

# Clearing the Record

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Rated: PG

Summary: In 1996, Perry White, editor of the Daily Planet, makes a visit to Smallville, bringing along a surprise visitor for Martha and Jonathan Kent.

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## 1996 — Destiny's Children Smallville, Kansas

Perry White, editor of the Daily Planet newspaper in Metropolis, watched the older couple worriedly as he handed them the three month old baby, a grandson they hadn't known existed until Perry's call to them, two days before.

Martha Kent took the child in her arms and sat down in the rocking chair she kept in the corner of the farmhouse living room. She peered into the baby's face. Brown almond shaped eyes, longish hair the color of midnight, olive skin that spoke of no particular ethnicity but seemed to partake of all of them. The face of her dead son as he looked the first time she held him in her arms so many years ago — when she and her husband rescued him out of a spaceship in Schuster's field. The baby smiled at her, made a grab for her glasses.

"How?" she asked her late son's boss.

Perry sighed and sat down on the worn sofa. "You remember the tissue samples Ching took from Clark's body last year?"

"During that whole New Krypton mess?" Jonathan Kent elaborated. Of course they remembered. Their boy had been in the ground for less than three days when the super-powered aliens showed up. Two of them made a mess of downtown Smallville before being killed by a pair of military sharpshooters using kryptonite. The third, Ching, had come to them with Jimmy Olsen, their son's friend, to exhume Clark's body. "Yeah, we remember."

"Well, Zara was Kal-El's birth-wife and she needed to return home to her people pregnant by him so she could solve some political issues," Perry explained.

"So he's Clark's and this Zara woman's child?" Martha asked.

"Not exactly," Perry admitted. "The baby is a clone of Clark. His identical twin brother, only thirty years younger." He let this information sink in before continuing. "Two days ago, I got a message from Ching, from New Krypton, telling me he was sending two survivors to Earth. This little boy and a little girl who couldn't be much more than a day old. Ching's final message was that New Krypton had destroyed itself. He asked me to make sure the children would be safe."

Martha looked over at her husband. "We're not as young as we used to be," she commented.

"You're not much older than I am, and you did a good job raising Clark," Perry said. Their son had been one of the best

investigative reporters the editor had ever had the privilege of knowing, and one of the best men, even without the Superman persona.

"If we'd done a good job, we wouldn't be having this conversation," Jonathan said sadly. "Or maybe we might, but it would have been Clark giving you the message, not some stranger. If we'd done a good job, he wouldn't have felt so alone... he wouldn't have done what he did to himself and everyone around him."

"Jonathan, it's not the baby's fault Clark's not here," Martha said. The baby has starting to fuss. "Has he got a name?"

"His Kryptonian name is Ler-El. His birth certificate says Clark Joseph Kent, son of Clark Jerome Kent and Sarah Ray. The story Jimmy and I gave out at the Planet was that Sarah came to me a few months after Clark's death, pregnant, looking for him. She had no family. I'd kept in touch with her, helped her out a little. Then she died a few days ago, an accident. Her roommate contacted me and here we are."

"Hello CJ," Martha crooned. The baby's eyes locked onto her face and he smiled.

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## Metropolis, New Troy

"Do you think they'll buy it?" James Bartholomew Olsen asked his fiancée, Lucille Jennifer Lane. They were standing outside her uncle's restaurant in midtown, the American Bistro, waiting a few minutes before going in to see Lucy's parents.

Lucy shrugged at his question, taking a moment to straighten the lace bonnet that covered the dark hair of the tiny baby he held in his arms. "With my parents, it's anybody's guess. I just wish your dad hadn't put your name on the birth certificate as the father."

"The way my dad explained it, with my name on it, we don't have to worry about social services trying to lay claim to her, put her in foster care. We certainly couldn't put your name down as the mother, could we?" Jimmy asked.

"I guess not," Lucy admitted. She looked inside the restaurant, spotting her parents already seated at a table. From the looks of it, her mother was starting on her second glass of wine. Lucy picked up the baby carrier she'd set on the ground. "We'd better go in."

They walked over to the corner table where Sam and Ellen Lane were seated. One of the waiters noticed the baby and hurried to bring a high chair to sit the carrier on. Jimmy settled the newborn into the carrier before taking a seat beside Lucy at the table.

"Whose kid?" Sam asked.

"It's complicated, Dad," Lucy began.

"It always is," Ellen put in.

Jimmy and Lucy looked at one another. This was going to be harder than either of them had hoped, although maybe not as bad as Lucy had imagined.

Jimmy cleared his throat. "She's mine, and before you say anything, it happened before Lucy and I got serious about each other, and I had no idea until two days ago that the woman had even gotten pregnant."

"So, how do you happen to have her?" Sam asked. He was a just little less hostile than before.

"Two nights ago, I got a call from the mother, telling me to come get her, or else," Jimmy explained.

"Or else what?" Ellen asked.

"I didn't ask. She sounded pretty strung out on the phone. When Perry and I got to the hospital where she said she was, she'd already left. The description the nurse gave me matched a woman I went out with a couple times nine, ten months ago and the names matched on the paperwork. She'd put me down as the father, so unless somebody can prove otherwise, I'm a daddy."

"So, when are you getting rid of her?" Ellen demanded,

finishing off her glass of wine.

“Mom,” Lucy said quietly. “Jimmy and I have talked about this, and we’ve decided to keep her, to raise her. It’s not her fault her mother couldn’t be bothered to let Jimmy know anything about her, or that she ran off.”

“And if this ‘person’ comes back, demanding the child?” Ellen asked. There was a vicious bite in her tone.

“If that happens, well, she abandoned her baby and walked out of the hospital,” Lucy said. “Mister White told us he’ll be surprised if the woman doesn’t show up on the police blotter sometime soon.”

Lucy sighed silently. She’d always hated it when her mother drank. As a child, she’d had Lois, her older sister, to protect her, to try and make things better. And things had gotten better for a while. Ellen had even stopped drinking for a couple years. Then Lois, Ellen’s first-born, died, accidentally killed by her friend Superman while they tried to foil a kidnapping.

Ellen fell back into the bottle and hadn’t come out since.

No one at the time, except Lucy, had blamed the superhero for Lois’s death, although he pled guilty of involuntary manslaughter. A year later, within days of completing his sentence, Superman was dead too, murdered by an alien assassin. At least, that’s what everyone said happened. Lucy had her doubts. She doubted even an alien assassin could have killed Superman unless he’d been distracted, unless he’d wanted to lose, to die.

Clark Kent, Lois’s partner, was also dead. So much waste, three lives snuffed out over one miscalculation.

Sam leaned over and peered at the sleeping child. “She looks healthy enough. I assume you’ve had her checked out?”

“Jimmy and I took her in to a clinic this morning. She’s perfectly healthy. No indications of maternal drug abuse, nothing like that,” Lucy told her father.

“And how do you plan to support a family?” Sam asked Jimmy.

“I have a decent job, decent income,” Jimmy explained.

“Lucy has a job, too. We’ll make it.”

Ellen looked at them, bleary eyed. “So, what’s her name?”

“We named her Lois,” Jimmy said. “Lois Joanne, after her aunt. After my friend.”

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## 2001 — Sins of the Fathers Smallville, Kansas

Martha Clark Kent stood on the front porch of the farm house, watching her husband of forty years with their grandson.

Five-year-old CJ didn’t seem to mind the cold as his grandfather hurried him through the snow to the road where the school bus would pick him up for kindergarten. It was still dark out, stars like sparks in the black dome of the sky. CJ stopped at the mailbox and looked up at the stars.

Martha’s heart squeezed in her chest. CJ was so much like his father it was painful. Of course, it was logical for CJ to be a lot like Clark. CJ wasn’t actually Clark’s son, but his clone, an identical genetic copy. But that wasn’t something Jonathan and Martha could tell anyone, any more than they could tell anyone that CJ, like Clark before him, was a refugee from the planet Krypton.

The school bus drove up and stopped and CJ climbed aboard, the first pickup. As usual, CJ waved goodbye. “Bye bye, Grandpa.” He’d stopped giving his grandfather good-bye hugs after the first week of school when the boy realized that Grandpa wouldn’t hug him back. How do you explain to a five year-old that hugs reminded his grandfather too much of his dead son?

The bus drove off, toward town and Jonathan turned to head back to the barn, to his chores. She knew he wasn’t being fair to the boy and she tried to compensate for his lack of warmth. But even after five years the hurt, the guilt over his adopted son’s

death lay like ice around Jonathan’s heart.

Martha also knew that CJ was not having as easy a time at school as the boy let on. Clark had experienced a few problems in school, mostly caused by busybodies who didn’t think it was right for good, upstanding citizens to adopt a child they thought was illegitimate. In CJ’s case, it was probably even worse. Not only was he illegitimate, but his father had died before he was born.

Martha knew it wasn’t easy for CJ when the folks around Smallville who remembered his father as a boy, gave him funny looks, trying to make sure Jonathan and Martha didn’t notice when they shook their heads or said things about how his father had hurt them and how it was a shame they got stuck raising their grandkid.

Luckily, kindergarten was easy for him and he liked his teacher, Miss Standish. Martha had made sure he knew how to read and he knew his numbers even though, like Clark before him, the sevens got him confused.

And although he had to go to bed before there was anything on TV the other kids watched, he liked helping Jonathan in the morning with the animals, collecting the eggs from the chicken coop before breakfast, making sure the cows were happy, looking after Betsy the goat. And even though the old rooster would chase him, she knew it didn’t hurt too badly when he got pecked at. Being Kryptonian had advantages. But still, Clark had been a happy child. CJ was more muted, more wary, almost as though he remembered things. Things a child shouldn’t know.

Martha pattered around the house while Jonathan did his chores. It was the last day of school before the winter break — it wasn’t called Christmas break any more — and Jimmy and Lucy with their two kids, and Perry White would be arriving Sunday to spend Christmas with them. It was a holiday tradition for the families, one year in Metropolis, the next year in Smallville. If Perry’s family objected to him spending time in Smallville instead of with his own family, he never mentioned it.

Martha went up to the attic and brought down the boxes of Christmas decorations. After supper she, CJ, and Jonathan would put a Christmas movie on and decorate the house, except for the tree. Jonathan and CJ would go pick out a tree sometime tomorrow, just as Jonathan had done with Clark, years before.

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## Metropolis, New Troy

Lucy Lane Olsen packed her two kids into the back of her late model Chevy and headed off to Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary to drop five-year-old Lois off at kindergarten and three year old Johnny off to preschool before heading off to work. She worked in research for the Daily Planet, where her husband Jimmy worked as a photojournalist, or at least he was working until the first of the year, when he was to start with Time-Life, in their European section.

Lucy and the kids would stay in Metropolis until the end of the school year, then move to Paris to be with Jimmy. Lucy was looking forward to Paris. Even after six years, Metropolis and the Daily Planet held too many memories of her late sister and her sister’s dead partner.

In the back seat, Lois was talking non-stop to her little brother who was already an expert on tuning her out. Lois had a comment on everything she saw. The little girl had an uncanny resemblance to her namesake Lois Lane, the award-winning journalist. The same curiosity, the same knack for words, the same biting intellect, although in a form more suitable to a kindergarten.

Lucy sometimes wondered about her foster daughter. Lucy knew the names on Lois’s birth certificate were false. Jimmy was not the girl’s natural father since the child was born on New Krypton, a doomed, now dead, world. When Lois hit puberty, she would start to gain her powers, powers like CJ would develop in

Smallville, powers like Superman had before he died. Powers enough to save or destroy the world.

Lucy still wondered how she had missed it, missed figuring out that Superman had been raised on Earth, that he was really Clark Kent from Smallville and when Clark had died, Superman had died with him. She wondered if Lois had figured it out before she died. Had she died not knowing the two men she had loved were one?

“Be good you two,” Lucy warned her children, letting them out of the car. She watched as they both disappeared into the building. Time to go to work, get home, then get ready for the company Christmas party. Sunday they would head for Smallville for a country Christmas. With any luck, Lois wouldn’t send CJ into tears this year. Lois knew exactly which buttons to push on the poor boy.

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### **Smallville, Kansas**

Martha waited by the mailbox for the school bus to drop CJ off. The bus didn’t come. She waited a while longer before heading back inside the house to call the bus barn.

CJ hadn’t boarded the bus after school. No one at school had seen him leave. A call to Miss Standish told her he’d been upset about some of the older kids teasing him.

“Jonathan!” Martha screamed for her husband. Jonathan hurried into the house.

“What is it, Martha? Where’s CJ?”

“He didn’t get on the bus for home after school. The school doesn’t know where he is. Miss Standish said he was upset when class let out.”

“You call the sheriff, I’ll get in the truck, drive into town, see if I can find him,” Jonathan told her.

“Jonathan, he’s only a baby,” she said, starting to cry with worry.

“Don’t worry, we’ll find him,” Jonathan tried to assure her, but his heart wasn’t in it. CJ was only five, and Smallville wasn’t the small community it was when Clark was a little boy.

Ever since the death of the two New Kryptonian invaders, Smallville had been the sightseeing target of every UFO cult and anti-alien group in the U.S., if not the world. Luckily, no one had linked the arrival of the super-powered invaders in Smallville to Clark Kent or his parents, or Superman for that matter, and as the years passed, Jonathan Kent held out the hope that no one ever would.

But CJ hadn’t gotten on the bus after school. CJ hadn’t come home.

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Sheriff Rachel Harris listened to Martha Kent’s terror stricken report with a sinking heart. It was cold, it was dark, and it was snowing again. None of which boded well for a small boy gone missing. She called her deputies in, Tom Wilson, Andy Butler, Bill Saunders, and filled them in, gave them their marching orders — check the school, then fan out, searching every store, every alley, any place a small child could hide or be hidden. She reminded them to check garages for refrigerators that were sitting where a child could get to them.

Despite all the warnings about old refrigerators and freezers being left outside unlocked with their doors still on, a four year old had died just last summer over in the next town, trapped in an old freezer the owners were thinking about having hauled away. And although she was pretty sure that CJ was smarter than that, small children were unpredictable. It wasn’t outside the realm of possibility that someone, another child even, could have forced him to do something stupid.

The fact that CJ hadn’t come to the sheriff’s office after he’d missed the school bus didn’t bode well either. Rachel had gone out of her way to make her office a safe place for the kids in town, especially CJ Kent. They all knew she kept cookies and

soda for them and they could come to her if they were scared.

CJ had come in on his own twice already this school year after he’d gotten too scared of some of the older kids to get on the bus home. She’d called Martha to let her know where her grandson was, then drove him home in the sheriff’s wagon, letting him turn on the lights and siren for fun. She had a talk with the father of the kids who had threatened CJ and that seemed to have solved the problem, at least CJ hadn’t come in on his own after that. She made a note to check in on those kids; maybe they were up to their old tricks again.

CJ was a good kid. A lot like his father: kind, thoughtful, good. He didn’t need any more grief in his life.

Jonathan Kent walked into her office. He looked like he’d aged ten years. “Have you got anything yet?” he asked.

“My guys are checking the school then working outward from there. It’s too early to say anything more,” Rachel said.

“What about that Amber Alert thing?”

“We don’t know yet that he was abducted, Mister Kent,” she said. “But if we find he was seen with somebody, a stranger, I will call an Amber Alert on him.”

Jonathan was looking at her desk, at the collections of photos on the wall above her cluttered office area. Rachel’s eyes followed his gaze.

One of the photos was of Clark Kent the night he won some prestigious award for journalism. He was just twenty-eight and had just been acclaimed best of the best in his field. He was handsome, intelligent, sweet, and the photographer had caught all of it. Martha and Jonathan gave her the photo when she’d commented on how good Clark looked in the picture. A recent photo of CJ was tucked into the corner of the frame.

“You miss him too, don’t you Rachel?” Jonathan asked.

“Clark was a good friend,” she said. Her mind ticked over to the matter at hand. “Normally the first people we look at in cases like this is the family. CJ made it to school, but didn’t get on the bus afterwards, so I don’t expect to find his body in your barn. But I do have to ask this. Would CJ have had any reason to run away? Have you and Missus Kent had any problems recently that he might have overheard, may have thought he was to blame for?”

Jonathan shook his head. “We’re expecting company from Metropolis to arrive Sunday for Christmas. He was pretty excited about that. He helped pick out the presents for the Olsen kids. But he doesn’t tell us everything that happens at school either, and he’s come home upset a couple times this past week. He’s a lot like Clark was that way.”

“From what I’ve seen, he’s a lot like Clark in a lot of ways,” she said. “Tom should still be close to the school. Why don’t you team up with him? I’m going to call up the reserves. The more feet we get on the ground here, the faster we’ll find something.”

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### **Metropolis, New Troy**

The annual Daily Planet Christmas party was in full swing. Lucy and Jimmy kept a weather eye out on their two children. Even though the newsroom staff had practically adopted the youngsters, this was one of the parties where families were invited — that meant strangers and the Olsens weren’t comfortable with strangers near their children, especially around Lois. It was only eight years ago that Jason Trask was killed while threatening to find and destroy Superman.

Lucy checked on the kids. Johnny was asleep on the sofa in the conference room. Lois was holding court, seated at one of the desks near Perry’s office.

Lucy realized with a start that the desk Lois had chosen was her namesake’s desk. She was seated at Lois Lane’s old desk. She looked over at Perry who was watching the scene with bemusement.

“I can’t believe how much like your sister she is,” Perry said.

“I can understand CJ looking so much like Clark, but little Lois is the spitting image of her aunt.”

“It’s a little scary sometimes,” Lucy admitted.

“So, is Jimmy ready for Paris?” Perry asked.

Lucy shrugged. “It’s a great opportunity and he’s so excited about it.”

“But you’re not sure?”

“You and the Planet have been so good to us,” Lucy said.

“You’ve been a better granddad to Lois and Johnny than their own grandparents, at least my side. Hell, our last Christmas in this country and my folks aren’t even in the country.”

“They still haven’t come around, have they?” Perry asked.

Lucy shook her head.

“Uncle Mike’s been great, but my parent’s think I’m a fool for marrying a man with a child by another woman,” she said. “I dread to think what their reaction would be if they ever found out the truth.”

“Well, they say the best revenge is to live well,” Perry said with a sad smile. “And as much as I hate to see Jimmy leave here, this is a great opportunity for him, and for you.”

“Thanks Perry,” Lucy told him, giving him a hug. She looked around, checking on her children again. Lois had wandered off, probably to the snacks. Lois loved chocolate and she was quite capable of finishing off the entire tray of fudge brownies if left to her own devices.

Lucy hurried over to the table to find her errant daughter. The little girl was under the table. Concerned, Lucy ducked under the table as well. “Lois, what’s wrong?”

The dark-haired little girl looked up at her mother. There were tears on her cheeks. “Mommy, CJ’s hurt and he’s really scared,” she said with a sob, throwing herself into her mother’s arms.

