

# Hattie and the Main Street Bomber — Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 1 – O

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This version is rated PG-13

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Summary: Have you ever heard a frustrated parent say to a difficult child, “Just wait, someday you’ll have children and I hope they do to you what you have been doing to me”? Well, Lois is now editor of the Daily Planet and Hattie Kaplin is on the city desk. Enough said.

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Note:

This story takes place in the Matchmaker Chronicles universe. Hattie Kaplin has had a long standing relationship with Jon Kent and the entire Kent family; in fact she is almost part of the family. Recently she had been brought in on the family secret that the Kents are in fact the super family.

This story is a sequel to Hattie Kaplin — Reporter – Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 1C — N

\*denotes emphasis\*

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/” denotes telepathic communications.”/

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## Chapter 1 – Hattie

July 2028

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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The headline of Sunday’s edition of the Daily Planet read:

\*”10 KILLED 3 INJURED IN MYSTERIOUS BOMB

BLAST\*

By: Hattie Kaplin

*In this, the latest in a series of bombings of center city, 10 people lost their lives and 3 more were seriously hurt with life threatening injuries.*

*Emergency responders were on scene within minutes. When the medics arrived they found other pedestrians, uninjured by the blast applying first aid to the injured. One of the medics stated, \*”If not for the aid rendered by bystanders, we might have lost at least one more. The willingness of others to help, in this case, saved at least one life.”\* The injured received treatment at the scene and were transported to MetGen.*

*The Metropolis Police Department is requesting help from*

*the citizenry as they try to solve this case. A reward is being offered to anyone with information leading to an arrest.*

*To date the number of dead has reached 98 with an additional 40 people injured at various levels of severity.*

*This is the worst case of serial killings in the history of the city of Metropolis.*

*In this, the latest bombing, which took place on Saturday night, the explosion, as has all of the others, seems to have originated with a car which was stopped at an intersection. Those pedestrians closest to the car when it exploded were killed along with the car’s occupants.*

*MPD investigators have identified the vehicle as belonging to a family from New Jersey in Metropolis visiting relatives. All three members of the family, parents and a 5 year old girl, were killed in the blast.*

*As with the other explosions there has been no discernible pattern to either the timing or the victims. (Story continues 2A)”*

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It was early Monday morning in the bullpen of the Daily Planet. Lois Lane was in the editor’s office looking at a mock-up of the afternoon edition.

Hattie Kaplin had just arrived and she looked for her new partner, James Olsen, Junior (JJ). Their desks were in the center of the bullpen, metaphorically, the hub of all of the activity in the newsroom, the city desk.

She was surprised to see that his desk was vacant, but then she remembered that he would be out today because he was moving the final items from his apartment in Gotham City to his new apartment in Metropolis. She wouldn’t be seeing him until tomorrow.

Hattie had just finished checking her e-mails. She had gotten a note from one of her snitches. This guy was a bug for secrecy and used a pseudonym – Graham Kerr. Sometimes he jocularly called himself the gassy glutton. This snitch was just like Lois’ favorite snitch, Bobby Bigmouth, there were rumors to the effect that this was in fact his son. The parallels extended even to what he accepted as payment for his information. Food was the payment of choice, usually gourmet and also usually, copious.

His e-mail promised an important lead. The payment requested was two complete lasagna dinners from Travaglini’s. The meet was scheduled for seven that evening on pier 34.

Just as Hattie sent her reply Lois called her to the office.

As soon as Hattie was in the office Lois looked up and smiled at her protégé. She asked, “How’s it going Hattie? Good job on that story. How did you get that quote?”

“I was expecting another explosion and I was only two blocks away when it happened. I was there when the medics arrived.”

Lois interrupted her, “You were two blocks away! That was taking a big chance. That bomb could have been right next to you! You could have been killed!”

“Well, I did hedge my bets. I stayed off Main. I was on ninth.” She started to blush as she continued, “When the medics arrived ... I was applying direct pressure to a severed leg ... trying to stop the bleeding.”

With a shocked expression and a hushed tone Lois stood and said, “He was talking about you!”

Hattie nodded shyly and modestly said, “All I did was put into practice what I learned in first aid class.”

As she moved out from behind her desk Lois looked at Hattie with a new appreciation. She said, “Yeah, but how many people would actually do that?” while she was thinking, <This girl might not be a Kent, but she has the Kent spirit. That’s the stuff of heroes.> Putting her hands on Hattie’s shoulders she decided that the thought warranted being spoken. She looked Hattie square in the face and said, “Hattie, your last name may not be Kent, but you are one.” She gave her a quick hug and then she asked,

“Anything new on the Main Street Bomber since then? Have the police received any tips?”

Hattie was blushing from the attention and was thrilled at Lois’ statement. She said, “No, nothing new. He seems to only strike on the weekends. I haven’t been able to develop a pattern! There’s just nothing to go on. The last was a family from out of town just here for a visit. If there are targets of the bomber then they were the target, but there were seven others killed as collateral damage.”

Eager to share the rest that she had found out with Lois, Hattie said, “One thing the police have determined is that the bomb is actually rather primitive. It is composed of Nitroglycerine. That is unfortunate in that it can actually be made from components available in most high school chemistry classrooms and is ridiculously simple to make. Aside from that, MPD has recovered some clockwork parts. Not enough to identify the manufacturer. It appears to be a simple mechanical timer like a kitchen oven or egg timer available in most stores from Cost-Mart to exclusive kitchen stores.”

“If the explosive was dynamite, TNT or C-4 there would be a signature and we could look for missing supplies or even legitimate purchases, but this way we are dealing with someone working in their kitchen making the explosive. Until we can find enough to get a trace, we’re dead in the water.”

“I just had a note from Graham Kerr. He promises some info. I hope that’s what he has for me. I’m meeting him tonight.”

While Hattie had been speaking, Lois had returned to her chair behind her desk. She asked, “That’s that guy that’s so much like Bobby, right?”

“Yes, he’s reliable. He’s the best snitch I’ve got.”

Lois laughed and said, “I really need to give Bobby a call and find out if this is his son. It seems like he started just when Bobby retired. Maybe I could ask him in person. I’d like to go with you and meet him. Do you think he would mind?”

“I don’t know. Usually it’s just me or me and JJ. JJ is still in the process of moving his stuff from Gotham. He needed today off to go to his old apartment to pick up the last of it and move it to Metropolis. I wouldn’t mind the company.”

“What time and where?”

“We meet at different locations each time, tonight it’s at pier 34 at 7 pm.”

“My car or yours?”

Hattie started to laugh. “I think it will have to be yours. I haven’t gotten the settlement on mine yet and since it was blown to bits and not just disabled I’m using public transit to get around.”(1)

Lois said, “Let me give you the name of my insurance agent. They’ve been very cooperative whenever I’ve had a problem like that.”

“I’d appreciate it. It’s been weeks. They are trying to decide if it should be classified as vandalism or an act of God and that’s not getting a check into my hand. I mean, it was attempted murder! We caught them, well the evidence I collected put the police onto them. It was the head of MetroStaff that ordered the hit because I was going to blow the lid off of the corporate espionage case. I still can’t believe that he went so far as to try to kill me! What did I ever do to him? His thugs interrupted me before I could get the goods on him in that meeting and then I fell off the roof. Fortunately Kam-El was there to catch me. How is Jon anyhow? I haven’t seen him or Jen since the wedding.”

Lois was sitting back and marveling at this babble. When Hattie ran down she finally said, “Hattie, Hattie, Hattie. Is it too late to adopt you? If I didn’t know better I’d say that you were cast in my mold. Clark has always said that we are like two peas in a pod and I can’t argue with him. You even babble like me. Did you practice that?”

Hattie was surprised by this and said, “No, I uh, well, uh, no,

no I didn’t Do I really? Wow.”

Glancing over at Clark’s vacant desk, Lois quipped, “If Clark wasn’t out running an ‘errand’ he’d surely have made a comment by now.”

Hattie smiled. It had been more than ten years ago that she had met Jon Kent on her first day of middle school and she still could not get over her good fortune to be associated with the super family. Lois Lane had been first her hero, then her role model, then her mentor, and now her friend and boss.

She was still kicking herself over the fact that she hadn’t discovered until fairly recently that the Kents were in fact the super family and then only because she had thrown herself at Jon Kent’s superpersona, Kam-El. The night after they had booby trapped her car she had really read the signals wrong and tried to seduce Kam-El. She had been spending the night with Jon and Jen and thought Kam-El was there to check on her and really he was returning home from conferring with his dad, Superman, about the police investigation into her destroyed car. The only thing that kept her from completely giving up as an investigative reporter was the fact that, as Jon put it, they’d had a lot of practice at hiding who they were. (2)

Fortunately Jen forgave her for that same reason; there was no way she was supposed to know that under the spandex and that mask that it was Jon. After all, it was an honest mistake.(3)

Breaking into her musing, Lois finally answered her question, “Jon and Jen are due back from the honeymoon at the end of the week.” In a more conspiratorial tone she continued, “Since your personal guardian angel is away you’ll have to be satisfied with me looking out for you.”

Hattie was surprised and smiled, “Really? Jon’s my personal guardian angel?”(4)

“Yep, the same way his father was mine. He’s married to Jen now, but you are probably his closest friend outside of the family. If he didn’t look out for you, I’d be really disappointed in him. We take care of other family members and our friends. Actually, with you, it’s more like family than friend. You’re like another daughter.”

Hattie was beaming with pride at Lois’ statements. She had hero worshipped Lois Lane for a long time as a preteen and teenager. It had been a shock to find out that her new friend Jon Kent was the son of Lois Lane and Clark Kent. She had rapidly been accepted by the Kent family and her respect for Lois Lane had been undiminished, if anything it had been enhanced by seeing the family together and being accepted by them so completely. Jon was like the brother she had never had and his sister Lara was her best girlfriend. Lois had become like another mother, not that she didn’t like her parents, she loved her parents. She had a very pleasant childhood. Her parents weren’t overly strict or demanding and by the same token Hattie hadn’t been a difficult child. Actually, there were times when her parents were concerned about how driven Hattie was. They were a little concerned about her striving to follow in the footsteps of Lois Lane, until they actually met Lois, Clark and the Kent clan. As soon as that happened, Hattie’s parents lost all concern. They decided that the relationship that had developed could only be beneficial to Hattie and they thereafter encouraged it.(5)

Hattie was blushing as she replied, “I have to say that if I didn’t have the mom I have, I’d want you to be her. I mean, I’d want you to be my mom, if she wasn’t around, like she is.” She finished weakly.

Lois smiled and said, “I know Hattie. I love you too.”

Hattie smiled in return.

Lois said, “Well, we have page space to fill and it isn’t getting filled by you being in my office. Back to work.” Lois smiled to take any sting out of her words.

Still smiling Hattie nodded and left the office. When she reached her desk she picked up her phone and called Inspector

Cardona at the MPD.

When she was finally connected she said, “Inspector, Hattie Kaplin. How are things?”

“Kaplin, are you going to be a thorn in my side like all of the others on the Main Street Bomber?”

“Inspector, you’ve read my stuff. I report hard news, but I report factually and fairly and you know it.”

“Yeah, I’ll give you that much. I saw your article on Saturday’s incident. By the way, I heard what you did. Congratulations. From what I heard, you probably saved his life. Okay, what can I do for you?”

“I was wondering if you had anything new on the bomber that you could give me.”

“I wish I did. We have hit a brick wall. We’ve got nothin’ to go on.”

“Have you been able to get a better handle on the explosive used?”

“No, it looks like a home lab produced nitro. Whatever container it was packed in, in each case, is completely destroyed. If it was a pipe bomb there would be metal shrapnel. If it was an anti-personnel bomb it would use metal pieces, nails, nuts and bolts, ball bearings, something like that to cause additional injury, but there’s been none of that. The bomb has simply destroyed the car carrying it, killing the occupants and people in the immediate vicinity. In the case of the guy you saved, his leg was cut by a piece of the car.”

“Have you been able to determine any links between the victims?”

“No, as we said the last time, the victims appear to be chosen at random.”

Hattie mused out loud, “There has to be some connection, there just has to be.”

“Well, if you find one, I’d appreciate it if you would let me know what it is. At this point I’ll listen to any theory you may come up with.”

“If I come up with anything, you’ll be the first to know.”

“Thanks, Kaplin. We’re grasping at straws here.”

“If the victims are truly random, perhaps there is still something common.”

“How do you figure that there could be something common to a random selection of victims?”

“Doesn’t sound too logical, does it? The way I see it, there has to be a pattern, even to the randomness. We just have to figure out what the actual pattern is. It would make it so much easier if there was an apparent motive. What is this guy after?”

“It looks like we are dealing with someone that is simply insane, choosing victims at random. There isn’t a discernible pattern.”

“Maybe we’re just not looking at it the right way.”

“What other way is there?”

“I don’t know, just yet. I have to think about it for a while. I’ll get back to you, Inspector, when I have this figured out.”

“I hope you can. So far we’ve had almost one hundred fatalities in just under three weeks. I’d like to catch this guy before he kills any more people.”

“I’ll do my best Inspector.” She hung up her phone.

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## Chapter 02 – Hattie and Lois

Monday night

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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After most of the staff had left, Hattie joined Lois in her office.

Lois asked, “Find anything new yet?”

“Nah, I’m hoping that Graham will have something for me. This guy, the bomber, has really racked up a large number of kills in a short time. The first bomb was totally unexpected. The second bomb went off while we were all at Jon and Jen’s wedding reception. Numbers three, four and five were last weekend when Superman and Ultra Woman were dealing with the aftermath of another earthquake in Japan. Ultra Woman 2 now protects LA and Kam-EI was otherwise occupied.” Looking around so that she was sure that no one could hear she asked, “What about Sean and Celeste and Jess? Why haven’t they been covering downtown?”

“Actually, Sean and Celeste have. They have both been on the evening shift in the ER at MetGen. They are both doing their ER rotation, so they haven’t been able to get away and have had to deal with the injured when the medics have delivered them.(6) Jess has been studying in Paris. It’s a shame that we can’t be everywhere at once, but once the rest of the kids are ready, they will be joining the family business. They just aren’t ready yet. Jimmy needs a lot more practice and the rest can’t even fly yet.”

“I look forward to the day when there are enough to go around. It’s a shame that JJ, his brothers and sisters don’t have powers.”

“Yeah, they are Lucy and Jimmy’s children so they don’t have superpowers.” Lois replied, as a doubtful expression came over her face. “How many will be enough? We know that Jen and Mike will be super soon, but do we want to risk bringing them out into the public eye? What effect would that have? People could start thinking that New Krypton has invaded again and start to be fearful. We’ve discussed this at length and we decided to go slowly. We have to check the public’s acceptance of additional super powered individuals one or two at a time.”

Nodding in agreement, Hattie responded, “I guess you’re right to be cautious. Who knows how the people will react, let alone the military.”

Lois had a faraway look as she said, “You don’t know just how right you are. There was one government agency that was a real problem. They saw Superman as a threat and tried to kill him. They almost succeeded too. It was a close call. Years later when New Krypton, well, actually a criminal element of New Krypton, invaded and tried to take over the Earth, the military used Kryptonite laced gas to kill the ring leaders and almost killed Superman along with them. That was another close one.” Lois looked at her watch and noting the time said, “I think we just have time to go grab a bite to eat and make the meeting. Let’s hit Travaglini’s for dinner, my treat.”

Smiling, Hattie replied, “You don’t have to ask me twice. Let me grab my bags. I’ll meet you at the elevator.”

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At seven p.m. Lois and Hattie were in Lois’ Jeep sitting in the shade of a warehouse on pier 34. Two Styrofoam containers were resting on Hattie’s lap. They had arrived a few minutes early and were sipping a couple of coffees while they waited.

Lois asked, “Could the presence of Superman, Ultra Woman or one of the other superheroes have made a difference in these bombings?”

“I really don’t see how. The bombs are somehow, magically appearing in these cars and suddenly they go off. They’d have to scan every car and even then since we don’t know what the bomb looks like, what would they be looking for? I talked with Cardona, but he had nothing for me. I’m hoping that Graham will have something.”

Suddenly, from the back seat a voice was heard, “Sorry to disappoint you, but what I got has nothin’ to do with the bomber.”

Lois and Hattie were both startled by this sudden appearance. Hattie was a little less startled than Lois. She was more used to Graham’s arrivals. Lois must have been concentrating on the

conversation because she hadn't heard him with her superhearing.

With an accusation in her eyes and tone Lois said, "Your pop has to be Bobby Bigmouth. He did that to me and Clark all of the time." Lois suddenly realized why even Clark had been surprised by Bobby. He had been paying attention to her and not so much what was going on around them. She started to smile as she thought just how sweet that was, that she had been the total focus of his attention.

With a chuckle and some barely disguised pride he replied, "Guilty as charged. Somebody had to carry on the family business. I hadn't expected the editor of the Planet to be at a meet with a source."

"Hattie has told me so much about you that I just had to meet you. If only to satisfy my curiosity on that point. How's your dad?"

