

# Autumn in Paris — Part Two of the Visitor Trilogy

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Continuing in the Visitor Universe. With the help of Jor-EL's transfer beam, he has been reunited with his son, Kal-El. But what happened to the others in the previous story such as Abrihet Sensai and Bernie Klein? Is Lex Luthor in the Phantom Zone or does some other fate await him? Read on ...

My, how plans change! Originally this was supposed to be a follow-up to the epilogue of *An Unexpected Visitor*. But edits and additions piled on and as the story expanded it became clear such would not be the case. A few FoLCs also have asked me to develop the tender romance between Bernie and Abrihet. Which I shall endeavor to do, but there's more going on than that! Oh yeah, there will also be a brief mention of our favorite couple, Lois and Clark.

Thanks to excellent betas Bobbart, KenJ and Sydney. Their guiding hands gave this story a sense of Paris, whimsy and yet firmly grounded the whole thing in reality.

**Legal Disclaimer:** Most of the characters in this story are not my property. I am only spending a little time with them in an Alternative Universe.

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*Metropolis*  
*Early Autumn*

"Yes, Lois, I shall happily give her your regards, my best to Clark, good-night." Bernie placed the phone receiver in its cradle and grinned. It was exciting to acquaint Lois with their plans. For a little over two months, he was going to live in Paris. He and Abrihet wanted to get to know one another better and that was impossible when separated by three thousand miles of dark, blue Atlantic Ocean. He thought, *'I always fantasized about being James Bond, but right now having Superman's mastery of flight would be supremely helpful.'* The expense of flying back and forth from one country to another was not a great concern. Over the years he had patented a number of devices, the proceeds of which allowed him to live quite comfortably.

He stood up from the couch and looked around his living room taking in the mishmash of furniture which he privately thought of as 'yard sale chic.' He seldom entertained and when he did it was for academics and scientists like himself whose only concern was that the coffee be flavored with cognac, the pastries were delicious and the conversation scintillating. But with Abrihet visiting him most evenings he felt it was time his condo received a much needed — what was it she quite tactfully said? 'Decoration do-over'? With a chuckle and a spring in his step he walked down the hallway to tell his lady about the phone conversation with Lois.

"Chéri, what did Lois say?" Abrihet called out. She had been reading an online journal of the processing of iron ore while Bernie had been on the phone with Lois.

Bernie walked into the second bedroom that served as his

office and answered, "She — and I am quite certain Clark — are happy for us!"

Her mouth stretched into a wide, luminous smile showing off beautiful, white teeth. "This is so *fantastique!* I have only really gotten to know you without a computer between us for three weeks, and yet it feels like we have been together always." She hesitated for a moment and asked shyly, "Going to Paris together, are we not moving too rapidly Bernard?"

He cherished the way she spoke his name, the combination of French and Nigerian accents were like the melding of a precise mathematical proof. Apprehensive, yet confident of every word he answered firmly, "No. We are mature adults and scientists. We both know what we want; which is to explore our relationship in the traditional sense. We will each keep separate homes and spend time together between my attending conferences and giving lectures and your work. Shall there be challenges? Yes, aplenty. Abrihet, I have spent my days among scientists, laboratories and computer printouts— hiding from life. In the short time I have known you, my life and world have *exploded* in multiple directions, which I won't stop now."

Indeed in a tiny stride of days — less time than it requires for the moon to go around the earth, this dazzlingly attractive and multi-talented woman had come to mean so much to him. Just when had they come to be more than friends and yet less than lovers? They had begun corresponding via e-mail over a year before; when he had seen an article she had posted in a journal, translated from the French language, on metallurgy. He had a series of questions which she answered in such a warm and inviting manner he wondered what the woman behind the e-mail was like.

They must have exchanged over one thousand e-mails, discussing everything from Tycho Brahe's planetary observations to the history of the waltz. He could not begin to remember how many times he would call her to ask a quick metallurgic question only to remain on the phone for hours. His personal phone bill was frightening. He had spoken so much about their discussions with colleagues that it piqued the board of directors' interest and they extended an invitation for her to come to S.T.A.R. Labs and present a lecture on her findings.

Naturally they had exchanged photos, yet he was eager to meet her in the flesh, but nothing had prepared him for the reality. From the moment she walked into his laboratory, extended her hand and smiled at him, he knew with absolute certainty his existence would by no means ever be the same.

Never in his neatly ordered life of pursuing scientific perfection had he ever envisioned experiencing the mysterious equation for falling in love.

