

The Pub

By **bobbart** — Bob Bartholomew <bobbart_99@yahoo.com>

Rated: PG

Submitted: May 2012

Summary: A young Clark Kent is struggling to get by in a world that never recovered from Nightfall. With no Lois Lane, no Daily Planet and Metropolis in ruins, will he find the inspiration to step up and make a difference?

Disclaimer: This is a fanfic based on the television show, Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman. I have no claim on the pre-existing characters whatsoever, nor am I profiting by their use. The new story elements are mine. No infringement is intended by this work.

Prelude: The Pub — Elsewhere

Clancy looked around at the inside of the bar. There was a lot of dark wood. The walls had the right mix of pictures and other paraphernalia. The tables, chairs and barstools were all clean and in their places. The room looked comfortable and welcoming. He looked carefully around the empty room again. Everything here told the story of a gathering place that had been welcoming guests for many years. If this was going to work, it had to feel right.

It was almost time to start. He turned toward the doorway behind the bar. “Ben, are you ready?”

Ben stepped through the door. He was a huge bear of a man but had that fatherly look about him that made other people comfortable. “I think we’re as ready as we’re going to get,” he replied.

Clancy glanced down at a control screen in front of him. There were so many lines. Many were bright, but not all. He adjusted a control and the field of lines shifted to the left. After a few minutes of searching, he found it. This was the line that had moved him to take action. In this region, most of the lines were bright, but there was one exception. Right there in the middle of a bright region was a line so dark that it looked black. He adjusted another control and the image shifted along the direction that the lines ran. This dark line had started out like the others, neither particularly bright nor dark. But there was a point where the other lines brightened while this one turned dark. He looked up at Ben. “It’s show time.”

Part 1: Clark Kent — Metropolis

“We need to keep moving,” Clark called out to his friend Paul who had stopped to look in through the broken window of a burned-out shop. “We need to get out of this area.”

“Go on,” his friend called back. “I’m right behind you.”

With a heavy sigh, Clark turned and started back. “We don’t want to get separated,” he called to his friend. “It’s past curfew now. If we get picked up...”

“Clark, you’re such an old lady. Don’t worry so much. Besides, once we get across this dead section, we’ll be at my apartment.”

Clark finally made it back to where Paul had stopped. The old shop was nothing but a pile of empty shelves and broken glass. Paul had to have known that there would be nothing here. None of these had reopened after Nightfall, and that had been over twenty years ago. “C’mon, Paul,” Clark pleaded. “There isn’t anything here.”

“You never know,” Paul replied, as he continued to poke

around and look through the debris. “I’ve heard stories of cans of food and sometimes even some stuff of real value that people find buried in places like this.”

“We’ve all grown up hearing those,” Clark replied tiredly. “They’re nothing but stories. These places were all picked over right after Nightfall. Anything the first round of scroungers might have missed would have been found in the first year or two of the Empire.”

Paul paused in his search and looked back at Clark with a smile. “You know me, I’m always an optimist. Besides, if you don’t look, you’ll never find that one thing that others missed.”

Clark had to smile back. Paul was an optimist. That was one of the things that Clark enjoyed about him. In a world as messed up as theirs, people like Paul were a breath of fresh air. Clark was about to reply when he heard people moving nearby. He concentrated and was able to make out voices. “...said they were in the area. Two males. Probably kids looking for trouble.” Then Clark heard another voice respond. “They found it.”

“Paul, we need to get out of here now,” Clark said, his voice suddenly stressed. “I think I heard someone coming this way. It could be the Patrol.”

That got Paul’s attention. Nobody wanted to be picked up by The People’s Patrol. If they found you in a restricted zone, you were likely to never be seen again. “Let’s go,” he said quickly, his face now a mask of fear.

They scrambled out of the shop and resumed the path that would lead them to Paul’s apartment. At first, it seemed like they had left the Patrol behind, but as they reached the edge of the restricted zone they found the final street blocked by two Patrol officers. They were watching the street for anyone trying to get across.

As Clark considered the two officers in front of them, he heard footsteps approaching from behind. He had to do something right now, or Paul would be in a labor camp by morning. “We need a diversion,” he said to Paul in hushed tones. “I’m faster than you. I’m going to run across their line of sight and try to get them to follow me to the left. All you need to do is get across the street and you should be fine.”

“You know what patrolers do to anyone that they see running away,” Paul replied. “In this area they’ll start shooting as soon as they see you run.”

“They won’t hit me and they won’t catch me. Besides, I don’t have any ties to Metropolis. If they catch you, then your family and all their friends will attract the attention of the Patrol. I can’t let that happen.” Clark could see that mentioning the risk to Paul’s family had decided it. “I’ll be fine. Now, get ready.”

