

# Far From Fiction

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Rated G

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Summary: Lois is left behind as Superman flies off to save New Krypton. Tempus has a plan for her in an alternate reality where Lois and Clark is nothing but a TV show...

Thanks to my betas, Female Hawk and KenJ and my GE, GooBoo!

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Time stopped as my whole world disappeared out through the Daily Planet window.

I was strong until that moment. Until the last flutter of his cape had disappeared in a streak of red, I was able to hold on, believe that our love would carry us through any disaster, any eventuality.

But as soon as he was gone, really gone, I collapsed. Inwardly, my heart broke into a million pieces as my one anchor to this earth left, possibly forever. I buckled into the steady arms of his parents; mere proxies for the one I longed to hold me... who I feared might never hold me again.

And I had stood there and let it happen! Because Clark had always been my rock, I had been able to lean on him, trust his judgment that helping his people was the right thing to do. His noble nature had rubbed off on me, after all. But with him gone, I fell immediately back into lost and lonely Lois Lane—and I can't believe I let it happen!

"It's over," I whispered brokenly, realizing what I had lost, let go of because I had decided to be noble and self-sacrificing—for a people and a place I'd never see. "I shouldn't have let him go!"

Only in my deepest heart did I admit the hate I felt for those Kryptonians for taking away my Clark, my husband in all but name. They had snatched away our future happiness together by appealing to what had always been strong in Clark, his need to help people. And I hated them for it. I hated them for taking him away, and I felt guilty because of that hate.

As the tears fell, I cringed at what Clark would think if he could read my mind like his Kryptonian brethren could read his. Would he be shocked? Disappointed that he had almost married a woman so selfish?

I always knew that marrying Superman would mean I would have to share him with the world. I just never thought that could mean I would have to share him with the universe...

Jonathan Kent murmured to me, "A love that risks nothing, is worth nothing."

I wanted to believe that, but Clark and I had already risked so much. Our love had already been tested by amnesia, clones, and psychopaths. Why must it be put through this trial as well?

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I sat alone on the sofa for hours that night... first holding the teddy bear Clark had given me during a long-ago fair in Smallville... Our time together had been so short—it could have been so much more meaningful if I had acknowledged the connection between us sooner, instead of running away from him.

It doesn't matter. What matters is the time I had with him—and the hope I must hold onto that he will return to me again someday.

In my darkest despair, I could almost hear him calling to me... I didn't know if it was my imagination, and I didn't care. My heart simply reached out to the endless skies that separated us

as I stood up from the sofa and moved to the window. I wiped my eyes, searching the starlit sky for his star. "Clark?" came out choked and weak, speaking his name only burning a more painful hole in my chest, as I feared I may never speak it to his face again.

I heard him, though, in my soul, and despite how crazy it sounds, I'm certain through the darkness and across the stars he'd already traveled, I heard him say, "I love you." I hold on to those words, bury them deep in my heart, a balm to the wound that is still freshly there, a wound that can only heal with his return...

Slowly, I made my way back to my sofa. As I sat, I idly watched the curtains flutter, thinking of the many times Clark had come in through those curtains as Superman. I can almost see his reassuring smile, his majestic cape swishing behind him.

In retrospect, I wondered how many times he had come by my place after a particularly harrowing rescue, before I had known his secret. How many times had he come here because I had turned him away as Clark? I never asked him about those nights, sensing that he had felt embarrassed about that period of our relationship; and I didn't want him to feel embarrassed that those visits had been his guilty pleasure—they had certainly been mine. And in my own way, I had tried to be there for him, even then, as best I could without knowing the truth.

And now... when I needed him most, I had let him go... and all I can do is trust that he'll come back to me.

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I think I dozed off a moment. I looked up, seeing the curtain still fluttering, and I thought I saw a figure on the balcony...

My heart in my throat, I called out, "Clark?" as I raced over.

Before I could get to the window, a tall blond man stepped inside instead, and I felt my blood run cold with fear.

"Tempus," I whispered, dread surging through me.

"So good of you to remember me, Lois," he said with a snide grin. "I know you must be awfully lonely without your fiancé in tights... so, I thought I'd give you a treat."

"What do you want?" I said steadily, trying to reign in my fear. I didn't trust him any farther than I could throw him.

"Just for you to take a little trip..."

He grabbed my arm, and before I could protest, we were whisked away...

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I woke up in my apartment.

I sat up and looked around, suddenly remembering being abducted by Tempus.

I began walking around, noticing that something... was off. The walls around me seemed unnaturally flimsy, and the light outside was a shade or two brighter than normal. I tried the sink, and the stream that came out was a pathetic trickle. I'd have to talk to Mr. Tracewski about that...

"Hey, thought you left already... I know the feeling. I'm gonna miss this old set."

I froze, hearing that voice, a voice I'd know anywhere from behind me. I turned, and there was Clark wearing a baseball cap, jeans, and a t-shirt. I ran to him without thinking and threw my arms around him.

"I never thought I'd see you again!" I cried, overcome.

"Teri, calm down. I told you, we'll keep in touch." He pulled back from the hug and looked me in the eyes. "What's with the waterworks?" he asked gently.

I looked up at him, and really saw him, realizing that something wasn't right. I stepped out of his arms and looked around the apartment again. Was this a trick? Who's Teri? Where had Tempus sent me?

Clark—or the man I thought was Clark-- had a concerned look on his face. I wanted to crumple into tears right there. That was my Clark's look of concern—but, he wasn't Clark.

I sat down on the sofa, which was much more uncomfortable

than my real sofa, and started sobbing. “Tempus! Tempus did this!” I cried.

The man who wasn’t Clark came and sat beside me. “Teri, what’s going on? Look I know, taping the last three episodes was a bit insane, but we got through it. I thought you’d be on a flight by now back to New York. Are you okay?”

I looked up at him, the man who wasn’t Clark, with tears streaming down my face. “Who are you?” I asked, shaken. “Where am I?”

He looked at me with infinite patience, which only sent me into more tears, as that’s exactly how my Clark would look at me. “Did you hit your head?” he asked kindly.

I shook it in answer, demonstrating that it had not in fact been smacked. He took my hands, and I fought the urge to lean into him. “Teri, I know it’s been stressful... We both loved these characters, and it’s hard to let them go. I’m still trying to get them to at least let me keep the cape, you know? Just to have something to remember it all by... Look, why don’t we go get a bite to eat, get off the set, and shake it off, okay?”

Not knowing what else to do, confused and heart-broken, I accepted his arm as we wandered out of my apartment and on to what looked like a film set...

#### DEAN

Teri must be taking the wrap-up harder than even I am...

We stepped out onto the Warner Brothers back lot, and she looked around, eyes wide.

“Where am I?” she whispered.

I took her by the shoulders, and steered her towards the parking lot. “Teri, are you sure you are okay?”

She turned to face me, her eyes hitting me square in the chest. It reminded me of a few of those long nights on set, when we were both so exhausted yet would find a little bit of magic left – usually in a scene that ended with a kiss. When the director would yell cut, we’d always pull away like two guilty children.

Teri was married... and yet, this was work, our job. We were paid to be in love.

How many times over the last four years have I had to repeat that to myself?

But she turned to me with one of those intense gazes that always gave me chills on set, when I really felt her channeling Lois Lane.

She whispered something, and I longed to have Clark Kent’s super hearing just for a moment to catch it. I asked her again if she was all right and she stopped in the middle of the parking lot.

“I’m Lois Lane,” she said with desperate conviction that, quite honestly, frightened me.

“Teri---”

Breathless, with tears in her eyes, she shook her head. “You have to believe me – I’m Lois Lane!”

Noticing some techies eyeing our odd little scene, I ushered Teri into my car. I came around to the driver’s side, buckled up and started the engine.

Teri was in tears next to me. I couldn’t just ignore her, but people around the lot were starting to notice and I knew the last thing Teri would want was gossip to stir up. So I quietly backed my car out and started driving. I was tempted to turn on the radio, but I didn’t want Teri to think I was disrespecting her grief.

When her tears subsided a little, I finally spoke. “Do you want to talk about it?” I pulled out on to the 134 Freeway, which was already jammed with the evening traffic. We’d be here a while.

“I don’t understand what ha—happened,” she stammered. “Tempus... what did he do?” she whispered fiercely.

Teri is one of the sharpest people I know. She dove into her role wholeheartedly as Lois Lane, but she could always turn it off and relax after a shoot. This new Teri sitting next to me was unnerving.

I glanced over at her, her doe eyes wide with fear and trepidation. I couldn’t let her continue to suffer like that. I reached out for her hand. Her tiny one slid into mine, and she seemed to breathe easier.

“You’re just like him,” she whispered. “But—I know you’re not...”

“Teri—what’s going on?”

“I. Am. Lois. Lane,” she said deliberately. “I don’t know how to explain it... I don’t know how to explain you—and why do you keep calling me Teri?”

The traffic was beginning to move a little. I shifted my Miata to scoot around a few cars, but we ended up right behind all the slow traffic a moment later.

“We acted together. In a show about Superman,” I explained patiently. “I played Clark Kent/Superman, and you played—”

“-- Lois Lane,” she said numbly. “Tempus sure does have a sick sense of humor...”

“Who?”

“Tempus. He hates everything about y—Clark. And this surely tops his schemes...”

I sighed. Still trying to wrap my mind around the idea that this might not actually be Teri. Unless—had Teri lost it? We both had wanted the show to continue. We had all kinds of ideas that the producers had been willing to discuss, and I had at least two ideas for episodes I was thinking of writing...

But surely...

At last, traffic was starting to free up. But I had no idea where I could take Te—er, Lois? “Do you want to get a bite to eat somewhere?” I asked.

“I need to figure out how to get back. H-he’ll come back, and I have to be there,” she said a little desperately.

“Who? Eh, Tempus?” I said warily, not believing I was having this conversation with my co-star.

“Clark,” she said, so brokenly, so full of lonely love and isolation that my heart reached out for her – whoever she was. Had Teri really lost it? Or was this just a strange joke being played on me?

But no matter. She was upset, and we were friends.

“Tell you what? We’re only a few miles from my condo. Why don’t we go there?” I suggested, realizing that if we appeared in public together we’d probably get mobbed, and if Teri started talking like she was Lois Lane, well, the papers would have a field day.

“I suppose so,” she answered quietly, staring out the window. A light rain had begun, and I switched on the wipers. The quiet swoosh of the wipers across the windshield was the only noise in the car.

I heard her voice, but didn’t hear what she said. “What?” I asked quietly, turning off the highway as I headed for home.

