

# Red Like Kryptonite

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Summary: In the conclusion to the author's "[Target: Lois Lane](#)," Clark is acting differently and Lois thinks he's trying to avoid her after the previous night when things got out of hand between them. Intergang is lurking in the shadows, making a play for ownership of the Daily Planet. When Perry is kidnapped the Planet becomes even more vulnerable. Will Lois and Clark be able to stop them or will their personal issues get in the way?

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<<“Oh, Clark,” She moaned, reaching beneath the waistband of his jeans. She gasped as he rained a trail of featherlight kisses between the valley of her breasts.

“Oh, God, Lois...” he murmured.

“Oh, Clark, right there.” She whispered as he raised himself to her collarbone, massaging it with his tongue.>>

Just as quickly as he had appeared, he vanished.

“Clark?”

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Lois sat up in bed, confused as she reached out for her clock to check the time. She looked around the room, assuring herself she was indeed alone. For the last week, she'd spent the entire week dreaming of that night with Clark. Every time, it ended the same. He would disappear from her arms, and she would call out for him with no answer.

She grimaced when she saw the time, 2:21 AM.

“It's going to be a long night,” she muttered. She buried her head beneath the comforter as she repositioned herself against the pillow, willing sleep to overtake her once again.

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Bill Church Jr. took a puff from his cigar as he leaned back into the leather chair, folding his hands in front of him as he read over the scientific reports. He glanced up at the balding man in front of him who fidgeted nervously. “So, this Nirvana, how much are you wanting Intergang to front you?”

“We're looking at about 100 K, give or take, but the return will be worth the investment,” Charles Knox urged.

“That's what they all say,” Bill Church muttered, “I fronted the Wilders over 100K and look at all the good that did me. Wasn't Valhalla your idea, Knox?”

“Valhalla was fool-proof and it would have worked if Superman hadn't,” Mr. Knox apologized.

“Yeah, I heard.” Church shook his head.

“We have a deal with the FDA to push Nirvana through afterward, allowing us to profit from its effects,” Knox explained.

“It's your head if this falls through, Knox,” Church warned.

“I understand,” Knox nodded nervously.

“I'll get you your money by the end of the week,” he added.

“Thank you, sir.”

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In the dark, a flashlight shone the way for a group of men dressed in black. The trees acted as a shield as they began to dig. “Hey, I think I found something.” A red glow could be seen through the soil as they continued to dig.

A large piece of the red glowing rock was excavated and a man in his mid-forties pulled it out. “Well, boys, I think we've struck gold...or in this instance, Kryptonite.”

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Clark watched as Lois stepped into the newsroom, carrying her briefcase, engrossed in the fax she was reading. He uncomfortably shifted in place as he watched her chew the inside of her lip. The small gesture that she had done countless times before was now yet another thing that quietly drove him crazy. She glanced over at him, smiling.

Did she know what she was doing to him? Probably not.

He watched entranced as she turned to take a seat at her desk, adjusting herself as she first crossed, then uncrossed her legs a couple of times. She was trying to kill him.

“CK?” Jimmy waved a hand in front of him, trying to get his attention.

Clark shook his head, turning his attention to the young man in front of him. “Jimmy, you're back.”

Jimmy nodded, “Yeah. The doc gave me a clean bill of health.”

“That's great,” Clark nodded. “We really missed you around here.”

“Yeah, I kinda missed the Planet too,” Jimmy acknowledged. “Just don't tell the Chief that.”

“Your secret's safe with me,” Clark promised.

“Hey, Jimmy, it's good to see you,” Lois said, walking up mid-conversation. “How are you feeling?”

Jimmy laughed, “Don't worry, Lois. I won't be pulling any guns on you guys anytime soon. The doc gave me a clean bill of health. He said the Ticeon seems to have worked its way out of my system.”

“That's good.” Lois seemed visibly relieved.

“What about you guys, anything exciting happen while I was gone?”

“No,” Lois said hurriedly at the same time as Clark, “Not a thing.”

Jimmy furrowed an eyebrow at them for a moment, confused. He seemed not to want to push the issue, though. “So, I read that piece you guys wrote on the Wilders. Good stuff.”

Lois seemed to relax visibly at Jimmy's change of the subject. “Thanks. I'm just glad it had a happy ending.”

“I know. Can you imagine what would have happened if they'd succeeded with ‘Valhalla?’” Clark added.

“They were seriously trying to sell this stuff as a weapon?”

Jimmy shook his head. “That still freaks me out, knowing someone else was controlling me like that.”

Lois patted his arm. “You weren't yourself,”

“I pulled a gun on you guys.” Jimmy shook his head, “I still can't believe I did that.”

“Everything turned out all right,” Lois reassured him.

“But I shot at you,” Jimmy agonized. “I'd been trained to shoot a gun since I was nine. I'm surprised and grateful I missed.”

Clark shifted nervously in his seat. Jimmy hadn't missed. He'd been right on target, and Clark had gotten to the bullet before it had hit them. There was no way he could tell his young friend that. He glanced over at Lois, who seemed just as nervous about Jimmy's comments as he was.

“Well, what's in the past is past,” Lois said hurriedly.

“Right,” Clark added. “Nothing to worry about,”

“Exactly.”

Jimmy looked at them curiously for a moment then shrugged it off. “Well, I'd better check in with the Chief before he starts.”

“OLSEN!!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom.

“Speaking of,” Lois smiled at Jimmy. “We'll catch up later.”

Jimmy sighed, “Duty calls.”

Lois and Clark watched as Jimmy raced across the newsroom to the Editor-in-Chief's office. “Well, I guess things are getting back to normal,” Lois commented.

Clark laughed, watching Jimmy's frantic hand gestures as he spoke to Perry. “Yeah, normal for the Planet anyway.”

Lois smiled, “True.”

He caught her gaze for a moment. He could feel the anxiety resonating from her. “So, what have you got?” He motioned to the fax in her hand.

“What?” She took a moment to realize what he was referring to. “Oh, uh, Perry wants us to do a follow-up on the Wilders.” She pushed back a strand of hair behind her ear. “I was going to meet with Bobby Bigmouth, try and find out what we could about this drug they were trying to push. It’s just a bit hard to believe that a widow and daughter thought up this plan by themselves.”

“You thinking Intergang?” Clark asked.

“Maybe,” she shrugged.

He nodded, “Sounds good.” She was still nervous around him. He wanted more than anything for things to go back to the way they had been before. “Lois...”

At the same time, she said, “Clark...”

“You go first,” they both said in unison.

Lois smiled back at him, “Sorry; what did you want to say?”

“I just —” he began.

“Hey, guys, guess what?” Excited, Jimmy bounded up to them, unaware he was interrupting a long-awaited conversation.

“What’s up, Jimmy?” Lois asked with a forced smile. She seemed mildly miffed as she spoke.

“You’re looking at the Planet’s newest Photo Journalist!”

Jimmy showed them the form Perry had given him to get his new press badge.

“Congratulations, Jimmy,” Clark said. “That’s great,”

“Yeah, I’m really proud of you,” Lois added.

“Thanks, I still can’t believe it,” Jimmy beamed proudly.

“That’s really great, Jimmy,” Lois continued. “You’d better go ahead and get your ID made. You never know when that big story is gonna show up,”

“Right,” Jimmy nodded, taking the hint. He headed towards the elevator.

Lois watched him, shaking her head, “I swear. That boy should come with a bell around his neck.”

“He doesn’t do it on purpose,” Clark defended.

“That’s what’s bad about it,” She shot back.

“So, what have we got on the capture of the Wilders?” Clark asked, changing the subject.

“Oh.” Lois glanced back at her desk. There was a twinge of something in her tone. Disappointment?

He followed her back to her desk where she pulled out the file they had on the Wilders. “Well, Katherine and her mother were captured. Henderson is questioning the man who was with them, Mr. Neener. He thinks he may have been a potential buyer of this drug.” Lois rolled her shoulders forwards, moving her neck from side to side as she spoke.

“You okay?” Clark asked, placing a hesitant hand on her shoulders.