"He's doing fine. He moved into management at the food court, that's why he retired from the information business. He ran out of time for information gathering. That's why he turned the business over to me. At first we weren't sure if it would work out. Then we started seeing Hattie's name on front page articles when you moved to the editor's office. We decided that if she had your confidence, well ... we took a chance and contacted her. The rest, as they say, is history."

"Well, your father taught you well, I must say. You managed to sneak up on us the same way he could."

"I'll tell Pop that you approve."

Hattie was becoming impatient at all of this small talk so she jumped in and asked, "What do you have for me?"

"I know that you want info on the bomber and as soon as I have something, I'll call you, but I don't have anything on that. What I have is on Councilman Robbins. You know what district he represents?"

"Yeah, downtown."

"Right, well I think you'll find that he has been receiving kick backs from a consortium of big business in exchange for legislation put forward that will prevent independents from operating businesses downtown."

"What do you have as proof?"

He laughed, "That's your problem, not mine. I gave you the tip. Now you need to investigate."

Lois laughed, "Just like Bobby."

Hattie passed over the lasagna dinners.

Graham said, "Pleasure doing business with you." He exited the car and quickly disappeared into the shadows.

"Okay, now I have two things to work on. I think I need to give priority to the bomber. I want to get him before he kills again."

"What leads do you have?"

"That's the problem, there is nothing. I'm going to have to create something. Force a break."

"How do you propose to do that?" Lois asked.

"Well, for starters, I'm going to go over the scenes of the bombings. Maybe I can find something."

As she was reaching for the key to start the Jeep, Lois asked, "Want me to drop you at your place?"

"No, if you don't mind, I've got my bag; could you drop me off at the Dojo?"

Smiling, Lois asked, "Mind if I stay a while and watch?"

Smiling back Hattie said, "Actually, I've got a spare gi if you want to join in. You can come as my guest."

Smiling and nodding, Lois said, "Sounds like fun. Let's do it." Lois put the car into motion.

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Later that evening Lois dropped Hattie at her apartment. As usual Hattie was wearing a loose cover up over her spandex workout gear. She stepped into the bathroom and stripped while the shower heated. She took a quick shower and then with a

Kelly green towel wrapped around herself she took her workout gear and gi to the washer.

As she finished adding the detergent there was a knock on the door. She moved over and checked through the peep hole to see who it was. Looking through the lens she was surprised to see a shock of red hair and recognized it as that of her partner, Jimmy junior, JJ. She shouted, "Just a sec," and started undoing the locks. Shortly she was able to open the door.

When she opened the door she stood back so that he could enter.

At sight of her, he stood there rooted to the spot with his eyes practically bugging out of his head.

It wasn't until she looked down at herself that she realized she had forgotten that all she had on was her towel, that it barely covered the essentials and gapped open where it overlapped on her left side revealing her creamy flesh from her thigh to a level above her belly button just under her breast. With this sudden realization came a blush and she stammered out, "Uh, yeah, JJ, come on in and uh, make yourself comfortable. I guess I need to put some clothes on. Be right back." She hastened into her bedroom giving JJ a tantalizing view of her pert lower derriere and her long shapely legs in the process. She dressed in sweats, emerging to find JJ in her kitchen making coffee for them both.

When she joined him he asked, "I didn't expect to see you today. How did the move go?"

"It went well, in fact I finished earlier than I expected. Had anything to eat?"

Nodding, Hattie replied, "Yes, Lois and I had dinner at Travaglino's."

He shook his head and said, "Shoot, and I ordered pizza. Would you still like a slice?"

She replied, "Sure, I'm easy." Realizing just what she had said, she tried to correct, "I mean about what to have for dinner. I've never really been easy ... you know ... that way."

JJ was laughing at her discomfiture and said, "I never thought you were."

She started to blush as she said, "The way I greeted you at the door could lead to another conclusion."

"Hattie, I would never think that of you. I think I know you well enough by now. We have been partners for a couple of weeks now and we were paired up at the wedding, not to mention all the times we were together at Aunt Lois and Uncle Clark's place." Spotting a couple of pictures on a shelf nearby, of them as a couple and the other of the entire wedding party, at the wedding reception, he said, "I must say, we made a handsome couple. I need to remember to thank Jen for having a rainbow wedding. That powder blue Bride's Maid gown you wore was perfect for you. Since I had to match I had on a tux of the same color and it complimented both of our complexions since we're both redheads." Pulling down the other picture he said, "Such a large wedding party. All of my cousins, you and me. Lara was Matron of Honor and Mike was Best Man. Sean with Celeste wore pastel red, Jessica and Jimmy wore yellow, Lucy and Sam wore green and we wore blue. Colorful!" He put the picture back in its place, handed her a mug of coffee and then after they had each taken a sip, continued, "I tried calling earlier, but you didn't answer. Since my new apartment is here in the same building I thought I'd run on down and see if you had gotten in."

Smiling at the memory, Hattie said, "Lois and I had a meet with Graham and then we went to the Dojo together."

"You and Aunt Lois are thick as thieves. How do you get any work done?"

Hattie laughed and said, "You know her better than that. She's as driven as ever, even though she has moved to the editor's office. She wanted to meet Graham and prove her pet theory that he's Bobby Bigmouth's son."

"Well, is he?"

“Yep, when Bobby retired from the information business he passed it on to his son.”

“What did this meeting cost?”

She was still laughing as she replied, “Two lasagna dinners.”

“What’d he have for us?”

“Councilman Robbins, kickbacks for legislation.”

“Nothing on the bomber?”

“No and I spoke to Cardona this morning and the MPD don’t have anything new either.”

There was a knock on the door. JJ answered it and after accepting the delivery and giving the boy a tip he closed the door and holding up the pizza said, “Dinner is served.”

The coffee forgotten, Hattie retrieved some soft drinks from the fridge, they sat on the sofa and opened the boxes.

Over pizza they discussed what they had on the bomber, which wasn’t much. They kicked around ideas as to how to proceed. No plan was developed so after a while JJ said goodnight and returned to his own apartment.

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Tuesday morning

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The next morning JJ once again knocked on Hattie’s door. This time when she answered she was fully dressed and ready for work, the strap of her bag over her shoulder. She handed him a coffee she had prepared and locked her door before going with him down to his car. She dearly missed her Jeep, but until the insurance company came to a decision she was stuck car pooling.

When they arrived at the Planet and moved to their desks, Hattie saw that Lois and Clark were already in their office sipping on a couple of coffees. Lois looked up and catching Hattie’s eye raised her coffee cup in salute. Hattie returned the gesture.

Just then Lois apparently had a thought and gestured for Hattie to join them in the office.

As she was putting her bag on her desk, Hattie said, “JJ, I think Lois wants us.”

JJ draped his jacket over the back of his chair and as they were walking over to the office he was rolling up his sleeves.

After they were in the office, Lois said, “I’ve been giving the bomber some thought. Do you think there’s any way to find the location and source of the bombs?”

“According to the MPD, they’re homemade.”

“That’s not what I mean. Where are they on the cars? Did they bring them with them or did somebody give them to the drivers to take with them. The drivers might have thought they were doing someone a favor, carrying a package or something. I really don’t think that is feasible because that would presuppose that every one of the cars that blew up had someone inside that knew the bomber. What would be the odds against that being the case?”

“That sounds like something that we will have to check into. Thanks!”

“Don’t mention it. See what you can come up with.”

They headed back to their desks.

JJ sat in the chair next to Hattie’s desk. He asked, “What do you want to work on, Robbins or the bomber?”

“Why don’t you work on Robbins?”

“Okay, I’ll start with his financials. See if there is any unusual unexplained influx of funds or expenditures and if there are, who they’re from.”

Hattie was deep in thought as he was saying this and made no comment. JJ said, “Penny for your thoughts.”

“Huh? Oh. What Lois suggested got me to thinking. Where were the bombs placed? An oven timer or an egg timer will only count down so many minutes. Most will go up to an hour. What if the timer was always set to a particular time? I need a map of the city.” Looking around and spotting the gofer she shouted, “Frank!

I need a city map, large format, in the conference room in five minutes!”

With a stricken look Frank looked around as if lost and because he knew how Hattie could be, said, in a tremulous voice, “I’ll try.”

“Don’t just try – do it!”

JJ asked, “What are you going to do?”

“Find out just where these bombs are coming from.”

“Okay ... I’ll start on Robbins and then join you in the conference room.”

“Right. I have to get some stuff together.” She picked up her bag and threw the strap over her shoulder, the file she had on the bombings, some markers, a sticky note pad and some sticky arrows. Once she had everything she headed for the conference room. The first thing she did was make a do not disturb sign for the door then she laid out the file and started looking through the contents.

It was actually closer to ten minutes before Frank had the map and brought it to the conference room. When he dropped it off, Hattie said, “Thanks, Frank. Now, could you be a dear and bring me a cup of coffee?”

Happy that he had satisfied Hattie he smiled and said, “Be happy to,” and headed out of the conference room on his errand.

Hattie used magnets to stick the map to the white board on the wall. As she finished this task, Frank returned with her coffee, placing it and a donut on the conference room table.

Spotting this Hattie smiled and said, “Thanks, Frank. That’s sweet of you. I’ll be sure to call you if I need anything else.”

“Anytime, Ms. Kaplin.” He turned and left.

By the time he had closed the door, Hattie had taken the report from the first bombing in her free hand as she sipped the coffee. Setting down the mug, she took a sticky pointer and placed the head at the location that the bomb had exploded. She ran through all of the reports, marking the locations of all of the explosions and then she stood back and took it in while she nibbled on the donut and had another sip of the coffee.

Setting the coffee down again, she picked up the first report a second time and wrote the time of detonation on that arrow. She did the same thing with each arrow. Then she took a white board marker and made a table of the detonation times. When they were laid out in tabular format it was easy to see that all of the detonations occurred within just a very few minutes of each other and the differences could be accounted for by differences in the setting of the watches of the observers. She thought <If I assume that the witnesses could be wrong then all of the bombs went off at the same time.>

Just then JJ came into the conference room. Walking up beside Hattie, with a slight chuckle, he asked, “Do you have it figured out yet?”

Hattie didn’t take her eyes off the map as she answered, “Not yet. I need to add more data.”

Walking up to the map, JJ pointed at a couple of the pointers and said, “Except for a few, like these, all of the bombs detonated on Main Street within just a few blocks.”

Hattie said, “Let’s assume that those bombs failed in reaching their target. What’s on Main Street ...” checking the street names she finished, “between tenth and fourteenth?”

“That’s easy, that’s the theater district. Movie theaters, a playhouse, some boutiques and restaurants.” JJ pointed out.

As if that had slipped her mind briefly she said, “Yeah, that’s right. Okay, let’s assume that the theater district was the target. Why?”

“Maximum damage. Lots of people in a confined area,” JJ offered.

“There has to be more to it than that. What’s playing?” Hattie asked.

“It can’t be related to that because the features change too

frequently and these bombings have covered a span of several changes.”

“Okay, if it isn’t a particular movie, what about the stage?” Hattie asked.

“The playhouse is between shows. They are tearing down sets and creating new ones for the next production. Actually that might be working to our benefit, fewer people in the area. How do the explosions match up to show times?”

“If we discount variations in memory or how far off a watch is then the bombs all detonated at 7:30 p.m. That would be show time for at least half of the theaters. People would be lined up on the sidewalks.”

“That supports my theory that they’re timed for maximum damage.”

With a negative shake of her head, Hattie said, “I don’t buy it. There has to be another reason.” Hattie stated emphatically. “I keep waiting for an ultimatum of some sort, perhaps a ransom note like downtown is being held hostage. Okay, they were all timed to go off at the same time. How were they delivered?”

“How can we figure that out?”

With a sly smile Hattie replied, “I’ve got an idea.”

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### Chapter 03 – Hattie and JJ Investigate

Tuesday night

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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After work Hattie and JJ went to a local burger joint and had a quick meal. It was getting dark as they left in JJ’s car. They headed to the outskirts of town. JJ pulled up outside of a fenced parking area. Hattie bounced out of the car. She was dressed in a workman’s coverall. Similarly dressed, JJ exited the car and looked at the obstacles they would need to overcome.

Shaking his head he said, “Barbed wire topped ten foot fence. The only access is through an electronically controlled gate which is a continuation of the fence itself. How do you plan to get in and what are we going to do once we \*are\* in?”

Hattie hissed, “Not so loud. What if there’s a guard? Wait here. I’ll pick you up shortly.”

Keeping his voice down, JJ said, “What?!?!?!? You don’t even know if there’s a guard. What if there is, you’ll get caught!”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be back shortly.”

In a hushed tone he asked, “Hattie, just what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to get us a truck to use so that we can check out those blast sites.”

JJ took a closer look at the fenced area and saw that it was the Road Department vehicle yard. Aghast he hissed, “Wouldn’t it be easier to just ask the police to help?”

Her reply wasn’t all that encouraging, “They’re not going to be willing to disrupt traffic so that we can look at the blast sites. Trust me, this is the only way. Wait here.”

Hattie took off at a run and, rounding a corner of the fenced area, was lost to JJ’s sight.

Hattie’s coverall was of a dark color. Out of a pocket she pulled a ski mask and put it on, concealing her flame colored hair and fair complexion. Out of another pocket she pulled a pair of leather gloves, heavy enough to protect her hands yet soft and supple enough that they wouldn’t interfere with her grip.

Once she had the gloves on she started to climb the chain link fence. The gloves enabled her to get a good grip and the toes of her shoes fit neatly into the spaces between the wires. It was only marginally harder than climbing a ladder. When she reached the top she found that the three strands of barbed wire were

suspended from brackets that tilted inward from the top.

She continued to climb until her toes were on the top bar of the fence and she stood balancing, like a tightrope walker or gymnast, there for a few seconds to make sure of her equilibrium before bending down and placing her hands on the bracket, one near the fence and the other at the outer end. Slowly she did a handstand raising her body into the vertical. Very slowly she shifted her weight until it was all on the hand which gripped the end. Releasing the other hand she moved it to join the one at the end. Reaching under the outer strand of wire she changed her grip so that her fingers were over the support. As soon as she was sure of her grip she allowed herself to drop, swinging free of the barbed wire. Her body performed an arc which brought her feet into contact with the fence with a sudden rattle. That contact made a little more noise than she had wanted and she simply hung there for a few seconds to see if she had attracted the attention of a guard. After 30 seconds of quiet she walked her hands down the bracket to the fence where she proceeded to climb back to the ground.

Once on the ground she went from vehicle to vehicle looking for one with the keys still in it. After checking ten trucks she finally found what she was looking for. She climbed into the cab and looking around saw an electronic module like a remote garage door opener clipped to the visor on the driver’s side. Before starting up the truck she slipped out of the cab and stealthily approached the guard shack. Looking in she saw that it was deserted with no evidence of occupancy. The guard shack was right on the fence with a door to the outside. Hattie decided that they must depend on the fence for preserving the assets and the workers simply entered and exited through the shack when they came for a truck.

Hastening back to the truck she started it up and pulled out to the gate. After hitting the button she waited for the gate to open enough for her to drive out. Once outside she stopped and JJ climbed in. As he was climbing in Hattie took off her ski mask, but kept the gloves on. She said, “Don’t touch anything until you have gloves on. We don’t want to leave any fingerprints.”

JJ growled, “Thanks, I wish you had said something before I grabbed the door handle.”

Airily, Hattie said, “We can wipe them off, as long as you are sure that’s all you touched.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

“Good, because I wouldn’t want my partner arrested for grand theft – auto. I’d have to work alone again.”

“Your concern is underwhelming! Instead of sitting here jawing, let’s get this done so that we can get this truck back where it belongs.”

Laughing, Hattie threw the truck into gear and headed downtown. JJ pulled out the map that he had carried, since Hattie had needed to travel light, and by the light from the dash directed her to the closest location indicated on the map.

Once they parked Hattie put on the flashing lights and they pulled out the road cones and put a pair behind the truck. Then they pulled out the halogen lights and plugged them into the receptacle on the truck. Placing the lights so that the area where the blast occurred was well lighted, they bent to examine the road surface. Producing a tape measure from a zippered pocket Hattie measured the damaged area dictating her findings to JJ who wrote them down. Then she asked JJ for the camera that he was carrying in a pocket. She took several shots then she moved the halogen lights so that they were at the road surface. This cast shadow into the slight depression caused by the explosion. Hattie took several more pictures.

They packed up the equipment and moved to the next scene. They repeated this process at all of the blast sites before driving back to the marshaling yard. JJ jumped out, outside of the fence. Hattie drove the truck in and parked it in a spot very close to the

gate. It wasn't the spot she had found it in, but it would have to do.

Just before she dropped down to the ground she hit the switch to close the gate and then she sprinted for the closing gate, just making it before it closed. They jumped into JJ's car and he pulled away.

Smiling to herself, Hattie was pleased that at least he hadn't parked anywhere that he would have to cross any soft ground leaving behind a tire track. If their use of the truck were discovered there would be no clues as to just who had done the deed since they had remembered to wipe JJ's fingerprints off of the door handle. JJ was a quick learner. All in all, it had been a good night's work.