“I’m not crazy... I just don’t know—how to explain this. Or —you,” she said.

“It’s okay... we’ll figure it out,” I said calmly, though I had no idea how.

#### LOIS

He looked like Clark. He sounded like him – but he wasn’t him.

This world seemed so strange, so--- not right.

Clark had taught me to believe in the impossible and the improbable. He had taught me to believe in miracles...

I had to believe that somehow either he or HG Wells would find me. Even in this strange, alternate world, where Clark was-- not Clark.

I surreptitiously studied the man next to me. “What did you say your name was?”

He seemed startled at my question, but quickly recovered. “Dean... Dean Cain,” he said, shaking his head. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

I sighed, and sunk in my seat. “Fine,” I murmured, meanwhile feeling far from it.

At last, we pulled up to a gated house. Dean leaned out the window to punch in a code. Whoever he was, apparently he was important enough to need a gated house.

We drove into a garage and went inside. He led me to his kitchen. A spacious, modern kitchen that might even make an incompetent cook like me passable...

“Would you like something to drink? Orange juice... water... wine?”

“Wine,” I said immediately.

He poured us two glasses of Merlot and lifted his in a sort of toast.

He glanced around the kitchen, seemingly at a loss what to say, when he reached across the counter to check his blinking answering machine.

“You have one new message: Thursday, November 24, 1996, 4:02 PM: ‘Dean, hey it’s Teri. Just wanted to let you know I got back to New York safely—’”

Dean hit the button and glanced at me. I think my jaw dropped to my toes – that woman sounded just like me!

“That was—Teri?” I somehow managed to get out.

Dean looked just as shocked as I felt. He took his baseball cap off and ran his fingers through his hair in an unnervingly Clark-like gesture. “Yeah... so I guess that really does make you ---Lois Lane,” he said, though he still didn’t seem to believe it. “But how is that possible?”

I shrugged, still trying to understand how there could be a Clark who wasn’t Clark, and a me who wasn’t me out there in the world.

“I just want to get back to where I belong,” I said simply, an ache building in my chest as I thought about Clark, out there—somewhere.

“Look, I don’t know what to think. I mean, unless my answering machine is faulty... that was Teri on the phone. So – that must make you –” he gestured his out towards me, and I nodded to encourage him. “Lois Lane?”

“Yes,” I answered softly. “Look, I don’t get it either... I mean, you look just like my Clark! But – you’re not him... “ I suddenly started to feel panicky. “You’re an actor? And you play Clark on TV?” I said, having just as hard a time as he did understanding what was going on.

“I have an idea,” Dean said, moving towards the living room. “I have some tapes of our show—maybe watching them will help you understand---”

“Understand what? That Tempus sent me to this alternate universe—where Clark and I are a sitcom?”

“Not a sitcom... More of a family drama...er, well, it’s a family show...”

He dug through his large cabinet, next to his big screen TV. Suddenly he turned around, a triumphant grin on his face. My heart flipped –how could he look just like Clark, and yet not be him?

He cleared his throat, perhaps seeing my slight discomfiture and started getting the VCR ready. “What’s it like?” he asked, suddenly a little shy.

“What?”

He glanced over his shoulder, though not looking at me. “Flying with Superman?” he said with a slight chuckle. He shook his head, coming to sit by me on the sofa as he grabbed a remote. “I can’t believe I’m asking you that...”

“It’s okay...” I said, even though I felt a lump in my throat at the thought... Would I ever see Clark again? He was worlds away, and I—was completely lost in another dimension.

I sighed, gathering my thoughts and reining in my emotions. “It’s amazing. He’s—amazing.”

Dean smiled slightly and seemed embarrassed. “I can’t

believe any of this is real, but—” he said, pressing play.

We sat there for the next three hours, watching episodes of what were essentially mine and Clark’s lives. Not word for word, mind, and the effects looked pretty fake- - but the shocking thing was the events of our lives took the shape of plots in this television series.

I was riveted to the screen, and made Dean show me episode after episode, flabbergasted that a whole world existed where Clark and I existed, but merely in fictional form.

After about the third episode and halfway through the second bottle of wine, Dean turned to me, curious. “So—what happened when you disappeared?”

I took another long sip of the wine, overwhelmed by the events of the day, but eventually answered him. “Clark left... to lead his people on New Krypton,” I croaked out, the pain of his absence still so raw. “And I—I don’t know if I’ll ever see him again.”

Tears were streaming down my cheeks as I looked helplessly up at Dean. He grimaced sympathetically and reached across the table to hand me a tissue.

“Thanks,” I murmured. Suddenly, I had a thought. “Wait. If your show follows our lives, albeit not exactly—but maybe I could learn what will happen to Clark?” I looked up at him expectantly, hope surging through me.

He gave me an apologetic shrug. “Sorry, I don’t have the season four tapes yet. But Lois, in our show, Superman does return,” he said, and then seemed to hesitate.

“What is it?” I ask calculatingly, seeing his guarded expression. “What aren’t you telling me?”

He cleared his throat, like a doctor about to deliver some bad news, but his eyes met mine, “Clark comes back because a Kryptonian named Lord Nor decides to attack Earth.”

**DEAN**

I can’t believe those words left my mouth, and that somehow, somewhere, they are actually the truth.

I can see it on her face. The look of terror in her eyes, and I immediately want to reassure her. “But it all works out in the end, Lois. Clark fights Lord Nor and saves Earth.”

Lois’ tears returned, her eyes full of soulful sorrow. “But that was a television show, Dean. Of course the hero wins. But in real life?”

I sigh, still trying to wrap my mind around the idea that this is the real Lois Lane, engaged to a real Superman, out there somewhere. I laugh a little to myself, and Lois gives me a reproving look.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing. I guess it’s true what they say about parallel universes and all that.”

She looked at me with a wry expression, classic Lois Lane, in my view. “But what are we going to do about it? I have to get back!”

Even in her distress, I found her determined spirit charming. It was unsettling, really. Teri had only played a character that I had found disarming at times and had to work hard not to fall for. But Lois Lane in the flesh? I was a dead man.

I wanted to help her any way I could, strangely because of Clark Kent. I somehow could feel the expectation on my shoulders. I looked like him, and therefore she expected that I would be like him. And some foolish part of me desperately wanted to try to be.

My pager beeped. I glanced down and saw it was Sharon, a woman I’d been dating off and on. We were supposed to go out tonight. But there was no way I was going to leave *the* Lois Lane alone in my apartment, in a strange world. I knew Clark Kent wouldn’t want me to either.

“Can you excuse me a moment? I need to make a phone call,” I say, heading off into the bedroom.

**LOIS**

While Dean left to make his phone call, I tried to keep myself from falling apart, worried about my world.

Clark would be back. And so would I.

I had to believe that.

I scanned the names of the episodes on the tapes, trying to work out how accurate they may have been to Clark's and my real-life adventures. Was Dean right? Would Lord Nor try to take over Earth?

But how was I to get back? How would Clark know how to find me?

I felt so lost, only half-recognizing the titles of his books, seeing how truly different this world was. I came across a picture of him and Teri, dressed up like me and Clark and tears caught in my throat at the striking resemblances. Sure, Clark's Superman suit looked much more resplendent in real life, but there was a genuine affection between the two actors that came across clearly in the photo. I nosed around a bit more, but didn't see any other photos.

Was Dean single?

My heart went out to him, somehow feeling like he was similar to the Clark I had met in that other universe, the Clark who had lost his family and his Lois... it broke my heart to think Dean was alone in the same way.

I heard him clear his throat behind me. "That was taken after Season 2, just before Teri cut her hair."

Almost subconsciously, I reached for my own pageboy hair, chilled again by the uncanny similarities of our worlds.

"I always thought it looked better cut that way," he said softly, gesturing to my current style.

I suddenly sighed, frustrated to hear the same tenderness in his voice that I would hear in Clark's and yet know that he wasn't Clark. "How am I going to get back?" I asked helplessly.

"I don't know. But we'll find a way," he said, again so like Clark. It broke my resolve, and I was abruptly in a flood of tears once more.

Dean hesitated a moment, but then suddenly wrapped me in his arms, rubbing my back like a small child. "Please don't cry. We'll figure this out. I promise."

"And you don't think I'm crazy?" I said, my voice sounding muffled as I cried into his shoulder.

"I don't know what to think. But I don't think you are crazy."

Eventually my tears calmed, held in his arms. I pulled away from him, feeling guilty for having sought some solace there.

He cleared his throat, sensing the awkwardness and offered me more wine.

I suddenly felt very sleepy and shook my head. "I'd just like to go to bed, if it's all the same to you. I have no idea what to do, but I know I can't think as tired as I am."

"No problem at all. There's a guest room upstairs. Follow me."

**DEAN**

Lois Lane was sleeping in my guest room.

I smiled to myself as I jogged lightly back down the stairs.

What a strange world...

My kitchen phone rang and I reached to answer it. "Dean, hi. It's Teri," came that voice that always made me smile. That voice in the form of Lois Lane was even more extraordinary.

I steadied myself, resisting the urge to blurt out the fact that Lois Lane herself had somehow found her way into our world and instead listened to why Teri was calling.

"Did you have a nice flight?" I managed to get out, hoping she didn't hear the edge of nervous excitement in my voice.

"First class is always better than coach," she quipped. "Hey, listen, I was supposed to be back in LA by Friday for the unofficial L&C farewell party, but my agent just called and I have to stay in New York over the weekend. Is it horrible that

your co-star won't be there?" she said apologetically.

Normally, I would have been very disappointed, and I knew that the rest of the cast and crew who had been looking forward to another chance to celebrate and remember the show would be, too. Yet, I had her replacement just upstairs...

"Uh, sure. I'm sure they'll understand," I said, smiling at the idea of actually taking Lois Lane herself to the wrap-up party.

"Business is business, right?"

"Thanks. So you don't mind making my excuses for me?"

"No, don't worry about anything. I'll find another date."

"OK. Well, look me up next time you're in New York, and same when I come back to LA."

"Of course. Take care, Teri."

"You, too, Dean. Bye."

I hung up the phone and sighed, my heart still racing at the idea of Lois going to the party.

Would it work? Would everyone buy that she was Teri?

And would Lois mind?

I hoped not.

I had always enjoyed my co-star's company, but especially when she was in the throes of playing Lois Lane.

Secretly, I had really enjoyed our fourth season – when we were married. I had been able to pretend Lois Lane was my wife, hold Teri in my arms and kiss her quite frequently. There were a few occasions where I had felt quite guilty afterwards, confused between my acting and my own feelings of loneliness.