“Fine,” she said hurriedly.

He figured it was best to stay on topic. “So, the Wilders were trying to make a sale of this drug, and we have a potential buyer. Anything else?”

“Um,” Lois turned her chair to face him. He removed his hand from her shoulder, and she showed him her notes. “I’m looking at a possible connection to, uh, Intergang.”

“You mentioned them before, but are you sure they’re still in business? Bill Church retired,” he reminded her.

“Well, Bill Church Sr. may be out of action, but his son’s not.”

“Lois, just because his dad was a criminal doesn’t mean...” Clark was cut off when Lois glared at him.

“If something looks like a duck, quacks like a duck.” Lois began.

“...chances are it is a duck,” Clark finished. “Fine, let’s see what Bobby Bigmouth has to say,”

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“What do you mean you don’t know anything, Bobby?” Lois pulled the sandwich out of his mouth.

“HEY!” Bobby looked at her in shock.

“Lois!” Clark admonished.

“I’m not feeding you for nothing,” Lois shot back in disgust.

“I didn’t say I had nothing.” Bobby eyed the sandwich in her hand appreciatively. “Taking food from a hungry man? You have no heart.”

“If you want to eat, you have to talk. That’s the deal. Got it?” Lois retorted.

“I said I don’t know anything concrete. There’s a difference. Now can I PLEASE have my sandwich back?”

“Lo-is,” Clark warned.

“Fine, start talking,” She shoved the sandwich back into Bobby’s mouth, forcing him to gag slightly.

Bobby took another bite of his food. “Remember, you didn’t hear this from me.”

“We never do,” Clark reassured him.

“Bill Church Jr. is running Intergang.”

“I knew it!” Lois congratulated herself.

“Things are a lot more cutthroat than when Bill Sr. was running it. Nobody is talking, but everyone knows who the boss man is. He’s looking at a drug — Nirvana, I think is what it’s called.”

“Does this drug have anything to do with the Ticeon the Wilders were using with the Valhalla Project?” Clark asked curiously.

“I’m not sure, but I do know their buyer was connected to Intergang.” Bobby took a swig of his soda, “But I don’t know how long he’ll be connected now that he’s being questioned by the police — if you catch my drift.” He finished the rest of his sandwich in one bite then got up. “That’s all I know for now. I’ll be in touch.”

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#### INTERGANG CONNECTED TO VALHALLA!!!

Headlines soared off the newsstands. Every channel had something to say about the latest news piece. Theories and speculations were debated on every channel. Finally having enough, Bill Church Jr. clicked the television off as he paced around his office angrily. “One of these days I’m gonna get you, Perry.” He muttered. “Then we’ll see who’s smiling.”

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Lois stepped out of the shower, wrapping a towel around herself as she wiped the fog off the mirror. It had been a long day. It was exhausting working with Clark, knowing he was lying to her when he came up with lame excuses to leave, only to return hours later. Pretending to be in the dark was hard, but she needed him to tell her the truth. She needed him to be honest with her.

She couldn’t believe that she was wrong about Clark. He had always been honest with her about everything else. He was genuine and open-hearted, completely opposite of every other man she’d had any relationship with. He was her best friend and the possibility of losing that friendship was too much for her to bear. He had to tell her. There was no other option.

The only way they would make it was if he was honest with her.

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“I thought Kryptonite was supposed to be green. This is red.” Bill Church Jr. eyed the substance before him critically.

Gene Newtrich pulled out a report, “Three different laboratories have assured me it’s Kryptonite. It has all the same properties, but it has a different color.”

“Will it kill Superman?”

“We don’t know,”

“We don’t know? Well, then what we need is a field test. Of course, that means we have to send someone expendable. Someone we at Intergang won’t miss if they wind up in jail.” He

turned to Gene, “How about you, Gene?”

“My pleasure, Mr. Church,” Gene replied.

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The next morning, Lois and Clark walked to the Planet together. “Clark, can we talk?” Lois began.

“Sure. What’s on your mind?”

“I wanted to talk about what happened last week,”

“Oh.” An awkward silence fell between the two of them.

Lois noticed the way he seemed to be concentrating on looking at the ground as they walked. She was going to just have to do it. She had to have this conversation with him, or they were going to remain in this awkward limbo. “Clark...”

A gunshot interrupted her speech. Lois and Clark looked towards an armored truck that was parked in front of the Planet. “Lois, isn’t that the truck that delivers our checks?”

“Oh, my God! It’s always something,”

“I’ll be right back. I’m gonna go call the police.” Before she could argue he was gone.

“Somebody stop them!” Lois yelled as she crossed the street to advance toward the criminals. “They’re robbing the truck!”

“Don’t worry, Lois, they’ll be in jail before you can say, ‘Cappuccino.’” Superman landed beside her.

Lois did a double take. She still couldn’t believe she had been so blind. The witty comments, the way he joked with her, was all Clark.

She watched as Clark approached the armored car. “I’m afraid you’ll have to take a rain check on those checks, boys.”

The men wore ski masks. One of them looked up at him with a smile, “Really? What if we don’t want to?” He reached inside the armored car for something.

Clark shook his head then looked back at the men. His whole demeanor seemed to have changed. “Well, I don’t know. Maybe nothing. I mean, they’ll just have to reissue the checks. So, what do I care?”

“Uh, right.” The man turned to his henchmen, “Come on!” They disappeared in their getaway car, and Clark just watched, not doing a thing.

“Cla-Superman! You let them get away!” Lois caught herself at the last minute. She was used to thinking of him as Clark. She had almost slipped up.

He didn’t seem to notice. “It’s not that big a deal, Lois. Most criminals are repeat offenders. I’ll probably just catch them again later.” He began to fly off, “And if I don’t, who cares?”

“Hey, get back here!” she hollered as he disappeared in the sky.

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Lois punched the elevator call button furiously. He just let those criminals go. Why would he do that? “Clark Kent, you better be in the newsroom by the time I get there or your name is mud...” she muttered under her breath, positive that he could hear her. She pushed her way past the other staffers on the elevator, daring anyone to say the wrong thing to her.

She stepped off the elevator in a huff. She was a woman on a mission. The Daily Planet staffers avoided her like the plague as she scanned the newsroom for her missing partner. “Jimmy!” she called across the newsroom.

“What is it... Whoa! What’s wrong?” Jimmy asked when he saw the look on Lois’ face.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong? I don’t know, Jimmy, why don’t you tell me what could possibly be wrong with SUPERMAN letting a bunch of criminals take off with our checks... HE just STOOD THERE!” she ranted, tossing her briefcase on her desk as she angrily sank into her chair.

“Oh,” Jimmy replied meekly. “I see.”

“Really? Because I don’t see, Jimmy!” Lois snapped back, “I don’t see how he could... DO something like that!” Lois was near tears at this point.

Jimmy just stared on, unsure of what to do. “Lois, I’m sure there’s a really good explanation for all of this.” He began, desperately scanning the newsroom for Clark. Clark was the only person that seemed to be able to cajole Lois out of her bad moods. He spotted Clark coming out of the elevator and called him over, “CK!”

Clark met Jimmy’s pleading gaze and headed towards him and Lois, “What’s up?”

“Uh, apparently Superman let some criminals go earlier... with everyone’s checks...” Jimmy explained, nodding his head discreetly at Lois while mouthing ‘She’s in a bad mood!’ to Clark.

“What?” Clark just shrugged his shoulders, “Well, I guess they’ll have to reissue the checks.”

“CK? Are you feeling okay?” Jimmy asked.

“Never better,” Clark responded.

“How can you be so calm? Our paychecks were just stolen, and SUPERMAN didn’t do a thing about it!” Lois snapped at him.

“Lois, the payroll company is responsible for the safety of the checks, not Superman. Let them take care of it,” Clark replied indifferently.

“What about the responsibility of the individual to the society as a whole? The social contract that obligates one person to help others for the betterment of everyone?” she shot back.

“Well, Lois, if that’s the way you feel... great. Otherwise, I say, kick back. Enjoy. Do your own thing.” He shrugged.

