly remembered the kids she had rescued from the fire last week. She hoped the ones she had to fly to the hospital had turned out okay.

Dad nodded, understanding. "I remember having similar conversations with your grandfather back when I was traveling. He would tell me I needed stop using my powers where people could see me, and I'd tell him I couldn't ignore someone who was in trouble. I thought when I created the secret identity that we wouldn't have this problem anymore."

He leaned over and gave Kiley a hug. "I'm glad you're seeing someone that makes you happy, Kiley. And I understand the situation with the rescues, believe me. But try to be careful anyway, okay?"

"I'll do my best, Dad." Kiley replied.

"Hey, I know we said this wasn't dinner, but how would you like some chocolate cake?" Dad asked, trying to break the tension.

Kiley laughed. "Gee, Dad, I don't know. I'll have to think about that for a second."

Mom grinned. "Well, I don't need to think about it, Clark!" she exclaimed, getting up to head for the kitchen.

Kiley followed her parents, saying, "Okay, you don't have to twist my arm already!"

Alice came downstairs as well, and they all enjoyed Dad's famous chocolate cake. Kiley admitted to herself that it was almost as good as Larry's chocolates.

The next day, Kiley was getting ready for another date with Larry. They were going to watch another movie at his house. It was nice to know that her parents approved of her dating someone, even though she knew they would have a different opinion if they knew who he was. Still, their tentative approval and the prospect of seeing Larry again soon had put her in a great mood.

She sang cheerfully as she got dressed. She put on a green top and a pair of jeans.

She continued to sing as she spun into Superwoman. Hopefully nothing would happen that would need her attention today. That would keep Larry happy, who wouldn't understand why she would be late again, her parents, who were trying to protect their family's identities, and her, who didn't want to deal with criminals or be traumatized by innocent victims today. Not to mention the fact that the victims themselves didn't need to deal with it, either.

Fortunately, Kiley landed in the area she used to change into her normal clothes without any incident. She quickly walked over to Larry's house and knocked on the door. He opened the door almost momentarily, grinning. "Hi, Kiley! Come on in."

Kiley walked in the house happily. "Hi, Larry," she greeted him. They leaned in and kissed, softly.

"So what movie are we going to watch tonight?" she asked him when the broke apart.

Larry shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. Let's go into the den and find something."

As they walked into the den, Larry causally picked up a newspaper article. "Have you seen this? It seems Superwoman is thinking of taking residence in Europe," he commented, with a bitter tone in his voice.

Kiley stopped sort. She thought she wouldn't have to deal with this today! And what was with Larry's bitter tone, anyway? "I don't think she's going to take residence in Europe any time soon," she replied.

"Well, the article says she's been sighted in Europe at least six times over the past month, Kiley. These sightings are not the international disasters those superheroes usually take care of. Why is she here anyway?"

"Well, that may be true, but I think she'd say her home is still in Metropolis, and she'd like to keep it that way! And for the record, she is here to help." So much for wondering whether Larry would support her in the superhero business!

Larry sighed. "Look, I know that you're used to the superheroes in Metropolis, and they're supposed to be here to help. But they've just always seemed kind of egotistical to me. I mean, 'Superman?' 'Superwoman?' And those big flashy clothes they wear that demand attention! They say 'notice me! I'm better than the average human!' I just don't want that kind of person hanging around my home that much."

Kiley was shocked. He didn't want Superwoman hanging around his home, huh? Well then, maybe she shouldn't be here!

"Larry, if that's the way you really feel, then I'm leaving." She turned around and walked out the door.

"Kiley, wait! Why is that so important to you?"

She ignored him as she flew home. That was the end of that! She should've known better than to try to date Lex Luthor's nephew! They were all alike. And if Larry couldn't accept Superwoman, he would never accept her. Tears stung in her eyes as she arrived at her apartment. Larry! Blinking until her tears disappeared, she sighed. She wouldn't let herself cry over him. He wasn't worth it. He was scum, just like his uncle.

Clark arrived at the police station the next night. Some of the police officers had seemed surprised that he wanted to be involved in this, although they happily accepted Superman's assistance. After all, it was just a bust of an illegal gambling casino. They did them routinely, whenever the police found enough information on the newest one.

Clark understood that, of course. But something about that casino made him uneasy. Maybe it was just bad memories of what happened years ago, like he was telling Lois the other night. Still, the owner of the casino had a coldness about him that made Clark nervous. What was that man capable of if the police busted his casino? He decided Superman's presence would be a good idea.

"Okay," the lieutenant in charge of this section announced. "Everyone is here. Superman, we appreciate your assistance," he added, nodding to Clark. He nodded back.

So all the police officers took off in their squad cars and he took off flying. They arrived about ten minutes later, ready with search warrants, hand cuffs, and bullet proof vests just in case anything got nasty.

The lieutenant went inside first. Inside there was lot of activity. People were playing every game from poker to blackjack. In the corner was a bar and many people had drinks with them. "We have a search warrant for this building," he announced, holding up the document. The rest of the police officers and Superman followed closely behind.

Everything happened at once. Half the gamblers scurried to hide. Some of the dealers attempted to hide the equipment in vain. And the owner of the casino pulled out a gun and began

shooting it randomly. "Don't you dare try to cross me!" he cried.

The police officers tried to calm the owner down, find the missing gamblers, and arrest the remaining people in the casino all at once. Clark eyes went up almost to the top of his head when he saw the gun come out. He knew that man had the potential to do something like this! He used super speed to take the weapon away from the man before anything really bad happened.

Naturally, all the police officers had bullet proof vests on, but he was still concerned about the other people there. Besides, although the vests prevented the officers from being hit in the most dangerous place, the chest, they could still be wounded pretty badly in the arm, leg, or even head.

As he confiscated the weapon, the owner sneered, "You won't be able to stop me Superman. I'll get out! This is my place. You can't keep it from me forever. You can't stop me! You can't stop me!"

Clark sighed and handed the man to the police. Some things never changed. Dealing with criminals was one of those things. He helped gather up the rest of the people, particularly those that had attempted to hide. X-ray vision really came in handy sometimes.

For the next two days, Kiley didn't know what to do with herself. She would like to paint, but she simply could not handle working on the abstract portrait of Larry she had been doing before. And she didn't have the heart to start a different one, either. She had cleaned her apartment top to bottom twice, but what was she going to do after that?

At least Mom and Dad didn't have to worry about Superwoman sightings in Europe, she said to herself. She would probably never fly there again, not even to buy more chocolate. Larry had made it perfectly clear Superwoman was not welcome in his home or anywhere around it.

Maybe she'd read for a while. Just as she was about to go upstairs to look at her books, the phone rang. Who was bothering her now? she wondered, but she answered the phone anyway. "Hello?" she said into the phone, rather annoyed.

"Hello, Kiley," Larry's voice replied, nervously.

Larry? Part of her wanted to slam the phone down right there. But the other half of her was very curious just how he had managed to call her in the first place. She had never given him her number! Besides, he thought she was still in Switzerland, didn't he? "How'd you get this number?" she asked, rather briskly.

"Well, I tried all the hotels I could think of in Zurich. But I didn't really think you'd stay there after you left yesterday, anyway. I figured you'd be on a plane to Metropolis as fast as you could get a seat. So I looked up the area codes for the United States, specifically Metropolis. And then I gave the operator your name. It took a lot of leg work, but it was worth it to talk to you again."

Kiley was a little touched. Larry had gone through a lot of work just to talk to her. It was sweet. But it still didn't change the fact that he didn't accept Superwoman. So there was no way for their relationship to work. "I appreciate you trying to get ahold of me, Larry," she commented carefully. "But I still don't see how we can continue dating anymore."

"Kiley, I don't understand how the way I feel about the superheroes affects our relationship. But I will tell you that the reason why I don't like egotistical people has a lot to do with my uncle. He was really self-centered, you know. Even though I had a pretty good relationship with him when I was young, that bothered me, especially when I saw what he had done to my mother. Can you understand that?"

Kiley thought for a minute, beginning to understand. He didn't have a problem with her so much as the idea of her. Larry was sensitive to anyone who might be egotistical, because of his

uncle. Darn Lex Luthor! Even when he was dead, his legacy lived on. Still, his comment last night had really hurt her. Could she get over that? And if Larry knew she was Superwoman, would she really accept her? "I'll think about," she told him, finally.

"Please, Kiley?" Larry pleaded. "Can't we agree to disagree on this one issue?"

No, she said to herself, we really can't. Still, if he had a problem with the idea of Superwoman, would he change his mind if he saw her in person in the costume? "Okay," she finally replied. "We can try again."

"Great!" Larry exclaimed, relief evident in his voice. "Can you get a plane back here soon or will I have to wait a few weeks? Flying here is probably expensive, huh?"

That was a loaded question! Flying commercial to Switzerland would be expensive, but she wasn't flying commercial because she was one of those "egotistical superheroes!" And did she want to see Larry again soon or let her anger die down a little more? "I'll get back to you," she finally responded.

She sighed as she hung up the phone. Kiley was still angry with Larry for saying he didn't want Superwoman in his home. So, did she make the right decision? She didn't know. After all, Larry might not be able handle HER being Superwoman, assuming she ever decided to tell him. Still, his problems about egotistical behavior made sense, and she really wanted this relationship to work. Maybe she'd work on her abstract painting of Larry after all.

Clark was just leaving work that night when he heard a call for help. It sounded like it was nearby, so he figured he should handle it. He discretely told Lois where he was headed and then headed for the Daily Planet roof. Spinning into Superman, he took off and headed for the sound. About ten blocks from the Planet was an old electrical company. It looked like someone had gotten caught in some of the wiring. He wondered how that had happened.

Looking closer, he realized the wiring had been used to tie the man up. Shrugging, he untied the man and attempted to use his x-ray vision just to make sure that he hadn't been hurt. Who knew what happened to him before he was tied up? But Clark's x-ray vision just wouldn't turn on, no matter how hard he tried. What was wrong with his powers? Suddenly an intense wave of pain went through him and he answered his question. Kryptonite.

The man from the gambling casino came out of the shadows, laughing. "I told you you couldn't stop me, Superman! Kryptonite hasn't been used in years, because you keep it locked up with your buddy, Klein. But there was another piece around, too. I found it in one of the sewer pipes a few months ago. I thought it might come in handy some day. And then you busted up my casino last night, and I knew I had to get even with you! I rise again!"

Clark felt like an idiot for not looking around him when he first arrived. And what was going to happen to the man being used as a hostage? He was no longer screaming, because he had been untied, but he still seemed to be in pain. He hated it when criminals used innocent people just to get to him. He fell to the floor, crumbling in pain, while the casino man continued to laugh.

Kiley continued to work on her abstract painting of Larry. She put some judgment in his face, because she was still angry at him for believing Superwoman was egotistical even though he had never met her in costume. But she also added more inner insecurities in his eyes about his relationship with his uncle. And his deep caring he seemed to have for her since he had gone through all that work to track her down.

Suddenly, she heard the phone ringing again. Was it Larry again? Didn't he know she still needed some space? Still, she went into her living room and answered the phone. "Hello?"

"Hi, Kiley, it's Mom. Listen, I'm worried about your father. He left on a rescue right before we left the Planet, and that was an hour ago. He should be back by now. And there are no other emergencies that he should be involved in, right?"

Kiley paused. No, there shouldn't be any other emergencies, because she would have heard them, right? She quickly turned on her radio and listened for reports of international problems or distress. Nothing. And she couldn't hear anyone calling for help, either. So what had happened to Dad? "Mom, I'm sure it's nothing to worry about, but I'm going to fly around and see if I can find him. Maybe he needs help — with the rescue, anyway."

"Thanks, Kiley," her mother replied, hanging up.

Kiley hung up as well and quickly spun into Superwoman. Was Dad really in trouble? There wasn't much that could hurt him, but still... Mom was right. He should have been back by now. Anyway, extra help could never hurt in a rescue. Maybe that's why he was taking so long. Yeah, that was probably it.

She flew off and began looking for him on the Daily Planet side of town. That was where the rescue probably was, because otherwise she would have heard it first. She didn't see her father's red and blue anywhere. Should she try x-ray vision? If he was inside one of the buildings, she wouldn't see him right away. So Kiley tried looking for him in the surrounding area with x-ray vision. Dad still wasn't anywhere to be seen.

Kiley was getting really nervous. If she couldn't find him in any of the areas immediately surrounding the Daily Planet, there was more possibility of foul play. After all, if someone was going to attack Superman, they always made sure to do it where they wouldn't be spotted by the authorities. Besides, he should have really come home by now. What had happened to Dad? She didn't really want to believe he was in trouble, that's why she preferred to think he just needed help on a rescue. But it looked more and more like he was in danger.

Heading further, Kiley flew off to the left of the Daily Planet. After all, she still assumed he had gone in the general area of the Daily Planet, because he had heard the call first. She searched more diligently this time, sure to use her x-ray vision on all the buildings. If something had happened to Dad, he probably wasn't in plain sight.

Finally her eyes came across the old electrical building. As she x-rayed it, she noticed her father lying on the ground in pain. What was the problem, here?

Kiley flew into the building as fast as she possibly could. "What's wrong, Dad?"

Clark whimpered in reply.

Kiley sighed, realizing he wouldn't be able to answer her. Dad was seriously hurt! She blinked back her tears as fast as she could. If she let herself lose control, she wouldn't be able to help him at all! She looked around as fast as she could, trying to find what might have hurt him. Suddenly she noticed a piece of a green rock. That was it then, she thought to herself as she grabbed the rock and threw it away from Dad as hard as she could.

She had almost forgotten about Kryptonite; it appeared so rarely now in the hands of criminals. But apparently someone had found an extra piece. Either that or STAR labs had been robbed again. Still, she would have thought Dad would have mentioned it if they had been. Kiley thanked everything that was good in the world that she wasn't affected by Kryptonite, though. Otherwise she wouldn't be able to save Dad.

"Dad?" she asked again, after she had gotten rid of the Kryptonite. She shook him gently.

"Kiley?" he asked softly.

"Yes, Dad," she replied, still shaking him, trying to get him

back to reality.

"Are you okay?" he mumbled.

"Yes, Dad."

"What about the other man?"

Kiley stopped shaking him for a second. What other man? She looked around, trying to see if there was anyone else there. She had assumed that who ever hit her father with Kryptonite had since left. After a few minutes of seeing Superman in pain, most criminals found watching him rather boring. Still, she looked anyway.

In the corner was another man who seemed to be in some pain. She flew over to him, even though she really hated to leave Dad. But he should be okay, since she had gotten rid of the Kryptonite. And if there really was another victim, here, she should look at him. She examined him quickly, with her x-ray vision. He didn't seem to be in serious trouble. "Are you okay?" she asked him.

"Yeah," the man replied. "But my arms and legs are numb. It's like I can't even move them! I was tied up very tightly. I wish I had been able to help Superman."

She looked at his arms and legs closer. "It looks like you may have lost some of your circulation. You should be okay, but you might want to get checked out, anyway. Do you want me to take you to the hospital?"

The man shrugged. "My doctor is always telling me I need to improve my blood circulation, anyway. I'm sure he'll only say the same thing."

"Yeah, but still," Kiley sighed, trying to maintain the "stern, emotionless superhero" in this situation, even though she was still worried about Dad, "it would probably be a good idea if you can't walk."

He nodded and Superwoman flew him to the hospital. For a second, she considered calling Thomas to handle the hostage victim. That way, she could stay with Dad. Then she dismissed the thought. Even though she could reach Smallville in minutes, it still wouldn't be worth the time. Still, she worried about her father. He would be okay now that she had gotten rid of the Kryptonite, right? Kiley really wished she didn't have to leave him alone. It made her feel like she was abandoning her father. But she knew Dad would want her to take care of the other victim as well.

A short time later, she returned to the old electrical building. She sighed. Dad was always so good to her. She remembered all the times when he comforted her when she was sick and boosted her self-confidence when she needed it. It was nice that she could help him as well.

Still, as she flew over to her father, she wondered if she was being disloyal to him. She had agreed to continue her relationship with Larry, but she knew if she ever told her father she was dating a Luthor, he would think she was choosing Larry over Dad and the rest of the family. She wondered if that was true. Watching her father in that much pain had reminded her how much he meant to her. She didn't want to hurt him.

Clark saw Kiley come into view again after taking care of the hostage. "Hi Kiley," he replied weakly. He hated to admit that he was still weak, even after she had gotten rid of the Kryptonite, but he knew she would realize it anyway. Sometimes having children with superpowers could be a disadvantage.

"Hi, Dad," she replied. She rubbed his shoulders a little. He supposed he had worried her with his reaction to the Kryptonite. She wasn't used to seeing that anymore.

"Come on, let's go home." Kiley grabbed his hand and took off. He was glad she realized that he wouldn't want others to notice he needed his daughter's assistance to fly, even though he did. Still... "ah, Kiley... thanks."

"No problem, Dad," Kiley grinned as they took to the air.

Clark thanked everything that was good in the world that none of his children had to live with the affects of Kryptonite. They may have to worry about an occasional cold, which certainly upset him, but never the agonizing pain and embarrassment of that stuff.

Soon, they landed in the yard of Hyperion Avenue. Clark took a deep breath. He was glad Kiley had rescued him, but he wasn't looking forward to explaining the situation to Lois. She would probably tell him he needed to be more careful. Well, look who was talking.

They went inside. Lois was pacing in the living room. "Oh, thank goodness!" she cried running over to hug Clark and Kiley. "You found him! So what happened?"

"Well, the short version is that someone had a hostage tied up, and by the time I realized he had Kryptonite, it was too late," Clark replied.

"By. The. Time. You. Realized.," Lois replied as slowly as possible. "How could you not realize there was Kryptonite around, Clark? I thought you could recognize that stuff right away!"

Kiley looked nervously between her parents. "Speaking of the Kryptonite, I think I should go back and get it, now that Dad's okay. I wouldn't want anyone else to notice it. I'll give it to Dr. Klein." She flew off quickly, leaving an awkward moment between Lois and Clark.

But within a few seconds, Lois's steam returned, full force. "How many times do I have to tell you to be careful when you're out as Superman, Clark? Just because you're invulnerable from most things doesn't mean you're invulnerable from everything! The criminals have proven that enough times, haven't they? We're just lucky that Kiley isn't affected by Kryptonite!"

Clark sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. "I didn't realize it was Kryptonite right away because it's been so long since I've felt it, Lois. I thought I wouldn't have to deal with that stuff anymore. And I know I'm not invulnerable to everything. But I still need to answer calls for help. You know that."

Lois sighed and sat one of the couches. "I was just so afraid, Clark. I was just so afraid."

He sat down next to her. "I know, honey, and I'm sorry you had to go through that. Like you said, we're lucky Kiley isn't affected by the Kyrptonite."

Alice ran down the stairs. "Dad!" she shrieked. "I'm glad you're okay." She ran in and hugged Clark. He hugged her back. "I'm glad I'm okay, too, sweetie."

Later that night, Clark realized he needed to tell Lois who had attacked him with Kryptonite. It would make her more upset, but otherwise, he was keeping something from her. He had stopped keeping secrets from Lois a long time ago. Besides, since the man owned the illegal casino, it indirectly involved the story they were working on.

"Ah, Lois," he commented nervously as they were getting ready for bed. "About the Kryptonite thing..." he sighed. How should he say this?

"Yes, Clark?" Lois asked, confused. "I thought we went through that already."

"Yeah, well...um...the guy who attacked me with Kryptonite? He was the owner of the illegal gambling casino we helped bust. The one all the city council members were going to?"

Lois sighed and thought about this for a second. "So we had problems with that place after all. I told you not to get in front of guns in that casino, Clark! But Kryptonite is even worse! You could actually get killed from that! I knew casinos were just bad luck for us! I thought you said you'd be careful when we went into the casino?"

Clark sighed and ran his fingers through his hair again. He

knew she was going to be upset about this. That's why he almost didn't tell her. He hated to make his wife upset. What could he do about it now anyway?

"I'm so sorry, Lois. I knew that guy could be dangerous; that's why wanted to help the police with the bust. But I never expected he might have Kryptonite available."

"Clark, you never expect criminals who attack you to have Kryptonite! I thought you said you'd be extra careful at that casino."

"I know, Lois. I know."

"How on earth did he get out of jail, anyway?"

Clark shrugged. "I think he told me he made bail, but I was kind of out-of-it at that time."

"A man who pulled a gun at police raid made bail? That doesn't make any sense, Clark!"

Clark ran his fingers through his hair. "I know it doesn't. But like I said, I was kind of out-of-it at the time."

Lois sighed. "We'll have to figure out how he got out. For the story, and for my own piece of mind. Anyone who has Kryptonite is a danger to us, Clark. We need to know more about him. But casinos are just bad luck for us, Clark. I hope we never have another story involving one. If we do, let's give it to someone else." She shook her head, sadly. There was a time when Lois Lane would never give up a story, no matter what the price. But that was before she almost lost Clark. She still remembered John Dillinger shooting Clark that night. And the way they dragged his body away...And now, they decided to take another story involving a casino, and he was attacked with that deadly substance. There were just too many bad memories associated with those places.

Then she smiled up at Clark. "I'm glad you're okay now." She rubbed his chest. They kept themselves occupied for the next hour or two.

Kiley relaxed the next morning as she ate her breakfast. She liked to have toast and orange juice for breakfast. It was actually the only meal of the day where she did not touch milk.

Mom and Dad had made good progress on their city hall corruption story, with her help. She felt good about that, although she really wished someone hadn't attacked Dad with Kryptonite as a result. But they still got the story they had been working on for the last two months, even though they were still having trouble finishing part of the story with the illegal casino. How did that man make bail? But the city council seemed to appear to be fixed. In fact, the campaigns for new council members were starting today.

Dad was okay as well. By the next morning, his powers were fine, he had told her. In fact, he had gone to assist with an oil spill clean-up on the coast. It was nothing she needed to worry about; it wasn't that serious. But they were glad to have one superhero's assistance.

She still had yet to get in touch with Larry since his phone call, though. Kiley was glad that they were together again, but she wasn't quite ready to see him yet. Still, it was nice to know their relationship seemed to be on a good note. Or as good a note as it could be, considering Larry still thought Superwoman was egotistical.

Speaking of Superwoman, her hearing snapped on. What was that? "He's crazy!" someone screamed. "Someone help!" It was coming from the city council building. What on earth was going on there? She'd better find out, she said to herself as she spun into her Superwoman costume. Especially since Dad was busy with the oil spill.

When she arrived at the city council building, everything was in chaos. People in charge of the campaigns attempted to get their materials together. Other people screamed. And in the center of all the action was a man with a gun. "The city council needs to be

wiped out!" he cried as he shot the gun randomly.

Kiley caught the bullets in mid air and then went for the gun. "If they're going gamble our city funds, they should be done away with!" he continued to cry as she took his gun away from the man. She sighed. Didn't he realize the people here today weren't involved in the scandal? They were trying to help Metropolis find a new city council.

The police arrived and attempted to calm the people down. But the man with the gun continued to cry, "This city is better off with no government! All should be done away with!" Kiley sighed and flew him to the police station, even though he struggled against her. It sounded to her like this man needed serious mental help, but he had committed a crime, so she'd let the police decide that.

After he was taken care of, she flew back to the city council building, just to make sure the police had everything under control. Fortunately, they had. So Kiley flew home. She shrugged. Usually the people she dealt with as Superwoman were either victims or criminals that had little interest in obeying the law. But every now and then, she got a few that were out of touch with reality. Well, luckily, the man wasn't her problem anymore.

