

Unanswered Prayers

By CarolM <carolmfolc@gmail.com>

Rated: PG-13

Submitted: August 2009

Summary: In this sequel to the fanfic "On the Other Hand," Lois and Clark adjust to life without threats hanging over them. In the process, they get more than a glimpse of what might have been if just one little thing had gone differently. A 2008 Nanowrimo fic.

Author's Notes:

Thanks to Alisha, Beth, Nancy and Queenie whose beta skills were invaluable as this was written.

Thanks to the other Nano authors/cheerleaders who cheered as we wrote. Thanks also to all of those who commented on the boards. There is an additional chapter in here that wasn't posted on the boards.

The characters [mostly] don't belong to me. They belong to people with a lot more money than I have. And as I have no job, there would be no point in suing me.

Notes:

Lane house/Smallville [threads are marked]:
http://www.lcficmbs.com/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=6;t=001440

Pics of my son/'Nate' here [thread is marked]:
http://www.lcficmbs.com/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=6;t=001510

Part 1
 May 2006
 Lois

~~~~~  
 It had been an amazing night.  
 Filled with long, slow lovemaking to the man I loved more than life itself.

The father of my sons.  
 My husband.  
 The man who had finally realized that he loved me.  
 That he wanted to be with me.  
 That his grandparents had been right.

Love isn't who you can live with — we'd been doing that in some fashion for years — but who you can't without — and Clark had finally realized that he couldn't live without me.

It wasn't like I'd jumped him and our clothes were shed the first time he said it.

No, I made him prove it to me.  
 And he had.

He'd taken me to the cabin where we'd first made love — even if we wouldn't really remember it for a long time afterwards — made a romantic dinner, danced with me, fed me my favorite chocolate cake and then asked me to be his wife.

He told me that he didn't know how to breathe without me anymore and I believed him.

Finally.

And so we'd kissed and spent the next little while making love in front of the fireplace again, but the only time I'd prefer sleeping on the floor was if we were hypothermic again and

getting to one of the beds would take way too long, so Clark had floated us into our room.

He'd told me to hold still and a few seconds later, we were curled up together under the covers, fire blazing, clothes still missing.

Instinct took over again from there.

And then again.

"Get some sleep," he murmured into my hair.

"Why?" I asked, an impish tone in my voice. "Am I going to need my energy for something tomorrow? I'm not planning on getting out of bed."

He kissed along my neck. "Neither am I."

"Yes, you are," I informed him. "We'll need more wood and you may get your energy from the sun that'll come streaming in through the window, but you're going to have to feed me at some point. Besides, I'm still recuperating."

"Honey, if you'll marry me — for real — but not make me wait until our wedding night to do more of what we've been doing all night, I'll bring you the moon."

I turned serious and rolled over in his arms. I looked him in the face. "Clark, are you really sure about this?"

He brushed my hair back from my face. "I love you, Lois. I don't know why I fought it for so long, but I do."

Tears filled my eyes. "I know why you did. And most of me believes you, that you do truly love me, but at the same time this little part of me keeps rearing its ugly head deep inside and saying someday you'll realize that you really don't. That you still love... her or someone else."

He reached an arm out and pulled me close to him. "There isn't anyone else. There never will be. What I feel for you, once I let myself start feeling it, makes everything else pale in comparison." He kissed my forehead. "There's a lot I know about Krypton, about Kryptonians, that I never told you."

"I know." And I did know that. I knew there were holograms he'd never really talked about, never showed me.

"And I talked to Van-El," he said. "He knew a lot more about Kryptonian society than I ever did."

Well, that made sense. Clark's brother had been sixteen when Krypton exploded, well older than Clark. Their parents had managed to make two ships — one for each brother — but Van-El's ship had taken ten or more years longer to reach Earth than Clark's, making him effectively only six years or so older than my husband.

"He told me about courtship and mating and all of that on Krypton," Clark continued. "I told him about how confused I was. I loved Lana, I really did, but the bond I felt with you... It defied — defies — explanation. Kryptonians mate for life. Jor-El told me that when I was about fifteen, but I wondered what that meant. Did it mean that there was no provision made for divorce? Did it have something to do with the physical relationship? That once a couple consummated their relationship, it meant they were soul mates or something? That by being with you after your dad's heart attack — or after our first night here, really — I'd..." He searched for the right words. "...turned you into my soul mate and if Lana and I hadn't been waiting to get married, she would have been. And then I wondered if the reason why I couldn't say 'no' to you that night was because *you* were my soul mate and what did that mean about Lana and all kinds of other things."

He paused for a breath while my head spun. "Van-El said that there's a bond between Kryptonians and their mates that defies logic, which is odd because the Kryptonians were apparently very Vulcan. That consummating a relationship with someone who's not your soul mate would create a bond, but *with* your soul mate, it's different."

"So you don't think you turned me *into* your soul mate when you slept with me?"

"No. I think you always were. He said that soul mates mate

for life. That doesn't mean we'll always agree on everything or that we'll never fight or whatever, we'll have to work at our relationship but we were meant to be together."

I sighed. I couldn't put my finger on it but some Kryptonian destiny thing didn't necessarily quell the questions.

"What it means is that I was confused about my feelings for you and Lana, and all that, but that there's no reason for you to be worried about someone else someday. It's you and me. I don't want to screw this up. I don't think I'd survive if I did. I want to be a real husband, a real father and I want us to last for a lifetime."

I believed him, I really did, but I couldn't shake the uncomfortable feeling that the other shoe hadn't dropped yet.

\*\*\*

*Clark*

I hoped she believed me.

I kissed her again, doing my best to keep it gentle and undemanding, but I couldn't or Lois couldn't or both of us couldn't and soon the passion between us was flaring once again. It wasn't long before we were both breathing heavily again.

"What was that?" she asked dreamily, her ankles crossed and propped up on the headboard.

"I'm not quite sure," I said, kissing her arm where it rested by my head. She turned her head slightly so her cheek was resting against my upper arm. "I think you attacked me."

"Don't play 'Mr. Innocent' over there," she said rolling her eyes.

I hesitated slightly, reminded of the last time we'd made love before this trip to the cabin. In a split-second, I was turned, lying next to her, my feet propped up next to hers. "I'll spend the rest of my life letting you do that," I promised her.

"Then I'll let you spend the rest of your life doing it," she said with a yawn. "You still have a lot to make up for though."

"I know," I told her honestly. I did.

"I mean," she said, turning and sliding under the covers, "you never have taken me to Mt. Everest. And it's been a while since you made me breakfast in bed."

I moved behind her, wrapping her in my arms, pulling her close to my chest, my body curled around hers. "I'll do whatever you want to make it up to you."

"Oh I know. And I'm sure I'll have a list for you eventually," she murmured as she neared sleep. "But the first thing..." her voice trailed off.

"What's that?"

"I know I might almost like her, but don't ever mention your ex-girlfriend's name while we're naked together."

I laughed lightly. "Deal."

And, for the first time in a very long time, we fell asleep in each other's arms.

I woke a few hours later to find her still sound asleep. I smiled to myself. We'd certainly burned a lot of calories the night before — and very early in the morning. Combined with the stress she'd been under recently, it wouldn't surprise me if she slept really late. She liked to do that sometimes anyway and I was sure it would be good for her.

Carefully, I left her side and pulled on the pair of silk boxers and shirt I'd got for the night before — even though it was just the two of us, it felt weird walking around without clothes on. Even after three and half years, it wasn't something that was part of our daily life.

Yet.

Hopefully, our lives were changing.

I now knew how my dad felt when he asked Mom and me to marry him. I'd been so scared that she'd say no; that I'd ruined my chances at the best thing that ever happened to me. That I'd pushed her away so long that she'd want nothing to do with me.

My heart had been in my throat when I asked her to just go to the cabin with me. I was pretty sure that once I got her here, I could convince her that it was real; that I wanted her and the boys and the life that everyone already thought we had.

I was still trying to wrap my mind around the fact that my brother was alive. That he was here on Earth with me. That he was a *superhero*.

The name Van-El stuck in my head and that was what he went by in his superhero guise, but his real name was Dr. Bernie Klein — he'd wanted to go with Vance Ellis, but Louie had convinced him otherwise. If I ever decided to do the superhero thing, my public name was going to be as far from 'Clark Kent' as you could get.

I walked into the kitchen and in just a few minutes, I had pancakes and bacon and eggs made. I sprinkled the tray with some of the rose petals from the night before. I put one of the long-stemmed roses in a bud vase and arranged the food on the tray, pouring a glass of milk and another of orange juice. And a cup of coffee.

I headed back towards the room where my wife — how different that word sounded than it had just the day before — waited.

I carefully opened the door and walked in. Lois had her back to me and the sheet pulled up over her shoulders. Her even breathing seemed to indicate that she was still asleep.

Until I heard the slight hitch.

I moved to the other side of the bed and set the tray on the floor out of the way. I sat on the bed next to her, gently brushing her hair off her temple. "Hey," I said softly. "What's wrong?"

She gave a half shrug.

I leaned over and kissed her temple. "What is it, sweetheart?"

"It's stupid," she whispered.

"Whatever it is, it's not stupid," I told her pragmatically. "What is it?"

"I woke up and you were gone."

The light bulb went off. "And you were afraid last night was all a dream or something?"

She nodded.

I winced. "Well, unfortunately, I've given you good reason to wonder. I was gone the morning after we made Nate and when you finished in the bathroom the next night. I'm so sorry, but I did bring breakfast. Even coffee. Just like you like it."

She pushed up, holding the sheet carefully around her, and scooted back against the headboard. "Coffee?"

I laughed and set the tray in front of her. "Your breakfast is served."

She smiled a bit shyly at me. "Thank you."

I glanced at the sheet that stayed with her the whole time she moved. "Did they teach you girls how to do that when the boys were talking about hygiene or something?"

She munched on a piece of bacon. "What?"

I nodded at her torso. "The sheet thing."

She shrugged. "Nope. While you were learning sports metaphors. Besides, you're clothed."

I grinned and leaned over to kiss her gently. "If you decide you want to do something about that, let me know."

She blushed. "Is this weird for you, too?"

"What?"

"You. Me. Us. Like this."

I floated over her and sat next to her on the open side of the bed, snatching a piece of bacon as I did. "A little. There's a lot we don't know about each other and stuff that we should know. It's not like we've been building towards this night for a long time or anything."

She nodded.

I took a deep breath. "I want to date — for real. Kind of like the second year, but better. Knowing we're building towards

something together — towards keeping what we have now and making it infinitely better.”

She stared at her plate for a minute. “Are you really sure?”

“That I want to date you?” I asked puzzled.

She shook her head. “That this is what you want. That *I’m* what you want. Not just the idyllic family life we’ve portrayed for the last few years, but the idyllic family life with *me*?”

“No,” I said slowly. “I don’t want the idyllic family life we’ve portrayed. I want *real* life. With fights and sick kids and bills to pay.” I smiled at her. “Okay, I could do without the bills part, but I don’t want a fifties sitcom. I want you and our boys and real life without a dictator threatening us.”

She leaned against me. “That’s what I want, too. I guess my brain is just having a hard time letting my heart believe it’s really real — that it’s really what you want.”

“It is,” I told her softly. “So what do you say? Will you go out with me tonight?”

Her brow furrowed. “I don’t know about tonight.”

“What? Why not?”

“I told you. I’m not planning on leaving this bed all day.”

I chuckled. “Okay, how about tomorrow night then?”

She munched on some bacon. “You’re on.”

I kissed her again. “Good. Because you’re not ever getting rid of me.”

“Good,” she told me as she kissed me back.

\*\*\*

2

Lois

~~~~~

I was glad Clark had made breakfast. I’d woken up hungry. And alone.

I hadn’t been able to stop the feeling that Clark had left again and I couldn’t begin to describe the relief that flooded over me when he came back in the room with breakfast. I guessed it was just part of trying to find our new normal. To a certain extent, the only thing that would really, truly convince me was time.

“So when do I get to meet your brother?” I asked around a mouthful of pancake.

“You’ve already met him. He saved your life,” he reminded me.

“You know what I mean.”

“When do you want to?” he asked back, stealing another piece of bacon.

I shrugged. “Whenever’s good for him, I guess.”

“You have no idea how happy he was to hear that we have one — and probably two — kids together.”

I was sure I looked puzzled. “Why?”

“He’s engaged. Jor-El thought we’d be able to have children with human women, but there was no way to know for sure. His fiancée wants kids, badly, but is willing to accept that it may not happen for them. He was certain that she’d be ecstatic.”

“What’s her name?”

“Ashley.”

“Right.” I took the last bite of pancake. “So how’s his whole superhero thing going?”

Clark shrugged. “Fine, I guess. He wants to set up a foundation where proceeds from merchandise and stuff goes and then it can be dispensed from there to worthwhile charities.”

It had only been a week and merchandise had been popping up for several days already.

I took a deep breath and asked my next question. “Have you thought any more about it?”

“Being a superhero?” he asked quietly.

I nodded. “I wouldn’t do it without your support, but I’d like to, eventually. Once we’re sure Nate’s okay and all that. I bet Mom could come up with a good costume for me.”

“I’m sure she could.”

I rested my head on his shoulder. “I know I said I didn’t want to get out of bed all day, but what if we went to meet him today? You said he works from home sometimes, right? Or is he still on his leave of absence? So we could drop in?”

Clark nodded against my head. “Yeah. I can give him a call, just in case, but he said to stop by whenever I wanted.”

“Do you mind?”

He turned just enough to kiss my head. “Can we do more of what we did last night later?”

I smiled. “If you’re nice to me today.”

“Then I’ll be very nice.”

“Good.”

An hour later, I’d showered — and hadn’t let Clark help me wash my hair again or we’d never leave the cabin — and was wearing the best outfit I’d brought with me. My stomach was in knots.

“Why are you so nervous?” Clark asked as he wrapped his arms around me.

I kissed him softly. “I’ve never met a real live alien before,” I said with a twinkle in my eyes.

“Sure you have.”

“But I didn’t *know* you were an alien then.”

“He’s just a guy, Lois. He talks a little more formally than we do sometimes because of how he was raised, but that’s about it.”

“I know.”

“Ready?” he asked.

I turned in his arms. “Ready.”

A minute later, we were soaring high above the city of Metropolis. It was amazing to fly like this. We were high enough that no one on the ground would be able to see us, but if they did see anything, they’d assume it was Van-El. A few minutes later, we set down on the balcony of the apartment on Clinton Avenue.

“Did you call him?” I whispered.

Clark nodded. “He knows we’re here.”

“How...” Right. Of course. They both had the hearing thing. He would have heard us land and said something to Clark who could have heard it from the moon.

He held me close to him for a minute. “He’s going to love you. You’ll see.”

He took my hand and we headed up to the back door. He opened it. I looked at him a bit oddly — surely he wasn’t *that* comfortable with his brother already.

“He said to come on in,” Clark explained.

“Right.”

We headed into the bedroom. The bed was situated opposite the large window that overlooked the balcony with archways on either side. We went through one of the arches into a kitchen that looked well-used — maybe the cooking thing was genetic. On our right was a living room full of furniture that looked like it was as much for function as fashion.

In one of the chairs was a man leaning forward, his elbows on his knees. He was frowning at the laptop sitting on the coffee table in front of him.

“Have a seat,” he said waving an arm towards the couch. “Just a second.”

His fingers flew over the keyboard and he sat back and sighed. “Okay, that’s the best it’s going to get for now.” He stood up and the smile that crossed his face reminded me so much of Clark. He held out a hand to me. “It’s very nice to meet you, officially anyway. I’m Ka... Clark’s brother. Bernie.”

“It’s nice to meet you, officially,” I replied shaking his hand. “I can’t begin to thank you for saving me on the ship the other day.”

He smiled. “I’m glad that I was there. I don’t think my brother would have forgiven me if I’d let something happen to you.” He motioned to the couch again. “Please have a seat. Can I get you anything?”

“No, thanks,” Clark said sitting on the couch.

I sat next to him, but not too close. A second later, Clark’s arm was around me tugging me closer. I scooted next to him and his free hand reached for one of mine.

It was so different from the way our relationship had been for so long. Even though we’d played the role of the happy couple for so long, it was different being close like this because we wanted to — because *Clark* wanted to.

“May I call you Lois?” he asked me.

I nodded. “Please.” I was nervous. My stomach was churning. I wasn’t sure why. Yes, he was Clark’s brother, but it wasn’t like Clark had grown up with him or anything like that. It wasn’t like meeting his parents or even Granny.

But I was still nervous.

Maybe it was because — even though I’d seen Clark do special stuff regularly — I knew this man was a gen-u-ine superhero.

Who’d saved my life at least once already.

Just then both of their heads snapped up. I’d seen Clark do that from time to time, but it wasn’t like our neighborhood was a hotbed of criminal activity. The area where Bernie lived was a much seedier part of town.

“Go,” Clark said.

Bernie stood up and spun. A second later, the now-famous black suit with bright blue emblem on it emerged. He hurried to the balcony and the familiar whoosh indicated his take-off.

I looked around. “Now what?”

“We’ll wait for a few minutes, but if it’s something that’s going to take a while, we head out.”

I rested my head on his shoulder. “Is this what it’s like living with a superhero?”

Clark shrugged. “I don’t know. There’d be two of us, for starters. And he works from home a lot of the time so if he’s needed, he can just go. I might not be able to do that, but we could rotate nights or something, give each other ‘off’ times — unless something really major comes up, that kind of thing.”

I nodded. “Maybe it wouldn’t be too bad.”

Clark’s head suddenly jerked up.

“What?” I asked him.

~~~~~  
*Clark*

<We haven’t done this yet, have we?>

What? It sounded like Van, but how could I have heard him in my head?

<Kryptonians are telepathic,> he said in my head.

Right. I knew that.

<How do I do this?> I asked him.

<Just like that,> he said back. <It’s going to take a while. I’ll talk to you later? I wish I’d been able to talk to Lois longer. We’d like to do dinner with you two sometime soon and I’d like to meet your parents if it’s okay with them.>

<Um, sure. Call me.> I turned to Lois.

“Did you know that Kryptonians are telepathic?” I asked her.

She shook her head. “You’ve never told me a whole lot about Krypton,” she reminded me.

I winced slightly. “Would you like to go to the farm? I *want* to show you the globe and the holograms and everything else. I should have a long time ago.”

She nodded. “I’d like that — if you want to show me.”

I put a hand to her face and kissed her softly. “I do. I want you to know everything.”

I sent a mental message to my brother and a minute later, we headed out the balcony door to take off for Smallville.

The trip never took long, but this time it took a bit longer than usual.

Mainly because I was distracted by the feel of Lois in my arms.

However, it still wasn’t very long before we landed near the farmhouse.

“Mom?” I called, knowing Dad wasn’t home — his truck was gone. I’d called them the day before while I was getting everything set up and told them my plan.

“Clark!” Mom hurried out of the kitchen. “How’d it go with...?” She spied Lois and her eyes filled with tears. “Lois.” She held her arms out and Lois immediately went to her. They held each other for a long time. “I’m so glad,” Mom whispered. “Me, too,” Lois whispered back.

Mom finally let Lois go and we headed to the living room. I sped ahead of them and flopped down in my favorite chair. I grabbed Lois’ arm as she walked by and pulled her onto my lap.

“Clark!” she squealed.

I grinned and whispered in her ear. “I know we’re not technically on our honeymoon, but can I help it if it feels like it?”

I couldn’t see her face, but I was sure she was rolling her eyes. Regardless, she snuggled down in my arms.

Mom had a big grin on her face.

I should have known.

“I’m so happy for you two,” she told us. “The threat is gone and you’re going to move on together.”

Lois giggled a bit. “We’re even getting married.”

Mom looked puzzled. “What?” I had told them I had a plan, but I hadn’t given them the details.

“Clark proposed to me last night.” She held out her hand to show off the engagement ring. “He asked me to marry him all over again. To do it all right.”

“Except for the whole ‘wait until the wedding night’ thing,” I said.

Lois groaned and turned eight shades of red. Mom just laughed. “I figured that much already. That’s a beautiful ring. You did good, Clark.”

“It was my mom’s,” Lois said quietly. “Clark said Daddy gave it to him the other night because he knew I loved it and would want it.”

“That was sweet. So when’s the big day?”

Lois turned enough to look at me. “I don’t know. What do you think?”

I shrugged. “It’s up to you. My big concern was whether or not you were going to make me wait — then I’d have something to say about when it was. But since you’re not making me wait, whenever you want is fine with me.”

Lois did a great imitation of a tomato. “I was thinking maybe on our anniversary except it’s on a Wednesday next year, I think.”

“We could make it a big New Year’s Eve party,” I suggested. “Not quite on our anniversary but close and that’s a Sunday. Everyone should have Monday off.”

“What do you think, Martha?” Lois asked.

Mom shrugged. “Whatever you two want to do is fine. Are you going to have it in Metropolis?”

Lois looked at me. “I don’t know. I guess, but will most of your family be able to make it then?” she asked me.

“Now, you two do what’s best for you two. Don’t worry about the family. We can do another big potluck next spring or summer or something.”

“Or we could do two weddings,” I said. “One here on Christmas Eve or something and one in Metropolis on New Year’s Eve — or vice versa. Wherever we’re planning on doing Christmas.”

She frowned. “We’ll have been married almost four years by then. I can see the two weddings or one wedding and a reception if we were just now getting married, but we’re not — and I know everything, or almost everything, is public knowledge anyway, I’m not sure I want to actually announce why we’re just now having a wedding and all that.”

“True,” I said slowly. “But does it matter? It’s for us and

those who love us enough to know and understand. Does everyone else matter?"

Lois sighed. "We'll talk about it later." She turned back to Mom. "I met Van-El *officially* a little while ago."

Mom's face brightened. "You did? What's he like?"

Lois laughed. "He looks just like Clark and he left about three minutes after we got there."

"Why?" Mom asked, puzzled.

"Rescue," I told her. "Hostage situation at a bank. He said he'd call me later. He and Ashley want to meet you guys."

"Did you know Kryptonians are telepathic?" Lois asked with a roll of her eyes.

"Really?" Mom's eyebrow raised. "Did you know this, Clark?"

I shrugged. "Jor-El mentioned it, but when have I had another Kryptonian to be telepathic with? I guess with the whole fires with my eyes thing, telepathy with people from a dead planet just seemed less important."

"Good point," Mom said. "It was more important to know why you almost burned the house down."

"That's something I wanted to talk to you and Dad about.

Lois and I have already talked about it a little bit, but what about the whole superhero thing? I help when and where I can but it seems like so little... Especially compared to what Van-El is doing or what we could do together at a major disaster or whatever."

Mom sighed. "We figured this conversation was coming once we heard Navance had been killed. It's up to the two of you. Lois and the boys will be a lot more affected than we will. How many nights will you not be home because of some emergency? How many birthday parties might you miss? Things like that."

"I've thought about that," I said honestly. "I think it would be a lot easier for both of us if there were two of us. I mean, we take a family vacation to DisneyWorld or something and Van would know I'm not available. Ashley has a baby and he wants to take a week off, I cover more. School play? Same thing. Like an on-call doctor type thing or something. Trade nights or weeks or something like that. Unless it's something really big like that tsunami a couple years ago or something."

Mom nodded slowly. "That might work better than if there was just one of you, that's for sure. When you decide let me know and I'll help with a costume or whatever you need."

"Let's do it," Lois said suddenly.

"What?" Mom and I said simultaneously.

"I mean it," she said. "I've seen you watch coverage of mudslides and earthquake aftermaths and I know how much you want to help. I've seen you watch Van-El in action and I know how much you'd like to be doing that, too. And the telepathy thing will sure help with that, I'd think."

"Are you sure?" I asked, shifting so we could look at each other.

"I am," she said quietly. "You've been given some amazing gifts and it's all well and good to use them to keep a fire going or make a quick trip to Smallville, but there's so much more you could do with them and I know you want to."

I kissed her gently. "I love you," I said quietly.

"You should," she replied with a grin.

I looked at Mom. "Okay. Let's do this."

\*\*\*

Part 3

Lois

~~~~~  
Several hours later, I stretched out on the king sized bed in Clark's old room and waited.

A minute after that, Clark walked in and I grinned.

"No," he said.

"I like it," I told him, making sure not to look at Martha as I

did. If I looked at Martha, it was all over.

The leopard print with orange and green briefs on the outside was pretty funny. I think Martha knew even as she made it that it would be.

I finally glanced her way and the giggles took over for both of us.

"Go try on the next one, honey," she told him. "That was the worst of them, I think," she whispered to me. "I made up several after Van-El made his appearance."

He came back in a green blue and yellow outfit that sort of resembled the Brazilian flag in an odd sort of way.

I shook my head. "It's not right."

Martha sighed. "No. It's not."

"Next," I told him.

A second later, he was back in some magenta and orange thing with a hood that covered the top half of his face.

I shook my head again. "I think the hood seems to indicate that you have something to hide. There's going to be enough people wondering about secret identities. I think your face needs to be unobstructed."

Martha nodded. "She's right. Next."

Clark rolled his eyes and headed back to the bathroom to change again. He came back wearing orange sock things with a blue body suit with yellow and red vertical stripes on it.

"Better," I said. "But..."

"Mom, do they have to be so tight?" he whined.

"It'll cut down on wind resistance," Martha reminded him. "Next."

He sighed and headed back out again. "What about black like Van-El?" he called from the bathroom before coming back out in a bright blue suit with red briefs and a yellow belt.

"I like that one best," I said the instant I saw him.

"Me, too. I think black is fine for Van-El, but I like the primary colors better. It's much more superhero-y. Just look at most of the outfits in 'The Incredibles'."

I snapped my fingers. "A cape!"

"What?" they both asked in unison.

"A cape. It'll look great while you're flying and..." I made a spinning motion with my finger "...turn around so I can see the back." He sighed and did as directed. "Yep. You need a cape."

"Why?" he asked, looking over his shoulder at me. "Edna would never approve."

Christopher had made us watch 'The Incredibles' innumerable times and Clark was right. Edna — outfitter of all superheroes — would not approve of a cape.

"Well, Edna's not here," I pointed out. "And I really don't need all the women in the world staring at my husband's tushie."

He looked over his shoulder, trying to see his rear. "What's wrong with my tushie?" he asked, shocked.

"Nothing," I informed him. "You have a great tushie, but no other women need to be gawking at it. I'll have to mention that to Ashley. I bet she'd prefer that Bernie wear a cape, too. Have you seen the tushie shots of your brother? Already?"

He sighed. "Mom?"

"It *will* look great while you're flying," Martha agreed.

"We're right," I told him.

He sighed again. "I know when I'm outvoted."

His phone was lying on the bed next to me and chose that moment to ring. I put a finger over my lips in Martha's direction. She nodded — it wouldn't do for my dad or someone to hear her in the background. "Hello?" I said, answering it. I listened for a second then handed the phone to Clark. "It's your brother."

A minute later, he told us that Bernie and Ashley were coming our way and would be here in about ten minutes.

Martha's eyes got wide. "An actual superhero is coming here?"

Clark raised an eyebrow at her. "Um, Mom?" He gestured at

himself. “What am I? Chopped liver?”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re not a superhero yet. Soon, but not yet.” She bit her bottom lip. “I wonder what I have to eat.”

“Don’t worry, Martha. We can always send the two of them to China for dinner while we... chat.” I winked at her.

Clark groaned. “You’re going to share embarrassing stories, aren’t you?”

Martha and I glanced at each other and shrugged. “Probably,” we said in unison.

“Can I at least change out of this?” he whined.

“No,” we told him.

“We want to see what your brother thinks,” Martha added.

Martha looked thoughtful. “It needs something...” She snapped her fingers and hurried to her room.

We glanced at each other and Clark reached a hand out to help me up. She was pulling a trunk out from under her bed when we made it in there.

“We found you with these,” she said softly, pulling out a bright blue baby blanket and the symbol Van-El wore on his Suit — the one Clark said was a family crest of some kind, the same one he had tattooed on his hip. I’d have to find out what that was all about from his brother once I was comfortable asking him something like that. Or I’d get Clark to.

I looked more closely at the shield. “What if he wore that on his chest and you made a red cape to go with it?”

Martha nodded. “And a gold one on the back of the cape.”

Clark looked at us. “Do I get a vote?”

“No,” we said again in unison. Martha used a couple of safety pins to tack the shield in place.

Clark winced as she stabbed him and bent the safety pin.

“Don’t act like that hurt,” I said with a roll of my eyes.

His head snapped up. “They’re here.”

I heard a ‘whooshing’ sound and felt butterflies in my stomach.

Clark led us downstairs as I heard the door open.

Here went nothing.

~~~~~

*Clark*

Here went nothing.

I walked into the kitchen — I’d told Van to come on in — biting my bottom lip and grateful I couldn’t actually make it bleed because I was sure I would be otherwise.

“What do you think?” I asked before anyone else could say anything.

Bernie raised an eyebrow and Ashley’s mouth dropped open.

I turned to look at Mom and Lois who were right behind me. “Told you.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “Clark, no one will be looking at your face, which is the whole point. And once your mom gets the cape made, no one’ll look at your tushie either.”

“Cape?” Bernie asked.

“Yes, cape,” Ashley said. “I told you — you need a cape.”

“But Edna...” Bernie started.

I sighed. “That’s what I said.”

“Remember Vortex?” Bernie asked me.

“Exactly,” I said.

Martha rolled her eyes. “You two are invulnerable. Vortex wasn’t.”

Lois gave an exaggerated roll of her eyes. “His name *wasn’t* Vortex. His name was Splashdown and he was sucked *into* a vortex. Thunderhead got his cape caught on a missile fin. Stratogale was caught in a jet turbine. Metaman was an express elevator. Dynaguy snagged on take-off. And, of course, Syndrome was also caught in a turbine or something, but there was no Vortex.”

I looked at her, eyes narrowed.

“Your son made me watch it with him over and over and over

again,” she reminded me

Mom jumped in. “And you two are still invulnerable and none of them were. That was all Christopher wanted to do while I was staying with you guys — watch Incredibles or play Incredible pretend games. Where do you think I got the idea from?”

“The same place I did,” I admitted.

“Me, too,” Bernie sighed. “It hadn’t occurred to me before then.”

“I hadn’t actually seen it yet, when I had the idea,” I told them. “Jessica, our nanny, told me she and Christopher had gone to see it.”

Lois looked at me, puzzled. “When did Jessica take Christopher to see it? I never knew where he got the fascination from originally.”

I winced slightly. “The night your dad was in the hospital after his heart attack.” There were a lot of good things about that night — we’d made Nate — but a lot of not so good things as well — I’d been gone when she woke up the next morning, for one. I clapped my hands together. “Okay, introductions.” I turned back to the other couple. “You must be Ashley.” She took my offered hand and shook it. “I’m Clark, this is my wife, Lois, and my mom, Martha. My dad, Jonathan, should be home before too long. Mom, Lois, this is my brother, Van-El or Dr. Bernie Klein and his fiancée, Ashley.”

There were handshakes and hugs all around.

A few minutes later, Ashley and Lois were sitting on the bed in our room and Mom was making capes.

We could hear our... other halves giggling like schoolgirls in the other room.

“I think they hit it off,” I told Bernie sardonically.

“I believe you’re right,” he said with a slight grin. “So the cape thing?”

I sighed. “Lois was right. Have you seen the pictures of your rear end that are out there? I’d like to avoid that if at all possible. Besides, your pants aren’t tights like these things are and Mom and Lois won’t let me go with ones like yours. And Lois said she has no desire to have women ogling my butt.”

“But, um...” He looked at my mom who wasn’t looking at us. “...if she doesn’t want people seeing your behind, why wouldn’t she go for looser pants? A cape doesn’t cover the, um, front.”

“Aerodynamics,” Mom said, without looking at either of us. “And people won’t be looking at his face. The back is easy to cover and covered or not you can’t see his face from back there.”

I looked at Bernie and shrugged. “I’ve learned not to fight with Mom and Lois.”

“Good plan,” she muttered. “You should have listened to me more years ago.”

“I know, Mom.” I sighed. “At least my butt will be covered and Lois will be happy women — or men — won’t be ogling it.” I shuddered involuntarily at the thought.

“Ashley *has* said the same thing,” he confided in me. “She’s glad no one’s really looking at my face, so they’re not trying to figure out who I am, but she’s not crazy about the groupies.”

“Lois won’t be either, I’m sure, but she knows how important this is to me.”

“To me, too. Our parents would have wanted us to help in whatever way we could,” he said quietly.

“I’d like to hear all about them sometime,” I told him honestly. “And we can say we’re both from Krypton — like you told Lois in that interview — but I probably need to know a bit more about it so I don’t contradict you or something.”

“We’ll talk,” he said as Mom turned around with the bright red fabric she’d been working with.

“Okay, Clark, take the top off.”

I did as I was told. “You’re going to have to show me how to

get in and out of this thing a lot faster.”

“It gets easier,” he promised.

“Now you,” Mom ordered him.

Bernie complied.

She handed him a piece of flowing black fabric with a bright blue emblem on it and me the red one with the gold emblem. “The harnesses go around your shoulders. I’ve been thinking about this for a few days — since you showed up, Van — and I think if it’s attached to the Suit itself, it’ll just drag it down — it’s too heavy for that.”

We put them on and pulled the tops of our Suits back up. I looked at my brother — my *brother* — and sighed. “Here goes nothing,” I muttered.

“Hey! Superboys!” Lois called from the other room. “We need a fashion show or we’re going to find ice cream!”

“We’re coming,” I hollered back.

~~~~~

Lois

Ashley was great. We were like long-lost sisters ourselves and we were fully prepared to give them men in our lives a very hard time.

We heard the sound of boots traipsing down the hall.

We were stretched across the bed, chins resting on our hands, legs bent at the knees, ankles crossed. “Come on!” I hollered. “We don’t have all day.”

“You can’t get home without us,” Clark reminded me as he walked in.

I sat up on my knees. “Wow.”

Ashley sat up next to me. “Wow is right. Hon, you look great. The cape works for you. Really.”

The two of them stood uncomfortably next to each other.

I rolled my eyes. “Do your superhero pose thing.”

“What?” they asked in unison.

“Fists on your hips or arms crossed in front of you all stern superhero-ish. Sheesh.” I looked at Ashley. “Did they not teach this kind of thing on Krypton? You have to *act* like a superhero. Were there no Saturday morning Justice League cartoons?”

Clark glared at me as he crossed his arms in front of him.

“That’s it!” I said pointing at him. “Very superhero looking.”

“The Justice League didn’t have anyone like us,” he pointed out. “Though Van does look a bit Batman-ish.”

“No cowl, though,” Ashley said. “We talked about that. We thought if he didn’t hide his face, no one would think he had anything to hide — another identity or whatever.”

“Exactly,” Martha said. “So what do you girls think of the capes?”

Ashley and I shared a look. “I like them,” I told her. “There’s already pictures of Bernie’s rear out there, we don’t need any of Clark’s.”

“I agree with that,” Clark said. “I feel conspicuous enough as it is.”

“Then the capes stay,” Ashley said.

“Can we change then?” Clark asked shifting uncomfortably. He looked at Martha. “Please, Mom?”

I stifled a laugh as he used his best puppy dog eyes on her; the same ones Christopher tried to use on me all the time — and I was sure they were going to teach Nate the same thing. Martha was better at resisting than I was.

She gave in this time, though. “Go ahead and I’ll get dinner started.”

The three of us traipsed downstairs while they changed. The two of them beat us to the living room.

“Show off,” I mumbled.

Clark grabbed me around the waist and pulled me back to him. “I’ll show off for you later,” he whispered in my ear.

Bernie coughed and turned bright red — about the same shade I was sure I was, knowing he’d heard what Clark said.

Clark just looked at him and grinned. “Hey, no eavesdropping on my private innuendos with my wife.”

Bernie looked chagrined. “Sorry. It’s just...”

“What?” Clark asked, loosening his grip on me slightly.

He sighed. “On Krypton, there is not much... PDA.”

Clark and I both laughed.

Bernie looked puzzled. “What?”

“You’ll understand after you’ve been around Martha and Jonathan for a while,” I told him. “They *de-fine* PDA.”

“I grew up with it,” Clark said. “It was embarrassing as a teen.”

Martha rolled her eyes. “We were *never* inappropriate.”

“No, you weren’t. But apparently, you’re a bit more affectionate than my birth parents were,” he said. “And since you raised me, I think I probably take after you two a bit more than them. Besides, I like holding my wife and whispering innuendos in her ear.”

Was it possible to die of embarrassment?

Martha laughed. “Oh, Clark, you don’t know how long we’ve waited for you to do that.”

“It’s better than the time and temperature,” I muttered. He’d whispered that in my ear more times than I could count when we were trying to make things look good for our family and friends.

Ashley just looked from one to the other and finally summed up her thoughts in one word. “What?”

Clark pulled me into the same chair we’d been in earlier. Martha took the other chair and Bernie and Ashley took the couch. I noted that they sat fairly close together, but the only part of them that was touching was their hands lightly grasped. I was sitting on Clark’s lap with his arms around me and they were barely holding hands. I thought Ashley looked slightly jealous, but it passed quickly.

“It’s a long story,” Clark started. “Essentially, we’re on our honeymoon.”

“Don’t you have two kids?” she asked.

I nodded. “Did you hear about how General Navance from Latislan tried to claim an American baby?”

She nodded.

“That was us. Without going into too much detail, we got married only to protect me and the baby who would turn out to be Christopher from Navance. Clark was...” I paused and he squeezed my hand slightly. “...in love with his girlfriend. I had a boyfriend and it’s been a very long road to get here. Just last night, Clark asked me to marry him for real. We’re going to have a real wedding and do things right, but essentially, we are on our first honeymoon. Besides the whole dictator in love with other people thing, I was pregnant, miserably sick and pregnant, and we were stuck in Europe on a military base. Even if we had been... more conventional, it wouldn’t have been much of a honeymoon.”

Ashley sighed. “I think I’d like to hear more of that story some day, but I’m glad you two are together.”

“Me, too,” I said honestly. “I’ve been in love with Clark for a long time, but I’m glad he finally realized that we belong together.”

“I wouldn’t trade you for anything, my little tornado,” he said, kissing my hair. “Not for anything.”

Part 4

Clark

~~~~~

I landed us near the front door of the cabin, kissing Lois’ neck as we walked towards the door.

She made little noises I was rapidly coming to love as I did.

“When are you making your superhero debut?” she asked with a sigh.

“Not tonight,” I told her as we fell to the floor inside the door.

I managed to turn both of us — me so I was the one on the floor and her in my arms so she was facing me.

“Good,” she said looking down at me. “I like your brother and Ashley and you know I love your folks, but it was time to get back here.”

“Alone,” I said, floating us towards our room.

Our room.

How long had it taken me to get comfortable calling it that?

How long had it been that I called it ‘her room’ or ‘Lois’ room’ and stayed in Lucy’s room if no one else was here with us?

Too long.

We kissed the whole way to our room and I flipped us over so she was on the mattress. I leaned up on my elbow next to her.

“I love you, Lois, more than anything. I want you to know that.”

She kissed me softly, trailing one finger up my shirt until she reached the top button and undid it. “It’s not just because I’m good at this?”

I remembered the conversation from so long ago — a lifetime ago — not long after our second night together, the first one we really remembered. She’d said I certainly didn’t seem inexperienced even though it was my first time — as far as I really knew at the time. I’d said that she didn’t either and I’d reiterated that again the night before as we discovered the physical side of our relationship.

“That’s only part of it,” I said with a grin.

Her fingers stilled.

“What?” I asked her. “I love you no matter what, you know that right?”

She smiled a small smile. “I’m getting there — my head believes you, but my heart’s still a little scared. I was just thinking about that night — the night we made Nate and the next night.”

“What about them?”

“I was afraid that was all I’d ever have with you,” she admitted quietly. “Just the one night — or two if you count the other — and that was it. I poured everything I felt for you into that night and hoped that you wouldn’t notice too much.”

Tears had filled her eyes.

“Oh, honey,” I whispered. “I’m so sorry I hurt you so badly.” I brushed the hair off her face, tangling my fingers in it as I stroked her cheekbone with my thumb. “I did notice — looking back, I mean. At the time, I tried not to think about it much at all, but I think, deep down, I knew.”

A few tears escaped despite her valiant efforts to keep them in. I brushed them away and pulled her close to me. “It’s okay to let it out,” I told her. “The last few days have been an absolute whirlwind and I don’t think you’ve let it out at all, have you?”

She shook her head against me as the tears began to flow in earnest. I didn’t know how long I held her there, letting her sob against me, a few tears of my own leaking out as I realized again how close I’d come to losing everything that mattered to me, everything that made life worth living. It scared me again to realize how much of my well-being was wrapped up in one small brunette whirlwind.

At some point, her sobs slowed and her even breathing told me she’d fallen asleep in my arms. After the... unusual exertions of the night before, I was sure she needed more sleep than usual as the stress continued to bleed off. We’d only been free from Navance for a few days and really, this was the first truly quiet — hopefully, stress free — time since then. Between Christopher’s near kidnapping the week before, our first big stories at the Planet and nearly being blown up on the colonists’ transport, she needed some down time.

And she’d moved out of our room in the meantime, certain that we were over. The night before had been filled with other types of stress — would I be able to convince her what I felt was

real or would she end up alone with two kids? Would I try to take the kids from her? All those kinds of things, but now... Now she needed rest; a chance to let the stress and pressure that had pervaded every pore of our marriage since before it began to bleed off and truly find some peace.

Together.

Sunlight streaming in the window woke me up. Lois had her back to me, blanket pulled over her head. I smiled to myself and zipped around, pulling the curtains closed.

“Thank you,” came the mumbled response from under the covers.

“Want some ibuprofen?” I asked her. I heard a very muffled ‘uh huh’ and I chuckled lightly. “Be right back.” A second later, I sat next to her on the bed. “Here you go.”

She pulled the covers down and took the medicine from my hand. She took a sip of the water I’d brought with me, too.

“Want to get some more sleep?” I asked quietly. “I think even I could use some more right now. The stress relief, endorphin let down is getting to both of us, I think.”

She nodded, pulling the covers back up around her shoulders. “I would like to know where the rest of my clothes went, though.”

“You wouldn’t have been comfortable sleeping in jeans,” I told her practically.

“But my T-shirt?” she asked. “T-shirts are comfy to sleep in — it was the John Deere one you gave me for our second anniversary. I’ve worn it lots of times.”

I slipped under the covers behind her, pulling her close to me — feeling her skin on mine as I settled back into the warmth of the perfect spot, when it’s not too cool or too hot or anything else; when it’s *just right*. “I didn’t think you’d be comfortable sleeping in your bra,” I told her kissing her shoulder. “Your shirt was in the way when I went to take it off.”

“You undressed me and I missed it?” she asked with a yawn.

“Hey, I missed it the first time you undressed me,” I reminded her.

“You were unconscious and hypothermic. I had no choice if I wanted you to li...” Her voice trailed off as she dozed off again.

I smiled to myself and closed my eyes, listening to the soothing sound of her heartbeat as I went back to sleep.

~~~~~

Lois

I felt much better the second time I woke up.

The drapes were still pulled tightly closed, which I was grateful for. It kept the room dark enough to allow us to sleep as late as we wanted.

Clark was still behind me, holding me close to him as we slept.

“Good afternoon, beautiful,” he murmured against my shoulder.

“Is it afternoon?”

He nodded. “Yeah. You’ve slept for over twelve hours.”

I rolled in his arms, turning to face him. “Thank you for letting me sleep. I needed that badly.” I kissed him softly. “I know we’d planned on doing... other stuff last night.”

He brushed my hair off my face. “You needed the sleep; we *both* needed the sleep. I slept almost as much as you did.”

“And now that we’re awake?” I asked, looking up at him from under my eyelashes.

“Now that we’re awake,” he said, running his finger down the side of my neck and along my shoulder. “I’d like to do that stuff we didn’t do last night, but I think you may need some food first.”

I shook my head. “No. We can eat later.”

He grinned. “I was kind of hoping you’d say that.”

“That’s why you wanted to sleep practically naked with me, wasn’t it?”

“Sleeping nearly naked with my gorgeous wife?”

I nodded.

“Guilty as charged,” he said, kissing me softly.

I couldn’t let him get away with that and I kissed him back.

I didn’t keep track of the time, but at some point, I was back in Clark’s John Deere T-shirt, sitting at the counter while he made us something to eat.

“So what did you think of my brother and Ashley?” he asked as he flipped the grilled cheese — he’d found over the years that some things couldn’t be rushed with his powers and grilled cheese was one of them.

“I liked Ashley. A lot.” I munched on a carrot. “I got a bit of a vibe, though.”

He looked at me. “What kind of vibe?”

“That she’d like more of the PDA stuff that is apparently non-existent on Krypton.”

“What gives you that idea?” he asked.

I shrugged. “The way she kept glancing at us and sighing under her breath. When we were in the chair together, or you standing behind me and holding me — that kind of thing.”

“Maybe it’s a married Kryptonian thing,” he said. “And Bernie’ll be more like that after they’re together like we’ve been together the last couple of days. He told me that, on Krypton, couples don’t have a physical relationship before marriage. He said that kisses are short, chaste and there’s not a lot of them before the union ceremony. They don’t have receptions or anything like that but the couple goes straight to the wedding chamber.”

“So everyone knows exactly what they’re doing and when?” I asked with a smirk.

“I guess,” he chuckled. “But let’s face it; everyone here knows what happens as soon as the couple leaves the reception.”

“Do you think it’s a nurture thing then? Because you were like that with Lana — not completely like you have been with me the last couple days, but openly affectionate and all that.” I couldn’t believe how easy had been for me to say her name and how my heart hadn’t dropped out of my chest when I did.

He shrugged. “I guess that could be it. He was raised in that society for sixteen years. I wasn’t. I was raised here with parents and grandparents who were very affectionate.”

“I guess.”

He set a plate in front of me with a perfectly grilled sandwich on it.

“When are we heading home?” I asked him. I was still a bit in the dark about the plans for the weekend.

“Tomorrow night,” he said taking a big bite of his own sandwich. “I told your dad and Jessica that we’d be back sometime tomorrow, probably before bedtime for the boys.”

I nodded. “Good. I miss them.”

“Me, too,” he admitted. “But I can handle another day by ourselves. And we don’t have to work tomorrow either. You’re still officially recuperating from being almost blown up.”

I nodded. “Now that this is all over, do you think we should get a place of our own? Move out of Daddy’s house? Do you think he’ll want us to? I mean, the whole point of us living there was because of the protection we needed. We don’t need that anymore, not with both Navance and his nephew dead.”

He munched on his sandwich while he thought about that. “I think your dad likes having us there; having the boys so close. We could afford a place of our own, I think — not nearly as nice as your dad’s, of course, but we both have good jobs and all that.”

“What about daycare? Jessica is great, but can we afford her or someone like her? How much does the Planet’s daycare cost and do they have set hours or need us to have set hours or what?” I sighed. “I always appreciated Daddy’s help with that kind of thing but I never really thought too much about it, you know?”

He nodded. “Your dad’s been good to us. I’m glad we didn’t

have to do all this on our own.”

“Me, too. We should do something nice for him.”

“Like what?”

I shrugged. “No idea. Find him a girlfriend? One who’s not a psycho gun runner?”

Clark laughed. “That’s a possibility. I think he’s just relieved that you and Christopher are safe now.”

I nodded. “It’s weird. I never realized how much it pervaded my life, you know? It wasn’t like the Sceves surrounded me at all times or anything like that; that I was always looking over my shoulder or whatever. But now that it’s over... It’s like there’s a weight I didn’t realize was there is gone.”

He leaned over and kissed me softly. “I’m so glad you’re safe, that Christopher’s safe.”

I kissed him back. “Me, too. What do you want to do the rest of the day? Not that what we’ve been doing isn’t very nice, but I think I need a bit of a break.”

He looked concerned. “Are you okay?”

I nodded. “Let’s just say I’m more convinced than ever that nothing happened that Halloween and that Christopher is your son.”

He winced. “Sore?”

“Yeah, but it’s okay,” I told him, kissing him again. “I wouldn’t trade any minute of our time together the last couple of days for anything. I *would* appreciate doing something else for a while though.”

“What do you want to do?” he asked.

I shrugged. “Whatever. Movie, game, something like that.”

He grinned. “Strip poker?”

I rolled my eyes.

“What?”

I just looked at him.

“I never said anything about what we’d do once we got naked,” he pointed out.

“*We* wouldn’t get naked,” I told him.

“We wouldn’t?” he asked with a raised brow.

“Nope. *You* would get naked while I remained almost completely clothed.”

“Almost?” he asked hopefully.

I shrugged. “You’ll win a hand or two but that’s about it. Besides, a friend of mine in high school looked up the rules to strip poker and it’s more than just losing an article of clothing when you lose a hand, so no strip poker — not today anyway.”

“We could make up whatever rules we wanted,” Clark pointed out. He grinned. “We could even play strip Happy Days Game.”

I rolled my eyes.

“Fine, no strip poker, no strip Happy Days Game, no strip Scrabble, or anything like that.”

“Go pick a movie,” I told him.

He zipped over to the cabinet and stared at it for a long minute, before picking one out.

A few minutes later, we were sitting in the big chair we’d shared many times before.

But this time it was different.

This time we were together.

Truly together.

It was like an answer to prayer.

Part 5

Clark

~~~~~

“Clark?”

The movie was almost over and I’d thought Lois was drifting off for a nap, but apparently not. And she sounded nervous.

“Yeah?” I asked back, kissing the side of her head nearest me.

“Should we do all those things that most couples do when

they first get married?”

“Like what? I think we’ve gotten pretty good with the honeymoon stuff, but I do think we should keep practicing as often as possible,” I told her, pressing another kiss into her hair.

She twisted to look at me. “You’re going to have a one-track mind from now on, aren’t you?”

“Probably,” I said before kissing her softly.

She rolled her eyes. “Figures. But that’s not what I was talking about.”

“Okay, what then?”

“Bank accounts, insurance policies, all that kind of thing. I mean, we’re on the same car insurance, but that’s it. Health insurance isn’t a huge thing because we both have it through work so it’s not like I need to be on yours or whatever. But the Jeep won’t last forever, so at some point, we’ll need a new vehicle and with as few bills as we have, I’d rather not take out a loan — we should be able to save up and just buy one, especially if we’re living with Dad, but I have no clue how much money’s in your bank account, or you mine. At the very least, we’re going to have child care expenses to think about and shouldn’t we do all that kind of stuff together?”

I nodded slowly. “Makes sense. I have a lot of money saved up at the moment. I wasn’t really spending it on much of anything. If we’re in this together, long term — and we are as far as I’m concerned — then, yeah, we really should be in this together. Finances, decisions, all that stuff. I mean, I figured we would more than we have but there probably is some logistical stuff to work out. Put your name on the truck, mine on the Jeep — if you’re willing to share, of course.” I nuzzled her neck. “I’ll even pay usage fees.”

She sighed and tilted her head farther to the side. “Do we want to stay with my dad if he offers?”

“What do you think?” I murmured, kissing my way up the newly exposed neck.

“It seems kind of silly not to,” she said. “Great house, probably rent free, no utilities. Daddy loves having the boys there. Jacuzzi and big shower in our room...”

I grinned against her neck. “Want to use those together sometime soon?”

“Will you wash my hair for me again?”

“Oh, yeah.” I remembered doing that for her a year earlier. She’d been very pregnant with Nate and had ‘won’ all kinds of things from me that night — back and leg rubs, feeding her cake — much as I had two nights earlier — and washing her hair, among other things. I’d set up one of the patio chairs in Sam’s shower because it was bigger than the one in our room. I hadn’t really known what I was doing, but she’d liked it and I remembered distinctly thinking how sensuous and romantic it could be.

I’d have to do that here in a while. No sexual pressure, of course, because she’d said she was sore and I didn’t want to hurt her.

Light candles all around the bathroom. Warm bath with the rose petals I’d left in there. I could float over her while she relaxed and wash her hair for her again.

“You know,” I said, rubbing a hand up and down her arm as something occurred to me. “I think I’m glad we don’t really remember the first time — that it wasn’t a conscious choice.”

“What? Why? I mean, I’m glad we have Christopher, too, and if we’d been conscious it certainly wouldn’t have happened.”

“I just mean, there’s something that’s scared me a bit since I was old enough to understand. That I wouldn’t be able to control myself or something and I’d hurt whoever it was that I was with and that wasn’t a concern the next time we were together because... I don’t know. It just wasn’t. You’d already had a baby at that point so that was part of it because I know it hurts for some women the first time and it wasn’t your first time. But Dad

and I had talked about that, about being careful and all that and I’m just glad that I don’t remember hurting you — I hope I didn’t but...” I sighed. “You know what I’m saying?”

She nodded. “For what it’s worth, I don’t remember it hurting at all, but I still don’t remember it real well. I’d think I’d remember if it was bad.”

“I’m glad.”

The credits ended and I floated us up before lowering her back down to the chair. “Don’t move.”

I went to our bathroom and started the water in the large bathtub.

“What’re you doing?” Lois asked.

I looked up from where I was pouring bubble bath in to see her leaning against the door way.

“That’s *way* too many bubbles,” she told me.

“I didn’t put that many in?” It was more question than statement. What did I know about bubble baths? I was determined to learn though — now that I had someone to enjoy them with, or making them for, anyway.

“It doesn’t take much, especially in a Jacuzzi tub.” She looked amused.

I looked back at the tub. Sure enough, it seemed like a lot of bubbles and not a lot of water at this point.

“So, what’re you doing, exactly?”

“Well, you were supposed to stay put,” I reminded her. “But I’m trying to make you a bubble bath for you to relax in.”

“I see.” She pointed towards the bedroom. “I’m going to pump real quick then.” She shifted uncomfortably. “I’m just hoping that between the weekend and this little vacation, Nate’s not ready to stop nursing.”

I sat on the edge of the tub. “You know, I’ve never actually seen you nurse one of the boys.”

She shrugged. “There’s a reason for that. If you want to, though, you can when we get home — if Nate cooperates, of course.”

“I’ve wondered, you know,” I told her, not looking at her. “Thinking it was cool that you were feeding my baby and all that, but...”

“Just one more way we were different?” she asked quietly.

“Yeah.”

“I’ll be back in a few minutes.” She turned and headed back into our room. I blew a cooling breath around the bathroom, lit the candles and jump started the fire in the fireplace between the two rooms. I used the bowl I’d left in there — with rose petals in it — to scoop out the extra bubbles and tossed them in the shower.

“Capful, tops,” Lois said, leaning against the door again, this time in her bathrobe. She was smirking again.

“I’ve learned my lesson.”

“Are you getting in with me?” she asked, biting her lip a bit.

I shook my head. “Not just yet. I have to run an errand real quick and then I’ll be back. I should only be gone a few minutes.” I kissed her softly. “I love you.”

She smiled. “I love you. Thanks.”

I flashed her a smile. “Be right back.”

~~~~~

Lois

I took my bathrobe off as I heard Clark’s ‘whoosh’ out the back door and stepped into the tub. It wasn’t too hot, which was nice, and it wasn’t too cold, which was also nice though as soon as Clark got back he could reheat it for me if I asked him to.

I was kind of glad that he wasn’t with me at the moment. I loved him and I would have loved having him with me, but I was also looking forward to a few minutes alone to try to absorb everything that had happened over the last few days.

And while I’d enjoyed — very much — what we’d been doing a lot of since we’d gotten here and I knew Clark wouldn’t

intentionally push me, I knew I'd want to and he'd want to — and I really needed a bit of a break.

And this was all still so new to us.

This whole 'communication' thing was pretty new to us.

"Dollar for your thoughts," came a quiet voice from the doorway.

I looked up to see Clark, obviously holding something behind his back, dressed in his swim trunks.

I shrugged, not sure how to broach the subject with him. 'Oh, by the way, no sex tonight. It was great and all, but...'

"What did you get?" I asked instead, swirling the ubiquitous bubbles around and sinking deeper in the warm water.

He pulled a bag of rose petals from behind his back. "The ones I put in here the other day were wilted."

"Ah." I hated this. Not this, but this. Trying to decide whether or not to read something into his behavior. And if so, what. If we'd been dating for a while and gotten married, it'd be different, but this... Jumping from married friends with kids to lovers with no crash course in body language and other subtleties was something I didn't know how to deal with.

"It would have been one thing to have them in here when you came in and saw everything or whatever, but now that you're already in the tub, it seems kinda silly to sprinkle them around or something."

"Put them in the fridge and use them later?"

He flickered in front of me and reappeared a second later sans bag of petals.

"So are you going to tell me what's bugging you?" he asked, sitting himself cross-legged in mid-air.

I shrugged again.

He stretched himself out and bobbed towards me, reaching out and tucking that strand of hair behind my ear. "Talk to me? Please?"

I didn't look at him, but stared at the animal shapes I found in the bubbles. "It's weird," I finally said.

"What's weird?"

"This. Us. It's weird."

"Yeah. Some," he said slowly. "But what, specifically, is it that's bothering you now?"

I sighed. "I love you. You're my best friend. And I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but that's not saying a whole lot right now. Ever since we got married, more or less, I've isolated myself from close friendships. I couldn't afford to let anyone get too close. To a certain extent, it's only because you were in that mess with me. You were the only one I *could* talk to about that stuff. Jimmy's basically family. Serena's probably my next best friend and, heck, after everything the last week or so, Lana's probably next in line. But at the same time, even though you are my *best* friend, at the moment, it's still a fairly relative term."

He lowered himself until he rested on the edge of the tub, still stretched out. "I'm sorry. I should have done more to be your friend. I understand why you cut yourself off, and I have, too, to a large extent, but not like you had to. Josh and Pete are still good friends, but it's mostly 'Hey, the kids are good. How's the fishing this year?' that kind of stuff. A bit more with Jimmy, but he knows about all the stuff like the other guys don't and if I needed any of them, all I'd have to do is say the word and, literally, at the drop of a hat, they'd come running. And same for me with them."

I nodded. They would — and he would. And he would for me, too. He *had* for me. Literally and figuratively, a number of times.

"So you're my best friend, but that doesn't mean I'm at that point where I'm automatically going to easily tell you anything and everything. Would you mind warming the water up a bit?" I asked avoiding things a bit longer.

I could see a faint red tint in his eyes as the water warmed up.

"So what is it that you're having a hard time telling me?" His

fingers brushed through my hair.

"That I don't want to have sex tonight," I said in a rush before I could lose my nerve. "I mean, not that I don't *want* to but..." I was sure my face was the color of a tomato.

He leaned over — probably floating some at least — and kissed my temple. "I know."

"You do?" I was a bit surprised.

"Well, yeah. You said so earlier. I wouldn't want it to be painful or uncomfortable or whatever for you. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a bit disappointed, but your comfort is much more important."

I still didn't look at him. "And all this isn't to try to get me to change my mind?"

"No!" He sounded insulted. And he was probably right to be, but it wasn't like we had a history of me reading these situations wrong or something.

"I wasn't sure..." My voice trailed off. "This is all new, okay? How am I supposed to know if this is all just a nice gesture or a ploy to try to get me naked again?" I asked defensively.

"Are you wearing your swimsuit?" he asked, floating over me and flipped onto his stomach.

I stared at the bubbles some more as I shook my head.

"Then I succeeded, didn't I?" His voice sounded playful and I finally looked at him, taking note of the twinkle in his eye.