Jimmy and Lois just stared at him. “CK, are you sure you’re all right?” Jimmy asked.

“Yeah, why?”

“Who are you and what have you done with my partner?” Lois asked, feeling his forehead.

“What are you guys talking about?” Clark asked, heading towards his desk. “I’m fine.”

“Uh-huh.” Lois nodded. She watched Clark sit down at his desk and then turned to Jimmy, “Jimmy, get me a copy of the security tape from the entrance of the Daily Planet. If we’re lucky; the robbery was caught on tape. Something is definitely up.”

“You got it,” Jimmy muttered, scurrying away from her desk. Lois glanced across the aisle and saw Clark was at his computer... playing a computer game.

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Bill Church Jr. sat at his desk with Gene Newtrich, watching the playback of the robbery from earlier that morning. The image showed the crooks robbing the truck and then Superman appeared on the screen. “This is where Superman comes in! I talk to him and then—” Gene froze the picture, “There! That’s when we opened the box. When he got within about ten feet, his mood changed. Suddenly, it was like he didn’t care.”

Bill Church Jr. stared at the screen for a moment before bursting out in laughter, “Oh. This is perfect! This is better than killing him! He just doesn’t care! That’s the problem with that green stuff... it always ticked him off.” He tapped his fingers on the desk thoughtfully, picking up the edition of the Daily Planet from his desk. “For Operation Nirvana to succeed, it’s essential we control the media, and that means the Daily Planet. And if Franklin Stern won’t sell the Planet to me, we’ll just have to do things the old-fashioned way. And Perry White’s pal Superman won’t be able to do a thing about it.”

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He let a group of criminals escape. How could he do that? Clark sat at his desk, staring into space as he tried to understand what had come over him earlier that morning. He had remembered walking to work with Lois. She had brought up that night when things had gotten pretty heated between them... He winced at that memory. They really needed to talk about that night, but every time he even thought about it, he felt his body responding uncontrollably to the memory of her skin against his...

“CK?” Jimmy’s voice interrupted his thoughts. Clark looked

up to see

Jimmy handing him a stack of photos. "Here are the photos you needed for the Quine project."

"Huh? Oh, sorry, Jimmy. I was... someplace else." Clark took the photos from him and began to sift through them.

"You okay, CK?" Jimmy asked hesitantly. "You seemed kind of off earlier. Is everything okay with you and Lois?"

"Yeah, it's nothing like that." Clark smiled reassuringly at him. "I was just wondering about why Superman let those crooks get away."

Jimmy nodded, smiling knowingly at Clark. "That was wild, wasn't it? I mean, what was Superman thinking?"

"I don't know." Clark answered, "I- He just didn't seem to... care."

"Man, those are the luckiest crooks in Metropolis, huh?"

Clark nodded and stood up from his desk, "Not for long... Because when Superman makes up his mind to do something, he doesn't back down." He watched Lois from a distance typing furiously at her desk. "Excuse me." He walked towards Lois' desk hesitantly.

"So," he began hesitantly, kneeling down to peer over her shoulder, "what have we got?"

"Hah, Jimmy, did you hear something?" Lois looked around sarcastically.

"Lois..." Clark breathed.

She turned to glare at him. "What? You have some explanation for why you've opted to play computer games all morning rather than help track down the people that stole our checks? I'd love to hear it, but my bullshit meter has met its max for the day."

"I'm sorry. I honestly don't know what was wrong with me earlier." He placed a hand on her shoulder, squeezing it supportively. "The cops still don't have any leads?"

She shook her head, "No." Then she glanced towards Perry's office in concern. "I wonder how Mr. Stern is taking it."

Clark followed her gaze towards Perry's office where the blinds were drawn and Perry was on the phone, raising his fists in the air as he walked around the office. He shook his head. "Judging, by the way, Perry's pacing, I'd say 'not good.'"

"Well, let's see what Perry's plan is," Lois said, walking toward the Editor-in-Chief's office.

They knocked on Perry's door, and he waved them in, still on the phone. "Whoa whoa whoa. Now, Franklin, I disagree. The Planet is harder hitting than it's ever been. We're the last bastion of truth in Metropolis. We're the lead man in the fight for justice. The lighthouse of enlightenment! The... Okay, great. Yes. Yes. Give my best to Muriel. Call me when you get to Paris. You too, bye." He hung up the phone and turned to Clark and Lois. "Have I lost my edge?"

"No, why do you ask?" Lois asked.

"Oh, no reason," Perry sighed.

"What did Mr. Stern say?" Clark asked.

"He's got an offer on the table, and he's thinking about selling the Planet to Multi-world Communications," Perry explained.

Lois' eyes widened in horror, "What?? Not to Intergang!" She and Clark had worked for months to dismantle the organization and put a stop to them adding Metropolis to the long list of cities they had taken over. There was no way she would work for Intergang.

Perry was quick to counter, "Now, Lois, we've never had any proof Intergang runs Multi-world Communications."

"Everybody on the street knows it." Lois threw her hands up in the air for emphasis. "Bill Church ran Intergang, and after he retired, his son took over."

Perry shook his head, refusing to listen to any more of Lois' arguments. "Lois put a brake on that wagon. I know you've been working on that story since November, but you're talking about Bill Jr. I've known him since he was old enough to spit up on me."

"And that makes him innocent?" Lois asked sarcastically, crossing her arms in defiance.

Perry wasn't budging, "Billy used to caddy for me and his dad and the only thing he took over from Bill Sr. is Cost-Mart stores. And he's doubled the stock. Now he's one of the biggest philanthropists in the country."

"And the biggest fake," she sniped.

Clark decided to butt in before the argument got any more heated. He had his own suspicions about Bill Jr., but he'd learned the hard way not to force someone to see something they didn't want to see. "Chief, what did Mr. Stern say he was going to do about the offer?"

"Well, between the printer's strike and the delivery drivers out sick and now this payroll thing..." Perry held his index finger and thumb close to one another for emphasis. "He was this close to selling, but I talked him out of it."

"Great." Lois and Clark sighed in relief.

"For now; at least for seventy-two hours." Perry sighed. "Then we're goners. Unless you two can prove to Mr. Stern and me that Bill Church Jr is behind Intergang."

"Seventy-two hours?" Lois asked in disbelief.

"It'll take us that long just to organize our research," Clark complained.

"Hey, you want to swim with the big fish, you have got to swim fast. Now, I suggest we adjourn for lunch so you can bring me up to speed on what you got so far," Perry said looking at his watch.

"Chief, it's nine-fifteen in the morning," Clark said, slightly amused.

"Am I still in charge here? When I say it's lunch; it's lunch. Now, move!" Perry shot back. He motioned to the door as he grabbed his coat. Lois and Clark nodded and headed out the door with Perry.

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Lois, Clark, and Perry walked towards the elevator of the parking garage. Perry felt his hip pocket and frowned. "I forgot my wallet," he sighed. "I'll be right back. I've got so many things on my mind... I'd probably lose my head if it wasn't attached. I'll meet you in the lobby." He walked back towards his car.

Lois pressed the call button for the elevator, "I can hardly wait to have some nice fat pastrami at nine-thirty in the morning."

Clark nodded in agreement, "Yeah, yahoo! But if it helps keep us from being sold to Multiworld Communications, I'm all for it."

Lois laughed, "What. You don't want to write stories like, 'My Stepmother Was an Alien Go-Go Dancer?'"

Clark laughed and turned to step into the elevator car. The sound of Perry's voice reached his ears, "Get the hell away from me!"

Clark moved at super-speed, changing into Superman on the way, to help Perry. Lois looked around and realized Clark was already at Perry's side. She approached the scene and found Perry surrounded by a group of men dressed in black with ski masks over their heads. He was struggling in their grasp. Perry pulled off the mask of one of the assailants in an attempt to get loose.

"That was a big mistake." Gene Newtrich remarked coldly.

"Gentlemen..." Clark stated. The struggle stopped. Perry was confident Superman would rescue him. "Mr. White doesn't appear to WANT to go with you. Let him go."

"Yeah, lucky for you, Superman showed up. I was about to do a little tap-dance on your heads." Perry remarked cockily.