Clark waited only long enough to be sure Paul would be prepared to go in an instant. Then he bolted from the alley. He ran in the opposite direction that Paul would have to go. Both patrolers shouted for him to stop. As soon as they saw him, both officers reached for their weapons.

Clark ran at a speed that would be expected of a very fast normal man. Since he knew the shots were sure to come at any instant, he ran a tight zig-zag pattern.

He heard the first shot and then another. He could hear each bullet fly past. Good! This meant that both patrolers were focused on him. He risked a quick look back over his shoulder and managed to see Paul in the distance making it to safety.

Clark didn’t want to risk drawing the patrolers into the safe zone where they might find Paul, so he turned back toward the restricted zone. He’d gone far enough that once he was out of the patrolers’ sight he could disappear into the sky without fear of being spotted by anyone else. He heard two more shots and felt both hit him right in the center of the back of his head. Well, no harm done. In another few seconds the only thing that the patrolers would be able to report would be a man disappearing into the restricted zone.

With a final glance back at his pursuers, he veered into an alley. That brief look back turned out to be a mistake as he barreled over a trash can and went sprawling to the ground.

Before he could recover, he felt arms lifting him to his feet. “Hurry up. They’re right behind you.” Whoever this man was, he was big. “This way,” the man said, pulling Clark to the side of the alley. Before he really knew what was happening he was through a doorway. Only when they were inside did his benefactor let go of his arm and close the door.

Help was the last thing that Clark needed, but there was nothing to be done about it now. “Thanks for the help, but those are patrollers. You shouldn’t have risked it.”

The big man just laughed. The sound filled the room like an earthquake. “Don’t worry, son. They’ll never find that door. Once it’s closed there’s no sign of it from that alley.”

Clark glanced at the door and tried to see if the patrollers had gone by, but his x-ray vision couldn’t penetrate either the door or the wall. He almost asked if the room had lead shielding, but thought better of it. He just hoped the big man knew what he was doing. Clark turned back to face the man. “My name’s Clark Kent.”

The big man smiled and thrust his hand out toward Clark. “Ben Wojciehowicz,” the man offered.

“Thanks for rescuing me, Mr. Wojciehowicz. I’m not a troublemaker, and I promise that the only thing I was guilty of was taking a shortcut across the restricted zone after curfew.”

There was that room-shaking laugh again. “Call me Ben,” he said pleasantly. “I believe you. I’m a good judge of people and I knew you were good folks before I pulled you through the doorway. Now, follow me and we’ll get you someplace where you can relax and get a bite to eat before you go on your way.”

Ben turned and started down a flight of stairs. “We have a ways to walk,” he said over his shoulder. “This is a remote entrance for the pub I work in. I think it was a secret entrance left over from prohibition. I check the door once a day. It’s a good thing for you that you ducked in that alley when you did. Any other time and you would have never seen a door.”

The stairs ended in a narrow tunnel lit by a line of light bulbs hung from the ceiling. They walked for several minutes as the tunnel changed directions a few times. Eventually they came to a set of ascending stairs. The trap door at the top led to a small office. As he climbed into the room, Clark could hear crowd noise from beyond the far door.

“We’re in Clancy’s place,” Ben said as he closed the trap door. “You can relax here for a while before you go on your way.”

“I really shouldn’t stay,” Clark started. He wanted to check to see if Paul had made it home.

Just then, the door opened. “Ben, who’s your friend?”

Clark looked up to find a man standing in the doorway. He had sandy red hair, a medium build and a friendly smile.

“Clancy, I’d like you to meet Clark Kent,” Ben answered. “I was checking the far door and there he was. Clark here looked like he could use a hand with a tight situation.”

Clancy stepped over and stuck out his hand, “We aren’t used to anyone coming in through that way. Welcome to *Many Worlds*.”

“Many Worlds?” Clark asked.

“That’s the name of this place. It’s kind of a theme that all the regulars use.” Clancy paused at Clark’s obvious confusion.

“Don’t worry. You’ll see once you’ve been out in the main room for a few minutes.”

At the mention of spending time there, Clark suddenly remembered the patrollers. “Thank you for helping me out, sir,” he replied. “But I really should be going. I don’t want to cause any trouble for you with the Patrol.”

“Call me Clancy. As for the people that you’re worried about,

well, we don’t have any trouble with the Patrol here. I assure you that you can stay as long as you like and no patroller will even know you’re here.” Clancy stepped back and looked Clark over. “When was the last time you had a decent meal?”

In reality, Clark hadn’t eaten for over a month. As much as he liked to eat, the ability to get by on no food had made survival much easier for him than for many he’d met in his life. “A while,” he finally answered.

“I thought so. Why don’t you come on out to the bar and I’ll get you something?”

“That’s very kind of you, but I don’t...”

