

# What the Hey You Can't Have Everything

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Summary: A weekend getaway for newlyweds Lois and Clark. What could possibly go wrong? A hidden agenda comes to head and nothing is as it seems in this rewrite of "Sex, Lies, and Videotape." (Part 1 of 3)

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The room was quiet. The music Randy had left playing when he'd left the office earlier had been turned off. He silently cursed the janitor whom he was already prepared to blame for interfering with ruining the setting of his office.

The sound of fingernails drumming against his wood-grain desk caught his attention. Someone was still here. The sinking feeling in his gut told him it wasn't the janitor. The smell of cigar smoke confirmed it.

"You know that's not good for you," Randy stated flatly as he walked up behind his intruder.

Mindy Church turned around in his plush leather chair to face him. She looked slightly startled, "Randy, don't sneak up on me like that," she chastised.

"Don't make surprise visits. This is still MY office." He pointed out.

Mindy shrugged, removing her feet from the desk. She turned around to face him. "Since when is it a crime for me to visit my favorite big brother?" She pouted.

Randy Goode sighed, "You never wanted to visit before. You were too busy with... what's his name?"

"Bill?" Mindy prompted.

"Yeah," Randy nodded. "How is the old chap?" He asked sidely.

Mindy glared at him. "I don't know; he's in prison. How does it feel to be runner-up to Superman again?"

"For the last time," Randy said. "I have my own plans for Superman."

"You have your own plans for Superman?" Mindy asked. "Like what?"

"I'm going to make it, so he won't be able to show his face in Metropolis anymore, or anywhere else, for that matter. His peace treaty negotiations will fall apart, and I'll be there to pick up the pieces."

"No," Mindy corrected. "They fall apart. Our partners in Latislan want nothing to do with these treaties. Be sure it stays that way."

"Just leave it to me," Randy smiled back smugly.

"You're forgetting one small detail..." Mindy reminded him. "Everyone has tried to destroy Superman and failed. No one has ever succeeded in scaring Superman off or killing him."

"Everyone has dirty laundry. I'm going to find and expose it, then watch the chips fall where they may," Randy explained.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Mindy sniffed.

"Well, then it's a good thing we have a multi billion dollar communications company available to us to do just that." Randy reminded her. "They don't call me the king of sleaze for nothing."

"Well, if you do actually manage to pull it off it would be

perfect. Intergang could finally regain its stronghold on the city." Mindy said wistfully.

Randy handed her a glass of wine, and held his own glass up, "To Intergang,"

"To Intergang," She agreed before taking a sip.

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The Daily Planet always seemed in a state of chaos. Reporters were constantly scurrying about, trying to meet deadlines. It was hard to keep track of everyone's comings and goings. So, it wasn't surprising that no one noticed the new researcher at the Daily Planet.

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Lois glanced sorrowfully towards the television monitors reflecting the image of nuclear missiles being armed. She turned back towards Clark. Their planned weekend getaway was falling apart as she watched the armies on either side approaching the borders of Latislan and Podansk. It was a volatile situation, to say the least. By the grim expression on her husband's face, she knew he was going to intervene. 'So much for a weekend of no interruptions,' she thought to herself.

"You're not going to be able to go anyway." She sighed reaching for the phone, "I'll cancel the reservations."

"No," He removed the phone from her grasp and replaced the phone on the receiver. "You go on up." He whispered conspiratorially. "I'll meet you there." He smiled before casting a wayward glance towards the television monitors. "Superman's gonna have a little talk with those old warhorses..." he added as Lois beamed brightly at him, reaching up to loosen his tie in anticipation of their upcoming weekend. "...and get them to honor their truce."

She tugged him towards her, pulling him in for a passionate kiss. "Don't be long." He reluctantly pulled away and then headed towards the stairwell. She watched his retreating figure appreciatively.

"Lois Lane?" A petite unknown woman with glasses, shoulder-length black hair, and a stack of files in her arms interrupted Lois' thoughts.

Lois reluctantly broke her gaze away from the retreating figure of her husband and addressed the mysterious woman, "Yes?"

"Okay, you don't know me. I'm just a pencil-pusher in research," the woman gushed. "My name is Samantha, and you're my idol!" She violently shook Lois' hand.

Lois blushed at the compliment. "Well, thank you." She began to shut down her computer, preparing to leave for the airport. She turned to Samantha, who was still standing next to her. She followed Samantha's gaze and noticed she was watching Clark's retreating figure as well.

When Lois gazed at her critically, Samantha blushed. "Wow, that husband of yours; he a hunk isn't he? I mean, he's no Superman, but what the hey; you can't have everything."

"Excuse me?" Lois made no effort to hide the chill in her tone. Did she just make a dig at Clark? She glared at Samantha. "Did you seriously just --?"

"What's Superman like?" Samantha interrupted, not giving Lois a chance to voice her outrage.

"Like?" Lois stared at the woman incredulously. What was her deal? First Clark, now Superman?

"Could you introduce me?" Samantha sat on the edge of Lois' desk, trying to appear demure.

"Pardon?" Lois was dumbfounded by the audacity of this woman. She wasn't sure if Samantha was trying to compliment or insult her.

"Of course, I don't even know if he dates outside of his own species," Samantha interrupted Lois' thoughts.

Lois took a deep breath before speaking. "Uh, pardon me, but I have to go. I have a plane to catch." She grabbed her coat and headed for the nearest exit. She didn't notice Samantha picking up

the confirmation letter from Chateau Roberge on her desk.

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Frustration. That was the only word for it. Clark had spent the entire afternoon disabling missile after missile when the leaders of Latislan and Podansk had both violated the terms of their agreement. They were trying to iron out terms of the peace treaty but that seemed almost impossible when neither side trusted the other.

Both parties had been forced to leave their guards outside the conference room when he had arranged for them to meet him at the Metropolis Diamond Hotel. It was a small room with six chairs and a long conference table. The seats seemed comfortable but no one was using them at the moment. The room was titled, 'Tranquil Silence.' It was ironic. Things were anything but tranquil and silent.

As Clark, he had been gone on assignment all week covering the International Peace Prize ceremony in Stockholm. Now, as Superman, the first thing he had to deal with was negotiating a peace treaty between these two world leaders. He was tired. His body didn't need a lot of sleep to function; not like everyone else's anyway, but he could feel the weariness taking its toll on him. He missed Lois. He had only been in town long enough to land before both their schedules had demanded their attention. Lois had had her deadlines with the paper as did he; and Superman, as always, was needed.

At the UN last night, he'd agreed to help the cause of world peace by mediating between President Kasparov and General Navance. They seemed like respectable reasonable men when he'd first met with them this morning. Now he wasn't so sure. They were two grown men—world leaders—fighting over the pettiest of details. Neither one of them seemed able to let go of the past long enough to move forward. Maybe this was a mistake?

"And another thing, Kasparov, the brutality with which your people attacked -"

Navance was cut off by President Kasparov. "My people?? You and your armies,"

No, it wasn't a mistake. He had agreed to bring these two enemies together and help them find common ground, and that's exactly what he was going to do.

"ENOUGH!!" Clark interrupted. "Gentlemen, you can't keep doing this!" He tried to portray a calm he didn't feel as he spoke. "How do you expect to negotiate a peace treaty between your countries if you two cannot agree on anything?"

Navance and Kasparov glanced at one another. President Kasparov spoke first, "Navance. Superman is right. All we're doing is tearing each other apart."

"Why don't we all meet back here on Monday; take some time to reflect and write up the proposals?" Clark suggested. Hopefully, that would keep them sidetracked long enough for both sides to calm down and think more clearly.

"Superman does have a point," Navance pointed out.

President Kasparov's face softened as he contemplated Superman's suggestion, looking towards General Navance, "It wouldn't hurt for us to take a break for the weekend."

"Then we're agreed. The proposals will be submitted Monday when we meet again?" Clark asked.

"Agreed," General Navance replied. The men stiffly walked out of the conference room and made their way to their separate quarters.

Clark breathed a sigh of relief once the two men had vacated the conference room. Finally, he could leave. Lois had planned their weekend getaway, and he was already late. He left the office at super-speed and headed north. Hopefully, there would be no more distractions, and he would be able to spend an uninterrupted weekend with his wife. He just had to make one pit stop...

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Lois glanced out the window once more; looking for a sign of

Clark's arrival. Since his return to Metropolis, a few days ago they'd scarcely seen one another outside of work. Superman's presence had been demanded by the long-time enemies, Latislan and Podansk. The two countries were trying to iron out a peace treaty with the help of her husband.

She sighed, running her hand through the silky brunette strands of hair that brushed against the nape of her neck. She was proud of Clark for helping these two enemies agree on peace. It was after all, what Superman did; what Clark did, but she still had a hard time sharing him with the world when he'd been away from her for so long. She knew it was selfish to feel that way. With time, she thought. She would probably learn to adjust to Superman's hectic schedule, but right now she missed her husband.

She sat on the edge of the luxurious king-size bed, stretching her arms up over her head as she brushed her hands against the soft cotton. A cool breeze brushed against her face. She eagerly sat up to face the window, hoping to see Clark waiting for her. The open window teased her with its white cotton drapes blowing in the wind. No sign of Clark.

Lois glanced over at the once roaring fire that was now just glowing coals. She sighed, getting off the bed to stir it. The flames slowly began to ignite once more after she added another log to the fire.

She turned to stand up when two familiar hands covered her eyes, "Guess who?" Clark whispered.

Feeling playful, she replied coyly, "Give me a hint?"

His lips met hers, teasing her with his familiar taste and aroma. He slowly pulled away from her, helping her to her feet. "I missed you," Lois said, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"I've missed you," Clark whispered back, cupping her cheek as he rested his head against hers. She smiled broadly, running her hands through his dark hair.

She pulled away from him slightly to guide them towards the king-sized bed. She smoothed the imaginary wrinkles in his jacket while she gave him a once-over. He looked good, really good, in his black long sleeve button-up shirt and faded blue jeans.

She held onto the lapels of his jacket as she backed up towards the master bed, guiding him with her. "No more interruptions."

"No more interruptions," Clark repeated, wrapping his arms around her waist. "No more meetings until Monday," he promised, walking towards the bed with her. "And I seriously doubt any calls for help are going to reach this far up into the mountains."

Lois gave him an evil grin, "That's the idea," she murmured, tightening her grip on his jacket lapels. The back of her jean-clad thighs came in contact with the edge of the bed. She helped Clark shed his jacket, tossing it to the floor. She turned to see the bouquet of roses on the nightstand and a bottle of champagne in the ice bucket.

She looked back at him with a smile, the question written on her face. "I made a pit stop." He explained, pushing her back against the soft mattress. "You like?"

Lois looked behind her, as he fell onto the bed next to her, catching another glimpse of the roses and the champagne. "Oh, Clark." She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him towards her. "You didn't have to go to all that trouble."

Clark cupped her cheek, tracing the outline of her jaw, "Yes... Yes. I..." he whispered. "I wanted this weekend to be special. Just, you," he placed a kiss on her cheek, "and me," he brushed another kiss against the tip of her nose, "alone." He finally met her lips with his, holding her close to him.

She pulled him closer. His arms encircled her waist, molding her tiny frame against his solid build. She lifted her leg slightly to brush her frame against his and set her foot against his calf.

"Lois," he murmured, his breath warming her lips. His arms tightened around her, rolling them over, so she was beneath him. Her legs wrapped tightly around his waist. She grinned as he

released a guttural moan of approval. She tightened her legs more securely around him, “Lo-iss...”

She whispered a kiss on his neck, nibbling gently at the skin, “I’ve missed you,” she murmured in between open-mouthed kisses.

“I know,” His hand moved to cup her cheek lovingly, and he leaned in, in order to recapture her lips once more.

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Metropolis Airlines would never receive business from Goode International again. Samantha fumed as she rode in the taxi up the steep mountains that hid the luxurious getaway, Chateau Roberge. She had lost Lois Lane. After barely making it onto her flight, she had been stuck between a bitter old couple arguing about who had coughed. Then when the plane had landed, she had been stopped repeatedly by airport security, asking to check her camera bag.

“We’re here,” the cab driver informed her, pointing to the luxurious estate in front of them.

“Wow,” Samantha looked up at the tall brick building behind the iron gates. It was beautiful. The snow made it look like a winter land fairy tale. “Thank you.”

She handed the driver money for the fare and a tip. “Have a good night. Hope you find what you’re looking for.”

“Believe me, so do I,” she grinned back at him, closing the door behind her. She watched the cab drive off then headed inside.

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Lois tugged fiercely at the remainder of the button down dress shirt neatly tucked inside Clark’s jeans. It hung loosely off his shoulders as she raked her fingers against his hard chiseled chest. He pulled away to disentangle himself from the garment and tossed it to the floor. A moment later, he was in her arms again.

Her gaze hungrily crossed over his impressive build. “Clark,” she murmured breathlessly against his lips.

“I love you so much,” he whispered, slipping his hand beneath her sweater. “Lois,” he breathed softly in her ear.

She moaned in pleasure, tightening her arms around him. “Clark.” She ground her hips against his. His hand rested at her waistline, lifting her sweater upward.

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No sign of Superman. Samantha hesitantly looked around the snowy terrace of Chateau Roberge. Was she in the right place? She checked the suite number once more. Based on the information she had gotten from the front-desk clerk, she was standing below Lois Lane’s room at this moment. She approached the ladder that led up to Lois’s suite. It was pretty high up. Samantha hated heights.

“Promotion, promotion, promotion, promotion...” Samantha repeated to herself as she stepped up the ladder; one foot at a time.

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Their clothing lay scattered on the floor by the bed. Lois lay beneath him completely bare. She felt him shudder beneath her touch. She always found it amusing to watch him as he struggled to remain in control during their foreplay. Even though they had been married for a few months and experienced one another in different ways he still melted beneath her touch.

“Pachattar, cauhattar, tihattar...”

Lois laughed, “What is that?”

“Hindi,” he whispered, pressing his lips against her collarbone. She could feel her toes curling beneath his touch as he continued his sensual assault on her body.

She knew he was having just as much of a struggle in keeping control as she was. Early in their engagement, she had caught him muttering under his breath in different languages to keep from being pushed over the edge during their heated make out sessions.

He moved up her body, nibbling at the flesh along his way. He let out a low moan, “Lo-is, you’re killing me,”

“What do you expect?” She teased, “It’s been almost a week and...”

“Five days, twelve hours, thirty-eight minutes, and sixteen seconds,” He responded before capturing her mouth with his. “And at this rate, I won’t be able to make it another minute,”

“Another minu—Oh!” She opened her mouth, unable to voice the pleasurable thrill that had run through her at that moment. He smiled, capturing her mouth with his as he continued his sweet torture.

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Samantha clicked her camera rapidly as she took in the sight before her, slightly amused. Lois Lane and her husband had been going at it like world-class mattress tramps, barely coming up for air. She wasn’t sure where Superman was, but she was sure she had heard his arrival; maybe he was watching somewhere? No; she could see the entire room from where she stood. Superman was nowhere in sight.

This wasn’t right. Superman was supposed to be here, not Clark Kent. So far, all she had seen was the married-couple strip each other down and go at it like a bunch of horny teenagers. No Superman. Mr. Goode would not be pleased.

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He cautiously choked out, “Lois, baby,” afraid that the wrong movement would send him over the edge. She still hadn’t quite reached that point of pleasure he wanted.

“Cl...”

He didn’t know how much more he could take. He captured her mouth hungrily, flipping them over so, she was on her back. He let out a guttural moan as she tightened her legs around him, pulling him.

“God, Lo-is,” He cried out as his head began to spin, pulling him into a euphoric state; out of body, out of time. All he knew or thought of was Lois and the pleasure she had brought him to. He wrapped his arms more securely around her as they reached their completion together.

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Samantha continued to take shots of Lois and Clark. She wasn’t sure what to do at this point. Superman was here to be seen. Could she have been wrong? Lois Lane obviously had no problems with her husband.

She’d promised Randy Goode a scandal on Superman. He wasn’t someone you wanted to disappoint. Scott Johnson had made a crack about Mr. Goode being ‘the king of sleaze’ and then the police found him at the bottom of the elevator shaft the next day. Everyone knew better than to say anything. What would he do to her if she didn’t deliver? It was clear Mr. Goode wanted dirt on Superman bad. Would she be the next to end up at the bottom of the elevator shaft? Or worse?