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It was after three AM when they got back to the apartments. They removed the coveralls and once inside Hattie's apartment they both flopped down on her sofa.

They both started to laugh, for no apparent reason. It was a nervous laughter which came with the release of the tension they had been under.

JJ said, "I think we did it. Do you think we'll get caught?"

Hattie said, "I don't see how. We were very careful. Do you have the notes?"

"Sure, right here." He pulled his notebook out of his pocket and handed it to her.

She opened her bag, pulled out her laptop, dropped it into its docking station and booted it up. While it was booting she said, "Hand me the memory stick from the camera, please."

JJ popped out the memory and handed it to Hattie. She dropped it into the proper slot and downloaded the pictures to her hard drive.

She flipped to the page with the information and pulled up the first set of pictures. She zoomed in on the spot and jumped out of her chair. Pointing at the screen she said, "I need to check the others, but I think I know where the bombs were located."

Looking at the picture JJ had a puzzled expression. He asked, "What exactly do you see that I don't. I just see pavement."

Sitting back down Hattie picked up a laser pointer and pointed at the picture. As she pointed she said, "See this here and here? See the cracking?" She switched pictures. This one was taken when the light was at ground level. She asked, "Can you see where there is a slight depression? The light throws it into shadow. I think that's called spalling. I need to check the others to be sure, but I think I know how the bombs were delivered and why it was so random."

JJ asked, "Can we continue this tomorrow? I'm starting to see double I'm so tired."

Hattie had been running on adrenaline and she was starting to feel the letdown. Now that JJ had said something she couldn't stifle the yawn that suddenly came on.

When she finished, she said, "Yeah, I guess you're right. I'm kinda tired too. I guess I'll see you in the morning."

"Right, I'll pick you up." JJ replied.

She walked JJ to the door and after he passed through she locked her various locks. Casting a wistful glance at her laptop she let it go to screensaver and headed for the bedroom.

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Wednesday morning

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The next morning Hattie received a call, "Daily Planet, Kaplin."

"Kaplin, Cardona here."

"Inspector, do you have something for me?"

In a very dry tone he replied, "Actually, I need you to answer a few questions. Can you and your partner in crime come in and see me."

Hattie's mood changed in an instant. She spluttered out, "Part

... partner in ... crime?"

"It's just an expression, unless you have a guilty conscience."

"Oh, right, uh, okay Inspector, we'll be there in a little while."

"Oh, take your time. I don't want to \*interfere\* in \*your\* investigation."

The emphasis he placed on certain words had Hattie worried. She said, "We'll be there as quickly as we can, Inspector."

"You do that little thing." He hung up.

JJ saw Hattie's expression as she hung the phone up. He got up and approached her desk, "What's up?"

"I'm not sure, but I think it's the jig."

"Huh?"

"I think the jig is up. That was Cardona. I think he knows about last night. He wants us to come and see him."

JJ paled as she said all of this and his knees suddenly becoming weak, he dropped into the chair next to her desk, limply. "I thought you said there was no way we could be caught."

"I don't see how we could be. I guess we need to go see what he wants. I'd better let Lois know where we're going."

Casting her eyes in that direction Hattie saw that Lois and Clark were both at their desks. Sighing to herself she headed in that direction.

When she knocked on the door Clark motioned for her to come in.

Hearing her enter, Lois looked up and asked, "What's up?"

Hattie moved over so that she was half way between the two desks and said, "I just had a call from Inspector Cardona ..."

Lois interrupted, "Was it about the Main Street Bomber?"

"Uhhhhh, in a way. I don't know how, but I think he found out about what JJ and I did last night."

Lois rolled her eyes and asked, "All right, what did you do now?"

"Well, I needed to check out the places that the bombs exploded and I couldn't do that when there's a lot of traffic and the only way to stop traffic would be to have the police do it or perhaps a road crew was working and, well, we borrowed a road maintenance truck and used it so that we could examine the blast sites and I think I know how the bombs were delivered which is more than the police have figured out and we put the truck back, almost in the exact spot I took it from so all that was missing was a little gas and I'll pay for that ..."

Lois held up her hand to stop her flow of words. "I assume you were careful and wore a disguise."

Back on keel now realizing that Lois was going to back up her play she nodded and said, "Of course, we dressed in coveralls like road workers. We put out the road cones and everything to make it look legit."

Hattie saw Clark leaning back in his chair with his fingers laced together and his hands behind his head laughing softly. Finally he said to Lois, "I feel like I've been transported back in time without the benefit of Herb and his time machine. She's you and you're Perry. This is just like something you would do. It is absolutely scary ... seeing history repeating itself. My consolation is that now you are seeing just what you did to Perry. I think some of your antics were what caused his high blood pressure. I don't think I'll need to recommend Pava leaves to you though."

Lois threw him a look and then turned back to Hattie. "Okay, here's the thing. Don't let him get to you. If you have to, use what you have found out to bargain with him. Above all, don't admit to anything. Let him tell you what he knows. Got it?"

"Got it."

"Remember, we're all on the same side. We'd be turning over what we find to them anyhow."

"Okay, thanks. We'd better go. I don't want to keep him

waiting.”

“Good idea. Get going.”

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When Hattie and JJ entered Cardona’s office he said, “Have a seat.”

He watched them as they seated themselves. He was a shrewd judge of character and he looked directly at JJ and asked, “What were you doing downtown last night?”

JJ was shaken and was about to blurt out an answer when Hattie kicked his shin and he stopped, just before spilling the beans. Looking at Hattie accusingly, but catching himself he asked, “Why do you think I was downtown last night?”

Cardona looked at Hattie and said, “Okay, that’s what I thought. You’re the ring leader. What did you think you were doing, missy?”

“Inspector, I really don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Let me explain it so that you understand. At approximately 11:30 p.m. a public works road maintenance truck showed up on Main Street. There was no maintenance scheduled for that day and time.” He turned, flipped on a TV and hit the play button on a remote control.

Hattie was shaken from her normal confidence. Looking at the TV screen over Cardona’s shoulder she saw a section of a road. Occasionally a car would move through the frame. Suddenly a road maintenance truck move into the center of the frame and parked. Two people jumped out and she immediately recognized herself and JJ. Even at night the red hair stood out. She had completely forgotten about the traffic cams! He had them dead to rights. The best course was to admit what they had done and bargain with what they had learned.

While the disk played he turned back to them and said, “A traffic cam picked up the truck. The two occupants look strangely familiar, wouldn’t you say? At least you put out the traffic cones, I’ll give you that much. You stole that truck. What do you have to say for yourselves?”

She said, “Really, Inspector, I can explain . . .”

Cardona interrupted, “It had better be good.”

“Oh, it is inspector. I needed to be able to examine the areas of the explosions without being interrupted. I thought that the middle of the night a road crew could block a lane with minimal impact and I wouldn’t have to tie up police resources stopping traffic.”

“Okay, I’m with you so far. Go on. What did you find?”

“In all of the reports I’ve read the location of the bombs, in the cars, has been a mystery.”

“I know that.”

“Well, when I examined the spots, I noticed spalling which indicates to me that the bomb was on the underside of the car. Somehow it was attached to the undercarriage, perhaps without the knowledge of the driver and passengers.”

Cardona leaned back in his chair and said, “Okay, missy, you just got yourself and your partner out of my dog house. Did you find anything more?”

“Not yet, but we’re working on it.”

“Send me your evidence and analysis and I’ll include it in the case file. Next time, ask me for help.”

“Inspector, can I have a copy of that video and do you have video of the explosions?”

Turning he ejected the disk and handed it to her. He said, “I’ll have copies of the events sent to you by messenger.”

Standing up, she took the offered disk then grabbing JJ’s hand and pulling him up she said, “Thanks, Inspector, and next time I \*will\* ask for help. Let’s go JJ,” as she dragged JJ behind her and out the door.

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As soon as they walked into the newsroom, Hattie looked into the editor’s office and spotted Lois. Lois was gesturing for

them. They changed course from heading for their desks to heading for the editor’s office. When they entered they sat side by side on the couch.

Lois asked, “Okay, I didn’t have to pay your bail to get you out of jail so I guess it went well. What was the beef?”

Chagrined and ashamed to have to admit it she quietly said, “I forgot all about the traffic cams.” As she was saying this she held up the disk Cardona had given her.

Lois barked out a laugh, “You mean they got you on video in a stolen truck, obstructing traffic downtown in the middle of the night?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

Lois was laughing as she said, “All I can say is learn from your mistakes. I guess the coveralls weren’t enough. The red hair is kinda distinctive, on both of you. Next time, wear a wig or a hat or something.”

Hattie and Lois both laughed in relief and Hattie said, “Yeah, we will.”

Shocked, JJ blurted out, “Next time?!?!?!?”

Lois looked at JJ and said, “James Bartholomew Olsen, Junior, if I know this girl, and I think I do, there will always be a next time for her, just like there was for me.” She winked at Hattie who proceeded to break up in laughter while JJ paled.

JJ said, more to himself than to anyone else, “Oh well, no pain, no gain.”

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#### Chapter 04 – Wednesday afternoon

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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Later that afternoon Hattie was in the conference room with JJ. They were in front of the board looking at the map. Hattie was thinking aloud as she said, “How could the bomber be certain that his victims would be where he wanted them?” She stepped up to the map and put a finger on the intersection of Main and tenth and another on Main and fourteenth. Turning to JJ she said, “It is obvious that he was targeting this section of Main Street. How could he be sure of hitting his target?”

“How accurate is one of those timers?”

“Accurate enough, I mean an electronic timer would be more accurate, but a mechanical one should be good to within a few seconds.”

JJ asked, “In order for the bomber to have the bombs all go off, where he wanted them to, how close to the target when he planted the bomb would they have to be?”

Hattie had been thinking about other things and the fact that JJ was talking to her took a second to register. She finally asked, “Huh, what?”

“How close would he need to be to his target area in order to ensure that he hit his target?”

“HHHmmmmm, that’s a \*\*good\*\* question. How \*\*could\*\* he be \*\*sure\*\* to hit his target?” She started looking at the map again. The arrows made a colored patchwork between tenth and fourteenth along Main Street with one on eleventh and one on twelfth.

Suddenly, JJ broke the silence that had reigned for several minutes while he and Hattie contemplated the map, “What is the traffic pattern on eleventh?”

Absently Hattie replied, “Odd numbers east, even numbers west.”

JJ said, “That kinda makes sense. It looks like one car turned off of Main onto eleventh. It was almost a whole block off Main and if it had continued on Main it would have fallen into the zone. The same with the one on twelfth. That one only made it

half a block.”

Hattie snapped around and grabbed JJ and in her exuberance kissed him.

It happened so quickly that JJ didn't have time to respond. Afterwards he found himself wishing that he was from the Kent side of the family and not the Olsen side and that he had superspeed and would have been able to gather her into his arms and hold her there so that they would linger in the kiss. As it was, the only thing that lingered, was the feel of her lips on his and that was the only thing that confirmed it had actually transpired.

She said, “That's it! That's the key! The point that the bombs are put on the cars has to be somewhere on Main and it has to be near the target area. The timer has to be set for, oh, five minutes at most.”

She took a marker and drew a big circle with the most distant blast point on the outer edge using the intersection of tenth and main as the center point.

Stepping back she said, “The bomb has to be planted somewhere within that circle, but how?”

JJ looked at his watch. Noting the time he said, “Robbins is having a press conference in a few minutes. He may say something about the rash of bombings. I'll be back in a while.”

Thinking only for a second, Hattie said, “JJ, wait, I'll go with you. I need to get away from this for a while. Just let me grab my bag.”

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A short time later, at the press conference.

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Hattie and JJ arrived a little early and had an opportunity to be greeted by Robbins' staffers who were schmoozing the press. As they entered they were greeted, “Hello, I'm Jack Crane, I'm special assistant for special projects for Councilman Robbins.” He offered his hand which JJ shook and then Hattie. Mr. Crane was a young rather good looking guy just a little taller than JJ with sandy colored hair.

Hattie was wearing a smart business suit in maroon. The skirt was short, the hem riding at least six inches above her knees which showed off her shapely legs. She had on a light burgundy shell under a short jacket that matched the skirt. She was wearing her favorite medium high heels, the ones that had been repaired after her spill off the roof.

Obviously liking what he saw, Mr. Crane eyed Hattie up and down as he greeted her, holding her hand perhaps a little longer than would be considered appropriate. Hattie knew that she was a rather attractive woman with her naturally wavy red hair and her peaches and cream complexion. She knew that she was fortunate, for a red head, she had very few freckles. She had become accustomed to the appreciative looks she received from the men she met.

Mr. Crane continued to hold her hand as he asked, “Who do I have the pleasure of speaking with?”

“Hattie Kaplin, Daily Planet and this is my partner, James Olsen.”

He was still holding her hand as he glanced at JJ then back at her and asked, “Business partner, or ... otherwise?”

She smiled and said, “So far, just business.”

Crane smiled and finally released her hand. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a business card. He wrote a number on the back and handed it to her. He said, “My private cell number. Give me a call.”

Hattie smiled as she accepted the card and dropped it into her bag. She and JJ moved over to stand with the rest of the press corps.

A few minutes later Councilman Robbins came in and was introduced by his Chief of Staff.

“Thank you Dave for the introduction. Ladies and gentlemen of the press, recently there has been a rash of bombings in center

city. There has been terrible loss of life in a rather short time.”

“It has been brought to my attention that the businesses in that area are suffering a drop in revenue as a result of people avoiding the area. It is my understanding that these explosions have all been perpetrated by person or persons unknown by sending them into the area in cars.”

“In response to this continued threat, I am proposing legislation to the council which would restrict businesses in that area to chain franchises because they have the sales base of other outlets to withstand a slight downturn in revenue in a single area whereas independents would not have the resources.”

Hattie put her lips close to JJ's ear and whispered, “That confirms the tip Graham gave us.”

“Further, I am proposing that the area be turned into a walking mall within center city, rerouting traffic around the area and adding new landscaping. This will call for additional funding which would be provided by a bond sale.”

JJ and Hattie looked at each other. Hattie said, “We can talk about that later.”

The Councilman finished up with, “That is the extent of this announcement. I have another commitment so there will be no questions. Thank you for your attention.” He stepped back from the podium and exited behind his Chief of Staff who led the way out.

After he had walked out, Hattie turned to Jimmy. She was holding her hand up to her head as she said, “Wow. My head suddenly hurts and what do you make of this?” She motioned toward the podium, indicating the announcement.

Soto voce, JJ replied, “It seems to fit with the tip and it sure looks like it meshes with the bombings. Man, I think I need to get some aspirin. Suddenly I have a splitting headache. That's weird! Why did we both get headaches at the same time?”

Hattie nodded her head and said, “Yeah, me too and my heart feels like it's pounding out of my chest. I wonder what's going on. I don't usually get headaches and why would my heart be doing flip-flops? It seems to be getting worse by the minute.”

Looking around she saw that there were a number of others showing signs of distress such as she and JJ were experiencing. She filed that piece of information away for further research. She said, “Let's get out of here and back to the office. If we have to we can send Frank out for aspirin. We have more research to do.”

“I'm with you, partner.” He stuffed his pad and pencil in his pocket and placing a hand in the small of her back, ushered her from the building.

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On the cab ride back to the Planet, neither of them spoke. Hattie had her head back and her eyes closed, obviously in a lot of pain. By comparison, JJ apparently was handling his pain better, or else his was less.

By the time they were in the bullpen the headache and other symptoms had peaked and started to abate. They moved into the conference room.

Hattie turned to JJ and asked, “What do you think about that bond issue?”

JJ replied, “Sounds like a big pot of money that could wind up missing.”

“My thoughts exactly.” Hattie replied. She turned around and looked at the board. She stood there, staring at the map. After what seemed like ten minutes she said, “Where would they have to attach the bomb to make sure it went where they wanted it to?”

JJ replied, “You know, when we were examining the blast marks, they were all on the same side of the street.”

Hattie had been leaning back into the conference table, but when he said that she pushed upright and moved to stand in front of the map. She said, “Yeah, they were all on the northbound side, those that weren't on side streets at least. Okay, that means that the bombs were placed somewhere south of the target area.

The variations in detonation locations could be accounted for by differences in the speed of traffic flow.”

JJ added, “It would have to be fairly close to the target so that they could be certain that most of the bombs would go off where they wanted them to.” JJ stepped up to the map and drew a smaller circle, more of an ellipse, encompassing Main from tenth to eighth. He narrated as he did, “In order to be sure that the bombs were delivered on target they would have to be placed close to the target to minimize divergence like we saw with those two that turned off. I’d say it would have to be somewhere within the two blocks before the target.”

“That sounds reasonable to me. We need to go down there and time the movement of the traffic to be sure. JJ, has your headache gone away yet?”

“Not completely, no.”

“I wonder what could have caused it. Did you notice that we both got them at the same time? I thought I saw several others at that press conference that looked like they were getting headaches as well. What could have caused all of us to get headaches all at the same time? It’s interfering with my ability to think straight. I say, let’s call it a day. I’m going to tell Lois that we’re both sick and are headed home.”