Lois watched in horror as Clark's entire demeanor changed before her eyes. "Go ahead," he said.

"What?" Perry asked.

"Tap dance or conga," Clark said. "Do whatever you want. I mean, what would you do if I wasn't here?"

The unclad man smiled and took Perry in his grasp as he and the thugs made their getaway. "Superman?" Perry called out

in disbelief.

“Perry!” Lois tried valiantly to stop the men but found herself shoved to the ground. The doors slammed and the van sped away.

Clark knelt down to help Lois up. “Are you okay?”

Lois looked at him through her unshed tears. “What is wrong with you?”

She stood up and pulled away from him angrily.

“What are you talking about?” Clark asked confused.

“Perry’s been kidnapped. Go after them!” she cried.

“Lois, don’t have a stroke. What do you think the police are for?”

“The police?” she asked dumbfounded, “What is wrong with you?” she grabbed him by his cape and began to cry.

“Lois,” He put an arm around her, trying to soothe her crying.

“Don’t!” she pulled away from him. “Don’t you dare touch me, Clark.”

Clark looked down at himself, confused. He was wearing the Superman suit. “Clark?”

“Don’t look so shocked.” Lois snapped. “What is going on with you? Perry was just kidnapped and you just stood there!”

“I- I don’t know,” Clark replied solemnly, trying to rack his brain.

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Perry continued to fight his assailants with everything he had. He was guided inside an unknown building. He heard clapping in the background; they were mocking him. “I’ll have you in jail longer than a cat with nine lives!”

The hand that remained on his arm released him. “If you need anything, just pick up the phone.” With that his captor left, locking the door behind him.

“I’d be phoning my attorney if I were you!” Perry shouted at the closed door. The clapping continued. He peeled the blindfold off and turned around. He couldn’t believe what he saw.

“Bravo. Bravo. I’d expect nothing less from the crusading Perry White,” Bill Church Jr said, taking a puff from his cigar.

“Billy? They got you too?”

Bill Jr. just smiled. “Actually, they work for me; so in a sense, I’ve got you.”

Perry looked at the young man in anguish, uncertain if he’d heard correctly. “Wanna run that by me again?”

“Intergang. I run it. Now, do the pieces fit?”

“Like horns on a June bug. You’re behind the Multi-World Communications offer to buy the Planet?”

“Of course. Not only did I take over Dad’s legit business, but I took over Intergang as well. Kind of a two-for-one deal.” Bill’s face sobered.

“Unfortunately, you made Mr. Stern hesitate on our bid, so I thought this might help tip the scales.”

Perry shook his head. How had he been so blind? His eyes narrowed as he looked at Bill. “The only paper you’re about to become publisher of is the Maximum Security Monthly.”

Bill ignored the comment, “Perry, look, I brought you here to make you an offer. I want you to be a part of the Intergang family. You and Alice will be taken care of for life. We’ve got a great medical program and a terrific retirement plan.” Perry just glared at him. “Anyway,” Bill got up and headed towards the door. “I know this is a lot to absorb. Think it over. We’ll talk some more; then we’ll see.” He knocked three times on the door’s wooden panel and someone on the other side opened the door.

Perry watched in disgust as Church winked at him before turning to leave finally. He heard the hard click of the door being locked. He shook his head in disgust and turned towards the window. Hoping to find a clue as to where he was being held, he pulled open the drapes and stopped in surprise. Nothing but a brick wall on the other side to greet him. He slumped down into one of the chairs in defeat. “Superman, where are you when I need you?”

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Clark cradled his head in his hands as he listened. “Clark, Perry was being kidnapped and you just...stood there!” Lois angrily paced around him. “What is going on with you?”

“I don’t know,” Clark said defeated. “I just...didn’t care...”

“How could you not care? Perry is your friend.” Lois looked at him anguished. “I-I don’t understand what is going on with you.”

“I don’t know,” Clark said, raking a hand through his hair.

“You mentioned that,” she muttered irritably. “Why would someone kidnap Perry?”

Clark looked up and noticed she was looking at him for an answer. His mind seemed to be in a fog. “I don’t know.” He winced at her glare.

“Maybe it has something to do with that offer from Multi-World Communications.” A light bulb went off in his head and he grabbed a piece of paper and pencil to quickly sketch out the face of the abductor.

“Maybe this will help. I just wish I’d thought of this sooner.”

“No kidding,” Lois muttered under her breath. She took the sketch from him and opened the door to Perry’s office. “Jimmy?”

Jimmy ran up to her, “What’s up?”

“Fax a copy of this to the police and get one to everyone we know on the street, including Bobby Bigmouth. Somebody’s got to know this guy.” Lois instructed.

Jimmy nodded, “You got it.” Then he was gone to carry out Lois’ orders.

Lois then turned back to Clark, “So, have you ever had these moods before?”

“Moods?” Clark asked confused.

“Where you just don’t care?” Lois prompted.

“No.” He shook his head. “The first time I noticed it was this morning. I had every intention of stopping those thieves, then all of a sudden I stopped.”

“Did you see anything out of the ordinary?” Lois asked, concerned.

“No,” Clark shook his head.

“Clark,” Lois began at the same time Clark began, “Lois,”

“Sorry,” Clark smiled weakly at her.

“Do you think it could be stress-related?” Lois asked.

Clark cocked an eyebrow at her. “Remember who you’re talking to,” he pointed out.

Lois nodded then took a seat next to him. “I just meant with everything that’s been going on lately. I mean, last week with Jimmy and Sarah, then what happened... You know what I’m saying?” She could feel a slight blush creeping on her cheeks as she looked hesitantly up at Clark.

He took the hand she had been wringing as she was rambling and held it gently in his palm. “Lois, it’s nothing like that. I may be a lot of things, but stressed is not one of them.” He smiled up at her, “Right now I’m a bit confused, though,”

Lois nodded, realizing what he was referring to. “Oh.”

“Let me guess, here. It was during the fiasco with Jimmy and Sarah?” Lois nodded. “You saw me catch the bullets?” She nodded again. “I was going to tell you...”

She looked up at him, holding back tears. “Then why didn’t you?”

A knock at the door interrupted them. “Hey, Lois...” Their heads both shot up as they looked at Jimmy. “Err...Sorry guys.”

“What is it, Jimmy?” Lois asked.

“Here’s that tape from the security camera you wanted.” Jimmy waved the tape in front of him.

Lois grabbed it. “Thanks, Jimmy.” Jimmy nodded and left. “Let’s see what’s on here.”

“Lois,” Clark took the tape from her.

“We have to find Perry. We can talk about this later,” she said briskly. Realizing she wasn’t budging, Clark just nodded and put

the tape in.

\*\*\*

Bill Church sat down in the large cushioned chair across from Perry. “So, have you thought any more about my offer?”

Perry sighed, “All I have to do for all this is, what? Give up my pride, my integrity? Throw away the public trust I’ve earned through thirty-five years of hard work? ‘Back off’ on my responsibility to give the American people the truth?”

Bill Church Jr. nodded, “Basically.”

“Yeah, well, I won’t do it.” Perry snapped back, glaring at Bill Church Jr.

Bill stared at Perry, slightly amused. “You know, I talked to your mom today,” he mused.

Perry stared at Bill Jr., confused. “My mom?”

Bill nodded, standing up to pace around Perry. “Love the rest home. Very tasteful. She’s in great shape for a woman her age. She cheats at bridge, but she’s in great shape. She sends her love.”

“My mother would twist your head off if she knew what you’d done.” Bill Church Jr. nodded, “No doubt, but she doesn’t know, does she?” He laughed to himself. “Oh, and Alice says hello too.” Perry just stared blankly back at Bill. “Don’t you think she deserves a new car? After a few years, things start to go wrong... like brakes.”

Perry’s face fell as the underlying threat became clear. He stood up and placed his hands on Bill’s shoulders. “Now, Billy, let’s put our differences aside for a moment. You and me... We go way back. Listen to what you’re saying, son...” His tone turned hysterical as he grabbed Bill by his coat jacket, “This is Alice you’re talking about! This is Alice!”