“You don’t have any money,” Clancy finished for him. “Don’t worry about it. I’ll serve you at the bar and you can fill me in on how you ended up at my back door. I’m sure your story will be worth more to me than the cost of anything you can eat.”

Clark could smell the aromas of food from the pub clearly. What would be the harm of telling some of his story? “Okay, if you’re sure you want to swap a meal for the chance to talk with me, I’m in.”

“Great,” Clancy replied and then turned and headed out the door that led to the bar.

Clark glanced at Ben and the big man waved his hand to indicate that Clark should follow Clancy. He followed Clancy down a short hallway. They went past the public restrooms and entered the main part of the bar. Clark could see why both Clancy and Ben had called it a pub. It looked like a perfect mix of restaurant and bar. It was as clean as any modern establishment, but had a pleasing old-world feel. There were many people seated around tables or on stools at the bar. Some had only a beverage, but most were enjoying meals.

There were no families with children, but there were all manner of other people. As Clark passed one of the tables where three women about his own age were sitting together, he clearly heard the lone blonde in the group say, “Hey, stranger.” And she definitely smiled at him.

That act of open flirtation took Clark by surprise. No one was that relaxed in public. It just wasn’t safe. Clancy indicated an open seat at the bar and Clark sat down. When his host reached the other side, he seemed to pick up on Clark’s confusion. “What’s wrong?” Clancy asked.

Clark looked out over the mostly filled bar. “All these people... They seem to be having so much fun. They’re all so... relaxed.”

“I try to run a friendly place,” Clancy replied casually.

“But the People’s Police... the curfews... the prohibition against gatherings?” Clark asked.

Clancy set a pint of ale in front of Clark. “Just try to relax and enjoy yourself. I’ll have some food for you in a few minutes.” Clancy started to turn away but seemed to think of something at the last minute and turned back. “And Clark, do you remember what I said about the name of this place?”

“You said it was called *Many Worlds*,” Clark answered.

“Right. Well, you’ll probably hear people talking as if this were another time or as if they came from another place. You should... Well, you’re welcome to say anything you want about where you come from, but please try to keep an open mind. It may be hard to believe, but not everyone here is crazy.”

“What?” Clark asked, confused. “What does that mean?”

Clancy smiled the smile of a man who knows a secret. “You’ll figure it out. Just humor us and everything will be fine.”

Part 2: Lois Lane — Metropolis

Metropolis really did deserve the name, ‘the city that never sleeps.’ Lois Lane, new graduate of Metropolis University’s journalism program, loved this city. At one time, she’d have expected to be spending this evening with family or a boyfriend, but her life hadn’t worked out that way.

At least her mom and sister had been present earlier today at her graduation ceremony. Of course, her dad was a no show, but at least that meant that she hadn't had to deal with her parents fighting.

Tonight was a right-of-passage night. Yesterday she'd been a student and tomorrow she'd be the newest member of the Daily Planet's news team.

After the graduation ceremony, she'd made a quick stop at the Planet to make sure that everything was in place for her first day of work tomorrow. Afterwards she'd spent time settling into her new apartment. It was small, but Lois didn't mind. She was sure of her abilities and knew what it took to succeed in this city. Metropolis could be hard, but if you were strong enough to face its special challenges head-on, the city could be generous.

She looked around again. This was the best time to be out in the city. The sun had gone down and the bright lights had come on. During the day, the city was grey and hard. At night, the neon transformed the featureless grey walls into color-filled mosaics.

As Lois let her gaze wander across the lights and signs that illuminated the street, her eyes stopped on an especially brightly lighted storefront. The sign said *Many Worlds* in beautifully stylized script. But it wasn't the name that caught her attention. Every few seconds a set of two letters would appear. The letters cycled, but there were only a few. In the course of the minute or so that she watched, she saw, 'PW', 'CK' and 'LL'.

It was the LL that caught her attention. It wasn't just the fact that those were her initials. There were two strange things about the 'LL'. First, for the other pairs of letters, each time they appeared, the letters were in the same color and the same style. For some reason the 'LL' appeared twice as often as the others, and the shape and color changed. One version was a very formal-looking 'LL' in gold. The other was a much more stylized 'LL' in a dark royal purple. What amazed her was that the second version of 'LL' was almost exactly the way she sometimes wrote her initials. And that shade of purple was her favorite color.

A closer look revealed the place to be some kind of bar. It looked friendly enough, and it took only a second to decide that this was a place she had to check out.

Once inside, she discovered that it was a little less modern than she'd expected based on all that neon on the outside, but it had a nice feel to it. And the food smelled great. None of the tables were open, but she saw that many of the people at the bar had food in front of them. Lois went over to an empty seat at the end of the bar. She figured that at least that way she wouldn't have to have strangers sitting on both sides of her.