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As JJ was dropping Hattie off at her door she said, “Give me a call later. If we’re up to it, I’d like to go time the traffic flow.”

JJ countered with, “If you get hungry later give me a call. We can go out to get something.”

Hattie smiled and asked, “This wouldn’t have anything to do with Jack Crane, would it?”

“Well, what if it does? I think we can be more than just work partners. I’d like to give it a try. How about you?”

“Yeah, we can give it a try. I’ll call you later.”

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Wednesday evening

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Later that evening found Hattie and JJ at Travaglini’s. She was still wearing the burgundy outfit; however, she had removed the jacket because of the July heat. They were seated at an outdoor table with a candle in the neck of a Chianti bottle with wax of numerous colors dripped down the outside with a new string of red being added as the light breeze flicked the flame around.

While they waited for their orders to be delivered JJ offered a toast, “To more than work partners.”

Smiling, Hattie clinked her glass against his and they each drank.

JJ said, “You know, we have Aunt Lois and Uncle Clark’s approval.”

Hattie said, “Really?”

Chuckling JJ replied, “They begged me to jump ship at the Gotham Gazette and join the Planet. I think it was done just so that they could put us together.”

“They were playing Matchmaker?”

“Initially, they were saying how our writing styles would complement each other’s the same way that theirs did. We can both see how that worked out.”

“Do they expect us to fall in love the way they did?”

“I’ve talked with Jon about that. It seems like they weren’t alone in this. That was also why we were paired up in the wedding party. That was Jen’s idea. I, for one, would hate to disappoint them. I’ve liked you for years. You spent so much time with them, you were almost a member of the family. Any time we were together at Aunt Lois and Uncle Clark’s I enjoyed the time with you. I have to say that right from rehearsal night, I’ve wanted a serious relationship with you. The time we spent together at the reception was fantastic. You had to have known I was attracted to you.”

With a shy smile, Hattie replied, “I really enjoyed my time with you too and yeah, I guess I did know. I really hadn’t considered dating. That had taken a back seat to winning a Kerth. Now that we are together, I’m starting to think there’s more to life than awards, at least a little bit.”

“Are you saying that you would be willing to date me?”

Shyly Hattie bobbed her head in the affirmative.

JJ smiled and said, “That’s great! Oh, here come our orders.”

They chatted over dinner and planned what they would be doing after dinner.

When they finished, JJ paid the check and hand in hand they walked down the sidewalk, in the direction of Main Street where it intersects with ninth.

When they got there Hattie pulled out her earpiece and turned it on. After tapping it she heard, “Say a command.”

She said, “Call JJ.”

JJ almost didn’t have time to grab his earpiece and get it on before there was a buzzing coming from it. He tapped it to accept the call.

Hattie said, “I’m going to go up a few blocks. When I’m in place you can give me an ID on a car that is passing. I’ll time it.”

He nodded his understanding as she turned and walked up the block. Since it was near the midpoint of the detonations she walked to the intersection with twelfth and stopped. Speaking to her earpiece she said, “Send me one.”

The reply came immediately, “Late model, red, Toyota, passing ... now.”

Hattie started the timing it and watched the traffic as it flowed by. When the target vehicle passed she looked at the time. It was almost three minutes. She noted the time in her notebook. She spoke again and said, “Let’s do it again. I want to clock at least five for an average. Once we have five, I’ll need you to move back a block and we’ll do it from there.”

She heard back, “Gotc’ha. Here’s the next one, blue convert ... now.”

Hattie timed this one and three more before JJ moved a block away. They repeated this process until they had a good average for the travel. In the course of their survey they found two cars that passed JJ’s location that didn’t pass Hattie indicating that they had turned off somewhere.

Finishing up and putting her pad away, Hattie spoke again and said, “Care to join me partner?”

“Be right there.”

A few minutes later JJ walked up. She said, “I think that’s enough for tonight. Would you like to escort me home?”

Laughing he replied, “Since we live in the same building, where else would I be going?”

Hattie smiled coyly and said, “You just took all of the romance out of my offer.”

“Oh, sorry, how about, my lady, I would be happy to escort you home. Door to door service and all that.” Crooking his arm at her he made a slight bow.

She hooked her arm through his and giggled as they turned in the direction of home.

When they arrived at her door, Hattie unlocked the locks on her door and partially opened it. She turned to him and putting out her hand said, “I had a lovely evening. Thank you.”

He took her hand and started to lean in for a kiss.

She shied away and coyly said, “I don’t kiss on the first date.”

He was disappointed and it was evident on his face, but he made the best of it by taking her hand which he still held and bringing it to his lips, kissed the back of it.

After he released her hand she slowly withdrew it and he said, “Until the next time.”

In a dreamy tone she said, “Yeah, the next time.” She disappeared into her apartment. Closing the door, she leaned back

against it for a few seconds. Coming to a sudden decision she whirled around and threw the door open, only to find an empty hallway. Disappointed she again closed her door, this time she threw the locks.

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**Chapter 05 – Thursday morning**

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Universal Locator designation  
Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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As soon as they walked into the newsroom Hattie headed for the conference room. When she was inside she dropped her bag on the table and pulled out her notebook. Picking up a marker she approached the board. Opening to the page where she had the times recorded she started making an information table.

She noted both the times to target and also how many divergences they experienced. The times and the number of divergences from JJ's position on eighth eerily paralleled the recorded detonation sites as well as fit her self-proclaimed time limit of five minutes.

Just as she was finishing the table, JJ entered with fresh coffee for each of them and a couple of donuts, maple for Hattie and plain cake for himself. As he was placing these on the table he was looking at the new data. He said, "You know, I think we're onto something."

Stepping back Hattie continued looking at the data. JJ put her mug in her hand and she was so focused on the data that she didn't even take her eyes from the board as she lifted the mug mechanically to her lips and took a sip. Suddenly realizing what she had in her hand she looked at JJ and smiled her thanks.

He asked, "Okay, where do we stand?"

Using the mug in her hand as a pointer she indicated the table of travel times and said, "I think we have to look at eighth as the source."

"Why eighth?"

"The travel times fall into the five minute window that I think fits best and even the amount of divergences fits."

"Okay, so, the bombs are given to the drivers or stuck to the cars somehow around eighth and Main, on the northbound side. How?"

"I don't know just yet."

"I think if someone ran out into traffic to hand someone a bomb it would be noticed."

"But, from our evidence, the bomb was attached to the underside of the cars."

"That would be even more memorable. Just imagine, someone runs out into traffic and crawls under a car to fasten a bomb on the undercarriage. I'm sure someone would notice that!"

"Yeah, I guess they would. Someone would have reported something like that, assuming they were still alive that is, and no one has."

"There has to be another way. I'm still having some trouble thinking. Do you still have a headache?" Hattie asked.

"No, mine cleared up last night."

Hattie reached into her bag for the small bottle of aspirin she had dropped in there and felt stiff paper. She pulled out the card that Jack Crane had given her and looked at it. She dropped it back into her bag and found the aspirin bottle. She popped two and chased them with a swallow of coffee.

In a few minutes though the pain had gotten worse instead of better. She let out a groan of pain and JJ was immediately by her side. "What is it Hattie?"

"This headache just won't quit." Suddenly something came to mind. Headache, Aunt Henrietta, her namesake, she had suffered from headaches. No, she had suffered from a heart problem. A

heart problem that made her take medicine. The medicine caused headaches. What was that? <Oh, it's so hard to think with my head throbbing like this.>

JJ said, "Maybe you should take the rest of the day off."

"I can't! It's Thursday already. He'll strike again on Friday. More people will die if we don't stop him."

"But, if you're not thinking straight, how can you figure anything out?"

"I'll manage, somehow. We have to stop this. We have to figure out how he is planting the bombs on the cars."

JJ tried to take the lead so that Hattie could baby her headache. "We know that he couldn't enter the traffic stream and crawl under the cars to plant the bombs. We know that it had to be done somewhere around eighth. How could he get under the cars and no one see him?"

Hattie, with a weary or pained tone asked, "What's under the cars?"

JJ replied, "Well, let's see, shocks or struts, springs, brake lines, miscellaneous wires and tubes ..."

Waving her hand in the air to stop his recitation, she said, "I know all of that. What's under the cars? How is he getting under them? We know he isn't putting them up on a mechanic's lift so there must be some way he is getting under them without running out into the street. How is he doing it? Ooooooo, my head is splitting. I need to lie down for a while."

"Want me to take you home? I could tuck you into bed."

Even though she was in pain she had to reply to that, "We've only had two dates. You're not entitled to tuck me into bed yet. Not until after at least \*four\* dates."

Puzzled JJ said, "Two dates??? I thought that last night was our \*first\*."

"Yeah, well, about that, I decided that we could count the reception as our first date, so I came back out for a goodnight kiss, but you had already left."

"Aggg, I wish I had known. I would've stuck around."

"Well, better luck next time."

"Yeah, next time, unless you like Crane better. You were looking at his card again."

"Actually, I don't even know why I kept his card. Hey, this headache got worse right after I handled his card. We both got headaches right after shaking hands with him."

"Yeah and your headache was worse than mine. Could that be because he held your hand longer?" JJ pointed out.

"Could he have been wearing some kind of cologne or aftershave that we're allergic to?" Hattie asked.

"It wasn't just us, remember? You said that there were a number of people that were affected. How could all of us have been allergic to the same thing?"

"I wonder if Crane could have been poisoning everyone."

"We need to check his background. What exactly does he do for Robbins?"

"He said something about 'Special Projects' didn't he?"

"I guess this downtown walking mall would fall into that category."

"See if you can pull his financials and how are you doing on Robbins?"

"I expect the report shortly."

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Later

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JJ came into the conference room where Hattie had her head down on the table resting. He placed a hand gently on her shoulder and shook it.

She stirred and lifting her head, looked up at him with bloodshot eyes. He said, "Wow, you really look like you have been through a war. Are you sure you don't want to go home?"

"Positive. We're running out of time. What do you have?"

“Okay, I’ve been going over Robbins’ financials. There’s a problem with them. It looks like his campaign war chest had been nearly empty and recently has seen a large, a very large influx of funds. I’ve traced some of the money back to some large corporations, but no where nearly enough to hang a case on.”

“What about Crane?”

“He was a recent hire. He’s only been with Robbins for five weeks. I tried to trace back to previous employers and I got nowhere.”

“So, Crane made us and a lot of other people sick and he started with Robbins a few weeks before the bombings started. Have you found out what ‘special project’ he was hired to honcho?”

“No, I haven’t been able to find anything.”

Hattie got up and started packing her bag. She said, “Let’s get out of here. I need some decent sleep to get rid of this headache. Later, you and I are going to pay Robbins a visit.”

“Huh?”

“Do you still have those coveralls handy?”

“Now, wait a minute, what are you planning?”

“Let’s get out of here. I’ll explain in the car.”

\*\*\*

Thursday evening

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Later that evening a cleaning crew moved down a corridor in a building downtown. They wheeled their cart up to the door of a particular office and stopped. Neither would have been recognized as Hattie or JJ. Both had on wigs and ball caps. They had darkened their complexions and JJ sported a big bushy mustache. Both had on glasses with dark frames.

Hattie pulled out a lock pick set and went to work on the lock.

JJ was intently looking on at this activity when Hattie hissed, “Stop watching me and keep a lookout for guards.”

“Uh, right.” JJ jerked upright and started pacing back and forth checking the opposite ends of the corridor.

A few seconds later there was an audible click and the door was opened. Hattie hissed, “Okay, come on.”

They wheeled the cart inside and then closed and locked the door behind them.

Going to a set of filing cabinets they started rifling the contents.

They each held a mini-light in their mouth aimed at where they would be looking. Hattie went through several drawers without finding anything incriminating. She said, “You keep going through these files. I’m going to check out the inner office.”

Stepping through the door Hattie did a quick survey. There was a single two drawer file and a desk. She moved to the desk and found a locked drawer. She went to work with her lock picks again. The drawer lock yielded a lot quicker than the door and she was soon surveying the contents. She started to smile as she perused the content of this file. She spread a file out on the desk. She pulled out a small camera and started snapping pictures. When she had finished she put everything back where she had found it and relocked the drawer.

Moving to the outer office she closed the file JJ was looking at, shut off his light and placed the file back in the drawer. She said, “Let’s get out of here.”

JJ looked at her and said, “You found something, didn’t you?”

JJ could barely see Hattie nodding her head in the dim light filtering in through the window. Hattie said, “The mother lode. Let’s go.”

After listening at the door for almost a minute and hearing nothing, carefully, Hattie opened the door and surveyed the corridor. It was empty so they scooted out and closed the door

behind them.

As they started to move down the corridor a guard came around the far corner and approached them. He stopped in front of them blocking their way. He asked, “I haven’t seen you two around here before. What happened to Jesus and Maria?”

Trying to be flippant and using a Hispanic accent, Hattie replied, “Well, jew know, you have to take bacation sometimes. It is July, a berry popular bacation month. We’re de relf crew.”

As he dropped a candy wrapper into the cart receptacle he said, “Yeah, I guess you’re right. How long will they be gone?”

Building on her story, Hattie replied, “I doan no. Eet could be a week or two. Dey doan tell us nosing, just go here, go dare. Clean dis inodoro. Dump dat trash. Chew know how it is.”

Looking around at all of the closed and darkened doors he said, “Yeah, I guess I do. Okay, see you around.” He moved off toward the other end of the corridor and they moved toward the elevator.

Suddenly the guard stopped, turned and called to their retreating forms, “Hey, wait a minute. Where are your IDs?”

Hattie and JJ both froze in mid step.

Thinking furiously Hattie slowly turned and hitting on a plan, reached into her pocket. She pulled out a rectangle of plastic that was part of her lock picking kit and held it up.

In the dim light of the corridor and at that distance the guard could see that she had something in her hand, although he could not make out just what it was. He said, “You should be wearing that. Have a good night.” He turned and headed away from them.

When he turned the corner JJ pushed the button for the elevator. He was fidgeting all the time they had to wait for it to arrive. When it did he practically jumped inside dragging the cart behind him, not waiting for Hattie to push it. As soon as she was in Hattie pushed the button for the basement. Releasing a relieved sigh, JJ said, “That was too close.”

Hattie chuckled and said, “Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.”

JJ replied, “Easy for you to say. I never did anything like this in all my time at the Gazette. I thought he had us for sure.”

Even though Hattie had been scared of the same thing she put on a show of bravado, “You’ll get used to it. Just stick with me.”

When the doors opened there were a man and a woman standing there. JJ spotted them as the doors parted and said in a whisper, “Oh no. Here we go again.”

This other couple was dressed in coveralls, similar to those that Hattie and JJ had on. They were facing each other, the woman was wagging her finger in the face of the man and they were arguing. Hearing the elevator open they turned towards it and the woman, presumably Maria, asked, “Who are you and what are you doing with our cart?”

Hattie started shoving JJ out of the elevator and away from the couple who were standing back as she said, “We were just inspecting your equipment. You are in violation of several ordinances. Don’t you realize that you have to separate the recyclables from the regular trash?”

Maria started to object, but Hattie interrupted her. She said, “We’ll overlook it this time, but in the future make sure you put all of the framzits in the trash and not recyclables.”

Pushing JJ in front of her she started down the hall.

Behind them they could hear Jesus say, “See, I toll you I deedant move de cart!”

Once they had some distance they ran the rest of the way down the corridor to the stairs to street level and they didn’t stop running until they reached JJ’s car.

Hattie was laughing as she said, “Do you think she’ll ever find a framzits?”

As he peeled off his moustache he was laughing almost too hard to reply, but he finally managed to choke out, “I don’t know, but if she does, I don’t think she’ll put it in with the recyclables.”

“Let’s go partner, we’ve got things to do.”

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When they got to Hattie’s apartment she immediately pulled her laptop out of her bag, dropped it into its docking station and booted it up. She had been fortunate during the Metrostaff incident that she had been carrying her laptop so when her apartment had been searched it had not been found. Since then she had made it a habit to keep it with her at all times.

She pulled out the memory stick from the camera and dropped it into its slot. She downloaded the pictures to her hard drive.

JJ didn’t know just what to expect, but what he saw was a document, actually as she scrolled through the pictures he saw that there were several documents.

As he was looking over her shoulder, a whistle escaped through his teeth and in a reverent tone he said, “Wow, you weren’t kidding. This \*is\* the mother lode.”

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### Chapter 06 – Friday morning

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Universal Locator designation  
Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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As soon as they walked into the bullpen Hattie spotted Frank as she headed for the conference room with the map and shouted, “Frank, conference room!”

Frank jumped at hearing her voice and was so startled that he dropped what he had in his hands, scattering papers all over the floor. Quickly he picked them up, put them on a desk and headed for the conference room.

Hattie put her bag on the table and turned to the door, waiting for Frank. As soon as he stepped in she said, “Frank, I need a more detailed map. It doesn’t have to be the large format, but it has to have more detail, storm drains, sewer access points, fire hydrants, the whole shebang.”

Frank said, “I’ll go back where I found that.” He nodded in the direction of the map.