"Yeah, I guess you did," I said, shaking my head slightly at his obvious amusement.

He floated down, reaching out to tip my chin towards him. "I love you. I want to be with you. I want to make love to you tonight and probably pretty much every night from here on out. But that doesn't mean that one or both of us will always be in the mood or that we won't have sick kids or deadlines or whatever. And that doesn't mean we can't hold each other or make out. We've never done that," he pointed out. "The only real make-out session I think we've ever had was the other day and that wasn't really a *make-out* session. That was me desperate, hoping you felt what I felt and you stopping when we were half-naked because we hadn't resolved enough of our issues yet."

"And you're okay with that?" I asked dubiously.

"If we hadn't ended up in Latislan, if you'd found out you were pregnant when we got back from Europe and Joe offered to marry you and you said yes, do you really think you or he or both wouldn't have nights where — for whatever reason — you didn't want to have sex? Or me and Lana for that matter? It's the way it is with all couples."

"On what is essentially our honeymoon?" I asked with a raised brow. "And I thought I told you not to mention her name when we're naked," I muttered.

"*We're* not naked; *you* are," he answered with a grin. "And sure. We've been pretty busy over the last couple days. It's natural that we'd need a break at some point." He floated closer and kissed me softly. "I love you for more than your body and what we can do together in that respect."

"I'm still getting used to that, I guess."

"Well, the whole point of all this wasn't to get you to change your mind, but hopefully so you could relax. You still had a pretty big ordeal a couple of days ago. And I was thinking about how much you enjoyed getting your hair washed last year and that I might do that for you if you wanted. But that's it. No pressure."

"Thank you," I whispered. Part of me — probably my heart — was still in that 'if I don't have sex with him as much as he wants, he'll leave' phase. I doubted anything but time and reassurance would really change that, though I thought my head was starting to understand that Clark really was in this for the long-term.

"So do you want me to?" he asked, unaware of my internal musings.

“To what?”

“Wash your hair for you.”

I smiled almost shyly at him. “I’d like that.”

Part 6

Clark

~~~~~

I watched as she did something to her hair so it wasn’t piled on top of her head anymore before she slid down under the water, raking her hair back with her fingers as she emerged.

I poured some of her shampoo into my hand and carefully lathered her head, massaging her scalp as I did.

She let out a small sigh. “That feels wonderful.”

“I’m glad.” I rinsed her hair out, taking care not to get the soap in her eyes, before working the conditioner into it.

“You can do this whenever you want,” she told me.

“I’ll remember that.” I had to remind myself that was for her — for her to relax and not as a prelude to something else. There would be plenty of time for that another day.

A few minutes later, I headed back into our room to let her get dried off and dressed in private — I still wasn’t completely comfortable walking around in the ‘all together’, as my dad had called it, and I was sure she wasn’t either.

I blew cooling air around the room again, making sure to avoid the fireplace — I wouldn’t want to put it out — because otherwise the fire was unnecessary this time of year.

A few minutes later, she came into the room wearing my John Deere T-shirt. Well, her John Deere T-shirt and I couldn’t tell if she was wearing shorts underneath it or not. She crawled under the covers and snuggled close to me.

“Thank you,” she said quietly. “I needed that.”

“How’re you feeling? After the whole almost blown up thing, that is.” I pulled her closer to me, realizing again how well we fit together.

She shrugged. “Pretty good. I’m glad we have another day off, but over all I feel good.”

“Good. I’m glad.”

“Have you thought any more about when you’re making your big superhero debut?”

“Not until after we’re sure Nate’s healthy,” I told her. Overall, he was doing a lot better, but he was still so small for ten months old. I knew Sam was still a bit concerned and so was I, in a place deep inside I didn’t like going — the gut instinct that said my son still wasn’t quite okay.

“And you don’t think he is?” I could hear the underlying fear in her voice.

“I don’t *know* that he’s not, but I still think I’d rather wait until he has a clean bill of health and your dad’s not concerned anymore either.”

She nodded as I rolled onto my back and she nestled in next to me, her leg thrown over mine and her arm across my stomach. I rubbed a hand up and down her arm. “You know something that bothered me the second time we slept in here together — after you had that nightmare?”

“The one that turned out to be practically premonition?”

I nodded. “Yeah.”

“What?”

“How well we fit together. How easily we found our way into a comfortable position together. And how different that was from me and Lana because we always had a harder time getting comfortable when we were up in the hayloft or on my bunk or whatever. It bothered me that it was much easier for you and me than it was for me and her.” I hugged her closer. “And we’re not naked so...”

She smiled. “I loved those mornings, you know.”

“Which ones?”

“When we were here. The first morning, I was just relieved

that we were alive, but later I remembered being in your arms. The second morning, it surprised me because I didn’t know you’d fallen asleep in here. But you wouldn’t let me go. You said something about it being our honeymoon and maybe I could sleep in your room at home now that we were married. I loved you holding me like that.” She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “That nightmare though... It really freaked me out. I needed you that night and thank you for being there for me — even though you knew it would make Lana mad.”

“We had no idea you were pregnant that night. With my baby.”

I could see her biting her lip as though she was trying to decide whether she wanted to tell me something.

“What?” I finally asked.

“Remember how I told you that I just knew I was married in the dream but I couldn’t really see the guy?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, that wasn’t entirely true. I couldn’t really see him, but what I could see made him look an awful lot like you, but I wasn’t about to tell you that. I think I was half in love with you even then,” she said without looking at me. “Well, I wanted what you and Lana had. What the movies had. Daddy and Mom. I didn’t know it then, obviously, but your parents. I just didn’t see that happening with Joe at that point. When we talked on the way to Europe, things were different and I think maybe we could have been happy together — like you and Lana could probably have been happy together — but I think I’m really happy things turned out this way instead.”

“I know I am.” She yawned a big yawn. “Get some sleep. You still need to get your rest.”

She snuggled in a little closer to me before tilting her head towards me. “I love you,” she said quietly.

“I love you,” I told her, kissing her softly.

Her head rested against my chest and her even breathing soon told me she was asleep. It wasn’t long before I was too.

~~~~~

Lois

Clark was flopped over on his side of the bed, lying on his stomach, when I woke up. A glance at the clock told me it was pretty early and we had a while before we needed to leave for home — all day really. Clark had said we weren’t supposed to be home until dinner.

A thought occurred to me. I needed to pump, I knew that, and I was going to get up and head to another room so I wouldn’t bother Clark. I carefully slid out of bed and grabbed the bag that held the pump. I bit my bottom lip and glanced at the bed to make sure he was still asleep before searching through Clark’s bag for something I thought he had in there. I pulled it out, stashing it in the bathroom as I headed towards the living room.

“Lois?” Clark’s still sleepy voice called a few minutes later.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes,” I called back. “Go back to sleep.” Or not to sleep, but don’t get up, I tried to communicate silently.

A few minutes later, I put everything away and headed back to our room.

“Aren’t you coming?” Clark asked, lifting himself up on his elbows as I headed towards the bathroom.

“I gotta pee,” I told him and that was partially true. I breathed a silent sigh of relief as he flopped back down on the bed.

I shut the door behind me and pulled the package out of the drawer. I carefully opened it as quietly as I could. If Clark really wanted to, he could be watching me anyway.

So this was what Clark had bought for me, for the other night, just in case.

I held it up — it was black and satiny and had a short, filmy robe that came with it. It didn’t cover much but it wasn’t completely revealing either. I’d seen more risqué lingerie on

‘Friends’.

Could I do this? Could I go through with it?

Sure, I’d worn nightgowns in front of Clark before, but they were usually knee length or longer and I always had much better robes than this one that covered a lot more and certainly weren’t see through.

And it wasn’t like Clark hadn’t seen me naked before — a lot the past few days — and this certainly wasn’t naked.

But still there was something different, something... I wasn’t sure. Something that seemed to imply a sexual confidence that I simply didn’t have. Not yet.

Obviously, this was something Clark had put some thought into at some point. The receipt showed he’d bought it in California. Was that because he happened to be there anyway? Or because he hadn’t gone shopping until too late to go on the East Coast? Or because he’d looked a number of places and this was the first thing he’d found that he’d liked? Or thought he would like on me?

“You okay?” he called.

“Yeah. I’ll be right out.” I quickly pulled the shirt over my head and changed into it, pulling the robe on over the top of it. I purposely avoided looking in the mirror.

I took a deep breath and opened the door before I lost my nerve. I leaned against the door frame. “Is this what you had in mind?” I bit my bottom lip and hoped it looked as good as he’d thought it would, hoping he wouldn’t see the flaws.

He wasn’t moving quickly, but yawned and rubbed his hands over his face before turning to look at me.

My heart was in my throat.

“It doesn’t look as good as you hoped it would, does it?” I asked, nervously pulling the robe more closely around me and knowing it covered little more than the outfit itself did.

He sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed, his eyes leaving me only long enough to light some of the candles around the room — thanks to the heavy curtains, it was still pretty dark.

“You look incredible,” he whispered, his hands coming to rest on my shoulders. “*Better* than I thought it would, because you chose to. You decided to find it and wear it for me all on your own. You look *amazing* anyway, but that you’re comfortable enough to do this...”

“I’m not really,” I told him shyly. “But I knew you’d gone to a lot of trouble to get something for me to wear and I thought you’d want me to.”

He leaned over and kissed me softly. “You don’t have to do anything because you think I want you to.”

“I know. I wanted to. Really, I did, but I’m still a bit nervous about this. About how I look. I don’t have the figure I used to have.”

He ran his hands down my arms until they came to rest on my waist. “Your figure is fine. Wonderful. Amazing. Incredible. Do you look the same as you did when we met? No, but you’ve had two babies since then. My babies. You have no *idea* how attractive that is. But, you know what else?”

I shook my head.

“You could gain a hundred pounds — or more — and I’d still think you were incredibly sexy. You’re my wife, the mother of my children, and I love you very much — I *want* you very much — no matter what you look like.”

He kissed me again. And again. My arms wound their way around his neck and he wrapped his around my waist, picking me up. My legs found their way around him and he carried me to the bed, his lips never leaving mine.

“I thought we were looking for more creative places than the bed,” I murmured as he put a knee on the bed and lowered me towards it, his lips moving down my neck.

“We haven’t tried the ceiling in here yet,” he told me.

“Otherwise, more creative can wait for later.”

“Ceiling sounds good,” I said as his body pressed mine into the mattress.

He stopped suddenly, moving back up to look me in the eyes. “I love you,” he said, pressing his lips hard against mine. “I love you more than anything. Nothing, *nothing*, is going to separate us ever again, okay?”

I nodded and kissed him again.

We ended up on the ceiling again and Clark slowly floated us down to the bed. “I had no idea it could be like this,” he said against my hair as we settled back on the mattress.

“Me, either,” I admitted. “But I never expected the ceiling to be an option either.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

I giggled. “I know.”

We laid there for a little while longer, talking quietly, making plans. We talked about planning a wedding and the boys, and our trip to see an NCIS episode being taped, but before too long, my stomach growled and Clark promised me breakfast in bed.

While he did that, I pulled my T-shirt back on and popped open my laptop. I logged in and checked my email before starting to write one of the hardest emails I think I’d ever had to deal with.

I sighed and started, writing from the heart.

‘Lana,

‘They say good news travels fast, but bad news travels faster. And really good gossip in a small town... Well, I think ‘lightning’ might describe that. And since you haven’t heard that Clark and I had a huge fight and split up permanently, you may think that things have gone well.

‘Or you may not have thought of us at all.

‘Well, things have gone really well and we have you to thank for that — at least partially. You were there, a sounding board, when Clark needed one the other day. You could have made things very difficult for both of us, driving the wedge that already existed even further into the rift between us.

‘But you didn’t. Thank you for that. I don’t know Chad, but I hope that the two of you will be very happy together. Clark said you two are good for each other.

‘I know we’ll probably never be *friends*, but I’d like it to if we can be *friendly* when we see each other.

‘Thank you again — for everything. You saved Christopher that day and I will forever be indebted to you for that alone.

‘Lois’

“What’re you doing?” Clark asked, bringing the tray in.

“Emailing Lana.”

“Ah. Anything I should be worried about?”

I finished rereading it and decided to just hit send rather than obsess about it.

We ate breakfast together before kissing again and finding that we really didn’t *need* anywhere but the bed to be together. And really we probably didn’t need that.

“I think I’m going to let you do all the packing and all that while I lay here a little while longer,” I told him as we realized we’d need to leave before too long.

“Lazy?” he asked with a grin, one finger drawing random patterns on my stomach.

I shook my head as I changed my mind. “Actually, I think I’m going to go take a shower while you do all that, flyboy. You’re just *so* much more efficient than I am.”

He sighed. “Fine.”

I got up and got a change of clothes out of my suitcase — a pair of shorts that were a little on the short side and a top that showed a little more if I left an extra button or two undone.

I’d been in the shower for all of a minute or so when I felt Clark’s strong arms around me, pulling me to him.

“You did say you wanted to find somewhere more creative,”

he practically growled.

I'd never had so much fun getting clean.

Part 7
Clark

~~~~~  
We drove home, hand in hand.

That was unusual. We never held hands while driving.

We chatted about little stuff, both of us a little disappointed that our three days alone were over.

We hadn't spent them *completely* alone, but that was by choice and I now had a new superhero costume in my suitcase.  
"Clark?"

Lois startled me slightly as she spoke.

"What?" I asked, bring her hand to my lips and kissing it lightly.

"Should we tell my Dad?"

My brow furrowed. "Tell your Dad what? The whole truth about us?"

Sam didn't know that we weren't entirely certain Christopher was my son though he had a pretty good idea about the true nature of our relationship over the last three and a half years.

She shrugged. "Maybe, but I meant about you."

"What about me?"

She took a deep breath. "The whole Kryptonian thing."

I sat in stunned silence for a minute. The thought of telling *anyone* scared me, but my father-in-law? Telling him that an alien was doing his daughter? Where had that phrase come from?

"I mean, he's said some nice things about Van-El and he's curious about the whole alien thing — who isn't? — but he's a doctor, his grandsons are affected. It's in his own best interests and the interests of his family to keep the secret, but if he's officially your doctor then there's the confidentiality thing, too. But besides that, if we stay at the house, surely he'll notice you being gone at weird times and stuff."

I sighed. "Can I think about it? You know it's not easy for me and what about Van? Wouldn't that mean we'd have to tell your dad about him so we should probably talk to them about it first, right?"

"Would you invite them over for dinner and let them meet Dad?"

I decided to do just that immediately. <Van?>

<How was your little vacation?> came the voice in my head.

<Good. We're on our way home. Do you and Ashley have dinner plans tonight?>

There was a brief pause. <No. Just dinner at her place. Why?>

I sighed.

"What?" Lois asked.

"Talking to Van. Think your dad would be okay if they came over for dinner tonight?"

She shrugged. "Don't know why not."

<Would you like to come over for dinner tonight? Meet Lois' dad and the boys?>

<I'll ask Ashley, but we've mentioned wanting to. Any particular reason why?>

I hesitated. <Lois wants us to think about telling her dad about us.>

I could feel his shock.

<Hear me out,> I continued. <I know you don't know him and that's why we want you to come over. He's a doctor who might be able to help us in that sense — and his grandsons are half-Kryptonian. Spilling our secret wouldn't be an issue, but we live with him and even though the house is huge, he's going to notice if I'm gone regularly and all that. I trust him, but I wouldn't do that without talking to you two first. If he realizes I'm the new superhero — even if we don't tell him — he'll start

wondering about you.>

There was a long pause. <I'll talk to Ashley about tonight and I'll think about it, okay? That's all I can promise right now. I'll talk to her about telling Lois' dad and we'll go from there, okay?>

<That's all I ask. Let me know about tonight.>

"What'd he say?" Lois asked me.

I told her what he said.

She nodded. "Well, we'll go from there." She picked up her phone and called her dad. He was available for dinner.

An hour later, we pulled up in front of the house.

"Mommy! Mommy!" Christopher ran to Lois and held his arms up.

Lois grabbed him and swung him around. "Hey, buddy. Did you miss us?"

He nodded. "I miss you and Na' miss you, too, bu' he's too yittle to use words 'till."

Lois laughed. "I know."

At that moment, Nate crawled rapidly out of the living room towards us, making babbling sounds the whole way.

Christopher squirmed down and ran over to give me a hug as Lois picked up Nate.

Jessica was close behind and we chatted with her for a few minutes before telling her that she was free to go. She was going to go out with her sister, she told us before heading for the now-unlocked down portion of the house.

Sam walked in at that moment and we all headed towards the living room on our end of the house. When Christopher was big enough to warrant a play area, he'd turned over two offices on that end of the house to us. One for a living room/play area and one for an office/study area for me and Lois while we were in college.

The boys immediately headed for the toys and we sat down to talk.

"What's on your minds?" he asked.

Lois glanced at me as my arm found its way around her, pulling her closer to me than had been our norm — and Sam noticed, too.

"Navance isn't a threat anymore," Lois started quietly.

"We've been talking about what that means for us, for the boys."

Sam frowned. "Are you thinking about moving out?"

I shrugged. "Well, the reason we moved in was security and your very generous offer of childcare for Christopher while we were in college and while the threat continued. The threat's over. We talked about it. We're not poor college students anymore so we could afford something much nicer than we could have after our freshman year when we moved in here. We don't want to... assume that you want us to continue imposing on you."

Sam rolled his eyes. "My family is never an imposition." He looked at Lois. "I never told you this, Princess, but for a long time I hoped that you and your husband — whoever that might end up being — and your family would live here with me. I've got the room. I've got the money and living here by myself would be very lonely, even with Vicki and Ollie around. I love having the two of you and my grandsons here."

"Thank you, Daddy," Lois whispered. "We do appreciate that, but I want to make sure you know that it's not *necessary*."

"I know," he said. "But I want you here. The security needs will go way down, though I'll probably leave the keypads in place for emergencies but upstairs won't be locked down anymore and Scott and Steve won't be needed anymore. I'll have Allie keep the monitoring contract for the regular security system, but we'll back down on everything else once the media furor dies down in a couple days."

"Thanks, Sam."

"What about Jessica?" Lois asked suddenly, looking at me.

"If we stay here, especially if Daddy's not going to charge us rent

or whatever, we could afford to keep her on as a nanny for a while. It would probably be better for the boys and our hours could get kind of weird sometimes as we work our way up the investigative reporting ladder.”

I nodded. “If she’s willing, that’s fine with me.”

Sam smiled. “Well, that’s settled then. So, who’s coming over for dinner?”

Lois and I glanced at each other again. “Bernie and Ashley. They’re new friends.”

“How’d you meet?”

“I met Bernie through work,” Lois told him — that was technically true. She was the first reporter with a Van-El exclusive of any kind but that was because she’d threatened him. And he’d believed her. “I introduced him to Clark and he introduced us to his fiancée, Ashley, and we’ve all hit it off.”

I glanced at my watch as I heard Van’s voice reverberate through my head. “They should be here any minute.”

I also realized that I needed to start calling him Bernie in my head so I didn’t slip up.

The buzzing sound didn’t shock me at all. Sam moved to the speaker and spoke with the guard still stationed at the front gate for the time being. He told him to let my brother and Ashley in.

<Nice place,> came the sarcastic voice in my head.

I picked up Nate and Lois led Christopher — taking my sons to meet my brother.

~~~~~  
Lois

I was struck again by how much Clark and Bernie looked alike. We’d headed out the side door and Dad gone through the house and come out the front door.

He’d stopped in his tracks when he saw Clark and Bernie standing there.

“Are you two related?” he asked as we walked inside after introductions all around. “I thought you were adopted, Clark.”

“I was,” Clark confirmed. “Lois met Bernie a couple weeks ago and actually thought he was me at first — from a distance. We shared histories and it seems like a pretty good guess that I’m the little brother Bernie remembers.”

“That’s amazing,” Dad said as we headed towards the kitchen. “Vicki said she put Garlic Chicken Parmesan in the oven for us. Clark, would you mind getting the bread in?”

Clark put Nate in his high chair and started working on the bread, chatting with Bernie as he did.

“This place is great, Lois,” Ashley said quietly, looking around.

I smiled. “It’s pathetic, but I took it for granted for a long time, but right after we got married, Clark and I lived in a dump on campus and I swore if I ever moved back in with Dad for any reason, I would appreciate it a lot more. And I do, believe me. The ‘apartment’...” I used finger quotes for emphasis. “...we lived in was about the size of our bathroom here.”

She winced. “My first apartment was about like that. Right now, I have a nice one bedroom over on Carter Avenue, but I guess I’m going to move in with Bernie after the wedding. My place is a bit bigger, but it’s not good for the whole...” She made a wavy motion with her hand. “...thing.”

“Right. I’ll show you around later if you want.”

“I’d like that.”

We all laughed and talked throughout dinner. Nate still looked so small, but ate his jars of food rapidly, demanding faster delivery between jars. Ashley made a comment about how small he looked. We told him his history, which caused the two of them to share a look with each other and with us, especially when we told them about his surgery.

“And everything’s okay now?” Bernie asked.

Dad looked at me to answer.

I sighed. “He’s still so small and we’re starting to get

concerned again. His birthday is coming up in a few weeks and we’re *hoping* for the thirteen pound range. He goes to the doctor for his one year check next month, so we’ll see what they say.”

Dad kept quiet. He was concerned about Nate’s very small size and just could not understand my reluctance for any more medical intervention than absolutely necessary. The decision Clark and I had made for him to have surgery at four months old had been gut wrenching.

At the same time, I knew we’d reach a point where we couldn’t wait any longer and that point was rapidly approaching. Clark knew it, too, and it was one of the things we’d discussed as we headed home — that it could be good for Daddy to understand the full ramifications of everything.

Ashley and Bernie shared another look with each other.

Topics changed and we finished dinner a few minutes later.

After dinner, we went outside for a bit and let Christopher run around the swing set for a while and Nate swung happily in his bucket swing.

“Bedtime,” Clark told Christopher, grabbing him around the waist as he ran by.

“No,” Christopher pouted. “Wanna play some more.”

I picked Nate up from his swing and started towards the porch. “Christopher, come on.”

“I got it,” Clark said.

“Let me help,” Bernie said suddenly, reaching for Nate.

“Thanks,” I said, handing him over.

Clark and Bernie headed towards our side of the house and Ashley and I watched them go. Clark had Christopher swung over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry.

Dad had headed towards the back door, saying he needed to make a phone call.

“Bernie,” Ashley said quietly.

Both brothers stopped and turned.

She nodded and Bernie looked at her for a long minute before he and Clark headed back towards the house.

She and I walked slowly towards the house. “I understand why you want to tell your dad,” she said suddenly. “Especially with Nate’s health issues. I got the impression that your dad thinks you should have been a bit more aggressive with his medical treatment recently.”

I nodded. “He has. He knows that we agonized over the decision for surgery but not the full potential ramifications. Fortunately, everything worked fine and there was no ‘your son is half-alien’ aftermath. It wasn’t like he was green inside instead of red or something.”

“That’s good,” she said with a small smile. “Jor-El and Lara pounded it into Bernie’s head that he shouldn’t let anyone know about him, but that he should help when he could. We saw ‘The Incredibles’ with my sister and her kids at the theater a couple years ago and ever since then, he’s been restless, wanting to do more, to help more. Finally, about a month ago, he asked me to marry him and I told him I would but only if he seriously considered finally doing something about the superhero business. He’d been waffling way too long.”

“That was when it first occurred to Clark, too,” I told her. “When Christopher saw it, that is. But we were still in college, two weeks later we found out I was pregnant again and the timing just wasn’t right. With me sick and everything else while pregnant and then Nate’s health, the superhero thing got pushed to the back burner.”

“I can understand that,” she said as we walked slowly up the stairs to the deck.

We went into the living room and sat down. Daddy joined us before too long and the three of us talked until Clark and Bernie came back in.

Clark held up the baby monitor. “We’ll see if he stays put.”

“He always stays put for you,” I reminded him as he sat next

to me, his arm immediately going around me.

He whispered in my ear. “Bernie said it’s okay with him.”

I nodded. “Daddy,” I said abruptly.

Dad looked at me expectantly.

I took a deep breath. “There’s something we need to tell you, something I hope you’ll understand and not be mad that Clark and I didn’t tell you a long time ago.”

He looked puzzled. “What’s that, Princess?”

“It’s about Clark and Bernie and the fact that they’re related and where they come from and how they know that and it affects all of us and Christopher and Nate and...” I made myself stop and take a deep breath. “Daddy, Clark and Bernie... They’re brothers, we told you that already, but what we didn’t tell you is where they were born.”

Dad looked from one to the other. “Where were they born?”

I looked at Bernie who nodded and Clark squeezed my shoulder lightly. “They were born on Krypton. Bernie is Van-El, the new superhero and this weekend Martha made Clark a superhero costume of his own.”

Dad’s jaw dropped and we all waited with bated breath to see his reaction.

Part 8

Clark

~~~~~

We carried the boys upstairs, through the unlocked door and into their room.

“This is a nice house,” Bernie said.

“Lois’ dad has money. Lots of it. When he found out about the threat from Navance, he secured this wing and we moved in here. Now that the threat’s over, he wants us to stay anyway,” I told him.

“That’s very nice of him,” Bernie replied, taking it all in.

He seemed a bit uneasy as I gave Christopher a quick bath — using the shower head to rinse him off rather than an actual *bath*. Christopher hated that — he’d rather play with his boats. When I got back to the bedroom, Bernie was in the glider with Nate staring out the window when I came back in with Christopher in his pajamas.

“Okay, little man, it’s bedtime,” I said, doing my best to be stern. “Leave your brother alone.” I gave him my best stern Dad look. The one my mom and Lois had perfected. Well, stern parent look. Dad had it perfected, too, for that matter.

He nodded as he yawned. “Wuv you, Daddy,” he said giving me a big hug and resting his head on my shoulder for a long minute.

“Love you, too,” I told him, giving him a big hug back. I set him down in his toddler bed. “Sleep in your bed tonight, okay?”

He nodded and picked up his bag of animals off the floor, setting it next to him.

“Not on the floor,” I warned. “You’ve got your big boy pants on so you have to sleep on your bed.”

He gave an exasperated sigh. “I *know*, Dad.” He lay down on the bed and put his head on the pillow. “Co’er me up?”

“Of course.” I pulled his sheet and blanket up over him before kissing his forehead. “Love you, little man.”

“Wuv you, Daddy.”

I turned to Bernie who was watching us with a mixture of jealousy and something else on his face. I motioned with my head for him to follow me and we all headed into our room.

I had a clean onesie flung over my shoulder and a size one diaper in one hand. I reached for Nate and he came willingly. “Come here, big guy.”

He babbled incessantly as I bounced him up and down on our bed.

“Have a seat,” I told Bernie, motioning to the living area.

He chose instead to sit in the chair on Lois’ side of the bed

near the door to the boys’ room.

I kept Nate from crawling too far away as I managed to undo the snaps on the outfit he had on. “Hey, stay here.”

He blew a raspberry my direction and grabbed his pacifier holder, sticking the wrong end of it in his mouth as I worked the one piece outfit over his tiny body. I changed his diaper and slipped the new outfit on him. I grabbed him again as he tried to scramble off towards the edge of the bed. I flopped him back right in the middle of our super king size bed and zipped to the mini-fridge in our closet, getting back with his bottle of milk before he had a chance to get back to the edge. Not that I was too worried with Van — Bernie — right there.

I picked Nate up and sat in the chair on the other side of the room, with my feet propped up in mid-air as Nate grabbed hold of the bottle. I held it away from him, heating it with my eyes.

“There you go,” I said, letting him have it. He’d nursed almost as soon as we’d gotten back from the cabin and again since then, but he usually had a bottle right before bed.

He settled into the crook of my arm, eagerly drinking from the bottle.

“I think this is my favorite time of day,” I told Van.

“Christopher is down and quiet and I get to spend some time with just Nate. He’s not nursing as much anymore so Lois isn’t the only one who feeds him.”

“Ashley was glad to hear that you have biological children,” he said quietly. “Our father thought it would be possible for us to have children with human women, but he wasn’t certain. She wants to be a mom not long after we get married.”

I wanted to ask him more about courtship and... mating or whatever on Krypton but I wasn’t sure how to.

“You and Lois... the... physical relationship between you two...” He blushed furiously. “Not here,” he added quickly, waving a hand towards the bed. “In public, or at least in front of your families, you’re very openly affectionate.”

I nodded slowly. “Yes, we are. We always have been, but until recently, it was because if Navance found out that we were only staying married to keep him away from Lois and Christopher, he had a claim to our son under Latislani law so we tried to be openly affectionate or whatever so no one would think we were faking it. The last few days though...” I shrugged. “It’s just natural. It feels natural to be close to her, to want her close to me. Is that not... normal on Krypton?”

Bernie sighed. “Perhaps in private, somewhat. Our parents were more affectionate at home than anyone else I ever saw, even when I had a friend over or our grandparents were there, but not much. And in public, there was no contact at all — not even hand holding or things like that — except on special occasions where there was a formal escort or something.”

“Lois noticed that with you and Ashley,” I told him. “That you held hands but that was about it.”

He stared at the ground. “I’ll admit to you that I fly slower than I really need to when I fly with Ashley.”

“Why is that?”

“Because she’s in my arms,” he admitted. “I...” He sighed. “This is a conversation for another day,” he said, nodding at my now sleeping son. “About Lois’ father...”

“Yeah?” I asked, lifting Nate to my shoulder and patting his back until he burped.

“Ashley and I talked about it earlier and agreed that she’d send me a signal if she was comfortable with it and she did when we came inside. That means it’s up to me and I think, especially given your son’s medical needs, telling him would be a good idea. If he’s willing, he could act as physician for all of us, as needed. It would be good to keep that in the family, I think. I’m a doctor, but not a practicing medical doctor like he is.”

I nodded. “I think that’s a good idea and I’m glad you agree. Let me put this guy down, and we’ll head back downstairs.”

A few minutes later, I was sitting next to Lois as she told her dad that Van and I were from Krypton.

His jaw — literally — dropped.

“Could you repeat that?” he finally said.

“We’re from Krypton,” I told him quietly. “I crashed landed in Kansas when I was a few months old. I was found by Martha Clark and Chris Davis. They got married that night and adopted me. The night they found me, he was killed in a fire, rescuing a baby who would be one of my best friends growing up — you’ve met him; Josh Irig, he married my cousin, Kara, right around the time of Nate’s surgery. A ceiling collapsed on Chris. Five years later, Mom married Jonathan Kent who adopted me.”

“So not too different from the story you’ve told us,” Sam said slowly. “Just the whole crash landed thing?”

I nodded.

He turned to my brother. “And you’re the new superhero that’s been flying around?”

Van — Bernie — nodded.

He turned back to me. “And you can do all of the same things he can?”

“Yeah.”

“Daddy, that’s why we’ve been so reluctant to seek medical help for Nate. The thought of him having surgery scared us half to death and not just because they wanted to open up our three-month-old. We were so afraid that they’d see something that would tell them that he’s not quite normal,” Lois told him.

Sam nodded slowly as it began to sink in. “I can understand that.”

“That’s one of the reasons we wanted to tell you, Sam, but we also wanted Bernie and Ashley to be comfortable with it because we knew you’d figure out that we were related pretty quickly. And, especially if we’re going to keep living here, then you’ll soon notice that I’m gone at odd hours sometimes. Mom made me a superhero costume of my own yesterday.”

“Because you just... flew out to see her?” Sam asked.

I nodded. “Van — Bernie — and Ashley met us out there and helped us decide on the colors and stuff.”

“We’re hoping that you can help us with the medical stuff for all of us, Daddy,” Lois told him.

He nodded slowly. “I don’t see why not. But Clark and Bernie won’t need medical care, will they?” I could see the light bulb go off in his head as he turned back to me. “What happened at the cabin then, Clark?”

~~~~~

Lois

Tears sprang to my eyes.

“That was not a good night,” I told them all, my voice barely a whisper. “We didn’t know then, but we do now. There’s this green rock. We think it came from Krypton, but it glows and it was in Bremerton. He passed out, and it causes intense pain and a loss of all of his powers.”

Bernie looked shocked. “What?” he asked, astounded.

Clark nodded. “I didn’t like it at all.”

“We almost died that night,” I told Bernie quietly. “The really big snowstorm the first weekend of November a few years ago. We got stuck about half or three-quarters of a mile from the cabin and barely made it. There was no power and Clark was passed out.” A tear streaked down my face as I remembered the desperation of the night. “I got a fire started and got our wet clothes off of us and got us under the blankets and Daddy found us there the next day.”

“It was scary,” Dad admitted. “Sitting here with the roads closed and no one able to go look for them. The phone line had gone down after Lois called me.” He sighed. “I’d like to try to learn more about this green rock at some point, but at least one good thing came out of that night — Christopher.”

Clark and I glanced at each other.

Daddy caught the look. “What?”

I sighed. “We’re not sure,” I finally whispered. “We think so, but we’re not sure.”

“What?!” he asked.

Bernie and Ashley looked at each other uncomfortably.

“On Halloween, we went to a frat party with Lana and Joe,” I told him. “We lost them and each other and later, Clark found me upstairs behind a couch, with my shorts and underwear off. We don’t — and didn’t — *think* anything happened, that Clark got there in time, but we’re not sure.”

“So when you got married, when you told Navance you were pregnant with Clark’s baby, you weren’t sure?” I could see him trying to wrap his head around all the new information.

I shook my head. “No. When Clark told Navance he was the father of my baby, he had no idea that there was even a chance that he really was. We didn’t really remember what happened that night until much later — we both thought we’d dreamed it, and Clark actually thought he’d dreamed about Lana for a long time.”

Daddy sat back in his seat. “When you guys spring stuff on a guy, you really do it right.” He looked at Clark. “I won’t say I’m sorry for the result, but I’m sorry for the pressure I put on you on the plane on the way back here. You did a very brave and noble thing to protect Lois and the baby you didn’t know was yours — that you didn’t think *could* be yours.”

“I couldn’t let him get to them. He was evil. Literally,” Clark said.

“He was,” I said, resting my head against Clark. “And Clark’s never told me the worst of it. He said I didn’t see the worst and if that’s true, I can’t even imagine what he would be like.”

“Why didn’t you just...” Daddy made a flying motion at Clark.

Clark sighed. “I didn’t want to risk it. I would have if it came right down to it. I would have grabbed her and we would have disappeared, but she didn’t seem to be in physical danger and I’ve spent my whole life hiding who I am and what I can do. I thought I’d wait and see what happened. I never would have guessed that he would have come after us like that.”

“We talked about it a long time ago, Daddy. He wouldn’t have thought that long-term danger would be an issue,” I told him.

“When did he tell you?” Bernie asked.

“When my mom made me,” Clark told them, appropriately chagrined.

“What?” Ashley asked.

“They thought I was pregnant with a half-Kryptonian baby. I was, but we didn’t know it. It was still our freshman year in college and Martha told him if he didn’t tell me, they’d stop sending the spending money they had been.”

“And that she’d tan my hide,” Clark said, wincing. “I may be invulnerable but there’s two things besides that green rock — Lois named it Kryptonite, by the way — that scare me... Mom and Lois.” He rubbed his ear. “As recently as my senior year in high school, she grabbed my ear when I got in trouble and... I mean, it was probably psychosomatic, but it hurt!”

I rolled my eyes. “Poor baby.”

Clark sighed and pulled me closer to him. “I didn’t have the guts to just tell her so I gave her a copy of this paper I wrote — about being a foundling and being adopted and how my parents met and got together and how both Chris and my dad didn’t have to take on the responsibility of being a dad. The paper I turned in told the official story, but I’d written the real one, too, and showed it to my parents and it hit me it was a way to start the conversation with Lois. So she read it and I told her what all I could do and...” He shrugged.

“I didn’t care about the whole ‘I’m an alien’ thing. What made me mad was that he already knew when the divorce was going to happen,” I said quietly. At the startled looks, I continued.

“When we got back to the States, we found out Navance had changed the law and the husband was only the legal father if the marriage lasted five years after the birth of the baby. We’d said we’d file for divorce the day after Christopher’s birthday if nothing changed before that. It made me mad that he wanted to be the kind of dad Chris would have been and Jonathan still was, but he knew what day we’d file for divorce.”

“She let me have it for that one,” Clark said.

“Good,” Dad said.

“I deserved it,” Clark told him with a shrug. “I’m just glad I came to my senses and was able to convince her to keep me around,” he said softly, kissing the side of my head. “I don’t know what I’d do without her. I don’t know what I’d do without my boys, but without Lois...” He pulled me closer to him still. “I’d be completely lost. I thank God he didn’t answer my prayers for an eventual reconciliation with Lana. And that you saved her the other day, Bernie. I don’t know what I would have done if she’d been hurt or worse on that transport.”

“Then I am extra glad I was able to be of service,” he said.

“Thank you,” Daddy said suddenly. “For saving my little girl.” He sighed. “Okay, we’re going to have to figure out what to do about this little guy.”

“And then you’re going to have to move all my stuff back into our room,” I told Clark.

His fingers played with the hair at my temple. “You moved it out, you can move it back?”

I turned enough to glare at him. “Now that Daddy knows, you can have it done in about three seconds. If I had to do it...”

He was gone.

Less than a minute later, he was back. “All done,” he announced, sitting next to me, feet propped up in mid-air.

Daddy’s jaw dropped again. “Wow.”

Part 9

Clark

~~~~~

Why was I nervous?

It wasn’t like Lois was going to leave me if the night didn’t go perfectly.

At least — I was pretty sure she wasn’t.

This was still so new. The two of us.

Together.

It had been an *amazing* week together. We’d been back at work for a couple days and now it was date night. I had on my best charcoal suit and a tie I knew Lois... Well, liked would be too strong a term, but that I knew she loved to make fun of.

I took a deep breath and knocked on the front door of the house.

I could hear Lois calling to me from inside, but I also knew that she thought I was still upstairs. She opened the door and I sucked in a sharp breath.

“Hi,” she said, looking a bit puzzled. “What’re you doing down here?”

“I’m picking you up for our date.” I looked her up and down. “You look... incredible.”

She was wearing a new black dress — I guessed it was new anyway; I’d never seen it before — and pearls I knew had been her mom’s.

I held out a single red rose. “For you.”

“Thank you,” she said, still looking at me a bit oddly.

“Please, come in?”

I followed her into the kitchen, where she dug a bud vase out of one of the cabinets.

“Daddy’s got the boys outside playing. I already said good-bye. Did you?”

“You have kids?” I asked, trying to keep in my self-appointed role as a first date.

She just glared at me.

“Too far?” I asked, chagrined.

“A bit,” she told me. She patted my chest as she walked by. “I already know whose bed you’re going to end up in tonight so pretending this is a real first date is pushing it a bit.” She bit her lip and looked at me from under her lashes. I was pretty sure she was thinking about what was going to happen in that bed later.

I grinned at her. “You think you’re going to get me into bed tonight?” A plan formed in my mind.

She shrugged. “Bed, yes.” She turned to look directly at me, a small smile on her face. “Clothes, maybe.” She moved closer to me until she was close enough to put a hand on my tie. “Is that a problem?”

I wanted to kiss her, but I didn’t. “Ms. Lane-Kent, the only thing you’ll get out of me on this date tonight is a kiss. Maybe.”

I wanted this date to be about us — about getting to know *us* — not a prelude to sex. And I’d told her that.

“And what about after the date?” she asked moving slightly closer to me, her breath mingling with mine. “After you drop me off and I go upstairs and change into something slightly uncomfortable?”

Her voice was low and seductive and I wasn’t sure why exactly I didn’t fly her up to our room at that moment.

“Well, that wouldn’t be on our date then, would it?” My tone matched hers.

“No, it wouldn’t.” She moved again, until she was even closer to me and it was all I could do not to kiss her senseless.

“I think we better go,” I said, never taking my eyes from hers.

“I think you’re right.”

We stood there for another long minute before I took a deep breath and moved back. I held one arm out in front of me, in the general direction of the door. “After you.”

She smiled at me and there was something in her eyes I hadn’t quite learned to read yet. My hand found its way to the small of her back, gently guiding her even though she didn’t need me to. I just liked touching her, even just a little bit like this.

“So where are we going?” she asked as I opened the passenger door of the Jeep.

“This little restaurant I know. It has incredible pasta and chocolate cake that I think you’ll like. And dancing.”

I loved dancing with Lois. It was one of the first things we’d done together that, looking back, should have shown me we’d make a great pair. At the time, of course, I’d been in love with Lana, but we’d won the Tush Push Contest in Bremerton two months or so after we met.

The day she got pregnant with Christopher.

The day we’d both nearly died.

I shook my head slightly to clear it — I didn’t want to think about that.

Dancing with Lois was okay to think about. I didn’t know how many times we’d danced together since then. Quite a few. The time I remembered most — besides earlier in the week before I asked her to marry me all over again — was the night after she’d told me she was in love with me. She’d given me — us — a cruise for Christmas and our anniversary. While there, on our second anniversary, she’d told me that she’d fallen in love with me. The next night had been one of the formal nights on the cruise and we’d danced together for a very long time — probably an hour and a half or longer.

Why couldn’t I have seen it then? Looking back, it was so clear, but at the time...

“What’re you thinking about?” Lois asked quietly from her side of the car.

“Dancing with you on the cruise,” I told her. “And wondering why I was stupid for another eighteen months.”

“Not tonight, Clark, please,” she said looking out her window. “I don’t want to talk about all that tonight.”

"I was really thinking about how much I love dancing with you," I said, reaching for her hand. "And how I'm hoping I get to dance all of my dances with you."

"You won't," she informed me. "More than anyone else maybe, but you'll still have to dance with your mom and Granny and..." She gave me a smile and rubbed her thumb along my hand. "But I hope you don't dance with them like you dance with me."

I pulled her hand to me and kissed the back of it. "Not even close."

I pulled up in front of the little restaurant in Pittsdale. It was a nice enough place that it had valet service — most non-fast food restaurants in Pittsdale did; it was an upscale community after all.

I walked around the car and offered Lois my arm. She threaded her hand through it and I found my other hand on top of hers. I'd found just about every reason under the sun to touch her in the last week. Little touches, like holding hands or putting a hand on her shoulder while we worked on a story at work or any other of a million little ways I'd never realized I missed before.

We had reservations and were seated quickly.

We'd spent part of the day earlier combining households — things we should have done a long time ago but hadn't. We now had joint checking and savings accounts, but I'd kept money out for this. I wanted to pay for it myself. It was a guy thing I thought.

It wasn't long before we were eating some of the best pasta I'd ever had. We talked about just about anything but the fact that we were already married. I told her some stories about growing up. She told me more about her mom and sister, her eyes filling with tears as she said she'd give almost anything to have them there with her.

"Would you like to dance?" I asked as we finished our meal.

She nodded. "I'd like that."

I held her chair for her as she stood up and took her hand, leading her to the dance floor.

I didn't remember us immediately dancing so close before. Usually, we'd get closer as the dance or dances went on, but this time, Lois moved right in close to me, my chin at her temple.

"You're the right height," I told her quietly.

~~~~~  
Lois

Of course that's what he would think of. I rolled my eyes at him.

"Of course I am," I informed him. "I have shoes on tonight."

I loved being in his arms. I always had. I thought the first time he'd ever held me at all was after we'd won the dance contest in Bremerton. I'd sort of flung myself at him when we won. That night, I'd fallen asleep — or really, more like passed out — with an arm wrapped around him, his bare skin on mine and had woken up in his arms, not realizing we'd made love in the meantime and just happy that we'd survived. I didn't know how many times I'd been in his arms for one reason or another since then, but this was different. He wanted to hold me in a way he never had before and that made it different. The difference was palpable.

We danced for three or four songs and then headed back to our table where a piece of chocolate cake waited.

Clark held my chair and then sat down across from me before cutting a small bite of cake off and holding it out to me.

It was delicious. Almost as good as Clark's cake.

"You have no idea what it does to me when you do that," he said quietly.

I looked over at him. His eyes were dark with desire.

"What?" I asked innocently. I wasn't quite sure what I'd done to evoke such a response, but I thought I'd do it again.

He held out another bite of cake and I closed my lips around it as he pulled the fork away. My eyes closed as the delectable

chocolate frosting assaulted my taste buds.

"That," he whispered huskily.

I was sure I was bright red and, despite my earlier thoughts, was more careful as he fed me the rest of the cake.

We finished the cake and talked for a while longer before deciding it was time to head home.

He walked me to one of the doors to our wing of the house.

"I had a great time tonight," he said, one hand resting on my cheek.

I turned my head slightly into it. "Me, too."

He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me close to him before kissing me — long and slow and undemanding.

A nearly perfect kiss.

"Good night," he whispered when he pulled away.

"It's been a great night."

He gave me another soft kiss before letting me go. "We should do this again sometime."

I nodded. "Definitely."

One more kiss and he was gone.

I sighed happily and headed inside, going up to our room and expecting to find him waiting for me, but he was nowhere to be seen.

I went into the bathroom and changed into a nightgown before taking my hair down and brushing it out. I finished getting ready for bed and headed back into the bedroom.

I noticed a definite chill as I opened the bathroom door and I smiled slightly as I realized Clark had a fire going. It was way too warm for that unless he'd chilled the room down some.

In front of the fireplace was a mountain of pillows and blankets.

Clark was reclining in the middle of them wearing the black silk shirt and boxers he had earlier in the week.

"What exactly did you think was going to happen tonight?" I asked him, an amused tone to my voice I was sure.

He didn't turn to look at me, but I saw him shrug as I walked his direction. "I just know how much you love a fire and chocolate covered strawberries." He finally turned to look at me and I could hear his breath catch. He stood in front of me. "You look beautiful. Is this what I think it is?" he asked, running a finger under the spaghetti strap.

I nodded. "I haven't worn it since then," I told him. "Not since the first time we really made love."

"You look as beautiful tonight as you did then," he told me.

He looked like he wanted to kiss me but instead took my hand and led me to the area in front of the fireplace. He sat back down and pulled me next to him.

"This isn't part of our date, is it?" I asked as I got comfortable.

He shook his head. "This is me feeding my wife strawberries," he said, holding one out for me and then pulling it back and stealing a kiss instead.

I kissed him back, more enthusiastically than I had downstairs. He pulled away and this time let me have a big bite. When I finished, I took a strawberry and fed it to him.

We took turns until they were gone.

He suddenly stopped everything and looked at me, a very serious expression on his face. "I love you."

"I love you, too," I told him, leaning in for a kiss.

This one started soft and sweet but grew quickly in intensity. "I don't want to hurt you," he whispered. "The floor's hard," he told me by way of explanation as he resisted my attempt to pull him on top of me.

I'd told him how much I loved the feeling of his body on mine, but he was right. Pushing the thoughts from my head, I focused on kissing him.

On him kissing me.

On the feel of his skin under my fingertips.

On the feel of his fingertips on my skin.
 On the sensations of making love with him.
 “Are we sleeping here?” I murmured, as we snuggled into the pillows and he pulled a blanket over us.
 “I don’t think that’s a good idea. Christopher will be up early so we probably need to be at least clothed and he’d want to know why we had a fire in June.
 “Good point,” I said, snuggling in closer to him. “That’s all your responsibility, including getting me clothed again.
 He chuckled. “It’s much more fun getting you unclothed.”
 “I know, but you make good points and I don’t want to move.”
 “I know.”
 A few minutes later, we were snuggled in our bed, clothes back in place.
 “You know, if all our dates are going to end like that, I think I want you to ask me out again.”
 “That wasn’t part of our date.”
 I yawned as I felt sleep overtaking me. “Well, regardless, I hope you ask me out again.”
 “Don’t worry,” I heard him say as I drifted off. “I plan on it.”

Part 10
 July 2006
 Clark

~~~~~  
 As usual, Lois fell asleep with her head on my chest as I stared at the stars through the ceiling.  
 I was going to be a superhero.  
 It had been nearly six weeks since Mom had made the costume, but Nate’s health was still kind of up in the air and we were still settling in to our jobs at the Planet — thankfully, things hadn’t been quite as eventful as that first week had been — so I still hadn’t made my debut.  
 And we still hadn’t come up with a name — I thought about using Kal-El but something about that seemed... wrong. We’d have to come up with something else. Maybe something with an ‘S’ since the family crest resembled one.  
 Splendiferous.  
 Yeah. That was it.  
 I sighed and decided that I wasn’t going to decide anything before I went to sleep.  
 I shifted us both so we’d be more comfortable and went to sleep with my arms wrapped around her.  
 We woke with the sun streaming in the windows.  
 “What’s your plan for the day?” Lois asked her head resting on my chest again.  
 “Work and...” I kissed her forehead. “...make love to my wife at some point.”  
 I could feel her smile against me. “We’ll see.”  
 “What about you?”  
 “Work then take Nate to the doctor.”  
 “What do you think they’re going to say?” I asked quietly.  
 She sighed. “That there’s something wrong or something. I have no idea what, but something. Maybe he’s not digesting his food properly and getting everything out of it or something.”  
 “Do you want me to go with you?”  
 She shook her head. “I think it’ll be okay. As long as he doesn’t get that stomach bug I had a couple weeks ago, I think he’ll be fine. Maybe he just needs more ‘real’ food or something.”  
 I glanced at the clock and sighed. “We’ve got to get going.”  
 “I don’t want to move,” she complained.  
 We laid there for a few more minutes before we got up and got ready for the day.  
 We didn’t see much of each other during at work. I was covering a police academy graduation and a press conference at

city hall about the plan to artistically enhance Centennial Park — whatever that meant. Lois was covering some flower thing and then taking Nate to the doctor.  
 It was nearly four in the afternoon when my cell phone rang. I pulled it out of the clip on my belt.  
 “Hello?”  
 “Hey.” I could hear tears in her voice.  
 “What’d they say?” I asked her, my heart in my throat.  
 “They want us to take him to the Met U hospital in a couple weeks to see a Failure to Thrive specialty clinic.”  
 I ran a hand down my face. “How big was he?”  
 “Just over thirteen pounds,” she told me as I heard her snapping his car seat into place. “He’s only gained about nine ounces in the last three months. That’s just not enough — not even given... you know.”  
 I looked at the clock. “I can get out of here. I’ll meet you at home, okay? We’ll talk to your dad and see what he says, okay?”  
 “Okay.”  
 “Hey,” I said with a small smile. “I love you.”  
 “I love you, too.”  
 “It’s going to be okay,” I promised.  
 “I know.”  
 A few hours later we were sitting in the living room talking to Sam about it. We’d given Nate the same Beef Stroganoff the rest of us had and hoped that the ‘real food’ would help him gain some weight before his appointment with the specialist in two weeks and another weight check at his regular doctors’ two weeks after that.  
 Sam sighed. “I don’t see another choice,” he said. “I’ve never noticed any differences between your kids and other kids and I don’t think they would here. Especially if they didn’t notice anything during his surgery and such.”  
 Lois leaned her head against my shoulder. “I know it’s what needs to be done but...”  
 My head snapped up as I heard it and I literally flew to the nursery.  
 ~~~~~  
 Lois
 Clark’s head shot up and there was a gush as he disappeared. Daddy looked puzzled. “Where’d he go?”
 I shrugged. “He heard something.”
 “How do you know?”
 “The head tilt,” I told him.
 “This is still taking some getting used to.”
 “Tell me about it.”
 A second whoosh filled the room, followed quickly by gagging sounds. Dad and I exchanged puzzled looks and headed to the kitchen.
 A grim looking Clark was holding Nate over the trash can as he threw up every bit of Beef Stroganoff he’d eaten.
 “Oh, no,” I whispered. “Is that what you heard?”
 Clark nodded. “It’s all over his crib but I didn’t want to wake Christopher up by keeping him in there.”
 Tears filled my eyes. Daddy and Clark would understand but I doubted many other people would. Of all the things that could happen to Nate, a gastrointestinal bug was about the worst at the moment.
 I even found myself whispering a prayer that this was a one-time thing.
 He was so small... His little body wouldn’t be able to handle something like what I’d had a few weeks earlier.
 It was a better part of an hour before he was truly done throwing up. Daddy had finally recommended that I call his doctor’s office and I spoke with an on-call triage nurse who gave us some ideas to help keep him hydrated and what to watch for as signs of dehydration.
 While I was talking to her, he filled his diaper.

It wasn't good.

Dad left to go to CostMart and get some infant rehydrating drink stuff, but by the time he got back, Nate had nursed again — something the nurse had said to do as often as he wanted — and was sound asleep.

I laid him carefully in his freshly cleaned crib and went back to our room.

Clark was lying on his back, fingers laced behind his head, staring at the ceiling — or, knowing him, more likely the stars beyond the ceiling.

I slid under the covers next to him, resting my head on his chest. “What if he doesn't get better? What if he does have that bug that I had and it's not just that he didn't like dinner?”

His hand rubbed up and down my arm. “We'll deal with it,” he said. “What's the worst case scenario?”

“Hospital,” I said. “IV support to keep him hydrated while his body fights off the virus.”

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Well, that wouldn't be *good*, but it's not horrible.”

“Except that he's half-Kryptonian,” I reminded him. “I know no one noticed anything last time, but the more blood tests he has, the more times he's poked and prodded, the more likely it is that *someone* is going to notice *something* weird.”

“It's a risk we may have to take,” he said quietly.

“I know.” A few tears leaked down my cheeks and onto his chest.

“Hey,” he said quietly. “It's going to be okay, I promise.”

I closed my eyes and just let him hold me.

August 2006

Clark

“What does that mean?” I asked Lois, pinching the bridge of my nose under my glasses and holding the phone between my shoulder and my ear.

I could hear the tears — and relief — in her reply. “It means we're admitting him back into the hospital.”

Nate had been sick for nine days and had lost eleven ounces, taking him back down under twelve and a half pounds — so small he was even further off the growth charts in his doctor's office.

The nurse practitioner had seen him a few minutes earlier and reached the same conclusion we had with Sam that morning. Despite our best efforts, he was borderline dehydrated. That he wasn't *actually* dehydrated was a minor miracle in and of itself. The decision to put him in the hospital to prevent further deterioration wasn't a surprise to any of us.

We spoke for a few more minutes and I told her I'd be there as soon as I could. I set my glasses on the desk and rested my face in my hands.

“Everything okay, son?” Perry asked, clapping me on the shoulder.

We'd kept him updated on the situation with Nate over the last week. “Nate's being admitted,” I told him. “Hopefully, just for a couple days while he gets over this bug but...” I sighed. “They're going to run some tests and stuff, too, to see if they can figure out what else is wrong. We have that appointment at the Failure to Thrive Clinic next week, but it's in the same building so...”

“Are you about done?”

I nodded. “Yeah. A final run though and then I'll send it to you.”

“Do that and get out of here, would you?”

“Thanks, Perry.”

He smacked my shoulder again. “Keep me posted and give the little guy a hug for me, would ya?”

I smiled at him. “Of course. I'll probably be another ten

minutes.”

He turned and yelled at Ralph as he walked off.

I skimmed over my article about the new Library Center, sending it to Perry when I was done. I sent an email to Jimmy, Billy and Serena, letting them know what was going on.

I waved to Perry as I waited for the elevator and called Bernie as I headed towards the parking garage. I filled him in and asked him again if he had any ideas about how Nate's Kryptonian heritage might be affecting him.

I knew the answer before I asked and he knew I knew but understood why I had to ask again.

He didn't know anything that might be helpful in this situation. He promised that he and Ashley would be by later in the evening to see us.

Twenty minutes later, I was buzzed into the pediatric unit in the Ellen Lane Memorial Medical Building. I found the room Lois told me was ours for the next few days.

“Hey,” I said quietly as I saw her staring out the window. I was making a special effort not to hear anything special. Somehow I knew that Nate was somewhere nearby getting blood drawn and an IV started.

She stood up and I wrapped my arms around her. Even though we both knew this was for the best and more precautionary than anything at the moment, and that there was no real danger to our son because we were seeking appropriate medical attention, it wasn't an easy thing for either of us — and I didn't think the half-Kryptonian thing had anything to do with it.

“He's going to be okay,” I whispered.

“I know.” She took a deep breath. “I know it's the best thing for him and it's what we need to do, but it's still hard.”

“I know.”

Lois

I had a hard time falling asleep.

I couldn't believe how quickly I'd gotten used to sleeping in Clark's arms.

Dr. Mayors thought that the only thing wrong with Nate at this point was the gastrointestinal bug. I'd talked with him and the hospital nutritionist and the consensus was that he needed a higher fat, higher calorie diet, even if it meant less nursing and more Pediasure — a high fat, high calorie drink for kids, similar to Ensure for adults. Our appointment in a few days with the specialists would most likely confirm that.

I rolled onto my side in the very uncomfortable pull-out chair. I stared at my little boy sleeping soundly in the metal, industrial, hospital crib.

Clark, Daddy and I were going to take turns here at the hospital with him. Fortunately, I was already scheduled off for the next two days and Clark the day after that.

I finally managed to doze off and then spent two of the most boring days of my life staring out the hospital window.

Nate was doing better. His stomach still looked distended from time to time — like one of the kids from one of those ‘feed the children’ commercials. His ribs were so pronounced and his head so disproportionately large compared to the rest of his body. They said that was actually a good sign at this point, because his brain growth wasn't stunted or anything. His body could catch up, they thought, but it was harder for a head to catch up.

It made sense in my head anyway.

On the fourth day, we went home with instructions to keep an eye on him and follow up with the specialist in a couple days.

A couple days later, the specialists said essentially the same thing. High fat, high calorie diet. Reduce the nursing, increase Pediasure.

I wanted what was best for my son. That went without saying — or so I thought. They'd bent over backwards trying not to offend me while suggesting that nursing wasn't enough for him.

As much as I enjoyed nursing him regularly, and how good I knew it was for both of us, his health was much more important and they all looked very relieved when I said so.

“So?” I asked Clark once the boys were in bed.

“So what?” he asked pulling his shirt over his head.

I let my eyes linger over his now-bare chest.

He grinned at me. “So what?” he repeated.

“When is the new superhero making his debut? Nate’s doing fine. Bernie’s been helping out a lot. When’s it your turn?”

He sat on the bed and held out his hand towards me. I took it and he pulled me to him. “Are you really sure about this?”

I kissed him softly. “Yes. I am. So when is the new superhero making his debut?”

He smiled at me and kissed me again. “As soon as we come up with a name, I guess.”

“Not Kal-El,” I asked puzzled.

He shook his head. “No. I don’t want anything that connects to me — even if it is my Kryptonian name that only six people alive know.”

“Okay, then. What’re you thinking?”

He shrugged. “Something with an S? To go with the family crest thing.”

“Like Stupendous Man?” I asked, one hand playing with the hair at the back of his neck.

He groaned. “No. And not Splendiferous either.”

“Surprising Man?”

He shook his head.

“Stunning Man?”

He rolled his eyes.

“You are you know,” I told him. “You’re stunning.”

“Well, let’s still stick with ‘no’ on that one,” he told me, tangling his fingers in my hair. “You’re the only one around here who needs to be stunning.”

“Fine. Be a superhero without a name.” I snapped my fingers. “That’s it!”

“What’s it?” he asked, puzzled by the leap I’d made without him.

“Your new name,” I told him with a grin.

“What is it?”

I shook my head. “Not telling. Just make sure I get the first interview with you. And I’ll make sure Bernie and Ashley knows what it is, too. Just in case.”

“But you’re not going to tell me?” he asked with a raised brow.