Gracefully Abrihet stood up from his work station, arched her back and stretched the tight muscles. Although it had been years since she had taught ballroom dancing, her body was mature, but fit and strong. She looked attractive in anything, but the fashionable jeans and a red pullover sweater lent her a sophisticated, yet comfortable air.

She walked over to him and taking his hand, she said, "As has mine." No further words were spoken as they embraced, holding each other, drawing strength and love. He ran his fingers through her long braids, loving their texture and scent of Thierry Mugler's *Angel*, a popular perfume in France. The cloying scent of her *French perfume*, these two words conveyed all of the glamour, beauty and elegance of his beloved. Oh yes, he might have spent most of his time in the laboratory however with Abrihet in his life he was learning a great deal about French culture in general and Paris in particular.

Her voice — soft and gentle with a suggestion of sadness — whispered into his chest, "Bernard, I wish to remain here in Metropolis longer, but sadly I must return to my duties and classes at the Sorbonne ..."

Reluctantly Bernie pulled away from their embrace. He had been expecting to hear that, but not so soon. He could feel his throat tighten as he spoke, “When?”

“As soon as possible, remember my visit began in early August, I must return in time for the September classes. As you know, it is impossible for a French citizen to go the US if she can’t prove to the American Immigration authorities that she had the ticket to return to her country. So return I must.”

Bernard stuttered, “I ... I have friends at the State Department, they can get you a work visa.”

She placed a tender forefinger on his lips and whispered, “No. We have spoken of this in the past. I must prepare for my students.”

“*Je vois.*” (I see) Bernie offered, his voice gloomy.

“Ah! Tu t’entraînes?” (Practicing?)

“Oui,” the gentle scientist said with a tiny, fragile smile.

Abrihet was trying to turn his mind away from her departure. “Bon! While I am gone I expect great progress. So, you shall join me as soon as affairs here are concluded?”

“Yes, I will take care of renting out my condo and making sure there are at least two people to cover for me at the lab.”

“Oui, without a visa, you will be allowed to remain in France for ninety days. Fortunately the Université Pierre et Marie Curie, part of Sorbonne Universities, was so excited to have you as a guest lecturer on quantum physics they bypassed a number of rules. So you will not be paid by the school, but by S.T.A.R. Labs.”

He looked down into her dark eyes and said with a hint of mischief, “But we won’t be working all the time? Weren’t there fascinating, special places you wanted us to explore together?”

His remark was rewarded by seeing her face light up in happy anticipation. “Bernard there are *so* many places for us to see, the Sorbonne at night, my favorite market, Place Maubert, and wait until we walk over to the square Saint-Julien-le Pauvre, at the corner of rue Galande. From there, we can see Notre-Dame! Ah yes, the Louvre! It will take weeks for us to cover all the exhibits; artwork and statues from Egypt and Babylon, some are several meters high. There is an exhibit of Napoleon’s apartment. Such opulence! We must sample the pastries at Clark’s favorite bakery *Chez Morel*. I want to introduce you to Amandine, the owner.”

Excited by the prospect of seeing the everyday places of her life he said, “I want to see the boat, the one that floats down the Seine. Oh, what is its name? *Bateau Mouche*? That was in the movie with Audrey Hepburn and Cary Grant ... *Charade*.”

Her laughter soared in the air like a young girl’s. “Oui! Many Americans remember that film, as well as Fred Astaire’s, *An American in Paris*.”

“Gene Kelly,” he corrected gently.

“They are both dancers, no?” She smiled slyly. “Speaking of dance, so shall we ...”

Bernie paled with genuine apprehension. “Me? Dance? Oh no! Not that!”

She playfully punched him in the ribs. “Chéri, if I can teach the strongest man in the world to waltz, I can teach you!”

He fought to hold back a smile but failed miserably, despite all the difficulties of continuing their courtship, everything just seemed so *right*. Take for instance her visit to his home this evening. Abrihet’s presence had filled the apartment in a way it had never been before; there was a warmth and comfort that the proper bachelor’s home had been sorely missing.

Falling in love was all his friends and colleagues said it would be and so much more. Her voice broke into his thoughts.

“It is very well for us to be thinking about autumn in Paris, but for now, should we not be thinking about *dinner*? Mentioning *Chez Morel* was *not* a good idea. I am famished!”

He wanted to make the evening easier on both of them and show off his French at the same time, Bernie replied, “Où

aimerais-tu aller?” (Where would you like to go?)

She wrinkled her nose. “All this eating out is not good for us. Why not have a meal here? What is in your réfrigérateur?”