She shuddered involuntarily at his anticipated reaction. She had to do something.

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Lois rested her head against Clark’s chest and sighed, “Wow....I mean....That was....” She couldn’t finish her sentence. She grinned up at Clark.

“Mmm...incredible...” Clark sighed, caressing the side of her face, pulling her towards him.

Lois leaned up to kiss him. “I missed you so much,” she whispered, leaning into his embrace.

“I can tell,” he murmured. “If this is the kind of welcome home I’m going to get, maybe I should go away more often.”

“No way,” Lois pulled him into her arms once more, and they resumed their earlier activities. Their reunion lasted well into the night.

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Suicide Slum was known as Metropolis’ pocket community of drug addicts and criminals of all kinds. The community remained tight-lipped, never speaking of the activities that occurred on the streets. When Lex Luthor ran his underworld organization people learned not to repeat what they saw for fear of dire consequences.

The same occurred when Bill Church came to town and brought the criminal organization Intergang with him. Suicide Slum was every criminal's favorite place to conduct business because of its history. It wasn't a real stretch to understand why so many of the shadier businesses were located in Suicide Slum.

One of those businesses was 'Hank's Photo Lab.' Hank Jackson sat at the front desk of his father's Photo Lab listening to music as loud as he could get it to go. His head moved with the music as the guitar solo began.

"HEY!" A sudden jerk of his headphones caused him to look up. A woman in her early thirties stood in front of him with a large file folder in her hands. She stared at him sternly. She pulled out a press badge, identifying herself to be with 'Goode International.' He'd heard of the company before. It was run by a gun named Randy Goode. He was rumored to have connections with Intergang, but no one could prove it.

"I'm with Goode International." She said, tucking her ID badge back into her pocket. She laid the folder on his desk. "I have a job for you."

Hank nodded, looking at her cautiously. He lifted the folder open and was surprised to find a very compromising photograph of the famous married couple, Lois Lane, and Clark Kent. The photo was of the couple lying on a bed. Clark Kent was clad in his trousers, no shirt and Lois Lane lying beneath him in a passionate embrace. Clark was reaching to lift her sweater up, but everything remained covered. "What the...?" He looked up at the woman skeptically, uncertain with how to continue. He flipped to the next page in the file. It was a publicity shot of Superman. Hank looked back from the photo of Lois Lane and Clark Kent to the photo of Superman; hoping he wasn't correct in his assumption of what this woman wanted him to do. "What exactly do you want here?"

"I want to create a scandal against Superman."

"But...this is Superman; you can't just—"

"If you don't do it, I'll find someone who will. Do you really want to make an enemy out of Randy Goode?"

"No." Hank sighed resignedly. "But I'm charging you triple the normal price. I don't feel right about this."

"Very well," She pulled out a Goode International business credit card. "I want this ready by Monday morning. I want to get it in the Monday edition of the Dirt Digger."

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Lois stared at the front page of the Daily Planet, engrossed in the article discussing the possibility of war if Superman were unable to persuade President Kasparov and General Navance to reach common ground. "Seems things have been pretty quiet this weekend - they managed to get the Planet printed without us." She gestured to the paper in her hands as they walked through the lobby.

"I guess General Navance and President Kasparov kept their word. They're supposed to have those proposals finished by this afternoon." Clark sighed, shaking his head. "I just hope Superman will be able to get them to agree to peace. They are both one argument away from a nuclear war."

"Long-time enemies finally make peace after years of conflict?" Lois shook her head skeptically.

"What, you don't think it's possible?"

"I think one of them is about to run out of the plutonium for their nuclear weapons, or they ran out of money for buying it and that's why they're trying to make peace."

"That is so cynical." Clark admonished.

"It's realistic."

"Maybe they're just tired of being at war with one another. Maybe they want peace."

"Maybe the Smurfs will come out of hiding and help them see to reason," Lois said sarcastically. At his amused look, she continued. "I don't understand war, period. Innocent people are killed because the leaders of the countries can't get along. They

fight and kill one another over what? Land? Oh, no, the idea of being 'right.'" She pressed the call button for the elevator. "It just seems more like Neanderthal thinking than anything. Men trying to compensate for things by pulling out the missiles and nuclear weapons," Lois continued her rant as they stepped into the elevator.

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Samantha watched curiously as Lois and Clark boarded the elevator. She checked the video camera in her hands and smiled to herself. Lois Lane's entire rant was caught on tape. She turned the camera off and placed it back in her bag and pulled out her phone. "Mr. Goode? Yes, I'm watching them."

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Inside the elevator, Lois continued her rant. "And another thing, what is the point of fighting over land?"

Clark laughed at Lois... "I don't know. War never made any sense to me either." He moved his hand to cup her cheek, "Why so wound up this early in the morning?"

"I don't know." She shrugged. "We still have a lot to work to do on this story, and I never did get my 'Superman exclusive' on the subject."

"Oh, really?" He teased. "I thought that was what this weekend was about."

"That's not the exclusive I was referring to, Mr. Kent."

"Oh, really?" He whispered, wrapping his arms around her waist. "I didn't hear any complaints," His face was a few inches away from hers.

"Who's complaining?"

"I believe you were," he pointed out.

Lois tugged on his tie, pulling him towards her, "Shut up and kiss me." With that she wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him closer as his lips came crashing down on hers. She moaned as his tongue dipped inside her mouth, exploring its inner confines.

The heat between them was building up. Her head began to spin. She could feel her stomach tightening. She really wanted to continue this. Maybe no one would notice if they pulled the emergency stop?

She groaned in disapproval when the elevator bell dinged, announcing their arrival to the newsroom floor. Clark reluctantly pulled away from her, breaking off their kiss. It took all her self-control not to close the elevator doors and continue what they'd started. She could never get enough of Clark. After the weekend, they'd had her desire for him had been heightened.

They walked down the ramp hand in hand. She glanced regretfully at Clark, who mouthed, "Later" to her. She smiled. He was just as disappointed with their interruption as she was.

She looked towards the newsroom, only to be met with stares of disapproval from her co-workers. Assuming they were giving them looks of disapproval for their embrace in the elevator, she shrugged it off. "What? Oh, you all should be used to it by now," Lois muttered. She looked down at her clothing, checking to make sure everything was still in place.

"What?" Clark asked the crowd of onlookers, equally as confused and uncomfortable with the stares.

"You guys didn't catch this morning's Dirt Digger, huh?" Jimmy asked as he approached them hesitantly.

"That supermarket trash... why would we want to read that garbage? Everything they've ever printed has been a lie..." Lois remarked. "And I thought Perry told you not to read that garbage anyway..."

"Or Tattletale Weekly?" Jimmy asked hesitantly.

"Of course not, Jimmy. What is going on?" Clark asked.

"I just want to be the first to say I don't believe it for a minute," Jimmy said. He was still holding the paper behind his back.

"Don't believe WHAT? What is going on, Jimmy?" Lois asked, getting more and more exasperated by the second. She

hated to be the last one to know anything...especially when it was about her or Clark.

Jimmy sighed and revealed the paper to his friends. "Oh, my God!" Lois' eyes widened at the photo she saw. It was a picture of her and SUPERMAN in a passionate embrace on a bed. The bed at Chateau Roberge. "That...that's me..."

"And Superman?" Clark said in disbelief. Lois glanced at him in concern. They both knew there was no way this photograph could be authentic. Chateau Roberge. It was the bed from Chateau Roberge. Someone had been watching her and Clark.

However, why would they put Superman in the picture? The more she thought about it the angrier she got. Someone was trying to smear her and Clark's reputation. Someone had been watching her and Clark when they had been making love.... Lois was fuming. "WHO printed this ....this....GARBAGE!?!?!"

Jimmy fumbled over his words as he struggled to give them the information they needed. "Well, there...there's no credit taken for the photograph....but like I said the photo's obviously bogus..."

Lois sighed in relief when he called the photo 'bogus' but allowed him to continue. They had to watch their reaction around people. She couldn't give anyone any reason to suspect the merit of the allegations being printed in these rags.

"Thanks, Jimmy," Clark murmured, pulling Lois towards him, making a show of support for what was obviously upsetting to both.

"Although, it's pretty good work. I mean the matte lines all match..." Jimmy trailed off. Lois smacked him in the head with the paper. "Ow!" Jimmy rubbed his head. "Sorry. On your side, one hundred percent."

"Lois, Clark, my office," Perry called across the newsroom in a rare detached and solemn voice.

Lois and Clark looked at one another and sighed. It was going to be a long day.

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Samantha held her breath, uncertain of what Randy Goode's reaction would be. She had rushed the story to print, bypassing him in the process. She couldn't afford to waste any time. If he'd had the time to analyze the photo, he may have noticed something.

Randy turned away from her after a long pause, clicking his television on. She thought she heard a squeal escape his throat as he flipped back and forth between TV stations.

"This is incredible. It's everywhere. Every station, every news story," he sat back down at his desk and logged on, "it's even on the internet. Superman's blood is in the water, and the sharks are swimming in order to take a bite."

"You're a genius, Mr. Goode," Samantha gushed.

"Call me Randy," he supplied as he gestured towards the open seat at his desk. "Because you just moved up the ladder, Ms. Vice President!"

"Are you serious?" Vice President? The title sent chills down her spine.

"As a heart attack!" Randy shouted. "Are you kidding me? This is the biggest story of the year! And for the first time, one of our stories is actually authentic." Her face fell at his last remark. If he knew what she'd done would he be promoting her?

"But we can't stop here. We really must stoke the fire. We have to orchestrate a full smear campaign against Superman! Anything goes; even if it's a lie, the more outrageous the better!" He spun his office chair around as he shot out ideas. "Superman Used his X-ray Vision to Peep at My Sister! Superman Dropped Me While Flying—And I Smelled Booze on His Breath! We don't need Kryptonite to destroy Superman. We've got the most powerful weapon ever invented. A scandal! And we'll take Superman down with it,"

A smear campaign? She could do that. She'd proven as much. But why? Dare she ask."Mr. Goode? What is the point to all of

this?" Samantha asked.

"Oh, I have my reasons. Discrediting Superman will soon push him out of Metropolis; opening the door for me to take control." Randy took the seat at his desk. "Metropolis embraced its golden boy before now, offering up these awards. He's been given the key to the city, and 'Man of the Year' awards; along with the most recent award, the 'International Peace Prize.' This will all change now that this city has seen his true colors. They'll turn their backs on him and, he'll have no choice but to leave."

"I'm not sure I understand," Samantha shrugged in dismay.

Randy Goode smiled knowingly, "It's better if I show you," he pressed a button below his desk and the wall behind him revealed a panel of television monitors and a large map of Metropolis. She could feel her jaw drop as she stared at the panel. He smiled at her, "Goode International was always my business, but this is the family business,"

"F-family business?" She stammered.

"Intergang," He elaborated. "Mindy always knew how to pick them. Inheriting a criminal superpower like this was a dream come true."

Mindy? He must mean Mindy Church. There was always speculation that she was more than a dumb blonde.

"Oh, so Mindy was..."

"My sister; Mindy Church," He prompted.

"Wow, well, that explains a lot." His hatred for Superman now made perfect sense. Superman had single-handedly pushed Intergang out of Metropolis.

"I'm sure it does, but understand this: Intergang can be your friend or your enemy. Now that you are a part of Intergang, there is no backing out. I wouldn't recommend trying to leave. The last person that tried that...oh...he had an accident."

"Uh, yes, Mr. Goode. I understand," Samantha stuttered. What had she gotten herself into?

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Clark took a seat next to Lois. She angrily flipped through the channels on the television. Every station had something to say about Lois and Superman. She finally flicked the television off and turned her attention to the pile of tabloid papers on the coffee table.

Superman's morals had come under attack. Everyone had something to say about it. Lois and Clark's first instinct was to deny it, but it wasn't that simple. Clark had flown to Chateau Roberge as Superman. Had the photographer seen him and used a fake photograph as a ploy in order to expose him? They didn't know.

There was no credit for the photograph which raised another red flag. Under normal circumstances, the photographer would be all over the news. In this instance, however, that was not the case.

When Perry had called them into his office earlier that morning he had assured them that he didn't believe a word of it and that the Daily Planet would be handling the situation. Unfortunately, "handling the situation" meant that Lois and Clark could not speak to anyone about the scandal and were not to issue any statements without the Daily Planet's approval.

Lois half suspected the board was eating this up, that they were eager to make money off the attention this had brought to the Planet.

"Every station. Every paper. Every paparazzi. I had to turn the ringer off on the phone to get some peace," Lois muttered bitterly, turning to face him.

Clark shook his head. "I mean, Perry said he was handling it..."

"What are we supposed to do in the meantime? Something like this doesn't just happen." She threw the paper down and turned to face him, "Someone is obviously out to get you. That's the only explanation. I mean, when we were that involved you had already rid yourself of the Suit,"

"Among other things," Clark muttered under his breath. She couldn't help but crack a half smile back at him.

"Someone had to have been watching us,"

"Maybe. Maybe not," Clark replied. "It depends. The software that is used for this kind of stuff is very advanced,"

Lois shot him a look of disbelief. She knew he was thinking the same thing she was. "They had a picture of the same room we were in, Clark. None of those rooms are designed the same. Do you seriously think that's a coincidence?"

"Maybe," He shrugged. His argument was weak.

She rested her head in her hands, rubbing her temples. "Someone was watching us. That's the only explanation."

"Lois..." He rubbed her back, trying to calm her down.

She shook her head, pulling away to look up at him, "What are we going to do?"

"Well, I guess we can try to find the person that was responsible for creating this photograph," Clark replied.

Lois let out a shaky breath, wiping away the few tears that had escaped from the corners of her eyes. "I hate feeling this helpless."

"We'll figure this out." He reassured her. "Perry said..."

"Yeah, they're going to investigate. I know," She shook her head. "What if they find the person behind this and they claim they saw you outside our hotel room? What then? I feel like I'm walking on eggshells and waiting for them all to break."

"What if the person responsible was just another paparazzi trying to make a headline? They do it all the time with the Elvis stories."

"Elvis is dead," Lois shot back, "You and I," she motioned between them, "are very much alive, and it's not like we can explain that it didn't matter if it was Superman or Clark in my hotel room because you're one and the same."

She reached up to swipe at the few tears that had escaped the corners of her eyes. She looked up to see Clark looking at her in concern. "Lois, we'll get this figured out." He pulled her into his arms; she shuddered against him, finally giving into her emotions. She let out a quiet sob. The stress of seeing the photograph and dealing with the world's reaction to it had been hard on both of them.

She hated letting her emotions get the better of her. She took a shaky breath and pulled away, looking up at him apologetically, "Sorry. I just..."

Clark tipped her chin to look at him. "It's been a stressful day for both of us."

"Yeah," Lois sighed. She leaned in to kiss him but stopped when she recognized the look on his face. "What?"

"The neighbor's TV." Clark turned the television on and found the LNN station.

"The peace negotiations between Latislan and Podansk have been called off tonight due to the Superman scandal. It appears war is inevitable."

"Oh, no," Lois groaned.

A little boy appeared on the television dressed in a Boy Scout uniform and looked sadly out at the camera. "I don't believe in Superman anymore."

"You don't believe in him?" the newscaster asked. The boy responded by shaking his head 'no'.

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Clark tried to hide the pain he felt when he heard the painful words. Lois took the remote from him and turned the television off.

"I don't believe in Superman anymore."

The words stung.

"It's the idea of Superman; someone to bring a few hopes around," Lois had told him so many years ago and now that idea had been shattered. People were viewing him as a common criminal and comparing him to the everyday politician. He hated that the scandal had reached so far as to taint the image of

Superman in the eyes of such a young child.

"Clark," She hugged him, enveloping him in her loving arms. He sighed, holding her close to him. He thought of Superman as just a suit he put on in order to use his abilities to help. Lois had argued with him that Superman was more than that. He had never acknowledged that until he'd come under attack.

Superman was a part of him. He was more than just the persona he showed the world. Superman helped people and earned people's trust. Now that trust was shattered. The angry words aimed at Superman cut him deep. They were attacking him, not just Superman.

Lois leaned up to kiss him, wrapping her arms around his neck. He devoured her lips with his own hungrily. Her soft moans of pleasure echoed through his mind. She reached up to remove his glasses, laying them on the table next to the couch then turned back to him, brushing featherlight kisses across his face as she wrapped her arms around him.