“Perry...”

“Not Alice!” Perry pleaded. “Not Alice!!”

“Perry, take it easy,” Bill pried Perry off of him. “I’m a patient man,” He reassured then glared at Perry, “to a point.”

\*\*\*

“Lois?” Clark knocked on the conference room door.

Lois looked up, “Hi.” She gestured to the screen shots from the security camera’s footage in front of her. “I’m just...going over all this. I haven’t really found anything. You’re right. It’s just out of the blue that you, uh, you know?” She shrugged her shoulders uncertainly. “Any sign of Perry?”

“No, I still can’t believe I did that, just let them drive off,” Clark shook his head in disgust.

“Well, I guess we should try and figure out what made you do that,” Lois said, sifting through the photos in front of her to avoid his gaze.

“Yeah,” Clark nodded. He grabbed a stack of photos and began scanning through them at super speed, using his enhanced vision. After flipping through the photos twice he pulled out one of the screen shots to focus on it more in detail.

Lois looked up with intrigue. “Did you find something?”

“Maybe,” he said. He pointed to the image of the van where a man in black was hunched over an object that was not visible to the naked eye. He zeroed in on the image and grimaced. “It looks like some kind of metal box...”

“Metal box?” Lois asked; confused. Realization suddenly dawned on her.

“You thinking they might have...”

Clark seemed to be having the same train of thought. “Kryptonite?” His nose scrunched up. “But I didn’t feel the effects of it. No pain. No nausea...”

Lois gave him a twisted smile. “I don’t know. Something’s up. I guess we should start with trying to run the plates on that van; see who it’s registered to. Then we can ....” Lois caught Clark smiling at her. “What?”

“Nothing. He shook his head. “Nothing.”

“Why are you staring at me then?” Lois tucked a wayward lock of hair behind her ear nervously.

“Because we’re starting to get somewhere with this.” Clark breathed a sigh of relief. “I thought I was going crazy there for a little bit.”

“You’re relieved, so you stare at me?” Lois asked suspiciously, arching her eyebrow at him.

“Well, yeah, that and I thought we could talk,” Clark said.

“I should get these down to the photo lab,” she said quickly; standing up from her seat. Before he could argue she was out the door, leaving him behind to wonder what he’d done now.

\*\*\*

“Knox. This is a surprise,” Bill mused when he opened the door to his office.

“We have a problem,” Knox muttered angrily.

“A problem?” Bill asked.

“With Operation Nirvana. I think I have a leak,” Knox said angrily.

“Information...about Nirvana. I’m getting calls from the DEA.”

“Well, how is that my problem? You’re the one that guaranteed me this was a done deal.” Bill retorted, taking a puff of his cigar. “If you can’t handle your own problems...”

“I can!” Knox argued.

“Then take care of your problem,” Bill retorted menacingly, “or I’ll pull the plug on your entire stinking operation.”

“Y-yes,” Knox stammered. “Absolutely, Mr. Church.”

\*\*\*

“What have you got?” Clark asked concerned when Lois made her way down the steps into the newsroom with a pile of folders.

“Plenty!” she said smugly. “Let’s go into the conference room.”

He nodded and followed her, closing the door behind them. “Well?”

“We’ve got our connection to Intergang,” Lois smirked. “The van is owned by Cost-Mart and the man you made a sketch of is a soil engineer that works for Cost Mart, Gene Newtrich.” Lois pulled out the background check she had done on Newtrich. “There’s nothing on him. No record of any kind.”

“Well, Luthor didn’t even have a parking ticket on him before the police found the long list of his dirty laundry,” Clark pointed out.

“True.” Lois sighed. “And I’ll bet he’s the same one in this picture carrying the Kryptonite if that’s what it is.”

“So, what now?” he asked.

“Well, now I think it’s time to take a look at Mr. Newtrich’s office and pay him a visit,” Lois said. “You up to it?”

“Yeah.”

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Clark glanced up at the sign that read “Gene Newtrich Engineering” skeptically. “So, what exactly is the plan?”

“Well, it’s late,” Lois began, uncertainly. “Hopefully everyone will have gone home by now so we can just duck in and duck out...”

“Break in?” Clark supplied.

“Don’t sound so judgmental!” Lois snapped. “Come on!”

Unbeknownst to either of them a black sedan had slid up and was watching them as they entered the building.

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Clark scanned the office they were in, looking for any signs of evidence linking to Intergang or to Perry’s kidnapping. Nothing. There were plenty of blueprints spread out on one of the desks along with disarrayed files scattered all around the office.

“What exactly are we looking for?” Clark asked.

“I have no idea, but hopefully we’ll find it,” Lois said curtly, flipping through the blueprints on the desk.

Clark moved to the other side of the room and began opening the file cabinets, uncertain what he was looking for specifically. “I don’t see why a soil engineer would be involved in a plot to

kidnap Perry.”

“That’s the 64-billion-dollar question,” Lois muttered under her breath. Clark continued going through the drawers. A strange feeling washed over him as he closed the last drawer. He looked up and noticed Lois hunched over a roll of blueprints. “Newtrich was hired by Cost-Mart; Intergang. We know he kidnapped Perry; now all we need is to find out where he’s keeping him.”

Unconcerned with what Lois was talking about or with searching the office any further Clark walked up behind her; wrapping his arms around her. “Why don’t we get out of here?” He whispered in her ear. “I can take you wherever you want to go.”

He smiled when he felt Lois’ body shake against him. “Clark, stop it...” She tried unsuccessfully to pry herself out of his arms. She noticed the title of the plans she was looking at and jerked away from him again. “These are the plans for the substructure of Cost-Mart.”

“That’s nice,” he whispered, nibbling at the spot behind her ear that she loved so much.

“Clark, there has to be a connection...Oh, God...Stop. I can’t think when you do that...” She whispered breathlessly.

He smiled against her skin. “That’s the idea.”

“Clark, we have to find Perry.” She turned in his arms to face him. “Please concentrate.”

“I am,” he whispered, leaning in to capture her mouth.

\*\*\*

“This is getting too far,” Knox muttered under his breath. He turned towards Bill Church Jr. “Those reporters, Lane and Kent, they’re becoming a problem. What do you want my boys to do about them?”

Bill sighed, shaking his head. “Never do things the easy way,” he muttered. “Bring ‘em here. We’ll deal with them.”

“You got it.”

\*\*\*

“Cl..Clark...” Lois whimpered against his lips. “We really need to...Oh, God...” She murmured. The back of her thighs touched the edge of the desk. They needed to cool it and work on finding Perry. They hadn’t even talked about what had happened last week or where they stood.

“I love you so much, Lois,” he murmured against her lips. His hands rested on her hips as he pressed his solid frame against hers. “Do you have any idea, how LONG I’ve fantasized about what happened last week?” His hands slipped down her thighs and came to rest on her hips.

“Last week?” Lois asked breathlessly.

“Mhmm,” He nibbled at her earlobe, tugging on it slightly. He stepped closer, lifting her up to increase the contact between them. She moaned, tightening her legs around him. Why was she fighting this? Just last week she had wanted this, albeit under different circumstances...

<<‘He’s not himself!’>> her conscience chastised her.

She felt her body being lowered against the wood grain of the desk. His solid frame was pressed against hers. She had to stop. “Clark, please wait...”

A loud bang from the hallway caught their attention. They both looked up, surprised. Two armed men, dressed in black, stood with their guns trained on them. “Well, isn’t this cozy? You two lovebirds are coming with us!”

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“And how are we feeling now?” Bill Church Jr. asked, stepping into the room where Perry was imprisoned. Perry just glared at him. “Still a bit disgruntled? I understand. But Perry, I don’t want you to think of this as a prison. Think of it as your future headquarters.”

“I’ll never join Intergang.” Perry snapped vehemently.

“I don’t think you fully understand the seriousness of the situation. If you work for me, you get rich beyond your wildest

dreams. If on the other hand, you continue to cling to your misguided morality, you die. At Harvard Business School, we’d call that a no-brainer.”