Hattie said, “Yeah, you can start there, but I need detail. Just to be sure, bring me several, the level of detail can vary.”

“Okay. I’ll see what I can find.” He turned and fled the conference room on his map quest.

Frank nearly bowled JJ over as he was exiting. JJ walked in and his head was following Frank as he ran off. He asked, “What’d you do to him?”

“I just gave him an assignment. I needed another map.”

“An assignment? He tore out of here like there was a demon on his tail.”

Shaking her head she said, “I don’t know why, but ever since he started it’s like he’s afraid of me or something. Do I make unreasonable demands?”

“Well, you can be kinda ... intense.”

“Now that I think about it, he didn’t start acting that way until the day Kam-El flew me into the bullpen after I fell off the building. Could that be it? Could he think I have an ‘in’ with the superheroes?”

Glancing around before speaking and then when he did, keeping his voice low JJ asked, “Well, don’t you?”

Hattie smiled and responded, just as quietly, “Yeah, I guess I do at that.”

She pulled her laptop out of her bag and booted it up. She checked her Wi-Fi signal and brought up her personal e-mail program.

“JJ, could you get me some coffee?”

“Sure. Be back in a flash, oh, that’s another guy. I’ll be right back.” JJ smiled.

Hattie let out a groan at his obvious pun.

Once her e-mail had downloaded she looked at what she had. A smile came to her lips as she saw that she had a note from her mom. She opened it and read it.

\*TO: Hattie255@Metro.us.net  
FROM: Mel.Kap@Metro.us.net  
SUBJECT: RE: Aunt Henrietta\*

*Hi Hattie,*

*How’s my girl? You haven’t called for a few days, but I understand. I read everything you write so I know just how busy you are. About Aunt Henrietta, yes, she did have a heart condition. I had to go back and check. She had what’s called Angina Pectoris. Anytime she would get really excited or upset it could cause her heart to work too hard. She had a medicine that she would take and it would relieve the symptoms pretty quickly. I forget what it is called, but it always gave her a headache when she took it. She used to complain that she’d rather have the heart problem than have to put up with the headache she got from the medicine. I hope this helps. Keep in touch, baby girl.*

*Mom*

Hattie dashed off a quick reply.

\*TO: Mel.Kap@Metro.us.net  
FROM: Hattie255@Metro.us.net  
SUBJECT: RE: Aunt Henrietta\*

*Thanks Mom. That’s perfect. Just what I thought. I’ll try to come by over the weekend to see you and Dad. BTW: now don’t say anything to anybody, but remember the guy I was paired up with in the wedding? Well, he asked me out on a date and we had a really good time. We’ve known each other for years, but have been out of touch for a while. Who knows, maybe it could lead to something. He is a cousin of Jon Kent’s and a really nice guy. He’s also my partner here at work so you’ll see his name with mine on our articles.*

*Love ya,*

*H.*

As she finished sending that note, JJ came into the conference room, but he wasn’t carting coffee. He had a long box in his hands. With a worried look, he said, “Hattie, this was just delivered for you. Do you have a secret admirer? Do I have competition?”

She was surprised at seeing the box; it was obviously a flower delivery box. She took it from JJ and set it on the table. As she untied the ribbon and opened the box she said, “I wonder who these could be from?” Inside was a dozen long stemmed pink roses.

JJ let out a whistle through his teeth and he said, “Wow, long stemmed roses!”

Hattie was staring at the flowers in appreciation. She wasn’t about to tell JJ, but she had never before received flowers from anyone and she was utterly thrilled and captivated by the thought that someone would send her flowers, let alone \*roses\*. In a distracted fashion she replied, “Not just roses, \*pink\* roses.”

“Yeah, I can see that they are pink. Does it make a difference what the color is? Could they be from Crane?”

Teasingly Hattie replied, “Maybe I do have a secret admirer.” She looked at him and lifted an eyebrow. “Would that be so hard to believe?”

“No, no, it’s not hard to believe at all.”

Hattie looked at him and asked, “I guess they aren’t from you. You wouldn’t have any reason to send pink roses.”

JJ sputtered, “No, no I didn’t. Not that I don’t want ... I just haven’t ... you know, we’ve been kinda busy with this case and all. Should I send pink?”

“No, \*you\* shouldn’t send \*pink\*, unless you want to \*thank me\* for something. You should send \*red\*. Well, since we have established that they’re not from you then who sent them?”

“Why don’t you check the card?”

“I don’t see one.” JJ hadn’t seen it, but Hattie had palmed the card when she opened the box because she wanted to see who they were from before JJ did.

“Are you in the habit of receiving anonymous flowers?”

She was looking at the flowers with a happy smile. “No, I am not in the habit, but I would like to be, that is if there was someone that wanted to send me flowers occasionally. It is rather nice, don’t you think? Now, of course, I’d prefer to get flowers from someone that I know.”

“But, we just started dating!”

“That keeps you from sending flowers? Well, I guess it all depends on how fast you want to get to number four. I’m going to go see what I can find to put them in.” Hattie left the conference room and headed to the supply closet. When she was in the supply closet she read the card. It was unsigned, but she knew just who it was from. She found an old coffee urn, put some water in it and brought it to the conference room.

When she started taking the flowers out of the box to arrange them, in her impromptu vase, she let the card fall to the table.

Seeing the card fall, JJ said, “Hey, there *\*\*is\*\** a card,” as he pounced on it. Thinking better of how he was acting, he handed it to Hattie and said, “Here, I don’t want to look. What does it say? *\*\*Are\*\** they from Crane?”

Hattie took it from him and read aloud: *“Thank you. I appreciate what you did for me. The docs say I’ll walk again, thanks to you. You’re my hero.”* She smiled and said, “This is sure turn-about. Usually you send flowers to someone *\*\*in\*\** the hospital. This time a person in the hospital sent flowers to someone on the outside.”

“Huh?”

“Long story, short – on Saturday, I was on the scene right after the bomb went off. I had a chance to practice my first aid. These are from the guy I helped. I’ll tell you the whole story sometime.”

With a relieved sigh, JJ said, “Okay, as long as it wasn’t Crane. I guess I’ll go get that coffee.” He left the conference room on his errand.

As soon as he left she pulled up a search page and checked a medical information site for Angina Pectoris and just what medicines were prescribed for the condition. One of them jumped out at her and she checked the side effects of the medication. Occasionally she would glance to the side, look at the roses and smile.

As she was finishing her reading JJ came in with the coffee and as he was approaching the conference room he saw Hattie looking at the flowers and smiling. He made a mental note. JJ carried in the coffee and he sat it on the table beside Hattie as she finished her reading.

As she stood up she said, “Don’t go away. Be right back.” She went to the supply room and found a pair of plastic gloves normally used by the copier tech when changing out the toner cartridges in the laser printers and copiers. She also found a plastic bag used for spent inkjet cartridges. When she walked back into the conference room JJ watched her. She put on the gloves and delved into her bag. She found Crane’s business card and pulling it out she dropped it into the plastic bag and sealed it. JJ watched this activity and asked, “What’s that all about?”

With a grim smile she said, “The pieces are starting to fall into place.” She pointed at the page she had been reading.

“Huh?”

“Read that.”

After reading the medical information page he nodded in understanding and said, “Oh, I see what you mean. Wow.”

A few minutes later when Frank came in, he had several maps. JJ and Hattie were huddled over printouts of the documents she had copied the previous night.

Hattie took the maps and said, “Okay, Frank, I need you to get together with research and find me anything you can on bombings where the explosive used was nitroglycerine anywhere in the US between January and July this year.”

“Just nitroglycerine?”

“Yes, just nitroglycerine. That should narrow the field considerably.”

Frank left on his errand.

Indicating the copies of the document that Hattie had obtained from Robbins’ office, JJ asked, “What can we do with this information? It wasn’t obtained legally so it can’t be used in court.”

“Yeah, but it may be enough for Cardona to get a search warrant and then he can get it legally.”

Hattie pulled a map off the top of the stack and spread it out on the table refolding it until the part of town they were interested in was what they were looking at. She was looking specifically at the area around the intersection of eighth and Main. This map had water mains and fire hydrants marked. She set it aside as not suitable. Picking up the next one she folded it the same way and they started looking at it. This one had electrical services indicated. This one she also set aside.

By the time they got to the fourth map, they were becoming discouraged.

Disappointment evident in her voice, Hattie complained, “None of these has given us a single clue as to how this is being done.”

Trying to be upbeat, JJ said, “There are only a couple more.”

Picking up the next one and blowing off the dust, Hattie queried, “Where do you think he got this one? It looks as old as a pirate’s treasure map.”

After refolding it and spreading it out on the table Hattie shouted, *“BINGO!!!!”* “She put her finger tip on the map. “That’s it! Do you see what I see?”

“Yeah, a side branch off that line. I wonder why it didn’t show up on any of the other maps.”

\*\*\*

While Hattie and JJ were discussing the ramifications of what they had discovered, Frank came in with a sheaf of papers. He said, “You were so right. Limiting the search to just nitro sure did shortcut the process. Here’s the stack.” He placed the papers on the table.

Immediately moving over and grabbing the top sheet to scan Hattie said, “Thanks Frank. That was quick work. While we’re going through this stuff, could you bring us some coffee?”

“Sure thing.” He turned to the door and exited.

Hattie was looking at a story from Missouri and JJ was looking at a story from Cincinnati.

JJ said, “I don’t think this one is what we are looking for. Yes, it involved nitroglycerine, but it was being used by a crook to blow a safe. The job went bad because he used too much and blew himself up along with the safe.”

Perusing another story, Hattie said, “I think I may have pay dirt here. This is from Missouri . . . St. Louis. It says that members of a local gang, get this they called themselves the Clanton Gang.” She started to chuckle.

JJ apparently didn’t see the humor and he just looked at her as if he was lost.

Surprised at JJ’s lack of response, Hattie asked, “Don’t you get it? *\*Ike Clanton!\**”

JJ’s expression didn’t change.

Hattie asked, “Where did you go to school?”

“Jefferson.”

“Our kids are definitely not going to Jefferson. Maybe you’ll

recognize him by this, ‘The Gunfight at the O.K. Corral!’

“Oh, yeah, I’ve heard of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral!”  
Suddenly what she had said hit him and with a startled expression he said, “Wait a minute! OUR KIDS? Our kids aren’t going to Jefferson? OUR KIDS?”

With a wicked little grin she said, “That is, of course, unless you really insist.”

He was smiling from ear to ear as he said, “Our kids. I like the sound of that.”

“Well, they aren’t here yet and if we don’t solve this mystery they may never arrive.”

With renewed vigor JJ grabbed another story and started perusing it. He said, “This one if from Missouri too. Clanton Gang again. Hey, this one mentions the James Gang. What is it with these people taking the names of gangs from the 1880’s for their names?”

Just then Frank returned with the coffees. As he was placing them on the table Hattie said, “Frank, another assignment. Research the James Gang and the Clanton Gang. They operate in Missouri around St. Louis.”

Nodding his head in acknowledgement Frank headed out of the conference room again.

Picking up another story, JJ said, “This looks like an op-ed piece.” JJ started reading the article aloud, quoting,

“The recent dispute between the Clanton Gang and the James Gang

has resulted in a number of deaths. The Clanton Gang has been losing members to mysterious explosions. The explosive being used is nitroglycerine.

The retaliation against the James Gang has been violent, to say the least.

The benefit to the community has been a reduction of overall criminal activity.

The populace has been able to rest easier now that their life savings are intact

and financial institutions have not been attacked recently.”

Rifling through the articles Hattie said, “I just checked the dates on these articles. The last one is dated about eight weeks ago. According to the last one, the police were hoping to break the case shortly. They were getting close to issuing a warrant. It seems like as soon as this announcement was made, the bombings stopped. I’d suspect that the bomber, whoever he is, decided to fold his tent and clear out. Now it looks like he has taken up residence here. It sure looks like if we can solve \*this\* case, we will solve \*theirs\* as well. What say, partner, you up for solving \*two\* cases at the same time?”

“I’d be happy to solve \*this one\* so that we can get on to that other thing.”

Hattie laughed and said, “Let’s not rush into anything.”

“But, you said . . .”

“I know, just give it some time. After all, we’ve only had two dates so far.”

With a rueful expression he replied, “Yeah, I wish I’d known that last night.”

Hattie laughed.

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When Frank returned he was smiling. He said, “This has been a history lesson. There have been two James Gangs. One was run by Frank and Jesse James and the new one is run by Ben and Jerry. There was a gang called the Clanton Gang run by Ike Clanton and a new one being run by Frank and Rich. The heads of both gangs claim that they are descended from the original family members. That appears to be where any similarity ends. They both operate more like the Mafia and organized crime than Wild West gangs.”

JJ said, “From what we have seen, there’s one way they are

alike. They kill each other off.”

Hattie replied, “I think that the one that was doing the killing with the bombs was not a regular member of the gang. I think he was, to use the old west terminology, a hired gun. Either that or he was a regular member of the gang and just took it on the lam because the cops were getting too close.”

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## Chapter 07 – The Bomber strikes – Again

Friday evening

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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Six-fifteen, Friday night, JJ knocked on Hattie’s door. As if she had been waiting for his knock, within seconds, the door opened. Hattie was dressed the same way he was, in dark jeans and top. However that was where the similarity ended. The outfit Hattie had on did nothing to conceal her figure. The dark top was almost skintight, as were the jeans which just accentuated her curves. JJ was seriously distracted. He simply stood there, remembering.

\*\*\*

He had been on numerous outings with the Kent family when Hattie had been with them and in his mind’s eye he kept seeing Hattie, at the beach, in that yellow bathing suit. Even as a teen she had a striking figure. She was every bit as voluptuous as his cousins. As a teen he had been attracted to her and that attraction hadn’t diminished over time. Truth be told, any time he knew that Hattie would be spending time with his cousins JJ had contrived to be there as well. He loved being with Hattie. He always felt comfortable with her. They would talk for what seemed like hours, mostly about how much she wanted to be an investigative reporter like his Aunt Lois. He had to admit to himself that was part of the reason he had gone into journalism, that and the fact that his dad and mom both worked for the Planet.

He was always comfortable with her, much more so than anyone, other than his cousins. She and he would tease each other, but Hattie never teased him about the one thing that he was really sensitive about, his weight. As a child and young teen JJ had had a weight problem and between that and his flame colored hair he was a ripe target for all of the bullies in school. That poor self image was the reason that JJ had never asked Hattie out on a date.

It wasn’t until he went away to college that all of that changed. The food in the cafeteria wasn’t the best and that discouraged overeating. Added to that, for a PE grade he had taken a weight training class. At first it had been a real chore, but once he had gotten into the swing of it he found out that he liked it and spent a lot more than the required class time in the weight room.

It wasn’t too long until he had two movie posters adorning the walls of his dorm room. One of Arnold as the Terminator with his well muscled arm folded across his chest holding a weapon and another of Sylvester as Rocky in a fighting stance showing off his muscular arms and very well defined abs. These posters became his inspiration. He wanted to look like them.

As he started dropping weight he found that he had more energy and a buddy of his from the weight training class asked him to go with him to the Judo club. That was all it took, JJ was hooked on the martial arts. He found that he was adept at Judo, winning several tournaments in his particular weight class progressing through the belts rapidly. That led to an interest in karate. It turned out that he was better at Judo, but he did learn the fundamentals of karate well.

It had torn him up when he had gone away to college and

then when he went to another city to work at the Gazette, but by going to another paper no one could holler 'nepotism'. He had almost given up hope of seeing her again. When Aunt Lois had contacted him with the job offer, the idea that he would be returning to Metropolis and seeing Hattie again, well, he couldn't accept the offer quickly enough. After Jon's wedding and before the reception, Aunt Lois had pulled him aside and told him that she was partnering him up with Hattie. As soon as he heard that, well, he was in seventh heaven. It was simply a dream come true. He was still pinching himself. He was tempted to tell Hattie at the reception, but Aunt Lois had cautioned him against doing that. She had said that it was supposed to be a surprise for Hattie.

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Hattie had been expecting JJ and as soon as he knocked she was ready to open the door. When she opened the door, she got her first good look at JJ and her mouth went dry. It suddenly hit her, JJ had changed! Ever since he had come back to Metropolis all she had seen him in was suits and sometimes coveralls. He had always been her chunky friend. This was ... WOW. JJ was dressed in close fitting, not skintight jeans which emphasized his now narrow waist and a black pullover long sleeve T-shirt. The shirt fit like a second skin. If she didn't know better she would have thought the he had borrowed some of Jon's spandex. It only served to emphasize the broad shoulders, the definition of his six-pack abs and show off his muscular arms. It looked like the sleeves were being stretched near the breaking point. Suddenly an image came to mind, an old TV show about a mild mannered scientist who, if he got angry, would turn into a green monster, ripping his shirt to shreds in the transformation. Gone was the slightly chunky guy she liked to spend time with and tease. Gone was chunky, here was hunky! In the place of her chunky friend was a red haired Adonis or action movie hero. She finally managed to pull herself together enough to say, "Wow, I mean well, yeah, I guess it's time to go. Just let me grab your bicep, uh, bag ... my bag ... let me grab my bag." Blushing from that slip, she turned and picked up her bag, taking her time in order to give herself some time to regain some control.