The anguish on his face silently pleaded his need for comfort as he pulled her onto his lap, cupping her face with his palm. She looked back at him, stroking the soft curls of his hair with her fingertips. "I'm right here..." she whispered, capturing his lips softly as she cupped him through his jeans, feeling his growing arousal beneath her touch. "Make love to me..."

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Several hours later they laid on the couch completely sated. Lois had collapsed on top of him, unwilling to move as she enjoyed the feeling of being in her husband's arms after their recent lovemaking. Her breathing was ragged. "Wow..." her voice cracked slightly; she leaned down to kiss him lightly. She placed her hand against his chest as she lay with him. "Your heart is pounding."

"So is yours." He murmured, kissing her back. "You okay?"

"Better than okay," She smiled back at him with a smile.

She smiled, turning to link her arms around his neck, snuggling closer to him as she pulled him tightly against her. He rolled them over so that she could stretch out more comfortably. She sighed as she rested her head on his chest.

He glanced down at the clothing scattered on the floor. He could see the raised goose bumps on Lois' arms. "Are you cold?" He asked concerned.

She shook her head 'no' even though he knew it was a lie. He aimed a beam of heat vision against her skin, watching in amazement as the goose bumps disappeared before his eyes. "Thank you," she murmured softly.

She was fighting sleep. He watched as her eyelashes fluttered up and down, struggling to stay awake. "You tired?" He asked.

"No," She shook her head as she rested her head against his chest, closing her eyes. He sighed, amused at her antics. She could be exhausted and still deny she was tired. He lifted them up off the couch and floated them upstairs into the bedroom where he covered them both with the soft cotton comforter of their bed.

He stayed up most the night, watching her sleep, hoping she had been more successful in distracting herself from the dilemma they were faced with at the moment.

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The sun shone into the bedroom of the townhome on Hyperion Avenue, spraying sunlight across Lois' face. She groaned in frustration. She didn't want to wake up. She reached out to Clark's side of the bed only to find emptiness. "Clark?"

"Right here," He laid a tray of fruit in front of her, along with a steaming cup of coffee. "I figured you needed to sleep in. Breakfast is served."

"What time is it?" she asked sleepily as she popped a piece of pineapple in her mouth.

"It's 9:30."

"What? Clark, we've got to get to work." She tried to push herself up from the bed but found two strong arms pushing her

back down.

"I already called Perry. I told him we'd be in this afternoon," Clark replied. "Finish your breakfast."

"Clark... that's only going to make people talk even more."

"I don't care. I don't care what other people think. You needed your rest and frankly, so did I. If people want to talk... let them."

"Really? What about what everyone was saying about Superman last night?"

"I'm pretty sure this will all die soon. It's paparazzi trying to get their ten seconds of fame." He sighed. Lois shot him a look of disbelief. "But I still think we need to find out who's behind this."

"I agree. Any ideas?" Lois asked.

"Jimmy?" He suggested.

"What?" Lois laughed.

"Come on. He knows more about photography than anyone we know. He's bound to know where you go to create stuff like this."

"All right. Let's get to work."

\*\*\*

"I love it, big brother. You've got Superman right where we want him. Everybody hates him... even the little children." Mindy puffed on her cigar, leaning back in her office chair.

"Yeah, and as a bonus, we were able to discredit Lois Lane as well. Her reporting credibility will definitely come into question now."

"Yes. However, we need Superman to be pushed out of Metropolis, Randy. I can't have him flashing his little red cape in my business anymore."

"Mindy, he's already taking the walk of shame. The chips will fall into place; just be patient."

"Yes, how long until he leaves Metropolis?" Mindy asked. "I want you to raise the stakes a bit."

Randy sighed, "Whatever you want, Mindy."

\*\*\*

Lois and Clark walked through the Daily Planet doors hand-in-hand. She took in a deep breath, preparing herself for the cold stares that awaited her from her co-workers.

"You ready?" Clark asked as they stepped into the elevator.

"As I'll ever be."

"Hey, we'll get through this." He caressed her cheek and kissed her lightly.

The elevator doors opened, and they stepped out into the newsroom. The same cold stares met them that had been there before, but this time, they were prepared. Lois opened her mouth to shout at everyone, but Clark's warning glare reminded her not to.

Jimmy walked up to them with his usual cheerfulness. "Morning, guys!" he lowered his voice, glancing at the crowd behind him, "Tough crowd, huh?"

Clark half smiled at Jimmy's crack, but Lois didn't find it amusing, "Jimmy, were you able to find anything out about those photo labs?"

"Uh, you just told me this morning; I..." Jimmy stammered, following them to Lois' desk. There are hundreds of photo labs all over Metropolis... it could take weeks to go through all of them—" Jimmy was met with a look of death from Lois. "However, I am working REALLY hard on this... I mean... yeah, well; I'll get on it... right now -"

"Jimmy, we need to try and figure this out as soon as possible," Clark said.

"I—I know, CK, and I'm working on this. I promise," Jimmy replied.

"Thanks, Jimmy," Clark replied. "Any word on what's going on with these peace treaty negotiations?"

"Both sides are not even considering negotiations until Superman can give an acceptable explanation for the photograph, but no one has been able to get in contact with him. I guess he's

avoiding the chaos out there."

"Can you blame him?" Lois muttered bitterly. "Look at what everyone did to him when that Leigh-Anne person came out of the woodwork last year..."

Jimmy gave Lois and Clark an odd look then recovered. "Yeah, I guess you can't blame him, but still... shouldn't he at least say something?"

"Jimmy, if Superman makes any kind of statement without evidence to back it up no one will believe him. Right now it's the paparazzi vs. Superman and Superman is losing the battle. That's why we really need you to find out where this photo came from." Lois grimaced as she watched Clark. It was clear the frustration and stress of the ordeal was getting to him as well.

"Hey, no sweat. I'll keep on this. Hang in there, guys. I got your back." Jimmy said.

"Thanks, Jimmy." Lois smiled warmly at him.

"Guys?"

"Yeah, Jimmy?" Lois inquired.

"Tell Superman I've got his back too. We'll figure this out."

"Thanks, Jimmy," Clark replied warmly.

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Randy Goode sat at his desk, deep in thought. How to push Superman out? Go after his woman? Attack his loved ones? He needed something... original.

He picked up the phone and dialed. "Get me Barry."

\*\*\*

"Help! Somebody, help!" the cries reached Clark's ears as he exited the conference room. Perry had just finished up the afternoon's staff meeting. Clark signaled to Lois he had to go. She nodded in agreement, and he headed for the stairs.

A few seconds later he was flying above the city, trying to narrow down where the cries were coming from. It was a little girl, crying for help. She was trapped in a car on the interstate. A large SUV had hit her small compact car head-on. The collision of the two vehicles had caused a fire that was heading towards her.

Superman landed in front of the wreckage and shook his head at the sight before him. He used his super breath to put out the fire. He made his way over to the SUV and found a young teenage boy in the driver's seat. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Dude... Superman... Wha-What happened?" the teen was obviously disoriented. Superman could smell the alcohol on his breath and grimaced. Drunk drivers caused so many wrecks these days.

"You were in a car wreck... are you all right?" Clark asked.

"Yeah... Man, my dad's gonna flip," the young man groaned.

Clark ignored the comment and made his way over to the compact car. The SUV had crushed the entire front end of the car. A man and woman in their late twenties lay ominously still in the crumpled front seats.

The blood. There was blood everywhere. He scanned inside the automobile and x-rayed the passengers. The man's neck had snapped in half. The woman had a severe cut in her abdomen. He listened for a heartbeat. Nothing. A young girl cried piteously in the back seat. She was still strapped in her car seat, holding her teddy bear.

"Are you all right?" he asked hoarsely. He had seen wreckage like this before, but it never failed to affect him. The loss of life always caused him pain.

"Su-Superman?" the little girl looked up at him wide-eyed.

"Yes," he replied.

"They-they won't wake up. My mommy and daddy won't wake up..." she cried. Clark tried to hold back his own tears as he struggled to console the young girl.

\*\*\*

Lois sat diligently typing away on her computer when Dianne came up to her desk. "Here are the files I borrowed from you, Lois." She had a bit of a bite in her tone.

"Huh?" Lois shook her head from her reverie. "I'm sorry, Dianne, what did you say?"

"Your files. Here." She handed them to Lois abrasively and began to walk away. Lois rolled her eyes as she watched Dianne walk away. Dianne was just one of the many colleagues who had offered her a cold shoulder due to the scandal. Lois was mildly surprised when Dianne turned around to stride back to her desk. This couldn't be good. "Can I ask you a question? How can you live with yourself?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Clark is madly in love with you. I mean, I thought you had gotten over your Superman obsession. How could you do that to him?" Dianne shot at her bitterly. "Do you know how many women here envy you for having married Clark Kent? How could you?"

"Okay. Let's put this to rest right here and right now. I did not DO ANYTHING."

"Well, that picture says otherwise," Dianne shot back. "Are you saying the whole world is wrong?"

"You know what? I don't care what that picture appears to be. I don't care what the rest of the world thinks. The only person's opinion that matters to me is Clark's."

"I still don't understand how he can even stand you—"

Lois shook her head. "I am not going to sit here and listen to this—"

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Clark had just returned from the Child Services office. Superman had made sure the young girl would find a proper home with her Aunt and Uncle. Clark walked up to Lois' desk and was greeted by the sight of his wife's angry face and their co-worker Dianne's look of disgust.

"What's going on here?" he interrupted.

"Nothing." Dianne shot him a smile, trying to cover up the fight, she and Lois had been engaged in.

"Yeah." Lois got up from her desk and headed to the Conference Room to escape the stares of her co-workers.

Clark watched Lois's retreat and stared at Dianne expectantly. "Well?"

"What?" Dianne asked.

"You want to tell me what that was all about?"

"Do you really have to ask? It's all over the news," she shot back.

Clark held in his frustration. Dianne's abrasive attitude was disturbing. She had always seemed very friendly and easy-going. "I know what is all over the news. What I don't know is why you're lashing out at Lois. She hasn't DONE anything."

"Oh, really? Maybe you should get your prescription checked, Clark. You're blind if you don't see it."

Clark let out a long breath of frustration. He wasn't used to people being so openly rude to him. Usually, his co-workers always had a polite veneer. This 'scandal' had opened his eyes to a lot of obvious misconceptions of his co-workers. "You are out of line."

"How can you sit there and defend her like that after all that she's done to you?"

"Lois is my wife and my partner. I will support her no matter what. Now, read my lips. She hasn't DONE anything. I don't need anyone's sympathy. I don't need anyone's condolences. Please tell whoever keeps putting this—" he gestured to his desk, which was covered with balloons and cards of sympathy, "--all over my desk to stop." He stared at Dianne. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to check on my wife."

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"Lois?" Clark knocked on the door before entering the conference room. "Hey, you okay?"

"I don't know what to do. I'm so sick and tired of this. Everywhere I go, it's cold stares and even colder shoulders..."

Lois began pacing around the conference table as she relayed her feelings to Clark. "I guess people blame me for bringing down their hero."

Clark pulled her close to him and smiled. "Well, if it makes you feel any better, they're not so crazy about their hero either. The ladies in the steno pool are using Superman's picture for a dart board"

Lois let out a breath of frustration and sighed against his chest. "I'm sorry. I know this must be pretty hard on you too. What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," he said solemnly.

"How did the rescue go?" she asked trying to change the subject.

"Um, it was bad," he said, trying to distance himself from the memory.

Lois noticed the tone in his voice, "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really. A little girl is an orphan now because a teenager wanted to drive drunk."

"Oh, no, Clark, that's horrible."

"Yeah. The kid's in custody, but the sad part is he'll probably be bailed out by morning." He shook his head in disgust. "You know what just eats my guts about this whole thing?"

"What?"

"I created Superman to help people...when his image is destroyed like this it's hard to help anyone."

"What are you talking about?"

"When I first landed no one was on the scene. I put the fire out and helped the little girl out of the car. Then as soon as the media got wind, I was over there it turned into a three-ring circus. I was unable to keep track of what was going on. They began trying to question the little girl as well—it's insane."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that."

"I know it's their job, but she was four-years-old...She had just been told her parents had died..." He let out a breath of frustration. "I'll be glad when we can figure this out."

"Me too," she murmured. "Jimmy is looking into those labs for me." She rested her head on his chest, memorizing the rhythm of his heartbeat when there was a knock on the door.

Jimmy Olsen opened the door slightly. "Guys? I think I've got a lead."

"What is it?" Lois asked.

"Hank's Photo Lab. They're kind of new. They've only been in Metropolis for about a year and a half. They seemed kind of suspicious; when I called to ask for an interview the guy hung up on me."

"Hung up on you?" Clark asked as they walked out of the conference room with Jimmy.

"Yeah. I tried to access their files online and all I came up with was their financial records," Jimmy explained.

"Anything interesting?" Lois asked curiously.

Jimmy shook his head excitedly. "Yeah. A huge deposit was made the day before the photograph was printed."

"Sounds like we need to do a little B&E and pay Hank a visit?" Lois suggested.

"B&E?" Jimmy asked curiously.

"Breaking and entering," Lois and Clark answered him in unison. Clark's tone was more subdued than Lois'.

"Jimmy, you're sure there's no way to access their files online?" Clark asked. He felt uncomfortable with breaking in; no matter how urgent the necessity.

Jimmy shook his head 'no'. "I guess they keep hard copies of everything."

The LNN newscaster brought their conversation to a halt. A picture of a missile shooting through the air appeared on the screen as the newscaster narrated the scene. "With peace talks broken down because of the Superman scandal, border skirmishes

he erupted between Latislan and Podansk. U.N. troops reported short-range missiles have already become airborne..."

Clark headed towards the stairway.

Lois and Jimmy watched the screen in anticipation along with the rest of the Daily Planet staff. Lois sighed in relief as a red and blue streak destroyed the missile mid-air, causing no harm.

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"...wait a minute... sources now say, an unidentified object is streaking to intercept one of the missiles...apparently; that unidentified object was Superman." The LNN announcer smiled back at his audience, apparently pleased with the interception of the missile.

Jimmy smiled broadly at the announcement, "All right, Superman!" he cheered. He looked around the newsroom a bit self-conscious about the fact that he was the only one cheering. He then raised his voice in frustration, "Would you all have preferred he let the missile hit some innocent people?"

Everyone stared at one another for a moment, looking a bit ashamed, but still not wanting to give congratulations to the Man of Steel.

"You all make me sick," Jimmy muttered.

"Jimmy!" Perry hollered across the newsroom.

"Yeah, Chief?"

"I want you to go down to Metropolis Child Services' office with Lois and Clark. There was a wreck on the Metropolis Bridge earlier. Parents died. I want my exclusive. Get me some page one photos!" he hollered, and then looked around. "Where's Clark?"

"He had an errand to run earlier, Perry. We're on it," Lois called and grabbed her coat as she and Jimmy headed for the door.

"Where did CK go?" Jimmy mused.

"Uh, an errand," Lois said. She was unwilling to go into more detail.

"Things are pretty tough, huh?" Jimmy asked as the elevator doors closed behind them.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lois said as she pushed the call button.

"Come on, Lois. This is Jimmy. I know it can't be easy seeing a picture of yourself like that all over the place. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Jimmy. Really. I'm fine. I just want to get to the bottom of this," Lois said as she exited the elevator doors, and they walked through the Lobby of the Daily Planet.

"Why would someone want to destroy Superman's image like this? I mean, it doesn't make any sense. He's done so much good for Metropolis."

"Maybe. But the same question can be asked about why people would want to kill him as well. How many times has someone tried to kill him since he came to Metropolis?"

"I guess you're right. It just doesn't make any sense. I kinda wonder sometimes how he deals with it. I mean, does he have anyone to talk to about that kind of stuff?"

Lois smiled at Jimmy. She had never realized how observant Jimmy really was. She patted him on the shoulder and gave him a peck on the cheek. "You are a remarkable young man, James Olsen. You remind me of Clark."

Jimmy blushed. "Really? You really think so?"

She smiled at him. "Yes. Thank you for being such a good friend."

Jimmy smiled broadly. He didn't know what he had said or done. Whatever it was it had apparently brightened Lois' spirits. "I really remind you of CK? How? I'm not as good with the ladies as CK...I can't ever keep a girlfriend..."

