

The Rival – Matchmaker Style

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Rated: PG13

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Summary: This is the ninth story in the Matchmaker Style series. Lois finds herself having to work with her old college roommate and best friend, Linda King. She doesn't have to worry about Clark because they tell Linda about their marriage; however, Linda thinks that Superman is fair game.

Story Size: 23,125 words (24Kb as text)

A/N: When Virginia proposed the challenge of taking a first season story and having it result in Lois and Clark being married I took up the challenge and “The Green, Green Glow of Home — Matchmaker Style” was the result.

That was all well and good, but then I started thinking — What about future episodes? How would the fact that they are now married affect the dynamic? For instance, how would “Pheromone My Lovely” have been changed by the marriage? How would it affect “Honeymoon in Metropolis” and “All Shook Up”, “Witness”, “Illusions of Grandeur”, “Ides of Metropolis” and “The Foundling”?

In the previous stories, you've seen my take on the answer. So, now, to answer the question — ‘What if Lois and Clark were already married when The Rival happened?’ I offer the following.

The Rival — Matchmaker Style

Disclaimers: The characters in this story are property of DC, December 3rd Productions and Warner Bros. No copyright infringement is intended. I have just borrowed the characters for a short time.

In this, the sequel to “The Foundling — Matchmaker Style”, Lois and Clark have been back from the assignment in Smallville for a few months. The events of PML were delightful; however, Lois really has no recollection of what happened. Clark finally had a chance to give Lois a real honeymoon. Then her life had been threatened because she had witnessed a murder. Next they investigated the kidnappings of the children of wealthy families. They have dealt with a murder and a threat to the internet and the messages regarding Clark's origin. Now they have to deal with a rival paper.

Lois and Clark now have returned to Clark's ‘old’ apartment.

In this particular story a lot of the dialogue is taken from the script text. I wish to express my thanks to my Beta readers Artemis and Ray Reynolds for their invaluable help. This was a VERY rough draft when it first landed in their hands.

* * denotes emphasis

< > denotes thoughts

As always comments are welcome. (ken.janney@kjanney.com)

Chapter 1

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha -34 x Gamma 255 x Tau -225
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The weather was starting to get warmer. Spring had quickly sprung into early summer.

It was Saturday and Lois was going to be spending most of the day with Lucy, taking care of the lease on her old apartment and getting her settled in. Lucy was going to start at MetU with some summer school classes and wanted to get those things out of the way.

Clark had been called away as Superman because of a mud-slide in the Andes. But because of the sparse population it had not occupied much of his time and he had returned to Metropolis. Knowing that Lois was busy he decided to just kick back and have some fun. There was a community center that the Superman Foundation had paid to rehab and he wanted to check out the facilities. He decided that he didn't want to do it as Superman, but he didn't want Clark Kent to be seen on that side of town when his home was quite a distance away, so he landed nearby and spun into shorts, a cut-off sweat shirt and tennis shoes, but he refrained from putting on his glasses. He figured that without the glasses he looked sufficiently unlike Clark Kent that he wouldn't be recognized and also without the Suit he would look sufficiently unlike Superman that no one would suspect.

In an equipment locker he found a basketball on an unoccupied half-court. He started thinking about great basketball teams and a theme song started playing in his head. He just had to whistle “Sweet Georgia Brown” while he played, spinning the ball while balancing it on a fingertip, then dribbling and practicing his shots. He was really enjoying himself, passing the ball between his legs during the dribble and showing off, a little.

He was concentrating on what he was doing so thoroughly that he didn't know that he had drawn an audience until his observer made his presence known. Clark had just completed a dribble approach to the net that included several between the leg passes when his watcher applauded.

Clark was so startled that he missed the pass and the ball rolled toward the watcher.

The watcher trapped the ball under his own foot. “You're pretty good.”

Clark thought that he recognized him and asked, “You're ... Bo?”

Bo smiled at the recognition and said, “I know.”

Clark smiled again and said, “Of course you'd know.”

Bo asked, “What to play a little one-on-one?”

Clark smiled and said, “Sure.”

Bo bounced the ball a couple of times and said, “First free throw wins the ball.” He approached the foul line and launched the ball. (Swish) The ball went through without even touching the rim. Clark captured the ball and turned to Bo. Bo smiled and said, “Bo knows free throws.”

Clark threw him the ball. After some dribbling, Bo broke around Clark's guard and moved in for a clean lay-up shot. He used the backboard, but the ball went right through the hoop.

As Clark recovered the ball and turned around, Bo said, “Bo knows lay-ups.”

Clark threw him the ball so that he could try again.

Bo started dribbling, but this time, Clark was guarding him closely. Bo managed to move him closer to the net and with a quick turn and a leap he brought the ball up and over his head in a hook shot. The ball sailed through the hoop once again.

As Clark was recovering the ball he said, “Let me guess, ‘Bo knows hook-shots’.”

Bo made another hook shot and then smiled and nodded as

Clark threw the ball back to him.

This continued for throw after throw. Bo completely dominated Clark. It just seemed like he couldn't miss. Clark would guard against a lay-up and Bo would make a jump shot. Clark would change his tactic and guard against the jump or hook shot and Bo would circle around and perform a lay-up. Clark just couldn't win.

Bo started dribbling once again, this time he stayed at a distance with Clark facing him. He was outside the three point ring when he set up and launched the ball.

Clark had been limiting himself to his human abilities and had been feeling frustrated at Bo's dominating the game and decided that it was time to stop holding back. Seeing him launch a three point shot, he turned at super-speed and ran toward the basket. Launching himself into the air he floated high enough to intercept the ball in mid-flight, preventing it from reaching the basket.

Bo was simply standing there, his mouth agape. At first, when he launched the ball, he had a smug look on his face because he was sure that his aim was true. His smug look turned to one of consternation when he saw what his 'opponent' was doing. Seeing him fly up to intercept the ball the realization hit him that he had been playing against Superman in disguise and his jaw had dropped open. As Clark floated back to the ground, Bo finally said, "Bo doesn't know that."

Clark started a super-speed dribble, circling Bo three times so quickly that Bo couldn't move before heading for the hoop. As he left the ground he had the ball in both hands like he was going to do a slam-dunk, but at the last second he simply released the ball and allowed it to gently fall through the hoop.

Landing, Clark caught the ball on the first bounce, smiled and flipped it to Bo who stood there and stared in awe at the person he now knew was the superhero. The ball fell from his hands, unheeded and he continued to stare as Clark waved, lifted off and flew away.

Clark had told Lois about meeting Bo. She had been concerned that he might have recognized him as Clark Kent and put two and two together, but Clark had reassured her that since he wasn't wearing his glasses and especially since his hair still had some of the gel in it he didn't think that would happen. His hair wasn't slicked back ala Superman, but it wasn't Clark's soft and fluffy do. When they hadn't heard anything for a week, Lois started to feel a little more confident that the secret was safe.

Some weeks earlier, just after Clark had recovered his globe and rescued Jack, there had been an attempt on Clark's life. An individual driving a truck had tried to run him down. The driver had been caught and taken into police custody.

Lois and Clark were both convinced that Luthor had been behind the hit-and-run attempt, but the driver had died in police custody before they had been able to get anything out of him. Yet another dead end, no pun intended. (See "Foundling — Matchmaker Style", Chapter 10)

They had also looked for the woman that Clark had been helping across the street. When they found her, it was in the morgue. She had been the victim of a hit-and-run.

It seemed like that had been a signal for the lower elements of society to take a break and things had quieted down. Of course there were the occasional robberies, but these all proved to be lone-wolf adventures, clumsily handled, many of which Superman was able to take care of.

Lois awoke before the alarm went off and felt her husband's body spooned against hers. She wiggled her body, snuggling more firmly against him. When she did, she felt something pressing into her behind. She smiled in the knowledge of just what that was and wiggled her behind that much more.

The arm that was across her waist tightened in response and she felt a tender kiss being placed on the back of her neck then he was whispering, "Be careful what you wish for. Your wish just may come true."

She grinned and said, "Promises, promises ..." Anything more that she was going to say was lost in her squeal as he started a period of marital intimacy. This lasted until they were interrupted by the alarm. From her position, still under her husband, she reached over and turned off the alarm. Languidly, she said, "Time to get up."

With a smirk, he replied, "I thought I was."

She smiled at his little joke and said, "I'll say you were." She rolled onto her side on the bed while he moved to the bathroom to get ready for work.

When he came out a few seconds later he headed for the kitchen while she headed for the bathroom.

Things had been rather quiet for the past couple of months. Aside from the occasional Superman rescue there hadn't been much since they had found the stash of rare art under the museum.

The police forensics team had been all over that vault dusting for prints. They had not found anything usable. The jets of mist that had been released as Luthor and Nigel fled were a corrosive mixture that wouldn't harm the artwork, but did erase any fingerprints so the police had hit a dead end on that investigation.

Lois and Clark had tried to trace back on the construction, going on the assumption that there had to be records ... somewhere, but they had come up empty. Luthor had covered his tracks very thoroughly.

When they arrived at work the staff was milling around, apparently with nothing to do.

The dearth of lead stories was weighing heavily on all of the staff, but especially on Perry White. It came to a head when Perry was called upstairs. He was up there for a long time and all of the staff became more and more apprehensive the longer he was up there.

It didn't help that when he came down he didn't say a single word and there was a grim look on his face. He walked straight to the conference room and pulled the shades.

Everyone knew that something was up, they just didn't know what it was.

Finally, Perry stuck his head out of the conference room and called Jack. A few minutes later, Perry and Jack wheeled a large board covered by a drape into the pit. Once it was placed, Perry said, "Thanks, Jack." Then he raised his voice, "Gather around, everyone."

Once Jack had finished helping Perry he had gone over to listen to a police scanner. Everyone, including Jimmy, turned to hear what Perry had to say. Everyone was curious about what the chief had been up to in the conference room and the covered board just added to their curiosity.

As soon as Perry was sure that he had everyone's attention he addressed the staff, in a somewhat sarcastic tone, "Well, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, I'm glad to see everyone is here. Glad, only because I won't have to go over this more than once. The bad news is ... that everyone is here! Y'all are *supposed* to be out chasin' down stories!" With a flourish he whipped the drape from the board. On the board was a display. On one side was a copy of the Daily Planet. On the other side was a copy of the Star. In between was a listing of the sales figures for the two papers.

The latest edition of the Planet had the headline: "**Council to Debate Coliseum**" while the banner headline on the Star literally screamed: "**Crooks 1, Cops 0!**"

Perry stood back and gestured at the display. He said, "The sales department just sent this little reminder down. I'll make it

easy. It says that since Preston Carpenter bought the Metropolis Star and started throwin' his money around, the Star's selling twice as many papers as the Planet, news stand and subscription." He looked around the gathered staff and asked, "Anybody know how?"

Lois quipped, "Bigger type, smaller words?"

Perry had a sour expression on his face as he said, "Uh-uh. Carpenter's got people out-hustlin' us on the streets, Lois. In the last month they scooped us on *every* major news story in this city. Now what am I going to lead the afternoon edition with that's gonna change that?"

Perry acknowledged Clark's raised hand, "Secretary Wallace is in town to sign that nuclear arms treaty with Omir. Lois and I are waiting to hear on a one-on-one."

Sarcasm was dripping from Lois's voice as she said, "I can see them lining up at the news stands for that."

Perry pegged Lois with his eyes and asked, "You got something better?"

Lois really didn't have anything, but she floated a possibility anyhow, "Police charity scams?"

No one, not even Perry reacted with any enthusiasm.

Indignant at this response, Lois became defensive, "At least it's local."

It was time for Perry to climb on his soapbox and motivate the troops, "People, people. For fifty years the Daily Planet's been the top dog in this town and the Metropolis Star's been the dirty little puppy nippin' at our heels. Now I don't mean to be an alarmist, but if we don't start getting some big stories of our own, the faces around here may start changing. We need a good scandal, a crime wave or a ..."

He was interrupted by Jack's shout, "Hotel fire!"

Perry, thinking that he was simply offering a suggestion and not reporting a current event said, "That'll do."

Jack, realizing that he had been misunderstood, shouted, "Police scanner! There's a woman trapped on a ledge of the Metropolitan and the fire department's ladders can't reach her."

Looking at his two main reporters, Perry said, "Clark, Lois! Shake some tail!"

Lois and Clark exchanged a glance. Lois dived for her bag and headed for the elevator while Clark headed for the stairwell.

As they went into action, Perry looked heavenward and lifting his fists said, "Yes!"

Lois knew that Clark had to go be Superman and rescue the woman and was hoping that she could get to the scene in time to get the scoop and perhaps an interview.

Lois was fortunate that no one needed the elevator while she was on her way to the lobby floor. As soon as the doors to the elevator were open wide enough for her slender frame to squeeze through, she did and made a dash for the street. Placing two fingers to her lips she blew and emitted an ear piercing whistle which attracted a cab. Jumping into the back almost before he came to a complete stop she ordered, "The Metropolitan and step on it! There's an extra \$20 in it if we are there in less than five minutes!"