A week later, Kiley thought about seeing Larry again. She wasn't nearly as angry at him for his misconception on her family's self-centeredness. It was something she was sure she could correct in time. And she missed him. The way he smiled at her. The way he kissed her. How well he understood and supported her artwork. How much fun he was to talk to. How great his cooking was. And let's not forget the chocolate, she added to herself.

In fact, she didn't have any of his chocolate left. She'd fly over to get some today, Kiley decided. That way, she could have some more Swiss chocolate and hopefully more Larry as well. Furthermore, since she knew where he lived, if he wasn't working today, she wouldn't need to blow up at his innocent employee, she added to herself with a chuckle.

As she spun into Superwoman, she remembered her parents' warning about flying in Europe. She might want to take a different route, so people wouldn't notice she was flying in the same areas all the time. But that was the best she could do. Kiley certainly wasn't going to ignore people in trouble.

So Kiley flew off, soaring over Spain and Italy, instead of England and France. Ten minutes later, she strolled into the familiar chocolate shop. She had missed this place! The chocolates were great, she thought to herself as she picked up one of the boxes of assorted chocolates. But what she really missed about it was Larry. Everything about the Choco Bean reminded her of Larry, including her favorite chocolates.

Kiley glanced at the counter quickly. To her relief, Larry stood behind it. She smiled and walked toward him. "Hi, I, ah, got another craving for Swiss chocolate," she told him as she put her chocolates on the counter.

Larry's face lit up when he saw Kiley in front of him. "Kiley! I'm so glad you're back! Even if it is just for the chocolates."

"Well, in case you haven't noticed, I'm picky about which chocolates I buy. I'd never get them at any other store."

"Well, remember, my store always has fresh Swiss chocolate," he replied as he rung the chocolates up.

"That's right, you get them in every three days at 7:00AM," Kiley commented, remembering their first meeting.

"So, since you're back, do you think we could see each other again soon?" Larry asked with pleading eyes.

Kiley smiled. How could she say no to him when he looked like that? "Yeah, I'd like that."

"Hey! I've got a great idea! I don't know if you've heard of the Zurich Street Parade, but it's a big deal around here. It's in another three days. Do you think we could watch it together?"

Kiley grinned. That would be a nice way to spend a date.

"Yes, I think I'd like that."

"Okay, how about we meet at my house at 9:00 AM?"

She nodded, making a note to get up at 2:30AM in Metropolis so she could meet him at 9:00AM in Zurich. Then she picked up her chocolates and left the store happily. When she got home, Kiley made sure to add Larry's wonderful sense of humor to his portrait.

Three days later, she got up at 2:30AM, right on schedule. It was a bit early, but she needed to take a shower, eat breakfast, and everything before she left.

Twenty minutes later, she was all set. She had a nice bright blue shirt with sparkles on, since she figured she may as well match today's festive outlook. And her outfit was finished with a new pair of jeans. She'd brushed her hair thoroughly and put it up as well, deciding it might be a good idea because it would probably be windy.

Spinning into Superwoman, she took off happily. Hopefully there would be no appearance of her in costume today. She didn't want to ruin the mood. But just in case, she made sure she took a different route again, this time flying past Africa. Landing near Larry's house, she spun back into her regular clothes. Fortunately, there had been no emergencies that warranted Superwoman's attention. Then she happily walked over to his door and knocked. Larry came to the door in seconds and grinned at her as he opened it. "Hi, Kiley! Come in."

"We should probably take something to drink with us," Larry told her as they walked into his home. "It can get pretty hot out there with all those people. Do you want water, or soda, or lemonade or something? I have to say, this is one time where milk would probably not be a good option."

Kiley smiled back at his teasing. "Yeah, I know what you mean. And this isn't meal time, so milk doesn't have the same value for me, anyway. I'll take some water."

Larry nodded and handed her a bottle of water, after getting out a bottle of soda for himself. "So, looks like we're all set."

Kiley shook her head. "No, there's something important we need to do first."

Larry looked confused. "What's that? I thought I remembered everything."

"This," she replied, leaning over and kissing him.

Larry grinned after she finished. "Yeah, I guess you're right. That's important. In fact, I think we might need another one before we leave." He leaned over and kissed her, longer this time.

Kiley laughed when they finished. "We better go or we won't be able to get a good place to see the parade." They grabbed each other's hands and their beverages and set out. They walked because Larry only lived about fifteen minutes from the parade route. Furthermore, it was a relatively nice day.

They soon found a spot on the street where it looked as if they would be able to see the attractions easily. Without the addition of telescopic vision, Kiley added to herself. Looking around, Kiley wondered if she dressed too conservatively for this occasion. Many of the spectators dressed in tube-tops, halter tops, bathing suits, or even full costumes. Maybe she should have gone dressed as Superwoman. Thinking of what Larry's reaction to that costume would be, though, she shook her head.

Larry noticed her shaking her head and asked her what was bothering her. "Well..um...just wondering if I should have dressed differently." That was mostly true, she thought to herself.

Larry nodded, looking at some of the other spectators as well. "Kiley, a lot of people will dress like that to get attention at an event like this. Some of them dress that way in everyday life. You don't have to worry about looking out of place. You dressed the way you feel comfortable. And," he added, "You already have my attention. Besides, I dressed the same way I always do, too."

Larry was wearing a green top and a pair of jeans. Kiley grinned at him. "Yeah, I guess you're right. Thanks."

The parade began about forty-five minutes later. The theme this year was "freedom," so all the floats featured that in some way. Floats of local businesses, charities, and governments came down the street. Others featured Swiss folk culture, such as Hansel and Gretel. Some also included pop stars. People dressed in costumes. (5)

Around noon time, Larry mentioned there was also music available at the parade. Would Kiley like to hear it? She nodded and the eventually found one of the stages. Several singers sang about the importance of freedom, using electronic music background. It was very different, but Kiley decided she liked it. This was really a great way to spend the day, and she enjoyed herself once she relaxed. She was, however, definitely glad Larry had given her a bottle of water before they left. It came in handy. Even though heat didn't really affect her, she still got thirsty.

They picked up a traditional sausage salad at one of the food vendors for lunch. Kiley was really getting a taste for Swiss German cuisine, although she still enjoyed American food as well. Particularly considering when Larry cooked, he usually used American recipes. Still, she munched happily on her salad, as she continued to enjoy the festivities.

By the end of the day, Kiley was really glad she had decided to give Larry another chance. It looked like things would work out between them after all. Larry had even invited her to tour his bakery in a few days, remembering the promise he had made to her a couple of weeks ago. Kiley accepted, eager to see how her favorite chocolates were made and to learn more about Larry. They agreed to meet at The Choco Bean this time, as the bakery was the building right next door.

As Kiley got ready for her next date with Larry, she smiled. She was really looking forward to seeing the bakery. She wondered if she should dress a little more casually today. After all, if they were going to spend time in the bakery, there was always the possibility of someone spilling something. Still, even though she didn't feel the need to "dress up" when she saw Larry anymore, she wasn't sure if she was ready for those kinds of clothes. What would Larry think if he saw her in her painting/cleaning/grunge clothes? Besides, it wasn't as if THEY were going to be baking! He was just going to give her a tour.

In the end, Kiley decided to wear a clean t-shirt and jeans. It was a little more casual, but it still wasn't what she wore when she was painting. She crossed her fingers that nothing happened, but at least she was somewhat prepared just in case. She also put her hair up so it would be out of her face.

As she spun into her Superwoman costume, Kiley paused. Was it really a good idea to continue to date Larry? She loved spending time with him, but wearing this suit reminded her of their unresolved issues. Would he really get over his incorrect perception of Superwoman and the rest of her family? If only there was another way to transport herself to Switzerland easily! Flying to see Larry only made the situation worse.

Then Kiley pictured Larry's eyes, his smile, and remembered his kisses. She thought about how excited she was to see his bakery today. She sighed and took off to Switzerland, hoping she wouldn't notice anyone in trouble today.

Within a few minutes, Kiley found an alley near the Choco Bean and spun back into her t-shirt and jeans. Then she happily walked into the store. "Hi, Kiley!" Larry said happily, spotting her almost immediately.

"Hi Larry," she replied, happily as well.

"Give me a minute to tell my employees where I'm going, then we'll be all set," he told her, grinning.

A few minutes later, they left the chocolate shop and headed around the back where the bakery was located. As he opened the

door, Kiley immediately noticed the smell of chocolate baking. Mmmmm. The bakery was a large room that had many machines in it throughout the room. Off to the side was a big table for mixing dough.

When they entered, several of the chocolate chefs looked up, noticing that the boss had just arrived. "Hello, Mr. Luthor. How are you today?"

Kiley bristled for a second. Even though she knew what Larry's last name was, she wasn't used to him being referred to as "Mr. Luthor." Of course, part of the reason for that was that Larry avoided using his last name whenever he could. Still, it made her uncomfortable. She took a deep breath, reminding herself that Larry wasn't exactly proud of the connotations of his last name.

Larry smiled in response to his employee's greeting. "Hello, everyone. I've brought my girlfriend here today. I thought I could show her how this crazy operation we have runs from behind the scenes." He put his arm around Kiley.

Kiley smiled at that comment. Even though they had been dating for over a month now, it was the first time Larry had referred to her as his girlfriend. It was a nice feeling. Of course, it would be a nicer feeling if she knew they were going to last but...girlfriend. Larry's girlfriend. It just sounded right.

Meanwhile, the chocolate chefs nodded. They went back to baking, although you could tell they were trying to be on their best behavior because the boss had decided to pay a visit, with his girlfriend, no less.

Larry walked over to the first station. "This is our cookie machine, (6)" Larry commented, showing Kiley a slightly above-the-waist machine. "You see, the chefs put the dough in here," he said, pointing to the top of the machine. "And then you turn it on," he added as he pushed the red button. The machine hummed and the belt on the front moved. "Then the chef can mold the dough to shape the cookie."

Kiley nodded in understanding. Then they moved to the next station. This one had a chef working at it. "Hi, Niclas," Larry greeted the chef. "Can you show Kiley how this machine works?" The machine, Kiley noticed, was about the same size as the previous one, although it was wider instead of tall.

"Of course, Mr. Luthor," Niclas agreed obediently. "This is our 'chocolate mould filling machine.' We use it for the truffles. We put the cookies in here," he said as he put eight cookies in the little holes on the machine. "Next, we take the chocolate and dump it in the top." Niclas picked up a bottle of chocolate and did just that. Kiley's mouth watered as she looked at all that wonderful melted chocolate! "Then we push this button," he continued as he pushed one of the buttons directly above the cookie holes. The large wheel on the left side of the cookies began spinning, and the cookies were moved so they were directly in front of a large metal spout. Then the melted chocolate poured onto the four of the cookies. "When that's done, we carefully put them together," Niclas finished, as he picked up the other cookies that didn't have chocolate on them and molded them to the ones that did.

After that, Kiley and Larry stopped next to a man who was using several of the ovens. "Hello, Jonas," Larry greeted him.

"Hello, Mr. Luthor," Jonas replied. Jonas placed a dozen chocolate cookies on a greased pan. Then he put them in one of the ovens. There were three long skinny ovens stacked on top of each other. Next, Jonas did the same with the truffles Niclas had just finished putting together.

"See, this part is pretty standard, Kiley." Larry told her. "You put the cookies on the baking pan and put them in the oven. Then you turn it on and set the timer."

Kiley nodded, they moved on to the next station. "This is the enrobing machine," Larry commented, just as one of the chefs walked up to it. The machine was much taller than the previous ones. It started out about waist-high. Then there was an open

window, and it finished almost over Kiley's head. (7)

"Hello, Mr. Luthor," the chef said nervously. "I just came back from the bathroom. I was doing my job before that, honest, sir."

Larry chuckled. "It's okay, David," he replied. "I know you're doing your job. I just came to show Kiley the bakery."

David nodded, looking relieved. "Well, this is the enrobing machine. It's how we make our chocolate candies. You see, we put the coconut, nuts, solid chocolate, caramel, mint, whatever we are using for filling in those holes," he began, pointing to the machine's probably about fifty holes. David proceeded to fill the holes with cameral.

"Kiley," Larry commented. His face showed an idea was slowly coming to him. "Would you like to help make a batch of these since they're your favorite?"

Kiley's heart melted. Larry was so sweet to try to get her involved with chocolate-making, especially her favorite kind of chocolates! Briefly, she glanced at her outfit. Now she was really beginning to wish she had worn her other clothes! Oh well. "Yeah, I think that sounds like fun."

David smiled, seeming to enjoy the interaction. "Okay, watch me, and then you can make your own. Then, you add the chocolate in here," he continued, pouring the melted chocolate into the holes at the top of the machine. "Then, you push this button," he finished as he pushed the small button on the side of the machine. With that, the top of the machine slowly came down on top of the caramel. A minute or so later, the top moved back up. The pieces of caramel were now covered with chocolate.

"Now we just have to set them aside so they can cool," Larry added, picking up the sheet of chocolates and placing them in a nearby cooler. "Okay, what did you want for your filling?" he asked, turning back to face Kiley.

Kiley thought for a minute. There were so many different fillings that she liked! That was one of the reasons she always bought the box of assorted chocolates. She sighed and attempted to run her fingers through her hair without thinking. Then she stopped. Since she had her hair up, it really wasn't possible to do that. She really shouldn't do that in a food-based environment, anyway. People might worry that she would get hair in the chocolate! Anyway, what kind of filling did she want?

"Mint," she finally decided. Larry and David nodded. David handed her the mint filling, and she filled every single hole with it. Next, David handed her the chocolate, and she reached up and poured the chocolate in the top of the machine. Then she pushed the button and watched the top move down to the mint fillings. Her mouth watered. Those really looked good.

A few minutes later, the top of the machine moved back up. Larry handed her a container for the new chocolates, and she placed all of them in the cooler. "They should be ready by the end of the day, if you want to come get them."

She stopped short and looked at him. "Shouldn't I pay for them first? I mean, this is your business!"

Larry smiled at her and shook his head. "No. That was a freebie for you."

"But, Larry—" Kiley began protesting.

"It's okay, Kiley. They're my gift to you."

She sighed. "Thanks."

He continued to show her various other pieces of equipment which all helped make the wonderful chocolates he sold. Kiley loved the experience.

"Why don't we have lunch in the park?" Larry asked her after they finished the tour.

Kiley nodded happily. That sounded like a really good idea. So after Larry thanked the chefs for their assistance, they left the chocolate bakery and headed for a nearby sandwich shop.

However, as they were walking, Kiley's super hearing suddenly snapped on. "No, Timm!" a frantic woman screamed.

"You can't get me!" the young boy replied.

Kiley looked to the direction of the noise and noticed a young boy playing on the edge of a balcony on a very tall building! There was no way his mother could get to him in time! He seemed to be taunting his mother, but Kiley could see that he was about to fall any second, as he wasn't paying attention to his footing.

She took a deep breath. She didn't care what her parents had said; she was going to have to save the boy. But what would Larry think when he saw Superwoman in person? Would he resent her more than he already did? What if he came right up to her when she was in the costume and told her to go home? Or would he change his mind about at least one superhero? She sighed. She really didn't want to bring Superwoman into this situation. There were just too many possible consequences. But if the young boy was going to fall from a building at least fifteen stories tall, she had to rescue him.

"Larry, I, ah, have to...um..." Gosh, why couldn't she think of a good excuse when she needed one? She needed to leave now! "Leave for a few minutes!" she finished, out of ideas. She ran to a nearby alley as fast as a normal human could.

Meanwhile, Larry called out, "Kiley! Why'd you run off like that? I can't find you!"

Kiley spun into her Superwoman outfit and flew off to catch the boy, just as he fell from the balcony, screaming. She quickly flew back into the balcony, and set the boy next to his mother.

"Oh, thank you, Superwoman!" the woman exclaimed as she hugged her son. "It's a good thing you were nearby today."

"Yes, of course," Kiley replied politely. Inwardly, she sighed. She was glad that she was here to save the little boy, but this rescue was probably going to cause her a lot of problems. Not the least of it was the fact that she had run out on Larry! Speaking of that... "I should probably be leaving now that you're all set," she told the woman. "Try not to play on the edge of the balcony anymore, okay?" she told the young boy. Then she flew off.

Finding an alley, she quickly spun back into her regular clothes. Now where was Larry? She used her X-ray vision to search for him. Was he at the sandwich shop? No. Where she had left him? No. Anywhere on that block? No. How about the next block? No. How about near the building where the kid had fallen? There he was!

Now that she had spotted him, Kiley ran over to Larry. "Hi!" she greeted him, hoping that he wouldn't question where she had disappeared to.

Unfortunately, she wasn't that lucky. "Where did you run off to?" he asked with a puzzled look on his face. "I thought we were going to the sandwich shop and the park TOGETHER." Now he looked a little hurt.

"We are," Kiley replied. "I just had to leave for a second. Now I'm all set." She reached for his hand.

"Yes, but where did you run off TO," he continued, not willing to let this drop. "Why won't you answer that? Are you keeping something from me?"

Kiley looked at the ground. Yes, she was keeping something from him, but she wasn't happy about it. Still, telling him that she was Superwoman was not something she was ready for. She needed to know that he could accept her other persona first. It would have to be discussed with her parents, especially given who Larry was. She wondered if she would ever be ready for that. Anyway, he was still waiting for her to answer his question.

"There was just something I had to do," Kiley finally answered. Why was it that she could never think of an excuse? Mom always said Dad's early excuses were really bad, but at least he came up with something! "Can we leave it at that, please? I'd really like to go on that picnic with you." Her eyes pleaded with him to agree.

Larry sighed. "Okay, but someday we're going to have to talk

about what you're keeping from me." He finally took her hand and they walked back to the sandwich shop to get their lunch.

Kiley sighed in relief. At least that was over, for now anyway. Hopefully she wouldn't have to hear him complaining about Superwoman as well. She wasn't sure if she could handle that.

Twenty minutes later, Kiley and Larry had their ham-and-Swiss sandwiches spread out on a picnic table at the park, since he still refused to sit on the ground. "Ah, Kiley," Larry began slowly and nervously.

"Yes?" she replied just as nervously. What was this about? She ran her fingers through her hair.

"I don't know if you noticed Superwoman was just here recently?"

"Yes. I noticed. What's this about?" Kiley replied briskly. She had told him she'd given him another chance after knowing how he felt about Superwoman and the other superheroes, but it still bothered her. What was he going to say?

"Well, she saved that little boy from falling from a fifteen story building," he continued. "And I kept thinking where that boy would be if she hadn't saved him. And how upset his mother would have been. I'm glad she was here, Kiley."

Kiley's heart melted. Larry was telling her he was okay with Superwoman! He wanted her hanging around his home! "I'm glad you saw that," she replied. "But what happened to 'all the superheroes are egotistical? They have names and costumes that are self-centered'?"

Larry munched on his sandwich. "Well, I won't deny that the names sound self-centered, and the costumes look egotistical," he replied slowly. "But Superwoman didn't seem to act self-centered at all, just now. She just wanted to save that little boy." He paused for a second, and seemed to be gathering his courage to continue.

"Thinking back, one of the main reasons why I always believed that the superheroes were egotistical was because of what my uncle told me about Superman. And knowing what I know about Uncle Lex now, it makes sense that he didn't like Superman. He probably really put a dent in Uncle Lex's crime empire. Maybe the superheroes are good people, after all. I'm open to the idea, now."

Kiley's heart soared. "Thanks, Larry. You have no idea how much that means to me." She ran over to the other side of the picnic table and threw her arms around him. Then she kissed him hard. Larry seemed surprised at her reaction at first, but responded to the kiss within a few seconds. Then they continued eating their lunch, but Kiley was glad he was finally willing to possibly see superheroes as good people. They made plans for dinner in a few days.

Before she left for the day, Kiley picked up her now perfectly-chilled mint chocolates, thinking what a special present they were from Larry. After all, he had let her be a part of the chocolate bakery and gave her the reward as well! And anything from Larry was special, especially since he could probably accept her other identity now.

Kiley was almost finished with Larry's abstract portrait. She had added more kindness and understanding to his face since their last conversation. She smiled at the painting. She loved being able to see him everyday, even when she wasn't in Switzerland. The abstract painting also allowed her to see the "real" Larry, not just what he looked like. When she was finished with this one, maybe she'd hang it up in her room. That way, Larry's picture would be the first thing she saw when she woke up. She liked that idea.

Picking up her paintbrush, she placed it in the brown paint. She sighed. There really wasn't much left on the tray. For a minute, she searched for the bottle, before remembering that was the last of her brown paint. It looked like she was done painting for the day. After all, while she didn't have to get ready for her

date with Larry right away, she didn't have enough time to buy any more paint. So Kiley began cleaning up her studio for the day.

When that was finished, she went upstairs to change. What did she want to wear tonight? Or this afternoon, depending on which way you look at it, she thought to herself with a chuckle, as she looked at the clock. It was only 11:00AM here. But since it would be 6:00 PM in Switzerland when she met Larry...

Whatever. Anyway, what was she going to wear? She and Larry were having dinner again at his house. Nothing fancy, of course, but she should look nice enough. She remembered her "t-shirt and jeans" attire from the other day. Larry hadn't seemed to mind that she wasn't dressed up, but still... She picked out a pair of black pants and a deep blue shirt. There. Now she was all set.

What was she going to do for the next forty-five minutes, though? It was too early to fly to Larry's, but there wasn't enough time to start another project. She could fly around and see if she could find anyone who needed Superwoman's assistance, but that probably wasn't a very good idea, especially after the lecture her parents had given her about being careful. She didn't want to do anything that was abnormal for Superwoman. She had enough reporters in Europe wondering about her already.

Maybe she should just read for awhile, she finally decided. She picked up a copy of Great Expectations and settled in. Within minutes, she was lost in the world of Pip and Estella.

Half an hour later, Kiley got up. She should fly to Larry's soon, especially since she didn't want to hurt him by being late. Hopefully, she wouldn't run into any trouble on the way. Although he was certainly more accepting of Superwoman than he used to be, which made her feel better about being Superwoman around him, he wouldn't accept her being late without giving him a reason again! Maybe she should sit down and think of some good excuses soon. But right now she needed to go.

So Kiley spun into her Superwoman costume and took off. After arriving in an area near his house where she could change, she quickly spun into her regular clothes. Then she strolled happily over to Larry's home. She smiled. She really was looking forward to seeing him. And kissing him, she added to herself with a grin. She wondered what he would cook for them tonight. She knocked on the door, waiting in anticipation for Larry to answer.

Within a few minutes Larry opened the door. "Hi, Kiley! Come on in." Kiley walked inside and gave him a kiss. Larry grinned at her and kissed her back.

Then they walked into his kitchen. "So, listen...um... ah, I've got something to ask you," Larry began. It was obvious he was nervous about whatever it was. "My mother was talking to me earlier, and I happened to mention that you were coming over for dinner tonight. So... ah... she wanted to know if she could come over and meet you. She said she was really interested in this young lady that I've been spending so much time with. So... um, I know we had planned on just the two of us for dinner tonight, but... would you mind if she ate with us?"

Kiley paused and thought for a few minutes. She really would like to meet Larry's mother. Was she the reason he hadn't turned out to be a junior Lex Luthor? But on the other hand, were they ready for that? Even though they had gotten a lot closer in the last couple of weeks, especially since he was willing to look at the superheroes as more than "egotistical," she wasn't sure. Meeting parents was usually a sign of a serious relationship. Was their's that serious? Besides, after she met his mother, it would be expected for her to arrange for him to meet HER parents. And that was something she definitely wasn't ready for.