Lois laughed. "Don't worry, Jimmy. We'll marry you off eventually..."

They headed outside of the Daily Planet building and were greeted by a camera and microphone shoved in their face. "Ms. Lane! I'm Barry Dunning!" the man said as he chased her across the street. Jimmy struggled to keep up with her pace.

Lois groaned, "I swear to..."

"Barry Dunning? As in the show 'In Your Face with Barry Dunning?'" Jimmy asked, excited at meeting the talk show host.

"Yes. You've heard of me?" Barry was always eager to meet a fan.

"Yeah. I watch it all the time! Lois and CK say it's a bunch of garbage...but you really do talk about—"

"Jimmy," Lois warned. "Let's go. We don't have time for this."

"Ms. Lane, I want to give you a chance to tell your side of the story..."

"Yeah right..." Lois muttered under her breath. "Jimmy, do I have 'idiot' stamped on my forehead?"

"No, why?" Jimmy responded, confused.

"Just checking." She then continued to walk away from Dunning and his crew.

"Ms. Lane, what do you have to say to those that are calling you Superman's Super Strumpet?" Dunning called out.

"They're calling me WHAT??" Lois asked in disbelief. She stopped walking.

Jimmy recognized that look in her eyes. It spelled trouble.

"Uh, Mr. Dunning, you should probably go ahead and get yourself a head start."

"What? Why?" he asked.

"Because the last time I saw that look on her face was when she kicked that Colonel in the groin for using Kryptonite on Superman during Lord Nor's raid. I would run if I were you," Jimmy warned. Lois' eyes narrowed.

Barry Dunning stared back and forth between Jimmy and Lois then back again. He was getting paid to try and get the dirt here. He had to stay. "Ms. Lane? Do you care to respond?"

Lois looked like she was about to snap on him then thought better of it and turned away to walk towards her Jeep. She was fighting every impulse to tell this creep off.

"Do you have ANYTHING to say for yourself?" Dunning continued his attack.

"Say for myself?" Lois countered. "What do I have to say for MYSELF?? Are you kidding me?"

"Oh, boy..." Jimmy muttered.

"Why bother? I mean seriously? You already have your mind made up. You're ready to tell your sleaze of a story.... Why bother? Its not like any of you guys actually check FACTS???"

"Here we go..." Jimmy sighed.

"Say for myself? Really? I am not the one that is out there making a career out of destroying other people's lives. I don't publish stories based on a LIE..." Lois fumed.

"I tried to warn you..." Jimmy muttered.

"You are a disgrace to legitimate reporters like Clark and myself, and you are not going to get what you are digging for here, VULTURE BOY..." Lois visibly winced for a moment, catching her breath.

"Nobody ever listens to me," Jimmy continued, apparently talking to himself because no one was paying him any attention.

"I'm not going to give you some sound bite that you can twist and turn...What do I have to say for MYSELF??? You should be ashamed of YOURSELF!! You...You..." Her hands were flying all over the place as she ranted.

"Hey, Lois, we're going to be late. We need to, uh, go. Now?" Jimmy was watching the whole scene unfold, and he was afraid Lois was going to hit the poor guy.

Lois relented. She stormed away from the reporter and headed towards her Jeep in a huff. She opened the door and climbed in, slamming the door behind her. Jimmy got in on the passenger side of the Jeep and watched in dismay as Lois struggled to regain control of her emotions.

"You okay?" Jimmy asked.

"No," Lois said, turning the engine on. She turned towards

him to back out of the parking space, and Jimmy was surprised to see unshed tears in her eyes.

\*\*\*

Randy Goode sat in his office with General Navance and President Kasparov. His plan to bring down Superman's image was working like a charm. He gestured towards the tray on the table. "General, caviar? President Kasparov, canapé?"

"Forgive my bluntness, Mr. Goode, but I am a suspicious man by nature. Why are you so interested in resurrecting these peace talks?" President Kasparov asked.

General Navance caught onto the president's suspicions. "Yes, what do you get out of it?"

Goode smiled. "Why, I get what we all get potentially, peace on earth and goodwill toward man. And since I was the runner-up for the Peace Prize, I thought the least I could do was to see if we can't come up with a solution together. Shrimp?"

"I beg your pardon?" General Navance thought Randy had insulted him.

"Cocktail. Care for some shrimp cocktail?" Goode gestured toward the tray.

President Kasparov was getting impatient, "You said Superman would be here to explain everything. Where is he?"

Goode smiled to himself. "Well, he promised me he'd be here. Maybe Lois Lane got tickets to 'Cats' or something..."

\*\*\*

Clark soared through the air, searching for the General and President. This war had to stop. He finally spotted them. He found them inside the office of Goode International and hovered outside a moment, listening in.

"You said Superman would be here to explain everything. Where is he?"

Goode's response shocked him. "Well, he told me he'd be here. Maybe Lois Lane got tickets to 'Cats' or something."

<<WHAT??>>

This made no sense at all. Why was Randy Goode trying to discredit him? Did he WANT to start a war...unless...could he be responsible for the photograph? There was only one way to find out.

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"Superman!" President Kasparov exclaimed.

"You must call a cease fire immediately!" Clark ordered as he stepped into the room, scanning it for Kryptonite or any lead-lined boxes that could be used to hide the meteorite. These days, he could never be too careful. He found no sign of the rock. "There is nothing that this war could ever achieve that you couldn't better achieve without it." Images of that day's wreckage floated through his mind. He shook his head as he tried to regain control of his emotions. He could dwell on his feelings of guilt later.

General Navance scoffed, "Who are you to lecture us? You are no better than the common politician. You stand for nothing!"

Clark tried to regain his composure as he addressed them. The idea that they would think he stood for nothing was appalling. "I stand for what is right! And what is right is peace. Please, do not let any side issues distract you from our common goal."

President Kasparov, who seemed to be the more level-headed of the two leaders smiled, "Peace is built on the cornerstones of trust, Superman. And if either one of us is to trust you again, first -- you must explain this." He laid a copy of the National Inquisitor on the table.

"And this," General Navance threw a copy of Dirt Digger on the table as well. Both tabloids shared the same incriminating photograph of Superman in a clinch with Lois Lane.

Clark struggled to find the words to relay what he needed to say to them. Before he could speak Randy Goode cut in smugly, "Yes, Superman. We're all ears."

Clark stared sternly at Goode. The man was definitely up to something, "Gentlemen, you trusted me enough to ask me to

mediate the talks -- trust me now when I say that this photograph is not what it appears to be."

President Kasparov smiled, thinking Superman was talking about admitting to the affair, "Superman, General Navance and myself... we understand such things. We're world leaders. But our people are not so sophisticated. They are outraged by what you've done -- they won't allow you to broker our peace talks unless you can give them a more...acceptable explanation."

"Mr. President, I haven't done anything..." Clark began but was cut off by Randy Goode turning on the TV where he saw Lois and Jimmy trying to shoo Barry Dunning out of their faces.

Clark eyed the TV skeptically. That show didn't normally come on at this hour. He looked at the controls. It was on a tape.

Lois' voice echoed throughout the room, "I'm not going to give you some sound byte that you can twist and turn...What do I have to say for MYSELF??? You should be ashamed of YOURSELF!! You...You..."

Her retreating figure could be seen on the screen as Dunning turned to the camera. "There you have it. Right from Lois Lane's own lips, she and Superman are indeed having an affair. And apparently so intimate--so passionate--she can't even put it into words."

"Well, talk about denials. That one ranks right up there with Watergate," Goode said smugly.

"Why is it on tape?" Clark's eyes narrowed, and he confronted Goode before either leader could respond.

Goode looked around, not sure of what to say. "What are you talking about?"

"The tape that's in the VCR--why don't you play the whole thing?" Clark challenged, still unsure of Goode's intentions.

"Well, I--"

"Unless, you're afraid of what's on it..." Clark countered. His eyes narrowed as he met Goode's gaze. There was something sinister going on here.

"Very well." Goode rewound the tape and played it once more.

They all watched in rapt attention as scenes from the morning before showed Lois and Clark walking hand-in-hand into the lobby of the Daily Planet.

<<"Long-time enemies finally make peace after years of conflict?" Lois shook her head skeptically.

"What, you don't think it's possible?"

"I think one of them is about to run out of the plutonium for their nuclear weapons, or they ran out of money for buying it and that's why they're trying to make peace."

"That is so cynical." Clark admonished.

"It's realistic."

"Maybe they're just tired of being at war with one another. Maybe they want peace."

"Maybe the Smurfs will come out of hiding and help them see to reason," Lois said sarcastically. At his amused look, she continued. "I don't understand war, period. Innocent people are killed because the leaders of the countries can't get along. They fight and kill one another over what? Land? Oh, no, the idea of being 'right.'">>

Clark couldn't help but be amused by the uncomfortable looks that ran across both leaders faces as they watched the tape. He flushed slightly as he watched himself and Lois move into a tight embrace as the elevator doors closed behind them.

Clark cringed inwardly. Lois had been right. Someone had been watching them. Did he really want to see the whole tape Goode had? Were there images of him and Lois...being intimate with one another?

The next image showed Lois and Dianne in the newsroom earlier, fighting over the scandal. Lois was standing her ground against Dianne's attack on her character. Clark had interrupted the fight.

<<"Do you know how many women here envy you for having

married Clark Kent? How could you?" Dianne snipped.

"Okay. Let's put this to rest right here and right now. I did not DO ANYTHING."

"Well, that picture says otherwise." Dianne shot back. "Are you saying the whole world is wrong?"

"You know what? I don't care what that picture appears to be. I don't care what the rest of the world thinks. The only person's opinion that matters to me is Clark's."

"I still don't understand how he can even stand you—"

Lois shook her head. "I am not going to sit here and listen to this—"

"What's going on here?" Clark interrupted.

"Nothing." Dianne smiled.

"Yeah." Lois got up from her desk and headed to the Conference Room to escape the stares of her co-workers.

Clark watched Lois's retreat and stared at Dianne expectantly. "Well?"

"What?" Dianne asked.

"You want to tell me what that was all about?"

"Do you really have to ask? It's all over the news," she shot back.

Clark held in his frustration. "I know what is all over the news. What I don't know is why you're lashing out at Lois. She hasn't DONE anything."

"Oh, really? Maybe you should get your prescription checked, Clark. You're blind if you don't see it."

Clark let out a long breath of frustration. "You are out of line."

"How can you sit there and defend her like that after all that she's done to you?"

"Lois is my wife and my partner. I will support her no matter what. Now, read my lips. She hasn't DONE anything. >>

Clark recalled his surprise at Dianne's actions. He cringed inwardly as the scene unfolded before his eyes. His and Lois' tempers had gotten the best of them. Now the world could see them at their worst.

The next image was disturbing. Lois and Jimmy were walking off the elevator at the Planet discussing ...him.

<<"Come on, Lois. This is Jimmy. I know it can't be easy seeing a picture of yourself like that all over the place. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Jimmy. Really. I'm fine. I just want to get to the bottom of this," Lois said as she exited the elevator doors, and they walked through the Lobby of the Daily Planet.

"Why would someone want to destroy Superman's image like this? I mean, it doesn't make any sense. He's done so much good for Metropolis."

"Maybe. But the same question can be asked about why people would want to kill him as well. How many times has someone tried to kill him since he came to Metropolis?"

"I guess you're right. It just doesn't make any sense. I kinda wonder sometimes how he deals with it. I mean, does he have anyone to talk to about that kind of stuff?"

Lois smiled at Jimmy. She patted him on the shoulder and gave him a peck on the cheek. "You are a remarkable young man, James Olsen. You remind me of Clark."

Jimmy blushed. "Really? You really think so?"

She smiled at him. "Yes. Thank you for being such a good friend.">>>

His heart leaped out to his friend as he listened to Jimmy convey his concern for why someone would deliberately attack Superman's image like that. Lois' answer was honest and unnerving. "Why do people want to kill Superman?" The statement was true, but it brought to light many fears, he held deep inside. He was always a target. The people around him were targets. Now Lois was being attacked to get to him.

His thoughts were interrupted by Barry Dunning's obnoxious voice. The man hounded Lois and Jimmy from the outside of the

Planet all the way to the parking garage. They continued to refuse to comment, but he kept pushing. Clark narrowed his eyes in disgust. If that man tried that with him around, he would be sorry.

<<"Ms. Lane, I want to give you a chance to tell your side of the story..."

"Jimmy, do I have 'idiot' stamped on my forehead?" Lois asked.

"No, why?" Jimmy responded, confused.

"Just checking." She then continued to walk away from Dunning and his crew.

"Ms. Lane, what do you have to say to those that are calling you Superman's Super Strumpet??" Dunning called out.

"They're calling me WHAT??" Lois asked in disbelief. She stopped walking.

Jimmy interrupted, recognizing a glint in Lois' eyes as trouble. "Uh, Mr. Dunning, you should probably go ahead and get yourself a head start."

"What? Why?" he asked.

"Because the last time I saw that look on her face was when she kicked that Colonel in the groin for using Kryptonite on Superman during Lord Nor's raid. I would run if I were you," Jimmy warned. Lois' eyes narrowed.

Barry Dunning stared back and forth between Jimmy and Lois then back again. "Ms. Lane? Do you care to respond?" Lois just turned away and continued to walk towards her Jeep. "Do you have ANYTHING to say for yourself?" Dunning continued his attack.

"Why bother? I mean seriously? You already have your mind made up. You're ready to tell your sleaze of a story... Why bother? Its not like any of you guys actually check FACTS???"

"Here we go..." Jimmy sighed.

"Say for myself? Really? I am not the one that is out there making a career out of destroying other people's lives. I don't publish stories based on a LIE..." Lois fumed.

"I tried to warn you..." Jimmy muttered.

"You are a disgrace to legitimate reporters like Clark and myself, and you are not going to get what you are digging for here, VULTURE BOY..." Lois visibly winced for a moment, catching her breath.

"Nobody ever listens to me," Jimmy continued, apparently talking to himself because no one was paying him any attention.

"I'm not going to give you some sound bite that you can twist and turn...What do I have to say for MYSELF??? You should be ashamed of YOURSELF!! You...You..." Her hands were flying all over the place as she ranted.

"Hey, Lois, we're going to be late. We need to, uh, go. Now?" Jimmy interrupted. Lois and Jimmy's retreating figures could be seen on the screen as Dunning turned back to the camera with a grin on his face.

"There you have it. Right from Lois Lane's own lips. She and Superman are indeed having an affair. And apparently so intimate...so passionate...she can't even put it into words.">>>

Where had he gotten that from? All she had told him was 'no comment' and refused an interview. Then when asked what she had to say for herself, she called him a liar. Where in that was Dunning able to infer she was having an affair?

The two stubborn men still didn't seem convinced, though. He spoke up, "Don't you see what is going on? This so-called scandal is obviously the result of some kind of smear campaign..."

"Your words are empty!" General Navance shouted. "No proof! My people will not become a victim of your lies and his," He pointed at President Kasparov, "Betrayal! Enough talk! My armies will destroy yours!" General Navance cried out.

"My missiles will destroy you first!" President Kasparov shot back.

"Gentlemen, please!" Clark blocked them from exiting the room. "I know this looks bad, but trust me, there is something else

going on here. Someone is trying to make sure these peace talks fail. Do you really want to give them the satisfaction?"

"Where is your proof?" General Navance challenged.

Clark sighed, "I don't have any...yet."

"When you can prove these allegations, then we will have something to discuss, Superman." President Kasparov said.

"Mr. President ..."

"Unless you can offer us proof that THIS," General Navance gestured to the tabloid once more, "is the result of a conspiracy we have nothing to talk about."

"Gentlemen, thousands of lives depend on these talks..."

Clark begged.

"We will give you seventy-two hours to come up with proof of this theory of yours," President Kasparov countered. "If not, these negotiations are over."

"...and we WILL be going to war." General Navance added gruffly. The warning was clear.

The men exited the office in a huff, leaving Clark alone with Randy Goode. He stared the man down sternly. "This isn't over," he warned before leaving the office.

"Oh, I think it is," Randy smiled back at him.

"Not a chance," Clark countered. "I know you're behind this. I'm going to bring you down,"

"Empty threats won't do you any good," Randy countered.