Perry just glared at Bill Church Jr in disgust. “I’m ashamed I ever let you spit up on me!”

\*\*\*

“Well, well, what do we have here?” Knox asked, circling around Lois and Clark. He resembled a vulture of sorts. They had been thrown into the back seat of a black sedan by the thugs and held at gunpoint. Clark didn’t seem to care. Lois looked over at him in concern. She hoped he wouldn’t do anything to expose himself in his state of apathy.

“You won’t get away with this!” Lois snapped. “People know where we are! They’ll come looking for us!”

“The famous Lois Lane spunk,” Knox muttered in disgust. “I hate spunk. It doesn’t matter. Soon you’ll be working for us.”

\*\*\*

Clark’s head seemed to be in a fog. All he could concentrate on was Lois. He should be doing something, but for the life of him, he couldn’t think of what it was. All he wanted to do was take Lois in his arms and pick up where he’d started before.

They had been unloaded from the sedan to what appeared to be some sort of warehouse. It didn’t look like anything of interest to him. He looked towards Lois who was standing next to him, putting up her best fight with the goons that held them there.

“You won’t get away with this!” Lois snapped at the balding man in front of them. “People know where we are! They’ll come looking for us!”

“They can’t come looking for you if they don’t know where you are!” The man shot back.

Lois glared at him, stepping forward as if to challenge him. The man lifted his hand towards Lois. Clark caught his wrist midair. “Don’t even think about it!”

“Well, well, someone has guts. Spunk and guts. The two things I hate the most.”

“Mr. Knox, your FDA guy is here to see you,” one of the thugs said, hanging up his phone.

Knox smiled, “Let him in.”

“FDA?” Lois asked confused. The other side of the room lit up when the elevator car arrived. The doors opened, revealing a familiar face. “Dan?”

\*\*\*

Perry held a halogen lamp in his hands, tightening his grip on the neck of the lamp. The door to his room opened and one of the guards, dressed in a suit, wheeled in a full course meal on a cart. “Dinner is served,” he said, lifting the dome up.

“Boy, I could get used to this,” Perry laughed.

“Mr. Church has his own chef,” the guard said simply. He turned to face the door and Perry turned the light off. He used some strategic martial arts moves and the halogen lamp to knock the guard unconscious.

Perry slipped into the hallway unnoticed as he made his way towards what he thought was the exit. He opened the door and found an empty office with a map on the wall of buildings and different locations around the world. It appeared he had found the headquarters of Intergang.

\*\*\*

“Nice to see you again, Lois,” Dan beamed. “Sorry, it’s under such dire circumstances.”

“Enough of the small talk.” Knox hissed, interrupting them. He then sneered at Lois, “You won’t be able to say anything much longer!”

Dan glared at Lois and Clark, then turned his attention to Charles Knox. “Hi, Charles Knox, right? Dan Scardino, FDA.” Lois coughed at that comment; he ignored it. Looking at the briefcase Knox held in his hand, Dan asked, “Is that the money?”

Lois just glared at him. “You really are a piece of work!”

Knox nodded and hefted the briefcase up to open it, revealing the money. “Let’s talk dates.”

Dan smiled. “We hardly know each other, but hell, if you’re paying....”

Knox slammed the suitcase closed and stepped into Dan’s face. “Go be Chuckles the Clown on your own time! On my clock, shut your mouth! Now, we want FDA approval on the drug. We want it by the first of the year and we want it guaranteed.”

“What about all your ethics now, Dan? What about Jenna? Did she even really exist?” Lois continued to rant.

“You got it.” Dan smiled back. He cast another wayward glance at Lois and Clark. The four guards had their guns trained on them, ready to shoot at the slightest motion.

Knox turned towards her. “You are getting on my last nerve!” He raised his hand towards Lois once again only to find Clark blocking him.

Dan decided to intervene. “Hey, hey, let’s all calm down here.” He cast an uneasy look at Lois and Clark then turned back to Knox.

Knox glared at him menacingly. “Do you have a problem, Mr. Scardino?”

“No, no, not at all...it’s just...Well, I think ....”

“Yes?” Knox glared at him.

“I don’t believe in hitting women.” Dan gulped.

Knox stepped away then laughed. “You really are a piece of work.” He kept a watchful eye on Dan. “Well, we only need one of them alive. You just made our choice easy for us.” Knox handed him a gun.

“What’s this?” Dan asked, looking at the gun Knox had tossed him uneasily.

“Take care of the problem,” Knox remarked menacingly.

“Unless you have another set of morals we aren’t aware of.”

Dan stared at Clark for a moment. He met Dan’s gaze without an ounce of fear. How could he stay so calm? He caught the glance between Lois and Clark. There was such tenderness in her eyes and something else.

Fear?

“What’s wrong, Scardino?” Knox asked. “Pull the trigger!”

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“He-He’s not here...” Jimmy stammered, looking around the newsroom for any sign of Lois or Clark.” It was five in the morning. He had come in early to try and get caught up on his research and he had been bombarded by Wally, one of the veteran reporters. Wally was known for digging up the dirt on the politicians in Metropolis. “Perry went to...an executive retreat. You know one of those think-tank things where they talk about the future of the world, then play a little golf.”

Wally was impatient. “Well, when’s he getting back?”

“I’m not exactly sure, but soon,” Jimmy stammered, trying to keep his cool.

“I’m sitting on a major story. I just learned that a certain aide to the Mayor has been the unwilling recipient of her Honor’s sexual advances.”

“Wow! Really?” Jimmy tried to calm his reaction down to a more professional manner. “Uh, are there any witnesses?”

“I’ve got an eyewitness, but she’s not back in town until tomorrow.”

“Man, uh, I don’t know, Wally...”

Wally scoffed, “You don’t know? Who cares if you don’t know? I need Perry’s approval to go with this now.”

“I’ll try to get him on the phone and run it by him.”

“You do that.”

Wally waltzed away, leaving Jimmy in a frenzy. “Where are you, Chief?” he muttered. Just then the phone on Perry’s desk rang. He looked at it skeptically. Did he dare answer it?

Gingerly he picked up the phone and in a hesitant tone he spoke into the phone, expecting the worst. “Hello?”

“Olsen??” Perry’s voice boomed from the other side.

“Chief! I am so glad to hear from you! Are you all right?”

“I’m fine; listen, I’m being held by Bill Church Jr. He’s head of the whole Intergang operation.”

“Wow! So, I guess Lois and CK were right, huh?” There was no answer. “Chief?”

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Perry sat in a chair across from Church’s desk with a gun trained on him. “You disappoint me, Perry. Why did you have to go snooping around?”

“Old reporter’s instinct, I guess.”

“Too bad it doesn’t include an instinct for survival,” Bill Jr muttered.

“What to do with you?”

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“Look, Inspector Henderson, I’m telling you there’s something going on. He said he was being held by Bill Church Jr. Maybe look in the Cost-Mart stores?” Jimmy ran a ragged hand through his hair. “No, I don’t know where Lois and Clark are. They haven’t been in all morning.”

\*\*\*

“Well, he won’t be causing any problems,” Dan muttered, looking on the ground at the unconscious Knox and surrounding guards. “How’d you know I wasn’t really going to shoot you, Kent?”

Clark just shrugged. “I figured you’d have done it long ago if you were gonna do it.”

“Ah,” Dan smiled. “Let’s get out of here.”

“First we need to find Perry. It can’t be any coincidence that we’re in the sub-basement for Cost-Mart,” Lois said. “Bill Church Jr has Perry and we need to stop him.”

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“I even had a nameplate made for you and everything,” Bill sighed. “I guess that’s the way it goes, huh?” He moved closer to Perry. “Don’t worry. I’ll tell Alice you said good-bye.”

A loud resounding bang could be heard in the hallway. Bill’s head jerked up and Perry took the opportunity to deliver a swift kick in the stomach, causing Bill to hunch over in pain. Perry bolted out the door only to come face to face with Lois, Clark, and Agent Scardino.

“Perry!” Lois exclaimed, happy to see him.

“Lois, run, honey! Run!”