She'd barely sat down when the bartender came over. "Welcome to *Many Worlds*. What can I get for you this fine evening?"

Lois liked the sound of his voice. She'd been in too many places where the bartender was more interested in getting a date than providing a drink. This guy was old enough to be her dad but felt a little like her Uncle Mike. "First, you can tell me what all those letters mean."

"Letters?" the bartender asked.

"On the outside of the building," she replied shortly. "They're even on the wall behind you," she added, pointing over his shoulder.

The bartender turned and glanced at the smaller versions of the letters that she'd seen on the outside of the building. "Oh, those," he said as he turned back to face her. "They're initials of famous people."

"Who?" Lois asked.

"This is your first time here, isn't it?"

"Yes. So?" Lois replied, growing irritated.

"I'm sorry, miss," he said, somewhat defensively. "But it's a rule in *Many Worlds* that we never reveal that until your second time here. I hope you enjoy our little establishment enough to

grace us with another visit. I promise that if you don't know by then, I'll tell you who they are myself."

"I guess I can live with that," Lois said with a resigned shrug. "So what do you have that's good?"

"We have a full menu, and I'm told that our red ale is exceptional. As for food..." The bartender made a show of looking Lois over. "...I think you would enjoy a chicken sandwich. I assure you, it's very good."

"Those sound good," Lois said.

"I'll be right back."

As the bartender turned away, Lois heard a voice from the man next to her. "I hadn't noticed those letters before."

Lois turned to face him. She was expecting a smarmy guy using his favorite pick-up line for this place. Instead, she saw a cute man, about her own age, staring at the letters over the back mirror. He looked anything but smarmy. He turned to face her. Okay, he was very good looking. But there was something else. This man had led a hard life. Lois wasn't sure how she knew that, but she was certain that she could see it in his eyes. It took only a second to decide that he was safe to talk to. "How could you miss those initials? They're all over the front of the building. In fact, those aren't the only versions in the bar."

"You're kidding," he said. Then he tuned away from the bar and looked out over the seating area. "I didn't come in through the front door, so I never had the chance to see the front of the building. I'm usually pretty good at noticing things, but I've been a little distracted tonight. Where are the other versions?"

"I'm not sure I can tell you. The bartender..."

"Clancy," the man supplied.

"Clancy said that they are initials of people, but he wouldn't tell me who they are. Since that seems to be some kind of house rule, I'm not sure I'm allowed tell you anything about them." She was smiling broadly by the time she'd finished. Lois could hardly believe how quickly she'd fallen into a flirtatious pattern with this man. There was something about him that made her feel very comfortable.

"Fair enough," he answered, with a smile of his own. "But you see, if they're initials, this gets a lot more personal."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, believe it or not, one of those sets matches my name."

"You're kidding. It's not the LL is it?"

His face turned dark. "No, I think I know who the LL initials belong to. I..." He stopped to compose himself. "No, not the LL. My name is Clark Kent."

"Really," she replied. "So your initials are 'CK'."

"Yes," he answered.

"That means I'm sitting in your seat."

Clark looked back and forth between the barstools. "I don't understand," he said.

"Look carefully at the back of the seat," she directed as she turned so that he was looking at her back.

Clark dragged his eyes down past the very pleasant form of her back until his gaze came to rest on the barstool. Sure enough, 'CK' was printed on the back of the seat in small silver letters. "I guess you are," he replied. "Are you..." Clark twisted to see the letters on his own chair. "... 'PW'? If so, we should definitely swap seats."

"No, I'm not 'PW'." Then a more serious look crossed her face. "Why do you think you know what the 'LL' stands for?"

Before Clark could reply, Clancy arrived with a pint of ale and a plate with the sandwich and some chips. "Here you go, Miss. Is there anything else I can get you?"

"No, thank you."

Now that the food had arrived, Lois suddenly felt hungry. She pulled the plate toward her and reached for the mug. As her hand closed on the handle of the mug, she heard Clark say, "The red ale is very good. But be careful, it's a little strong."

Lois gave him a sidelong look before taking a sip from her glass. “You’re right. It is good.” Then she thought for a moment. “But it doesn’t seem that strong.”

“Well, tonight is my first time here and I haven’t had enough to affect me, but based on how I’ve seen other people become overly... relaxed, you should probably stop at one pint.”

“So you don’t think I’m attractive?” Lois asked as she took a bite from her sandwich.

Clark’s eyes went wide. “What? No. You’re very...” he stuttered out, clearly flustered. “Why would you think that?” he finally forced out.

“I thought that when a guy met a pretty girl in a bar, one of his goals was to encourage her to drink too much.”

“No. That isn’t what all guys do,” he said in a noticeably less friendly tone.