"No one trusts you anymore. You need evidence and you...." he gave Clark a once over before meeting his gaze with a dark glare, "...have none."

"We'll see about that," Clark glared at him with a steely gaze before turning to leave. Randy watched Superman leave with a smile on his face.

\*\*\*

Lois slammed the door to the Metropolis Child Services and made her way to the Jeep, Jimmy following in hot pursuit.

"Unbelievable! So much for professional courtesy!"

"Come on, Lois. It wasn't that bad," Jimmy began.

"Lois Lane!" Barry Dunning's voice echoed as he approached Lois and Jimmy.

"What now??" Lois was getting sick and tired of Barry Dunning and his harassment. "What? What? What? What the hell do you want from me? Do you not understand English? NO! There's an 'N' and an 'O'....I don't..." Jimmy laughed, unable to keep a straight face. She took a shuddered breath. She needed to calm down. She kept getting herself worked up and it seemed to be causing her to fight to catch her breath. She was furious.

"You never did answer my question, Ms. Lane. The people of Metropolis want to know—"

The familiar embrace of her husband wrapping his hands around her waist from behind caught her by surprise, "Mr. Dunning, I think Lois has already said enough to you," She looked back at him and saw his eyes narrowed at Dunning.

"Clark!" She beamed; leaning up to give him a peck on the lips. His arms tightened around her waist protectively as he stared Dunning down.

"Mister...Mister Kent..." Dunning stuttered. Obviously, he had not expected to run into Clark.

"You should be going..." Clark said. Anger reflected through his eyes as he narrowed them at Dunning. He'd probably seen what Dunning had done earlier, Lois thought.

"Yeah, what CK said." Jimmy chipped in.

"I'm just trying to do my job," Dunning explained.

"By harassing my wife?" Clark countered. "Shouldn't you be working on your follow-up about 'Cross-Dressing Cousins'?"

Lois couldn't help but smile at Clark's last comment. Yes, he'd definitely seen what had happened earlier. Normally Clark was very professional when dealing with fellow reporters but it seemed even he had his limits. He was uncharacteristically rude with Dunning as he confronted him about his remarks. "How much are

you getting paid to spread this pathetic of an excuse of a smear campaign? Aren't you worried about losing what's left of your credibility when it gets exposed for the lie it is... which I can personally guarantee it will be."

Lois felt a little flushed. Everything around her was spinning. She leaned back against Clark's solid form, tightening her hands around his arm. Dunning's counter to Clark echoed through her mind as she took a deep breath, "My job is to expose the truth...as ugly as it is..."

"Lois??" Jimmy's voice echoed around her as she fell back against Clark.

"Cl..." She could feel everything continue to spin around her as her body lowered to the ground.

Clark was by her side, cradeling her in his arms as she tried to focus on everything around her. "Lois, what's wrong?"

"I..." She wheezed out. She couldn't focus. Everything around her was blurry fading in and out in bright blotches of color and darkness.

"Get that camera out of here!" Jimmy's voice echoed around her. "Can't you give her some breathing room?"

The echo of Clark's voice ran through her mind. "You have two seconds to get that camera out of here before you have to have it surgically removed..."

"Yeah, get the hell out of here..." Jimmy added.

"Lois??" Clark's voice echoed around her again.

"Clark...I can't...dizzy..." she mumbled incoherently.

Clark nodded, wrapping his arms around her. "Are you okay to move?"

Lois shook her head, "I don't know..."

She felt Clark scoop her up as he spoke, "Jimmy, I'm going to take Lois to the hospital." He placed her inside the Jeep and then turned to face their young friend, "Can you get back to the Planet all right?"

She didn't hear Jimmy's response. The images around her began to blur once more, and soon she gave into the darkness that seemed to block out everything around her.

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Randy Goode sat at his desk, pouring himself a glass of bourbon. He had Superman exactly where he wanted him. The peace negotiations would break down, and war would be soon to follow. Superman would be blamed for the war and would soon be pushed out of Metropolis.

\*\*\*

Lois stirred, hearing the monotone beep beside her bed. She opened her eyes partly and saw Clark sitting in a chair next to her, slumped over in his sleep. His glasses were slightly askew, and his clothes were rumpled.

She rolled over delicately and reached out to adjust his glasses. He stirred from his sleep and yawned slightly. "Lois?"

"Morning, sunshine." She smiled at him.

He took her hand in his own and kissed her knuckles. "How are you feeling?"

"Mmm...better...I think," she murmured. "What happened?"

"You passed out, by the time I got you to the hospital. I would have gotten you here sooner if that Barry Dunning hadn't been there," Clark apologized.

"I know." She stroked his face as he spoke to her.

"The doctors took some blood about an hour ago. The test results haven't come in yet. They did say you were severely dehydrated but that was it..." He shot her a warning glare, "Honey, you've got to slow down... You scared me."

"I'm sorry..." Lois apologized. "I guess I forgot to eat...How long have I been here?"

"About three or four hours..."

"Are you serious???" Lois shot up from the bed.

"Knock, knock." The nurse opened the door and entered.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Kent?"

"I'm —I'm fine. I think," Lois replied. "What happened?"  
 "The doctor will be here in a few minutes with the test results. I'm just here to check your vitals." The nurse explained.

Just then a woman in her mid-thirties, wearing a white lab coat, appeared behind the nurse. "Uh, could you come back in a few minutes?"

"Sure." The nurse nodded and exited the room, closing the door behind her.

"I'm Dr. Weston." She offered her hand to the couple to shake. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay. I guess." Lois shrugged. "What happened?"

"Your body was having a negative reaction to the stress you were under. You really need to take it easy and make sure you're eating healthy and drinking plenty of water. We ran your blood through all the general tests. Your blood work came back positive for the HCG pregnancy hormone so you're going to need to..."

"WHAT??" Lois and Clark both asked in unison.

"I'm assuming you didn't know." Dr. Weston smiled with a knowing look.

"But...but this doesn't make any sense...I'm...I'm on the pill..." Lois stammered.

"The pill is not 100% effective." Dr. Weston smiled.

"Congratulations. Here is a prescription for some prenatal vitamins. You'll need to get in to see an OB/GYN. If you don't already have one, here is a list of the ones here in Metropolis." She handed them the list and prescriptions. "Good luck." She left Lois and Clark alone to absorb the newest information.

\*\*\*

"Wow," Clark murmured, unable to wipe the smile off his face. A baby. They were going to have a baby.

"Yeah," Lois said shakily.

Noticing her tone, he looked at her in concern. "You okay?" he asked.

"I...I don't know." Lois let out a long breath. "I—I think I'm kind of freaking out here."

"Honey..." Here it came. All the insecurities from her childhood.

"Clark, I...I can't be a mother...I'm not ready. WE aren't ready. We have only been married for a couple of months. Are we even ready for this? Oh, my God..."

"Lois, you're babbling." He smiled at her. She had brought up very good points but right now he was more interested in trying to keep her calm. She had already collapsed from the stress, they were both dealing with; he didn't want her dealing with any more stress than necessary. "Please, honey, just try to relax," Clark said. He kissed her lightly. "Can I get you anything? Something to drink or...or eat?"

"No. I'm fine. I'm just a bit freaked out...I mean, this added on with EVERYTHING else..."

"I know."

She smiled back at him. Hopefully, he could keep her calm. He knew she was terrified of the prospect of being a mother, but he also knew she would be wonderful. She seemed blind to her natural instinct with children. She had helped to raise her younger sister and had also broken down the barrier that Amy Valdez had built up around herself during the fiasco with Metamide 5. Then during Christmas two years ago she had warmed up the young orphan, Danielle...

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Samantha sifted through Lois Lane's medical file, trying to find something she could use to help destroy Superman's image even more. She squashed any incipient feelings of guilt and worked on the mission at hand. Most of the file was filled with notes of disapproval of not following up with the doctors, Lois constantly in danger, ... Wait! Blood tests...prescription for prenatal vitamins??

'No WAY! ....' Samantha smiled to herself. She could

definitely use this. Lois Lane was pregnant.

\*\*\*

Jimmy groggily picked up his phone; he placed the game he had been playing on pause. "Hello?"

"Jimmy? You there?" Clark asked.

"Yeah, CK. I'm here. What's up?"

"I need you to try and find everything you can about Randy Goode."

"The philanthropist? Why?"

"I just got a feeling something isn't right with him. He was deliberately trying to sabotage Superman with President Kasparov and General Navance this evening—I want to know why."

"Uh, right. So, you talked to Superman? Is he doing okay?"

"Yeah, Jimmy, he's fine."

"How's Lois?"

"She's fine. She forgot to eat...That combined with everything..."

"I guess we're not going to try to go over to Hank's Photo Lab, huh?"

"No. You and I are going to head over there. Lois is going to stay here whether she likes it or not. I'll be over there in five. Be ready."

"Wait, CK!" Jimmy stared at the phone in disbelief. Clark had already hung up. "Well, better get ready," he muttered to himself.

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"This place is so cool! Check it out! Digital composers..." Jimmy continued looking around the lab.

"Yeah, but there's nothing here about Superman," Clark observed.

"I can check the computer files. They should have a digital memory of at least the last month...just give me a minute."

Clark scanned through the invoices. "Dirt Digger's been doing a lot of business with them. Huh? The invoice is addressed to Goode International..."

Jimmy looked at the invoice and smiled. "I guess that's a start..."

"Yeah, but we're going to need a lot more than this to bring him down."

"Bring him down?"

"I think he's behind this whole scandal."

"Yeah, but why? I mean, he seems like such a stand-up guy."

"So did Bill Church and Lex Luthor. Look at what happened to them," Clark pointed out. "Anything?"

"This whole hard drive is encrypted. I'm going to need more time to access the files..."

"Save the files to disk. We don't have a lot of time. Anybody could walk in—"

"Yeah. Just give me twenty minutes?"

Clark nodded in agreement. He knew what they needed had to be on the hard drive. Jimmy just had to access it.

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"So, Randy, what's the plan now?" Mindy asked as she puffed on her cigar. "When is Superman going to leave Metropolis?"

"I'm working on it, Mindy. These things take time. You never were a patient person."

"I want him out of Metropolis! He's had his fun. Now it's my turn!"

Randy rolled his eyes at his sister's immaturity. "Don't worry. Pretty soon Superman won't be able to show his face anywhere."

\*\*\*

Hank Jackson read the headline of the Dirt Digger as he drank his beer. He tried to squash any feelings of guilt. He had gotten a mother, and father killed because of his drinking. He had helped to destroy Superman's image. He couldn't stand to look at himself... he was 19 years old, and he had single-handedly destroyed so many lives. He reached for another beer in the fridge...

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"I'm not following..." Clark shook his head in disgust as he paced in front of Inspector Henderson's desk.

"Okay," Henderson leaned back in his chair, folding his hands in his lap, trying to reflect a calm he didn't feel. Clark Kent had come to him with accusations of voyeurism against Randy Goode. The problem was it was legal. "You and Lois are both considered public figures. Legally anyone can photograph, tape, or record you without your permission..." At Clark's aghast look he held his hands up, "to an extent."

"There has to be something we can do..." Clark shook his head angrily as he continued to pace. "He had tapes of every intimate conversation...and God knows what else...not just of us...our friends too... There has to be something we can do."

Henderson shook his head, "If you had these conversations in a public place he's within the letter of the law."

"What about our rights to privacy?" Clark fumed angrily.

"That's where it's dicey. If he put cameras or video anywhere you expect to have privacy...restrooms, inside restaurants that prevent paparazzi from entering the establishment, your home...your bedroom..." At Clark's anguished face he continued more softly, "I can't do anything without proof he crossed that line. If he did we can throw him in jail along with whatever photographers or paparazzi he worked with...but from what you're saying...No law has been broken. I'm sorry."

Clark sighed, raking a hand through his hair for the hundredth time that night, "What am I supposed to tell Lois?"

Henderson shook his head, "I don't know. I wish I could help you, but right now my hands are tied. I personally think what this guy is doing is deplorable..."

"They're not stopping," Clark said. "They're camped outside our home. There had to be at least 50 photographers there when Lois and I got home earlier..."

"Are they on the property or on the curb?" Henderson edged.

"The curb," Clark spat bitterly.

Henderson sighed, hanging his head in defeat, "You know the law..."

"Yeah, well I don't have to like it." Clark shook his head in disgust. "That Barry Dunning was harassing Lois and Jimmy earlier... she'd literally collapsed and he still wouldn't get the damn camera out of her face...What would have happened if I hadn't been there?"

Henderson sighed. The problem was Clark was right, but there was no law on the books he could use to fight this. "I heard what happened. Is she okay?"

"She'll live," Clark said quietly, "This isn't right. There has to be some law...somewhere we can use to stop them..."

"There is one method that's worked in the past..." Henderson began, pulling a pen out and writing on the notepad in front of him.

"What?"

"Lawsuit..." Henderson grinned happily.

"Lawsuit?" Clark repeated skeptically.

"Hit 'em where it hurts," Henderson winked.

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Lois rolled over in her bed and reached out for Clark only to find an empty space. "Clark?" She got up from the bed and frowned; looking down at the negligee she wore. She felt a slight chill in the air and reached for the robe that hung on the bedroom door. Still, no sign of him.

She was about to open the door to explore the rest of the townhome when she felt him wrap his arms around her waist from behind. "You're supposed to be resting."

She turned to face him, "Where have you been?"

"Uh..." He offered her a boyish grin. That meant trouble. She arched her eyebrow at him, waiting impatiently for an answer. "I went over to Hank's Photo Lab with Jimmy..." He explained sheepishly.

Lois angrily paced around the bedroom, confronting Clark. "You went to Hank's Photo Lab without me. How could you, Clark? We're supposed to be a team."

"You were still asleep. I wanted to get in there and see if I could find anything we could use to prove this photograph is a fake," Clark explained.

"Did you?" She countered.

"I think so. The hard drive was encrypted Jimmy's working on it right now..." Clark explained.

"Great."

"I did find something out, though," Clark edged cautiously.

"What?"

"Randy Goode is the one footing the bill for the Dirt Digger."

Lois shook her head in disgust. "That doesn't necessarily mean anything. It could just be someone that works for him that started this. Goode International is one of the largest media empires right now. He may not even realize what is being printed. I mean, he was runner-up for the International Peace Prize..."

"Lois, he deliberately tried to sabotage Superman in front of the leaders of Latislan and Podansk." He said softly.

"What?"

"He had this tape..."

Dread filled her eyes. "What kind of tape?"

"Honey, someone's been watching us. Someone's been watching...and taping..."

Lois covered her mouth in shock, "Oh, my God! It...it wasn't when we were...?"

"No, no, nothing like that," Clark quickly reassured her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

Tapes. There were tapes of her and Clark. Someone had been following them and...

Lois did her best to suppress the fury that was threatening to boil over as she imagined how many intimate conversations she and Clark had had that could have been caught on tape.

"Well, if he wants to come after us then I'm game," She said, heading towards their walk in closet. She opened the door and began sifting through her outfits, trying to find something to change into, "Get Jimmy to pull up everything he can on Randy Goode and Goode International,"

"I'm already way ahead of you. Jimmy's already working on that," Clark reassured her, following her into the closet, "What do you think you're doing?"

"I can't sit here and do nothing. I'm going to head over to the Planet and see what I can dig up." She pulled one of her suits off its hanger.

Clark shook his head and took the suit from her. "Oh, no, you're not."

"Clark, I want to find who's behind all of this. They're out there trying to discredit you and..."

Her argument was met with a stern look from her husband.

"Lois, you just got out of the hospital. You are NOT going anywhere tonight and that is final."

"Clark..." Lois pouted, pleading with him.

He could be so stubborn at times. Clark crossed his arms defiantly, "I don't want to hear it. I am putting my foot down, Lois. You have been pushing yourself too hard. You need to take it easy. Please, Lois If not for your sake, then do it for our baby's." He placed a protective hand over her abdomen to reinforce his point.

Lois relented immediately. "Clark, that's not fair,"

"I just want you to rest." He whispered, lowering his mouth to meet hers.

"Clark, doing my job is not going to hurt the baby," Lois murmured against his lips.

He slowly broke away from her and sighed, "I know. Lois, but you scared me tonight. I didn't know what to do. If anything ever happened to you I would die. I don't know what I would do if I

ever lost you.”

