

Las Vegas's Kerth Ceremonies

or

Lois & Clark Meet Susan & Casey

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Rated: PG

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Summary: A *Lois & Clark/Desperate Housewives/Las Vegas* crossover/mistaken identity story. Get Lois Lane, Clark Kent, Susan Mayer, and Casey Manning all under one roof, and the fun starts.

This was a challenge way back in 2009 to merge *L&C* with *Desperate Housewives* and *Las Vegas*. The idea festered, grew, and refused to go away. Finally, in torment, I decided to take it on as a project. This is a mistaken identity/crossover fiction about early fifth season Lois & Clark meeting a very early first season Susan Mayer of *Desperate Housewives* and Casey Manning as owner of the Montecito Casino in the third season of *Las Vegas*.

This is a homegrown story of three different TV shows that are set in different times. Other people have been referenced in the story strictly because of their name recognition; they are not specific to the 1990s, 2000s, or later. The blended trio of shows are meant to show a 30 year-old Lois and Clark with a 40 year-old Susan and Casey. Most of the other names should be taken to be the age they portrayed on television, not their current age. I just took their portrayals and ran with my muse to create this tale. I promise not to injure any of them and to return them to their owners with just a little extra wear. Okay?

The asterisk (*) dividers might mean a jump in time or just signify a division of different settings happening in this story, but I'm sure you'll be able to pick up on that when it happens. <BG>

"Oh, what fun! The Kerths are going to be awarded in Las Vegas this year. I can't wait to go out there and just relax. Plus, we will be coming home with no less than three more Kerths, I hope. I'm just wondering if we'll sweep all five categories where we have been nominated." Lois Lane Kent was babbling all over about the trip to Las Vegas at the end of the week. She had been there before, but never with her husband Clark. The two of them would have so much fun being tourists and getting a little action at the poker tables. They were also looking forward to seeing reporters from the other newspapers who were also counting on being awarded the coveted Kerth Awards for Journalistic Excellence. Lois grudgingly admitted that she and Clark were not the only good journalists, but preferred to dwell on the fact that they won awards because of hard work and the way their writing styles meshed so perfectly.

Lois had been shopping earlier in the day and picked up a beautiful turquoise-colored, floor-length dress with crystals across the bodice. She knew that it would knock her husband's eyes out when she got all dressed up for the award banquet. And, she was counting on being in the spotlight often and having her photograph appear on the front of the *Daily Planet* as the winner

of many awards with Clark. She giggled a little to herself as she thought how pleased he would be when he finally saw her in the new dress.

"Clark, can we stay an extra night or two since we don't have to use conventional airlines to make this trip?" Lois loved their method of traveling.

"Honey, as much as I would love to take you out there under the power of SupermanExpress, we have to go traditional on this trip because of the others who will be traveling with us. But, yes, we can stay a bit longer and maybe even come back with some of our Vegas winnings. I figured I'd surprise you with the fact that I have already cleared our schedule with Perry. Then again, I don't care whether we win or lose while we're out there, all I can think about is getting you alone in a hotel room." Clark reached over and pulled Lois into a tight embrace. "There's something about hotel sex that makes my motor run." Clark smiled at Lois and the way he raised his eyebrows told her volumes.

Susan Mayer was startled to learn that she was a nominee for the coveted Kerth Award for the illustrations she had done in a series of children's books entitled *A Rabbit's View of the World*. No one was more surprised than Susan that her illustrations were being featured on the editorial page. An editor had stumbled onto the children's books, discovering that she and her husband laughed more at the book than their three-year-old daughter. She introduced it to a senior editor at work, who immediately recognized that they were amusing and well-illustrated; the Rabbit seemed to have something pithy to say about everything, and when paired with the front page of the paper, revealed a grown-up humor to Susan's illustrations.

Susan reread the letter of notification to see if she had missed any of the details. She was thrilled! She would be staying at the famous Montecito Resort and Casino where the awards ceremony was going to be held. Julie could stay at her friend's house and Susan could have adult time in Las Vegas. She might even meet a handsome man there who would show her a good time and make her smile.

As Susan opened her closet to look at what she wanted to take with her, it occurred to her that she would need a new gown for the actual night of the awards. She wondered if Bree would allow her to borrow the beautiful dress she had worn to the New Year's Eve party at the Country Club. She and Bree were about the same height and size, so it would save her some money if she could borrow the dress. Maybe then she'd have some spare change to spend in the slots, or even at the poker tables. She pulled a few things out of the closet and put them across the chair while mentally packing her bag.

Casey Manning was restless. His ex-wife, Sam, was giving him a rough time about the fact that he had shown up unannounced at his own casino. He had purchased the Montecito Resort and Casino when the previous owner had died and it was left to a charity for the blind. The best part of the deal was that he could gamble when he felt the urge and, if Lady Luck frowned upon him, at least his losses swelled the casino's profits. According to Casey, that was a win-win situation. He was ruthless about business. He had gone from a working stiff to a multi-millionaire overnight, but not without a lot of sweat involved. As a result of purchasing the Montecito, Casey was now considered a billionaire. His only weak spot seemed to be his ex.

He was still smarting from her desertion of their marriage, while keeping the perk of occupying the Owner's Penthouse. Since Casey was into peaceful co-existence, he had checked into the 19th floor Presidential Suite instead of making her leave the Owner's Penthouse. It was only a three-room suite, but it was large enough for the weekend visit which was all he planned to

stay. He had settled into this suite because of the wonderful Jacuzzi and nine-headed shower that were so perfect for relaxation at the end of a hard day. It also had a very large California King bed in the main bedroom that was dwarfed by the huge room. Casey felt very comfortable there.

As Casey sat at the desk looking at his laptop, he wished for the umpteenth time that he could make peace with Sam. He reached across the desk for the phone, but put it back just as soon as he realized that pleading with her for another chance wouldn't change anything. Being a billionaire had not made his life any easier. He sighed as he wished he had someone who would look into his eyes and tell him sincerely how much he was loved.

Meanwhile, business still called to him as he sat there. This coming week, the Montecito had a high-stakes poker tournament involving some of the wealthiest players in the world, a convention of the Million Dollar Roundtable of Insurance Brokers, and the Kerth Awards booked. There was a long list of people who were looking forward to a weekend in Las Vegas and had chosen the Montecito for their destination.

"Lois! Clark! My office now!"

Lois and Clark stopped their progress toward their desks and instead marched toward Perry's office. It was still early and the bullpen was still relatively empty, so their footfalls sounded loudly as they headed to his office. "Shut the door behind you, please," their editor said as he sat down behind his desk.

"Good morning, Chief," said Clark. Lois mumbled the same. Both stood at attention, waiting to hear what Perry had to say. They were anxious to wrap up unfinished articles and return home.

"We've tied up the loose ends in all the articles that we are working on, so Lois and I thought we'd come in and try to turn in the extra fluff that makes up the weekend news. Both of us have an article or two for you, and unless there is something else going on, we are about ready to leave for Las Vegas." Clark hoped that he would not have to stay too long at work, as he wanted to do a patrol as Superman before they left for the airport.

"That's not exactly why I called you in here. I know that you, Clark, have something about a school bus fire and a Superman rescue of someone who fell into Hobbs Bay. And Lois, I believe that you even did a flower show review this week? You must really be looking forward to going to Vegas to do something like that without a grumble," Perry said while shifting the paperwork on his desk. "But the real reason I called you two in here is that I wanted to tell you that I'm so proud of your five Kerth nominations. FIVE! If you win them all, individually as well as a team, it means you will have won twelve Kerths. That's bragging rights to any organization! I know that there is a possibility that you will not get all of them, but anything over three and we are in the lead. I just wanted you guys to think of that as your names are being called out tomorrow night. We are all so darn proud of you both!" Perry looked up at them with a big grin on his face.

Lois and Clark looked at each other and the same grin broke out across their faces too. Clark squeezed his wife's hand. They were just as happy as could be to get nominations this year. Last year they had only been nominated for one award and had not won. This year there was a real possibility that, with the quality of the stories and the smooth writing style of the team, they would win.

"Well, don't just stand there. I believe you have a few stories to turn in before you get out of here." Perry was still grinning, but he had to editor them out the door somehow, and it seemed that being gruff was easier than hugging them. Clark turned and let go of his wife's hand as the two of them went back out into the bullpen toward their desks.

"If I didn't know better, I'd think Perry WAS actually proud of us," Lois said with a huge grin on her face. "He used the word,

and we didn't even get an Elvis story this morning."

Both of them sat at their desks, booted up their computers, and in a short time had submitted their stories to Perry. About an hour after they had arrived at the Daily Planet, they were returning home to finish their packing.

Lois had kept her dress hidden from Clark so that the first time he saw it would be when she was getting ready to go to the awards banquet. She wished there was some way to hide it even longer so that the first time he saw her would be at the Kerths, but she knew that her hubby would be getting dressed in his tux at the same time as her so there was no way to prolong the surprise.

Casey stepped into the security office to talk to Ed Deline. The casino's head of security was a former CIA agent and even tougher than he looked. Ed was a no-nonsense type of guy and he took the security of the Montecito seriously. Casey was curious about the increased security for this weekend, but he also just wanted to have a talk with Ed. "Hi, Ed. Got a few minutes to go over the plans for the high-stakes poker game scheduled for this weekend?"

Ed looked up from the bank of monitors he was watching and motioned for Casey to take a seat next to him. He then looked back at the monitors and picked up the radio to call out to his right-hand man, Danny. "Hey, Danny, table 15, the guy with the green-striped shirt is stealing chips from the roulette table. He puts one down and palms two or more from someone else's bet."

"On it, Ed," came the reply.

Ed laid the radio down and looked over at his boss. Casey did not come into town very often, and he never questioned what was going on with the daily operations of the casino. He was a boss who looked at the spreadsheets and grinned at the bottom numbers. "Well, Casey. What's so interesting about this game?" he asked.

"It's just that with the convention in town, and an award banquet tomorrow night, this game is going to be put in a different location than usual. I was just curious about how you had planned to put the cameras in a room we don't usually use to protect these high rollers? After all, there is going to be a lot of money on the table. Plus, I've known most of these guys for years. I have crossed paths with most of them on many occasions. I want to make sure that they're comfortable this weekend."

"Actually, Sam has agreed that the best place to hold this game is in the Owner's Penthouse. She's moving down to a single room, and we are presently installing cameras in all seven rooms of the Penthouse Suite. With the private elevator from the Crystal Suite, and the fact that the players will all have suites on the 25th floor, we need to actually control very little footage. The Crystal Suite will be used as a hospitality room for the players to go to when they are not in the game, or their individual suites." Ed looked back over at the monitors as he finished telling Casey the details of the game. "We figure they will be playing for about two days or so, and it will take another day for us to remove the cameras and hidden security measures so that Sam can get back into the Penthouse. That should bring us up to Monday when it all magically goes back to what it was before." Ed watched as Danny and Tom marched the man away from the roulette table quickly and efficiently. Ed punched the buttons to record the man's face into their computer's facial-recognition system.

"Well, these players are well-known and expect us to not let them get as much as a hangnail while they are quietly losing sums that would make the rest of the world choke. I'm just concerned, with so much going on in the hotel this coming weekend, that these whales feel safe and pampered." Casey looked back at Ed.

"Well, the safe part I can ensure, but the pampered part you will have to take up with either Sam, Mary, or Delinda. That's

their specialty. By the way, I've seen the extra girls hired for this weekend, and the complexion of the place is going to get close to beauty queen status." A tight grin briefly flitted across Ed's face. "Of course, I'm a married man, but I thought you might like to know."