\*\*\*

Six-thirty, Friday night, a few blocks away, in the alley just off the intersection of eighth and Main, two figures moved into the shadows.

At the same time, Lois was still in the office. Clark had left to deal with another mud slide in Tegucigalpa, Honduras and she needed to put the paper to bed. Lois was trying to finish up so that Ultra Woman could be in the air over Main before 7:30 when there was a possibility of another bomb. She was not sure how much good it would do since they had no idea as to what the bombs looked like, but from what Hattie had deduced when she was scanning vehicles, if she saw anything unusual attached to the underside of a vehicle it could be what they were looking for. Therefore she would be looking for any foreign objects starting at about 7:15 and hoping that she didn't miss anything.

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6:45 PM

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A few blocks away, in the alley just off the intersection of eighth and Main, two figures moved looking down at the pavement, Hattie said, "It has to be here somewhere. We saw it on the map."

JJ said, "That was an old map."

"I know, it was left off of the newer maps, probably because it isn't used anymore. I think it's still here."

They were dodging around dumpsters and miscellaneous trash and finally as they approached the end of the alley Hattie let out a snort, "I \*\*knew\*\* it! Here it is. Give me a hand with this thing."

Setting her bag on the ground, she and JJ both knelt down

next to the manhole cover, one on each side. There were holes in the cover just large enough for them to slip their fingers in. She started to slip her fingers in and he stopped her. He said, "Let me." He raised the manhole cover and set it aside. Hattie actually couldn't have contributed to moving the plate. She was too distracted, watching the play of the muscles of his arms and abs when he moved the heavy steel plate, making it look like it was nothing at all. A fleeting thought crossed her mind, <And he's not from the Kent side of the family. He had to work for this. Wow!>

Once the plate was out of the way, Hattie pulled a flashlight out of her bag and shined the light into the hole he had uncovered. There was a little drop. A tall man would be able to hang by his hands and only fall a foot or so, but Hattie was all of five four. By the same token a tall man would be able to, as long as the cover was off, jump up and pull himself out, but that also would be impossible for Hattie. The problem was that JJ was also not a tall guy being only five eleven.

As she was peering into the black maw of the manhole, Hattie said, "Okay, it looks like I have to be the one to go in."

Trying to dissuade her, JJ said, "Why does it always have to be you?"

As if trying to convince him that she was correct, Hattie said, "Because I'm lighter than you. Besides, you're so much stronger than me. You can lower me and bring me back up whereas I couldn't do that for you. Also, you'd be better as a guard up here than me. Come on JJ, we have to check this out and get the police here before 7:30 so that they can catch this guy."

He knew that she was just stroking his ego, but actually there wasn't any good argument against her logic. Giving in he said, "Okay, let's do this thing."

After shoving her bag out of the way Hattie shifted around to sit on the edge of the manhole. She said, "If I'm right, this tunnel will lead out under the street. If it does, we'll know how it's done."

JJ suggested, "If this is it then hopefully we will have enough time so that we can notify the police and they can stake it out and catch the guy red handed."

She put her hands in his and said, "Right. Okay, hold on tight. Let me down slowly." As she felt his hands grasp hers she was awed at the controlled strength she felt. She felt that if he had wanted to he could have crushed all of the bones in her hands without breaking a sweat, yet he was so gentle with her.

He was kneeling in the lip and slowly bent down lowering her into the hole. When he was as far down as he could go he said, "That's it."

She said, "Okay, let me drop."

He released his grip and she fell less than a foot to the tunnel floor.

Immediately concerned he said, "You okay?"

She flashed her light around and said, "Yeah, that was perfect. Like jumping off the bottom rung of a ladder. I'm going to head down the tunnel. I'll be back in a minute. I just want to see where this thing goes."

He watched her light recede into the darkness. He was uncomfortable in that position so he started to straighten up. Just as he did he was slugged over the head and was out like the proverbial light.

\*\*\*

He carried the duffle carefully; it wouldn't do to jar it too violently, not when they were so close to success. It wouldn't take many more of these little packages to convince the rest of the council members to vote the way they wanted.

As he moved into the alley his eyes took a second to adjust to the gloom of the shadows. When they did he spotted a figure, dressed in dark clothing kneeling at the manhole cover. He had been discovered. He would have to deal with this, and permanently.

The figure at the manhole was so focused on what was below that he was able to sneak up on it. The sound of a gunshot would have drawn too much attention so he used the butt of his gun as a sap. There was a sickening thunk and the figure collapsed. He put his gun back in its holster and reached for his victim's hands. It wasn't until he started to drag the body away from the opening that he saw that he was still alive. <I didn't hit him hard enough. Well, he didn't see me so maybe I can afford to let him live.> As he was dragging him away he had a vague feeling that he recognized him. Suddenly, it came to him, that press conference. This was one of the reporters. He dragged him over behind a dumpster and dropped him, unceremoniously. Didn't he have a partner? Where was she? He looked at the open manhole and nodded in understanding.

He moved over to the manhole and used the strap to lower the duffel to the floor of the tunnel and then he lightly dropped down the hole himself. He picked up the duffel and moved down the tunnel that had become so familiar over the past few of weeks. Just before he had dropped in he had put on a ski mask, just in case.

Confidently he moved down the tunnel. He was slightly bent over so that his head didn't rub against the top. He saw a light bobbing up ahead and made sure that his tread was as silent as a ghost as he slowly closed the distance.

\*\*\*

Hattie had been counting her paces as she moved down the tunnel. She knew that she had to be nearing the street so she swept her light from side to side and along the roof looking for any way to reach the outside world. Suddenly the confining sides of the tunnel flared out and she found that she was in a small chamber. She stopped and started flashing her light around. She was rewarded for her efforts by seeing side tunnels running north and south and metal rungs sunk in one side of the chamber leading up. Following those rungs with her light disclosed the bottom of another manhole cover. This had to be it. This was where the bombs were attached to the undercarriage of the cars as they passed overhead, the occupants all unawares that they had just been given a death sentence.

A slight noise behind her alerted Hattie that she was no longer alone and instinctively she started to duck. Between that and the fact that her hair was fluffed out in a current style which disguised the actual location of her skull, the blow didn't fall with the intended force. As a result the gun butt that was aimed at her head actually only grazed her, stunning her very briefly. She came to seconds later feeling hands on hers. She kept her eyes closed, feigning unconsciousness. She felt an object placed in her hands and then tape being wound around her hands, binding them and the object in them.

Thinking her unconscious, her assailant spoke and she heard, "It's a good thing for me I got here early tonight. I might not have known that I had been found out. I could have walked right into a trap. Such a shame. Pretty girl like you putting your nose in where it doesn't belong. Well, actually, this works out for me. They will find their bomber or, at least, what's left of her. They'll think she accidentally blew herself up while planting a bomb. This could complicate the plan. If the bombings stop now, the council might not vote for the bill, but I don't see any other way."

A final strip of tape was applied and then she felt her hands moved. She heard the ratchet of a timer being set and then rapid steps receding down the tunnel.

As soon as her hands had been dropped she had peeked and saw the bomber with his back to her. She saw that he had a ski mask on so she couldn't get a visual ID.

He was several paces away, bent over and running. It was now or never. She sat up and struggled briefly with the tape, but there was too much for her to get it free. She took a deep breath and screamed at the top of her lungs, "\*\*\*UUULLLTTRRRAAA

... WWWOOMMMAAANNN!!!!

HHHHEEEEEEEEEELLLLLLLLPPPPPP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

UULLTTRRAA WWOOMMAANN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!\*\*" Even as she screamed she continued to struggle to get free.

The man running down the tunnel heard Hattie's scream. For a second he considered going back to silence her, but knowing how short a time he had set the timer for he decided that he had to get as much distance between himself and her as was possible. If he was still in the tunnel when that bomb went off, he would be as dead as she would be. Just as he reached the open manhole another piercing scream followed him.

The second scream ripped past him.

\*\*\*UUULLLTTRRRAAA ...

WWWOOMMAANN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HHHHHHHHHEEEEEEEEEELLLLLLLLPPPPPPPPPP!!!!

!!!!!!!!\*\*"

He jumped caught the lip of the manhole and lifted himself out just as another scream started.

\*\*\*UUULLLTTRRRAAA

WWWOOMMMAAANN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HHHHHEEEEEELLLL\*pppppppp!!!!!!!! Ultra Woman!!!!!!!!!"

As he slid the manhole cover back over the hole he muffled the third scream even as it was being shouted. Turning, he ran for the end of the alley. As he ran he yanked off his mask and blending into the crowd moved down the street away from the alley.

\*\*\*

It was a few minutes before seven and Lois was keeping an eye on the time, knowing that she would have to leave soon if she had any chance of preventing another bombing. She was looking at a story turned in for the weekend section when she heard her super name being called in a very familiar voice. Before the first shriek had died away Lois was in motion.

As she headed for the stairwell, she scanned the bullpen. A few of the night crew were milling around, mostly around the coffee station, so as quickly as she could she headed for the stairs. As soon as she was through the door she spun into her uniform and flew up the stairs to the roof access and into the air at superspeed. She knew that Hattie was working the Main Street Bomber case so it stood to reason that she would be found somewhere around there so she headed in that direction.

As she took to the air, she heard a second shriek and then as she neared Main a third was started it was suddenly cut off, but not before she was able to zero in on where it came from, somewhere off Main near eighth.

Ultra Woman landed in the alley and looked around. The sound of Hattie's voice had definitely come from here. As she landed she heard rapid footsteps leaving the area. She briefly contemplated going after the fleeing individual, but then discounted it. The terror in Hattie's shrieks was all too evident. She needed to find her pseudo-daughter.

She used her super vision to perform a quick scan of the immediate vicinity and when she did she spotted JJ's unconscious form stuffed behind a dumpster. As she was kneeling next to JJ she gave the dumpster a little shove, just a flick of the wrist, which sent it screeching across the pavement for ten feet. Once the dumpster was moved aside she dragged JJ upright and propped him against the wall.

She gently slapped his cheeks and he started to come around. She was shouting, "JJ! JJ! Come on JJ, wake up! JJ, come on!"

He was disoriented, but his first word was "Hattie!"

Lois put her hands on both sides of his face, forcing him to look at her. She said, "JJ, where's Hattie?"

Still foggy, he replied, "Down."

"Down where, JJ? Tell me, down where?"

"Down the manhole."

"What manhole?"

He waved in the general direction of the back of the alley. Ultra Woman used her supervision again and spotted a manhole cover partially covered by debris. At superspeed she zoomed to the manhole cover and picked it up, setting it aside. Then she heard it again, “\*\*Ultra Woman!!!!!!!!!!!!\*\*”

Lois dropped down into the tunnel and followed the sounds of Hattie’s voice.

She found Hattie with a bomb duct-taped to her hands and struggling to get free. Lois could see the timer and knew that there were only seconds remaining until detonation. She ripped the duct tape and grabbed the bomb. Shifting into superspeed she retraced her path to the manhole cover and soared into the air. As soon as she was above the surrounding buildings she flung the bomb up and away. Five seconds later it exploded. By that time, however, she was already back in the under street tunnel.

She helped Hattie remove the rest of the tape and then to stand. She asked, “How did this happen?”

Hattie replied, “I know how it was done and I think I know who the bomber is.”

Ultra Woman, dropped her stoic demeanor and reverting to Lois said, “Way to go girl, but did you have to get yourself almost blown up to prove your point?”

With a contrite smile, Hattie replied, “It wasn’t supposed to turn out this way. I was supposed to confirm how it was done and then get the police so that they could do a stakeout. I’m just glad my guardian angel was watching out for me. Can we get out of here now? I have one last stop to make before I have all of the proof I need.”

“Holding out on me huh? I guess you’re going to make me wait until you file the story, is that it?”

With a wicked little grin and a laugh Hattie replied, “Why, Ultra Woman, I guess you’ll just have to read the Daily Planet to find out the answer.”

Lois laughed in reply and said, “At least I’ll see it before it hits the streets.”

Ultra Woman helped Hattie get up to the alley. As soon as she was out Hattie saw JJ sitting against the wall. She rushed over to him and knelt down taking his hand in hers, “JJ, are you okay? ... JJ, speak to me.”

Looking up at her with bleary eyes he asked, “Is working with you always going to be like this?”

“Like what?”

“Almost getting arrested, getting hit over the head, maybe almost getting killed? What good is Judo or karate if someone sneaks up behind you and knocks you out?”

“Not much, I guess. I hope it isn’t always this bad.”

As he struggled to get to his feet with Hattie’s assistance he said, “I hope not too.”

Lois said, “If the two of you will promise to not get into any more trouble, I’ll head back to the office.”

JJ, still shook up from having been knocked out said, “Thanks, Au ... Ultra Woman.”

Hattie chimed in, “Yeah, thanks, Ultra Woman. I’ll see to it that he gets home okay.”

Ultra Woman said, “Be careful. The bad guy’s still out there you know.”

Hattie replied, “Yeah, we know and we’ll be careful.”

As Ultra Woman disappeared into the sky, Hattie moved over and picked up her bag. She moved back over and taking his hand, pulled a stumbling JJ along in her wake. She said, “Come on. We have to get to STAR Labs.”

Out on the street she hailed a cab. One of the benefits she received from having her bright red hair and striking figure was the fact that usually, when she signaled for a cab, she didn’t have to wait very long for one to pull up to the curb. She and JJ climbed in and she gave the destination.

Fifteen minutes later they were dropped off in front of the

lab.

Approaching the front desk she introduced herself, “Hattie Kaplin, Daily Planet. Is Doctor Bernard Klein still in his lab?”

The receptionist laughed and said, “We have to practically blast him to get him out and make him go home, especially right now, with his assistant, Jon Kent away. Let me check.” She picked up a phone and called. “He’ll be right here.”

“Thanks.” Hattie paced as they waited what seemed like an hour, but which was probably more like five minutes. She spotted him as he came through into the lobby. She had met him several times at functions at the Kent house so she recognized him as soon as he came in.

She rushed over to him and said, “Doctor Klein, I hope you remember me, I’m Hattie Kaplin. I’m a friend of Lois and Clark, as well as Jon Kent and his brothers and sisters.”

“Ahhh, yes, I thought I had seen you before. How are they? I haven’t seen Jon since the wedding. Aren’t they due back from their honeymoon soon?”

“Yes, they’re due back this weekend.”

Giving her and JJ a second look he said, “Say, weren’t both of you in the wedding party?”

“Yes, yes we were.”

JJ supplied, “I’m Jon’s cousin.”

Dr. Klein was impressed and asked, “Well, what can I do for you?”

“Doctor Klein, is there a way to detect nitroglycerine?”

“I assume you mean by some way other than blowing something up with it.”

“Yes, I mean, if someone that worked with nitroglycerine were to handle something, would it rub off and if it did, could that residue be detected?”

“Of course, there are a number of analyses that can demonstrate the presence of nitroglycerine.”

“Can you detect it on paper?”

“Actually paper is an excellent media for soaking up nitroglycerine and it is easily extracted from it as well. What do you have?”

Hattie reached into her bag and pulled out a business card in a plastic baggie. She handed it to him and said, “I think you’ll find nitro on this card. Can we come and watch you while you check?”

“Sure, come right this way.” He led the way to his lab. Once inside he said, “Let me see.” He pulled out a reference text book and turned to the index. Found the page he was interested in and muttered, “UhHmmmm. Okay.”

He put the book down and moved over to a lab bench. He pulled out some reagent and measured a quantity into a graduated cylinder. He poured this into a beaker and then opening the bag he used forceps to pick up the card and dropped it into the beaker. He used a glass stirring rod to stir the contents for a minute and then he let it sit while he moved over and turned on a machine.

Hattie asked, “What is that?”

“That? Oh, that is a liquid chromatograph.”

“What are you going to do with it?”

With the air of a magician preparing to perform a feat of legerdemain, he pulled on the sleeves of his lab coat as he said, “Observe. Watch closely now! Please note that at no time do my hands leave my wrists.” He was chuckling at his own joke as he moved over and picked up the beaker and brought it and a syringe over to the machine. He sobered and said, “Sorry, but sometimes analytical chemistry can seem like magic to the non-scientist.” He sucked up a measured amount of the reagent with the syringe and injected it into a port on the machine. When he did, he marked a trace coming from a recorder. The cross lines marked off seconds and minutes. They watched the tracing and suddenly the pen started wiggling back and forth across the paper. He said, “That’s the reagent. It comes through first. Now

we wait for the active ingredient.” When it hit a certain time the pen deflected very strongly. After some more time had elapsed the pen started wiggling again. “Ahhh, that would be the inks.” Less than a minute later, more wiggles, “That would be the sizing.” Noting their expression, he explained, “Chemicals used to bind the wood fibers together to make the paper.” Doctor Klein circled the main peak, checked the time to confirm it and said, “Yep, you’ve got nitroglycerine all right and a lot of it. How did you get this sample?”