“Honey, CJ’s in Smallville, with his grandparents. That’s a long ways from here, but we’ll see him Sunday,” Lucy assured her.

Lois shook her head. “Lucy, why would anybody want to hurt Clark?”

Lucy pulled back and stared at the little girl for a long moment. Teary hazel eyes looked into worried brown ones. She’d sounded exactly like her sister and the possibilities that came to mind chilled Lucy to the core.

“I miss him so much,” Lois was saying. Lucy pulled her close once more.

“I’m sure he’s fine,” her mother assured her. “And you’ll see him Sunday, I promise.”

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### Smallville, Kansas

Jonathan met up with Tom Wilson on the grounds of the elementary school.

“Anything?” Jonathan asked.

Tom shook his head. He was a tall, laconic black man. “Miss Standish tells me the two Myerson boys were on CJ’s case again this week and there are other witnesses that say they were both seen with CJ this afternoon. I’ve let Rache know. She’s going to talk to them, see if they know anything.”

“CJ’s come home a couple times this week really upset, but he wouldn’t tell me or Martha what was wrong,” Jonathan told him.

“Well, Andy and Bill are checking the neighborhoods. I figure we can head north, check out those places,” Tom said. He clapped Jonathan on the shoulder. “We’ll find him.”

“I hope so,” Jonathan said. “I don’t think I could ever forgive myself if anything happened to the boy. He’s all Martha and I have left of Clark.”

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Rachel Harris pulled her black and white painted station wagon to a stop in front of the Myerson house on the outskirts of

Smallville. It was a run-down modular that the recent snow had done nothing to improve the look of. Myerson’s black Focus was parked in the driveway, but two motorcycles and a kid-sized ATV were parked on the lawn, nearly blocking access to the front door.

As sheriff, Rachel tried to keep an open mind about people. But Russell Myerson rubbed her the wrong way. So did his two kids. The older one, Jake, was fourteen and had already spent time in the juvenile court system for theft and assault. On his next offence he would be tried as an adult.

The younger boy, Jase, was nine. The neighbors called in complaints about the family nearly once a month. Little came of them except for more paperwork for her people. But there was a pattern to the complaints, missing pets, items taken from garages and sheds. Nothing could be proven, but the missing pets was a disturbing trend.

Rachel knocked on the front door. The draperies covering the living room windows twitched and she thought she saw the older Myerson boy peer out at her. After a moment, the front door opened a crack.

“Yeah, watcha’ want?” a young voice demanded.

“I want to talk to your dad,” Rachel told him.

“He’s not here.”

“Oh?” Rachel looked around the front yard once again. Russ Meyerson’s car was still in the driveway. “Where is he?”

“Out.”

“May I come in and wait for him?”

“No.” The door slammed.

“Want do you want?” a man’s voice asked. She turned to see Russ Myerson walking across the frozen lawn toward the front of his house.

“I need to talk to Jake and Jase,” she said.

“About what?”

“Jake has been seen at the elementary school, even though he’s been banned from the building and he knows it.”

“He’s supposed to go pick up his brother,” Myerson told her. “He has to go into the building to get him.”

That was an out and out lie, but Rachel chose not to call him on that one. “Mister Myerson, I can either talk to Jake and Jase here, or we can do it in my office. Your choice. But right now I have a missing kindergartner on my hands and your two boys were the last ones to see him.”

Myerson just looked at her for a long moment. Then he pulled his keys out of his jeans and unlocked the front door. She stepped inside.

The inside of the house wasn’t much neater than the outside. The sofa was broken down, cushions stained and misshapen. The coffee table was photo-wood, showing signs of water damage and abuse. There were cigarette burns in the shag carpet. The house smelled of stale tobacco and beer.

Jase was sitting on the sofa, holding a paper towel to his hand. There was blood on the towel.

“The sheriff here wants to ask you two some questions,” Myerson said. He left the room, leaving her alone with a sullen teenager and a glowering fourth grader.

“What happened to your hand?” she asked. She caught Jake’s warning look to his little brother.

“Got bit by that damn dog over at the Wingates,” Jase said.

“Isn’t your dad going to take you to the clinic? Have it looked at?” she asked.

“It’s not as bad as you think,” Jake told her. “Dad said you wanted to ask us some questions.”

“What were you doing down by the kindergarten when school let out this afternoon?”

“Nothin’. We weren’t there.” Jake said.

“I’ve got witnesses that say different,” Rachel said. “I have witnesses who say the two of you were talking to one of the little kids even though you’re not supposed to be at that end of the

building. I've also been told that little kid left the building with you."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jake said. "They're lying about us. Everybody knows Standish and that old geezer janitor hates me."

Jase chimed up. "We don't know where the Kent brat is."

Jake reached over and smacked his brother across the top of his head.

"Mister Myerson, these two are coming to the office with me, after a quick stop at the clinic," Rachel called out.

"You can't do that," Myerson announced, coming out of the next room. "You've got nothin' on them."

"Oh, really?" Rachel asked. Alarms were already ringing in her head. Now they kicked up a notch. *He knows something.*

"Jacob Myerson, you are under arrest for criminal trespass and suspicion of kidnapping. Jason Myerson, you are under arrest on suspicion of kidnapping. You have the right to remain silent.

Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to represent you if you wish. You can decide at any time to stop answering questions if you wish."

She turned to the boy's father. "You can follow me to the clinic," she said, pulling out her cell phone. "Andy, you and Bill get on to Judge Baxter to get a search warrant for the Myerson's. Then get over here and bring the search kit with you."

"What's the probable cause?"

"I have reason to believe the two boys are involved in the Kent boy being missing."

"We'll be right there," Andy promised.

"You don't have the right to do this," Myerson shouted. "You've got no cause! You're just like the rest of them around here! Blind and stupid!"

"Mister Myerson, I advise you to keep a civil tongue in your mouth," Rachel warned. "I've got a scared little boy somewhere out there in the cold and dark. At least I hope to God he's scared. Cause if he's not, if he's dead, Jacob here could be looking at murder one as an adult."

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### Metropolis, New Troy

Jim crouched down beside his wife and daughter. "What's going on?" he asked.

Lois was hiccupping, wiping away tears from her face. "CJ is hurt and scared," she said in a small voice.

"You're sure?" Jim asked. She nodded solemnly.

He pulled out his cell phone and walked over to the large outside window. "Martha? Jim Olsen. Um, I'm sorry to bother you, but Lois has gotten herself worked up about CJ being hurt and scared." He listened for a few moments, eyes growing wide as Martha spoke to him. "Oh, God, Martha. Look, keep us posted, okay? I know there's nothing we can do from here, but, keep us posted, please?" He folded up his phone and put it back in his pocket.

"Jim, what's wrong?" Lucy asked. He looked like he was in shock. Perry came to stand beside her, Lois perched on his arm.

"CJ didn't come home after school," he told them. "They have the whole sheriff's department and everybody else out looking for him. Apparently, Sheriff Harris even hauled in a couple kids for questioning."

Lucy gave her foster daughter a worried look. "How did she know?"

Perry shrugged. "Probably the same way Lois Lane and Clark Kent knew things. There were times I'd swear they were reading each other's minds. That's one of the reasons they were the best. Of course, there were other times it seemed like they weren't even speaking the same language."

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### Smallville, Kansas

CJ huddled underneath the spruce tree, staying close to the trunk, trying to keep from dislodging the snow that brought the tree's branches down to the ground. He was shivering, more from fear than cold, although it was cold enough he could feel it. Jake had taken his jacket and backpack away, telling him monsters didn't need to go to school, monsters didn't deserve nice coats, monsters should be killed.

"I'm not a monster," CJ kept repeating to himself. Jase had put his hand over his mouth and nose so he couldn't breathe. He didn't want to think about what Jake threatened to do. CJ had kicked and tried to scream, but with a hand over his mouth, he couldn't. Finally, CJ simply bit down on Jase's hand as hard as he could.

Jase screamed and let go of him. Jake tried to grab his neck, but CJ twisted free and ran faster than he had ever run before, away from his tormentors, away from the people who called him a monster.

He tried not to whimper, tried to stay small and quiet under the tree. Jake had a green rock that had made CJ's head hurt and made him sick to his stomach. Jake had laughed when he fell down crying from the green rock. *I am not a monster.*

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Rachel Harris and Russ Myerson stood by watching as Doctor Farnsworth examined Jason Myerson's hand. The older man clucked to himself as he cleaned the wounds, then pulled out a Polaroid camera and took pictures before bandaging up the boy's fingers. He put the photos in the pocket of his white lab coat.

"Nasty bite, young fella'," Farnsworth said. He turned to the boy's father. "Are his tetanus vaccinations up to date?"

"Of course they are. It's that blasted dog next door," Russ Myerson complained. "He's always tryin' to take a chunk out of Jase. I've complained and complained about that damn dog and nobody'll listen to me. The animal's a menace. It should be put down."

Rachel didn't miss the puzzled look the doctor gave Myerson. There was a knock on the door and Wayne Irig's head came around the door.

"Andy said you might need me over here," the gray old farmer told her.

"Yes, Mister Irig, thanks," Rachel said. "Would you keep an eye on these two," indicating the youngsters, "while I talk to the doc?"

"Sure thing, Sheriff," Irig said, stepping into the room to stand beside the door. Rachel beckoned the doctor to follow her into the hallway outside and down the corridor a little bit.

"Do you usually take Polaroids of dog bites?" Rachel began.

"Yes, when the injury is as severe as that one," Farnsworth told her. "But then we both know the Wingate's Wendy is over at Doc Smith's while they're away. That bite didn't come from any dog. Those are human tooth marks, from a four or five year old I'd say."

"You'd swear to that in court?" Rachel asked softly.

"That's what I'm putting in my notes and in his medical record," Farnsworth said. "That boy was bit by a human child."

"Thanks, Doc," Rachel told him.

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District Magistrate Amelia Baxter had only needed to hear two names before authorizing a search warrant for the Myerson's property: Myerson and Kent. Baxter had served on the bench in 26<sup>th</sup> judicial district in Kansas for nearly twenty-five years. She had a reputation for scrupulous fairness as well as open-mindedness.

She was also a good friend of Jonathan and Martha Kent. They had befriended her when she was new in town, a recently divorced female lawyer with a young son. She in turn had stood

by them when their son died, helped them when their grandson was handed to them. She and Martha took art classes together. Her son Rob had gone to school with Clark Kent, Lana Lang, and Rachel Harris.

Smallville was a very small town and if Sheriff Harris thought there was probable cause, there probably was.

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Andy Butler and Bill Saunders searched the Myerson house. There weren't many crimes in Lowell County. Twenty felonies or so a year, maybe forty misdemeanors, ten to fifteen incidents dealing with kids, mostly kids left alone when they shouldn't be. They just didn't have major crimes in Smallville. At least not like they did in the big city — Wichita, Chicago, Metropolis.

They had the training, Sheriff Harris made sure of that. Bill took the pictures and noted down the measurements, observations. They found a small coat with blood on it stuffed into the garbage can. A book bag with kindergarten books and papers, papers with CJ Kent's name written on them in a careful child's script was found in the back of closet in the boys' room.

Inside the book bag they also found a green crystal that glowed in the dark. Kryptonite. After the whole Jason Trask problem eight years before, nearly everyone in Smallville knew about kryptonite, the one substance that had been able to hurt Superman.

The information about the coat, the book bag and the kryptonite they called into Rachel. But when they went to search the third bedroom, they called Rachel and she called the state police. The third bedroom had been locked, but Andy made quick work of it. The room itself was an armory, handguns, semi-automatic rifles, fully automatic rifles, armor piercing ammunition, explosives.

"Oh my God," Bill found himself murmuring as he took the pictures. "There's enough stuff here to take out the whole county."

"Let's check the back," Andy suggested.

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"Andy and Bill found a coat and book bag at the Myerson's. The book bag is definitely CJ's," Tom told Jonathan. "They think they found some kryptonite, too."

"But no sign of CJ?" Jonathan asked.

"At least they didn't find his body," Tom tried to assure him.

"Why doesn't that reassure me?" Jonathan asked.

"Mister Kent, we have everyone available looking for him," Tom said. "We'll find him."

"Tom, he's five years old."

They found themselves crossing the snow into the cemetery.

"CJ?" Jonathan yelled. He realized they weren't very far from Clark's grave and close by was the spruce tree that CJ liked to play under when they came to visit Clark on Sundays. The temperature was dropping and was well below freezing. Tom and Jonathan slowly swung their flashlights around as they walked.

"CJ?" Tom yelled. "CJ, where are you?"

"Clark!" Jonathan yelled and there was a rustle from beneath the spruce tree. "Clark Joseph Kent?" Jonathan ran to the tree, ducking down and shining the light through the branches.

A very small, frightened voice called out: "Daddy?" A very wet small boy came out from under the branches, grabbing the old, heavyset man into a fierce hug. "Daddy!"

"Oh, Clark, are you okay?" Jonathan asked, checking the boy over with his hands before pulling him into his jacket. The child felt warm, feverish.

"They tried to hurt me," CJ was moaning. "They said I was a monster. They said I should be dead!" He was crying uncontrollably. "I couldn't get away. I couldn't fly."

"Clark, of course you can't fly. Little kids don't fly. Only grownups fly," Jonathan told him. He ignored Tom standing beside him calling the report into Rachel that CJ had been found.

"Jonathan," Tom said softly. "We need to get the boy to the clinic to get checked out."

"Tom, I just want to get him home," Jonathan told him.

"After the clinic, okay?"

Finally, Jonathan nodded agreement in the darkness and followed Tom to the squad car.

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### Metropolis, New Troy

Jim Olsen's cell phone chimed and he opened it. "James Olsen... Oh Martha, have they found him?"

"Jonathan just called. They're taking him to the clinic to be checked over, but Jonathan said he seemed okay," Martha told him.

Jim relayed the information to the rest of the Planet staff still in the newsroom. A palpable sense of relief filled the room. While most of them had met CJ at last year's Christmas party, many of them also remembered working with his father. Clark had been a popular guy.

"Jim, why would someone try to hurt CJ?" Martha asked. Jim knew it was a rhetorical question.

"I don't know, Martha," he said. "I mean, why do sickos do anything?" He looked over at Lois, still perched on Perry's arm. "They found CJ, hon'. He's gonna be okay."

She wiped her face and gave her father a smile, although her lower lip was still trembling. "Good," she told them. "I don't want Clark to get hurt. We have work to do."

Again Lucy had the eerie feeling that her foster daughter was far older than just five years old. That her sister, Lois Joanne Lane, daughter of Sam and Ellen Lane, was hiding behind those hazel eyes. A Lois Lane who was just itching to get back into the world.

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### Smallville, Kansas

Tom spotted Russ Myerson's car parked in the clinic parking lot next to Rachel's station wagon. "Myerson's inside," Tom muttered, warning Jonathan. Seated between the two men, CJ stiffened and grabbed his grandfather's arm.

"It's okay, CJ," Tom assured him. "I'll be right with you and your grandpa and I won't let anything bad happen to you."

CJ looked up at him with big brown eyes. *A child should never look that frightened.*

"Come on, Clark," Jonathan said, taking the boy into his arms. "Let's get inside and have Doctor Farnsworth make sure you're okay."

Rachel was still waiting inside with Myerson and his two boys. She nodded when she caught sight of Tom, Jonathan and CJ, nodding to them to go into the examining room. Tom saw CJ's face go even paler when he caught sight of Russ Myerson.

"Since you've found the brat, I expect we can go now?" Myerson said. There was a definite sneer in his voice.

"I don't think so," Rachel told him. "There's still the matter of kidnapping and criminal trespass."

"You can't prove a goddamned thing," Myerson sneered. He stepped close to Rachel, forcing her to look up at him.

"Don't bet the farm on it, Mister Myerson," Rachel told him without flinching.

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In the examining room, Jonathan sat CJ on the padded table. CJ wrapped his arms around Jonathan's neck. "That man was with Trask at Mister Irig's farm," he whispered.

"How...? You're sure?" Jonathan asked.

CJ nodded his head solemnly. "I saw him... He... I saw him."

"Tom, Doc, keep an eye on him," Jonathan said as he headed into the corridor. "Rachel?" He beckoned her closer. "I just remembered where I've seen that man before," he said. "He was at Wayne's farm eight years ago, when Trask was making all that

trouble.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure. I was there, remember? As I recall, Clark got a couple good licks in on him. I just don’t know why I didn’t place him before. I think he was using the name of Russo, Major Russo.”

“Thanks, Mister Kent,” she said, heading back to her prisoners. Jonathan went back to CJ.

Farnsworth looked up as Jonathan walked in. Tom was taking photographs of the bruises on CJ’s neck and body. “CJ, who put their hands on your neck?” Farnsworth asked gently.

“Jake,” CJ said simply. “Jase put his hand over my mouth so I couldn’t breathe, so I bit him and I tried to run away but Jake had a green rock and he hurt me.” He pointed to his head, and Farnsworth brushed away thick hair to find a scalp wound.

“Jonathan, I need to get some x-rays,” Farnsworth said.

“Are you sure?”

Farnsworth smiled. “It’ll be fine Jonathan. I took care of his dad when he was a kid, remember?”

“It’s just... You know how Martha and I worry,” Jonathan said.

“It’s okay,” Doc Farnsworth told him. “I understand.”

Jonathan picked CJ up, wrapping the hospital blanket around him and followed Farnsworth out to the corridor, down to radiology.

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“Well, I gotta hand it to you,” Rachel said cheerfully. “When it comes to stirring things up around here, there’s usually a Kent involved somewhere.” She was standing in the Kent’s kitchen warming her hands on a mug of coffee. It was Christmas Eve and she’d stopped by to fill them in on what was happening with Myerson and his boys. “Although, I have to admit, I thought CJ was a little young to be following in his daddy’s footsteps.”

From the living room came a shrill cry: “I am not a lunkhead, Lois. Stop calling me that!”

“You are too, Clark Kent,” another very young, irate voice. “You are a lunkhead!”

The adults in the kitchen chuckled. The two Olsens, Mister White and the two Kents.

“Grandpa Perry, she’s picking on me!” CJ complained, running into the kitchen.

“Lois, honey, why are you picking on CJ?” Perry asked.

She stalked into the kitchen. “Because... Just because.”

Perry beckoned to CJ, pulling the boy onto his lap. “Son, let me give you some advice from a man who’s seen it all. When arguing with a woman, if you’re losing, apologize immediately. If by some chance you’re winning, apologize immediately. You’ll live longer.” He chuckled as CJ gave him a blank look and Martha nudged Jonathan in the ribs with her elbow.

CJ grabbed three cookies from the plate on the table and scrambled off Perry’s lap, running back into the living room.

“So, what’s happening with the case, Sheriff?” Jim Olsen asked.