I shook my head. “Nope.”

“So what if someone asks me?”

“Tell them to read about you in the Daily Planet. That they’ve shown themselves honest or whatever with your brother so they’ll have your first exclusive and more information can be found there soon.”

He rolled his eyes. “So I’m pulling someone out of a burning building and they say ‘hey, what’s your name?’ and I say ‘read about it in the Daily Planet?’”

I nodded. “That’s about it.” I stood up and headed for the bathroom, smiling to myself.

Superman.

It was perfect.

Part 11

Clark

~~~~~

She still wouldn’t tell me what my new superhero name was. I badgered her the whole way to work and... nothing.

She just had that evil little smile on her face.

Okay, it wasn’t *really* evil, but she was doing a great imitation of a clam.

We got to work and the first thing she did was go to the

ladies’ room — where she knew I wouldn’t even think about listening in — and call Ashley, who would then pass the name on to Bernie, I knew.

<Nice name,> came the voice in my head.

I groaned mentally. <What is it?> I asked.

<Sorry. I’ve been threatened within an inch of my life if I tell before the timing is right.>

<And when will that be?>

<I imagine right after Lois gets an interview with the new superhero.>

His slight emphasis on the word ‘super’ gave me pause. Surely not. She wouldn’t, would she? Supersomething?

I sighed as Lois walked towards me, that same smirk on her face.

Yes, she would.

And I really was better off not knowing until she decided I was ready to.

She sat in her desk across from me. “So, Studmuffin Man, what’s on our agenda for the day?”

I groaned. “You’re going to torture me all day, aren’t you?”

She smiled at me. “You love it.”

“Not this kind of torture,” I muttered. “Bernie already smirked at me in my head,” I told her quietly — very quietly.

She grinned. “Good, SexyMan.”

I just smiled at her. “I know you didn’t go with that.”

Her face showed wide-eyed innocence that I was sure was all an act. “Why not? You are sexy.”

“But you were too concerned about my rear end being tabloid fodder to go with something like that.”

She rolled her eyes. “Fine. I’ll only call you SexyMan at home.”

“Kents! My office! Now!”

We both cringed. We were early. We didn’t have any stories in the works. We *shouldn’t* be in trouble.

And Perry was still yelling.

I sighed. “Let’s go. Duty bellows.”

Perry was behind his desk when we got in there. “Have a seat.”

I shut the door behind us and we both sat on the couch.

“How’s that boy of yours doing?”

“Much better, thanks, Perry,” Lois said. It had only been a couple weeks, but we’d seen the difference almost immediately. As he was getting better, and as he was getting the higher fat and calorie diet, he was getting bigger.

“Well, here’s the deal. Lois, you got the first interview of any kind with Van-El and you’ve had a couple quotes since then. We want more. We need more information about him. Is he the only one? Are there others like him? Is he really the lead for an invasion like the nutcases say?” He leaned back in his chair.

“He’s been on the scene for a couple months now and no one has the definitive word. He hasn’t done an in-depth interview with anyone and I want him to do it with us. Now, normally, I’d give this to Norcross and Judd, but they’re working on something else big and you’re the only one who’s been able to get close to this guy. He’s fair game. If someone else can get the interview, more power to them, but for the moment I want to two of you all over him like white on rice. Clark, I know you haven’t had an interview or quote or anything with him yet, so you help Lois in whatever way she needs and if you can get the interview together, that’s fine, too.”

Lois looked at Perry. “Let me get this straight. Clark’s not working with me this time around, he’s working for me?”

I could hear the fake innocence in her voice.

Perry was trying not to smile. “Something like that, darlin’.”

“Okay. Just making sure we’re clear on that.”

“Now, go get me a story. With pictures. Take Jimmy with you for that.”

“Okay.” She turned to look at me. “Let’s go.”

We headed out of the office and she grabbed her bag. “You hear that, Kent? You’re not working *with* me, you’re working *for* me. I call the shots. I ask the questions. You’re low man. I’m top banana and that’s the way I like it.” We’d made it to the elevators by the end of her speech. “Comprende?”

I could barely keep a straight face. I was glad no one else was around. “You like to be on top. Got it.”

She turned and raised an eyebrow at me. “Don’t push me, Kent. You are *way* out of your league.”

The elevator opened and we went in. “I know I am,” I said softly. “You are way out of my league.”

The door shut and she launched herself into my arms, trusting me to catch her. “And don’t you forget it,” she whispered, before she kissed me until the doors opened to the parking garage.

~~~~~  
Lois

I almost felt guilty.

Almost.

I doubted Clark or Bernie would give *anyone* a truly definitive interview, but I had a much better chance than anyone else at getting it.

Except Clark.

I let go of him as we got to the garage.

“And don’t even think about using your inside track to beat me on this one,” I told him as I walked ahead of him towards the Jeep. “If you’re good to me, I’ll let you share the byline on it.”

I felt him grab me around the waist. “If you don’t let me share the byline, I’ll go sleep in one of the other rooms,” he whispered in my ear. “And then you’ll have to get up in the middle of the night with the kids and have to sleep all by yourself.”

I grinned to myself. “But then you’d have to sleep by yourself, too, and I know you wouldn’t like that at all.”

He sighed. “You’re right. So you just better be nice or I’ll tell Van not to tell you anything.”

I sighed as I unlocked the Jeep. “Okay, Woodward, we have to figure out exactly how we’re going to play this.”

Clark held my door open for me. “What do you mean, Bernstein?”

“We could have this story wrapped up in about an hour but we can’t do that.” I didn’t bother waiting for him to get in the other side before starting the car and trusting him to hear what I was saying. “You could track him down in about two seconds, but I think we probably need to be seen trying to track him down.”

My cell phone rang. I glanced at the caller ID before picking it up. “We’re on our way out of the garage now, Perry.”

“Good. Head down to the Riverview area. Another four alarm fire.”

“Another fire?” I asked, incredulous. “There was one there yesterday.” I glanced at Clark, who looked grim. “Is Van-El there?”

“ANC shows him on the scene.”

I pressed down a bit harder on the gas. “We’re on our way.”

“Thanks, darlin’.”

I hung up and stopped at the next light, then turned into an alley. “Out.”

“What?” Clark said.

“You want to go and you should. Kiss me and do that spinny thing or something and go be a superhero, SerendipitousMan.”

He groaned, kissed me and got out of the Jeep. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

“I’ll be right behind you,” I promised.

He looked around carefully. Confident that no one would see, he spun into the bright suit.

“You’ll have to show me how that comes off later,” I

mumbled, noting that he turned bright red as he took off. “And don’t you dare give anyone else so much as a quote,” I called after him as I put the Jeep back in gear.

I wasn’t surprised when my phone rang a minute later. “Yeah, Perry?”

“There’s a second one,” he told me without preamble.

“A second what?” I asked, doing my best to sound bored.

“A second hero. This one’s in bright blue with a red cape. I want the story on both of them, capice?”

“Got it. Jimmy’s meeting me down there, right?”

“He’s on his way.”

“Good.” I smiled. “The story’s as good as got, Perry. I promise.”

“Good. You’re a rookie, despite the Toyman, Van-El, colonists’ transport things, and this would be a great way for you to prove yourself.”

“Thanks, Perry.”

I pulled up as close as I could get to the barriers, watching for Clark or Bernie as I did.

There.

Van-El, in his black Suit, was carrying two people out of the building.

My breath caught as I saw Clark doing the same thing. I knew he could do the same things Bernie could.

Intellectually.

I’d flown with him a few times — not nearly as many times as Ashley had flown with Bernie — and I knew I’d get to fly with him many more.

I knew he was invulnerable and I’d seen him grab the handle of a pan or something like that a few times, but never fly into a fire.

I’d seen him start the fire in the fireplace with his eyes and chill a soda with his breath, but I’d never seen him breathing on a fire like this before.

He and Van-El worked together well and before long, the fire was out.

I could see Jimmy snapping pictures on the other side of the crowd.

“Van-El!” I called.

I could see him snap his head around and fly towards me. I’d staked out a spot away from the rest of the reporters.

“Yes, ma’am?” he asked with disgusting formality.

“Lois Lane-Kent, with the Daily Planet. We’ve spoken before.”

“Yes, Mrs. Kent. What can I do for you?”

He’d adopted the stern superhero pose Ashley and I had made fun of him for.

“You can answer a few questions for me. My boss wants me to get the first exclusive interview.” I could see the pack of reporters heading towards us. I had to make this quick. “For now, can you tell me who that is with you?”

“He’s going to kill you,” Van-El whispered.

“I know,” I whispered back.

“He’s Kryptonian as well. *He* hasn’t told me what name he’s going to go by. I think he may think his Kryptonian name is too difficult to pronounce.”

I kept my eyes on Clark as Van-El spoke.

“Well, he needs a name. What’s the ‘S’ stand for?”

“It’s a Kryptonian symbol, similar to your ‘S’.”

I pretended to think for a minute. “How about Superman?” I said. “That fits, doesn’t it?”

Clark’s head jerked up and he stared right me.

Van-El did his best to keep a straight face. “I suppose it does.”

I smirked. “Thank you. Would it be possible to arrange a time for a more in depth interview?”

The rest of the reporters managed to make their way through

the crowd and the firefighters and other emergency personnel and were closing in on us.

He lifted lightly into the air. “We’ll be in touch.”

“You better be,” I muttered, looking straight at Clark as I did.

The two of them flew off together.

“Lois!”

I turned to see Clark pushing his way through the crowd.

“There you are!” I exclaimed, searching his face. There was relief and exhilaration and something else I couldn’t quite define.

“CK! Lois!” Jimmy joined us. “I got some good pictures.”

“Come on,” I said, leading us back towards the Jeep as the crowd began to disperse.

“Check this one out.” Jimmy held up the camera’s screen.

There was Van-El and Superman hovering next to each other. Van-El was pointing to something and Superman was listening intently.

“We’re going to Bernie’s house,” Clark told me quietly.

“Jimmy can come, too.”

I glanced at him, questions written all over my face, and he nodded slightly.

“Why are we going to Bernie’s?” Jimmy asked. He’d heard about Clark’s brother, but they hadn’t been introduced yet.

That was about to change.

“It’s a long story, Jim,” Clark said. “We’ll explain it all after we get there.”

“What’d he say?” I asked quietly.

“He agreed,” Clark said. “He trusts us about that.”

“And the other?”

“He agreed to a limited one, but you have to work *with* me on it.”

I could see the corners of his mouth twitching.

I gave an exaggerated sigh. “Fine.”

“Um, shouldn’t I get these to Perry?” Jimmy asked from the backseat.

“You can send them from Bernie’s,” Clark told him. “He’s got wifi and computers and all that.”

“We’ll file our story from there, too,” I told him. “The appearance of a new superhero.”

My phone rang, as though on cue.

“We got it, Perry,” I said without looking at the caller ID.

“Good. What’d you get?”

“I got a couple quotes. Jimmy got pictures and we may have an interview. Not a complete in-depth one, but exclusive and more than he’s ever talked about before. We’re still working on the details.”

“And the new guy?”

I tried not to smile too much. “Van-El said the family crest from Krypton looks like an ‘S’ and he thought maybe the other guy thought his Kryptonian name would be too hard to pronounce.”

“So they’re related? If it’s a family crest thing?”

I shrugged as I pulled into a spot on Clinton. “I guess so. He didn’t say, but it would make sense.”

“What’s Krypton? And what’s the new guy’s name then? If we can’t pronounce his Kryptonian one?”

I took a deep breath. “I named him.”

“You did?”

“Yep.” I looked straight at Clark again as I did. “Superman. Goes with the ‘S’ and the things they can do are pretty super so...”

“Makes sense. So... Krypton...”

I gave an exasperated sigh. “At least let me get the interview first, would ya?”

“Fine. And the fire story?”

“We just pulled into Clark’s brother’s house. He’s letting us use his computer. Jimmy’s with us and we’ll have copy and pictures to you before you can sing ‘Blue Suede Shoes.’”

“I better.”

“Bye, Perry.” I hung up the phone as we went up the stairs. Clark knocked on the door and we heard Bernie call from inside.

We traipsed in and I immediately set up my laptop on the coffee table.

I had the article three-quarters written in my head before I even knew what kind of emergency Clark would first respond to and my fingers flew over the keyboard.

“Jimmy?” I held out my hand. “Pictures?”

He stuck the memory card in my hand and I quickly sent the story file along with five of the best shots to Perry’s inbox with the promise of more to come.

I sat back. “Okay, that’s done. Now for the rest.”

Clark and Bernie had been talking quietly in the kitchen and Jimmy just looked uncomfortable.

“First things first,” Clark said as Ashley walked in the door.

“What’s that?” she asked.

Clark introduced Jimmy to both Bernie and Ashley then turned to look at me.

“Superman? Really? What on Earth were you thinking naming me that?”

Jimmy looked at him, eyes squinted.

“CK?” he asked, realization dawning. “Is there something I need to know here?”

Clark sighed. “Jim, I’m... Superman.”

With that, both Clark and Vance spun into their Suits.

Jimmy stared at them, his mouth wide open.

Then he collapsed.

Part 12

Clark

~~~~~

Jimmy collapsed onto the couch with his eyes closed.

“You okay, Jim?” Lois asked quietly sitting next to him.

“Um, not to be rude or anything, but when did we decide to tell anyone else?” Ashley asked.

Bernie looked chagrined. “Sorry, Ash. I should have talked to you first. Jimmy is practically Lois’ brother — his adopted brother was Lois’ half-brother — and Clark’s best friend. He’s already made some comments about how much Van-El looks like Clark.”

“Just how big is this little circle going to get?” she demanded. “Lois, Martha, Jonathan — those were no brainers. And I understood Sam; I encouraged it even. I know how important Nate’s health is and that having a physician in the know could be a good thing, but are we just telling *everyone* who’s remotely family? Because what about my dad? Or my college tennis doubles partner? Or my hairdresser’s dog’s sister’s owner’s second cousin?”

“We’ve talked about telling your dad, Ash,” Bernie told her. “And we decided not to for a lot of reasons. Not yet. Not until after the wedding.”

“Do Lois and Clark have to approve that decision?”

Lois and I looked at each other uncomfortably.

“No,” Lois said quietly. “If you trust someone enough to tell them, then we trust you. Of course, we’d prefer that you didn’t just tell everyone, but I know you wouldn’t and neither would we. Jimmy *is* family. His parents adopted my older half-brother. His brother died before I ever had a chance to meet him. We trust him implicitly. He had his own passcodes to the house when Navance was after us. *That’s* how much we trust him. The only other people who had access were two security guys, Clark’s parents, my dad, our nanny and the family that’s worked for my dad for longer than I can remember and not all of them had access to our wing of the house which was *always* locked down. But Jimmy did. I trusted him to protect the life of my son and I

trust him no less now.”

I sighed. “I think, whenever possible, talking about it before telling anyone would be a good plan, but that may not be possible and I don’t know how many other people there might be to tell, to be honest. Perry’s about the only one I can think of on our end as even a remote possibility at this point.”

Lois sighed. “Vicki and Ollie are a maybe at some point, too, but only because they live there. They could notice something or something like that. I’ve known them my whole life. But I agree with you, we should keep the circle as small as possible and consult whenever possible.”

“Um, guys?” Jimmy said.

“What?” I asked him.

“Would you mind reversing that twirly thing so I can talk to you guys and not...” He waved a hand in the air. “...you guys.”

Bernie and I ‘reverse twirled’ and sat down.

“It’s really more of a spin,” I told Jimmy. “Not a twirl.” Twirl was too girlie, I thought, and Bernie agreed in my head.

“Whatever,” he said. “Why are you telling me this?”

“You’re family,” Lois said quietly. “You’ve already made a few connections that most other people won’t because you’re so close to us and we could use your help.”

“My help?” Jimmy asked, puzzled. “What can I help with?”

Lois rested her head on his shoulder. “You’re our resident superhero expert. All any of us know is leftover Justice League stuff and ‘The Incredibles’.”

“Edna would never approve of the capes,” he told us with a smile.

“Yeah, we know,” Bernie and I said in unison.

“Lois and Mom thought it would look great while we were flying,” I added. “And Vortex wasn’t invulnerable.”

“Splashdown,” Lois muttered. “And Dynaguy and Thunderhead and Stratogale and Metaman. There was no Vortex.”

“Right,” Bernie and I said together.

“Right. Invulnerable.” Jimmy let out a long slow breath. “So what exactly is it you need help with?”

We talked for a couple hours about what kinds of things we’d be doing and not doing and how best to release that information to the public.

For instance, we knew we couldn’t respond to every mugging or every petty crime or even every fire — and the same was true even if we’d been full-time superheroes, but we weren’t going to mention that we weren’t; that we had secret identities.

We worked out the details of the article. We’d help at bigger events — like that morning’s fire as often as possible — and petty crime when we could, most likely if we happened to be in the area. We planned regular patrols, the details of which would not be released. A brief rundown of some of our abilities was included. Lois made sure to point out that we were invulnerable — but there was no mention of the green rock, for obvious reasons — as well as the breath and flying stuff we’d already demonstrated publically.

We included some information about Krypton — that the planet had exploded and we’d been able to escape in separate ships that had landed at different times. As far as we knew, we were the sole survivors of the now dead planet. There was no ‘invasion’ coming or anything like that.

We emphasized that we were there to help and that we had no desire to rule the world as had been posited. Those stories had been found in some of tabloid papers.

Lois came up with us fighting for truth and justice. Jimmy wanted to add ‘and the American way’, but we decided against that because we planned on helping around the world as we could — at major disasters, etc.

Finally satisfied, we then decided to sort of hang out for a while — couldn’t let Perry think it was too easy.

Of course, just then, we heard about a hostage situation and so Bernie and I took off for the Metropolitan National Bank with Lois and Jimmy following by car.

~~~~~  
Lois

I was pleased with the article we’d written. It was a good article and it would be a boost for both of our careers. I still felt a tiny bit guilty about how easy it was. It wasn’t like we really had to investigate to find Van-El and Superman, but there was no way I was going to let anyone else, even Billy and Serena, have the story and I really didn’t want anyone poking too deeply into their lives. Hopefully, by giving enough information, we could prevent that.

Jimmy and I pulled up to the bank and watched as Van-El and Superman — I made myself use their hero names even in my head when they were ‘in costume’ so I wouldn’t slip up — consulted with the police. Jimmy snapped a few pictures and I scribbled furiously.

Ten minutes later it was over and Clark ran up from behind us asking what he’d missed.

We headed back to the Planet and showed Perry what we had.

“Hells bells, kids, this is great stuff.” He chewed on his pen as he read through the interview piece. “There’s some questions you didn’t ask — where do they live? Do they expect to be paid or something like that — is there any compensation that they want? Things like that.”

“There were a few questions they refused to answer, Chief. And quite frankly, I’m not sure it’s any of our business where they live,” Jimmy said.

I wanted to kiss him for saying it. Then it wasn’t coming from me or Clark.

“Oh, you’re right. We’re not the National Tattler or anything like that, but it would be an interesting read. Did they bring families with them?”

“They said they were the only two that made it off the planet, Perry,” I told him quietly. “I think any family they had was left behind.” That statement was completely factual. Their Kryptonian family had been left behind, but they were both making new ones here. No one else needed to know that, though.

“How long have they been here then?”

“They didn’t say. Just that their ships landed at different times but both had been destroyed or something. Apparently, they were able to enter the atmosphere unnoticed. At least, the alien, UFO nuts haven’t seen anything recently that could be attributed to them. Van-El said it would have surprised him greatly if his ship had been noticed.” I held my breath and hoped Perry would drop it.

He nodded. “Good work, kids. I smell a Kerth in your future. Now, go get me another story.”

We hurried out of his office and before we knew it were working the phone lines trying to come up with something else. I got a phone interview with one of the hostages and Clark managed to get Henderson — the detective in charge of the arson case — to talk to him briefly.

By five, we felt we’d put in a good day’s work — even if the biggest story of the day had been by far the easiest — and we headed home.

I banged my head against my headrest as I maneuvered through rush hour traffic.

“What?” Clark asked.

“The wedding planner is coming tonight.”

“Can’t we kick her out? It’s the same lady Serena’s mom wanted to use.” His voice had taken on a whining tone. “Serena said ‘no’, can’t we?”

I laughed. “Daddy wants us to hear her out. The wedding’s going to be here before you know it.”

“I’m just glad Perry’s giving us two weeks off. Wedding

Christmas Eve, you and me by ourselves at the cabin Christmas Eve night. Christmas with the family at the cabin. They leave the 26th. And then..." He reached for my hand and brought it to his lips. "You and me, *alone* for a whole week before we go to Smallville the day after New Year's."

"And what about our anniversary?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "Those plans are a secret. A very heavily guarded secret."

"So who knows besides you?" I asked, linking my fingers with his.

"No one," he whispered. "Mom and Dad know they're going to have the boys for a couple days, but that's it."

"Hawaii?" I asked dreamily.

"Not telling."

"You're mean," I informed him.

"I'll tell you this much, the whole two weeks... Unless we're actually with other people, clothing is optional."

I let go of his hand to pat his thigh. "Good. And Daddy said he's getting the hot tub fixed up at the cabin, too. He said he's been meaning to for a while, but he wanted to get it done before winter this year."

"The hot tub in the snow is nice," Clark admitted.

We'd used the one at the house while it was snowing several times — usually to take Christopher 'swimming'. He thought it was a blast. With just the two of us though... Now that things were like they were...

I was sure I was turning red just thinking about it and hoped Clark couldn't read my mind, too.

"Penny for your thoughts?" The husky tone of his voice and the look on his face told me what his thoughts were.

"I think you know," I told him.

"So should I bother buying you a new swimsuit?" he asked.

"Something string bikini-ish and appropriate for honeymooners?"

I glanced at him. "Do you really think a string bikini is the way to go, given all the stretch marks all over my stomach?"

"Well, it'd only be the two of us and I happen to think they're pretty sexy myself."

"Well, if it's just the two of us," I started in what I hoped was my most flirtatious voice, "do I really need a swimsuit?"

His fingers brushed against the hair at my temple. "You have an *amazing* body. You know that right? And I'm not saying that just because I'm biased."

I shrugged. "It used to be better. Then I had kids and I know that goes with the territory, but..."

"I want to have another baby someday," he said abruptly.

"What?" I asked, caught completely off-guard. We hadn't discussed any more kids.

"Watching you while you were pregnant with Christopher was cool, except we were in such a weird space. Watching you while you were pregnant with Nate was even cooler because I knew you were having my baby, but we were still in a weird spot. I want to have another baby with you. To know that you're having my baby and make love to you while you're pregnant and watch your stomach grow and talk to the baby and all those things that didn't happen the last two times because of our relationship."

"Can I think about it? Please?"

"I know I caught you off-guard, but it's something that's crossed my mind a couple times in the last few weeks. And not necessarily right away, but before too long maybe."

I nodded. "I'll think about it. Promise."

We pulled up in front of the gate and it swung open as the censor in the car told it who was here. I was so glad the days of intense security were behind us — for more than one reason.

Two hours later, Beverly Lipman, wedding coordinator extraordinaire, had left and Daddy looked properly chagrined.

"Okay," he said. "That's out. Let's do this ourselves or get

Vicki to do most of it or something because, as much as I love you two, we don't need doves."

Clark nodded. "Three hundred white doves don't say 'I love Lois' to me. Sorry, hon."

I shuddered. "Don't worry. It doesn't say you love me to me either."

Daddy smiled. "Okay then. Fairly simple. Let's just make some decisions."

Fifteen minutes later, we'd decided to have the wedding in the great room and the reception either in a — heated — tent outside or in the house. Outside was more likely — right off the back deck. Or even over the back deck. Part of it depended on the final guest list.

We made tentative menu decisions and Daddy had connections to musicians and caterers and stuff from his fundraisers. We talked about seeing if Perry would marry us. Daddy talked about borrowing one of his friends' jets to fly out some of Clark's family, if they wanted to come. A random thought flew through my head. Who borrowed a jet? Of course, the guy in question was richer than Donald Trump and loved to travel, with an entourage so there would be room, but he'd need a head count before he knew if it would work or not and, regardless of the size of the house — we probably wouldn't want to house eighty members of Clark's extended family while trying to set up a wedding. We *could* but I doubted any of us would enjoy it. We talked about driving back from the cabin — or flying, more likely — and doing Christmas with all of Clark's extended family that came, but again that would depend on head count.

By the time Clark and I headed upstairs to practice for the honeymoon, it seemed that the wedding was half planned.

Part 13

September 2006

Clark

~~~~~

"I *cannot* believe you're holding me to this," Lois whined.

"Why not?" I asked, pulling my Albert Pujols Cardinals jersey on over my head. "I won fair and square."

"It was like two years ago."

"So? You never paid up."

We'd bet on a number of election issues two years earlier and we'd each won a couple of them. This was the one I'd looked forward to collecting on the most but with Lois being pregnant and then Nate's health problems, it hadn't happened the year before.

We'd been to two baseball games together — Metropolis v. St. Louis — my team of choice. I'd grown up listening to the Cardinals on the radio and watching them on TV when the opportunity arose — when I wasn't helping Dad with the farm and it was on one of the local stations because satellite just hadn't been necessary when I was a kid, though Mom and Dad did finally give in — after I moved out.

Some of my earliest memories were sitting on the porch with Pop Pop when Mom and I lived with him and Nana. We'd sit there and drink lemonade or iced tea and listen to Jack Buck and Bob Carpenter and Mike Shannon call the games. I'd close my eyes and imagine the game using the occasional TV broadcast as my 'template'. For a while, I'd even wanted to be an announcer — sitting there with Pop Pop, it had been my dream.

Tears filled my eyes as I thought about the man who had been the first father I'd really known. The third in my short life, and not technically my father, he'd been everything I could have wanted in a father or grandfather. Looking back, he'd been even more amazing than I'd given him credit for. Jor-El had died with Krypton. Chris Davis and Mom had found me, gotten married and taken me home, only for him to die in a house fire saving the baby that would be one of my best friends and, more recently,

cousin-in-law, Josh Irig. Mom and Dad hadn't gotten married until I was five. Pop Pop was the first father figure I remembered.

Looking back, he'd been there for me and Mom when we'd needed a place to live. Mom had needed help with an infant and no real, marketable skills for Smallville — her degree in Art History wouldn't get her a job in town. Mom had helped Nana and Pop Pop and we'd lived with them until she married Dad.

And when she'd married Dad, Pop Pop had stepped back. His role in my life wasn't the same anymore and he knew and accepted that.

><~><~><

"Clarkie?"

I looked up from where I was scuffing the toe of my good shoe in the dirt. "Sorry," I muttered, stilling my swinging leg.

He chuckled. "Bet you're about ready to get outta those clothes, aren't ya, son?"

I nodded. "I wanna go to Mr. Ken... Daddy's house." He and Mama had left a few minutes earlier to go to our new house. I didn't understand why I couldn't go with them. We were a family now — everyone said so.

He laughed again. "You'll get to go over there tomorrow. Nana and I are glad you'll be staying with us for one more night though. We're going to miss you."

"We're not going far," I told him seriously. "Mr... Daddy's house isn't far away at all."

"Oh, I know, but who else is going to get up with me to have milk in the middle of the night?"

I wrinkled my nose. "I don't bet the girls will." My uncle, aunt and cousins were moving in with Nana and Pop Pop the next week — something about Pop Pop not being able to handle the farm like he used to.

"No," he said slowly. "I don't bet they will. But, you know, they don't need a daddy. Their daddy is moving with them."

"I didn't have a daddy," I said quietly. "Till now."

Pop Pop came to sit next to me on the edge of the steps. "You had a daddy who loved you very much." He wrapped his arm around me. "Chris Davis was as good a daddy as you could have asked for and I know he hated that he couldn't be here for you and your mom. But Jonathan Kent... he's a good man, too. He loves your mama and he loves you. Very much."

"I know." I rested my head against Pop Pop's shoulder. "I gonna miss you, Pop Pop."

"I'm gonna miss you, too, son, but I'm glad you've got a real daddy now."

We sat there for a few more minutes before we headed towards the car and my last night at my first home.

><~><~><

"What is it?"

I hadn't even realized that I'd sat down on the bed.

Or that Lois had sat next to me.

And wrapped her arm around me and tugged my head onto her shoulder.

Or that tears had started streaming down my cheeks.

I didn't understand. It had been nearly two years since Pop Pop's death. Why was it hitting me so hard on this random day?

I sat up straighter and wiped my cheeks with my fingers. "Just missing Pop Pop," I said. "He took me to my first Cardinals game, you know. I was four and he and I drove to Kansas City to see them play the Royals." I smiled slightly. "There were more Cardinals fans there than Royals fans, I think. It sure seemed like a lot of red anyway. Just the two of us in the old truck..." I sighed. "I just missed him all the sudden, you know?"

She rested her head on my shoulder. "I still break down every once in a while over my mom and sister and Pop Pop was your first real dad in many ways and it really hasn't been that long."

"I'm surprised Nana's still with us," I said suddenly, softly. "She loved him so much... I mean, I'm grateful that she is, but I

don't think it would have surprised any of us if she'd followed him..."

"I know."

I took a deep breath and turned my head enough to kiss the top of her hair. "I love you," I told her seriously. "I don't know what I'd do if something ever happened to you."

"Well, it's a good thing I've got my own personal superman," she said, humor in her voice. "But I'm more worried about surviving tonight. Do you know what Star's going to think when she sees me in this getup?"

I turned to look at her, laughing when she stood and pirouetted for me. "I'd say I like it, but..." Her red Yadier Molina jersey was inside out. "Not gonna work, hon. You have to cheer for the Cardinals tonight and that means wearing the jersey the right way."

She sighed and tugged it off, revealing a black tank top underneath. "Fine."

"I won the bet," I reminded her. "One game — you and me, Metropolis v. St. Louis — and you have to be a Cardinals fan for the night."

She sighed. "I know. But that doesn't mean I have to like it." She gave me a quick kiss. "Are you okay? Really?"

I nodded. "I am. Really."

"Good, because if you ever make me do this again..." Her voice trailed off as she headed for the bathroom. I saw her pick up a baseball hat and start maneuvering her hair into it.

"What?" I asked, curious.

"Let's just say you won't see me without a jersey on for a while if you make me do this again."

I was behind her in a second, arms wrapped around her waist. "You don't really mean that, do you?"

She laughed. "No, but that doesn't mean I'm looking forward to this."

I smiled at her in the mirror. "I am. Believe me, I am."

~~~~~

Lois

I didn't even remember which bet I had lost that made it so I had to wear the Cardinals' jersey and cheer for them while sitting in my dad's seats at a Metropolis game. The presidential election, I thought. I should have known I'd lose but Clark had goaded me into taking the bet. I had bet against my preferred candidate and lost. I should have known better...

As we walked down the steps towards our seats and I noticed the glances I was getting from some of the regulars, I decided I liked the first time we'd bet on stuff much better. Then I'd won no matter what. I'd been six or seven months pregnant with Nate and we'd gone to the cabin for the night and I'd won even when I'd lost. Clark had fed me cake and chilled the room down so we could have a fire and found a way to wash my hair and give me a scalp massage in Daddy's shower while I wore the maternity swimsuit that made me look like a whale. I could feel myself turn red as I remembered some of the scalp massages he'd given me since we'd become a real couple. There had been an entirely different outcome to those scalp massages. Of course, neither one of us had been wearing a stitch of clothes for most of those.

I sat down and folded my arms over my chest. Between that and the slumping I hoped that no one would notice the jersey I was wearing.

"You're going to have to stand up and cheer with me at some point," Clark whispered, his arm wrapping around my shoulder and tugging me towards him.

"Not if they stink like they did last night," I muttered. It had been one of few stinkers in the Cardinals' season — it looked like they were going to win the National League Central Division title. It was even looking good for them in the playoffs — though those weren't set. I couldn't imagine how excited Clark would be if they won the World Series. He'd been thrilled two years earlier

when they'd made it only to be crushed when they lost to the Red Sox.

"Not gonna happen," he said, removing his arm and popping a nacho in his mouth. "They've only had a couple games like that all season and none back to back."

"Just my luck," I sighed.

"Lois? Is that you?"

I turned in my seat to see Star, with her trademark tin foil hat on. "Star!" I set my nachos down and turned, kneeling on my seat as she gave me a big hug.

She looked me up and down. "Does your Daddy know you dress like this?" she asked.

I groaned. "I lost a bet with Clark and so I have to cheer for the Cardinals tonight."

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry." She sat down. "Now, I need to see new pictures of those boys of yours."

I laughed and shoved Clark's arm. "Pictures, Kent."

He laughed. "Hi, Star." He pulled his wallet out of his back pocket and handed it over.

"Oh, Lois, they're adorable," Star said as she flipped through the pictures.

"Thanks," I said with a smile, reflecting on the difference between this game and the last one we'd been to with Star — Clark and I had barely been talking to each other.

"I've been following your columns. I'm so glad to hear that Nate is healthy. I mean," she added with a shrug, "I knew he would be, but it's nice to see it actually happen."

"Thanks. It was rough for a while, but he's great now."

She smacked Clark on the back. "And good to see that you're stepping up."

He turned and looked at me and then Star. "Excuse me?"

Star rolled her eyes. "You may have thought you were fooling everyone else the last time you two were here, but not ol' Star. I know you were both miserable and that blonde I saw you with... Who was she?"

I sighed. She hadn't actually *seen* Clark with a blonde and she was pretty streaky as far as her accuracy went but she'd been right on that night. "That was Clark's ex, Star. And she was pregnant at the time." I really didn't want to relive that painful part of our lives.

"Well, I'm glad he finally straightened up," she told me. "You two are great together and I knew that even then, but it's good to see that he finally does."

I smiled at her. "It is, isn't it?"

The voice came over the loudspeaker. "Ladies and gentlemen, please rise and take off your caps..." I gave Star a hug while tuning the announcer out before turning and listening to the post office's choir sing the national anthem.

"Play ball!" Clark yelled as we sat down, earning us glares from some of the Metropolis fans around us.

"You're going to get beer dumped all over us, you know that, don't you?" I asked him as I propped a foot up on the chair in front of me.

He shrugged. "Nah. Star'll protect us."

"Oh, no, honey. You're on your own on this one. Both of you are." Star patted him on the head. "But don't worry; you won't get beer dumped all over you."

To my dismay and Clark's great delight, the Cardinals had a great game. A complete game shutout for rookie pitcher Anthony Reyes. Two home runs for slugger Albert Pujols and another one for Scott Rolen. David Eckstein, who had come to one of Daddy's Adoption Option fundraisers — Clark had practically had a stroke when he found out the shortstop was coming to the house — went three for four, driving in three runs and stealing two bases.

In short, I spent the whole night cheering for the wrong team.

I was in a pretty grumpy mood by the time we made it back

home. As soon as we walking in our room, I pulled my jersey off and tossed it towards the closet. "If you ever make me go through something like that again..."

"What?" Clark asked, wrapping his arms around me and kissing me softly.

"I'll rip out your spleen," I told him, my arms finding their way around his neck.

He grinned at me. "Good luck with that."

I kissed him again. "Try me." I pulled away from him and headed towards the bathroom, stripping my clothes off as I went. "You coming?"

A second later we were in the shower, helping each other get clean.

Part 14

October 2006

Clark

~~~~~

I put Nate in the backpack and snapped it around me. Lois put Christopher in the stroller. I doubted he'd stay in there for long, but we also knew he wouldn't last all day without it.

"So are we painting this town John Deere Green again, Ken?"

I laughed. "I guess we can. As long as I win the baseball contest again this year, we're good."

She looked at me over the top of her sunglasses. "You've won *once* in what? Fifteen years? And Chad's in it this year, too, don't forget. He's got a couple years on all of you and he has more incentive than the rest of you."

"How do you figure? I haven't won in front of Nate yet. And Pete and Josh have both gotten married since the last one. They'll be distracted."

"But Chad's still trying to impress Lana. She hasn't actually said 'yes' yet."

I grabbed her around the waist, pulling her back towards me. "But this is the first year you might actually *reward* me for winning," I whispered in her ear.

"I rewarded you last time," she reminded me primly. "I squealed appropriately, threw myself at you and even gave you a big ole smooch right on the lips."

"That's not the kind of reward I'm talking about," I whispered. "We haven't broken in my old room yet. That big ole bed..."

"You have a one track mind, Kent."

I chuckled. "I'm not the only one and I happen to know what you have in that suitcase so..."

Before she could say anything else, Christopher was trying to escape from his stroller. "G'amps! G'amps!"

Sure enough, my parents were headed our way.

We chatted with them for a few minutes and they took Christopher and Nate to go... somewhere. I didn't quite catch where, just that they'd see us in an hour.

Lois' arm was wrapped around my waist and mine automatically went around her shoulders, pulling her closer to me. "So what do you want to do for an hour?"

I grinned down at her. "I thought I was the one with a one-track mind."

She glared back up at me. "I didn't say anything about anything like that." She turned to face me, wrapping her other arm around me. "Though now that you mention it... It has been a while..."

I sighed. "Three days — give or take." My grin grew. "I never have shown you the hayloft, have I?"

"There was a good reason for that," she reminded me.

"Well, maybe I need someone to help me make a new memory or two up there." I kissed her softly. "Any idea who might be able to help me do that?"

"Oh, I might, but is that really what you want to do right

now?" She kissed me again.

"I thought you were the one who said I had a one track mind. Besides, I could have us there in about four seconds."

She sighed and rolled her eyes. "Let's find an alley then, I guess, if you insist..."

"If I insist?" I asked as she grabbed my hand and dragged me towards an area where we could take off unnoticed.

Five seconds later we were in the hayloft and I spread a blanket on the hay. Lois laid down on it and looked up at me, waiting. I floated down next to her, propped up on one elbow. The other hand found its way under her shirt, tracing the stretch marks found there. "I love you," I told her simply.

She smiled. "I love you, too." She grabbed a fistful of my shirt and pulled me towards her. "But we don't have a lot of time."

~~~~~

Lois

Clothes were discarded with surprising speed.

Or maybe not.

Not given who I was married to.

When he had proper incentive, we could both go from completely clothed to no clothes at all in a matter of a second or so, though he'd admitted once that he preferred more human speed for that part of things.

And, really, I did, too, but right now wasn't the time for finesse when it came to clothing removal.

I lost track of time but didn't much care. "So did we erase those old memories?" I asked a while later as I tucked my shirt back in.

"Oh, I don't know," he told me with a grin before turning into a blur, stopping fully dressed. "We might need to do that a few more times — or maybe a few dozen." He pulled me to him, kissing my neck.

"You are insatiable," I told him. "But now we need to get back to town. You have a pitching contest to lose."

"I have every intention of winning," he told me.

"You always have every intention of winning," I pointed out.

A few seconds later, we were back in Smallville.

"Kent! There you are!" Pete smacked him on the back as soon as he was within reach. "Ready to lose this year?"

"Hey, I've won every year I've participated since we got married," Clark told him, his arms around me as we walked towards the pitching booth.

"You've only participated *once* since you got married. Besides, Josh and I both have wives to show off for this year and I have a feeling Chad's trying to impress Lana."

"That's what I said," I told Pete.

"Well, then we'll have to win the dance contest this year," Clark said, moving from behind me, but leaving one arm around my shoulders as we worked our way through the crowd.

"We won the last dance contest we were in," I said, before sobering as I remembered what happened after it.

"What?" Pete asked.

"Nothing," I said, trying to shake it off.

Clark's arm tightened around me and I could hear the emotion in his voice. "That was the night we almost died of exposure. We barely made it to her dad's cabin alive and then the power was out... It wasn't good. She saved my life. Literally."

Pete stopped and looked at me. "I did hear about that. Thank you for saving him."

"I couldn't do anything else," I said honestly. And ever since we'd realized the green rock in Danielle's sculpture was what caused Clark pain, we'd avoided Shuster's Field at all costs.

"Well, he couldn't die without winning the pitching contest once," Pete said, trying to shrug it off.

"I'm going to win at least twice," Clark told him. He nodded. "There's Josh and Kara and Chad and Lana."

"And Rachel," Pete said, trotting off towards his wife.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" Clark asked me quietly.

"With what? You losing?"

He chuckled. "No. Lana and everything."

"Are you planning on spending any time with her in a hayloft anytime soon?"

He stopped and turned me to look at him. He tipped my face up towards him. "You know I'm not."

I smiled. "I know." I kissed him softly. "And you never did those kinds of things with her in the hayloft."

"Nope," he said, smiling back. "I never did."

"Kent! We're waiting on you again!" Pete hollered.

"I'm kissing my wife!" he hollered back and proceeded to do just that.

"For luck," I whispered. "Are you okay with this?"

"What? Kissing my wife?" he whispered back.

I shook my head. "Chad and Lana. All smoochie."

"It's a little weird, but yeah I'm okay with it. I've got you," he told me with a grin.

"Kent!"

"I'm still kissing my wife," he said, before kissing me softly again. "Okay, I've got a contest to win."

"Yeah, right!" That came from both Josh and Pete.

Chad just looked a bit uncomfortable.

I knew he and Clark had only had a passing acquaintance at best — from when he'd dated one of Clark's many cousins. And everyone knew that Clark and Lana had been one of those storybook high school romances that was supposed to last until they were eighty or longer. And everyone knew that the break up had not been pleasant — and because I was pregnant with Clark's baby, not to mention that technically Clark and I had been married over a week by the time the break-up actually happened.

We'd come a long way since then — Clark, Lana and I — but I could still see how Chad might be a bit worried or concerned or whatever. He'd been invited to join because, apparently, it was no fun with just Josh and Pete. Except for two years earlier, Clark had never won. And Clark wasn't local anymore so he wasn't always home for this. Chad was local and I was sure that Pete and Josh were hoping he was as easy to beat as Clark usually was.

Clark kissed me again before letting me go and jogging over to the booth. I hesitated before deciding where to go.

With the giggling Rachel, Kara and Lana?

Kara and I had actually become *fairly* close since our last trip to Smallville over Spring Break for Pete and Rachel's wedding. But there's a difference between emails and instant messages and I still felt a little awkward in person — but I'd felt awkward around most of his family since the story about us being the couple Navance was after had broken during Pop Pop's funeral.

But I still wouldn't have thought twice about if Lana wasn't there.

So, stay where I was?

Find my way somewhere else not too far away?

Sure, Lana had saved Christopher from the Toyman and she'd pushed me and Clark towards each other, but still... We hadn't seen each other since the day Christopher had almost been kidnapped in May. And she and I had emailed a few times since then and I didn't think things would be *too* weird but still...

"Mommy!"

Christopher running towards me solved that problem.

"Hey, bud," I said, swinging him up into my arms.

"Wha's Daddy doin'?"

"He's trying to win a game," I told him.

"He win. He best," Christopher said seriously.

I laughed. "Daddy won last time you were here when you were little like Nate."

"Daddy win dis tim', too."

There was a loud smack as one of Clark's pitches missed and hit the plywood. At the end of the first round, Chad had three strikes and everyone else had two.

Christopher wiggled his way down and ran towards Lana. Martha and Jonathan walked up with Nate at that moment. He'd been moved from the carrier to the stroller while Christopher apparently ran ahead.

It hit me suddenly and I was nearly overwhelmed.

There was a bench nearby and I sank onto it.

Clark was at my side in a second. "What is it?"

I looked up at him, tears filling my eyes. "He can run around. There's no security. The Sceves are back in Metropolis or protecting someone else, somewhere else. He can be with your parents, out of the stroller, and run off and — at least here in Smallville — we don't have to worry about anything more than him getting lost." The tears overflowed. "I knew he was gone, the threat was gone, but to realize that he's out here, running around and..." I couldn't go on.

Clark pulled me up and into his arms. I knew he understood. We hadn't really been anywhere in public since Navance's overthrow and subsequent death so this was the first time we were somewhere that we would have normally had security with us and kept Christopher on a very tight leash.

My arms were tight around his neck, my face buried between his shoulder and his neck as the tears came.

"Mommy?" Christopher was tugging on my shirt. "You 'kay, Mommy?"

I pulled back and looked down at him. "I'm fine, buddy." I pulled far enough away from Clark to wipe at my cheeks. "These are happy tears."

"Cuz Daddy's winnin'?" he asked puzzled.

I laughed. "No, not because Daddy's winning." Clark's still held me loosely. "Just happy tears. You'll understand when you're older."

He sighed. "'Kay."

"Kent! We're waiting on you again!" That came from Pete.

I looked over to see Pete, Josh and Chad standing with their arms around their significant others. I knew that they understood something was going on — even if they didn't immediately grasp what. Lana's head was resting on Chad's chest and I could see understanding on her face.

"Hold your horses," he called back. He kissed me softly. "He's safe. Except from Pete's chili, but we won't let him have any of that."

I laughed and wiped my cheeks again. "No, we won't. He doesn't have a stomach of steel."

Clark leaned close and whispered in my ear. "Not yet anyway."

"Come on!" Pete was starting to get impatient now that I was okay.

"Good luck," I told him, giving him a swift kiss. He headed back towards the booth and I sat back on the bench, pulling a protesting Christopher with me. Martha started to head my way, but Lana beat her to it.

She reached out and brushed Christopher's hair off his forehead. "There's no one after him," she said quietly. "It finally hit you, didn't it?"

I nodded and kissed Christopher's hair, finally letting him squirm away. I watched as he ran back to Martha. "It did. This is the first time we've been anywhere in public without security."

"The 'friends' who always happened to be in Smallville at the same time as you guys?"

I laughed lightly. "I was surprised no one caught on to that. Those were the Sceves — Scott and Steve. Even after three years, I couldn't remember which was which. They thought it was funny. They were at the house after graduation. You talked to them that day, didn't you?"

"Yeah. But I didn't realize that's who it was. I'd never seen them before, except a glimpse at Pop Pop's funeral."

"Right." I smiled at her. "Thank you. For everything. I know the first couple years especially weren't easy on you, but thank you."

We weren't really paying much attention to the baseball booth.

"Hey! Clark or Chad might actually win this thing!" That came from an incredulous Kara.

Lana and I looked up to see both of them looking pretty proud of themselves.

"What's the score?" Lana called.

"Those yahoos are tied and Josh and Pete are down by two," Rachel told us.

"I'm impressed," I said, looking at Clark. "I didn't know you had it in you."

We stayed on the bench, but watched as Josh and Pete got one strike each. Neither one could win.

Clark went next and pulled out two strikes.

Chad took a deep breath before glancing back at Lana. It seemed like there was more than just pride riding on this, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what or why I felt that way.

Strike one.

Lana whistled.

Strike two.

"Tie!" Josh hollered. "Come on, Chad. You can beat ol' Clark!"

Chad took another deep breath and let it fly.

Strike three.

Lana jumped up and ran to him, squealing as she threw her arms around him, kissing him, much as I had with Clark two years earlier.

Speaking of Clark, he had Christopher and was coming to sit by me. "Sorry. Didn't happen this year."

I rested my head on his shoulder. "Eh, you win some, you lose some. Or you... You win one, you lose some. I think I'll keep you anyway."

He laughed. "That's good." Christopher scrambled down and headed towards Martha leaving Clark free to wrap an arm around me and pull me closer. "You couldn't get rid of me now if you tried."

"Good to know."

He stood up and grabbed my hand. "Let's go see what Lana picks. She's never gotten to before."

"Hmmm..." I said under my breath. "That's right. You only won for me."

I knew he heard me and he grabbed me around the waist, pulling me to him as we neared the booth.

Pop Pop had run the booth two years earlier. The next year, Clark's Uncle Jerry had taken over.

He reached under the counter. "Lana, I think I have something you'll love." He held out a brown teddy bear that didn't look like any of the other prizes.

Lana turned to Chad who had a grin on his face and something else I couldn't define. "You didn't," she said.

"I found it online and knew you'd love it," he told her.

"Lana had one just like that as a kid," Clark whispered in my ear. "I forget how she lost it."

"How sweet," I whispered back.

She was looking at it more closely before she looked back up at him. I could see tears in her eyes.

"What's this?" she asked softly.

He took the bear from her and did something to it I couldn't see. He set the bear back on the counter and got down on one knee in front of her.

He took her hand and held out the ring he must have taken off the ribbon around the bear's neck.

“Lana, will you marry me?”

Part 15

Clark

I had my arms around Lois and she was pulled close to me as I watched something I hadn't expected unfold in front of me.

Chad proposing to Lana.

Lois had told me they had fairly set plans for a summer wedding — when Chad was moving back to Smallville to take over the pediatric practice — but to actually see it was a little weird.

I was happy for them. I was glad she'd found someone that she could be happy with.

But it was still a little weird.

I watched as Lana said 'yes' and Chad slipped the ring on her finger. He stood up and gave her a long hug before kissing her, again and again and again. I wondered how Lana had felt when she saw me and Lois kiss the first few times. Probably a million times worse or weirder than I did seeing her kiss Chad.

Lois turned her head to look up at me. “Are you okay?” she asked quietly.

I smiled at her, turning her in my arms. “I have you. I'm more than okay.”

Her hands rested on my chest. “You know what I mean.”

I shrugged. “It's a little weird, but, heck, we've been married almost four years. It makes me... appreciate more what she went through when we got married and flaunted it in front of her. And flaunted isn't the right word, but you know what I mean — we didn't have a choice. And I really am happy for them,” I finished quietly.

“I know.”

Our moment was interrupted by a three-year-old tugging on my pants. “Daddy, I hungry. G'ams say tell you.”

I laughed. “Okay, little man. Let's go find some lunch.”

Lana and Chad were still in their own little world so we headed off; we could congratulate them later.

We had a fun day together. Christopher was old enough to participate in some of the games that he hadn't been two years earlier — and probably wouldn't have been the year before, but we hadn't come because of Nate's health.

Lois and I signed up for the dance contest later in the evening. That would be fun. It was even possible that we'd win again. It had been nearly four years since the last time we'd line danced together though — since either of us had line danced at all, actually — so I wasn't holding my breath.

About two, Mom took Nate home for a nap. Christopher refused to go with her. Granny had offered to take both of them home to put them to bed in the evening so Lois and I could stay later — she'd said she wouldn't stay very late anyway; she wasn't as young as she used to be after all. Mom had promised that she'd run home with them and make sure that they didn't give Granny a hard time. I was sure Granny could hold her own, but I also wouldn't put it past Christopher to test her and he knew better than to test Mom.

We talked about going to Maisie's for dinner, but ended up at Uncle Mark's BBQ stand instead. By the time dinner was done, Lois said his pulled BBQ chicken sandwich was better than the one at J. Buck's — one of her favorite restaurants.

The dance contest was ready to start by the time we'd finished dinner. We came in fifth but had a blast. It was a lot more fun than the first time since we were a couple now. When it was over, she sat down and I was out on the dance floor with Granny before she took the kids home.

I glanced over and saw Lois and Lana chatting at the table. Christopher was sitting next to Lois, eating a piece of pumpkin pie and Nate was sitting on Lana's lap holding a bottle.

“That's the picture you imagined for a long time, wasn't it?” Granny asked me.

“What?”

“Lana, holding your child.”

I spun her in a circle. “Yeah, it was. But it was also her child in that picture. That one there,” I said, nodding at Nate, “is mine and Lois', and that's the way it's supposed to be. Now... I wouldn't have it any other way. I wish Lana hadn't gotten hurt in the process, but...” I sighed. “I hurt Lois very badly for a long time — I'm just grateful she gave me another chance.”

“Even knowing what I know about what happened...”

Granny sighed. “I don't understand why on earth it took you so long to realize what you had.”

“I don't either, Granny.”

She looked like she wanted to say something else but didn't. Finally, she looked me square in the eye. “You take care of her, Clarkie, or you'll have me to answer to, even if I've already gone to join Gramps, you hear?”

I nodded. “Yes, ma'am. I intend to.”

“That's my boy. You know what the smartest thing your dad ever did was?”

“What?”

“Marry your mom. And the smartest thing you ever did was marry that girl — no matter what the reason. I love Lana, you know that, but you and Lois were made for each other. I knew that the minute I met her.”

The song ended and I gave Granny a big hug before she was commandeered by Grandpa Lewis for a dance.

I headed over to Maisie's drink stand to get a lemonade.

I thanked Maise's son for the lemonade and turned around nearly running into the person behind me.

“Excuse me,” I said as I looked up. “Chad. Hey. Congratulations.”

“Hi, Clark.” He turned to the counter. “One hot chocolate.” He handed over the money.

I felt the need to say something. “I'm really happy for you guys. You make her happy,” I told him as we walked away from the stand. “If anyone deserves that it's Lana.” Well, and Lois after everything I put her through, but that wasn't part of this conversation.

“Yeah, she does,” Chad agreed quietly. “I know you didn't mean to, but you put her through hell.”

“I think I'd want to deck me if I were you,” I told him. “Even though it's been almost four years.”

“The thought's crossed my mind.”

“I never wanted to hurt her,” I told honestly. “Things just... happened. Lots of things I didn't always have a lot of control over.”

“She's told me everything she knows about what happened, but also knows that she doesn't know all of what went on between you and Lois.”

“She knows most of it. I can't think of anything she doesn't know, actually.” Except maybe what a jerk I'd been to Lois for a lot of that time, but that wasn't relevant, was it? I sighed. “I'm sure things could have been handled better and I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't ended up in Latislan together, but by then Lois was having my baby. What would have happened between me and Lana once we knew about Christopher...” I shrugged. “Who can say?”

Chad looked like he wanted to say something but I wasn't sure what.

“Listen, you and Lana are much better together than she and I were. Could we have made it work for a lifetime? Probably. We loved each other. Does that mean that you and her aren't *better* for each other? Not at all. I think Lois and I are better for each other than Lana and I were. Lana's a wonderful person and she's going to make a great wife and a great mom and she's already a

great teacher. She's lucky to have you and you're lucky to have her."

"I am lucky to have her," he agreed.

I took a deep breath and went on. "I would understand if you don't want to, but we'd love for you guys to be at the wedding in December. I know it's Christmas Eve and all, and I don't know if you have plans with family or whatever, but really, we'd like to have you there." I hurried on. "I know double dating or being best friends or whatever is out all around, but I think Lois and Lana have buried the hatchet so to speak and it would mean a lot to both of us — for a lot of reasons — but we also understand if you wouldn't be comfortable with that. I know you're living in Metropolis still, but if you're here for break or whatever, Lois' dad has a plane for anyone coming and hotel's taken care of if you need it. Will you at least think about it?"

He hesitated before nodding. "I'll talk to Lana and go from there."

"Thank you." I looked around. "Do you think we better get over there before they come up with some diabolical plan for us?" I asked inclining my head in the direction of where Lois and Lana sat by themselves after Granny took the boys home.

He nodded. "I think that's a good plan."

~~~~~  
Lois

"Do you mind if I have a seat?"

I looked up to see Lana standing there.

"Not at all." I gestured to the chair next to me. "Though you might not want that one." It was covered with the remains of Christopher's dinner.

She laughed and sat on the other side of it. "Thanks."

"Congratulations," I said. "I'm happy for you both and I know Clark is, too." Clark was on the dance floor with Granny.

"Thank you. I knew it was probably coming this weekend, but I had no idea when," she said, fiddling with the ring on her finger.

I pulled Nate out of the high chair that attached to the table and set him on my lap. If I didn't, he'd play with his bottle and not drink it.

"Mommy, I wan' more whi' stuff."

I turned to Christopher who was eating pumpkin pie. "Eat some of your pie first."

He frowned. "Wan' more whi' stuff."

"I know you do, but you need to eat your pie and not just Cool Whip."

He crossed his arms and slumped in his chair.

I sighed and turned back to Lana. "Sorry."

"Can I?" she asked reaching for Nate.

I laughed as Nate reached back. "Sure."

Nate settled onto Lana's lap, bottle of Pediasure in hand.

I ignored Christopher's muttering about 'mean mommy'.

Lana smiled. "You are such a mom."

I shrugged. "I guess. You grow into it."

"We want kids," Lana said, quietly, not looking at me.

"Before long."

"You'll make a great mom." I hesitated. Clark had always said that she would, but was that something appropriate to tell her?

"Clark's a great dad. I always knew he would be." She still didn't look at me.

"Yeah, he is," I agreed, watching him spin Granny in a circle.

"How're the wedding plans coming?"

"Pretty well done, I think. It's at the house and the chairs and all that stuff are picked out and ordered and all that. The tents and everything inside it is taken care of. We'll have to finalize the menu around Thanksgiving, but other than that... Tuxes are ordered and I've finally found my dress so..." This was the hard part. I took a deep breath. "Um, I have something to ask you."

"What's that?" she asked, playing with Nate's foot and not really paying that much attention.

"I'd understand completely if you don't want to, but would you be one of my bridesmaids?" I asked in a rush. I couldn't look at her.

She finally looked at me in surprise. "What?"

"I have a matron of honor and two bridesmaids, but Clark has four guys — Josh, Pete, my practically brother Jimmy — I think you met him a couple times — and his brother."

"His brother?" she asked, shocked.

I nodded. "We found his brother. You'll see when you meet him — there's no way they're not related and they shared histories and..." I shrugged. "They're getting to be pretty close friends, which is great for him. Anyway, he's got four attendants and we were talking about it... Bernie's fiancée is one of the bridesmaids and Kara is the other. A friend from the Planet is my matron of honor. Clark and I talked about it, and we'd understand if you don't want to, but we'd be honored if you would."

She leaned back in her seat. "Wow. I don't know, Lois. I mean, a lot of water's gone under the bridge and I know that we're not... enemies anymore, but your husband's ex-girlfriend? Are you sure you want me?"

I sighed and picked at the table cloth, watching Christopher run over towards Martha. He was probably going to ask for more Cool Whip. "I don't want this to come out wrong — like you're some kind of desperate choice or something because that's not it at all. There are a couple other people I could ask — and will if you decide you don't want to do it — and I would completely understand. I don't have many friends." I didn't. And the only other people I could even think of were Clark's cousin, Danielle, and Jessica. Danielle was the one who'd accidentally exposed Clark to Kryptonite — twice — and even though she'd had no clue, I still felt a bit weird about inviting trouble. And Jessica... She was more than an employee but she'd also be helping look after the boys at the wedding. "Things are getting better, but the last four years... I've been pretty isolated. I couldn't afford to let anyone get close. It started that first semester when..." I sighed. I wasn't sure how much I wanted to tell her about how bad things were between me and Clark during that time.

"I couldn't afford for anyone to know what was going on. I was almost completely isolated except for Clark and..." I shrugged. "I lost touch with all my friends from high school and I haven't made a whole lot of new friends since then. Serena and I have worked together since not long after Christopher was born and she's the closest thing I have to a best friend, besides Clark and Vicki, but she's got more of a mother-of-the-bridle thing going on. Ashley and Kara are recent friends, even though I've been related to Kara by marriage for nearly four years, it wasn't until Pete and Rachel's wedding that we really started to connect. We didn't make it to her and Josh's wedding because of Nate's surgery."

I sighed. "You saved Christopher that day. And you pushed Clark when he needed it. Towards me. You didn't have to do that. Even if you didn't want him, you didn't have to do that — you could have tried to drive the wedge between us even deeper and you didn't. I owe you a lot. And I don't know that we'll ever truly be... *friends* but, I know you're a good person and under different circumstances, I think we could have been. Anyway, I'd be honored if you'd be one of my bridesmaids."

She stared at the sock covered foot still resting in her hand. "How about I'll think about it? I'll talk to Chad and see if we have other plans we can't change — it's Christmas Eve right?" I nodded. "I'll talk to Chad and get back to you later this week."

"That's all I ask. Thank you."

"I do still hope that you two will come to our wedding."

"We're planning on it — barring something unexpected, of course."

Martha and Granny came over and took the boys. I gave both of them kisses and admonished them to behave. Christopher promised he'd be good but I wasn't sure I'd believed him.

I watched as they walked off before turning back to Lana. "I am happy for you, really, I am."

"Thank you." She looked past me. "They're heading our way. Together."

I looked over my shoulder. "Is that a good thing?"

"I don't think Chad's decked him — and he's told me a few times that he's wanted to."

"I don't blame him," I said quietly. "It wouldn't surprise me if you wanted to slap me a time or two."

"I have," she told me. "But not anymore. This is all still pretty new to Chad."

"Right."

A minute later, they were sitting with us and we chatted amiably while Clark put some Cool Whip on and then ate Christopher's nearly untouched pie.

We danced a few more dances before Clark took me back to his parents' house so that we could 'break in' his old room.

He had a one track mind.

Of course, I did, too.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

\*\*\*

Part 16

December 2006

Clark

~~~~~

I tweaked my tie and frowned.