That stopped Casey for a minute. He cleared his throat before starting again. "We will be having plenty of prestigious guests this weekend. The Kerth Awards will have some of the brightest minds in the journalistic world descend on us. The last thing we want is even a minor glitch in security with them around. These journalist guys can make a scandal appear from a bit of pixie dust. I want us to be pixie dust-free. I want a smooth and well-oiled appearance to be the face of this place." Casey knew he was worrying about nothing, but it was still a real concern to him. "Hide the hookers, cancel the meeting of the hard-core gamblers, and take the drunks to another casino for a few days. I want us to come out of this weekend looking extra squeaky clean when Monday's magic happens."

Casey looked over at a monitor as Ed leaned forward to stare at it. He picked up the radio and began to talk immediately. "Danny, we've got a weight against a slot machine in the Silver Sands corner, third machine from the end of row nine. Young lady with blonde hair and a white outfit."

"Mike, handle this, please," the radio squawked. As a part of the undercover security force, Mike stepped into the picture with his tie flapping, put his hand to the side of the machine, palmed the weight, and then talked to the young woman. By the time the uniformed security guard arrived, Mike had her standing up and the three of them disappeared from view. Ed clicked a picture of her face into the computer's recognition software. It did not bring up any information.

"As you can see, we are on top of things around here. Don't worry, Casey. We'll flow like melted butter tonight." Ed did not take his eyes off the monitors, but he put his hand out for Casey to shake. It was as close as he got to dismissing the owner.

California was having an unusual amount of rain. It just was not like the heavens to leak like they had been doing. Susan was upset that she would have to load the heavy suitcases into the trunk of her car in the rain. She was running late getting to the airport and did not have time to dither about getting wet, but she was concerned about the suitcases. Wisteria Lane was just not its usual cheery self today, and Susan was not pleased that she had put off cleaning out the garage to the point that she was having to park on the street instead of in the garage. And then for it to rain when she had somewhere to be was just inconvenient. She wondered if she could get Lynette's boys to load her car if she offered them each a dollar. She picked up the phone to call Lynette just as her daughter came into the kitchen with her backpack.

"You all ready?" Julie asked, seeing how her mom looked a little frazzled.

"Yes, Julie, I'm going out the door as soon as Nonna's mom arrives. I hope you will have a wonderful time with her." Susan looked at her watch.

"Hey, Mom. Can I have \$20 in case we decide to go to a show or out to eat?"

Susan reached into her purse and gave it to Julie. She looked out the door again, impatiently awaiting Julie's ride. A car came into the driveway and Susan breathed a sigh of relief. This weekend was really

going to happen.

Julie started toward the door and turned to ask her mother a few questions. "Mom, have you got your paperwork for the trip, your plane tickets, some extra cash, and the fancy jewelry for the banquet you will be attending?"

Susan answered positively to all the questions and scooted

her daughter out the door to the honking car in the driveway. As Julie got ready to make a dash for the car, she asked one last question. "You order your cab yet? You need to be at the airport in about an hour, so if you don't order a cab soon, you will be late."

Susan reached over and kissed her daughter on the cheek. "YES! A cab. The driver can load my suitcases and I don't have to worry about finding the car again in the parking garage."

Julie just shook her head and ran out the door toward the waiting car.

Lois looked over at Clark, who was in the process of putting their luggage on the scale. "You want the window or the aisle? It doesn't matter to me, so you choose."

"The aisle, I guess. Not that I'm too comfortable in either position," said Clark. He read the weight of the combined bags before coming to the conclusion that surely this was more clothing than was needed for a four-day visit. Lois must have packed enough clothes for them to go undercover at the casino or to be able to change every hour on the hour. All he wanted to do was get Lois alone in their room and he was sure that clothing was optional for what he had in mind.

After Lois finished the paperwork needed to check in, she picked up her briefcase and the overnight bag. They went to the gift shop to get some newspapers and magazines for the lost time between their security check and departure time. At the last second, Lois also added two chocolate bars to the purchase and Clark grinned at her. She was in a good mood if she was openly purchasing chocolate. Clark crammed the papers and magazines in his briefcase and Lois put the chocolate in her purse. They proceeded to the security check-in for the long examination before they were allowed to enter the secured boarding area. Clark had made sure, after his patrol over Metropolis, to leave the Superman suit at home so that it would not show up if they needed to be searched. Considering the lines and all the delays, security went fairly fast and Clark picked up most of the things off the conveyer belt on the other side, while Lois claimed her purse.

Finding some seats to wait the hour and a half before the flight took off, Lois and Clark settled in at the gate. They talked quietly for a few minutes and then pulled out the newspapers and magazines. Lois was reading a gossip rag when she noticed Clark stiffen up. She looked over at him and noticed that his glasses were off the end of his nose and he was looking through the closed door leading to the place where their plane would be located eventually. He relaxed and she looked puzzled about what was going on. Clark said, "It was just a bunch of young hoodlums trying to steal food and drinks off a cart sitting in the corridor. The security around here is much better than I thought, because they got caught in mere minutes." He relaxed back into the seat with his glasses firmly pushed back up on his nose.

Eventually their flight was called and they picked up their carry-on luggage and got in line to board. Finding their seats Lois slipped into the row while Clark stowed their bags. At the last second, he pulled the magazines that they had not yet read back out of the briefcases. He sat down and waited for the flight to depart. His thoughts kept circling back to all the time wasted by using conventional airlines. He could have had the suitcases, the carry-ons, and Lois there long ago and they could have been pulling the lever on a slot machine by the time it took for them to taxi out to the runway. But, it would have taken a lot of backpedaling when they turned in their receipts for the trip. The bean counters up in Accounting did not like some of the fancy footwork that they already did and they were not about to tempt fate by insisting that they go SupermanExpress and then try later to cover their tracks.

"Gee, Lois. I feel like a hotdog in a metal bun. This is

supposed to be advanced travel? Our method of air travel is so much more efficient."

"You advertising for customers or just bragging?" Lois asked with a grin on her face.

The flight was uneventful. Lois read all the reading material, took a short nap, cuddled with Clark for a bit, and then she started to dig into the pocket of the seat in front of her. Clark watched with amusement as she pulled out the barf bags and the card telling how to evacuate the plane in case of an emergency. When she did not seem to find what she was looking for, she leaned over and started rummaging through his seat's pocket. He was quiet and did not question her, but his face clearly asked what she was trying to do.

"I want to see the magazine with all the duty-free purchases," was the answer to the unspoken question. She dug down in the pocket and all of a sudden seemed to not be able to pull her hand back out. Clark sat there watching Lois, but he did not do anything until suddenly she said, "Honey, can you help me? My ring got caught in the loose weave of this material, and now I can't seem to get it back out of there. Gently, see if you can find what it is stuck on, and remove it please." With an amused look on his face Clark reached down into the pocket. He gently disengaged the ring from the material, and helped her pull her hand back out. When she finished getting her hand back, she looked at her engagement ring and was startled to discover that two of the six prongs holding her diamond in place were pulled away from the stone.

"Oh, my! I'm going to lose my diamond if I don't watch it," she said. She took off her engagement ring and put it in her billfold. "Remind me to go to the jewelry shop in the hotel and see if they can repair it. Okay?"

The rest of the time in the air and the trip to the Montecito went quickly. Lois spotted the jewelry store just off the lobby and stopped in there while Clark checked them into their room. His chore was done long before Lois caught up with him, so he went to the jewelry store to meet up with his wife. A man with a jeweler's loupe on was studying Lois's ring. He gave her an estimate of how much it would cost to fix her ring and told her she could have it back on Monday morning. The clerk then asked if she would like to leave her wedding band, and Clark's also, to be steam cleaned. He explained that after the repairs he would be polishing her ring and it would make her wedding band look dull in comparison. She looked over at Clark and pulled off her wedding ring. He took his off, too, and the jeweler put all of them in a tray to be worked on.

As they exited the store, Clark leaned over and whispered in Lois's ear, "Well, well, we go away for a work-related convention and take off our wedding rings before the beginning of the convention? Naughty, naughty girl! Shacking up with your work partner in Las Vegas? Wonder what your husband or my wife would say about this?"

Clark grinned, grabbed her around the shoulders, and then steered her to the elevators that would take them up to their room on the 19th floor. When they arrived, the bell captain had their suitcases laid on the bed, opened, and the hanging bag in the closet, and was ready to leave. As soon as he had tipped the bell captain, Clark made short work of putting all their clothes away in the dresser or closet. Since he had super-sped through the tedious work of getting their suitcases unpacked, he thought he should be rewarded. Suddenly Lois found herself on the bed, minus a few clothes.

"Hello, this is Susan Mayer. I live on Wisteria Lane and I need a cab to go to the airport. Can you get one here quickly, please? I'm running a bit late and will have to get there before my plane takes off."

Surprisingly, the cab arrived ten minutes later, and the driver

loaded Susan's two suitcases and her overnight bag in the trunk. She closed and locked her front door and started down the sidewalk to enter the cab when the thought struck her to go back into the house and check to make sure her stove was off. She did not remember leaving it on, but since she had the thought she couldn't help but go back to the house and check. It was off. She locked the door again and got into the cab.

On the way to the airport, Susan thought about the beautiful turquoise and crystal dress she had borrowed for the awards celebration. She had brought some very high heels with her and knew she would be the belle of the ball when she wore Bree's castoff.

As the cab driver pulled off the interstate, he asked over his shoulder, "Which airline do you need to be let out at so that we can get your curbside check-in for your luggage?"

She answered, "Las Vegas Airlines." There was a slight pause, after which the driver asked her to check her ticket again because he was not familiar with a Las Vegas Airlines. A slightly frazzled Susan reached for her purse and found that she didn't have the paperwork from her publisher in her purse. She asked the driver to pull over and let her get into the overnight bag he had stowed in the trunk. The driver found a safe place to pull over and the two of them exited the cab and went to the trunk. The driver opened the trunk, and Susan pulled her overnight bag toward her. She opened it and found that there was no paperwork inside it either. She then proceeded to open each suitcase and could not find where she had put the letter from the publisher. The driver had to manhandle the last suitcase to get its lock to catch.

Susan was on the verge of tears, and thoroughly frustrated. She did not know where she had put the paperwork. She remembered having it that very morning, but where had it gone? It was not evident in the kitchen when she went back in to check the stove. And it was not in any of her luggage. Where else could she have put the papers? Since she did not know which airline or even which hotel she would be staying in when she got to Vegas, it was obvious that she needed to find the paperwork. And time was running short. She needed to be at the airport NOW, because her plane would be leaving in about an hour. A wet and upset Susan climbed back into the cab. "Take me back home, I guess. I have to find those papers from my publisher or I can't go to Las Vegas," she said with an edge of a tear in her voice.

The trip back to Wisteria Lane took a lot longer than she thought the trip took to get to the airport. All the way back home she did a thorough mental inventory of her bedroom, bathroom, living room, and kitchen. She could not remember the paperwork in any of those rooms. She thought back to when Julie asked her about the paperwork. She did know where it was then, but it just was not obvious to her right now. She wondered if Julie had picked up her letter and put it in her bag by accident? She mentally retraced her steps and remembered wanting to hire Lynette's boys to put her suitcases in the trunk of her car. But she did not remember having the paperwork when she got ready to make that call. She must have done something with the letter before she got ready to put her suitcases in the trunk. Then she remembered! She let out a relieved yelp, scaring the driver.