“I’ve got this covered.” Dan pulled out his gun and kept it aimed on Bill Church Jr’s door.

“So do I.” A voice from behind him said. The cold barrel of a semi-automatic grazed against Dan’s forehead.

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“Everyone, I want the perimeter secured. No one gets out. We’ll go in through the back. Roger, I want your team to go in through the front.

Everyone understand? This is the kind of thing that could make or break a career. The day we’ve been praying for. Don’t screw it up! Everyone does everything by the book or else!” Henderson roared to his team outside the Cost-Mart. Jimmy Olsen stood on the sidelines impatiently waiting for a sign of Perry or Lois and Clark to show up.

\*\*\*

Clark watched as Gene Newtrich held the gun up to Scardino’s head. He had to do something. He had to get out of here and change into Superman, but there was no way of escape. This may be one time where Superman couldn’t come to the rescue. Lois remained behind him; Perry stood next to him. Gene kept a secure grip on Dan as he inched towards Church.

“Miss Lane, your timing couldn’t be worse,” Bill said. He turned towards Dan. “I assume you’re the one responsible for Mr. Knox being incapacitated?”

Dan just glared back. “You won’t get away with this,” Lois



said vehemently. Clark took in a breath when he felt her arms tighten around his waist. She was terrified.

"Maybe, but as you can see, I'm giving it my best shot." Bill sneered.

Clark aimed a beam of heat vision at the above lantern, causing darkness to fall over them. At super speed, he moved to secure Church and Gene along with their guards. A light aimed towards him.

"Kent?" Henderson's voice boomed through the hallway. "I thought I heard Superman?"

"I think you just missed him, Inspector," Clark replied. He pointed to Gene, Church, and the guards that sat tied up in the corner.

"Uh-huh." Inspector Henderson looked from Clark to the angry Church and Gene, then back again. "Let's go," he said, grabbing the criminals and taking them by the collar.

Dan stood up from the ground, where he had been knocked down. "Wow. Superman doesn't waste any time, does he?"

"I guess not," Clark said evasively.

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I've seen enough of this place," Perry interrupted.

"Yeah." Clark nodded, heading towards the elevators with Henderson, Lois, Dan, and Perry.

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"It's crazy, huh?" Jimmy asked, watching Lois and Perry leave.

Clark shook his head. "Yeah, crazy.... I still can't believe Bill Church Jr kidnapped Perry like that."

"I know. The Chief was his biggest defender." Jimmy shook his head.

"Well, it looks like my work here is done." Scardino muttered, brushing himself off. "If you run into Superman, tell him I said thanks for saving my butt."

Jimmy looked from Scardino to Clark, anticipating the former rivalry that had once existed between them. Nothing.

"I'll let him know," Clark said.

"See you around," Scardino replied. With that, he was gone.

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One Week Later

"Lois, Clark, my office!" Perry bellowed across the newsroom. Lois and Clark glanced at each other, wondering what the other had done, but followed Perry's orders.

"What's up, Chief?" Lois asked, closing the door behind them.

"So, the police did a search of Billy's office and found something interesting," Perry said, pulling out a large metal box. "I figured you two could take it over to STAR Labs. I know a lot of people say this stuff is only harmful to Superman, but I don't want to take any chances."

"Chances?" Lois asked, feigning ignorance.

"Kryptonite," Perry said grimly. "It's red."

"Red?" Lois and Clark asked in unison.

Lois and Clark glanced at one another. Pretending not to know of the meteorite's existence wouldn't work this time. They had both fought so hard to keep its existence a secret to protect Clark. Now Perry knew about it. Would he want the story printed? Would he hide the Red Kryptonite's existence? They looked back towards their Editor-in-Chief, who looked at them with a Cheshire grin on his face.

"I figured you two could take it over to STAR Labs for safe keeping. With all the officers that were in Billy's pocket... Well, I don't want this getting into the wrong hands." At their questioning looks, he pressed on, "Don't look so surprised. I didn't become Editor-in-Chief because I can yodel."

\*\*\*

After dropping off the red kryptonite with STAR Labs Lois and Clark made their way back to Lois' apartment. Clark seemed withdrawn as Lois discussed the events of the past week. A new

version of Kryptonite was out there. That was why he'd been apathetic during Perry's kidnapping and why he'd allowed Gene and his henchmen to take the checks that morning.

The exposure to the red Kryptonite had left Clark feeling numb. He had buried so many emotions over the years and thought nothing of them. His fears of not being able to do everything had come out as he allowed himself to sit back and do nothing when his friends needed him most.

Over the last two years, he'd suppressed his desire for a relationship with Lois. Now, the closer they got, the harder it was to ignore the emotions he had bottled up for so long. The night Lois had come to his apartment and pushed their relationship past the normal barriers she'd kept for so long. Lately, those emotions had risen closer and closer to the surface. During his exposure to the red kryptonite, hiding those feelings had been impossible.

"Clark?" Lois waved a hand in front of him, trying to get his attention.

"Huh?" Clark looked up and saw Lois looking at him with concern.

"Are you okay?" She sat down next to him on the couch.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I was just thinking," Clark apologized, offering her a weak smile.

"It's been a rough few weeks. How are you feeling?"

"Better, I guess." Clark sighed. "I'm relieved to have an answer to a lot of unanswered questions."

"Yeah."

"I wonder how many different versions of Kryptonite there are out there." Clark mused. "This red variation.... definitely had a different effect on me."

Lois flushed slightly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "I'll say."

Clark cupped her cheek. "I'm really sorry about that. I should never have done that."

Lois took a shuddered breath. "Well, I wasn't exactly beating you off me."

Clark looked up at her. They needed to talk. They really needed to talk. He caught her gaze. "Lois..." At the same time, she said, "Clark..." Then in unison, they both said, "You go first."

Lois smiled shyly, "We've really got to stop doing that." Her hand brushed against his as she watched him.

He looked up at her and smiled. "Yeah. I am really sorry, Lois, for everything."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Lois asked.

"I wanted to," Clark said.

"You wanted to?"

"I've been trying to figure out how to tell you for the last few months," Clark explained. "The timing... just wasn't there."

"I guess Mayson's death and Dan showing up constantly didn't make it any easier," Lois reasoned.

Clark smiled weakly, then reached out to grasp her hand.

"How mad are you?"

"I'm not mad."

"What?"

"I'm not. I was embarrassed, angry, hurt, and... okay, I WAS mad, but not anymore."

"Is this a trick?" he asked suspiciously.

"No, it's no trick. I'm not mad. I had time to allow everything to sink in. I... I wasn't the easiest person to deal with when you first met me."

"Lois, I—"

"No, let me finish," she said, holding up her hand to stop him from talking further. "I was mean, cruel in some instances, but you still put up with me. You put me in my place when I needed it and you were my friend when I needed you to be. I still can't figure out why." Her tears fell down her cheeks of their own accord.

Clark pulled her into his arms, trying to soothe her. "Lois, you're being too hard on yourself. We've both put each other

through...a lot.” He held her against him.

“I don’t understand why you put up with me,” she whispered.

“Lois, I don’t know how NOT to. You.... I love you, Lois.” He gazed down at her and cupped her cheek.

She smiled up at him. “I love you too, Clark. I’ve been trying to deny it for so long, but I do love you.” She leaned up to kiss him.

“Lois...” Clark whispered against her lips. “You have no idea how long I’ve waited to hear you say those words.”

“I think we’ve both waited long enough to hear a lot of things from one another.” She linked her arms around his neck.

“So, where do we go from here?” he asked.

“Well, I love you; you love me. That’s a good start to...well,” She leaned up to capture his mouth once again. He moaned against her lips, his arms encircling her waist.

<< He felt so good. His body was pressed up against hers as she wrapped her legs around him. She raked her hands through his dark silky hair as she continued to devour him. Their surroundings had changed. She felt the soft cotton of his bed sheets against her back as his weight shifted against her. “Cl...”

She hadn’t even felt them move from the couch to the bed. He felt so good. He shifted his weight against her, releasing her lips as he brushed his lips against the swell of her breasts, massaging them gently through the fabric of her lace bra. She recalled tossing her blouse on the floor in the living room earlier.