It wasn't easy being a good-looking TV star. You usually had either starlets or local fans chasing after you, and neither seemed to want to be with you for the right reasons.

So no wonder, sometimes between the moments of reality, under the TV lights and with a make-believe super persona to back me up, I enjoyed kissing my co-star.

There, I admitted it. She was happily married to someone else, and I enjoyed kissing her. Her Lois Lane was so much fun, so charming, and a part of me had fallen for her.

But Lois Lane herself was another level of amazing. And I looked just like her real-life fiancé. In her world, I was Superman.

I reached for the wine bottle, needing something to take the nervous edge off my emotions. I sighed as I sat in front of the TV and searched for a basketball game to watch.

But my thoughts kept drifting to the strange events of today. It seemed that there actually were parallel worlds. What was fiction here, was true somewhere else. This was ground-breaking – if the scientific community knew, they'd have a field day.

I could be famous for something other than playing Clark Kent/Superman.

But the part of me that remembered what it was like to play Clark Kent, who was scared of his origins, and feared getting dissected like a frog, knew I had to keep this to myself.

If anyone actually found out that Lois Lane was really herself, her life would never be the same.

I owed it to that real Clark Kent out there, and to the character I had believed in for the last four years, to do everything in my power to protect Lois – and to somehow figure out how to get her back where she belonged.

**LOIS**

I woke up to sunshine on my face.

The bed I was in was deliciously comfortable and I groaned at the thought of having to leave it.

"Morning, sleepy head," came a familiar voice from the doorway.

*Clark?*

My heart sank as I peeked from out of the covers, realizing I was still in that other world, with a man who looked and talked like my fiancé, yet wasn't.

I sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes. Dean had a tray in his

arms and brought it over to me.

Eggs, bacon, and toast, along with a glass of orange juice. He even had added a flower and a local newspaper.

My hands immediately reached for the paper. I glanced up at Dean, and he smiled.

“I should have known that a true journalist would first be hungry for the news in the morning.”

My eager eyes devoured the headlines, unfamiliar with the obviously important names. The differences in our worlds was hugely unsettling. “President Clinton?” I squeaked out. Very unnerving to be a top reporter and not even recognize the name of the leader of the free world.

“A bit different than from where you’re from?” he asked sympathetically.

I nodded mutely and continued to read while I reached for a piece of toast.

Dean cleared his throat, and I pulled my eyes away from the newspaper to look at him.

“Uh, we don’t know how long you’ll be here... and uh, well, Teri can’t make it this weekend to the wrap-up party...” he started, looking decidedly very nervous. “I was wondering – if you’d want to go?”

I set the paper aside and gave him my best you’ve-got-to-be-kidding gape. “You want me to go to a party where I pretend to be the actress who plays me on TV?”

He grimaced. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything – I’ll find another date—”

But I didn’t want him to have another date. He was obviously lonely, and I was worlds away from my Clark – I suddenly grinned up at him. “I suppose it would be something to do.”

“So—you wouldn’t mind?” he asked, looking a little hopeful.

“Well, it’s not my first choice – but neither is being sent to a world I can’t explain. But you know what they say about being in Rome,” I said gamely.

“You truly are an amazing woman, Lois Lane,” he murmured.

The soft look in his eyes took me aback, suddenly reminding me of Clark. If he was just an actor, he seemed to have an awful lot of affection for either Teri or... me. “What was your relationship like with Teri?”, I blurted, and he gaped at me, clearly taken off guard. “Sorry. I have a tendency to say what I think,” I shrugged apologetically, reaching for the orange juice.

He nodded with a sigh. “I suppose it’s a fair question... Teri and I had a great relationship. We had great chemistry – lots of fun on set. I—well, I guess—”

“Did you fall for her?” I asked, slightly amused. How ironic if he had fallen for Teri much like Clark had fallen for me.

He shrugged. “I don’t know... Often times, it was—confusing. There was definitely something there between us, only—” he glanced sheepishly at me. “Teri is married.”

“Oh,” I responded, beginning to understand.

“Yeah... but it’s fine. I mean, Teri and I are great friends.”

Now it was time for me to grimace. “You sound a lot like Clark, in the early days of our relationship. He always claimed that he just loved working with me. But there would be days when... I knew, you know?”

Dean reluctantly nodded. “Yeah... I know.”

I reached for his hand before I knew what I had done, and his eyes met mine, so like Clark’s. “I met another Clark once,” I began softly. “He never met his Lois Lane... and though I can’t help you become Superman, I think you’re a decent guy, Dean. She’s out there somewhere, I’m sure of it.”

He stared at me a moment, I suppose searching for what to say. He pulled his hand away from mine and stood up, walking towards the window. “This is all so... strange, I guess... and I don’t want to drag you down with my own issues, Lois... Maybe it would be better if you stayed here—”

I gave him a lopsided smile. “Did you really learn nothing

playing Clark?” I teased. “When do I ever stay put?”

He grinned back, seeming to relax a bit from the tension a moment ago. “Fair enough. Besides, I was always curious what it would be like to actually take you out.”

**DEAN**

This has been the strangest day, and quite honestly, the most fun I’ve had in a long time.

I took Lois out shopping, so she’d have something to wear for the party. She admitted she hated shopping, but she was a lot of fun on Rodeo Drive. We pretended she was Teri, as a sort of warm-up for the party, and tried to avoid the paparazzi whenever possible.

Lord knows what Teri would say if she saw photos of Lois and I hanging out in downtown L.A.

Anyway, despite missing her Clark, Lois was able to let loose a little bit as we joked and teased. I told her stories about Teri and I on set, and she’d come back with these amazing parallels to our fictional show. I’m still blown away by the fact that she’s really Lois Lane in the flesh, but I also feel like I know her, as Teri had really captured the essence of her, especially in our early seasons.

This Lois was just as bouncy, just as sharp, just as witty. She had a quick mind, and a generous heart. Every now and then, she’d get a bit melancholic, and I knew she was missing *him*. I really did feel like Clark Kent, unable to measure up to Superman... knowing that I could never win her affections the way he had. And while I respected their relationship, I just couldn’t help feeling that I was a part of it somehow, a part of them. What a peculiar thing to say, and yet, I did feel connected. I thought that what Teri and I had created on camera was at the very least, a glimpse into the love that these two felt for each other. And somehow, I felt connected to that love, as strange as it is for me to admit.

As we drove back to my place, after Lois had finally picked a suitable dress, she drifted off to sleep. I hummed softly to the radio, wondering if I should wake her when we arrived back at my place.

When I pulled in the garage, she looked so peaceful, so sweet, that I didn’t want to disturb her.

I hesitated a moment, but then, telling myself that it was nothing but altruism and a desire for her to stay resting, I came around the other side of the car and lifted her out of the seat and into my arms. Now, I had carried Teri any number of times on set. But I wasn’t ready for the real thing.

Lois Lane was cradled in my arms. Though she wasn’t very heavy, I suddenly felt her turn into my embrace, her head settling on my shoulder, as if she knew exactly how to place her body with mine. And I realized, she probably thought it was her Clark – Superman, who carried her.

I wasn’t sure if I should feel complimented that I so resembled the hero, or worried that I was so attracted to her.

“Clar...” she murmured, nuzzling under my chin.

I simply couldn’t believe this is happening. This was starting like so many fantasies that I had on the set with Teri... but I knew this wouldn’t go anywhere, as I wouldn’t dare take advantage of the trust she had put in me.

And like Teri, we were just friends.

“Clark Kent is one lucky guy,” I couldn’t help whisper as I laid her down in the bed upstairs.

“Come back to me soon...” she murmured, turning onto her side, and I found myself smiling.

What a life... to be engaged to Superman. And she was so used to him leaving at any and all times of day or night. Yet she knew – he’d always come back.

I sighed. Her Clark was out there on New Krypton, I suppose. And while things had resolved okay on our television series, I couldn’t help but feel a bit of fear for her.

I hoped she’d find a way back.

And I hoped that Superman would be there waiting for her.

**LOIS**

I was trying to shake myself from the nightmare... it just seemed too horrific to contemplate.

Kryptonians had taken over Smallville... people were working as slaves, building a fort for the Kryptonians...

Where was Clark?

Why wasn't Superman there to stop them?

"Clark..." I called out, and suddenly felt very lonely and afraid. Clark was gone... he was on another planet...

I felt a hand on my shoulder, shaking me out of the dream.

"It's okay, Lois." I knew that voice... that was Clark's voice. It pulled me out of the haze of my dream, long enough for me to look into his eyes, to reach for his arms. He held me a minute and I felt safe, secure... if Clark was here, then everything would be all right.

But he gently disentangled himself from my embrace, looking slightly guilty. "Lois, I—I'm sorry."

I looked at him, perplexed a moment, until the truth all came rushing back to me. I was still in that other world, where Clark was nothing but an actor and I—

"I have to get back," I said, looking straight at him. "I think the Kryptonians are on Earth... I dreamed about them. We have to stop them!"

Dean let out a heavy sigh. "I understand, Lois. But how do you suppose we get back there? It's not like I have an inter-dimensional time machine lying around here."

I felt the crushing weight of the truth heavy on my shoulders. Tempus had certainly done a job on me, hadn't he? Dean was right. There was no way back... not without the help of HG Wells. And how was he to find me here?

I pulled my knees up and hugged them close to me. I had never felt so hopeless in my life. I couldn't see a way out of this, a way back to Clark or even back to my world.

"What does it matter? Even if I could go back, Clark is gone..." I whispered, feeling tears clog my throat.

Dean, looking a bit helpless, sat down on the bed next to me. "There has to be a way, Lois. I can't believe that you are stuck here forever."

He didn't sound very convinced, and it just pushed my tears to the surface. "I just wish... I just wish that Clark could save me," I said brokenly, and fell into Dean's arms once more to have a good cry.

**DEAN**

Lois eventually went back to sleep, but I was unable to do the same. I went down to the living room and found myself drawn to my Lois and Clark tapes. I thought I'd have to put all of that behind me, and yet somehow, somehow it had suddenly become a larger part of my life than I had ever expected.

I put on a season 2 video, though I didn't really care what episode. I just wanted to try and imagine what it must have been like for Lois, if all of this were real. She had told me that the story lines were roughly the same as events in her life, so I knew things hadn't happened the same word for word and moment for moment, yet still — the extraordinary reality of Superman being real was overwhelming to me.

As a kid, I had been a huge Superman fan, and I was enthralled as the rest of the world had been by Christopher Reeve's Superman. But the fact that I looked like Lois' Superman, so much so that she confused us, was a lot to take in.