She suddenly realized that she’d all but accused him of being some kind of slime ball. She might as well have said that she thought he was the kind of person that would get a woman drunk to take advantage of her. “Great job, girl.” She mumbled to herself. “I meet a nice guy and insult him within five minutes of saying hello. I knew I shouldn’t have tried to flirt. No wonder all my relationships are disasters.”

They were quiet for a minute or two while Lois ate some of her meal. The food was very good. She’d have to remember this place. Of course, there was no way she’d forget a place with her initials all over it. Then she remembered her interrupted question to Clark. “You said you thought you knew who the ‘LL’ person was.”

Clark looked up at the letters behind the bar. “I’d have to guess that the ones in gold are Lex Luthor. But I can’t imagine why anyone would put up something that looks like a tribute to him.”

“Who’s Lex Luthor?”

“Who’s...?” Clark replied, startled. Then he seemed to remember something. “That’s right, many worlds. I forgot for a second.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I guess you didn’t get the lecture. Okay, I’ll tell you, but you need the lecture first.”

“Lecture?” Lois asked.

“Sure. The reason this place is called *Many Worlds* is that everyone comes — or pretends to come — from different times and places. Get it? We are all from many different worlds.”

“What?” Lois asked incredulously. Clearly, she’d walked into a gathering for Metropolis crazies.

“It sounds crazy to me too,” Clark said as if he were reading her mind. “But see that table over there...” Clark pointed to a table with some men in old-fashioned suits. “I heard them talking. They seem to think it’s the 1940’s and they are trying to figure out how to get out of a gang run by someone called the Spider Lady.” Then Clark pointed to another table. “Those women seem to be from 2008. They were talking about a vigilante that goes around in a green suit with a bow and arrow. They were also talking about some other mysterious person they called the Blur.”

Then Clark turned to face her. He looked as sincere as anyone Lois could remember. “I suspect that the place you come from will be very different than what I would tell you, but I’ve heard enough here tonight not to let it bother me too much. I’m sure my story will probably sound as crazy to you as theirs did to me.” He paused to give that information a chance to soak in. “So, now that we have that out of the way, do you want to hear about where I come from and why I’m sure that set of initials is for Lex Luthor?”

Lois was glad that Clark had apparently forgiven her for the earlier slight. He seemed like a nice guy. It didn’t matter if his story sounded crazy. She still hadn’t even given him her name.

“Sure, Clark, but I hope you understand if I don’t necessarily believe everything you say.”

“Based on some of the stories I’ve heard tonight, I’d be surprised if anything I say about where I come from even sounded sane.”

In some ways his open admission that what he was about to say would probably sound crazy put Lois much more at ease. At least she didn’t have to pretend. But the casual way he gave her leave to not believe him left her wondering. “You’ve warned me. I promise I’ll listen with an open mind, but whether I believe it or not is up to me. Let’s hear your story.”

Part 3: Lois and Clark: The Pub

“It’s not so much my story as the story of where I come from.”

Clark paused, but the woman just waited. He really wished she’d told him her name, but the fact that she hadn’t offered it yet showed a reticence that he understood too well. Her whole manner spoke of a history very different from his, yet they seemed to share the same instinctive caution.

“First of all,” he started, “I come from the year 2023.”

He paused, figuring that the girl was going to object. She started to interrupt but didn’t quite get there. Quickly she motioned him to continue. “My world is a mess and has been for nearly 30 years. Back in 1994 the world was hit by an asteroid called Nightfall. All of civilization was thrown into chaos.”

He watched the woman for signs of disbelief. All he saw was interest, so he continued. “Most of the great cities were completely destroyed. Metropolis was one of the few exceptions. Not only did Metropolis survive physically, but it also provided the organizational base for one man to start the rebuilding process. This man, Lex Luthor, had survived thanks to a heavily fortified bunker he’d built right here in Metropolis. He emerged from the destruction with more organization than the government had left. Within a year, a new government was in place. Instead of the United States we had the Empire of America.”

Clark turned and pointed at the gold LL on the wall. “That was his personal symbol.”

“I’d think getting the country back on its feet would be a good thing,” the girl said. “But it’s clear that you don’t think it was. So tell me the rest of the story.”

“I told you that it was called the Empire of America. The justification for such a... radical name was that to recover from Nightfall required bold ideas and bold deeds. Luthor looked to the great empires of Eurasia for guidance. Less than a year after Nightfall, the Empire had replaced the United States. Instead of a president, we had Emperor Luthor.

Clark paused and took a sip of water before continuing. “The bold deeds that Luthor had mentioned turned out to be year after year of martial law and disappearing people. The years ticked by and things barely got better. Luthor kept explaining that the destruction from Nightfall had been too great and stressed the need for shared sacrifice. When there seemed to be injustice, most people attributed it to necessity.”