Bernie looked at her with a quizzical expression. S.T.A.R. Labs had an excellent cafeteria. Many nights when he wasn’t working late he purchased something from there and brought it home. Years before getting involved with all-night experiments, he could cook, but had simply fallen out of the habit. He shrugged, a little embarrassed. “Nothing much, some odds and ends ...”

She entered the tiny kitchen and pulled open the cupboards and fridge, revealing the contents: roasted chicken, tri-color tortellini, broccoli, grape tomatoes and a jar of Fettuccini Alfredo sauce.

“Ah! Perfect! Tonight we stay in! Bernard, could you get us a bottle of Chianti?”

He grinned from ear to ear. That he could do!

Within thirty minutes, they were sitting down at the table to eat.

“Bernard, Paris in fall is a little chilly, you will need proper clothing to wear during our strolls. The avenues and parks in autumn take on a different ‘feel’ on my street, the lamplights set off the golden gown of leaves. Autumn is not only a time for me to return to school, it is also a time for my adopted city to renew and celebrate its devotion to culture. Paris embraces the celebration and the sight is restful and at the same time inspiring. If we are to enjoy long walks through Paris then you need a warm and comfortable sweater — either a cardigan or a shawl collar would be perfect over your lean frame.”

He shrugged thinking this was a simple matter. “I can purchase one before leaving.”

“No, that is not *special* enough. I shall knit one while waiting for your arrival. Lois told me about a *boutique de fil* across the street from her uncle’s restaurant. It is called, *Rhapsody Knits*. Tomorrow if you wish, we can go and see what kind of *laine* and color works for you.”

His quiet face lit up in surprise. “Knit a sweater? What can Abrihet Sensai *not* do?”

Her brown eyes became soft and she said, “As the two months go by and we grow closer we will understand and learn from each other’s strengths and weaknesses. I hope our feelings for each other are stronger in November ...” Without warning, her face grew flushed with embarrassment. She looked down at her plate not wishing to say more.

Bernie understood that their relationship was still in its ‘first bloom’ stage and the distance that separated them was a thorny dilemma. They had both crammed as much time seeing each other as their schedules allowed. Deeply touched, he stood, came around the table and gently pulled her up to him. Taking his hands, he cradled her cheeks lovingly, their lips met in a bold, deep kiss, their tongues tasting and teasing as their hearts swelled with an almost desperate longing. Although her flight would not be for two more days they were already missing each other terribly.

The words fell from his lips before his mind realized what he was saying. “Abrihet ... stay with me tonight.”

It was a request, a plea and need to draw even closer to this woman. Demonstrating to her not just with words too weak to describe his fervor, but with gentle, sweet touches the depths of his love and yearning.

Anxious decision danced in her eyes, the color of which seemed to flicker between brown with delicate microscopic flecks of gold to a dark chocolate that reflected her own desires. “Bernard, by staying tonight my darling I ... I will never return home. I must go. As you say, we are mature people; we must not let our desires take first place.” She took in a deep, shuddering breath and then said, “We must give ourselves time, for this

desire to grow and bloom into something far stronger and more precious than a single night's fleeting passion."

Bernie sighed and pulled her to him, he would have to wait a little longer to be with his future wife.

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Later that evening as they were walking back to her hotel, the conversation was kept light and easy. Bernie said, "Regarding the sweater, if we can find yarn in a rich burgundy that would be my preference."

"Oui, it would go nicely with your eyes," she said thoughtfully.

A companionable silence fell over the couple, one of many since dinner. They regretted the foolish tangle of red tape that prevented her from remaining in Metropolis. Yet, now that they had found each other they were determined to make the relationship, despite the obvious setback, work. Bernie cleared his throat and spoke. "I'm glad a friendship is developing between you and Lois. I was afraid you might not get to know anyone here, Metropolis can sometimes be a cold place."

She "squeezed his hand in acknowledgement of the comment. "You needn't have worried; truly I have loved my time here, with you, working with the S.T.A.R. Labs staff and on my own. Ah, Lois has a good heart. We have lunched together at least twice this week. It seems odd to me, but since Lex Luthor's disappearance, both she and Clark are more relaxed. Considering all the terrible unpleasantness Mr. Luthor brought into their lives, that is a very good thing."

Bernie considered what she had said. Mr. Luthor *had* disappeared on the same day that Clark had been shot. Regardless of the fact that he was Superman's physician, there were some things even he was not privileged to know. An uneasy feeling sent a chill through his body; perhaps the Kents knew more about what had happened to the devious billionaire than either was willing to say. As a consequence, he could not help but wonder if the two events were related and if so, what *really* happened to Lex Luthor?