"I need Lois," I told my mom.

She laughed. "It's only an hour until the wedding starts."

"I know that." I sighed and turned to look at her. "I can't ever get my tie straight. She can do it in about two seconds."

"Daddy!" Christopher ran into the room, followed by my dad carrying Nate.

Nate was doing *so* much better, he was like a different child, but — at almost eighteen months — he still wasn't walking. None of the doctors were concerned about it, not even Sam. He'd spent so much time just trying to survive the first six months or so that as long as he continued to progress, they were happy for now.

"Hey, big guy," I said swinging him up into my arms.

"Mommy looks pretty," he said.

"I bet she does." I knew she would. My wife was *hot* — as Pete had told me the first year we'd gone to the Corn Festival together. I resisted the urge to peek into the room upstairs and see how she looked. I'd promised her I wouldn't. She and Vicki had looked for a long time for the right dress and she didn't want me to spoil the effect or something like that.

We'd wanted both Christopher and Nate to be ring bearers, but it's hard to have a ring bearer who can't walk so Nate was out. Christopher was going to be escorting my cousin, Danielle's, daughter, Amy, down the aisle.

Pete was my best man. Jimmy, Bernie, and Josh were groomsmen. As long as the little guy stayed awake, one of them would hold Nate.

Lois had a harder time picking her maid of honor and bridesmaids. Ashley was a pretty obvious choice for bridesmaid so that was easy enough.

My cousin, Kara Clark Irig, who had become friends with Lois through emails and chats over the last couple years — and the last six months or so especially — was another bridesmaid.

The one that would surprise everyone was Lana — not only that Lois had asked, but that Lana had agreed.

But maid of honor... Lucy would have been her first choice, but that couldn't happen.

Finally, she'd settled on Serena Judd-Norcross. They'd

become friends over the last several years and I was glad she had a good friend. She'd been so isolated most of the time, during the first three and a half years of our marriage. I deeply regretted much of what I'd done and part of what had led to her life being that way.

I shook myself slightly. Today wasn't the day for those kinds of thoughts. I'd apologized to her over and over and done my best to make it up to her for being so awful for so much of our marriage.

Christopher was jabbering on about how good Lois looked and how he wasn't supposed to fidget while he was up front with us, but he wasn't really sure what fidget meant.

Perry poked his head in. "You about ready, Kent?"

Mom and Dad gave me a big hug each and then took Christopher with them to go to the front of the house where the procession would start.

Bernie took Nate from my dad as they left and the six of us went with Perry to the great room, taking our places in front of the large picture window. We'd debated for a long time over whether to have the wedding situated this way or in front of the enormous fire place. The winter wonderland outside had settled the question once and for all the day before.

The tent was outside but off to one side so that it wouldn't interrupt the view out the windows behind us.

I took my spot and started to tug on my tie, but Mom had managed to get it straight — around the three-year-old trying to 'help' her — and I didn't want to mess it up.

Dad escorted Mom down the aisle and they took their spots in the front row.

Lana and Kara came next. They both looked great and I was sure Chad and Josh thought so, too. Josh was next to me and Chad was seated somewhere.

I heard Bernie's intake of breath as Ashley came into view. She did look very nice and she had eyes for only one of the El family members at the altar. Serena followed and Billy watched from his aisle seat. Her pregnancy was just starting to show and I was surprised *he* wasn't actually floating. I knew I was going to have a hard time not floating when I finally saw Lois.

Amy and Christopher carefully walked down the aisle. She threw rose petals — of all colors, reminiscent of the ones from the cabin the night I asked her to marry me all over again — and he carefully balanced the pillow on both hands. When they reached the front, they split and Christopher stood next to Jimmy.

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly as the wedding march started and the crowd stood.

A minute later, I saw her.

Her hand was tucked inside Sam's elbow and his other hand rested protectively over the top of it. She held a simple bouquet of wild flowers — fresh from Africa — in her other hand.

The veil hung over her face and I could see tears shining in her eyes even through the filmy substance.

A minute later, I reached for her hand and she took mine willingly.

"Dearly Beloved, I'm so glad you're all here and that the snow storm was three days ago and not today or none of us would be here." There was a smattering of laughter. "This day has been a long time coming. I think with everything that's happened between the two of you, you guys have learned something. Love survives. Survives any joy, any sorrow; all the rights, all the wrongs; even life and death. But then you both know that already, just like you know now, that now you have finally arrived at the perfect time and the perfect place to make this really official." He turned to me. "Clark?"

I took a deep breath. We'd decided to say our own vows — we'd done the traditional thing before. "Lois," I started. "I was fascinated by you the first time I saw you, even though I didn't know it was you at the time. We've been through a lifetime of

hurt and pain and fear since then and came out of it stronger and happier and completely in love. I love your humor, your incredibly sarcastic wit, your ability to find just the right nickname for any occasion.” She smiled at that, her beautiful smile. “I love your passion, the way you dive right in, even when you probably shouldn’t, even when it gets you in trouble.” Henderson had threatened to get us fired at least once a week since we’d started — in large part because of Lois not always looking before she leaped. “Because you refuse to just watch the world, you demand that it be a better place, and because of you, it is. A little over four years ago, you saved my life in the worst snow storm New Troy had seen in over a century. And so today, I give you what I can of the world. I give you my fidelity, my heart, my soul, our sons, our future.” I slipped her mom’s wedding band on her finger; she’d moved the one from Latislan onto her right hand. “I give you my life.”

Perry turned to her. “Lois?”

I knew she wasn’t going to make it through this without crying.

~~~~~  
Lois

Why couldn’t I do this without crying?

I hadn’t missed what Clark had said — *our* sons. Reiterating the belief that Christopher was his son and knowing we might not even know for sure.

“Lois?” Perry prompted again.

I took a deep breath and tried to steady myself. Clark squeezed my hands lightly and smiled encouragingly at me.

“Clark, you’re my best friend. Until you, I never really had a best friend. I had good friends, but not a real best friend, not like you.” I was cognizant that Joe was there, with his fiancée, Debbie, at his side. What he and I had had was special, but it paled in comparison to what I had with Clark. “Falling in love with you was so easy once I let myself. Seeing you with Christopher, and later Nate, made me fall in love with you a little more every day. You have such a gentle grace and such quiet strength and such incredible kindness. You saved my life that night in the snow storm just as much as I saved yours. You were there for me in the darkest days, when I feared not only for my own life, but for the life of our son. You saved both of us from a brutal dictator, even though — at the time — you thought it cost you everything. We’ve come so far since then,” I said, looking up at him through tear filled eyes. “I’ve never known anyone with such a pure heart and today I give you my fidelity and my love and my honor and our sons and our life together.”

I saw tears in his eyes. Many gathered with us wouldn’t understand the enormity of some of what was said, but we knew.

We knew what it meant that Clark pledged his fidelity to me and what it had cost him to marry me the first time. I knew many people wouldn’t understand what had happened between all of us to make it so that I would want Lana standing up with me during my second wedding to Clark, but I couldn’t tell her how much I appreciated what she’d done for us earlier in the year.

Perry looked at the assembled crowd. “Ladies and gentlemen, it’s my honor and privilege to present for the first time — today anyway...” There were chuckles in the crowd. “Clark and Lois Kent.”

“Kiss her, Cuz,” came a voice from the crowd.

“Don’t you dare,” I whispered.

“Sorry,” he said, grinning as he shifted my veil back. “It’s tradition.”

He held me in his arms and bent me backwards, kissing me soundly on the lips until the catcalls and lack of oxygen on my part made it necessary for him to help me stand back up.

I rested my head against his shoulder and only partly because I enjoyed being close to him. That kiss — unlike the one at the family barbecue years earlier — had left me breathless and weak

in the knees.

The recession started and I tucked my hand in Clark’s elbow. We started up the aisle as the trumpet suddenly changed tunes.

I couldn’t help but laugh when the strains of ‘I Feel Good’ blared in the room.

“I do, you know,” Clark whispered, grinning as we walked up the aisle. “I feel great. It feels official.”

We reached the circular area between the staircases and stopped. He kissed me gently.

“No,” I whispered, playing with one of the buttons on his shirt. “It’s not official until I get to take this off of you. I’ve never gotten to *really* do that, you know.”

I’d taken a tux off of him one time, but that was a night we’d rather not remember. That was the night his beloved grandfather — the first father he’d really known — had died of a massive heart attack. He’d been in shock, unable to even get ready for bed, so I’d had to help him. He’d fallen asleep in my arms, crying.

Tonight would be different though. Tonight, I’d take that tux off of him and it would be a long time before we actually slept.

“I love you,” he whispered, before kissing me again.

Perry had finished the announcements and we traded hugs with the wedding party, setting up the receiving line near the down staircase.

We chatted briefly with each of the guests as they passed us. Several of Clark’s friends from high school — including Rachel and Chad — had flown in with about twenty members of his family. There were several Planet colleagues as well as both ‘Sceves’. I still couldn’t remember which was Scott and which was Steve, even though they’d been Christopher’s main security detail for nearly three years.

Clark barely let go of my hand or was touching me in some other way the whole time we were greeting the guests and while we took pictures.

“Wait a minute,” Bernie said as we all started to head downstairs.

I’d noticed him and Clark having one of their telepathic conversations a few minutes earlier. He’d whispered to me and I’d nodded my agreement.

He turned to his fiancée. “Ashley, I don’t want to wait any more.” He took her hands in his. “Marry me. Here tonight.”

“Uh, son,” Perry said. “Do you have a license?”

He nodded. “I do. It’s a long story but we have one. It’s all set to go.” He looked back at Ashley. “Marry me. I don’t want to wait any more for you to be my wife.”

He cupped her cheek like Clark often did mine. “I want to be your husband, to take care of you, love you, be a family with you.”

“Are you sure?” she asked softly, searching his eyes with her own.

“I’m sure,” he answered in equally quiet tones.

“Well, do you want to get the crowd back up here or do this in the tent or what then?” Perry asked.

“Here,” Bernie said. “Right here, right now.”

A minute later, Clark and I were situated on either side of them as they recited the time honored vows that Bernie had said were so similar to ones on Krypton.

“You may kiss your bride,” Perry said when it was all over.

My eyes filled with tears as Bernie kissed her tenderly and I wondered if their PDA thing would change now — and I hoped it would.

They were never far from each other the rest of the night, I noticed. Holding hands, little touches, dancing close together and rarely with anyone else.

We left the transformed living room and headed downstairs and out to the tent. I managed to eat a little bit of dinner, but was

nervous about later. I wasn't sure why except that we'd had a 'no sex' pact for the last two weeks in an effort to make tonight special.

I couldn't remember why we'd thought that was a good idea.

Clark held me close to him as we moved around the dance floor. I danced with Jonathan and Bernie and Daddy and Billy and Josh and Pete and Chad and a number of others. Clark danced with his mom and grandmas and a bunch of his cousins, including Kara and Danielle. I'd even noticed him dancing with Lana and was relieved when it didn't bother me in the slightest. Jimmy and I were laughing when a hand suddenly tapped him on the shoulder.

"May I cut in?"

I looked up to see Joe standing there. Jimmy nodded and passed my hand off to my ex-boyfriend.

"Will Clark mind?" he asked.

I shook my head before he put his hand on my waist and started dancing with me.

"You look beautiful," he said quietly. "And I've never seen you look happier."

"You either," I told him. "Being in love with Debbie really agrees with you."

"She's great," he told me. We danced for long minutes before he spoke again. "Why didn't you tell me? The whole truth?"

I sighed. "I'm so sorry. We didn't tell anyone the whole truth until later."

"Is Clark Christopher's father?" he asked quietly.

"I think so," I told him honestly. "We didn't know it for a long time, though. When we first found out, we thought it was Halloween, but... It was foggy for years, it still is really, but the story we told everyone about the cabin... It's more or less true. We were trying to survive and got caught up in it or something and..."

"I understand."

"I would never have cheated on you," I promised him.

"I know."

The song ended and Clark appeared at my side.

"Take care of her," Joe said.

"For the rest of my life," Clark promised, kissing the side of my head. "For the rest of my life."

\*\*\*

Part 17

Clark

~~~~~

I promised Joe again that I'd take care of her and I meant it, like I'd never meant it before. I'd meant it before when he and I had had that same conversation, but this time I was in love with her and truly committed to making a life with her.

I pulled her into my arms and held her close to me as we danced.

I could see Bernie and Ashley dancing on the other side of the floor.

"They look happy, don't they?" Lois asked.

Bernie looked over at us and smiled. I'd never seen the two of them so close together and not flying at the same time.

<You don't have to stay, you know,> I told him. <You guys have waited a long time for this. Go make love to your wife.>

Van looked at me a bit shocked.

<What? Don't Kryptonians not believe in receptions and head straight to the wedding chamber?>

<Well, yeah,> he responded, <but we're not on Krypton. We don't want to be rude by leaving early.> He seemed shocked that I'd suggest they might.

<So? Take your bride home and make her your wife in every sense.> I smiled to myself as he whispered something to her and she turned bright red.

"What did you say to him?" Lois whispered in my arms.

"That they should get out of here and he should make love to his wife," I whispered back.

"Are you going to take your own advice anytime soon?"

I nodded. "Before you know it." I leaned closer to whisper in her ear. "And we're *flying* to the cabin. None of this slow, driving nonsense."

She smiled up at me. "Good. I wouldn't want to wait a couple more hours. Why exactly did we have that pact anyway?"

He shrugged. "Beats me. I guess it seemed like a good idea at the time."

"I've missed you," she told me. She'd slept in my arms every night, we'd kissed, but we'd put strict limits on ourselves for the last couple weeks. After months of making love often, it had been nearly torturous.

"Not nearly as much as I've missed you."

Bernie and Ashley walked over to us.

"We're leaving," he said without preamble.

"Good," Lois said. "Get out of here. Go be married." She smiled at them. "We won't be far behind you."

He turned to Ashley. "I don't have reservations anywhere or anything."

She smiled at him and kissed him. "That's okay. I'm just happy I'm your wife. Finally. Take me back to your place — our place — and..." She stopped abruptly and looked at us. "Can we leave the car here?"

I laughed. "Sure. We're not driving tonight either."

She leaned in so only the four of us could hear her. "Believe me, if we didn't have such a fast mode of transportation, we'd be borrowing one of the rooms here for the night."

Bernie turned red as Lois and I laughed. "You're welcome to," she told them, "but I understand if you don't want to."

Bernie answered for her. "Thank you, Lois, but that won't be necessary. But *we are* going to be leaving momentarily."

"Good," Lois said again.

She and Ashley hugged tightly, as Bernie and I gave each other a quick hug. We traded and I gave Ashley a big hug. "Welcome to the family," I told her quietly. "We're a bit odd, but you'll love us."

She laughed. "You know I do."

They made their way towards the exit, saying good-bye to the people they ran into as they did. Lois and I were dancing again as we heard the 'whoosh' that indicated their departure.

"We need to do that pretty quick," she told me. "I want to get you out of that tux."

"Are you changing before we leave?"

She shook her head. "I hadn't planned on it. I thought you might want to help me out of my dress."

I looked it up and down. "Can I just rip it off?"

She looked at me sternly. "No. I do have something else special for later though."

I groaned. "Can we leave yet?"

She shrugged. "It's our wedding; we can do what we want."

"Then I think it's time for us to say our good-byes."

She laughed as I led her off the dance floor towards those who were still there.

Ten minutes later, we'd taken off. For the first time since the creation of Superman, I was flying as me. I was in my tux, carrying the most beautiful woman in the world in my arms and we were married — again.

Well, still.

But we'd had a real wedding with our family and friends and our sons there.

It wasn't that the first wedding hadn't been *real* but it had been rushed, forced by a dictator with a military chaplain officiating and a diplomat and a member of 'security' — who we found out later was Jimmy's dad — as our wedding party. And we'd thought it was only going to last a couple weeks and then

I'd be groveling to Lana and Lois and Joe might be trying to make it work again — if he could have accepted the idea that she was pregnant with someone else's baby, an unknown someone's baby. And he would have. He'd offered to marry Lois when she told him — but, thankfully now, that hadn't been necessary.

Thank God for unanswered prayers.

I had loved Lana. I knew that.

But it was nothing — *nothing* — compared to what Lois and I shared now. Would it have eventually grown into something like what Lois and I had? There was no way to know, of course, but somehow, I doubted it.

"Penny for your thoughts," she whispered.

I stopped in mid-air and lowered her until she stood in front of me. "Just thinking how glad I am that you and I ended up together." I brushed the tendril of hair that had escaped back behind her ear. "How glad I am that the only thing I really prayed for in high school was answered with a resounding 'no' and that now I'm here with you. Forever."

"Forever? You're not getting rid of me that easily," she said, her arms wrapped securely around my neck. "Now, would you mind getting us to that cabin? I need someone to keep me warm."

I reached down and scooped her up again. It wasn't our usual way of flying but it seemed to work better with the poofy skirt of her dress.

Minutes later, we landed on the porch of the cabin. She opened the door and I carried her in, setting her down inside.

"Why am I nervous?" she whispered. "It's not like we've never done this before."

I smiled at her and rested my hand on the side of her face, my thumb rubbing over her cheekbone. "It feels a bit different, doesn't it? I mean it's not like we're any more married than we were two weeks ago." We hadn't slept much that night, having agreed to that no-sex pact for the remainder of our 'engagement'.

"I know," she said, fingering one of the buttons on my shirt. "I guess it still doesn't seem really real. Or something. I feel like I'm waiting for a shoe to drop. Not *another* shoe, because I don't know what the first shoe would have been, but..."

~~~~~  
Lois

I did. I had an uneasy feeling inside. I couldn't explain it, but it had been getting worse since we left the reception.

We'd finally had our real wedding, reception and all that. We should be happy — and I was. And if the way Clark had started kissing my neck was any indication, he was happy, too.

"What is it?" he asked, his face still in that curve between my neck and my shoulder. He kissed my shoulder lightly.

"I can't shake it, Clark, and it's starting to scare me."

He pulled back to look at me again. "What is it?"

"Nothing I can define," I told him honestly. "Just a sense of impending doom. Like there's an asteroid heading for earth — one of the global killers like from 'Armageddon' — but no one knows about it yet."

"No more Bruce Willis films for you then," he said with mock sternness.

"I'm serious, Clark. I don't think that's what it really is and if it was, I bet you and Bernie could take care of it, but..." I shook my head. "Please don't make fun of me."

He turned serious again. "Okay. What can I do to make it better?"

"Go check on the boys," I said quietly. "Maybe Mindy's come out of the black hole she disappeared into and is after them or something. I don't know, but please?" Where had that idea come from? I didn't know, but it had popped into my head.

He nodded. "I'll be right back."

He turned into a dark blur, lighting the fire he'd already had waiting before he went.

I crossed to stare out the big window.

Less than five minutes later, he was back, but the pit in my stomach hadn't gone away.

"Your dad put the house on lockdown for the night," he said. "Steve and Scott were still there and they agreed to stay for a couple days."

I grimaced. "I bet their wives weren't too happy about that." "They understand."

I relaxed slightly.

"Hey," he said tipping my face up towards him. "It's okay. It's all going to be just fine."

"I know, but I'm still scared." How I'd gone from inexplicably nervous to scared in just a few minutes was beyond me.

"Do you want to go home?" he asked.

"Could we?" I asked with tears in my eyes.

"Hey." He brushed away the tears that had escaped onto my cheeks. "You really are scared, aren't you?"

I nodded, more tears spilling silently down my cheeks. "I can't explain it but I'd rather be at home, near the boys tonight. We can shut the door and still have our own time together, but we'd be feet away from them instead of miles and miles."

He pulled me to him and kissed my forehead. "It's okay, honey. Really. I don't understand what's scaring you, but I know better than to question a woman's intuition — a *mom's* intuition."

"Thank you," I said quietly, my arms around him. We stood there for a long minute before I pulled back. "Call Daddy and let him know we're coming and let's go."

Clark pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and spoke briefly to Daddy before scooping me up in his arms. I tucked my head in close to his shoulder so he could fly faster and minutes later we landed near one of the side entrances to the house away from any eyes of staff still helping with clean-up and that kind of thing.

We ran into Vicki almost as soon as we got inside.

"Lois? Clark? What are you guys doing here?"

"We came back," I told her. "I've got a bad feeling I can't shake so we decided to turn around and come home."

"But it's your wedding night," she said a bit puzzled.

"Not really," I said quietly. "We've been married almost four years and have two kids so it's not like it's anything new. We'll go somewhere in a few days. We've got two weeks off."

"Well, that's true." She smiled at us. "Jessica put the boys to bed right after you left. Why don't you go check on them and then lock yourselves in your room?" She winked at both of us before giving me a big hug. "Trust your gut, though, honey. God gave it to you for a reason."

"I will," I whispered.

Clark took my hand and we headed up the stairs. We went through our room and into the boys' room. They were sound asleep and we spent long minutes just watching them.

"Better?" he asked, moving behind me and wrapping me in his arms.

I nodded. "A little." I shook my head. "I still can't shake it but I feel better knowing they're close by."

"Can we go back to our room then?" he murmured into my neck. "And lock ourselves in?"

I smiled. "Yeah, we can." I took him by the hand and led him back into our room.

He shut the door and I turned to him, a smile on my face. I reached for him, planning to pull him to me and kiss him senseless, but he held up a hand.

"Hold on." He disappeared and a minute later the room was filled with candle and firelight, with rose petals strewn about the room.

I laughed lightly. "So you're planning on seeing me naked?" I asked, remembering the night we'd spent at the cabin when we decided we wanted to try to make this work for real.

He leaned against one of the bedposts. “You betcha.”

“Good,” I whispered.

In a second he was in front of me, kissing me. Deciding that finesse wasn’t what I wanted or needed at the moment, I began frantically tugging at his tie and fumbling with his buttons.

He pulled away from me after a minute. “What is it? I thought we were going to take this slow the first time.”

I shook my head. “I changed my mind.” I reached behind me and tugged on the ribbon laced up the back of my wedding dress. “I need you, Clark. Now.”

“Are you sure?”

I didn’t answer but kissed him instead. Following my frantic lead, Clark turned on the speed and seconds later we were on the bed together.

I couldn’t stop the tears as we frantically made love.

They continued to fall as I rested in Clark’s arms afterwards.

“Oh, sweetie. I wish I knew what it was that was bothering you,” he whispered into my hair. “I wish we could figure it out and make it go away.”

“Me, too,” I whispered.

He pulled me closer to him, and I fell asleep with my head on his chest, blankets pulled up over us, his fingers gently stroking the hair at my temple.

“I love you, Lois,” I heard him whisper as I drifted off. “More than life itself.”

\*\*\*

Part 18

Clark

~~~~~

Something felt off.

I didn’t bother to open my eyes, but pulled Lois a little closer to me. She shifted in my arms and her arm tightened across my torso. Still without looking, I kissed her hair.

“Morning, beautiful,” I whispered. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas,” she murmured back.

My eyes flew open.

She didn’t sound right.

I looked down at her, expecting to see a mess of dark hair strewn across my chest. She hadn’t taken it down out of the fancy ‘do before we fell asleep the night before. After her unexplained near panic attack and our frantic love making, she’d not let go of me and hadn’t wanted to move, even enough to take her hair down.

Instead what I saw shocked me.

A mass of blonde hair met my gaze.

Lois’ hair wasn’t blonde.

Something inside told me not to freak out. That this was a time to gather information and find out what was going on before making any sudden movements or rash decisions.

I closed my eyes again and turned my ears into the room next door.

Instead of the comforting heartbeats of our sons, two other heartbeats greeted me.

My parents? They were staying at the house instead of a hotel with the rest of the family, but in their usual apartment. Had someone already gotten the boys up and they were getting them some clothes or something?

I listened more closely. No, they were still asleep.

I opened an eye as the woman in my arms shifted again.

The room was the one Lois and I had lived in for three and a half years, but the door to the nursery was gone and the decor was what I remembered from before we moved in.

I wanted to tune in to whoever it was that was with me but I was afraid I knew the answer.

There was only one person I could think of, but it didn’t make any sense.

Was I in Bizzaro world or something?

Lois.

This was her house — unless the world had turned *completely* on its ear and I was suddenly a Lane or something.

I reached out carefully with my hearing and found her heartbeat, reassuring me that she was nearby and asleep.

I tuned into other heartbeats.

There was Sam’s with an unknown heartbeat next to him.

Granny was on the other side of Mom and Dad.

There was Jimmy and someone else. They weren’t asleep but I didn’t listen any further than that.

That was odd. Jimmy didn’t have a girlfriend, not last I’d heard. He dated casually but had never met anyone he wanted to date seriously — not anyone he’d bring to spend Christmas Eve or Christmas Day with.

There was another two heartbeats I didn’t recognize upstairs somewhere.

Vicki and Ollie were supposed to be leaving early this morning to go spend Christmas with her family, but a glance at the clock had shown it was way too early for that. I reached my hearing towards their house, but there was no one there.

I sighed.

The hair moved and the one heartbeat I’d been consciously avoiding filled my ears.

Lana.

She looked up at me, sleep filling her eyes. “What’s wrong, honey?” She brushed her hair back with her left hand.

The engagement ring I’d picked out before the trip to Europe glittered on her finger. Next to it was a gold wedding band.

Surreptitiously, I felt my left hand.

Wedding band.

I sighed again. “Just can’t sleep, that’s all,” I told her with a forced smile. “It’s still early; don’t let me keep you up.”

She smiled a smile I recognized and made me very nervous. “I’ll stay up with you. We can keep each other entertained.”

I smiled again. “You look so tired. Listen, I’m going to go get a drink. Get some more sleep.”

As though to emphasize my point, she yawned. She nodded. “Okay, but wake me up in a bit, okay?”

She leaned up and kissed me softly.

It felt so wrong — something that used to feel so right — but I made myself kiss her back lightly.

She rolled over and I breathed a silent sigh of relief as I realized she was clothed.

I slipped on a pair of pajama pants and the John Deere T-shirt Lois had stolen from me years earlier. They’d been lying over one of the chairs near the bed and I was glad I didn’t have to search for them.

I grabbed my glasses and the laptop bag sitting next to the nightstand. Maybe I could get online and figure out what was going on.

I quietly made my way to the kitchen. Once there, I poured a glass of milk and wished, for once, that alcohol affected me. I popped open the laptop on the breakfast bar and waited for it to boot up.

My password wasn’t the one I remember. Of course not. It appeared I was married to Lana. Why would a Lois related password be on my computer?

I thought for a long minute and typed in the date I was supposed to have proposed to her.

I was in.

Not sure where to start, I finally opened the picture file.

It was as organized as I would have expected on my computer. Lois’ pictures were a mess. Mine were categorized and dated. Hers were in whatever file they ended up in when she downloaded them from the camera.

I opened the most recent folder. There were nearly a hundred pictures in it. All were of me and Lana or Lana. We were at a

number of places around the world — the pyramids, the Great Wall, somewhere that was either the Mediterranean or the Caribbean and she was wearing one of those skimpy swim suits Lois refused to wear because of her stretch marks.

I backed out of the folder and looked through the rest of the folder names.

“Kerths,” I said softly. I opened that folder and found two more folders. I opened the oldest one to find pictures of Billy and Serena with Lois and Jimmy at the ceremony where they’d won the award for their open adoption story. The other one was more recent — from this year? — where it appeared Lois and I had won an award. I zoomed in on the program lying on the table in one of the pictures.

“Lois Lane and Clark Kent,” I muttered under my breath, “of the Daily Planet. Series of articles on Van-El. Photos by James Olsen.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. My brother was here. Wherever here was.

There were a couple pictures of me and Lois accepting our award and a few more of me and Lana and Lois and Joe and one or two of all of us together.

There was one of Jimmy with a smiling brunette that looked familiar but I couldn’t quite place. They were with us in a few of the pictures and there was one of the brunette and Lois.

There was a striking resemblance between the two.

I noted the wedding ring on her finger. She looked a little younger than Lois but that didn’t mean anything.

I scrolled down further until I found a picture of Joe.

With Lois.

Proposing to her.

Joe had proposed to Lois at the Kerths?

Jimmy was in the background and had his arm around the chair of the brunette who was next to Lois.

I moved on to the next picture before going back.

There was a wedding ring on Jimmy’s hand.

Jimmy and the brunette were married?

I opened Firefox and went to the Daily Planet’s home page. I looked for the ‘contributors’ link and found the list of major contributors to the Daily Planet’s news. It was a list of the regular columnists and reporters and photographers with links to short biographies.

I clicked on mine.

“Clark Kent is a graduate of Metropolis University’s Journalism Program,” I read aloud. “He grew up in Smallville, Kansas and married his high school sweetheart the summer after their freshman year of college. They have no children but would like a large family one day. His wife, Lana Lang Kent, works for the Daily Planet preschool. Partnered with Lois Lane on a regular basis, Clark has received one joint Kerth Award for their series of articles on superhero Van-El.”

Well, that made some sort of sense at least. If I really was in Bizarro World.

I backed up and looked for Lois. I clicked on her name.

“Raised in the exclusive Pittsdale community, Lois Lane is a graduate of Pittsdale’s Lincoln High and Metropolis University’s Journalism Program. Recently engaged to her high school sweetheart, she and Joe are planning a wedding shortly after New Year’s. Partnered with Clark Kent on a regular basis, Lois has received one joint Kerth Award for their series of articles on superhero Van-El.”

Okay. About what I expected. I wasn’t sure why, but I did. In whatever Bizarro world we were in, that seemed right, too.

Jimmy Olsen’s bio was next.

“Jimmy Olsen is a graduate of UNT Metropolis’ Journalism Photography program. Married to his high school sweetheart since just after graduation, they are expecting their first child next summer. Lucy Lane Olsen is a junior photographer at the Planet

but plans to open her own studio and work from home after the birth of their child.”

I started to back out of the page when what I’d read hit me.

Lucy Lane Olsen.

Lucy Lane.

Lucy Lane.

Lucy?

It kept repeating over and over in my head.

It must have been her heartbeat I’d heard — not sleeping — near Jimmy’s earlier.

I went to Google and typed in ‘Adoption Option’. Currently, Sam’s favorite of his organizations, they were committed to helping women who wanted to put a child they knew would have special needs — mental, physical or medical — up for adoption and matching them with families willing to adopt those special kids. They also maintained a list of both birth parents and adopted children who were willing to be contacted in case medical issues arose that required the help of the child’s birth family.

It had started after Jimmy and Lois had realized that his adopted brother, Dave, was Lois’ half-brother. Ellen had given birth to a baby while she and Sam were separated during their senior year in high school. She’d moved to another city and they’d broken up. She’d gotten pregnant by a guy she’d dated once or twice and put the baby up for adoption after Sam wrote to her wanting to get back together. She had never told Sam until he found a letter after her death. It was several years before Sam searched for Dave and by then he’d died waiting for a bone marrow transplant. Both Ellen and Lois would have been matches.

But...

If Lucy was alive, what about Ellen? Was she the heartbeat next to Sam?

And Dave?

I clicked on the Adoption Option website and clicked history.

“Adoption Option was created as a part of the Sam and Ellen Lane Foundation. Ellen Lane gave up a baby for adoption her senior year of high school but didn’t tell her husband until many years later when the family of her child came searching for them. In need of a bone marrow transplant, Dave Olsen’s life was saved when Ellen Lane immediately decided to be his donor.”

I read on. “Afterwards, they created the Adoption Option in an effort...” I skimmed the rest. It was basically the same as what I remembered, but with Ellen and Dave alive.

There was a picture of all four Lanes with Jimmy and Dave on the page. I studied his face so I’d recognize him if I ever saw him.

I sighed and went back to the pictures folder.

Christmas last year.

There was me and Lana sitting in the great room off to one side of me now. We’d spent Christmas here? That seemed odd to me — as odd as us spending it here this year did. Four years ago, I wouldn’t have imagined spending Christmas with Lois and her family after Lana and I got married. Jimmy and Lucy were there. Sam and the woman who must be Ellen — she looked like an elegantly aging version of the pictures of Lois’ mom that I’d seen over the years. And there were my parents.

I backed out of that folder and opened the weddings folder. I decided that I didn’t want to see the pictures of my wedding to Lana and clicked on the Jimmy/Lucy folder. Apparently, Jimmy and I were good friends in this Bizarro World, too. It looked like Dave was his best man and I was the groomsman. Lois had been maid of honor, but I didn’t recognize the bridesmaid I’d been paired with. There were reception pictures that included me and Lana dancing close. Lois and Joe danced the same way. Lois and I had danced apparently, but there was daylight between us. We looked friendly but that was it.

Something else occurred to me. I went back to Google and typed in the search word ‘Superman’.

Nothing.

There was no Superman in Bizzaro world.

What did that mean?

I searched for Van-El and found my brother, sans cape, was doing his superhero thing.

My head snapped up when I heard a sleepy voice whisper my name upstairs.

“Clark?” came Lois’ voice again, a little bit louder.

I winced. If she started yelling, it was going to be a bad scene. I was just glad Joe wasn’t spending the night. It occurred to me that he could be one of the other two unidentified heartbeats but at least he wasn’t with Lois.

I zipped up to her room and knocked quietly. “Lois?” I whispered, cracking the door open so she could hear me.

“Clark? Where am I?”

I glanced around to make sure that no one was near and went in, shutting the door silently behind me.

“Hey,” I whispered. “Are you okay?”

“What’s going on?”

I looked around and realized that the room wasn’t decorated the same way that it had been when we’d lived in it for a few days when we first moved in.

“I don’t know,” I answered quietly.

“This isn’t the ring you gave me. And where’s my wedding ring?”

I sighed. That was the least of our worries.

“Come on,” I whispered. “We have to get out of here and go somewhere we can really talk.”

She was wearing warm pajamas and she grabbed a coat. “Fly us somewhere?”

I hesitated. That was probably best, but how would we explain our absence?

“No. Let’s go down to the basement. We can say we were un hiding presents or something.”

“What?”

“Come on.” I used my eyes and ears to make sure no one else was awake nearby. Jimmy and Lucy had apparently gone back to sleep. I grabbed my laptop as we went through the kitchen on our way to the most secluded spot in the basement — backstage of the theater.

Yes, the theater. It had a big screen but also had a little stage. Lois had told me that she and Lucy had loved putting on plays and we were sure the boys would eventually, too.

We shut the door behind us.

“Clark, you’re scaring me,” Lois said a bit louder. “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” I told her honestly. “We’re not home. I don’t know where we are.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, fear written all over her face. “Where’s the boys?”

“I don’t know,” I whispered, agonized. “No, I think I do know. They’re not here.”

“What?!” Her voice raised to a shout. I shushed her, even though the closest person wasn’t anywhere near us. “What?!” she said more quietly. “Did Mindy get them? Or Navance’s nephew? What?”

I sighed. “Navance’s nephew is dead. I don’t think they’re here because...”

I couldn’t say it. It was going to break Lois’ heart. And I didn’t know how to fix it.

“Because why?” she demanded.

I took a deep breath.

“Because I’m married to Lana.”

Part 19

Lois

~~~~~

What?

“What?” I hissed. “Lana? How are you married to Lana?”

Clark sighed. “Sit down.”

“I think I’ll pace.” I started walking around the small backstage area. “What is going on here?”

“I don’t know,” Clark said, running a hand through his hair, “but look at this.”

He showed me some pictures of us at the Kerths — winning one for our articles on Van-El.

“We were nominated,” I reminded him. “But we didn’t win.”

“Here — wherever ‘here’ is — we did,” he insisted.

And the pictures seemed to prove him right.

“What’s that?” I asked, as another picture popped onto the screen.

“That’s Joe proposing,” he said in a voice as tight as my heart felt.

“No,” I whispered. “Not that. Who’s that with Jimmy?”

It couldn’t be.

I knew who it looked like, but it couldn’t be.

“That’s Lucy,” Clark said quietly. “In whatever Bizzaro world we’re in, I’m married to Lana, you’re engaged to Joe, Lucy and your mom and Dave are all alive, Jimmy and Lucy have been married for nearly two years with a baby on the way.”

“But Christopher... Nate...” Tears filled my eyes and quickly overflowed. “They’re not here. They can’t be if you’re married to Lana.”

“They’re not,” he whispered softly as he gathered me in his arms.

“How do we fix this? How do we undo whatever happened to send us here?”

I pulled away from him and started pacing again.

“Or maybe this is all a big nightmare,” I said, arms flailing bit. “Maybe we’re dreaming and it’s a nightmare.” I held my arm out towards him. “Pinch me.”

“I’m not going to pinch you,” he sighed.

“Well, I’m not going to pinch you,” I huffed. “You’d barely feel it and I’d probably hurt myself.”

The tears continued to flow. “I need my sons, Clark. And I love Joe, you know that, he’s always been a good friend to me, but I don’t want to marry him. I want our lives. The one where we just got married again, or still, or whatever, and Navance is dead and we live in the other wing of the house and we’re talking about having another baby.”

“Oh, that’s still possible, Ms. Lane.”

Clark and I both turned to see another man stepping through a window hanging in mid-air. Clark instantly situated himself between me and the man with the reddish beard.

We both stared.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “And who are you?”

“My name is Tempus,” he announced grandly. He paused as though waiting for us to acknowledge him. “You don’t know who I am?”

“No,” Clark said threateningly. “But I suggest you tell us what’s going on or...”

“Or what *Superman*? You’ll fry me with your eyes? Or drop me off on the top of Mt. Everest and leave me there?” His voice dripped with sarcasm. “We all know Ma and Pa Kent would never approve. Just like they’d never approve of you being down here hiding out with a woman who’s not your wife. Right?”

Clark glanced at me.

“So, here’s the deal,” he said, attempting to be dramatic. “I go around hopping through universes and destroy the Utopias created by all Lois Lanes and Clark Kents and their descendants. It’s quite interesting work, actually.”

“I’m sure it is,” I said drily. “What did you do to us?”

"It's quite simple, Ms. Lane. I simply arranged things so that your beloved mother and adored little sister didn't die in an accident and let nature take over from there." He gave a dramatic bow. "You never lived on campus. You never saved Clark here from near death in Bremerton. He married his high school sweetheart. You see the pattern?"

I nodded slowly. "Fix it," I told him, as menacingly as I could.

"Oh, I'm going to let you do that." He tossed a small black box up and down in the air. "At midnight tonight, you'll find this little gizmo right here. You have two choices. You can go back in time and make the accident happen, killing your little sister — who right now is expecting a baby of her own with one of your best friends — and your mother — the woman who gave you life and get your life back. Complete with two little rugrats and a Christmas Eve wedding."

"Or?" Clark said quietly.

"Well, Dave dies, too then, of course. So you'd essentially kill your mother, sister and half-brother, as well as your niece or nephew." He was looking straight at me. "Or you can stay here. All three — or four — of them alive and well. Clark, you could always divorce the little missus, break her heart all over again when she finds out you've been in love with your co-worker for years — or that's what she'll think. And Lois, Joe'll be thrilled to find out you're willing to sleep with a married man, but not him until after the wedding."

"How do you know so much about us?" I demanded. "Have you been spying on us?"

He shrugged. "You're in *all* the history books. There's dozens of authorized and unauthorized biographies about both of you and Superman and Van-El..."

"There is no Superman here," Clark said.

"What?" I asked him, shocked. "You didn't become Superman after your brother appeared?"

He shrugged. "I guess not."

"Oh, that's right," Tempus said, snapping his fingers. "*This* little woman is accepting of the whole alien/super powers thing, but only where no one can see you. And since the world already has one hero, why does it need another?"

He stepped back through the window. "See you at midnight."

The window shimmered then disappeared.

We both stared, slack jawed, at the spot where he'd been.

"That was..." Clark's voice trailed off.

"Exactly." I sunk to the floor. "How are we supposed to make this choice, Clark?" I looked up at him with tears streaming again. "My mom and my sister and my brother or our sons? That's an impossible decision to make."

He sat next to me and wrapped an arm around me, kissing my hair as he did. "I don't know, honey. I don't know what to do."

"Can we go to the cabin and hide? Spend all day doing what we were supposed to be doing all night last night before I freaked out?"

He let out a deep sigh. "I wish we could. Your gut was right. Something was going wrong, though I never would have imagined this."

"So let's run away for the day and come back tonight and get that device and figure out what to do."

"We can't, Lois. We can't run off together."

"Why not?" I asked between snuffles, afraid I already knew the answer.

"Because I'm married to Lana."

Yep, that was the answer I expected. But that didn't make me like it any better.

So what did I do?

I kissed him.

And he kissed me back — his fingers tangling in my hair, his hands framing my face — for long minutes.

I reached for the hem of his shirt. He was *my* husband, damn it. I didn't care what kind of weird world we were in.

He stopped as my fingers brushed his stomach. He leaned his head against mine.

"I love you, Lois," he whispered. "More than anything. More than life."

"Please, Clark."

"I can't, sweetheart. If I'm married to Lana, I made vows. I promised to be faithful to her, I'm sure, and I can't do that to her, to you, to me, to *us*."

"Will you keep your promise to be faithful to me?" I asked him, scared of the answer. "Can you not make love to her while we figure this out?"

He kissed me again, leaving no doubt where his desires lie.

"I won't," he promised. "Even if she wants to, I'll find a way not to. I promise."

"Don't be alone with her. Please. If you're not alone with her..." I knew I sounded desperate.

"I'll do my best," he promised.

"At least I'm not sleeping with Joe," I muttered. "If Mr. Insane-o can be believed."

"We're still going to have to put on a good front today," he said, shifting us, so he was sitting next to me, his arm around me, holding me to him. "No one can know about any of this just yet."

"I'll stay as far away from Joe as I can if you'll stay as far away from Lana."

"I don't even know if Joe's here," he said. "There were two heartbeats I didn't recognize, but I never paid any attention to what his sounded like."

I sighed. "Well, we've done it before..."

"I know, but not with Joe and Lana." I leaned against him even more. "I miss you already," I whispered. "What were we thinking about the last two weeks?"

"I don't know."

I sniffled. "There's something I didn't tell you."

"What's that?"

"You said whenever I was ready to try to get pregnant again, you were ready, right?"

He turned and looked at me. "What are you saying?"

I sniffled again. "I meant to tell you last night at the cabin, but I was too busy freaking out."

"What?"

"I stopped taking my birth control a few weeks ago," I whispered. "After my last cycle. I guessed that I wouldn't ovulate before our two week dry spell and I don't think I have, but... I was hoping that it would be right about now, but I don't think there's any way to know yet."

"So it's possible..."

I nodded. "Yeah. I didn't mean to blindside you. I had... other stuff with me, in case you'd changed your mind but..."

"It's okay," he whispered. "I would have been ecstatic."

"I figured."

His head popped up. "People are starting to stir. I can hear your mom and dad moving around and I think Jimmy and Lucy are getting up."

"Lana's going to be looking for you," I said quietly.

"Well, she'll have to keep looking. I'm going back to the kitchen with my laptop and she can find me there or something." He looked at me. "You probably want to go clean your face up a bit though."

I nodded. "I bet I'm a mess."

"You're beautiful," he whispered.

I had a sudden thought and lifted my pajama shirt. I closed my eyes and breathed a sigh of relief.

"What?"

"When you said that..." My eyes filled with tears again. "You said that the night we made Nate."

“I remember.” He kissed my hair.  
 “I still have my stretch marks,” I told him. “They didn’t just disappear. Our boys are still out there somewhere.”  
 “We’ll figure it out,” he whispered. “I love you.”  
 “I love you, too.”  
 “We better go.”  
 I wanted to kiss him again, long and sensuous and loving and promising more later.  
 But he wouldn’t.  
 He wouldn’t let himself when he wanted Lana when he was married to me — well, just the two times and he was guilt-ridden over those.  
 And he wouldn’t let himself now, even though we knew we were supposed to be married.  
 I sighed. “We better.”  
 I decided I didn’t care and I leaned over and kissed him again, softly.  
 “I love you, Clark Kent.”  
 “I love you, Lois Lane-Kent.”  
 I sighed. “Let’s go.” He stood up and held out a hand to me, pulling me to him for a long hug.  
 “We should go different ways,” he told me. “Different stairs.”  
 I nodded against his chest. “I don’t want to let go.”  
 “We’ll figure it out tonight. No time alone with Lana or Joe today and we’ll figure it out tonight. We’ll get a call from Perry and have to go to work or something.”  
 “Okay.”

He kissed me again. Softly. “I’ll still love you tonight.”  
 “And I’ll still love you.”  
 He tilted his head again. “I need to go — fast, so I can be in the kitchen when your mom gets there.”  
 I squeezed for just a second then let him go. “Go,” I whispered.  
 He disappeared in a blur and I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I carefully made my way back to my room, taking great care not to be seen by anyone.  
 I went into the big bathroom and splashed water on my face, deciding to take a long, hot shower.  
 Did we still have the pajama tradition? I should have asked Clark.  
 I physically missed him. This was going to be the hardest day of my life. I could pretend with Joe and be okay, but watching a married Clark and Lana... That was going to be torture.  
 I made the tears stay inside, willing them back into the depths inside my eyes.  
 I toweled off and put the pajamas that looked the most comfy. I didn’t recognize any of the clothes in any of the drawers or the closet.  
 I pulled my hair into a loose ponytail and headed down to the kitchen.  
 I stopped when I heard voices. Clark was talking to a female. Who was it? Who had he said?  
 Mom.  
 He’d said Mom was heading for the kitchen. It had been... twelve years? Thirteen years? Something like that since I’d seen her. I was going to have to keep my emotions under control — both at seeing Clark and at seeing her for the first time in well over a decade.  
 I took a deep breath and headed into the kitchen.  
 “Well, hi, Pumpkin. You’re up early.”  
 There she was smiling brightly at me as she poured another cup of coffee.  
 “I was just telling Clark that I figured you’d sleep in this morning. There’s no little kids around to wake us all up. We’ll save the early bird stuff for when the grandkids are big enough to understand and too young to want to sleep in.” She put an arm around me as I stood next to her, taking the coffee she handed me

gratefully.  
 “Thanks,” I said, carefully modulating my tone, but closing my eyes as I rested my head on her shoulder.  
 I could sense Clark’s eyes on me. That was how in tune we’d become over the last six months since Navance’s death.  
 “That includes your kids, Clark. You and Lana are family now, too.”  
 “Thanks. The Lanes and Olsens are family to me, too.” I could hear the strain in his voice that I was sure no one else would.  
 Except maybe Lana.  
 His wife.  
 I hoped she didn’t pick up on anything during the day.  
 Or maybe she would and she’d dump Clark after a big fight or something.  
 I sighed and opened my eyes, without moving my head of my mom’s shoulder.  
 I could see what I was feeling reflected in his eyes — in his feelings for me. He knew how overwhelmed I was by this meeting, how overwhelmed I would be to see Lucy and to actually meet Dave.  
 He turned his eyes back to his laptop, afraid, I was sure, that they would betray him and his feelings for me.  
 “Hey, handsome,” came a familiar, and presently grating, voice. “I missed you when I woke up.”  
 \*\*\*

Part 20  
 Clark

~~~~~  
 I wanted to take Lois in my arms and kiss her senseless and fly her somewhere far, far away and make love to her for the rest of the day until we could figure out how to get our lives back.
 But I couldn’t.
 What if we never got our lives back?
 I didn’t say it and she didn’t say it, but I was quite sure she’d thought it, too.
 I heard someone — Ellen, I thought — heading downstairs.
 “I need to go — fast,” I whispered, “so I can be in the kitchen when your mom gets there.”
 She squeezed me tightly for just a second, then let go. “Go,” she whispered back.
 In a blur, I grabbed my laptop and sped all the way up to the kitchen — without ‘whooshing’ a few seconds before Ellen did.
 I kept one ear tuned to Lois and heard her carefully making her way back to her childhood room.
 “Well, good morning, Clark,” Ellen said as she walked in.
 “You’re up early.”
 “I couldn’t sleep,” I told her honestly.
 “Research for your next hot story with Lois?” she asked, putting on a big pot of coffee.
 “Something like that,” I said with bit of a smile. “Sorry I didn’t get that started.” I really wasn’t — I’d rather have spent those few minutes with Lois — but under other circumstances, I would have.
 “Oh, no problem.” She smiled at me. “Perry talks all the time about how well you two work together.”
 “Really?” I was glad I wasn’t taking a drink or something. I had no idea the Lanes were friendly with Perry. They weren’t in our world. Sam and Perry had met a few times at social occasions and stuff, but they weren’t *friendly*.
 “Yep. He said you two are the hottest reporting team in town.” She leaned forward and whispered. “He said you two are going to be better than Billy and Serena before long.”
 I smiled. “I’m sure that’ll make Lois happy to hear.”
 Ellen laughed. “Oh, I haven’t told her. It’d go straight to her head.”
 “Probably,” I said with a genuine smile. It was weird. She

thought we'd known each other for years, apparently, but I was just meeting her for the first time. I studied her carefully out of the corner of my eye as I scrolled through information on my laptop.

I could see bits of Lois in her. Or her in Lois. Whichever. The way she blew on her coffee before she took a sip was pure Lois.

I could hear Lois taking a shower and was half-tempted to sneak a peek to make sure she was okay, but I couldn't do that — for so many reasons. I didn't hear tears which was a good sign, except it probably meant she was cried out.

Watching her and Joe together was going to be torture. Staying close enough to Lana that she didn't know anything was wrong but far enough away that Lois and I were both half-comfortable with it... That was going to be a very fine line to walk.

I sighed.

"You okay?" Ellen asked gently.

I sighed again. "A lot on my mind." *That* was an understatement.

"Well, trying to start a family will do that to you," she said with a smile. "When we decided to get pregnant with Lois, it made for some pretty trying times. And deciding we were done after Lucy did, too."

Trying to start a family?

I managed not to react.

Lana and I were... trying to get pregnant?! I closed my eyes and breathed a silent prayer that she wasn't anywhere near ovulation at the moment. If she was, it would be nearly impossible to avoid her.

"And I know you've had some concerns about whether or not the two of you can get pregnant, but look at your parents. Even if you can't, I bet there's a baby out there waiting for the two of you." She leaned in and whispered. "And you've got connections at an adoption agency."

She knew we might be having problems?

Did she know about me or just that we thought we might have a hard time getting pregnant?

Was there a chance Lana was already pregnant and was planning on springing it on me today?

"And you *just* started trying so even if it doesn't happen right away, don't let it get you down." She smiled. "And think of all the fun you'll have practicing."

I stifled a groan and smiled instead.

"I know you don't want to let Lana down." She covered my hand. "And you won't. No matter the eventual outcome."

Was it possible that we'd gone to Sam and Ellen with our potential fertility problems? Sam was a great doctor, on the cutting edge of medicine, but not fertility. His work — in our world anyway — was in sports medicine and reconstruction of joints and things like that, not fertility or anything remotely like it.

I kept one ear tuned to Lois. She was getting dressed. Seeing her mom was going to be hard for her. Would she be able to take it in stride?

"So what movie did you and Lana decide on?"

"Hmm?" She caught me off guard with that.

She laughed as she poured a cup of coffee. I shook my head as she offered me one. "Lucy and Jimmy picked 'Die Hard' — it was his turn to pick this year; last year she went with 'It's a Wonderful Life'. Sam and I chose that this year because she'd be so sad if she didn't get to see it today. Last I heard, Lois and Joe were talking about one of the 'Back to the Future' movies."

Sounded like every couple picked a movie. What would Lana and I have picked?

"Your parents went with 'Independence Day' again this year."

I shook my head slightly. "Figures."

That was the same in any universe. Both they and Lois loved

that movie and loved to make fun of me being an alien while we watched it.

I wondered suddenly if Lana did the same.

She sighed. "I bet we've got a while before anyone else gets up. Especially Lois. I'm sure she'd love to sleep in."

But Lois wasn't asleep. She was getting closer.

"Well, hi, Pumpkin. You're up early." Ellen fixed her a cup of coffee as she walked in.

I didn't think Ellen heard her sharp intake of breath.

"I was just telling Clark that I figured you'd sleep in this morning. There's no little kids around to wake us all up. We'll save the early bird stuff for when the grandkids are big." She put an arm around Lois, handing her the cup of coffee. Lois rested her head on her mom's shoulder and closed her eyes.

"Thanks," Lois said carefully keeping her voice even. I could hear her heart pounding. She was doing a great job of keeping herself under control.

"That includes your kids, Clark. You and Lana are family now, too."

"Thanks. The Lanes and Olsens are family to me, too." I shifted my eyes from Lois as I spoke. They were family, just not the family they thought they were.

I looked back at her as she opened her eyes to look at me.

I had to look away, back at the laptop, before my eyes betrayed me. How much I loved her.

"Hey, handsome. I missed you when I woke up."

How had I missed Lana heading our way?

"Sorry," I said as she wrapped her arms around me from behind. "I couldn't get back to sleep."

I was sure she wanted me to turn and kiss her but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

Not with Lois right there.

She was staring at her coffee, but I could feel the tears threatening. Her tears. I could feel her tears threatening.

"There you are," came another familiar voice. "I wondered why you didn't open your door when I knocked."

Ellen moved away from Lois so Joe could wrap his arms around her as she leaned against the counter.