Lois was thrown back in her seat as the cabby, with visions of twenty dollar bills dancing in his head put down the pedal and screeched into traffic, receiving several blasts of car horns for his efforts.

As soon as Clark was through the doors and into the stairwell he spun into the Suit and flew up the stairs and out the roof access. It was only a matter of seconds before he was airborne. He saw the smoke as he took to the air and headed in that direction.

Using his telescopic vision he saw the woman that Jack had mentioned, clinging to a ledge on the outside of the building, near a window on the tenth floor. He was envisioning a simple rescue

as he approached when suddenly there was an explosion in the room behind her and a ball of flame erupted from the window that she was clinging to. Between the fright and the force of the explosion her grip was broken and with a scream she began to fall.

Seeing her start to fall, Superman changed course and intercepted her before she hit the ground, catching her in mid-air. As he did, her arms automatically came up around his neck and she buried her face in his shoulder.

He scanned the crowd for Lois, but apparently she hadn't arrived as yet. He couldn't think of any good reason not to land and turn the woman over to the paramedics, so he slowly lowered them, landing near an ambulance.

As he was placing her on a stretcher he spoke briefly with her. He was thinking that he could use the interview material for a story in the Planet. When he finished he was approached by a very attractive blonde. She was talking into a cell phone as she approached, "If not for the incredible last second rescue by Superman. Wait a sec. Stand by." She pulled the phone away from her face as she spoke to Superman, "Superman. Linda King, Metropolis Star. Can you tell me what it was like up there?" She held out her cell phone so that it would pick up what Superman said in reply to her question.

Clark felt trapped. He wanted to be giving the story to Lois for the Planet, but couldn't see any way to avoid talking to Linda, "The smoke was very intense. Visibility to the human eye was probably zero. Let's just be glad that woman held on long enough for me to reach her. She's a mother with three kids. And, if you'll excuse me, I've got to go."

As he took off, Linda had a look of satisfaction on her face. She finished speaking into her phone, "Just another day in the life of a superhero. That's it, Vicky."

Chapter 2

After a wild cab ride, Lois finally made it to the Metropolitan. She could still see smoke billowing from the upper floors as she paid off the cabby and headed for the scene of the action.

Just as Linda was closing her phone to put it away, Lois charged up, elbowing her way through the crowd. As soon as she laid eyes on Linda she stopped dead in her tracks and blurted out, "What are *you* doing here?"

Nonplused, Linda replied, "Nice to see you, too, Lois. It's it been, what, six years since graduation? Unfortunately, you haven't changed a bit."

Lois retorted, "Look, Linda, we're not starting that again. I'm here on business for the Daily Planet and I need to talk to Superman."

With a smug look, Linda said, "You just missed him. He was very helpful. Not only did he save the woman at the last second, but he was nice enough to give me a quote for my story."

Lois was dumbfounded and blurted out, "*Your* story?"

With an almost one-upmanship tone, Linda replied, "Haven't you heard? I'm working for the Metropolis Star." She paused to let that sink in and then threw salt into the wound as she said, "And I believe you've just been scooped."

Linda smiled a cat-got-the-canary smile as she turned away while Lois was in a fury. Linda didn't hear Lois as she muttered, "Clark Kent, you're dead meat."

After the rescue, Clark had helped the fire department put out the fire then he did a quick patrol before returning to the Planet. As he stepped out of the stairwell and straightened his tie, Lois spotted him and stood at her desk. As he approached he saw a look bordering on anger on Lois's face. He looked around to see if the anger was directed at him or someone near him. Not seeing anyone else that could possibly be the subject of her wrath, he prepared himself for the onslaught. Without saying a word, she

started moving in the direction of the conference room. Knowing that following her was tantamount to entering the lion's den, but having no other choice, he altered course to follow her.

When he entered, she was standing in the middle of the room and her posture was absolutely rigid. She said, "Close the door and the blinds," without even turning around.

Her tone brooked no hesitation so he instantly complied.

As soon as she heard the blinds snap shut she whirled around, her eyes blazing with anger. She barely controlled her volume as she almost shouted, "How could you?"

Confused, Clark looked around and then asked, "How could I, what?"

"How could you give her the scoop? You're my partner ... my husband and you gave that scoop to ... *her* of all people."

"Wait a minute. Do I get a chance to explain?"

"Go ahead. Try to explain this ... this ... betrayal away. Go ahead. Try."

"Okay, well, as I flew in there was an explosion and the woman started to fall. I caught her in mid-air."

"Okay, you caught her. You couldn't land near me and give me the story?"

"Lois, I looked for you, but you weren't there. I couldn't see any good reason to deny her immediate medical attention, so I had to land and turn her over to the paramedics."

"But you gave the story to ... *her*."

"She ambushed me. She caught me before I was able to fly away."

In a sullen tone, Lois replied, "You didn't have to talk to her. You could have waited for me and given me the story."

Clark saw the degree of anger. Trying to placate his wife, he said, "Lois, you know that Superman can't show favoritism. So you got scooped. It happens. You just have to focus on the next story."

When she finally managed to control herself she said, "Spare me the Smallville pep talk. I wasn't *just* scooped. A hideous part of my past has reared its ugly head." He reached for her and Lois moved into his embrace, accepting his comfort as she started to cry.

Still unsure what had happened, Clark quipped, "Never let it be said Lois Lane doesn't have a flair for exaggeration."

Lois puffed out a breath and replied, "You don't know this woman, Clark. She has no conscience. She couldn't even spell it."

In a melodramatic tone, Clark said, "Am I to assume that this is less about the story and more about the reporter? It was a dark day for the Daily Planet when Linda King rode into town."

Indignant now, Lois continued, "Go ahead. Mock me. But there are no depths to which she won't stoop for a story ... or anything else for that matter." Lois moved over to open the blinds preparatory to returning to their desks. She said, "Come on. Let's go down to the stand in the lobby for some coffee. I really don't think I could take the newsroom coffee right now."

They exited the conference room and took the elevator to the lobby. As they exited, Lois said, "You just don't know her."

The next day, as they were headed out, Clark said, "Lois, ever since yesterday, you have been obsessing over Linda King."

Lois denied, "I have not been obsessing."

"Look, I tell you that you are obsessing."

"Don't tell me that I am obsessing. I do not obsess. You obsess."

"Do I detect the scent of jealousy?"

Lois got a startled look as she observed Linda King entering through the revolving door and said, "You detect the smell of a rat," she looked pointedly toward the doors, "and it just scurried in."

Linda spotted her old rival and headed in her direction. When she was in front of her, she offered her hand and said, "Hello,

Lois. I thought we could get re-acquainted."

Lois crossed her arms across her chest and simply stared at her.

"Or perhaps not." Turning to Clark, Linda held out the hand she had offered to Lois and turned on the charm, "Well, hel — lo, I'm Linda King."

Taking her hand in his he said, "Clark Kent. I've heard about you."

Linda was very obviously giving Clark the eye, taking in his stature and looks and obviously liking what she saw. "From Lois? Let me guess. No conscience. Will stoop to anything."

Lois spoke for the first time, "See?"

Always the peacemaker, Clark tried, "She's kidding."

Lois gave Linda the kind of look a biologist gives a bug under a microscope, "No, I'm not." She turned her fury on Linda and said, "Oh, and one more thing, stay away from Superman." With that Lois stomped off and headed for the coffee wagon.

Linda watched her go and quickly turned back to Clark to say, "I guess Lois thinks Superman's her own personal source, doesn't she?" Clark gave a half-hearted shrug and Linda continued, half musingly, "I'd love to talk to him again."

Trying to change the topic, Clark asked, "Is there a reason that you're here?"

"Yes, you know Superman. Wouldn't an introduction fall under the category of professional courtesy?"

Clark was surprised and shaking his head in the negative, said, "Sorry."

"Well then, what should we talk about?"

Clark searched for something and finally came up with, "I read your piece on the hotel fire yesterday. Nice work."

Linda smiled and said, "Thanks. Surprising to hear you say that, though."

Clark smiled in his disarming manner and replied, "Just because we're competitors, doesn't mean we don't appreciate the competition. I also liked the editorial your publisher wrote demanding changes in the fire department. He's a very powerful writer."

Linda smiled a somewhat smug smile and replied, "Preston Carpenter's a very powerful man, period." She considered for a second before speaking again, "You know, he's throwing a party tonight at the Metropolis Press Club. Maybe you'd like to go."

Clark looked over at Lois who was studiously avoiding them and hedged, "It's kind of last-minute and I hate going to those things and besides, I couldn't go with you."

Linda replied, "Please, don't misunderstand. I already have a date. You should come and bring a date."

Clark looked over at Lois and said, "Okay, thanks."

Thinking she had made a point, Linda smiled and said, "Great. See you tonight."

Lois was watching the entire exchange and trying to be inconspicuous, hiding behind a magazine that she had picked off of a rack.

As Linda walked past Lois on her way out, she said, "See you around, Lois."

After Linda had walked past, Lois put her magazine down and snorted in frustration. She approached Clark and asked, "All right. What'd she want? Spill it!"

Clark smiled an innocent smile at Lois's discomfiture and said, "She invited me ... us to a dinner Carpenter's throwing tonight. Want to go?"

"Clark, How could you accept an invitation from her after everything I just told you?!"

Clark smiled again, "Come on, Lois. Look, the Star has been scooping the Planet recently. We need to find out how. We might just learn something."

Lois relented, "Okay. It's an investigation. I'll go along with that, but if she starts hitting on you, I swear, I'll tear her eyes out."

“I don’t think you have to worry. She said she already has a date.”

“Thank heaven for small favors.”

Lois had kicked Clark out of the bedroom while she dressed for the dinner. She had gone out and purchased a new dress for the affair and wanted to surprise him. She had made him promise not to peek and he was good to his word.

Finally, when she was dressed she called out to him, “Ready?”

He chuckled and said, “I’m waiting with bated breath.”

She stepped around the partition and as she did, he gasped. She was an absolute vision of loveliness. The dress was a floor length creation of blue lace, just a little darker than the Suit, that hugged all of her curves. It had a yoke neck that dipped down to show her cleavage and was slit up the left to mid-thigh. The lace of the sleeves was unlined.

Clark let out a whistle and said, “Lois, you look ... sensational! Maybe we’ll stay home.” He wiggled his eyebrows.

Lois smiled demurely and said, “I’m glad you like it. I bought it for you.”

“I appreciate the thought, but I really don’t look all that good in a dress. On you it’s perfect.”

Smiling at his joke she said, “Do you think I’ll look okay at this affair?”

“You’ll be the belle of the ball. I’m just glad that we’re already married. I won’t have to worry about someone trying to steal you away from me.”

“As if anyone would want to.”

“How could they help it? Actually, I’m not so sure I should let you out of the house looking this good. Just make sure that your wedding ring is on your hand.”

She pulled her left hand up to her chest and held it lovingly with her right hand, “I never take it off. It’s a part of me. It represents our love. I love it and the man that gave it to me.”

As they entered the Metropolis Press Club they could hear a small band playing and the loud buzz of numerous conversations. Lois had checked her wrap at the cloakroom before they entered. They made a striking couple. Clark was wearing his tux and looked very dashing next to Lois. Her arm was threaded through his as they entered.

They stopped just inside the entryway and Lois looked around. She whispered to Clark, “Do you see Linda?”

He did a quick scan and said, “No, not yet.”

Lois muttered, “I wonder what *she* is going to be wearing?”

Lois hadn’t as yet filled Clark in on the story about Linda, so in response to her question, he said, “Wild guess here, but there’s more to this rivalry than just who’s the better reporter. Right?”

Lois looked at him and said, “Don’t insult me.”

Clark was stunned, “I insulted you?”

She raised an eyebrow and said, “There’s no question who’s the better reporter.”

Clark was continuing to scan the attendees. He finally spotted their host and said, “Look, there’s Preston Carpenter over there with Secretary Wallace.”

“What’s he doing here? See if you can hear what they are saying.”

Suddenly, from behind them, Linda swept in. She was wearing what had to be a designer original gown in Kryptonite green. As she approached she said, “Lois, what a surprise. *You’re Clark’s date. What else do you do together?”

Clark said, “We are reporting partners and ...”

“...and we are married.” Lois finished for him as she brought her left hand up and placed it on his arm so that her ring would be visible.

Linda was struck speechless and stood there with her mouth open, staring at Lois’s ring.

Lois said, “You had better close your mouth before a fly enters.”

Linda came out of her stupor and said, “You’re serious? You’re married? Wow.”

Lois asked, “What happened, Linda, your date stand you up?”

Snapping out of it, Linda said, “Of course not. Follow me. I’ll introduce you.”

Lois hung onto Clark’s arm, tightly, as they followed Linda through the crowd.

As they were moving through the crowd, Linda gave Lois another jab, “I love your dress, Lois. You’re so lucky. I can never wear anything off the rack.”

Lois started to bristle, but Clark placed a restraining hand on hers and whispered, “I love you in this dress. You are drop dead gorgeous.”