It was hard to argue when he was like this. He was scared for her health and the baby's. She knew she'd had a scare tonight, but she still wanted to see what she could find out on Goode International. If he was behind this scandal, she wanted to know why. She and Clark had been living in a nightmare ever since that photograph had made its way to the cover of the tabloids, and she wanted it nipped in the bud sooner rather than later. Besides, now that she knew she was pregnant she could take the precautions to protect herself and her unborn child.

She opened her mouth to respond only to have her lips covered with his. His hand cupped her cheek softly, holding her close as he slowly broke off the kiss; resting his forehead against hers. She could see the anxiety written all over his face as he tightened his arms around her. He let out a sigh of relief and she leaned up to stroke his cheek, “Clark, I'm fine. We're going to be fine. You worry too much.”

“I love you so much...” He murmured.

She smiled, leaning up to kiss him. He deepened the kiss, holding her tightly against him. All thoughts of Randy Goode and his schemes left her mind as she had more important things to focus on at the moment.

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“Do you realize how much our lives are going to change?” Lois asked, linking her arms around her husband's neck.

“Yeah, but for the better.” He kissed her lightly on the head, releasing her from his embrace. He scooped her into his arms and carried her over to their bed and lay them down on it. She sighed, snuggling up to him and resting her cheek against his chest. He looked down at her in concern, “Are you still worried about having this baby?”

She sighed, “I'm not worried about HAVING the baby...I just don't know how we're going to handle the responsibility of a child. I mean, our lives are already complicated enough as it is. And if we don't get this scandal nipped in the bud soon...I don't know, Clark.”

Clark hugged her close, “Honey; I know it will be hard, but we'll figure everything out. If I have to cut back on my Superman duties, then so be it. Lois, you and this baby...you mean everything to me. You have no idea how happy you've made me. Having a family with you is everything I've ever dreamed of. Thank you. I know it will be hard, but we'll get through this together. We will expose whoever is behind this scandal...”

“Clark, you know that's going to be easier said than done. Look at how fast its spread already. What a mess.” Lois muttered angrily.

“I may have some thoughts on that.” Clark said quietly. “I was talking to Henderson and...”

“Henderson?” Lois looked back at him in surprise. “When did you see Henderson?”

“After I dropped Jimmy off,” he continued, “...Anyway, there isn't much on laws to protect us against people like Barry Dunning but there is plenty on the civil side we can do...”

“Lawsuit?” Lois looked at him incredulously. “Are you serious?”

“As a last resort.” Clark said. “...but yeah, if they don't quit then I'm more than willing to file one against everyone of them if I have to.”

“Hopefully we don't have to.” Lois said quietly. “Maybe once we get this scandal exposed things'll go back to normal?”

Clark nodded. “Superman's going to get these warhorses to sign this peace treaty, and then we'll work on getting things back to normal.”

“Whatever's normal for us?” Lois muttered as she snuggled into Clark's arms. They fell into a restless sleep, each wondering what the next day would bring.

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Hank Jackson sat in his garage, staring off into space. He had been approached with another project. He had no choice. He had to do as Randy Goode said otherwise his father, his brother, everyone he cared about could be killed. Randy Goode was a powerful man.

He grabbed another beer as he continued to try and drown out the voice of his conscience. He knew what he was doing was wrong. Superman didn't deserve this. Lois Lane and Clark Kent didn't deserve this either, but what was he to do?

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Lois and Clark walked through the bullpen hand-in-hand, ignoring the cold stares and shoulders they encountered.

“Guys?” Jimmy called as he approached them, newspaper in hand.

“Morning, Jimmy. Did you have any luck deciphering that hard drive?” Clark asked.

“I'm about 50 percent done; I had to balance it with researching Randy Goode. I have good news, and I have bad news. You guys better take a look at this.” He revealed a tabloid headline. ‘Lane and Kent's Marriage a Hoax! Cover-Up for Super Baby! Lois is With Child!’

“WHAT??” Lois and Clark cried out in unison.

“Do they EVER stop?” Lois cried out.

Clark grabbed the paper and threw it into his wastebasket, shaking his head in disgust. “What have you found out about Randy Goode?”

“Oh, you are going to LOVE me!” Jimmy pulled out a manila envelope. “Nobody has been able to find any solid proof, but there are a lot of theories going around. Randy Goode is a powerful man. The organization he owns used to be called Multi-World Communications. Ring any bells?”

“Intergang,” Lois replied bitterly. “I know they sold it off bits and pieces after the Churches were arrested.

“Not necessarily. It's the same exact company. It just has a new name and a new owner. Oh, and check this out. Multi-World Communications used to be called Lex Entertainment. Small world, huh?”

“Lex? So, what are you saying? Lex and Intergang were working together?”

“No. After Luthor jumped in '94 his company was sold off piece by piece. Bill Church stepped in and bought Lex Entertainment and used it as a front for his criminal organization as well as the Cost Mart stores.”

“So, if Goode International is Multi-World Communications...” Clark began.

“...then chances are he's also a part of Intergang?” Lois finished.

“Maybe. I need to do some more digging. Everyone is scared to say anything. Apparently, Mr. Goode has quite a temper on him.”

“The best criminals always do,” Lois replied dryly.

Clark flipped through the file. “He was raised in the Caribbean. Both parents were murdered. Oh, look at this. One sibling. A sister.”

“Who?” Lois asked.

“Mindy Goode Church,” Clark replied smugly.

“Are you kidding me?” Lois asked in shock. Her eyes widened as she took in the information. She could feel the story coming together and could sense this was definitely a big one. “Jimmy, stay on this. Find out what you can about his relationship with Mindy. I knew there was a reason I didn't trust her.”

“Lois, there's no proof that Mindy Church was running Intergang,” Clark replied.

“You had no proof against Lex Luthor when you went after him and look what came out. The man was a career criminal, and nobody knew it. Mindy is running Intergang with her brother. I just know it.” Lois smiled ear to ear. Her mood had definitely

lifted.

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Perry White watched from his office as Lois and Clark entered the newsroom and spoke with Jimmy. He had seen the newest story being printed on the tabloids cover. He knew the story about their marriage being a sham as well as the cover up for a Super baby was bologna, but he did wonder... he had seen the news story of Lois collapsing last night. Could she be pregnant?

Deciding to get to the bottom of the mystery, he stuck his head outside his office door and bellowed across the newsroom, "Lois, Clark, my office!"

Lois and Clark looked at one another bewildered. Neither one of them knew what Perry wanted this time. By the look on Perry's face, it couldn't be good news.

"What is it, Chief?" Clark asked as he closed the door behind himself and Lois.

"I, uh, I assume you all saw that trash that was in this morning's rag?" Perry asked as he took a seat at his desk.

"Yeah. Jimmy showed it to us this morning, Perry," Lois replied. She had a bite in her voice. The intrusion into her and Clark's private lives was definitely getting to her.

"I want you to know I do not believe that garbage for a minute. Anyone with half a hemisphere can see that all of that is tabloid trash."

"Thanks, Chief," Clark said as he held Lois close to him.

"However, I do have one concern. I, uh, I saw the Barry Dunning show last night. Are you okay, Lois?"

"I'm fine, Perry. It was just stress pains..."

"The doctors said it was stress combined with exhaustion," Clark said. He was trying to steer the conversation elsewhere. He wasn't comfortable with opening up about Lois' pregnancy right now. He and Lois hadn't even discussed telling people yet. Especially not right now. With the gossip flying around people were sure to try and label Lois as an adulterer even more...and worse yet, their child would be linked to Superman...putting him or her in danger. Criminals would be coming out of the woodwork trying to target Lois and their unborn child even more than they already did.

"Uh-huh. Well, 'stress pains' are often an indication of other things. I remember when Alice started getting what we thought were stress pains. It was when I first became editor of the Daily Planet. I had been working long hours. We barely could see each other. She was working on the city beat. A lot of stress. She ended up having to go into the hospital... You, uh, need to take it easy..." Perry warned.

Lois immediately recognized where this story was going.

"Perry, I'm fine, really..."

"You didn't look 'fine' to me," Perry responded gruffly. "Now, I know the last few days have been rough on the both of you but you can't push yourself like that... Speaking of which, do either one of you have any leads on who is behind this?"

"We don't have anything concrete, but I spoke with Superman, and he told me Randy Goode had tried to arrange peace treaty negotiations between the leaders of Latislan and Podansk." Clark said grimly.

"Well, there's nothing wrong with that," Perry replied.

"He arranged the meeting by telling them Superman would be there to explain everything then spent the whole time trying to discredit him. All the while forgetting to invite Superman to the meeting."

"What? That doesn't make any sense." Perry shook his head, "Randy Goode?"

"Exactly," Lois chimed in. "We had Jimmy do a background check on him and found a connection."

"A connection to what?" Perry asked curiously.

"Intergang. Mindy Church is his little sister. He runs these tabloid papers. The news stations that run these talk shows like

that Barry Dunning character..."

"Wait a minute, are you saying this Randy Goode is working for Intergang?"

"No, I'm saying I think he's running it WITH his sister."

"Do you have any proof?"

"Not yet, but we're working on it," Lois said. "The day before this 'photograph' was published a photo lab received a huge deposit. Jimmy copied everything on the hard drive and is now working on decoding the encrypted files. We just need to find the evidence to prove that photograph was a fake."

"Well, that would take care of the scandal," Perry began. "But, Lois, you do realize this thing has already spread—someone is going to have to hold a press conference and show the world what a dirtbag this guy is."

"Why would we need to hold a press conference? Isn't publishing the exoneration enough?"

"Not anymore, Lois. This scandal has been spread throughout the media by television and the internet as well as newspaper. It's out of control. Now, someone has to nip this in the bud. Otherwise, there may be no way of salvaging your reputations—or Superman's, for that matter."

Lois and Clark stared at one another as the realization of the damage that had been done began to sink in.

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Jimmy Olsen sat at his desk working on trying to hack into the system of Hank's Photo Lab. He had deciphered some of the work but was still unable to access any photographs. All he was able to view right now was financial statements.

"Excuse me, do you know where I can find Lois Lane and Clark Kent?" a young man stood before Jimmy Olsen, clutching a manila envelope as he looked around nervously.

"Hey, aren't you the guy that--" Jimmy immediately recognized the man from the police file on the accident, he and Lois had been covering the day before.

"Hank Jackson. My name is Hank Jackson. I know. You probably recognize me from my mug shot the other day." The man struggled to maintain his balance. His face was worn and there was a hint of tears in the corners of his eyes.

"Right." Jimmy stood up and brought a chair to the man.

"Why don't you sit down? I'll go get Lois and CK."

"Thank you."

Jimmy headed for Perry's office and opened the door. "Lois? CK?"

"Jimmy, can't you knock?" Perry was exasperated. "We're in the middle of something here."

"Sorry, Chief, but there's a guy... Hank Jackson... he asked to see Lois and CK."

"Hank Jackson? Isn't that the guy who was arrested for drunk driving and vehicular homicide from the accident the other day?" Clark asked.

"Yeah. He's sitting at my desk right now. What should I do?"

"Send him to the conference room. We'll be in there in a few minutes." Lois replied. "Perry? We'll finish this later?" Perry nodded in agreement as the duo left his office.

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Samantha watched from her corner of the newsroom as the exchange between Lois, Clark and Hank Jackson played out. They were getting too close. She had to do something. If Randy Goode found out, she had faked that photograph, she was sure to meet a fate, not unlike that of her late co-worker, Scott Johnson.

No, something had to be done. She reached into her purse and pulled out a 9mm and headed for the conference room.

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Lois and Clark entered the conference room, closing the door behind them. "Mr. Johnson?" Lois inquired.

"Yes." The man stood up as the duo approached him.

"You said you needed to see us? What is this about?" Lois

inquired.

"It's about the-the supposed scandal. It's a fake. The whole thing is a fake. I am so sorry. He keeps getting greedier and greedier. He wants more and more. I - I can't be a part of this. If he finds out—my whole family could be in danger. You have to help me."

"Okay, back up. Who is getting greedier? What are you a part of? And why would your family be in danger?" Lois shot the questions out one after another.

"I was approached a few days ago with a photo of you two ... together." Hank looked at the ground as he blushed slightly.

"What kind of photo?" Clark asked.

"It was obvious you two were...you know?" Hank's face was beet red at this point. "Anyway, I was approached with this photo and a publicity shot of Superman. They wanted to create a scandal against Superman. When I said 'no' they threatened me."

"Who threatened you?" Clark asked.

"She worked for him."

"Who?" Lois asked.

"Randy Goode."

"Where is the photo?" Lois asked.

Hank pulled out the manila envelope he had been carrying with him and opened it up. The first photograph was of Lois and Clark in an embrace on the bed at Chateau Roberge. Clark lay on top of Lois, his hand reaching for the hem of her sweater. While Lois was fully dressed in the picture, Clark was only in his trousers and an unbuttoned black shirt.

"Oh, my God, Clark..."

"Lois..."

They looked at one another then back at the photograph. Someone had been watching them. Someone had photographed them while they had been making love. Lois self-consciously tugged at her suit jacket, pulling it close around her as Clark wrapped a supportive arm around her waist.

They flipped through the stack of photos and papers and found a picture that had been edited. It was another photograph of Lois and Clark at Chateau Roberge. A large black box had been placed over her chest and her and Clark's intimate areas. Clark lay on the bed; Lois sat straddled on him, their lips locked with one another.

Lois flushed as she looked at the photo. Someone had the negatives of these photographs. Pictures of her and Clark ...no clothes...nothing to protect them from prying eyes...

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Clark swallowed the bitterness he felt begin to envelop him. Someone had been watching him and Lois. He would find out whom, and he would make sure these photographs never saw the light of day ever again. The intimacy he felt with Lois whenever they shared their bodies with one another had been turned into something tawdry...dirty--it made him sick. He and Lois had nothing to be ashamed of, and this photographer had turned their lovemaking into something shameful. Who would do such a thing?

The next photograph was that of a publicity shot of Superman. The one after was a copy of the faked photo of Lois and Superman together.

Clark angrily threw the stack on the table and glared at the young man. "Who took these?"

"I don't know. I never got a name."

"What do you mean you never got a name? What kind of business are you running?" Lois inquired.

"It's my dad's business. I just do some work for him from time to time," Hank began. He took a step back, frightened of the anger he could see reflected in Clark's eyes.

"Do you know what they looked like?" Lois asked.

"Yeah. I remember what she looked like."

"She?" Clark repeated, curiously. Maybe it wasn't Randy Goode behind the scandal after all.

"Yeah, it was a woman."

"What kind of person would...would do such a thing?" Lois asked shaking her head in dismay.

"I don't know," Clark said solemnly.

Samantha closed the door behind her, and the duo looked in her direction as she pulled out the gun she had been concealing in her jacket pocket. "I don't know. Who would do such a thing?" She trained the gun on Hank Jackson; a look of anger flashed through her eyes.

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Randy Goode stared at the large lead box that sat on his desk. "What is this?"

"Kryptonite. Don't you read the papers?" Mindy replied.

"He's going to suspect something if I have a chunk of Kryptonite just lying around."

"Randy, I want Superman taken care of by any means necessary. Those nosy reporters are getting too close to my company. My men are telling me that they've begun investigating Goode International. How is that supposed to make me feel? You promised you would get Superman out of Metropolis permanently..."

"You can't just wait until he gets pushed out of Metropolis? I mean everyone hates him...with this new story about him knocking up Lois Lane...I'm sure he won't last long."

"Your story is a fraud. You should do your homework better. Your little photographer faked the photo."

"What? No, she didn't. She said she saw them..."

"She's a liar. She did take a pretty steamy picture of Lois Lane...but she was with her husband. Get with the program. Scandal against Superman...not working. Superman needs to go. Kryptonite is the best way to get rid of him. While you're at it, you can take care of those pesky reporters as well."

Randy sulked, "You never let me have any fun."

"If you would like you can cut him up into little pieces after he's vulnerable enough and throw him into the river..." Mindy shrugged. "I know you like to do things messy."

Randy watched his sister leave and sighed grudgingly. She was right. He hated it when she was right. He had to take care of Superman and those reporters. He sent the Kryptonite over to Intergang's science lab to have it cut into bullets. He then called the representatives for both President Kasparov and General Navance and asked them to meet him in his office. Their deaths would be blamed on Superman, of course, because he was responsible for the peace treaties and both sides had been contacted under the impression that the meeting had been arranged by Superman. It was brilliant. Then when Superman's reputation was destroyed, he would put the Man of Steel out of his misery.