I watched my performance as Clark and the more self-assured Superman and wondered how I measured up to the real deal. I could see where I should have said a line differently, or when something was off with the timing, but in reality, even without considering the super powers, Clark Kent was a lot to live up to.

And yet why did I feel I needed to live up to him?

*Because it's not every day that Lois Lane walks into your life.*

I mean, obviously I knew that there could never be anything between us, despite my fantasies and her missing Clark. But the truth was, we didn't know how or when she'd return to her own time and place. All I knew was that somehow — she had to, and while she was here, I'd try to be the best Clark Kent I could for her.

**LOIS**

I stared at the dress Dean and I had bought yesterday. I can't believe I am getting ready to go to a party, while who knows what was happening back home.

I took a deep breath. It could all just have been a dream. I could have just taken my insecurity and Dean's suggestions about Lord Nor to heart and had a nightmare.

But something in my gut was telling me it was more than just a dream...

I closed my eyes and thought of Clark. Somehow, he'd rescue me from this... somehow, I would make it back and everything would be all right.

Whatever was going on in Metropolis, I just hoped that at least one thing Dean had said was true — that Superman would indeed return.

**DEAN**

Lois Lane came down the stairs looking more stunning than I could ever imagine. Teri was a knockout, but there was something so striking about Lois' spirit that shone through, no matter what she wore. She had on the elegant black dress I had bought her yesterday. It was a little low cut, but the creamy contrast of her skin to the velvety fabric made me want to reach out and touch her.

I didn't have to, though, because she took my arm and smiled up at me. "Well, if we're going to do this—let's go."

She seemed to be forcing herself a bit and I turned to look at her. "Lois, you don't have to go through with this. I can just go to the party alone, really. You'll have to put up with people referring to you as Teri. Are you sure you're okay with that?"

She shrugged, and her smile got wider, which made me worry even more that she was forcing it. "If I stayed here I'd just wallow in self-pity. At least at a party I can try to have a little fun."

**LOIS**

The party was a little quieter than I'd expect for a Hollywood event. However, Dean explained to me that this was just an informal wrap-up party, so as to avoid the press, which was probably for the best, all things considered.

I wasn't ready though to be referred to as Teri, while at the same time being playfully called Lois by co-stars. It made me a bit melancholic, actually, and I think I drank a few more cocktails than I should have.

Dean found me about an hour in, wallowing in my own misery at the bar.

"Do you want to go home?" he said, and then cringed. "Sorry. Bad choice of words. We can leave whenever you'd like."

I didn't look at him. Already hearing how much he sounded like Clark was too much, especially in my vulnerable state. But to look up at him, in a suit, even without the glasses, and see that compassionate gaze -- it would break my heart...

"Have you talked to anyone besides me?" he asked, sounding a little nervous.

I sighed and downed the rest of my too-sweet martini drink. "Don't worry, our cover is still intact. I spoke with Marth-- I mean, K." I shook my head. "Maybe I should have stayed at your place... this is all a little too weird."

**DEAN**

She looked so despondent, and I felt quite guilty for having brought her here. All around us were pictures from the show, and while I saw great memories and friends, she must see loved ones and people she missed, people she feared she'd never see again.

It had been a mistake to do this to her, and for all the world, I wondered what Clark Kent would do in this moment.

“Excuse me,” said a diminutive male voice behind me.

I turned, and there was Terry Kiser, fully dressed as HG Wells. I know he loved his character, and he had added a certain bit of credible whimsy to the show, but the last thing Lois needed right now was to run into someone in costume.

“Terry, how are you?” I asked, unenthused.

“Don’t you start calling me Teri again,” Lois grumbled and then I shook my head, nodding in Terry’s direction. Lois followed my gaze, and then with a gasp, ran over to him.

“HG Wells? Is that really you?” she said, giving him a hug.

I cringed, fearing what Terry would think at Lois’ display, but instead he answered her as if it were the most normal question in the world.

“Yes, my dear. I have been trying to track you down for days! Without Superman on the planet-- how I normally locate you two--I became entirely distressed. Do you know what has happened in your world?”

“Wait, so you’re actually HG Wells?” I asked, incredulous, looking between the two of them. Would the whole real-world cast of our show just keep popping out of the woodwork?

“Yes, my boy. But don’t go anywhere... I may need your help as well.”

#### LOIS

I was so relieved to see that HG Wells had found me. It meant that I had a way back! That all was not lost!

“Wait. So what happened?” I asked, momentarily distracted by the prospects of going home, that I missed the implications of what he had said.

“Well, my dear, I’m afraid that Major Zod is after Superman.”

“Major Zod? Don’t you mean Lord Nor?” I asked, glancing at Dean, who I admit, was looking a little uncomfortable.

HG Wells gave me a puzzled glance. “I have no idea who you are talking about... but Major Zod, he’s holding Metropolis hostage. We need to contact your Clark and bring Superman back, right away!”

“But how? I mean, he could be anywhere,” I answered sadly. “As much as I want to go home, to go without Clark being there... well, it would almost be as bad as being stuck here.”

“Well, when I tracked you here, I realized that Clark Kent had a copy of himself in this dimension,” Wells said, glancing at Dean. “Though he isn’t Superman, of course, he could give the city of Metropolis some hope.”

“And risk his life to do it!” I interjected. “You can’t expect Dean to pretend to be Superman!”

“My boy, what do you think? Could you play Superman, just long enough for us to locate the real one and bring him back to Earth?”

#### DEAN

I stared at Lois, and then back at the real HG Wells. My mouth went dry with fear, thinking of the implications... the prospect of playing Superman again, in a world where he actually existed... It was the chance of a lifetime, and yet, not without its own risks.

I sighed, resting my hands on my hips as I thought. “I mean, I could play Clark Kent, no problem. But to put on the suit, in his actual world—” I shook my head. “I don’t know. I mean, people will realize pretty quickly that I am not the real Superman.”

“I’ll help you,” Lois interjected, evidently warming to the idea. “I mean, I’ve seen Clark when he’s lost his powers. There are ways... please, Dean. You would be that symbol of hope for Metropolis, until we can somehow get word to my Clark. It would mean a lot to me.”

She looked at me with those doe eyes of hers, and I knew I wouldn’t say no.

It was the role of a lifetime, after all. I just hoped that I’d make it through it alive.

“All right... when do we leave?”

#### DEAN

We had stepped out into the alleyway, and HG Wells pushed a few buttons on a little device, and suddenly, we were there... in Metropolis.

I looked up in awe for a few moments, trying to absorb the world around me. The city felt vaguely like New York, but lighter, somehow, maybe full of more innocence. I glanced at the shops around us, not recognizing any of them. The billboards carried advertisements for brands I had never heard of.

One thing was for sure. This definitely wasn’t Kansas, Toto.

HG Wells handed me a pair of glasses, which I slipped on. “Remember now, you are Clark Kent. You had been on assignment as far as anyone at the Planet is concerned. You are engaged to Lois Lane. We’ll meet later to discuss how we’ll use Superman. Meanwhile, I will work on a way to try and contact him. Do you think you can handle it from here, Lois?”

She beamed at Wells. “Yes. I just want to run home and change clothes. I’ll take D—I mean, Clark by his apartment as well. Where are the Kryptonians though?”

“Oh they are around, I’m afraid. There is a curfew, I believe. Stay together and you should be fine. Good luck, my dear.”

Wells disappeared and suddenly I was standing alone with Lois Lane, on the streets of Metropolis, ready to jump into a role I knew inside and out yet was terrified to play.

“Now it’s my turn to ask,” Lois said with a smile as she grabbed my arm. “How are you holding up?”

“All right, I suppose. Just... nervous. I mean... I’m really not sure if I can do this...”

“You can. I know you can. Now, let’s go get changed.”

#### LOIS

I was breathing easier, being back in Metropolis.

Walking alongside Dean, I could almost imagine that things were how they had been before. Clark and I on a story, off to save the world...

I glanced over at him, and could see he was nervously looking around. He was quite unsure of himself, and I felt a pang of sympathy for him.

Clark/Superman were big shoes to fill. I could only hope that HG Wells found my Clark soon, and hopefully before Dean got into any trouble.

I felt a nervous flutter of doubt in my stomach about this whole scheme. Dean was just an average guy – an actor, no less! He could play the role, but could he convince his audience?

“Here’s my apartment,” I announced. “You can come up if you like. I’ll just be a few minutes.”

“Uh, I think I’d better. I’m still trying to wrap my head around all this.”

I gave him a sympathetic pat on the shoulder. “Don’t worry. Things will work out. You can do this.”

I smiled to myself, proud that I had been so encouraging. It reminded me of the early days of Clark’s and my relationship. I was always telling him not to worry that he couldn’t measure up to Superman, never knowing how ironic my pep talks were. But Dean was like the naïve Clark I thought I had known. I’d have to do my best to navigate him through these unfamiliar waters.

My apartment was just as I had left it, which was a relief. Looking through my mail, it seemed I had been gone a few weeks, even though to me it had only been a few days. I immediately worried about what Perry must be thinking. I ran to my answering machine and listened to my messages.

One from Lucy... two from my mother... Those will have to be answered later. Ah, here we go – Perry.

“Uh, Lois, we haven’t heard a word from you in three days. I’ve got Inspector Henderson investigating what’s going on.

Without--- Superman I --well, we're worried about you is all."

My heart went out to Perry, who was like a father to me. I wanted to call him right away, but I knew I needed to have a plausible story lined up about my disappearance.

"Is everything okay?" I jumped at the voice, forgetting that Dean was in my apartment.

"Uh, yeah. It's just Perry, my editor. But of course, you know that... anyway, it seems I was gone for longer than just a few days. I just need to listen to the rest of these messages."

There were a few more worried ones from Perry, and at least two from Jimmy, all within the span of about a week. Had they given up on me? Did they think I was -- dead?

I felt panic begin to rise. Maybe it was impulsive, but the plaintive phone messages really shook me up. I had to at least let Perry know I was alive.

I dialed Perry's direct line.

"Perry? It's Lois. I--"

"Lois! Where in the Sam Hill have you been for the last two weeks?"

"Two weeks? Well, uh, Clark... we, uh--- well, we were on this story and--"

"But you're all right?"

"Yes, everything's fine. Clark's back too, Perry. We'll be in a bit later."

"Good. I need someone to investigate what's going on with these... aliens. I wish to Elvis that Superman were here. They claim to be from the same planet as him. Can you imagine? Well, look, it's good to hear your voice."

"Yours too, Perry."