“The FBI and ATF have been going over that property with a fine tooth comb. So far they’ve found weapons caches, drugs — not the usual stuff, not narcotics or meth or anything like that, but experimental truth drugs, hallucinogens, spy thriller stuff. They found animal bodies buried in the back. That is *not* a good sign. Some people from CPS have already come down and taken Jason off to a foster home, and we’re holding Jake as an adult along with his dad. And it turns out that Myerson may not even be their dad. The FBI’s looking into that too.”

“But why did they go after CJ?” Lucy asked. “He’s just a little kid.”

“A couple things, I think. One, Jake may have seen CJ as an easy victim. We’re pretty sure he was the one stealing and killing the neighbors’ pets. It’s not much of a step for a sick mind to go

from a dog to a child. Plus, from the writings we found in the house, Myerson blamed Clark for Trask’s death. He also made some wild claims that Clark was Superman, if you can believe that. But since both Clark and Superman are six years dead, he decided to go after Clark’s kid. But then, he was also making claims that CJ wasn’t Clark’s son at all, but a Superman clone.” Rachel gave Jonathan and Martha a speculative look. “Of course, Myerson was loony-toons, so none of us are going to take anything he has to say seriously. Besides, whether CJ is Clark’s son, or Superman’s clone, he’s your grandbaby.”

“Thanks Rachel,” Martha said earnestly. “For everything.”

“Just part of my job, ma’am,” Rachel said, putting her empty mug in the sink. She paused, looking toward the archway into the living room. “I just can’t believe how much CJ looks and acts like Clark. It’s positively uncanny.”

“Yeah, it is, sometimes,” Jonathan admitted. “We’ll be by your office Friday so you can record CJ’s deposition.”

“See you then,” Rachel told him. “Merry Christmas, everybody.”

“Merry Christmas.”

After Rachel left, Martha turned to Jonathan. “Is there something you haven’t told me?”

“Only what you already knew,” Jonathan admitted. “That I’m a damn fool for letting my anger at Clark get in the way of appreciating CJ for who he is.”

“And?” Martha urged, watching her husband carefully.

“Martha, he was crying when I found him, because he couldn’t fly.”

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### Interlude I

Herbert George Wells fidgeted as he waited for one of the Archivists to leave her (his?) current activity to talk to him.

Herbert’s soul name was something else, but it was this incarnation that was in trouble with the Archivists, so that was the name he used.

The Archive itself was outside of time and space. Few people knew of it, fewer believed that it was real and only a handful, if that many, on each world the Archive served, had visited the repository. Herbert was one of those who hadn’t really believed in the Archive itself, but he was one of the few in all the worlds who had taken it upon himself to interfere with its workings.

As penance, he was under the orders of one of the Archivists to actively remedy problems he’d had a hand in causing. Or, in this particular case, his lack of action had caused. He hadn’t stopped Tempus from killing Lois Lane, initiating a string of consequences too terrible to contemplate.

One of the Archivists approached him — his case manager, as he had dubbed him (her?). All the Archivists were soul-stuff. They had no real substance that could be quantified by science, no distinguishing features that could be seen by the eye, not that he had eyes. His body was an illusion. It was all illusion. Yet, he could tell them apart. There were subtle differences in color and texture — language was inadequate to describe what he saw, sensed, felt. No artist’s pallet could do them justice.

“Crisis averted, I see,” the Archivist murmured. “Interesting solution.”

“I could see no other way without direct interference,” Herbert defended himself.

The Archivist nodded. “I understand the need to allow the boy access to his previous incarnation’s memories. It was needed for his survival. But why the girl child?”

“I felt that the link between them would be helpful,” Herbert explained. “In the worst case, she would be able to find him, lead others to him.”

The Archivist nodded again and Herbert was relieved.

“You realize they now carry their previous knowledge with them. It cannot be erased.”

"I felt it was the lesser risk," Herbert explained.

The Archivist beckoned him to follow deeper into the stacks of records. "The next crisis may not be as simple. Their memories may complicate the problem."

"They are both quite intelligent," Herbert reminded her (him?).

"But are they strong enough to handle what you've forced on them?"

"I hope so," Herbert admitted. "Archivist, forgive me for asking, but why is Lois so angry with Clark?"

The Archivist smiled and shook his (her?) head. "She discovered her beloved was a fool, among other things. She was prepared to go back to him, to find him, to help him. Her first demand on awaking in Summerland was to be sent back to her body. She was not happy when she found she could not, and was angry when he arrived here too soon. She was the one waiting for him. 'Lunkhead' was the most polite term she used." She (he?) shook his (her?) head. "I have never seen soul mates as anxious to leave the between life as they were."

Herbert sighed. "A little more time might have done them some good?"

"There was no more time. Not for the path they chose. And they do have some serious obstacles to overcome before they can reach the path that should have been theirs to begin with."

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### Justice Delayed

2006

### Metropolis, New Troy

"Grandpa Perry!" a dark-haired ten-year-old boy yelled, running into the newsroom at the Daily Planet.

Perry White came out of his office at the shout, a pleased grin on his face. "CJ!" he yelled back as the boy ran down the stairs into his arms. "I can't believe how big you're getting." Perry looked up to see the older couple who had accompanied the boy walking down the ramp toward him. Martha Kent looked as spry as ever, but Jonathan was thinner, grayer than Perry remembered just from last Christmas. Martha was carrying a battered brown leather suitcase.

"Perry, we want to thank you again for keeping an eye on CJ while we're traveling," Martha began, setting down the suitcase. "Alice isn't too upset, is she?"

"Nah," Perry responded. "It took her awhile, but she's come around. She came to Smallville for Christmas, didn't she?" He smiled at the memory. After nine years of spending Christmases apart from him, she had finally agreed to meet the families he chose to spend Christmas with — the Olsens and the Kents. Next Christmas, she promised to stay in Metropolis and share the holidays with them again. Their own children and grandchildren would be there too, he hoped.

"It'll be fine, plus we've got Lois coming in later today to stay with us while her mom's in the hospital." Perry promised.

"What's wrong with Lucy?" Martha asked.

"Nothing, we hope," Perry said. "Something showed up in her last checkup. They're doing biopsies. Johnny's staying with Sam and Ellen, and Alice and I are watching Lois." He turned to the boy. "Rich and Penny are gone for the week, so you can use one of their computers to go on the Internet or play games. Just don't erase anything, okay?"

"Sure, Chief," CJ agreed cheerfully, sitting down at one of the indicated stations. He chose Rich's desk. Eleven years before, it had been Clark Kent's desk.

"And don't call me Chief," Perry chided.

CJ gave him a cheeky grin.

"Gets more like his dad every day," Perry commented.

"You have no idea," Martha said with a grin. She gave CJ a kiss on the cheek. "Now, you behave for Grandpa Perry, okay? We'll call you when we get to London."

"I wish I could come with you," CJ said sadly.

"I know you do, CJ," Jonathan told him. "But we'll be back before you know it." Jonathan pulled the boy into a hug. "So you be good, okay?"

"Okay," CJ agreed glumly, watching his grandparents head back to the elevators. "Bye, Grandma, Grandpa," he called. They waved back at him as the elevator doors closed.

"Grandpa Perry, why couldn't I go with them?" CJ wondered aloud.

Perry grabbed the chair from the nearest vacant desk and sat down. "Well, CJ, you know your grandparents aren't young, and it's been a long time since they had a vacation together, just the two of them. Not since before you were born, I think."

"And Grandpa's sick," CJ told him. "They don't like to talk about it. They think I'm too little to understand, but I know if Grandpa has another heart attack, he'll die. Grandma's already talked to Sheriff Rachel about taking care of me if anything happens to them." His lower lip was quivering as the boy fought back tears. "How am I supposed to grow up to be like my dad if they're not here to help me?"

"Son, you're already more like your dad that you probably realize," Perry assured him, placing a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Things'll work out."

\*\*\*

"I cannot believe them," Ellen Lane complained as she stood outside the baggage claim at Berkowitz International Airport. "Putting a ten year-old and an eight year-old alone on a plane across the country."

"The kids have been on a plane before, Ellen," Sam Lane reminded his wife. "I just don't understand why they didn't ask us to fly out instead. I mean, I could've taken a week or so away from work to help out."

"And why the devil did Jim have to move them to Los Angeles, of all places. Paris was bad enough, but Los Angeles?" Ellen went on.

"Because that's where his boss sent him," Sam said. "I'm sure if there'd been an opening in Metropolis they'd have moved back here."

"Sam, Ellen!" a man's voice called out. The couple turned to see Perry White approaching. A dark-haired boy with brown almond-shaped eyes trotted beside him.

"Oh, you're here for Lois, aren't you?" Ellen observed. "And who's this young man?"

Perry looked over at CJ, standing patiently beside him. "Ellen, Sam, I don't think I ever mentioned him, but this is CJ, Clark Kent's son. CJ, Doctor and Missus Lane, Lois and Johnny's grandparents."

"How do you do?" CJ said formally. He held out his hand as his grandparents had taught him. Sam Lane ignored it. CJ put his hands in his pockets and studied the toes of his sneakers.

"Sam!" Ellen admonished her husband.

Sam sighed and put his hand out to be shook by the boy. CJ had a firm grip, stronger than Sam expected from a boy his age. But it was his eyes that disquieted him. There was something old in the boy's eyes, at least something far more adult than Sam had expected to see. A wary sadness that Sam remembered seeing in another set of brown eyes. Was it twelve years ago? This boy hadn't even been born. Then, suddenly, it was just a bright-eyed ten-year-old grinning at him, and Sam found himself wondering if he had imagined what he'd just observed.

"I didn't know Clark had found someone else after Lois died," Ellen commented. "His mother...?"

"She died when he was a baby," Perry explained. "It's complicated."

"It always is," Ellen agreed.

"Clarkie!" a girl's voice yelled, interrupting any questions Ellen might have had. The three adults looked over to the

baggage claim to see a dark-haired girl waving at them. Beside her, holding her other hand was a younger boy with auburn hair. A tall woman wearing a blue airline uniform was holding the younger boy's other hand.

CJ and Perry waved back.

"That's Grandpa Perry and Clarkie" they heard the girl tell the woman.

"And Grandpa Sam, and Grandma Ellen," the boy chimed in, breaking free of the hands and running to Sam and Ellen.

"Johnny!" Sam greeted his eight-year-old grandson.

At the carousel, Lois Olsen and the woman grabbed two bags and checked the tags with security. Perry reached over the low fence and grabbed one of the bags, handing it to Sam. Lois ran around the gate into Perry's arms. "Grandpa Perry!"

"Lois, honey! You all set to stay with Grandma Alice and CJ?" Perry asked, grabbing Lois's bag.

"Yup," Lois said. She turned to her younger brother. "You be good, Johnny," she ordered. Johnny made a face at her and she shrugged.

"Lois, are you sure you don't want to stay with your Grandma Ellen and me?" Sam asked. It had taken some time, years in fact, but Sam and Ellen had finally come to terms with the fact that their daughter and son-in-law were raising Jim Olsen's bastard child. A child their son-in-law claimed he hadn't even known about until the day she was born and foisted off on him by her irresponsible mother — a woman who hadn't been heard from since.

Sam and Ellen had been trying to treat Lois as their own granddaughter. They hadn't been very successful. But they were trying.

"That's okay," she told Sam. "You have fun with Johnny. I'll stay with Perry and Clark. Maybe we can come by and visit some time."

There was something oddly adult in the way she said it. Something sad and familiar, just as he'd sensed in the boy — something that reminded him of someone twelve years dead. Lois. His eldest daughter who had tried and failed to bring her parents together, whose death had done what her life hadn't.

Then suddenly, it was a fourth-grader in front of him, bright-eyed, a little worldly, only pretending to be grown-up. Sam had an odd sense of *déjà vu*. There was something very odd about the pair. *Lois called the boy Clark. CJ Kent? Clark J. Kent, Jr.?* Neither Lucy nor Jim had ever mentioned that Lois Lane's partner had a son, and from Little Lois's reaction she knew the boy well. *Why hadn't they mentioned him?*

\*\*\*

"Uncle Mike?" Lois asked as Perry, CJ, and Lois walked into the American Bistro, a café in Midtown Metropolis. A burly gray man came out of the back to greet them. They ignored the few other patrons who watched with mild curiosity before turning their attention back to their meals.

"Lois?" Mike Lane's rough face split into a wide grin as he caught sight of his grandniece and her companions. "CJ?" He made a show of checking the calendar on the wall. "Is it Christmas already?"

Both kids ran up and hugged him, giggling.

"Over here, you two," Mike ordered them to a table in the back corner. "Afternoon, Perry."

"They insisted on seeing you," Perry explained, taking a seat at the table. "I don't think they fed Lois on the plane, and you know boys..." Lois and CJ took chairs on either side of him, grinning at Mike.

"Two Bottomless Pit burgers coming right up," Mike announced cheerfully. "What about you, Perry?"

"Chicken Caesar and coffee for me," Perry decided.

Their meals came quickly and Mike sat down for a few moments to chat before more customers came in. Mike hadn't

had a problem with his niece's decision to adopt her husband's bastard daughter. In fact, he had seen the resemblance early on between Lois Joanne Olsen and Lois Joanne Lane. It was less a physical resemblance, although that was there, but one of personality and intellect.

Mike Lane had traveled the world, both as a Marine and after, before settling in Metropolis. He'd seen many things he couldn't explain. His grandniece and her buddy CJ were among them. They made him almost believe in reincarnation.

Both kids finished their sandwiches and fries, chattering cheerfully with Perry and Mike. "What's for dessert, Uncle Mike," Lois demanded.

"Double chocolate cake with raspberry sauce," Mike told them. "How about you kids split a piece?"

Both kids nodded. "And after dessert, can we go to the park?" CJ asked.

"Sure," Perry agreed. "There's a new playground in Centennial Park, near the Superman Memorial."

"Superman Memorial?" CJ repeated. There was an odd look on his face, not worry, but maybe embarrassment? "When did they put up a memorial for Superman?"

"Not long after he died," Perry told him. "But you've always visited Metropolis in the middle of winter, so you've never had a chance to see it."

"But he's not buried there," CJ pointed out.

"No, he's not," Perry agreed. "All they found was his cape and a bloody boot and those are in the crypt beneath the memorial. You want to visit it?"

"Not until we finish our cake," Lois declared. "Besides, who wants to visit a stupid ol' statue anyway?"

"Lois, hon', you know CJ hasn't seen it," Perry reminded her.

"Okay," Lois conceded. "But then we're going to the playground."

\*\*\*

CJ looked up at the bronze on its marble pedestal. The nine-foot tall figure was looking up into the sky, one arm outstretched pointing up. "It's awfully big," he commented. "And it doesn't look like... It doesn't look much like him, does it?"

"All the sculptor had to work from was photographs," Perry told him. "It's not really that bad, is it?"

"CJ's right," Lois announced. "It doesn't look like his pictures."

"Do you think Superman would have wanted a statue like this?" CJ asked.

"No, I don't think he would have," Perry told him. "But this was put up so we would remember him, the good he did, the hope he brought to those who had no hope."

"But he was in Metropolis for only three years," CJ reminded him.

Perry crouched down beside the boy. "I know that, Clark. I wrote his obituary. But what he, what Superman showed us while he was here, that's what's important for us to remember. But enough of this," Perry announced. "Let's spend some time at the playground, and then we'll get back to the Planet. I still have a paper to get out."

The play structure was not too far from the memorial and was powder-coated in blue, red, and yellow. Superman's family crest was prominently displayed in the design and on the rules placard. Despite the years since Superman's death, his symbol was still well regarded and the playground was popular.

Perry took a seat on the blue steel bench and watched as the two children scrambled over the structure. They seemed surprisingly evenly matched as they ran and climbed. There were several other children on the structure as well, but it seemed to Perry that CJ and Lois were just a little faster, a little better coordinated than the other kids.

"Be careful," he yelled at them. They both stopped

momentarily and waved at him, but he noticed they slowed down to closer to normal. *Are their powers coming in already? Do they know their legacy?*

\*\*\*

“I was getting tuckered out just watching you two,” Perry complained mildly as he paid the man at the little hot dog and drink stand just outside the park. He handed the kids their sodas and they guzzled them down.

“But we’re not tired,” Lois told him, skipping along beside him as he started walking toward the Daily Planet building. CJ was on his other side, walking backwards half the time. It was about a mile away from the park, but Perry’s doctor had told him to walk that much everyday. Having the kids around gave him an excuse to get out and do it.

Lois and CJ kept up a running commentary on what they saw as they walked — at least until CJ spotted the quaint old shop with books in the window. The name on the sign read: *Dark Moon Rising, Metaphysical Books, Herbs, and Charms.*

“Grandpa Perry, can we go in?” CJ asked. His eyes were bright with excitement.

Perry gave him a dubious look. “I’m not sure your Grandma Martha would approve,” he pointed out.

“But Grandma reads Starhawk and Ravenswolf,” CJ told him. “She has all of Starhawk’s books.”

“And who is Starhawk?” Lois asked.

CJ rolled his eyes. “She’s a writer. She writes about philosophical sorts of things, like magic and souls and stuff. Grandma’s been studying reincarnation, too.”

“Okay,” Perry conceded. “But if I get into trouble with your Grandma, you’re getting a swat, understood?”

CJ giggled. Lois rolled her eyes.

The shop was as quaint on the inside as it had looked through the window. Bookshelves lined both side walls to the high ceiling and the cases had rolling shelf ladders to aid in getting to the higher shelves with their old, dusty volumes. Old wood and glass display cases held boxes of polished stones and crystals, all neatly labeled in fancy script. Other shelves held large amber jars of herbs and amber, red, and cobalt blue bottles of potions. There was a large rack of candles in a myriad of colors, shapes and sizes.

Two men came out of the back room at the sound of the chimes on the door. The first one was tall man with swarthy skin. He was wearing the Hollywood idea of traditional Indian dress — an off-white sherwani suit and a white turban with some sort of red faux gem clipped to the front. The second man was shorter and older, wearing a tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows. He was bald, with cold eyes and a neatly trimmed brown goatee threaded with gray.

“I am Asabi, and this is my associate, Mister Alexander,” the first man said, addressing Perry. “How may we assist you?” He smiled toothily at them.

Perry frowned. Both men seemed oddly familiar. “My grandkids wanted to look around,” he explained.

“I was just curious,” CJ said, suddenly shy. He went over and looked at the display of crystals. A locked glass case held a large green crystal that seemed to glow from an inner light. “Isn’t this kryptonite?”

“Yes, it is,” Asabi told him. “One of the last pieces known to exist outside the Museum of Natural History, and STAR Labs, of course.”

“Aren’t you worried about the radioactivity?” Perry asked.

Mister Alexander shrugged. “The case is made of leaded glass. And there aren’t any Kryptonians on Earth to be effected by it, are there?” If he noticed that both children were looking ill, he didn’t show it. “Feel free to look around. Asabi and I will be glad to answer any questions you have.”