"Sorry," Susan said. She grinned at him in the rearview mirror. "I finally figured where I left the letter. It won't take me long to get it when we get back home."

Arriving at home, Susan quickly grabbed the letter off the front seat of her car and locked the car door. She had neglected to take the key out of the ignition after locking the car the first time, and wondered if she would have even had a car after this trip if not for the little detail of forgetting to take her letter with her.

Susan climbed back into the cab and told the driver to take her back to the airport and to Blue Aire Airlines this time. He pulled back out on the road and asked Susan if she needed to call

the airport and make other arrangements since she had obviously missed her original flight? She was embarrassed to admit that she did not have a clue how to make new reservations, so she instead told the driver she would fix everything once she was back at the airport. The driver shook his head, but didn't question the wisdom of the statement. That left Susan wondering just how did someone get on another flight? Surely there were many flights going from California to Las Vegas and she should be able to get on one of them after she talked to a clerk at Blue Aire Airlines. They must have a way to make it so she would take a later flight.

Upon arriving at the Blue Aire terminal of the airport, the cab pulled over into the curb lane and parked. It was then that Susan noticed the meter said \$75.75. Even with a stingy tip that would take the remainder of the \$100 she had taken from the bank that morning, minus the \$20 she had given Julie. She thought she taken out plenty of money when she went to the bank, but now realized that her original \$15 was what she had left to go all the way to Las Vegas.

Susan went to where the driver had left her suitcases by the side of the terminal. She moved the suitcases, one by one, toward the bell captain who was checking the luggage in at the side of the curb. She handed him her paperwork, and he looked at it and handed it back to her.

"Lady, you got to be kidding. I can't check you in for a flight that left 45 minutes ago." The airline employee turned and helped the next person in line.

"But what am I supposed to do now?" Susan was nearly whining, she realized.

"Take your suitcases and that paperwork into the terminal and they will help you straighten it out." The airline employee was not in a patient mood and Susan realized that she was dismissed. It was obvious he could not help her check her baggage in curbside. Susan wondered to herself how she was going to manage moving her two very large, very heavy suitcases all the way into the terminal all alone?

She stood still for a few moments after moving her bulky luggage a few feet away from the check-in point. She watched to see how others managed to make the trip inside to the counter. Soon she realized that she could rent a cart for her suitcases instead of dragging them into the airport. She went over to the turnstile where the carts were being rented. It said to insert a five dollar bill and push a cart from the end. She looked in her wallet and found she only had a \$10 bill and five \$1 bills. She was afraid to leave her luggage so she pushed, pulled, and kicked it back to the curbside check-in desk. She asked the airline employee to exchange her \$1 bills for a \$5 bill. He found someone who was able to exchange her money. Then Susan manhandled her luggage back to the rental turnstile, got a cart, and loaded her heavy luggage. At this point she was already tired and discouraged. She pushed her luggage into the main lobby of Blue Aire Airlines and began to read the signs over the various lines waiting to see a clerk. Just where was the "I-missed-my-flight-so-I-need-another-one" line? And, why hadn't someone thought to put chairs in the lobby for the long wait to see a clerk?

Casey knew that he would be shepherding the high rollers in the Owner's Penthouse most of the night, so he thought it would be wise for him to try to get some sleep in the afternoon. He had come into town just for this game, and he wanted to be ready for it.

He picked up the phone. "Yes, Mr. Manning, what can I do for you?"

"I am going to be out of pocket for the next few hours and would like for you to hold my calls, please. I'll notify you when I am back," Casey told the operator.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Manning," said the operator. "I'll put your phone to voicemail until you tell me differently."

"Thank you." Casey hung up the phone and relaxed. He was so glad that there were people who actively ran the Montecito. Most of his employees ate, drank, and slept the business and were able to make sure that it all ran smoothly. In his absence, it all worked smoothly and seamlessly. The thought crossed his mind that he wasn't needed at the casino at all, but since that was what helped him make a profit, he didn't mind at all. After all, making a tidy profit was his biggest interest in the place.

He turned back the bedspread on his large bed, dimmed the lights, and put on soft classical music that played in the background. His system slowed down immediately, and he fell asleep almost as soon as he closed his eyes.

Lois was up and thumbing through the various materials in the desk drawer in the hotel room. She was interested in the services the Montecito offered. She had called the beauty parlor and asked for an early appointment to have her hair done the next day. After all, she would be on the front page of the *Daily Planet* as a winner at the Kerth Awards. The salon gave her a 2:00 p.m. appointment. She was just killing time today before she and Clark flew home to pick up his Superman suit. They both hoped that there would not be an emergency requiring Superman's attention, but it would be tempting fate not to get the suit when they had the time to pick it up. About that time, two very muscular arms appeared around her middle and she felt herself being pulled back against her husband's body. The same body that was kissing down her neck. She relaxed into the grasp of her husband while he put her findings back in the desk drawer.

"We've got a little more time before we take our trip back to Metropolis, so how about we find out how the ceiling works in this hotel?"

Lois grinned back at the boyish charms of her husband. There was plenty of time before they needed to go home. "Want to bet whether we can set off the sprinklers?"

That evening, there was a sound like Superman taking off in Las Vegas, and it happened again about 45 minutes later. But no one really paid it much attention.

Susan managed to get to the front of the line by sheer willpower. She had decided that even though she needed to use the restroom, she would wait until she had checked her luggage with the airlines and she had a firm departure time. She would go to the restroom soon, she hoped. As a result, when she got to the front of the line, and the lady behind the counter patiently tried to explain how people who had missed their planes were shuffled back into already full flights, she was in real agony. Susan had been put on standby for three separate flights, the first starting in 30 minutes and the last for a flight near midnight. She was not sure she understood what she was supposed to do to claim those floating tickets to imaginary seats in fully booked flights, but she checked her luggage and took the cart back with her toward the restroom. She left the cart outside the stall near the sinks and went into the stall. She relieved herself and went to the sink to wash her hands. It was then that she realized that her cart, and the source of a \$2 rebate if returned to the turnstile, was missing. She had very little money and now she'd been robbed of \$2. Could this day get any worse?

Susan looked in the mirror above the sink. She looked pretty bad. How was she going to catch the eye of a man when she had a mad-wet-kitten-in-the-rain aura? She looked into her purse but saw that she did not have a comb or a brush in there. She had checked both of her suitcases and her overnight bag, so this was as good as it got, she guessed. She smoothed the wrinkles out of her jacket, finger combed her hair, and headed to the first gate listed by the clerk. As she was making her way through security and the long lines to get to the other side of the airport, she heard her name being called over the intercom.

"Blue Aire Airlines paging Ms. Susan Mayer. Please pick up one of the blue courtesy phones, Ms. Susan Mayer." Where were the phones, much less the blue phones? Susan headed toward a security guard standing along the edge of the security line. She blurted out her name and told the guard she had just been paged, so where was the blue phone she needed to use? The guard told her that all the courtesy phones were on the other side of the airport, after you made it all the way through the security. She would need a minimum of ten minutes before she managed to clear security, barring any difficulties. Susan could see the phone bank that the guard pointed out to her, but could not get to it.

Susan missed her chance to board the early flight. By the time she made it to the gate where her flight was located, it had pulled out of the dock and was lined up to taxi down the runway. Susan just turned around and headed back to the restroom, because she knew she was going to cry. The problem was that she did not realize that by going back to the same restroom she had gone to the before, she had crossed over to the wrong side of security again. She had to go through all the "empty your pockets, take your shoes off, put your belongings on the conveyer belt" business again. What a revolting development!

Casey picked up the house phone. "Good afternoon, Mr. Manning. How may I direct your call?" said the operator.

"Could you please connect me with the main office? I need to speak to either Mary or Delinda, please."

"Of course, Mr. Manning. I'm Patrice and I'll be on the switchboard most of the evening in case you need anything else." Casey heard a series of soft clicks in the background.

"This is Mary. How may I help you?"

"Hello, Mary. It's Casey. Have any of the whales from the poker game arrived yet?" He heard the soft sound of keys being tapped and the voice on the other end said, "Yes, George Jefferson has arrived and J.R. Ewing's pilot called from the airport asking for us to send a town car to meet his plane. He should be here within the hour."

"It sounds like things are moving toward the midnight start of the game. If any of the whales call and say they are delayed, will you please notify me? I know you are on it, but I want to be available to smooth out any bumps that might happen before the high rollers leave on Sunday evening."

"We'll handle it, Casey. Is there anything else we can help you with?"

"Not that I can think of right now. Thanks, Mary." He gently put the receiver back down on the phone and turned on the giant television to see if there were any games on that caught his attention. How he loved to have a well-run place. He just was not into clutter and excess effort to make something happen. His staff made things happen without even breaking a sweat. This made him very, very happy.

About six o'clock, Susan began to really be hungry. She had eaten cereal for breakfast, but she had not even had a drink of water since then, unless you counted all the raindrops she had inhaled. Being careful not to cross back into unsecured territory, she went to the little shop down the concourse only to discover that a bag of pretzels was \$2.99 and a bottle of water was \$1.50. The next chance she had to get on a standby flight was 7:40 p.m. Susan walked back to the desk again, but no one was manning the desk at the gate she was assigned to. What was she going to do about the fact that she had no money with her, she hadn't eaten all day, and as the day progressed, her appearance got rougher? She was definitely looking like a drowned cat, even though all the wet stuff had dried up. She made a decision to go to the sandwich shop and buy herself a roast beef and Swiss on rye bread. She had seen it advertised on the front of the store as she paced the halls, and it had just about overcome her senses.

She checked her billfold to make sure she had her credit card with her, and went into the little corner store that had a bar and sandwich shop in it. She sat down and picked up the menu. The waitress came over and took her order. Susan wished she could order something with a salad or bread to be served immediately. She was drooling with anticipation.

When her meal arrived, Susan devoured her sandwich and fries. She had two colas and ordered a slice of key lime pie. She was starting to get some color back into her face when the waitress brought her check and scared the color right back out of her face. The bill came to \$21.33. With a minimum tip, she had been eating a \$25 meal. Reluctantly, she gave the girl her credit card and determined that regardless of what plane she managed to take to Las Vegas, she would not eat again until she was on the publisher's tab at the hotel.

Lois and Clark put on casual clothes and appeared in public for the first time since they had arrived. Clark took her hand in his and they held hands the entire length of the hallway. When they arrived at the elevator, they heard the warning bell that the elevator was stopping on their floor. When the doors opened, out stepped someone both of them recognized. Jerry Stark was an award-winning reporter from the *Kansas City Enquirer*. They had met at a previous Kerth Awards ceremony, but did not recall ever speaking to one another before today. With him was a beautiful, blonde lady who looked all of twelve years old. Clark nodded at him, but was shocked into silence at the age difference of the people standing in front of him. Lois, on the other hand, plunged right into a conversation.

"Hello, I'm Lois Lane Kent and this is my husband, Clark. You're Jerry Stark, right? You must be here for the awards. Is your companion here from the paper also?"

"Nice to meet you two. We've never really had a conversation before, even though we are up against each other for an award again this year. Oh, let me introduce you to my daughter, Melanie. My wife and son, Dave, are around here somewhere. Good luck with all the awards you are nominated to win, minus mine. I enjoy reading your articles." Jerry and Melanie turned left and started down the hallway.

"See you tonight, Jerry," were Clark's parting words as he pushed the button to bring the elevator back up to their floor.