“Oh, Clark,” She moaned, reaching beneath the waistband of his jeans. She gasped as he rained a trail of featherlight kisses between the valley of her breasts.

“Oh, God, Lois...” he murmured.

“Oh, Clark, right there.” She whispered as he raised himself to her collarbone, massaging it with his tongue.

“Lois...” He moaned against her skin.

She laughed when his lips brushed against her earlobe, nibbling at the sensitive skin. She reached out to hold his hand, intertwining her fingers with his as he continued the pleasurable assault on her body. Her heart was pounding against her chest. He felt so good pressed up against her; as if he was meant to be there in her arms forever.

“Clark...” She moaned against his lips.>>

Was she ready for this step? She certainly felt like she was. It definitely felt right. They may have only been dating one another for a little over a month, but they’d known each other for almost two years. He had been her best friend for over a year now. Yes, it was scary to edge closer and closer to that intimacy threshold but to not cross it would probably drive them both insane.

He pulled away from her and had opted to just hold her against him. She wasn’t sure if she was relieved or disappointed. She could feel the heat from his body against her own. She wanted to touch him. Should she make the first move? Give him a sign that she wanted more from him?

“You didn’t listen,” she said, patting his knee lightly.

“Listen to what?” he asked, confused.

“When I told you not to fall for me. You didn’t listen,” Lois teased, crossing her arms over her chest in mock irritation.

“Oh, really?” he teased back. His tone was full of humor but his eyes were filled with something else. Desire? “I don’t seem to recall you having any problems with that before.”

Her breath caught in her throat as she tried to continue the teasing banter between them. “Yes, well, you made me think you were two different people. You tricked me into it.”

“Well, I had to figure out some way to break down the maximum security system you built around yourself,” Clark shot back.

Lois closed her eyes a moment, savoring the warmth from his touch. Her heart pounded as she watched him hesitantly. He seemed to be contemplating something as he gently squeezed her kneecap. He looked at her hesitantly, keeping her gaze. He seemed

nervous.

<<<“Oh, God, Lois...” he murmured.

“Oh, Clark, right there.” She whispered as he raised himself to her collarbone, massaging it with his tongue.

“Lois...” He moaned against her skin.>>

She really wanted him, but she was afraid to make the first move. What if he pulled away again? She traced the outline of his hand with her own, anticipating his next move. She tilted her head towards his as he leaned in to kiss her.

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He felt her hand relax against his the moment their lips touched one another. She hungrily devoured him, pulling him into her arms as their embrace continued. The last few weeks had taken a toll on them both. He wasn’t sure where his head was, nor was he sure where hers was. He still wasn’t sure if she was even ready to take the next step in their relationship. Where they had been a few weeks ago was completely different now that she knew of his alter ego. Now she had to readjust, take everything she knew about him and merge that with everything she knew about his other identity.

He groaned in approval as she slipped her tongue inside his mouth. She ran her hands up and down his chest methodically, encouraging the embrace. He deepened the kiss, cupping her face with one hand. She linked her arms around his neck, pulling him closer. Her hands roamed up and down the sides of his face as she tugged at his lower lip with her teeth.

He allowed his other hand to explore the curves of her body. He hesitated at first, but encouraged by her moans, grew more assertive. She felt so good in his arms. The things she was doing to him...

The memory of her body molded to his from a few weeks ago still haunted him. The way her skin felt, tasted... The way she felt when she...

“Oh, God...” he moaned as she moved to straddle him. He could feel his body responding to her touch as she raked her hands up and down his chest. His hands encircled her waist as she ran her hands through his hair, devouring his lips with her own.

He ran his hand up and down her creamy thigh, kneading it gently. He was surprised to find bare flesh beneath his touch. It intrigued him and turned him on even more. He looked down to see the ivory skin beneath her cream skirt.

“Clark...” She murmured as she leaned up against him, pressing her chest against his face as she fumbled with the button to her suit jacket.

His hands continued their exploration up the back of her thighs, kneading the flesh as she brushed her jacket off, revealing the pink sleeveless blouse beneath. He brushed his lips against her collarbone, pulling her to him as he lowered himself on the couch to begin shedding himself of his own jacket.

“Mmm....yes....” she murmured as she tugged his arm out of the jacket and threw it behind her.

“Lois...” he hissed when she began to grind her hips against his. He could feel his body responding to her with each touch. If they kept this up he wouldn’t be able to stop. Right now he wasn’t sure if he wanted to. Every time, he thought they would slow things down, she grew more insistent, devouring him with her lips.

“Please...don’t stop...” she pleaded with him, moving his hand higher, towards her inner thigh. He groaned in approval.

“Oh, God...” he moaned, trying to string together a coherent thought in between kisses. “Lois...are...you...sure...we aren’t...moving...too...” he was cut short when she pressed her body against his, pushing him back against the couch cushion. “Oh, God...” he moaned, capturing her mouth once more.

She wanted this; that much was obvious. “Oh, God, yes...” she moaned, arching her back against him.

Did she know what that sultry moan was doing to him? He didn’t care.

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“Don’t stop,” she pleaded.

“Are ... you ... sure ... about ... this?” Clark managed to choke out.

She didn’t give him a chance to question her further. Recapturing his mouth eagerly, she pressed her body against his. She’d never been so turned on in her life. He caught her gaze for a moment. Before she knew what was happening, he scooped her up and carried her into the bedroom.

She stood at the edge of the bed with him. He unzipped her skirt, allowing it to pool around her ankles as she kicked it off. She lifted her sleeveless top up, over her head and allowed him to drink in the sight of her.

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Clark had never thought he’d seen Lois look so beautiful than when he’d picked her up for dinner a few nights ago. The sight of her in burgundy sent chills down his spine. He had been wrong. She lay beneath him in the sexiest ensemble he had ever seen. It was a sheer burgundy corset. The material barely concealed anything but it accented her body in all the right ways.

He moved down her body, leaving a trail of open-mouthed kisses along his path. She moaned in pleasure when he nudged at her ear. He’d have to remember that spot. He slipped a finger beneath the strap on her shoulder, tugging it down. Trailing a path of kisses along her collar bone, he detached the corset clasp in the back. Her muted cries of pleasure weren’t lost on him. His trousers still hung loosely around his waist and his briefs were growing more and more uncomfortable.

In one fluid motion, he tugged his trousers and briefs off. He flung them across the room.

“I thought you’d never do that,” Lois rasped out, taking hold of his member and pulling him towards her. “Please...” she pleaded with him.

That was all the encouragement he needed. “Does that hurt?” he asked cautiously.

“No...” she moaned again. “...just been...a...long...time.” She bucked her hips against his.

He smiled with relief and captured her mouth again. He took hold of her right hand, intertwining his fingers with hers as he deepened the kiss. He couldn’t help but get a sense of déjà vu as her body began to move against his. The only difference was there were no mind-controlling scientists bursting through the door or friends whose minds had been turned to mush. It was just him and Lois. That was all he ever wanted to be in a moment so intimate and precious to him.

Her cries of pleasure weren’t lost on him as he moved with her, exploring every crevice as he brought them both to the point of pleasurable ecstasy.

“Cl-ark!” she cried out. There it was. That sultry cry that had haunted him for so many nights over the past few years. He had dreamt of this for so long. Now there it was music to his ears. His name on her lips when she cried out in pleasure.

He collapsed on top of her. Any thought of moving was a foreign idea as of now. She still clung to him in the aftermath of their lovemaking, panting heavily. Her heart rate was racing, her face was flushed.

He rolled them over so they were on their sides, facing one another. She still had a glazed look on her face. He couldn’t help but smile. “You okay?” he asked.

“Huh?” she asked, slightly dazed. “Never better.” She said.

“You are...amazing,” he whispered, tightening his arms around her. How he loved this woman! That was the only thing that mattered. “I love you, Lois Lane,”

“I love you, Clark Kent,” She linked her arms around his neck once more and recaptured his lips, intent on repeating their earlier activities well into the night.

THE END