CJ and Lois started moving around the room, peering into the

other cases. CJ pulled down a few old books and peered at the titles. Perry noticed that not all the books he was looking at were written in English.

“Do you read Hindi?” Asabi asked him, sounding amused. CJ shook his head and put back the book.

“I think it’s time we got back to the office,” Perry said, beckoning the two children to come with him.

“Just a moment,” Alexander said. He went to one of the jars and pulled out two dark crystals and handed them to the children. “A gift.”

“We’re not supposed to take presents from strangers,” Lois told him firmly, backing away from him.

“Smart child. But you already know my name,” Alexander told her with a smile. “So, how about yours?”

“I’m Lois and that’s CJ,” Lois said.

“You’re twins?”

“Cousins,” Perry told him. “Now, CJ, which book did you want?”

CJ went to the shelf and pulled out one of the old volumes he had put back, one of the ones not in English.

“Are you sure?” Perry asked. CJ nodded.

“Well, I suppose you can find someone in Metropolis to translate it for him,” Alexander said, ringing up the book.

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“Asabi,” Alexander said as soon as Perry White and the two children were gone. “Did you see anything familiar about those two?”

“Familiar, sir? How?” Asabi asked.

“The boy,” Alexander said. “I know him, or possibly his father. The girl too.”

“Who do you think they are, sir?”

“Doesn’t the boy resemble our old adversary, Clark Kent?” Alexander asked. “He has the same features, down to the little birthmark above his lip.”

“And the girl?”

“Her name is Lois,” Alexander pointed out. “I’m wondering if it’s more than a coincidence. See what you can find out about Mister White’s grandchildren. Especially in the ‘other’ records.”

Asabi frowned. “I’m not sure that will be possible, sir. But I will try.”

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“Mister ‘Alexander’ recognized us,” CJ told Lois and Perry as they headed down the street.

“How do you know that, son?” Perry asked.

CJ just shook his head. “He suspects I’m Clark Kent’s son and he’s going to have Asabi find out what he can about us.”

“Are you sure you’re only ten years old?” Perry asked, only half joking.

“Grandpa says I’m ten going on thirty,” CJ said by way of explanation.

“But why would that creepy old man want to know about us?” Lois asked. “And how did you know what was going on in there?”

“Didn’t you recognize them?” CJ asked. Perry noticed that CJ hadn’t answered her question. “That was Lex Luthor and his old valet, Asabi Washa.”

“Lex Luthor?” Perry asked. “I thought he went into hiding after he got out of prison. That was a couple years ago.”

“Okay, so that was Lex Luthor,” Lois said with a shrug. “What does he want with us and how do you know?”

“Luthor claimed he was in love with Lois Lane, nearly married her but she said no at the last minute,” Perry explained. “He took it hard when she died. Swore she’d eventually come back to be reunited with him. Told everybody that they were soul mates, destined to be together for all time.”

“Isn’t that just a little sick?” Lois asked. “I mean, he’s an old man and I’m ten years old.”

“Lois, I think we need to have a talk when we get back to the office,” Perry suggested.

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Perry set the pair in front of the computers closest to his office. “I’ll tell you what I told CJ. You can use their computers, but don’t change anything and absolutely do not delete or erase anything.”

Lois and CJ both nodded agreement. Perry had already noticed they each had sat down at the desks their namesakes had used.

“You two be good,” he warned as he went into his office and closed the door. He doubted closing the door would stop CJ from listening in if his suspicions were correct.

“Jim,” Perry began when the phone on the other end picked up. “Perry. Got a minute?”

“Sure,” Jim Olsen said. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, mostly,” Perry told him. “What have you told Lois about her parentage?”

Perry could hear Jim take a deep breath. “We figured it was too early. She’s only ten years old. I mean, she knows Lucy isn’t her biological mother, but we haven’t told her much else. And nothing’s happened yet.”

“I’m not so sure,” Perry told him. “A couple things happened today that make me think CJ is coming into his. And, for the most part, Lois was keeping up with him. I’m thinking it might be time.”

“But I thought we’d have at least until high school,” Jim said. “I thought that’s... I thought we had at least until puberty.”

“I’ve been wondering about that,” Perry admitted. “But I’m thinking that since CJ and his grandparents know that it’s going to happen, maybe we’re picking it up sooner. Also, CJ knows a lot of things that Clark knew. Things a ten-year-old from Kansas shouldn’t know.”

“Like what?”

“He recognized Lex Luthor when we ran into him at a shop near the park,” Perry explained. “He also wanted a book on reincarnation written in Hindi and I’ve no doubt he’ll be able to read it.”

“Perry, Lois has pulled some of the same things,” Jim said. “Not the language bit, even though I can’t believe how fast she picks up languages, but little comments on writing, crime. All the things Lois would comment on before... You said you guys ran into Luthor?”

“At a little metaphysical shop about half a mile from the Planet,” Perry told him. “And Jim, he has a display case with kryptonite in it.”

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“Clarkie, what was Grandpa Perry talking about with my daddy?” Lois asked.

“Grandma says it’s not polite to listen to other people’s conversations,” CJ told her.

“Like you weren’t listening to Mister Alexander?” Lois challenged.

“That was different,” CJ defended himself. “That was Lex Luthor and he was looking at us funny. He also has kryptonite.”

“But that only effects people from Krypton, doesn’t it?”

CJ nodded his head. “But what if Superman wasn’t the only Kryptonian around? What if he had kids and they were sent to Earth to be raised?”

“Clarkie? Do you think that’s why I see colors Daddy can’t take pictures of? Colors that aren’t in any crayon box I can find?” she whispered.

“Like the color around things that are alive? And the color of things that are hot, even when other people can’t tell they’re hot?” CJ suggested quietly.

“And the color the sky gets then it’s cloudy and other people say the sun’s not out?”

“Could be,” CJ said. He looked worried.

“But that would mean my daddy’s not really my daddy,” Lois pointed out. Her eyes were starting to tear and she wiped at them angrily. Lois Lane didn’t cry in public. Her eyes widened as she regarded the boy sitting at the next desk. “Clark, we’re not brother and sister, are we?”

“No, honey,” Perry said, coming up behind them. “But I do have some things to talk to you two about.”

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Lucy Olsen watched her husband close his cell phone and sit down on the sofa in their living room. He was taking a few days off from work to be with her during the tests and trying hard not to act as worried as she was sure he felt.

“What did Perry want?” Lucy asked. “And did I hear you mention Luthor?”

Jim nodded. “Perry thinks CJ is coming into his abilities and suspects Lois is too. Plus CJ seems to be accessing things Clark knew. That doesn’t surprise me, considering what he is. I mean Professor Hamilton was able to activate prior life memories in clones, so it’s definitely possible for CJ to have Clark’s memories. But our Lois seems to be accessing the other Lois’s memories as well, even though it’s just little things right now.”

“And Luthor?” Lucy asked. She remembered Lex Luthor’s obsession with her sister. Lois had always shrugged it off but Lucy suspected that it was more bravado than anything else. Luthor was one who didn’t take rejection well. She remembered his rants from prison after he was told that Lois Lane had died, accidentally, at the hands of Superman. The madman had sworn vengeance against the superhero, and sworn that Lois, ‘his Lois’, would return to him so they could be united forever. He’d even gone so far as to send agents to purchase the burial plots adjacent to Lois’s only to be foiled by the fact that Sam and Ellen Lane had already purchased them to enlarge the family plot.

“Perry said CJ recognized him and Perry’s real sure CJ’s right,” Jim told her.

“Jim, do you think the kids are in danger?”

“I honestly don’t know, Lucy,” Jim admitted. “I’d be less worried if they weren’t only ten years old.”

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“Kids,” Perry began, closing the door to the office behind them. Lois climbed into one of the chairs facing his desk while CJ stood beside her. Their expressions were worried, expectant, even a touch belligerent — *like they’re expecting me to cancel the investigation they’re on, one that isn’t panning out the way they wanted.*

“There’s something I want you to hear,” he continued. He had a piece of cloth in his hand and picked up an object a little larger than a tennis ball, folding it into the cloth. He placed in on his desk. CJ and Lois both leaned closer to look at the round, soft green object. Perry touched it with his bare hand and a man’s voice began to speak.

*“This will be the last communication to Earth from the colony of New Krypton. I send this in hopes that the last two survivors have been retrieved safely because, by the time you hear this, there will be no sentient life left on New Krypton. There may, in fact, be no planet at all.*

*“As I’m sure you have surmised, the male child is the clone of Kal-El born of Zara. Our efforts to avoid that were not successful. His name is Ler-El. The female is his birth-wife, Lausa Gem-Ar, last daughter of the House of Ar, an old and noble house.*

*“Despite our best efforts to avoid conflict, Lord Nor and his followers attempted a coup against the Houses of El and Ra, making claims that the union of Zara and Kal-El was a subterfuge, that the child of her womb was not his. Civil war broke out. Many died. When it became apparent to Nor and his followers that they could not prevail militarily and relocating the*

*colony to Earth was not an option, they attempted to coerce the population into accepting his rule by threatening to use weapons of mass destruction.*

*"I do not know how the weapons were deployed, if they were set off accidentally or deliberately, but within moments of launching the life pod to Earth, fusion devices were set off both on the surface and below ground. Zara is already dead as are most of the council of Elders, killed when the council chambers collapsed. By the time you hear this, the rest of us will have joined them.*

*"Please, take care of our children. They are all that are left of a once great people. They are our gift to you. Love them, as we should have done."*

The recording ended and Perry put the globe back on the shelf. Even after all this time, Ching's voice sent chills down his spine. The last message from a world that knew it was already dead.

"He's talking about us," Lois said quietly. "We're the babies they sent to Earth."

Perry nodded. He noted the speculative look she gave CJ.

"Kal-El was Superman, wasn't he?" she asked. "That means... Clark was Superman?"

CJ nodded, watching Lois through the corners of his eyes, head bowed.

"I think I knew," she murmured. It was uncanny to hear Lois Lane's words coming out of the mouth of a child. She looked over at CJ. "It wasn't your fault," she said. "I knew the risks when I asked you to do it. It was an accident."

Perry cleared his throat. "It may not have been an accident," he said. They both looked up at him, eyes wide. "I've never said anything, not even to your dad," he said, looking at Lois. "But after Clark died, one of my sources came to me. It was his contention that Lois's autopsy showed that her body had been tampered with after she'd been frozen by Superman. Tampered with in such a way that made revival impossible. He also contended that District Attorney Grant Clemens had deliberately suppressed that evidence to try to get a conviction against Superman for second degree murder."

Perry knew that the fact that Superman had confessed to involuntary manslaughter before Clemens could put together a grand jury had infuriated the D.A. The fact that the judge in the case had also been convinced to be lenient made it even worse. Clemens had wanted to use Lane's death as a platform for his bid for governor and a big showy trial would have been just the ticket for him.

"You mean Clemens let everybody believe that Superman was guilty of killing Lois when he knew all along it wasn't true?" CJ asked. He actually looked pale. "He let Superman confess to a crime he hadn't committed? Be punished for a crime he hadn't committed?"

"Superman did put her life in danger by freezing her and we don't know if he could have revived her," Perry reminded him. "But it may be that someone made sure he couldn't."

"Do you think Jason Mazik knew who it was?" CJ asked.

"Impossible to say," Perry told them. "Mazik was judged incompetent to stand trial for kidnapping the Kents, being an accessory in the death of Lois Lane and poisoning Nigel St. John. He was found murdered in his room at Belle Reve a little more than a year later, even though he was under constant camera surveillance and under suicide watch. My bet is that Luthor had him killed for killing Lois and St. John, but nothing could ever be proven."

"And it's too late to do anything, anyway," CJ said. "Lois Lane has been dead twelve years. Clark Kent and Superman have both been dead for more than eleven years. Even if you could find anything, the statute of limitations has run out on whatever crimes Clemens may have committed."

"We can clear Superman's name," Lois pointed out. "We might even figure out who really killed Lois Lane and Jason Mazik."

"Are you sure you want to do that?" Perry asked. They both nodded solemnly. "Okay, you have my permission to try. Just don't get me in trouble with child protective services, okay. I don't think they'd believe me if I told them I thought you two were really twenty-somethings hiding in ten year old bodies."

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"What did you find out?" Lex Luthor demanded as soon as Asabi came out of his trance.

"You were correct," Asabi said. "Mister White's grandchildren are, in fact, the reincarnations of the late Clark Kent and Lois Lane. But there's something else going on with them as well, something the record keepers are blocking, aside from the fact that neither of them is actually biologically related to White during this incarnation."

"I already knew that," Luthor told him. "The boy is supposedly the son of Kent and some woman we don't even have a name for since the one listed on the birth certificate is a fake. Same for the girl. The mother's name is fake and there was no abandoned female newborn in the Greater Metropolis area that could possibly resemble that girl. So, tell me something I don't know."

"I was not able to completely access their records, sir," Asabi said.

"You told me that the Akashic records were open to anyone with the ability to get to them," Luthor stated.

"They are," Asabi told him. "Or at least they were. There is something very odd happening. Something the record keepers refused to explain except in riddles. I know they chose to return to Earth sooner than what would be normal. But I do not know the reason, and other information was blocked from me.

Information concerning how they are linked to other members of their soul group, even information on other past incarnations was blocked," Asabi told him. "It is almost as though... It's almost as though the record keepers were on the lookout for someone who wishes to tamper with the records."

"Is that possible?" Luthor asked.

"I don't know," Asabi admitted. "And I am fearful of finding out."

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"So what do you want to do first?" CJ asked Lois.

"Well, first see what there is here on it, then get copies of the police reports on Lois Lane's death and M.E.'s reports on the autopsy," Lois said. "Perry said his source said Clemens knew something about her death. Maybe we can talk to him, too."

Most of the adults in the newsroom seemed to be taking their presence in stride. Only a few seemed to think it was odd or funny for two ten year-olds to be sitting at the desks that were normally occupied by the Daily Planet's current star reporters. One of the older women tried to pinch CJ's cheek, but a glower from Lois managed to stop it.

"Thanks," he murmured. He had managed to pull up the articles the Daily Planet had printed on Lois Lane's death at the hands of Superman. He winced inwardly at the by-line on the articles — Clark Kent. He hadn't been exactly charitable to his alter ego regarding the matter.

It was odd — he had memories of being an adult, of being Superman, of being Clark Jerome Kent working for a Perry White who was ten years younger. He had those memories but there was no real emotional value in them. All those things he remembered happened to someone else. It was someone else's story, even though it was in *his* head.

"He was being a little mean, don't you think?" Lois asked, coming over to read the article on the screen. "I mean, it was an accident. It wasn't like Superman meant to kill her. It wasn't like

she didn't understand the risk."

"Clark was in love with her," CJ explained. "He'd bought the engagement ring and had planned to ask her to marry him that evening. Then she died and he never got the chance to tell her how much... He couldn't tell anyone what really happened or how much it hurt that he'd been the cause. He never got to that place where he could forgive himself, and as far as he was concerned, nobody else had the right to."

"How sad," Lois murmured. Her expression turned thoughtful. "Clark, you don't...?"

He shook his head. "That was my dad, not me. But I think it would be justice if I could clear Superman's name." He gave her a curious look. "Do you remember being *her*?"

"Kind of," she admitted. "It's like she's a character in a movie, or a book. I know everything she did, everything she felt, like memories. I pretty much know everything she knew. Only they're not *my* memories. I know she loved *her* Clark. She would have done anything for him, and she trusted him implicitly. I think she would have been very upset at the choices he made afterward."

"I think you're right," CJ agreed.

Perry had been closeted in his office with one of the interns. The office door opened and Perry came out, followed by a young red-haired woman.

"Uh, kids, before you run off and get me into trouble, I want you meet Megan Gordon," Perry said with a smile. "I'm putting her in charge of you while you work on this."

"But Grandpa Perry..." CJ and Lois both whined.

Perry shook his head. "This is the deal. She has a company credit card for cab fare and lunches and she has orders to keep you two out of trouble."

"But Grandpa Perry..."

"I don't want to hear it," he told them. "She goes with you or you don't leave the building, understood?"

"Understood," Lois agreed. CJ watched her eye the college age 'sitter'.

"Lois, come on," CJ urged. "It'll be okay. I mean, we can use the help, can't we?"

Lois glowered at him and he winced.

Perry grinned at them. "I've arranged for you to meet Police Commissioner Henderson at his office. He's the one who headed the investigation into your aunt's death," he said, nodding to Lois. "He was also a good friend to your dad," he told CJ.

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"So, you're Lois Lane's niece, and Clark Kent's son?" Henderson observed with a gentle smile. They were sitting in the chairs opposite his desk, feet barely skimming the floor. The girl had a pad and pen and was ready to take notes. The young woman, Megan, was standing near the door. Her expression indicated that she really didn't want to be there. At least she didn't want to be in his office baby-sitting two kids.

"Yes, sir," the boy said. "Mister White said you were the detective in charge of the Lois Lane case."

"Yes, I was. And I have to admit, it was one of the hardest cases I've ever had to work on. Not because it was hard to solve, but because of the people involved. Superman, the Kents... It was hard." He sighed and indicated the thick folder that was sitting on his desk. "I pulled the file for you to look at." He looked over at Megan. "Normally I would never even consider showing this to anyone underage, but Perry has assured me that you two are very mature for your ages. I wouldn't want to be held responsible for giving you nightmares."

"Well, we won't tell any grownups if you don't," Lois quipped. She hopped off her chair and stepped over to the desk. Henderson pushed the file towards her and she opened it. CJ was right beside her.

The first photo in the file was of a dead woman laid out on a

steel table. She was wearing a pinstripe suit, hands folded at her waist. Her expression was calm, serene even. Except for the yellow-gray tone to her skin, she looked as though she was asleep, as though she could open her eyes at any moment. Both the children peered intently at the photo as if trying to glean some hidden meaning from it before setting it aside.

The boy sorted through the papers and pulled out one to read more closely: the medical examiner's report. Henderson watched the boy frown.

"This last page was edited after it was finished, wasn't it?" he asked.

"What makes you say that?" Henderson wondered aloud, his curiosity piqued.

"Little things, the inconsistencies in grammar that show up when something's been rewritten in a hurry," CJ explained. "Plus, the last page gives the conclusion that the freezing was what killed her, only earlier, he mentions contusions to the heart muscle and the fact that there was no apparent cell damage from ice crystals. In fact, there's nothing in the report outside of the conclusion that would even show she'd been frozen at all."

"Exactly how old are you?" Henderson asked. White had mentioned they were mature, but he hadn't mentioned exactly how 'mature' they were. There was something eerily familiar about them.

"Ten going on thirty, at least that's what my parents tell everybody," Lois said with a little giggle. Then her expression became more thoughtful. "Did Superman know about this report?"