Soon the elevator arrived and took them down to the main floor where Lois and Clark found a seafood special on lobster. They both enjoyed the large meal and decided to leave the Montecito for a walk to work off the calories. Lois seemed to enjoy ducking into other casinos to look around, but Clark soon became very bored with the noise and flashing lights. After the third casino, Clark pulled his wife to him, and kissed her before whispering in her ear he knew a better way to work off calories. Instead of going further down the main street, they walked back to the Montecito. They ignored a group of journalists involved in a lively discussion in the lobby. Instead, they entered the elevators and because no one else was riding up with them, a loving make-out session began. They managed to pull apart just as the bell announced their floor. Clark put on a little super speed getting them down the hall, and they arrived at their room very quickly. As Clark was trying to locate the door key, Lois mentioned she wanted to do other things beside seeing the inside of their room, but she did it with a big grin on her face. She did not remember how they got from the door to the bed, but they covered the space in record time even for someone capable of super speed.

Eight p.m. came and Susan was still not on a plane to Las Vegas. She was assured that they would fit her on her last standby flight leaving a little before midnight. She wondered aloud to the lady sitting next to her just how they knew in advance when to

send her bags to Vegas. The woman picked up and moved to another seat.

Sure enough, when the plane for her midnight flight arrived, she was called to the desk and told they had a seat for her. Susan was tired and hungry, and could not wait until she arrived in Las Vegas. She was exhausted being a resident of the airport and was ready to be anywhere but there. They loaded the plane and it pulled away from the gate. It seemed like it took forever to taxi out to the runway, and at the last second the pilot's voice came over the intercom to announce that they would be returning to the gate to pick up a special passenger. Susan was trying very hard to keep a check on her temper, but she was quickly getting to the point where she was ready to bark at the next inconvenience thrown at her. They pulled back up at the gate, but from Susan's vantage point she could not see who came aboard. Whomever it was went in the opposite direction from her location, and she heard applause happening in the front of the plane. Quickly, the plane pulled back away from the gate and as they awaited to get back into the line to take off, the pilot announced, "We welcome the famous explorer and college professor, Indiana Jones, who has just joined us for our trip to the East Coast." Susan had seen him interviewed on television before, so she knew who he was. She was not impressed that he had held up her flight though.

Susan tried to relax against her seat again, but her blood pressure was way too high from the day she'd had for her to relax completely. As soon as they had taken off, the flight attendants came back and handed her a package of pretzels and a can of soda about half the size of a normal soda. She wolfed her pretzels and washed it down with the drink. She would have loved another helping of both, but didn't ask. She didn't know if they would charge for seconds, and she wasn't about to get in a position to spend her last dollar when she would soon be in Las Vegas where her food costs would be paid for.

Upon arriving at McCarran Airport in Las Vegas, Susan followed the crowd to the baggage claim area. She waited, and waited, and waited as the rest of her fellow passengers took their luggage and left the area, leaving her very concerned. Finally, she asked the only other person left what would happen if her luggage was not on the plane. The man told her he was headed to the Lost Luggage Office, and she was welcome to accompany him. As they arrived at the office, very loud voices greeted Susan as she opened the door. This was not a room for someone who was tired, hungry, and stressed out about her trip thus far. Susan waited her turn to report her lost luggage, and the lady behind the counter consulted her computer and got on the phone. Soon, Susan saw her two largest suitcases coming through the door from the back room. But, where was her overnight bag? She told the lady helping her she had one more suitcase and was told that it was on its way to Seattle, Washington. Susan was assured it would be delivered to her hotel the following morning. It was after she left the office, trying with all her might to manhandle the heavy suitcases, that she realized she did not have a way to get to the Montecito. Susan stopped to talk to a security guard.

"Excuse me, sir. I have a reservation at the Montecito Resort and Casino. Do they send cars out to the airport to pick up people with reservations?"

"There is a shuttle bus that takes people to all the casinos. It comes every thirty minutes, so you won't have to wait too long. Go right out this door and wait near the signs on the front drive indicating SHUTTLE BUS. The driver will help you load your luggage and make sure you arrive safely."

Susan relaxed for a second. "Thank you so much for the information." She moved her suitcases slowly toward the door and went outside to the indicated space. There were a number of people already waiting, so Susan hoped that meant that a bus would be arriving soon. A very tired traveler sat down on top of her suitcases at the edge of the front drive to await the next

shuttle.

Watching the busy traffic in and out of the airport was almost overwhelming. Susan was so very tired and her stomach was growling. She wondered if the shuttle would take her credit card? She knew that her \$10 would not get her very far. She watched as a very large bus pulled up to the curb. It had SHUTTLE BUS written on the side of it. Susan was glad she didn't have to guess about it, since her patience was very short.

She approached the driver. "Does this bus go to the Montecito Resort and Casino?"

"Yes, ma'am, we go to all of the major casinos. I just need to mark your luggage with the name of your casino." The man handed Susan an orange ticket and a small pencil and asked her to fill it out.

"I have two bags. Will this do for both of them?" Susan was tired, but didn't want to lose her suitcases. She already had one on a trip headed elsewhere, and didn't need more than one bag wandering around.

He handed her another orange tag, and Susan filled it out with her name and phone number. She attached them to her bags and handed the pencil back to the driver. She watched as he loaded both of them in the underside cargo bay.

As an afterthought, she turned back to the driver. "Do you take a credit card for this trip?" she asked.

"These shuttles are complimentary from the casinos," was the answer. Susan climbed on board and settled in for the trip to her destination.

At the Montecito entrance, the driver announced the name of the resort, opened the door of the bus, and went to take Susan's luggage from the underside. He pulled out the bags, but no one appeared to claim them. When she did not appear, he went back to the door and announced "MONTECITO" in a very loud voice. No one appeared. So the driver went back into the bus and went down the aisle until he found a very sound asleep Susan. He woke her up and asked her to follow him as they were at her resort. Susan slowly came back to consciousness. She picked up her purse and followed him to the outside. A porter came from inside the casino and picked up her heavy bags like they were filled with cotton candy. For some reason this depressed Susan more than she could explain. She was on the edge of tears. This was the worst day in her life, trying to get to an award banquet to celebrate something special in her life. Her yin and yang were not in balance. She was certain she had too much yin. Or was that yang?

Strong cigar smoke met Casey's nose as he eased himself into the poker game. He came through the outer sitting room of the suite and was met by one of the beautiful hostesses hired just to pamper the high rollers playing in this game. Each of these girls was dressed in a very short, strapless, sequined dress in either gold or silver. All of them wore smiles on their faces and very high heels on their feet. They were walking around carrying trays with drinks or sandwiches to the poker table. A beautiful blonde with a name tag reading "Jana" asked if she could help him. He assured her that he was only there to peek in and make sure things were being handled.

Casey entered the large, lavishly furnished main room of the suite and was greeted by the sight of six high rollers sitting around the green felt table in the center of the room. He immediately recognized J.R. Ewing, the oil baron and a business associate. They had crossed paths just last week at a meeting. Next to J.R. was Jonathan Hart, a California private eye and all-around nice guy. Jonathan made a mock salute in Casey's direction to acknowledge his presence. Next to Jonathan was James Rockford. He was not a millionaire like the rest, but had financial backing because of his poker skills. He also was a private eye, but seemed to attract a different sort of customers. In

the next chair was George Jefferson, the owner of a chain of dry cleaners in New York City and New Jersey. He was such a regular guest of the casino that suite number three (or the Jasper Hall Suite) was lovingly nicknamed 'The Jefferson'. Dr. Frasier Crane occupied the next seat. He was a psychologist and a well-known radio personality. Casey did not recognize the lady with the huge cigar in her mouth, but he assumed it was Roseanne Conner. She was the winner of \$108 million from the Illinois Lottery, and entered into her first high roller tournament. There was a chair to her left that was vacant, awaiting the arrival of the seventh player.

Casey stood just in the shadows as he watched the game and the young ladies milling around the penthouse. It looked to him like everything was under control. He spotted Delinda on the edge of the game, and moved quickly over to her.

"Delinda, you having any problems here?"

"Oh, hi, Casey. No, it seems to be under control. You here now, or just checking in for a visit?"

"I'll be back in a while. I have a few other things I need to check on before I come back to stay. By the way, I noticed when I came in the door that there is a very heavy cigar smell. Are there any candles or oil deodorizers that we can put in the room?"

Delinda thought for a moment. She had been inventorying in the penthouse and hadn't seen anything they could use. Then she remembered that there were some down in the Crystal Suite.

"Just go back down to the Crystal Suite and ask them to go to the locked closet under the bookcase and get a deodorizer out. I'll make sure it gets put where it will mask the smell as soon as I get it."

"Thanks, Delinda. I'll be back later." He moved out of the room immediately.

Casey took the private elevator back down to the Crystal Suite, the companion suite of the Owner's Penthouse. He observed more beautiful girls milling around, also dressed very scantily in sequins with their midriffs showing. He stopped next to a young lady with the nametag reading "Sophie" and asked her to get into the locked cabinet in the bookcase and take a room deodorizer upstairs to Delinda. Sophie said she would take care of it and disappeared immediately to complete the task.

Casey was very happy with all he had seen. High rollers did not have these \$100,000 buy-in games very often, but a casino had to keep up all the perks to make sure that they felt welcomed and pampered. Most of these players were very wealthy with well-honed poker skills. He hoped that all of them had a wonderful time and the Montecito would be thought of next time one of these games was organized. He knew that his presence was not required, but would make the players feel safer when he occupied the edges of the game. So, he would spend his night up here watching the game, talking to the occupants, and making it an experience to remember.

Into the lobby dragged a homeless-looking young lady. She had been caught in the rain repeatedly that morning and her hair reflected that fact. She had a very wrinkled windbreaker jacket over a dark blue, but very faded, t-shirt. Her blue jeans were baggy and creased to the point that they looked like they had many pleats down the front of the legs. Sitting for hours in the airport had not helped her appearance or her disposition. This mess stood in line waiting for her room assignment, while looking at the people behind the counter with not a hair out of place, flawless make-up, and pressed suits on every employee. Susan was tired, hungry, angry about her lost bag, and all she wanted to do was get through the check-in process quickly.

When it was her turn, she was greeted by a cheery young lady with a nametag identifying her as Renee. Susan handed her the paperwork about her reservation, and Renee told her she'd be right back. She took the paperwork with her over to a glassed-off

partition, and soon she came back with another woman trailing her. As the second woman got back to the counter, her cell phone rang. She immediately stopped coming towards Susan, and turned around as she took the call. Then she turned around when it was finished, and put a smile on her face and came to the counter where Susan was waiting, not very patiently.

"Good evening, Ms. Mayer. I'm Mary. It seems we have a slight problem with your reservation. When you didn't arrive by midnight or call us to hold your reservation over for a few more hours, we canceled it. The problem is that we have a capacity crowd right now. All of our rooms are spoken for and I do not have another room I can assign you. I have two suites left, but they would require you to make up the difference. I also have a Penthouse Suite."

Susan looked at the smiling woman. "No, no, no, No, NO, NO! This cannot be happening to me. My publisher booked me on a one-hour flight that took me fourteen hours. My overnight bag was sent to Seattle, and I am tired, hungry, and not in a good mood. So don't tell me that my room is no longer available." With that Susan just collapsed into a sobbing mess on the floor in front of the counter. Her consistently louder "NOs" had gotten the attention of the security guards, and two of them appeared on either side of her and took her to a small, elegantly furnished room just off the lobby. She was seated in a shell pink high backed chair next to a table where there was a fresh arrangement of colorful flowers. Mary took a seat beside her in a matching chair and she pushed a box of Kleenex toward the sobbing woman. Mary took her cell phone out and made a call. All Susan could hear was 'missed planes, late arrival, penthouse.' Mary turned to Susan and told her that someone who would fix the problem would be there in just a few minutes.