"Merry Christmas, beautiful," he whispered so only Lois — and I — could hear him.

~~~~~

*Lois*

There was something familiar and almost comfortable being in Joe's arms, except that they weren't where I belonged. I belonged in the super-strong arms across the kitchen from me.

"Merry Christmas," I said softly back, unable to make myself turn to kiss him hello, though I was sure he expected it.

"We're getting an early start this morning," Mom — *Mom* — said as she poured Joe a cup, handing him the sugar and creamer as she handed him the cup.

"Thanks, Mom."

Mom? Joe called Mom... Mom?

"Two more weeks, Joe," she said with a warning tone.

Joe chuckled. "I keep trying to convince Lois to run off to Vegas with me so I can call you Mom, you know."

Mom snorted. "Yeah right. We all know why you want Lois to run off to Vegas with you and it has nothing to do with calling me 'Mom'."

I could see his grin. "You got me." He put his arm around me and pulled me close to him. "It's so I can get in her bed."

Mom and Lana laughed and Clark smiled slightly, glad I was sure, for the reason why Joe kept trying to push the wedding date up.

"I thought I heard voices out here," Daddy said as he walked into the kitchen. "Wow, everyone's up early for a day we can sleep in." He gave Mom a quick kiss as he poured his own coffee. "Merry Christmas, everyone."

“Merry Christmas,” we all said, practically in unison.  
 “I guess Lucy and Jimmy aren’t up yet?” he asked.  
 “Oh, they may be up but they won’t be downstairs for a while,” Joe mumbled. “That’s us next year,” he whispered in my ear. “It’s usually Lana and Clark, too. At least Dave doesn’t have anyone yet. And how much do you want to bet Martha and Jonathan’ll be the last ones down...”

Dave.  
 My half-brother.  
 He was surely here too.  
 And thinking about him kept me from thinking about what Jimmy might be doing with my — pregnant — little sister.  
 I sighed.

Daddy clapped his hands together. “Okay, let’s get this breakfast started. Clark, you’re in charge again this year. Bacon, eggs, biscuits, gravy, pancakes, all that good stuff.”

I closed my eyes. If we didn’t get this fixed tonight, we’d know in a couple of days if I was pregnant. My appetite would be absolutely out of control for a week or so.

“I’m not all that hungry,” Lana said.  
 I breathed a sigh of relief at that. At least she might not be pregnant. *That* would throw a wrench in the works. As much as Clark wanted to get back to our boys, he’d have a hard time dealing with leaving a pregnant Lana.

Daddy clapped his hands again and spoke up. “All right, Clark’s the cook. Everyone else out of the way.”

I tried not to watch as Clark half turned his head and kissed in Lana’s direction as she kissed his cheek.

I didn’t move as Lana, Joe, Mom and Dad headed to the other room.

Joe stopped. “Are you going to help get breakfast ready?” he asked with a raised brow.

I guess having Mom live didn’t help with my cooking skills.  
 I shook my head. “No, there’s just something I wanted to talk to Clark about real quick. I won’t touch the food. Promise.”

Clark was busy getting dishes out of the cabinets and food out of the pantry and refrigerator.

I stayed where I was, not looking at him.  
 “Some things never change,” he said quietly as he grabbed a spatula out of holder next to me.

“Nope,” I said taking another sip. “How are you?”  
 “Miserable. You?”  
 “Same.”

“I want to...” His voice trailed off, but I knew what he was thinking.

“I know,” I said so quietly no one else would have been able to hear even if they’d been next to me.

“We’re trying to get pregnant,” he said suddenly.  
 “I’m aware,” I said drily.  
 “No.”

He didn’t need to say anything else.  
 “Oh.”

“Not long and apparently not successful yet.”  
 “Thank God,” I breathed.  
 “You said it.”

“She said what?” Lana asked walking back in.  
 Clark smiled at her. “Nothing.”

Lana rested her head on his shoulder before reaching up to kiss him. I couldn’t watch. “I never got a good morning kiss.”

“Earlier doesn’t count?” Clark said, pointedly looking anywhere but at me as he spoke.

“Nope. I was still mostly asleep and you had just turned me down.” I didn’t think I was supposed to hear that part.

I closed my eyes and my head dropped slightly. He’d turned her down this morning. He’d wanted to be with her for so long and he’d had the opportunity this morning. If this had happened a year ago... Would he have then? That was a harder question to

answer, but now, I knew he wasn’t interested.

“Uh, sorry about that.”  
 “What’d you do?”  
 “Oh, research.”  
 “Clark,” she said, crossing her arms in front of her. “It’s Christmas.”

“I know, but no one else was up and I wanted to check out a couple of things for one of the stories we’ve got in the works.”

That was close enough to true. We’d never be able to publish it, of course, but what a story it was.

“No more, Clark. I mean it.”  
 “I know,” he said hesitantly. He didn’t look at me again as he kissed her head. “Don’t worry about it. I’ll make breakfast. Go have a seat and watch the parade or whatever they’ve got on in there.”

“It’s too early for the parade.”  
 “Ah.”  
 “But I do think I’m going to go curl up under a blanket somewhere.”

“Good plan.”  
 She kissed him again — on the lips — and went back to the great room.

“What’re we going to do, Clark?” I whispered, fighting the tears. “I don’t think I can do this.”

“Sure you can,” he replied. “Just remember the boys. Christopher and Nate. You’re doing this for them. We have to make it through the day and then we’ll get home.”

“What about my mom? And Lucy? And Jimmy’s baby? And Dave? Changing the past back will essentially kill all of them.”

He let out a deep breath. “We’ll figure something out. I promise.”

“You can’t promise that.”  
 “I promise — not alone with her.”

“Thank you.”  
 “This morning...”  
 “I think I got the picture.”  
 “Nothing...”

“I know.” I didn’t want any details of what she might have tried before he turned her down.

He reached for the rolling pin sitting on a holder near me. “I love you,” he whispered.

“I know,” I whispered back. “I love you, too. More than anything.”

“I’ve loved you since the beginning.”  
 “I’ll love you until the end.”

Where that had come from I didn’t know. We’d said something similar once before, but that was it.

But it was true.  
 I’d loved Clark since the beginning and I’d love him till the end.

He felt the same way.  
 I knew he did.

We just had to make it through the day and then we’d figure this mess out.

\*\*\*

Part 21  
*Lois*

I’d told everyone I had a headache and went up to my room to lie down for a bit after lunch.

The morning had been hard. I’d stayed as busy as I could, but had to spend some time with Joe — and had to watch Clark with Lana.

Martha had come down and helped Clark with breakfast in the kitchen.

I curled up on the bed with a teddy bear I remembered from childhood and missing my Clarkie Bear.

“Clark,” I whispered, “if you can hear me and come up for a minute...” I willed the tears back in. “I miss you.”

I sighed. Even he had heard me... “I understand if you can’t — or even won’t — though. Being alone... With me... How long until Perry ‘calls us in’?”

The door to the balcony slid open. I didn’t bother looking — only one person would be coming in that way.

“Hi,” I said quietly.

“Hey. How’s your head?”

I moved just enough to shrug as he came to sit next to me on the bed. “Same as it always is after a crying jag.”

“Did you take anything?”

I shook my head. “No. A headache gives me a reason to be off.”

“Right.”

I didn’t want to ask him what I wanted to ask him. If being with Lana — even like this — was what he’d thought it would be before we got married.

“I miss you, too,” he said quietly. “I was really looking forward to spending Christmas together this year. I got you a great present and everything.”

I smiled slightly. “What?”

“Uh huh,” he said brushing my hair back off my face. “Not telling. You’ll see when we get out of this mess.”

“What if we don’t get out of it, Clark? Then what? Am I supposed to marry Joe and pretend to be happy? Are you supposed to have babies with Lana?”

“I don’t know.” I could hear the tears in his voice.

“Or do we leave them and run off together? Do we tell them the whole universe hopping truth? But even then we wouldn’t have Christopher and Nate,” I pointed out. “Christopher’s three and a half in our original universe or whatever and Nate’s almost eighteen months. And what if I am pregnant from last night? How do we explain that?”

“We’ll cross those bridges when we get to them,” he said quietly.

“I don’t want to cross them. I want to go home,” I told him. “I want to wake up to Christmas morning with our sons. I want to make love to my husband.”

“I know. I want that, too, sweetheart. I want to do what we’d planned for the next week not universe hop or something.” His fingers continued to play with my hair. “I need to get back downstairs, though,” he said quietly.

“I know.”

His head snapped up. “Joe’s on his way up to check on you.” “Should we go see Bernie later?” I asked.

Clark sighed. “I don’t know. I don’t know that I know him in this world.”

“Try to ask subtle questions? I find it hard to believe any version of you wouldn’t have gone looking for his brother when Van-El showed up.”

“I know.” He kissed my forehead softly. “I gotta go.”

“I know.”

“I love *you*, Lois, and I don’t want to be anywhere else.”

How well he knew me.

“I know. And I love you.” I finally looked up at him. “More than anything.”

“We’ll figure this out,” he promised me again for the umpteenth time.

He leaned over and kissed my lips softly. “Joe’ll be here in just a second.” He kissed me again and was gone.

Tears overflowed — no matter how hard I tried, they wouldn’t stay in.

There was a quiet knock on the door as it opened. “Lois?” Joe called, poking his head in.

I rolled onto my back. “Come on in,” I said.

“How’re you feeling?” he asked, sitting right where Clark

had just been and brushing my hair back just like Clark had.

“My head hurts.” That was the honest truth.

“I’m sorry.”

I gave him a half-smile. “It’s not your fault.”

“You know what’s good for headaches?”

“What?” I felt like I should know this answer.

“Run off to Vegas with me and we’ll find out.” He was grinning.

I smiled weakly. “Sorry. Not up for that.”

“Well, we don’t *have* to wait till it’s all legal, do we?” he asked, stretching out beside me on the bed.

“Joe,” I answered with a warning tone in my voice.

“I know.” He propped himself up on his elbow, kissing my forehead as he did. “Two more weeks.”

“Two more weeks,” I echoed.

“We’ve been waiting a long time for this.”

“I know.”

“I love you, Lois Lane.”

I smiled weakly again. “I know you do.” I wanted to tell him I loved him back — that was what he expected to hear and I *did* love him even if not like that — but I just couldn’t.

He looked slightly caught off guard by that but then he kissed me and I fought to keep the tears from flowing again. It was a nice kiss but it didn’t evoke the same feelings a kiss from Clark did.

“What is it?” he asked, concerned.

“Just my head,” I said.

“I’m going to go get your dad. You’ve never had a migraine like this before, have you?”

“Don’t bother Daddy,” I told him. “I just need to get some sleep. I didn’t sleep well last night and that’s not helping.”

He settled in next to me and pulled me to him. I wanted to fight it but I couldn’t. I could only hope Clark would understand. He should — he’d woken up in Lana’s arms earlier.

“I’ll stay till you’re asleep,” he whispered, kissing my forehead again.

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to.”

I sighed and closed my eyes, willing myself to sleep.

~~~~~

Clark

I stifled a sigh. I kept an ear on the conversation between Lois and Joe and was so glad that they were still waiting for their wedding night. I knew Lana and I were... doing the kinds of things I should only be doing with Lois and I didn’t know what I was going to do if she tried to get me alone — except find a way to avoid it.

“Clark, will you help me make some hot chocolate for everyone?” Mom startled me.

“Sure,” I replied — quickly, but hopefully not too quickly. I moved from Lana’s side and headed into the kitchen.

We made it into the kitchen and Mom just stopped and looked at me.

“What?” I asked, hoping I didn’t know what.

“What’s going on?”

“What are you talking about?” I asked, getting the stuff out for hot chocolate.

“Something’s off here today and I want to know what it is.”

I sighed. “It’s nothing, Mom.”

“Don’t give me that, Clark Jerome Davis Kent.”

Well, that answered the question about Chris and my mom and this universe.

“It’s nothing I can talk about, how’s that?”

“What’s going on with you and Lois?”

My head snapped up and I couldn’t stop it. “What?”

“You and Lois. You’ve been looking at her all day and she’s been looking at you when you think no one else is looking.” She

leaned closer to me and gave me the sternest glare I'd ever seen. "What is going on between you and Lois? You two aren't... Are you? Because that's what the looks I've seen say and, I swear to you, Clark, if you ever cheat on Lana, you'll have me to deal with."

I closed my eyes and leaned against the counter, covering my hands with my face before running them through my hair.

"Cl-ark."

"It's not like that, Mom. I swear. I can't tell you what's going on, but I'd never cheat on my wife." Whichever wife it was we were talking about.

"Then what's it like?"

I saw Joe coming back into the living room and listened for Lois again and sighed.

"What?"

"Lois is asleep and you'll never believe the story without her corroboration and even then it's iffy." My parents we could trust, maybe they could help figure something out, but I couldn't tell them without talking to Lois first. "And really, it's more her story to tell."

"Well, something had to have happened overnight or something, because you guys were all fine yesterday."

"Kind of." Overnight in what universe? I sighed. "I need to ask you something and I need you to just answer and, if it's okay with Lois since it all ties together, I'll tell you why later, but for now I just need an answer."

She nodded slowly. "We'll see what the question is."

"Who knows about me?" I asked without looking at her.

"Why?"

"Please, Mom."

She sighed. "Lana, Sam and Ellen."

"Does Lois know? Jimmy and Lucy?"

"Not that you've ever said."

I nodded. "Why do Sam and Ellen know?"

"You and Lana were worried about whether or not you could have kids so you went to them." She eyed me. "You know this stuff, Clark, why are you asking me these things?"

"I can't tell you that. Not yet."

She looked at me for a long time before nodding.

"One more. Do I know Van-El?"

She gave me an odd look. "You talked about going to see him sometime and trying to find out what he knew about Krypton and all that, but you never did. You never said why."

I nodded slowly. "That's what I thought."

Ellen walked in just then.

Mom looked sternly at me and whispered so only I could hear. "I don't care what Lois says, you will give us some answers later, young man."

I didn't respond but turned to talk to Ellen.

The afternoon seemed to drag on. Lois finally made another appearance, but didn't do much but lie on the couch.

The movie marathon started in the basement theater. Lana seemed to indicate that she wanted to make-out under cover of darkness, but I tried to pretend I didn't catch her hints.

I went to the bathroom in the middle of 'Independence Day' and found Lois in the hall when I headed back.

"Hi," she said quietly.

"Hey," I sighed.

"What?"

"Mom called me on it earlier."

She winced. "We should have known."

"Your parents know about me and I never went to meet Van."

"You asked?" she asked me, surprised.

"I told her I needed answers, no questions asked, and she said we were going to tell her and Dad the whole story later."

"We?"

"I told her it was your story to tell."

"Ah."

"Now's as good a time as any."

The voice startled both of us and we turned to see my mom and dad standing there.

I looked at Lois, who nodded. "Okay. Let's go somewhere where no one else is going to hear."

"Where?" Mom asked.

"How about the room you're staying in?"

Lois turned and headed towards the stairs to the apartment.

"Lois," I started. She stopped and looked at me. "They're staying on the other side. In that middle room."

"Oh." She glanced back and forth between the three of us. "Right."

We started towards that part of the house. By the time we entered the room my parents were using, Lois was in tears again.

Mom looked at her, concerned. "What is it, Lois?" She turned to me. "I can't do this, Clark. Not here."

I couldn't help it. I pulled her in my arms and held her close to me. "We'll find them, honey, I promise."

I didn't look at my parents but I could imagine and when I finally did, they looked about like I expected.

Fuming.

I sighed without letting go of Lois. "Have a seat and we'll tell you everything," I promised.

We sat in the seating area of their room. Lois sat in one chair and I sat in the other.

"What's going on?" Dad asked, quietly. Quiet Dad was worse than yelling Dad any day. In any universe.

"We're not who you think we are," I said quietly.

"Then who exactly are you?" Mom asked with a raised brow.

I looked at Lois and took her hand. "I'm Clark Kent and, this is my wife, Lois Lane-Kent."

Part 22

Lois

~~~~~

I wasn't quite sure how I'd expected Clark to tell them but that sure wasn't it.

The silence in the room stretched on into seeming eternity.

"Would you mind repeating that?" Jonathan said slowly.

Clark sighed. "I know it's hard to believe, but it's the God's honest truth. The way we remember it, last night, Lois and I had our official wedding, we went to sleep together in the room next door and this morning I woke up in there with Lana. Lois woke up in the room she'd lived in growing up."

"Why were you staying here if you just got married? Why weren't you at a nice hotel or something?" Martha asked.

"We didn't just get married," I told them. "We just had a wedding. We've been married almost four years."

Martha and Jonathan exchanged looks.

I sighed. "It's a very long, very convoluted story."

"We have time," Jonathan interjected, before I could go on.

Clark grimaced. "I'm afraid I don't look very good in most of it."

I squeezed his hand. "You made up for it. Well, you're still making up for it. You were supposed to bring me breakfast in bed this morning." I smiled slightly through the tears.

"Let's start with why you were staying here on your wedding night." That came from Martha.

I took a deep breath and started. "Like I said we've been married almost four years. It was a... shotgun wedding, for lack of a better term."

"You were pregnant?" That came from Jonathan.

I glanced at Clark. "That's part of the long, convoluted part of the story," Clark told them.

"Was she pregnant with your baby?" Martha asked incredulously.

“Long and convoluted, Mom,” Clark said, slightly exasperated.

“Anyway,” I interjected. “We were flying to the cabin for the night and the farther away we got, the more uneasy I became. Clark left and came back here and Daddy set up the security grid again.”

“Security grid?”

I nodded. “We had heavy security for a long time and it has nothing to do with Clark’s identity,” I told them, preempting their next question. “Daddy set it up again, two of the bodyguards who’d worked with us for a long time had come to the wedding and said they’d stay, but after Clark got back, I was still so...” I looked at him, hoping for the right word.

“Agitated. Anxious. Completely freaked out.”

I nodded. “That sounds about right. Clark brought us back here and we stayed the night here. Next door, in the room that’s been ours for three and a half years since we moved in with Daddy.” I glanced at him. “You two — Clark’s parents — whatever, weren’t in this room. You two and Granny Kent were over in the apartment you stay in whenever you’re here.”

“Then who was in here?” Jonathan asked.

Clark squeezed my hand slightly as I spoke. “Our sons.”

Jonathan swallowed visibly and Martha blinked rapidly.

“What?” they asked in unison.

“We have two sons,” Clark told them. “Christopher Jonathan is three and a half. Nathaniel David is nearly eighteen months.”

“You’ll forgive me for having a hard time believing all this,” Martha said.

“Get your laptop, Clark. One of the pictures you showed me earlier should help us prove it.”

He nodded and disappeared. He was back a second later and handed me the laptop. I scrolled through the pictures until I found the one I was looking for. One of me and Joe on the beach — the summer before based on the date. I was wearing a bikini.

“Look at this picture.”

“You and Joe,” Martha said, unimpressed.

“Look at the swimsuit,” I prompted.

Clark glanced at me, puzzled, then looked at the picture more closely. “I don’t recognize it.”

“That’s because I haven’t worn a two-piece in years.” I stood up and tugged my shirt up. “Look.”

They all turned and looked at my stomach — something that had embarrassed me for years.

Stretch marks and all.

Martha nodded slowly. “I see what you’re saying.”

I swiped at my cheeks. “I miss my sons. I miss my husband, but...” I went to sit down, but Clark took my hand and pulled me next to him on the loveseat.

Clark took over. “We woke up this morning and... I told Lana I couldn’t sleep and went downstairs to get online, look at the pictures, all that kind of stuff, see if I could figure out what was going on. After Lois woke up, we went down back stage and tried to figure it out together.” He sighed. “This is more hard to believe stuff. This guy stepped through a door that just hung in the midair. He said he lived to ruin the lives of Lois Lanes and Clark Kents in all universes and he’d made one... small change in this universe, our universe, changed all sorts of things and not just the Lana and Joe stuff.”

“What else is different?” Jonathan asked. He still didn’t look like he believed us.

“My family mostly,” I told him.

“What about them?” Martha looked at Jonathan as she asked.

“Mom, Lucy, Dave...” The tears came again. “Mom and Lucy died in a car accident when I was ten. Daddy didn’t know about Dave until after that and he didn’t look for him until years later. Until years too late. I would have been a match for him, but we didn’t know. We work with Jimmy and we figured it out

eventually, but he’s single, dates some, but hasn’t found anyone special.”

“And Van’s not the only superhero,” Clark told them. “I’m a superhero, too. Superman — Lois named me. Ber... Van and his girlfriend, Ashley, got married last night after our wedding. They’re good friends of ours.”

I smiled as I remember their faces as they left the reception.

Jonathan ran a hand over his face. “Wow.”

“That’s the understatement of the year,” I told him. “And this guy said at midnight tonight we’d find a doohickey like the one he had down behind the stage and we had a choice to make. We could go back in time and make sure the accident happens or we stay here. We choose between a life with our kids and our marriage and our life together and a life with my mom and my pregnant sister married to one of our best friends and my half-brother still alive.”

“It’s an impossible choice,” Clark continued. “For both of us.”

Martha stood up and started pacing. “Tell us the whole convoluted story while I think. There’s an idea... It’s... right there. And I know I shouldn’t believe any of this, but Chris and I found a baby in a spaceship. Is this any harder to believe than that?” She turned to Clark. “What about Chris?”

“He died the night you got married,” Clark told her quietly. “You found me, went to Oklahoma to get married and he died in a fire at the Irig place, saving Josh.”

She nodded. “That’s about right.”

“Well,” I said. “If this guy’s right, then everything was the same until my mom and sister didn’t die.”

Martha started walking again. “Okay. Convoluted story, from the beginning.”

~~~~~  
Clark
~~~~~

It was hard enough living through it the first time. I hated telling most of this story because I was a heel.

I held Lois’ hand a little tighter, took a deep breath and plunged in. “It started when Lana and I moved to Met U. A couple days after we got there I finally met my new roommate. It was Lois.” Mom stopped pacing to stare at me. I nodded. “I know. It’s weird. There was a paperwork mix-up and Lois couldn’t move home. Her dad’s girlfriend had made that clear.” They looked shocked at that, too. “Ellen had been gone for eight years by then,” I reminded them and the look slowly disappeared. “Lana was one of our suitemates and wasn’t happy about it, but...” I shrugged. “That’s what it was. On Halloween the four of us — me and Lana, Lois and Joe — went to a frat party and we all got separated. I found Lois behind a couch with a guy who had drugged her. She didn’t *think* anything had happened — that I’d gotten there in time... But she refused to go to the Emergency Room in the Ellen Lane Memorial Medical Building and she never went to get tested or checked or anything.”

This part was hard to tell them. “We went to Bremerton, New Troy for their annual Fall Festival two days later. Have you ever come across anything that hurts me?” I asked them.

“The last time you were sick, you threw up on me,” Dad said.

“On your first date,” I finished with a slight smile.

“That’s right,” he said, grinning

“Well, in Bremerton, I passed out.”

Mom stopped and stared at me. Dad’s eyes grew big as saucers.

“I’ll tell you about it later so you can be on the lookout for it when we get this all straightened out,” I promised. “Anyway, I came to a few minutes later and we headed back to Metropolis. It was the really bad snow storm a few years ago. Worst in over a hundred years. We made it almost to the cabin and got stuck. Lois practically carried me through the snow. There wasn’t any power

at the cabin and I passed out again. Lois built a fire, called her dad, stripped our clothes off and prayed we'd make it through the night.

"Lois thought she'd had a dream about the two of us that night. I thought I dreamed about being with Lana, but she kept morphing into Lois and the longer it was, the more it was Lois with me and not Lana. Sam made it up there the next day. We ended up stuck for a week and went home and back to our lives."

"So you found out you were pregnant, figured it wasn't a dream and got married?" Dad asked.

"No," Lois said. "I didn't know I was pregnant for a long time, ten weeks almost. We went to Europe with Lana and Joe and a bunch of other kids from school. While we were there, I saw Mindy, Dad's girlfriend. She was supposed to be in Little Rock, not Paris. Clark was with me when I saw her and he wouldn't let me follow her by myself. We ended up stuck in the cargo hold of a plane full of guns on its way to Latislan. When we got there, I got caught. I'd been sick for a few days — delayed morning sickness — and knew I couldn't stop it so I ran out, hoping Clark wouldn't get found. I managed to tick off General Navance, the local sociopathic dictator, and I ended up in the hospital when I kneed him and then passed out."

She sighed. "That's when I found out I was pregnant. Navance claimed the baby and the only way to negate his claim was if I was married, so Clark made arrangements without telling me about it until after they snuck me out of the hospital."

"Did you realize who the father of your baby was?" Mom asked softly.

Lois shook her head. "We thought we were wrong about the toga party. But Clark married me anyway. We were going to get annulled when we got back, but Navance changed the law so we had to be married for five years after the baby was born. He made all kinds of vague and specific, real threats so we stayed married and lied to everyone. We told everyone it was the cabin, but we really didn't think it was Clark's baby."

"I broke Lana's heart," I told them quietly. "And I almost cheated on my wife that day. I didn't love Lois; I loved Lana and I was saying good-bye to her and it was so tempting..." I sighed. "We kissed that day and another about a week later, but that was it. I wasn't alone with her, ever, after that. We went to Smallville for Spring Break and Mom made me tell her everything about myself. That's when I found out Lana was sleeping with Tim and that drove another wedge between the two of us."

Lois picked up the story. "A few months later, Daddy found out about the continuing threat. We moved in here and these three rooms were converted into a very secure wing for us, the baby and a nanny Daddy would pay for while we were working or at school. Christopher was born in June. In early September, Clark finally stepped up as a dad to Christopher and they've been practically inseparable since, but us... We were one of those relationships that was one way in public and another in private. We spent a lot of time alone together, ignoring each other. We were at the cabin for our anniversary when I told Clark I couldn't do it anymore, no matter what the danger to me and Christopher."

"She scared me," I told them. "She hadn't told me — for good reason — that she'd been on anti-depressants since her check-up. She said she'd never been suicidal but wondered if the world would be a better place without her. If it would be better for me and Christopher and everyone else. I finally snapped out of my funk and we started being friends again."

"What about Lana?" Dad asked.

I sighed. "She and Tim were going to have a baby but she was in an accident and the baby didn't survive. We both felt horrible for both of them, but there wasn't anything we could do for them. Us contacting them would have just made it worse." I sighed. "It was a pretty good year for us. We were friends; we could stand being in the same room together. We knew about

Jimmy by then and we all hung out a lot. Then Pop Pop died." It was still hard to talk about. "The story about Americans and Navance and a baby had come out at the time, but our names had never been released. They were released the day of Pop Pop's funeral." I looked at Mom. "Our family didn't react well to news trucks at the cemetery and things went back downhill for us — in part because I was in shock over losing him," I admitted.

"I'd realized the year before that I was falling in love with him," Lois said softly. "And then Daddy had a heart attack a few weeks later, but that night..."

I was glad she was telling this part of the story.

She took a deep breath. "I asked him to help me forget for a while and... Nate was born a month early eight months later." She swiped at her cheeks. "He's had health problems — a hard time gaining weight and had surgery when he was three and a half months old. He was doing better until he got sick last summer but he's great now. It was a long, hard road, but he's doing great."

I took over again. "Last summer, Navance was killed when the government was overthrown. Lois thought I was going to leave and that had always been the plan. When the five years was up or when he died, we'd get divorced and I'd beg Lana to take me back." They didn't look happy about that bit of information. "But I realized something Nana and Pop Pop always said. Love isn't who you can live with..."

"...it's who you can't live without," Mom finished for me.

"Right. Van-El had made his appearance and I talked to him about it all — Krypton, superheroes, Lois. Then Lois was on the colonists' transport and nearly got blown up. Eventually, I managed to convince Lois that I meant it; that I'd fallen in love with her somewhere along the way. I asked her to marry me all over again. I became a superhero, too, and last night we had our official wedding here at the house. This morning we woke up in Bizzaro World."

Mom had continued pacing, listening, but thinking as well. She stopped and looked at us. "I think I've got it."

\*\*\*

Part 23

Lois

~~~~~

I watched Martha hopefully.

She sighed. "I have an idea, that is, but if you two are here and remember all of that, where are the Clark and Lois that went to sleep here last night?"

Clark and I looked at each other.

"I have no idea," Clark said. "I don't know if there's some other universe out there somewhere with our original lives in it or if they just disappeared or what. That guy didn't say."

"If he is what he says he is," Mom pointed out, "can you believe anything he said? If he's really out to destroy all Lois and Clarks?"

I sighed. "Do we have any other choice? Is there any other — remotely logical — explanation for this? I mean, if we just made up that story, it'd be one thing, but I've got the stretch marks to prove it and in a few days..." I stopped.

"In a few days what?" Jonathan asked.

"Sorry," I said to Clark. "I didn't mean to..."

"I know," he told me. "In a few days, we'll know if Lois is pregnant again."

"What?" they said simultaneously.

"We started officially trying to get pregnant again last night," I told them. "If I am, I'll be ravenous in a couple days. The first week or so of both of my pregnancies found me absolutely starving. I eat like Michael Phelps for a week or so, then it goes back closer to normal, then at about ten weeks or so I get so sick for about ten more weeks..." I stopped. "Anyway, if I am pregnant, I'll be starving again in a few days."

"I guess the timing's right?" Martha asked.

I shrugged. "No way to know. I wasn't tracking my temperature or anything and I'm not regular enough to guess. This is the first time we would have been trying to get pregnant so I figured we'd just... practice a lot and see what happened. We certainly didn't have any trouble the first two times." I looked at the ground as I said that.

"So if we end up stuck here," Clark said, "I could end up with two pregnant wives and I don't even begin to know how to deal with that."

"Don't even joke about that," I whispered, squeezing his hand.

"So, what's your idea, Martha?"

She sighed. "It's a 'Back to the Future' thing." She sat by Jonathan. "Remember how George McFly had never stood up to anyone before but then he punched Biff to protect Lorraine, right?"

We all nodded.

"Well, when Marty got back to the future, his life was similar to what he remembered, but his parents were happy together, his dad just had a novel published, his siblings were successful, he had that truck, all those things — all because George stood up to Biff."

"How does that apply to us?" I asked her. "We don't want things to change a little bit, there's some pretty major things we're talking about here."

Martha sighed. "Part of me wonders what happens to all of us if you go change things again. Will we just disappear or will a new universe be created? Or what?"

Clark shrugged. "We have no idea."

"I'll admit that worries me a bit, but I'd guess we wouldn't really know what happened, just like none of us — except you two — knew what happened this morning. And that makes me wonder if this guy didn't create some sort of alternate timeline and mix you two up with our Lois and Clark."

"It's possible," I told her. "But he didn't say anything about universe hopping with that doodad he had. Just time travel." I blew out a breath. "Listen to us talking about time travel like it's no big deal."

Martha sighed. "If you have a time travel device, you could, at any point, go back and make sure the accident happened, right?"

"I guess," Clark said.

"So, theoretically, you could try something else first, right?"

We shrugged.

"What if..." She stood and started pacing again. "There had to be key points in your life where things change. Certain turning points. The accident was one of them. What were some others?"

Clark looked at me. "Being roommates. Bremerton and the cabin. Latislan and getting married. Sam's heart attack and making love together afterwards."

"So first one is being roommates." Martha tapped the fingers of one hand on the other. "Could you take this device and go back in time to when Lois is filling out her applications and stuff and convince her that she has to live on campus? Because our Lois didn't. She lived here during college. Convince her to move to campus and be your roommate and then go forward again and see if that fixed it."

Clark and I looked at each other. Could it be that simple? Simple?

Time travel and convincing ourselves to do stuff was simple?

"What about you guys?" Clark asked quietly. "I want my life back — our life back — but the idea of somehow hurting you guys — any version of my parents — I don't think I can do that either."

Martha smiled at him. "You have to think of your family first, Clark. Go back. Fix things. If you can. We'll be fine, I'm sure."

No one in 'Back to the Future' noticed anything weird happen to them," she pointed out.

"That's a movie," Clark reminded her.

I sighed. "Okay. That's worth a shot, I guess. And if it doesn't work, we go back to before we went and then go ahead again and end up back here or something, right?"

Martha nodded. "That's what the theory says."

I closed my eyes and rested my head against the back of the loveseat. "I'll take your word for it, Martha."

"I've read up on time travel theory over the years," she told us. "I figured if aliens and space travel and all the things you can do were possible, it might be, too."

I moved slightly so my head was on Clark's shoulder. "That's all well and good, but what about the rest of the day. Lana thinks she's married to Clark and they're trying to get pregnant and Joe's engaged to me... This story's a little too far out there to tell everyone about, especially them. It could turn their lives upside down even if they won't remember it. Especially Daddy. And Jimmy. I don't think I could tell them I was going to try to take their wives — and child or grandchild — away so I could get my life back."

"Well, we've been up here for an hour," Clark said, tilting his head so it was resting on mine. He paused for a minute. "Joe just asked Lana if he knew where you were. They're getting ready to switch movies."

"Can we get called in to work yet?" I asked him quietly. "Go somewhere and hide out until midnight? I don't think I can deal with you and Lana anymore."

"I know, sweetheart."

We still had several hours before midnight. What were going to do until then?

"What's the reasoning behind the pretense then?" Jonathan asked.

"We didn't know what was going on at first," Clark told them. "We decided that we probably just better go along with things today. I know Lana thinks something's a bit off, but you're the only one who said anything, Mom. I think she just thinks I've got something on my mind."

"And I hate headaches, but I didn't take any medicine so that I could use that as an excuse to not be myself today," I told them. "And, believe me, waking up to find my kids had disappeared and my husband was married to his ex-girlfriend caused a crying fit that brought on a monster headache."

"I can't imagine," Martha said. "Finding a baby in a spaceship is one thing, finding your life — literally — completely turned upside down is another."

Clark jumped up, suddenly, and I practically fell on to the love seat as my support was removed.

~~~~~

Clark

"Lana's on her way up," I said grimly.

Lois looked like she was going to cry all over again.

Mom stood next to me. "Take her and go. Get out of here.

Hang around close enough that you can hear whatever excuse we come up with — and be quiet, no whooshing. Both of you. We'll meet you backstage later."

"Thanks, Mom." I gave her a quick hug and then gave Dad one as well. "Thanks, Dad. I know this has to be hard to believe."

"We believe you," Dad told me. "Even without the stretch marks, you wouldn't lie about something like this."

"No, I wouldn't," I promised. Lana was getting closer. "I love both of you — whether you're technically my parents or not."

"Same here," Lois said. "And thank you."

I wrapped my arms around her. "Lana'll be here in a second. Thank you." And we disappeared out the window.

I set us down inside the tree line and listened in to the conversation.

><~><~><

“Mom, Dad, have you guys seen Clark? Or Lois?” Lana asked them.

“They had to go. Work I think they said,” Dad told her. “Some big story breaking or something. I think Lois got a call from one of her sources and told Clark about it and they decided it couldn’t wait until tomorrow. Did they not tell you guys? They just left a few minutes ago.”

“No. They didn’t tell Joe either.” Lana sounded perturbed, and I really couldn’t blame her. I could hear her punching buttons on her cell phone.

><~><~><

The phone in my pocket buzzed.

“Do I answer it?” I whispered.

Lois shrugged as she huddled close to me. “Whatever you think. Whenever her Clark gets back, he’s going to be in a world of trouble anyway.”

It stopped buzzing and went to voice mail. I sighed when it buzzed again indicating she’d left me a message.

“I hate doing this to her,” I told Lois. “She has no clue what’s going on.”

“I know.” She rested her head on my chest and I wrapped my arms around her and held her close to me.

“Cold?”

She nodded. “Can we hit the tropics for a while?”

“Sure.”

I tuned my ears back into my parents. “They’re steering Lana back downstairs.” I pulled her closer to me and rose slowly before picking up speed and heading south.

We landed on a little island in the South Pacific and Lois breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank you,” she said. “Much better. Maybe even a bit too warm.”

“You have to pick,” I told her with a grin.

“I really don’t care as long as we’re together,” she told me, putting her arms around my neck.

I shifted uncomfortably. “I love you, sweetheart, but until we get all of this figured out... Right here, right now, I’m married to Lana.”

“I know,” she sighed. “Will you at least go get me something to eat? I didn’t eat much Christmas dinner.”

I chuckled. “Sure. What sounds good? China’s not too far away.”

“That’s fine. See if they have that one spot that you found when Christopher was little.”

“On my way.”

I zipped off and found the restaurant in Shanghai was open — as expected — and brought back an assortment of Lois’ favorite Chinese dishes.

We sat on the beach and ate in near silence.

“So what’s our first time stop?” she asked as we finished.

I sighed. “I guess about the time you’re filling out your college applications and stuff.”

“Will the universe explode if I meet myself?” she asked.

I shrugged. “I have no idea.”

“We’ll have to ask your mom.”

She cracked open her fortune cookie and handed it to me.

“A good horse is like a member of the family,” I read, knowing she would hate it.

“I hate that. That’s not a fortune and you know I love Strawberry,” she said before I could say anything else.

I chuckled. “Sorry, hon.” I opened mine. “You’re about to go on the adventure of a lifetime,” I read.

“Got that right,” she muttered. “So do you think convincing me to live on campus is enough? How do we know that the same clerical errors are going to happen?”

I leaned my head against the tree behind me. “Well, I can’t

believe I’m suggesting this, but you could tell her to fill it out the way it’s supposed to be, we could substitute her original form with one where she ends up as my roommate. Then switch it back after it’s in the system.”

She sighed. “I guess that’s it. How do I convince me, her, whatever?”

I shrugged. “I have no idea. What would have convinced you?”

“That I have a wonderful life and I want it back but I don’t want to cause the accident to make that happen. I want to do the ‘Back to the Future’ thing where it’s the same but better.”

I nodded. “Sounds good to me.”

“Are we going to have to convince you of anything?” she asked.

I thought about that. “I don’t think so. I can’t imagine what I would do or not do if the situations are similar. I mean, I can’t imagine not marrying you in Latislan so I can’t imagine having to tell myself to take care of you no matter what or something, but maybe that’s not a bad idea. We’ll have to watch and see what happens, I guess.”

We spent a long time just staring at the waves as they broke on the beach in front of us.

“What time is it?” she finally asked me.

“We have about two hours,” I told her.

Her head was resting on my shoulder and our fingers were intertwined.

“Get some rest,” I suggested. “Who knows when we’ll get more sleep.”

She closed her eyes and a few minutes later, her even breathing said she’d taken my suggestion.

It had been interesting to get a glimpse of what my life would have been like if I’d married Lana as I’d originally planned. It didn’t seem like a *bad* life, but it wasn’t the life I wanted. I wanted my life with Lois, with my sons, back.

If we could find a way to get our lives back *and* keep Ellen and Lucy and Dave alive...

Well, that would be ideal, wouldn’t it?

As long as we managed to avoid destroying the fabric of the space time continuum in the process, we could have the best of both worlds.

Couldn’t we?

I reached over with my left hand and brushed Lois’ hair off her forehead. Seeing her with her mom and sister that day had been priceless. I could tell she was trying to soak up as much of them as she could, but trying to keep her distance at the same time so her heart might not break quite as much if they had to disappear to get our lives back.

As much as she loved them, I didn’t think she’d trade our sons for them.

And if we did end up having to stay here for some reason, then what?

Sure she’d have her mom and sister and half-brother and niece or nephew on the way, but I’d be with Lana — unless and until I managed to leave her without completely destroying her — and she’d be with Joe, but I thought she’d have an easier time leaving him than I would Lana.

Not because I wouldn’t leave Lana, but because I’d seen Lana’s heart break before and I’d have to find a way to do it as easily as possible and it would be harder to let her down as gently as I could than it would be for her to let go of Joe.

Maybe we could work this all out.

I glanced at my watch and woke her up.

“It’s time to go, Lois.”

She opened her eyes and looked at me. “It wasn’t a nightmare, was it?”

I nodded. “It’s a nightmare, all right, but it’s real. And it’s time to get back.”

She nodded. “Let’s go. Let’s get our lives back.”  
I wrapped my arms around her and took off for Metropolis.

\*\*\*

Part 24

Lois

~~~~~  
We landed in the darkness near the back of the house.

“What’s going on?” I whispered to Clark.

“Mom and Dad are headed this way. Lana’s sleeping, I think and no one else is around.”

I breathed a sigh of relief.

We carefully snuck inside and made it backstage easily. A minute later, Martha and Jonathan came in.

“How bad was it?” Clark asked, wincing slightly.

Martha shrugged. “Lana’s not happy, but once this is all straightened out, her Clark or us will explain or something.”

“What about Joe?” I asked.

“He seems to be a lot more used to you running off,” Martha said with a smirk.

Clark laughed lightly. “That sounds like you.”

“Doesn’t it, though?” I sighed. “What time is it?”

The frame appeared in mid-air again — between us and Clark’s parents — and a black square flew out of it.

“Have fun,” came the evil voice.

“Wait!” I yelled. “How does it work?”

He stuck his head through the window. “Award winning legendary investigative reporter Lois Lane has to ask how something works? You’ll figure it out. And if not...” He laughed. “. . . well, Lana and Joe aren’t bad consolation prizes, now are they?”

He disappeared and the window shrunk, then popped out of existence.

“I don’t think I like him,” Jonathan said.

“I know I don’t,” I muttered.

Clark picked up the doohickey and looked it over. “I’m not sure I just want to start pushing buttons.” He turned it over in his hands and sighed. “I don’t get it.” He looked at it more closely. “Wait. This one has ‘pgrm’ on it — program?”

I shrugged. “Sounds good to me.”

He looked at all of us. “Ready?”

Jonathan and Martha wrapped an arm around each other and nodded. I grabbed a hold of Clark’s arm at the elbow. I didn’t want to be separated from him if he suddenly popped into another universe or something.

He took a deep breath and pushed the button.

A small, transparent box popped up — a screen of sorts, hanging in mid-air.

“Set date,” Clark read and reached up with his other hand.

“When did you apply for college?” he asked me. “When did you fill out your Met U paperwork?”

I closed my eyes and thought. “February 14, my senior year. Joe went out with Denise because I told him we weren’t having sex just because it was a holiday.”

“I can’t say I’m sorry.” He poked a finger at the display hanging in mid-air. Despite its seeming transparent, holographic appearance, Clark was able to press a ‘0’ then a ‘2’ for February. He finished punching in the date. “Hold on. I’m hoping it’ll ask for a time or destination but. . . Mom, Dad, you guys might want to move back a bit.”

They did and he pressed the ‘enter’ button.

We waited with bated breath, but another screen popped up.

“Location,” Clark read. “Do we want to end up here? Or somewhere else?” he asked me.

“Here is fine. There shouldn’t be anyone down here,” I told him.

He pressed the ‘don’t change locations’ button. “Time?”

“Seven-thirty?” I suggested.

He typed that in and looked over at his parents before pressing the enter button again. “Thanks for everything. Thanks for understanding. If we can, we’ll let you know what happens.”

“Thanks. Take care of those boys,” Martha said.

“We will.” Clark looked down at me. “Ready?”

I nodded.

We both took a deep breath and I clung a little more tightly to him.

He pressed the enter button and rather than being instantly transported somewhere a big frame appeared in midair. Looking through the frame showed a darkened backstage area, but looking around it showed Martha and Jonathan waiting with bated breath.

“I guess we walk through?” I said tentatively.

“I guess so.”

“Good luck,” Martha told us.

“Be careful,” Jonathan echoed.

We peered around the window at them. “We will,” Clark promised. “And we’ll try not to destroy the space-time continuum or anything.”

They laughed. “We’d appreciate that,” Martha said.

“Ready?” he asked, looking at me.

I nodded and together we stepped through the window into the darkened room. We turned to see Martha and Jonathan coming around to the other side of the window.

“Good luck,” they called in unison.

“Thanks,” we both called back as Clark pressed the ‘close window’ button on the screen.

The window disappeared.

“Okay,” I whispered. “We’re here. Now what?”

He tilted his head slightly. “You’re up in your room and I think we’re the only ones here.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay. Let’s do this.”

“I’ll wait here,” he said.

“No, you don’t, mister,” I informed him. “You’re coming with me.”

We hurried up to my room.

“Here goes nothing,” I whispered and opened the door, walking in like I owned the place.

“Mom?” came the voice I recognized as my own.

“No,” I said as authoritatively as I knew how.

I saw the younger version of me turn in her desk chair.

She froze when she saw me.

The universe didn’t implode and I took that as a good sign.

“Who are you?” she asked, warily.

“I’m you,” I told her. “From the future. I know that’s hard to believe,” I hurried on, “but it’s true.”

She didn’t believe me.

“I know you’re home tonight working on college applications because Joe wanted to have sex with whoever he went out with tonight and you wouldn’t. I know that you have a half-brother named Dave that Mom gave birth to in high school. I know that his brother, Jimmy, and Lucy are great together.”

“Ha!” she said. “They hate each other.”

I smiled. “Well, that won’t last.” What else could convince her? “I know how you got the scar on your collar bone. I know the main character of the novel you’ve been wanting to write is Lola Dane.”

That one got her attention. “I never told anyone that,” she said cautiously. “Okay, say, for a minute, that I believe you’re me from the future. Why are you here?”

“Where are you planning on going to college?” I asked her.

“Shouldn’t you know that?”

I nodded. “Your first choice is UNT Met, but the competition is fierce and with your parents’ connections, Met U is more likely because you want to get a scholarship and get your own way through school so they don’t have to pay for it, even though they can afford it easily. You want to do it on your own.”

“Okay.” She leaned back in her chair with her arms crossed. “Tell me what’s going to happen.”

I shook my head. “I can’t do that. Not completely, but I need you to do something. Otherwise…” My eyes filled with tears. “I know it’s going to be hard to believe, but I am you. I promise, but my life… I woke up this morning and it was different. I was married with two wonderful boys and this morning I woke up to find out I was engaged to…” I shouldn’t tell her everything, should I? “…someone else. My husband and his family are apparently close enough to all of us that they were staying here at the house, but he was married to his ex-girlfriend. And I want my life back. Very badly. But…”

“How did everything change?” she asked. “That just doesn’t seem possible.”

“That’s what we’ve been saying all day. Then this guy appeared while we were talking and he said that he’d changed one thing in my past and because of that one thing, everything in my life had changed. He said we could go back in time and change that one thing back and get our lives back or we could stay where we were.”

“And talking to me will change that back?” she asked, with one brow raised.

“No,” I whispered. “I can’t change back what he changed. It’s too hard a choice so we’re trying to fix it without changing that.”

“What is it that he changed that you can’t just change back?” she demanded.

I sat on the bed, a tear streaking down my cheek. “Do you remember going to the cabin when you were ten? You and Daddy were involved in a Monopoly game and Mom and Lucy came back early?”

She thought for a minute. “Maybe. Why?”

“In my world, Mom and Lucy were killed in an accident on the way home. Daddy sunk into deep despair and we nearly lost everything. We managed to hang on to the house and the cabin but that’s about it. Mom had never told him about Dave but left him a letter when she died. Daddy didn’t look for him until years later, after it was too late. I’ll go back and make sure the accident happens, but only if it’s my only choice. I’d rather try to keep all of them alive and get my life with my husband and my sons back at the same time.” The tears flowed freely down my cheeks.

She nodded slowly. “I guess that makes sense.” She sighed. “So what is it I need to do to change things? And do I really want to? Is the life that you have better than the life you woke up to? Obviously, you’re in love with someone if you’re going to marry him,” she pointed out.

I nodded. “He’s a great guy, really he is, and I probably could love him, but what I feel for my husband… And my sons…” The tears continued to flow down my cheeks. “Please,” I whispered. “Don’t make me put Daddy and all of us through losing Mom and Lucy if I can fix it another way.”

“Okay, but how will you know?”

“We’ll go ahead in time and see what changed and go from there,” I told her.

“And if things aren’t right?”

I sighed. “Then we’ll try again at another point in the future.”

“So what is it I need to do?”

“It’s easy at this point,” I told her. “Live on campus at Met U.”

“That’s it?” she asked with a raised brow.

I nodded. “That’s it.”

She thought it over for a minute. “I’d thought about living on campus anyway. I can do that. Maybe Daddy can get me on the academic floor at Lane Hall.” She glanced at me. “I suppose that’s acceptable?”

“Yes,” I said with a sigh of relief. “But there’s one thing — I can’t know for sure where you’ll end up on campus, but *no matter what*, you *have* to live on campus.”

She smirked at me. “Even if they end up sticking me with a guy for a roommate?”

I snorted. “Even if.”

“Okay then. I can do that.”

“And go to Europe,” I added hurriedly. “There’s a school trip after Christmas. You have to go. With Joe.”

She made a face. “I’m not real crazy about Joe right now.”

“I know, but believe me on this one.”

She nodded. “Okay. I can take a trip to Europe with Joe. Though,” she went on, “I’m a bit worried that you said it’s ‘easy at this point’.”

I smiled. “I should have known you’d catch that. I can’t promise it’s all going to be easy, but it’s so worth it in the end. I promise.”

“Okay.”

There was a slight knock on the door.

She stood up. “I wonder who that is.”

“My — our — husband. You can’t see him. You can’t know who he is at this point.” Clark and I had talked about that on the flight back to Metropolis. “But trust me,” I told her with a grin. “He’s *hot*.”

“Well, of course,” she said with a nonchalant shrug.

My grin widened. “He said he’d knock if we had to go, so I guess it’s time.” My eyes filled with tears again. “Thanks.”

She nodded. “I’d say anytime but…” She shrugged. “I’ll see you when I’m you.”

“Thank you.” There was another knock. “He thanks you, too. It might take a while for you guys to work things out, but it’s so worth it. I promise.”

She raised that eyebrow again. “We have a rocky relationship before he finally proposes?”

“Something like that.”

She nodded.

The knocking was more insistent.

“Go,” she said, shooing me off.

The second I was out the door, Clark whooshed me away.

“What?” I whispered.

“Your parents just got home.”

“Oh.”

We were backstage again.

“Is she muttering to herself?” I asked him.

He nodded. “Yeah, she’s wondering if you were a hallucination, but she pulled out the dorm paperwork.”

I leaned against him. “Thank God.”

“So what next?”

“We trade forms,” I told him.

“How do we get another copy of it?”

He looked over the top of his glasses towards my room. “She has two. We’ll snag the other one and you can fill it out as ‘Louis Lane’ and request me for a roommate. Then we’ll trade them back a couple months in the future.”

I nodded. “Okay. Wait till she’s asleep?”

He grinned. “Why wait? We have a time machine.”

He carefully programmed it and we stepped through the window again. He went upstairs carefully and floated into her — my — room to get the form. He kept an ear out as I filled it out and we put everything back in a sealed envelope and he returned it just as he’d found it.

We went back to the basement and set the date for the day after our wedding — Christmas Day.

“Here goes nothing,” Clark whispered as we stepped through again.

I breathed a sigh of relief as the window shut behind us. “Do you see and hear thing. What’s going on?”

I held my breath as he scanned the house.

“Your mom and dad are both here. So are Jimmy and Lucy. My parents and Granny.”

"I don't feel so well, Clark," I said suddenly.

He looked alarmed. "I know why."

"Why?" His look scared me.

"We have to get out of here," he said grimly. He punched the buttons on the box and the control panel as quickly as he could. A second later, he pulled me through the window after him.

I tried to look around but couldn't move because he was holding me so tightly.

"Clark, you're hurting me," I managed to squeak out.

His grip loosened and I looked around.

"Where are we? Or when rather?" I amended as I realized we were at the cabin. It was snowing outside.

"We're on our way back from Bremerton," he said grimly.

"Well, not us but the younger us."

"Okay," I said slowly. "But that turned out okay, didn't it?"

He shook his head. "No, it didn't. Your room was dusty so I looked at Lucy's room and saw an article in her desk. You couldn't get us inside the cabin and collapsed on the porch. According to the article, I barely survived."

"And me?" I whispered.

He pulled me back into the tight hug. "You didn't make it, sweetheart. That's why you weren't feeling well, I'd bet money on it. You weren't supposed to be there."

I closed my eyes and rested on his chest when his head popped up. "Are we close?"

He nodded. "You stay here and get some blankets and stuff out. I'm going to go make sure we get here."

He disappeared and I did as he suggested, pulling blankets out and leaving them folded neatly on the couch.

That's why they were there.

It suddenly clicked.

I'd never thought about it too much but random blankets on the couch when we'd made it to the cabin didn't make much sense to me at the time. Of course, that was the least of my concerns when I'd woken up naked with Clark.

The door.

Clark said we hadn't made it inside.

I unlocked the door so even when I dropped my keys it would be okay.

I heard thumping on the porch and I hurriedly hid in my room, watching through a crack in the door as my younger self practically dragged Clark's younger self to the fire, where he collapsed.

Clark appeared behind me and I rested my head on his shoulder.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"I had to," he whispered back.

"Now we just have to make sure that we make Christopher," I told him.

His eyes widened. "What?"

Part 25

Clark

~~~~~

It had scared me beyond anything when I realized Lois hadn't survived our trip to the cabin.

And waiting for the futuristic time travel contraption to keep up with punching numbers in it was frustrating. Surely future technology could keep up with superspeed.

I held her as tightly as I could without hurting her.

Apparently, I wasn't too successful because she said I was.

She asked where — or rather when — we were and I told her what I'd read. That she'd died trying to save me and that I'd barely survived. I didn't know anything about the rest of my life except that I appeared to still be in contact with the Lanes. But that didn't matter. Life without Lois was unacceptable.

I heard the two of us struggling to make it through the snow. I

left her to find blankets and stuff as I headed out the back.

I hovered nearby and used my eyesight to find us.

There I was, in the snow, face down and Lois was begging me to get up.

I saw myself stand up and sway. I used a little bit of super breath to keep the other me upright.

I used a bit more — and some heat vision — to partially clear the path in front of them and keep them moving towards the cabin.

I watched as the other me collapsed on the stairs and the other Lois dropped her keys. I glanced inside to see Lois unlock the door. She hurried back to our room and I zipped back inside to join her.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"I had to," I whispered back.

"Now we just have to make sure we make Christopher."

I stared at her in disbelief. "What?"

She gestured wildly as she whispered. "We have to make sure we — they — make Christopher. We have to make *sure* I get pregnant," she hissed at me.

"And *how* exactly do you plan on doing that?" I asked her.

We heard the other Lois make a growly noise.

"What was that about?"

She sighed. "I realized I was going to have to take *all* of your clothes off. I was glad to realize you were wearing boxers, though."

She bumped into the door and we both froze. I could see the other Lois freeze. "Be right back," I whispered before disappearing.

"What'd you do?" my Lois whispered when I got back.

"I knocked down a big tree limb near the house. It was going to break before long anyway," I told her.

She nodded. "I remember that." She peeked carefully out the door. "Can you see the fireplace from here?"

I looked through the crack in the door. "Only through the mirror."

"Can you bounce some heat vision off it like you do when you shave and get the fire going better?"

I did and the fire started crackling.

"Did I get my clothes off?" she asked me.

"I'm not going to watch her," I told her indignantly.

She rolled her eyes. "It's *me*. It's nothing you haven't seen before — or since — or whatever."

"So?" I couldn't believe her.

She glared at me.

"It's weird," I told her, "and I'm not doing it."

"Once we remembered this night, didn't you remember seeing me naked?"

"Well, yeah," I started. "Mostly."

"So really you'd just see what you remember seeing anyway," she finished triumphantly.

"I'm *not* looking," I insisted. "If you want to check you can, but I'm not looking at another version of you naked."

She sighed. "Fine. But I can't see through walls." She peeked through the slightly opened door. "I'm crawling under the blankets with you."

I glanced that way carefully, taking great care not to look *through* the blankets. I noticed a little smile on Lois' face.

"What was that about?" I asked her.

"What?"

"That little grin when you put your arm around me."

She turned to look at me and ran a finger down my chest, grinning seductively. "I realized I was sleeping naked with you before Lana ever got to. Now go warm us — them — up and fix the electricity."

"What makes you think I can fix the electricity?" I asked her as I shot a diffused blast of heat vision their direction.

She rolled her eyes at me. “Do you *really* think the electric company got it fixed that fast?”

I sighed and swept them with heat vision again.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

I realized the problem was going to be a fairly easy one to fix at this point. The wire had become disconnected from the weather head on the roof when a branch fell on it. I reconnected it and looked towards the kitchen, grateful to see the clock on the stove flashing.

I headed back inside. “Fixed,” I told her quietly. “Can we go now?”

She shook her head vehemently. “No. We have to make *sure* we make Christopher.”

What?!

“Lois, we can’t *watch* us...” I waved in the general direction of the living room.

“Did I *say* watch?” she asked, arms crossed in front of her.

“How else do you plan on making sure we, they...”

“Make love?” she finished for me.

“Yeah.”

“I don’t know,” she said, close to tears, “but we have to.”

I sighed and resigned myself to this. “Well, how much longer was it?”

She shrugged and I pulled her into my arms.

I glanced through the wall. “We’re pretty out of it right now,” I told her as she rested her head against me.

She looked up at me through lowered lashes. “Really?” she whispered, fiddling with one of the buttons on my shirt. “I *wonder* how we could pass the time...”

“No! Lois!”

“Why not?” she pouted.

“Because,” I hissed at her. “Technically, I’m still married to Lana.” She raised a brow at me. “Or something. Not until we know we’ve fixed everything.”

She sighed. “Goody two shoes.” She rested her head back against me. “Got a deck of cards?”

“No,” I told her. “Why?”

“You promised me a game of strip poker on our honeymoon.”

“Lo-is.” I shot another blast of heat vision at our other selves. “Wake up and cheat on your girlfriend already,” I muttered.

She glared at me.

“I can’t believe I’m helping myself cheat on Lana.” I sighed.

“You have to,” she whispered, her eyes filling with tears as she pulled away from me.

I pulled her back to me and wrapped her in my arms. “I know, sweetheart.”

We both heard a noise at the same time.

“Are we moving?” she asked.

I looked through the wall. “Yeah, a little. I rolled over and your head’s on my chest.”

“Just don’t tell me if you call me Lana, okay?”

“Don’t worry,” I groaned.

She moved enough to peek through the door. “Our first kiss,” she whispered.

“Good,” I said, relieved. “Can we go now?”

She shook her head violently. “No. I have to *know*. We can’t leave until *after*...”

“What exactly do you expect us to do if they don’t?” I asked her.

“I don’t know but we can’t leave until we know.”

I shifted uncomfortably. “I’m not listening in,” I told her.

“Then how are we going to know?”

“I don’t know,” I hissed at her. “But I’m not listening to our other selves make love and I’m not watching either.”

We both cringed slightly at a noise in the other room.

“I think it’s probably safe for you to look again,” she told me.

I rolled my eyes at her and waited a minute before looking

through the wall. “I’ve seen that look on your face before. Trust me, you’re pregnant. I’m holding you, er, he’s holding her, and they’re going back to sleep. Can we go now?”

Lois had tears on her cheeks when I looked at her again and she nodded. “Yeah, we can go.” She hesitated before continuing. “Any chance you can use your microscopic gizmo to see Christopher yet?”

I sighed. “Lois, even if the little guys are super fast, it hasn’t been long enough yet.”

“Well, then we’ll come back in a couple days and make sure I’m ravenous. You’re going to have to take the power out again anyway so he can protect her from the dream napping. And if I’m not, we’ll come back a few minutes after we leave and do something about it.”

“Like what?” I asked her.

She shrugged. “We’ll figure that out later.”

I sighed. “Okay. Let’s go.” I took the device out of my pocket. “We’ll come back a couple days from right now.”

Lois shook her head. “No. There’s another stop to make first. I don’t want to interfere with anything, but...”

“What?”

“I want to see who it was at the frat party. I *need* to know for sure if anything happened there,” she told me with more tears in her eyes. “And I need to know who it was so I can clobber him if I ever see him again.”

I nodded slowly. “Okay. But *no* interfering. We don’t want to have to fix all this again.”

She nodded. “Just fly us near the building so we can see who it was.”

I shook my head. “We’ll hover high enough that no one can see us and I’ll look.”

I ignored her glare as I punched in the date and location. We stepped through the window and into a wooded area near the university. She turned so her back was to me and I wrapped my arms around her and we floated high into the sky.

I looked through the crowd at the frat house, doing my best to avoid looking in the bedrooms. “There you are,” I whispered as I spotted her with some guy behind the couch. “I’m on my way to get you,” I told her as I saw myself walking up the stairs.

“Who is it?” she asked.

The guy’s head shot up as he pulled the other Lois’ shorts and underwear off.

“You’re not going to believe it,” I said grimly.

“Who? Joe or something? Les?” It took me a minute to remember that Les had been Joe’s roommate.

“No.” I sighed. This was just great. Of all the people it could have been...

“Who?” she demanded.

“Navance’s nephew.”

“What?!” she hissed. “I want to see!”

“No. I’m not going down there.”

“Now,” she said. “Or you’ll regret it, Clark Jerome Davis Kent.”

I sighed. Invulnerable or not, arguing with that tone of voice was pointless. Carefully, I maneuvered close enough that she could see him through the window.

I kept an eye on me as the other me looked for Lois.

Lois gave a startled cry as I suddenly flew us to the far side of campus.

“What was that for?” she whispered.

“I was looking at us,” I told her.

She sighed. “That was the whole point.”

“No, the other me was looking at us outside the window.”

“Oh.” She twisted in my arms and rested her head on my chest. “I can’t believe it was him.”

“I know, sweetheart. It’s ironic, isn’t it? Knowing what happens.”

“Did he...” I could tell she couldn’t bring herself to ask the question.

“No,” I told her quietly, brushing the hair off her face. “He didn’t. I got there in time.”

She closed her eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. “He didn’t.”

“He didn’t,” I confirmed.

“Christopher’s your son,” she said.

“Christopher’s my son,” I repeated.

She looked up at me with a big grin. “I know we’ve thought it for a long time, but Christopher is your son!”

I grinned back. “He’s my son!” I wrapped my arms back around her waist and spun her in mid-air. “It’s nice to have confirmation, but you know it doesn’t matter, right?”

She nodded. “I know, but I hated the thought that some creep was my first and his dad. I’d much rather not really remember what happened with you and have you be his dad and my first.”

“Me, too,” I whispered, kissing her softly. “I knew we decided it was pretty unlikely, but the thought that someone else had been with you... Even though we didn’t *mean* to be together that first time...”

“I know.” She kissed me. “Can we go make sure I’m pregnant now?”

I nodded. “Power outage, here we come.” I pulled the device out of my pocket and a minute later we were outside the cabin a few days later.

“What am I doing?” she whispered.

“You’re watching a movie and crying,” I told her, pulling her closer to me. “Why were you crying?”

She didn’t answer for a long moment.

“What?” I asked softly.

“I was wondering what it would be like to have someone love me like Daddy loved Mom. Like Ricky loved Lucy.” She paused. “Like you loved Lana.”

I turned her so she was facing me. “Honey, I don’t love you like I loved Lana. I love you so far beyond that...”

“I know,” she told me with a small smile and a shiver.

I swept a bit of heat vision over her and turned my attention back to the cabin. “I think you’re pregnant. There’s two bags of popcorn in the trash can.”

She smiled. “Sounds like it.” She moved back. “Now go hide your shirt and ditch the power.”

“How am I supposed to hide my shirt from me?”

She shrugged. “You’re a superhero. You’ll figure it out.”

I looked at her, concerned. “Are you sure you’ll be okay here? Not too cold?”

“I’ll be fine.”

I kissed her lightly. “Here goes.”

I headed to the cabin but decided I should knock the power out first. That way there was no way anyone would see me.

Having disconnected the wire from the weather head again, I silently went inside going quickly to Lucy’s room.

The other me was sound asleep. My shirt was where I remembered it — lying on the other side of the bed. I snatched it up, wincing as I hit one of the four posts.

I zipped to the bathroom and hid in the tub, praying that the other me wouldn’t notice me there.

I — he — didn’t and headed downstairs. I heard the conversation with Lois about the power and the ice cream. Once they were in her room, I managed to sneak quietly back out.

Lois was freezing when we got back.

I wrapped my arms around her. “Before we go anywhere else, we’re going to the tropics to warm you up.”

She shook her shivering head. “No. Just use your gizmo and warm me up and let’s head back to Christmas.”

I concentrated on warming her up and pulling her back to me. “Ready?” I asked.

She nodded. “Let’s see if we fixed this.”

We stepped through the window to backstage in the basement of her house.

She sighed in relief. “Do your hearing thing.”

I closed my eyes and I could feel my face relax.

“What?” she asked.

“Christopher is here.”

“Thank God,” she whispered. “What else?”

I concentrated my hearing and then frowned, lines creasing my forehead.

“What?”

“Um, there’s another version of you here,” I told her.

“What?!” she hissed. “What about another you? And Nate?”

The noises I was hearing made me clap my hands over my ears and shut it down.

“What?”

I used my vision to look throughout the house, holding up one finger.

“Oh, no,” I whispered, when I found what I was looking for.

“What?”

“Your parents are here. Jimmy and Lucy are here. Dave’s here. Joe’s here. Me, Lana and my family are here, but...”

“But what?” she asked scared.

I sighed. “I’m up there, apparently, still married to Lana and you...” I took a deep breath. “You’re married to Joe.”

\*\*\*

Part 26

Lois

~~~~~

“I’m *what*?” I hissed.