Lois smiled and whispered, “As long as you like it, that’s what counts.”

He whispered back, “I see a lot of heads turning and they aren’t looking at Linda. They’re looking at you. I’m just glad you’re mine.”

“Forever.”

He smiled and repeated, “Forever.”

Finally, as they followed Linda, Clark tuned in with his super-hearing and heard Carpenter say, “Mister Secretary, this treaty between our country and Omir is a huge miscalculation. That country is run by terrorists. We must neutralize them, not legitimize them.”

Secretary Wallace was appalled and he replied, “And you’d risk an all-out war, wouldn’t you? I don’t need your lectures, Mister Carpenter,” and stormed off, insulted.

Lois and Clark were surprised when Linda led them directly to Preston Carpenter. When he noted their approach, Preston Carpenter’s face lit up with pleasure. He said, “Linda,” and turning to Lois and Clark said, “I am at a loss for words to describe her.”

Lois quipped, “I can help there.”

Ignoring her, Linda said, “Preston, I’d like you to meet Clark Kent, a reporter with the Daily Planet. And Lois Lane. His date. Clark, Lois, Preston Carpenter.”

Clark corrected her, “Actually, we are a reporting team and we are also married.”

Carpenter reached for Clark’s offered hand and shook it as he said, “The Daily Planet was a fine paper in its day. Fine paper. But things change. That’s the lesson of life now, isn’t it? You either make it happen, or it happens to you.”

As Carpenter finished speaking, the man behind him tapped him on the shoulder.

Clark noted that he was a compact, sullen looking, dour individual. He had an earring in his left ear that had a dangling figurine that looked like an ankh.

Carpenter noted Clark’s perusal and said, “Allow me to introduce my body-guard and chauffeur, Mr. Stark.”

Stark leaned close and said, “The Mayor would like to have a moment with you.”

Carpenter nodded and said, “Please excuse me.”

As Preston walked away, Lois made a catty comment, “Well, now we know how you got your job.”

Linda was about to make a retort when the band started another number. Clark stopped the conflict by saying, “Lois, I believe that you promised me this dance.” He put his hand at the small of her back and led her to the dance floor.

Chapter 3

The next morning, Lois and Clark arrived late at the Planet. As they came out of the elevator; Lois noticed that Jimmy was reading a copy of the Star.

As Lois was putting her bag away, Jimmy looked up from his reading, and asked, “Where have you guys been?”

Lois replied, “Fire department. They think the hotel’s a probable arson. I want you to get down there, get me some aftermath photos, investigators sifting through the rubble, that kind of thing.” Spotting what he was reading, she accosted him, “Why are you reading that tabloid rag?”

“There’s an article, with pictures, about Carpenter’s Gala last night. You guys were there. I saw your pictures along with other ‘prominent’ reporters. Wow, Lois, that dress was something! How was it?”

“Yeah, it was okay, but only because Clark and I were together. I need some good news for a change.”

Jimmy put the paper down and said in an almost conspiratorial tone, “Then don’t read the bulletin board.”

Lois’s interest was piqued, “Why?”

In a disappointed tone, Jimmy replied, “The paper’s cut out expense accounts.”

Lois was indignant, “They can’t do that!”

“Just did. Memo says it’s cost cutting due to lower circulation.” His tone turned conspiratorial, “Perry thinks paid sick days are the next thing to go.”

Lois’s disappointment was obvious as she reached for her purse, looked over at Clark and said, “Come on, Clark. We’re going to the Fudge Castle and you’re buying.”

“Are you sure you want to go there? I had another place in mind.”

“Okay, I’ll bite. Where?”

“I thought we’d go to the Tri-Crown. Since Lucy is now paying, well actually, Sam is paying the lease on your old apartment for Lucy, we can celebrate a little.”

“Well, since you put it that way, why not?”

The Tri-Crown was an eatery on the ground floor of a high rise near the Planet. It specialized in the business lunch crowd.

When they arrive at the Tri-Crown they found it to be rather crowded, but Clark spotted a table with a couple of open seats and guided Lois in that direction.

As they approached, Lois thought that the blonde head that she saw looked familiar. As Clark was addressing the blonde, Lois finally got a look at her face, recognized it to be Linda and gasped.

Lois stepped back as if ready to bolt and said, “Clark, we can’t sit here.”

Clark looked around and said, “These are the only open seats in the entire place. Come on. What’s it gonna hurt? Maybe you two should bury the hatchet.”

She hissed in reply, “Only if it’s in her skull.”

He put his lips next to her ear and whispered, “Lois, I really don’t know what this is all about, but I want you to remember one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“We’re married. I’m yours ... forever.”

“Yeah, I know that.”

“Whatever happened in the past is just that ... in the past. Let’s get past it and move ahead. Do it for me, okay?”

She looked up into his pleading eyes and relented, “I’ll do it for you, but you owe me, big time, for this.” She plastered a fake smile on her face and said, “Linda, how nice to see you again. Mind if we join you?”

Linda smiled up at them and said, “Please, join me.”

Once they were seated, Linda started the conversation, “You know, I really hadn’t read anything in the Planet. I was working in Florida before moving back to Metropolis. Clark, since you were kind enough to read my work, I’ve been reading some of yours. I’m impressed with you. I’m not easily impressed. I’ve been reading yours too, Lois.”

“Almost all of what we do is together.”

Linda was still throwing little barbs at her old rival and said, “That says even more about your talent.”

“Actually, Lois has taught me a lot.”

“Did I hear you say that the two of you are married?”

Lois smiled and made sure that she flashed her ring as she said, “Yes, we are.”

The conversation was interrupted by Linda’s cell phone ringing. She pulled it out, flipped it open and said, “King ... I’m at the Tri-Crown.” She nodded and closed her phone, severing the connection. She explained to Clark, “Carpenter. He likes to know where his reporters are at all times.”

Clark was curious, “Don’t you log out?”

Linda’s reply was enlightening, “Sure. But nothing happens at the Star without Carpenter’s say so. He’s the most hands-on publisher I’ve ever worked for.”

This was unusual, to say the least and Lois started to mull on it.

Clark continued the conversation, “The way the Star’s been getting stories, I’d say it’s working for him.”

Linda didn’t display any suspicion at all when she said, “We’re just having a run of great luck.”

Lois got an inkling that Clark was thinking along the same lines as her when he said, “It takes more than luck to be in the right place at the right time, so often.”

Innocently or naively, Linda said, “I’d like to take credit, but truth be told, I only nailed that fire story because I happened to be covering a fashion show in the hotel when it broke out.”

Suddenly they all heard sirens outside which drew their attention to the lobby of the building.

Snidely, Clark asked, “Something like this?”

Since Lois and Clark hadn’t been served as yet they both jumped up and headed in that direction. Linda threw a couple of bills on the table and followed close behind.

To his retreating back, Linda replied, “Sort of.”

As Lois and Clark, followed by Linda entered the lobby they saw a commotion near the elevators and headed that way.

Spotting the Fire Chief, Lois shouted, “Lois Lane, Daily Planet. What’s going on?”

Without even turning he replied, “Cable broke on an elevator! The car’s dangling on the seventy-first floor!” Turning to one of his men he asked, “How are you coming with the emergency key?”

He replied, “Have it in a minute, Chief.”

Lois looked at Clark. He nodded and ducked away into the crowd.

Linda pushed her way up next to Lois.

Just as the fireman pulled the doors open the chief’s two-way radio crackled to life and he shouted, “It’s coming down!”

As the crowd started to react to this news a blue and red streak came in through the front doors, over the heads of the spectators and firemen and zipped into the elevator shaft disappearing up it as Superman moved to intercept the falling car.

Initially there was noise, the screams of the car passengers, the screech of the automatic brakes and the whine of the cable passing over the rollers above, but suddenly there was a profound silence which itself was eerie.

The chief literally risked his neck as he leaned in and looked up. If not for Superman the car could have decapitated him when he did, but flashing his light up the shaft he saw Superman below the car, supporting it and lowering it slowly.

Lois reached into her bag and grabbed her camera. She turned it on and it whined at her. She checked the indicator and saw that there was no film. She muttered, “Drat!” She wasn’t going to be getting any pictures of this rescue.

When he approached, the chief stepped back. Through the open doors, Lois saw her husband, hands and arms extended above his head slowly floating downward until the floor of the

elevator car was level with the lobby exit.

Seeing Lois with a camera in her hands, Linda was chagrined. Lois was going to scoop her. Then she saw Lois thrust her camera back in her bag in frustration. Linda knew that she needed to do something and as Superman passed the open doors, Linda snatched a camera from the hands of a bystander, said, "Give me that," and started snapping pictures. She said to the camera owner, "Stop by the Star office. I'll have them print off any shots you've already taken and give you back your negatives."

The firemen helped the passengers to alight. As soon as the car was empty, it sank from view as Superman lowered it gently to the bottom of the shaft.

A few seconds later, Superman made his appearance, floating up to and then stepping out through the doors.

The chief offered Superman his hand and said, "Thank you, Superman. You saved their lives."

Superman replied, "I'm glad I was around at the right time. I really need to go." With that he took off again and flew out the main doors.

As Superman flew off, Linda looked around and spotted Lois heading for the doors, presumably to call in her story. Linda started walking back to the Star, pulled out her cell phone and hit a speed dial number. When it was answered she said, "Vicki. Grab a pencil and paper ..." She dictated her story. She finished with, "Tell the lab I will have a roll of film that they will need to rush. I want this story in the evening edition."

That evening, Stark entered Preston Carpenter's office in the Metropolis Star building. This office never failed to amuse him. He was a man of action and the ornate nature of the office actually gave him the creeps. As he entered, Carpenter sat relaxed amidst the luxurious decorations and plush carpet behind a Louis XIV desk. He was busy typing on a desktop computer.

Stark crossed the floor and dropped a newspaper on the desk. He said, "Evening edition."

Carpenter opened the paper to find a banner headline which read: "**Miracle Save!**" and immediately under it were two pictures, one of Superman supporting the elevator car as he lowered it and the other of him shaking hands with the Fire Chief.

After reading the story, Carpenter said, "Well done, Mr. Stark. Don't you just love the news business?"

Stark shook his head and said, "This one wasn't easy."

Carpenter said, "If they were easy I wouldn't need your services, would I?"

"The Planet had the story at the same time, but they didn't get the pictures."

"What? How did that happen?"

"A couple of their reporters happened to be there at the same time as King."

"We'll have to see to it that that doesn't happen too often, won't we?"

Stark cut to the chase, "How many more? The more we do the greater the chance that someone will tumble to what we are doing."

Carpenter sat back in his chair and said, "As many as it takes to kill the Planet. Because then Stark, I will control over eighty percent of what the American people read."

When he finished this statement, Carpenter stood and moved to a picture window overlooking Metropolis then he continued, "And when you control what they read, you control what they think." He clasped his hands behind his back and turned to face Stark, "And when you control what they think, you can really begin to *make* it happen." When he finished speaking he had a malevolent smile.

At the same time that Stark was showing Carpenter the evening edition, Perry White was calling his staff together. Once

they were gathered in the conference room he held up copies of the Star and the Planet.

On the covers of both papers were stories about the elevator accident; however the Star had the Superman pictures to set it off while the Planet simply had the story. Most of the front page of the Planet had graphs showing the annual rainfall measurements.

Perry held up a paper in each hand and asked, "Now, who knows what's wrong with this picture?"

No one wanted to admit their failing, so silence reigned.

Perry wasn't happy with the prevailing silence and spoke as if he were instructing six-year-olds, "We have no picture, that's what's wrong! Superman's the biggest story of the day, and all we're leading with is a weather graph! Would someone please explain this to me?"

Jimmy decided that he, being almost low man on the totem pole didn't have that much to lose so he offered, "Well Chief, the first diagram illustrates the amount of rainfall we're getting this year, and the pie chart ..." His voice faded into inaudibility as Perry glared at him.

Perry turned to Lois and challenged, "Lois, you were there and got the story. Why did you let the Star get the pictures that we needed?"

Chagrined, Lois had to admit, "My camera was out of film. At least we weren't completely scooped."

"We might just as well have been. Without pictures we got nothing. It's because of this kind of thing that people are reading the Star. To the public in general it looks like the Star knows everything."

Jimmy piped up, "Bet they don't know how much rain we got this year."

Once again, Perry glared at Jimmy. This time it wasn't just Jimmy's voice that faded, he faded into the background.

Perry wasn't finished yet, "People, I can assure you, if we don't come up with some solid Page One stories PDQ, the only writing you'll be doing is your resumes!"

Suddenly a phone started to ring in the background and Jimmy moved to answer it, "Conference room."

Perry asked, "Well? Anybody got anything to say?"

Lois and Clark as well as the rest of the staff simply looked at each other and felt uncomfortable as Perry continued, "Oh, this is just great. I can see the next edition already. Under 'Today's Top News' we'll just print 'We haven't got a clue!' Just what in Sam Hill am I supposed to tell the Publisher if he calls?"