Susan looked over at Mary Connell. Her badge said her name and that she was a "Special Event Coordinator." Maybe she did not know about rooms in the hotel. The next person would have all the

answers. She would have a room with a comfortable bed in just a few moments. She would be okay. Susan wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

The door opened and in stepped a man. Mary immediately went to the door to meet the man. "Delinda called me and said that you have a problem. She's tied up right now, so let's see if I can help you. Please explain this to me." Mary led him back to the chairs. He sat down and looked over at Susan as Mary began.

"This is Ms. Susan Mayer. She had a few missed planes today, and lost a bag. She arrived here after midnight without renewing her reservation, so we canceled it. As you know, we are having an especially busy weekend. Ms. Mayer is a nominee for a Kerth Award. Her publisher prepaid her reservation. But we have nowhere to put her."

Casey looked again at this pathetic heap of a woman sitting there all rumpled and red-eyed. She was nominated as the best in her field? She must have had a horrible day.

"Mary, what do we have available? Is there a suite available?"

Mary looked down at her notepad. "Yes, sir, we have the Paris-House Suite that goes for \$250 a night, or the Mirror Hall Suite that goes for \$750 a night. We also have the remaining Penthouse Suite available. But all the single rooms are spoken for."

Casey stood up. He looked over at Mary and Susan. "Put her in the Paris-House Suite for both nights," he said. "Our mistake is her gain." He turned and walked quickly out the door.

"Who was that?" asked Susan.

"That was Casey Manning, the owner of the Montecito. He is most likely the only person who could give you a suite and not have it questioned by anyone. He usually does not get involved in front desk problems, so your luck has changed. If you will gather

up your things, we'll show you to your room." Susan sat with her mouth open. They were giving her a suite worth \$250 a night without asking her for any extra money? What was the catch?

There was a knock at the hotel room door. Clark put on his glasses and tightened up the thick terry cloth robe he had just put on. He opened the door to see two other Kerth nominees on the other side of the door.

Jim Powers and his lovely wife and writing partner, Tara, were standing at the door. Jim announced that he had seen Lois and Clark check in and that they were neighbors on the same floor. He asked if they would like to join him and his wife down at Mystiques for breakfast? Clark called across the room to Lois who was finishing dressing in the bathroom. She came into the room putting her earrings on. Jim repeated his question, and both the Kents agreed to meet them downstairs. Clark told Jim and Tara that they would join them downstairs in just a few minutes. The door closed, and instead of hurrying to finish dressing, Clark pushed Lois up against the door and gave her a very deep kiss.

"No pasta for you at breakfast," murmured Lois. "You are already primed without help from any outside sources." She grinned at him and gave him back the same intensity kiss as he had given her. He reluctantly pulled away and went to the bathroom to finish dressing.

When they arrived at Mystiques and were seated, they realized that they recognized a lot of patrons of the establishment. The hotel was filling up with Kerth nominees. These were the best and brightest, as evidenced by the nominations from their peers. Win or lose, they still did outstanding work that was worthy of adulation. These same people were all here to weed the best from the almost-best. Lois and Clark hoped that their five nominations would be the "best" and the other nominees would be the "almost-best." Regardless, they were impressed with the caliber of people seated around them.

Soon Jim and Tara joined Lois and Clark in a conversation of the happenings of the year and how some of the scandals broken by investigative newspaper journalists rivaled the skills of the police. On television, the arrests were shown as police work having solved the crimes, but in the journalistic field it was true that just as many were solved by long hours of poring over documents to see the breaches in the flow of information. Sometimes, a crime is solved without any of the razzle-dazzle of labs, finding hidden clues, or scientific breakthroughs. Sometimes, a journalist solves a crime by being at the right place at the right time or overhearing something that could lead to the unraveling of a crime. Both couples agreed that they were in the best profession in the world. It wasn't as flashy as portrayed on television, but it was just as successful.

The cell phone rang again. Casey took it out of his pocket and noticed that it was Mary Connell. Hoping that there weren't any more problems with Little Miss Bo Peep, he answered his phone.

"Manning."

"Casey, this is Mary. We have a very delicate situation right now that needs your gentle touch. Please come back down to the hospitality suite on the main floor."

"Can I have a few more details? I'm on my way back down to your floor, but what should I be prepared to do when I get there?" Casey awaited the answer on his phone.

"Our seventh and last guest for the game has arrived in less than satisfactory condition. He needs a coffee transfusion but I'm not even sure that will correct the situation. Because you are known to this person, I'm asking for you to make a judgment call whether we should try to dry him out or send him to his suite to sleep it off." Casey could tell Mary was being very careful with how she was describing the situation.

"I'll be there in a minute, Mary. Thank you for handling these

difficult situations personally." Casey was in the elevator on his way back down to the lobby when he signed off the call. He walked quickly across the marble lobby and entered the hospitality suite. There he found Rocky Balboa slumped across the pale pink sofa. His eyes were open, but looked glazed over like he could not see anything.

"Chassy, my broder. How's the hotel buziness?" asked the man who seconds earlier looked unconscious. "I met the goodest lookn peeze of femle and I thik I'm druk with her bouty. You's has the best looging galz in dee whorl. Hey, am I gonna play cards wiz you?"

"Mary, please call someone to help escort Mr. Balboa up to his suite. We'll start his game tomorrow around noon." Casey turned to face Rocky. "Rocky, buddy, you are not in any shape to play poker right now, so I want you to go to the room we have for you, and I want you to drink some water, take some

aspirin, and go right to sleep. After the break in the morning we will take you up to the suite to join the game when it resumes."

Two uniformed security men came into the room and helped Rocky Balboa onto his feet. Rocky looked over at Casey and gave him a huge smile. He looked over in Mary's direction and waved bye-bye. His eyes drooped shut and he went limp. A security guard grabbed a wheel chair in the room next to the hospitality suite and put Rocky in it. The bellman picked up his suitcase, took a key card from Mary, and followed them up to the suites on the twenty-fifth floor that had been reserved for the participants of this game.

Samantha Marquez was going to change rooms. She had gone into a single to give the high rollers the Owner's Suite, but that had left her in temporary quarters of a small room with a bed. She was used to a better living space. When she learned a large suite had been given to a lady who was booked into a single, Sam decided that she should trade her single room for the suite so she could get into more comfortable surroundings. Now, all she needed to do was have the front desk tell the suite resident that she was moving to the fourth floor. Mary had left for the day before she managed to get it all lined up, but the lady that had been given the suite in the middle of the night should not give them trouble. Sam would rather have someone else do the dirty work of making her leave the suite, so she talked to Shana in the main office. As she was leaving Room 471, Sam told the cleaning crew that there would be a move later in the day, so they could wait to clean her room. Sam was an events coordinator who was in charge of the welfare of some very important people, so she really did deserve the suite much more than the current occupant.

Early in the morning, Susan awoke with her stomach still growling. She had slept so heavily that she felt like a new woman. She grabbed a piece of fruit out of the basket sitting on the table in the main room of the suite. When she opened her suitcase to find something to wear, she remembered the good-looking man she met the night before and took out her best dressy-casual outfit. She wanted to look good today in case she ran into him again. She crunched on an apple as she thought about tonight and the beautiful dress she had to wear. Then she realized that if her overnight bag did not arrive soon, she would have no dress shoes, no jewelry, no make-up, no hairbrush, and worst of all, no way to pay to replace any of those things. It was hard to be depressed when staying in such beautiful surroundings, but Susan was afraid as she looked into the mirror that she was doomed to look like she was only playing at being as good as the rest of the Kerth nominees. It would take her all day to try to reverse the ravages of the trip yesterday, and that depended on her getting her overnight bag back.

She jumped into the shower and used the complimentary

shampoo and conditioner to wash yesterday out of her hair. As she got out of the shower and put her clothes on, she tried to finger-comb her hair. It was obvious that she was not going to make it look better that way. Wracking her brain to figure how to make her appearance presentable, Susan remembered that one of the things listed on the letter from her publisher was that she could have a spa visit while she was at the Montecito. Susan picked up the phone as an idea occurred to her.

"Hello. This is Susan Mayer in the Paris-House Suite. Can you connect me to the Spa?"

A series of clicks happened. "Montecito Spa."

"Hello. I'm Susan Mayer and I'm in the Paris-House Suite. My publisher gave me a spa package for my Kerth nomination. I was wondering if I could trade in my visit to you so instead I can have the beauty parlor do something with my hair. I have really done a number on it and need to have someone rescue me from looking like this tonight at the Awards."

"Of course, Ms. Mayer. Let me look up your records. Okay, I see that you were allotted two hours in the spa. That surely will allow you to have your hair done and your make-up too, if you would like to have that done."

"Oh, thank you! Can we make that appointment? I need to have some breakfast, but I am available any time you can make me an appointment." Susan could feel her ulcers start to relax.

"I have Ms. Susan Mayer scheduled for an eleven o'clock appointment with our beauty parlor. Is there anything else I can help you with?" The voice on the other side of the phone must know how bad she

looked, thought Susan.

"No, thank you. I'll see you at eleven this morning."

She rushed out the door to get some breakfast before her appointment. As the door closed behind her, she heard the phone in her room ring. She resisted the urge to ignore it, and opened the door and went back in to answer the phone.

"Good morning, Ms. Mayer. This is the front desk. I hope you slept well and feel ready for today."

"Yes," answered Susan. "What's not to like? This is a beautiful suite."

"Could you please come down to the front desk and speak to Shana? She requested that I relay this message for her."

Susan could feel her stomach tightening again. "Of course. May I know what this is all about?"

"I'm sorry, Ms. Mayer. I do not have that information. Shana will be able help you when you come down here."

"I'm starving. Can I please get some breakfast before I see Shana? I will be down there in about an hour, if you will relay that message to her." Susan was afraid of what this message was, but she was determined to have a better day than yesterday.

"I will relay that message to Shana. Have a good breakfast, Ms. Mayer." The phone clicked in her ear. Susan rushed back out the door before it could ring again.

Lois and Clark strolled, hand in hand, into the casino on the ground floor of the Montecito. There were noisy machines and activity all around them. Lois asked Clark for some cash so she could try her luck. Clark grinned at her and said, "You work and make your own money. Why are you asking me to fund your gambling habits?"

"If you will notice, husband dear, I don't have a purse with me. In fact, I don't even have a room key or any of the other things I usually carry in a purse. So, you have me where you want me... absolutely dependent on you." She giggled as she said it.

Clark burst out laughing at the remark. Lois had never in her life been helpless or dependent. He reached in his back pocket, took out his wallet, and handed her \$20. While he watched her looking at all the machines and choosing one, he said, "If I need

to go away, suddenly, I'll make sure to leave you a key before I go." He made their secret signal for flying to indicate his intentions if he had to leave.

Lois sat down in front of her chosen slot machine and Clark took the empty seat right next to it. She inserted money in the machine and watched that amount come up on the lighted screen. She pushed the buttons and watched the wheels rotate. When it was done with the transaction, it said on the screen that she had won 25 cents back on the dollar she had gambled. She looked over at Clark and grinned. "See, I'm a winner." Clark pointed out to her that her bet was for \$1, so a quarter return was not exactly winning. He looked amused, but did not laugh at her. Between bets, she looked at him and asked, "You going to try your luck too?"