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Jimmy Olsen stared at his screen entranced. He had finally done it. He had found the photograph that had been used to create the scandal against Superman. It was a photograph of Lois and Clark in an intimate embrace. The setting was the same. The position was the same. The only thing different was Clark had been replaced with an image of Superman.

Jimmy shook his head in disgust. What kind of person would do such a thing? He looked at the photograph thoughtfully. He could see the love in Lois' eyes as she looked at Clark. The passion in her eyes was evident. The desire and love in Clark's eyes was apparent as well. It was funny. This was the first time he had seen a picture of Clark without his glasses. He looked a lot like Superman, but not quite. Superman had a bigger forehead... maybe. He wasn't sure.

He looked up from his screen when he heard the conference room door open. Who was this Hank guy? Nobody had come out of the conference room yet, but someone had gone in.

Why was that new girl from research going into the conference room? And why did she shut the door behind her? He

got up from his desk and headed towards the conference room to investigate.

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"You." Lois recognized the woman immediately.

"Yes. So, you're not my idol," Samantha mocked.

"What do you want?" Clark asked as he stepped protectively in front of Lois. He was prepared to catch any bullets if the new intruder decided to fire.

"Isn't it obvious, Mr. Kent? I think you and Ms. Lane, here are getting a little too curious. I can't have you ruining my employment with Intergang. I've never seen so much money in my life. I'm not going to throw all of that away just because the photograph I happened to submit to Dirt Digger was a fake." Samantha eyed them coldly then turned to Hank Jackson, "I warned you what would happen to you if you squealed. Do you have any idea who you're dealing with? You think you can cross Intergang?" She cocked the trigger and aimed the gun at Hank. "You need a witness to back up his evidence. Say good night, Mr. Johnson."

Clark aimed a beam of heat vision on the handle of the gun she held. The heat began to spread throughout the metal. "OW!" The hot metal caused Samantha's hand to contract involuntarily. The pistol discharged.

At that same moment, Jimmy Olsen opened the door, knocking Samantha down. Clark caught the bullet a few seconds before it made contact with Hank Jackson's arm. He quickly moved his arm away and ducked his head. He looked around the office and shrugged. "I guess she's a bad shot?"

Jimmy grabbed Samantha by the arm and took the gun from her. "What's going on here?"

"Let me go!" Samantha cried out.

"No way!" Jimmy said as he tightened the grip on her. "Lois? CK? Are you guys all right?"

Lois nodded, leaning into Clark's protective embrace. "We're fine, Jimmy."

Clark released Lois and approached Jimmy hesitantly. He grabbed a pen from his pocket and picked up the gun from the floor, placing it on the table. "Apparently, we're getting close."

"Yeah, I found the picture on the database. I've downloaded the information, and I've copied it to disk for evidence." Jimmy replied.

"Uh, exactly what picture did you find?" Lois asked nervously.

Jimmy smiled. "Don't worry. Everything's covered. I hid parts of the picture that were...inappropriate for...uh, the public to see...Anyway, nobody will be ogling...CK, you've got to tell me how you do it...Long hours at the Planet and you still have time to work out..." Jimmy explained.

"Uh, yeah..." Clark replied trying to avoid going into too much detail about his physique.

Lois and Clark both felt relief wash over them when Jimmy revealed the latest news. Even though the world saw Superman in revealing spandex every day that didn't mean Clark was comfortable with the world seeing him exposed like that. Clark was uncomfortable with anyone but his wife seeing him like that.

"You...conniving, self-righteous bitch! When I get through with you, you're great-grandchildren are going to need a lawyer!" Lois snapped angrily.

Samantha just smiled back smugly. "Guilty as charged. I thought you were meeting Superman and thought I'd catch it on film, but you disappointed me, Lois." Her last remark was met with a slap across the face. Samantha laughed. "Did I hit a nerve?"

"Get her out of here," Lois said as she shoved Samantha back against the wall. "...or she'll be leaving in a body cast..."

Jimmy struggled to keep a grip on her as he led her out of the conference room and headed towards the security desk.

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Lois watched Jimmy lead Samantha away and shook her head in disgust. "What do we do now?" Clark picked up the phone and began to dial. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to set up a meeting with President Kasparov and General Navance. If this doesn't prove this is a smear campaign I don't know what will."

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Randy Goode opened the lead-lined box in front of him and began loading his gun with the Kryptonite bullets. His meeting with the leaders of President Kasparov and General Navance had been canceled and now he had to move things a little more quickly than necessary. Mindy wanted Superman eliminated and disappointing her was not something he wanted to do. With Superman gone, he and Mindy would be able to take over Metropolis. Intergang would rise once more, and the people of Metropolis would be at their mercy.

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General Navance and President Kasparov sat in the Metropolis Hotel's Penthouse awaiting the arrival of Superman.

"Where is he?" General Navance asked as he paced around the room. President Kasparov just shrugged.

The doors to the Penthouse opened revealing Jimmy Olsen with a file in his hands and Lois and Clark behind him. Clark nodded to the leaders, "General, Mr. President; my name is Clark Kent. This is my wife Lois Lane and this," he gestured to Jimmy, "is James Olsen. He is the Daily Planet's head researcher. We have information on this smear campaign that has been spreading throughout Metropolis the last few days."

Jimmy opened the folder and began showing the leaders the photographs. "Just keep in mind I had to block certain aspects of these photos for modesty reasons, but as you can see here the photo here of Lois and Superman was, in fact, a picture of Lois and CK. We have a sworn statement from the gentleman who actually worked on this picture. He was paid by Goode International."

"Goode? As in...?" General Navance began to piece the information together.

"Randy Goode," Lois confirmed.

"But why? Why would he do such a thing?" President Kasparov asked.

"Why don't you ask him?" Randy Goode asked as he entered the room holding a gun on the group as he closed the door behind him.

"What is the meaning of this? Put that gun away." President Kasparov demanded.

"I can't do that. If I put the gun away, then how am I going to kill Superman?" Randy replied.

The bodyguards of the two men approached Randy and reached for their weapons only to be shot down in cold-blood by Randy before Clark could even move in their direction. "Anyone else feel like being a hero?"

Clark glanced at Lois, who gave him a warning glare. He knew there was no way he could try anything right now. There were too many people in the room. He couldn't risk being exposed and putting Lois and the baby at risk. If this scandal had taught him anything it had proven just how valuable his private life was; both as Superman and as Clark Kent.

No one responded to Randy Goode's question and he smirked at them, "I didn't think so."

"Why? Why would you k-kill Superman?" General Navance asked in disbelief.

"Oh, that's simple. He is getting in the way of good business. With him, gone Intergang can take control of Metropolis and finally reclaim its position as the most notorious criminal organization in the world."

"You're insane," Lois said in disbelief.

"Maybe. Or maybe I'm just smart enough to see what a

nuisance Superman really is to our society. Either way, I get what I want because I'm the one holding the gun. Comprene?"

Clark moved protectively in front of Lois preparing himself to catch any bullets that might be fired.

"Please, Gentlemen, sit down. I know it gets harder to stand in your old age." Randy gestured at the chairs at the Conference Table. The leaders took their seats, keeping a watchful eye on Randy. "I wouldn't recommend getting up." He said as he hit a button on the remote control in his hand, "One move and boom! You'll find yourselves as charcoal briquettes... not the most pleasant future." Randy laughed.

He turned to Lois and Clark. "You know; I thought I would have been able to push Superman out with this scandal—then it turns out, there was no scandal. Too bad. Making Superman leave Metropolis like that would have been delicious. However, I couldn't do that because he never had an affair with you. Did he, Ms. Lane?"

Lois just stared at him in shock. This man was seriously unhinged. He had created this scandal for the sole purpose of getting rid of Superman. She and Clark had been ridiculed and shunned. Even with all the adversity they had faced, not once had the thought of leaving Metropolis ever occurred. Where would Randy get such an idea?

"It's not too late, Randy. You don't have to do this," Clark tried to plead with him.

"Oh, yes, I do. I want to kill people and ruin lives. That's what I do."

"What about all those charities you helped out with - are you saying all of that was a facade?" Clark asked. He was desperate to try to touch at least a part of the humanistic side of Randy and make him rethink his actions.

"I was trying to win the International Peace Prize. I had to do good things. Do you think I did that because I liked it? NO!" Randy raised the gun and aimed it at Lois. "You know for a while, I actually thought you WERE having an affair with Superman. I mean with all the publicity when he first came to town...you were always there, Ms. Lane. But my sister did quite a bit of research. It was quite surprising, Ms. Lane, to find out that you weren't the one that had the most interviews with Superman. It was actually your husband who had had that honor." A sinister look came over his eyes as the gun swayed back and forth between Lois and Clark.

"CK? Really?" Jimmy was surprised to discover this tidbit of information.

"Yes. You two must be best friends, huh, Mr. Kent? I mean, he's always there to save your wife whenever she's in danger, and he always is giving you these exclusives."

"Randy put the gun down," Clark pleaded. "You don't want to do this."

"Don't I?" Randy's eyes glazed over. A look of pure evil could be seen behind his eyes. He aimed the gun at Clark and fired.

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"Clark!" Lois screamed. Blood. Clark was bleeding. There was blood coming out of his shoulder. Only one thing could make him bleed.

Clark looked at his shoulder in shock. "K-Kryptonite?"

"Of course. How else did you think I was going to kill Superman?" Randy asked. "Haven't you been paying attention?"

Lois leaned down to check on Clark, but he pushed her away. Whispering, he said, "No. The radiation...the baby."

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"Baby?" Jimmy whispered to himself. He watched as Lois tended to Clark. She was pregnant. His friends were going to have a baby. Imagining Lois as a mother was hard, but not unreasonable.

"But Clark, you're bleeding..." Lois pleaded through her tears.

Jimmy was brought back to the present. Yes, his friends were

going to be parents, but neither of them would be able to enjoy that if they didn't get out of here.

"All right, Mr. Kent. Call your friend Superman—" Randy pointed the barrel of the gun directly in Clark's face.

"Go to hell..." Clark spat angrily, staring back at with a steely gaze.

"Oh, really?" Randy pulled out the remains of the Kryptonite out of a small lead box from his jacket pocket and struck Clark across the face with it. "Call him! Your friendship is not worth your life, Mr. Kent!"

"Leave him alone!" Jimmy stepped up standing between Clark and Randy Goode. Clark lay on the floor motionless. Jimmy noticed Lois slowly creeping towards Clark. He hoped they would be okay. Clark had been concerned about the radiation from the Kryptonite. Was it harmful to the baby? There was so much unknown about the substance. The only thing he knew for sure was that it was harmful to Superman.

"Oh, someone's trying to be a hero?" Randy smashed Jimmy with the Kryptonite as well, knocking him out cold next to Clark.

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Lois covered her mouth in horror as she watched Jimmy fall down next to her. She checked his breathing and sighed with relief. He was still breathing. She winced in pain as she knelt over him and knew that the baby was indeed affected by close proximity to Kryptonite. It was somewhere nearby, and she wasn't sure where. She edged away from Jimmy carefully, keeping a watchful eye on her surroundings as she did so.

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The General and President stared on in horror. Both were horrified at the sight before them. Randy Goode had seemed so trustworthy and wholesome. They had been duped by his lies. The man obviously cared nothing for the safety of the world or their countries.

General Navance felt a bitter bile rise in his throat. He had been so cruel to Superman; quick to judge something he knew nothing about. Where was Superman now? Would he even come to their rescue?

President Kasparov watched the scene numbly. His original judgment of Superman had been correct. He was a good man, now that good man was having his life, his friends...everything he stood for...ridiculed by the world. He empathized with the missing hero. He had fought for truth and justice the entire time he had been here. Now his friend was fighting for him...

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Randy grabbed Lois by the arm and pointed the barrel at her temple. "Scream, Ms. Lane. Scream 'Help Superman!' You've done it a thousand times before."

Lois stared at Clark's body slumped over on the floor. The blood was still coming out. His forehead was cut, and the Kryptonite bullet remained in his shoulder. An ominous green could be seen glowing through the dark blood that was seeping from his shoulder. Blood covered his glasses and was dripping into his hair.

"I said scream!" the barrel of the gun was pressed against her temple even harder.

"Help, Superman..." Lois squeaked out.

"You are a miserable, bitch, is that the best you can do?" He leaned down and pointed the barrel at her abdomen. "Say goodbye to any child that ever was."

In the corner of the room, Jimmy Olsen's cell phone had fallen out of his pocket and lay on the ground face down. The phone had dialed a number... Perry White's.

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Perry White sat at his desk editing the copy for the evening edition when his phone rang.

"White here," he said gruffly into the phone. There was no reply. He could hear voices in the background, though.

A woman was crying in the background. A man was yelling. He heard the man's next words loud and clear, though. "Scream, Ms. Lane. Scream 'Help Superman!'"

Perry White put the line on hold and switched over to the second line; dialing the all too familiar numbers of Inspector Henderson's office. He could switch to a different line to make phone calls to the police while staying connected to Jimmy's phone. Lois was obviously in trouble. He needed to get help, and he had a feeling it wouldn't be a good idea to call Superman in on this one. If someone wanted Lois to call for Superman it usually meant bad news for the Man of Steel.

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Bill Henderson sat impatiently at his phone tapping on his desk. Clark Kent had called him that morning telling him to keep a look out because they were planning on exposing Randy Goode as a criminal to the leaders of Latislan and Podansk. After the close call, they had experienced with Goode's photographer Kent hadn't wanted to take any chances. Henderson had placed two bodyguards from the Metropolis Police Department Dignitary Protection unit with the President and General to ensure everyone's safety, but he hadn't heard anything all afternoon and had a nagging feeling in the pit of his stomach. Something wasn't right.

As he was getting up to leave his phone rang. He leaped for the phone and answered it on pins and needles, hoping it was Lane or Kent calling to tell him everything was okay. "Henderson here." "Henderson? This is Perry White. I think Lois and Clark are in trouble. I just got the strangest call..."

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Clark slowly began to regain consciousness. He looked around the room as he suppressed a groan. His entire right side felt like it was on fire. The Kryptonite was burning him from the inside. Every muscle he tried to move was non-responsive. Everything hurt.

He glanced across the room to where Randy Goode stood in front of Lois with the barrel of his gun pointed at her abdomen.

'No.'

'The baby.'

He fought back tears as he struggled to move. The pain was unbearable, but he had to stop Randy Goode.

"Say goodbye to any child that ever was."

"NO!" Clark gave everything he had as he leaped forward, knocking Goode off balance. He held onto the adrenaline coursing through him as he wrestled Goode to the ground, struggling to gain control of his weapon.

He could feel the coursing pain of the poisonous meteorite stabbing at his insides as he fought Goode. This mad man would not win. He refused to let him. Even in his weakened state, he put up a valiant fight against Goode.

For the sake of his wife and child, he had to fight Goode off. If he didn't...

He threw another punch, diverting Goode as he swung at him once more. He did his best to ignore the pain he felt at each movement. Clark continued to throw punches at Goode, struggling to free the gun from Goode's grip but was unable to take control of the weapon. Every time, he felt the grip on the gun begin to loosen. Goode would throw another punch.

Clark was afraid he was fighting a losing battle that neither of them would win. His body was growing weaker and weaker as he fought, but he refused to give up. If that Kryptonite were to come in contact with his and Lois' unborn child, there was no telling what would happen. He had to keep this maniac at bay and away from Lois and their child. There was no telling what would happen if he didn't.

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Lois stared at the two in horror. She didn't know what to do. She looked around the room for something she could use against

Goode. She caught sight of the lead box that he had held the Kryptonite in. She shuddered at the mere thought of the meteorite. It was as dangerous to her as it was to her husband now. The life of her child had to come first at all costs. She cautiously looked around the room for the missing rock. If she could get that rock put away maybe Clark could start to heal a little and give him an upper hand.

She spotted the rock over by Jimmy and headed to him cautiously. She reached over Jimmy's slumped body and picked up the rock. Immediately, she felt a searing pain flow through her. She dropped it into the box and closed the lid, frantic for the pain to go away. The worst agony stopped, but a slight pain in her abdomen lingered on. She looked down at Jimmy and saw why. He had slivers of Kryptonite in his forehead. She moved away from him, desperate to get away from the poisonous rock.