There was silence as Perry finished which Jimmy broke. He had his hand over the mouthpiece as he said, "Whatever it is, he's waiting to hear it on line one."

Perry sighed heavily and looked heavenward for strength. He made one final comment before he turned toward his office, "Just a warning, folks. I've seen papers shut down. It's not a pretty picture. Not pretty at all." With a dispirited air, Perry turned toward his office. He looked like a man on the way to the gallows.

Lois and Clark exchanged a look and then Clark picked up the copy of the Star. He started looking at the pictures. Something caught his eye and he slid his glasses down his nose so that he could use his microscopic vision.

Lois saw the move and knew exactly what it meant. She sidled up next to him and whispered, "What do you see?"

He looked around to make sure they weren't being observed and then pointed at a particular individual in one of the pictures. "I recognized this man. It's Stark. Carpenter's body guard."

Lois grabbed the paper and looked closely, "How can you tell? He's turned away from the camera."

"He has an earring with a dangling ank in his left ear. You can just see it."

"I'm glad you can because I sure can't. What would he be doing there?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Wait here. There's something I

need to check.”

“Okay, don’t be gone too long though. There’s no telling when Perry will finish and what news he will deliver.”

Clark reached up and started to loosen his tie as he said, “I’ll be right back.” He turned and headed for the stairwell.

A few seconds later, Lois saw a red and blue streak go past the window and knew that Superman was on the job.

Chapter 4

Lois didn’t have to wait very long before Clark was exiting the stairwell, straightening his tie.

When he got close to Lois she asked, “Well, where did you go? What did you find?”

“Let’s go into the conference room.”

Hearing this, Lois became eager to hear what he had found out and jumping up headed for the conference room. Once inside, Clark closed the door and pulled the shades. This only served to heighten Lois’s anticipation, she said, “Okay, give!”

“I thought that the number of times that Linda was on scene when something big occurred was pushing the bounds of coincidence.”

“Right. I’ll agree with that. What did you find?”

“Why would Carpenter’s body guard be on scene? He should be with Carpenter.”

“Right. There was no good reason for him to be there. What’d you find?” Her frustration was evident in the fact that each of her questions had been uttered in a slightly more elevated tone.

“Okay, you’ll be happy to see this then.” Clark pulled a piece of cable from his inside jacket pocket and held it out.

Lois took it and looked at it. Then she looked up at him and in a deflated tone, asked, “That’s it? That’s what you found? Okay, I see it. When do I get happy?”

Clark took it back and said, “This is a piece of elevator cable. I found it in the shaft. Check the end.”

Lois took it back from him and scrutinized it. She said, with a doubtful air, “Well, I’m still not happy, but I’m closing in on bored.”

Clark couldn’t help rolling his eyes.

Lois saw the movement and glared at him.

He took the cable back and pointed at the end and explained, like to a five-year-old, “It’s not frayed, Lois. It’s smooth, like it’s been cut.”

The expression on Lois’s face morphed into one of excitement. She blurted out, “Cut? Then the accident ...”

Clark finished for her, “Wasn’t. Somebody wanted that elevator to fall, just at that time.”

With this revelation, Lois was becoming more and more excited. She shouted, “Clark, do you know what this means? I can scoop Linda!”

Clark was shocked at her attitude and blurted out, “You?”

Lois, realizing that she had been caught, amended her statement, “Us. Didn’t I say us? I meant us.”

Clark chuckled and took the cable back from Lois. He said, “Uh-huh. Before we write anything, I want the lab to verify my, I mean, *our* theory.”

Lois had visions of holding up a Page One headline saving the paper dancing through her head with her foot on Linda King’s back, pushing her face into the mud. When she came back to Earth she realized that they would need to corroborate the story before they could move forward on it. She said, “Of course. Absolutely. That’s the rational thing to do.” She hurried to the conference room door, threw it open and shouted, to no one in particular, “Messenger... I need ... Somebody get me a messenger!”

Staffers in the pit were startled by this outburst. It was so out of character for Lois Lane, at least out of character for the Lois that was married to Clark Kent. He had been such a calming

influence on her that this outburst startled everyone and they simply froze in their tracks.

Clark caught up to her in the doorway, “Lois, let’s grab a bite to eat, sit down and talk this through. You seem a little tense.”

Lois was taken aback, “Tense? Me? I’m fine.” She turned to the pit and shouted again, “*Where’s that messenger?!*” Another staffer chose that second to pass by and Lois grabbed him by the lapels and shouted in his face, “Are you the messenger?”

There was a look of amusement on Clark’s face as he looked at her and rolled his eyes. He placed a hand on her shoulder and said, “That’s not the messenger, let’s have Jack take this to S.T.A.R Labs.”

Lois settled down somewhat, “What? Jack? S.T.A.R Labs? Yes. Yes! That’s it. S.T.A.R Labs.”

Looking around, Clark spotted Jack and called, “Jack, got a minute? I’ve got a job for you.”

Jack was appreciative of the job that Clark had helped him get and was willing to go out of his way to help Clark out. Jack came over and said, “What can I do you for, Mr. K?”

Clark grabbed a small box and placed the cable section in it. He closed it and said, “I need you to take this over to S. T. A. R. Labs. I need them to take a look at the ends. The questions is — how did it get separated?”

“How do I get there?”

“Huh?”

“They cut expense accounts.”

Clark nodded his understanding and dug into his pocket. He pulled out a twenty dollar bill and handed it to Jack. He said, “Keep the change.”

“Thanks, Mr. K. I’ll go right away.” He turned and hurried into the elevator.

They decided to go to the Press Club for lunch and as they were seated and their waitress was about to take their order they were handed copies of the Star.

Lois looked at the waitress and asked, “What’s this?”

Clark was actually the one to answer, “Looks like a new promotion by the Star. Every customer receives a free copy.”

Lois griped, “It’s bad enough Carpenter cut his news stand price. Now he’s giving it away. What are you looking at?”

Lois had looked at it with disgust and tossed it aside while Clark had opened his.

Clark was obviously engrossed in the article that he was reading.

“Earth to Clark. Earth to Clark. All right, let’s think it through. Assume the cable was cut. Who would benefit? You’d kill a random person.”

Clark was still reading as he replied, “There are a number of possibilities. The building owner? An insurance scam?”

Seeing that he was still intent on the article, Lois asked, “Clark! What’s so interesting?”

“This is the same edition that has the elevator accident reported. Carpenter has an editorial demanding stronger building codes in light of the elevator accident, calling for a criminal investigation into the manufacturers.”

“So?”

“So he’s a mighty fast writer. It’s in the same edition as Linda’s article.”

“Clark, the man’s a walking opinion. It’s not like he has to do a lot of thinking.”

“Lois, don’t you see? In order for him to have an editorial about that in the same edition he’d almost have had to have prior knowledge of the incident.”

Lois looked at Clark with a mystified expression. She asked, “How do you figure?”

“Look, Linda was covering a fashion show and upstairs a fire starts, which the investigator now says was probably arson. Linda

was at lunch at the Tri-Crown and there was an elevator ‘accident.’” He used finger quotes for the word *accident*.

“Hey, you may be on to something.”

“Remember, Carpenter called to make sure of where she was just before the incident occurred.”

Lois put her napkin on the table and said, “‘I’ll be right back. Order me angel hair with tomato and basil, no olive oil, extra parmesan cheese.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Press Club, Linda King and Preston Carpenter were having lunch together.

They had just placed their orders and as the waitress departed, Carpenter said, “Two Page One stories in as many days. You should be proud of yourself.”

Linda, somewhat in awe of Carpenter and his praise, replied, “It’s an unexpected start, I’ll say that.”

Carpenter, pouring on the charm said, “I don’t find it unexpected at all.”

Linda, trying her own flattery, replied, “You’re a man of vision, isn’t that what they say?

Somewhat amused, Carpenter replied, “I don’t know about that. I am a man of action. Remember Charles Foster Kane?”

Smiling at the reference to a classic, Linda said, “Of course.”

Carpenter smiled in return, happy that she knew his reference, “My idol, although he was only a movie character. I have, however, devoted my time to becoming the genuine article.”

Linda smiled demurely and asked, “Aren’t you already?”

Carpenter’s attitude changed slightly as he replied, “Not quite. You see, Kane not only reported the news, he made it. He set out an agenda for the country, and then had his papers promote that agenda. And the country followed. Soon I’ll have that kind of power. Soon.” As he finished there was the light of fanaticism in his eyes.

Without breaking his eye contact with Linda, Carpenter reached under the table and placed his hand on Linda’s knee. He asked, “Does that excite you as much as it does me?”

Linda was feeling distinctly uncomfortable and she said, “I don’t think we should confuse our relationship.”

Carpenter slid his hand up under the hem of her skirt as he said, “My dear, if there is anything I am not, it is confused.”

Linda was feeling more and more uncomfortable the farther his hand traveled and not knowing any other way to escape the situation hastily stood and said, “I really think I should go ... freshen up.”

Lois had finished in the stall and washed her hands. She had pulled out a paper towel from the dispenser and dried her hands. As she carelessly threw the towel away she felt her bracelet release and follow the towel into the wall mounted waste container. This was just one more thing to add to her recent trials and with a sigh of resignation she thrust her hand into the container in quest of the errant bracelet. Her frustration grew as she felt around in vain and looked into the bin in an attempt to see the object of her search.

Just then, as if to add to her trials, Linda entered and observing Lois’s position at the waste bin, quipped, “Looking for your career?”

Lois had been mulling over Clark’s words and the truth of what he had said had been making inroads, improving her attitude toward Linda, but this comment stung. She replied, keeping a tight rein on her voice, “I lost my bracelet.”

Linda, didn’t let up, “I’ve seen how you accessorize, Lois. Believe me, it’s not worth the effort.”

Lois was hurt by this comment, but didn’t let on. With a sigh of satisfaction her hand closed over the errant bit of jewelry and she pulled her hand out of the bin, holding it up in triumph. She turned to Linda and said, “There is one accessory that I won’t do

without.” She held up her left hand to display her wedding ring.

Linda sighed and asked, “How did you manage to land a hunk like Clark Kent?”

Smugly, Lois replied, “I guess I just have what it takes to land a man like him. You probably wish you had some of it.” Lois slipped her bracelet back on and turned to the sink to rewash her hands. “Is there no getting away from you?”

Linda quipped, “Actually, I’m surprised to see *you* here.”

Lois looked up from her hands to Linda’s image in the mirror and said, “I’m a member.”

Linda smiled smugly and replied, “Really? I thought members had to be working for a news organization that was still in business.”

Clark’s admonitions were slowly fading from Lois’s conscious mind the longer this conversation lasted and her reply showed that some of her cattiness was returning, “I wouldn’t start swaggering yet.” Then she looked Linda up and down before finishing, “Though, on second thought, your hips could use the exercise.” The glare that Linda gave her told Lois that her comment had hit the mark and she smiled, smugly.

Linda replied, “Speaking of bodies, your partner has a great one. Talk about buns of steel.”

This was coming too close to the secret, but Lois didn’t know how to change the subject, “How would *you* know?”

Linda had a wistful expression as she said, “You don’t need Superman’s x-ray vision to figure that out.”

This comment sent Lois back to her college days in her memory, to a time that she’d rather not think about. She knew that her relationship with Clark couldn’t be threatened, but Linda *was* a blond and she feared Clark’s weakness for blondes might be a problem. She couldn’t help herself as she blurted out, “I’m warning you, Linda. Stay away from him.”

Linda looked at Lois aghast and said, “That’s what you said about Superman. What is it with you?”

Lois had to stop and think. Her defensiveness of her relationship with Clark was extending to Superman because that was who her husband was. She needed to be more careful in the future. She said, “I know you only want to use him to get back at me. This is different. This isn’t Paul. Clark is my husband and he loves me.”

Linda continued the conversation as she looked in the mirror, touching up her makeup. “If he does why do you feel so threatened? Lois, for me to want to ‘get back’ at you, you’d have to have done something that mattered to me.” She reapplied her lipstick before she finished, “Which you haven’t.”

They exited the ladies room together. Linda looked in the direction of the table she had occupied with Carpenter and saw that he was gone. She breathed a sigh of relief. She had been gone long enough that he’d been called away. She felt that she needed to talk to somebody and decided that rather than Lois, she’d like to talk to Clark so she followed Lois back to her table. When they got there, Linda was at a loss as to what to say, so she approached Clark and said, “Clark, can I ask you a favor?”

Lois was still annoyed about the confrontation in the ladies room and Linda’s comments about their relationship. She said the first thing that came to mind, “He’s working. *We’re* working.”

Linda said, “You look like you’re about to have dinner.” She turned to Clark and said, “I’d like you to walk me to the subway. I’m still learning my way around Metropolis. It’d really help me out.”

Lois quipped, “By all means, Clark. Help her out. Then lock the door behind her.”

Linda gave Lois a scathing look and replied, “Such wit, Lois. I hope it’ll help pass the hours at the unemployment office.”

Trying to prevent World War III from happening there in the Press Club, Clark spoke up, “Do you mind if I butt in?”