I hung up the phone with a sigh. I'd have to have a story prepared for Dean to give Perry as Clark. I know Clark's writing style inside and out, but that wouldn't help unless we came up with a plausible story.

I wandered back into the living room, and saw Dean sitting on the couch, looking uncomfortable in his new environment.

"Are you all right?" I asked, still a bit taken aback at how he looked just like Clark.

"Sure. I suppose so," he said, and then breathed out a heavy sigh. "So what did Perry say?"

"Just that he wants us on this alien invasion story, which is fine by me. I'm hoping they know how to reach Clark. Or will give me a clue as to how to reach him."

Dean suddenly looked up at me, an anxious expression on his face. "Wait. You're not planning to talk to them, are you?"

I nodded firmly. "Absolutely. They are from Clark's planet. Hopefully that means that they know him. I mean, what are the odds that the people from the same planet as Clark's would end up on Earth without knowing something about him?"

Dean's face suddenly went pale with fear. "Lois, you know that I am not really Clark. I am just an actor. I can't--protect you should anything go wrong."

His concern for me was touching, and reminded me of Clark in the days before I knew his secret. Of course then, Clark could have indeed protected me and I always knew that Superman was looking out for me.

"I understand the risks, Dean. But even if I were captured, word could get back to Clark and--"

Dean looked at me in shock. "Wait. That's your plan, isn't it? To get captured so Clark will have to come back. Lois--"

"I know what I am doing. Well, sort of... I just mean, if I can bring Clark back, then it will be worth it."

**DEAN**

I stared at Lois a long moment, completely flummoxed by her proposal.

She was crazy.

And daring.

And... amazing.

No wonder Superman fell for her.

I sighed as I stood up off the sofa.

"So... what do you want me to do?"

"The easy part," she said with a smile. "I'll write up some notes for a story and I'll try to call if I can to update you. You go to the Planet, write the story -- you can write, can't you? -- and play the distressed fiancé of Lois Lane."

"Uh, yeah, I can write passably. I wrote a screenplay for our show once. Not that it was the best, but--"

She tore off a piece of paper and slammed it into my chest as she made a grab for her coat. "Great. Then you have experience." She handed me a wad of cash, which looked very different from standard American dollars, and a pocket map of the city. "The Planet is only a few blocks from here. You can walk. Here's some money for food and odd ends. Oh, and here's a key to the apartment. I'll be back if I can. If not, please don't worry about me. I have to bring him back, Dean. Surely you understand?"

Her fingers were resting softly on my chest, and I suddenly found it hard to swallow. Her brown eyes were kind, yet there was a fire lit there, and I knew she wouldn't stop until she got what she wanted. I nodded, feeling numb. I was an actor in a play. I had my lines, and yet the reality of what she was about to do was overwhelming. She would march right into the enemy's camp, and I wouldn't doubt much more, in order to bring Clark Kent back to Earth. I couldn't help but admire her for it. It was one thing to stare down a foe on television, and something else entirely to see that courage real and raw before your eyes.

"Just--be careful," I managed to say, and she answered me with a sad, small smile.

"You sound just like Clark. Before--before I knew, you know?" she said, looking vulnerable and beautiful at the same time. But like someone had dropped a curtain, the look was gone, replaced by steely determination. "Everything will be fine, Dean. You've just got to trust me."

**LOIS**

My words to Dean echoed in my head as I left him to his own devices: *You've just got to trust me*. Trust me to do what? I knew I was being irrational and foolhardy, especially when there was no Superman around to catch me if I fell into the wrong hands... but what I was hoping was that being captured would lead me to Clark. I didn't know how -- he could be light years away by now -- but I knew I had to try.

It was easier than I had expected to find the alien base camp. They were set up right in the middle of the city, overseeing all the goings on of Metropolis. They held the mayor and the chief of police hostage, and threatened to kill them should the city try to reach for outside help. I learned this from a few passersby who were trying to warn me to stay away.

The Kryptonians had taken over the old City Library building, and I tried to head around the back to see if there was an unguarded entrance. But it was swarming with Kryptonians. It was either present myself to them or turn around and head back, and I wasn't about to run away.

"Who's running this popsicle stand, anyway?" I asked boldly to one of the guards.

"Step away, Earth woman," he warned, lifting a strange rifle in my direction.

I lifted my hands in what I hoped was also the intergalactic symbol of surrender and tried to take on a more mild demeanor. "Sorry... I guess what I was trying to say was -- 'take me to your leader.'"

"Major Zod does not speak to Earth people. Move along," he said, turning away from me.

"No, you don't understand. I'm Lois Lane. I'm Cl--I mean, Kal-El's fiancée."

This garnered some interest from the guard, and he signaled to someone else who ran into the building.

“Wait here,” he said sternly.

Well, at least this seemed like progress.

A few minutes later, the man who had run inside returned.

“Major Zod wants to speak with her.”

I was suddenly grabbed by the arm and led into the building. They led me through several corridors until we came to the main library hall. This Major Zod character had set himself up on a makeshift throne of sorts, mostly made of books and nineteenth century furniture. It would have been laughable if the man himself hadn’t been so imposing.

“Lois Lane... You are just who I wanted to see.”

“Well, that makes two of us... I guess,” I said lamely, fearful as to why exactly he wanted to see me.

“I knew Kal-El’s father on Krypton. We were actually old friends... until he betrayed me to the Council. My chance at revenge is in taking over this planet – and seeing Kal-El kneel at my feet.”

“Kal-El stands for peace. Whatever...issues you may have from the past, he will only try to make peace with you, not war,” I said, frightened by the dark look of hate in the man’s eye.

“But he will fight me. He will have to,” Zod said darkly.

“Only if you continue to try and take over the Earth. I know Kal-El will find a way to stop you!”

“I only need this city... and you, my dear, are the other piece of the puzzle. As we speak, word is being sent to Kal-El that you are my prisoner.”

#### DEAN

Walking into the real Daily Planet was amazingly weird. It looked a lot like our set, except much busier, and the building had a more imposing sense of history to it. The wood paneling didn’t just look old, it actually was built in the early twentieth century. In the main hallway, famous articles on everything from World War II to Jimmy Hoffa to the moon landing covered the walls. I was a bit in awe, and felt a tad overwhelmed at the role I was about to play. Even if I had gotten comfortable playing Clark Kent over the last four years, stepping into the man’s actual life was entirely different.

I reached the bullpen and tried not to look like I was trying to figure out which desk was mine. I spotted Lois’ name plate, and had to do a little circle until I worked out where mine was; it was catty-corner to hers. I sat down in his chair, and got chills up my spine.

This was Superman’s desk. He actually existed, and I was playing his alter ego in real life! I let out a huge puff of air, trying to calm myself enough to start writing.

I started to log on to the computer and realized I didn’t have Clark’s password. I felt a moment’s panic, worrying that our little scheme was going to unravel even before it had begun, all because of a password!

I typed in a few obvious ones: LoisLane? Nope... Smallville? Nada. Krypton? Bingo.

I smiled to myself, proud that I had figured out Superman’s password. I mean, for a man with many secrets, you’d think he’d be harder to figure out. But like I had played him on the show, what you see is what you get. And I found that oddly comforting.

So now that a small disaster had been averted by finding his password, it was time to get to work.

Lois had handed me a write-up on a story that they-- er, we supposedly had been working on. Luckily, it actually sounded somewhat familiar. Something about Senator Harrington... I used her notes and tried to write up a cohesive story, not having a single clue as to how long it should be or if it was in Clark Kent’s style. But I figured she’d edit it before it went to Perry.

Speaking of Perry, he was heading to my desk, and my first test of an actor was about to begin.

Perry White in person was quite impressive. He had a tall, stocky stature and a stern expression to match. You could see that

he had seen it all – wars, presidents, scandals... you name it. The history he had witnessed was stamped on his face. But there was also a kindly, grandfatherly manner about him that reminded me of our Perry on set. I immediately breathed a little easier, stepping back into the role as a sort of adopted son.

“How you been, Clark? Lois tells me a story has been keeping you two busy,” he said, though a question seemed to be in his voice.

“Yeah, I’m just writing it up now, Chief,” I said, hearing Clark Kent in my head once more.

“Are you sure that’s all? I know it’s been strange around here since Superman left... I mean, is Lois handling it okay?”

Poor guy. Clark Kent, I mean. He’s constantly compared to Superman. He must be one hell of a confident guy to deal with the constant put downs. Clark Kent was Lois’ fiancé after all.

“Yeah, she’s fine, Chief. Really. I mean, we did take a little extra time. Just the two of us to get away. And sorry if you were worried about us. But everything’s fine.”

I have no idea what made me add in that embellishment, and I regretted it the moment it escaped my lips. Because now I’ll have to remember to tell Lois that I had said that, and we’ll both have to think of where we could have disappeared to.

“Where is Lois? I thought you two were coming in together.”

“Uh, she wanted to investigate these aliens. I told her not to go alone... but she thinks she might be able to reach Superman if she speaks with them.” There. Fully convincing that I was part of this bizarre world. Perry looked like he believed me, and I suppressed a smile, feeling almost dizzy that I was really part of a world where men flew and aliens invaded the Earth.

“I wish you had gone with her,” Perry started.

I sighed, playing up my Clark Kent. “I tried, Chief. But you know Lois...”

Perry nodded. “Yeah, I know. You can’t convince her to do anything she doesn’t want to do. Let’s just hope her scheme works... And let me know if you need anything, okay?”

“Sure, Chief.”

#### LOIS

This really wasn’t one of my better ideas...

Zod had dismissed me as carelessly as if I were some offending insect. His guards carried me away, down into the basement of the library. Never had I feared libraries before, but I thought I might develop an aversion to them after this...

The basement smelled damp and was quite chilly. We headed into a poorly lit hallway filled with small caged rooms. I realized this was a book storage area that had been converted into their makeshift prison. I passed by the mayor and the chief of police, both of whom recognized me.

“What’s happening in the city, Miss Lane?” the mayor asked anxiously, though he was quickly silenced by the guard with a wave of his strange weapon.

A guard was tugging me roughly by the arm down the hallway, but I wanted to say something to reassure him. “Keeping in good spirits, sir.”

I was jerked harder for speaking. “Some evolved people you are! Still treat women like chattel!” I grumbled as they tossed me into my book storage unit – um, cell.

I slumped onto a tiny shelf, which I realized would also have to double for a bed if I ended up stuck here for too long. The entire width and length of the cell was no more than about four feet. Great if you need to store books. Crappy when you want to store people.