“Didn’t people figure out what was going on?” Lois asked.

“We all came to learn the power inherent in complete control of communication. Nightfall destroyed most of the worldwide communication systems. Those parts that were left were brought under Luthor’s control.”

“What about things like HAM radios?” she asked. “Those are nearly impossible to restrict.”

“Luthor was resourceful. With the right tools, you can track down any radio. Luthor’s teams were ruthless. Whenever they located an illegal broadcast site, Luthor’s people would go in and kill every person in that region. Whole towns were wiped off the map for being near an unauthorized radio transmission.”

Clark shook himself. This girl wasn’t interested in the whole

history of his world. “Anyway, Luthor died in a freak accident in 2010 and his Empire collapsed. Unfortunately, the government that replaced him is almost as bad. I’ve lived my whole life under martial law, and it all started with him.”

She seemed to be considering his story and after a minute she looked back at the initials. “So if these stand for this man Luthor,” she said, “Then the others must be related somehow.” She stared at the initials for a moment. “CK,” she mused. “I assume that you never met the man?”

“No. I grew up in the Kent orphanage in Smallville, Kansas. It’s nowhere near Metropolis, and I was only 9 years old when he died.”

“The Kent orphanage? Is that where your name comes from?”

“Yes. This couple, the Kents, founded an orphanage in the 1970’s after they found out that they couldn’t have children.”

She considered that for a moment. “Were there any CKs that played a role in Luthor’s life?”

“Not in any history that I’ve read.”

She looked again at the initials. “Do any of those match up with other people in his life?”

Clark looked again. “Well, there is one possibility. The other LL.”

“What do you mean?”

“Luthor’s wife had the same initials.”

“Why would that mean anything? There are lots of women’s first names that start with an L.”

“No,” Clark replied. “Her initials were LL before they were married. Her maiden name was Lois Lane.”

The woman’s face went pale. After several long seconds, she muttered, “What?”

“Before Nightfall she’d been the top investigative reporter for The Daily Planet newspaper here in Metropolis. No one knows exactly how she went from being a reporter to the wife of the Emperor, but that’s what happened. Anyway, before she married Luthor, she apparently had a reputation for truth and fairness. The history books say that her presence at his side in the early days added an element of credibility to Luthor’s claims about working for the betterment of the people.”

“What happened to her?” the woman asked, barely above a whisper.

“After Luthor died, evidence turned up that indicated that she had been responsible for many of the worst acts of the regime. Apparently, it was she, not Lex Luthor, who had been the real force of evil behind the Empire. Her trial was the spectacle of 2011. She tried to argue that Lex Luthor had fabricated the evidence and had it hidden away in case he ever faced a trial. Some believed her, but with Luthor already dead, most people wanted someone to blame for what Luthor’s empire had done. She was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison.”

He paused for a moment, but the girl seemed lost in thought, so he continued. “For my part, I’ll never believe she was anything but another victim.”

That got her attention. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“About two years ago I was here in Metropolis. I’d been near a Patrol action and got pulled into the People’s Court as a witness. By pure coincidence, it was the day of her 10-year review-of-sentence. I was in the right place at the right time and I saw her. For one brief second she looked in my direction and we made eye contact. Even over 50 and with all that she’d been through, she was beautiful. But there was something more. When we made eye contact, it was as if I could see into her soul. It may sound crazy, but in that instant I just knew... There was no evil in her.”

The woman had been staring at the letters on the back wall. She slowly turned to Clark and they locked eyes. She suddenly looked incredibly sad. Clark felt the almost overwhelming need

to put his arms around her and say that no matter what, he’d do what he could to help. After a long moment, she started to speak. Her voice was soft but very deliberate. “I come from Metropolis in the year 1988. Tomorrow I start my first job as a reporter for The Daily Planet. My name is Lois Lane.”

For a second Clark was speechless, but as he looked at this young woman, the resemblance to the older woman he’d seen so briefly became clear. “I see it,” he said quietly. “It was the hair that threw me. In all of her pictures, Lois Luthor wore her hair long. Yours looks so much nicer. I don’t see why she... you... ever change it.”

Then Lois’s head popped up. “Perry White,” she said softly. “Excuse me?”

Now she looked animated again, “The PW initials,” she said excitedly, pointing at the letters. “Perry White is the editor of the Daily Planet. If I’m the LL then Mr. White might be the PW.”

“How...” Clark started.

But Lois cut him off. “That has to be it. The purple LL initials have to be mine. I’ve used that style and color for my initials since I was a little girl. My being here can’t be a coincidence.”

“Miss Lane...” Clark tried to get her attention.

She reached out and touched his arm. “Call me Lois. After all, you seem to know more about me than I do. And if you’re right, we’ve met before... Well, sort of.”