“Married to Joe,” he told me. “And from what I’m trying desperately not to hear, you enjoy it very much.”

I winced on his behalf. “Can you hear who else is here without hearing... that?”

“How about I *look* and avoid looking in rooms I know have couples in them?”

“That sounds like a better idea,” I agreed.

He looked over his glasses. “There’s Christopher. He’s in the room next to Lucy’s old room and...”

“And what?” I asked.

“He has a little sister,” Clark said, sounding somewhat sad.

“What?!” I couldn’t believe what I just heard. “Joe and I...”

He shrugged. “I guess.”

I sat down on one of the chairs, my head in my hands. “Okay. So we can leave here and not worry too much about it. There’s a Lois and Clark here and apparently, they’re pretty happy with Lana and Joe. So we can’t stay and we don’t really *want* to stay. So what happened? What changed — or didn’t change — or whatever?”

Clark sighed and tugged on my hand until I stood up. He took my seat and pulled me onto his lap. “Okay, what was the next major milestone in our lives?”

“Getting married,” I told him. “The whole Latislan debacle.”

“Right. If I had to guess, I’d guess this us never ended up in Latislan. Otherwise, I can’t imagine me not marrying you and all that.”

“So to Europe?”

He nodded. “To Europe.”

A minute later, we were in the same spot, but several years earlier.

“I thought we’d fly,” he said. “It’s the right day and time, I think, but I had no idea where to tell it to take us.”

I nodded. “Makes sense.”

Ten minutes later, we landed outside the hotel.

“How do we get us to follow Mindy?” I asked him.

He shrugged. “You’re in your room getting ready to go.”

“I should have told her when I saw her the first time,” I muttered. “Not just go to Europe, but go to Europe and follow the

blonde.”

He zipped us up the stairs. “Do you think that’s the best way to do this?”

I nodded. “Just make sure no one sees me.”

A split second later, we were outside my door.

I knocked while Clark hid.

A second later, the other me opened the door. “Joe, I thought we said we’d meet...” She stopped mid-sentence. “You again.”

“Can I come in?” I asked, looking nervously around.

“Sure. Why not? It’s your fault I’ve got Cruella and Madame Medusa for suitemates after all,” she said sarcastically.

“Yeah, but Clark’s your roommate right?” I asked as I walked in, shutting the door behind me.

She sighed and nodded. “Yeah. He’s fine. But his girlfriend...”

“Oh, I know. Believe me, I know. But, really, when it really counts, she’s not so bad,” I finished quietly.

“So what is it I’m supposed to do this time?” she asked flopping down on the bed. “I’m Clark’s roommate and I’m in Europe.”

“You want the story that’ll win you a Kerth?” I asked her.

She sat straight up. “Heck, yeah.”

“Well, it won’t happen right away, but something happens tonight — and if you take advantage of it — you’ll get your first Kerth out of tonight.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What?”

“Something happens tonight. And if you do what you need to, a long-term result is a Kerth. It’s part of a sequence of events that leads to your first Kerth.”

“O-kay,” she said warily. “What is it?”

“Tonight, you’ll go downstairs to meet Joe and there’ll be a blonde lady there in white leather pants and a sparkly pink shirt.”

She raised a brow. “Really?”

I nodded. “Follow her and get Clark to help you. He’ll be downstairs. Wherever she goes, follow her and investigate what she’s doing. You won’t be able to write about any of it right away, but eventually, the series of events will lead to that.”

She sighed. “How do I know I can believe you?”

Tears filled my eyes. “Because I have part of my life back when I go forward to the future, but not all of it yet. Tonight is another turning point.”

“Fine. But if I don’t get an award...” she threatened.

“You will,” I promised. “It won’t be until after graduation, but you will. But tonight is the beginning of the groundwork. The rest of the groundwork will come to you.”

“Why can’t I take Joe with me?”

“You’ll see her before Joe meets you. Clark will be downstairs. Get him to go with you and don’t let her see you.”

“Fine. Now do you mind? I need to get ready to go. Joe and I are trying again at this relationship thing, but you probably already know that.”

I nodded. “Yeah, I know.”

“Is it going somewhere this time?”

I hesitated. “I can’t tell you that. Not now.”

She gave an exasperated roll of her eyes. “Then go so I can get ready.”

I smiled slightly. “Thank you. And thank you for saving Clark. He’s a good friend.”

She nodded. “That wasn’t fun. I mean, hanging out with him that week was fun, but not traipsing through the snow.”

I grimaced. “I remember. You have no idea how close both of you came to not making it that night.”

She hesitated slightly. “I had a dream that night...” Her voice trailed off, as though she was afraid to finish the question.

“I know,” I said quietly. “But I can’t tell you anymore about that.”

There was a light ‘shave and a haircut’ knock on the door.

“I have to go.” I headed towards the door. “Good luck.”

“I hope I never see you again.”

“I don’t blame you.” I exited quickly to find Clark waiting for me. He grabbed me and we zipped off, on the roof before I knew it. “Why are we up here?” I asked him.

“I talked to... me,” he said. “And I had an idea.”

“What’s that?”

“A way to maybe get to Mindy once we get everything fixed.”

My eyes lit up. “What?”

“We follow her after the plane leaves and see what we can see. When we get back, we try tracing her again.”

I nodded. “That’s a good idea.”

He kissed me softly. “We’re getting there.”

“I know,” I told him as another thought occurred to me. “But what if we fix everything and we get back to that Christmas or whatever and there’s already an us there?”

He sighed. “We cross that bridge when we get there and deal with it then.”

“Can I at least kiss you now?”

He nodded. “I wish you would.”

I stood on my tiptoes and kissed him for all I was worth.

“Okay. Let’s get us to a dictator.”

~~~~~

Clark

Lois disappeared inside her — the other hers — room.

Was I really sure that this incarnation of me would follow her and a random woman?

I looked around and found my room, knocking quietly on the door.

The door opened and I found myself staring at the younger version of me. “I need to come in, Kal-El.”

I couldn’t think of any other way to shock myself into cooperating.

He backed up, mutely staring at me.

I walked in and he shut the door behind me.

He just stared at me. “Van-El?” he asked.

I shook my head. “No, I’m not Van-El, but good guess.”

“Then who are you?”

I sighed. “I’m you. A future you.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Time travel? Really?”

“Baby in a space ship? Flying man starts fire with his eyes?” I asked with the same raised brow. “Really?”

“Good point.” He still looked skeptical. “But...”

“I know it’s hard to believe, believe me, but I’m you from the future. I know you’re planning on asking Lana to marry you tonight, but you’re going to have to put that off.”

His eyes narrowed. “What? Why?”

“Because Lois is going to need your help and when I was you, the circumstances were a little different and I helped her a little more readily than I think you will.”

“What’re you talking about?”

I sighed. “When I woke up this morning, I was married to the wrong woman.”

“Who were you married to?” he asked, with narrowed eyes.

“I can’t tell you details, just that Lois and I were both in the wrong... timeline or something, but just the two of us. Everyone else was original. We figured out something was wrong and we met up and talked about it. This guy brought us this.” I pulled the time travel box out of my pocket. “Well, he showed up, told us what he’d changed and that he’d be back at midnight with this. We had the day to decide if we wanted to change one event in Lois’ past that changed everything for both of us.”

The other me nodded slowly. “Okay. Like George McFly punching Griff. That one thing...”

I smirked. “That’s exactly what Mom in that timeline said.”

“How many timelines have you been in?” he asked, still a bit

incredulous.

I thought for a minute. “I think we’ve created at least two new ones.” I grimaced. “I didn’t like one of them very much at all.”

“Why?”

“Lois died trying to save you... me... us... whatever at the cabin that night. We left that timeline pretty quickly.”

A light went off in his head. “Did you help us get to the cabin?”

I nodded. “Yeah. And I made sure the power came back on and then went off again before anyone knew it had been tampered with.”

“I thought I felt something blowing on me, helping me stand up, but I figured I was delirious.”

“That was me. My Lois — for lack of a better term,” I hurried on. I couldn’t let him know he’d be marrying Lois in a couple days. “Not the Lois who’s your roommate now, that is, but the one who’s been traveling through time with me, unlocked the door and made sure blankets were handy and stuff. I helped get the fire going and turn the power back on after you went to sleep.”

He shifted uncomfortably. “I had the weirdest dream that night...”

“I know,” I told him quietly. “I can’t tell you anymore about it than you already know.”

He nodded. “I don’t remember it real well.”

“I don’t either,” I told him honestly. I didn’t remember it nearly as well as I remembered the next time I’d made love to Lois.

“So about tonight... Is it really bad enough that I need to go with Lois? Can’t you help her surreptitiously or something?”

I shook my head. “It has to be you. Do whatever you have to to protect her.” I told him softly.

“What if I don’t? You guys go back further in time and change something else right?”

I sighed. “It’s too big a change. It’s only one thing but...”

“What?”

I told him about Ellen, Lucy and Dave. “She moved into the dorms because Lois went and found her a year or so ago, your time, and told her she had to and that, no matter what, she had to live on campus. It’s all part of the eventual outcome and the lives we’re trying to get back to, but we’re trying to keep them alive *and* get our lives as we knew them back. The woman I woke up married to today and I... We don’t have any kids, for one thing — besides just not being *my* wife. But *my* wife and I...” I could feel the emotion welling up. “We have two kids and I miss them more than anything besides being able to kiss her. Lois and I... we’ve managed to get part of our lives back but not all of them. Tonight is part of that.”

He looked awestruck. “I can have kids?” he asked in a hushed tone.

I nodded. “You can and they’re great kids and you have a great wife.”

He sighed. “Okay. What do I need to do?”

“Just go with Lois tonight. Lois is telling her what she needs to do but you need to go with her. Protect her no matter what.” I looked at him intently, trying to impress on him the importance of what I was saying. “*No matter what*. Got it?”

He nodded. “Got it.”

“I mean it. It’s important that you do whatever you have to do. Everything *but* reveal what you can do,” I added as an afterthought. “This is something you have to do without your gifts. There may be a time or two where you think just snatching her and flying her off would be the best way to protect her, but you can’t do that.”

He sighed. “Fine.”

“And don’t tell anyone — not even her — about this

conversation.”

He nodded. “Fine.”

I glanced at the clock. “You need to get downstairs. Lois will be down soon and you need to be there.”

“What’s the deal with me and Lois? And you and Lois?”

I sighed. “The guy who gave us the device said he traveled throughout universes destroying the lives of any Lois and Clark he could find. I don’t know why them, us, whatever. Maybe the other versions of us in his original universe pissed him off or something, so Lois and I are trying to get back to our original lives, but with Ellen and Lucy and Dave.”

He nodded. “I guess I can understand that. But you promise, I’ll be happy if I do this. It won’t ruin things with Lana?”

I hesitated. “It’s the way it has to be. If Lois does what she’s going to do tonight without you... It’ll be bad. Really, really bad for her. Beyond what you can imagine right now. Going with her... It doesn’t ruin things. In the long run, it fixes things, but just remember to be nice to her. For however long it takes to get it all taken care of, be nice to her. It’s going to be hard on her and she needs you to be her friend.” Maybe he’d be nicer to Lois than I had been.

“So it won’t be finished tonight?”

I shook my head. “It’ll take longer than that, but take Lana’s ring with you.” I made myself smile. “You’ll need it.” To get married to Lois, I added silently. “And now, you need to get downstairs and the Lois I’m with and I need to get out of here.” I stood by the door. “Thank you.”

“If I ever see you again and it doesn’t turn out well...” he threatened.

“What? You’ll incinerate me?” I asked with a small smile tugging at my lips before I left.

\*\*\*

Part 27

Lois

~~~~~

“Where are we going to find Mindy?” I asked Clark as we flew.

“We’ll start at the airport and make sure we get on the plane and go from there.”

We landed silently on one of the buildings near the plane in question and watched from there.

“There we are,” Clark whispered pointing to two shadows hiding behind a car.

I nodded and watched as Mindy was handed the briefcase.

The younger me ran towards the rear hatch of the plane and hid inside.

“Go,” whispered Clark. The younger him followed the younger me and a few minutes later, the plane was shut. “I’m not happy,” he said quietly. “I mean he’s not happy. I told him he’d have to put off proposing and he had to protect you, but that he needed to take the ring with him. I think he thought that he’d be able to propose tomorrow or something, not that he’d need to sell it to marry you.”

I sighed. “They’re in for a rude awakening, but we have to make sure it happens. Before we jump forward again, let’s go to Latislan in a couple days and make sure I get out of the hospital and back to the embassy.”

“Maybe we can run interference for ourselves or something,” he said. He leaned closer to me to whisper in my ear. “I can’t wait until we’re married again.”

Chills ran through me — good chills. “Me either.” The thought of making love to him again... It had been... well, more than twenty-four hours, but not that much. We’d spent eighteen hours or so in Bizzaro World and several more hours running through time. I yawned. I’d been up for over twenty-four hours and running on pure adrenaline but even if I was exhausted, we had to get us married so that Clark would quit being so noble and

have his way with me or something.

I couldn't help but daydream. He could fly us to a deserted island in Greece and then go to Italy for pasta while I rested for a few minutes and then, knowing what pasta did to him, we'd have some fun together.

Probably more than once.

I couldn't wait.

"I see some papers in the office," he whispered interrupting my daydreams of the two of us on a beach somewhere.

Where clothing was optional.

I shook my head and looked at him. "What?"

"Where were you?" he asked with a grin.

"A beach in Greece as soon as we make sure the two of them got married," I told him. "With pasta. And no clothes. And then a nap."

His smile broadened. "I like that plan, especially the clothes part, but we have to get there first."

"I know." I put a hand on his cheek. "So what did you say?"

"I see some papers in the office."

"Something we can snag and take with us or use your phone to take pictures of, or what?"

"Pictures are a good idea."

Mindy and her henchman went into the office below us.

Clark listened to their conversation and repeated it to me. Something about an unnamed boss.

"There's some CostMart invoices in there, too," he whispered. "But they might be completely legitimate."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "What could Mindy be a part of that's completely legitimate?"

He shrugged. "Part of the cover?"

"Maybe." I sighed. "Anything else we can get from here?"

He shook his head. "I'll come back while you take a nap and take some pictures."

I glared at him. "You *are not* time traveling without me."

"Of course not. I mean, leave you sleeping on the beach and I'll come back here and take some pictures."

Mindy and company chose that moment to leave.

"Take them now. I don't want to be away from you any longer than absolutely necessary."

He nodded and was back a few minutes later. "Where to now?"

"Latislan, but let's fly. I want to see what happens at the airport."

He stood behind me and wrapped his arms around me, taking off for the small southeastern European country.

"I can't believe we're going back there voluntarily," I said as we flew.

"We're staying way out of sight this time," he promised me.

"He can't get to you."

I sighed. "Except that he can get to me."

"Not *you*," he reminded me. "I know it's going to be hard to watch him with her, but she'll survive and eventually, they'll be as happy as we are now."

"I know."

"And I told him to be nice to her, no matter what," he told me.

I snorted. "Good luck. I love you, Clark, you know that, but that first year I don't think Kryptonite would have knocked any sense into you."

"I'm so sorry about that," he said, stopping in mid-air and burying his face in the back of my neck.

"I know and you're going to spend the rest of your life making it up to me."

"Got that right. Starting with breakfast in bed the day after we get back."

I shook my head. "I want to spend time with the boys first. Lots of time. But there will be plenty of breakfast in bed

opportunities in the future."

We took off again and landed on the roof of one of the buildings near the tarmac where the plane would land.

Clark sat down, leaning against the side of the building and pulled me down in front of him, his arms around me. "Now we wait," he said.

"How long?" I asked him with a yawn.

"Not too long," he promised, "but if you want to doze off for a little bit, you can."

"Thanks," I murmured, as I closed my eyes and did just that.

~~~~~  
Clark

Hopefully, it wouldn't take long for us to get the younger us married off and then we could go find that beach Lois had mentioned...

I sighed. It wouldn't do to get distracted and miss this all. Daydreaming would have to wait.

And then it wouldn't be daydreaming.

I wasn't sure how long we sat there, but it wasn't too long. "Lois," I whispered. "The plane's landing."

"Wha?" she asked, practically jumping out of my arms.

"Shh..." I hissed, clapping a hand over her mouth.

She nodded against me and I let her go.

"Sorry," I whispered. "Don't want the bad guys to have two of us."

"Sorry," she whispered back. "Is that the plane?" she asked nodded towards the tarmac.

As if to answer her question, she came running out of the rear hatch.

Or rather the other her did.

We watched for another half hour or so until she kneed Navance in the groin and they all headed towards the building that passed for a hospital in this country.

We both breathed a sigh of relief at the other me's attitude and protectiveness of the other her.

"Do we want to make sure he claims paternity?" I asked her.

"When was that?" she asked back. "I don't remember."

"Hour, hour and a half, something like that."

She nodded. "Let's go sit on top of the hospital and you can keep an ear on everything and wake me up when he does." She turned to look at me. "Are you okay? I mean I know you need less sleep than the rest of us but are you okay?"

I nodded and brushed her hair behind her ear. "I'm fine. I'll need some rest before too long, but we'll just be sitting there... Wait."

"What?"

I grinned at her. "We have a time machine. We go forward an hour and see what's happening and go from there."

She grinned back. "That's a better plan."

A minute later we stepped through the window to the same rooftop an hour later. I wrapped my arms around her and we headed silently towards the hospital.

"Just in time," I whispered as we saw Navance stride into the building. Sure enough, a few minutes later, I heard my younger self claiming Lois' baby — his baby, even if he didn't know it.

"Now when?" Lois asked after I told her that he'd done it.

"Get you out of the hospital and towards the embassy?"

She nodded. "Let's go forward... three days?"

I nodded and we did just that. It amazed me how quickly we'd adapted to this whole time travel thing.

I looked around and grimaced. "Jack's on his way and I'm hiding in the alley but I don't think he's going to make it in time," I told her watching as an orderly made his way from room to room on the floor.

Lois nibbled on her bottom lip as she thought. "I'll distract the guard, you get her out. Just wear a mask."

"How do I convince her I'm a good guy without showing her

who I am?”

“He used a PDA or something to type messages to me. One said you were waiting for me or something like that. The second said that you said to save you a Tush Push. That’s how I knew for sure it was okay — only you would have said something like that.”

I nodded. “You have to be careful. Very careful.” I told her.

She smiled at me and moved into the circle of my arms. “I trust you to take care of me, because in like an hour when they’re married, we’re heading for the beach.”

I kissed her softly. “Let’s go.”

I managed to get us through the stairwell silently and found an empty supply room with some extra scrubs in it. I changed into some and Lois did as well. I grabbed some extras in her size for her younger self.

“Ready?” I whispered as we reached the corner near her room.

She nodded, but I could tell she was nervous.

“I won’t let anything happen to either one of you,” I promised her.

“I know.” She took a deep breath. “Here goes.”

I watched as she sauntered up to the guard, who looked shocked to see her out of her room. She looked enough like her younger self that he didn’t know what to do but follow her. I grabbed an empty syringe to try to throw them off or something and did what she’d told me had happened. The younger Lois and I made it out of the hospital and I saw her in the arms of my younger self and breathed a sigh of relief.

A minute later, my Lois came running up, a big grin on her face. “They don’t know what hit them,” she whispered. “But they’re right behind me. We need to lead them away from the other two.”

I nodded. “Let’s go.”

~~~~~  
Lois

This was much more fun the second time around.

We ran through the streets of Skopje, leading the guards away from the embassy. After nearly half an hour, we ducked into an alley.

“Can we be done yet?” I whispered. The catnaps had been nice, but I was ready for real food and a good night’s sleep. As much as I wanted to get this all over with, I was more than ready for that.

And some alone time with my husband.

While he wasn’t Lana’s husband.

Clark nodded. “Let’s head over to the embassy and make sure he goes through with it.”

He pulled me close to him and we landed on a roof near the embassy. Getting too close — with all the Marines on their guard — wasn’t a good idea.

“There,” Clark whispered pointing and I could see through a small window into the chapel.

Tears flowed down my cheeks on behalf of my younger self. She was in for a rough row to hoe and she didn’t know the half of it yet.

“She’ll be okay.” His arms tightened around me. “She’s strong. She’s tough and tenacious and she’s going to be a great mom.”

“I know.”

The wedding was over and I turned to Clark. I put my hands on either side of his face and kissed him passionately. “Let’s get out of here,” I whispered.

Minutes later, we were on the sand of one of those deserted islands I’d mentioned. At least I thought it was deserted. I trusted Clark and I didn’t really care.

It wasn’t long before we were lying in each other’s arms and even Clark was breathing heavily as we floated above the sand.

“I’ll spread out clothes out as best I can and grab a towel or something while I’m in Italy,” he said, kissing me softly. “Unless you’d rather find a hotel somewhere or something.”

I shook my head. “We should stay as low-key as possible. Go get us pasta.” I grinned. “Though we didn’t need it that time.”

He smiled at me. “No, we didn’t.” He kissed me again. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.” He disappeared into the night.

It felt a bit weird lying there under the stars, only Clark’s shirt over me as a blanket, knowing that not too far away the other me was probably crying her eyes out.

It was less than ten minutes before Clark returned with pasta and blankets. He spread one out on the beach and I stuck my arms into the sleeves of his shirt and buttoned a couple of the buttons.

He raised an eyebrow at me as I pulled my underwear back on.

“I thought clothing was optional,” he said as he dug out the lasagna to hand to me.

“You’ll have to work to get my clothes off again, mister. You have to feed me before there’s even a chance. Besides you’re clothed,” I pointed out, eyeing his jeans and form-fitting T-shirt. I grabbed a garlic breadstick out of the bag and took a big bite. “Mmmmmm,” I said, my eyes practically rolling in the back of my head. “I knew I was hungry but I had no idea *how* hungry.” I could see Clark watching me with thinly disguised desire. “Eat, buster.”

He laughed and pulled out a fettuccini Alfredo for himself.

It didn’t take long for us to finish off all the food he’d brought. As he put the trash into the sack and incinerated it on the beach, I yawned. “Ready to get some sleep?”

I tried not to laugh at his forlorn little boy look.

“Seriously?” he asked, petulantly.

I giggled. “No. I know what pasta does to you. *Then* we’ll get some sleep.”

He floated over to me as I stretched out on the blanket. He parted the sides of his shirt below where I’d buttoned it. Lovingly, he traced my stretch marks with the tips of his fingers. “I know I’ve always said that you’re beautiful, stretch marks and all, but now...” He kissed my stomach gently. “...they take on a whole new meaning, don’t they?”

I nodded. “They do.” I reached up to brush a lock of hair off his forehead. “You know what I remember the most about the night we made Nate?”

He looked up at me. “What’s that?”

“The first time you looked at me — after you took my nightgown off...” My eyes filled with tears at the memory.

“What about it?” he asked, moving to lie next to me, his fingers still caressing my stomach.

“I’d told you I didn’t care if you pretended I was Lana as long as you didn’t use her name.”

“She was never there that night,” he whispered, kissing my forehead. “Only you. I should have known then...”

The tears streaked down my temples and into my ears.

“What?” he asked. “Did you think I did imagine Lana?”

I shook my head. “No, I never really thought that, but after you took my nightgown off and laid us down, you rolled to the side and I could tell you were looking at me, but...”

“You couldn’t bring yourself to watch me, could you? You were afraid of what I’d think after you’d been nursing for so long and the stretch marks, weren’t you?”

I nodded. “But then you told me I was beautiful and somehow I knew you were talking about me and not pretending I was Lana.”

“I was,” he told me. “From the time you kissed me to the time when I woke up and saw you lying on my side of the bed and the sheet was down nearly to your rear end and all I could see was your back and I wondered what would happen if you woke

up just then... You were the only thing in my world, sweetheart. You still are. Every time we make love. I don't hear emergencies or anything." He began kissing his way up my neck between words. "Just you. Your heartbeat. The little noises you make. You fill my world, my senses. You're my life."

The tears had picked up a bit. "Clark..."

Whatever I was about to say was lost in his passionate kiss.

We made love again, under the stars, and then Clark pulled a blanket up over us as we fell asleep in each other's arms.

Part 28

Clark

~~~~~

Waking up with my naked wife in my arms was a dream come true.

Apparently, she was thinking something along the same lines, because she started kissing me as soon as she woke up.

Not that I was complaining.

All too soon, though, it was time to get dressed again.

Lois sighed as she pulled her shirt over her head. "Now when?"

"Back to the future, I guess," I told her, buttoning up my flannel shirt that she looked so good in. "Christmas morning and go from there."

"I have a bad feeling about this," she said. "Something's not going to be right, but I've not got a clue what it is. Maybe the other you decided that 'be nice to Lois' meant leave her when she told him she couldn't do it anymore on their first anniversary."

"You mean instead of kissing her?" I asked wryly.

She glared at me. "I would have slapped you except I would have hurt myself. I was *not* amused."

I wrapped my arms around her. "I'm sorry for that, too."

She sighed again and rested her head on my chest, her arms finding their way around me. "At some point, you're going to have to stop apologizing, Clark. It's been six months since Navance died. I'm not saying you don't still have some making up for it to do — those breakfasts in bed, the night flights, all that stuff — but I know you're sorry. I know you regret a lot of what happened those first few years. I've forgiven you; have you forgiven yourself?"

That was an interesting question. I believed Lois when she said she'd forgiven me. And all that 'making it up' stuff was stuff I wanted to do for her anyway — because I loved her and I would have done it anyway.

*Had I forgiven myself?*

I deeply regretted a lot of what happened before Navance died. Most of the second year of our marriage was pretty good — from a friend perspective anyway — but the rest of it...

I sighed. "I think that's something I need to deal with another day. Right now, we need to get our lives back."

She nodded against me before lifting her face to mine. "I love you, Clark Jerome Davis Kent." She kissed me softly.

"I love you, Lois Joanne Lane-Kent." I kissed her back.

"Let's go figure this out," she said with renewed determination.

I nodded. "Let's go."

We stepped through the time window onto the same beach and she turned to me with a raised brow. "Trying to tell me something, Kent?"

I shrugged. "That I want to fly with my wife."

She smiled. "I guess I can't argue with that, can I?"

I pulled her into my arms and we took off for Pittsdale.

We hovered near the house and I grimaced. Lois had been right. Something was wrong.

"What?" she asked.

I sighed as I set us down in the trees near the house.

"None of my family is here. You are, but I'm not. Just you

and your parents and Lucy and Jimmy."

"Christopher?" she asked fearfully.

I nodded. "He's here." I took a deep breath. "But Nate's not. And there's no place for him — no crib or anything. Our wing has all the lock-down stuff in it so we must have lived here together at some point."

"We must not have been together after Daddy's heart attack," she said burying her head in my chest.

I sighed. "Back we go then, but to what time? Before the heart attack and warn them? After and you convince yourself to come on to me or what?"

"Go to the hospital? Try to corner them while they're alone?"

"Shhh..." I saw something.

I saw the other me land near the house and walk in.

"Did you see that?" I whispered.

"That was you, right? Not Bernie or something?"

"That was me."

><~><~><

"Hi," the other Clark said.

"How're you?" the other Lois replied heading back into the house. "His bag is packed," she went on, without waiting for a response. "He's been waiting for you to get here since about five this morning. He can't wait to see your folks."

"They send their love," Clark told her.

"Send mine back." She handed him a small 'Incredibles' suitcase.

"Are you okay?" he asked after a long pause.

She shrugged. "Fine. Still mad at the other version of myself for putting us all through this hell and wondering at what point does it become worthwhile. I mean, I love Christopher, you know that, but if she hadn't sent us on that wild goose chase with the blonde..."

"Right." He set the suitcase down and shoved his hands in his pockets. "I'm still not real crazy about the other me either. Part of me wishes they would show up again so we could give them what for."

"How is Lana, anyway?" Lois asked, turning away from him.

Clark shrugged. "Fine, I guess. I haven't talked to her in a while."

Lois looked up, surprised. "She didn't take you back?"

Clark shook his head. "Not yet. She understands why I did what I did, why you and I both did what we did, but I still have some groveling to do at this point. She asked me to give her some time."

She turned to look at him. "I hope you're happy when this is all sorted out, really, I do. But I meant it when I said I wouldn't tolerate Lana treating Christopher like the spawn of Satan or something. Talking about your 'real' family or whatever. If I find out she's doing stuff like that, you'll only get to see him when she's not around. Got it?"

He nodded. "I don't think she'd do that, but I wouldn't tolerate it either."

There was a long awkward silence.

"Sometimes I wish he was your son," Lois suddenly blurted out. "I had a dream that night at the cabin and sometimes I wish it had been real."

"What?" Clark asked after a second of stunned silence.

Lois sighed. "Never mind."

"No. What was that about a dream?"

She sighed. "I had a dream that night in front of the fire. That we really had been together in some hypothermic induced haze."

"I had the same dream," Clark said quietly. "At the time, I thought it was with Lana, but she kept morphing into you. The longer we were together, the more it was just you there with me that night."

Lois looked at him with tears in her eyes. "Do you think it's possible?"

Clark shrugged. “He *does* look a lot like me, but there’s no way to know what really happened on Halloween either.”

“If we ever see ourselves again, we should ask them.”

Clark’s brow furrowed for a minute, before understanding dawned. “When I talked to him, he said he had two kids with his wife.”

“Well, even though the divorce isn’t final, I don’t see us having another baby anytime soon,” Lois told him.

“No. That’s not it. He *had* to know you were pregnant by then. And looking back, I know how I took a lot of the things he said — like how I needed to take the engagement ring with me because I’d need it. I thought he meant that I wouldn’t make it back to the hotel again before it was time to see Lana again, but what he really meant was that I’d need it to get us out of Latislan — to sell it for the rings and the license and stuff. But the two kids... Do you think he meant Christopher was my son and that at some point, they had another baby?”

She shrugged. “It’s possible, I guess.”

There was another long silence. “Can I ask you something, Lois?”

She shrugged again. “Sure.”

“How are you? Really?”

“Except for Christopher, life stinks. What do you expect?”

He went and sat in one of the chairs. “I know you’re probably not going to believe me, but I’ve been thinking about something for a long time. Ever since Lana said she needed some time. I’ve been thinking a lot about my life and something Nana and Pop Pop always said keeps coming back to me.”

“What’s that?”

“Love isn’t who you can live with, it’s who you can’t live without,” he quoted softly. “The last six months, without the two of you have been harder than the first six months without Lana were. I mean, I know I see Christopher regularly, but it’s not the same. When I saw Lana, every time I saw her, it was like I was going through the motions. I knew I should still be in love with her, but every time, I found myself comparing her to you. And every time, she came up short. I hated that for a while — hated you for that, even though it wasn’t your fault. Finally, Mom asked me what had been bugging me and she said something — I’m not even sure what — that made me reevaluate things.”

He took a deep breath before continuing. “I’m not in love with Lana anymore, though I guess if she called today and said she wanted to try dating again, I probably would, but I don’t think that’s where I really want to be. And, I’m not in love with you either, but I keep daydreaming about asking you out — on a real date — and you saying yes, and spending the day together with Christopher and going out at night, just the two of us. I don’t think Lana’s what I really want anymore. I think I really was in love with her, but I know I’m not anymore. And I can’t honestly say that I’m in love with you but I *can* say I’d like to take you out, to get to know the real Lois Lane again, to see what could happen between us, whether Christopher is really my son or not.” He looked up at Lois hopefully. “Whaddya say? Can we try to make this work for real?”

Lois swiped at the tears on her cheeks. “I would like that,” she said softly. “But I swear to you, if you’re just killing time until Lana decides to take you back...” She left the threat hanging in the air.

“I’m not,” he said standing up. “I promise. I know that doesn’t mean much coming from me, but it’s the truth.”

She nodded as Christopher came running in to the room, flinging himself into Clark’s arms.

Clark and Christopher chatted for a minute, before Clark turned back to Lois. “Would you like to come with us? Spend Christmas with my folks?”

She nodded through her tears. “I’d like that very much. Just let me tell Mom.”

><><><

Lois

~~~~~

Tears had filled my eyes and we stepped quietly through the window before they could take off. Clark had whispered the entire conversation to me. It looked like things would turn out okay for these two after all.

But it still wasn’t *our* lives.

So back to the time of the heart attack we went.

We watched as the ambulance took Daddy away and the opportunity presented itself. Jessica, apparently, had spent the night elsewhere — something that was different between our universes or timelines or whatever.

I was waiting in the garage when the younger me walked in, keys to the Jeep in her hand.

“Go to hell,” she said barely looking at me.

“I don’t blame you,” I said quietly. “I know you didn’t think I was getting you into this mess.”

“And don’t you ever change clothes?”

I smirked. “Benefits of time travel. For you it’s been years since we first met, but it’s only been a few hours for me — maybe twelve or so. After we helped you get out of the hospital and saw the wedding in Latislan, we went to a beach to sleep for a while. I’d been up for nearly thirty-six hours by then. We didn’t start the whole time travel thing till midnight and I’d been up since about five that morning.”

She crossed her arms and stared at me. “So talking me into living on campus and going to Latislan took seventeen hours?”

I shook my head. “No,” I said quietly. “We’ve been a lot more times and places than that.”

“Like when?”

“The cabin,” I told her. “I was the one who made sure it was unlocked and the blankets were on the couch. After I saw you the first time, we went back to when we started and found out that you hadn’t survived. You’d collapsed on the porch trying to break the window. Clark barely managed to survive. We went back to help. We fixed the power that night and...” I didn’t think telling her we’d turned it back off a couple days later was a good idea.

“And then?”

“Then we went forward and things still weren’t right. So we went to Europe. I talked to you, Clark talked to Clark. We watched Navance and we wouldn’t have let anything happen to you if things had gone differently than they did for us. My Clark was the one who helped you out of the hospital while I distracted the guard and then we ran through the streets of Skopje, leading them away from the embassy so you two could get there safely.”

“So at what point does this all become worth it? Because I’m just not seeing it. Joe offered to marry me and if I hadn’t already been married to Clark, he would have and he and I would have been happy together.”

“Probably,” I said softly. “But I still think things are more than worth it in the end.”

“Is Daddy going to be okay?” she asked suddenly, her eyes full of tears.

I nodded. “He’s going to be fine. I promise.”

She breathed a sigh of relief, then another of resignation. “What is it I have to do this time?”

“Tonight, after you get home, go to bed. Try to get some sleep and when Clark asks what he can do to help make it better, tell him. Whatever you feel in your heart that you want him to do to help, tell him and then act on it. If it’s a night flight or game night or *whatever*, just tell him what you really want in the bottom of your heart.”

“I want him to love me,” she whispered. “Like Daddy loves Mom. Like Jimmy’s falling in love with Lucy. Like he loves Lana.”

“I know,” I whispered back. “And I don’t know that tonight’s

the right time to tell him that, but tell him what he can *do* to help make it better. I don't think you'll want to have *that* conversation tonight. But be honest with him about what he can do to help in the middle of the night tonight. Trust your heart about what to ask him for. It'll be worth it, I promise."

One other thing. "Oh. And you need to remember one word. You won't need it for a while, but the look..." I hesitated, not wanting to tell her too much. "Just remember 'Superman'."

"Superman?" she asked with a raised brow.

"I promise that's one you want to remember."

"You've promised a lot of things."

"I know."

She sighed. "But you did say the Kerth doesn't come until *after* graduation, so..."

"Believe me when I say that once you've been through what you two have already been through and what you're going to go through to get where we are now, you'll never take it for granted. Never take Mom and Lucy and Dave for granted either. I still miss them every day and I never met Dave until I woke up in the wrong timeline."

"So who's Jimmy with then? If Lucy's not there?" she asked quietly.

I shook my head. "He hasn't found anyone yet. I hope he does."

"I hope so, too."

"Trust him tonight," I told her as I pushed off the car. "It'll be worth it."

Part 29

Clark

I took a deep breath and started to knock on the door to the veranda when it jerked open.

"What do you want?" an angry younger version of me demanded.

I winced. "You're not happy with me?"

He just glared and turned to go back inside. "You lied to me."

"No," I said, shutting the door behind me. "I never lied.

Misled, maybe, but never lied. I said you'd need the ring, and you did. You just assumed I meant you wouldn't be back to the hotel before you saw Lana again, but I meant you'd need it so you could sell it so you could protect Lois and Christopher."

He just glared at me and I was glad I was invulnerable.

"This year hasn't been all bad, has it?" I noticed the bear sitting on one of the chairs. "You won the baseball toss-off, didn't you?"

A half smile appeared on his face. "Yeah, I did. About time, too."

"How'd that feel?" I asked him. "Not winning, but winning for Lois?"

"Better than I thought it would," he admitted grudgingly.

"And when she kissed you afterwards? You didn't want it to stop, did you?"

He sighed. "No, I didn't." He sat on the edge of the bed. "Is Sam going to be okay?"

I nodded. "Yeah, he's going to be fine. Recovery will take a while, but it usually does after a heart attack."

"Makes sense. What about me and Lois?"

"What about you and Lois?"

"Is she the wife you're trying to get back to?" He didn't look at me. "Or did you get back with Lana at some point?"

"I can't tell you that." I sat next to him, careful not to touch him. Who knew if that might make the universe explode or something? "I can tell you she's going to need you tonight.

Seeing her dad in the hospital like that... She's going to need a friend and that's you. She's going to wake you up when she's crying. Just ask her what you can do to make it better and really

listen to her tell you what she needs from you."

"And then do whatever it is that she asks for?" he asked with a raised brow.

"Something like that," I said with a smirk. "Trust me on this one. I know this isn't the life you wanted, the life you planned, but when you get to the place you're going, you'll appreciate it that much more. It's hard to appreciate a good crop if you never have a bad one."

He snorted. "Quoting Pop Pop?"

I shrugged. "Whatever works."

I heard something I knew he hadn't because he hadn't been listening for it. "I've got to go, but be there for her tonight. Be her friend, be what she needs you to be, even if it's just for tonight and then you go back to being practically strangers who share a bed. Tonight she needs you."

He nodded. "I'll remember that."

I smiled. If things went even close to the way I remembered them, he wouldn't remember a thing about this conversation once she started kissing him. "Take care of her," I said quietly as I headed for the veranda.

"I will."

I headed down to the backstage area of the basement.

"How'd she take it?" I asked Lois when I saw her.

"She's mad at me," she said, coming willingly into my arms.

"He's mad at me, too," I told her.

"Did you convince him?"

"I think so. Her?"

"I told her to follow her heart. To tell him what she really needs from him tonight."

"Good."

I pulled the time travel thing out of my pocket.

Lois stopped me with a hand on my arm. "What if they're there? Doesn't that seem like what's going to happen? We'll get to the day after the wedding and the us that's here will already be there so there's nowhere for *us* to be. There's already been an us in every universe we've been to."

I sighed. "We deal with it, I guess." I kissed her softly. "Together."

I punched in the information and we took a deep breath and stepped through. The window closed behind us.

Lois turned to me. "Okay, do your hearing thing."

"Hello."

~~~~~  
Lois

We both jumped and turned around, Clark moving protectively in front of me.

There we stood.

The us of this universe.

I couldn't take it anymore and crumpled into the chair next to me, tears over flowing.

My Clark knelt next to me. "It's okay, sweetheart." He pulled me towards him until I was sitting on the floor in front of him, wrapped in his arms.

"No, it's not. I want my life back. I want my life back but with Mom and Lucy and Dave. And even if I can't have that life, I have no idea how to get back to *my* life, to *our* life, to *our* kids."

He floated us slightly until we were in a better position for him to hold me to him, my head on his chest as I cried.

"We'll be back in a few minutes," I heard the other Clark whisper and I felt my Clark nod his head.

He just held me where we were while I cried it out.

"I want to go home," I whispered.

"I know," he whispered back.

"Did Jor-El send ruby slippers with you by any chance? In that ship of yours."

He chuckled. "No. No ruby slippers."

"Drat."

“Is it safe to come back in?” I heard the other Clark say.

“Yes,” I called as Clark stood us both up. They came in, the other Clark’s arm around the other me. “I’m sorry about that.”

She smiled at me. “It’s okay. I can’t imagine, being where we finally are now, and then having everything ripped away from us.” She gestured towards the door. “Would you guys be more comfortable sitting out here?”

We nodded and all headed towards the front of the theater.

“How was the wedding?” I asked her as we sat down.

“Good,” she said with a smile. “Bernie and Ashley got married, too. *Finally.*”

“At our wedding, too.” I looked at her with a grin. “And Superman?”

“I should have *known* that was your idea,” the other Clark said with a groan.

The other Lois and I dissolved into a sudden fit of giggles.

“He looks really good in that Suit, doesn’t he?” she whispered.

I nodded. “There’s no Superman where we started out this morning,” I said suddenly.

“What?” she asked in shock. “Whichever Clark is supposed to be there isn’t Superman? What about Van-El?”

“He’s there,” my Clark said. “But the other me, apparently, never even met him — not really. I mean, that Lois and Clark won a Kerth for their stories about him, but my parents said as far as they knew I’d never talked to him about being my brother and Krypton and all that.”

“I wonder why that is,” the other Clark asked thoughtfully.

“I bet I know,” the other me said.

“What’s that?”

“My Clark told me you said something about being married to the wrong woman, right?”

We nodded.

“Were you married to Lana?” she asked.

We nodded again.

She turned to her husband. “She said something about thinking flying with Van-El would be cool when she emailed me after the transport thing, but would she have wanted you to be a superhero?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I think she would have been okay with me if I’d told her after I’d proposed like originally planned. Then it would have been *me*, her fiancée and all that rather than random guy.”

Clark nodded thoughtfully. “That sounds about right. Maybe she took it okay, but isn’t crazy about the powers and all that or at least the thought of a secret identity and using them in public and because of that he decided not to be a superhero.”

“Maybe,” the other Clark said.

“How are things for you guys?” I asked the other Lois.

“Thank you,” she said. “Without you two, things would never have turned out like they did.”

I smiled through the tears that had found their way back to my eyes. “I’m so glad.”

She looked like she wanted to hug me. “I know this is the life you wanted for yourself. I’m sorry we can’t both have it.”

“Thank you.” I sighed. “After traveling through however many different timelines we have, I’m glad someone’s where they should be.”

“How many timelines have you been to?” the other Clark asked curiously.

I glanced at my husband. “Um...” I ticked them off on my fingers. “There’s our original universe, timeline, whatever. Then the one we woke up in. Then the one where the Lois had died at the cabin; that’s three. Then the one where I was happily married to Joe with Christopher and a little girl.”

“What?!” they both exclaimed.

Clark winced. “I didn’t like that universe. It was better than

the one without Lois but... We hopped into this room and I listened for heartbeats and heard that Lois and Joe...” Both guys shuddered simultaneously.

“So that was four,” I went on with a look at them. “Then there was the one where you didn’t have Nate.” I paused. “You do have Nate, don’t you?”

They nodded. “The night after we saw you guys again,” her Clark said softly. “You both gave us some good advice.”

“We’ve lived it,” my Clark told him in the same tone. “Every point we visited was a turning point in our lives and that was a big one. Not just because of Nate, but because it was when I started to realize that maybe I didn’t belong with Lana after all.”

“So what was different in that other universe besides no Nate?” Lois asked us.

Clark and I glanced at each other. “Um,” he started. “We weren’t there long, but apparently, after Navance died, that Lois and Clark separated. We were there Christmas morning when he was coming to pick Christopher up for Christmas. While we were there, he said that he wasn’t in love with Lana anymore and he didn’t know if he was in love with Lois, but that he wanted to give them a real try.”

“Kind of like Joe on the airplane to Paris,” I told them.

“I hope it worked out,” Lois said softly. “I think all the versions of us were in love with their Clarks long before they were.”

They glanced at each other. “Do you think we could borrow the time machine for a minute?” she asked.

“Why?” I asked back.

“We’d talked about seeing if we could. Clark watched when you two left last time and saw when and where you went so we knew you’d be here, now, but we’d like to go back to Halloween and the cabin and find out for sure who Christopher’s dad is.”

~~~~~

Clark

I glanced at Lois and pulled her slightly closer to me. “We know. We went back to both times.”

“And?” the other me asked anxiously.

“You are,” I told him. “It was Navance’s nephew at the Halloween party but you got there in time, just like you thought.”

His eyes closed and he rested his head on his wife’s. “Thank goodness.”

“So it was at the cabin?”

We nodded. “Yeah,” I said. “We were there, too. Helping get the fire going, making sure the power was back on for a while...” My voice trailed off.

“You told me that before, but...” My counterpart’s eyes narrowed. “You didn’t... did you?”

“No!” I said vehemently and I noticed Lois had the good grace to look embarrassed. “We were there and we saw you kiss and I saw the look on your face,” I nodded at Lois, “after but we didn’t watch or listen or anything like that. Neither one of us saw either of you...” I waved a vague hand. “...naked or anything like that.” I winced. “I did hide your shirt after the power went back out.”

They both breathed a sigh of relief before she asked, “Why?”

Lois shrugged. “Falling asleep and later waking up in his arms was something that helped keep me going for a long time.”

The other Lois nodded. “I remember it well.”

“Did he kiss you and come on to you on your first birthday together, then call you Lana?” she whispered to her other self.

They both looked shocked. “No!” he exclaimed. “I’ll admit that I thought about kissing her that night, but I didn’t. I went and got her dinner from Japan the next night for her birthday.” He looked at me with a raised brow. “Really? You called her Lana?”

I shifted uncomfortably. “I still don’t remember that part of it, but I know better than to argue with my wife on something like

that.”

The other Clark and I heard noises upstairs at the same time. The two of us exchanged a look.

“Listen, we talked about it and if you two want to stay here and be us today, you can. We could go to the cabin for the day and you could have the life you’ve wanted, Lois,” the other Lois said. “Even if it’s just for a little while.”

One look at Lois’ face told me how tempting the idea was. “You don’t want to spend Christmas here — your first Christmas as a really real family?” We’d come back on Christmas morning instead of Christmas night for a reason. Just like we had after we left Latislan or Greece or whatever. We wanted to spend the day with our boys.

“We do,” the other her said softly. “But I’ve also realized how hard this would have been without my mom and my sister to help me through it and if I didn’t have them, I might give just about anything for a one day glimpse of what life could be like.”

She looked up at me. “What do you think, honey?”

“I think,” I said slowly, “that it’s your mom and sister and brother and it’s your decision.”

She thought about it for a long minute before shaking her head. “I think it would be worse spending a day with them and knowing it could never be, what might have been if my life had been a little different. Right now, I can deal with not having them, if I can have my sons back, my life back, but I don’t know how to get there.”

The other Lois thought for a minute. “You said Mom and Lucy were in accident when we were ten, right?”

Lois nodded.

“What if you went back to when we were nine and then went forward or something? Where would you end up?”

I looked at Lois and we both shrugged.

“One of the six timelines, I guess,” my Lois answered. “As long as we’re very careful not to change anything while we’re there.”

“So we go someplace extremely secluded and are there long enough to reprogram the doohickey and step back through,” I said. “Fifteen minutes after midnight tonight. That way if we’re still here, in this time, you’ll know when to look for us and we can come up with something else. And if we end up back where we started this morning, for instance, we’ll already be gone instead of two of us there.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” the other me said. “Good luck. And thank you. For everything. For helping us get what we really wanted even when we didn’t know what we really wanted.”

“No problem,” Lois told him. “But I’d really like to get home now.”

I took the black square out of my pocket. “Where and when?” I asked her.

“Right here is fine,” she said. “When we were at Disneyworld the first week of June when I was nine but in the middle of the night — like four in the morning.”

The other Lois nodded. “That sounds good.”

I was happy for them — really I was — even though they had the life I’d wanted for myself. I was glad some version of me had it.

Right now I just wanted to get back to *my* life.

A minute later, we waved to the other us and stepped through. I immediately started to reset the controller and we stepped back through, to whatever timeline we were going to end up in, fifteen minutes after we left the first one.

~~~~~

*Lois*

They were — unsurprisingly — in each other’s arms when we stepped back through.

I wanted to collapse and cry again, but I wouldn’t let myself.

“It didn’t work,” I said, slumping down into one of the seats.

“So where to next?” Clark asked, sinking down next to me.

“Where’ve you been?” Martha asked. “You’ve only been gone a few minutes.”

“Really?” I asked, shocked. No, it made sense. I put my head in my hands and stifled a scream. “Why? Why can’t we get home?”

Martha sighed. “Let’s go out in the theater and we’ll talk about it there. It’s more comfortable.”

We moved to the other room and I noticed Clark was keeping his distance from me again.

Damn it.

The tears came anyway.

“How long have you two been gone anyway?” Martha asked as we sat down.

I glanced at Clark. “Eighteen hours? Something like that. We hopped several timelines, then ate and slept for a while, then hopped some more and managed to get a timeline with our lives but with my mom and sister and brother and everything, but there was already an us there.” I wiped at my eyes. “We went back to 1994, before the accident happened or didn’t happen or whatever and came forward again and this was where we ended up.” I looked at Clark in anguish. “Why did we come here? Why didn’t we go home?”

“You said there was a Lois and Clark already in the other timeline?” Martha asked.

We nodded.

“Did you go to any other 2006s?” This came from Jonathan.

“Yeah,” Clark answered. “Four, I think. We’re calling this the second one. The third one was bad. Lois had died in that one and we left really quickly. The fourth one had Lois and Joe married with two kids. The fifth had us married but splitting up but thinking about getting back together and one kid. The sixth was the one we wanted to be in.” He’d reached over and taken my hand. “We weren’t in any of them for more than a few minutes.”

“So all but the third had a Lois and a Clark?” Martha again.

“We didn’t see Clark in the third one but yeah,” Clark told her.

“Hmmm...” She looked like she was pondering something.

“So there’s a total of six 2006s out there. You went back to a time before the split took place. This was the only 2006 that didn’t have a Lois and Clark that was supposed to?”

“As far as we know,” I said.

Martha sighed. “Then I bet that’s it. Nature — and I’d guess time — abhors a vacuum. Since we’re guessing that our Lois and Clark are in your timeline, this would be the only one of the six that didn’t have one of you so this is where you ended up.”

“So how do we get back?” I whispered, looking at Clark desperately.

“I don’t think we do,” he said grimly, tears in his own eyes. “I don’t think we do.”

\*\*\*

Part 30

*Clark*

~~~~~

I was breaking her heart.

Why was it that I always ended up breaking the heart of the woman I loved?

I’d loved Lana and broken her heart.

I loved Lois so much more than I ever had Lana.

And I was breaking her heart.

And if we couldn’t figure out a way out of this, I was going to break Lana’s all over again.

“There has to be a way,” she whispered.

“I don’t know what it is,” I told her honestly. “If Mom’s right... There’s no way to get back to our 2006.”

“What if she’s not?” Lois asked me. “I love you Martha, whichever Martha you are, but -who’s the expert on time travel?”

Doc Brown?"

"So what do you recommend?" I asked her. "Jumping back and forth to 1994 or other random years and see where we end up?"

"I don't know."

I wanted nothing more than to take her in my arms and fly off with her, but here... Here and now, Clark Kent was married to Lana, not Lois.

I looked to Mom and Dad. "Any ideas?"

"I'm out," Mom said quietly.

"I don't have any ideas either," Dad said. "Are there any other buttons on that doohickey?"

I pulled it back out of my pocket and looked at it. "There's only one other button on here. It's got IMTH on it, but I have no idea what that could stand for and I'd really rather not destroy the universe or something."

Lois sighed. "So what are we supposed to do? I love Joe, he's been a good friend to me over the years, but I can't marry him in a couple weeks. And I really can't stand the idea of you going upstairs and even just *sleeping* with Lana," she told me. "But I know you and I know you're not going to come within ten feet of me while you're in a universe where you're married to someone else. That's why we took our dinner and rest break when we did — in a universe *after* we got married." She closed her eyes tightly. "And now there's an even greater chance that I'm pregnant and if Lana is pregnant already... then what?"

I groaned. "I don't know, honey, but what're we supposed to do?"

"I don't think Lana could be pregnant yet," Mom told us. "Not based on what she told me today anyway. She said it would be another three or four weeks before she could take a test."

I looked at them. "I've almost always gone to my parents for advice, except for part of the whole thing with Navance where we didn't know if Christopher was my son and that we were planning on divorcing after five years." I sighed. "Help."

Mom and Dad shared a look.

"Follow your heart," Mom finally said. "If it means telling everyone here the truth, canceling the wedding and divorcing Lana, then so be it. Lana and Joe won't be happy if you two are trying to fake a life with them here. They'll catch on sooner or later, if they haven't already. If nothing else, in two weeks, Joe would notice the stretch marks. And if you *could* go from Clark to Joe that quickly, even just to maintain appearances and you both slept with them, you'd have a hard time telling him you're pregnant with someone else's baby, Lois. But at the same time, in your lives, you're married to each other and I can't see the Lois or Clark I know suddenly doing something like that just to keep up appearances, and I can't imagine you two doing it either."

"No," I told her running my free hand through my hair. "As far as I'm concerned Lois is my wife. But since Lana is *legally* my wife in this timeline, universe, whatever, that means we can't be together right now either."

Lois gripped my hand tighter. "So what do we do?"

"Talk to my parents some more," I told her. "Find out more about our new lives and then..." I sighed. "Break it off with Joe and Lana, I guess. Keep researching, trying to find a way back to our world, but..."

"How long does a divorce take in New Troy?" she asked glumly. "And how long after its final do you have to wait to get remarried?"

Mom and Dad both cringed at that. "This is going to take some getting used to," Mom said for both of them. "We love you, Lois, but we really don't know you that well. Not compared to Lana. We've known her her whole life. We talked about this earlier, about what would happen if you couldn't find your way home. We understand the decision and why it has to be done, but you're going to hurt a lot of people if you do this. I'm not saying

you shouldn't, just that you should be mindful of it."

"What if we talked to Daddy first?" Lois said suddenly. "He's always tinkering with inventions and stuff, maybe he can figure it out, or knows somebody who can. Give him a week or something. Tell everyone the truth — Mom, Dad, Joe, Lana, at least. Give him a week to either figure it out or find a friend at some lab or other who can figure it out. Tell them so they're not caught off guard. So Lana knows why you're not sleeping with her. But then... if he can't... *then* we start taking steps, starting with canceling the wedding. We'll know by then if I'm pregnant or not and it gives us a week to try to get their Lois and Clark back to them before we do anything drastic."

"You'll know that quickly?" Mom asked.

Lois nodded. "If I'm pregnant... And I know there won't be any other opportunities for me to get pregnant for a while," she added, looking at me. "But if I am, I'll be absolutely ravenous in a couple days. Well," she amended, "it depends on when it happened. If it happened at home, it could start as early as tomorrow. If it happened while we were gone, while we were in a universe where we were married, it'll be a couple of days."

Mom nodded. "I think that sounds like a good plan. It's not drastic. It gives everyone a few days to adjust before you take any action. And maybe your dad *can* figure it out and this all be pointless."

"You're brilliant," I said softly, putting my hand on the side of her cheek, tangling my fingers in her hair. "It's one of the many reasons I love you."

"Thank you," she said with her characteristic blush.

"So what now? Right now, I mean," I said to all of them.

"We go wake up my parents," Lois said determinedly. "Get Daddy working on this."

"It's the middle of the night, hon," I reminded her with a raised brow.

"And what do you think is going to happen if you don't go up and... you know..." She waved her hand in the air. "I say we go talk to Mom and Dad and then decide whether or not to wake up Lana and Joe and tell them now or wait until morning."

I nodded. "Let's go then." I turned to Mom and Dad.

"They're in the Master Suite on the main floor, aren't they?"