"I'm sorry if you weren't ready for that," Larry said quickly, noticing her hesitation. "I didn't mean to put pressure on you. But my mother is really pleased that I met you, that's all. Maybe I should tell her to come next week?" Larry pleaded, obviously

trying to fix what he believed to be a mistake.

"No Larry, I'd love to meet her tonight," Kiley replied, deciding she should just go with this. She DID want to meet his mother; maybe she should just leave it at that. And she didn't want Larry to think she was upset by his offer to meet his mother, even with such short notice.

"Really?" asked Larry, sounding excited and nervous at the same time.

"Really," she answered, smiling as Larry's face lit up with relief. He looked so cute. And she loved the fact that she was the reason why his face lit up like that.

So Larry went over to his phone in the living room and dialed a number. "Hi, Mom, it's me. She says you're welcome to come tonight. Yes, I mean it, she's okay with it. You'll be fine, Mom." Then he hung up the phone and wandered back into the kitchen. "She'll be here in about twenty minutes. In the meantime, I'll get started on dinner. I'm making Greek salad grilled chicken tonight," he commented as he got out the ingredients.

"Sounds great," Kiley replied cheerfully, trying not to sound nervous. She was looking forward to meeting Larry's mother. After all, she could tell her more about Larry. But she was still a little anxious as well. Would Larry's mother like her? Was this a sign of how fast their relationship was moving? Still, she really should calm down, she thought to herself, remembering Larry's reaction when he thought she didn't want to meet his mother.

Absentmindedly, she picked up a nearby dish towel and began wiping the counter. Cleaning always helped calm her down.

About fifteen minutes later, there was a knock on the door. This was it.

Larry put down his spatula to answer the door. Kiley took a deep breath and followed him, resisting the urge to run her fingers through her hair. "Hi, Mom," Larry greeted a tall blonde-haired woman with an uncertain smile on her face.

"Hello, Larry," the woman replied carefully. Then she turned to face Kiley, looking more uncertain. "Hello, you must be Kiley. I'm Lacey." Lacey took a deep breath and held out her hand to Kiley.

Kiley smiled at her and shook it. "Yes," she replied nervously. "Actually, my name is Kiley KENT. Maybe you've heard of the name?" Maybe Lacey wouldn't accept her once she knew that. It was best to know right away.

"Yes, I think I've heard of the name," Lacey replied causally.

Kiley blinked a few times. It didn't bother her at all?

"So, dinner will be ready in about twenty-five minutes," Larry told them.

"Sounds great, Larry," Lacey replied. She turned back to Kiley. "Larry tells me you're an artist. You're here to paint some of our scenery?"

Kiley paused for a second. That was the reason that she had given to Larry for being in Switzerland. And at the time, it had been the truth to a certain extent. But that was no longer the case. Unless you counted Larry as scenery, she added to herself with a grin. But he was a lot more than that. So how was she going to answer that question?

As Kiley was still deciding how to answer, Larry replied, "She's great, Mom! She painted that!" He pointed to her "Swiss Alps Mystic," which proudly hung right in the middle of Larry's living room.

Lacey turned around to look at the painting and gasped. "That's amazing, Kiley! No wonder you're an artist. See this corner over here?" She pointed to an area which showed the Alps as they morphed into a part of the sky, the sun catching part of the mountain, while leaving the other shadowed. "That reminds me of some of Rembrandt's work. And the way the colors come together like that! It reminds me of Da Vinci! But you still made the piece your own. I love it!"

Kiley was surprised at this, to say the least. It wasn't often that people outside of art school would be able to notice things like that. And the fact that her artwork was being compared to Rembrandt and Da Vinci was very flattering, although she thought Larry's mother was exaggerating just to be nice to Larry's girlfriend. She shrugged. "Thanks, I loved painting it."

Lacey smiled back at her, and they all went into the kitchen. Larry went back to cooking. Meanwhile, Kiley picked up the broom and began sweeping. She really needed to calm down. Larry's mother seemed nice, and she really appreciated her comments on her art, but Lacey was still making her very edgy. Lacey, on the other hand, began setting the table.

Larry turned around for a second and looked at both of them, dumbfounded. "I've got everything all set you guys. You're guests. Have a seat," he replied firmly.

Kiley stopped in mid-sweep, embarrassed. "Sorry. Cleaning is something I do to calm myself down."

Lacey looked confused. "But this is my job! I'm a waitress!"

Larry looked from one woman to the other, seeming more dumbfounded, not to mention confused, than ever. "Kiley, if it makes you feel better to sweep my floor, you're welcome to it. But don't think you have to." Then he sighed deeply. "Mom, you may work as a waitress, but you're not working right now. I'm not paying you to be here. I thought we've been over this before."

Lacey looked from Kiley to Larry, still looking confused. "But you have company tonight!"

"Yes, Mom. And you're part of that company," Larry replied firmly.

"Okay," Lacey finally replied.

Kiley shrugged and continued to sweep the floor to calm down, although she was blown away by that conversation. Larry's mother actually thought she had to continue waitressing outside the restaurant she worked at?! And it apparently was something she and Larry had discussed before. And yet, by her comments about Rembrandt and Da Vinci, she knew this woman was smart. Kiley remembered Larry telling her that her mother had become dependent on her brother, but she hadn't really thought about the implications. She wondered if Lex Luthor really had destroyed this woman's self esteem so much that she thought she was supposed to be a waitress at all times. How had this woman done so well raising Larry in those circumstances?

About fifteen minutes later, they all sat down to eat. Larry filled all their cups with milk, causing Kiley to share a special smile with him. He was so sweet to remember that, especially with his mother here with them.

"This is really good, Larry. You're a wonderful chef," Lacey commented brightly.

Kiley dug in and agreed. "I love your meals, Larry."

Larry smiled happily between the two women at his table. "I'm glad you're both enjoying it."

"So Larry, have you shown this young lady how you make your chocolates yet? I'm sure she'd love to find out."

Larry grinned back at his mother. "Yeah, I did that the other day. I even let her make her own chocolate mint candies."

Kiley's eyes lit up. "Oh, I love those chocolates! They're the best, especially because they're from Larry." She looked down at her plate for a second. Had she said too much in front of Larry's mother?

But Lacey smiled warmly at her in return. "I'm glad he's treating you right. I want my son to treat his girlfriend special."

Kiley smiled back at her. She seemed to be a very nice lady who loved her son and was eager to get to know his son's girlfriend. Kiley wished she knew her well enough to understand her apparent lack of self-confidence, though.

"I was reading Hamlet yesterday," Lacey said causally a few minutes later. "And I was thinking about how that story was an excellent portrayal of a young man's love for his father on so

many levels. I mean, on one hand, Hamlet is deeply grieving for his father's death, but on the other hand, he wants justice for his father. Do you know what I mean?"

Kiley and Larry nodded. Larry replied, "I remember reading that in my studies. And there's Polaris and Laertes, too. Which is kind of similar to Hamlet and his father, but different, too."

Kiley paused for a second. This was an unusual conversation between a mother and son. Literature? Then she shrugged and decided to join in. "Yes, I remember reading that in school. What I think is interesting is to try to figure out how much Hamlet is play-acting and how much are his real feelings. You know, because he decides he's going to pretend to be crazy so people won't care what they say in front of him. But how much of that is actually real? And who does he tell his plans to?"

Larry and Lacey both nodded. Everyone was just finishing up dinner. Lacey got up and took everyone's plates.

Larry sighed. "Mom, didn't we have this conversation a half an hour ago? You're not waitressing in my house! You're my guest, just like Kiley is. And I know I grew up with servants, but I don't consider it beneath me to take care of my dishes!" He hugged his mother and she hugged him back.

"Yes, I know. I guess it's just hard to remember," Lacey replied.

Kiley sighed inwardly. Larry was right when he told her that his mother was smart. But she really only saw herself as a waitress. And as Larry's mother, she supposed. It was so sad. She was obviously a wonderful mother. But as woman in her own right...?

Later on that night, Lacey brought up another interesting topic. "I hear Superwoman's been spending some time in Europe," she commented.

Kiley's ears went on end. That again. Her superhero persona seemed to be chasing her where ever she went these days. What was Lacey going to say about it?

"I think she's doing a lot of good," Lacey continued. "I don't care why she's here, I'm just glad she is."

Kiley smiled but raised her eyebrows at Larry. Apparently she wasn't bothered by "those egotistical superheroes."

Larry took a deep breath, "I guess maybe you're right, Mom."

Kiley grinned from ear to ear. "I'm glad to hear that."

An hour later, Lacey decided she should go home. After all, she had to work the early morning shift at the restaurant. She didn't look too thrilled about that, either. In fact, she looked like she was dreading it. Kiley had to wonder if she even liked waitressing. That poor woman.

Larry and Kiley stood alone in his living room after Lacey left. "So, what do you think of my Mom?" Larry asked her.

Kiley took a deep breath and replied carefully, "I thought she was really nice, and I enjoyed her company. But...does she really think she has to waitress all the time?"

Larry sighed and replied, "It's like how she defines herself. Lacey Luthor, waitress. 'That's all I'm ever going to be,' she tells me."

"But doesn't she consider being your mother important as well?" Kiley asked, confused.

"Of course, you saw how she wanted to make sure I was treating you properly." Larry grinned at her and brushed her cheek with his hand. "And when I was growing up, being my mother was how she defined herself. Today, she still keeps pretty close tabs on me. But since I've grown up, I guess she feels she can't define herself that way anymore."

Larry shook his head sadly and sat down on his couch. "It wouldn't be so bad if being a waitress was just a job for her. But it isn't. I mean, she really thinks she needs to waitress in my house! And she does that when she goes to dinner at other peoples' homes, too. Besides, she's really smart. I'd like to see

her get a teaching degree or something. I'd help her pay for it if she'd let me. But she always tells me 'waitressing is what I do. I can't do anything else.' Uncle Lex, for you. He's the one who convinced her she'd never be able to do anything in her life."

Kiley looked at Larry sadly. "I'm sorry about your Mom, and I wish there was something I could do for her. But I'm glad she's still a good mother for you. And listen, I know this is a touchy subject, but what do you think about what she had to say about Superwoman?" She ran her fingers through her hair.

Larry grinned at her. "I've been thinking about that since we last talked, and then I listened to what my mother said, and I realized that she's right. Superwoman, and probably all the superheroes, are all right. Actually, they're great."

Kiley looked at Larry for a few minutes. In that instant, she knew she loved him. Then she jumped on top of him and kissed him with all the enthusiasm she ever had in her life.

When Kiley got home that night, she was walking on air. Literally. The night had gone amazingly well. Larry's mother was nice and she had accepted her. She also helped Larry accept her other identity. And Larry was so sweet the way he tried to help his mother. He was sweet in so many other ways as well, of course. Like the way he kissed, for example. She really did love him.

Suddenly Kiley dropped to the floor with a loud thud. She loved him? Wouldn't that mean it was time to tell someone about Larry? She had always said she wanted to wait until she knew he was the right guy. Well, now she knew, didn't she? Larry had already introduced her to his mother. Was it time to return the favor?

But how could introducing Larry to her parents be a favor to him? She knew how her parents would react to him. They would consider him a junior Lex Luthor. They'd never accept him the way his mother accepted her.

Accepted her. That was another thing. Now that she knew Larry accepted Superwoman, was it time to tell him about her other identity? She remembered how upset he'd been when she had to leave in the middle of their date. There was also the time when she was late, and she couldn't explain why. He almost didn't let her in that day. She didn't want to go through that again. Besides, there were a lot of things she'd like to share with him as Superwoman. Flying, for example. And how the stress of the job affected her sometimes.

Still, she really didn't see how she could tell Larry she was Superwoman before she told her parents about Larry. So where did that leave her? What could she do? She sighed, and decided maybe her apartment needed to be cleaned again.

The next day, Kiley woke up, remembering her dilemma from last night. Unfortunately, she wasn't any closer to deciding what to do today. Maybe an answer would come to her as the day went along. So she got dressed and ate breakfast and was still no closer to an answer.

Suddenly she remembered her abstract portrait of Larry. Wouldn't it be nice to finish it? Then she could hang it up in her bedroom. But she'd have to buy the brown paint first, remembering the reason why she couldn't finish yesterday. So Kiley changed into Superwoman and flew off to the art store, making sure no one saw her change back into regular clothes in a nearby alley.

She picked up the paint she wanted and flew back to her apartment quickly. There. Now she was ready to begin. Then she looked down at her clothes. Maybe she should change first! The last thing she needed was to get paint on her Superwoman costume!

Five minutes later, she was finally ready to begin painting. She added the brown to Larry's eyes that she had been meaning

to do, making them look deeper. And she added his acceptance, both of her and his mother, because of last night. She made the finishing touches, showing how much she loved him. There. Perfect.

Or not so perfect. Well, Larry's portrait had come out well, but she was still no closer to deciding what to do about her parents, Larry, and her other identity. Why did things have to be so complicated? She picked up another canvas and began doodling with her paints intensely. As she continued to obsess, she remembered a conversation from several years ago.

(flashback)

"This is different from the stuff I usually paint," twenty-year-old Kiley commented to Grandma Kent. She was in the process of painting Grandpa's tractor with the corn fields in the background. "Usually I paint stuff around Metropolis."

"Well, it's a good idea to paint different things sometimes," Grandma Kent replied. "That's what my art teachers told me. Now, me, I've got a lot of corn field paintings. I don't know if I've ever tried that cubism you were telling me from your art class. Maybe I will try it sometime. But this is fine for now." Grandma Kent was sitting next to her with her easel in front of her. She was in the process of painting an abstract of the porch swing out front.

Kiley and Grandma Kent smiled at each other as they enjoyed painting together. "It's nice to have someone to paint with, you know. I've never had anyone to share it with," said Grandma Kent.

"I'm glad I've got you to paint with too, Grandma."

"And you know it's not just painting. The two of us spending time together like this is a good time for us to talk about what's in our lives as well," Grandma Kent added. So they did.

(end of flashback)

Kiley smiled at that memory. Grandma was right; it was good to paint different things. She had painted a couple of "firsts" this year. "War's Honor and Grief" was her first painting that wasn't bright and happy. "Swiss Alps Mystic" was a first in so many other ways.

Would Grandma Kent be the one to talk to about this? It was true that after her father, and to a certain extent, her mother, she was definitely closest to Grandma Kent out of her whole family. So if she couldn't talk to Mom and Dad, Grandma would be the next best option. She would probably be a little more objective about Larry than her parents. It was definitely less nerve-racking to consider talking to her. Although she continued to doodle, she slowed her pace down a little. At the same time, it would be good to talk about Larry to someone. She'd love to tell someone about his chocolate shop and the special mint chocolates he let her make. And what a great cook he was. And how much fun he was to talk to.

Speaking of chocolate, she put her paintbrush down and went to get some more. The chocolates were delicious, of course, but what really made them special was thinking about Larry and how he gave them to her.

Still, if she really was going to fly out to talk to Grandma Kent, she should call first. Of course, she almost never did that; it was much easier to just fly out there than bother with the phone. But she didn't want to take the chance that Grandma wouldn't be there and she'd end up running into Grandpa, or worse, Thomas. As much as she loved Grandpa Kent, she didn't find him as easy to talk to as Grandma. And she really didn't want to involve her siblings in this. They'd feel caught in the middle between her and Mom and Dad. Grandma was the only one she wanted to talk to.

Kiley took a deep breath and went over to the phone, running her fingers through her hair as she went. She dialed the number.

Did she really want to do this? Telling Grandma was not like

telling her parents, but it was a step. Was she ready for this step? She could stop right now. All she had to do was hang up right now and pretend she had never dialed this number. Her hand moved to hang up the phone.

Then she remembered how Larry had been willing to introduce her to his mother. He had been brave. She remembered how much she loved him. How much longer could she honestly keep Larry a secret? She sighed and waited for the phone to be answered.

"Hello?" Grandma Kent's voice answered.

"Hello, Grandma," Kiley answered.

"Hi, Kiley!" exclaimed Grandma's surprised voice. "Not that I'm not glad to hear from you, but what's the occasion, Kiley? Usually you fly over if you want to talk."

"Um, yeah, usually I do," Kiley replied. She knew this was going to be an issue. "I just wanted to make sure you were home."

"Well, I'm right here, just like I always am," Grandma replied cheerfully, although there was a little wariness in her voice as well.

"That's good," Kiley answered hesitantly. "Um, well, I'd like to come over. But, um can you tell me if Thomas and Grandpa are going to be around the house today first?"

Grandma paused for a minute. "No, I think they said they had a lot of stuff to do in the field today. Why?"

Kiley sighed and maneuvered the phone onto her shoulder so she could run her fingers through her hair. "Well, I just want this to be between us, Grandma. Is that okay?"

"Sure," Grandma answered, sounding a little confused. "I'll get the easels set up. See you in a few minutes."

Despite being still nervous, Kiley smiled as she hung up the phone. Grandma knew they always painted while they talked. Even if it was nothing but doodles.

She took a deep breath and spun into Superwoman. This was it, she said to herself as she headed for the window. I'm about to tell someone else about Larry. Then she jumped in the air and headed for Kansas.

Kiley certainly took her time getting there, though. Was it her fault that the clouds were so much fun to fly through today? Or that she had never noticed how beautiful the landscape of Tennessee was from the air? Tennessee had wonderful mountain ranges. Not quite as spectacular as the Alps, but still, nice.

Eventually, Kiley came across Kansas. Slowly, she found Smallville and flew down next to Thomas's and her grandparents' house. She looked around her quickly. The last thing she needed was for Grandpa or Thomas to see her right now! Taking a deep breath, she spun back into her painting clothes and walked into the kitchen. "Hi, Grandma."

"Oh, there you are, Kiley. I thought maybe you were held up somewhere. It took you a lot longer to get here than it usually does."

"Yeah, well, you know..."

"Yeah, I do. A superhero's work is never done."

Kiley looked at the floor. She hadn't said anything, but she had certainly given Grandma Kent the impression that she was late because of a rescue or other kind of emergency. When in reality, it was only her cowardliness. Wasn't today about coming clean to at least one person? "Well, um... Grandma... where are the easels?" One confession was enough, she decided.

"Over in the living room," Grandma replied.

Kiley followed her into the next room. Off to the side of the room, near the window, two easels had been set up, complete with new paper, brushes, paint, and newspaper on the floor incase they spilled. She grinned and sat down in front of one. She may be very nervous about this conversation, but she loved to paint with Grandma Kent.

"So what's bothering you, Kiley?" Grandma asked, as she sat

down at the other easel and picked up a paintbrush.

"How do you know there's something wrong?" Kiley asked, feeling defensive all the sudden. After all, she met the man she loved, so that was a good thing right? She picked up a paintbrush as well and began making random strokes.

"Please!" Grandma replied, laughing. "You call me up before you come, and I can't remember the last time you did that. You make sure I'm the only one who's going to be at the house today. Plus, do you have any idea how much you're like your father when you're worried about something? You've been brooding for a while about this, haven't you?"

Kiley sighed. Grandma was right, of course. Kiley had been told that she had a lot of her father's qualities, from her compassion, to her patience, to her nervous habit of running her fingers through her hair. Her habit of worrying, or brooding, or obsessing, whatever you wanted to call it, also came from Dad. But hearing that now only reminded her of how much her news was going to hurt her father when and if she finally told him.

"Okay, yeah, I have. But there is some good news, too. I've... been dating someone for two months now. And I think, no, I KNOW that I'm in love with him."

Grandma Kent broke into a huge smile. "That's great, Kiley! It's always wonderful when you've found your special someone." Grandma leaned over and hugged her. "So what's he like?"

Kiley grinned. Here was her chance to talk about how wonderful Larry was! "He's great. He runs a wonderful little chocolate shop in Switzerland, with the best chocolate I've ever tasted. Recently, he even gave me a tour of his bakery and let me make my own chocolate candies! And he's really sweet, always wanting to look after his mother and everything. He's always fun to talk to. And he doesn't just cook chocolate, either. He's a wonderful chef. He kind of reminds me of Dad, in that way."

Grandma looked confused for a second, seeming to be wondering what the problem was in this situation. Then her eyes widened, in apparent understanding. "So since you said he runs a chocolate shop in Switzerland, does that mean he lives in Switzerland?"

"Um, yeah," Kiley replied. She doodled with her paints some more.

"So you've been flying out to see him?"

"Yeah." Why did Grandma Kent consider this issue so important? She hadn't even told her the important stuff yet!

"So does this cause problems for your other identity? Do you feel guilty for keeping that from him?" Grandma began painting a few circles.

Ah. So that's where Grandma was going. She thought the reason why she was brooding was because of her Superwoman persona and how that affected her relationship. Of course, that was an issue, but certainly not the biggest one.

"I remember this was a big issue when your father was dating your mother," Grandma Kent continued, seeming to be sure she was on the right track. "He felt so guilty for lying to her, but he couldn't face the idea of telling her the truth. In fact, he almost ran away because of that." Grandma's voice continued as her mind wandered back to that time.

(flashback)

Martha and Jonathan were helping Clark pack all of his belongings, even though neither wanted to see him do this. He was planning on pretending to move overseas, and then becoming Superman full time. And Clark said something like, 'I don't want to do this, but I don't see anything else that's fair to Lois.' I said to him 'If Lois is the problem, why are you running away?' But Clark still couldn't see the answer right in front of him! So, not wanting to push any further than they already had, Martha and Jonathan went out to eat.

(end of flashback)

"When we came back, they seemed to have solved at least some of their problems, so your father didn't run away. But, in the end, he had to accept he had to tell your mother."

Kiley got the message loud and clear. She did want to tell Larry about Superwoman, especially knowing he would accept her other identity. But she couldn't bring herself to do that without telling her parents about Larry first, even though she had a feeling the former would be easier. She sighed and swirled her paintbrush around the paper. "Grandma, I understand what you're saying. And I want to tell him the truth about Superwoman. But I have to do something else, first. I just don't know if I'm ready for that, yet. That's what I'm here to talk about."

Grandma looked incredibly surprised. "Okay, what is it?"

Kiley took a deep breath. Could she really manage to get the words out? She put her paintbrush down and ran her fingers through her hair a few times. Then she picked it up again and made random dots of paint on the paper. "The guy I'm seeing? His name is Larry Luthor. He's Lex Luthor's nephew."

Grandma dropped her paintbrush, creating a big paint streak across the front of her picture. "Did I hear right? Did you say 'Luthor'?"

Kiley nodded nervously.

"As in the root of all evil in Metropolis thirty years ago?"

"Yyyeeeessss....That was Lex Luthor."

"Are you sure about this, Kiley?" Grandma Kent's voice sounded doubtful.

"Yes, Grandma. I know it's hard to take in, but Larry isn't like his uncle. He's sweet, and not at all power-hungry. And he's really concerned about his mother, who was Lex Luthor's sister. He seemed to really have destroyed her self-esteem."

Grandma still looked unconvinced. She remembered how Clark used to talk about Lex Luthor when he first settled in Metropolis.

(flashback)

"There's someone testing me, Mom. The jumpers the other day were from opposite ends of Metropolis, but only seconds apart. And the bomb today. It didn't go off until I was inside the building."

"Are you sure, Clark?" It did sound a little too coincidental, but could someone really be trying to hurt her boy?