Lois looked at him and said, “Tell her ‘no’ and let’s eat.”

Clark looked at Lois and said, “Lois, you heard her. She’s still learning her way around.”

Unconvinced, Lois said, “She knows her way around enough to beat us twice since she got here.”

Clark leaned down and whispered in Lois’s ear, “Trust me. Keep in mind, we’re doing an investigation.” Straightening up he said to Linda, “There’s a subway entrance a couple of blocks from here.” He turned back to Lois and said, “I’ll be right back.”

Once they were outside, Linda started chatting Clark up. As they neared the subway entrance, Linda said, “Clark, the real reason I asked for you to come with me was to ask for some help. I think that Carpenter is coming on to me and I don’t know how to handle it. He could fire me on the spot if I’m not careful. He has also said some things that make me suspicious of his motives ... and methods. He said that his idol is Charles Foster Kane. I’m no dummy. I don’t need a building to fall on me to see that there’s something not right. Two Page One stories in two days, how often does something like that happen?”

When Clark returned to the Press Club he found Lois waiting for him. She was half way through her pasta and his order was sitting at his place, cooling.

A judicious blast of heat vision and his food was re-warmed and he started eating. After a couple of bites, Lois asked, “Okay. Investigation. What did you investigate? Her apartment?”

“Oh, come on, Lois. You know me better than that. She wanted to talk. I guess she didn’t feel comfortable around you and no wonder the way you’ve been sniping at one another.”

Lois looked reluctant and then relented. “All right. I’ll try to do better. What did she want to talk about?”

“She said that Carpenter was coming on to her and she didn’t know how to handle it.”

“That’s a laugh. She didn’t have any problems like that when we were in college.”

Clark gave her a stern look and said, “There you go again.” “Okay. Sorry.”

“Anyhow, she is also a little suspicious. She thinks that two headlines in two days is a bit much the same as we do. She apparently doesn’t know what’s behind it, but it is making her uncomfortable. She could be an ally in this investigation. Our contact on the inside.” Clark thought for a second and then said, “She gave me some food for thought. She said that Carpenter’s idol is Charles Foster Kane.”

Lois was blown away, “That guy would stop at nothing.”

Chapter 5

Following dinner, Lois and Clark returned to the apartment and after they were comfortable, Lois snuggled back into Clark’s embrace. Cuddling on the sofa, Clark asked, “All right. Don’t you think it’s about time that you told me why Linda gets to you?”

Lois sat up and looked back at him. Startled she blurted out, “Get to me?” She considered for a second and then settled back in his arms before she said, “You were right. All I can say in my defense is that this is all still so new to me.”

“This? What is the this of which you speak?”

She gestured with her hands indicating both of them and said, “This. Us. Our relationship. Our marriage.” She twined the fingers of one of her hands with the fingers of one of his. “I guess I still forget ... sometimes. Okay, here it is, but keep it to yourself, please.”

Clark nodded and kissed the top of her head. “My lips are sealed.”

“Okay. Linda and I were *best friends*. But it was very competitive. You may not believe this, but there was a time when I had to be the best at everything.”

Clark smiled and gave a soft chuckle.

Lois heard and smiled in reply before she continued, “Anyway, there was this editor I was trying to impress, a guy named Paul Bender. He was a senior, and I had a very big crush on him. My first. So when I found out some of the school’s football players weren’t taking their own exams, I thought, this is it. This is the story that’s going to get Paul to really notice me.”

When Lois paused, Clark prompted her, “Did it?”

Lois spat out, “No. Somehow Linda stole my story and wrote it under her name. Of course, he fell for her and she continued to impress him, in ways I won’t go into. Needless to say, that was the end of our friendship.” Lois craned around to look at Clark as she asked, “So now you know everything. Happy?”

Clark pulled her in to a tighter embrace as he said, “So, she stole a story and she stole a guy and now you’re afraid she’s going to try to do it again, huh?”

“Irrational, huh?”

“You have nothing to worry about.”

“But you have this weakness for blondes.”

“Lois, I only have two weaknesses. Kryptonite and a particular very special brunette.”

In response, Lois craned around and gave him a kiss before she said, “Okay, so where do we stand?”

“I’ve been thinking. I checked back and guess what I found.”

Lois sat up and looked at him, expectantly. “What did you find?”

“Remember the hotel fire she scooped you on?”

“Don’t remind me.”

“Interesting thing about that. When I checked there was an editorial about hotel fire safety. Now, how could he have an editorial prepared for that so that it could be printed in the same edition as the headline?”

Lois offered, “Maybe he has a stable of editorials and when the time is right he pulls it out and prints it?”

“Highly unlikely. Just as unlikely as it is for a particular journalist to be on scene at two incidents, two days in a row.”

“And he had that editorial on elevator safety in the same edition as the elevator story.”

“Remember — the fire chief believes that fire was arson.”

“And you found that cable that looks like it was cut.”

“And Carpenter called Linda, checking on her location just before the elevator incident occurred.”

“As if he was making sure she was there to get the story. A set up!”

“That’s why we need somebody on the inside.”

“Does it have to be Linda?”

“Who else do we know?”

“I guess you’re right. What do we do?”

“Here’s my idea ...”

The next day, Lois and Clark received the call that they had been expecting from Secretary Wallace for the interview.

After the formal interview was finished, Clark said, “Secretary Wallace, we were at the Press Club the other night. I couldn’t help but overhear part of your conversation with Preston Carpenter. Off the record, what was he advocating?”

“Off the record, of course, he was advocating that instead of an arms treaty with the Omiri we should treat them as adversaries and as he puts it, ‘neutralize’ them. That would only precipitate a war. He obviously doesn’t believe in the old axiom; keep your friends close and your enemies closer. By signing this arms treaty we will be able to keep a close eye on them and their arms development.”

“Treating them as terrorists as Carpenter suggests does sound like a risky proposition.”

“Yes, as it is, the premier will be giving us a gift of the Orani Jewels. They are to be presented at an event this afternoon. I would like it if you attended.”

“Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We’ll be there.”

That afternoon, Lois and Clark along with other representatives of the media were in attendance for the presentation ceremony.

Lois and Clark were sitting on the right side as they faced the podium.

Suddenly, Lois jabbed Clark in the side with her elbow, “Linda just walked in.”

“Let’s just see if our theory pans out.”

Seconds before the start of the ceremony, Linda’s cell phone rang and she answered it.

Clark listened in with his super-hearing. “King.”

Clark recognized the voice on the other end as that of Carpenter, “Where are you, my dear?”

“At the presentation ceremony.”

“Good.” The connection was cut and Linda put her cell phone away.

Lois said, “So far so good. She got a call.”

“It was Carpenter, checking to make sure she was here.”

“Look around. See if you can spot what’s going to happen.”

Clark used his super-hearing and x-ray vision to scan the room and the immediate vicinity. He was rewarded by seeing ski-mask clothed, heavily armed men hidden behind the door of a closet near where he and Lois were sitting. As he watched he saw them preparing to burst out and attack. He couldn’t be sure if the Omiri Premier or the jewels were their object, but he knew that he had to stop them and do it in such a way that wouldn’t be obvious.

Spotting the decorative pillars located at intervals along the walls he directed a blast of super-breath against the one nearest the door. When it toppled over it effectively blocked the door, preventing it from opening.

Secretary Wallace stepped up to the podium and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, the Premier and I will be happy to answer a few questions before the unveiling.”

Linda called out, “Mister Secretary, Linda King, Metropolis Star. What do you think ...”

She was interrupted by Lois as she shouted, “Mister Secretary, Lois Lane, Daily Planet. Is it true ...”

Linda became indignant and retorted, “Excuse me! But I believe I was asking a question.”

Lois retorted, “Well, so was I.” Lois was trying to provide a distraction so that Clark could come up with a way to foil whatever was supposed to be happening and felt satisfied that she was succeeding and getting back at Linda at the same time. It was always nice to be able to kill two birds with one stone. She added one final jab, “Hypocrite.”

Linda was stung by this comment, “Me? You sure can dish it out but you can’t take it.”

Lois snorted and spat out, “Oh, get off your high horse!”

Linda sneered as she said, “And get down in the gutter with you?!”

Secretary Wallace was bewildered at this behavior and looked back and forth between the two women in perplexity.

Annoyed by this disturbance, Secretary Wallace finally said, “Ladies, please! Please! No questions. That’s it.”

Lois and Linda stopped speaking and simply glared at one another while the other members of the press corps jeered and said, “Thanks a lot, Lane!” or “Way to go, King!”

Secretary Wallace tried to get the ceremony back on track, “Let’s get to the real reason we’re here, the ceremonial exchange from the Kingdom of Omir to the United States. Ladies and gentlemen, the gift from the Premier of Omir — the Orani Jewels.”

With that statement, Secretary Wallace whipped aside the cloth and displayed the jewels to the hushed exclamations of the appreciative public.

While Lois had provided the distraction, as casually as he could manage, Clark had stood and moved over to the fallen statuary and feigned moving it. In reality he was making sure that the door was effectively blocked. He was bracing the door so that it didn’t so much as rattle, no matter what the thugs trapped inside did. He knelt there until the ceremony was complete. Lois came over to him and whispered, “What do you want me to do, now?”

He replied, quietly, “Get the police. Tell them to send SWAT.”

Lois hurried off to complete her errand.

When the SWAT team arrived, Lois led them up to the conference center.

Clark said, “Gentlemen, behind this door are four very heavily armed crooks. They were either going to assassinate the Premier or steal the jewels.”

The Lieutenant in charge said, “We’ll take it from here.”

Clark stepped back.

“This is Lieutenant Nesbit of Metropolis SWAT. We have the room surrounded. Put down your weapons and come out, with your hands up.”

There was an explosion from inside and a bullet came through the door. Fortunately, per protocol, Nesbit was standing off to the side.

Nesbit signaled one of his men. The man came forward, at a crouch, inserted a small tube under the door and triggered the pressurized canister that was attached to it.

Nesbit explained to Lois and Clark, “A form of pepper spray. It will act like tear gas. It’s a kind that you don’t have to hit them in the face with. They’ll be begging us to take them into custody in about two minutes.”

Sure enough, in less than two minutes the screams from inside told them how effective the spray was. There were shouts of, “We surrender,” and “We quit,” were heard along with the thud of weapons being dropped.

Nesbit said, “Okay, come out, one at a time. Hands behind your necks!”

When the door opened, Lois started snapping pictures. After the operation, Lois and Clark interviewed Nesbit and tried to get a statement from the crooks, but they stonewalled them.

The next morning the Planet had a banner headline:

“Assassination Attempt and Jewel Theft Foiled.”

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

“The Omiri Premier and the Orani Jewels were saved by the accidental toppling of a piece of statuary as the Jewels were being presented to Secretary Wallace. After the ceremony, MPD SWAT was summoned and the perpetrators were subdued by the use of a form of non-lethal pepper spray. Story continues pg A2”

Needless to say, Perry was ecstatic and called Lois and Clark into his office.

“Great job. How did you do it?”

Clark replied, “We were just in the right place at the right time.”

Lois smirked at his reply.

Perry noticed Lois’s smirk. He challenged, “All right. What do the two of you have going on?”

Lois looked around and stepping to Perry’s door, closed it.

That action piqued Perry’s interest and he started to smile.

Once the door was closed, Lois and Clark moved closer to Perry’s desk. Clark said, “We suspect ...”

Lois interrupted, “Believe. We believe that we really haven’t been being scooped. It’s all been a set-up by the Star to boost their circulation.”

Clark continued, “The same edition that had the story about the hotel fire there was an editorial demanding changes in the fire department.”

When he paused for a breath, Lois picked up the tale, “In the

same edition that had the story about the elevator ‘accident’.” She used finger quotes, “there was an editorial demanding stronger building codes in view of the accident. How could he have had the editorials in the same edition? He’d have to be either a very fast writer or ... have previous knowledge of what was to happen.”

Clark added, “The fire chief has declared the hotel fire to be arson.”

Lois gave Clark an adoring look as she said, “We have a piece of the elevator cable being analyzed. It looks like it was cut.”

Clark pointed out, “And in both cases, Linda King was on scene and received a call from Preston Carpenter, confirming her location just prior to the incident.”

Lois said, “Today, Linda received a call just before the Orani jewels were to be presented by the Omiri Premier. It was purely accidental that the perpetrators got themselves trapped in that closet.”

“I think that proves that Linda is in the clear on these, though. When the incident failed to materialize she at least acted as if she didn’t expect anything. I think we can get her to work with us to prove what’s happening.”

Perry dropped into his chair and looked back and forth at them. He quipped, “Listening to the two of you go back and forth like that is like watching a ping-pong match.” He shook his head, “I wish the rest of my staff worked as well together as the two of you. Okay, so how do we go about proving all of this?”

Clark replied, “I think we need to approach Linda and ask her to help. The other day she asked me to walk her to the subway entrance. On the way she confided to me that Carpenter was hitting on her and she is uneasy about getting so many headlines in such a short time. I think she is suspicious.”

Lois quipped, “I’m suspicious of her motives.”