Being captured had been my plan. But for some reason I hadn’t really thought through the reality of it. And word was being sent to Clark that I was a prisoner. That was hopeful, even if it was designed to torment him. It would spur him into action nevertheless, and assuming he wasn’t galaxies away, he would return to Earth to rescue me.

At least, I hoped so.

As much as I knew Clark loved me, there was a tiny part of me that worried about him not wanting to return. What if he felt more whole with his own people? I know he longed to fit in, and what if his leaving Earth had given him that?

These were my deepest fears, but I knew they were unfounded. Clark loved me. And he loved this planet. If we were in danger, I had to believe that he'd do all in his power to return as soon as could.

And Dean?

I wondered how he was faring at the Planet. I hoped he was able to play a convincing enough Clark to fool Perry. Though I know that not much got past our intrepid editor, it would be way too complicated to try and explain how a Hollywood actor who played Superman on TV ended up in Clark's desk.

I sighed, standing up in my tiny cell, as I tried to look down the narrow hall to see the mayor or the police chief. Some guards were blocking my view.

I looked down at the lock on my cage, and suddenly wished I had long curly hair that required the wearing of bobby pins on a daily basis. The lock was a typical locker padlock. With a small pin, I could pick that thing in no time... Too bad my hair was bone straight.

I sat down again, wondering how long I'd have to wait here until Clark returned. Hours? Days? Weeks?

Dear God, I'd go stir crazy if I had to be here longer than a day.

I sighed again, deciding to try and conserve my strength. I closed my eyes and tried to just think about the moment I'd see Clark in his blue and red coming to rescue me...

**DEAN**

After I finished typing up my piece, I started to relax a bit, feeling like pretending to be Clark Kent wouldn't be so difficult after all.

Colleagues pretty much ignored me, and I was able to sift through some of the archived pieces that the real Lois and Clark had written.

Their writing was really quite good, and after the early pieces, you could start to see how they influenced each other's writing style. Yet, no matter how real the articles were, it was still absurd and astounding to see Superman in the headlines.

I heard the elevator ding open, and saw HG Wells head towards my desk. I got the feeling that every time he showed up, more trouble lay ahead.

"Can we talk privately, my boy?" he asked politely. I nodded and we headed into the conference room. "Well, I believe the Kryptonians are heading to the Planet any moment. I think they plan to get out their message of... well, dominate rule over the people through this paper."

"How did you manage to beat them here?" I asked.

"Well, actually it's conjecture and speculation, really. They took over LNN, and I figured their next logical target would be the Daily Planet. But I have a plan, and I need your help to make it happen," he said, suddenly making me nervous with that determined look in his eye. "We have to make them think that Superman has returned... we need to go to Clark's apartment and stage a little... scene. Are you up for it, my boy?"

I sighed, feeling more anxious than I would have liked. "I guess I have to be. It's why I came, isn't it? Okay, let's get out of here..." I said, as we made our way towards the elevator. "Have you seen Lois?"

"No, I'm afraid not. She may have been captured."

"I think that was her plan all along," I said grimly. "I don't know how Clark puts up with it. Her rashness would drive me crazy," I admitted, knowing full well that I wasn't the Man of Steel, capable of dealing with such an impulsive fiancée.

"No doubt, my boy. No doubt," Wells chuckled.

"Maybe we should take the stairs. It might be faster?"

\*\*\*

I was dressed as Superman, standing in the real Clark Kent's apartment.

It was a bit homier than the one I had 'lived' in on set. For one, it had carpet, and a real working dishwasher. It was a bit smaller than the one we had used, and didn't have that cement, basement-like smell that plagued the set. I couldn't help noticing all the details that made the real thing different from the imposter from my world.

Including myself.

I was the imposter here.

Yet I had to be convincing enough to a group of aliens that they couldn't take over this planet; that its protector had returned.

The suit suddenly felt too tight, and I could feel myself cooking up a sweat. Superman doesn't sweat. They'll notice I am not really him. Surely there are a million tells...

Yet, this was a world where no one connected the fact that Clark and Superman looked so much alike. This world was used to being fooled by simply stating what should be the truth.

But would the same logic work on an alien race?

I had to believe that it would.

"Dean? Are you ready, my boy?" HG Wells called from the living room.

I took one last glance in the mirror, wiping my forehead of any sweat that might be there and took a deep breath. It was now or never. I'd had four years to prepare for this role, and now millions of people counted on me making this work.

"They are going to want to meet with me," I hedged, as Wells handed me what would be my script for the ruse.

"Yes, they will. We will delay it as long as possible. And hopefully, Clark is already on his way back to Earth. Are you sure this camera is set up right?" Wells said, looking warily at the hand held camera set up on a tripod.

"Yeah, it will work. Just press the red button... Let's get this over with and sent to LNN as soon as possible."

"Right. All right. I am going to press it in 3, 2—"

The red light came on, and I suddenly felt like I could do this. I had, after all, acted the role a hundred times in front of the camera. What was one more little scene?

We set up the recording space to be in front of a blank wall, so that there was no way to verify where I was speaking from.

"Fellow citizens of Krypton, this is Kal-El. I ask that you leave the people of Earth be, that you leave this planet. I have heard of your taking over the city of Metropolis, and how you have tried to cower its citizens. It will not work. The citizens that I love so dearly are courageous and indomitable. I am returning to Earth to stop you. We will meet soon, and this matter will be settled, once and for all."

I nodded to Wells, who then hit the red button again.

"Well done, my boy. Superman would be proud."

I smiled wryly. "I only did what I have been doing for the last four years. Speak someone else's words. Now let's take this to LNN and get it broadcast right away. Then, I am going to see what I can do about getting Lois Lane set free."

**LOIS**

It was almost nightfall. The basement was dark, but there were a few small windows, high on the wall down by where the guards kept watch.

We had been offered just a bit of bread and water, and eating my meager meal, I suddenly realized how foolhardy I had been.

What had I been I thinking, provoking them like that?

Clark was light years away, and I had no way of knowing if he could come back to Earth. Perhaps we were doomed...

I sighed, hating myself for giving into wallowing. I knew that Clark would want me to stay strong, to believe in him. Of course he'll come back, and he'll put Zod and all the rest of these

Kryptonians in their place.

I just had to keep believing that...

**DEAN**

LNN broadcast my video all over Metropolis. As soon as I left the LNN building, I changed out of the Superman costume, suddenly nervous about what we had done. If Superman – the real Superman—didn't come back, I would have to face General Zod, and I knew I would be quickly discovered as a fraud.

Still, I also knew that Lois had gotten herself captured and I felt I had to do something about it. I had learned a trick or two playing Clark Kent. I felt I should at least try to rescue Lois. Worst case scenario, maybe Superman would come back in time to rescue us both – it sure had worked often enough for Lois.

Even as I thought it, I shook my head at the absurdity of the situation. I was going to rescue Lois and Superman himself would rescue us if I didn't pull it off?

Where were the cameras? Surely this was a joke, a movie to capitalize on the end of our series... cause no one would believe this back home!

I headed back to the Daily Planet to see if I could dig up a map of the library where Lois was being held. If I was going to be foolhardy, I at least wanted to try to be prepared and foolhardy.

"Kent! In my office, now!" I heard Perry bellow as soon as I hit the bull pen.

No doubt he wanted the Superman scoop, now that the video was out there.

"Yes, Chief?" I asked, stepping into his office where he was wearing a track in the floor with his pacing.

"What do you know about this Superman video? Has it been authenticated?"

"I don't know, Chief. I just saw it on my way back over here."

He stopped a moment in his pacing to look at me. "Back? Where had you been?"

"Uh," I said, uncomfortably, getting a taste of what the real Clark must feel like lying to his editor every day.

"Where's Lois? Have you heard anything?"

"Yes, Chief. She's being held by the Kryptonians, down at the old City Library. I think she went there to try to talk to General Zod."

Perry snorted a half laugh, "Yeah, she would do that, wouldn't she? So... what are you going to do?"

"Well, Chief—"

I didn't have time to tell him my idea, as I saw him suddenly distracted by something going on in the newsroom.

"Great shades of Elvis, I don't believe it," he grumbled, moving past me to head into the bull pen.

I turned around, and was momentarily speechless as there stood my Doppelgänger, the real Superman. I felt chills up and down my spine, seeing him in person. He seemed a little taller than me, and his uniform looked a lot sharper than the one I had worn on set, or even the one we had dug up to make the video.

I had this weird feeling of relief, seeing that he really was real – that there really was a Superman out there, somewhere. During the time I played Superman, I would run into fans quite often. The adults of course understood that I was just an actor, but it was the kids that were always the hardest to meet with. They'd look up at you with hero worship in their eyes, as if you could solve all the world's problems. And you'd have to explain to them that Superman wasn't really real, that you couldn't really fly. And I hated those moments, as it always killed something precious and pure – their innocence about the world.

And yet, here was standing before me, the real deal. I felt a smile light up my face, knowing that from now on, I could always tell them that Superman did really exist, that I was just his stand-in.

The whole newsroom buzzed to life around Superman, but I saw his eyes searching for one person.

Lois Lane, of course.

I suddenly felt guilty for not making sure Lois had remained safe. How was I to explain that I let her walk right into a trap?

His eyes eventually lit onto me. He had a puzzled expression, which I had expected. With just a hand gesture, he excused himself from the crowd and motioned that I follow him into the conference room.

I didn't know what to say, just staring at him, thinking of all the millions of Superman fans back in my universe who would kill to be standing in my shoes just at that moment. And yet, I would have done anything to change shoes with any one of them. I was so worried that he'd be angry at me for not looking after Lois.

"Are you the Clark from the other dimension, the other Superman?" he asked eventually. It took me a moment to realize what he meant. The story arc we had had on our show with a second Clark, who was also Superman...

"No," I said hastily, lest he think I have superpowers. "It's... even weirder than that..."

He crossed his arms on his chest, waiting expectantly for me to explain. Again, his resemblance to me unnerved me. How many times had I used that pose of intimidation on camera?

"My name is Dean Cain... I... I'm actually an actor, and in my universe—I played you on TV," I managed to get out, the words feeling foreign in my mouth as I tried to wrap my head around what was going on.

He looked at me like I had two heads. I knew that our plots had been often weird and contrived, and I imagined the real Superman had seen any number of strange things and improbable circumstances, but I definitely had him stumped by that admission.

"You played me... on TV?" he asked.

"Yeah... look, Lois can tell you all about it when—"

At her name, his questions about my origins suddenly took a back seat. "Where is she? I went to her apartment first, but she wasn't there."

I sighed, really hoping he was as good a guy as I had always imagined him to be and that he wouldn't grab me by the collar when I told him this next part. "You know Lois... She..."