"Pretty sure. And I've got an idea who it might be, too. The jumpers both worked for Lexcorp."

"But a lot of people work for Lexcorp in Metropolis. Doesn't he employ over a million people?"

"Yes, but Mom, this is different. And Lex Luthor tried to sabotage the space program, too, you know. I just can't prove that."

"Lex Luthor? The philanthropist?" Martha had always heard pretty good news about that man. A self-made man. Gave money to orphans. Of course, he probably had his enemies, just like everyone did. But could he honestly be a criminal out to get her son?

A few months later:

"Lex Luthor used those kids, Mom. He seduced them with the idea of being smart without having to work at it. He told them how successful they'd be. And he knew if the kids drank too much of it, their brains would overload! This guy is evil. I just don't know how to stop him."

Lex Luthor encouraged children to take extremely destructive drugs? Martha thought to herself. Innocent children who just let their curiosity get the better of them when they accepted the "smart stuff?" Clark was right; he was evil.

Several months later:

"I found out the extra Superman was really a clone. He didn't say who created him, but I think I know who. Whoever created

the clone wanted their own Superman to take me out, and then influence the clone to their satisfaction. I can only think of one person that would fit that definition, not to mention have the resources to carry through with it. Lex Luthor, of course. You know, I think I can actually say I hate him."

Martha understood Clark's perspective of Lex Luthor. She had long since given up her perception of Luthor as a philanthropist. But hate was a very strong word for her boy to use. Was he sure he meant that?

"You know, I don't like Lex Luthor, either. But hate is a very strong word, you know," Martha told her son gently.

"I know, Mom. And believe me, I don't use it lightly. But I think it fits in this case."

(end of flashback)

"You know, your father told me he really did hate Lex Luthor," Grandma said carefully. "He had very good reasons for that, too. Are you sure Larry's different?" Grandma Kent picked up her brush and began painting again.

"Yes, Grandma, I am. Believe me, I thought about that, too. 'Are all Luthors the same?' I asked myself over and over. And every time Larry would bring up Lex in conversation I would shudder. Larry does remember him, you know. 'What does that mean?' I would ask myself. But eventually I had to trust my heart. Larry wasn't raised by Lex Luthor. He was raised by his mother, Lacey. And he isn't his SON. He's his nephew. It makes a difference. I know Larry. I've spent enough time with him to know who he really is."

Grandma Kent nodded, her face showing understanding for the first time. "I see your point, Kiley. We all need to trust our hearts. But is two months really enough time to know that? From what I understand, Lex Luthor was a master of deception. How do you know Larry's not deceiving you as well?"

Kiley sighed. She supposed Grandma had a point. What was the difference between knowing and thinking you knew? On the other hand, her Superwoman persona was already causing problems in their relationship. "How much longer can I keep deceiving him?" She made rough, angry strokes with her paintbrush.

Grandma sighed. "Kiley... well... I know I encouraged you to tell him about Superwoman, but Kiley, Luthor tried to attack Superman more than any other person I can think of." She shuddered. "I'm just not sure... Do you know Lex Luthor put your father in a Kryptonite cage once? He came so close to dying that night." Grandma Kent's eyes welled up with tears at the memory of almost losing her son.

(flashback)

"What's wrong Clark?" You don't sound too good." What happened to her boy? As he was growing up, Martha had gotten used to, and thanked everything for, the fact that her boy could not get hurt. Now that was no longer true.

"Well, Mom... I've been exposed to Kryptonite for the past twenty-four hours."

Martha gasped. She had seen the problems that rock caused him after a short exposure. What kind of problems would result in such a long one? Was he going to be okay? "Kryptonite? Twenty-four hours?" she said out loud.

"Yeah," he replied in the same voice. That voice really bothered her. He sounded withdrawn, maybe even depressed. And really tired, too.

"Luthor set a trap for me. And like an idiot, I walked right into it. He had a Kryptonite cage rigged up."

That monster! Martha knew Luthor was out to get her son. But the very idea that he would put him in a cage like an animal, made of that horrible stuff that made her son suffer so...

"So I won't be able to fly to Kansas for a while. If I ever will

again," Clark added, sounding even more depressed. "I was exposed to it for a lot longer this time. I was kind of out-of-it for a while."

Martha decided then and there that she and Jonathan would fly out to Metropolis within a day or so. And she decided she was glad Lex Luthor was dead.

(end of flashback)

"Lex Luthor kept Dad in a Kryptonite cage? He almost died?" Kiley was shocked. She expected that there would be some information her parents wouldn't print, but she really didn't expect this. How could she ever tell Dad about Larry now?

"Yes. We've had a lot of bad issues with Luthors."

"I know. I know. That's why I don't know what to do about Larry. But I still love him, Grandma."

Grandma sighed. "Then you have to have faith in that. And Kiley, I know this is going to be incredibly hard, but you need to talk to your parents. Otherwise, you're living a lie."

Kiley's mind kept wandering the next day as she and Larry were watching the second movie in the Pirates of the Caribbean Series. Was Grandma right? Did she not know Larry as well as she thought she did? Then she snuggled closer to him on his couch. No, that was disloyal to Larry, she thought to herself, remembering how much it bothered him to be compared to his uncle. She loved him. And she knew he wasn't deceiving her.

Of course, she couldn't say the same about herself. She knew she was deceiving him. Kiley could feel the spandex from her costume under her clothes. She had never felt heat before, but having that many clothes on was really bothering her tonight. She sighed and tried to concentrate on the movie. Wasn't one of the benefits of watching movies that you focused on the characters' problems instead of your own?

Ten minutes later, Kiley's mind wandered again. She wished she could just tell Larry what her problem was. But as much as she loved Larry and wanted to tell him about Superwoman as well as the problem with her parents, she couldn't do that to Mom and Dad.

They had always been a close family, and it had been an agreement between all of the family that if anyone ever felt the need to tell someone the secret, they would discuss it with the rest of the family first, if at all possible. And even though she tried to pretend otherwise, she knew Grandma didn't count. Especially since she made Grandma promise not to tell anyone else.

The secret was something none of them took lightly. Her parents would probably understand wanting to tell the man she loved. They had been there once, as she remembered Grandma's story. But they wouldn't understand her wanting to tell Lex Luthor's nephew.

She looked deep into Larry's eyes. His uncle had really locked her father up in a Kryptonite cage and tried to kill Dad! She imagined the amount of pain that would have caused him. Kiley knew how much painful a small amount of Kryptonite could be for her father; she had witnessed it a couple of weeks ago. But a whole cage made of Kryptonite...? And for twenty-four hours...? How could that man do that to her father? And how could Larry's kind, sweet eyes give her any answers?

"Are you okay, Kiley?" Larry asked as she continued to search his eyes for any signs of his murderous uncle. "Maybe you'd like to watch a different movie?"

"No," Kiley replied, trying to sound causal. "This one's fine. We've already seen the first one."

"Well, that's what I mean," Larry commented, trying to be helpful. "Maybe you'd like to watch something completely new."

"No, like I said, this one's fine." It didn't matter which movie she watched, Kiley realized. Focusing her mind on the characters'

problems was just not working for her tonight. She snuggled up against Larry again and tried to think only of how much she loved him if she couldn't concentrate on the movie.

Suddenly, without warning, her super hearing kicked in from 20,000 feet. "I've lost control!" the pilot screamed. "I can't get the nose up! We're going down! We're going to land in the Alps!"

Oh gosh, trouble or no trouble, she really needed to land that plane! She was really their only hope, and the mountains, particularly high mountains, were a bad place for a plane to crash! Now if she could only come up with a reason to leave. What happened to her list of excuses she was going to work on?

"Listen Larry," she said as she untangled from him, "I'm going to...um...go upstairs for a minute."

Larry nodded nonchalantly. Apparently that was a good excuse, although she didn't know why she would need to go upstairs in his house. Whatever. She raced upstairs, changed into Superwoman, and flew out the upstairs window.

Then she quickly found the plane that was in trouble and carried it to safety. The pilot, crew, and the passengers thanked her for her assistance. But unfortunately, some of the passengers were reporters.

Kiley sighed. She loved her parents and she knew they loved their profession, but she really didn't like reporters at all. They were too much of a reminder of what half of Metropolis thought would be "the perfect career" for Kiley Kent. And reporters who questioned her as Superwoman made her nervous. What if she made a slip? Add to the fact that Superwoman's repeated presence in Europe had been questioned a few weeks ago, and Kiley was more nervous and annoyed than usual. She made a conscious effort not to run her fingers through her hair.

Quite frankly, she didn't want to talk to the reporters at all, especially since she was still in the middle of a date with Larry. But she remembered how her father trained her to deal with the press as Superwoman.

The words, "One of the worst things you can do is make the press believe you have something to hide. Believe me, I know. So when you're Superwoman and the press comes to ask you questions, answer them to the best of your ability. Don't just fly off unless there is another rescue you need to go to," echoed in her mind. And with the European press particularly interested in her right now, that advice was especially fitting. "Be careful," her parents told her when they had talked about her going to Switzerland. She needed to honor them right now.

Even though Larry was sure to think she was skipping out on him, she thought sadly, remembering the look on his face when she left in the middle of a date last time.

Okay. Try to keep the formal Superwoman appearance, she said to herself.

"Superwoman, we're glad you were able to help us, but can you tell us why you spend so much time in Europe for the past two months?"

"Europe has needed my assistance. I believe the people were always grateful," Kiley replied as politely as she could. Reporters! They drove her nuts.

"Yes, they were grateful, but most of these rescues did not qualify as the 'international disasters', your family usually helps out with outside your home base. Are you still living in Metropolis?"

"Yes," she replied, maybe a little too briskly. "Is that everything? I need to be leaving."

"Okay, sure. But... Superwoman what is the importance of Europe in your opinion?"

Larry! That's what's important. And that's who I need to get back to!

"It has a lot of big cities with crime problems, just like Metropolis," she replied, just as briskly as the last time. She

wasn't supposed use that voice as Superwoman, but the reporters were really getting on her nerves. And they were keeping her away from Larry. Okay Dad, she said to herself, did I answer enough of their questions? "I really need to be leaving," she commented, taking off.

She quickly arrived back at Larry's house and spun back into her regular clothes.

Larry was waiting for her downstairs, and he didn't look happy.

"Hello," she said nervously. What should she say to him? She ran her fingers through her hair.

Larry looked straight at her and said, "Kiley, where did you go?"

"I went upstairs," she replied, a little confused. She knew he might be a little bothered by the fact that she was gone for about half an hour, but he didn't seem bothered by her going upstairs before. What was this about?

"You may have LEFT to go upstairs but that's not where you WENT," Larry replied, obviously getting angry. "I went upstairs about ten minutes ago because I was worried that you didn't come right back. I had thought you went to use the restroom, or maybe you wanted to um... get more comfortable up there."

Kiley almost blushed, invulnerability or not, when she realized what Larry had probably thought she wanted to do. Larry's bedroom was up there!

"But when I went up there, you weren't anywhere around. So where did you go? And more importantly, WHY DID YOU LIE TO ME?"

Kiley's face crumpled. How could what sounded like a perfect excuse end up being the exact wrong excuse? And darn those stupid reporters! Why did they have to be so nosy anyway? She was the one who saved them from the plane crash!

"Larry, I don't know what to tell you. I'm sorry I worried you. But I don't know what to tell you," Kiley replied as carefully as she could.

"Well, you need to think of something then!" Larry put his hands on his hips. "Kiley, I've known you've been keeping something from me for a while. And that bothers me enough, particularly with all of the things I've told you. Do you remember the time at the art exhibit I poured my heart out about what it was like to grow up in Uncle Lex's fortress? Or how I told you how worried I was about my mother? But I was willing to let that go. I figured you'd tell me when you're ready. And I know something's been bothering you tonight, even though you tried to pretend otherwise. But I told myself 'give her time, maybe she'll come around.' But then you look me right in the face and LIE to me, Kiley! I've had enough!"

Kiley shook her head. She'd had enough, too. She'd had enough with reporters, she'd had enough with all the pressure she was under, and she'd had enough with Larry, too! "I didn't lie, Larry!"

"Oh, yeah? Then tell me how you could have gone upstairs and not be anywhere around when I went looking for you?"

Kiley opened her mouth and no sound came out. What should she say, I flew out the window?

"See," Larry cried triumphantly, pointing at her lack of explanation. "I've got to tell you, Kiley, I love spending time with you, but if you can't even tell me the truth about where you've been for the last half hour, maybe we shouldn't see each other anymore."

"No!" Kiley cried. Anything but that! "I... I love you, Larry. Give me another chance."

"I love you, too, Kiley." He sighed. "But I'm tired of giving you chances on this. If you really mean that, you'll tell me."

With that, Kiley got up and left the room. Then she ran down to her normal alley and flew off. In the distance, she could hear Larry punching his couch pillows and yelling "Why, Kiley?"

Why?"

Well, that did it, she thought to herself as she flew into her window. It was really over with Larry. How could that be? She loved him. Shouldn't they be able to get through their problems?

As she spun back into her normal clothes, she sighed. Superwoman. That was the problem with their relationship. Her stupid other identity! First he wouldn't accept Superwoman because he thought she was self-centered. Then, when that was finally cleared up, Superwoman still caused problems because she had to leave without explaining why. Kiley took off her superhero costume, which had still been under her clothes, and shoved it aside. She never wanted to see it again.

The next morning, Kiley got up and smiled at her abstract portrait of Larry. She reached up and brushed her fingers against the canvas. That was all she had of him now.

After getting dressed, she didn't even notice what she had put on, she went downstairs. There, hanging in her living room was what used to be one of her favorite paintings. The sun. Its bright rays shined at her, reminding her that it gave her special powers. Powers to become Superwoman. Powers to help that boy when he fell out of the building. Powers to help those children out of the fire about a month ago. Powers to help with the relief effort in the war in South America. She reached up and brushed her fingers on the sun. That was who she was.

Or who she used to be, anyway, Kiley added to herself as she walked away from the painting. She was done with being Superwoman. The painting of the sun was nice, but it only reminded her of times when being Superwoman made her feel good about herself. It didn't make her feel good anymore. It only reminded her of the problems it created with Larry.

But how could she listen to cries for help and not answer? she asked herself. How could she tell Dad she wasn't going to work with him anymore? Imagining the hurt look on his face, she sighed. She had already felt disloyal to Dad when she was dating Larry. Larry Luthor. How could her father have ever understood that? And she knew she had been distancing herself from her father and the rest of her family because of Larry as well. She had already hurt her father enough with her actions over the past two months. Kiley knew giving up Superwoman would hurt him most of all.

Still, she knew she couldn't continue with the charade after last night. Larry was right; she had been keeping something from him. Every time she put on that Superwoman costume, she was pretending to be someone else. Someone more formal, who didn't feel emotions. Someone who didn't have anything to hide. Someone who actually liked reporters, she added with a grunt. Those stupid reporters! It was their entire fault she was so late when she left Larry's last night. If she stopped being Superwoman, she'd never have to deal with those annoying reporters again.

Suddenly an idea came to her. If she left Metropolis, she wouldn't have to worry about not answering all those cries for help, because she wouldn't hear them! And she wouldn't have to worry about the look on Dad's face when she told him she wasn't going to be Superwoman anymore, because she wouldn't tell him.

Grinning, as the idea appealed to her more and more, she picked up her old suitcase and began throwing clothes inside, purposely not adding extra superhero costumes. She'd find an old cave or something that no humans ever went to anymore. Then she wouldn't have to pretend to be someone else. She wouldn't have to listen to reporters. She wouldn't have to listen to Arnold and his snide remarks about her paintings. She wouldn't even have to feel guilty about what happened with Larry, because she was doing something to correct the problem with their relationship.

Gently, she picked up her abstract painting of Larry that she had hung above her bed and brushed it with her fingertips. She did miss him. The way they had ended things didn't stop her from loving him. But there was nothing else she could do. She went downstairs and picked up some plastic wrap. Then she carefully wrapped the painting and placed it in the sleeve of her suitcase. At least she'd have that to remember Larry.

Kiley picked up her suitcase with one hand easily. She remembered a conversation from one of her dates with Larry.

(flashback)

"Are you sure you can carry the chair all the way to the park?" Larry had asked her as they were getting ready for their picnic.

Kiley laughed inwardly. Of course she could! In fact, she could carry both chairs and their picnic basket with no trouble at all. But she knew that would be unusual for a woman. So she needed to pretend it was harder for her than it was. Not hard enough for Larry to believe he had to carry the chair himself, of course. Just enough to make it realistic.

(end of flashback)

Kiley sighed. She was really going to miss those evenings with Larry. And that night in the park was a special memory for her because of the way he had responded to "Swiss Alps Mystic." They went to the park because of the way he responded to it. Still, there was another instance where she had to pretend to be someone she wasn't around Larry. It was nice she didn't have to do that anymore.

She brought the suitcase downstairs. Even though she wouldn't be able to sell her paintings anymore if she lived alone like she was planning to, Kiley would never survive without painting. So she picked up some brushes, a few of her favorite paints, as well as one canvas. As for food, she was sure there would be some around wherever she was going. Actually, didn't she have a book on edible wild plants somewhere? Thomas had given it to her. She didn't know why she never got rid of it, but it would come in handy now.

There, she was all set. If she took off fast and stayed in the cloud cover, hopefully no one would even notice she was leaving. Briefly, her mind flashed back to what Grandma told her. How Dad had planned to run away once, because he couldn't bring himself to tell Mom the truth about himself, but had gotten tired of lying to her. This was completely different! she insisted to herself.

She picked up her suitcase and took off from her window, faster than the eye could see. As she started flying above the clouds, she couldn't believe how liberating it felt to fly without the superhero costume. She was free.

After flying around the world several times, Kiley finally settled on a small cave in northern Russia. She doubted many people lived around here. It was far too cold for a normal person. Perfect.

Kiley spent the next few hours setting up her new home. She turned a big rock into a vanity, placing her brush, deodorant and hair ties in a neat arrangement. She took out a few of her favorite outfits and draped them on another rock. Who cared if they got dirt on them? She put her painting materials in another corner, using a flat rock as an easel.

When she was finished, she knew she needed to get something to eat. She picked up her "wild plants" book and searched for something that could be found in this area. There. Perfect. A few hours after eating, Kiley went to sleep, listening to the wind blow. There was no traffic noise here, she noticed. She always liked traffic noise.

The next day she woke up and ate more plants for breakfast. There was no chocolate available here, she thought to herself

sadly. If she wanted more she'd have to go back to civilization to get it. She didn't think she could handle that now. Of course, thanks to the way her relationship with Larry had turned out, chocolate had some unpleasant memories associated with it. But it was still great tasting.

And she missed her family. She hadn't really thought about how that would affect her. She had been distancing herself from them for a while because of Larry, what was a little more distance? A lot, she realized. There would be no more Kent family dinners for her. No more working with Dad on the bigger rescues in Metropolis, or all of them working together on an international disaster. No more seeing Mom and Dad cuddle up together, secure in the fact that they loved each other, while Alice grumbled about it.

She picked up one of her canvases and began doodling with her paints while she thought. At least she still had painting. And it was nice that she was alone out here, she repeated to herself several times. She had felt alone for a while because she was the only one who knew Larry. It meant there were no emergencies for Superwoman to get involved in. It was definitely better this way.

She munched on more plants for lunch. She had to admit, they tasted a little bland. She had always enjoyed grilled cheese sandwiches, chicken soup, and things like that. And her father made wonderful steaks. Larry also made great gourmet dinners. Well, those meals were no longer options for her anymore. It was better this way, she repeated to herself. And of course, there was always the mint chocolate candies Larry had given her.

That night, she went to sleep, listening to the wind again. Why did she miss the sound of traffic so much?

The next morning, she doodled with her paints again. Kiley couldn't bring herself to start another painting yet. It was too final.

She sighed as she stroked the canvas. Her family would no longer come to her openings and encourage her. She would no longer praise Thomas for helping Grandpa on the farm. Her face would no longer gleam with pride as she looked at another Daily Planet exclusive for her parents. Because despite all the grief that she got from the rest of Metropolis about how she should be a reporter, she WAS proud of her parents' work.

Still, there was no way she could go home now. She simply couldn't be Superwoman anymore. And she couldn't face her parents' disappointment, especially her father's, if she had to tell them that.

Kiley ate the same plants she had been eating for the last two days for supper. They were really getting old, though. Maybe she'd look around for something new tomorrow.

The next day, she looked through her wild plants book for ideas. Then she walked around, looking for something similar. But all she could find were the same old plants. Maybe if she flew, she could cover more ground. She took a deep breath and took to the air. Within a few minutes, she found what she was looking for.

As she landed next to the plants, she paused. It had been a few days since she had flown. She had forgotten how enjoyable it was. But as enjoyable as it was, it also made her remember her responsibilities. She had always believed she had been given these powers to help others, just like Dad did. How could she have forgotten that so quickly?

Not only that, but how could she have thought running away would solve anything? Because that's what she had done, even though she tried to deny it. She'd run away from her problems, and she'd run away from who she was.

But what was she supposed to do about it now? She was still no closer to solving her problem with Larry. She reached over and picked up his portrait that she had leant up against a rock. Her Larry. She loved him. And he said he loved her too.

She sighed and picked some more plants for lunch. She remembered Grandma's voice, "You need to tell your parents, Kiley. Otherwise, you're living a lie." Was that the answer? Could she really just go home and tell her parents about Larry? Or would that create more problems than it solved?

She listened to the wind again. Still no traffic noise. It was surprising how much she missed the city. She wasn't like her mother who liked to have all kinds of things going on at once. And she liked to work alone. But she had lived in Metropolis almost her whole life. She liked its sounds, its atmosphere. And she did miss being Superwoman. Helping people, making a difference in the world, being someone people looked up to was important to her. It was a big part of Kiley Kent even though she had tried to deny it the day before.

Finally, late that night, Kiley gathered her things in her suitcase again and flew back to Metropolis.

The next morning she woke up, again brushing her fingers on Larry's abstract portrait. What was she going to do? She hadn't been honest with Larry about that, while he had been completely honest with her. She remembered how he spelled out to her all the secrets he had revealed to her about his life. And how hurt he was when she didn't do the same. He was right. She needed to tell him. Because Superwoman was a part of her.

Of course, in order to do that, she would have to tell her parents about Larry. Could she really do that? Telling Grandma had been hard enough. Then she thought about the hurt and anger in Larry's face the other night. His screaming, "Why, Kiley, why?" after she left. And Grandma's comment that if she didn't tell her parents about him, she WAS living a lie. She couldn't hide from her parents anymore. Yesterday had taught her that.

She looked at her phone like it was a snake, only worse. Then she took a step toward it. And another. And another. Twenty-five baby steps later, and she was standing right next to the phone. She ran her fingers through her hair. She was about to call her parents to tell them that she was dating Lex Luthor's nephew and wanted to tell him her other identity. The man who once put her father in a Kryptonite cage. Was she crazy?

Then she remembered Grandma saying "You need to tell your parents. Otherwise, you're living a lie." And Larry, once again screaming, "Why, Kiley, Why?" as he pounded into his couch. She picked up the phone and dialed her parents' number.

"Hello?" her mother's voice greeted her.

"Hi, Mom, it's me."

"Oh, hi, Kiley." Her mother's voice sounded a little confused, which was understandable. The Kents rarely used phones to call each other.

"Um... I... was wondering if we could have a family meeting tonight. You know, about... stuff. We could invite Thomas, too. Of course, if it's not a good night, we could do it later. Yeah, later would be fine. Definitely fine."