"I know he was given a copy," Henderson said. "I don't know if he bothered to read it, nor would I swear that he'd been given a complete copy of the report. I do know he blamed himself for her death. I just wish he hadn't taken it upon himself to go it alone. We were already looking into Jason Mazik's involvement in other matters, the burglary at his brother's store, threats made against other jewelers. We even suspected he had something to do with some valuable pieces that went missing from the Luthor estate. If Clark had just told us that he and Superman were being threatened we might have been able to do something."

"Between Mazik and St. John, they were holding all the cards," CJ told him. "They knew his weaknesses, everyone he cared about, what lengths he'd go to, to protect them. They knew everything and he was convinced there was nothing he could do about it."

"He was wrong," Henderson said. "Mazik had the original of the diary in his safe."

"But..." CJ began. "Who knows about it?" There was an edge of panic in his young voice.

"I have it. No one else knows about it, except you three now," the police officer said. "It's mostly the ravings of a madman, but a few things stand out. Like accurately detailing every major historical event from 1866 to 1995."

"The year Lois Lane died," Lois said softly.

"Her death is not mentioned, nor is Superman's a year later," Henderson went on. "In fact, after 1995, the predictions are wildly inaccurate since it details things Superman did, leaving for New Krypton for a short time in 1996, winning the International Peace Prize in 1997. The writer also mentions Lois Lane and Clark Kent getting married in 1996, starting a family in 1998. Their eldest would be about a year younger than you are."

Henderson noted that Megan had started listening more closely.

"What are you saying?" the young woman asked. "Somebody was able to predict the future then started getting it all wrong after Superman died?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying, Miss Gordon," Henderson said. "The diary was supposedly written by a man named Tempus. He was an inmate in an insane asylum in Kansas in

1866. He claimed he was a time traveler from sometime in the fairly distant future, a future where Superman and his descendants had created a utopia. A future that Tempus hated passionately. He claimed he had made several attempts to destroy Superman, and had failed every time.”

“But someone succeeded,” Lois pointed out.

“Someone succeeded,” Henderson agreed. “But there are a couple interesting points. Mazik’s wild statements about the diary he no longer had and time travelers and other things landed him at Belle Reve for observation. But the one thing he repeatedly insisted was that neither he nor St. John touched Lois Lane’s body after Superman laid her on the table.”

“But if Mazik or St. John didn’t tamper with her body, who did?” CJ asked.

“That’s another one of those points you won’t see in this file,” Henderson said. “Mazik claimed she was killed by Tempus himself. That Tempus showed up minutes after St. John died claiming he’d found a way to destroy Utopia once and for all. There’s also the fact that a set of fingerprints that we still haven’t been able to identify were found in the underground bunker.”

“Do you think Mazik was telling the truth?” Lois asked.

“I think he was mad as a hatter,” Henderson said. “But I do think he was also telling the truth as far as he knew it. I don’t think he killed Lois Lane. And someone, maybe Luthor, maybe not, killed Mazik to shut him up.”

“You know Luthor’s in Metropolis, don’t you?” CJ asked.

Henderson nodded. “As far as we can tell he’s been keeping his nose clean. But we have been keeping an eye on him. You ran into him?”

CJ nodded. “At *Dark Moon Rising*. It’s a bookstore a couple blocks from the Daily Planet. I think he recognized us. And he has kryptonite.”

“I’ll have somebody check it out,” Henderson promised. “Not that there are any Kryptonians around here. Now, was there anything else you’d like to know?”

“Grandpa Perry, I mean Mister White, told us he had reason to believe that D.A. Clemens had attempted to suppress evidence in the case so he could get a murder charges against Superman.” Lois stated. “Do you know anything about that?”

“I’m not sure I’d put it like that, but Clemens did want to take the case to trial in the worst way,” Henderson told them.

“Superman short-circuited that by confessing to freezing Lane in order to fake her death. After some prodding, he also admitted he had committed the act under extreme duress. That Mazik had abducted and threatened to kill the Kents if he did not comply. He refused to say what other threats Mazik used. I know that when Superman waived a jury trial, Clemens wasn’t well pleased. A jury trial would have suited the D.A. just fine. I also know Judge Diggs was in chambers quite a long time with Clemens, Constance Hunter, Superman, and Perry White. When they came out, Superman pled guilty to involuntary manslaughter and was sentenced to a year of community service.”

“But, do you think Superman would have pled guilty if he’d known that someone else had been involved? That maybe someone else had killed her?” Lois asked.

Henderson sat back in his chair, watching the two children over steepled fingers. “Miss Olsen, I’ve asked myself that question everyday for twelve years. I still don’t have an answer. But I do know this. The man who confessed to killing Lois Lane, the man who pled guilty in front of Judge Diggs: that man was utterly broken. I think... I *know* he would have cheerfully laid down his own life, sold his soul even, if that would have brought her back.”

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“Well?” CJ asked as they walked down the sidewalk. Megan was close behind them. “What do you think?” he continued.

“I think we need to find out if Clemens put the M.E. up to

altering the report or somebody else did,” Lois stated. “But I don’t see what Clemens would have had to gain by it. The discrepancies within the report Henderson has are too glaring. I mean, the conclusions weren’t based on any of the actual findings. It all would have come out if there’d been a trial.”

“It’s almost like whoever wrote the report didn’t want to fake the findings, but was fairly certain nobody would look past the conclusion page,” CJ reasoned. “They were expecting Superman to plead guilty and that nobody would look beyond that.”

“Which is exactly what happened,” Lois stated. She turned to Megan who was simply watching them in wide-eyed confusion. “Let’s see, the O.C.M.E.’s still on First, isn’t it?”

“Uh, yeah, I think so,” Megan replied.

“So, what are we waiting for?” Lois demanded.

“You want to go to see the medical examiner?” Megan asked as though she hadn’t understood the previous discussion.

“Uh huh,” CJ said with a grin.

“Do you two even know what goes on there?” Megan asked.

“Yes,” Lois answered. “That’s where they do the autopsies and forensic examinations. And that’s where we need to go.”

“And you have the press pass and the credit card,” CJ added cheekily.

“You know, I read a story once about some kids who had their brains boosted by some experimental drug...” Megan began. “Made them geniuses.”

“The Smart Kids,” CJ told her. “They’d be about twenty-three now. The drug didn’t work over the long term and had nasty side effects.”

“So you two...?”

“Nah, Doctor Carlton died and nobody knows what became of his research papers,” CJ said.

“And how do you know that?”

CJ shrugged. “My grandma used to save everything my dad had published. I’ve read all of them,” he said by way of explanation. “It was Lane and Kent that broke the story about Carleton’s experiments. And I have a really good memory.”

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The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner was in an aging brick building protected by a low wrought-iron fence and a weedy front lawn. The brass plaque by the entrance was the only sign that it wasn’t simply another old office building sliding into genteel obsolescence among the modern high rise medical buildings and hospitals. There were no signs of security cameras, no guard at the front door. The only security appeared to be the barred windows.

Lois led the way into the building, acting for all the world as if she was the one in charge of their little expedition. CJ and Megan trotted along behind her as she made her way to the receptionist.

“Lois Olsen and CJ Kent to see Doctor Sprengler,” Lois announced. The man simply stared at the two youngsters.

Megan stepped up to the counter. “We’re with the Daily Planet,” she explained, showing him her press pass. “We were hoping he’ll have time to talk to us about an old case.”

“I’ll see if he’s in his office...”

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Sprengler was waiting in his sixth floor office when the trio walked in. If he was surprised at the ages of his visitors, he didn’t show it.

“Commissioner Henderson called and let me know you were coming,” he explained. “So, I gather you’re looking into Lois Lane’s death?”

“Yes,” CJ said. “You remember the case?”

“Oh, yes,” Sprengler said. “I remember it very well...”

“So, on the report from your office, why is there such a discrepancy between the actual autopsy findings and the summary of the findings?” CJ asked.

"I see that Commissioner Henderson let you read the final report," Sprengler said. He sat back in his chair and contemplated the two children. "I won't lie. There was a great deal of pressure on the M.E.'s office to get the Lane case closed. The press, the D.A., other people..."

"So you allowed a false summary to go out?" Lois asked.

"I didn't. No." Sprengler said quietly. "My summary noted that all the evidence pointed to the woman having been super-cooled so fast and so thoroughly that no ice crystals were created within her cells. Her heart was damaged by a something long and sharp, most likely a large bore needle. A toxin had been injected into the area around the SA node. There was no way her heart was going to restart. She was killed by someone who knew exactly what they were doing."

"But that's not what the summary said," Lois reminded him.

"That's what *my* summary said," Sprengler told them. "I don't actually know who wrote the summary that was sent to the police and the D.A. I didn't even realize there was a discrepancy until after Clemens started in on Superman."

"But, why would someone want to falsify the summary?" Megan asked.

"To put pressure on Superman, I expect," Sprengler answered. "It worked, didn't it? He confessed to involuntary manslaughter and accepted Diggs' sentence."

"But then, who would have wanted to do it?" CJ asked. "And who would have had the opportunity? And why just the summary?"

"I can't answer those questions," Sprengler admitted. "But I do have a theory. I think the person who actually killed Lane wanted to make sure Superman was accused, and that he would believe he was guilty. But they didn't have the time, or the expertise, to fake the entire report. And they didn't especially care if the deception was found out."

"Because the damage to Superman would have already been done," Lois completed for him.

"Exactly," Sprengler agreed.

"What was Clemens' reaction when he found out about the falsified summary?" Megan asked.

Sprengler's expression turned grim. "He ordered me not to tell anyone or send out the corrected document."

"And why would he do that?" Lois asked.

"We all knew he had political ambitions," Sprengler said. "At the time, we thought he wanted to put Superman on trial for Lane's murder. A splashy court case like that would put his name on the front page, and a successful prosecution would do wonders for a bid for mayor or even governor."

"You said 'at the time...,'" CJ pointed out. "You think differently now?"

Sprengler nodded. "I've thought about it a lot over the years. Clemens isn't a stupid man and he was a very good prosecuting attorney. He knew he couldn't get a conviction against Superman, so why even bother?" Sprengler leaned forward on his desk to peer at his visitors. "I think someone, maybe Luthor's people, maybe whoever actually killed Lane, was putting the pressure on Clemens to put Superman away for murder and the only way out was for him to convince Superman to take a fall on a lesser charge. In any case, Clemens resigned a few months after Superman's sentencing. Moved away from Metropolis. I have no idea where he is now."

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"Now what do we do?" Lois whined as the trio headed back to the Daily Planet. "If Clemens wasn't behind the falsification, then who was? And why?"

"Well, I think the *'why'* is pretty obvious. To convince Superman he was guilty when he wasn't," CJ reminded her. "It's the *'who'* we have a problem with. We have the mysterious Tempus fellow who wrote the diary..."

"And who Mazik claimed did the deed," Lois chimed in.

"And we have Luthor... and who knows who else," CJ finished.

"Do you think Clemens will tell us who was putting pressure on him?" Megan asked.

"Well, we can find him and ask him," Lois said with a grin.

"Assuming Grandpa Perry lets us," Clark reminded her. "I doubt he'll let us leave town to track down Clemens."

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"So what did you find out today?" Perry asked the trio when they got back to the newsroom. He ushered them into his office.

"It was 'interesting,'" Megan began. "Apparently, your sources were right. Lois Lane's body had been tampered with after her death. Mazik told the police it was someone called Tempus."

"The same one who supposedly wrote that mysterious, never-seen diary foretelling the future?" Perry asked.

"The same," Lois said.

"But here's where it gets really weird," CJ put in. "According to the M.E., Clemens knew full well that the autopsy summary was a fake and ordered Sprengler not to correct it. It was Sprengler's opinion that Clemens knew he couldn't get a conviction but was under pressure from someone to push for one."

"Son, I was in the room with Diggs and them," Perry said. "I would have sworn Clemens was out for Kryptonian blood."

"Maybe he was a better actor than anyone knew," Lois suggested.

"Maybe," Perry conceded.

Perry remembered the hearing as if it was yesterday. If Jason Mazik's blackmail and Lois Lane's death had been the beginning of the end for Superman, Clemens' accusations had been the building of the hangman's scaffold.

*It was just like yesterday...*

Perry hadn't seen Lois or Clark come into the newsroom. He knew the pair was working on something, although neither had clued him into what it was, aside from the fact that Clark had spent the previous few days walking around looking like the devil was preparing to claim his soul.

Then Clark walked in, disheveled, pale, in shock. "I should never have let her do it. Why did I let her do it?" he had asked Perry. Perry had no idea what he was talking about.

"Sit down, son, before you fall down," Perry ordered. Clark settled into his desk chair, staring over at Lois's empty desk.

"She's dead, Perry. Lois is dead and..."

"Whoa, son. Lois is dead? How?"

Perry wasn't sure if Clark even heard him. Then Clark began to speak, his voice so low Perry could hardly make out the words. "Jason Mazik kidnapped my parents to make me do things I... to make me do things. Lois was helping me get things figured out. Mazik's last demand was for me to deliver Lois's dead body to him..."

Perry tried to keep the horror out of his expression. "Son...?"

Clark shook his head. "Lois had an idea. She talked Superman into freezing her to fake her death. He didn't want to do it. It was dangerous, but you know how persuasive Lois can be..."

Perry nodded. Lois could be as tenacious as a bulldog on a pant leg when she was going after something. He wasn't surprised that she could coerce even Superman to do her bidding.

Perry leaned back against Clark's desk. "So, what happened?"

"He was able to rescue my parents, but... but he couldn't revive Lois. Her heart wouldn't start. He tried, Perry... But he couldn't do it and now she's dead." Clark's head was on his desk and his shoulders were shaking. "I was going to ask her to marry me and now she's dead... He killed her..."

“Now, son, we both know Superman did his best to save her,” Perry said. He didn’t know what else to say to the grief stricken young man beside him. Perry knew, without any doubt, that while what Clark said had happened was probably strictly true, there were nuances he wasn’t telling. He also knew that his own shock and grief would catch up to him. Lois Lane, one of the finest young women he had ever had the privilege to work with, a woman he considered almost as a daughter, was dead.

“What good is he if he can’t save the people he cares about? When they can be used as weapons against him?” Clark asked, raising a tear-streaked face to look at his editor.

Perry had nothing to say to that.

The investigation into Lois Lane’s death was surprisingly quick. The initial autopsy results indicated Lois died of having been flash-frozen. Superman admitted to having done it at her request, but that didn’t excuse his actions. D.A. Clemens dropped any charges against Clark Kent for his involvement in the various crimes Mazik had ordered — all the gems Clark had been forced to steal had been found neatly bagged in Mazik’s office safe. Instead, Clemens was going after Superman.

The grand jury came back with indictments against Superman in the death of Lois Lane. Second-degree murder, manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter. Superman was arrested following a rescue and went quietly with the arresting officers. Despite the seriousness of the charges, the bail officer released Superman on his own recognizance. Clemens had a field day with the press.

It turned into a media frenzy. Superman couldn’t even show up to a rescue without being mobbed by reporters demanding to know why he had murdered Lois Lane. Superman made no comment. He refused to even speak to the media. He barely even spoke to the people he was trying to help.

The Daily Planet refused to join the feeding frenzy, insisting on keeping the reporting low key and noncommittal. Superman had saved so many people during his three years in Metropolis. To turn on him without hearing his side of the story was criminally negligent as far as Perry White was concerned. He was not going to allow the Daily Planet to devolve into a sensationalist tabloid.

Superman was not speaking to the press. But reports had started filtering in to Perry from fire fighters and police officers that Superman was taking Lois Lane’s death hard and they were worried about him — not that he was going to go rogue or become dangerous, but that he wasn’t taking care of himself. One officer went so far as to suggest the Man of Steel was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

Perry filed the reports, but didn’t publish them. It was his prerogative as editor to decide what news was fit to print. And this was one story he would willingly sit on for a while — forever if need be. Perry hoped Superman would snap out of it, but he had a strong hunch that it wasn’t going to happen any time soon, if ever. As far as Perry knew, Superman hadn’t even bothered to hire a lawyer to defend him.

Then Perry got a phone call from Clark’s parents. “Perry, you have to help Superman,” Martha began. “Find him a lawyer to help him. We’ll pay for it if we have to...”

Perry looked out his office window to where Clark was sitting. Clark seemed to be listening to something but when he noticed Perry’s eyes on him, he busied himself at his keyboard.

“Look, Martha... I don’t know what I can do,” Perry said. “Superman’s a big boy and if he wants...”

“Perry, he thinks he’s guilty,” Martha said. “But we all know he would *never* have willingly put Lois’s life in danger, even to save us. You have to help him, because he certainly won’t help himself.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Perry promised. “But it’s kinda hard to help somebody who doesn’t want to be helped.”

“We know, Perry. Believe me, we know,” Martha told him.

“And thank you.”

Perry managed to get hold of Constance Hunter, the attorney who had represented Superman when he was sued by Calvin Dregg for allegedly hurting him during a rescue. She agreed to represent Superman again, although she warned Perry that she wasn’t a criminal lawyer.

Later she told him that Superman did show up to talk to her about the case against him. She also told Perry that the man who came to her office wasn’t the same man who had asked for her help only two months before — this man didn’t seem to care if he was convicted. In fact, he didn’t care at all. She invited Perry to the arraignment hearing, when the full charges would be read and the trial date set.

The day of the arraignment was bright and clear. Perry walked into Judge Angela Diggs courtroom — the usual arraignment judge was out sick and she was covering for him. Superman was sitting with Constance Hunter as they waited their turn. Perry took the time to study the young man in the blue spandex. It had only been a few days since Lois’s death — her funeral had been just the day before — but Superman looked as though he had actually aged several years. He was a man in the throes of grief and no one seemed to notice or care.

It had been a long time since Perry had done a stint covering the criminal justice system in Metropolis. But even though the faces had changed, the evil that men do hadn’t — burglary, arson, drugs, murder, rape. They were all represented in the courtroom that morning. Orange jail jumpsuits mixed with business suits. The gallery was filled to overflowing with representatives of the media.

Grant Clemens was seated at the prosecutor’s desk. Perry was a little surprised to see the District Attorney there — arraignments were generally handled by assistants.

And then there was Superman.

“Ms. Hunter, I assume your client is aware of his rights?”

“Yes, your honor,” Hunter responded. Superman was standing next to her, but he seemed oblivious to what was going on around him.

“The charges are murder in the second degree, manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter in regards to the death of Lois Joanne Lane,” Diggs read off. She looked at Superman. “How do you plead?”

Hunter answered for him. “To the charge of murder in the second degree, we plead ‘not guilty’. To the charge of manslaughter, we plead ‘not guilty’.” Hunter whispered something to Superman and after a moment he nodded. “And to the charge of involuntary manslaughter, we plead ‘guilty’, your honor.”