Clark ignored her and said, “She also confided in me that Carpenter’s idol is Charles Foster Kane. Remember the movie starring Orson Wells.”

At the name Wells, Lois gasped and then relaxed. He wasn’t speaking of Herb.

Clark continued as if he hadn’t heard her, “Linda said that Carpenter said that Kane not only reported the news, he made it. He set out an agenda for the country. Did you get that — he made the news. That’s what is happening here. We think that Carpenter is manufacturing these emergencies to generate headlines.”

Carpenter called Stark into his office.

Once he entered, Carpenter challenged, “What happened? Where was the team of thieves? Why didn’t they steal those jewels? Why didn’t they kill the Premier?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know and I don’t know. I wasn’t there. They were only allowing so many of the press and dignitaries. At the last second those two reporters from the Planet were added to the list by Wallace and I got bumped off.”

“King was there. I called and checked. If the job had gone down she would have reported it. According to the story in the Planet the team was trapped in a storeroom and captured by SWAT. That wasn’t supposed to happen. This is going to make it that much harder to put the Planet out of business. Let’s move ahead with the next job.”

Chapter 6

The next morning, Clark called the Star using Linda King’s direct line. “Linda, Clark Kent.”

“Oh, hi, Clark. Congratulations on the story.”

“That’s kinda what I wanted to talk to you about. Listen, what are you doing for lunch?”

“No plans.”

“Carpenter hasn’t sent you anywhere today?”

“Not as yet, why?”

“Oh, just curious. Listen, how does the Press Club at twelve-thirty sound?”

“You want me to meet you for lunch? What would Lois say?”

“I don’t know. You can ask her when you arrive.”

“Oh, she’ll be there?”

“Linda, she *is* my wife.”

“Yeah, I wish we could change that.” That last was muttered almost under her breath, but Clark’s super-hearing picked it up. Then she said, aloud, “I’ll meet you at twelve-thirty.”

After the first few uncomfortable minutes, Lois started to lose some of her animosity toward Linda. After all, here she was, happily married to the greatest guy in the world, while Linda was still single and with no apparent prospects, other than Preston Carpenter.

Between the two of them they laid out the story, what they suspected and what they already had proof of.

When they finished, Linda stared at them in disbelief and pushed back from the table. She was in a state of denial because she had a hard time believing that she had been duped so thoroughly.

To reiterate, Clark said, “Think about it. Carpenter always calls to verify your location, right? He’s the publisher; he doesn’t need to do that.”

Lois added, “Unless he needs to make sure his man, or woman, is in place before he pulls the trigger on whatever he’s got planned.”

Clark added, “Like the elevator cable. Lab results are back. Definitely cut. It was no accident. You just happened to be there. Just like you happened to be at the fire which has been declared to be arson. Convenient timing, wouldn’t you say?”

Lois pointed out, “Just like Carpenter happens to have an editorial ready to run in the same edition for each incident.”

As Lois and Clark had been reciting all of their evidence, Linda had slowly relaxed and moved back to the table. It was quite a convincing litany. Linda slowly exhaled a big breath and said, “I feel so ... so ...”

Lois provided, “Abused? Duped? Used?”

Linda snapped, some of the old hostility coming to the surface, “What are you, a thesaurus?”

Clark, ever the peacemaker said, “Why don’t you both put this on hold? We have a lot of work to do.”

Lois gave Linda a look which clearly said that she was excluded and said, “We? We is an inclusive term Clark, one used to indicate all people present. That would be a clear misuse.”

Following along on her earlier theme, Linda snapped at Lois, “What are you now, a dictionary?”

Trying to prevent any more fireworks, Clark said, “Bottom line, it’s a Planet story.”

Lois nodded and agreed, “Absolutely.”

Clark added, “Which we can’t possibly prove or print without Linda’s help.”

Linda was mollified by his statement, “Exactly!” Still not sure what part she was to play, she asked, “What am I supposed to do? Walk up and say, ‘Hi, boss, where are you staging your next disaster?’”

Clark downplayed her concerns by saying, “All you need to do is get Carpenter out of his office long enough for us to get into his computer.”

Linda was mystified and asked, “How?”

Lois threw another barb, “You could use your ‘other talents.’ It wouldn’t be the first time.”

More reasonably, Clark said, “You said he’d been hitting on you. Maybe you could ... hit back?”

Linda saw that they were serious and started thinking how to go about it and nodded her head in understanding and agreement. Her part would be the simple part.

They left the Press Club separately, but they all headed in the same direction. They all entered the Star building separately. Linda came in the normal way, through the doors in the lobby while Clark flew himself and Lois to the roof.

They had made arrangements to meet on Carpenter's office floor. Linda was a little surprised when she found Lois and Clark waiting for her. She pointed to Carpenter's office door and then herself. She pointed at a door across the hall and then at them.

Lois nodded and used her lock picks to open the office door so that she and Clark could hide.

As soon as the door closed behind them, Linda opened Carpenter's door and boldly stepped in.

When she entered she found Carpenter in the process of donning his jacket and so preoccupied that at first he didn't notice her. When he did, he smiled, but then it turned to a look of disappointment as he said, "I'm afraid I've only got a few minutes. What can I do for you?"

Linda had been thinking all the way back from lunch as to what tack to take and she had come up with a very plausible topic, one which would play to his overinflated ego, "Well, I think the question is: What can I do for you? I just read the latest sales projections. Soon the Metropolis Star will be the most widely read paper in the country. It's all because of you. Congratulations."

Carpenter stopped what he was doing to smile and say, "May she be a beacon for the nation."

Linda realized that Lois had been right. If she wanted to completely control this situation she would have to use her 'other' talents, her feminine wiles. She changed her tone to what almost amounted to a 'come hither' as she said, "I was hoping you might like to join me for lunch. As my guest. To celebrate."

Linda was disappointed when Carpenter said, "That's very tempting. But as I said, I'm somewhat pressed for time today."

She knew that she had to be able to control his movements. She couldn't allow him to interrupt Lois and Clark in their activities so she decided to pull out the 'big guns'. She swayed over and perched on the edge of Carpenter's desk. When she did, her skirt hiked up to show a lot of leg.

When she saw Carpenter stare at her display she knew that his weakness for women was obvious. She also knew that she had played her trump card at just the right time. She slid her hand over her bare thigh which he followed hungrily with his eyes and she said, "Preston, even a busy publisher has to eat."

Carpenter swallowed hard and said, "After the other night, I wasn't sure you shared my interest in moving our relationship beyond just business."

Linda put on a pouty face and said, "Now who would have guessed a charming man like you could have any insecurities?"

She slid off the desk. As she did, the movement pulled her skirt that much higher and showed even more leg, but as she stood it fell back to just shy of knee length. She swayed over and started playing with his tie. She asked, "So, can we 'make it happen'?"

Carpenter offered a compromise, which wouldn't fulfill her commitment, "Maybe we should just eat here."

Almost too hastily, Linda replied, "Oh, no. We should go out. Someplace nice. Drinks, champagne. Then, well, who knows? So, where should we go?"

Linda knew she had won when he said, "I know just the place."

Linda hooked her arm around his and he started to lead her out. He said, "You're a very interesting woman, Linda." As they exited the office, Carpenter pulled out a key and locked it behind them.

Linda replied, "And the day is still young." Linda wasn't worried about the lock. She had just had a demonstration of how adept Lois was with picking locks.

Clark had been watching with his x-ray vision and when he saw Linda and Carpenter leave his office and head for the elevator, he told Lois so. When they were safely on board they exited the office, crossed the hall and entered Carpenter's office.

As soon as they entered, Lois spotted the computer on the very ornate desk. She headed straight for it as Clark locked the office door behind them. Lois had her eyes on the computer screen as Clark approached.

She muttered, "We're in luck. I know this program. I used to use it myself."

Suddenly the door knob rattled as someone tried to enter. They looked at one another. Lois was thinking, <Linda let us down.>

Clark was thinking, <We have to hide.>

Clark heard the jingle of keys as whoever was outside looked for the correct one.

Clark indicated the knee hole under the desk and whispered, "Quick, under there."

She looked at it and said, "It's not big enough for both of us."

They could both hear the key being inserted into the lock. As she started to crawl into the hole she whispered, "What about you?"

He whispered, "Just stay there."

She whispered, "What are you going to do? You don't have the power of invisibility."

Clark looked around for a place to hide. At the last second he spotted the floor to ceiling drapes. He slipped behind one and floated up so that his feet wouldn't be visible under it. He kept watch with his x-ray vision.

As he watched, Stark entered. He crossed to the side of the room and picked up a walking stick that Carpenter carried for show. Then he thought of another item he needed, Carpenter's briefcase. He snapped it shut and walked out, locking the door behind himself.

Clark came out from behind the drape as Lois crawled out from under the desk. She said, "That was close. Where did you hide?"

He pointed at the drape.

Clark said, "Let's not waste any time. He may come back."

Lois tapped a few keys and muttered, "We're in. Here's his sub-directory."

Looking over her shoulder, Clark was reading the screen. He questioned, "What's that file? Musings?"

Lois double clicked on it and after it opened they began to read.

Lois mused, "Looks like a personal diary." After reading further she said, "This man is very sick. In an x-rated kind of way."

Clark mused, "Let's hope that Linda doesn't have to call his bluff."

Lois quipped, "Don't worry. They're probably perfect for each other."

"Lois, this isn't helping. We're looking for proof, not scandal. Try another file." He pointed at the screen and said, "Try that one."

Lois double clicked on it, but it failed to open. Instead a password window popped up.

Lois mused, "This must be it. But we need a password to get into it."

Clark offered, "Try Kane. K A N E. Linda said that he has a Citizen Kane fixation".

Lois tried several combinations with and without capitals. None were successful, she said, "Nope. Let's see. How about .."

They simultaneously said, "Rosebud."

Lois looked at Clark with appreciation and said, "Great minds think alike. We're in."

Pointing at the screen, Clark said, "Look, there's the editorial

that went with the hotel fire ...”

Scrolling down through the files, Lois spotted another and said, “There’s the one on building inspections that ran with the elevator accident.”

Lois scrolled farther down and saw a title that looked intriguing. She opened the file and started to read, “‘An eye for an eye is the only course this country can take after today’s brutal assassination of Secretary Wallace at his hotel by Omiri extremists ...’” She paused in her reading, “Wallace isn’t dead.”

Clark’s statement was cryptic, “Yet.”

“Oh My God, Clark. Do you think that Carpenter plans to kill Wallace? Do you think that Carpenter’s willing to kill a member of the cabinet to sell a few papers?”

Clark nodded, “I wouldn’t put anything past him. I think he would even drag us into a war. And he’d also be willing to kill Linda if he knew she was on to him. Let’s go.”

Carpenter had taken Linda to the restaurant in the lobby of the International Hotel. He had gotten them a table right next to the window which gave a complete view of the front of the hotel and the street.

Looking out the window, Carpenter saw Stark when he arrived. He also saw the two men he had with him. They were dressed in conservative business suits and looked like they could be secret service. As he watched, Stark and the other two approached a parking valet and a gardener that were both working in the front of the hotel. As he watched the five moved out of sight around the building. Smiling in satisfaction, he turned back to the conversation he was having with Linda.

As he turned away from the window, Linda leaned toward him, giving him a chance to look down her bodice and asked, “So tell me, what’s next for Preston Carpenter? Running for president?”

Carpenter was distracted by her display and said, “Perhaps. But only as an interim step.”

Linda smiled sweetly and asked, “Interim to what?”

As he replied, he lost his lecherous stare at her breasts and the light of fanaticism she had seen once before lit his eyes, “My next goal is to convince the governments of the world that we need an International Federation. A United Nations with real teeth. A government to govern all governments.”

As Linda heard the words, they sounded at least a little altruistic, but the megalomania behind them was very evident. She decided that if she played along she might get more information, “And who could possibly head such a body?”

She knew she had struck a nerve when he smiled a self-satisfied smile. She was hoping that he would declare his motives, but the moment was lost when his bodyguard, Stark, approached the table and whispered in Carpenter’s ear.

After Stark had delivered his message, Carpenter turned to Linda and said, “Excuse me. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Linda’s curiosity was aroused so she asked, “Can I come with you?”

Speaking to her as if placating a five year-old, Carpenter said, “Why don’t you order dessert for us?”

Linda watched as the two men left and then turned back to the window. When she did, she saw a taxi pull up and Lois and Clark pile out.

Linda knew that things must be breaking in order for them to show up. She looked for Carpenter, but he was nowhere to be seen. She pushed away from the table, threw down her napkin and strode quickly from the restaurant, meeting Lois and Clark in the street.

Linda was indignant that they had shown up when she was pumping Carpenter for information. “What are you doing here? You’ll blow everything!”

Clark cut her off, “Carpenter is going to kill Secretary

Wallace!”

Lois added, “He’s already written the editorial. We found it on his computer. All he needs is your ‘exclusive’ report.”

Clark looked around and then said, “Stay here. I’m going in to warn the Secretary.”