Her mother laughed. "Sure, we can arrange that. I'll get back to you. You know, Kiley, you've always reminded me so much of your father, but I guess you've got some Lane babble in you, too."

She sighed and hung up the phone. Now what was she going to do while she waited until tonight? She could start a new painting, she supposed, but she couldn't think of anything to paint right now. Maybe clean her apartment? It had been thoroughly cleaned quite a few times in the last few weeks, but, hey, you can never have too much cleanliness, right?

That evening, after she had eaten supper, she got another call from her mother. "It's all set, Kiley. Thomas is coming, as well. Come on over."

Kiley sighed and spun into her Superwoman costume. This was it. Of course, Kiley noticed that the stars were especially bright tonight. And she had always enjoyed flying among the

stars. So she was just taking advantage of the clear night to enjoy herself, right?

But eventually, she arrived at Hyperion Avenue. When she arrived, her parents were talking about their latest story. It seemed that casino bust hadn't ended when everyone thought it would.

"So we found out Mr. Riucci bribed the judge to give him bail. I guess the judge seemed to enjoy the casino as well, even though he wasn't there on the night of the raid," Dad was saying. Mom and Dad were seated in the living room on one of the couches. Family meetings were different than Kent family dinners, so they had already eaten. Thomas and Alice were seated on the other couch. Kiley walked in and sat on the chair in between the couches.

"Hi, Kiley," everyone said cheerfully. Kiley motioned for Dad to continue what he was saying. The longer she could delay what she had to say tonight, the better, as far as she was concerned.

"So Mr. Riucci is trying to restart his casino. But I guess he's having trouble finding a place for it, because the police are watching the old one."

"But we still haven't figured out how he got the Kryptonite!" Lois added. Obviously, this was what had her most upset. Kiley couldn't blame her. She hated the stuff and its effect on Dad. "We talked to Dr. Klein. I guess we had all forgotten there was a piece missing when we started locking it up in STAR labs. But how did that man find it?" She shuddered. Then she reached over and grabbed Dad's hand, like she needed assurance he was still with her.

"But enough of that. We'll figure that out later. You had something you wanted to talk to us about, Kiley?"

"Yeah," Kiley replied. She took a deep breath. She was here now, so she couldn't back out. "You know I told you I'm seeing someone in Switzerland, right?" She ran her fingers through her hair.

Her parents nodded in understanding.

Thomas and Alice, who hadn't known this, looked surprised. "No, I didn't know that, sis, but I think it's good news. You really like him?" Thomas asked her, innocently.

Kiley nodded. "Actually... I love him."

Her parents smiled at her, and Thomas did, too.

Alice rolled her eyes. "Just what we need around here. More people acting moony."

"His name is Larry," Kiley continued, hoping to warm them up to Larry before she dropped the bombshell. "I've been dating him for about two months. He owns this great little chocolate shop." Kiley saw her mother's eyes perk up at that. "And he's got a great sense of humor. And he really cares about his mother. But... he's really upset that he's told me a lot of things and he knows I'm keeping something from him."

Her parents looked at each other and nodded. "We've been there," they both said at the same time. "And now you want to talk to us about telling Larry about Superwoman, right," Dad added.

Kiley nodded. "And I know you've been there," she told her parents. "Grandma told me about your big plans to run away once," she added to her father. She looked at the floor, remembering how she had done just that a few days ago.

Her father sighed, as if he was ashamed of this idea, and Lois rolled her eyes, and whispered "Lunkhead," in her father's ear.

Alice groaned again as she looked at Mom and Dad.

"But..." Kiley took a deep breath and ran her fingers through her hair three or four times. "The thing is, Larry's full name is Larry Luthor. He is Lex Luthor's nephew."

Clark stared at Kiley for a few seconds. Surely he must have heard her wrong. There was no way that Kiley had just said she

was dating Luthor and wanted to tell him about her other identity!

Lois jumped to her feet. "Kiley, you can't possibly mean that! Lex Luthor was evil. The things he did to your father..." She shook her head. "And to ME! To both of us! He's bad news, Kiley. All Luthors are."

Kiley sighed. "Yes, Mom, I know. I looked up the old newspapers. And Grandma told me about the Kryptonite cage. But Larry isn't Lex Luthor. He's Larry. He's a good man."

Clark sighed, putting his face in his hands. Were both of his favorite women going to fall for Luthor's deception? He remembered a night, so many years ago.

(flashback)

He and Lois were trying to act civil at Perry's retirement party. But all they could do was snap at each other. He loved Lois, and she was drifting closer and closer to Luthor. The man he could honestly say he hated. Why couldn't she see how evil he was? He tried to tell her about how he thought Luthor had done to the Daily Planet.

Lois replied, still blinded, "Clark, you're talking about a man I truly admire, who's always been completely truthful with me."

(end of flashback)

And now, Kiley was saying that Larry Luthor was a good man. She was just as blinded as Lois had been. "Kiley, NO Luthor is a good man. Believe me, that's the truth. Deception is the name of the game."

Thomas and Alice looked from Clark to Lois to Kiley, as if they were trying to figure out how they fit in this situation.

Thomas looked at Kiley. "I'm happy that you think you've found someone to love, but you should probably listen to Mom and Dad. It sounds like they know more about this than you do. Telling the secret is not an easy decision, you know."

Clark nodded in approval at Thomas, glad that his son was backing him up.

Alice, who was still trying to find her way in the world, threw up her hands and commented, "Love! It's just not worth all this trouble! Steve is cute," she added, mentioning a boy she had gone to a few school dances with, "but I'm not planning on telling him our family secret!" Then she ran upstairs calling back down, "Call me when you guys are willing to act rationally!"

Everyone was silent for a few moments. Then Lois began pacing back and forth in the living room. "So you've been flying out to see Larry LUTHOR for two months and you didn't tell us? I thought we told you to be careful, Kiley! We trusted you because you said there were good reasons why you went to Switzerland. Dating him doesn't sound like a good reason to me!"

Kiley sighed. "See, I knew you guys would react this way about Larry. That's exactly why I didn't tell you."

"So in other words," Lois continued, "You knew you were doing something wrong, something we wouldn't approve of, and you did it ANYWAY! How can we trust you after this?"

Kiley stopped short as if she hadn't considered that at all. Clark put his head in his hands again. How could Kiley's judgment be so terribly wrong? She'd never been one to jump to conclusions. She ran her hands through her hair. "I'm sorry I you don't think you can trust me anymore, Mom. I really am. But for the record, something you guys don't approve of and something that's wrong is not always the same thing. I needed to figure out what I thought of Larry for myself. Now I know. I love him."

Clark felt like he had been slapped in the face, and Lois looked the same way. How could Kiley disregard their judgment so easily?

Lois, meanwhile, had stopped pacing and sat back down on the couch. She reached for his hand, and he squeezed it. She was

obviously still quite angry, but seemed to be trying a different tactic. "Have you ever heard about Claude?" Clark rubbed Lois's shoulders and nodded in approval. He knew this was a difficult subject for her, but it might bring the point across.

"I dated him for a few weeks when I was new at the Planet. He was so handsome and charming. He was funny and he made me feel special. I was so sure I was in love with him. Until the night I told him about a story I was working on. He... ah... slept with me and then took my story the next morning. It turned out he was only interested in me for the story. I thought I was in love with him, but he always had an agenda." Lois took a deep breath and exhaled. She leaned back against Clark for support.

"Kiley, I don't think you're looking at this clearly. Larry probably has an agenda. By telling him THE SECRET, you're giving him the weapon he needs, just like I did with Claude."

Kiley ran her fingers through her hair. "Mom, I'm sorry about your experience with Claude. And I do appreciate you telling me about him. But I did think about the fact that Larry might have an agenda. The name Luthor, DID turn me off at first. But I really don't think he has one anymore. That's not the man he is."

Clark spoke up for the first time in awhile. "THINK isn't good enough, Kiley. Not when you're talking about telling him our secret."

"I know what you mean, Dad. But keeping the secret from him is driving us apart. I can't keep pretending around him anymore. I mean, you remember what that was like, to try to keep a secret from Mom?"

Clark nodded. He did, of course. But these were two completely different issues. She was talking about telling LUTHOR the secret. "But I still can't agree with you. There's nothing that's going to change my mind," Clark said firmly.

Lois nodded in agreement. "Kiley, I'm sorry, but this isn't right. You kept the truth from us, and now you expect us to give you our blessing. This is over."

Thomas had left a few minutes ago, apparently deciding that this was a private argument. After all, he'd already told Kiley what he thought of the situation.

Kiley's face crumpled. "So you mean my relationship with Larry is over?"

"If you want to put it that way, yes, but we don't think it should have ever begun," Clark said firmly.

"Kiley, it's time for you to leave," Lois showed her the door. "I want you to think about this."

Kiley flew off. She knew that it would be hard to tell her parents, but she had no idea how hard it would be. She supposed her mother was right; she hadn't been acting truthfully. She had thought about the fact that dating Larry was disloyal to her parents, but she hadn't thought about that. Still, that was probably what Grandma meant about "living a lie."

She arrived at her apartment and slumped on a chair. And she hadn't even told them about the worst thing she had done recently. She tried to run away from her problems and from herself.

Still, they weren't listening to her at all when she tried to tell them Larry was a good man. Of course she'd expected that, but it still hurt horribly. Larry was the man she loved, and her parents were telling her he was no good. And they said she couldn't see him anymore. Of course, she had known that already, after the other night. But she really wanted to see him again. She needed to tell him.

Was she really going to be forced to pick between her family and the man she loved? At the thought of having to choose, Kiley burst into tears.

The next day was no better. Once again, Kiley woke up and saw Larry's portrait next to her bed. All his wonderful features

and qualities looked back at her. But she could never see those wonderful features in person again. Or listen to his wonderful voice and the way he teased her, encouraged her and shared his wonderful chocolates. Not to mention his kisses.

She turned away from the painting to get dressed. Why should she bother looking at something she could no longer have, anyway? Not unless she wanted to betray her parents by telling him about Superwoman, that is. Superwoman! That other identity made things so complicated. Still, she also now knew getting rid of her wasn't the answer, either. So what was the answer? Her eyes welled up with tears again.

She tried to wipe her eyes away as she headed downstairs. Kiley couldn't remember the last time she had cried so much. Crying was for the weak. That's what she'd always thought, anyway. But the tears continued to run down her face.

Just as she was finishing breakfast, her super hearing clicked on to a radio nearby. She sighed and quickly turned on her own radio to listen more closely.

"...Earthquake in Japan hit two hours ago," the announcer was saying. "Thousands have already lost their lives in the turmoil..."

Oh, no. This was a huge disaster. Superwoman was going to have to make an appearance. Otherwise, thousands more would lose their lives. Not to mention homes, workplaces, and everything that makes up a life. Kiley needed to shape up no matter how low she was feeling right now. People depended on Superwoman and expected her to hold her head in a crisis.

She wiped her tears from her eyes one more time, forcing herself to think of the people who needed her. Washing her face, she tried to make herself look more presentable. Then she spun into her Superwoman costume, took a deep breath, and flew out the window.

When she arrived, she noticed Dad was already there. Of course he was. She had forgotten that they all helped out at international disasters like this one. Thomas should probably be along shortly as well. And she did appreciate the help. It was just that she wasn't sure that she wanted to see her family today. They had really hurt her last night.

Still...she presented herself to the emergency workers, and asked in Japanese where she could be the most help. They explained about a bridge about a mile away that needed to be held up. Superwoman quickly got to work.

Thomas showed up within a few minutes to help her with the bridge. They worked together, knowing exactly how they needed to support the bridge with the help of X-ray vision and past experience. She smiled at him when they finished; it was nice to work with her brother.

Then she noticed a group of about twenty people drowning because another bridge had collapsed. Kiley quickly dove into the river and picked several out. Placing them in what looked like a safe place, she then dove back in to pick up more of the victims. Ten minutes later, all of the people were out of the water. She hoped it wasn't too late for them. She quickly X-rayed their lungs, and to her relief, they were all fine.

Behind her, she suddenly heard her Dad's voice. "Superwoman! Hold this house up! There's a girl trapped underneath it." She nodded, although she didn't really want to help her father right now. But she certainly wasn't going to let a girl die because she was a little angry at her father.

So Kiley held the house up, although she deliberately did not look at her father as she did so. She noticed he didn't look at her either as he prepared to go in after the child. A minute later, Dad came out holding a child. His face crumpled as he noticed girl's heart had stopped.

Kiley slammed the house down. What was the point of doing that if the child was already dead? Dad attempted CPR on the girl with no result. This was when she noticed how far the strain

between her and her father had reached. If they had been on the same wavelength, as they usually were, Kiley would have assisted in the CPR. Or if that wasn't possible, at least prepared a good spot to get started. And after it didn't work, she and Dad would have shared a look of despair and understanding. They shared no such look now.

Three hours, many buildings, bridges, and victims later, the Superhero family was told the Japanese emergency workers could handle it from here. They told them all the work, especially the lives they saved, was appreciated. But all Kiley could think about was what didn't work. The lives they could not save. And the tension she felt with her father. Despite the fact that he had hurt her last night, and she was still a little angry at him, she missed Dad.

As she was flying home, she noticed her father up ahead. He looked just as unhappy as she was. Maybe she should try to talk to him again. Superwoman dashed off to catch up to him. "Hi, Dad," she greeted him nervously a few seconds later.

"Hi, Kiley," Superman replied just as nervously. He tried to run his fingers through his hair for a second, before realizing that he had gel in his hair right now.

Superwoman smiled at that. They really were so much alike. "Rough day, huh?" she commented, trying to find common ground.

"Yeah," he agreed. "It's always so hard." He shared a look with her; then looked toward Metropolis without even realizing it.

Superwoman sighed, knowing Dad was thinking of the comfort he could find in Mom's arms. She wished she had that. And she could, if she was ever able to tell Larry about her other identity. Right now, all she had was her painting. The paintings helped, but they weren't the same thing.

"Dad," she began slowly. Was it really a good idea to bring this up right now? "I'd really like to have someone to talk to when I get home. Like you do." Superwoman drifted gradually through the clouds as she tried to reconnect with her father.

Superman sighed as continued to drift through the clouds as well. "You can talk to me any time you want, sweetie. And your mother as well. Not to mention Grandma and Grandpa. Or Thomas."

"I know that, Dad. And I appreciate it. But Dad, you know there's a difference between talking to one of us or Grandma and Grandpa about difficult rescues, and talking to Mom." She looked at her father intently. Could she make him understand how important it was to talk to Larry?

Superman looked at his daughter just as intently. "Yes, I do know that. And someday, you'll find someone to share that with, I'm sure."

Superwoman sighed, understanding his message. Larry was not that person, no matter what she thought. She supposed it was too much to ask Dad to change his mind about Larry this quickly, especially with what she knew of Lex Luthor. Briefly, she imagined Dad in cage made of Kryptonite, withering in pain.

But she still wished Dad was more open to the possibility of Larry being a good man. She sighed, remembering how much it upset Larry to be treated like his uncle. Why couldn't he be given the benefit of doubt? "Bye, Dad. See you later," she commented, flying off. So much for that reconciliation attempt.

When Kiley arrived at home, she quickly spun back into her regular clothes. What was she going to do now? The images of people bleeding and dying filled her mind, especially that little girl she and Dad hadn't been able to save. The look on her father's face as she flew off the last time also flashed through her memory. And Larry yelling "Why, Kiley, why?" as she left him for what seemed to be the last time was also prominent.

For the third time today, Kiley burst into tears. Ten minutes later, she cleared herself up. She was NOT going to spend all of

her time crying from now on. She needed to be stronger than that. Looking at her art studio, she nodded determinedly. Painting was all she had right now.

So Kiley began two paintings. It was something she almost never did, but her emotions on both situations were so extreme. One was about the earthquake in Japan. She painted all the turmoil of people losing their homes and businesses. And the despair as they watched their loved ones die. And those little children that could not be saved, even with CPR.

The other was about the situation her family was in right now. The distancing, the tension, and the lack of closeness that they had always shared.

How could she solve this problem? Because it was all her fault. If it were not for her dating Larry, their family would be just as close as they had ever been. She remembered the last happy Kent family dinner they had had, without any secrets to get in the way. It was over two months ago.

Still, even if that was the case, she could not stop loving Larry. He was a wonderful guy, even if no one else believed her.

She painted her conflicting feelings and her guilt about being the catalyst for this family problem as well.

Several hours later, Kiley stopped for supper. She made herself a grilled cheese sandwich and poured some milk to go with it. Looking at the milk, she sighed. Would she ever laugh with the rest of their family as her mother poured everyone's milk for another Kent family dinner? Would she ever be at ease with them ever again?

She picked up one of the mint chocolate candies Larry had given her. This, to her, showed how well she knew Larry. He offered to show her his bakery and the inside of his business world because he knew she loved chocolate. He let her make the chocolate candies because he knew they were her favorite kind. Larry even let her pick which kind of filling she wanted, so she DID know what she was going to get in her box of chocolates. How could a man like that be anything like his uncle?

Kiley took a bite of the chocolate. Mmmm, they tasted good. Too bad they were all she had now. There was no way she would be able to go back to the Choco Bean now. There were too many memories there.

The rest of the week was no better for Kiley. She painted her feelings on her canvases, which did help, but not that much. Everywhere she went, there was a reminder of Larry and how much she loved him or a reminder of her family and how much she wanted to reconnect with them.

When she put on her Superwoman costume, she would be reminded of how happy Dad was when she first told him she wanted to create another super identity. And all the work they had done together as Superman and Superwoman in Metropolis.

Of course, the Superwoman costume was also a sign of the big secret that she had been keeping from Larry. The secret that had driven them apart.

When she ate her meals, she was reminded of happy Kent family dinners again. And romantic dinners Larry had also cooked for her, especially when he tried to make something more complicated. Larry and her father both cooked amazing meals. She wondered if they would ever find out how much they had in common.

When she talked to reporters as Superwoman, she was reminded of her parents and how much they loved being reporters. Instead of annoying her as they always had, reporters made her sad.

There was an advertisement for a new upcoming Pirates of the Caribbean movie in theaters. Of course, that made Kiley think of all the fun they had watching the first one, and all the kisses they shared.

On Friday, she went to a children's go-cart race, of which the

proceeds went to charity. The parents cheering for the children reminded her of how her parents had always supported and encouraged her.

A young boy tugged on her cape. "Superwoman?" he said uncertainly.

She turned around and tried to look cheerfully at the boy, even though she felt anything but cheerful these days. Then she gasped. The child looked very similar to the pictures Larry had shown her of him as a child.

"Um, well," the boy continued. "I wanted to know if you'd be in a picture with me. My Mom will take it."

Superwoman blinked, trying desperately to get rid of the tears that were starting to form in her eyes. She wondered if a child of Larry's would look anything like this boy. Then she forced herself to smile. "Sure," she answered. She followed the boy over to his go-cart and posed right next to it with him.

After she flew home that night, Kiley continued to work on her paintings. The one about the earthquake in Japan was almost done. It had really helped her work through her emotions, although she wished she had Larry to talk to as well.

But the other one still needed a lot of work. She was in the process of painting a picture of a typical "Kent family dinner." Only the table had been broken, with Mom and Dad on one side, Thomas and Alice on another, and her in the middle, because she felt like she was caught in the middle between wanting to fix things with her parents, and wanting to defend Larry.

The next morning, Kiley decided she had to see Larry, even if it was only from a distance. As much as she loved looking at the portrait she had painted, it wasn't the same thing. And she wondered how he was doing. Was he as upset about this situation as she was?

So after eating breakfast, she spun into her Superwoman costume and flew off to Switzerland. She smiled a little as she saw the Alps appear, remembering how her heart used to leap with joy as they came into view. Then she flew over to the direction of the Choco Bean. He would probably be working today, after all.

Kiley used her x-ray vision to see the inside of the store, then activated her telescopic vision to get a closer look at Larry. He was standing behind the counter; just like he had been the day she met him.

"Let me help you with those," he said to one customer, smiling as he picked up her purchase. The customer was a female. It looked like Larry was doing just fine! He had already found someone else to flirt with over the counter. Why had she ever thought she was special to him? All Luthors were playboys, didn't everyone know that?

She flew back to Metropolis, disgusted with herself and with Larry. "I love you, too, Kiley," Larry had told her. Why had she ever believed that?

She decided to clean her kitchen one more time. There was always some piece of scum somewhere that needed to be cleaned in the kitchen.

But a few hours later, Kiley sighed. Had she jumped to conclusions this morning? Of course Larry was going to smile at his customers, it was called "customer service!" It was the same thing she did when she smiled at her patrons at one of her openings. In order to really find out how Larry was doing, she should look in on him from his home.

Besides, she added to herself, she still missed him. She'd really like a reason to see him again. So Kiley put spun into her Superwoman costume once again and flew out the window.

This time, she headed for his house. He should be home from work by now. She quickly located Larry causally reading a book in his living room. He didn't seem to be that unhappy. Why did she assume he would be?

As she was just about to fly off again, she noticed Larry glance up at her "Swiss Alps Mystic" painting that still hung above his head. He put the book down and brushed the painting with his fingertips, sadly. It reminded her of the way she looked at and touched the abstract portrait she'd painted of him. So maybe he was a little more upset than she had thought.

Just then Larry's phone rang. "I know she was good for me, Mom," he said into the phone. "She brought a lot of happiness into my life. And maybe I did overdo it last week when I told her we couldn't see each other anymore. She looked pretty upset about what happened, too. It seems I have a tendency to get a lot more emotional around Kiley."

Kiley stopped short as she realized what this conversation was about. Without even noticing it, she continued to listen in. And it was funny that he mentioned that he got more emotional around her. She did that, too.

Larry continued, "...but I just have a hard time accepting that she was keeping something from me. And not just that, she lied to my face. Do you know how much that hurts, Mom?" Larry sighed. "Of course you were lied to! Uncle Lex lied to you every day of his life! Mom, how many times do I have to tell you that isn't true?"

Kiley flew off, realizing this was a private conversation. What business did she have listening to Larry try to tell his mother that Lex Luthor's assessments of her were incorrect? In fact, what business did she have to listen to Larry's phone call with his mother in the first place? So they had been talking about her, so what? Still, that answered her question about how Larry was doing. Not well at all.

So what could she do about it, she asked herself as she arrived home. There was another Kent family dinner tonight. Her parents were obviously trying to repair the rift in their family. Maybe there was something she could say then? A smile formed on Kiley's face as a plan formed in her mind. It just might bring her family back together and Larry back into her life at the same time.

Clark made the finishing touches on tonight's dinner. He and Lois had decided on an old family favorite, steak, to get everyone in the proper mood. They wanted everything to be perfect tonight. They really needed to get the family back together.

So Clark glazed the steaks to perfection and whipped the mashed potatoes until they were completely smooth. Lois set the table very carefully, making sure all the plates were in exactly the same place in proportion to the glasses and the silverware. Then she opened the refrigerator and touched the milk jug to her cheek.

"Is the milk cold enough, honey?" Clark asked, noticing what his wife was doing.

"I don't know," she replied. "It seems cold enough to me, but maybe you're a better judge at that kind of thing than I am. But what am I saying, you don't feel the difference between hot and cold at all! And neither do the kids, so what am I worried about? The milk is fine."

Clark sighed and put down the mashed potatoes. Then he wrapped his arms around his wife from behind. "I love it when you babble, do you know that? And just because we aren't affected by the hot and cold doesn't mean we don't feel it. So it is nice to have cold milk. But since that's been your job for the last twenty-five years, I think you're the best judge of that."