She heard a loud noise from across the room and looked up. Randy Goode stood with the gun pointed straight at Clark. Clark was breathing heavily, staring down the barrel of the gun. "It's been fun, Mr. Kent. Say goodnight. Or do you want to scream for your friend, Superman?" at Clark's glare Randy shrugged. "No? You're a true friend, Mr. Kent. I'll give you that." He cocked the trigger and aimed...

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Bill Henderson and his SWAT team made their way through the lobby of the Metropolis Hotel, looking for signs of disturbance. After showing his badge to the manager and describing the situation, they isolated the Penthouse from the rest of the staff and guests and headed upstairs.

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"NO!" Lois, threw the lead box across the room, hitting Goode in the shoulder hard enough to throw him off balance. Clark took advantage of the situation and grabbed the gun from him, holding him at bay.

Goode smiled up at Clark. He pressed a button on a small remote in his hands. "Go ahead. This whole building will be leveled in 10 minutes anyway." Goode laughed.

Clark wasn't sure what to do. He glanced over at Lois, who was headed toward the table that had the bomb. He shook his head in dismay, "Lois, get away from there!"

"It won't hurt to try and disarm it. Besides with how many bombs I've dismantled, you should be used to this by now." Lois shrugged as she crept below the table.

"Unbelievable," Clark muttered under his breath. He took a deep breath, continuing to hold Randy Goode at bay. They needed to call the police. They needed...

He could feel his body weakening.

'No.'

He had to keep Randy Goode away from Lois.

'It hurt.'

"Police! On the ground!" Henderson called out as he entered the room.

"It's okay, Henderson, he's unarmed," Clark replied as he handed the gun to Bill Henderson. The room was beginning to spin. He tried to concentrate on the image of Bill Henderson's face, but everything around him was beginning to blur.

"Kent? Are you all right?"

"I... I'm fine. I just need to get this bullet out..." Clark fell to the ground in pain. Bill Henderson knelt beside him while two officers escorted Randy Goode away in handcuffs.

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"Hey, Clark? He didn't even turn the thing on. It's disarmed, so..." Lois stopped talking when she saw Clark slumped over in pain. "Clark?"

"Hey, Kent? Stay with me!" Henderson called. Lois stared on in horror as she watched Clark get loaded onto a gurney by two ambulatory attendants. Henderson looked at Lois, "Do you want to ride with him?" Lois nodded mutely, following the attendants out

of the door.

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Henderson looked around the room. He saw Jimmy Olsen struggling to sit up in one corner of the room. Two bodyguards lay in a pool of blood in the middle of the room, and the two leaders of Latislan and Podansk sat in cold fear at the conference table. "Does one of you want to tell me what happened?"

President Kasparov began to speak. "He wanted Superman. Mr. Kent and Ms. Lane...they refused to give him up. I've led many armies into war, and I've seen great courage...but I've never seen the courage Mr. Kent showed tonight. He took beating after beating in the name of loyalty and friendship—protecting his wife and child...and his friend...I've never seen anything like it in my life."

"And you probably never will. CK's one of a kind," Jimmy cut into the conversation as the medic finished bandaging him up. "I just hope he's going to be okay."

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"WHAT?" Mindy screamed into her phone. "I cannot believe him! He can't pull off a simple hostage situation? What is wrong with criminals these days?" Mindy huffed as she paced around her office. She had to move and fast. Her name and location had been compromised. Lois and Clark would come looking for her soon.

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Lois sat by Clark's bed softly massaging the bruises that were left from where the Kryptonite had struck him. They had removed all remnants of the Kryptonite from his system. Henderson had sent the Kryptonite over to STAR labs via Dr. Klein himself. He had assured her that he would make sure it was put into a safe place.

She'd been surprised at the lack of response from Bill Henderson. Usually, he was quick to whip out half a dozen questions in under a minute, but for some reason, he sensed not to push the issue. She was sure he knew what the substance was that the doctors had dug out of Clark's body, but the fact that he hadn't pressed the issue made her wonder just how much he knew about Kryptonite and its connection to Superman. She decided not to question it.

Clark hadn't woken up since he had passed out in the penthouse. He had exerted himself to his maximum limit and was paying the price now.

Perry knocked on the door softly. "How's he doing?"

Lois closed her eyes, willing the tears that were forming behind her eyes to go away. "He still hasn't woken up, Perry."

"Hey, Lois, he'll be fine. He's a fighter, and he's got way too much to live for to give up now," Perry said, placing a supportive hand on her shoulder.

"I-I've never seen him look so pale before."

"Keep your chin up, Lois. Think positive. When was the last time you ate?"

"Um, breakfast? I think—" Lois struggled to remember the last time she did eat. Clark had fixed them breakfast that morning after they had made love. She swallowed more tears as the memory came to her.

"Here," Perry handed her a handkerchief. "I didn't mean to hit a nerve, Lois. I just want to make sure you were taking care of yourself. Can I get you anything?" Perry asked.

"No." She shook her head, willing the tears to stay buried long enough until Perry left. She couldn't let anyone see her like this. The only one that had that privilege was Clark. "What I need is Clark. I appreciate you coming by, Perry. It's really thoughtful of you, but if you don't mind I'd really like to be alone with my husband."

Perry nodded, taking the hint. He knew this was hard on Lois. Clark had always been her rock. He kept her balanced and whenever he wasn't there she was continually a mess. He knew everything would work out in the end. It always did, but it still

hurt him to see Lois so distraught. He wished the reporters that made claims against Lois that her marriage to Clark was a fraud could see her now. There was no way you could fake the love that shone through her eyes when she looked at Clark. Perry closed the door behind him and headed for the cafeteria. Lois may have wanted to be alone right now, but he wasn't about to leave her completely alone just yet.

Inside the hospital room, Lois was talking to Clark as he slept. "Kinda ironic, huh? After all the messes, we've both been in you're the one that ends up in the hospital bed. I must have cheated fate thousands of times—you have no idea how much I need you, Clark. You have to wake up. Please?"

"Since when does Mad Dog Lane NEED anyone?" Clark asked groggily. His voice was hoarse. He winced in pain as he opened his eyes.

"Clark? Oh, my God!" Lois lay across his hospital bed, flinging her arms around his neck. She began covering his face with kisses. "You're okay."

"Mmm..." Clark smiled back, returning her kiss with enthusiasm. "Very okay. I could get used to waking up like this."

"How are you feeling? Are you in any pain?"

"I'm feeling no pain right now," he said, kissing her and pulling her close. "I'm still a little sore, but it'll go away in a few days. How's the baby?"

"Fine. The doctor took some blood to run some tests but said everything should be fine. You scared me, Clark. You passed out. They removed the bullet and all the shards of Kryptonite, and you still didn't wake up. I was so afraid that you..."

"I told you before; you aren't getting rid of me that easily," Clark said. She smiled back at him, and then the tears she had been suppressing took over, and she began to cry. He held her close and allowed her to release the emotions that had taken an obvious toll on her in the past few days. She felt relief wash over her, as she reveled in the fact that he was alive and well.

Perry knocked on the door, carrying a tray of food for Lois. "Lois? I know you said you wanted to be alone but..." Perry stopped mid-sentence when he opened the door and saw Lois and Clark. Lois smiled up at him, lifting her head up from Clark's chest. Perry smiled happily, "Great shades of Elvis! Son, you gave us quite a scare! Are you all right?" He was by their side within a few minutes.

"I'm fine, Chief," Clark replied good-naturally. "What have you gotten there?"

"I brought some food back for Lois. She said she hadn't eaten since breakfast, and I wasn't sure what to get her, so I brought back a little of everything."

"Oh, Perry, you didn't have to." Lois was touched that Perry had gone out of his way for her.

"Nonsense. You've been through hell, and you need to keep up your strength," Perry said as he laid the tray down on the table beside them.

"Thank you, Perry," Clark said.

Perry nodded. "Besides, I heard from a little birdy you're eating for two now..."

Lois' eyes widened as she looked back at Clark then back at Perry again, "Chief..."

Clark sighed sitting up to put an arm around Lois, "We're not really telling anyone yet... We just found out."

Perry nodded. "Might want to tell your birdy then,"

"Tweet tweet," Jimmy said behind Perry as he stepped into the room.

"Hey, Jimmy..." Clark smiled at his young friend. He noticed the bandage on Jimmy's head, "How's your head?"

"Better than yours..." Jimmy said pointing at the bruises that still covered Clark's face. "How you doing?"

"I've had better days," Clark muttered, rubbing the side of his head.

"Yeah, I'll bet," Perry said, giving Clark a stern look. "I can't believe that man. He nearly killed you trying to get to Superman. I still can't believe the fight you put up. Why didn't you just call for help? It would have saved you a lot of pain and aggravation."

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Clark wasn't sure how to respond. He tried to be as honest as he could, but it was hard answering questions about his friendship with Superman. How did he answer questions about Superman and him 'defending' Superman as Clark?

"Superman's my friend, Chief. I couldn't betray him like that. Besides that was what Randy wanted. He wanted me to call him, so he could attack him. I wasn't going to be a part of that."

"Well, son, you are definitely a lot stronger than most men. I know many men who would have sung like a canary to protect their own skin." Perry patted him on the shoulder gently.

"Clark's not most men, Chief," Lois replied. She stroked his chest methodically, refusing to lose contact with him for even a moment. He turned to look at her, locking his gaze with her. He could see the fear and anxiety written all over her face. He gently squeezed her hand, silently reassuring her that he was there with her.

"Uh-huh." Perry nodded. "Well, I gotta head back to the Planet and get the paper to bed. Seems I'm gonna be out two reporters for at least a few weeks..." He gave Clark a stern look to emphasize the point he was trying to make. "...and a photographer for at least a few days..." He looked at Jimmy with the same expression.

Jimmy smiled sheepishly. "Well at least we got one hell of a story to tell."

They all burst into laughter. "Yeah, Jimmy, but maybe next time you want a story you can NOT end up in the hospital." Perry patted him on the shoulder. "Come on, let's give these two some privacy." He guided Jimmy to the door with him.

"Thanks, Chief," Clark said, watching Perry and Jimmy leave, closing the door behind them.

Lois smiled to herself as she turned back to Clark and laid on top of him. She leaned in to kiss him, slowly capturing his mouth with hers as she tugged lightly at his bottom lip.

He groaned against her lips as she dipped her tongue into his mouth, exploring his taste. She slowly broke off the kiss and pulled away. Clark stared at her slightly dazed. "Wow,"

She leaned in to kiss him again. He met her lips with feather light kisses. She groaned against his lips, "Don't ever scare me like that again, Mr. Kent..." She warned.

He kept his kisses light as he brushed his lips against her skin. "I will do my best, Mrs. Kent..." He kissed her softly, cupping her cheek. "Any word on when we can get out of here? As much as I'm enjoying this..." He motioned to her body pressed up against him, "I can't stand hospitals. I want to get out of here and go home."

"You sure you're all right?" Lois asked cautiously.

Clark shook his head. "I don't seem to have any of my powers...but other than that..." He shrugged. "I guess."

Lois nodded, lifting herself up from his embrace, "I'll get them to discharge you..."

"The sooner the better..." Clark added. Lois nodded, leaving the room to find a nurse to start the discharge process. Clark smiled, wrapping the hospital blanket around himself to help keep him warm. He could feel the cold chill of the air hitting his skin, an obvious sign that his powers were not in working order. Only time would tell when and if his powers would return.

\*\*\*

Lois unlocked the front door to their town home while negotiating their way through the crowd of paparazzi that was camped out in front. "Get out of those rose bushes! That's private property!"

"One day at a time..." Clark whispered in her ear as they

stepped in the foyer.

"When is Perry running that expose on Goode?" Lois asked as she opened the door to their townhome.

"I don't know I think..." He stopped when he saw his parents sitting in the living room.

Martha ran up to hug them both. "We caught the first flight out when we saw the news...Mr. White let us in...Oh, honey..." She stroked Clark's cheek gingerly.

Clark forced a smile for his mom. "I'll live,"

Jonathan patted Clark on the shoulder. "You're banged up pretty bad..."

"He had Kryptonite..." Lois said solemnly, walking with them to the living room.

"Kryptonite??" Martha shook her head angrily. "How... Why??"

"We don't know." Clark sighed, trying to portray a calm he didn't feel. He didn't want to worry his parents any more than they obviously were. "We think he was working with his sister running Intergang."

"I thought you caught the guy that was running it before...The Handyman??" Jonathan asked, uncertain of the name.

"Maybe not," Lois sighed, taking a deep breath as she leaned against the couch.

"Honey, are you all right?" Martha asked in concern.

"Fine," Lois nodded. "Just tired and..." she shook her head trying to focus.

"Are you sure?"

Clark smiled, looking at Lois happily. "She's fine, mom. It's just a side effect..."

Lois smirked back at Clark then smiled broadly, "I guess since Perry and Jimmy figured it out we should go ahead and tell you... I'm..." she stopped midsentence then darted out of the room towards the nearest bathroom.

"...pregnant." Clark finished.

"Pregnant??" Jonathan grinned happily, patting Clark on the shoulder happily.

"Oh, that's wonderful!" Martha hugged Clark as he stood up to follow Lois.

"Lois??" Even without his super-hearing he could hear Lois through the bathroom door. It seemed the morning sickness had begun.

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Three weeks later, Lois and Clark entered the newsroom together for the first time since Randy Goode's attack. The cold shoulders that had met them a few weeks before were replaced with words of kindness and friendly embraces. After the attack from Randy Goode, both President Kasparov and General Navance put their differences aside and worked on the peace talks among themselves. They came to visit Lois and Clark at the hospital to wish them well and commended them both for their loyalty to their friend Superman.

After a week of negotiations, the two leaders finally had reached an agreement both sides found reasonable. The peace treaty was signed, and the leaders left to return home shortly after but not without saying goodbye to Lois and Clark first. They wanted to say goodbye to Superman but were saddened to find that he hadn't been around lately. He had been avoiding the public ever since the scandal had broken out and hadn't been heard from since.

Fearing the worst, President Kasparov and General Navance held a press conference commending both Lois Lane and Clark Kent for their heroism and offering an apology to Superman for their skepticism of him. They also went so far as ridiculing the reporters who had hounded both Lois and Clark throughout the scandal.

News of the origins of the photograph in question came into light and speculation into Lois, and Clark's sex lives became

tabloid headlines for a short time until publishers realized there was no story given that Lois and Clark were married.

Things were gradually getting back to normal, everything that is except Superman. Clark was slowly regaining his powers, but he still was not at full capacity. He worried about the consequences if he was never able to perform the way he had in the past.

Lois had been surprised when several women had approached her apologizing profusely to her for the way they treated her. Although it gave her a slight thrill to see these women lie in the beds, they had made for themselves, she couldn't get pleasure from it. It just didn't seem right. Nothing seemed right in the way things had played out.

Clark had been hurt for no reason other than greed, and the life of their child had been put at risk. It scared her. The past few weeks she and Clark had taken full advantage of their extended vacation time. They had made love every moment, they found available to them. His recent brush with death had heightened the desire she felt for him, making her cling to him more and more. She didn't know what she would do when his powers did return, but she was content to deal with that issue when the time came. For now, she held her husband close and prayed for the safety of their unborn child. So many unknowns came with the birth of this child. They would have to face them together, just as they had faced so many adversities in the past. Together.

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"It's a shame about what happened to your brother," He took a long puff from his cigar before exhaling. "I know it's hard to see family go through such predicaments."

"Randy will be fine," Mindy shrugged, "Let's get down to business, Mister...?"

"Smith," He held out his hand to shake hers, "You can call me, Mr. Smith,"

"Intriguing," She smiled up at him. "Well, Mr. Smith, tell me what exactly it is you want,"

His eyes narrowed, "I want Superman destroyed and revenge on the two reporters who helped get him to where he is today. It's time Metropolis got a new hero to look up to,"

She laughed, "As much as I admire your plan, I have to warn you; it's been done and failed repeatedly. What makes you think you can pull it off?"

"I have something others don't," He replied.

"What's that?"

"Knowledge." He stated simply. "As my father told me so long ago, 'knowledge is power,'"

THE END

Author's Note: Read the Sequel "[Doe for President](#)" to find out what happens next.