"Where else would they be?" Dad asked.

~~~~~

Lois

I raised my hand to the door and hesitated. How did I tell my parents I wasn't really their daughter? Was there a manual for this somewhere?

Determined, I rapped sharply on the door.

I heard Mom's sleepy 'come in' and opened it, with Clark right behind me.

"Lois?" Daddy asked.

I nodded. "We need to talk to both of you."

"Can't it wait till morning?" That was a very sleepy Mom.

"No, it can't," I told her. "Please."

"Is this a long talk?" Dad asked.

"Very long," I answered.

"Joe, would you go make some coffee then?" Daddy swung his legs over the side of the bed and looked up more closely.

"Clark?"

"Yes, sir." He glanced at me. "I'll go make some coffee and be right back."

I nodded and he turned to leave.

Mom pulled her robe on and tied it around her, moving to the couch in the sitting room as she did. "Come on in here, honey."

"Mom?" I asked tentatively, afraid of what her answer to my question might be.

She looked at me expectantly.

"Can I sit with you?" I asked, like I had when I was a little girl and was supposed to be in bed.

She had a slightly puzzled expression on her face, but nodded. “Of course.”

I practically ran across the room and curled up next to her, her arm around me as I buried my face in her shoulder, tears streaming down my cheeks.

I had dreamed of sitting with her like this for so long. I had missed her for so long.

Daddy came in and sat on the other side of me and I felt his arm around both of us. I knew they had to be worried about me, but words wouldn’t come. It might be up to Clark to explain this.

“What is it, Pumpkin?” Daddy finally asked quietly. “Cold feet?”

I shook my head and took the Kleenex — the real Kleenex, part of me noted — Mom offered. “No, but let’s wait for Clark to get back. He’s a big part of this.”

I could feel both of them tense.

“Please. Don’t jump to conclusions,” I asked, still curled up next to Mom. “Whatever you’re thinking, that’s not it. Believe me, you’ll never guess what it is we have to talk to you about.”

They relaxed, but only slightly and a few minutes later, Clark walked in with an insulated carafe of coffee, four mugs and a bunch of stuff to doctor it up with.

He poured four cups, fixed mine just the way I liked it while Daddy did the same with Mom’s.

“Thank you,” I said as I took it from him. Neither one of us missed the look Mom and Dad exchanged.

I didn’t move from Mom’s side, but I did uncurl my legs.

“We have a story to tell you and it’s going to be hard to believe,” I warned them. “Nearly impossible, but...”

“You know Van-El?” Clark interrupted suddenly.

“Of course we know who he is,” Daddy said. “And you two have both met him, right? You won your Kerth for your stories on him?”

We nodded.

“Six months ago if someone told you that there was a man who could fly and do all the other things he can, a man from space, what would you have thought?” Clark continued.

“We’d have thought he or she was crazy,” Mom responded, appropriately.

“But now, not as much, right?”

“Of course we believe it now.”

“You know I trust you guys because you know about me and where I came from right?”

I’d forgotten that they knew.

“Of course.” Mom said glancing at me. As far as she knew, I didn’t know.

“Well, this is even harder to believe than spacemen,” I said quietly.

“What’s harder to believe than spacemen?” Dad said, trying to keep a touch of humor in his voice. “Time travel?”

Clark and I looked at each other but didn’t say anything.

Daddy deliberately set his cup on the table. “I think you two better start at the beginning.”

I sighed. “I don’t think the beginning is the place to start. Let’s start this morning. When we went to bed last night, we were in one reality. When we woke up this morning we were in a different one. But only me and Clark. Everyone else was the same as they’d always been. We met downstairs when we realized it and this guy opened a... window in the room and told us he lived to ruin the lives of Loises and Clarks throughout universes. He’d gone back in time and changed one thing about our lives — my life in particular — that changed everything for us. He said he’d be back at midnight with a time device for us to use. He said we could go change that one event back or leave things as is, but our lives are very different from what they were before. We want our lives back, but...”

Tears filled my eyes again. “I couldn’t bring myself to

unchange the change. It was too big a change. Martha and Jonathan can corroborate all this, by the way. Martha caught on that Clark isn’t the same Clark and we told them about this earlier. They saw the window appear and the box doohickey fly out of it and heard the guy’s laugh. And we left and came back five minutes later. But we were gone like eighteen hours trying to fix things without changing that one thing again.”

“I’m going to suspend disbelief for the moment,” Daddy said. “Were you able to?”

“You know what,” Clark said suddenly. “I can prove it and we can talk while I do.” He pulled the black box out of his pocket and punched at the controls. The window opened in midair and he took a pillow and threw it through the window. I think Mom and Dad thought it was just an opening in the air because the room on the other side of it looked the same, but the pillow didn’t come out the other side. Clark punched another button and the window shrunk back into its case. “I set it for ten minutes.”

Dad picked up his coffee and took a long slow sip. “Okay. Let’s say this is real. Were you able to fix things?”

“Sort of,” I told him. “We went back to different key points in our lives and talked to ourselves and convinced us to do what we needed to. By the time we were done, there was a timeline where our old lives existed even though that event in 1995 hadn’t happened.”

“So what’s the problem?” Daddy asked. “Why aren’t you there? Or back where you started from?”

“We have a theory. Martha came up with it,” I told them. “Every time we changed something, we came back to today. And every time, there was already a Lois and Clark there.”

“Except the time where Lois had died,” Clark said grimly. “We fixed that one as quickly as we could. We didn’t stay there long.”

“What?” Mom exclaimed as what Clark had said sunk in. “Lois had died?”

I nodded. “In our timeline, Clark and I went to Bremerton for the Fall Festival. He was sick and it was the day of that horrible storm a few years ago — early November 2002. We barely made it to the cabin. In that timeline, neither one of us made it. I didn’t make it at all and Clark almost died but was barely alive when someone found him. We went back and helped us make it to the cabin and keep warm and all that.”

“I think I want to hear about your lives,” Dad said suddenly. “What life did you two have when you went to sleep last night?”

“Our wedding was last night,” I told him abruptly. “Our four year anniversary is next week, but we finally had our wedding last night, Christmas Eve. We have two sons and we may have another baby on the way.”

Mom’s arm tightened around me.

“I have the stretch marks to prove it,” I told them, standing up suddenly and pulling up the hem of my shirt.

Dad sat back slightly. “Okay. I wasn’t sure what I expected, but not that. I thought maybe you were making all this up or something, some kind of sleight of hand or something with the pillow. A psychology experiment or something, but you can’t fake stretch marks like that and you wouldn’t, Pumpkin. So that leaves us with you’re telling the truth even before the pillow reappears. But I do have one question.”

“What?” I asked, surprised he was so accepting so readily.

“Why didn’t you just go change whatever it was that guy said he changed?”

Even more tears filled my eyes. “I couldn’t.” Clark put his arm around me. “When I was ten...” My voice cracked. “In 1995...” I shook my head and buried my head in Clark’s shoulder.

“In 1995,” he told them, “the four of you went to the cabin. Ellen, you and Lucy came back early because Lois and Sam were playing a hot game of Monopoly.”

"I remember," Ellen said quietly. "Lucy and I had a close call with a tractor trailer on the way home."

Clark took a deep breath. "Well, in our timeline, in our lives, it wasn't a close call. In our timeline, you were both killed instantly."

\*\*\*

Part 31  
Clark

~~~~~  
Sam's face turned ashen when I said that. "What?"

I nodded. "When Lois was ten, her mom and sister were killed by a tractor trailer. That led to a sequence of events eight years later that led to us getting married our freshman year of college. Once the two of them didn't die, that sequence of events didn't happen. As much as we want to get back to our lives, to our sons, Lois couldn't bring herself to go back and make that accident happen and neither could I. Jimmy is one of our best friends but he hasn't found anyone to settle down with like he has Lucy here. And Dave..." I sighed. "Ellen, you'd never told Sam about Dave. You left a letter for him when you died, but it was several years before he looked for him. By then it was too late. So making that accident happen would not only kill the two of you, but Dave and Lucy and Jimmy's baby."

Lois moved away from me slightly and wiped at her eyes. "And what we've learned since then says that our timeline is still out there somewhere, but we can't get to it. We went back to 1994, before the accident happened or didn't happen or whatever, and hoped that we'd get sent back to *our* 2006 because that was before the six different times diverged, but instead we ended up back here. Martha thinks that's because your Lois and Clark are in our timeline so when we went back, we got sent to the only one of the timelines that didn't have a Lois and Clark that was supposed to have one. The whole 'nature abhors a vacuum' thing."

"And that means you have no idea how to get back to your own timeline," Ellen said quietly.

"Right," Lois said in equal tones. "I've missed you *so* much..."

"Oh, honey, my Lois or not... Come here." Ellen held her arms out and Lois scrambled back on the couch next to her.

Just then the window opened again and a pillow came flying through the other side. We heard me saying I'd set it for ten minutes as it disappeared.

Sam sighed. "Okay. I guess that's proof. But now what?"

Lois turned to him. "We were hoping you could look at the doohickey and see if you can figure out if there's a universe hopping setting or something, where we can hop straight to our 2006. And if you can't, if you know someone who can. Because I do love Joe, he's always been my friend, but I can't marry him in a couple weeks."

"And Lana and I used to date, but I broke her heart a long time ago when I married Lois. I know I'm going to break it again, but Lois is my wife," I told them. "I can't be her Clark."

I handed the box to Sam and showed him what I knew of how it worked.

"Okay. I'll see what I can do, but it's going to take time," he told us.

"I know, Daddy. Here's what we were thinking. Tell Lana and Joe what's going on because they deserve to know. Give you a week and if you haven't figured it out by then, call off the wedding and all that. I know you guys have probably spent a lot of money on it, but I just can't..."

"Oh, sweetheart, of course not." Ellen held her closer. "And it's not like we're paying for three hundred doves or anything. It's actually a pretty simple affair here at the house." Ellen looked at me. "And I guess you'd start divorce proceedings then."

I sighed and sat down. "I don't see any other way. We'll

know by then if Lois is pregnant again, too."

"If I got pregnant before we left, I'll be ravenous by later today, probably," she told them. "If I got pregnant while we were in a universe where we were married, it'll be a couple days."

"Ravenous?" Sam asked her.

She stood and started walking around nervously. "It's a half-Kryptonian pregnancy thing, I guess. Or it's just how my body works. I think how fast it happens is Kryptonian. With Christopher, I got pregnant Saturday night and it was... Tuesday that I was eating everything in sight. Nate was the same actually."

"Christopher and Nate are your sons?" Ellen asked her quietly.

"Yeah. Christopher is three and a half and Nate is almost eighteen months. And before you start doing the math, yes, I was pregnant when we got married. Remember we told you about the Lois that didn't make it to the cabin?" They nodded. "We barely made it and neither one of us remembered what happened that night. Clark passed out. I got all of our wet clothes off and crawled under the blankets in front of the fire next to him. We didn't remember being together until much later." She sighed.

"The whole story of how we got together is a very long one that I don't think either of us wants to get into right now."

"You're not going to start time traveling, Sam," Ellen said suddenly as Sam continued to look it over.

He looked chagrined. "You know me too well."

She rolled her eyes. "Why don't you and Clark go mess with it — but don't travel with it or anything — and Lois and I will talk for a bit?"

"I'd like that," Lois said quietly, her head resting on my shoulder.

I rubbed her upper arm softly. "We'll figure it out." I kissed the side of her head lightly. "Promise."

"You can't promise that, Clark," she told me. "I know you and Daddy and me and Mom and your parents, we'll all do our best, but there's no guarantee that we'll ever make it home again. Not unless Tempus shows up and we beat the answer out of him or there's some sort of Time Cops thing that keeps tabs on him and shows up to fix things."

"Now would be a good time for them to show up," I said with a sigh.

"You said it."

I squeezed her lightly. "We'll go see what we can figure out."

She nodded and squeezed back. I knew she wanted to kiss me but I also knew that it wasn't a good idea just yet and I knew that she knew that, too.

I let her go and Sam and I headed to his office/workshop area in the basement.

"I love you," I heard her whisper under her breath as we walked towards the door of their room. I turned and held her eyes for a long minute before following Sam.

~~~~~

Lois

I wanted to crawl back on the couch next to my mom, but I wasn't sure she'd want me there now that she knew more about the me that wasn't really her daughter. From her perspective, I was leaving Joe — my long-time boyfriend who I was marrying in two weeks — for a friend and work colleague — and a married one at that.

Then she held out her hand and I took it. She tugged me to her. "You love him, don't you?"

I nodded. "More than anything. As much as you loved — love — Daddy. I always wanted somebody to love me like he'd loved you and I never thought it would happen, but it did. Last summer..." My voice trailed off.

"Clark didn't love you like that until last summer?" she asked, trying to keep the shock out of her voice, I was sure.

I nodded.

“But your four year anniversary is next week?”  
 “It’s a long story...” I started, not intending to tell her.  
 “I’ve got time,” she said quietly. “But how about we get some hot chocolate instead of coffee?”

I smiled. “I think the chocolate thing crosses all universes and time lines.”

“I got it,” Clark called softly into the room.

Mom looked surprised.

“He’s got great hearing,” I reminded her. “And he was probably half-listening in because he expected that.”

“You’re right,” he said, walking in with two steaming cups of hot chocolate, complete with mini marshmallows.

“That was fast.”

Clark winced. “I’d guess I haven’t done too much of that stuff around you guys, huh?”

“And not everyone around here knows about you,” I reminded him.

“I’ll be careful.” He looked like he wanted to kiss me. “I won’t listen in anymore, promise.”

We watched as he left.

“So tell me all about it,” Mom said, taking a sip of her hot chocolate. “Perfect,” she told me with a smile.

“He makes great hot chocolate. I think it’s Martha’s recipe.”

“Lo-is,” she said in that warning tone I hadn’t really missed much.

I sighed. “Okay. So I went to Met U for college and decided to live on campus.”

“Why?”

How to tell Mom Daddy had a girlfriend? “You and Lucy had been gone for a long time,” I reminded her. “Daddy was finally dating again. He went out a few times here and there but never anything remotely serious. The summer before college he went out with this lady a few times and it got pretty serious pretty quickly. I think part of it was the empty nest thing. I’d planned on living on campus anyway, but it wasn’t a huge deal to me either way. She moved in that August.” I couldn’t look at her while I told this part. “She told me I better move out or else. Did I mention that she’s an international arms dealer but Daddy didn’t know it? Still doesn’t?”

“What?!”

I nodded. “Anyway, I moved to campus and there was a clerical error or something...” I paused. Could some future version of us have switched my paperwork too?

“And what?” she prompted after a minute.

“And Clark was my roommate. But I couldn’t move home, because of her, and there was nowhere else to live on campus so we lived in the dorms together.” I told her about the toga party and the cabin and Thanksgiving and Christmas.

And Latislan.

And the wedding.

And Lana.

And the first few years of our marriage.

And Pop Pop’s death and the publication of our names.

And Daddy’s heart attack and getting pregnant with Nate.

She said Daddy hadn’t had a heart attack in this world — probably because she made sure he ate better than he did in my world.

I skipped over the ‘Nate was sick’ stuff and just said that things weren’t much better than before even though we knew I was having his baby that time.

And how Christopher had nearly been kidnapped.

And starting at the Planet.

Getting the first Van-El story.

“So then last summer, Navance was killed in a coup. I was so sure he was going to leave, to try to make things work with Lana. I wanted him to stay, but I wanted him to stay because he loved me. I knew he loved the boys, I just wanted him to love me.” I

swiped at my cheeks then took the last sip of my no-longer-hot chocolate.

“He does, sweetheart. I know he’s trying to keep his distance because here, Clark Kent is legally married to Lana, but it’s in his eyes, in his voice. He loves you, so much.”

“I know that now, but it took some convincing,” I told her.

“We’d spent three and a half years together and most of it he made no secret that he’d rather be somewhere else. Well, after we found out about Nate, it wasn’t so obvious he wanted to be back with Lana as much as it was he didn’t really want to be with me — you know? Or at least that’s what it seemed like at the time.

Really, he was closing in on himself because of Nate’s health problems, though,” I admitted, “a big part of it was just because it was such a difficult time for both of us.”

“Health problems?”

I told her about the spitting up, the weight fluctuations, the hospitalizations, the surgery, the gas, all of it.

“He felt guilty. We thought Christopher was his son, but we weren’t sure yet. We weren’t sure until we went and checked while we were time traveling. He looks just like Clark, but until we watched what happened at the toga party after we left here...

He was sure that being half-Kryptonian was the problem, but it wasn’t. I know it wasn’t. I knew it wasn’t then, it was just one of those things, but Clark tends to take the blame for things that aren’t really his fault and then obsess about them. And obsess about them. And obsess about them. Even things that aren’t his fault. He *did* break Lana’s heart; there’s no doubt about that. He let her believe that he cheated on her — which he did, but he didn’t know that and he was barely conscious at the time. He obsessed about that for a year. I told him I wanted out on our first anniversary because I couldn’t deal with the total dichotomy in our marriage anymore. I told him about the post-partum depression and how I was certain for a while that the world would have been a better place without me.”

“No world is a better place without you,” Mom said softly. “Different maybe, but not better.”

“That’s what finally snapped him out of it. He took me flying that night and we sat close together on one of the big chairs at the cabin because we wanted to, not because we had to keep up appearances. He held me that night as we went to sleep. The power was out,” I conceded, “and he didn’t want me to freeze, but after the week before... At Christmas, he’d asked me if I wanted a fire. I asked if he was going to keep me warm and he didn’t say anything. He just built one. That night, our anniversary, was the first time I’d slept in his arms since the week at the cabin.”

I sighed. “But then the whole Pop Pop thing... It was a misunderstanding followed by him flipping out about getting me pregnant and all that stuff...”

“What did he finally do to convince you?” Mom asked.

“I moved out of our room and then got on the colonists’ transport. Van-El was there, but there was a guy with a gun and an explosion... I was hit on the head and had smoke inhalation to deal with but was okay over all. After that, he asked me on a date to the cabin. No one knew the whole story yet — not really. Not about how things had been behind closed doors. I told him there was no guarantee he’d see me naked and he said he didn’t expect to.” A small smile crossed my face. “But we got there and he’d made this incredible dinner for me — all my favorites — and we danced. And danced. Then he fed me this *amazing* chocolate cake that he makes.”

“Ah, the way to a Lois’ heart is through chocolate,” Mom said with a grin.

“It sure doesn’t hurt,” I grinned back. “And then he proposed. He gave a beautiful — heartfelt — speech about something Nana and Pop Pop always said. Love isn’t who you can live with it’s who...”

“...you can’t live without. Gram used to say that all the time, too,” she told me.

“He told me he’d manage to survive if anything happened to the boys, but he didn’t think he knew how to breathe without me anymore.” A thought occurred to me. “One of the timelines we were in had a Lois and Clark who had a Christopher but no Nate. Apparently, they’d separated after Navance died, but he said that he wanted to try again — for real this time. He said the first six months without Lana had been hard, but they were nothing compared to what the last six months had been without her.” I shrugged. “I have no idea what their lives were like the two years before that because they didn’t have Nate, but... Anyway, he said he loved me and then he asked me to marry him all over again. Daddy had given him your rings the night before, because he knew I loved them, and he proposed using your engagement ring.”

“So did he get to see you naked?” she whispered conspiratorially.

I blushed and stared at the ground.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’,” she said with laughter in her voice.

“The wedding was Christmas Eve. We flew to the cabin, but I was a nervous wreck, afraid something was going to happen to the boys so we came home. We woke up here the next morning. Yesterday.” Tears filled my eyes. “And we have no way to know if we can ever get home.”

\*\*\*

Part 32

Clark

~~~~~

Sam and I were no closer to any answers than we had been after I got the hot chocolate for Lois and Ellen.

Light was streaming in the windows as morning came.

With morning came Lana and Joe.

And telling them what was going on.

Did we tell Lucy and Jimmy and Dave at the same time, too?

I sighed.

“I’m sorry, Clark.” Sam leaned against a table.

“It’s not your fault,” I told him honestly. “I just want to get back to my boys, to my life with Lois. I’m really glad she has a chance to see Ellen and Lucy again and to meet Dave but...” I ran a hand through my hair. “There’s this empty spot where my sons are supposed to be, where Lois my *wife* is supposed to be. I know she’s your daughter and all, and this is weird for you, but imagine if you woke up one day and were somewhere where you were married to someone else and Ellen was engaged to Dave’s dad or something.”

He glared at me.

“Okay, maybe that’s not a good example because he was a pig. But she was engaged to... Perry and you’re married to Alice.”

He looked shocked at that one.

I shrugged. “Something Ellen said earlier made it seem like you’re friends with the Whites.”

“We are.”

“So go with me on this. If you woke up married to Alice. Lucy and Lois are gone. How do you feel?”

“Empty,” he said with a sigh. “I’d want to run off with Ellen and...” He stopped, but I could imagine what it was.

“But it’s your daughter we’re talking about and you don’t think about stuff like that, right?”

He shrugged slightly. “Exactly. I know she’s supposed to marry Joe next week and all, and I want them to be happy but...”

I smiled slightly. “As much as I’d like a little girl someday...”

We sighed in unison.

My head snapped up suddenly. “Lana’s awake and looking for me.” I heard her calling my name and she didn’t sound happy.

If we were trying to get pregnant and I apparently hadn’t been in our room all night to... help with that, I’d bet that ‘not happy’ was an understatement.

I listened for Lois’ heartbeat and discovered that she was asleep. I glanced towards Sam and Ellen’s room and found her asleep on the couch in their sitting room, her head on Ellen’s lap and Ellen gently stroking her hair. Her eyes, even in sleep, were red and swollen and her cheeks showed the streaks of her tears.

“How is she?” Sam asked quietly.

“Asleep with Ellen. Cried out, I’d imagine. She’s going to have a massive headache when she wakes up, just like yesterday. Maybe she’ll take something for it today.”

“I can’t imagine what the last twelve years or so have been like for her without Ellen. Ellen and our Lois are very close. Lucy, too.”

“I was a jerk most of the first three and a half years we were together,” I told him honestly. “And she didn’t have anyone she could go to. Kristi — her OB — knew most of it, but they weren’t really *friends*. She stayed home a lot the first six months or so before we moved in with Sam. She got involved in a couple online communities, writing mainly, but no one she could really talk to about all of this.” I’d told him our story while he’d messed with the doodad. “I regret so much about those years. I didn’t miss much of the boys’ lives — the first couple months of Christopher’s I wasn’t really much of a dad but after that... But Lois and I...”

I sighed. “Mom gave me some good advice when we went home the first time, but I didn’t listen. She didn’t *understand*, but she was right. It wouldn’t be just me and Lois again for a long time and I wish we would have taken advantage of that — visiting exotic locales and sleeping in late together and all those things we won’t be able to do for a few years. Except now it looks like we might have that chance,” I ended quietly, tears filling my eyes. “Right now, it’s just the two of us, except that we’re not together officially here and now. And now I’m going to have to go break Lana’s heart all over again. I have to admit that I don’t think it’ll be as hard for *me* this time because I’m not in love with her now, but it’s probably going to be harder on her. And Lois’ heart is breaking. She doesn’t want to hurt Joe, but we don’t really get to be together either.”

I stared at the wall for a long minute. “There’s no way for you to know how far I’ve come since we got married. For the longest time, I didn’t care what Lois was feeling. I mean, I cared, but I didn’t *care*. I wallowed. This time... Now... My heart’s breaking, too. I miss my wife, my sons, but more than any of that, my heart breaks that I’m breaking her heart and, with everything I can do, there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“She’s right here,” Sam reminded me.

“It’s not the same and you know that,” I told him with a sigh. “We can’t be together in *any* sort of married couple sense while the Clark Kent of this universe is married to Lana. Even though I know she’s my wife and *she* knows she’s my wife... here...”

I stifled a scream. “Part of me says — most of me says — who cares about the Clark Kent from here? I’m *not* him. I married Lois. I took wedding vows with *Lois*, not Lana. The Clark Kent who promised all those things to Lana *isn’t* here. I didn’t promise Lana any of that. I want to just take Lois and fly off and set up lives somewhere else if we can’t get home.”

“I understand the sentiment,” he said slowly, “but I also understand the idea that, for now at least, you have to step into the roles of the Lois Lane and Clark Kent of this world.”

I sighed. “I feel like it would be different if I didn’t know that our world was still out there somewhere. If I thought this was it, there was no other life to get back to, then I’d feel more... obligated to Lana because Clark and Lana are married, but that’s not the way it is. I *know* our world is out there somewhere. Somewhere, your Lois and Clark are at *our* house, with *our* kids,

wondering what the hell happened with Lana and Joe and why are they married with kids and leftover security.”

I wanted to scream.

In fact, I thought about flying off to the Arctic and screaming my lungs out.

Instead, I was going to have to go upstairs and deal with Lana. We’d planned on telling her and Joe together, but...

Maybe I could just avoid her for a while.

At least until Lois was up and we could get the two of them alone together.

The last time we’d ended things with them, we’d done it separately, but this time I thought together was a better plan. Together probably would have been a better plan then, too, but it was too late for that now.

~~~~~

*Lois*

The first thing I noticed when I woke up was the killer headache.

The second was that I was still on my mom’s lap and she was still gently stroking the hair at my temple.

I struggled to sit up, my eyes closed tightly. “It hurts,” I whispered.

“Clark brought in some ibuprofen earlier,” Mom said softly. “Here.” She picked them up off the coffee table and put them in my hand. “And here’s some water.”

I took the water bottle and swallowed the pills. “Thanks. Now if I could just curl up somewhere dark until they kick in...”

“Clark said Lana’s on the warpath but he’s been avoiding her. He’s hoping you two can talk to the two of them together when you wake up.”

I sighed. That was probably the best plan. “I guess I should go find them.”

“I’m right here,” came a quiet voice in the doorway. “How’re you feeling?”

“Head hurts. Thanks for the medicine.” I wanted him to make it better; give me one of his back and foot rubs, maybe a scalp massage, but I knew that wasn’t going to happen.

“Are you ready to get this over with?” Clark asked me, sitting across from me. I could see the pain in his eyes.

“No,” I said with a sigh. “But I don’t think I ever will be.”

“Mom and Dad have been helping me avoid being alone with Lana, but I don’t think that’s going to last too much longer. And Joe’s been looking for you. Where do you want to do this at?”

I thought for a minute. “I don’t know. The Conservatory?”

He shrugged. “That’s as good a place as any. Are we going to tell Jimmy, Lucy and Dave?”

“I think we’ll have to,” I told him. “We’ll have to explain to them why we don’t really know them. I mean, we know Jimmy, but we don’t. We don’t know the Jimmy who fell in love with my sister and is having a baby with her.”

His head tilted and he looked grim. “We better go.”

I turned to my mom. “Thank you,” I whispered, giving her a big hug.

“That’s why I’m here, sweetheart,” she said as she hugged me back.

Clark and I looked at each other and I wanted nothing more than to hurl myself into his arms and stay there. He looked like he wanted me to.

“I’ll go find Joe,” I said after a minute. “Do you know where he is?”

“They’re both in the kitchen finishing up breakfast.”

“Let’s go.”

We headed out of Mom and Dad’s room towards the kitchen.

“How are you feeling?” he asked quietly.

“Starving,” I admitted. “But I don’t know if it’s because it’s been who knows how long since I ate or... the other.” I didn’t even want to say it just yet.

“Right. Do you want to eat first?”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “Let’s get this over with.”

We got to the kitchen where Joe was rinsing out his cereal bowl at the sink and Lana was glaring at both of us from her spot at the counter.

“Joe,” she started. “Would you mind to put this up for me? I need to have a little conversation with my husband.” She handed him her bowl. “Thanks.”

Clark glanced at me.

“Ah, actually, Joe, I need to talk to you,” I said.

“Okay,” he shrugged. “What’s up?”

I shook my head. “Not here.” I practically ran past him and grabbed his hand as I did. “Come on.”

“Let’s go, Lana,” I heard Clark say behind me. “Lois and I need to talk to both of you.”

“I don’t want to talk to Lois and Joe. You and I are going to discuss yesterday and last night and why you’re avoiding me.” I winced on his behalf, amazed that he seemed to be steering her after us anyway.

“It’s all related. We have some things we need to explain to both of you, but no matter what’s running through your head, that’s not it.”

A minute later, we were each seated in our own chair. Lana was glaring at everyone and Joe just looked concerned.

“Are you okay, Lois?” he asked. “You don’t look so good.”

I shook my head and pulled my legs into the chair, wrapping my arms around them. “No, I’m not. We need to talk to you two and you’re going to have a really hard time believing our story, but I swear to you, it’s all true.”

Clark was staring at his hands, Lana was still glaring and Joe hadn’t taken his eyes off of me. “Okay,” he said. “We’ll keep an open mind, right, Lana?”

She shrugged. “Whatever.”

“Do you want to tell it or me?” Clark asked me quietly.

I sighed. “I will. It started yesterday morning when we woke up...” I started and told them how we didn’t know where we were, how things were different than they had been when we went to sleep, how the guy had laughed at us, how Martha and Jonathan had helped us and we’d traveled through time trying to get our lives back without changing that ‘one thing’, but we’d failed.

Joe sat back in his seat and ran his hands through his hair. “That’s a pretty fantastic story,” he finally said.

“I know,” I said quietly. “All of our parents can vouch for it though. They’ve all seen the time doohickey work. Daddy’s trying to figure out how to get us back where we belong.”

“So this ‘other universe’ of yours,” Lana said, with as much sarcasm as she could muster, “what *exactly* was it like?”

I glanced at Clark. “This is the part where we hurt both of you,” I said quietly. “Something neither of us wants to do but...” I took a deep breath. “In our world, Clark and I... We’re married. We have been for four years. We have two boys together and it’s possible that I’m pregnant again.” I finished in a rush, the words stringing together.

Joe blinked slowly. “Would you mind repeating that?”

Clark took over. “Lois and I have been married four years next week. We have a three-year-old son named Christopher and a seventeen-month-old son named Nate. He’s had health problems but is doing *great* now. In that world, Lois was chased by a madman when she was pregnant with Christopher. I was with her when it all got really bad and the only way to protect them was for us to get married. My Lana and I were serious together when it happened and I broke her heart, too, but I had to. The whole story is a lot longer and a lot more convoluted, but I had to.”

“My Joe and I weren’t quite as serious,” I told them. “We’d dated off and on. We’d decided to try dating seriously again, but

then everything went to hell in a hand basket and that was the end of it. He offered to marry me when he found out I was pregnant, but I was already married to Clark at that point. Life wasn't easy, but we made it through a *lot* together and we're happy with our lives and we want them back, but we can't find a way to get there." I wiped the tears. "I miss my boys, so much, but the one thing we could change, I can't do. No matter what, I can't do it."

"What's that?" Joe asked.

"My mom and Lucy were killed in an accident when I was ten. We didn't know about Dave until it was too late. I can't be responsible for killing them. If I was *sure* it would get us back home, I don't think I could, but I don't know for sure that it would and I really can't do that then."

"So where's the Lois and Clark that went to sleep here the other night then?" Joe asked. "Where's *my* Lois?"

"And *my* Clark?" Lana wanted to know, still glaring at everyone she could find.

"They're in our world," Clark told her. "Living our lives."

\*\*\*

Part 33

Clark

~~~~~

This wasn't going very well. Not that I'd expected it to. Joe was taking it better than Lana but that didn't surprise me either.

"So *my* husband and Joe's fiancée are living it up in a world where they're married with two kids?" Lana asked icily.

"Something like that," I told her. "At least as far as we can tell. I wish we knew how to switch everything back, but we don't. We gave the time doohickey to Sam and he's trying to figure out how it works."

"I'm not sure I believe this," she said.

Lois sighed. "Well, this helped convince all our parents so..." She stood up and pulled up the hem of her shirt. "Stretch marks from two babies with Clark."

I wanted to run my fingers over them again, to kiss each and every one because they meant my sons were still out there somewhere.

"Wait a minute." Lana's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Both kids are yours?" she asked me.

I nodded. "Yeah."

"But you said you were hot and heavy with that Lana when you got married. You cheated on her?" Her tone was incredulous.

"Not really." We told them the story of the cabin and what happened there and how we didn't really remember it until much later.

Lana glanced at Joe. "So you're not... special?" she asked cryptically.

"Are you sure you want to do this here?" I asked her with a raised eyebrow.

"Why not? The *wife* already knows doesn't she?"

I nodded.

"So you *are*... special?"

I sighed. "I am, but there's one thing we've found that... undoes the specialness."

Joe glanced between the three of us. "What?"

I looked at Lois who shrugged. "I trust him enough to marry him — or the other me does anyway so... Something you don't know about Clark — and your Lois doesn't either from what I understand..."

"She doesn't," Lana interjected. "Not unless he told her and never told me."

"I'm Van-El's little brother. I was born on Krypton and sent here as a baby. I can fly and do all of the things he can." I floated slightly to illustrate my point. "In our world, I fly around in tights, too."

"He's Superman," Lois said quietly. "He doesn't use his Kryptonian name but wears the 'S' so I named him Superman."

"So are you sure that your second baby is really yours?" Lana asked coldly.

I looked at her, surprised. "What makes you ask that? Of course he's mine."

"Well, you said he had health problems," she said with a shrug. "Or is the Kryptonian invulnerable thing not hereditary?"

"I don't know if it is or not, but I wasn't invulnerable when I was little. And his problems stemmed from the valve into his stomach not being properly formed. Once that was fixed, it helped a *lot*."

"So what now?" Joe asked quietly.

Lois wiped tears off her face. "I've always cared about you, Joe. A lot, but I can't marry you in a couple weeks. I'm married to Clark in my heart; he's the one I took vows with and I just can't..."

He nodded. "I thought that was where this was going." He sighed. "I guess we need to start making calls."

I shook my head. "Not yet. We're hoping Sam can figure it out and your Lois will be back in time for the wedding."

"And if she's not?"

"We were thinking give it a week," Lois said quietly. "If it's not fixed by then, start calling off the wedding."

"What about us?" Lana asked, that same coldness in her voice.

I sighed. "The other you was my first real love, but not anymore. I love Lois more than anything and my sons, our sons, are a close second. I can't be married to you, Lana."

"So if Sam doesn't figure it out... then what?"

"Then I file for divorce," I told her, refusing to look at her. "And as soon as it's final, Lois and I get remarried. Within reason, I'll let you say or do whatever you want, but infidelity is off-limits. I never cheated on my wife, ever. No matter what universe I thought we were in, no matter who I was married to or who I was in love with."

"And I never cheated on you, Joe. I promise," Lois said quietly. "Once we realized what was going on here, what the differences were... And we won't. We agreed to that. Even though *we* are married, even though we've had two weddings, here and now, Clark Kent in this world is married to Lana, not me."

"Thank you," Joe said quietly.

"There's something else you should both know though," she said suddenly as her stomach rumbled.

"What else could there possibly be?" Lana asked exasperated. "You're pregnant?"

"Maybe," I told her, remembering that Lois had mentioned that possibility but knowing Lana probably didn't remember it. "We'd been trying again. We'll know in the next couple days." I looked at Lois. "Or even today, depending. We haven't told Lucy, Jimmy and Dave yet, but we're going to."

"So if Sam doesn't fix this in a week, but does in a few months and everyone gets switched back, you will have ruined their lives?" Lana's arms were crossed in front of her.

Lois and I sighed in unison. "We'd really rather just go home," I answered for the both of us. "But I love Lois and she loves me so I don't know what other option there is. Marrying Joe isn't an option for her." I shot a sympathetic glance his way. "And staying married to someone I don't love isn't an option for me. Not being Superman isn't an option for me anymore either."

"No!" Lana said emphatically, causing us to jump. "You *will* not fly around in tights while you're married to me. Clark and I had an agreement."

I shook my head. "Your Clark had an agreement with you, just like he's married to you. There is no formal process to break that agreement like a divorce. If it seems like we're stuck here, Superman will make an appearance before too long."

"We'll talk about this later," she hissed. "In private."

“No, we won’t,” I informed her. “Lois is involved in any decisions I make from here on out. She and I won’t be sleeping together at this point, and neither will you and I, but as far as I’m concerned, she’s my wife and will be involved in all aspects of my life.”

Lana glared at me for a minute longer before she stood and stalked out of the room.

“Well that went well,” Lois said sarcastically. “Not that I expected her to take it well.” She looked at Joe. “Are Lois and Lana friends?”

“Usually they get along pretty well, but they tend to get into it over work hours. Lois wants Clark to help her with stories when Lana wants him at home.” Joe shrugged. “Otherwise... They’re not best friends but they don’t fight or anything like that most of the time. Your parents all met a few years ago and get along great and ever since we’ve all spent holidays together.” He sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

~~~~~  
*Lois*

“I’m so sorry, Joe,” I said quietly. “Really I am. I hope your Lois gets back in time for the wedding and not just so I can go home. You’re a great guy and I hate what this is doing to you.”

He sighed. “It’s not your fault. I can’t blame you for not wanting to go back and make sure that accident happened.”

“I’d like to still be your friend for as long as we’re stuck here,” I told him. “If you want to be. You’ve been a big part of my life for as long as I can remember, even if we have lost touch since I got married. That was circumstances, not because I didn’t want to be your friend.”

“What about the me in your world?” he asked quietly.

“He’s engaged to a good friend from high school,” I told him with a smile. “They’re really happy together.”

“Who?”

I shook my head. “I’m not sure why, but I don’t feel like I should tell you.” Maybe he and Debbie would run into each other before long and something would happen here, too.

He sighed and stood up. “I think I’m going to go for a run.”

“I’m so sorry,” I whispered.

“I know.”

He left and I turned to Clark. “That went well.”

He snorted. “Yeah, right. Joe wasn’t too bad, but I cringe at what Lana might demand from the divorce if we don’t get out of here.”

My stomach rumbled again.

“Let’s get you something to eat,” he said. “If you are pregnant, you need to be eating.”

“I know.” I sighed. “Any chance you could do your buzz buzz thing and see anything yet?”

He shook his head. “I don’t think so and I’d hate to run any kind of risk.”

“That’s what I thought.”

We headed to the kitchen where Lucy, Jimmy and Dave were eating breakfast with Mom, Martha and Jonathan.

“What’s wrong with Lana?” Lucy asked as we walked in.

I grabbed a bowl and poured myself a bunch of cereal.

“You need something more substantial than that,” Clark said, opening the fridge.

“I know.” I turned to my little sister, tears threatening to fill my eyes again. “It’s a long story, Luce. We’ll tell all of you after breakfast, okay?”

Lucy shrugged. “Okay.”

The room was pretty quiet as they finished their breakfasts and Clark made bacon and eggs and pancakes for anyone who wanted them.

It took four pancakes, four eggs and about eight pieces of bacon before I started feeling full. After the big bowl of cereal.

Martha sat by me at the counter while I was eating. “Does

this mean what I think it does?” she asked as I helped myself to a fifth pancake.

I nodded. “I’d bet on it.”

She put an arm around me and gave me a hug. “I’m happy for you.”

“Thanks.” I scarfed down the pancake and looked up to see my sister looking at me with a raised brow. “What?”

She looked away with a shake of her head.

I sighed.

“Let’s go in the living room,” Clark said, “and we’ll tell you three the whole story.”

Half an hour later, the three of them were gawking at us.

“Time travel?” Jimmy said, finally finding his voice.

“Alternate universes? Really?”

We nodded.

“Wow.”

“What’s the change you couldn’t make again?” Lucy asked quietly.

Tears filled my eyes. “You and Mom had died in a car accident and we didn’t know about Dave until it was too late.”

Jimmy’s grip on her hand tightened and his face turned white.

“Really?” he whispered. “No Dave? No Lucy?”

I shook my head. “No.”

“I don’t think I’d want to live there,” he said.

“Part of me doesn’t,” I said honestly. “I got to spend a lot of time with Mom earlier and that was wonderful, but I miss the people in my life. Daddy isn’t quite the same here — he’s great, don’t get me wrong, but he’s still not *my* dad; the one who protected me and Christopher when he needed to because of a bunch of bad stuff we’re not getting into right now but if we’re here long enough, I’ll tell you all about. And I’d like to spend a lot of time with you, too, Luce. I know I’m not really your sister, but I miss my Lucy a lot sometimes still.”

She nodded. “I’d like that, too.”

“Same with you Dave. I only know you through Jimmy who’s told me a lot about you, but...” Tears filled my eyes. “I...”

Everything combined to overwhelm me.

Sitting in front of me were my sister and my half-brother, who I’d never known. I missed my sons, I wanted to get back to them, but I wanted to get to know these two wonderful people as well.

Why couldn’t my life be easy?

“Nothing worth having is easy,” Clark whispered.

I hadn’t even realized that he’d moved to sit next to me, holding me in his arms, or that I’d spoken aloud.

I was just ready for this all to be over, to be home.

Whoever the Tempus guy was, I hoped some future version of the time police locked him away for good.

And fixed our lives.

Sent us home.

Gave us some ruby slippers.

Something.

The tears spent themselves quickly and I straightened up.

“Sorry,” I said. I looked at Clark. “Was I this emotional before?”

He shrugged. “I don’t think so, but neither one was like this either. The bad stuff didn’t come till later the first time and the second...”

“First and second what?” Dave asked.

I sighed. “I’m probably pregnant. From before we got here. You guys saw the breakfast I just ate. That’s how I get a few days after. It’ll probably last a week or so and then it’ll go back to normal or so for a while and then at about ten or twelve weeks, I’ll get so sick...” I sighed. I wasn’t looking forward to that part.

Daddy walked in just then, his face serious.

“No luck?” Clark asked.

He shook his head. “No. I have no idea what that other button does and I keep hoping for some kind of owner’s manual option

but...” He sighed. “I don’t see how to open it and look inside. I’m hesitant to start pushing that button to see what it does. The other one was pretty obvious but...” He looked at me. “I’m so sorry, Princess. I’ll keep seeing what I can do, but I just don’t know. I’ve got a few friends I trust that might be able to help but...”

A sudden stroke of inspiration shot through me. “What if we got a hold of Van-El? Maybe he knows something we don’t.” The rest of the family didn’t know about Clark. Telling Joe was one thing, but the rest of them... not just yet would be my guess. Van-El was from a society much more technologically advanced than Earth. Maybe he knew something?

And it was a way for Clark to touch base with his brother.

Clark nodded slowly. “It’s worth a shot. Sam?” He looked at Daddy.

Dad shrugged. “May as well. He’s obviously had access to a lot more technology than anyone around here. Even if he’s not a scientist or whatever, he may know something.”

Lucy stood up. “I think I need a bit to think about all this before we get to into the sister bonding thing,” she told me. “I don’t mean to hurt your feelings or anything, but it’s the day after Christmas. I’d planned on going shopping and I think that some mindless CostMart time might be just what I need right now.”

Jimmy and Dave stood up with her. “I think we need some time, too,” Jimmy said. “We’ll see you guys later?”

We both nodded. “I understand,” I told them. “Really.”

They left the room and Clark turned to those of us left.

“Van’s on his way.”

“What?” Martha asked. “How do you know?”

“Kryptonians are telepathic,” Clark said with a shrug. “Didn’t you guys know that?”

\*\*\*

Part 34

Clark

~~~~~

<Van? You there?>

I could feel his stunned silence.

<We’ve never talked like this before have we?> I asked him.

<No,> came his tentative reply. <Kal?>

Maybe he didn’t realize Clark was Kal?

<Listen, something’s come up. I need your help. Do you know where Lois Lane lives?>

<Big house in Pittsdale? Yeah, I dropped her off there once.>

<Good. Can you come over as soon as possible? There’s a number of things I need to talk to you about, but mostly, I hope you can help us.>

<Okay, Kal.> His response was tentative at best. <I’ll be there in a few minutes.>

<Thanks.>

I turned to everyone else in the room. “Van’s on his way.”

“What?” Mom asked. “How do you know?”

“Kryptonians are telepathic.” I shrugged. “Didn’t you guys know that?” It clicked. “Of course you didn’t know that. Van didn’t realize it either. I mean, I know he did but he said that he and Clark had never talked telepathically before.”

“And your brother?” Sam asked. “You know him? More than just as acquaintances?”

I nodded. “We’ve become friends. He and his *wife*...” I winked at Lois with that. “...are friends of both of ours.”

“What’s the wink about?” Dad asked.

“Sorry. They just got married a couple days ago — after our wedding actually. So Ashley being his wife is a new thing.”

There were nods of understanding followed by a ‘whoosh’ outside and Van-El strode in, in full superhero regalia. “Lois. Good to see you again.”

He was being all formal.

I introduced myself, his eyes constantly on me. “Have a

seat.” <And here in a bit, you and I are going to have a talk.>

He was too shocked to respond to that.

Quickly, I told him just the bare bones of our story and I could see understanding start to dawn on him. “Do you think you might be able to help?” I asked as I finished.

He thought for a minute. “Kryptonian technology is far more advanced than here on Earth, that’s true, but we never did any time traveling or anything of that nature as far as I know.” He glanced at me. “I’d be happy to take a look at the device, of course, but I can’t promise that I’ll be any help.”

“Anything you can do would be a big help,” Lois said quietly.

He nodded. “I’ll do what I can.” He looked at me. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

I sighed. “Everyone here knows, Van. As far as I know, they don’t know your other identity, but they know that you’re my brother and that I donned a Suit myself back home.”

“What?”

“He’s Superman at home,” Lois said.

“Superman?” everyone else in the room said unanimously.

I winced. “Lois’ idea. The name anyway. You — or my brother rather — showed up on the scene and she was livid that I’d do that without consulting her, but I hadn’t of course. A few weeks later, when our lives calmed down, Superman was created. There you and your new wife are among our best friends.”

“Wife?” he whispered.

I nodded. “Yeah. Just a couple days ago.”

“Wow.”

“Anyway, everyone here knows I’m from Krypton so...” <I won’t tell them who you really are, though. Not without your permission.>

<Thanks.>

His face relaxed slightly, as though that had been bothering him. “Let’s go look at this thing.”

January 2007

I sighed and knocked on the door of the brownstone Lana and I apparently called home.

Her eyes were red-rimmed when she answered the door. “I guess you’re still here,” she said sarcastically as she turned, leaving the door open behind her.

Lois and I shared a glance and walked in.

“I wish there was another way,” I told her. “I wish we knew how to get your husband back here, but we don’t.”

“So you’re going to ruin his life while he’s gone?”

I sighed. “I’m not trying to ruin his life; I’m trying to live mine. And if I thought there was any chance we’d get home, get us all switched back, I wouldn’t do anything like that here, but we’ve been over the device. Van-El’s been over it. There’s nothing we can figure out. Which means the only choice you’re leaving me is for Clark to be seen as having an affair and that’s not acceptable. I’m not going to make it seem like he’s cheating on his wife, but I’m not going to live without mine indefinitely either.”

“So do you want to file or do you want me to?” she asked woodenly.

“I’m so sorry, Lana. Really, I am.” I was. Even though this wasn’t ‘my’ Lana, even though I wasn’t in love with her, I didn’t want to hurt her.

There was a long silence.

“I understand,” she finally said. “I’ve thought about it a lot this week and I wondered what I would have done if I had ended up in your universe with my Clark. I’d imagine he and I both would have wanted him to divorce you...” She nodded at Lois. “...and remarry me instead. And I wouldn’t want him to be Superman there either.”

“If he ever does make it back here,” Lois said suddenly. “I’d ask you to reconsider your position on that. If he’s careful, no one

will find out who he is, but he's good at it and it's good for him to use his powers to help others."

She glared at Lois. "Don't tell me how to live my life with my husband."

"Sorry." She glanced at me. "There's something else you should know. I *am* pregnant, but it happened before we got here."

"You can have everything," I told her, hoping she wouldn't dwell on the 'pregnant' thing. "Whatever assets we have, all of that. I don't want any of it and we'll figure out how to split any debt we have. I want to do this as easily as possible. The only thing I ask is that you leave Lois and anything regarding an 'affair'..." I made air quotes. "...out of it. That's not true and you know it, so I'd really prefer to leave my relationship with Lois out of it."

She nodded. "We don't have much debt at all, besides the brownstone, and the assets in savings and stuff more than offset it. Do you want to keep your retirement accounts? Those are the only things that are solely in one name or the other."

I glanced at Lois before nodding. "It makes sense for me to keep the retirement accounts that are in my name. Can you get me a list of everything? Sam said one of his lawyers would draw everything up for us, but that you'd probably want to get a lawyer of your own to look it over, just to make sure something didn't get missed."

She nodded. "I'll get it to you at work this week."

"I'm sorry, Lana," Lois told her quietly.

"I know." She took a deep breath. "I just have one favor to ask."

"What's that?" I replied.

"It's really more of a favor from Lois."

"What?" Lois asked.

"Can I get just one more kiss from him? I know he's not really my husband but..." She swiped at the tears. "It hurts to know I'll never get to see him again, never get to say good-bye."

"I understand," Lois said quietly. "Knowing I may never see my sons again, but that they'll grow up thinking another me is their mom... That hurts more than I know how to explain. And as grateful as I am for some time with my mom and my brother and my sister, I want my sons back, too. I miss them and I'm worried about them and how they're dealing with all this." She looked at me, question in her eyes.

I hesitated. "I don't know, Lana. I know we didn't tell you the whole story about how we ended up together instead of the way it happened here, but I don't know that it's a good idea." Visions of myself kissing Lana in her dorm room, in the library, flashed before me. I wouldn't do that to Lois — bring back those memories if I could avoid it.

"It's okay, Clark," Lois said suddenly. She turned to Lana.

"We got married very suddenly after we found out I was pregnant with Clark's baby. It's a very long and convoluted story and Clark didn't really cheat on his Lana, not consciously, but we got married, in large part, because of the baby, *before* he officially broke up with Lana. When he told her, he kissed her and a week later he kissed her again — and not just the kind of kiss you're asking for. I know that because I saw them together," Lois told her. "It took us a long time to get to the point where we're happy together and in love and working at building our marriage together. He doesn't want to bring any of that back for me." She turned to me. "It's okay. We're not there anymore. It's up to you."

"Are you sure?"

She nodded. "I'm sure."

I looked at Lana. She looked so much like the girl I'd been in love with. I could understand where she was coming from. I felt like Lois did. I missed my sons. I hated that someone else was going to play dad to them for however long we were here. I hated that they might be scared and confused and having separation anxiety in the extreme.

But at least I had Lois with me.

I had no idea what I'd do if only one of us had been switched. If I'd ended up here without her, or if I'd woken up with a strange Lois in my bed.

~~~~~  
Lois

I could see Clark at odds with himself over what to do, but I smiled encouragingly. I wasn't crazy about Clark kissing Lana under any circumstances, but these were understandable.

Sort of.

He looked at me again and I smiled again. As encouragingly as I could.

He took the few steps needed to stand in front of Lana. His hands rested on her shoulders and I could sense his hesitation before he leaned over to kiss her lightly.

Lana's tears escalated and Clark took her in his arms, holding her while she cried.

I expected to feel some jealousy, but I didn't. I was secure in Clark's love for me. I knew he loved me and not Lana.

It was a long time before she moved away from him.

"Thank you," she whispered, encompassing both of us.

"I'm so sorry for hurting you," Clark told her giving her one final squeeze.

"I know." She sighed as she swiped at her tears. "None of this is your faults. You guys don't want to be here anymore than I want you to be."

"If we can figure out a way to get him back here, we will," I promised her. "I just wish we'd figured it out before it got to this point."

"I know."

There was an awkward silence that seemed to stretch into eternity.

"What about your Lana?" she asked suddenly. "Is she happy?"

"She is," Clark said quietly. "She's engaged to a great guy. They're getting married this summer."

"So if you end up stuck here indefinitely and I never get my Clark back, there's hope that I won't end up alone?" she asked, her arms wrapped around herself.

I nodded. "It was really hard for her for a long time, but she was actually in our wedding last week. She did a lot for us around graduation and I wouldn't call us *friends* but we're way beyond where we used to be."

She nodded and we left a few minutes later.

We drove back toward the house in near silence. Telling Joe had been easier. I didn't know why that was, but I thought he'd accepted it several days before. And he knew that the him in our world was very happy with someone else, so he had some small hope that someday things would be better again, even if his Lois never made it back here. Maybe knowing that would help Lana, too.

"Now what?" I asked Clark quietly as we neared the house.

"We find you a doctor, I guess. Start settling into our lives here. You have three weeks off if you want them, but I don't. I have to go to work tomorrow."

"I'll call Perry, I guess. If I'm not getting married, I don't need the time off, right?" I sighed. This was going to be hard. I wasn't sure I was up for it.

Maybe three weeks off wouldn't be such a bad idea after all.

\*\*\*

Part 35

April 2007

Clark

~~~~~  
I held the papers in my hands. I'd known they were probably coming sometime late this week or early next, but I didn't know when.

I felt sad for my counterpart, should he ever make it back. My — his — whoever's divorce from Lana was final.

I could marry Lois again.

There was a big grin on my face, even as I was sad for him. Things had been a bit awkward for Lois when she called off the wedding and only took a few days off; she even worked all day on what was supposed to be her wedding day. Perry had tried to convince her not to, but she'd done it anyway.

When people started to realize that I'd filed for divorce at about the same time and that we were spending a lot more time together... Then the looks and whispers had started, but we were determined not to let any of it get to us. No one at work knew the whole story — except Lucy and Jimmy and they weren't telling anyone either.

We'd been very careful to play down our relationship at work, though it was probably pretty obvious to anyone with even a little bit of observational skills that something was going on. Perry knew that we were going to get married as soon as we could and probably suspected that Lois was pregnant, but that was it. We weren't going to tell him officially until after we were married again.

Whatever life had been like at work the last few months, I couldn't keep the grin off my face as I sat there reading the paperwork.

"What's that look for?" Lois asked, sitting back down at her desk. She looked pale and drawn. The baby was taking a toll on her; that was for sure, though it wasn't nearly as bad as with the boys. I knew she was secretly hoping for a girl this time.

I held up the papers. "It's final."

Tears filled her eyes. "It is?" she whispered.

I nodded. "Wanna go to Vegas with me later?"

She shook her head.

What? My heart froze for a second. I was sure I looked like a deer in the headlights.

"I don't want to go later. I want to go now."

I glanced around. "We can't go now."

"Why not?" she pouted.

"Because we have to finish the Superhero Foundation story and you have finish that police academy graduation story."

She sighed. "Fine, but let's hurry and get out of here."

I nodded. "No problem there. I'll finish the Foundation story while you get the other one done."

It was nearly two hours later before we could leave.

Superman had been called on to help with a hostage situation. Van-El had been busy with a train accident up near Bremerton, so Superman had to go.

I'd debuted as Superman about two weeks after Lana filed the divorce papers. I'd told her I was going to do it and she wasn't happy, but had agreed it wasn't her place to... forbid me or whatever. We'd also agreed that in Superman's debut he'd say that he didn't know how long he'd be able to stay on Earth — that he might be needed elsewhere or something. That way when her Clark came back, he wouldn't have to be Superman and everyone would assume that he'd gone to help on Blargon Seven or something.

"Are you ready for this?" I asked Lois as we stood on the roof of the Daily Planet.

She turned in my arms. "I've been ready for this since we got here. Well, since we realized we were going to have to stay here."

I kissed her softly. "Me, too. I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too."

We'd lived in the same house, worked together and spent lots of time together — officially dating, something we'd never done before. Long ago, before Christopher was born, Mom had told me to cherish the time we had together before he was born because it would be a long time before it was just the two of us again. At the time, I hadn't taken her words to heart but I did

now. We dated, we kissed, but that was it.

Until now.

Now I was going to get to marry her all over again.

"Are you feeling okay?" I asked as I took off with my arms wrapped around her.

"Well enough to rip that Suit off when we get where we're going," she murmured into the wind.

I smiled. "That works for me."

I set us down in a deserted alleyway in Las Vegas and spun back into the suit I'd worn to work. We found our way to a small wedding chapel, filled out the paperwork, said the vows that we'd made years earlier, slid the new rings on each other's fingers. We'd given the others back to Lana and Joe — in case their Lois and Clark ever made it back home.

"Where to now?" I asked, kissing her again and again as we stood in front of the chapel.

"The cabin," she whispered between kisses. "As fast as you can go without vaporizing me."

I swallowed hard and found a nearby alley in which to change back and a minute later we were on our way to the cabin.

It wasn't long before we stumbled in the door, my lips on her neck and my hands under her sweater looking for the clasp to her bra; her hands under the cape trying to pull the zipper down.

"It's in the front," she gasped, finding the zipper.

"Ahem."

We both froze.

"Who's that?" Lois asked in a whisper, her face now resting against my shoulder.

I glanced up before responding. "Pretty much everyone. Your parents," I whispered back. "And Lucy and Jimmy and Dave and Gina and Bernie and Ashley." Bernie and Ashley had gotten back together not long after we arrived — I still wasn't sure what the whole story there was; she'd introduced Dave to her cousin and best friend, Angelina — Gina — Giovanni, and they'd hit it off.

"Everyone's here?"

I nodded, grateful that everyone present knew the whole story. "Think we should tell them what I got today?"

"I think we better."

I straightened her sweater and we both tried to regain our composure, but she didn't move her head from my chest.

"I take it the divorce went through," Sam asked, a touch of amusement in his voice.

"So did the wedding," Lois said, without moving or looking at anyone seated in the living room.

It had occurred to us that they'd want to see their oldest daughter get married, so we'd planned a destination wedding for two weeks from Saturday. That was still on, but we'd also told them that if I got the paperwork before then, we'd probably make it official as soon as possible. They'd understood.

Lois took a deep breath and let it out slowly before turning. "Hi, guys."

She'd moved far enough away from me that I was able to spin back into my regular suit.

"We were supposed to be here tonight too, weren't we?" Lois asked, glancing at me and biting her bottom lip. "Easter weekend?"

Ellen nodded. "But we all knew the divorce was supposed to be finalized this week or next and knew we might not see you."

"I forgot all about it," Lois admitted as we moved to sit in the living room. Our favorite chair at home was unoccupied here. I sat down and she sat with me. "If I'd remembered, I wouldn't have told Clark to come here."