Lois smiled at him. "Thanks, Clark. I'm just so nervous about tonight, you know? I want everything to be perfect. Kiley thinks we've turned our back on her, when we're just looking out for her and the rest of the family. I just want us to be close again."

Clark nodded. "I know. Me too." Then he went back to perfecting the mashed potatoes.

Ten minutes later, Alice came downstairs, looking at the table nervously, as if she wasn't sure she wanted to join in. Clark

remembered how she had reacted the night Kiley told them she was dating Luthor. She hadn't understood what was going on, more than her family was yelling at each other and she believed they were behaving irrationally. She was probably worried they were still going to act that way. Hopefully that wouldn't be a problem.

"Hi, sweetie," he greeted her, smiling. "Have a seat."

"Okay," Alice gingerly grabbed the edge of her chair and slowly pulled it out. She looked at it for a second before sitting down.

Thomas arrived right after that. "Hi, Mom and Dad," he said trying to sound causal, even though you could tell he was nervous as well. He pulled his chair out and sat down.

Three minutes later there was another knock on the door. That would be Kiley. Lois went to answer the door. Kiley came into the dinning room slowly. "Hi," she greeted everyone as she ran her fingers through her hair two or three times.

"Hi, Kiley," Clark replied, tentatively smiling at her. Would she show them they could trust her again after tonight? Would she not be as hurt as she had been?

Kiley pushed her chair out and sat down. Then they all began eating.

"I love the steaks, Dad," Thomas said, smiling at Clark.

"Thanks, son."

"The milk is wonderful, Mom," Kiley said, laughing nervously, seeming to be trying to bridge the gap between her and her mother by bringing up an old family joke.

"Thanks," Lois replied. She seemed to understand the message.

Alice said nothing. She looked between her parents and her siblings, as if wondering when this whole thing was going to blow.

"So, we figured out where Mr. Riccoi got that Kryptonite from last month," Clark began, deciding to introduce a more neutral topic than what was one everyone's minds. "I guess he used to do part-time sewer clean-up before he started the illegal casino. He may have found it there. I think there may have been a piece missing from when Jace Mazic had it."

Lois shuddered. He knew that was another unpleasant memory for her. Why did he think everything would be okay back then, anyway? He grabbed her hand and kissed it softly.

Alice groaned at the sight, but he detected a smile behind it as well. He supposed she wanted things back to normal as much as the rest of them did.

"But we still need to make sure that's the case, Clark. What if there is another piece floating around somewhere?" She shook a little. Clark wished he could protect her from her fears, but he knew the best way to do that was to help her with this investigation. So he nodded in agreement.

Kiley put her fork down and took a deep breath. "Okay, I know the topic I introduced to you guys last week was a tough one. And it was probably too much for me to ask for you guys to agree I should tell Larry when you've never met him. I KNOW what the name Luthor means to you, especially you guys," she added looking directly at her parents.

Oh, no. Kiley wasn't over Larry yet. This didn't sound good. "Kiley—" Clark began.

"I thought this subject was done with," Lois said at the same time, firmly.

Kiley put up both her hands to silence them and shook her head. "Hear me out. What I think I should do is tell him that I can't tell him our secret without you agreeing, because it's such an important secret. Then I'll tell him that I want you to get to know him and vice versa. The reason why I know Larry isn't like Lex Luthor is because I know him. I'd like you guys to have that benefit as well. Does that sound like a good compromise?"

Thomas was nodding as if this sounded reasonable.

But Clark knew it wasn't reasonable at all. It just meant Luthor was going to get his hooks into Kiley in another way. And possibly the rest of the family as well.

Lois was already shaking her head as well. "Kiley, if you tell him that your family has an important secret, it just gives him an invitation to find out what it is. He'll search for it, even if you don't tell him exactly what it is."

Clark sighed, as if she was getting tired of this argument. "I can see your point, Mom, but I want, no, I NEED to see Larry again. I really miss him. But I don't want to violate our family trust by telling him the secret before you guys are ready. And I can tell you that Larry isn't going to search for answers if I tell him not to. He's not like that."

"Kiley, how do you expect us to trust your judgment if you kept this a secret for so long?" Lois pressed. She looked around the table sadly. Clark knew what she was thinking. Their perfect dinner was in shambles now.

"I'm sorry you feel I violated your trust because of that, Mom," Kiley replied carefully. "But answer me this, if I had told you I was dating Larry Luthor back at the beginning, even when I didn't want to tell him the secret, would you have agreed I could keep seeing him?"

Clark sighed. Of course not, he said to himself. I want Luthor out of my daughter's life now and I would have wanted Luthor out of my daughter's life two months ago, too.

Lois paused. "I would have been less hurt about you keeping something from us," she replied slowly. "And I wouldn't have been as afraid for you. But I think, in the end, I would have told you that Luthors were bad news. And they are, Kiley. We know more about this than you do."

Kiley sighed as she finished chewing her steak. "See, that's exactly why I didn't tell you. And believe me, I didn't enjoy keeping something from you guys. I know we tell each other everything. But I wanted to decide what I thought about Larry. Not what you think of him. I know MOST Luthors are bad news. But Larry isn't most Luthors. Actually, he really hates it when people compare him to his uncle."

Clark sighed. He had heard that line before, as well. He remembered another relative of Luthor's, or one pretending to be anyway.

(flashback)

He and Lois had been interviewing the new "Lex Luthor, Jr." who was trying to take over Lex corp. Originally, he had introduced himself as Leslie Luckabee. They had asked him, why did he pretend to be someone else? He replied, "... It got to be like a... nightmare. Everywhere I'd go, the second people heard my name, there'd be this look. Fear. Hate. So one day I just... gave another name. No reaction. It was a game at first, but I felt..."

(end of flashback)

Of course, he had been a phony as well, just trying to generate sympathy from people to feed his game. The "game" ended with the real Lex Luthor, Jr. using Lois, as well as the rest of Metropolis, as hostages.

Clark spoke for the first time in this argument. "Kiley, I understand what you're saying. And it's easy to feel sympathy for someone when they tell you they always get a bad reaction to their name. But that's another ploy, sweetie. Deception is the name of the game for Luthor."

Kiley slammed her fork down suddenly. "Deception may have been the name of the game for LEX LUTHOR but not for LARRY LUTHOR. Tell me, if he wanted to deceive me, why did he tell me he was Lex Luthor's nephew almost as soon as we met? Why did he tell me things he hasn't told almost anyone? Why did he introduce me to his mother? Why did he let me see

his chocolate bakery? Does that sound like someone on the make to you? He ISN'T his uncle. He's Larry. He's... my Larry," Kiley finished softly.

Clark sighed. It seemed this Luthor had his claws in Kiley a lot deeper than the old one had in Lois. She had really gotten attached to him. And Luthor obviously was just as good of an actor, if not a better one, than the original one was. That made him even more dangerous.

Alice looked from Clark to Lois to Thomas to Kiley, one by one. She was obviously judging them and finding them all wanting. Then she suddenly blew up. "I have so had ENOUGH of this argument! Mom and Dad don't want us to tell the secret, Kiley. Get over it! I don't understand what the big deal is, anyway. About who this Luthor guy is or why it would be important to tell him. I don't think I want to be around you guys right now!" She got up from her half-finished dinner and ran back upstairs. There was an awkward silence between those still left at the table. Thomas took a deep breath and exhaled. "I think Kiley has good points, and Mom and Dad have good points as well. I wish I knew how to fix this, but I don't." He stared at his dinner and took another bite.

Clark, Lois, Thomas and Kiley finished their meals in an uncomfortable silence. As Clark went to bed that night, he came to a realization. He was going to HAVE TO do something to get Kiley to see Luthor for who he was. Keeping her away from him simply wasn't working.

Remembering another time, Clark remembered how he was able to get Lois out of Luthor's thall.

(flashback)

Perry had just come back to Metropolis from his supposed retirement. Jack was trying to find away to clear his name from the Daily Planet bombing. Jimmy wanted his job back so he could pay his rent. And they all worried that there was more to the Daily Planet takeover and bombing than met the eye.

Clark, of course, believed that Luthor was behind it. And he wondered if he could prove to Lois that Luthor had bought the Planet with the intention of bombing it, would she see reason? Would she get out of Luthor's hooks? Would she become his best friend again? He missed her. And he worried about her.

He, Perry, Jimmy, and Jack had done enough investigating to get Luthor arrested. They had saved the Daily Planet and Lois.

(end of flashback)

Of course, Clark now knew that Lois had told Luthor "no" at the altar. So, whether he was arrested or not, she wouldn't have married him. But since Kiley claimed she loved this Luthor, he couldn't count on that. Starting tomorrow, he would go to Switzerland and investigate the new Luthor.

Hopefully, if he found enough implicating evidence, it would allow Kiley to see reason. He needed to get Kiley away from Luthor's influence. He wanted her to become his daughter again. The daughter he related to the most. He missed her. And he was worried about her.

The next morning, Clark got up early. 5:00 AM, to be exact. After all, he had a lot of work ahead of him. And in Switzerland, it was already 11:00 AM. So he needed to get a move on.

There was no need to wake up Lois, though, he said to himself. She needed sleep a lot more than he did. And he knew from personal experience that she was definitely NOT a morning person. So Clark quietly came downstairs and spun into Superman. Then he flew out the window without a second thought. There was no need to bother with breakfast. He didn't need to eat, and it would waste precious time.

He quickly arrived in Zurich, where Kiley had said that Luthor was living. He had to wonder why he hadn't decided to

take over Lexcorp in Metropolis yet. But he was probably just biding his time. Or maybe this Luthor was planning to take over Zurich instead.

Kiley said he ran a chocolate shop called, "The Choco Bean." He snorted. The man was obviously trying to seduce his daughter through chocolate. He was well aware of how much Lane women enjoyed chocolate; he had surprised Lois with it many times as well. But there was a difference between buying someone chocolate because you knew it made them happy, and buying someone chocolate so you could buy their love or seduce their good sense.

Anyway, the first thing he needed to do was talk to Luthor's employees if he wanted to find out about this man. So, after finding it, he causally strolled into the shop, pretending to look around. It wasn't as if he hadn't been in a dozen of these places over the years to buy gifts for Lois. They were all pretty similar.

He stopped next to a stock hand. "Hello, sir. Good day," Clark commented in Swiss German, trying to make conversation.

"Definitely," the man agreed.

"So can you tell me if this is a good place to work? What kind of benefits do you get?" Clark tried to keep his tone causal.

"It's a pretty good place," the employee said, nodding. "We get paid vacations and sick time and all that. And the owner is generally very cheerful. I've noticed he's not so happy for the last week or so, but he doesn't take it out on us or anything."

Okay, so Luthor kept his deception up to his employees. Or at least some of them, anyhow. Well, the original Luthor kept his deception to some of his employees as well. Of course, just as many of them lied for Luthor, so that could be the case here, as well.

He picked up a package of cookies and walked up to the counter. "Hello," he greeted the next employee. "Do you enjoy working here?"

The man behind the counter nodded nonchalantly and rung up the cookies. "It's not too bad."

"What kind of things do you do here?"

The cashier shrugged. "Over the counter, stock, whatever needs to be done."

Clark purposely listened to the man's heartbeat to see if he was lying, but seemed to be telling the truth. Of course, he noticed the man's comment about "whatever needs to be done." What kind of sinister work did that include, he wondered. He'd have to check that out more thoroughly later.

Clark walked out of the Choco Bean holding the cookies. Maybe he should pick people who weren't so loyal to Luthor. He signed their paychecks, after all. They probably felt they had to say nice things about him.

He picked up the box and sniffed the cookies carefully. He wouldn't put it past Luthor to put drugs in his chocolates to make more people buy them. But they smelled like cookies, and with his super-nose, he would be able to detect any drugs. Clark shrugged. Either there weren't any drugs in this particular batch, or he wasn't actually spiking the chocolates. That was something he'd have to look into later. He tossed the cookies in a nearby garbage can. It wasn't like he actually wanted anyone in his family to eat them, at any rate.

For now, he'd ask people nearby what they thought of Luthor. Some people were unlikely to know him; after all, for some reason, he didn't seem to have as much of a presence here as the original Luthor did in Metropolis. It could be because this Luthor worked more in the underground, of course. But, some people probably would know him, one way or another. And maybe he'd get a less biased view.

So he walked up to a person on the sidewalk very business like. "Excuse me, ma'am, my name is Clark. I'm conducting a survey. I work for a newspaper," he said in Swiss German. All of that was true, but it was also vague enough so she wouldn't

She finally went home and called her mother. "I've been all over Metropolis twice, Mom. And anywhere within 100 miles of here. I just don't know where else to look. I'm so sorry, Mom."

Her mother sighed. "Thanks for trying, Kiley. I'm trying to see where he might have gone or might have been taken myself, through the Daily Planet achieves. If I get anything concrete, I'll let you know."

Kiley decided to sleep for a couple of hours. She had been up all night, and even though she didn't need as much sleep as a normal human, it still helped. Besides, there was nothing else for her to do right now.

Clark flew into the window on Hyperion Avenue that night, tired. Even though Clark didn't need as much sleep as an earth human, he still needed some. He had been running non-stop for two days on this now, and he was feeling it. Besides, some people might notice if Superman kept flying around this area. Clark was still worried about Kiley and wanted to find some solid evidence to convince her of Luthor's wrongdoing, but he would be able to do that better after a night's rest. He'd have to try again another day.

Staring him in the face was a very angry Lois.

"Where have you been?! I thought maybe that casino man got a hold of more Kryptonite or something, but Kiley couldn't find you anywhere. I know you weren't on a rescue. There hasn't been anything on the news about Superman in over two days."

Clark hung his head. In his desire to get started quickly on his investigation, he didn't tell Lois where he was going at all. He should have at least left a note. He tried to imagine how worried he'd be if she disappeared for two days.

"I'm sorry, Lois. I know I should have told you where I was going. But after Kiley made it clear she still wanted to see Luthor, I decided I needed to investigate him. So I went to Switzerland. I haven't really found anything concrete, yet, though."

Lois did not look happy about this information. "So you went to investigate Larry Luthor by YOURSELF without telling me? Clark, the Luthors are known for having Kryptonite! I know we thought we had it all in Dr. Klein's vault, but then we found Mr. Ricco had some. Who knows, there might be more floating around! How could you do that without telling me?"

The idea that Luthor might have Kryptonite had not occurred to him, but it wasn't really the point. "Lois, I already told you that I'm sorry I didn't tell you. That was wrong. But quite frankly, I don't really care about the Kryptonite. I just want Kiley to see the light on Luthor. I had to do something."

Lois began pacing through their living room. "I agree with you that we need to do something about Kiley, Clark. But this isn't the way. You may not care that he might have Kryptonite, but I DO! And I need to tell Kiley that she can stop worrying about her father, because it looks like he's been fine all along!"

"I haven't been fine, Lois! I've been worried sick about Kiley!" He sighed and plopped himself on one of the living room couches.

Lois dialed Kiley's number. "Kiley, he's okay. You don't need to worry anymore... I... guess he went to Switzerland to find more information on Larry."

Several hours after falling asleep, Kiley woke up. Just then, the phone rang. "Hello?" she said into the phone, withdrawn.

"Kiley, he's okay. You don't need to worry anymore," Mom told her.

Thank goodness! Dad was okay! But how did Mom find him? And where was he? "Where was he, Mom?"

"I guess he went to Switzerland to find more information on Larry."

Oh my gosh, Kiley thought to herself. Why hadn't that occurred to me? She knew he was upset and worried about her

because of Larry. And since investigating was what her father did when he wasn't being Superman, it made sense.

"Thanks, Mom," she said into the phone before hanging up. She was grateful that her mother told her her father was okay. And she was glad that she didn't have to worry about Dad anymore. But even though she knew it made sense that he was investigating Larry, it hurt. It hurt a lot.

She knew how her parents investigated criminals. And since Dad obviously believed Larry was a criminal, he would operate the same way. They did breaking and entering, went through personal files, undercover work, and underhanded superpower work. Usually that was okay with her. After all, it put more criminals in jail, and her parents knew that it worked for them. They were good at it.

But this wasn't a criminal he was investigating right now. This was Larry. The man she loved. Her father was breaking and entering his chocolate shop, his house, and who knew what else to find his "evidence." He would be going through Larry's personal things. How could Dad do that to Larry? How could he do that to her? Why couldn't he trust her instincts on this, even just a little?

Not only that, but Dad had done this without telling anyone. He had made her and her mother, and the rest of the family, worry that he was in trouble. Because that was the only reason why Dad would disappear without telling anyone when he was obviously not on a rescue, right? That's what they'd always believed. Well, it was obviously not true anymore.

Kiley decided to clean her apartment again. She really needed to get her emotions under control right now.

Great. Now Kiley knew he was investigating Luthor. He wasn't sure that would go over well. He'd really like to find some concrete evidence, first. All he was trying to do was help Kiley, and hopefully put his family back together. Now it seemed everyone was ganging up on him. And he was tired. Why did he have to deal with this now?

"Lois, I came home because I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

"Fine!" Lois replied, not looking at him.

Clark went upstairs and soon fell asleep. However, a few hours later, Lois came to bed herself. Half asleep, he noticed Lois did not cuddle up with him or put her head on his chest as she usually did. Instead, she slept on the other side of the bed.

The next morning, he got up early again, ready to head back to Switzerland. This time, however, he made sure to leave Lois a note on where he was going, pinning it to the refrigerator. That was one mistake he could correct.

So what should he do first? Try to find this secret fortress again? Or look to see if there were drugs in the chocolates? Or should he talk to some of the shadier people in this town? Maybe they knew Luthor? The problem was Clark had a year to gain evidence against the original Luthor. He didn't have that much time now.

He finally decided to take a second look at the chocolates. After all, that was what would pertain to Kiley the most. Clark quickly found the bakery in the back of the Choco Bean and used his x-ray vision to look inside. They didn't seem to be doing anything except making chocolates, but of course, they probably wouldn't keep the drugs so out in the open.

Maybe he should look at Luthor's financial records. If he was putting drugs in the chocolates, he would have to buy them, right? Besides, that should give him an idea of what other suspicious business practices he had.

Still, he couldn't look at Luthor's financial records of the chocolate store until dark. If he knew where Luthor lived, he could look at his personal records, but Clark had no idea if Luthor was at home today. As much as he wanted to march right up to him, and tell him to leave his daughter alone, he also didn't

want to let Luthor know he was on to him yet.

So maybe he'd look for that darn fortress again. For all he knew, the financial records AND the drugs, not to mention who knew what else, were all there.

So Clark continued looking for this mythical fortress, but still found nothing. How close to Zurich was it anyway? Was it way out in the middle of nowhere? He flew further and further away, and still there was no sign of this place. Not even underground. Was it lined with lead, he suddenly wondered. There was a good possibility. No Luthor would want any superhero stumbling over his hideout. Why hadn't that occurred to him before?

It was getting dark. Maybe he'd try the financial records now. At least he knew where they should be. He flew back to Zurich and landed in an alley, spinning quickly into Clark. He looked around, trying to make sure there was no one in the shop.

A blond man quietly shut the door of the Choco Bean and locked the door. He didn't seem to recognize where he was going, so the man almost bumped into Clark.

"I'm sorry, sir," the man apologized. "I wasn't really looking where I was going. I've got a lot on my mind."

"I do, too. It's okay," Clark apologized. The man walked off.

Clark x-rayed the building and noticed to his delight that there was no one else inside. He walked around to the back and flicked the lock with his finger. Doing that, he was reminded of all the locks Lois picked when they investigated together. They didn't do that so much anymore, because their investigations had scaled down considerably after having children. But there were still a couple of them per a year.

Then he walked into the small office. Looking around, Clark wondered where Luthor would keep his records. In a filing cabinet? He didn't see any. In the desk? Clark began looking through the desk, careful not to disturb anything. He didn't want Luthor to know he had been here.

It was odd doing this sort of thing without his partner, Clark thought to himself as he continued to search for anything suspicious. Finally, he found the financial records. He didn't notice any expenses that would be unusual for a chocolate business, though. Clark supposed he'd have to look at his personal records for more details about Luthor.

As Clark was leaving, careful to keep everything the way he found it, he suddenly stopped short.

He had thought to himself several times that it was weird to do an investigation without Lois. But why WAS he doing an investigation without Lois? Of course, one of them had to go to work at the Planet. But still...they always did investigations together, even when it wasn't Planet business.

They investigated Tempus together when he tried to be elected President. They investigated Leslie Luckabee, or Lex Luthor, Jr., or whoever he was, together. Of course, he could fly to Switzerland easily and use his powers to make things go faster. But that never stopped him from wanting to work with Lois before. So what was his problem? Clark flew home, slowly. It was no wonder Lois had been mad at him last night. Not only did he not tell her where he was going, he didn't include her in his plans at all. He hoped she could forgive him.

He quietly flew into the window and landed. Lois seemed to be watching TV. "Hi, honey," he said softly as he sat next to her.

Lois ignored him. The way he had been ignoring her, he supposed. "Listen, I realized today that I didn't include you in my plans at all. I'm really sorry, honey."

She turned around and faced him. "Why was that, Clark? Not only do you go to a place that could possibly have Kryptonite waiting for you, you pretend I wouldn't want to be included. I CARE about Kiley, too, Clark. We always do our best investigating together."

"I know that, honey. I don't even know why it didn't occur to me to talk to you first. I know I could have used your input." He

buried his head in his hands in shame. How could he treat his wife like this? "I guess I was just so eager to get Luthor's claws out of Kiley, that's all I could think about... And... all this talk about Luthor is reminding me so much of one of the only investigations we didn't do together," Clark slowly came to the realization that that was what had been bothering him for the past three days.

Lois nodded in sudden understanding. "When I was engaged to Lex?" she asked him.

Clark nodded.

"Clark you know I'm sorry for everything I put you through back then, right? I didn't listen to you at all."

"I know. It's just that this situation is so similar. Kiley won't listen to us at all, either. She's just as stubborn as you were. I guess I've been reliving that so much that I ended up figuring I had to do my investigating without you, again."

"But I don't think that anymore, Clark. I would have helped, you know that, right?"

"I know, Lois. And I never should have shut you out. But my feelings... I'm so sorry, honey. I know I don't deserve it, but please forgive me."

Lois smiled and took him in her arms and kissed him. "Come, let's have some dinner."

Clark still felt he didn't deserve her forgiveness, but he followed her into the kitchen anyway.

As they ate their meal of Lois's favorite, Chinese, Lois kept brushing her hand against his shoulders. He supposed she was still trying to show him she actually forgave him.

Alice sat across the table from them as they ate. But rather than roll her eyes and grumble, as she usually did when she witnessed her parents' affection, she smiled.

The next day, Kiley continued to work on her painting about her broken family. Why couldn't things be different? Why did she have to fall in love with a Luthor, anyway? She missed the way her family used to be, and she missed her Larry, too.

And even though she wasn't quite as upset as she had been yesterday about what Dad was doing, she was still hurt. Dad was treating Larry the way Arnold treated her. Not exactly as in-your-face, but similar. Arnold didn't let her move on in her life with her painting. Instead, he continued to make comments about how she should be writing, or how writing in itself was better than painting. Every time he did that, she was a child again, trying to convince Metropolis that she DIDN'T want to be a reporter like her parents. She still lived in their shadow because of that.