The courtroom broke out in pandemonium. It took a few minutes for Diggs and the bailiffs to get things quieted down. Over the yells, Perry saw Clemens go pale.

“Another outburst like that and I will have this courtroom cleared,” Diggs yelled after the room had quieted enough for her to be heard. “Is that understood?”

“Your honor,” Hunter said loudly. “We also wish to waive the right to a jury trial.”

Diggs sat back in her chair in surprise. Clemens stood up so suddenly he knocked his chair over. “You can’t do that...” he yelled at Hunter.

“Mister District Attorney,” Diggs said angrily. “You are not in a position to dictate what rights the accused may or may not voluntarily waive.”

“And if you had bothered to return my calls yesterday,” Hunter added, “you would have known how my client planned to play this.”

“Mister Clemens, is it true that Ms. Hunter contacted your office concerning her client and you didn’t respond?” Diggs demanded.

Clemens opened and closed his mouth several times before responding to Judge Diggs question. "I was busy yesterday."

"Busy planning your trial strategy, no doubt," Diggs stated. Her mouth was pursed as though she had tasted something sour. "I am going to finish the rest of these arraignments and then I want to see the three of you in my chambers. I have no time for grandstanding or games." She concentrated her look on Superman and his attorney. "I am not going to accept your client's wish to waive his rights until after we talk, nor am I accepting a guilty plea at this time. Understood?"

"Understood, your honor," Hunter said.

"Superman?"

He seemed to rouse himself from a trance as he answered. "Yes, your honor. I understand." He began to say something else and Hunter put her hand on his arm to stop him. Then they went to take seats at the back of the room to wait. Perry left his own seat and slid in beside them.

"Just hang in there, son," Perry told Superman. "It'll be okay."

The young man shook his head. "Lois is dead," he said softly. "I don't know... I don't know how I can... she trusted me to bring her back, and I couldn't..."

"Son, I know you did everything you could," Perry assured him. "And the best way to honor her memory, to keep her death from being in vain, is for you to keep doing what you do, helping people. She would have wanted you to."

"You really think so?" he asked.

Perry nodded. "I know so, son."

"Thank you, Mister White," Superman said softly. There was something eerily familiar in Superman's voice, something that reminded him of Clark. Much later Perry would realize what it was — Superman sounded just like Clark Kent because he *was* Clark Kent.

Diggs finished the arraignments in her usual efficient fashion, instructed the bailiff to postpone the rest of her cases for the day, and then beckoned Superman, Hunter and Clemens to follow her.

"Mister White, I'd appreciate it if you'd join us," Superman said. Hunter gave him a surprised look. "It's okay, isn't it?" Superman asked her.

"If that's what you want, I'm sure Judge Diggs won't mind," Hunter told him.

Diggs hadn't minded. In fact, Perry wondered if the judge wasn't happy to have a witness in the room.

"Superman," Diggs began. "Do you understand what it means to waive your right to a jury trial?"

Superman nodded.

Diggs went on anyway. "It means you're putting your fate in the hands of one person, the judge, me or one of my peers, for whether you are judged guilty or not guilty of the crime Mister Clemens here believes you committed. It means one person will decide your fate within the dictates of the laws of this state."

"I understand that."

"Do you know what the minimum penalty for second degree murder is in this state?"

"Twenty years in prison," Superman responded, but it was like he was answering a question on a quiz. He didn't care about the answer. His head was bowed and Perry couldn't see his face.

"Do you think you deserve to be sent to prison for twenty years?" Diggs asked.

"Miss Lane is dead," he responded.

"Your honor..." Clemens protested.

"Sit down, Grant," Diggs ordered. "As I understand it, there's no question that Superman's actions were the cause of Miss Lane's untimely demise. Am I correct?"

"Yes, ma'am," Clemens agreed.

"So, unless he's recanting his confession..."

At this Superman shook his head.

Diggs continued. "Then the only question remaining is what constitutes a just charge and sentence in this case. I know you want to take this to trial, Grant, but Ms. Hunter's client doesn't seem to want to play that game with you. And in any case, I'm not going to let you turn my courtroom into a three ring circus."

"Your honor, might I suggest you recluse yourself from this case?" Clemens said.

"On what grounds?" Diggs demanded.

"Favoritism," Clemens shot back.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Diggs asked. "I'm the one who threw the book at the Blue Boy Scout last year for contempt of court. I'm the one who banished him from the city as a final recourse since he couldn't stop using his powers even when he promised he would."

"I still think..." Clemens tried again.

"Request denied," Diggs told him.

"The citizens of this city have the right to see justice done and they are going to demand a trial by jury presided over by a judge who isn't coming in with preconceptions," Clemens argued. "They have the right to determine for themselves whether or not this 'person' is a danger to the citizens of this city and state."

"Clemens, there isn't a person on this planet who isn't going to have preconceptions in this case," Diggs argued back. "And seeing as the court accepted him last year as a human being subject to the laws of this state, you'd better not be thinking of playing the 'he's not human so we use different standards' card this year. He has the right to waive a jury trial. And I have the authority to make it a closed hearing. I will not have my courtroom turned into a circus."

She turned back to Superman. "And I'll tell you right now, I wasn't happy last year with you making a mockery of my courtroom. I'm glad things worked out, but it appeared then that you have little respect for the law and the legal system."

"That wasn't my intent then, or now," Superman said, but his voice was so low he could barely be heard. "I'm sorry if it appeared that way. I have the utmost respect for this country's legal system."

"The charges against you are serious ones. Assuming I agree with Mister Clemens that your irresponsibility in causing Miss Lane's death makes you a danger to the community, how do you propose we administer your sentence?"

Clemens glowered at Diggs but she seemed to ignore him, focusing on Superman and his reaction.

Superman shifted in his seat. "Kryptonite," he said finally. "It's, um, poisonous to me."

"You mean it could kill you," Diggs stated. Superman nodded.

"Somehow I think that would constitute cruel and unusual punishment, don't you?" Diggs said. "The death penalty in a non-capital case? I don't think so. So tell me, what's the solution?"

"I don't think there is one," Superman said. "But if that's what it takes..."

"Do you really understand what's going on here?" Diggs demanded.

Superman raised his head and looked her in the eye. "Yes. I have asked to waive my right to a jury trial, which means the verdict on the charges against me will be rendered by a judge. I have already admitted that Lois Lane died as a direct result of my actions and I have pled guilty to involuntary manslaughter. Should I be sentenced to prison on one of the other charges, the only means available to keep me in prison, aside from my word of honor, will very likely kill me. And my word of honor isn't going to be good enough."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine," Superman answered.

"You were in love with her, weren't you?" Diggs asked.

Superman didn't answer but Perry knew the answer to the question was 'yes'. And from Diggs's expression, Perry knew that she knew as well.

"I'm not going to let you commit suicide this way," Diggs said after a long moment. "Now, I want you two..." she pointed at Clemens and Hunter. "...to go into the office next door and I don't want to see either of you until you've come up something I can agree to and Superman can survive."

Hunter accepted Diggs's order with better grace than Clemens, but they both left through the side door to the other office, shutting the adjoining door behind them.

Diggs turned back to Superman. "I'd like you to wait outside so I can talk to Mister White alone. If you need to leave suddenly, let the bailiff know."

"Yes, ma'am." With that, Superman left the office and Perry was alone with Diggs.

"He's a remarkable young man," Diggs began. "I hadn't realized how young he is. It would be a shame for this to ruin his life."

"I thought you were supposed to be impartial and open minded?" Perry asked. He had known Angela Diggs for many years — they were on several charity boards together and Perry occasionally went golfing with her husband. He wouldn't describe himself as a close friend, but they were friends, of sorts.

Diggs chuckled. "Justice isn't blind. But tell me, do you believe this incident is an indication of things to come, that he's going to abuse his abilities, endanger other innocent people?"

Perry shook his head. "From what I understand, Lois asked him to do it. Neither of them expected that he'd be unable to bring her back."

"Perry, whether or not she 'asked' him to do it is irrelevant, and it's certainly not a precedent I want to set now or ever. So, answer my question. Is he a potential threat to the people of this city?"

"I think it's more likely he'll start second-guessing himself and put people in danger by *not* acting, out of fear of doing something wrong," Perry told her.

"He's covered under the 'Good Samaritan' laws," Diggs reminded him. "Judge Wilson made sure of that so we wouldn't have any more like Dreggs, looking for deep pockets. But I think you've answered my question, not that it helps me any. If Clemens insists on bringing back a charge of second degree murder, I may not have much of a choice but to convict."

Perry opened his mouth to protest but she held up her hand.

"He was actively interfering in a police investigation," she stated. "He was knowingly aiding and abetting Jason Mazik and Clark Kent. He knowingly put Lois Lane's life in danger, resulting in her death. In fact, by all known medical criteria, she died at the time he froze her. That makes it murder."

"Clemens dropped the charges against Kent," Perry reminded her. "Mazik had abducted his parents and was threatening to kill them."

"I know that," Diggs said. "I also know that if Clemens gets stubborn and he and Hunter can't come to some agreement, I'll be condemning a man to death. I don't want that on my conscience."

"I thought you didn't want to play the 'he's not human so we use different standards' card," Perry pointed out.

"Justice isn't blind. I am well aware he's different, and therein lays part of my problem. He's a hero, more than that he's a 'super hero' who did something wrong and there's not a lot I can do to him," Diggs said. "But I don't want the court to be an active participant in his suicide either. And from where I'm sitting, that's what he wants. A life for a life."

"If justice isn't blind, maybe justice can afford to be lenient," Perry suggested. "It's not like he's not remorseful. He knows what he did was wrong. I don't think anyone regrets his actions

more than he does."

Diggs nodded. There was a knock on the door to the adjoining office. The door opened and Clemens and Hunter walked in. Neither looked happy.

"Well?" Diggs asked.

Hunter shook her head. Clemens simply glowered.

"I guess that leaves it up to me," Diggs said. She looked to Perry. "Assuming Superman is still outside, would you have him come in, please?"

Superman hadn't left or, if he had, he was back. Perry knew he would find out later in either case. The young man didn't say anything as he came back into Diggs's chambers.

"Since the District Attorney and the defense attorney cannot come to terms on a plea bargain and the accused has waived his right to a jury trial, it falls to me to make a determination in this case."

"This is rather irregular," Clemens protested. "He hasn't been arraigned yet."

"Yes, I know," Diggs said. "And we'll get to that. After due deliberation, I'm throwing out all charges except involuntary manslaughter, which Superman has already indicated he wishes to plead guilty to. I assume that is still the case?"

Both Hunter and Superman nodded.

"Good... let's head to the courtroom and we'll make this official."

*Perry remembered it like yesterday. Superman pled guilty to involuntary manslaughter and was sentenced to one year probation with community service. He was ordered to continue his service to the city assisting the police and fire departments as needed. He was also ordered to do nothing that would endanger his own life.*

*Clemens had been furious, claiming Judge Diggs had acted in a high-handed and prejudicial manner in letting Superman off with a slap on the hand. But there was nothing Clemens could do.*

"If Clemens was under pressure to get Superman convicted, that means someone had the means to put on pressure," Perry reasoned aloud. Megan and the two kids nodded.

"Find out who," he ordered. "It may be twelve years late, but I think both Lois *and* Superman deserve some justice.

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## Chapter 5: Puzzle Pieces

The next morning brought cloudy skies but that didn't dampen Lois or CJ's spirits. They were ready to get to work before Perry had his first cup of coffee.

A quick check on the internet showed that former New Troy District Attorney Grant Clemens was living in Metropolis. He now had a small legal firm over in Queensland Park that specialized in criminal law. They wouldn't have to hunt for him.

Megan called his office and made an appointment for the three of them later in the day.

"What do we do in the meantime?" CJ asked Lois.

Lois's face screwed up in thought. "We know St. John was involved with Mazik."

"And St. John was Luthor's right hand man until Luthor's empire was deconstructed after his alleged death and later conviction and imprisonment," CJ put in. "I don't know if anyone really looked into Luthor's part in all of it. I know he was in prison at the time but he was released not all that long after Lois Lane died. And we know the judge that overturned his conviction was later indicted on corruption charges."

"Maybe we should see what Luthor's been doing the since then," Lois suggested.

"And Asabi and Mrs. Cox," CJ added.

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"Well, what have you got?" Perry asked them over lunch in his office.

"Well, we talked to Polly over in Business. Luthor was still a

prisoner on Stryker’s Island when Lane died,” Megan started. “But the stories at the time were that even behind bars, he was still giving orders as ‘the Boss’. The story also goes that when he found out about Lois Lane’s death, he swore vengeance against Superman and everyone else involved. A year later both Mazik and Superman were dead.”

“But there’s absolutely nothing that links Luthor to Superman’s death,” Lois pointed out.

“That’s because if there is a link it’s very indirect,” CJ said. “On the other hand... Mazik was under the care of Doctor Elias Mendenhall at the time of the Kent kidnapping. Mendenhall had links back to Luthor through research grants from LexCorp supporting his work on memory restoration and reconstruction.”

“Reconstruction as in brainwashing?” Lois asked.

CJ nodded.

“Do you know why Mazik was under a doctor’s care?” Perry asked.

“His brother and sister said he’d started acting odd after he began going through their late father’s stored papers. One of the boxes had books and papers that belonged to an uncle, Harvey Benton. His father, Jacob Benton, was one of the doctors at the Kansas City Insane Asylum in the late 1860s,” CJ answered.

“And that box contained Tempus’s journal,” Lois stated.

“Apparently,” CJ said. “But Jason Mazik also had a history of mental issues. He was suspected of poisoning his own father after Mazik senior cut off his allowance when he got involved in some college frat-boy stuff that ended in a fatality. But nothing was ever proven. The father’s murder still listed as unsolved.”

Listening to the two of them was uncannily like listening to Lois and Clark so many years before — the odd leaps of logic, the multiple threads, the almost psychic ability to follow the trail. Lois Lane’s preternatural ability to find the truth had failed her only twice in her life — when looking into the criminal mastermind, ‘the Boss’, she didn’t recognize Luthor’s scent, nor did she recognize that her partner was Superman. But then no one else at the time had picked up on those either.

“I remember your dad working to expose Mendenhall’s link to a series of mysterious assassinations that occurred not long before...” Perry let his voice trail off. “But he couldn’t prove anything and Mendenhall was in prison on a drug conviction when Mazik was killed. Although Mendenhall did swear that he’d been framed for the crime.”

“But Mazik’s death had all the earmarks of one of Mendenhall’s programmed assassins,” CJ pointed out earnestly. “A crafted, professional hit by someone no one would ever expect, who would honestly have no knowledge of having done it.”

“CJ, your dad could never prove Mendenhall was responsible for the assassinations,” Perry said gently. “All he had were suspicions. We never printed those.”

“But there is a link to Luthor there,” CJ insisted.

“A very tenuous one,” Perry pointed out. “What about Luthor himself?”

Lois answered. “After his release he tried regain control of his former companies. That didn’t go over very well with the new boards of directors. Sheldon Bender and whoever he was really working for did a good job of transferring everything away from Luthor’s control and wiping out Luthor’s fortune.”

Perry nodded. “I remember he was pretty upset. Made lots of threats. Then he dropped out of sight.”

“He went overseas for a couple years,” Lois said, reading from the report in her hand. “France and Germany. According to Polly’s research it looks like he was trying to get back control of his international holdings but that didn’t go well either. Two years ago he was back in Metropolis and hooked up with Asabi.”

“And Mrs. Cox?”

CJ handed Perry a print of a photo. Mrs. Cox was clearly

recognizable in the picture. With her were a sandy-haired man of about thirty and a swarthy-skinned man with his face hidden by a large fedora. “Mrs. Cox skipped bail and disappeared not long after Luthor took his dive. Not a trace for two years, then she showed up in Melbourne, working for Lawrence Luckabee, the man who managed to get control of Luthor’s companies in Hong Kong and Tokyo. He also claimed to be Luthor’s son. The man in the hat is a Mister Smith, Luckabee’s body guard and assistant. Never leaves his side.”

“I remember there were some odd things with Luthor’s reaction to the news that his son had shown himself,” Perry said. “At first he denied he even had a son and then all of a sudden he changed his tune. You might want to ask Polly about that, too.”

“We did,” Lois said. “Information on Lawrence Luckabee is pretty sparse, but what there is strongly suggests he really is Luthor’s son. The two men met face to face in Hong Kong in late 2003. Supposedly Luthor was preparing to publically denounce Luckabee as an imposter then he suddenly changed his tune and proclaimed that Luckabee was his long lost son and heir. At last report, Mrs. Cox is still working for Luckabee and hasn’t returned to the U.S. even though the judge that let Luthor off also dismissed all charges against her.”

Perry nodded thoughtfully. “It would be nice to know what changed Luthor’s mind about Luckabee but I doubt he’d tell us. So, after meeting with Luckabee, Luthor settles back in Metropolis with his man servant and opens a book store. That had to be a pretty big letdown for somebody like him.”

“I’m not so sure,” CJ said. “I think he has full control of the ACL Corporation. It owns the store and the building and has been investing in the companies Luthor used to control.”

“That was the company that handled Arianna Carlin’s annuity, wasn’t it?” Lois asked. “Why wasn’t it deconstructed too?”

“My dad left some notes on it,” CJ said. “ACL was a real estate investment company and on paper it was wholly owned by Arianna Carlin, even if she didn’t have any actual control over it, so it wasn’t deconstructed like Luthor’s other companies, and Bender wasn’t involved in it once the art was auctioned off according to Luthor’s will. But here’s the kicker, on Carlin’s death, ACL reverted back to Luthor, just like what happened with LLL Corporation when Lois Lane died.”

Perry’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t remember Lois or Clark ever mentioning that Lois had an annuity from Luthor.”

“I don’t think she ever knew,” CJ said. “There was nothing mentioned about it during the reading of his will. But when he came back from the dead and she died he regained control of that company so he had about a hundred million dollars to play with while he was trying to get control of his other companies back.”

“CJ,” Perry said solemnly, “that means Luthor had a motive for Lois’s death. A lot of motive.”

CJ sighed. “I don’t know why Dad didn’t see it.”

“He was convinced Superman was guilty,” Lois answered. “So it didn’t matter if anyone else had a motive. But we know better now.”

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Grant Clemens’ office was in an elegant brick building in an older part of Queensland Park. For someone who left the New Troy DA’s office in disgrace, he seemed to be doing quite well.

The polished middle aged receptionist let Megan, Lois, and CJ through after a wait of only a few minutes.

Clemens seemed surprised when he saw them. “I was expecting a couple of reporters from the Daily Planet, not three kids,” he complained mildly after they introduced themselves.

“We didn’t want to mislead you, but would you have agreed to see us if you knew it was Lois Lane’s niece, Clark Kent’s son, and a summer intern looking into Lane’s death?” Megan asked.