"Obviously," Lucy said with a roll of her eyes. "Why are you guys staying anyway? Shouldn't you be heading back to the house or a hotel or something?"

~~~~~  
Lois

As much as I wanted to get Clark alone, I wasn't sure I wanted to leave a family occasion either. Even though I'd spent a lot of time with Lucy and Dave — and Mom — I still relished the time with them on a whole other level.

And it *was* a holiday weekend.

"It's okay," Clark whispered in my ear. "I want to get alone, too, but I know how you feel about any opportunity to spend time with your family."

"Thank you," I whispered back, snuggling in next to him. "Um, but actually, would you mind flying back to the house and getting my suitcase. I would love to change clothes."

"I'll be back in a few minutes."

He left the room and we heard the 'whoosh' as he took off for Pittsdale.

"Congratulations, sweetie," Mom said from her seat next to Daddy. "How're you feeling?"

I shrugged. "Not too bad. I've been worse, but I think it's starting to get a bit better. I'm just hoping to avoid bed rest this time." I wasn't sure why but the all-day sickness hadn't been quite so bad this time, but I was nearly seventeen weeks already and it hadn't been debilitating like it had been with the boys.

Christopher and Nate.

I missed them still — more than I could believe — but it was scaring me because I couldn't remember them like I used to. Their images in my head were already fading. Clark had drawn pictures of them — a lot of pictures — not long after we'd arrived but it wasn't the same. And I knew they weren't like that anymore. They'd have grown. Christopher was almost four and Nate was nearly two — he might even be walking by now. He was *probably* walking by now.

And they'd spent nearly four months — possibly — not knowing what happened to their parents. The thought that they were scared and confused tore at me.

I couldn't stop the tears. This was supposed to be a *happy* day. I'd thought I'd come to terms with losing my sons — because that's what it felt like — weeks earlier.

Mom was at my side before I knew it. "You miss them, don't you, sweetie?" she asked as she gathered me in her arms.

I nodded, unable to answer for the moment. "I want my life back," I finally whispered.

"I know." She held me while I cried and I heard everyone else sort of drift off for the moment.

Daddy sat near me, a hand on my leg, trying to offer what comfort he could. He handed me a tissue as I started to compose myself.

"Thanks," I said. "You know, I told Clark once that I'd trade almost anything to be able to spend some time with you, Mom, and Lucy and Dave, but this is too high a price. I love you. I've loved getting to know all three of you, but I want my sons. Christopher's birthday is going to be here before we know it. Nate's probably walking by now. I wonder if they realized that something was wrong when they first saw the other me or if they thought she was me and I can't decide which would make me feel better. Their lives being turned upside down because they know their mom isn't their mom and that means that they know *me* or if I'd rather they not notice because that would be easier on them." I swiped at my face. "And I know Clark's trying to be strong for me, but I know he's hurting, too. I know he misses them, too."

"I'm sure he does," Mom told me. "And as much as we've enjoyed getting to know you, we miss our Lois, too. We worry about her — suddenly thrust into a position as a mom of two little boys in a world where she's married to one of her best friends with everything that's happened to you two, without me and Lucy and Dave — who are also some of her best friends."

I sniffled and wiped my nose with the Kleenex. "I haven't really thought what this must be like for you guys. I'm sorry. It's got to be hard on you, too and I don't want you to think I've tried

to take her place because that wasn't intention. Well, kind of, but..."

Mom squeezed me. "We understand. If something had happened to our Lois and you suddenly showed up here, we would have wanted to get to know you, too."

"Bernie went to play around with the device again," Daddy said. "Maybe he'll figure it out."

I shrugged. "If he hasn't figured it out by now..." I wasn't holding out much hope. "My only real consolation, I guess, is that they're still out there somewhere and that they're okay. They're safe. If nothing else, they've got my dad and Jessica who's been there with them since Christopher was just a couple weeks old. And Martha and Jonathan. And I don't know your Lois but I can't imagine her or your Clark not doing their best to do what needs doing — even if that means trying to be parents to little boys."

"Your boys are in good hands with them," Daddy told me.

"Even if they're not you guys, they'll do their best to take care of them."

There was a thump outside the door and Clark walked in with our suitcases. His eyes immediately sought mine. "What's wrong?" he asked, instantly concerned. "The baby..."

I shook my head slightly. "Just missing the boys, that's all."

He breathed a sigh of relief. I knew that didn't mean he didn't care or wasn't concerned, but rather that there was no *immediate* danger to me or the baby.

He zipped into what was now *our* room again and put the bags up then came back to my side. Mom got up to allow him to get in next to me and take me in his arms. The tears started again and this time, I knew mine were mingled with Clark's as I felt them land on my head and my cheeks.

By the time I was done, everyone else was gone — we were alone in the living room. Mom and Dad were in the kitchen which wasn't too far away but...

"I think I need some ibuprofen," I told him. "And then I think I need to lay down for a little bit."

He pressed his lips against my forehead. "Go on. I'll bring some medicine in."

I nodded. "Thanks."

He helped me up and I went to our room, glad he'd left my suitcase on top of the dresser so I didn't have to hoist it. I took out my favorite pair of pajama pants and a T-shirt that I'd taken from the other Clark's things when Lana gave them to my husband. It was bright yellow and had only an ear of corn on it. Clark told me the story behind the one he'd had for a long time — Lana had given it to him when she was Corn Queen and he wasn't Corn King — but I didn't care. It reminded me of home and the Corn Festival. Oddly, I couldn't bring myself to wear his John Deere T-shirt — the one I practically lived in at times at home.

"Hey," Clark said as he walked in, just as I pulled my shirt off. He shut the door behind him. "I told your parents that you were going to take a nap and I was going to make sure you're okay."

"How do you plan on doing that?" I asked with a wan smile.

He held out some medicine and water. "Here."

"Thanks." I took the pills and then found myself in his arms.

"You're a sight for sore eyes," he said softly, running his hands up and down my nearly bare back.

My hands found their way under his shirt and I pushed it up. "So are you," I whispered as he pulled it off over his head.

He kissed me and I knew he was trying to be considerate of me and what I'd been feeling and how I'd been sick, but I was having none of that.

I practically attacked him.

"I've missed you," I told him a little while later as he lay on his side next to me, one hand rubbing over my expanding belly.

“I’ve missed making love to you.”

He looked up at me and shifted until he could kiss me again. “Same here. I love you, Lois Lane-Kent-Kent.”

I giggled. “I love you.” I turned serious. “I want to go home, Clark.”

He sighed. “I know, sweetheart. I know. I want to, too, but...” He stopped and his head tilted to one side.

“What?” I asked him.

“He thinks he’s got something.”

\*\*\*

Part 36

Clark

I had missed her more than I would have ever thought possible. It wasn’t the ‘taking our time’ lovemaking we both wanted, but it was something we both needed. We could take our time later.

I scooted my pillow down and rested my head near her stomach, one hand rubbing gently over it. I’d still managed to miss part of this pregnancy — not as much as I had the other two but...

Sam and Ellen had graciously allowed me to live at the house — in the room next to Lucy and Jimmy. Lois and I had spent lots of time together, but not being able to kiss her like I really wanted to and do... other things with her... That hadn’t been fun, but neither one of us really felt right about that. Not because *we* weren’t married, but because technically, Clark was married to Lana.

“I’ve missed you,” she told me, one hand brushing through my hair. “I’ve missed making love to you.”

I looked up at her and moved until I could kiss her. “Same here. I love you, Lois Lane-Kent-Kent.” I grinned at that and she giggled.

“I love you, Clark Kent,” she said, turning serious again as she ran a hand through my hair. “I want to go home, Clark.”

I sighed and settled in next to her, pulling her closer to me. “I know, sweetheart. I know. I want to, too, but...” My voice trailed off and my head jerked up.

<Clark, I think I got something,> Bernie’s voice sounded in my head.

“What?” Lois asked.

“He thinks he’s got something.”

She just stared at me.

<Actually, Ashley may have something — you know we work much better together than we ever did apart. Why on Earth did we break up? I missed her. She missed me. We work so...>

<Bernie!> I said sharply. <You found something? Or Ashley? I don’t care if the man in the moon found something — what is it?>

<We’re on our way back to the cabin now. We’ll be there in a few minutes.>

<We’ll be waiting,> I promised.

“What?” Lois whispered.

“Bernie said he thinks Ashley found something.”

She struggled to sit up, already encumbered some by the baby she was carrying. “They’re here?”

“On their way.”

We hurriedly pulled clothes on and Lois finger combed her hair, pulling it into a loose ponytail and we headed out to the living room.

“There’s the newlyweds,” Jimmy said with a smirk.

“Bernie told Clark Ashley found something,” Lois told them.

“What?!”

The word was spoken in unison by everyone in the room.

“They’re on their way,” I told them, moving behind her and wrapping my arms around her. My hands rested on her stomach and I could feel our baby moving underneath them.

A thump outside the front door indicated they had arrived.

I knew Lois was biting her lip as they walked in — Ellen was, too. I had to remind myself to breathe.

“What did you find?” Lois asked. I knew she was scared to get her hopes up, but it was hard not to.

Bernie took the device out and hit the program button. We gathered around him and I helped Lois onto a barstool.

The display looked the same as it always had.

“See this?” Ashley said pointing to a very small circular... button, for lack of a better word, in the bottom corner. It had an arrow, the end at the top and swinging to the right with the arrow at the bottom. It looked similar to the ‘back a page’ button on some Internet browsers.

“Yeah,” I said. “I noticed it, but I had no idea what it did.”

“Neither did we,” Ashley told us, “but today we decided to push it anyway. It’s only available for about thirty seconds or so when you first turn it on so it’s not like it’s just been sitting there the whole time we’ve messed with it.”

She did just that and the numeric keypad — with three date, time, location option buttons at the top and the ‘open window’ button at the bottom — disappeared and was replaced by a nearly standard keyboard. The numeric keypad was on the right and the same as it had been.

“Wow,” Sam said. “It makes sense that there’s a keyboard somewhere but I never would have guessed...”

“If you’re having problems with a computer program, what do you do?”

“Hit F1,” Jimmy said. “Or call me — one of the two.”

“Right. So I hit F1.” Ashley did.

A FAQ popped up.

“Once I was in here, I figured out how to disable the time window so you can still use the display but you can’t accidentally open a window or anything. I’ve got it turned off now.”

We nodded.

“So I looked around some more and found that you *can* set it to switch universes. The numeric keypad doesn’t have that option, but the keyboard does. Probably some kind of failsafe. The thing is...” She took a deep breath. “You have to know the alphanumeric code for the universe you want it to go to.”

“We don’t,” Lois whispered.

“We *didn’t*,” Ashley said triumphantly. “I think we do.”

“What?” Lois breathed. Her grip on my hand tightened.

“It’s like the call log on your cell phone,” she explained, punching another F button. “It shows the last ten or twenty or however many calls you made — depending on your phone and your carrier and all that. Well, according to the FAQ, this can store up to a hundred of the last places, times, whatever you’ve been. We accessed that and think we’ve figured out which universe is yours.”

“You have?” I asked, the band constricting around my heart and grateful Lois couldn’t actually hurt me when she squeezed tighter.

Ashley nodded. “Look.” She pointed to the screen. “This device only has a few entries, and I think most of them are yours — from when you two were using it. The last one was on the morning after Christmas and the beginning and ending times were about ten minutes apart.”

“The pillow,” Sam said.

“Right,” Ashley confirmed. “There’s quite a bit of information when you double click on one of them. This screen only shows the alphanumeric code of the universe and the destination time, but when you click on it...” She jabbed her finger at it quickly, twice in a row. It disappeared and it was replaced with another screen filled with numbers. “This screen shows the originating and destination universes — in this case they’re the same because you just tossed the pillow ten minutes into the future. It has both dates and times and locations using

latitude and longitude so I'd guess you can't end up on another planet."

We nodded our understanding.

"Okay, so we searched these backwards. The last one was the pillow. The one before that you came from 1994 to here. The 1994 code is different than this one."

"Wait," I said suddenly. "I need to go get my parents. They need to be here for this." I looked at Lois. "Call them while I head that way?" She nodded. "Bernie, will you make sure they get home if something happens and I can't?"

"Of course."

I was gone in a flash.

A few minutes later, I landed quietly outside the farmhouse and found Mom and Dad quickly getting a few things together.

"Clark," Mom said, giving me a big hug. "I'm so glad they think they figured this out."

I held her for a long minute. "Me, too."

"Let's go," Dad said. "If they really think they've got it, we can say our good-byes later."

I wrapped an arm around each of them and we took off for the cabin.

~~~~~

Lois

As soon as Clark left, Mom came over and stood behind me, putting her arms around me.

"I'm going to miss you," I told her, leaning my head back to rest it against her. "If this works, I'm really going to miss all of you."

"We'll miss you, too, sweetie."

Everyone talked quietly with the box and screen just sort of hanging in mid-air. I just enjoyed the feeling of being with my mom again, knowing it could well be one of the last times I got to be held by her.

It wasn't long before Clark and his parents came in. He held my hand, but Mom stayed where she was.

He'd apparently filled them in on the way back because he told Ashley to pick up where she left off.

"So this device has a number of different trips recorded in its memory," she went on. "By knowing what this one is and looking at the times and information you gave us about your trips among other things, we can figure out pretty much what the others are." She pointed to one of the entries — the twelfth. "This one, for instance, you left on January 1, 2003 from Greece and went to December 25, 2006 still in Greece. So that's the one where you helped Lois and Clark get married and then ate and slept on one of the little Greek islands. When you got to 2006, that Lois and Clark were separated and talking about possibly reconciling."

I nodded. "That makes sense. So when do we get to the part where you know what our original universe is?"

"The first time it was used it went from one universe very early Christmas morning to this one at the same time. 1994 was the only other time that code appears. My guess is since that was the original universe and that guy changed it, it has the same alphanumeric code all the way through."

Daddy nodded thoughtfully. "That makes sense. I mean, as much sense as any of the rest of this."

"So why did we end up here?" Clark asked, his thumb running over the back of my hand. "Why didn't we stay in that universe?"

"I did some more digging through the FAQ," Bernie said. "Super speed — or as fast as I could — you'd think future technology could keep up." He rolled his eyes. "There's a couple of relevant things. Martha, you were right. Unless the universe code is set — and you can't do that from the numeric keypad — the participants will be sent to a timeline that diverges from their present point. The timeline they go to is one that doesn't have their... life force, I guess, but is supposed to. So they wouldn't be

sent to a time where they were supposed to be dead — as long as they stay within their lifespan."

He took a deep breath. "It also says that pregnant women are discouraged from using the device, but if necessary for them to, it is deemed safe. One of those things like one glass of wine every now and then is probably fine, but it's best to just avoid it."

"Right," Lois said, and I could hear the fear in her voice.

"It said that the gestation of the pregnancy is not affected by the travel. So if you were to jump ahead a year, you'd still be four months pregnant."

We all nodded our understanding.

"I'm hesitant to send you back to Christmas," Bernie said. "I think we should probably send you back to today."

I knew Lois was fighting tears. I think we both figured that if they ever got it sorted out, we'd go back 'today', whenever 'today' was, but it was still a bit of a letdown to know that we would have missed nearly four months of our sons' lives, of our lives. I was sure that the other Lois and Clark wouldn't have 'ruined' them or anything — by quitting our jobs or committing heinous crimes or anything like that — but... Still.

We'd done that to them, I realized again, but I didn't know what other choice we would have had. Clark would come back to find himself divorced from Lana and Lois had talked to Joe a few days earlier and he actually had a date — with Debbie. His fiancée in our universe.

"I'm not sure I want Lois testing this," I said suddenly. "I'd rather make sure we're going to the right place first."

"I think that's a good plan," Sam agreed.

"Can you leave the window open while you go check it out?" Lois asked.

Bernie and I looked at each other. "I guess I could go through real quick and check it out and come back and get you," I told her.

She shook her head. "No. If it is the right place, and if it's okay with these guys, I'd like to stay one more day. I know that doesn't make any sense since I've been bawling about missing my babies, but if this is the last time I'm ever going to see Mom and Lucy and Dave..." Her voice trailed off and she wiped at her tears. "I'd like to stay another day if it's okay with them."

Ellen squeezed her slightly. "Of course, sweetie. We miss our Lois and Clark, too, but we can certainly understand where you're coming from."

I could tell Lois was forming some kind of plan, but I wasn't sure what it was.

"Besides, we need to get some stuff in order for them when they get back. You should probably call Lana and I should probably call Joe..."

"We'll take care of calling Lana," Mom said suddenly.

"And I'll call Joe," Jimmy said.

Lois nodded. "Thank you. We'll come up with some things tonight that they'll need when they get back and won't want to search for and all that — checkbook, debit card pin that got changed, computer passwords, things like that."

"I'm sure they'll appreciate that," Sam said quietly. I got the feeling that he was going to miss Lois at least a little bit and was hurting for her — she was going back to a world without Ellen, Lucy or Dave. And even though we'd be getting our sons back, she'd lose another part of her family.

"I'm sure they're going to wish we figured it out sooner," I said, squeezing Lois' hand. "Legally, they'll be married when they get here."

"They'll understand," Lucy said quietly. "If Clark and Lana or Lois and Joe had ended up there, they would have done the same thing. They might have waited longer to find a solution because of the kids, but it would have happened."

"Ready to test this?" Bernie asked me.

I nodded. "Ready as I'll ever be." I was nervous. I didn't like

leaving Lois by herself. Well, not by herself but without me. “You okay with this?” I asked her, looking down at her tear filled eyes.

She nodded. “Be careful.” She stood up and I wrapped my arms around her, holding her close to me. “I love you,” she said, looking up at me. “No matter what happens, I will *always* love you.”

“And I’ll always love you.” I was aware that everyone was watching but I kissed her anyway — and not the kind of kiss I’d usually give her in front of people. “I love you,” I whispered.

She nodded, tears flowing too fast for her to really respond.

“Um, listen,” Bernie said. “I think we should leave from the house — or near the house — and do it in real time.”

“It might be a couple hours, okay?” I told her. “In case they’re not home or whatever.” I wiped her cheeks. “Don’t worry if I’m gone a little while, okay?”

She nodded. “I’ll try not to.”

I kissed her again. And then again.

And then we left.

Part 37

Lois

~~~~~  
“He’s going to be fine,” Mom said, her arms tightening slightly around me.

“I know,” I said, only partially convinced. The time travel thing was practically old hat by now but intentionally hopping universes... I sighed. That was something else entirely.

“Well, I’m going to believe that this is going to work,” Martha said suddenly. “I know how much you must miss your kids and we miss our Lois and Clark, too, even though we have you two.”

I nodded, knowing that as much as I wanted to get back to Christopher and Nate, saying good-bye to my mom, Lucy and Dave was going to be very difficult at best.

“What do you want to do?” Mom asked me. “If this is your last day here, what do you want to do?”

“Just be with you guys,” I told them. “Hang out. Play games or something.”

That’s what we did. We played a couple games of *ScenIt* and I sat with Mom’s arm around me the whole time.

Daddy stared at the cabinet full of games and movies. “How about *Monopoly*?” he asked.

“I don’t play *Monopoly*,” I said quietly.

A hush came over the room. It was one of many ways I was different from their Lois. She, apparently, played *Monopoly* the same way either one of us would most things — take no prisoners. She was champ. That didn’t surprise me.

“Right. I forgot.” And that was one way this version of Daddy was different. He would never have suggested it — he didn’t play either.

Eventually, we settled on poker, but no one’s mind was really on the game. We were worried about Clark and Bernie and I was ever cognizant that these moments were quite likely some of my last with this part of my family.

Finally, it neared eleven or so and Lucy was too tired to keep her eyes open any longer. She and Jimmy headed up to their room. Dave, Gina and Ashley also went to their respective rooms. All of them had given me big hugs before they went to bed.

“I’m so sorry, sweetie,” Mom said as we sat on the couch together. “I can’t keep my eyes open much longer either.”

I nodded. “It’s okay. I have a few things I want to try to do before Clark gets back — make a list of things that we’ve acquired since we’ve been here that I want to take with me, writing down that information for your Lois, those kinds of things.”

“I love you, sweetie.”

“I love you, too, Mom.”

Daddy gave me a big hug and told me the same thing. They headed towards their room and I slowly climbed the stairs to mine.

I took a notepad out and started writing down pin numbers and passwords. I took all the relevant cards and things out of my purse.

Then I made a list of things for Clark to bring back from the house with him — gifts he’d gotten me, mementoes of our time here, of our dates and things. I made a list of things I needed him to go get when he got back. As much as I’d been looking forward to spending the night with him, if all went well, we’d have the rest of our lives to do that. Tonight, I had other things I needed him to do. I made a stack of things for the other Clark. The divorce papers, the marriage paperwork — they’d both need that.

Then came the hard stuff.

Letters to each of them. Not just Mom, Lucy and Dave, but Daddy, Jimmy, Bernie, Ashley and Gina. They’d come to mean a great deal to me while I was here. And Lana and Joe. Those would be hard, too. And this world’s Lois and Clark.

I heard ‘whooshes’ and dual thumps.

They were back.

~~~~~

Clark

“Are you sure this is going to work?” I asked my brother who wasn’t my brother.

He sighed. “I don’t see why not, but there’s always risk...”

“Right. That’s why I didn’t want Lois doing this until we knew. There’s something else I didn’t tell her I was going to do though.”

“What’s that?”

I pulled a camera out of my pocket. “I’m going to try to take some pictures of the boys. She’s going to have a hard time leaving her mom and everyone. I was thinking some new pictures of the boys might make it a little easier.”

“Are you going to be able to do that without being caught?”

I shrugged. “We’ll see. If I don’t think I can, I won’t. Maybe I’ll try to snag Sam’s camera that already has some on it instead or something. I’ll play it by ear.”

He nodded. “Do you want me to come with you?”

I shook my head. “No. I’ll do this.”

We were standing in the woods outside the house. “Go on inside, if you want,” I told him. “I’ll come find you when I get back.”

“You’ve got the universe codes?”

“Yeah, they’re programmed in here and I memorized them.”

He looked worried and I wasn’t sure I blamed him.

I took a deep breath and started pressing the appropriate buttons. The window shimmered in front of me. “I’ll be back,” I said with more confidence than I felt and stepped through.

I closed the window and tucked it securely in my pocket. I tuned my hearing in to the house and found familiar, comforting heartbeats.

My sons.

Lois’ sons.

I closed my eyes and just listened for several minutes.

I had to make sure that this *was* the right universe though. I used my vision to see the security measures still in place, if not in use. Everything looked right. I looked, carefully, into the room that should have been mine and Lois’. There was a Lois asleep in the bed and a Clark asleep on a fouton. That was a good sign, right? For some reason, they weren’t sleeping together. And the fouton was new. Was that good? I looked at other signs. Sam had never rearranged the downstairs master bedroom from when Lois had been on modified bed rest with Nate.

I looked in the garage. There was Lois’ wedding/Christmas present I’d never gotten to give her. A little worse for the wear

though.

I breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed I was home.

It just *felt... right* in a way none of the other universes had.

I flew silently to the veranda outside the boys' room. The door was unlocked and I snuck in — silently, I hoped. I pulled the camera out of my pocket and carefully aimed it at Nate's crib.

He'd gotten so big. My breath caught in my throat as he stirred slightly at the flash. The picture looked okay.

I did the same with Christopher and found tears welling up in my eyes. He was bigger than I remembered, too, but that shouldn't have surprised me.

He woke up slightly. "Daddy?"

I held very still until his even breathing said he was asleep again. I headed silently out to the veranda, ready to go back to the woods and go back to the other universe.

"Who are you and why are you sneaking around my sons' room?"

The other version of me was standing there with a bat on his shoulder.

"Are they your sons?" I asked him quietly, saying the first thing that came to mind. "Or mine?"

I could see his grip on the bat tighten to the point that he was starting to leave imprints on the metal.

I sighed. "Come on." I zipped out to the tree line. "I don't think we want to discuss that there and wake the boys up."

"Who are you?"

I sighed again. "I'm the one who belongs here. I've been in your universe."

"So Lois and I can go home now?"

"No," I said quietly.

"What?!"

I was kind of almost scared. Another version of me mad... Not a good plan.

"Listen, I want to go home," he said menacingly.

"I know. I want to stay, but Lois isn't with me. I wasn't about to let her try this until we knew it was going to work."

"Fine. Then here's what we're going to do. I'm going to go get Lois and we're all going back and you two can turn around and come back here."

I shook my head. "No."

"Yes."

"No." I exhaled slowly. "Listen. You've been here. You know the differences between this world and that one. My *wife* is back there and as much as she wants to come home and see her sons, she also wants to spend *one more day* with her mom and sister and brother that she never got to know. We'll be back tomorrow night and tell you everything you need to know about what happened while you were here and you can tell us and *then* you can go home. And before you start yelling and threatening me or anything, you don't know how the device works."

He sighed. "You'll be back tomorrow?"

I nodded. "I miss my sons. I want to come home but I'm not about to deny her one more day with her family either."

He looked at me for a long minute then nodded.

"We're making a list of things that you guys will need to know — passwords that we changed and things like that. We'd appreciate it if you'd do the same so we're not hunting down checkbooks and stuff."

He stared at me for long minutes then finally nodded. "Okay. Will you be able to tell us how we ended up like this?"

"We'll tell you everything we know," I promised. "Who here knows?"

"Sam, Bernie, Ashley, Jimmy, Lana, Chad and your folks."

"Lana? Chad?" I asked surprised.

He nodded. He rubbed the back of his neck. "I kinda kissed her Christmas morning before we figured out something was *really* wrong instead of just kinda wrong. And Chad was here so

he knows some but not the Krypton stuff as far as I know."

I winced. "I bet that went over well." I glanced at my watch. "Listen, I'm here in real time. So if I'm here an hour, I'm gone there an hour and I've already been gone longer than that all total. Do you have any recent pictures or videos or anything of the boys I can take with me? To show Lois and Sam and Ellen and my — your — folks. We've talked a lot about them, obviously, and I drew some pictures after we realized we were staying but..."

"Yeah. I'll be back in a minute."

True to his word he was back a minute later. "Here."

"Thanks," I said being careful to not actually touch him.

"We'll be back late tomorrow night. I'm not sure when. Probably between ten and midnight or so. We'll show up in the theater in the basement. If any of them want to be here, that would be great, but if we want to keep this meeting just between the four of us..." I shrugged, hoping to avoid telling him he was currently married to Lois. "That would be okay, too."

"See you then," he said, backing away.

I situated the device so he couldn't really see what I was doing — just in case — and then stepped through the open window. I listened for Bernie, but found him heading my direction.

"How'd it go?" he asked, landing next to me.

I shrugged. "I ran into me."

"What did you tell him?"

"Just that we'd be back tomorrow night."

"You didn't tell him about Lana?"

I shook my head. "Nope. I figured tomorrow was soon enough for that. Did my folks get a hold of Lana? Or Jimmy a hold of Joe?"

We took off in the night sky.

"No," he told me. "Not yet."

We flew in silence and landed together on the porch.

"I'm going to crash," he said. "I'll see you in the morning." I nodded as he headed to the room he was sharing with Dave.

I hurried to the room I shared with Lois. She was sitting against the headboard, a notepad on her knees. "Hey," I said as I walked in. "What're you doing?"

"I have a list of things for you to do," she said. "If you don't mind, of course. And things to get."

She'd been crying and I crawled onto the bed next to her.

"What're you doing?"

"Writing letters," she said. "I got Gina and Ashley and Bernie done already. They were pretty easy to do. Daddy should be and so should Jimmy. Mom, Lucy and Dave..." She wiped at her cheeks. "Those are the hard ones."

I put an arm around her and pulled her close to me.

"Was it the right place?" she asked.

"Yeah. It was."

"And the boys?"

"They're getting big." I sighed. "I ran into me. He gave me some pictures and videos of the boys. Do you want to see them now?"

She shook her head. "I want to get these done first." She bit her lip. "Just one?"

I held out the camera. "Here's the ones I took," I said.

"They're not great..."

She took it and the tears came faster as she stared at the small screen. "He's so big," she whispered as she looked at Nate. "He looks healthy."

"I know."

She flipped to the picture of Christopher. "He looks so big, too." She stared at him for a long moment before turning it off and setting it aside. "Okay, I've got to get these done." She handed me a piece of paper. "Could you? Please?"

I looked at the list. She was trying to cram a lifetime of

birthdays and Christmases and other special occasions into one day.

“Of course,” I told her before kissing her softly. “I’ll head to the West Coast or Hawaii and be back soon.”

She nodded. “Thanks. I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

With that, I took off for later time zones. It took a while but not too long before I had everything she wanted.

When I made it back she was asleep on the bed, notebook half fallen out of her hand. I could see letters for everyone but her mom folded neatly on the bed. The one to her mom... It looked like it had gone through several drafts and was partially finished on the page in front of her. I carefully stacked everything and took the notepad from her, setting it all on the dresser.

I floated her until I could get us both under the covers and for the first time in way too long, I fell asleep with her in my arms.

Part 38

Lois

~~~~~

For the first time in way too long, I woke up in Clark’s arms. It felt like coming home.

And then I remembered.

We were going home. In a few hours.

Which meant I only had a few hours left with my mom. And Lucy and Dave, but Mom was the one that was going to hurt the most.

“You awake?” Clark asked quietly.

I nodded through the tears already forming and started to get up. “I don’t want to waste any of the day,” I told him.

“Everyone else is asleep still,” he told me, pulling me back towards him. “And you really should be, too. You were up late.”

“I didn’t finish the letter to my mom.” I snuggled in next to him — just for a couple minutes. We had years to be like this together but I only had a few hours left...

I felt like a broken record, but I figured I’d be on a countdown all day.

“Can I help?”

I shook my head. “Were you able to get everything?”

“Yeah, I got everything.”

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure,” he said, kissing the side of my neck softly.

I knew what he wanted — and I did, too — but I had so little time... “I have to finish this, sweetheart. Tonight — or tomorrow — or next week, we’ll go on that honeymoon. I promise.”

He sighed. “I know. And I know how much this means to you...”

“But since everyone’s asleep...”

He rubbed my abdomen gently. “Something like that.”

I rolled over and rested my hand on his cheek. “I *have* to finish this.”

“I know.” He kissed me softly. “And you’re right. I never told you where we were going — and I’m still not going to — but as soon as we can arrange some time off...”

I nodded and kissed him back. “You’ve got a deal.”

“Then I’ll sit with you.” He pushed up and reached over for the notepad and pen. “Here.”

I moved to sit in front of him, my back to his chest, notepad on my legs. “I don’t know what to say,” I whispered after I’d stared at what was already written for long minutes.

And basically what I’d written was that I didn’t know what to say.

“Write from your heart,” he told me. “Whatever’s in your heart, just write it down.”

I nodded against him and started slowly writing. But the more I wrote, the faster it came. I wasn’t sure it was legible, but that could have been either the handwriting or the tears obscuring my

view.

Clark just sat behind me and held me as I wrote.

Finally, I ran out of words. I set the pad on the bed and turned in Clark’s arms. He held me as I cried again. I knew I couldn’t contribute all of it to hormones, but I knew that was a part of it.

He rubbed a hand up and down my back. As the tears slowed, he finally spoke. “Why don’t I get you some ibuprofen? I’m sure you’re going to cry a lot today and otherwise, you’ll have a massive headache. Go take a hot shower and get dressed and I’ll get it.”

I nodded and headed towards the bathroom.

Half an hour later, I was sitting in one of the big chairs in the living room, staring out the large window at the mountains.

“You’re up early,” I heard Daddy say as he walked out of his room.

“I couldn’t sleep,” I told him honestly, taking a sip of the coffee Clark had made.

“Too big a day?”

I nodded. “Yeah. I’m going home and I get to see my sons again but...”

He sat on the arm of the chair, putting a hand on my shoulder. “You’re going to miss your mom and Lucy and Dave.”

“Right.”

“Your boys will be so happy to see you and you to see them that it won’t hurt so bad.”

I nodded. “Maybe. But actually stepping through the time window... That won’t be easy. Clark ran into your Clark and he brought back some pictures and videos with him. That’ll either make it easier — seeing them and all — or harder because of how much I’ve missed and seeing how well they’re doing anyway, without me.”

He squeezed my shoulder. “Don’t think that way.”

I’d told them everything, including the whole post-partum depression thing that had haunted me until the previous fall. Not long after we’d arrived, Daddy had written me a prescription for Wellbutrin again. It was making a huge difference, but with everything going on, it was still a struggle.

“I’m sure they’ve missed you and will be ecstatic that you’re home.”

“Will they have noticed at all?” I asked quietly, finally truly voicing one of my fears. I’d mentioned it before but never the true depth of my fear. “Or will they think that your Lois is their mom.” I gave a small shake of my head. “I guess it’s a good thing I’m not nursing anymore.”

He chuckled. “Probably. Or that this didn’t happen while you were in the middle of all Nate’s medical issues.”

I nodded. “True. If you thought I’d freaked out at first as it was... I can’t imagine being taken away from him a couple days before surgery or something. I don’t know which would make me feel better — the boys knowing they aren’t us or them not knowing because then their lives would have been disrupted less.”

“I don’t know either.” We sat for another minute. “I’d like to see them, if you don’t mind.”

“The boys?” I asked suddenly.

“The pictures, the videos Clark brought back, if you don’t mind.”

“I’d be happy to, but I’m not sure what he did with them. When he’s out of the shower, I’ll ask.”

“Right here,” Clark said, coming out of our room, carrying a bag.

Moments later, Mom had joined us and we were sitting on the sofa. Clark hadn’t just brought recent pictures, but the scrapbooks and albums since Christopher was born.

Some of the early ones were hard to look at — it was obvious that things were strained between me and Clark. There were no pictures of the three of us.

And they were hard to look at because I missed him. We flipped through and found a picture of us at the Kerths with Billy and Serena — when they won for their adoption story.

“You look incredible,” Mom said. “Are those my pearls?”

I nodded. “Daddy gave them to me for that night.”

Next was a picture of Christopher from the Adoption Option kickoff. He looked like such a little man. Tears filled my eyes as I ran a finger over the picture.

Mom squeezed my shoulder. “He’s a sweetie,” she said as I flipped to another picture of him and Jimmy talking to Daddy.

The Corn Festival was next. Clark in his blue jeans and denim shirt, sleeves rolled up. Someone had gotten a picture of me kissing him after he won the baseball toss that year. Pop Pop was in the background. I still missed him.

We flipped through the rest of the book. There were pictures from the cruise we’d taken and even a couple of me looking absolutely miserable when I was on modified bed rest with Nate.

Then the pictures of him — including ones from the hospital when he had surgery.

~~~~~  
Clark

I was leaning against the back of the couch and I knew how hard those pictures were for Lois to look at. She moved past them and through the rest — up through the pictures we’d never seen of the wedding. Someone had added them after we left.

She picked up another book — pictures since we’d left.

Tears were flowing down her cheeks as she flipped though the book. “I miss them,” she whispered.

“They’re beautiful,” Ellen said, resting her head on Lois’. “I wish we had the opportunity to get to know them and this new baby.”

“I wish they had the chance to get to know you.”

Doors opened and Lucy and Jimmy came down stairs, followed closely by my parents.

Lois went through the pictures with them and I talked to Bernie when he came in.

“I still don’t get how we got switched without either of us — or the other Lois and Clark — noticing,” I told him as we sipped on cups of coffee.

“I think I know. Or I have a theory, anyway,” he told me.

“What’s that?” I turned to the kitchen to start working on breakfast.

“I found something else when I was looking through the FAQ after you got back last night.”

“What’s that?”

“Well, apparently, if someone uses the Intermacric Trans-homulator with a time window that’s open between two universes, the person or persons it’s being used on will be transpositioned with their counterparts on the other side of the window.”

I stared at him with a raised brow. “O-kay. What’s an intermultiplier homosapianator?”

He laughed. “An Intermacric Trans-homulator and I don’t have a clue, but that’s what it said. If someone used one near a window open between our two universes...” He shrugged.

I sighed. “I guess that would explain how neither of the Kryptonians involved woke up and how someone was actually able to move us without us noticing.”

“I think that’s what the other button is, but I’m still hesitant to push it and the FAQ only covers the time part of the machine. Apparently, the buttons aren’t supposed to be used in conjunction with each other, but you’re right. That explains it if they did.”

“What would explain it?” Sam asked as he poured himself another cup of coffee.

Bernie explained it.

Sam nodded thoughtfully. “Well, I’m not sure what one of those is either, obviously, but if we break it down... Intermacric

would be across macros — probably including universes or multiverses or whatever. And ‘trans’ is across or through or change. Homo would be man and ‘ulator’ is something like ‘it does things’. So it would do things across or through universes with humans. Or something like that.”

“Like ‘Beam me up, Scotty?’” I asked.

He shrugged. “I guess. If they can travel through time, ‘beam me up, Scotty,’ may not be too far out of the question.”

“I guess that’s as good an explanation as we’re going to get,” I said. “Does that explain why I was wearing his clothes and his wedding ring and all that?”

Bernie nodded. “It said that all personal effects, like jewelry, would stay in their original universe and be transferred to the other person or something like that.”

“We may never really know,” Sam said. “But it’s nice to have a potential explanation.”

Bernie and I worked together to make breakfast for everyone.

We spent the day hanging out at the cabin with family. Lois was rarely far from her mother’s side. I missed being with her, being close to her, but I wasn’t about to deny her this time with her mom and sister, especially.

After dinner, Lois had me bring out the things she’d had me get.

We stood in front of the family, her in front of me, my hands resting on her shoulder for support. “I wanted to do something for each of you before we left. You’ve all been so kind and so gracious, accepting us into your family even as you missed your own Lois and Clark.” She swiped at the tears. “It’s not much but I hope that it lets you know how much you’ve each meant to me — to us — since we’ve been here and how much we’re going to miss all of you — even those of you we have other versions of at home.”

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Where to start?” She turned to Gina. “We don’t know you at home, but I hope we meet the other you soon.” She turned to her sort-of sister-in-law. “Ashley, you’ve been like a sister to me at home and here, too, once you and Bernie started talking again. Thank you for that. For accepting Bernie — and Clark — as they are, for who they are.”

She looked at my parents. “Martha, Jonathan — you could have made this very difficult on us, especially me, and you didn’t. Your support when we first got here was invaluable to us. I don’t know what we would have done without you.” She moved on to Jimmy. “Jimmy, take care of my little sister. I wish she’d survived in our world for our Jimmy — not just because I miss her still but because I see how happy you two are and I want that for him. Take care of her and that baby or I promise, the other me will have something to say about it.”

She took another breath. “Bernie — and you too, Ashley — thank you for trying to find a way home for us. You’ve been good friends to us since we’ve been here and I can’t thank you enough for figuring out how to get us back to our family. You, too, Daddy. You didn’t have to be as accepting as you were, but thank you for taking care of us.”

“Of course, sweetheart. We couldn’t do anything else. We’re sure your dad helped take care of our Lois and Clark, too,” he told her.

Lois nodded. “I hope he did. Dave...” She wiped at her cheeks again. “I really wish I’d known about you in our world, that we’d been able to help him like Mom helped you. Daddy still feels so guilty about that — even though Jimmy and his family have told him that it’s not his fault. I’m going to miss you. So much.”

My arms went around her. These two were going to be the hardest.

“Lucy,” she whispered. “Thank you for letting me be your friend. I know I’m not really your sister and you’re not really

mine, but... Thank you for letting me pretend for a few months.”

Lucy stood up and I moved so that she could hug her sister. They clung to each other for a long moment.

“I’m glad you’re getting your sister back,” Lois whispered.

“Me, too,” Lucy whispered back. “But I am going to miss you.” She moved back to her seat by Jimmy.

Lois looked at Ellen. “Mom...” The tears came faster and she couldn’t speak.

Ellen moved quickly to her side, enveloping Lois in her arms. “Oh, sweetie. As much as I miss our Lois, I hate that we’re sending you back to a world without your mom and sister and brother. I’m going to miss you.” She moved back, tears running down her cheeks. “I can tell you this with absolute certainty though. Your mother would be very proud of you, of who you’ve become, of your family, of your choice in your life mate, regardless of why the choice was originally made. I love Joe, but I love Clark, too, and I can see why the two of you work so well together.”

Lois clung to Ellen for long minutes before she finally moved back. “I love you, Mom. I’m going to miss you so much...”

After another long hug, they sat on the couch together while I passed out the gifts Lois had asked me to pick up for them. There were books and scarves and other things that Lois knew each of them would like.

I wasn’t sure where the letters she’d written were.

We played another couple of games, but the mood was subdued.

The clock struck ten.

We both gave long hugs to everyone and with a long last look, we flew towards the house. I carried Lois and Bernie carried the boxes we were taking back with us.

Lois’ tears flowed the whole way there.

A few minutes later, we were in the theater in the basement of the house.

I prepared the window and took the boxes from Bernie.

I held Lois’ hand and looked at her.

“It’s time.”

Part 39

Lois

~~~~~

“It’s time.” Clark squeezed my hand as he said it.

I nodded. “I know.”

I was glad we’d left my family back at the cabin. I didn’t think I’d be able to do this otherwise. I knew my sons were on the other side of the time window, but leaving my mom and Lucy and Dave...

I turned to Bernie. “Here,” I said, handing him the packet of letters I’d written. “Would you give these to everyone for me?”

They’d said they were going to wait up for their Lois and Clark to get back. Bernie was going to wait at the house for them.

He nodded. “I’ll take them up there now and then come back.”

I gave him a hug. “Thanks, Bernie.”

“Bye, Bernie. Thanks. Hopefully, they’ll be here in an hour or so.” Clark let go of my hand long enough to push the last button on the screen.

The window appeared in mid-air.

We took a deep breath and stepped through.

Clark set the boxes down and turned. He closed the window and Bernie disappeared, leaving the other Lois and Clark in his place.

“Hi,” I said quietly.

“Hi,” the other Lois said, her arms crossed in front of her.

“What took you so long?”

“We’re only fifteen minutes late,” I pointed out.

“No, you’re four and a half months late.”

I sighed. “We got here as quick as we could. And it was only three and a half months. No one knew how to make the doohickey work and switch universes at the same time. All we knew was how to go backwards and forwards in time.”

“Time travel?” she asked, arms still crossed, brow raised.

“Baby in a space ship?” I asked, mirroring her body language.

“What?” she asked, looking at her Clark.

“You didn’t tell her?” my husband asked.

“She knows,” the other Clark said quietly.

“What?” she asked then shook her head slightly. “Right. Clark. Baby in a space ship.”

“How are my sons?” I asked her suddenly, tears filling my eyes. Clark wrapped an arm around me, helping me to a seat.

“They’re good,” the other Clark said quietly. “They’ve missed you both a lot, though. We didn’t tell them you were coming back tonight, just in case...”

We both nodded. “So they knew you weren’t us?” Clark asked them.

It was their turn to nod. “Almost immediately,” she said.

“Fortunately, the only people around were Lana, Martha, Jonathan and Daddy.”

“That’s good,” I said.

This was awkward. How were we going to tell them what we’d done to their lives?

“What about Superman?” my Clark asked.

The other Clark rubbed the back of his neck. “He was, uh, gone for a few weeks,” he told us. “But after that... Probably not around as much as you would have been but I’ve helped out at disasters and stuff like that. You?”

My Clark sighed. “A few weeks after we got there — after we realized we didn’t know how to get back. We said in his first interview that we didn’t know how long he’d be able to stay so if you don’t want to do that anymore, you have an out.”

The other Clark nodded. “What did Lana say?” He almost seemed afraid to ask more.

“She wasn’t happy about it.” My Clark shifted nervously in his seat.

“You divorced her, didn’t you?” Lois asked him. “And you didn’t marry Joe, either, did you?” she asked me.

“Right on both counts,” I said softly. “We told them the truth pretty quickly. We waited a week, hoping Daddy or Bernie could figure it out, but they couldn’t. Then we called off the wedding. A week later, divorce proceedings started.”

“How is she?” the other Clark asked.

“She’s okay,” my husband said. “She understood why. If you and she had ended up here with you married to Lois instead of her, you would have done the same thing.”

Our counterparts shared a look. “That’s about what we figured,” Lois said.

“Is it final yet?” Clark asked.

“Yesterday,” I told them. “And, um, we flew to Vegas yesterday, too.”

The other Clark let out a deep breath. “So, legally, Lois and I are married?”

We both nodded.

Lois sighed. “Well, at least you already have a divorce lawyer...” she said to ‘her’ Clark. “How’s Joe?” she asked us. “How’d he take all of this?”

“He didn’t take it well, but better than Lana,” I told her. “And he’s good. I talked to him a couple weeks ago to let him know that Clark and Lana’s divorce would be final soon and that we were planning a destination wedding in about a month — that’s two weeks from now. You’re supposed to be having your wedding in Barbados. Last we heard, no one had gotten a hold of either one of them since we figured out how to get back here. Jimmy was calling Joe and Martha was trying to get a hold of

Lana but..." I took a deep breath. "He has started dating again," I told her. "He didn't say how seriously or anything, just that he'd been out on a couple dates."

"With who?" she asked, her eyes narrowed.

"Debbie," I whispered, sure she knew what the potential significance of that was.

She sighed and scrubbed her eyes with the heels of her hands. "Part of me is really pissed at you two for screwing everything up, but I also know that if the situation had been reversed, I probably would have done the same thing. If Lana and Joe hadn't already been taken here, who knows what would have happened?" She sighed again. "We tried not to change too much here. We had no idea what had happened — we found a note telling us a little bit, but not much — and we decided to wait until after the boys' birthdays before doing anything drastic, but we also knew you guys might not wait long."

"We had another reason," Clark said quietly. "We found out not long after we got there that Lois is pregnant."

"We kept the information as closely guarded as possible," I assured them. "Not very many people know."

"I didn't cheat on Lana," my husband said quietly, putting his other hand over our joined ones. "We weren't together from the time we got there until we got married yesterday. Well, more or less. When we were time traveling trying to fix things, we were in a time and place where we were married and..."

They nodded their understanding.

"But Lois was already pregnant by the time we left here," he told them. "We're almost positive about that."

"When do we get to go home?" Lois asked.

"Is there anything we need to know?" my Clark asked.

"Like what?" she asked.

"Um, we left you guys lists of stuff — passwords that we changed, story notes, all of those things," I said. "Where to find the paperwork and stuff. All of that's at the cabin in our — my, your, whatever — room. We were there for the weekend with everyone. Everyone's waiting up for you."

"We made lists for you guys, too. It was harder trying to come up with what your passwords and stuff might be than it probably was for you," the other Clark said. "Day you were supposed to propose to Lana was probably easier to figure out than the day after Sam's heart attack or the day you almost died in a snowstorm. What's that about?"

I leaned my head against Clark. We were both a few shades of red, I was sure.

"The day we almost died..." His voice cracked.

~~~~~

Clark

That day was still hard to think about.

I took a deep breath. "The day we almost died... That was the first time we made love. We didn't know that for a long time, but it was. That's where Christopher came from. The night after Sam's heart attack was the next time. And we got Nate out of that and the very beginning of the seeds of realization that I can't live without her."

"We figured it was something like that," the other me said.

"Well, based on what your diary said about it, Lois." He nodded towards my wife.

"Diary?" I asked puzzled.

My Lois bit her lip. "I'll tell you about it later."

I nodded.

The other Lois looked at my wife. "I don't know how you've done everything you've done... Losing Mom and Lucy, never knowing Dave, everything with that crazy Navance..."

"Getting to spend a few months with them was like an answer to prayer," Lois said, her eyes filling with tears again. "I'm going to miss them so much..."

"I have missed them and your dad's great, but he's not my

dad."

I nodded my understanding.

"Wait. Clark's invulnerable," she said. "How'd he almost die?"

We told them about the green rock and how Mom and Dad had cleaned a bunch out of Shuster's Field. Neither one of us had been there — it would have been really bad for me and for the baby if we had been — but they'd found quite a bit and we hoped, for the other Clark's sake, that they'd gotten all of it.

"Is there anything else you can think of that we need to know?" I asked. "Who knows about all this?"

"Sam, Jimmy, Bernie and Ashley, Lana and Chad. He knows we're the wrong Lois and Clark but I don't think he knows about Krypton, even though Lana does," the other Clark said. "The boys just know that we're not you — at least Christopher does; I don't know about Nate — how much he knows. He knows we're not you guys but..." He shrugged. "I can't think of anything else. We left notes upstairs, but other than that... What about you? Anything else you can think of?"

Lois and I looked at each other and then shook our heads. "I don't think so."

"Then can we go home?" the other Lois asked, tears in her eyes. "I want to see my mom and my sister and my brother and..."

I nodded. "Thank you for taking care of our sons," I said quietly as I opened the window.

"We just... walk through?" she asked skeptically.

We nodded. "Just... walk through."

They grasped hands lightly, just in case, I thought, and walked through. They turned and waved slightly and I saw Bernie walk in. We all waved again and then I shut the window.

Lois collapsed against me. "Is Daddy still up?"

I nodded. "He's pacing around the living room. Probably waiting for us."

I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her to me for a long minute. "We're home," I whispered.

She nodded, resting her head against my chest. "Let's go see Daddy."

I kept an arm around her as we headed upstairs.

Sam must have heard us because he was waiting when we got there.

Lois flew into his arms. "Daddy," she whispered.

"Princess."

They stood there for a long time, just holding each other. I made a motion indicating that I was going to go back downstairs. I did that and brought the boxes back up with me. I didn't want to go all the way upstairs and see the boys without her.

When I got back, they had moved to the couch and they were sitting on the couch, Sam's arm around her, her head on his shoulder.

"He figured it out pretty quick," she told me.

"What's that?" I asked, putting the boxes down near the stairs.

"The baby," she said with a smile.

"Congratulations," Sam said, a big smile on his face. "Am I getting a granddaughter this time?"

"We don't know," Lois said. "We didn't find out with the boys and as much as I like knowing everything, I have to admit that it was kind of nice not knowing, too."

"What about my parents?" I asked, sitting across from them. "Do they know we're back?"

Sam shook his head. "We couldn't get a hold of them. They're visiting someone, but I don't remember who off the top of my head. I guess they're in the middle of nowhere with no cell phone reception. They're supposed to be back tomorrow so we left messages on their cell phones and at home."

I nodded. "Okay. I'll make sure to call them tomorrow."

“So what exactly happened?” he asked quietly. “The other two didn’t know much except that they didn’t belong here.”

I sighed and pulled the little black box out of my pocket. “It’s a time machine, believe it or not. And it goes between universes, too. And if an...” I closed my eyes and tried to remember right. “...Intermacroic Trans-homulator is used near a window open between universes, then the people it’s being used on will be switched with themselves on the other side — right down to jewelry and clothes. So they woke up wearing our wedding rings, for instance...” And no clothes, but I didn’t think Sam needed to know that — he could probably guess if he really thought about it. “...and we woke up wearing theirs. Some kind of ‘beam me up’ thing was the best we could determine.”

Lois chose that moment to yawn.

“Why don’t you go get some sleep, Princess?” Sam squeezed her shoulders. “We’ll talk tomorrow and you two both have a couple days off next week. The other Clark called Perry and said there was a family emergency of some kind or something.”

“We should have thought of that,” I said, chagrined.

“Hopefully they will. I’m sure they could use it, too. I have a feeling it’s going to be harder for them to get back to their lives than it will be for us.”

“Probably,” Lois agreed quietly.

“Why?” Sam asked. “What happened?”

I sighed. “The divorce and the marriage. Clark and Lana’s divorce was final yesterday and we flew off to Vegas and got married. Joe’s dating Debbie — at least they’ve gone out a couple times. No idea what Lana’s up to. Except,” I added, snapping my fingers, “they have the next three weeks off anyway because of the wedding so they won’t have to go to work tomorrow anyway.”

Sam stood and held out a hand to Lois, helping her up. He gave her another long hug. “Why don’t you go get some sleep and we’ll spend the day together tomorrow, okay?”

Lois nodded against him. “Sounds good. I want to see the boys.”

They kept arms around each other as we headed upstairs, me with boxes in my hands. Sam said good night at the door to his room. We headed towards our room — *our* room — where I set the boxes down. Christopher and Nate were in their beds. We walked quietly in.

I stood with my arms around her as we watched both of them sleeping. I could hear nearly silent tears streaming down Lois’ face.

Christopher stirred and we both held our breath. As much as we wanted to see them, we knew that either of them waking up would probably not be the best plan.

He rolled over and looked at us. “Mommy? Daddy?” he murmured.

“Shhh,” Lois whispered. “We’ll be here in the morning.”

He nodded sleepily and curled back under his Superman/Van-El blanket. That was new since we’d left.

Unwilling to risk it any longer, we headed back to our room where I took Lois in my arms.

“We’re home,” she whispered.

I nodded against her. “We are.”

She yawned again. “Do you mind if we go right to sleep?”

“Not at all,” I told her. “Hold still.”

I zipped around the room and a minute later, she was curled up in my arms and we fell asleep.

The last thought that ran through my head sort of amused me. Not the sentiment but the phrasing.

There’s no place like home.

Part 40

Lois

~~~~~

“Mommy? Daddy?”

I sighed inwardly. I was even dreaming Christopher’s voice. Or was I? It came flooding back to me.

“Mommy?” The voice came again as I felt a tug on the comforter. “Daddy?”

I opened my eyes and saw my son, a look of joy and disbelief on his face.

“Mommy?” he whispered.

I nodded as I reached for him. He buried his head in my shoulder and cried. “I mis’ t you, Mommy.”

“I missed you, too, bud,” I whispered, tears streaming down my own cheeks. I felt Clark’s arm reach over me until his hand rested on Christopher’s head.

I wasn’t sure how long we lay like that, but eventually Christopher pulled back and crawled between us. “I d’eam you come back.”

“You woke up for a minute when we looked at you last night,” Clark told him. “Mom told you to go back to sleep.”

He nodded. “I ‘member. Where you go?”

“A bad man took us away,” Clark told him quietly. “We worked as hard as we could to get home as fast as we could. We missed you and Nate *so* much.”

He nodded. “We miss you, too. Ot’er mommy...” He stopped.

“What is it, bud?” Clark asked him.

“Didn’ know wha’ e’s e to ca’ dem. Ca’ dem mommy an’ daddy,” he said without looking at us.

“It’s okay,” I told him quietly.

“Had to p’etend dey were mommy an’ daddy.”

I couldn’t lie to myself and say it didn’t hurt some that he’d called another me ‘mommy’, but I wasn’t about to tell him that.

“It’s okay,” I told him again.

“Dey were nice, but no’ you.”

“Were you a good boy?” Clark asked him.

He nodded.

“Good.”

“G’ampa know you home?”

“Yes,” I said. “We saw Grandpa last night.”

“G’amps and G’ams?”

“No, we haven’t talked to Gramps and Grams yet,” Clark said, kissing his hair. “We wanted to see you first thing this morning.”

“You should f’y to see dem.”

We exchanged a glance over the top of our son’s head.

“Well,” Clark said slowly, “we’d have to get tickets to get on an airplane...”

Christopher shook his head almost violently. “No. F’y. Like Unca Be’nie and da ot’er daddy.”

Our eyes met again, this time wide in shock. “What are you talking about?” I asked cautiously.

“Like Sup’ma’,” he said quietly.

“What?” Clark asked him.

Christopher looked between us with tear filled eyes. “I know Daddy Sup’ma’. I know I not supos’d to know but I know.”

“How do you know that, buddy?” Clark asked after I nodded my agreement with his silent ‘I don’t think we can deny this’ look.

He shrugged. “I know Unca Be’nie Va’-El when he come to da house.”

Our eyes stayed wide with shock. He’d known that day?

“Why didn’t you say anything?” I asked him.

He shrugged again. “Was a sec’et.”

Clark nodded slowly. “Yes, it is a secret. A big one.”

“I not tell anyone.”

“I know you won’t.” Clark pulled him into a big hug. “I love you, little man. I missed you so much.”

“I miss you, too, Daddy.” Christopher rested his head on

Clark's chest for a long minute.

Babbling sounds from the other room broke up the moment. "I'll get him," I said, giving Christopher another kiss and rolling over.

I headed into the boys' room, my eyes filling with tears as I saw Nate standing there in his crib.

He raised his arms immediately, squealing and smiling as he did. "Momomomomomom!"

"Hey, big guy," I managed to say around the lump in my throat. He was so big. And so healthy. I could tell how big he'd gotten when I picked him up; how much heavier he was.

"Daddy?" he asked as he laid his head on my shoulder.

"Daddy's in bed with Christopher," I told him as we walked back into our room.

We spent about twenty minutes just sitting with the boys before we decided it was time to get up and face the day.

\*\*\*

December 2007

Clark

~~~~~

We'd been home for seven and a half months.

There had been tearful reunions with family and friends. All had been ecstatic to hear that we were having another baby.

Mom and Dad had been so glad to see us. They'd enjoyed spending time with Clark, but just as his parents had said, it wasn't the same.

Jimmy had welled up when he'd heard that his counterpart was married to Lucy and was expecting a baby. Lois and I had both been surprised when he and Gina — Ashley's cousin — hit it off.

Bernie and Ashley were happy, in love. They were more openly affectionate than they had been before we left, but I thought the Kryptonian culture he'd been raised in had ingrained deeply a reticence for PDA. Though he was more comfortable with it, I didn't think he'd ever be as comfortable as I was with Lois — but I'd been raised with very openly affectionate parents and grandparents.

Perry had surprised us. We never told him the whole story and he never asked, but some of the things he said told us that he'd known something was off. As he often reminded us, he hadn't become editor of the Daily Planet because he could yodel.

Lois had been put on bed rest again in mid-July, after we'd attended Lana and Chad's wedding. They were so happy and we were so happy for them. They'd even emailed to say that they were expecting their first baby already. Lana had confided in Lois that after the mess she'd made of her life the spring of our freshman year, Chad had suggested they wait until marriage — because he knew that, deep down, she was afraid that was all he wanted from her like some of those guys had. Apparently, their first time together was as lucky for them as our first two had been for us. Or pretty close anyway.

As for me and Lois, we'd spent time with family and watched our baby grow in a way we hadn't with the boys. We had spent days together and eventually planned to take that first honeymoon — maybe when the baby was weaned. Lois had *loved* her wedding present, even if the other Lois had driven it first. A nearly new Jeep Cherokee that was now being supplemented with a minivan. Neither of us were crazy about that but the room made sense for us with three kids. I'd thought about selling my truck — the one I'd had since high school — but it was always nice to have a truck around so we'd kept it. It had sort of become a work truck for Sam and Ollie and whoever else needed it.

Sam had gone above and beyond, completely remodeling the two apartments on the other side of the house. It was now one big apartment with a big master suite and three smaller bedrooms, a small kitchen — a kitchenette really because we ate most of our

meals downstairs — a living area and an office. He said it was because he was so glad to have us home safe. The boys, however, had insisted they wanted to share a room so the fourth bedroom was currently a playroom. Jessica had moved into the suite in the basement so that she could have a bit more privacy but she continued to take care of the kids for us, just as she always had.

We had moved in to the new apartment in early August. Lois had lain on the couch and directed. She was good at that.

Lois had brought a few pictures back with her from the other universe, including one of her and her mom that I caught her looking at often. It was hard for her, missing her mom, but being home, with our sons in particular, more than offset her sorrow.

And then Lois had gone into labor, early labor still, but she tended to have pretty quick labors so we didn't waste any time heading towards Metropolis University and the Ellen Lane Memorial Medical Building.

An hour after we got there, the epidural had taken effect and I could see the relief written all over her face.

An hour after that... we had another baby.

"It's a girl," I'd told her with a grin.

She'd collapsed back onto the bed, a smile crossing her face. "A girl," she'd whispered.

"And as beautiful as her mom," I'd whispered, kissing Lois on the forehead as Dr. McConnell placed the tiny baby on Lois' chest.

And she was. She had lots of dark hair — even for three weeks early — and I knew it wasn't parental bias to say she was the best looking girl baby ever.

It wasn't all that long before the boys came in and we'd taken a family picture in the delivery room. Lois would hate it, I was sure, because she looked like she'd, well, just given birth.

We named her Larellen Lucille, just as we'd discussed before, but the names had even more meaning after our unexpected trip to another universe. We'd been careful to avoid *too* much pink froo froo and Ellie had soon settled into the family as though she was always meant to be there.

It was now Christmas Eve — barring any more unexpected time travel, our first Christmas as a *real* family.

I took a framed copy of our family picture from the week before and the small black box I'd hidden in the secret closet with my Suits in the new apartment — we kept everything that could be identified with the other universe in there, like the copies of the Daily Planet with the 'Lois Lane' byline on them. I went to the main master suite that no one currently occupied. I carefully programmed and opened the window.

I stepped carefully through. I set the picture frame and a Christmas card quietly on the dresser.

"Who's there?"

The soft female voice startled me.

"It's me, the other Clark. Merry Christmas," I whispered.

"What're you doing here?" Ellen asked, pulling a robe around her as she walked towards me.

I pointed towards the dresser. "I brought those for you."

"A girl?" she asked, picking the picture up. "That's wonderful."

"Larellen Lucille," I told her. "Ellie."

I could see the tears in her eyes. "That's great. How's Lois?"

"She's doing great."

"Clark?"

I heard Sam's voice but when I turned I was surprised to see Sam in the empty room on the other side of the time window.

"Ellen?" he whispered hoarsely, choking up as he realized who I was talking to.

"This is the other Ellen," I told him quietly.

Tears streaked down his face. "You look wonderful."

"So do you," she whispered, tears in her own eyes. "I'm so sorry..."

He nodded. “I know.” He swiped at his cheeks. “I still love her,” he managed to get out.

“I know. She knows.”

They held each other’s eyes for a long moment.

“Take care of yourself and those grandkids,” she told him.

“I will.”

Ellen turned to me. “You, too. Take care of them and take care of yourself.”

“I will,” I said, leaning to give her a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Wait,” she said, turning around and picking up another frame. “Here. It’s not very recent but...”

I looked at it — a picture of Sam, Ellen, Lois, Lucy, Jimmy and their new little girl. “Thank you.”

“Take care,” she whispered again, looking directly at Sam, and I stepped back through the window.

Sam held his fingers to his lips and held his hand towards her. She did the same.

He turned away, tears still flowing down his cheeks.

I waved and closed the window.

“Daddy?” Lois asked, wandering into the room holding Ellie. “What’s wrong?”

He smiled. “Nothing, Princess.” I took Ellie from her and he pulled Lois into his arms. “I just saw the other Ellen, that’s all.”

“I miss her. I miss both of them,” she told him.

“I do, too, but it was nice to see her just once more.” We headed out to the living room and they sat on the couch together. “I used to pray for that, you know,” he told her, one arm around her shoulders, the other hand holding the pictures. “To just see her and Lucy one more time.” Tears continued to flow. “It’s like an unexpected answer to prayer.”

We sat there for a while before Ellie decided that she was done being patient and she was ready to eat. Lois gave Sam one more big hug and he headed towards his room.

I put my arm around her shoulders. Hers went around my waist and she leaned her head on my shoulder as we headed towards the apartment.

“I love you,” I said quietly as we lay in each other’s arms a while later.

“I love you,” she told me moving just enough to kiss me lightly.

As I watched her nursing our daughter — something that never ceased to amaze me — it hit me that, even before I’d realized it, this — a woman I loved more than life and who loved me the same way, kids I treasured — this was what I’d spent my whole life praying for.

And my prayers had been answered.

THE END