Dad refused to believe the possibility that Larry was not exactly like Lex Luthor. He wasn't letting Larry move on with his life, either. By investigating him, he was forcing Larry to continue to live in his uncle's shadow. Kiley sighed, remembering how Larry had revealed to her how much that bothered him.

Still, remembering what she knew about Dad's history with Lex Luthor, she sighed. Should she cut him a little more slack? Lex Luthor had put Dad in a Kryptonite cage, after all. And tried to steal Mom from him, she added to herself, remembering that article. Still, that didn't excuse him from going through Larry's personal things!

Kiley continued painting for another few hours.

Suddenly she put her paintbrush down. Enough was enough. Mom and Dad were not going to believe her about Larry any time soon. Her life was in shambles. If she flew to Switzerland tonight, after Dad was done with his "investigation," she could tell Larry. Then at least she'd have him back in her life. And she could also warn him about her father's investigation.

Maybe someday, her parents would believe her about Larry, if for no other reason than he didn't attack the family.

Kiley took a deep breath and spun into Superwoman. She looked at the time. 2:00 PM. That meant it was 8:00 in Zurich.

Larry would be home by now, assuming he wasn't out tonight. That meant her father would at least have to be out of his house, if he had gone there today. Nodding to herself, she finally flew out the window.

As she approached the Alps, she smiled this time. Once again, they became a source of comfort. She should have her Larry back tonight.

Assuming Larry was okay with her being Superwoman, she added to herself, suddenly voicing a new fear. Larry was okay with Superwoman now. He had told her that he didn't consider her or the other super-heroes egotistical anymore. But would he really be okay with HER being Superwoman? And even if he was, would he be okay with her hiding the truth for so long? What if she told him, and he said he couldn't accept it?

Then she'd have no family at all and no Larry. It would be just like when she was in the cave in Northern Russia. All alone. Kiley started to turn around. Anything was better than that. Then she reminded herself about her father's investigation. Shouldn't she at least warn him about that? She took a deep breath. She had to know how this would turn out.

Kiley flew down to land in a familiar alley, and then walked over to Larry's house. Would he even be home? Since she hadn't contacted him in over a week, she didn't know what his schedule was anymore. What if he had gone to his mother's or something? What was going to happen tonight?

Kiley ran her fingers through her hair. Then she nervously knocked on the door. Would he slam the door in her face when he found out who it was? She ran her fingers through her hair again.

Just as Kiley was about to knock on the door again, it opened.

Larry stood on the other side, looking shocked. "Kiley? I thought I was never going to see you again!"

Kiley smiled slowly. "I wasn't sure if I'd ever see you again, either."

"Things were pretty intense when you left," Larry commented.

"Yeah, they were," Kiley agreed.

"Listen, I should probably apologize for the way I reacted. I don't usually act like that. Something about you makes me more emotional."

"Me, too." Kiley grinned. But she was still standing outside. Was he going to let her in?

"But it did really hurt me that you were keeping something from me and that you lied to me. Why did you do that if you said you loved me?" Larry pleaded for her to answer.

Kiley sighed. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Can I come in? This isn't really a conversation I can have if others might see or hear us."

Larry nodded, with his eyebrows raised.

They went into his living room, where "Swiss Alps Mystic" was still proudly displayed. They both looked at the painting, and then each other, at the same time.

"So," Kiley began. "You were right; I've been keeping something from you. And it's something big that is a major part of my life."

Larry opened his mouth to say something. He looked quite upset by this information.

She raised her hand to quiet him. "But I've had good reasons for doing so. This secret doesn't just affect me; it affects my whole family, Larry."

Larry seemed to calm down a little by this information. He nodded. They both sat on the couch.

"I wanted to tell you that night, I really did. But I couldn't do that without telling my family first. And then, well, when I did tell them..." Kiley's voice trailed off. She knew he didn't like people judging them because of his uncle.

Larry sighed and nodded in understanding. "They didn't want you to tell me because my last name's Luthor."

Kiley nodded. "I told them not to judge you by that, but they didn't listen. They've had a lot of bad history with him, and NOT just what's in the papers, I'm afraid. It has to do with our family secret."

Larry paused and seemed to be processing that information. "So this is a big family secret that involves bad history with my uncle? Why do you trust this with me, then?"

"Because I need you in my life, Larry!" Kiley cried. "I love you! I miss you, and I've been at odds with my family ever since I told them about you, anyway. Besides, some of the things Dad is doing really hurts, almost betrays me, and has me worried about you."

"Oh, and as far as the 'lie' last week, it wasn't actually a lie. I did go upstairs. I just didn't stay there." With that, Kiley took a deep breath and spun into Superwoman. "I flew out the window."

Larry's mouth fell open. "You're..."

Kiley nodded. "Yes."

"And I told you Superwoman was egotistical and I didn't want her around my home last month! No wonder you left that day the way you did! I can't believe you were still willing to talk to me after that!" He hung his head in shame.

Kiley shrugged. "Yeah, it hurt a lot. But your explanation when you called me made sense. And I really wanted to keep seeing you. Besides, it took me a while to really believe that you weren't like your uncle. So I could understand how you could have taken a while to believe Superwoman wasn't egotistical."

"But why didn't you just say you KNEW Superwoman, at least, wasn't egotistical? You didn't have to tell me you were her; you could just tell me you knew her." Larry sounded confused at this, trying to understand what was going on.

Kiley thought back to that time. "Yeah, that's true. I could have. And I did plan to help you see the truth when we got back together. But I guess I also felt it was easier to pretend the problem doesn't exist, you know? Brush it under the rug. And I thought that telling you that would sound too much like 'believe me because I told you so.' Would you have actually listened to that?"

Larry shrugged. "I don't know." Then he chuckled. "I feel kind of dumb, though. There were so many clues, I should have recognized! Why couldn't I see the truth?"

Kiley shrugged back at him. "We work hard for people not to even think we might have secret identities as regular people. And as for the rest, I'm just glad you didn't figure it out before we were ready for it. We're ready now," she added gesturing to her and Larry. With that Kiley leaned over and kissed him.

"I've missed that," she said, grinning when they came up for air.

"Me, too," Larry replied. Then he kissed her again.

"Oh, I almost forgot to tell you! My father is conducting an investigation about you."

Larry shrugged. "So? I don't think there's much we can do to stop him. Maybe it'll allow him to finally see the light."

Kiley sighed. "Larry, it's a lot more complicated than that." She rubbed Larry's knee while she talked. "First of all, I hate to admit it, and it hurts me, too, but Dad is going to take a long time to see the light on you. Lex Luthor put him in a Kryptonite cage, once. Grandma told me he was in there for almost twenty-four hours."

Larry paused to digest this information. "But Kryponite? Your father?" He sounded confused again. Then suddenly, the light seemed to come on in Larry's head. "Your father is Superman! I should have figured that out right away when you showed me you were Superwoman. And you said it was a FAMILY secret. But... I just..." his voice trailed off.

Kiley chuckled. "It's okay. You've had a lot to take in tonight."

He nodded. "So Uncle Lex once tried to kill your father."

Larry sighed. "This just keeps getting messier and messier. I can't believe I once looked UP TO that piece of slime!"

Kiley nodded sympathetically. "But anyway, Dad does his investigations, particularly one like this where he thinks he needs to 'save me,' the way Mom taught him. Breaking and entering, undercover, and underhanded superpowers. He'll go through your private things, if he hasn't already, to try to find evidence."

Larry sighed. He didn't look thrilled to know that a stranger who obviously hated him was going through his private things. "Well, there doesn't seem to be anything I can do to stop him. But thanks for telling me."

Kiley suddenly got an idea. "I don't know what you'll think of this, but would you come to Metropolis with me? Then at least, you wouldn't have to deal with my father face-to-face while he does this investigation. It might be better on both of you. And I miss having someone to talk to in Metropolis. I can't talk to my family anymore."

Larry looked horrified at this idea. "Kiley, I avoid going to Metropolis for a reason. If you walk around there with the name 'Luthor,' everyone's out to get you. I know that."

"But you don't look like Lex Luthor. Couldn't you just do what you do here? Not give out your last name?"

He shook his head. "But I'd at least need to get a hotel or something. I'd have to sign my full name for that."

Kiley shook her head and took his hand. "You don't have to get a hotel room, though. You could stay with me."

Larry looked taken aback. "Look Kiley, I love you and I know you love me... but..."

"You're not ready for intimacy?" she asked him, suddenly understanding. "Look, Larry, I'm not ready for that, either. I just meant you could sleep on my couch so we could avoid the hotel problem. Quite frankly, I hope you're okay with this, but I don't plan on doing that until I get married. That's what my parents did, and they tell me it really helped their relationship."

Larry looked relieved. "I'm glad to hear that. I always said I didn't want to do that unless I got married either. I didn't want to be a playboy like Uncle Lex. Not that us... 'making love' would make me a playboy, but..."

Kiley nodded in understanding. "So, seriously, would you come to Metropolis with me? It would mean a lot."

Larry took a deep breath and nodded. "For you, I'll do anything."

So Kiley, who was still wearing her Superwoman costume, stood up. "When my Dad takes my Mom flying, he cradles her. That's also what I do when I'm doing rescues, because the people feel safer. And I can do that for you if you want. But I'm wondering if it might feel... I don't know... not that you're all macho and everything, but..."

Larry nodded in understanding. "Yeah, it would be kind of weird for you to carry me like that. How about you put your arms around my waist from behind? Could you fly like that?"

Kiley grinned and wrapped her arms around him like he suggested. "Like this?" She leaned over and kissed his back.

Larry chuckled. "Yeah, like that."

"Can you open a window?" He nodded and did so. Then they got back into position and took off. Larry looked at the Alps from above. "I can see how you'd paint an 'aerial view,'" he commented, teasing her.

Kiley laughed. Flying with Larry was just as amazing as she thought it would be.

Ten minutes later, Kiley flew into her apartment.

Larry looked around her living room. "Nice place." He looked at the portrait of her family. "Is this your family?"

Kiley nodded. They used to be anyway. Now they were a broken family.

Larry noticed her reaction. "I'm sorry. Are you sure you made the right decision by telling me?"

Kiley shrugged. "I just didn't know what else to do. Well, it's late, especially by your time. There's the couch," she said, pointing. "Let me get you a pillow and a blanket."

The next morning, Kiley got up feeling a little better. Larry was back in her life. That was a good thing. She got dressed and went downstairs to greet him. "Hi, Larry," she smiled, and kissed him.

"What would you like for breakfast?" she asked him.

"Do you have stuff to make omelets? I've never made you my breakfast special yet!"

Kiley grinned. Larry, her chef.

So Larry made a couple of omelets with green peppers, onions, and cheese. They also had toast and juice. As they enjoyed their breakfast, they also kept touching shoulders, knees, and feet.

After they were finished, Kiley knew she wanted to work on her painting of her broken home. But Larry was here. What could she do? Suddenly, she nodded to herself. It was time to break that barrier as well. After all, Larry was the only one she had right now.

So after excusing herself for a second, she changed into her painting clothes. What would Larry think of her when she was dressed so grunge? She shook her head and told herself, "Larry loves you, not the way you dress!"

Then she came back downstairs.

Larry looked up. "Are those the clothes you use to paint with?" he asked causally.

She nodded, and then suddenly sneezed.

"Bless you," Larry replied automatically.

"I'm going to paint now... Would... you like to come with me?"

Larry looked at her in surprise. "I thought you told me you never showed anyone unfinished paintings?"

"I don't. But this is different. I want you to know all of me, Larry. I love you. You're the only one I have left." She took him by the hand and led him into her studio.

"This is a painting about my feelings concerning my family breaking up."

Larry smiled sadly at her and nodded.

Kiley got to work. A half hour after she started working she noticed her nose running. Was she getting a cold again? She shrugged and continued painting. Larry picked up a box of tissues for her.

That night, she and Larry read passages from "Romeo and Juliet." Each made parallels to their own situation as they cuddled up together on the couch.

"Romeo and Juliet decided they were going to be together no matter what their parents thought, just like we have," Kiley commented to Larry.

"Yeah, but they ended up not being able to fix the problem. Do you think we can really change your parents' minds eventually?"

Kiley sneezed again. "Yes, I do. My parents hated Lex Luthor, Larry. But they're good people. We just have to prove it to them. I just knew I couldn't do that by not seeing you. Besides, Romeo and Juliet were only children. We're not." She blew her nose again. "Besides that, I love you, Larry. I need you in my life, no matter what they say. "We're two halves of the same whole." She took his hands and looked intently into his eyes.

Larry nodded in understanding.

Then she sneezed again. She really was coming down with a cold. And no Dad to comfort her this time. At least she had Larry. She rubbed his legs.

The next day, Kiley noticed she had a fever as well as sneezing and blowing her nose. This was the one time where she actually was bothered by heat. She threw her blanket on the floor.

Larry came up to give her cold drinks, read her stories, and

comforted her the best he could. He warmed her heart and once again, she reminded herself she had done the right thing by telling him about Superwoman. Unfortunately she had a hard time telling him that, because her throat was so sore. Larry seemed to understand, though.

Her cold lasted three days, when she became less coherent. What was this place? Who was this nice man helping her? Oh that was right, Larry. How could she have forgotten him? As she sat up and tried to reach for him, she fainted.

When she came to, she could hear his voice in the background, "Look, I know you and your husband hate my guts because of my uncle. I don't blame you on that. But that isn't the point. The point is that Kiley is seriously ill and I don't know what to do! I thought it was just a cold, but now she's becoming incoherent. And she just fainted! Take me back to Switzerland or throw me in jail for all I care, just do something to make her better! Let her be okay!" Larry's voice sounded like it was cracking.

Clark still couldn't find what he was looking for in Switzerland, although at least he had Lois helping him now. Why had he ever thought he could do this by himself? Lois was looking up whatever financial records she could get from the Planet's databases. It seemed Luthor had supplied money to someone in Switzerland while he was alive, although he had tried very hard to make it untraceable. So the new Luthor probably got some of his money from the old one.

Clark had found Luthor's house in Switzerland. It was a nice place, but not exactly Luthor material. From his experience they usually went for grand, bigger-than-life type places, not ordinary homes like he seemed to have. He wondered if Luthor had several other homes in different places. He still wanted to find that fortress that some people in Zurich mentioned.

But right now, he was home for the night. He, Lois, and Alice had just finished supper when the phone rang. Lois answered it. "Hello? WHAT!!?" Clark wondered who was receiving Lois's wrath right now. Jimmy? His parents? Just about anybody, in her current state of mind, quite frankly. They were both on the edge these days.

Then Lois's voice completely changed from angry and annoyed to terrified. "Okay." Her voice shook. "Weeeellll...do our beesstt... Clark will coomme by and gett her." Then she hung up the phone. "We need Dr. Klein. Now!" She rummaged around frantically, looking for his home phone number.

Dr. Klein? What was all this about? "Honey, what's the matter?" Clark asked her quietly.

"We need him to examine Kiley as soon as possible." She continued to search for the number without looking at him. "There it is!" Lois grabbed the number and quickly dialed. "Dr. Klein, we need you to go to STAR labs now! It's important! There's something wrong with Kiley! Just get over there. We'll meet you there." Then she hung up the phone.

Clark took her into his arms as she crumpled. "Honey, what is the matter with Kiley?"

"I — I — don't know," she replied. "Apparently it looked like a cold at first. But now she's becoming incoherent. And she fainted!"

Clark gulped. That didn't sound good. Lois was right, they needed Dr. Klein. Only... "Where is she? And who was on the phone?"

"Brace yourself, Clark. She's at her apartment. And that was Larry calling."

Clark was shocked and, as he let the information digest, he felt betrayed. The only way, save that of a private jet which he saw no evidence that this Luthor had, that they could both be in her apartment, was if Kiley had told him she was Superwoman.

Still, that really wasn't the point right now. He needed to take

her to Dr. Klein first, so he could cure whatever her illness was. Then he'd tell Kiley how disappointed he was in her. He sighed. It was too bad he hadn't found any concrete evidence to show her yet.

"Clark, fly over and get her. I want her to see Dr. Klein as soon as possible. I'll take the jeep. I just hope... she's okay. She's got to be."

Clark nodded, took a deep breath and took off. Luthor knew who he was. That made him feel exposed, like he was naked. How could Kiley do this to him? To the family? And she didn't even bother to tell them that she had told Luthor herself! But, still... Lois was right. She had to be okay.

He quietly landed inside Kiley's apartment. Well, he thought to himself, let's get this over with. Just then, he noticed a blond man come down the stairs. This must be Luthor.

"Hi," Luthor said nervously. That was surprising, he had to admit. He'd never seen the original Luthor nervous. But it was probably another act. "She's upstairs. I... just want her to be okay, sir... That's all." Luthor's voice sounded almost as shaken as Lois's did.

And since when did Luthors have blond hair? That really surprised him. Logically, since this man was the original Luthor's nephew, there was no reason why he couldn't have blond hair. Still, he had expected him to have brown hair, like all the Luthors he'd come in contact with. But this wasn't important. Kiley was important.

Clark entered the bedroom and looked at Kiley. She looked awful. Her face was flushed, she looked feverish, and her nose looked red from blowing it too much. He picked her up off the bed, causing her to wake up. "Hello, sir. Who are you?" she mumbled as Clark lifted her into his arms. Kiley didn't know who he was! This was serious.

Did Luthor do something to her, he wondered? Clark looked accusingly at him and asked, "What happened?"

Luthor sighed. "I don't know. I really don't. I know you won't believe me, but I want her better as much as you do. I told your wife you could take me back to Switzerland or throw me in jail for all I care. Just make sure she's okay."

"Well, as much as the idea of taking you back to Switzerland is appealing, I don't have the time. And I don't have enough evidence to put you in jail."

Luthor nodded. "So, do you want me to stay here or...?" his voice trailed off, sounding unsure of what to say. Clark had to admit he was doing a wonderful job acting innocent and worried about Kiley. If he didn't know better, he might actually believe him. But he did know better.

"No, I don't want you to stay here. I want you where I can see you if you're going to be in the United States. Especially with... what you know."

Luthor nodded, looking resigned and relieved at the same time. "So how do I get to where you're going?"

"I'm not going to fly you. You can take the subway," he told Luthor. Then he gave him the directions and took off. Lois was going to kill him for inviting Luthor, but hopefully she'd understand his reasoning. He still felt naked, with Luthor knowing.

In the meantime, he needed to get Kiley to Dr. Klein as soon as possible.

Within minutes, Clark landed at STAR labs, near Dr. Klein's private office. Hopefully, he would be here soon. Right now, all he could do was wait. And wait. And wait. And wait. Clark looked at Kiley again. She had fallen asleep shortly after he had put her in his arms, but he still remembered her saying, "Hello, sir. Who are you?"

Ten minutes later, Dr. Klein arrived. "So what seems to be the problem?" he asked Clark as he began examining his patient.

Clark shook his head sadly. "I don't know. She has basic cold

symptoms like a fever, a stuffed nose and everything. But she seems to keep losing her sensibility. When I picked her up, she didn't even know who I was!"

Dr. Klein looked shocked. "This is serious. Let me see what I can do."

Just then Lois came into the office. "How is she, Dr. Klein? Please let her be okay! What's wrong with my girl? I wish I had seen this coming! Maybe if we had been talking to her, we could've done something!"

Dr. Klein sighed and shook his head. "I don't know, Lois. Your kids are harder to examine, because we can't do blood tests. Her throat looks swollen, so that fits with a cold... but I don't know."

Lois and Clark clung to each other for strength. Kiley would be okay, right? She had to be!

Just then Kiley woke up. She seemed to be a little more coherent this time. "Dr. Klein! What's going on? Can you tell me why I'm so sick? Where's Larry?"

Clark bristled at Luthor's first name. He supposed he'd be here soon enough. Lois frowned at the name, as well.

But a minute after that, Kiley suddenly fainted on Dr. Klein's table.

Everyone looked at each other, terrified. What was happening to Kiley?

Dr. Klein looked thoughtful for a moment. "Has she ever fainted before when she was sick?"

Lois and Clark shook their heads violently. "But apparently she's fainted since becoming sick this time. What are we going to do? How can we help her?"

Dr. Klein sighed. "I have a colleague working on something with anthrax. I'm afraid this fits all the symptoms of the inhaled form. Cold symptoms, followed by shocks. That could account for the fainting and incoherence. Let me talk to him for a minute to get more information."

Clark's eyebrows went up. Anthrax? Wasn't that sometimes used as a biological weapon? That didn't sound good. But how on earth would Kiley come in contact with that? Luthor? He didn't check for anything like that when he was in Switzerland. Why hadn't he thought of that?

As Clark was dwelling on this information, and continuing to hold Lois in his arms, Luthor walked into the office. "Hi," he mumbled, looking at the floor.

Clark let go of Lois for a moment. "You," he spat, pointing at Luthor. "What did you do to my daughter?! Dr. Klein tells me she might have anthrax!"

Lois looked from Clark to Luthor, trying to understand what was going on. "What are you doing here? You're not good enough for my daughter! Get out! I bet you're the reason why she's sick, anyway!"

Luthor sighed and continued to look at the floor. Once again, Clark wondered where that famous Luthor self-confidence, sometimes known as conceit, was. "I'll leave if you want me to. I just wanted to see Kiley." He glanced, seemingly longingly, at Kiley. "And I know you won't believe me, but I didn't get her sick. I just want her to be okay. And honestly," he added, sounding a little angry this time, "Why would I call you if I made her sick? I even offered to let you put me in jail!" Luthor shook his head and began walking away.

Clark sighed and put his head in his hands. What was he going to do? He'd still rather have Luthor were he could see him, though. "Lois, the reason why I told him to come was so that he wouldn't be able to do anything behind our backs. Does that make sense?"

Lois sighed and nodded slowly. "Come on back in," Clark called to Luthor, sighing. What was he getting himself into, letting him be acquainted with Superman's family medical practice?

So Luthor wandered back into the office. All three of them sat down and stared at each other and at Kiley. Would she really be okay?

Just then Dr. Klein came back in. "I'm pretty sure it is the inhaled form of anthrax. I will tell you that you guys are not in danger of catching it. Inhaled anthrax is only contagious at the point of release, or wherever she caught it. But as far as her treatment, I have to tell you, I don't know what to do here. That strain is hard to treat, and it has to be treated with IV drugs. But with her invulnerability...?"

Clark found it hard to breathe for a second. Dr. Klein couldn't possibly be saying what it sounded like he was saying, could he?

Lois, who had always been braver than he was, asked the question he couldn't bring himself to ask, "What will happen to Kiley if she can't get the medication?"

Dr. Klein took a deep breath and responded, "She'll die within twenty-four to thirty-six hours."

Clark's face crumpled. Lois buried her head in his chest. This could not be happening. He was not facing the possibility of losing Kiley! And as far as it not being contagious to them, who cared? They just needed to save Kiley! Although, Clark acknowledged to himself, it was probably good that she didn't allow anyone she had rescued recently to catch this. But anyway, what were they going to do?

Luthor's face also fell at the news. "No, no," he mumbled to himself.

"But if she's sick, maybe her invulnerability's not complete. We could try, right? We can't just give up!" Lois, of course. She never gave up without a fight. And she could very well be right. It could work, right?

Dr. Klein nodded. "Yes, we should try that. Let me get some drugs from the hospital. I'll be back in about twenty minutes. In the meantime, try to keep her comfortable."