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#### *New Krypton*

#### *Three weeks before*

One moment Lex was in the familiar and comfortable surroundings of his office, the next he was forcefully thrown into a cold void only to land unceremoniously on a surface of rough-hewn stones. The next moment his eyes ached from hard blue-white illumination that spilled from a wide aperture in midair, instinctively he knew that was where he had emerged from.

He tried to stand and regain some semblance of dignity, but it was impossible. A giant hand covered him, refusing to allow protesting muscles to respond. Hot, sticky sweat burst from the pores of his skin and in warm rivulets slithered down until it got into his eyes, stinging them. With no small effort the lids remained tightly shut, allowing only his ears to record what was happening to him. Quickly a fine sheen of sweat drenched his body; even his hands were disturbingly slick with moisture. The air seemed to squeeze itself within from his lungs, muscle, bone and sinew were so heavy, and the pain — like nothing he had ever experienced before — was indescribable. He had been in this nightmarish place a few seconds but everything, even the effort of breathing was tiring him.

A cacophony of strange voices, their words unfamiliar surrounded him; the sounds, so foreign so *alien*, threatened to harm not just his ears, but his fatigued brain cells as well. A woman's soft yet commanding voice cut through his agony, her voice a clear symphony over the mélange of noise. She spoke in English, but her accent was like Jor-El's, the madman who sent him here. "Do not attempt to move Mr. Luthor, if you do, the effort will shatter your bones."

Shocked, Lex slowly opened an eye to find out exactly where

he was. He lay on the floor of what could only be described as a cavernous room, hewn from some reddish rock. Before him were several oddly garbed people. The oldest of the group, a gray-haired man wearing dark, heavy robes in a red so deep it was almost black, walked over to the woman who must have spoken to him, a fascinating creature with long black hair that spilled down her back. She stood out among the group wearing clothing any young woman around Metropolis would wear. He seemed to be questioning her, but she shook her head, in the negative.

<<Trey, I go. He needs me. There is so much we need to be acquainted with about Kal-El's world." She turned and her eyes met Lex's, the disdain and anger radiating from her struck him like a physical thing. She pointed at him and spoke again in that strange language. <<Keep this one under guard in the new facility!>>

The older man shook his head; although Lex couldn't understand the words, he could tell from the fellow's body language he had every intention of pursuing this argument. <<My lady, this behavior of the First Lord's ... is unreasonable. Originally he was going to execute this Earthling for what he attempted to do to Lord Kal-El. If he does not desire to do so, wouldn't it be better to send him to the Phantom Zone instead? It would be so much cleaner than murder. He would have to struggle to continue to exist, but he would be alive and contained.>>

<<No. The people of New Krypton are crossing the threshold into a new age; one of reason and compassion. Should my husband decide to end this man's life it will be *his* decision. Enough blood from Nor's rebellion has been shed, would you not agree? Besides, the Phantom Zone is more a living death.>>

Lex knew they were speaking about him, but his limbs were so stressed, so drained of vital energy he struggled to remain conscious. A woman clad in a soft golden gown and carrying a tray knelt beside him and took a dark-green mask from the tray and placed it over his face. Despite a brief struggle, he breathed in the spicy scent, as it reached the sinuses, the blessed mists of unconsciousness plunged him into an emptiness as dark as any he had ever known.

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Once he was asleep, Zara removed a small, green gelatin pellet from the tray and placed it in Lex's ear. The heat from his body caused the pellet to dissolve in the canal and would eventually swathe the inner ear. "He will enter the healing sleep. Not only will his body heal from the trauma of transport, but it will allow the translation device to meld with the Primary Auditory Cortex of his brain. By the time the prisoner awakens, he should comprehend and speak our language."

Trey snorted in derision. "Good. It will make his life with us bearable."

No one responded to the councilman's comment.

A medium-built man with sandy hair, wearing a sapphire uniform cocked his head and said, "Should' understand?"

"Ching, my lady Josca this is not an exact science. He will be our first specimen of the human species. They look like us, but their organs are not exactly the same. He will be — what are those human words ...?"

The expression on Josca's face was conflicted when she said, "Guinea pig or test subject. You must not do that to him. He is a prisoner, but will be given his dignity ... which is far more than he deserves."

Zara stood and activated a device attached to her wrist and from nowhere a stretcher appeared, a guard stepped out from the group of people, carefully picked up the prisoner and laid him upon it.