This time Clark could not resist laughing. He leaned over to her and asked, "I thought I already got lucky three times. What do you think I want to happen on this casino floor?" The heated look he got back from her made him laugh all the more.

They stayed and tried various slot machines and had a drink that was offered to them, compliments of the house. Clark had a wonderful time watching Lois play the machines. The casino definitely won in the long run, but on one of her spins she got \$10 for a \$1 bet. In the end, the result was that they lost their investment of \$40 and all her winnings. But both of them had a wonderful and relaxing time.

In the security room the pictures on the screen of the boss and a woman were being examined with great interest. None of the security team had seen her before. But it was obvious to Ed that this woman was special to the boss. Out of curiosity, they ran a scan on her and found that she came up as a blank. This only meant that she had not been in trouble in Las Vegas before. Ed then put the national scan on her and was amazed that she was instantly recognized as Lois Lane, the famous reporter from Metropolis. She must be in town for the Kerth Awards. Ed wondered how Casey had met Miss Lane? And just how long has he known her? Their body language was very comfortable with each other, like they had been in each other's lives for a while.

Ed chuckled to himself as he returned to the job of protecting the casino. Casey and the famous Lois Lane! Who would have thought that one?

Susan ate a large breakfast and drank a lot of coffee. She signed her name and suite name to the check and showed the cashier her room key. She then left the large buffet. Her next stop was the front desk. They must have been telling her the truth about being at capacity, because there was no line trying to check in to the resort. One customer was speaking to the clerk and was given a brochure, but that was all the traffic in the lobby. When it was Susan's turn, she advanced to the counter and noticed that the name tag said "Emily" not "Shana." So she relayed the message that was given her and the clerk picked up the phone and had Shana paged to the front desk.

A beautiful brunette emerged from a side door and came over to Susan. She explained that a single had opened up and they would be moving her from the Paris-House Suite to a room on the fourth floor. Susan hesitated for a minute before she explained that she had a hair appointment in just a few minutes and did not have time to move her belongings. Shana smiled and said they would be glad to handle the move for her while she was having her hair done. She cut Susan a key card for Room 471 and watched as Susan made her way toward the beauty salon. She was about to walk away from the counter when Susan reversed her course and came back to tell Shana that she was expecting her lost overnight bag to be delivered soon, and could they please make sure it made the transfer? A note was written for the porters that there had been a change of room.

Casey was escorting Frasier Crane and J.R. Ewing, along with two of the hostesses from the penthouse, across the lobby to the steakhouse for their lunch break. Frasier seemed to be talking nonstop to his companion, while J.R. was grunting while his short companion was busy trying to keep up the conversation and having to step double-time just to keep up with him. As they went across the expanse of the lobby to get to the steakhouse on the back corridor, Casey looked over and saw a woman smiling at him. He was good with names and she looked familiar, but he could not place her. He slowed down as Frasier, J.R., and the two women kept going. Casey walked the steps between them and went over to the smiling woman who definitely thought she knew him.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Manning. I'm Susan Mayer from last night. You were so kind to me, and I want to make sure you understand just how grateful I am for your kindness. I do not remember ever being that tired in my entire life. I don't think I would have lasted much longer if you had not allowed me to crash here last night."

Casey stared. She was gorgeous. What a difference one night could make.

"Well, good afternoon to you too, Ms. Mayer. I'm sorry, I just didn't recognize you. Are you rested enough for tonight's festivities?" Casey just stood there with a wide grin on his face.

"I may take a nap this afternoon, but I definitely feel better. Yesterday was one of the roughest days I've ever encountered." Susan returned his smile.

"If you win tonight, would you let me have a dance to celebrate? I can be paged over the house phone, and I'd love to have a dance with you."

"It's a date, Mr. Manning. Can I get you to call me Susan? The Mayer part was my ex-husband's name. If I win tonight, I'd love to dance with you. And if I don't win, you could come down to give me a pity dance?" Susan stood there and just grinned at him.

Casey almost swallowed his tongue. She was not only beautiful, she was smart too. He cleared the cobwebs in his brain and told her he'd call her Susan only if she'd call him Casey. They stood in the lobby for a few minutes just chatting. Finally, Casey turned and indicated that he had to catch up with his group. Reluctantly they said goodbye to each other and said that they would meet again that evening for the dance.

In the security office, the meeting in the lobby did not go unnoticed by the watchful eyes of the security team. It was obvious to all who saw them that their boss was attracted to this woman.

Lois was getting her hair fixed, so a bored Clark decided to go to the jewelry store to check on their rings. The jeweler showed Clark how he had realigned the prongs of the engagement ring and was putting a little more gold on the weakest prong. Clark was happy with the progress of the work, but it had only taken up a fraction of the time Clark had left before Lois rejoined him. He started to look around the store to get Lois a reward for the year they'd had leading up to their record number of nominations. As he circled the lighted counters his eye was repeatedly drawn back to a pair of earrings. They were yellow gold with a marquise-shaped sapphire surrounded by oval-shaped opals. It looked like Lois. But Clark was not sure if it would go with the new dress Lois had purchased for this occasion. He couldn't remember ever seeing it. Clark asked the clerk to hold the earrings for a few minutes while he went up to the room to see if they would match his wife's dress. He told the clerk he would be back, regardless, because he wanted to purchase something for his amazing wife.

When he got back to their room, he opened the garment bag and took out a turquoise dress with some crystals across the bodice. He knew she would look spectacular with that color and her dark hair. He

couldn't wait to see her in the dress, and to get her out of it.

Clark rushed back down to the jewelry store and purchased the earrings. They cost a little more than he would have liked, but she was worth every cent. He pocketed his purchase and was very proud of himself.

When Clark got to the bank of elevators, there was a woman standing there who looked a lot like Lois. There was definitely something different about her, but if he had been distracted he was sure he would have thought she was Lois. Much to his amazement, she turned around and spotted him and a big grin broke out over her face. She asked, "Casey?"

"No, my name is Clark. You sure do look a lot like my wife. She's Lois Lane from the *Daily Planet*. You ever hear of her?"

"Oh, you must be Clark Kent then. I have read your articles before, both of you. My name is Susan Mayer, and I'm here for the same reason you and your wife are. I'm nominated for an award in the Syndicated Illustrations in an Editorial Setting category. But I'd know your names anyway. Just how many Kerths are you nominated for this year?"

Clark looked a little bit self-conscious as he answered. "Lois is nominated for two individual awards, I'm nominated for one award, and together we have two nominations. So I guess that means we have five nominations."

"Wow. The possibility of winning five awards? That must be some kind of a record," said Susan as the elevator slowed at the fourth floor.

Susan got out and called back over her shoulder, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Kent. See you tonight at the Kerths." She then looked at the numbering arrows and took a left down the hall.

When Susan got to Room 471 she knew immediately that she was going to be disappointed after the beautiful suite she had slept in last night. She opened the door and the first thing that met her eye was her overnight bag sitting against the wall just inside the door. That made her very happy. Her suitcases were spread over the queen-sized bed and left open for her. Whomever did the move was very thorough. They had nicely packed her bags and neatly hung her dress in the closet. She took the time to unpack her bags. She looked at her jewelry case and discovered that all the necklaces were tangled. She took the time to get kinks out and reloaded them into the jewelry box correctly. She chose a yellow gold chain with a crystal dangle that would match her dress. She was in a much better mood than yesterday.

Just as she had predicted, a nap was in her future. She'd had a grueling day yesterday, and even though she had slept soundly, she was tired. So to try to preserve her new hairdo with all her hair curled up on top of her head, she wrapped it in a towel before trying to take a nap.

Casey stood in front of the door to the Paris-House Suite. He hesitated before knocking because he knew he had no reason to check on her, but felt powerless to stay away. He knocked on the door before he could chicken out. He almost wished she wouldn't answer the door, because he was losing his nerve as he stood there. He was shocked when Sam answered the door. "What are you doing in this suite, Sam?" he asked.

"I learned that someone with a single reservation was staying in this suite. When a single opened up, I had her moved into it and I now reside here until I can get back into my penthouse."

"I'm the one who gave her this suite for her visit. She had another night in this place before she needed to move." Casey frowned at his ex-wife.

"So, you now hand out expensive suites to women to get

favors, hmmmm?" Sam was spitting the words out at Casey. "And then you follow up on your generosity by knocking on their doors? That is sleazy, even for you."

"Don't judge everyone by yourself, Sam. I happen to think Ms. Mayer is a lady," he said, folding his arms defensively. His ex had a habit of getting under his skin. "I was simply here to wish her good luck with the Kerths, and to discover how she is enjoying her stay here. So, where did you have her relocated?"

"She's in Room 471, just beyond the remodel. She will be very comfortable there. There is absolutely no reason for you to worry." Sam glared at Casey.

"And there was absolutely no reason for you to move her out of this room." Casey turned almost a military turn, and started to march back to the elevators. He stopped a few feet from the door and turned around.

"Actually, the more I think about it, the more I realize you do not understand the meaning of this business. We are here to accommodate the guests who come to visit us. We attempt to make them so comfortable that they have a wonderful time and remember us next time they want to go to a casino. How is that different from the way we treated Ms. Mayer? After all, no one forced you to give up my penthouse for the poker game. When you did, you did it for the enjoyment of the customers. All the customers."

"What do you mean, your penthouse?" Sam spit back. "I'm the one who lives there, not you."

"It's the Owner's Penthouse. I'm the owner, so that makes it my penthouse. Just because you are allowed to live there and I didn't ask you move out when I came to town, does not make you the owner or it your penthouse." Casey turned again and left the area quickly.

Casey was beyond upset. He went to the fourth floor and walked the length of the corridor to where the construction barricades marked the beginning of the remodeling project. He took a few deep breaths to get over being upset at Sam. When Casey knocked at the door, he hoped that he would not scare Susan by showing up at her room.

The lock was thrown and the door opened. Standing in front of him was a very sleepy looking Susan with a towel covering her head. Casey was taken aback by her appearance. He had interrupted her nap. But she grinned and invited him into her room. He stepped in and looked around at the worn appearance of the furnishings.

"Sorry, Susan. I didn't mean to interrupt your nap. I was just upset when I found out that you had been moved. I gave you the suite for a two-day stay. I had no intention of moving you even if a single became available. Let me make this up to you. I'll get my staff on the phone and we'll see how we can fix this."

Casey took his cell phone out of his pocket. He called the office and asked for a list of the suites available. He frowned slightly at the answer and asked what else was available. Susan thought that the only thing left must be the Penthouse Suite because Casey certainly did not look happy.

As soon as he hung up his phone and turned back around, Susan said, "This room is fine. I only need the place for one more night. I'm sure I can get dressed here just the same as in a suite. Don't worry about it." Susan suddenly realized that she still had a towel over her hair and she went to the mirror to take it off. She smoothed her curls back down and turned back to Casey with a smile on her face.

"All the smaller suites are spoken for and it seems that Murphy Brown and her crew have taken the Penthouse Suite. They are here to interview the insurance sales force that made the Million Dollar Round Table and record the Kerth Awards tonight. Since FYI has a crew of four, I don't think I can ask them to stay in a single room. But, I still feel bad that you lost out on your suite and I have nothing else to offer." Casey was trying to think

on his feet, when the answer dawned on him. "If you will trust me, I think I might have an solution. I really am not someone who tries to pick up women. Ask my staff. But it occurred to me that I have an unused room with a bath in my suite. I am working tonight, so it will be mostly unoccupied. The most I'd do there is change clothes. I want to assure you that I'm really very harmless, and my only motive is to rectify this injustice that happened about your suite."