Lois knew exactly what he needed to do and said, “Go.”

Linda gave Lois a skeptical look and repeated his command, “‘Stay here.’ Guess we know who calls the shots on your team.”

Lois rolled her eyes and replied, “Linda, what you don’t know would fill an encyclopedia.”

Linda replied, “I just know what I see.”

Lois wanted desperately to be in on the action and looking around said, “Stay here. I’m going after Clark.” She started to run off.

As soon as Lois turned to move away, Linda was right on her heels muttering to herself, “Nice try, Lane. You’re not freezing me out of this story.”

When Clark left Lois and Linda on the street he headed into the hotel. He was determined to simply warn Secretary Wallace of the danger and let his security detail handle it since there was no immediate threat. When he had looked around, while out in the street, he had surveyed the surroundings. He had not seen any gunmen or any other threat so he didn’t think that Superman needed to intervene.

As he entered, he looked around for Secretary Wallace and his entourage. He didn’t see any signs of them so he decided they must still be in his suite. The quickest way for him to reach that would be the stairs, so he disappeared into the stairwell.

As the door to the stairwell was closing behind him, Lois and Linda entered the lobby through another door and stopped to look around.

When they did, Linda spotted Carpenter, Stark and two others, one dressed like a gardener and the other a parking valet, entering an elevator. Linda pointed and said, “There they are.”

After the doors had closed they approached and Lois noted that the indicator was going down. She noted a nearby stairwell and said, “Come on,” and led the way through and down the stairs at a run.

Lois and Linda paused at the landing only long enough to stop gasping for breath from their run and Lois cracked the door and peered out. When she did she saw Carpenter and his men moving down the corridor.

Lois saw them pass through a set of swinging doors. As soon as they were out of sight, she threw open the door and the two women followed them. Lois saw the plaque that read Banquet Kitchen and sneaking up to the door, raised her head only high enough that she could peer through the porthole style window that was inset.

Linda looked through the other window. They both saw Carpenter and Stark and the other two huddled around a table.

Lois whispered, “One of us should notify the police. The other should stay on the story.”

Linda replied, “Great idea. You take the police.”

Lois looked at Linda and said, “I thought you’d handle that.”

Linda replied, “Think again.”

Before Lois could stop her, Linda pushed through the doors silently. Thinking, <Clark is going to kill me.> Lois followed her through.

Chapter 7

Lois followed Linda into the kitchen precincts and they both scuttled behind the tall racks that the wait staff used for moving large quantities of meals to the banquet hall. They had to depend mostly on their ears since they couldn’t chance being spotted. They did try to inch closer and as they moved from one piece of

concealment to another they saw Stark point to something, presumably a chart or map that was laid out on a table.

Stark said, “I’m here, on the roof across the street. You two set up here, and here. Fire when you hear my shot.” He turned to Carpenter and asked, “What about your ‘friend?’”

Lois and Linda couldn’t see what was happening and what they couldn’t see was critical. Carpenter pulled out a cell phone and dialed. As he hit the final button, he said, “I’ll take care of her.”

Lois and Linda were straining their ears to hear what was going on and the import of Carpenter’s statement was lost on them until suddenly the silence was broken as Linda’s cell phone began its shrill ring.

Lois and Linda were both startled, but no more than Carpenter and Stark. Linda almost dumped her purse in her attempt to get the cell phone out and silence it, but it was too late. The damage had been done.

Carpenter snapped his cell phone closed and he and Stark both moved toward the location of the ring they had heard. As they rounded the towering racks they spotted Lois and Linda kneeling on the floor behind them.

Carpenter was as urbane as Luthor at his best as he said, “Linda, dear. I guess I don’t have to tell you I’ve been detained, do I?”

Lois and Linda exchanged looks. Lois’s look was accusatory while Linda’s was apologetic.

Carpenter turned to Stark and said, “You have to take care of them. They know too much. It needs to look like an accident.”

Stark looked around and said, “We’re kinda limited on accidents around here. They could fall on a knife, I suppose.”

Carpenter replied, “No. Too messy and too much chance of the wound not being fatal, quickly enough. They might be found in time.”

Stark found some twine used in tying up cuts of meat and used that to bind the two women together. Once he was finished with this he looked around again. This time he spotted a walk-in refrigeration unit. He said, “Okay. Bring the dames over here.” He led the way as the other two goons manhandled Lois and Linda with Carpenter bringing up the rear.

Once Lois and Linda were in the refrigerator they were forced to sit. Stark used more of the twine to tie their legs and then bound them back-to-back. He gave the cords one last check and then stood up.

As he did, Carpenter said, “I can’t tell you how truly sorry I am that things turned out this way. On the other hand, you two are going to make a fantastic forty-eight point headline.”

As they were exiting, Stark looked at the pipes that lined the walls and pulling out a handgun, fired into one of the pipes. As the bullet penetrated the pipe a plume of what looked like steam started spraying out accompanied by the loud hissing sound of gas under pressure.

His parting words as he closed the door were, “Breathe deeply girls. Freon’s better than freezing to death.”

After the door closed Lois and Linda both struggled against their bonds, but Stark apparently had been a Boy Scout because he sure knew his knots. They couldn’t reach them to untie them nor were they loose enough for them to wriggle out. Lois briefly considered calling Clark, but she knew the danger that Secretary Wallace was in and she didn’t want to distract him from protecting him. She knew things would work out. They just had to. She knew that she would be having his baby and that wouldn’t happen if she died in this refrigerator.

Her irritation at the situation came out when she said, “Life is cruel.”

Linda reposted, “Don’t get philosophical. It’s never been one of your strengths.”

Just to goad Linda, Lois became philosophical, “Well, doesn’t it strike you as ironic? That the two of us could die together?”

Lois sighed and said, “We were best friends.”

Lois spat out, “*Were!*”

Linda picked up on Lois’s bitterness and decided that .. if this was the end she wanted to get some things off her chest, “Let’s clear this up once and for all, okay?”

Lois retorted, “Let’s not and if there’s anybody on the other side who asks us, let’s just say we did.”

Linda wasn’t to be turned from this conversation, “You think I stole Paul Bender from you. But I didn’t. You weren’t even dating him.”

“I was too dating him, I really cared for him and you knew it.” She gave a frustrated shake against their bonds.

Linda defended herself, “He came on to me.”

Lois retorted, “And you had no will power, huh?”

Linda, in a defeated tone, replied, “None. I would have done anything for Paul.”

Lois challenged, “And I guess you had no will power when you stole my story?”

There was a ton of regret in Linda’s tone as she replied, “Okay. I’m weak. It doesn’t mean I wasn’t a good friend. It just means I wasn’t as strong as you are.”

Lois’s reply was still snarky, “Wait a minute. You’re backing into an apology by arguing that you stole a story and a guy because you were under the influence of your hormones and because I was your best girlfriend at the time that I should have forgiven you then and not make a big deal about it now?”

Linda thought for a second and said, “Right.”

Lois was starting to worry. The level of the gas was quickly rising, displacing the breathable air as the heavier-than-air gas built up. She knew she had those memories, but what if Herb had made a mistake and they weren’t actually hers. He had said that there were many Lois and Clark couples in the multiverse. What if these weren’t really her memories? She could actually die, here and now. She started thinking, <Clark, where are you?>

As the gas was about to envelop her, Lois said, “Okay, I forgive you.”

Linda said, “You know, I really envy you, your relationship with Clark. He really loves you.”

“I know and I really love him. He’s going to miss me.”

As she finished speaking, the gas finally engulfed them and they started to choke and cough. They were coughing so violently that they toppled over onto their sides.

Clark was coming down the grand staircase into the lobby. He had been up on the Secretary’s floor and found that he must have just missed him. As he neared the lobby he spotted the Secretary and his entourage exiting the elevator. He was about to go after him when he heard Lois’s voice. She was coughing and choking. He decided that the Secretary’s guards would have to do their job until he could return. As quickly as he dared, he ran into the stairwell, loosening his tie as he went. As he exited into the basement as Superman he followed the sound of Lois’s voice to the locked refrigerator unit. Ripping the doors off the refrigerator, he spotted Lois and Linda. He saw the fumes gushing out of the ruptured pipe so he reached over and bent the pipe, crimping it and shutting off the flow of gas.

Kneeling, he inhaled and sucked up the fumes, clearing the heavier-than-air gas and allowing life-giving oxygen to flow into Lois’s and Linda’s lungs. He knelt next to them and snapped their bonds. He said, “You’ll feel better in a few minutes.”

Lois was the first to recover, “You’ve got to stop them. They’re ...”

He replied, “I know.”

As he left, Linda looked at Lois and asked, “How?”

“Clark must have told him.”

After leaving the women in the refrigerator, Carpenter and his men had moved to the street. Stark had taken a long case from the trunk of the limo and moved to a fire escape which he took to the roof of a building across the street from the hotel. While he was doing this the other two thugs stationed themselves at the front of the hotel.

Once he was on the roof, Stark opened the case and assembled the sniper rifle that it contained. He had pre-sighted it for the distances involved and made sure that all of his marks lined up as he installed the telescopic sight.

He sighted in on one of his accomplices and got a clear sight picture. He pulled the rifle back and looking over the parapet, spotted Carpenter looking up at him. He gave the thumbs up, 'go', signal.

Seeing this, Carpenter leaned back and poured himself a glass of champagne. Everything was going exactly according to plan.

Stark was watching as Secretary Wallace and his entourage exited the doors of the hotel and started to cross the walk to the limos. He brought up the rifle and sighted in on the secretary. As soon as he had a good sight picture he pulled the trigger.

Bare seconds after leaving Lois and Linda, Superman appeared outside and zipped to the side of Secretary Wallace and he wasn't a nanosecond early. His hand was practically touching Secretary Wallace's forehead when the slug slapped into his palm.

As soon as Secretary Wallace had made his appearance the other two gunmen had pulled small arms from under their uniforms and stood ready.

The echoes of the crack of the rifle hadn't even faded when they brought up their guns.

To free his hands, Superman tossed the slug he had caught into his mouth. At super-speed he moved Secretary Wallace into the limo and out of harm's way. When he turned back it was to face a fusillade of bullets from the other two gunmen. His hands became blurs as he intercepted the bullets, snagging them out of the air.

When their hammers fell on spent chambers he fused the slugs into a ball and tossed it, like a basketball, into a waste receptacle. It circled the rim twice before falling in.

He stepped to the car, pulled Secretary Wallace's pocket square from his suit pocket, took the slug from his mouth, placed it in the fabric, handed it to Wallace and said, "Hold on to this, Mr. Secretary. It's evidence."

As soon as Stark took his shot he had dropped the rifle down an air duct on the roof and hit the fire escape.

He had hot-footed it to the limo that Carpenter was waiting in and jumped behind the wheel. He started it up, slammed it into gear and floored the accelerator pedal.

He was surprised that the car failed to move. Then the rear of the car started to climb into the air.

Looking out the back window, Carpenter spotted Superman holding up the back end of the car. He blurted out, "Where'd *he* come from?"

Lois had been the first to recover. She jumped up and high-tailed it for the front of the hotel where the confrontation would occur. Linda managed to get herself together and follow, only about twenty feet behind Lois. Lois had the presence of mind to grab her camera from her bag as she bolted from the doors. She started snapping pictures. She caught the Secretary's guard detail as they subdued the other gunmen. As she whirled around, she got a picture of Secretary Wallace as he exited the limo claspings the pocket square with the slug in his hand. A little further around and she got a picture of Superman holding up the rear of Carpenter's limo with him and Stark inside.

As she finished snapping pictures, Linda arrived at her side. She turned to Linda and asked, "Do you still have your cell phone?"

With all that had been happening, Linda wasn't sure so she felt in her bag. She was surprised when she managed to close her hand around it and pull it out.

Lois asked, "Can I borrow that for a minute?"

Linda was still in something of a daze, but she handed it over.

Lois flipped it open and dialed a very familiar number.

"Homicide ... Henderson."

"Bill, Lois Lane. You need to get to the Grand Hotel, pronto.

Preston Carpenter just tried to have Secretary Wallace killed.

Superman caught them."

He didn't even reply. There was a click as he hung up the phone on his end. She knew that he would be shouting orders as soon as he was out his door.

As soon as he hung up, Lois dialed again. This time another very familiar voice answered, "Daily Planet ... Olsen."

"Jimmy, Lois. Grab your camera and get down to the Grand Hotel, now!"

"On my way!"

A couple of minutes later Lois heard sirens in the distance. Quickly the sirens got louder and several black and whites pulled up and police piled out, guns drawn. They were followed closely by a plain car with Bill Henderson behind the wheel and several other plain cars.

As soon as he was out of his car he started directing the activities. MPD officers took custody of the accomplices. Guns and shell casings were outlined with chalk on the pavement.

Just then a cab screeched to a stop and Jimmy piled out of the back. He threw a bill to the driver and pulling out his camera started taking pictures.

Secretary Wallace turned over the slug that Superman had placed in his custody. It was bagged and tagged.