Her touch sent a warm, pleasant shiver through his whole body. He shook off the feeling and pressed on. “Lois, I’m sure it’s just a coincidence.”

Her face turned stern. “Were you telling the truth about where you come from?”

“Yes,” he replied solemnly.

“So was I,” she retorted.

“But how? Why?” Clark sputtered.

“I don’t know,” she answered thoughtfully. “But if I am the LL on that wall, and Perry White is the PW, then maybe you’re the CK.”

“How could I be?”

“How can any of this be?” she asked, sweeping her arm to indicate the whole pub. “But I’ll tell you what... This Lois Lane won’t be marrying anyone named Luthor.”

“But your marrying Luthor is history. How... How can you change what’s already happened?” Clark asked.

“It may be your past, but it’s my future. Listen, Clark, my future has already changed. Like I said, whatever else happens I won’t be marrying anyone named Luthor. Not only that, but didn’t you say that Nightfall was due in 1994?”

“Yes,” Clark answered. “It hit in early January, right after Christmas.”

“That means I have over five years to see if I can help people get ready for it.”

“They’ll think you’re crazy.”

“No they won’t. I’m not going to start shouting ‘the sky is falling’ or anything like that. I’m going to be a reporter. I can cultivate friendships with scientists that may be in a position to look for Nightfall when it comes. Do you know if any attempts were made to divert the asteroid?”

“Yes, at least that’s what I learned in school. But it wasn’t spotted until only a few days before it hit. There was only time for one desperate try with a rocket. Once that failed, there was no time to do anything else.”

“Don’t you see?” she asked enthusiastically. “If I can get the right people looking in the right place, there will be time for plans and back-up plans. I have to do something,” she added, her voice now sounding like a plea. “I may not get along with my family very well, but if what you say is true, I could lose them to Nightfall.”

“She... you did,” Clark said. “Lois Lane lost everything to Nightfall.”

This news seemed to hit her hard. After a moment, she turned to him. “Do you have any family?”

“No. I was never adopted, and as an adult I’ve sort of drifted around.”

Lois was quiet as she stared at the mirror behind the bar. It was clear that she was processing all that she’d learned. A minute later her energy seemed to return and she turned to face Clark. “Come back with me,” she said, her voice suddenly urgent.

“What!? I... I don’t think I can.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“I don’t come from your world. Besides, I don’t think it’s possible.” Clark pointed at the entrance. “If a person could just walk from one world to another, I think you’d have people wandering into the wrong world all the time.”

Lois turned and watched the door for a moment. “Do you notice that the guy at the door makes sure that everyone leaving goes through the door one at a time?”

“That’s Ben. I noticed that he was monitoring the door. I thought he was just making sure that no one was taking any alcoholic beverage outside.”

“He is doing that,” Lois replied. “But given the nature of this place, it can’t be a coincidence that everyone leaves one person at a time. I’ll bet there’s something in the door that senses the person that opens it and sends them back to their world. I’ll bet that if another person followed right behind without the door closing, that person would end up in the same place as the person that opened the door.”

Clark’s mind was spinning. Going back and preventing the events that wrecked his world sounded like the right thing to do. And the idea of trying to save the world at Lois’s side was even more appealing.

Lois paid her bill and seemed to be getting ready to leave. “Clark, I have to think we met here today for a reason. I have a question, and I want you to think carefully before you answer.”

“Go ahead,” he said.

“With all you know, do you believe you could help the rest of us do a better job of getting through the Nightfall crisis?”

Clark had always been fascinated by Lex Luthor. He knew more than many about the criminal organization that had served as Luthor’s power base. With his help it might be possible for Lois to bring down Luthor before Nightfall arrived. As for Nightfall, there might be even more that he could do. In that world, maybe one man with his special abilities could make a difference. But he did have connections to his own world. Wouldn’t it be better to spend his efforts helping in the place he belonged?

She interrupted his muse. “All those initials... those people on the wall, do you think they’re connected?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Then you have to come. That must have been why things went so badly.”

“What do you mean?”

“In my time, Perry White and I are already planning to work together. I’ve never heard of Lex Luthor. Did he only appear after Nightfall hit?”

“No,” Clark replied. “He rose to fame sometime around 1990. By the time Nightfall hit, he had become one of the richest men in the world and the most powerful man in Metropolis.”

“So what if when the crisis came, CK was missing? What if everything went wrong because *you* weren’t there?”

A look of anguish crossed Clark’s face. “Lois, I want to come. I really do. But the odds are that those initials belong to someone else entirely. Someone in your own time. Someone that you just haven’t met yet. I’ll bet that with what you now know, you’ll be ready when your CK shows up. You’ll get that person up to speed and all of you together will be ready for Luthor and Nightfall.”