"Just tell me where she is, Dean," he said in a stern but calm voice that sounded so close to my own, yet still had the power to drive fear into me.

"She went to talk to Zod and got herself captured. She's being held at the City Library. I tried to talk her out of it—"

Superman suddenly smiled, and I had this weird déjà vu feeling as I recognized the emotion on his face – it was one I had often summoned up when secretly admiring the derring-do of our beloved Lois Lane. I felt a smile cross my face in answer, and I wondered why I had worried before about his reaction.

"I know. She didn't listen... Don't worry, I'll get her back... But maybe you can do something for me," he said, beginning to pace. I could tell he was formulating a plan.

"Sure, anything," I answered, feeling a little bit like a fan boy. *I get to help Superman!*

"I will need kryptonite to defeat Zod," he said in all seriousness, adding to the whole weirdness of this turn of events. "Go to Star Labs and explain everything to Dr. Klein... Would you mind reprising your role as me just one more time?"

**LOIS**

I paced in my tiny cell. I was too nervous to try and lie down to sleep, and too cramped to remain in one position. I needed to get out of here!

Perhaps if I demanded to see Zod I'd at least get a chance to walk around...

I looked down the narrow hallway, easily seeing what was

going on elsewhere in the room, as the room was just lined with book cages. I still couldn't believe they thought these tiny cages were suitable to hold a person, even if I was a prisoner.

I suddenly had to go to the bathroom, and seeing as they hadn't provided me with any kind of privy, perhaps they'd let me out to use the facilities.

"Hey, you!" I called, drawing the attention of one of the guards.

He stood up from his makeshift desk, towering over the lesser height of the book cages, and glanced at me. The chilling hate in his eyes shook me to my core. I was reminded that these Kryptonians all had Clark's powers. I have and never will be afraid of Clark, but I understand the capabilities of his powers. And those powers wielded in the hands of someone intent on hurting someone was an intimidating prospect, to be sure.

The guard stared me down, waiting for me to continue.

"Um, any way a girl can use the restroom around here?" I said weakly, suddenly trying to convince my bladder that it really didn't need to be emptied at the moment.

My eyes caught a flash of color, and I blinked quickly a few times, not sure of what I had seen. Was that a streak of red and blue? I felt a lurch in my heart, afraid of letting myself hope...

Then, a green glow caught my eye, down by where the guards were standing, causing them to double over suddenly in obvious agony. As quick as light, from the other end of the room, my hopes coalesced as I finally saw him... My Superman, my Clark.

The green glow to my left was gone, and suddenly I was whisked away, down the opposite hallway.

Before I knew it, I was soaring over the spires of Metropolis, held in Clark's arms.

My mind could barely process what had just happened. How had Clark managed with the kryptonite? Was he really here? And would he stay?

I stared at his familiar features, unable to speak for a moment. He had come back to me, just as I knew he would. He was here, and he was real...

As much as Dean had resembled my Clark, there was no replacing him. The way my Clark cradled me to his body, the way his eyes searched mine, as if seeing into my very soul – all told me that I was at last home and safe.

We didn't speak until we reached my balcony. He gently set me down in front of him, leaning his forehead against mine, each of us breathing in the other's presence. At last, he whispered against my temple, "I missed you."

I looked up into his warm, chocolate eyes, feeling my heart melt into them. My arms slipped around him, under his cape, pulling him close to me. "You returned," I exhaled, my soul filled with relief.

I pulled out of the hug, but didn't let him go. His eyes searched my features, as if reassuring himself that all of me was here too, just as he had left me.

He leaned down, and inevitably, our lips met. He kissed me, full of earnest passion. His arms held me close, gentle yet insistent, his forearm supporting my back. I answered him in equal measure as happy tears slid down my cheeks.

"You came back to me... you came back," I whispered in between kisses.

"I had to... you knew I would," he reassured me, his lips alternating between my lips, my neck, my chin, like warm points of light surging through my body.

He pulled out of our kisses after a moment, his eyes serious, as his thumb caressed my cheek, my face cradled in his hand. "Lois, I have to go back. Dean—"

My head was still dizzy from his kisses, and it took me a second to remember Dean. "Oh! So you met him?"

He smiled wryly. "How else do you think I managed with

kryptonite nearby? But I have to go back. I have to face off with Zod, and Dean is going to help me do it."

"Clark, are you sure you can do that? I mean, with kryptonite so close..."

"We've already got a plan worked out. Just... promise me, you'll stay out of the way," he said in that patronizing way that annoyed as much as comforted, knowing he was just trying to look out for me.

"Why do you even say that? You know I need to get this story..." I challenged him, but with a smile – still thrilled beyond words that he had returned.

"Lois..." he grumbled. "Fine. But stay out of the way," he conceded, sweeping me up into his arms as we flew back towards the library.

**DEAN**

I stared at the kryptonite in my hand, mesmerized by its very real existence. It was darker than how Hollywood had imagined it, and the crystals were less pronounced. However, it had amazingly done the trick and incapacitated the Kryptonians guarding Lois.

It would also keep me safe from any other Kryptonians until Superman returned so we could finish the rest of our plan.

My mouth went dry with anticipation, wondering how I could explain all this to anybody when I get back. Who would even believe me?

Just then, I saw Superman landing a safe distance away from me, carrying Lois. I felt a smile on my lips, seeing the two of them together. It was like seeing a reflection of Teri and me, and yet there was so much more there. Perhaps what I was seeing was the love they had for each other.

"Are you ready?" Superman asked, as Lois approached me.

"Are you sure you know what you are doing, Dean?" Lois said skeptically, eyeing the kryptonite in my hand.

I shook my head. "I haven't a clue... but he seems to," I said, gesturing towards Superman.

She nodded with a sigh. "OK, so what is the plan?"

"You stay with Dean," Superman said, still keeping a safe distance from the kryptonite. "I will go in and confront Zod. I will have to fight him, to prove to the other Kryptonians that I am their leader. When I hear our back-up arriving – I informed the authorities of our plan – Dean will follow with the kryptonite. If I can get Zod to yield and promise to leave Earth, then it will be over..."

"And if you can't?" Lois asked pointedly. "What then? He doesn't seem like the type to concede easily."

Superman sighed, and for the first time, I saw the man under the suit, the man who isn't always sure of his choices.

"I will do what I have to do to see that Earth is safe," he said quietly.

They say reading about heroes makes you feel like you can be one of them. Seeing one in person, gives you the humility to realize that it is never easy to be a hero. I understood that now.

Superman glanced at me and nodded. "All right. I'm ready. Let's finish this."

**LOIS**

I kept eyeing the kryptonite in Dean's hand, worried how this would all turn out. How could we be sure that Clark could get far enough away from Zod before Dean had to use it?

I touched Dean's arm, to get his attention. "I know you pretended to be hurt by kryptonite on your show... But Dean, the real thing... it's –"

His warm hand covered mine, reassuring me. "I know. Don't worry. I'll be careful," he said in warm tones, sounding so much like Clark.

We had hung back quite a bit to ensure that Clark wouldn't be affected by the kryptonite. When he reached the main library, we made our way to the other side, through the hallway that

surrounded the main stacks. We would be behind Zod, hopefully giving Clark the advantage if there were residual effects from us being nearby.

Superman was confronting Zod, and Zod did not seem at all amused that he had returned. “Why ever should I leave? These people are serving me nicely... here, I can rule. Here, I have power!”

“I exercise the Right of Challenge, Zod. I have the right to fight you... and I demand to have that right acknowledged,” I heard Clark demand.

“Indeed,” came the smug answer. “Fine, the victor that emerges from this chamber shall rule Earth.”

“I don’t want to rule Earth. But I will fight for the right for the people of Earth to live free.”

“So shall it be done.”

**DEAN**

So, they would fight each other, much like I had fought Lord Nor on our show. But Clark had had no training in physical combat, like I had had with Ching. Clark may not understand how ruthless Zod would be. He would fight to the death, and Clark would do all in his power not to let it end that way.

“Lois, Zod will try to kill him... Clark has to understand that,” I whispered to Lois.

She was peeking around the bookshelves to watch what was happening with her hero. “It’s up to him now. And us...” She turned to me suddenly, “Who is the back-up we are waiting for, and when are they coming?”

“Inspector Henderson and a dozen or so police. But they can’t get near this place without kryptonite... They are in the process of trying to secure the rock that Lex Luthor had... I took the only rock from Star Labs. I think Luthor’s is held in a vault at the Courthouse, but there is some bureaucratic tape that must be dealt with first...”

She looked at me with a shocked expression. “Do they understand what we are dealing with here? We don’t have time for bureaucratic tape!”

“Lois, the less kryptonite on the scene, the better, actually. I am hoping it won’t come to them needing to back us up... If there is a lot of it in the area, it could hurt Clark as well.”

She nodded her understanding, and I could see the memories of other times when Clark had been confronted with the green poison evident in her eyes. “I know...,” she said softly. “So, what is your plan?”

I handed her the kryptonite. “Hold this while I go change, would you?”

She took it, horror crossing her features as she tossed it back to me. “Dean! You can’t – I mean, he’ll know you are not him!”

“I know... that is the point. Fake him out for a moment, so I can get close enough to expose Zod to the kryptonite. Don’t blame me. It was your fiancé’s idea.”

**LOIS**

I don’t know what is worse... Clark acting foolishly or Dean following suit...

**DEAN**

I put on the spare suit that I had worn to make the video earlier. Clark had given me a yellow belt with a small pouch that I put the kryptonite in, hiding it behind my back under the cape, along with my Clark Kent glasses. I would have the appearance of Superman, yet the kryptonite would render Zod powerless.

Still, it didn’t mean that I wasn’t nervous about playing the part...

I was in the hallway changing, but I could hear things were heating up inside. I heard the sound of fighting and the clang of something like swords.

I knew I was taking too long to get into the suit, but the cape was giving me trouble. I usually had someone to help me put it on.

Giving up on putting it on myself, I stepped inside, seeing if Lois could help me, when I heard her scream. I glanced over to where we had been crouching, and saw that one of Zod’s goons had grabbed her. The cape was slung over my arm, but I tossed it aside as I ran over to her. The kryptonite sitting in my belt pouch, weakened the soldier, and Lois gave him a swift kick in the groin.

Just as she assured me she was safe, I saw her eyes grow in alarm as she pointed over my shoulder. “Clark!”

I turned around and saw that Zod had Superman on the ground, backed into a corner. If I neared them, Superman would also be affected by the kryptonite. However, if I didn’t do something, Zod might run him through anyway.