Clark noticed her face was still warm, so he picked up a clean cloth and began wiping her face. He'd do anything to help Kiley. Lois picked up another cloth and wiped her chest. What were they going to do?

In the background, Clark could see Luthor looking sadly at the situation and longingly at Kiley.

Just then Kiley woke up. "Mom? Dad?" she asked quietly as she looked at their faces. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Lois and Clark nodded. "It's okay," they said at the same time.

Then she looked past her parents, toward a blond-headed man. "Larry?" she mumbled softly. "Come here."

Luthor looked at Kiley as if his heart were breaking. Then he looked at Lois and Clark questioningly. Clark sighed and nodded. Lois paused and nodded as well. He hated Luthor anywhere near his daughter, but the man didn't seem to be doing any harm at the moment. And if it would make Kiley happy...

Luthor stepped up to the table that Kiley was laying on and took her hand. "Hi there," he said softly.

Kiley looked from Clark to Luthor intensely. She took each of their hands and told them, "You guys have more in common than you realize." Then her face became confused again. "What is this place? Why am I here?"

Clark, Lois and Luthor all looked at each other at the same time. Clark was sure they were all thinking the same thing. She needed the drugs now!

After fifteen minutes of waiting and trying to keep Kiley comfortable, Dr. Klein arrived with the drugs and the IV. He took a deep breath. "I hope this works," he commented grimly, before attempting to drive the needle into Kiley's left arm.

The needle broke and fell to the floor.

Everyone in the room looked at each other in terror. This couldn't be happening! "Maybe her other arm is more vulnerable?" Lois asked, obviously grasping at straws. But

everyone nodded. It was better than giving up.

So Dr. Klein picked up another needle and attempted to inject her right arm. Once again, the needle broke, without even nicking Kiley's skin. He tried several other places to put a needle into a patient, including both thighs, and several spots along both arms. But they all proved futile. Dr. Klein picked up the last needle he'd tried and threw it across the room. "This stuff is useless! This is exactly why I went into research!" Then he left the room.

They all gazed at each other again, sharing looks of horror and broken hearts. They were going to lose Kiley, and there was nothing they could do about it. Within 24 to 36 hours, Kiley's heart would stop beating. Clark glanced at Luthor. To think, just two hours ago, he was worried about her because of what this man might do to her. But it seemed he should have been worried about something else altogether.

Because as hard as it was to believe, Clark no longer could see Luthor as responsible for Kiley's illness. He had a point. Why would he call them if that was the case? And Clark had been looking for ANY sign of a crack in his act. In the original Luthor, he had found it early on. But he couldn't see it here.

And the fact of the matter was it was really Clark's fault that Kiley was sick. Or at least that she couldn't get better. He had given her that invulnerability! To think, when Clark first learned his children had his invulnerability, he was overjoyed. He wouldn't have to worry about them the way he always worried about Lois. But if she didn't have invulnerability, she'd be able to be treated.

Clark buried his head in shame in the corner of the office. This was all his fault. He stayed there for the rest of the night, while Lois looked torn between helping him and giving Kiley comfort.

Luthor sat next to Kiley, and eventually fell asleep.

Lois got up the next morning. "I'm going to call Alice and Thomas. They should have a chance to see her before... well, before..." Clark nodded. It was obvious what she couldn't say.

Alice showed up a half hour later. "Hey, sis," she commented, walking over to the table. "I wish it wasn't like this, you know? I never really told you how much I looked up to you. You knew you wanted to paint, even though the rest of Metropolis kept telling you to be a reporter. You knew you wanted to work with Dad, right from the beginning. I wish I could be like that. But I'm always changing my mind every two weeks... I just wish... we... could have had more time," she finished before sitting down.

Dr. Klein had set up something of a "hospital room/waiting room" in his old office, which was particularly useful today. Actually, Dr. Klein was officially retired now. After all, he was almost eighty. But he was the only doctor the Kents could trust to treat their family, so he had agreed to continue serving them. Occasionally, he would also have a part-time project as well.

Thomas said he would be by soon, and with Clark's parents as well. Clark looked at his little girl again, without touching her. He didn't feel he had the right. After all, this was partly his fault, right? Then he happened to glance in the corner of the room. There was a lead-lined box sitting there. Kryptonite.

If Kiley were vulnerable to Kryptonite, they could give her the drugs. It wouldn't even have to be a long exposure. Just a couple of minutes would all it would take. It would be a small price to pay to get her those drugs. And to think, how overjoyed Clark had been when they had first found out Kiley was invulnerable to Kryptonite. She'd never have to face that intense pain, he had thought to himself. She'd never have to worry about some villain surprising her with it when she'd least expected it.

To think, how grateful he had been that she hadn't been affected by Kryptonite when he had been exposed a month ago. He'd laughed at himself now. Clark would give anything for Kiley to be vulnerable to Kryptonite now, even if she had to leave

him in that warehouse. His life didn't matter when Kiley wasn't a part of it. Before he knew it, tears began streaming down his face. Clark picked up a tissue and wiped them off.

Then he picked up a cloth and wiped Kiley's forehead again. At least he could make her more comfortable.

Thomas arrived with Clark's parents. Thomas walked over to her and said, "I'm sorry it had to be this way, sis. I wish there was something I could do," before sitting down.

Suddenly, Clark's super hearing snapped to attention. There was a train headed off course! A lot of lives could be lost! But then he looked at Kiley. And what did it matter if Kiley was going to die anyway? He wanted to spend her last... her last... days with her.

Thomas glanced at his father and nodded. He would go. He spun into Whirlwind and left.

Mom and Dad also talked to Kiley. About how proud of her they were, and about how much they loved her.

Luthor still sat next to Kiley, but it seemed to improve her comfort, so Clark was getting used to it. Suddenly, Kiley woke up again. "Larry," she mumbled. "I want to stay with you... I... we... have so much left to do... so much left to see..."

Luthor stroked her hair tenderly. Clark had to admit, it reminded of him of the way he touched Lois. "We will stay together," he told her. "We're two halves of the same whole, remember?" His voice cracked.

Kiley, still lying down, struggled to reach out for Larry. But before she could reach him, she passed out again. Larry turned from the Kents quickly, but Clark noticed the tears running down his face first. A few minutes later, Dr. Klein told them she was in a coma. Lois reached for her daughter's hands, crying for her to stay with them.

Clark sighed. If only the Kryptonite...

He looked at Luthor, deep into the man's eyes, and saw no signs of evil. He remembered how he was able to sense evil in the original Luthor, Tempus, and many other villains, including the latest, Mr. Riccoi. He had seen how much he cared for Kiley. Maybe...?

"So," Clark commented, "Larry." He stressed the first name. "You say you're not like Lex Luthor?" The two of them went to sit down.

Larry took a deep breath and looked straight at Clark. "No, sir, I'm not. I admit, I knew him. And there was a time I looked up to him. But I don't approve of the things he did. From running general crime here, to cloning, to what he did to you and your wife. Kiley told me about the Kryptonite cage. I wish you hadn't had to go through that. Not to mention what he did to my mother. He destroyed her self-esteem thoroughly."

Clark sighed. "You know, as Superman, I claim to stand for justice. And one of the big things about justice is to give everyone a fair chance. I never even tried to do that for you."

Larry shrugged. "It's completely understandable. You were just trying to protect Kiley. I would have done the same thing if she were my daughter. I just wish... there was something I could do for her now." Larry sighed and looked longingly at Kiley again. "I wish there was something I could do, too. Maybe Kiley was right when she told us we're not that different." Clark held out his hand to Larry, and he shook it.

"You know, this situation is partly my fault. I gave her the invulnerability to the needles. If she didn't have that, Dr. Klein could give her the treatment," Clark grumbled.

Larry shook his head. "That's not true, sir. You didn't give her the anthrax virus."

Lois looked up, flashed Larry a thank you glance, and went to her husband. "Clark, none of this is your fault. Like he said, you didn't give her the virus. And it's MY genes that make her unresponsive to Kryptonite. How do you think that makes me feel?"

Clark sighed and took her in his arms. He hated for her to feel bad. And he was just wishing they could've used the Kryptonite, too. Larry hesitated, and then hugged them both.

Then they all went back to facing their living nightmare. Baring a miracle, Kiley was going to die with in twelve hours.

Two hours later, Dr. Klein walked back in to check on Kiley. She was getting progressively weaker, he told them. He would be back again.

When Dr. Klein arrived again, Kiley was just barely holding on. He looked at the Kent family, nervously. "I was talking to a colleague, and he gave me an idea. This is probably way too far-fetched but, well... nothing else is working... so..." Dr. Klein shrugged. "Anyway, here's the idea. Anthrax is bacterial. It's supposed to be killed with these drugs," he gestured to the useless treatment. "But it COULD possibly be killed with high power radiation, if it's powerful enough to get through her aura. I don't really know... but I thought maybe we could try it..." Dr. Klein seemed uncertain about this, like he didn't want to give up on his patient, but he also didn't want to give the Kent family false hope.

Clark, however, happily clung to anything that might work, as did the rest of the Kents, and Larry as well. They all nodded eagerly at this new possible development. "So where would we get high power radiation?"

Dr. Klein shrugged. "It would have to be one of those big power plants. Could you take her there?" he asked Clark.

He nodded, remembering a time in his life where the radiation from the power plants saved his life after swallowing Kryptonite. They might be able to save Kiley as well. He picked her up gently and flew off. Then he landed inside the biggest power plant in the state of New Troy. He ignored the protests from the workers, who shouted to him that civilians were NOT allowed inside. Unfortunately, Kiley was not wearing her Superwoman costume. It would have been too hot with her fever. So it looked to them like Superman was exposing an innocent woman to harmful radiation.

But he didn't care about that right now. He just wanted Kiley to be okay. He held her there for several minutes, hoping against hope there would be a change in her.

Then suddenly, he noticed her heartbeat speed up! She was coming out of the coma! "Larry," she mumbled softly. "Larry." Kiley was okay! She would recover! Clark flew out of the power plant, thinking about Kiley's mumblings, as well as Larry's speech just before she drifted into a coma.

He remembered a similar circumstance, back when he and Lois were engaged. Somehow, intergang had infected him with a Kryptonian virus. Clark had ended up in a coma, just like Kiley had been.

(flashback)

As he had hovered in consciousness, just before slipping into a coma, Lois had told him, "Remember once I asked how you felt about me... And you said being with me was stronger than you alone? Grab onto that strength now. We'll be strong enough for everybody."

Somehow, Clark had done just that. So even though the Kryptonite technically saved him, Clark credited Lois with saving his life that night.

(end of flashback)

It was quite possible, under the circumstances, that Larry had done the same for Kiley. When he got back to Dr. Klein office, Clark placed Kiley on the table and hugged Larry in open gratitude.

Kiley opened her eyes and said, "I must be in heaven now. Dad and Larry are hugging!" Everyone in the room lit up and began hugging everyone else. Kiley would be okay!

In the next few days, Kiley's health improved dramatically. She no longer had a fever, and she certainly didn't suffer from shocks. Her cold-like symptoms had also disappeared. Furthermore, according to Dr. Klein, she suffered no ill effects from the radiation. Apparently, even though her invulnerability did not include illnesses, it did include problems with radiation.

However, the general public was still wondering why Superman had taken a civilian inside a nuclear power plant. Now that Kiley was better, she had heard several people discuss this.

"...so even though Metropolis has always appreciated Superman, we wonder if he might be going too far this time. What right does he have to expose a civilian to harmful radiation like that?" She heard that one on the neighbor's radio.

"I heard Superman tried to fry someone with radiation! Next he'll be using heat vision. We have to be careful about these superheroes!" She heard that when she went grocery shopping.

It really made her mad. Her father had saved her life that day. Why was he getting such treatment from people he offered nothing but service? Of course, she admitted, it would have looked strange to an ordinary person, but couldn't they give him the benefit of doubt?

So she went to her parents' home that night to discuss options. She wouldn't allow her father to be treated like this!

Mom and Dad were overjoyed to see her. They both hugged her as she walked in the door. She knew they still couldn't believe she was okay. Honestly, she couldn't believe it either. Her throat was no longer sore, so it didn't hurt to talk. She wasn't burning up because of her fever. And best of all, she no longer had to go through those horrible shocks that caused her to wonder who her family was.

As well as who Larry was. She still couldn't believe she didn't have to choose between Larry and her family anymore. That was the real miracle, that her parents had finally accepted him. Larry had gone home yesterday, since he knew she would be okay. After all, he still had the Choco Bean to run. But she was free to see him whenever she wanted.

But right now, she wanted to help her father. "Hi, Mom and Dad," she greeted them as they hugged her.

"Kiley, I still can't believe you're okay!" Mom exclaimed, looking at her daughter in amazement.

"Me neither," Dad added, hugging her again.

Kiley grinned.

"So, I wanted to talk to you guys about the public's perception of Superman. What are we going to do?"

Her parents sighed and nodded, no longer looking quite so overjoyed. They all went to sit on one of the couches.

"Jim was talking to us about that today. I told him we could do an interview with Superman on the issue," Dad mentioned.

Mom nodded.

Kiley wasn't satisfied with this plan, however. She shook her head. "We need to do more than that, Dad. I mean, I know you guys like to think that everyone in Metropolis reads the Planet, but unfortunately, they don't. There are a lot of people who really distrust Superman right now. What's going to happen when you go on a rescue and someone refuses help?"

Dad shrugged. "I know, but right now, I don't really care. Yes, it upsets me, and yes, I wish more people would give me the benefit of doubt, but I saved you that day. I have my Kiley back." Dad hugged her again. "That's what's important to me."

Kiley smiled again. "Thanks Dad, I appreciate that. But it really bothers ME when I hear my father discussed so negatively. I want to help clear your name, Dad."

Mom spoke up, "It bothers me, too, Clark. I mean, I agree with you that saving Kiley was the most important thing, but I want Superman's name cleared. You know I always want the public to think the best of him." She grinned at Dad with her last

comment.

"Yeah, you've always wanted people to think the best of Superman, Lois." He grinned back. "So what should we do?"

"Maybe we should hold a press conference? We can go over the major points there, and just do a more in-depth interview for Jim," Mom suggested.

Kiley nodded. That sounded like it might work. "But what are we going to say? I mean, we can't tell them that you were treating Superwoman, because we don't want people to notice her without the costume on. It destroys the whole secret identity."

Her mother nodded. "And anyway, we wouldn't want people to know you can get sick."

They all sat on the couch, thinking.

"What if you were treating a NORMAL person for an illness, Clark? Could that work?" Mom's eyes were starting to light up, the way they did when she got excited about a story, lead, or angle.

Clark shook his head. "I've heard of treating cancers and such with radiation, but how do we explain why I had to take her to a power plant?"

They all sighed and continued to think.

"What about getting Dr. Klein to help? I mean, it was his idea in the first place. And even though he's technically retired, he's still well respected in the scientific and medical community. So if we got him to say he told Superman to help this woman with a 'special experimental treatment,' would that work?" Dad asked, building on Mom's original idea.

Kiley wasn't so sure about that, though. "But isn't Dr. Klein known for treating Superman and family? What if someone makes a connection that way?"

Mom sighed. "That's true, but he's also well respected in the scientific community, and has a history of dealing with 'unusual cases.' Not all of these cases involved Superman." She shrugged.

Dad sighed. "Well, I don't know if it's going to work, but we should try something. Let me call Jim and Dr. Klein."

As Dad did that, Kiley sighed. She was so grateful for him for saving his life, but it made her feel guilty for shutting him out before. She loved her parents. Had she put too much pressure on her parents to accept Larry? All they wanted was the best for her, even if they had a misguided view of how to achieve it.

When Dad returned from making his calls, Kiley spoke, "Mom, Dad, I'm really, really sorry for all I put you through with Larry. You were right, I wasn't being truthful, and that's no way to inspire trust in my judgment." She ran her fingers through her hair as she talked. Was it a good idea to discuss this, or should they leave it as "water under the bridge"?

But her parents shook their heads. "No, Kiley, you were right. We would have never let you continue seeing him if we knew earlier."

Kiley wasn't done, though. She shook her head. "I put so much pressure on you to like him. And you believed you were trying to protect me. Like you always do."

Dad sighed. "Yeah, but I seem to recall hearing that I can't protect my loved ones from everything all the time. I guess I still haven't learned that."

Everyone laughed. Dad and his over-protectiveness! "And I guess some of that has rubbed off onto me, as much as I always found your over-protectiveness annoying, Clark," Mom added.

"I still wish I had waited longer before telling him about Superwoman, though, Dad. I know, by extension, I told Larry about you, too. That wasn't fair to you. You had no reason to trust him."

"You know, about a month ago, Larry told me he thought the superheroes were egotistical." At her parents shocked faces, Kiley rushed on. "We dealt with that, and he doesn't think that anymore. But I didn't want to tell them they weren't or we weren't, however you want to put that," she sighed. "Because it

sounds like 'believe me because I said so.' But that's exactly what I was doing with you guys and Larry. 'Believe me because I said so.'"

Her mother sighed. "That's true, but you offered us a compromise to get around that, and we turned you down. We should have trusted you a little more. You've always had good judgment before."

"As far as the Superman thing," Dad commented, speaking up again, "Yes, I felt betrayed about that, and exposed. But," he shrugged. "It got Larry to Metropolis, and he helped save you. I may have given you the radiation but he gave you a reason to pull through. I can never repay him for that."

Kiley smiled bigger than she ever had. "Thanks, Mom and Dad." She hugged both of her parents again.

Two weeks later, it was time for another Kent family dinner. Kiley, however, made a special trip to Switzerland before flying to Hyperion Avenue. She landed in her usual spot, near Larry's house and knocked on the door.

"Hi, Kiley! Gosh, I've got to tell you, it feels really weird to be eating at midnight!"

Kiley grinned. Because of course, it was 6:00 PM in Metropolis, but it was 12:00 AM in Zurich.

"But I'll do anything for you. I can't believe your family actually wants me there! I'm Larry LUTHOR for goodness sakes!"

She smiled at him and went inside. "They really are over that, Larry. Don't worry about it."

"Well, I'm going to bring some chocolates with me anyway, just in case. I know you love them, and from what you've said, your mother will, too." He picked up a box of the assorted chocolates that had brought Kiley to Switzerland in the first place.

Kiley laughed. "Well, it certainly won't hurt!" Then she wrapped her arms around him from behind, as was their custom for flying, and they went out the window.

A few minutes later, they landed in her parents' yard. Kiley smiled and took Larry's hand to lead him to the door.

"Hi, there!" her mother said as she answered the door. "Hello," Larry replied nervously. He held out the chocolates, "I thought you might like these."

Mom laughed. "Definitely. Come in."

So Kiley and Larry followed Mom into the dinning room. Thomas and Alice were already seated. "Hello," they commented. Dad was busy finishing the pot roast. Kiley's mouth watered. That was her favorite meal.

Larry picked up the jug of milk on the counter and handed it to Mom. "I'm told this is your job," he commented as he sat down.

Mom grinned. "That's right!" she replied as she filled all the glasses.

Dad turned around and looked at Larry strangely for a second. "You have blond hair," he commented, quietly.

Larry nodded, looking confused.

"And you own the Choco Bean in Switzerland," he continued.

Larry nodded, still looking confused.

"So... it was you I bumped into when I was in Zurich!" Dad laughed.

Larry grinned. "Yeah, I guess I was. And I bumped into you."

Dad sobered then. "The reason I was there was to investigate you, though. I violated your privacy for no reason. I'm really sorry about that."

Larry shrugged. "Yeah, Kiley told me about that. But it's not important anymore. Let's eat."

Then everyone sat down and dug into the dinner. It was delicious. "So, I guess people seemed to accept Superman's

explanation for why he needed to take someone to the nuclear power plant. Dr. Klein really helped," Dad commented.

Everyone nodded. That was good news. "I'm glad people trust Superman again," Mom said softly, looking straight at Dad.

"I'm glad people are trusting Superman and Superwoman," Larry added. "So have you figured out how she got the anthrax?"

Mom shrugged. "We're not sure, but we have a few leads.

The guy who attacked the campaign for the new city council worked at STAR labs as a janitor. And Dr. Klein said someone WAS working on anthrax at STAR labs. Apparently it's a slow moving stain or something."

Dad picked up, "Normally anthrax takes only one to seven days for the symptoms to appear. But this guy is working on a strain that takes a lot longer, anywhere between a month to three months. And Kiley was at that campaign a month ago because he pulled a gun. We just aren't sure how he released the anthrax. And we haven't seen anyone else come down with it yet."

He sighed. "If we were assigned this story back at the beginning, we may have been able to catch it before Kiley got so sick. But it wasn't ours. We were busy with other things." Dad shook his head. "And I really wished I hadn't been cleaning an oil spill that morning. If I had gone, none of this would have happened. Anthrax doesn't affect me."

Kiley sighed. "Dad, weren't we having a conversation a little while ago about you being too over-protective? There was no way you could have known that would happen!"

Larry sighed. "I don't see how anybody would be able to realize something like that had happened, sir. It wasn't your fault."

Dad sighed and nodded in thanks.

Alice, meanwhile, had been listening to this conversation with interest. "You know, I've been thinking, you guys. About what I want to do with my life. I remember telling Kiley when she was sick how much I looked up to her because she knew what she wanted. And I remember thinking how brilliant Dr. Klein was for helping Kiley. I wish I could do the same. We're always saying Dr. Klein isn't going to be around forever. But what if I worked with Dr. Klein so I could treat our family? What if I went to medical school? I think... that's really what I want in life."

"I think that's a great idea, Alice." Dad nodding approvingly.

"I'm sure Dr. Klein would be glad to help you," Mom added, also approving of the plan.

Thomas nodded as well. "It looks like this family is really changing. Kiley has a boyfriend she loves and Mom and Dad approve of, and Alice finally has a direction in life. What's this world coming to?" he joked.

Everyone laughed.

Kiley looked around as her family continued talking. Her family was back to normal again. But more than that, it was better than it was before. Because her family included Larry now. She didn't have to choose between them, after all. She grabbed Larry's hand under the table, and he smiled at her. She smiled. Maybe it was good that "you never knew what you were going to get" in life. There was so much that had changed because of a relationship that started with a box of Swiss chocolates.

THE END

Finished!!!!!!

1 None of these addresses or numbers are real, with the exception of Zurick. I just created them off the top of my head because I needed them to go with the business card Kiley is looking at. Any similarities are entirely coincidental.

2 Attributed to Forrest Gump

3 All of the artists discussed here are (or were) real Swiss artists. Their paintings can be found at this website:

Kurstmuseum Basel museum fügegenwartskunst. Unfortunately, all the descriptions are in Swiss German so I can describe them, but I can't say what the names of the paintings are.

4 I really don't know if Switzerland's schools have field trips or not. Or if they have organizations that would take kids on field trips. (Like the scouts.) But it works for this part of the story, so I hope people will go with me here. Maybe this was a special program for a private school, or something.

5 I looked up some information on the Zurich Street Parade, and found some pictures, as well as information on what kind of stuff they had. They said the parade had a theme each year and honored peace, love, respect, and freedom. That's why I chose freedom for my theme. But I couldn't find anything on what kind of floats they had beyond that, so I just figured they had stuff similar to US big parades, only catered to the theme.

6 The images of these machines come from www.interbake.nl. Unfortunately the site doesn't tell me how the machines are used, so I'm just using educated guesses. But it's more important to me to describe what the machines that Kiley is seeing than it is for me to know what they do and not be able to get a picture of what they look like.

7 This one is found at www.kurtmakina.com/enrobing