Susan swallowed hard. Was she being played for a fool? Or was this good-looking man who was the owner of the whole casino trying to be nice to her? Because she couldn't think of any reason not to at least have a look, she asked Casey if he would conduct a tour of his suite. That put a huge grin on his face as he said, "Follow me!"

When Lois arrived back in the room after her hair appointment, she was met with an empty room and a note left on the bedside table. It read, "Volcano in Italy. Be back as soon as I can. Go to K awards and accept all 5 for both of us. Love you."

Lois was disappointed. She immediately put the television to LNN and noted that the disaster had taken over the news. She watched her husband come into view repeatedly, ferrying people out of danger's way. Lois was heartsick. They had worked so hard this year, and the result was the nomination for five awards. The two of them deserved to have a day free from disaster so they could bask in the spotlight of their accomplishments. As soon as the thought crossed her mind, Lois was ashamed. She knew that she was blessed, and her husband was responding to a higher calling than mere awards. But it was hard to get her priorities straight since she was not in the middle of the crisis like Clark. He would be disappointed to miss the ceremony, but not crushed. The loss of life at the disaster would make him upset, not the loss of adulation.

Lois called down to room service and ordered herself a salad with chicken and a pot of coffee. She was about to end the call when a strawberry-topped chocolate cheesecake caught her eye. She ordered herself a slice to top off the meal. It was obvious that the best way to overcome disappointment was to stuff her mouth.

Casey and Susan stepped up to the front of the entrance of the Presidential Suite. He opened the door and stepped aside for her to enter first. Her breath caught as she looked around at the lavish furnishings of the suite. It was even nicer than the one she had stayed in the night before. It had to be one of the most beautiful places she had ever seen. The lavish furniture was decorated in shades of green, gold, and ivory. There was a high gloss to the wood tables, gold and crystal lamps, and artwork that looked expensive and rare. Recessed lighting made the bar area stand out and gave off a warm glow. Susan swung around 180-degrees to look at the beautiful room. Casey watched with a grin.

"Follow me," Casey said. He went to a door off the far left side of the living area. "This is the room I've been using, but you can have it if you want it." He stood aside as she went into the room to see a king-sized bed, a desk, a dresser, and a love seat all in the room with a lot of space left over. It was obvious that someone very neat had occupied the place, as the bed was turned back and there was a shirt on the back of the desk chair, but other than that it was clear. Just then Susan heard Casey clear his throat, and he said, "Through the first door you will find a large closet and that second door leads to a bathroom. That bathroom is why I chose this suite. It has 'relaxation' written all over it."

Susan stepped into the bathroom that Casey had indicated. Last time she'd seen anything like this it was on television as part of a million dollar mansion. She instantly understood what Casey was saying.

Casey stood with an amused grin on his face as Susan looked around in the rooms. When she seemed to be through, he said,

"Let's go see the other room." Susan followed him back across the living quarters to the far side of the room. Casey reached into the second bedroom and flicked the light switch. "This is the empty bedroom. You are welcome to your choice of room."

Susan stepped into the room decorated in ivory with light green piping on the bedspread and the loveseat. The queen-sized bed was a tall canopy bed and the coloring of the room was definitely feminine in comparison to the other room. Susan giggled to herself as she thought she could just see herself in that big room with everything oversized, and Casey stuck in a smaller room with feminine decorations and smaller-scale furniture. She looked around and then went to the door leading into the bathroom. She flicked on the switch, and she was sure she was in the more feminine of the two rooms. There was a make-up desk with lights on it, and a claw-footed tub. In the corner where the shower was, the door had seashells etched into the glass. The whole room was softer in appearance than the other bathroom, but still it had some very high-end decorations. The gold fixtures on the sink and bathtub spoke of luxury one step beyond the normal bathroom.

When Susan wandered into the living area, Casey asked her to sit down and offered her a drink. Not wanting to start drinking so early when she had such an important evening ahead of her, she asked him for a Diet Coke. He reached into the refrigerator, and took out a Diet Coke, took down a glass from the shelf, and put ice in it. He then handed her the drink and went back to the refrigerator to get himself a ginger ale. When he had poured himself a glass, he sat down next to her on the sofa.

"Have you decided that you can trust me enough to come and stay here tonight?" Casey was very apprehensive about asking her, but he really did want her to stay.

Susan thought about his question for a minute and then said, "Why are you offering this to me? It is not your fault that I was moved into a single room like my publisher paid for me to stay in. That was the best I expected. Last night when I was so tired, you could have put me in a broom closet and I would have been satisfied."

"My ex-wife was the one who moved you from the suite today. I gave you that suite for two nights without any strings and I did not expect to have it yanked away from you. She has no authority to remove you like that when I gave you a place to stay. And if there was any other suite or penthouse available for you, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. But the facts are that I have a hotel at full capacity, an ex-wife who took something that wasn't hers to claim, and you left in a stuffy old closet of a room just because my ex could do it."

Casey was looking down into his drink. He looked so sad. Susan pondered his question about whether she trusted him. Oddly, even though she had not had a lot of experience with men, she did trust Casey. There were no clanging bells going off in the back of her mind. He had always been a gentleman. His explanation was plausible unless his ex-wife was in on his seductions. It came down to whether she was a fool to trust him or a fool to pass up this opportunity? If she stayed in the room she now occupied, she would be fine. But, she'd miss the chance to do something spectacular. And Susan was not one to miss an opportunity if she could help it. She looked over at Casey to discover he was watching her intently.

"Well, what you think? Would you like to move here for tonight? I promise you, there are no strings and no hidden costs in the offer. I have to be upstairs most of the evening with a very important group of people, and the whole place will be sitting empty most of the night." Casey looked into her eyes as he spoke and could see she was weakening. "I still plan to come down to the ballroom and dance your victory lap with you, but other than that you will probably not even see me all evening. Please, Susan. Consider moving in here so I don't have to worry about you in

the older room. You were meant to be in a nice suite."

"Thank you, Casey. I am in your debt once more. I don't know why you are being so nice to me, but I

do know I'd be a fool to turn your offer down. Can you help me locate a luggage cart so I can go and get my things? I'll try to be a good roommate and make sure you don't regret this offer."

"Let me get on the phone and I'll make it all happen while you are sitting here sipping your drink. Susan, welcome to your new home. Let me know which room you decide to take."

He picked up the house phone, and asked for a porter to be sent to Room 471 and everything transferred to his suite. He also asked for a key card to be made for Susan, and two tuxedos to be sent up to the suite in his size. He listened to the message being read back to him, and thanked the person on the other end of the phone.

"I wasn't expecting to have to dress up tonight, but since I now have a date to a formal dance, I thought I might need a tux or two here so I don't embarrass my beautiful companion." That put smiles on both of their faces.

The security office was abuzz with speculation about the latest gossip that the boss had moved a woman into his suite. Facial recognition had given them the name of Lois Lane, but she was registered in the hotel as Susan Mayer. Out of curiosity, Delinda looked Lois Lane up on the computer. The first fact that popped up was that Lois had married her writing partner a few years ago. They pulled the picture back up from the day before, and there was no wedding ring on her finger.

"Who would have thought Casey Manning was the type to date a married woman?" asked Danny.

It was the bewitching hour. Susan had put on her dress, jewelry, and her highest heels. She twirled in front of the mirror. She looked hot! She looked damned hot! Bree was smaller-busted than her, so Susan had quite a bit of cleavage showing with a dangling crystal in the center of all the exposed flesh. Her upswept hair made her neck look long and kissable. She looked hotter than hot!

She deposited her key in her bag, left the room to go down to the ballroom for supper and the awards ceremony, but most of all she was looking forward to dancing with Casey. Whether she won or not the dance would happen, but the best part was she might also get a Kerth for her illustrations. Even though the books she illustrated were written on a level for children, they were often syndicated to newspapers for the editorial pages. It was found that without much stretch in imagination the books were very adaptable to current events and satire of the front pages. Even though Susan had illustrated the books, she was getting a reputation of being an editorial illustrator. On the way down the hall Susan mused that she'd been having such good luck lately that she would be lucky enough to win tonight.

Down the hall from Susan was another brunette with her hair up on top of her head, wearing an identical dress that fit a little differently than hers. Lois's dress covered all the right parts and left a lot to the imagination. Lois was taking her time getting ready because she hoped that her husband would be able to come home before she had to go downstairs. The awards they were nominated for were being awarded late in the program, and Lois really did not want to sit around and hear a lot of people she didn't know get the unimportant Kerths that were awarded early in the program.

At the appointed hour when the banquet was to begin, the wait staff started handing out the salads. Susan ate and listened to the conversation at her table. Most of the people at her table were from Bellevue, Washington. They seemed to know each other and did not include her in their conversation. Then again, most of the people around at the tables were newspaper journalists, not

book illustrators. She reminded herself that later on, the good-looking fellow who had been so wonderful to her was going to dance with her. It was hard to be depressed when his face came to her mind.

The soup was served, and the lady next to her started to ask her about her nomination. When she said she was the illustrator for the Rabbit series, the lady told everyone at the table and all of them said they enjoyed the editorials. Susan did not tell them she did not write the pithy sayings, only drew the rabbit's pictures. She enjoyed the adulation for a few minutes before the conversation shifted again to families. Susan told them she had a teenage daughter, and they all said she looked too young to have teenager. Then the conversation switched again. When the main course was served, she couldn't wait for the actual award ceremony to start as she was exhausted by alternately talking to them and sitting quietly without any conversation.

As the dessert was served, the Master of Ceremonies came to the podium. He introduced a comedian who delivered a few jokes that were hard to laugh at. By the time the emcee came back to the podium, everyone was ready for the ceremony to start. The first category to be presented was the editorials. Susan pondered why she was nominated, but the writer of the book was not. She listened to those named and knew her writer was better than most of them. The next category of nominees was the illustrators of the editorial page. Susan sat very still and heard her name called along with the other eight nominees. As the card was opened with the name of the winner, Susan held her breath. Her name was called as the winner, and she seemed fused to her chair. Her tablemates told her she had won, but she continued to sit there in stunned silence. Finally a page came to her and helped her to the podium. As she looked out over the audience, she had stage fright. But she recovered enough to remember to thank the author of the book, her publisher, her daughter, and the readers who enjoy her pictures.

Susan did not see Casey, as he was standing in the shadows at the rear of the ballroom. He was half in and half out of the room with his face in the shadows. He really wanted to see her win but did not want her to feel she was being stalked if she saw him there. So, even though he clapped harder and louder than anyone else around him, he made sure that she did not see him. As Casey listened to Susan's thank you speech, he became aware of two female arms and a very female body pressed against him from the rear. A voice said to him, "Oh, there he is. My own little key carrier. Which pocket do you want me to put my key in?" Casey wrenched himself away from the unknown female, and turned around to see a woman who looked a lot like Susan, who was dressed a lot like her. He turned around again and looked back to the front of the room where Susan was winding up her speech. He turned back around, sure he must have been mistaken about the nearby female's resemblance.

"Oh, my God! You're not my husband! I'm so sorry, Mr. uh, uh, but I really thought when I saw you there that you were my husband."

Lois was mortified. How had she made this mistake? The man had a passing resemblance to Clark, but he was shorter, fuller in the face, and less muscular. He also had no glasses, but he wouldn't be mistaken for Superman. She wished she had not made the assumption that he was her husband before seeing him in the light.