Clemens didn’t answer. Instead he gestured for them to take

the chairs opposite his desk. When Clemens was the New Troy District Attorney he was known for his matinee idol good looks — light-brown hair, blue eyes, square chin and an easy smile. However, the past twelve years hadn't been easy on him. The man looked haggard and there was a lot of white in his hair now.

"What do you want to know?" Clemens asked.

Megan placed her recorder on his desk and made a show of turning it on.

Lois asked the first question. "We've talked to Doctor Sprengler about Lois Lane's autopsy and the M.E.'s report on her death. When you discovered that report had been tampered with, why did you ask that the report not be made right?"

Clemens swallowed hard. "You have to understand something. I was elected to the District Attorney's office on the promise that I would make sure that no one was above the law. Not Lex Luthor, not the police, and not Superman. So when the first report came through that Lois Lane was dead and Superman admitted to freezing her, it was a golden opportunity. Only there was a catch. A big one."

"And that was?" CJ prompted.

Clemens studied the boy for a moment. "Clark Kent's son, huh? You sound like him." Clemens sighed and went on. "An election, even for D.A., takes a lot of money. It turns out I should have been more suspicious of some of my larger contributors."

"Luthor?" Lois asked.

Clemens nodded. "And Church. I don't know which group contacted me, but they wanted to be sure Superman was convicted of Lois Lane's murder."

"So you suppressed the evidence that he might not have been guilty," Megan observed.

"Yes, and no," Clemens said. "I knew there was something 'off' about the whole thing starting with the investigation into the Mazik robbery. The cops had Kent dead to rights. There was no doubt it was him on those security tapes but they hardly even talked to him about it. Then Lane shows up dead and it turns out Mazik was a kidnapper *and* a blackmailer."

"So, you think that if Clark Kent had been taken into custody for the robbery..." Lois urged.

"I think he would have told us what Mazik was up to and we could have stopped him," Clemens said. He sighed. "I know you won't believe me, nobody does, but the last thing I wanted was for Superman to be convicted of a crime he may not have committed."

"Then why were you pressing for a trial for second degree murder?" CJ asked.

"Because a trial would have been public, out in the open. And during the trial it would have been shown that the M.E.'s report had been tampered with and Superman wasn't responsible for Lane's death. That would have led to an investigation that might well have led back to whoever was pulling the strings on the entire operation and who was threatening me and my family."

"Why didn't you tell anyone you were being threatened?" Megan asked.

Clemens snorted. "Because I couldn't prove it. As D.A., I got threats nearly every day — people I'd convicted, families who thought justice hadn't been done, crazies. But these threats were different, more subtle. I'd get messages asking if I knew where my kids were, what my wife was doing. Then money started being deposited into my bank accounts from overseas. It would show up one day and disappear a week later. I even changed banks but it still kept happening."

"Why didn't you tell Judge Diggs what was happening?" CJ asked.

"Because I had no way of knowing if she was involved," Clemens said. "I still don't because if she had read the full autopsy report, she wouldn't have accepted his plea of guilty on involuntary manslaughter. It would have been reckless

endangerment and since that wasn't one of the charges brought against him, he should have gotten off."

"Do you think she was under the same pressure you were?" Lois asked.

"I don't know," Clemens admitted. "I never asked."

"Mister Clemens, you do realize we may be going public with this?" Megan asked.

"Ms. Gordon, I resigned from the D.A.'s office for a number of reasons all stemming from Lane's death. My wife left me and took the kids because she couldn't handle being married to the man who accused *Superman* of murder. It may be a little late, but I think the truth about what happened has to come out sometime." He reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a folder. He pushed it across the desk to them. "Maybe you can use this."

Megan opened the file and flipped through the papers inside. "LLL Corporation?"

"Both of the banks claimed the deposits were all clerical or computer errors and the withdrawals were the 'corrections'. But one of the things I did find out was that all the deposits came from accounts controlled by that company. They denied any knowledge of the transactions and since it was an overseas company, I couldn't find out much more."

"Mister Clemens," Lois said. "LLL Corporation was and is controlled by Lex Luthor. I'm surprised you didn't know that."

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"Do you believe Clemens?" Lois asked on the way back to the Daily Planet.

"I think he has an interesting twist on the facts as we know them," CJ admitted. "But he did admit that he knew Superman was innocent and he basically did nothing."

"Maybe we should talk to Judge Diggs tomorrow," Megan suggested. "Maybe even his defense attorney, Hunter. She should have realized there was something wrong with the report. She could have used that to discredit Clemens' entire case."

"You don't think Grandpa Perry will mind us taking all your time like this?" CJ asked.

"It's more interesting than making the coffee," Megan answered with a grin.

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CJ had a hard time sleeping that night. Everything seemed so loud — Grandpa Perry's snoring, the street sounds, even the distant airport seemed loud and raucous. Closing his eyes didn't help. In his mind's eye he could see grownup Lois lying in a rat filled culvert. He swooped down and saved her. Or rather Superman swooped down to save the day.

Luthor was standing there watching, laughing his head off.

"Maybe you'd like to let me in on the joke," Superman asked. Luthor's maniacal laughter was annoying.

"Me! I'm the joke! Twice I've had the chance to kill you and twice the game has gone your way," Luthor said. He wouldn't stop laughing.

Superman wasn't amused. "The game's finally over, Luthor."

"No! I will *not* give you the satisfaction of taking me alive!" Luthor shouted. He ran toward the high voltage wires that he'd been stealing power from.

Gretchen Kelly's body was on the floor. Her heart wasn't beating and from the burns on her body, she'd been electrocuted. Superman cut the lines with his heat vision, plunging the underground lair in darkness. Luthor howled in rage.

"You can't cheat justice twice," Superman said, grabbing Luthor's arm to keep him from getting away.

"Don't be so smug," Luthor spat. "Tell him Lois. Tell him that you really love me. Tell him we're meant to be together. Tell him. *Tell him!*"

Luthor was gone and Lois was lying on the concrete floor in Mazik's underground lair.

She was cold. Deathly cold. Nigel St. John was there,

standing with Jace Mazik.

“Well, well... Dream all you want...” Nigel said musingly to no one in particular, “...but nothing quite prepares you for the sheer thrill of the moment.”

“Not a mark on her. How’d you do it, Superman?” Mazik asked.

Superman ignored the question. He had done what Mazik had wanted. Lois was there and she wasn’t breathing. For all intents and purposes, she was dead.

“Where are my parents?”

“Where are my parents, *sir?*” Jace sneered.

Superman grabbed Mazik by the collar. He was tired of the madman’s games.

Nigel clicked his tongue. “Now boys, boys, let’s not fight, particularly, since...” The Englishman pulled out a small gray metal box and opened the lid. “It wouldn’t exactly be fair... To Superman.”

The pain was excruciating. He backed away from the malevolent crystal but Nigel kept moving forward with the crystal in his hand.

“It’s relatively simple to use, Jace. Very few moving parts,” Nigel was saying conversationally. “Short term exposure leads to lasting effect. Give it a whirl.”

Nigel handed the crystal over to Mazik who taunted Superman with it.

“Superman... do the words ‘Nyah-nyah, nuh-nyah-nyah’ have any meaning to you?” Jace sneered as he forced his victim into the room beyond. Superman tripped, falling into a heap on the floor.

“Clark!” he heard his mother cry out.

“I know you must be in a lot of pain but here’s the good news... It’ll all be over soon,” Mazik said before he and Nigel backed out, tossing the kryptonite into the room before the door closed.

There was a hissing noise and white gas started to billow out from the ceiling vent. Superman tried to move but he was too weak. His parents dragged him to one side of the room even though they were barely able to stand.

“Dad, get the kryptonite,” he ordered. His dad did so, but stayed on the far side of the room.

He summoned what little strength he had left and blew a stream of freezing air up to the vent. It turned white with frost.

“Throw it!” Martha ordered. “At the vent!”

Jonathan wound up and threw the crystal at the vent. The frozen metal shattered and Superman could hear the crystal rattling in the ductwork above the lead coated ceiling.

He was still weak but managed to kick the door open.

Nigel was on the floor next to Lois. His heart wasn’t beating but Superman didn’t care. It was Lois who had his full attention.

“Oh, no... Lois...” his mother murmured.

He aimed a diffused heat beam across Lois’s body. Her body softened to a more normal tone, but her heart didn’t start. He grabbed her hand. “Live,” he ordered.

Nothing.

He began CPR. His mom moved in to help. Puff puff, thirty compressions, puff puff, thirty compressions.

“Lois, come back, you come back to me...” Clark begged.

Nothing. Another round of heat vision. Her body was now at normal temperature. Still nothing.

“You come back now! Do you hear me, Lois, don’t go! Don’t go! Fight!”

He and Martha kept going. Puff puff, thirty compressions, puff puff, thirty compressions.

“You are not dying on me, you are not giving up, now breathe! You breathe, dammit!”

“Son, the EMTs are here,” Jonathan said softly. “They’ll take over.”

Clark moved back to allow the EMTs do their work. Lois was intubated and shocked, drugs injected into her heart. Nothing.

Lois Lane was declared dead on arrival at Metropolis General Hospital. Clark Kent wanted to die with her. The longing was sudden and overwhelming, like a cold bitter wind blowing through his soul.

“*CJ!*”

CJ woke up with a scream to find Grandpa Perry shaking him.

“*CJ?*”

The boy gazed wide-eyed at the old man, tears running down his face.

“I had a real bad dream,” CJ whispered.

“Want to tell me about it?” Perry asked.

“I was Superman and Lois was dead...” He started sobbing again and Perry pulled him close.

“It was just a dream,” Perry assured him.

“No it wasn’t. He wanted to die with her, Grandpa Perry,” CJ said. “It was like all the color went out of the world and he didn’t care anymore. But it wasn’t a dream.”

Perry pulled back and studied the boy he was cradling. “CJ, how did you recognize Lex Luthor the other day?”

“I just did,” CJ said.

“You have Clark’s memories, don’t you?”

CJ nodded.

“Who else knows?”

“Grandma and Grandpa and Lois. Grandma thinks I’m his reincarnation and I came back to finish the job he couldn’t finish before because... he died.”

“And what do you think?”

“I don’t know,” CJ admitted, wiping his runny nose on his pajama sleeve. “I’m just a kid.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have let you and Lois start on this project,” Perry said.

“But we wanted to, Grandpa Perry,” Lois said from the doorway. “We can’t stop now.”

The feeling of uncanny familiarity hit Perry once again. “Lois hon, is that you?”

“Yes,” the girl said solemnly. “I really do have her memories. Makes being in grade school kinda bizarre.”

“Look, I don’t want to get into trouble with your grandparents for giving you nightmares, okay?” Perry said, turning back to CJ.

Familiar brown eyes looked back at him. “It wasn’t a dream, not really. I think Dad is trying to tell me something about what happened. Something everybody missed.”

“Like what?” Lois demanded. Her arms were crossed over her chest in a stance that was eerily familiar. The realization sent shivers down Perry’s spine. He discovered he had absolutely no trouble believing the two children in the room with him were Lois Lane and Clark Kent trapped in ten year old bodies.

CJ frowned. “Like why he never came to terms with her death and what made him go into the suicidal depression that finally killed him. He should have been able to move beyond it and he didn’t. Why?”

“We know that red kryptonite effected Superman’s mental state,” Perry said thoughtfully. “Maybe there was more out there than the pieces he knew about.”

“Gene Newtrich found the first pieces,” Lois said, coming over to sit at Perry’s other side. “*He* was working for Billy Church and Intergang.”

“Well that’s something you can look into tomorrow, okay?” Perry announced. It was nearly midnight, and whether they were his late star reporters reborn or not, they were kids. Besides, *he* needed his rest.

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The next morning, CJ was very quiet. Even Alice noticed it

over breakfast.

“CJ, are you okay?” she asked gently.

“He had a bad night,” Perry told his wife. “I probably shouldn’t have said yes when they asked to work on this story.”

“And what story is that?” Alice asked.

“Lois Lane’s murder,” Lois answered for him.

Alice looked confused. “I thought that was an accident.”

CJ shook his head. “It wasn’t an accident if someone made sure she couldn’t be revived.”

Perry took a sip of his coffee as he considered what to do next. He honestly hadn’t thought the two kids would come up with anything new. He had known they were very much like the Lois and Clark of his newsroom — he just hadn’t known exactly how much like them they really were. He was still working on getting his mind around the fact that they really did have the memories of their dead counterparts. It was easier to believe it of CJ. He was Clark’s genetic duplicate. It was harder to understand with Lois. She wasn’t related to Lois Lane at all except by adoption. But there was still that eerie similarity. He wondered a little why Sam and Ellen hadn’t picked up on it or maybe they had and couldn’t believe it.

“Grandpa Perry?” Lois was asking. “Did you hear me?”

Perry set down his coffee. “Yes, hon?”

“I was thinking we should get appointments to see Judge Diggs and Constance Hunter. Today, if we can,” Lois said. “I have this weird feeling we’re running out of time.”

CJ nodded agreement. “Diggs and Hunter today and tomorrow, depending what they tell us, let’s go see Luthor. I have the feeling he’s the key. He may not have been involved in Lois Lane’s death, but there’s little doubt he was involved in Superman’s conviction and maybe even Clark Kent’s death.”

“Honey, your father killed himself,” Alice said gently.

“I know that,” CJ said softly. “But what if somebody wanted to make sure he did?”

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Surprisingly, Judge Diggs agreed to meet with them before her first case of the day came up. If she was surprised to see that the people who had the appointments were mere kids, she didn’t show it.

“I can’t tell you how surprised I was to get a call from Perry White this morning,” she told them as they sat down opposite her desk. “I haven’t heard from Perry since... oh, my husband’s funeral.”

Megan nodded and smiled. Some quick research before they left the newsroom that morning had told them that Diggs’s husband had died two years before. Apparently Diggs had been preparing to retire from the bench, but on his death, she reconsidered. She was now running for the state Supreme Court and the pundits were saying she stood a good chance of winning.

The older woman studied the two children for a moment.

“Perry said you were looking into Lois Lane’s death and Superman’s conviction,” she said.

“Yes ma’am,” Lois said. “We talked to Grant Clemens yesterday.” Lois briefly summarized what Clemens had told them.

Diggs was silent for a long moment after Lois was finished. “I wish Clemens had told me he was under duress,” she said finally. “I might have done things differently, but then, maybe not. I knew the autopsy report was flawed. I also knew that I was seeing a young man who desperately wanted an end to his pain even if it meant his death, and I was in a position to give him an excuse not to die. I have to wonder, though, if Miss Hunter recognized the autopsy report was as flawed as it was. She had the perfect defense in her hands and she didn’t use it.”

“Do you think Miss Hunter was under the same duress as Clemens?” CJ asked.

Diggs shook her head. “If she had been, she would have

agreed with Clemens to take the case to trial and suppress the autopsy report. No, I think she was simply inexperienced. I’m told Hunter was and is a good honest corporate attorney, but she had no criminal law experience, almost no trial experience. Superman would have been better off with an eager beaver public defender. Of course, it wasn’t my place to tell him that and I doubt he would have listened.”

“Your honor, were *you* under duress at the time?” Lois asked.

Diggs actually smiled at the question. “Are you asking if I was being threatened if Superman wasn’t convicted? No. I was getting a lot of unwelcome advice from people who should have known better, people who felt Superman needed to be made an example of regardless of the facts in the case. People who felt that if he made one mistake that meant he was out of control and a menace to the community. But I wasn’t being threatened in any way that I took seriously.”

“Do you remember who they were? The one’s volunteering their advice?” CJ asked.

Diggs sighed. “Lex Luthor was one of them. Oh, it was never direct, always through people who worked for him, but I knew it was Luthor. That’s one of the reasons I took the route I did in the case. For Superman’s sake it needed to be handled quickly and quietly. I accepted his plea of guilty on the most minor charge Clemens gave me to work with and geared his sentence to keeping him safe from himself. I wasn’t going to give Luthor the pleasure of making Superman’s trial a public spectacle so he’d have a platform to spew his hate.”

“Do you know what Luthor’s reaction was to that?” Megan asked.

“I gather he wasn’t too happy about it, but there’s nothing he could do or say. If he so much as breathed a word that he had tried to suborn a judge and a district attorney to get Superman put away... well, there are laws against that sort of thing and I would have loved nothing better than to see Luthor spend even more time behind bars.”

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“Do you believe her?” Lois asked CJ as they ate hot dogs by the fountain in Centennial Park.

CJ shrugged. “*She* believes it.”

“Now what?” Megan asked.

“I don’t know,” CJ admitted. “The crime scene’s gone. I checked yesterday. The building was demolished ten years ago. And Sergeant Zymak, the detective in charge of the Mazik robbery investigation, took early retirement. He’s in Nebraska now.”

Lois’s eyes lit on the playground by the Superman Memorial. “Last one to the top is a rotten egg,” she announced taking off for the playground.

CJ was only a pace behind her when she reached the entrance to the playground. They reached the top of structure at the same time. Lois sat on one of the cross bars, feet wrapped around the other two sides of the one of the metal triangles that made up the large dome climbing structure. CJ sat opposite her.

Megan was running to catch up to them.

“Diggs didn’t really tell us much, did she,” Lois commented. From where she was sitting she could see nearly the entire park.

“Only what we already knew,” CJ said. He was scanning the area around them just as she was. “Judge Diggs had to deal with Superman’s confession and Clemens’s hard-nosed attitude, and she simply did the best she could.” CJ paused.

Lois frowned. “So what do we do now? I mean, we already have enough evidence to clear Superman’s name even without knowing who actually killed my Aunt Lois.”

“You think Mazik was telling the truth about this Tempus person?”

Lois shrugged. “That journal was written by someone who had a lot more information than they should have had. If Mazik

was right, then Tempus could have walked right in using technology we know nothing about. Tempus may have even been the one who killed Mazik. But I'm also thinking we may be going about this the wrong way."

"What do you mean?" CJ asked.

"Mazik said that Tempus said that he'd found a way to destroy Utopia once and for all."

"Whatever that means," CJ reminded her. "We don't know what Utopia even is except as the ravings of a madman."

Lois waved away his complaint. "Tempus wanted to destroy Superman to prevent Utopia from happening. Obviously, killing Lois Lane wasn't enough. He had to *destroy* Superman, not just kill him."

"He wanted Superman to be seen as culpable in Lois's death. He wanted Superman to..." CJ couldn't finish the thought.

"He wanted to destroy the *idea* of Superman," Lois said. "Now we just need to figure out how he drove Superman into a suicidal depression."

"Red kryptonite, maybe?"

"But how did he get exposed?" Lois asked. "Was it a single exposure that had long term effects or multiple exposures?"

CJ shook his head. "I think maybe that's what my nightmare was trying to tell me. He was first exposed when she was declared dead."