Clark’s plea was genuine. Even more, it was logical. Just because Clark was here and had the same initials as on the wall, didn’t mean that he was the CK that needed to be there to help in her time. She should take what she’d learned here tonight and go back and get started on saving her world.

She almost got up and left, but as she moved to stand she looked up at Clark. Her eyes locked with his and she felt it. There was something there. Some kind of connection. Clark had described what he’d felt when he’d met her older self. Now she knew what he meant. In that instant she was sure that Clark was her CK.

“Clancy!” Lois shouted.

“What can I get for you?” the bartender asked when he arrived.

“Nothing,” Lois answered. “What you can do is to tell Clark that he should come back with me.”

Clancy’s face went stiff. “That’s not my place,” he replied cautiously after he’d recovered.

“Lois,” Clark interjected. “I told you that you need to look for your CK in your time.”

Lois’s head whipped back toward Clancy. “Does CK stand for Clark Kent?” she asked, her voice suddenly cold and serious.

Clancy paused for a second before answering. “Yes.”

“Is there another Clark Kent back in my time?”

“No,” Clancy replied solemnly.

“What is this place?” Lois asked, her tone suddenly hopeful.

“This is a site for the principals,” he pointed over his shoulder toward the groups of initials, “to meet, and possibly make connections. Other people can find this place, but only if they’ve met one or more of the principals. Only a principal can leave and go to a place that they didn’t originate from.”

“So Clark can come to my world?” Lois asked.

“Yes,” he answered. Then he looked at Clark. “But once you step into a different world, you’ll never be able to go back. If you leave together, neither of you will ever see my pub again.”

There was a long moment of silence before Clark finally spoke up. “Could I really make a difference?”

Clark’s face turned deadly serious. “I honestly don’t know what will happen. The reason this place is here is to provide an opportunity to make things better. But there is simply no way to know until you decide.” Then he paused again — but only for a second — before continuing. “But with your... unique talents, there’s always room for hope.”

Clark’s eyes went wide at the phrase “unique talents,” but after another moment he simply nodded. Then he turned to Lois. “I’m going to need help...”

Lois cut him off excitedly. “Of course.”

“...and a friend,” Clark finished.

“I’ll... I’ll try,” Lois stuttered.

Clark just looked at her for a long moment. “Then I think it’s time for us to leave,” he said as he stood and offered her his hand.

Lois could feel her heart pounding. She reached out, took his hand in hers and let him help her stand. “Let’s go,” she said.

As they approached the door, still holding hands, Ben just smiled and waved them through. When they reached the door, Lois made sure that it was she that grasped the handle and opened the door to the Metropolis she knew. As they entered the doorway to what would certainly be a very different world than either of them would have known alone, Lois turned to Clark and asked, “What are these unique talents that Clancy mentioned?”

The door closed behind them before Clark could answer.

Epilogue: The Pub — Elsewhere

Once Lois and Clark had gone, it only took a few minutes to clear the bar of the remaining peripherals. As had been the case all night, there were a few minor incidents of individuals from

different origins trying to leave together, but by-and-large the closing went smoothly.

After closing the door for the last time, Ben walked over to Clancy who was standing behind the bar. “So it worked,” Ben offered.

“I hope it did,” he replied.

“What do you mean?” Ben asked. “It was perfect. I could see them starting to bond from across the room.”

“I hope you’re right. That was why we picked those two as our trial run. In this world-line, they should have had the chance to be together. It’s a miracle that he arrived on Earth at all with a barely functioning guidance computer in his ship. It got him here 35 years late, but he got here. Now that he’s in the right time, all we can do is hope.”

“We can do more than hope,” Ben offered. “Have you checked yet?”

“No. I’m a little scared. He wasn’t raised by the Kents. What if this change wasn’t enough?”

“You know we couldn’t move him any younger,” Ben offered consolingly. “If the change was any larger, all we would have done is to split the timeline. That wouldn’t make anything better.”

“I know,” Clancy replied tiredly. After another moment he seemed to gather his strength. “We might as well see how they do.”

Clancy pressed a button that opened a control panel. The screen showed a field of lines, some bright and others less so. Clancy adjusted a control and the lines shifted to a region where most of the lines were very bright. As the device came to the region that had been the catalyst for this enterprise, both Ben and Clancy looked carefully to discover the results of their effort.

THE END

Bottom Notes:

“The Pub” was inspired by a place called “The Bakery” which is the creation of the LnC writer Dandello. If you enjoyed the concept, I recommend those stories.

“The Spider Lady” was the lead villain in the original Superman serials produced in 1948 starring Nole Niell as Lois Lane and Kirk Alyn as Clark Kent.

“The Blur” is the pre-Superman identity of Clark Kent in the television series “Smallville.”