Hattie smiled a self-satisfied smile and replied, “It was given to me, along with a splitting headache the other day. Thank you Doctor Klein. Can you give me something that says just what you found, where and how much?”

“Sure, I can document it right now. Keep in mind that I didn’t do a calibration so I can’t quantify what’s there. All I can do is say what we found. Hold on.” Doctor Klein used a standard analysis report form to document his findings, signing it with a flourish.

Hattie fished in the beaker with the forceps and pulled out the card. She blew on it to dry the solvent and once it was sufficiently dry, dropped it back into the plastic bag.

Looking up from what she had just done and taking the report that Doctor Klein offered, she said, “Thank you, Doctor Klein, you’ve just helped solve a big case. Let’s go JJ.”

“Where?”

“MPD Headquarters. We are handing them a bomber, on a silver platter.”

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#### Chapter 08 –The Trial

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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Before they exited STAR Labs, Hattie pulled out her earpiece and put it on. She tapped it and heard, “Say a command.”

She said, “Call Metrocab.”

After a series of beeps and buzzes she heard, “Metrocab. How can I help you?”

Hattie said, “Pick up at STAR Labs.”

“Destination?”

“MPD HQ.”

“Name?”

“Kaplin.”

“The cab should be there within fifteen minutes. Standard rates will apply. Thank you for using Metrocab.”

There was a click as the line was disconnected.

Hattie tapped her earpiece again to initiate another call. This time she said, “Call MPD.”

Cardona had made it a point to be in the office since it was a Friday night in anticipation of yet another bombing. When the call had come in reporting an airborne detonation it surprised him, but only briefly. He was certain that one of the supermen of superwomen had prevented this latest bombing.

He was waiting for more details to be reported when his phone rang. Picking it up he said, “Cardona here.”

“Inspector, Hattie Kaplin. I think I have your bomber identified.”

“You what??? Do you know something about that airborne explosion? Who was responsible?”

“That, oh that was Ultra Woman. She saved me from being blown up.”

Cardona was shaken by her nonchalant attitude. As if he didn’t quite believe her he asked, “Ultra Woman saved you from being blown up? Are you sure it wasn’t a rocket someone had left over from the fourth?”

“No, I’m sure it wasn’t! That was a bomb that he had intended for a car, but decided to use to kill me.”

“He? He who?”

“The Main Street Bomber! Can we come in to see you?” She asked.

Cardona was shaken. “We who, you and Ultra Woman?”

“No, she had other things to do. Me and my partner, James Olsen.”

“Oh, your partner in crime. Sure come on in.”

“The cab should be here shortly.”

“Where are you? I’ll send a patrol car.”

“Wow, okay, we’re at STAR Labs. I think we have all the evidence you will need to get a search warrant as well as an arrest warrant for the bomber.”

“There should be a car there in less than five to pick you up.”

“Thanks, Inspector.” As she hung the phone up she tapped her earpiece again and said, “Call Metrocab.”

When she was connected she said, “Cancel the pickup at STAR Labs. I got a better offer.”

She couldn’t help tweaking the cab company a little when the dispatcher asked, “How would you rate our service?”

“Inferior to the police.”

Not knowing how to reply to that, the dispatcher simply repeated the tag line she was supposed to use, “Thank you for using Metrocab,” and hung up.

\*\*\*

True to his word, less than five minutes later a patrol car pulled up in front of STAR Labs. The patrolman stepped out and asked, “You Kaplin?”

Hattie answered, “Yes and this is my partner. We need to get to headquarters as quickly as we can.”

“Climb in and I’ll see if I can’t accommodate you.”

Once they were in the back seat with their seat belts buckled he flipped a switch and they could see the lights reflecting off of the facade of the building. They could hear through the partition as he grabbed his mic and after keying it said, “Dispatch. Car 51. Please inform inspector 10-12. In route 10-19. 10-7.” (*He was sending, “This is car 51. Please inform the inspector that the visitors are present. We are in route to the station. I will be out of service.”*)

The radio squawked and they heard, “10-4” (*Message received.*)

With a screech of tires he took off and headed into traffic. As they approached each intersection he would briefly turn on his siren and once assured that the traffic was granting him the right of way he would speed through. It was a little under five minutes later that they pulled up in front of MPD Headquarters.

Again he grabbed his mic and this time sent, “Dispatch. Car 51. 10-19. 10-10” (*Car 51. We are at the station and I’m going out of service, for dinner.*)

The radio squawked and they heard, “10-4” (*Message received.*)

Hattie was frustrated that she couldn’t just jump out of the car, but there was no door handle on the inside and she had to wait for the driver to get out and open the door for her.

There was a need for haste; however there was no need for them to run into the building so they walked quickly up the steps.

Cardona was waiting for them in the lobby and he led them directly back to his office.

Once they were in his office, Cardona asked, “Okay, what do you have for me?”

Hattie was anxious, still keyed up from her experience, and couldn’t sit down. She started pacing in front of Cardona’s desk as she fumbled around in her bag. Finally getting a grip on herself, she stopped pacing and put her bag on the corner of his desk. She delved into it, pulled out the report prepared by Doctor Klein and passed it over. She said, “Here, read this.”

Cardona perused the document and asked, “How does this prove who the bomber is?”

“Inspector, would that be enough to get a search warrant?”

“I should think so. Whose place has to be searched?”

Reaching into her bag, Hattie pulled out the bag with the card in it and passed it to the inspector.

He read it and let out a low whistle. He asked, “Is this who I think it is?”

“One and the same.” She pulled out the documents they had gotten on Robbins’ financials. She laid them down on his desk as she continued talking, “These are the financial reports on Councilman Robbins.”

Moving over and pointing to areas the he had highlighted, JJ added, “He was nearing bankruptcy. Donations to his campaign had fallen off and he was going to lose to his opponent in the next election cycle. Recently his war chest has been stuffed to overflowing by large businesses that would benefit by having outlets in the center of town with no competition from independents. In fact it has been overflowing into area where it is being used for functions other than his reelection effort.”

Hattie picked up the narrative, “One area that the funds have gone to is hiring new staff ... for instance,” she tapped the bag with the card in it, “Jack Crane, special assistant for special projects.”

JJ picked it up again, “We tried to back track on him and it is truly amazing, he has no history until he started working for Robbins about five weeks ago.”

Pulling out some more paper, Hattie added to the pile in front of Cardona. “Out in the mid-west there were a series of unexplained bombings. The authorities didn’t pay all that much attention to them because they all took out underworld figures.”

JJ added, “There was an op-ed piece expressing how relieved the people were that it was happening since their money was safer as a result.”

Hattie resumed, “The local police wrote it off as a gang war. It appears as though the James Gang, not Frank and Jesse, but Ben and Jerry were at war with the Clanton Gang. Members of the Clanton Gang were being killed in mysterious explosions which were relieving the police of some bad actors and they only gave pursuit of the perp lip service.”

JJ took his turn, “Those bombings stopped a few of weeks before Crane moved to Metropolis. The interesting thing is the weapon of choice ... nitroglycerine.”

It was Hattie’s turn again, “Approximately three weeks after Crane moved to Metropolis, we started having a problem downtown, in Robbins’ district.”

Hattie pulled out copies of the documents she had photographed in Robbins’ office and added them to the pile. She explained, “These documents outline a plan to skin millions from the income of the bond issue that Councilman Robbins is proposing to fund the work turning the downtown area into a walking mall, rerouting traffic and adding landscaping.”

JJ continued the narrative, “The plan was to see to it that the rest of the council would see it his way and vote for the legislation. The deaths downtown, being the result of vehicular traffic was used to push them in the direction that he wanted.”

Hattie pulled out the old map and laid it on top of all of the other documents. She pointed to the alley off of eighth. “Here is a manhole into a side tunnel from an old culvert system. The tunnel leads out under Main just short of the intersection with eighth.”

“The bomber carried the bombs into the tunnel. He waited until a red light stopped traffic and he would quickly lift the manhole cover and use a hook, which was part of the bomb casing, to attach the bomb to the undercarriage of the car sitting over the manhole after setting the timer to five minutes.”

“When I was checking out the tunnel he slugged JJ and then tried to kill me with the bomb he was going to use tonight.”

Cardona stopped her flow of words, “Pardon me for being so crass, but why aren’t you dead then?”

“At the last second I realized there was someone there and I ducked. He still clipped me, but not as hard as he intended. I was only stunned for a few seconds. When I came to he was talking and I recognized his voice. It wasn’t who I thought it would be.”

“Who was it?”

“Inspector, I think you need to get those search warrants issued. One for Jack Crane’s apartment. One for Councilman Robbins’ headquarters and the other for the Councilman’s home. Then arrest warrants for Jack Crane and Councilman Robbins. If nothing else he needs to explain the misuse of his election funds.”

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Inspector Cardona had to interrupt a dinner party that a judge was holding to get him to sign the search warrants as well as the arrest warrants.

Cardona and the judge had left the judge’s party and retired to his study. When the judge saw one of the names he had a number of questions.

Thanks to the briefing that Hattie had given him along with the evidence she and JJ had collected, Cardona was able to satisfy the judge and the warrants were all issued, however reluctantly.

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Hattie and JJ were invited to cover the story of the execution of the warrants and subsequent arrests.

When the story hit the streets the Daily Planet led the way.

\*\*\*MAIN STREET BOMBER ARRESTED\*\*

*By: Kaplin and Olsen*

*“In the early hours of Saturday, persons of interest were arrested in the Main Street Bomber case. Along with 98 counts of murder have been added two counts of attempted murder and conspiracy.*

*The information leading to the arrest was provided to MPD by members of the staff of the Daily Planet after a lengthy investigation.” Story on A2*

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A few weeks later

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When the case went to court, Hattie and JJ were going to be witnesses so, contrary to protocol, one of the current editors decided to return to the reporter ranks and cover the case, thus, Lois Lane was in the gallery for the duration of the trial.

Lois Lane, at age 60, was still an extremely attractive woman and constantly turned heads. On the first day of the trial she wore a smartly tailored gray pantsuit which rather than conceal her womanly figure, complimented it. She wore a cream colored shell with a modest neckline under the jacket with a single strand of pearls. The gray of the suit matched the sprinkling of gray at her temples which didn’t detract from her beauty in the slightest; in fact it lent an air of distinction to her presence. The men in the courtroom all had their eyes on her as she moved, with stunning grace to a seat just behind the prosecution and took out her notepad and pencil.

Looking around at the assembly, Lois noted Peter Parker, the sketch artist near the back. She hoped that he lived up to his reputation and turned in some good drawings.

She nodded to Lorelei Kilbourne of the Metropolis Star. Lorelei smiled and nodded in return. When Steve Wilson, former Managing Editor of the Illustrated Press in Milwaukee left to take the reins of the Star, it wasn’t long until Lorelei followed him. Lorelei was a new addition to the Star, but she was a serious journalist that had worked for Steve at Illustrated. It was only because of that change in management at the Star that she was willing to work there. The Star had changed a lot since Steve Wilson had taken over and it was now less of a scandal sheet than it had been in the days when Lois had been an investigative reporter for the Planet. Lorelei was going to give Hattie some

serious competition just as the Star was starting to give the Planet.

The first day of the trial consisted of testimony from the police forensics teams.

The DA, Mr. Reed, had been in his position for a fairly short time and was confident that with all of the evidence and witnesses that he had lined up that this case would go well. Convicting a political figure like this would be a feather in his cap. He was unusual for his breed in that he didn't have political aspirations. He was satisfied with his job and managing to, in some small way, contribute to cleaning up the city was all he wanted to do.

After the head of the forensics team was sworn in, Mr. Reed started his examination: "Lt. Pearl, could you tell us what you found at the residence of Jack Crane and tell us exactly why you were looking for it there."

\*Lt. Pearl:\* "When we entered the residence in execution of a warrant issued on Friday night we were looking for evidence of the manufacture of nitroglycerine. Based upon an analysis of materials provided by the suspect to one ..." He referred to his notes, "Henrietta Kaplin the presence of nitroglycerine was verified by Dr. Klein of STAR Labs. What we found was a fairly complete lab setup and all of the raw components necessary to manufacture the explosive. They consisted of concentrated nitric and sulfuric acids and glycerin"

"We also found several two-ounce containers filled with the finished product. As most people know, Dynamite is composed of nitroglycerine mixed with diatomaceous earth. A single stick of Dynamite will have far less than an ounce of nitro in the mix. That means that a two ounce container is the equivalent of many sticks of Dynamite, perhaps as many as ten sticks, even though it is a much smaller package."

"We found a number of mechanical timers such as have been identified as being used in the bombs used by the Main Street Bomber along with detonation devices."

"All items were properly photographed, bagged, tagged, cataloged and registered in the evidence room. Chain of custody has remained unbroken. There was one exception; the completed nitro was disposed of by the bomb squad. Regulations prohibit storage of explosives within the building."

"Fingerprints obtained from the equipment were consistent with those obtained from the suspect using the name of Jack Crane. Subsequent inquiries regarding those fingerprints disclosed the name of James Draper."

"Research into James Draper found that he was a chemist for a munitions firm in St. Louis, Missouri. He had been dismissed when it was discovered that project funds had been diverted for his personal use, gambling.

Checking his financials we found that he was heavily in debt to the James Gang through gambling losses."

\*Mr. Reed:\* "Was this individual arrested as the suspect in the Main Street Bomber case?"

\*Lt. Pearl:\* "No, James Draper was arrested as an accomplice and co-conspirator."

\*Mr. Reed:\* "Your witness"

The Defense attorney, Mr. Jacobs, was a hot shot youngster eager to make a name for himself as a defender and was willing to do whatever he could to win. During discovery he had been given access to the State's evidence and knew that this was really a lost cause as far as his client was concerned. His only option was to try to introduce some doubt in the minds of the jurors.

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* "Lt. Pearl, why was James Draper not arrested as the culprit?"

\*Lt. Pearl:\* "Eye witness testimony to the contrary."

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* "But, as you said, his fingerprints were all over the equipment."

\*Lt. Pearl:\* "That only proves that he used the equipment to

manufacture the explosive. It does not mean that he delivered it."

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* "No further questions."

\*Judge:\* "Lt. Pearl, you may step down. Next witness."

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## Chapter 09 –The Trial Wraps Up

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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Finally it was Hattie's turn to take the stand.

\*Mr. Reed:\* "The State calls Henrietta Kaplin."

Hattie got up and moved through the gate to a position before the witness stand where she took the oath. After she was seated, Mr. Reed began.

\*Mr. Reed:\* "Ms. Kaplin, in your own words, please, tell the court how you investigated this case."

\*Hattie:\* "My first break was when one of my snitches warned me that Councilman Robbins was taking kick-backs from large corporations in return for legislation restricting independent businesses from the downtown area. We started checking and found large contributions into what had been his empty campaign fund."

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* "Objection Your Honor. That is not germane to this case."

\*Mr. Reed:\* "Your Honor we wish to establish motive for the crimes that we are trying."

\*Judge:\* "Overruled. Proceed"

\*Mr. Reed:\* "Please proceed, Ms. Kaplin."

\*Hattie:\* "As you said, it speaks to motive. His advocacy on the behalf of big business and his plan to turn the downtown area into a walking mall, because of the bombings, were too convenient."

"I first became aware of the presence of nitroglycerine when I and a number of my colleagues in the fourth estate were all affected adversely by something we were exposed to during a press conference that was held by Councilman Robbins. Subsequently we determined that what we had been exposed to was, in fact, nitroglycerine."

"At the press conference I was given a business card by Jack Crane which was later found to be contaminated with the substance. In my research I found that frequently individuals that work with this material become immune to its effects, however if it is on their hands it can be passed to others by skin to skin contact. Those of us that shook hands with Jack Crane at the press conference were all contaminated and were made sick. Once I discovered this I was pretty sure of the source of the nitroglycerine."

"We needed to determine how the bombs were being delivered to the targets. First we examined the road surfaces where the bombs had gone off. What we discovered was evidence of spalling leading to the theory that the bombs had been placed under the car. Since the pavement surface was harder than the underside of the vehicle it was attached to and was unconfined, the road surface acted to deflect the force of the explosion up and out like a Misnay-Schardin shaped charge destroying the vehicle and killing people nearby."

"Determining where the bombs had been attached to the cars required us to check a number of maps. We found an old map which indicated the presence of a side tunnel extending into an alley from the sewer tunnel system just south of the Main Street/Eighth Avenue intersection.

While investigating this, my partner and I found that without help or the use of a rope or ladder a short person could not have been the bomber."

"With my partner's assistance I had entered the tunnel and

was pursuing the investigation when my partner was attacked and knocked unconscious.”

“The person who attacked him then entered the tunnel and came after me. He tried to knock me out the same way he had my partner, but was unsuccessful in his attempt. I pretended to be unconscious and he taped one of his bombs to me, planning to kill me and throw the blame for the bombings on me. I know this because he believed that I was unconscious and was speaking aloud to himself as he worked.”