"That was at Met General. Someone at Met General was waiting for Superman to show up?"

"It could have been anyone, a nurse, a doctor, a patient, a cop, even one of the guys fixing the ceiling," CJ pointed out. "And Superman was practically a regular in the emergency room, bringing in victims to be treated."

"So that's a dead end. What do you think the odds are that it's still in the hospital?" Lois asked.

"Well, I'm not about to walk in there and find out," CJ stated.

"Maybe we don't need to," Lois said. "Wasn't there a guy over at Star Labs who was studying Superman?"

"Doctor Klein," CJ said. "Bernard Klein."

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Bernard Klein hated meetings. He didn't mind seminars and symposiums — there was a chance he might learn about some interesting new research or lines of inquiry — but business meetings and staff meetings left him cold and always had. He much preferred to be in his lab exploring the outer edges of science. Nothing was too far out for him to at least take a look at.

Unfortunately, his current job as chief administrator of the Metropolis branch of STAR Labs left him little time to assuage his own vast curiosity, which was why he had absolutely no qualms about walking out of a staff meeting to meet with two children and a teenager claiming to be from the Daily Planet and looking into Superman's death.

"You were Superman's personal physician," the boy, CJ, began after introductions had been made.

Klein was surprised and he let it show. "Yes, I suppose I was," he admitted. "STAR Labs was the only research facility he cooperated with in any studies on him. And I had the privilege of being one of the few people he trusted with the information he gave us." He studied the boy. There was something eerily familiar about him. "But that information isn't exactly common knowledge," Klein added. For security reasons, STAR Labs had kept a tight lid on their relationship with Superman.

"Doctor Klein, did Superman ever come in for an examination after Lois Lane's death?" the little girl, Lois, asked.

Klein shook his head. "No, even though I tried to get him to come in for a checkup. We all knew there was something 'off'. There are natural stages in recovering from grief and he wasn't going through them. A lot of people knew he was in trouble, but we couldn't exactly demand he come in for an intervention. I was glad when those people from New Krypton showed up. I was

hoping they'd be able to help him. I hadn't realized..."

"Realized what, Doctor Klein?" the older girl prompted.

Klein shook his head. He had never voiced his suspicions that the person wearing Superman's suit in the recordings of Superman's wedding to Zara wasn't Superman at all but a human who bore a remarkable resemblance to the Kryptonian.

"It was all a long time ago and I doubt it matters," Klein said aloud. "Superman's dead."

"And that's what we wanted to ask you about," CJ said. "You said that people knew that something was 'off' with him.

Assuming there was an outside influence, what would it have been?"

"Oh, I know what it was," Klein said. "Repeated exposure to an isotope of kryptonite. It was common knowledge that green kryptonite was dangerous to him, but there was another isotope that was red. It affected his mental state rather than his physical one. A good-sized piece of the red isotope was found inside one of the ceilings in the Metropolis General Hospital emergency room about eight years ago. I've no doubt it was placed there at least a year before his death."

"I don't remember hearing anything about that," Megan said.

"The discovery was kept quiet," Klein said. "It wouldn't have been good for it to be known that someone had deliberately planted radioactive material at a hospital."

"So, where is the piece now?" Lois asked.

"In a secure vault with the other pieces of kryptonite we've collected over the years," Klein said. "We keep hoping we can use it as a power source, but so far we haven't had much luck. And don't ask to see it. Kryptonite is harmful to humans too. It just takes longer to have an effect."

"Doctor Klein, at the time, how many people would have known about red kryptonite?" Lois asked.

"Hard to say since the first pieces were found in the hands of criminals," Klein said. "But I know Lexlabs had a number of pieces they were working with. I'm fairly certain the piece that was found at Met General was from their collection and I have no doubt their people knew exactly what its effects were on Superman."

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"I think that answers everything," Lois said outside STAR Labs. "They were both murdered. Aunt Lois *and* Superman."

"But who was responsible?" CJ asked. "Luthor was in prison but capable of pulling the strings, but Masik was blaming Tempus — someone who may not have even existed. And even if we knew which one it was, we can't prove it."

"Maybe they were both responsible," Megan suggested. "Tempus murdered Lane but Luthor was responsible for taking out Superman."

"And only Luthor knows the truth," Lois added.

Megan checked her watch. "Well, we're not going to have time to see him today. We're barely going to make our appointment with Miss Hunter."

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Constance Hunter's office was in a bright new building in Midtown. Apparently she'd done fairly well for herself in the twelve years since Lois Lane's death.

A male receptionist ushered them into a posh corner office.

"Judge Diggs called and warned me you about you," Hunter said, coming around the broad slate-topped desk to greet them. "But I have to ask, why is Perry White risking his reputation by letting two kids use the Daily Planet's facilities for a lark?"

"We're looking into Lois Lane's murder," Megan explained.

"That case was closed twelve years ago," Hunter stated. "Superman pled guilty to involuntary manslaughter and was sentenced for that. There was no murder."

"That's not what the autopsy report said," Lois said.

Hunter didn't bat an eye. "Really? The report I was given

said Lois Lane died as a result of being flash frozen, by Superman.”

“The report we’ve read said her body was tampered with, making it impossible for him to revive her,” CJ said.

“But her body wouldn’t have been tampered with if she hadn’t been frozen first,” Hunter said.

“Is that why he was willing to plead guilty to involuntary manslaughter?” Megan asked.

“He didn’t give me his reasons,” Hunter said. “And even if he had, that would be covered under the umbrella of attorney client privilege.”

“But Superman’s dead,” Lois protested.

“And I’m not going to sully his memory by bringing up lies and rumors about things long since buried,” Hunter stated. “Now, if you don’t mind, I have a busy schedule.” With that she headed back to her seat at the desk.

Megan began to usher Lois and CJ out of the office.

CJ stopped and looked back at Hunter. “Ms. Hunter, we’ve been told that D.A. Clemens was being threatened by someone who wanted Superman convicted. Were you being threatened as well?”

She glared at him. “This interview is over.”

Outside Hunter’s offices, Lois turned to CJ. “Awfully nice digs for the one honest lawyer in Metropolis.”

CJ’s expression became distant then he beckoned for Lois and Megan to follow him down the corridor and around the corner to another door. This one was marked ‘private’. CJ pressed his ear against the door and Lois followed suit.

“What are you...?” Megan began but CJ held up a hand to shush her. After several minutes, both Lois and CJ grabbed Megan’s hands and hurried her around another corner just before the door opened. They watched as Constance Hunter checked the hallway before heading to the elevator. She seemed to be in a hurry.

“Do you want to follow her?” Megan asked.

“I’m pretty sure we know where she’s going,” Lois said.

“And where’s that?”

“To see Lex Luthor,” CJ said.

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“A problem, sir?” Asabi asked as Luthor hung up the phone.

“I’m not sure,” Luthor admitted. “The redoubtable Miss Hunter has informed me that young Master Kent and Miss Olsen are investigating the murder of Lois Lane.”

“After all this time, is there anything for them to find?” Asabi asked.

“That is something we need to find out,” Luthor said. “Check the ‘other’ records again, only this time see if the keepers will tell you who actually killed my Lois. Maybe there’s something in Masik’s record that will help us.”

“And if the information you want isn’t there?”

Luthor smiled. “I trust you will use your unique talents to get me what I want.”

“And what will you be doing while I do that, if I may ask?”

“Entertaining our favorite corporate attorney, naturally.”

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Hunter was flustered when she walked into the store. Normally questions about Superman’s conviction and death didn’t get to her but there was something uncanny about Kent’s son and Lane’s niece. It was like they knew she hadn’t done her best job for Superman.

She had put in a good effort for him, but she had also warned Superman and the Kents that she wasn’t a criminal attorney. She had little trial experience and she knew a more experienced attorney would do a better job for him. But Superman hadn’t wanted a different attorney. In fact, she wasn’t convinced he wanted an attorney at all, but she had promised the Kents and Perry White that she would do her best for him.

On the day of the arraignment, she’d been surprised to find that the District Attorney himself was handling the prosecution’s case. She was even more surprised at how intransigent Clemens was being concerning the charges he had decided to press against Superman and any offer to plea bargain. Finally she threw her hands up in disgust and frustration. The rest was history, but she had been left with the unsettled feeling that there was more she should have done even if Superman hadn’t wanted her to do it.

She told herself that she had done what she could for him and she had been willing to face the consequences of her failure. Oddly enough, the consequences had been the opposite of what she’d been expecting. She had expected that her practice would suffer for her failure — new clients wouldn’t be interested in working with the attorney who allowed Superman to be convicted of Lois Lane’s death. Instead, within a week of the sentencing, Hunter had two new corporate clients and generous retainers from both of them.

It wasn’t until Superman’s death that she found out who actually controlled LLL and ACL Corporations. By that time she knew she would be unable to convince anyone that she hadn’t been on Lex Luthor’s payroll at the time Superman was sentenced.

“Ah, Ms. Hunter,” Luthor greeted her, coming out from the back of the store. “Such an unexpected pleasure.”

She felt a chill as though a cold dank breeze had blown through the store.

“The Daily Planet is looking into Lois Lane’s murder and Superman’s death,” she announced.

“And how does this concern me?” Luthor asked. He poured a cup of coffee from the carafe on the sales counter and held it out to her. She ignored his offer and he set the cup down next to the carafe.

“They came to my office to ask me why Superman pled guilty,” Hunter said.

“He pled guilty because he *was* guilty.”

“He pled guilty because someone wanted to make sure he *believed* he was guilty,” Hunter spat. “Mind telling me how you managed that?”

“You give me too much credit,” Luthor protested mildly. He moved across the room to a glass display case that held a green glowing crystal. Hunter’s eyes followed him.

“Apparently Clemens was being pressured to get a conviction, even though he knew he’d likely lose if it went to trial,” Hunter said. “He also knew the autopsy report on Lane had been deliberately falsified.”

“Was it?” Luthor asked. He sounded surprised but Hunter knew how disingenuous the ex-billionaire could be — he had fooled everyone for years into believing he was Metropolis’s benevolent benefactor when in fact he was a mob boss the likes of which Metropolis hadn’t seen since the Thirties.

“You expect me to believe that you didn’t know?” Hunter asked.

“Do you expect me to believe *you* didn’t realize what you had while you were defending that...”

Hunter saw a flicker of *something* cross Luthor’s face. Hatred, maybe...

“*Man*,” Luthor continued. “The *man* that killed my Lois.”

“*Your* Lois?”

“She was my soul mate, my beloved, the one who was destined for me until *he* stole her away,” Luthor said.

“She left you at the altar,” Hunter reminded him. “She did everything in her power to bring you to justice.”

“Justice?” Luthor shouted. “Was it justice that put the third richest man in the world behind bars? Was it justice that *creature* stole my Lois from me, turned her against me? I owned this city. She was mine!”

“Is that why you had her killed?” Hunter asked. “Because she

chose someone else over you?”

“She did not choose him!” Luthor spat. “He seduced her away from me! And she would have come back to me if I hadn’t been betrayed by... by...”

“St. John may have betrayed you,” Hunter said. “But Lois Lane would never have willingly gone back to you.”

“She would have,” Luthor stated. “And she will come back to me. She has already come back to be with me.”

“Lois Lane is dead,” Hunter said.

“No,” he assured her. “I’ve seen her. She looks just like she did. She even has the same name so I would know her. And she *will* be mine.”

Hunter stared at him. There was a sinking, clenching feeling in her gut. ‘She even has the same name so I would know her.’ The little girl with the woman from the Daily Planet — her name was Lois.

Hunter’s mouth was dry. It was becoming obvious that Luthor had lost his mind.

“Mister Luthor, you’re out of your mind if you think people will just stand by while you have your way with a ten year old.”

“How dare you!” Luthor’s face was red with outrage.

“And I will dare what I have to, to keep that little girl safe from you!”

“You work for me! I own you!” Luthor screamed, spittle spraying.

Hunter stepped back from him suddenly afraid for her own safety. She hadn’t imagined that the urbane Luthor, even if insane, was capable of such hatred and rage.

She tried to keep her voice steady. “You don’t own me and as of right now, I don’t work for you.”

“No one walks out on Lex Luthor,” he stated, his voice suddenly cold. “No one quits until I say they’re quit.”

“Watch me,” Hunter stated, turning on her heel. The skin between her shoulder blades crawled but she wasn’t going to let him know how afraid she was.

“No one walks out on Lex Luthor,” he repeated.

Hunter felt a sharp pain in the back of her head and then there was nothing.

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Megan had her hand on the door to *Dark Moon Rising* when CJ pulled her away, almost knocking her over. At her glare he nodded to the interior of the shop on the other side of the display windows.

Mister ‘Alexander’ could be seen standing over Constance Hunter’s body. In his hand was a large geode that looked like it might have blood on it. His partner, Asabi, was nowhere to be seen.

“Call 9-1-1 right *now*,” CJ hissed at Megan. Wordlessly, she pulled out her cell phone and tapped in the numbers.

Luthor looked up and started towards them, the weapon still in his hand.

Lois and CJ started running, heading in opposite directions. CJ dragged Megan with him. Luthor headed after Lois, shouting after her. “I did it for you, my darling... They stole you from me...”

“Stay away from me!” Lois screamed back at him. Passersby stopped and stared. Several moved to intercept Luthor but he sidestepped them easily. Lois ran into the moving traffic.

“Lois, don’t,” Luthor shouted. “Our love is eternal, why are you running away? Come back! Come back to me!”

Lois easily slipped between the vehicles, moving at a speed and agility no normal ten-year-old should have managed. Drivers slammed on their brakes as she vaulted over car hoods, in some cases actually running up windshields and hopping from one car roof to another, ignoring the crashing of bumpers as less attentive drivers ran into the stopped cars in front of them.

“Stay away from me!” Lois shouted again. Luthor tried to

weave his way through the now stopped cars. Sirens could be heard in the near distance coming closer.

“Stay here,” CJ ordered Megan as he started toward Luthor.

Like Lois, he was moving faster and with more agility than a normal child his age — a lot faster. Megan wasn’t sure his feet were even on the ground.

“Stop, police!” a woman shouted. Luthor ignored the order as he tried to get closer to Lois. She was on the roof of the car and backed away from him. A shot rang out. Megan assumed it was a warning shot since Luthor stayed on his feet.

CJ tackled Luthor, sending him crashing into the hood of a car. The geode bounced off the car as Luthor lost his grip on it.

“She’s mine!” Luthor screamed. “She’s my soul mate, forever...”

“No, she is not,” Asabi stated. Megan hadn’t seen him leave the shop. But now he was standing at arm’s length from Luthor and CJ. Megan moved closer to listen. CJ stepped away from Luthor.

“You told me she was *mine*,” Luthor shouted at Asabi.

“I did not know that yours was the hand that murdered her,” Asabi said. Megan thought she heard a tremor in his voice. “That was what the keepers of the records did not want found. That you had found a way to bend the laws governing time and space and that it was *your* hand and no other, that murdered the one you claimed was your beloved.”

“You lie! That alien freak killed her! And I killed him for it!”

“Are you admitting to the murder of Superman?” a police officer asked Luthor.

“He wasn’t a *man*,” Luthor spat. “He was a monster. Killing a monster isn’t murder.”

“I doubt the courts will agree with you, Mister Luthor,” the officer stated as she started to handcuff him. “You’re under arrest for suspicion of murder. You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney...”

“No one makes a mockery of Lex Luthor,” Luthor snarled as he pulled away from her, almost knocking her down. “Killing a monster is not murder!” He lunged toward Lois one last time. A zapping sound and the smell of ozone and Luthor went down.

“You’re not committing suicide by cop on my watch,” the officer. “And the murder I was talking about wasn’t Superman’s.”

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“Are you kids okay?” Perry asked when he caught sight of the three entering the newsroom in the company of Commissioner Henderson.

“We’re fine, Grandpa Perry,” CJ assured him. “Mister Luthor tried to grab Lois but she ran really fast.” The boy’s expression turned more solemn. “We didn’t get there fast enough to help Ms. Hunter, though.”

He looked over to Megan who nodded her head. “Luthor never laid a hand on either of them. But Ms. Hunter wasn’t so lucky.”

“So Luthor completely lost it?” Perry asked, turning to Henderson.

“He’s under psychiatric observation at Metropolis General, but he was raving about killing Superman and his business partner claims that Luthor’s the one who murdered Lois Lane, but there’s no evidence to support that,” Henderson said. “I doubt he’ll be found competent to stand trial for Hunter’s death any time soon, if ever. And insisting that a ten-year-old girl is his returned-from-the-dead murdered soul-mate doesn’t say much for his mental stability.”

“So what now?”

Henderson shrugged. “Doctor Sprengler has finally released the corrected report on Lois Lane’s autopsy results. It functionally exonerates Superman from any wrong-doing in her death. She died because she was poisoned.”

“And has Luthor said how he murdered Superman?” Perry

asked.

“Red kryptonite poisoning.” Henderson grimaced. “Star Labs confirms that it was found some years ago exactly where Luthor claims it had been placed to do the most damage.”

“You’re saying Commissioner, that after all this time, Superman really was innocent? That he should never have been charged, much less convicted of killing her?” Chuck Blake, the crime beat reporter asked. Perry hadn’t noticed him joining their little group but wasn’t surprised that he had. He was good. Not as good as Lane or Kent, but good.

“He did confess to freezing her and that was incredibly reckless of him,” Henderson stated. “And not letting the police know that he and Kent were dealing with a hostage situation... The police, the FBI, we have people trained to handle these things. Trying to go it alone, no matter how talented or brilliant you are... never a good idea.” He was looking directly at CJ and Lois who squirmed under his gaze.

“Are you going to need anything more from the kids?” Perry asked.

“We have their statements,” Henderson said. “And like I said, it’s unlikely Luthor will ever stand trial.”

“And what about Clemens?” Megan asked. “He prosecuted a man he knew was innocent of the charges against him.”

“The statute of limitations for obstruction of justice in a case like that would be five years,” Henderson said. “I doubt the current D.A. will bother to look into more serious charges. Besides, Clemens still has his conscience to deal with.”

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## Interlude II

“Another interesting solution,” the Archivist said to Wells. “Although hiding material here from seekers of truth was a questionable act at best.”

“I doubt this incarnation of Asabi Washa was a true seeker of truth,” Wells commented. “He was deliberately misstating the concept of soul mates and how it works.”

“And you have never done so?” the Archivist asked. Wells thought he detected a chuckle in her (his?) voice.

“I *thought* I understood the concept,” Wells defended himself. “But, we did need to keep him from discovering the link between Clark Kent and Kal-El of Krypton.”

“Very true,” the Archivist agreed.

Wells paused as he considered his next question. “Are they closer to the path they should have been on?”

“Closer? Yes, closer. But there are still matters left undone. Dangerous matters for their world.”

THE END