“Zod! I’m over here!” I called across the room using my best Superman voice. My heart was going a mile a minute with a sudden kick of adrenaline. I felt exposed as well without the cape on my back.

Zod looked up, looking puzzled a second as he realized there were two Supermen. It gave Clark the chance he needed to get away, though I noticed he didn’t fly, but rather stumbled off towards Lois. I think the kryptonite must have affected him a bit, for when I turned to Zod, he too looked weaker. He gave a better effort at not showing it, though. As I neared, he fell to his knees.

“What... are you doing to me? Who-?”

I took the handcuffs off the belt Clark had procured earlier from Inspector Henderson and put them on Zod. “Your rule here is over, Zod. Leave Earth,” I said, relishing the words. “Kal-El has returned, and he has bested you. If you have any honor, you will leave peaceably.”

I forced him to his feet, though I felt a bit guilty at how badly the kryptonite was affecting him. I had imagined it many times on set, what it must feel like, and I had always conjured the feeling of a splitting headache with all over muscle weakness. But seeing the effects in real-life, I think it must be even worse than that.

Superman and Lois were nowhere to be found, as I had assumed they wanted to clear out if the authorities came with even more kryptonite. Though I felt a bit nervous, knowing I had the Kryptonian leader at my mercy. If his soldiers attacked me, despite the green poison, would I stand a chance?

I headed outside, and much to my relief, Inspector Henderson and MPD were standing by. Before we stepped outside, I put on Clark’s glasses, hoping to reinforce the illusion that it was just Clark Kent helping out Superman. Maybe not having the cape on would help that image as well. As we stepped onto the library steps, half of the police force held some small portion of kryptonite, leading me to assume they had obtained the rock and busted it up to split among them.

“What do you want to do with him, Henderson?” I called, though attempting to sound a little more like mild-mannered Clark Kent.

Henderson approached, motioning to his men to stand down. I saw a group of Kryptonians surrounded by guards with kryptonite. We had them at our mercy now, to be sure.

“General Zod, is it?” Henderson asked my captive warily. “Will you and your people promise to leave this planet?”

“Kal-El has won...” Zod said weakly. He mumbled something in what I assumed was Kryptonian, and a huge shadow appeared over the library out of nowhere. It seemed something sinister was going to happen, but suddenly, all of the Kryptonians vanished into thin air. The shadow overhead fell through the clouds, revealing a large, black spaceship. It hovered over the library for a moment, causing all nearby to look up in fear.

Then suddenly, with a whoosh sounding like fifty helicopters taking off, it disappeared into the sky.

The police slowly lowered their weapons, staring at the sky above us as we all tried to make sense out of what had just

happened.

When they seemed to think the aliens were gone for good, a few men moved into the building, presumably to free the remaining prisoners.

Dr. Klein appeared, coming out of one of the patrol cars. “Clark! I’m glad it worked!” He carried with him a large lead box. “I’ll collect the kryptonite. The City has agreed that it will be safer at Star Labs, where only Superman can have access to it.”

I nodded in agreement, wryly handing over my piece of the strange green rock. I almost wanted to take it with me when I go back... but I knew I would see Clark and Lois first, and I simply wouldn’t bring it near them again.

“Thank you for your help, Clark,” said Henderson. “I know you are eager to get back to the Planet to write your story, but I have just a few questions...”

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I made my way back to the Planet, actually quite thrilled with the idea of writing up the story. I know Lois will want to have her stamp on it, and I kind of relished the idea of writing up my own Superman story.

I was formulating in my mind how I should begin the story, when I saw HG Wells appear, a few blocks before I reached the Planet. I felt a wave of disappointment, knowing that my time here was coming to an end.

I sighed as I approached him. “Do I at least get to say goodbye to Lois and Clark first?”

“Of course, my boy. Of course.”

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As we walked along to Lois’ apartment, I tried to imprint in my mind as much of the city of Metropolis as I could. I wanted to remember this place forever, knowing that it was unlikely I would ever see it again.

The sounds of the cars, the height of the buildings... even the blue sky – all seemed different to any city I knew back home, rendered as they were against the backdrop of being Superman’s city. Here, you can even believe a man can fly...

We climbed the steps to Lois’ apartment and rang her bell.

“Dean! I was afraid you had left us already!” Lois cried, giving me a hug in greeting.

Clark was in his normal clothes, sitting on the sofa. He nodded in my direction as I came in.

“Thank you for your help today. I don’t know how I would have managed without you.”

“You would’ve found a way.”

“Maybe...” he said, though he looked doubtful. Lois came to sit next to him. Their eyes met, and Wells and I both felt a little like intruders.

“So... I guess it is time to say goodbye,” I said reluctantly. “I don’t think ‘thank you’ are the appropriate words... yet somehow, they are right.”

“How so?” Lois asked.

“Well, thank you for being... you, I guess. It was so hard for me to let the show go. But this experience... it is one I will carry with me forever.”

“Oh Dean! Thank you for taking care of me! When Tempus —” Lois suddenly jumped up, looking at Wells. “What are we going to do about Tempus?”

“Don’t worry, Lois,” Wells assured her. “I caught up with him before I found you and he is standing trial, even as we speak. Well, sometime in the future anyway.”

“Then I guess there is nothing left but to say goodbye,” Lois said softly, coming over to me. She gave me a hug, and I could see Clark looking on, a knowing smile on his face.

“What?” I couldn’t help asking.

He shook his head, laughing. “Nothing. It’s just ...did you really play me on a television show?”

“Yep. You’re a big deal where I’m from. Everything from comic books to movies. You’re an American icon.”

“Hmm... An American icon, huh? Well, I guess that means if I ever need a backup career, there’s always television!”

#### LOIS

After Dean left, Clark went to get us some Chinese food from that nice little place he knows... in China.

He flew back a short while later, giving me the time I needed to change into a cute black dress and light a few candles. I put on a Frank Sinatra CD, and the song that Clark and I had danced to on a night long ago started to play...

*Fly me to the moon*

*Let me play among the stars*

*Let me see what spring is like*

*On a, Jupiter and Mars*

*In other words, hold my hand*

*In other words, baby, kiss me*

“Would you like to dance?” I asked him, suddenly feeling breathless.

Still in his Superman suit, he set the Chinese food down on the table and took me in his arms. We danced quietly a moment, enjoying being together again. “I saw many things on my time away from Earth... and I’ll tell you about all of it some other time,” he said softly, his breath warm on my cheek. “But for now, all I want to do is hold you close to me.”

*Fill my heart with song*

*And let me sing for ever more*

*You are all I long for*

*All I worship and adore*

*In other words, please be true*

*In other words, I love you.*

We swayed to the music, and I suddenly felt us lift off the ground, ever so gently. “Now this is dancing,” I said, my heart filling with anticipation.

“That’s my line,” he teased gently, leaning down to kiss me.

We lingered in the air, moving to the music, lost in the moment. As the song ended, Clark brought us back down to earth. I felt a sense of melancholy fill me, and I could tell he sensed it.

“What is it?”

I moved over to the table and started unpacking our dinner, courtesy of Superman Express. “I just... I just can’t lose you again, Clark. I have to know... you are staying, right? You aren’t going to leave me again at the first sign of trouble on some distant star are you?” I feared I sounded clingy and insecure, but I couldn’t help it. I had to know that he was committed to us... not just me and him, but Metropolis. Earth. “I mean, you didn’t meet some other woman while you were out there, did you?”

He looked at me incredulously, and I suddenly felt very foolish. “Lois, I couldn’t wait to get back to Earth. It was all I could think about... I tried to fit in with the other Kryptonians, but – I am Clark Kent, first and foremost. And all I want is to get married to you.”

“Really?” I asked in a small voice, not trusting myself not to cry.

“Really...now, let’s have some dinner... and then, perhaps we can play among some stars of our own.”

#### DEAN

I was back.

HG Wells disappeared in a small spark of light, and I was back, standing in my condo alone.

I let out a sigh, trying to process all that I had witnessed. Superman was real.

Lois Lane was an amazingly real woman.

I walked over to my collection of video tapes, thinking I might watch an episode of my show, but I suddenly didn’t really want to. I had the memory of seeing those characters that I loved

so much, that I had poured so much heart and soul into, become real.

A picture caught my eye on the mantle, one I didn't remember putting there. It was me and Teri. Or so I thought... but upon closer inspection, I realized it was from the night of the wrap-up party, when Lois herself had accompanied me.

"You sly old man," I said aloud, marveling at how I thought it had gotten there. It had to have been Wells.

I had a memento to carry with me forever.

To remember a dear friend, and a character I deeply loved.

"Thanks, Wells. Wherever you are."

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A few weeks later, Teri and her husband were on their way over for drinks and dinner. As I straightened up and planned for dinner that day, the picture of me and the real Lois at the wrap-up party kept catching my eye. I debated whether I should leave it out, knowing that Teri might eventually ask about it.

I played out the scenario a dozen times in my head:

*"Dean, I don't remember this photo. When was this taken?"*

I would flounder a moment, unsure where to begin. Then I'd sigh and walk over to her, with her husband looking on.

*"Teri, you're never going to believe this..."*

Every scenario I played out ended badly. She'd laugh, or say I was drunk. She and her husband would worry I was obsessing over the show, or worse, her. No matter how I tossed it around, I always came up looking crazy or desperate.

So right before they came, I took the picture and hid it in a desk drawer.

We talked and reminisced for hours that night. We all joked and laughed and told stories, though I kept one story entirely to myself.

I also realized something else that night that was entirely revelatory to me.

As much as I loved talking to Teri and enjoyed her company, I was relieved to realize that I wasn't in love with her. I never had been.

It had been Lois Lane that I was crazy about.

Teri had brought her to life, and I had fallen for the character. I felt so... free.

For months I had carried around all this guilt that I had stepped over a line with my feelings for Teri. She was such a good friend, that if she ever had noticed, I know she'd never say anything. Neither would her husband.

And they were both so in love.

What an idiot I had been... wallowing in all that guilt.

Still, there was a hole in my heart, as I longed to find someone who could play my co-star in real life.

And even though I know a real Lois Lane is out there, I know she has found her Clark Kent.

I was reminded of a story line we had wanted to do, if we had continued on for five seasons. We had intended on finding the Clark Kent from the other universe – the one whose parents had died when he was a kid – his Lois Lane, by having HG Wells time travel to save her from being killed on a story in the Congo.

If there are parallel worlds – and my experience proved to me there are – then there seems to be just one logical answer.

My Lois Lane was out there somewhere.

And all I needed to do was find her.

THE END