Stark and Carpenter were pulled out of his limo and cuffed before Bill finally managed to interview Superman.

"Superman, what do you have for me? What can I charge them with?"

"Inspector, this man," Superman pointed to Stark, "fired a bullet at Secretary Wallace. I intercepted the slug. Secretary Wallace turned it over as evidence. He works for and presumably performed this act at the order of Preston Carpenter."

Stark sneered, "Where's your proof? Where's the gun? It's just your say-so."

Bill asked, "Where did the shot come from?"

Superman pointed to the roof of the building across the street.

Henderson called one of his plain clothes men over, "Jeffers, climb up to the roof of that building," he pointed to the one Superman had indicated, "and look around. Look for a weapon."

Henderson watched as Jeffers climbed the fire escape. As he was about to reach the top, Superman lifted off and landed on the roof, joining him.

They immediately found the case that the rifle had been in. Looking around though, there was no rifle in evidence. Superman looked around and noticed an air vent. Walking over to it, he looked in. It was a straight drop to the basement.

Superman stepped up to Jeffers and asked, "Can I give you a lift?"

Jeffers was apprehensive.

Seeing this, Superman said, "Don't worry. I haven't lost a passenger yet."

Jeffers relaxed and then nodded.

Standing next to him, Superman put an arm around his waist and then lifted off, landing a few seconds later on the sidewalk. He said to Jeffers, "This way. I think I know where the rifle is."

Jeffers followed him into the building and down to the basement.

Using his x-ray vision, Superman examined the ductwork until he found the correct one. Using his hands he ripped it open exposing the rifle that lay within.

Jeffers donned a pair of rubber gloves and picked up the rifle. Together they returned to Inspector Henderson. Jeffers displayed his trophy and said, “Up on the roof is the case this was carried in. Superman found it in an air duct where he had dropped it.”

Superman added, “I believe that ballistics will match the slug that Secretary Wallace turned in to this rifle. I’m sure that his,” he pointed at Stark, “fingerprints will be on the weapon.”

Seeing which way the wind was blowing, Stark started to declaim.

Henderson stopped him, “Jeffers, read him his rights.”

As Stark and Carpenter were being Mirandized Superman took his leave and flew off.

Jeffers read Starl his rights and when he replied that he understood, he stated, “It was Carpenter. He hired me for this gig. He’s crazy! He wanted to start a war!”

In a flat tone, Henderson said, “Take them downtown. Book them. Attempted murder. Get a forensics team down here to police up the area.”

Carpenter said, “My lawyers will have me out on bail so fast it’ll make your head swim, flatfoot.”

Bill deadpanned, “Not on a charge of attempted murder, he won’t.”

Just then, Clark came strolling up.

Linda spotted him and asked, “Where have you been all this time?”

Lois replied before Clark had a chance, “I’m sure that Clark was smart enough to hide when all the shooting started. He knows I don’t want him getting hurt. I need him to take care of me. Don’t I, honey?”

“I want to be around for you for a long time.”

Lois rewound the film in her camera, removed the film cassette and gave it to Jimmy, “Here, Jim. You might find something usable here.” As soon as she handed it to Jim she reloaded her camera. She was determined that she wouldn’t be caught with it empty again.

Clark excused himself and went over to talk to Bill Henderson. When they started to talk they strolled away from everyone so that they could talk privately.

Chapter 8

When things quieted down they all returned to the Planet. Jimmy headed for the darkroom while Lois and Clark wrote up the story. After they sent it to Perry they headed home.

Once they were in the apartment, Lois asked, “What was that heart-to-heart you had with Henderson?”

“I decided to enlist his aid in the Luthor investigation.”

Worried now, Lois asked, “How much did you tell him?”

“Nothing. I didn’t mention any names. I just pointed out what had happened to the driver of the truck that tried to run me down and the old lady that I was helping. He agreed that it had to be an inside job. He’s going to work on finding out just who he can and cannot trust within the department. I suggested a safe house of some sort that he could send collars to that will actually keep them safe until they can be questioned.”

“Do you really think that they’ll try again?”

“I feel pretty certain that they will. The thing that worries me is that you might be hurt when they try for me.”

“You’d never let anything happen to me. And I’m not going to let anything happen to you, either.”

The next morning the Metropolis Star was in total disarray. The Editorial staff had clamped down on any stories dealing with Carpenter and they ran wire service leads.

Meanwhile the Daily Planet ran a forty-eight point banner headline: “**NEW AGE KANE NIPPED IN THE BUD**”

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent, with special contribution by

Linda King

“Preston Carpenter, publisher of the Metropolis Star in an attempt to imitate his idol, the fictitious Charles Foster Kane from the movie Citizen Kane, Preston Carpenter was, rather than reporting the news was making the news. Story continued pg. 2A”

As they entered the lobby of the Planet, Lois grabbed a copy of the morning edition from the news stand and scanned the headline. She blew out a frustrated sigh and said, “She did it again!”

Jimmy who happened to be nearby asked, “What?”

She started to answer Jimmy, but also drew Clark’s attention to it, “The by-line, Clark.” She started to read aloud, “By Clark Kent and Lois Lane.” A note of sarcasm crept into her voice as she finished, “Special contribution by Linda King.” She slapped the paper back down and said, “Oh right.”

Clark was surprised at what Lois had read, “Now how did she do that?”

Jimmy looked around at the sound of the elevator doors opening. He cleared his throat to get Lois and Clark’s attention and then nodded in that direction.

When they turned to look they saw Perry and Linda in the elevator car and Linda was just pulling back from giving Perry a smooch on the cheek.

Seeing them all looking at him, Perry became embarrassed and hit the floor button for the newsroom. Linda exited as the doors closed.

Having seen how Lois reacted to Linda and seeing her approach, Jimmy decided that he needed to get to the newsroom so he headed for the nearest stairwell since it was nearer than the elevator.

Linda was gushing as she approached, “Mister White is such a generous man!”

Lois sneered, “You have no shame.”

Linda rebutted, “Yes I do!” She thought for a second and then with a self-deprecating chuckle said, “Not a lot, but some.”

Clark could see at least some of the fences lowering and with a smile asked, “So, what’s next for you?”

Linda smiled at him and said, “I’ve taken a job on the coast.” She glanced at Lois and said to Clark, “If you get tired of the old ball and chain, you could join me.”

Lois gasped and it was very apparent that she was prepared to defend her territory against this interloper.

Barely in time to head her off, Linda held up her hands in a defensive gesture and said, “I’m kidding. I’m kidding.” Once she saw that Lois had accepted her statement, Linda addressed her, “Lois, I do have something to say to you.”

Lois, was still angry and snapped, “Don’t.”

Unperturbed, Linda said, “When you told me you accepted my apology, that meant a lot to me.”

Lois looked down her nose at Linda and said, “Not to me. I thought I was dying and I wanted to clean the slate.”

Clark admonished Lois with a look and said, “You don’t mean that.” He turned to Linda and said, “She doesn’t mean that.” He looked back at Lois and seeing her look turned back to Linda and said, “She means it.”

Linda, trying to put a spin on it, said, “Look at it this way, Lois. Maybe you’re the reporter you are because of the competition you felt with me.”

Lois snorted in disgust and said, “Not only am I supposed to accept your lame apology, but now I’m supposed to thank you!?”

Lois looked at Clark expecting to receive his support. Instead he changed the subject, “So, Linda, which paper are you headed to next?”

Linda smiled and said, “No paper. I’m getting out of news.”

Lois smiled and said, “Good.”

Linda just smiled all the broader and said, “I just optioned the film rights to my inside story of Preston Carpenter’s fall from

grace.” She leaned in and lowered her voice to conspiratorial levels and said, “It’s obscene how much money those Hollywood producers can throw at you.”

Lois was dumbfounded and her mouth fell open.

Clark shook his head and asked, “Who’s going to play you?”

“They’re looking for a very big name. I did, however, insist in my contract that I get to play one of the *small* parts.”

Lois’s curiosity was piqued, “Which part is that?”

Linda smiled, patted Lois on the shoulder and said, “I’ll try to do you justice.”

As Linda sauntered off, Lois gaped at her, speechless.

A little later, Lois and Clark were in the newsroom and things were quite busy. Now that the story about the Star had been printed there were follow-ups and sidebars to be written. Things were going to be busy for a while.

During a lull, Lois looked over at Clark and saw that he was sitting at his desk, idly playing with a micro-cassette. Getting up from her desk she moved over and leaned back against the edge of Clark’s desk. When she did, she crossed her legs so that the slit in her skirt opened and displayed her leg. Clark stopped playing with the cassette and gave Lois his attention. She reached out, snagged the bit of plastic from his hand and asked, “What do we have here?”

He shook his head and said, “I’m not sure. A long shot?”

“Frequently your long shots pay off. What is it?”

“Remember back when we were helping Eugene? We had that meeting with Luthor and Nigel. Well, I had a feeling that I should record that conversation. I had my recorder in my pocket.”

“There wasn’t anything incriminating in that conversation.”

“It’s not the content of the conversation; it’s the voices.”

“What about the voices?”

“Remember when Jack stole the globe. He sold it to parties unknown. He told me that he didn’t see the faces, but they had to have spoken. I thought that maybe, if I played this for him, he’d recognize the voices.”

Lois pushed herself upright quickly, suddenly excited at the prospect of having proof of who had purchased the globe. “Let’s have him listen.”

Clark took the tape from her hand and placed it into his micro-recorder. Looking around he spotted Jack and called him over. Once he was there, Clark said, “I’d like to ask you to do me a favor.”

“Sure Mr. K. What do you need?”

“Let’s go into the conference room.”

Once they were in the conference room, Clark said, “Jack, I hate to bring this up again, but I really need the answers to some questions.”

Seeing that he was serious, Jack, who had really come to like Clark said, “I’ll answer if I can, Mr. K.”

“I know, Jack and I appreciate it. You know that the case of the globe you stole is still open.”

Jack started to become apprehensive, Clark could see it in his eyes and quickly moved to assuage his apprehension, “No one is looking to jam you up on that. Superman said he wouldn’t press charges. You’re in the clear.”

Jack immediately relaxed and Clark continued, “Look, when you sold Superman’s globe you said that you dealt with two men. You said that you didn’t recognize them.”

A little hotly, he replied, “That’s right. I didn’t.”

“Nobody is questioning your truthfulness on that. I’d like to know if either one or both of them spoke to you.”

Jack was quick to reply, “Yeah, they both did.”

Clark smiled and asked, “Do you think you’d recognize the voices?”

“I don’t know, maybe.”

“Okay, listen to this and tell me if you recognize the voices.”

Clark pushed the play button and the first voice that Jack heard was Nigel St. John as he said in his British English accent, “Mr. Luthor awaits you on the balcony. This way, if you please.”

Jack signaled Clark to stop the tape, “Yeah, that’s one of them. That’s the money man. The other guy hung back while that dude carried the cash. I’d say that the other one was the boss though. He was the one that told this dude to pay off.”

“Very good, Jack. That’s one down and one to go.” He hit play again.

He heard a voice say, “Pull!” Then there was a weird springing sound and then the sound of a firearm.

Jack was getting nervous again and Clark placed a calming hand on his shoulder.

He heard Clark ask, “What happens if you miss?”

There was silence for a few seconds and then a new voice said, “Interesting question, Mr. Kent. Let’s see ...” There was a brief pause. “This clay pigeon weighs two ounces. We are on the one hundred and twentieth floor, approximately fifteen hundred feet above street level. Considering the G force and the speed ... if the object hit the pavement, or some hapless passer-by, it would make contact at about two hundred miles per hour. My guess is that it would, unfortunately, kill him or her, instantly.” There was another pause. “I never miss.”

Jack looked like he was considering what he heard carefully before he answered. “Yeah, I think so. Most of the time he tried to disguise his voice, but there were times that he spoke normally. Yeah, that’s the guy that bought Superman’s globe.”

“Thanks, Jack. You’ve been a big help. I think I’m going to ask you to join me and meet with a member of the legal staff, upstairs. I need to get a sworn statement from you attesting that the voices you heard on this tape are those of the people that bought the globe. Can you do that for me?”

“Sure, Mr. K. I’d actually like to help you catch those crooks. I’m really sorry for what I did and I’d like to make it up to you and Superman.”

“Thanks, Jack. I appreciate it.” He nodded to Lois who was smiling.

Jack left the conference room and Clark said to Lois, “Just as we suspected, Nigel and Lex. That ties him to that hidden museum and the stolen art treasures.”

“Where do we go from here?”

“I think we need to work with Bill Henderson. Once we have the deposition from Jack with the tape Superman can be deposed as to the ownership of the globe and that Clark Kent was holding it for him.”

“We’re going to need more though.”

“I’ve been thinking about that. There are some other people that know more than what they are saying.”

“Who?”

“Toni Taylor and Miranda.”

Lois was appalled, “What, them?”

“They can each tell what they know about Luthor and his activities.”

“If Luthor feels like he is threatened by them, he’ll have them killed like that truck driver.”

“We’ll just have to see to it that he doesn’t.”

THE END