"Hello, I'm Casey Manning. And you are?"

"I'm Lois Lane Kent. My husband is Clark Kent. We're reporters with the *Daily Planet*. He and I were on different schedules, so I came down first. When I saw you standing there, for some unknown reason I thought you were Clark. I don't think I've ever been quite so embarrassed."

"Well, Lois. I would love to meet that husband of yours. I've

not had many people mistake me for someone they know that well. When he gets here, please introduce me to him."

"You will be around here later? Are you a nominee also?"

Casey gave her a big grin. "I don't think I'll be going anywhere. I'm the owner of the Montecito. I'm here all weekend long and would love to make sure that you and your husband enjoy your stay here and want to come back to visit again soon."

"I'll make sure to introduce you to Clark then. Have a good evening, Casey. Again, I'm so sorry about that goof."

Lois moved through the crowded ballroom and went to the table that the escort said was where she and Clark were to sit. As she sat down, the program continued and the waiters brought food out for her to eat.

Susan felt as if her feet were not touching the ground. She had won! A group of her peers had decided that her work was award-winning. She had pictures taken with her Kerth and they engraved her name on it while she waited. Instead of going back to the table where she felt so uncomfortable, Susan decided to take her Kerth Award upstairs to the suite. She would be dancing with Casey, and didn't need to hold on to the award. So instead of returning to the ballroom, she made her way out the side door and took the elevator back up to the 19th floor. She let herself into the suite and after she had kissed the statue, she left it on her bedside table. As she made her way back to the elevator banks, a pair of arms grabbed her from behind and picked her off her feet. As soon as she squealed the arms let her go. Susan turned around to see Casey standing in the hallway in a pair of jeans. Or was it Clark?

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Susan. It's me, Clark Kent. You look so much like my wife, and her dress for the banquet is the same color. I thought she was running late going down to the banquet, and I had caught up with her. Please forgive me. I would never have made that mistake if I wasn't in fast-forward mode. My mind was only recognizing people around me with half-efficiency. I need to get in the shower, put my tux on, and get down to the banquet. When I get down to the banquet, can I introduce you to Lois? You will see that I really did make an honest mistake."

"I'd love to meet the famous Lois Lane. I'll look forward to seeing you in a little bit." Susan got on the elevator, but when she got downstairs she decided to sit in the lobby and wait for Clark instead of going back into the ballroom.

While she was sitting alone, Susan contemplated the fact that Casey had kept his word and given her the privacy she needed in their rooms. Spending time with Casey would not have been a hardship. Instead of treating her as a roommate, he'd let her have the suite as her private sanctuary. She was glad she had trusted her instincts about him. He was a great guy.

Clark sped through the clean-up process. He put his tux on, slowed down considerably to make sure his tie was straight, and pocketed his present for his wife. He looked once more in the mirror, and sped down the hall to the elevators. He was almost ready to take the stairs when the elevator finally arrived. It seemed to stop at all of the floors to either let someone on or off. As he got to the lobby of the hotel, he became aware of Susan sitting on a sofa outside the banquet room. He stopped to talk to her and when he learned she was waiting for him, he took her inside and located his wife. He then spoke to a member of the staff and asked if he could have an extra chair put at the table where he and his wife were assigned. Susan stood still and looked around. She spotted a woman with dark hair piled on top of her head who had a dress on that was close to the same color as hers. She followed Clark and the waiter who was moving a chair to the table. When they arrived at the table, Clark stooped down and kissed his wife, and helped Susan take her chair on the other side

of Lois. He then introduced Lois and Susan, and told of the mix-ups they'd had all day with mistaken identity. Lois's eyes got big. She told Clark that she'd had the same trouble of mistaken identity with his look-alike. Susan said she had met both Clark and Casey. The three of them talked quietly until the Master of Ceremonies started to announce the categories that Lois and Clark were nominated in. Then they grew silent awaiting results.

The categories of investigative reporting that they were nominated in were named. Lois won one of the two individual categories she was nominated and Clark won his individual category also. The crime-fighting reports that they did together both won, so the family total was four wins out of five. Susan waited patiently as they went to the podium repeatedly. As the ceremony drew to a close, the table with the Kents had four beautiful Kerth Awards sitting on the table all neatly engraved with their names. Clark leaned over to his wife and told her he needed to go back to Italy for just a second to make sure that the diversion of lava he had created was still effective. To the people at the table, he announced that he would take the four awards up to their room so that he would be able to dance with his wife and not have to worry about misplacing them. He leaned over and kissed Lois, told Susan he'd be back in about ten minutes, and scooted out the door holding all four trophies in his arms. He spotted a security camera in the back hallway, and skirted it. He made a last super-blast at the entrance to the stairway, and whizzed up all nineteen floors to his floor. When he arrived at the room, he quickly put the Kerths on the dresser, changed into his Superman suit, and super-spun through the stairs, back hallway, and out the roof entrance.

Danny was sitting in front of the monitor bank in the security room. He thought he saw a shadow in the back stairway leading to the roof, but a person never came into view, so he recorded the time on the clock so he could review it later. When he looked back up he saw a flash of red and the roof's service door slamming shut. He started an auxiliary tape running and backed up the tape of the passageway leading to the roof service entrance. There it was again. Something red for just a split second. Was he seeing things? Did he need to call Ed or Mike to check something out, or was he just having low blood sugar from not having had his supper yet? He started the tapes up and had two covering the same area.

When the awards ceremony was over, the dance began. Lois and Susan were both without a male so they just sat there for a little while talking about their trip out to Las Vegas. Lois was sympathetic with Susan about the horrible trip she had coming out. When the conversation lagged, Lois asked if Susan was going to have anyone to dance with, and Susan told her about Casey. Lois looked shocked.

"You mean Casey Manning? You are planning to go to the dance with Casey? I met him when I thought he was Clark. How did you two meet?"

Susan told her that after her horrible airport experiences, missed planes, and cancelled rooms, she arrived and there was no room held for her. It had been cancelled at midnight, and Susan did not know that she needed to ask them to hold it for her. She told of how he had given her a wonderful suite when there were no single rooms left. She also told of being moved out of the room, so Casey made sure she was given another suite for this evening. Susan left out the part where Casey gave her a room in his suite, but that was not the important part of the story. She and Casey kept bumping into each other, and he finally asked if he could dance with her at the Kerths. Lois told her to go ahead and dance with him, and when Clark got back they would introduce the two men who were often mistaken for each other.

Susan got on the casino phone and paged Casey. He was

found in their suite, changing into his tuxedo. He told Susan that he would be down in a few minutes. When he arrived in the ballroom, he went to the table with the two women dressed in turquoise dresses with their hair up. He stood between them, and correctly identified them by name. That surprised both women. He asked Susan if she would like to dance with him, and she said she'd love to have a dance or two. Casey asked Lois where Clark was and was assured that he would be back in a few minutes after he put their awards up in their room.

Lois watched as Casey and Susan danced. She overheard him tell her how beautiful she looked. They both looked so happy. When their first dance ended they just stayed on the dance floor and danced another. On Susan and Casey's third dance, Clark reappeared. He kissed his wife before giving her a small blue velvet box. When she opened the box she saw a pair of the most beautiful sapphire and opal earrings. She immediately took the hoops she was wearing out of her ears and handed them to Clark to put in his pocket. She put the earrings on and handed him the velvet box. She then took his hand and the two of them went out on the dance floor. They danced slow and close, as if there was no one else there. When the band took a break, the two couples sat at the table and had a few laughs and a long talk.

Ed had just checked in for his shift to relieve Danny at the banks of security monitors. Danny was giving him the rundown of all the trouble he had had in the last three hours of his shift. Ed was the man who always ran the tapes to see what might be missed by other security personnel. Danny showed him the times he had recorded and which corridors he thought he had seen something. Ed said he would check out all the tapes if Danny would check the back hallway and stairway to the service entrance on the roof before he left. Danny called back in on the radio that there was no evidence of tampering on the locks and no one was lurking in the back hallway or the stairway.

Ed pulled the tapes off the machines and replaced them with new, fresh tapes. He started recording the cameras again, and eased down in a chair to make himself comfortable. It was obvious that Danny was getting squirrely.

Just as he began to relax that his world was secure, he looked over at the monitor showing the entrance to the ballroom. He saw the boss coming out of the room with a beautiful brunette in a bright blue dress. She was busting out of her dress. Ed grinned for Casey. Then he did a double take! Coming out the same door a few steps behind the boss was his look-alike in glasses holding the hand of a lady who could be the twin sister of Casey's friend. WHAT WAS THAT? The four of them stopped almost under the camera and talked for a few minutes, hugged each other and went in two different directions.

Ed snapped four pictures to make sure he had all the evidence that strange things were happening and he wasn't completely crazy. He would deal with the boss and his look-alike in glasses with their twin friends tomorrow. He poured himself a stiff shot of whiskey and sat back to stare at the monitors. What a night! He wondered if being crazy was catching?

Casey walked Susan into the lobby and asked her to sit down. He said he wouldn't be going back into the Presidential Suite until tomorrow morning so she would feel safe. He was bound and determined to keep his promise to her that he would not pressure her at all. But he did want to talk with her. So they sat down.

"Susan, I have had a wonderful day getting to know you and to enjoy your company. I would like to see you again after we all get back home. You said you lived in Fairview, California, right? I have a condo in Los Angeles so I can be nearly in the same town as you if you would let me call on you."

Susan put her head on his shoulder. "I'd love to see you

again. But there is one question I've been dying to ask you. Has anyone ever told you that you look a lot like Superman? And you make wonderful things happen like him too. So, are you Superman, or just my own private Superman?"

"Sorry to disappoint you. I'm just a mortal man who can't fly unless I have an airplane under me. Could I take that plane and come to visit you and take you out in the future?"

"I'd love to have that happen. I'll make sure I leave my contact information in the suite for you." Susan was grinning like she had hit the jackpot at one of his casino tables.

Casey stood up and helped Susan stand up. Together they walked to the elevator that took them up to the 19th floor. Casey walked Susan to the door of his suite, opened the door for her, kissed her on the forehead, and turned around to leave.

"It's been a wonderful two days, Casey. You made the nightmare of my journey out here vanish. Thank you."

"Good night, Susan."

"Good night, Casey."

THE END

That's all folks, except to thank some people.

The original challenge was issued by Marcus Rowland and it caught my attention right away. I thought it was a wonderful idea, and I added *Desperate Housewives* to his challenge to merge *L&C* and *Las Vegas*. When I finished it (or thought I'd finished it) I asked Marcus to read it and tell me what he thought. It was his suggestion that the security team catch some of the mistaken identity on their monitors and use the face recognition to the advantage of the story. And so I added a few scenes with the security office. Thanks, Marcus. It really helped.

My thanks to Jenni Debbage for helping me flesh out the images of the people involved so that they had personalities instead of meshing people together with no A-plot.

Also thanks to the IRC group who helped me brainstorm some ideas I had and wanted to use but they needed help. Thanks to Chris, Lori, and Peggy for the hours of work on small details. Also thanks to Lori for lending me Coco. I needed something funny to base a child's story on, and Coco is a funny bunny.

I also want to thank Darth Michael for his beta of this. Thanks so much for all your hard work, Michael. If you write, you need to experience his humor and viewpoint once! What an experience! But he did help improve the story. It just seems that it shouldn't be so much fun to accomplish a rewrite of some of the rough places that need work.

Thanks also to the G.E., Marcelle. She and I clashed a bit, but she did try to make it a better story. I appreciate your work.