Josca spoke to the man wearing the sapphire uniform, "General Ching, make certain he reaches the special chamber before the medicine Zara administered wears off. The last thing

we need is for our ‘guest’ to die before reaching his new home.”

“By your command Lady Josca,” he looked thoughtful and then said, “I have a capable man who will be suitable for the task of warder. He was a former member of the Sapphire corps. The duty will give him time to ... reflect.” General Ching stiffly nodded his head, turned, his short blue cape fluttering gently and followed the stretcher out of the chamber.

“The First Lord and I will return soon. Trey, as head of the Council, we hold you in trust of New Krypton until our return. If something should happen to us. Jor-El’s second born, Yar-El, shall become the new First Lord.”

Trey bowed, he was not pleased with this arrangement, but since Jor-El had created the transfer beam he had known that this day would come. “As *your husband*, the First Lord of Krypton, wishes I shall obey.”

She smirked; Trey was a product of the past, when Kryptonian noblewomen were still little better than chattel. He still did not realize that *together* she and Jor-El ruled this new world. Nonetheless she had developed a grudging respect for the old man; he had given his life in service to Krypton, both old and new. She reached up and placed her hand on Trey’s shoulder knowing it would disturb him because physical contact — especially in public — between nobles would be perceived as overly familiar. He gave her an odd look and then with a diplomat’s grace, bowed his head in acknowledgment of her command and touch.

“Thank you my friend. Care for our people while we are gone with the honor and dignity we know you possess. Now, I must go.”

Without another word, Josca turned and walked into the aperture of blue-white light and vanished.

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Lex awoke in a large bed; the sea-green sleeping silks were soft and delectable against his skin. He no longer wore a suit, but fine sleeping clothes of a fabric he had never felt before. The air felt cool and easy as it floated over his hands and face. He was in a sumptuously outfitted bedroom; spacious and appropriate for Alexander the Great himself. He looked around and noticed odd, colorful pennants made of a heavy woven fabric which adorned the walls; the furnishings; such as the sleeping silks had a color and texture that was decidedly *alien* to his senses. He was surprised to notice his mind was clear and the pain that had nearly crushed his chest disappeared.

“Hello!” he cried out.

No answer.

“Hello, is *anyone* here?”

He stood up, pushed back the silks and slowly climbed out of bed. The floor covering felt warm and soothing to his feet, so much so he ignored what looked to be slippers and crossed the room to the only door and opened it. It led to another room, larger than the bedroom more like a living room, fitted out with heavy, exquisitely carved wooden furniture which gave the room a palatial feel. Yet again the colors and octagonal shapes of the windows and doors gave an alien quality to the room; it reinforced the fact that he was no longer on Earth.

Here, on New Krypton, *he* was the alien.

Standing by the door was a tall man with saturnine features and dark neatly-trimmed beard wearing a gray uniform similar to the one he had seen before blacking out. He seemed to be waiting for Lex.

In an irritated tone, Lex strode up to him and demanded, “Where am I? Who are you?”

The man stood straighter and looked at Lex as if he were an annoyance that had to be dealt with. Then with a movement as swift as lightning, knocked Lex to the floor and stood over him. “To answer your first question, you are in a special compound designed to simulate conditions on a small planet orbiting a

yellow sun. In his wisdom and compassion,” the man spoke these words as if they were dust in his mouth, “First Lord Jor-El has decided to spare your pathetic life. These apartments have been constructed for your habitation; it is where you will live out the remainder of that life. Should you try to leave this compound without special armor, the weight of your body under the acceleration of New Krypton’s gravity will surely incapacitate if not kill you as effectively as any weapon.” To emphasize this point, the man patted his thigh on which rested a wicked-looking gun.

Stunned, Lex looked at the man and muttered, “I see.”

“When my people are in your gravity and under the yellow sun we become stronger and faster. In these apartments I am your physical superior. It is my understanding that while living on Earth you were a man of great influence.” His features grew hard and ugly. “In the days ahead you will tell me *everything* about your world: its peoples, communications, political arrangements and most of all its defenses. Ching thought that placing me here would isolate me. But he has made a serious tactical error.”

Lex climbed to his feet, speechless trying to absorb what this man had so callously declared. Especially since they were not in English and he *understood every word perfectly*.

A distasteful frown flicked over the man’s face. “To answer your second question: who am I? Let me assure you, I am no one of any great importance; merely your jailor, a former member of New Krypton’s elite Sapphire guard, Captain Zod.”

THE END