“As soon as I had seen the tunnel access I knew that I had been wrong thinking that Jack Crane was the culprit. He was rather too short, being only about five foot eleven. It would have taken someone six-one or six-two at least to enter and leave the tunnel unaided.”

“As the bomber was leaving I looked and saw that he was wearing a ski mask, but when he spoke, I recognized the voice as that of Councilman Robbins himself. He fits the profile in that he is six-three and was therefore able to negotiate the tunnel access unassisted.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “What happened then?”

\*Hattie:\* “Ultra Woman arrived and removed the bomb sending it into the sky, where it wouldn’t harm anyone and then helped me leave the tunnel.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “No further questions.”

\*Judge:\* “Does the defense have any questions?”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “Yes, Your Honor. Ms. Kaplin, you stated that you had been knocked unconscious while in this so called tunnel.”

\*Hattie:\* “Yes, sir. Briefly.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “If you had been knocked out how were you able to so surely identify Councilman Robbins as the individual there with you? Surely you would have been disoriented from this supposed blow to the head. You were the one with the bomb after all when Ultra Woman found you. How can we be sure that you, yourself are not in fact the bomber?”

Seeing just where this was going Lois sent out a mental summons, /”Clark, I need to get out of here. Give me a call and then come take my place.”/

Within seconds, Lois’ cell phone started to vibrate and the sound was audible to those sitting next to her. She pulled the phone out and excused herself as she got up to head out of the room, ostensibly to take an important call. Just as she was leaving, Clark Kent entered.

Clark was wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit with a crisp white shirt and a tie that was ... a tie that ... well, it was purple and blue and red on a dark brown background and looked like an artist’s palate while he was working on mixing colors. His black hair was also showing some gray at the temples which made him look very debonair. As he and Lois passed in the aisle they exchanged a brief touch as Lois handed him her notepad and then he took her just-vacated seat.

While this was going on, Mr. Reed had jumped to his feet and proffered an objection, “Your Honor, this witness is not on trial here! This is a blatant attempt by the defense to cloud the picture.”

\*Judge:\* “We have to consider all possibilities. Is there another witness that can corroborate this witnesses’ statements?”

Just then the doors at the back of the room opened and the ever youthful Ultra Woman stepped in. Her cape swished side to side behind her as she moved. To every outward appearance Ultra Woman was a woman of about thirty, just as she had been since the day she had made her debut and then returned after an absence of about thirteen years. She did not appear to have aged a day in the thirty years since her debut.

Her entry caused a stir and all eyes turned in her direction, including those of the judge and the prosecutor.

The super heroine walked to the front, stopping just behind

the swinging gate and spoke in whispers to Mr. Reed.

When she finished, Mr. Reed turned to the judge and said, “Your Honor, I would like to excuse Ms. Kaplin, subject to recall and call Ultra Woman as a state’s witness.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “Objection, Your Honor! How can we credit the testimony of an individual who will not even reveal their true identity and hides behind a mask?”

\*Judge:\* “Objection, overruled. There is precedent which will allow said testimony. Ms. Kaplin, you may step down. Mr. Reed, you may proceed.”

Mr. Reed made the formal announcement, “The State calls Ultra Woman.”

After being sworn in, Ultra Woman took her place on the witness stand.

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Ultra Woman, I understand that your time is very valuable, so please just tell us what you told me a minute ago.”

\*UW:\* “At approximately 7:00 the Friday evening in question, I heard a cry for help. When I arrived on the scene in response to the cries for help, I heard footsteps retiring down the alley and away from the scene. I found James Olsen Junior unconscious from a blow on the head. I was able to rouse him to consciousness and he told me about the manhole and where Ms. Kaplin was. When I arrived on the scene I found Ms. Kaplin bound with duct tape and a bomb duct-taped in her hands. If the bomb had been allowed to detonate, the duct tape would have been destroyed leaving her apparently unbound and the perpetrator of the crime. As it was, it would have been impossible for her to have done that to herself. It required a second party to do that to her. The duct tape has been turned over to the MPD to follow up on; however, they will need more time to complete that investigation.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Your witness.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “No questions.”

\*Judge:\* “Thank you Ultra Woman for coming in and volunteering your time to testify. You are excused.”

\*UW:\* “You are welcome, Your Honor. Superman and I always want to see justice done.”

Ultra Woman exited through the gate, strode up the aisle and exited through the doors at the rear.

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “I’d like to recall Ms. Kaplin.”

\*Judge:\* “Ms. Kaplin, please retake the stand and keep in mind that you are still under oath.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “Ms. Kaplin, you say that you recognized the voice of your assailant. How were you able to identify it when the mask you say he was wearing would have muffled the sounds?”

\*Hattie:\* “There was more than just the sound. I did allow for a certain muffling due to the mask. There was a certain cadence and pronunciation of words which I had heard at the press conference just a few days prior.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “No further questions.”

\*Judge:\* “You may step down.”

Just as Hattie was leaving the witness box, Lois Lane re-entered. She moved down front and took a seat next to her husband. Clark handed her the notepad so that she could take the notes.

\*Mr. Reed:\* “The State calls James Draper.”

While they were waiting for Draper to be brought in, Clark leaned over to Lois and they had a whispered conversation, which when they finished he stood and left the courtroom.

A few minutes later, Draper was escorted in by a bailiff and sworn in.

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Mr. Draper you are aware of the charges pending in your case?”

\*Draper:\* “Yes, I am.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Would you care to explain your involvement in

this case?”

\*Draper:\* “I was blackmailed into producing the nitro for Robbins.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Would you care to explain your statement?”

\*Draper:\* “Somehow Robbins found out about St. Louis. He threatened to turn me over to the Clanton Gang if I didn’t cooperate and make the nitro. Initially he wanted me to plant the bombs, but I refused. I didn’t mind offing bad guys in St. Lou, but killing innocent people so that he could rob the public, nah, I didn’t want anything to do with that. When he threatened to turn me over to the Clantons, there wasn’t a lot I could do. I had to cooperate.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “You are saying that you were coerced into producing the explosive then.”

\*Draper:\* “Yes, that’s what I am saying. If I didn’t produce the bombs for him, I was a dead man.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Thank you, Mr. Draper. No further questions.” He turned to the defense attorney and said, “Your witness.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “Mr. Draper, it seems rather convenient that you would suddenly develop a conscience about killing innocent people when, by your own admission, in St. Louis you killed numerous individuals in the same way. Mr. Draper, it would seem to me that perhaps you are trying to shift the blame for these atrocities off of yourself and onto a respected public servant who has only worked for the public good for a great number of years.”

\*Mr. Reed:\* “Objection, Your Honor! Mr. Draper is not on trial here, Councilman Robbins is.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “Your Honor, if there is a possibility that the councilman didn’t do this the jury needs to be appraised of that possibility.”

\*Judge:\* “Objection overruled. Proceed with the cross-examination.”

\*Mr. Jacobs:\* “Mr. Draper, exactly where were you at seven the night of the incident in question?”

A rather smug look overtook Draper’s features as he responded, “I was at a town hall meeting with several hundred people preparing the crowd for the councilman. The councilman was due there at 7:30. He scheduled it that way so that he would be present when the bomb went off. The venue was just around the corner from Eighth and Main, a location he could reach before the detonation.”

In a deflated tone, Mr. Jacobs said, “No further questions.”

The judge addressed Mr. Reed, “Redirect?”

Mr. Reed replied, “No, Your Honor. No questions.”

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At that point it was all over but the shouting. After a few more technical witnesses the case was given to the jury.

After the jury deliberated for a short time they came back in.

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A special edition of the Daily Planet hit the streets a short time after the jury returned its verdict.

\*)COUNCILMAN ROBBINS CONVICTED AS SERIAL MURDERER)\*

By: Lois Lane

*“In a surprise twist, charges were presented against Councilman Robbins regarding the activities of the Main Street Bomber.*

*As a result of the testimony presented by members of the staff of the Daily Planet and the Metropolis Police Department, Councilman Robbins has been convicted of 98 counts of murder in the first degree, conspiracy to commit murder and attempted murder.*

*James Draper, his accomplice, was convicted of conspiracy and will be remanded to the St. Louis jurisdiction where he will be tried on separate counts of murder in the deaths of members of the infamous Clanton Gang.*

*The nature of the evidence presented was so compelling that*

*the jury deliberated only two hours before returning a verdict of guilty on all counts. Sentencing will be performed in ten days, but it is expected that the death penalty could be imposed. (Story continues A2)”*

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A little later, in the editor’s office at the Daily Planet, Lois, Clark, Hattie and JJ were together. Hattie and JJ were sitting on the couch while Lois and Clark were in their office chairs.

Hattie said to Lois, “Thanks for testifying. That kept them from trying to place the blame on me.”

Lois smiled and said, “All I did was tell the truth, besides, you didn’t do anything except gather all the evidence the police needed to put him away, for good. Good job.” She looked over at Clark and said as she started to laugh, “You’re right. Two peas in a pod.”

Clark gave JJ a wink as he said, “Absolutely scary.”

Just then there was a knock on the door.

Lois signaled for the person to enter.

A delivery boy entered and said, “Delivery for Kaplin”

Surprised, Hattie jumped up and said, “That’s me!”

She accepted the box. It was long and was obviously a flower box. Hattie sat it on the corner of Lois’ desk and opened it. Inside were a dozen red roses. Hattie looked over at JJ and smiled. She said, “You don’t waste any time do you?”

“How can you be so sure it was me?”

“After the discussion the other day?” Hattie put the flower box under her arm and with her free hand grabbed JJ’s hand and said, “Come on JJ, you owe me a dinner.”

Shocked JJ stammered, “Dinner? I do?”

Hattie smiled and said, “Sure, this will be number three. Remember what I said about number four?”

JJ started to smile at the memory and said, “Ahhhh, yes, yes I do! Let’s go partner. I know this little place around the corner. Romantic sidewalk seating and they have the best Italian food in the city.”

As the door closed behind them Lois looked at Clark and said, “I think we did good partnering them up.”(7)

“Yeah, I guess we did. You know, I think JJ’s on to something. How does Italian sound to you for dinner?”

Lois got up out of her office chair and moved over to Clark and sat in his lap. She turned so that she was facing him and put her arms around his neck. She moved in close so that she was whispering in his ear, “You and I both know what Italian does to you, so I say, I know this little place in Rome. Someone who shall remain nameless used to fly me there for dinner sometimes.”

Clark jerked back and asked, “Luthor?”

Lois laughed and said, “No, silly, Superman! Now, don’t give away this secret, but I think he had a thing for me.” She giggled. “I have always enjoyed my time with you. Remember my birthday, back in 2010 when I got the pendant? We flew to Paris for dinner and then we joined the mile high club.”(8) She closed the distance between their lips for a lingering kiss before she finished, “I’d kinda like a repeat performance. The paper has been put to bed. Celeste or Lucy can make dinner for the rest of the kids. Superman and Ultra Woman are taking the night off. Let’s get out of here.”

With a gleam in his eyes, Clark said, “I can’t wait. Let’s go.” <“Hmmmm, the last time we did this we wound up with Sam. I wonder.”>

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Epilogue

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 Canon universe also called – Prime

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One week after the jury rendered its verdict the banner headline of the Daily Planet read:

\*\*\*FORMER COUNCILMAN RICHARD ROBBINS FOUND DEAD\*\*\*

*By: Kaplin and Olsen*

*Former City Councilman Richard Robbins was found dead in the exercise yard of Metropolis Prison today.*

*The Councilman was in the general population of the prison while awaiting sentencing in his conviction as a serial murderer. When he was not present for roll call after an exercise period a search was conducted. He was found in a shaded corner of the yard with a toothbrush, the handle of which had been filed down into a sharp point sticking out of his chest. The implement of death was inserted into his chest just to the left of the sternum and pierced the heart. Death would have been instantaneous.*

*Sources in the DA's office say that his lawyer had been in negotiations with ADA Sylvia Costas offering a deal which would have guaranteed a life sentence rather than the death penalty at sentencing.*

*It is speculated that the motive for his death was revenge taken by a members of one of the families that he killed in his bombings.*

*The former Councilman's lawyer was unavailable for comment." (Story continues 2A)*

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Hattie was pacing in Lois and Clark's office while JJ sat on the couch watching her.

As she paced she expostulated, "This stinks to high heaven. We've started cross-checking the names of the victims against the list of the prison population. What was the result JJ?"

JJ answered, "We haven't found a single match. There are at least no obvious matches. We haven't checked for cousins and such as yet."

Hattie continued, "I spoke with ADA Costas and she told me that this deal that was in the works would have blown the lid off of something big. That was all that she had at this point ... something big. Something really big."

Lois asked, "What do you think it could be?"

"I don't know yet, but I'll find out."

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In a rundown warehouse on the other side of town, two men were in a darkened office. The light in the room was being provided by a video monitor.

The monitor depicted a single individual, strapped into a chair. The individual was thoroughly restrained in his bonds, unable to do more than move his head slightly. On his head was attached a pair of headphones. They were taped in place so that he couldn't shake them off. The camera providing the picture was positioned so that it showed the imprisoned individual and some of his surroundings. What could be seen were walls completely enclosing the chair at a short distance. Across the walls played a kaleidoscope of colors and it wouldn't matter what direction the prisoner looked since the colors were being projected on all four walls the floor and the ceiling.

As the prisoner started to slump in his bonds, apparently dozing off to asleep, a switch was closed and he jerked up and a look of extreme pain overtook his features. Over the speaker could be heard a muted version of the noise being pumped into his ears by the headphones. The noise was loud, just below the threshold that would cause permanent damage to the ears, but painful none the less.

After a minute which seemed like an eternity to the individual in the chamber, for such it was, the sound was turned off and the man in the office keyed a microphone and said, "Tell me what Robbins told you."

The individual in the chair blubbered, "I told you, he didn't

tell me anything! He didn't trust me. He wanted the DA's guarantee before he would say anything. I was just his mouthpiece talking to the DA's office."

His statements were picked up by a microphone in the sensory chamber and transmitted through the speakers in the office.

Again the switch was closed and the noise was pumped into his ears. His body was vibrating like a tuning fork in response to the noise as he writhed in pain. This time after thirty seconds it stopped and he slumped forward in relief.

The man in the office keyed a microphone again and said, "Tell me what Robbins told you."

The individual in the chair thrashed around and blubbered, "I told you. I've told you over and over, he didn't tell me anything! He didn't trust me. He wanted the DA's guarantee before he would say anything. I was just his mouthpiece talking to the DA's office."

Again the switch was closed. This time the noise was sent for two minutes before the question was again asked.

This process was followed for hours. The subject's body alternately subjected to pain and then relief and constantly seeing the play of colors all over the chamber, no matter where he looked he couldn't get away from the colors, just as he couldn't get away from the noise.

Slowly, over time, the subject failed to respond as violently to the sound and he sat staring straight ahead at the moving colors.

He was asked again and his reply was in a calm voice, "He didn't tell me anything. He said that his information would lead to a big arrest. That was all. He didn't give any names or other details."

The man in the office keyed his mic again and said, "You will forget that you have been here. You will remember a weekend at the beach...." A complete history of impressed memories for the weekend were provided. When he finished he said, "You will go to sleep now and wake up in the morning, in your own bed and remember your relaxing weekend at the beach. Go to sleep now."

The subject closed his eyes and slumped forward.

The walls of the chamber went dark and the earphones were turned off.

The man behind the mic said, "You will return him to his apartment tonight. Tomorrow we will start on our next project."

A desk lamp clicked on, throwing a circle of light on the desktop throwing the rest of the room into utter gloom. Centered in the light on the desktop was a copy of the Daily Planet. The article about Robbins was on the top of the page.

Next to the article was a miniature snapshot of Hattie and JJ, the authors of the article. The man said, "This one," he placed his fingertip below Hattie's picture, "cost me possibly billions in patents when she exposed the MetroStaff corporate espionage. Now they together have cost me additional millions on this deal."

"At least we were able to plant the documents that implicated Robbins in the bond scheme and we were able to silence him, permanently, before he could tell anyone about our ... arrangement. Those blackmail materials will no longer be needed. They served their purpose. He performed the tasks we required and now he is dead."

"Crane may have to be dealt with in a similar fashion, if Robbins told him anything. Have one of our stooges get near him in the prison and pump him for what he knows. If Robbins kept him in the dark we may just let nature take its course."

"Do make sure that the lawyer he gets in St. Louis cooperates and sees to it that he receives the death penalty. We will let the state do our dirty work for us."

Touching the paper again he continued, "Now, these two. They are getting too close." A pen appeared in his hand. He drew a circle around Hattie's picture. Then he drew a vertical line through it followed by a horizontal line. When he was finished it

looked like she was being looked at through a rifle scope. “They need to be dealt with before they interfere in any more of my plans.”

THE END

1. “Hattie Kaplin – Reporter — Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 1C – N”
2. Idem
3. Idem
4. Idem
5. “After Summer Camp – Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 1CA”
6. “First Love – Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 1 D – 1L”
7. Ibid “Hattie Kaplin — Reporter
8. “Lois Lane – Mother of Utopia – The Early Years (A Christmas Story) Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 1A”